

28% increase in IT exports
F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The National Assembly was informed that there has been a twenty-eight percent increase in Information and Computer Technology exports in the first six months of the current fiscal year. Minister of State for Information Technology Shaza Fatima Khawaja told the House that this increase in exports is directly proportional to the increase of internet usage and speed in the country.



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PTI founder, wife sentenced to jail

Imran fined Rs1 million, spouse half a million rupees; Bushra Bibi was taken into custody from courtroom soon after verdict

F.P. Report

RAWALPINDI: An accountability court on Friday sentenced former prime minister and Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) founder Imran Khan and his wife Bushra Bibi to jail terms in the 190 million pounds Al-Qadir Trust corruption case.

According to the verdict, Imran Khan will serve 14-year imprisonment and Bushra Bibi has been jailed for seven years. Besides jail term, Imran Khan has been fined Rs1 million and Bushra Bibi half a million rupees. In case of failure to pay fine, Imran will have to undergo six months' additional imprisonment and Bushra Bibi for three months. The court also ordered authorities to take control of Al-Qadir University.

After pronouncement of the verdict, Bushra Bibi was taken into custody from the courtroom. Judge Nasir Javed Rana of anti-corruption court announced the verdict in Adiala Jail after the scheduled 11:30am time. Imran Khan and Bushra Bibi were brought to the temporary courtroom on the jail premises, where the judge was present. PTI lawyer Barrister Salman Akram Raja, and Bushra Bibi's daughter and son-in-law also were in court to hear the ver-

Omar Ayub says PTI will challenge decision in superior courts

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) on Friday announced that the party would challenge the jail sentence handed down to former prime minister Imran Khan and his wife Bushra Bibi in the Al-Qadir Trust case. "We will challenge this verdict in the superior courts," said Omar Ayub, the leader of the opposition in the National Assembly, during a press conference here. Condemning the decision, he said the question should be asked to Nawaz Sharif's son, Hassan Nawaz, how he laundered money to buy the One Hyde Park building in London and then sold it. Omar deplored that they [Sharifs] are walking around with impunity.

Senator Shibli Faraz called the day a black day. "We strongly condemn this decision. There is neither rule of law nor supremacy of the constitution in this country. The government did not lose a single paisa from the Al-Qadir Trust, and neither Imran Khan nor Bushra Bibi gained anything." He said that those who robbed the country have been posing as "respectable". "Thieves roam free and innocent people are in jail. We will challenge the decision [in higher courts]," he added. Shibli said cases like Toshakhana and the iddat were thrown out by the courts. All the cases against the PTI founder and workers are political, he added.

Earlier, PTI Chairman Barrister Gohar Ali Khan said that if the decision of 190 million pound case was based on justice, former Imran Khan would be acquitted and released from Adiala Jail. The PTI chief was talking to media before the pronouncement of 190 million pound case outside Adiala Jail in Rawalpindi. However, the accountability court sentenced Imran Khan to 14 years and his wife Bushra Bibi in jail in the case. Barrister Gohar said the party has been facing persecution for the last two years. He said that the decision in the 190 million pounds case would not be postponed. "We have come prepared, and we are ready to hear whatever the decision is," he added.

dict.

NAB prosecution representatives Irfan Ahmed, Sohail Arif and Awaiz Arshad were also present. PTI Chairman Barrister Gohar, along with Shoaib Shaheen, also reached court. Gohar told media persons that there would be no more delay in the judgement. He said the PTI would accept the decision and demanded justice the party had been denied in the last two years.

Earlier, Barrister Saif said the verdict would be announced and there

would be no more delay. The court had completed the hearing of the case on Dec 18 but reserved the judgement until Dec 23. Later, the court fixed Jan 6 as the new date for announcing the verdict and then Jan 13, but it was delayed twice.

The 190 million pounds case involves a reference filed by the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) against former prime minister Imran Khan, his wife Bushra Bibi, and others in December 2023. The case centres around an alleged settle-

ment between the PTI government and a property tycoon, which reportedly caused a loss of 190 million pounds to Pakistan's national exchequer.

Khan and the other accused are alleged to have misused 190 million pounds sent by the UK's National Crime Agency (NCA) as part of the settlement. Bushra Bibi was named an accused for her role as a trustee of the Al-Qadir Trust. Additionally, the couple is accused of receiving undue benefits, including over 458 kanal in

Mauza Bakrala, Sohawa, for the establishment of Al-Qadir University.

During Khan's tenure, the NCA seized 190 million pounds worth of assets from the tycoon. The assets were meant to be handed to Pakistan, with the settlement deemed a civil matter by the NCA. However, the details of the confidential agreement were not disclosed when Khan's cabinet approved it in December 2019. Subsequently, the Al-Qadir Trust was established in Islamabad.

Opp leaders call for constitutional supremacy

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Opposition leaders said on Friday all the political leaders would have to coordinate with each other for constitutional supremacy.

Addressing a press conference in the capital along with Mahmood Khan Achakzai and Shahid Khaqan Abbasi, Asad Qaiser said a joint mechanism would be devised by taking into account the point of views of all political parties. He said the recent verdict in the 190 million pounds case was anything but fair. Even the ministers were holding press conferences before the verdict which suggested that the system was unfair.

The PTI leader said the opposition would have to unite against barbarity. Also he said all legal means would be utilised to file an appeal against this verdict. Former PM Abbasi said if the country does not run according to the constitution then political chaos would be continued.

Pakistan launches first indigenous Electro-Optical satellite

F.P. Report

RAWALPINDI: Launch of Pakistan's Indigenous Electro-Optical (EO-1) Satellite on 17 Jan 25 marks a momentous milestone in Pakistan's space journey.

The EO-1 satellite offers substantial benefits across various sectors in Pakistan. In agriculture, it will enable precision farming by monitoring crops, assessing irrigation needs, predicting yields, and supporting food security initiatives. For urban development planning, the satellite will assist in tracking infrastructure growth and, managing urban sprawl.

In environmental monitoring and disaster management, it will provide timely updates on floods, landslides, earthquakes, deforestation, and land erosion. Additionally, it will support monitoring of minerals, oil and gas fields, glacier recession, and water



resources.

This achievement is set to position advanced space technology capabilities at the forefront of national progress and development, aligning with the goals of National Space Policy.

Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif on Friday felicitated the entire nation including the scientists and engineers on successful launch of the country's first indigenous Electro-Optical (EO-1) satellite from the Jiuquan



Satellite Launch Center, China.

The prime minister, in a social media post on his X timeline, "Soaring higher and higher! Proud moment for the nation as Pakistan proudly launches its first indigenous Electro-Optical (EO-1) satellite from the Jiuquan Satellite Launch Center, China."

PM Shehbaz underscored that from predicting crop yields to tracking urban growth, EO-1 was a leap forward in the

nation's journey towards progress.

Acknowledging the Pakistan Space and Upper Atmosphere Research Commission (SUPARCO)'s efforts, the prime minister said that the successful satellite launch spearheaded by SUPARCO demonstrated the nation's growing capabilities in space science and technology. "Congratulations to our scientists and engineers for their dedication and a great team effort!," he said.

Decision exposes Imran's real face: Ahsan

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Minister for Planning, Development and Special Initiatives Professor Ahsan Iqbal on Friday said the court decision in the £190 million (around Rs 64 billion) corruption case, which he called the 'biggest graft case' in the political history of Pakistan, had exposed the real face of the PTI founder and his spouse.

"It is the biggest corruption case in the political history of Pakistan, perhaps in South Asia, which ended in conviction following clear documented evidence and the court trial," he said while addressing a news conference.

He remarked on how strange it was that the PTI founder hoodwinked and mustered public support in the name of Tehreek-e-Insaf (a justice movement) to gain get into the power corridors; and looted the public exchequer by handing over the recovered £190 million to Malik Riaz, a property tycoon.

Elaborating, the minister said the National Crime Agency (NCA) of Britain had recovered the laundered money from the property tycoon, which was meant to be deposited in the national exchequer but was instead transferred into an account intended to deposit the fine imposed by the apex court on Bahria Town as part of a settlement in a land occupation case. He said the recovered amount was used by the PTI government to pay the court fine, effectively converting the laundered money into white money. In exchange, the PTI founder and his spouse received land and jewelry, added.

"To cover up this corruption, they staged a drama by setting up a university," he said, adding that no charitable work could be justified if it was carried out with looted and plundered money. Ahsan Iqbal also recalled that a leading British newspaper, The Financial Times, had uncovered that the PTI founder gave the Shaikat Khanum hospital's charity fund to his friend Naqvi for political purposes and election campaigning. "The news story has not been denied or challenged so far by the PTI, which is tantamount to accepting it as true," he added.

In contrast, the minister pointed out that the PTI government's SAPM on Accountability Shehzad Akbar managed to publish a story in the British newspaper Daily Mail against Shehbaz Sharif, which was later challenged in the UK court, clearing the PML-N leader. With the recovered money from the NCA, the minister said at least six international recognized universities, thousands of schools and hundreds of medical dispensaries could have been established, in addition to awarding scholarships to thousands of students.

PM orders installation of modern cargo system

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif on Friday directed the relevant authorities to install international standard cargo scanning system in Karachi and other key trading hubs to tackle the issue of smuggling in the country.

"The old systems of tracking, tracing and scanning in the trading hubs must be replaced with the new systems equipped with modern technology," the prime minister said while chairing a review meeting regarding transit cargo and tracking system. He also issued directives to ensure the third party validation of quality of the cargo tracking services providing entities.

The prime minister noted that with the improvement of the tracking system, smuggling had significantly reduced. He highlighted that due to steps taken to stop smuggling, sugar export worth US\$211 million to Afghanistan became possible.



PM Shehbaz pointed out that Pakistan would become center of transit trade for other regional countries due to an integrated communication system and improved cargo tracking. The meeting was attended by Minister for Finance Muhammad Aurangzeb, Minister for Economic Affairs Division Ahad Khan Cheema, Chairman Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) and senior government officials.

Meanwhile, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif welcomed current account surplus posted for the third consecutive month. The continuous surplus in the current account for

October, November, and December 2024 reflected the right direction of economic policies, the prime minister said in a press statement.

He noted that a surplus of \$1.2 billion was recorded in the first six months of the current fiscal year. We are actively working to further increase the surplus in the current fiscal year, the prime minister added. He said positive economic indicators reflected the growing trust of the business community in the government and its economic policies. Programs like "Uraan" will further strengthen the national economy, he added.

Security forces kill five terrorists

F.P. Report

RAWALPINDI: Security Forces conducted an intelligence based operation in general area Tirah, Khyber District on reported presence of khwarji.

During the conduct of operation, own troops effectively engaged khwarji location, as a result of which, five khwarji including Kharji ring leader Abidullah@ Turab, were sent to hell, while one kharji was apprehended.

Weapons and ammunition were also recovered from the khwarji, who remained actively involved in numerous terrorist activities in the area against the security forces as well as killing of innocent civilians. Sanitization operation is being conducted to eliminate any other Kharji found in the area as the security forces of Pakistan are determined to wipe out the menace of terrorism from the country.

President Asif Ali Zardari Friday lauded the security forces for eliminating five terrorists during operation in Tirah , district Khyber. He appreciated the bravery of security forces for killing five Khawarij including Khawarij ringleader Obaidullah during an intelligence based operation.

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif Friday appreciated security forces for successful operation against terrorists of Fitna Al-Khawarij in Tirah, district Khyber. He lauded the security forces for killing five Khawarij terrorists. He said the whole nation stood with the security forces in the war against terrorism. "We are determined to fully eradicate all forms of terrorism from the country," he added.

Death toll in attack on Kurram convoy rises to 10

F.P. Report

PARACHINAR: The death toll from Thursday's attack on a supply convoy bound for Parachinar in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Kurram district has risen to 10, said District Health Officer (DHO) Qaiser Abbas.

The official, speaking to media on Friday, said the deceased included one more security official, six drivers and two passengers. In retaliatory action by security personnel escorting the convoy, six attackers were killed and 10 others were injured. Although communications were lost with the drivers of 29 vehicles, some of them managed to make it safely to Thall in Hangu district.

The Kurram DHO told media on Friday that one of the security officials injured a day ago had succumbed to his injuries overnight. Regarding the other deceased, he said: "The bodies of a driver and a passenger were dismembered and taken to Lower Alizai in sacks."

He added that the bodies of four drivers were found in the morning in the Udawal area with their hands bound and signs of torture. The DHO said they had been shot dead and the bodies were moved to Alizai Hospital. Additionally, the drivers' family members told media that they were in contact with the victims until lam, after which they could not be reached.

Meanwhile, Nazir Ahmad, president of the Parachinar Trade Union, told media that 20 trucks in the convoy were burned and looted, while only one reached Parachinar and returned to its point of origin after delivering its cargo. "Six drivers were killed and three others are missing," Ahmad said.

A substantial security detail, including police, Frontier Corps (FC), and other security forces, had been deployed for protection. Following the terrorism incident, the convoy transporting goods to

Kurram was halted and sent back for safety.

It was a major setback to the peace agreement that finally allowed aid to be sent to the restive region which remained in the spotlight for months following a wave of tribal violence that claimed over 130 lives and resulted in the closure of routes for over 100 days. So far, only two consignments of aid for Kurram could be dispatched during the last two weeks, with the latest one to reach the tribal region on January 14.

The residents complain that the aid that had been delivered goods were "not good enough", while the helicopter service for patient transfers from Kurram also remains suspended for the past 10 days. Despite a peace deal reached between the warring tribes under the negotiations facilitated by the Grand Jirga, the Kurram Peace Committee, and local peace groups, the situation remains precarious in the district.

Israeli security cabinet approves ceasefire deal

DOHA/CAIRO/JERUSAL EM (Reuters): The Israeli security cabinet approved a ceasefire deal on Friday, paving the way for the return of the first hostages from Gaza as early as Sunday and bringing a halt to 15 months of conflict that have devastated the coastal strip. The accord is still conditional on the approval of the full cabinet, which was meeting on Friday afternoon..

In Gaza itself, Israeli warplanes kept up intense strikes, and Palestinian authorities said late on Thursday that at least 86 people were killed in the day after the truce was unveiled. With longstanding divisions apparent among ministers, Israel delayed meetings expected on Thursday when the cabinet was expected to vote on the pact, blaming Hamas for the hold-up.

But in the early hours of Friday, Netanyahu's office said approval was imminent. "Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was informed by the negotiating team that agreements have been reached on a deal to release the hostages," his office said in a statement. The security cabinet would meet on Friday before a full meeting of the cabinet later to approve the deal, it said.

Ukraine attack Russia

MOSCOW (Reuters): Ukraine launched an attack on Russia's Belgorod region with six US-made ATACMS missiles, the Russian Defence Ministry said on Friday. It said that Russia would retaliate, but that all the missiles had been intercepted, resulting in no casualties or damage. Moscow has said it will respond every time Ukraine fires ATACMS or British-supplies Storm Shadow cruise missiles into Russia.



LAHORE: Chairman Ruet-e-Halal Committee Maulana Abdul Khabeer Azad addressing to Itehad e Ummat conference at Badshahi Masjid. —APP Photo

Societies ignoring scholars’ advice face destruction: Salman

LAHORE (APP): Punjab Health Minister Khawaja Salman Rafique Friday highlighted the critical role of religious scholars in guiding societies, stating that communities disregarding their advice face destruction.

He expressed these views as the chief guest at the 22nd annual “Dai-e-Itehad-e-Ummat” conference, held at Badshahi Masjid here on Friday. The event was organised to honour the legacy of the late Maulana Abdul Qadir Azad. In his address, Khawaja Salman Rafique remarked, “It is a blessing from Allah Almighty that He created humans as the most superior of all creations, and an even greater blessing is that we are the followers of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). This conference is remarkable, attended by esteemed

scholars whom I deeply respect.”

Highlighting the contributions of Maulana Abdul Qadir Azad, he added, “Maulana Azad’s uniqueness lies in the fact that many of his disciples are proficient in Arabic. It is an honor to visit the Badshahi Masjid, where the Poet of the East Allama Iqbal was laid to rest. Allama Azad always worked for the unity of the Muslim Ummah, and his efforts are evident today as people from all schools of thought are present on this stage.”

Khateeb Badshahi Masjid Maulana Abdul Khabir Azad also addressed the gathering, condemning Israel’s atrocities in Gaza and Palestine. “Israel will have to account for its actions. Every child in Pakistan stands in solidarity with Palestine. While we appreciate the peace agreement, we pay tribute to

the sacrifices of the martyrs,” he said.

He also praised the efforts of Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif, saying, “She is doing excellent work in Punjab. The cleanliness of Punjab, health initiatives, and numerous welfare projects for women are a testament to her performance. The nation stands with its military institutions, and those spreading discord will face failure. The entire nation is resolute against terrorism, and we will drive the final nail into the coffin of terrorism.”

The conference concluded with a message of unity among different schools of thought and a pledge to work together for peace and harmony. Secretary Auqaf Tahir Raza Bukhari, renowned Ulema and Mashaikh also spoke on the occasion.

New regulations for drug addicts in Punjab jails: Home Dept

LAHORE (APP): The Home Department Punjab on Friday issued new rules and regulations under the jail reform agenda for prisoners involved in drug-related crimes.

A spokesperson for the Home Department said that according to the new regulations, separate barracks had been designated for drug addicts and drug traffickers in jails across Punjab, ensuring that these prisoners are isolated from each other as well as from other inmates.

The spokesperson explained that these regulations aim to rehabilitate drug addicts and prevent the spread of the addiction among other prisoners.

Under the new rules, each prisoner would undergo a medical check-up upon entering jail to determine any drug use and those found to be addicted would be placed in a separate category. Additionally, drug addicts and traffickers barracks would be closely monitored with special CCTV cameras

and surveillance equipment.

The jail medical officers would conduct daily visits to assess the health of these prisoners and treatment as well as counseling would be provided according to the department’s SOPs.

Furthermore, jail authorities had been instructed to include recovering prisoners in educational courses and skill development programme. Separate days would be assigned for family visits for drug-addicted and trafficking prisoners and all items brought by

visitors would be thoroughly searched and scanned.

Similarly, separate days would also be designated for these prisoners to use the Public Call Offices (PCOs), ensuring no communication between drug offenders.

U.S. CG Kristin K. Hawkins visits UET

LAHORE (APP): A four-day training workshop on the strengthening of higher education system, under the USAID initiative, concluded at the University of Engineering and Technology (UET) Lahore on Friday.

The closing ceremony of the workshop was held at the main campus, while the U.S. Consul General Kristin K. Hawkins attended it as the chief guest. She met Vice Chancellor Prof. Dr. Shahid Munir and discussed various issues including academic exchange opportunities between universities in Pakistan and the United States.

The workshop, conducted with the support of USAID, was held in collaboration with the U.S. government and 16 public universities across Pakistan. The primary aim of the workshop was to equip Pakistani students with the necessary resources to build successful careers in the future.

Experts such as Dr. Randy McCrillis and Dr. Kari Ellingson from the University of Utah, Kerry Johnson from the American University in Cairo, and Dr. Kevin D. Arco from Duke University, provided training on topics including student leadership and mental health services.

PEMA increases outsourced schools' funds

LAHORE (APP): The Punjab Education Initiative Management Authority (PEMA) has announced an increase in funds for outsourced schools.

According to the initiative, the outsourced school administration will get Rs1,500 per student. PEMA sources said that after this increase, outsourced schools will also be given Rs. 850 towards tuition fees and Rs. 350 for administrative and other expenses. In addition, an additional Rs. 300 would also be given for upgradation of school buildings and organization of co-curricular activities.

Meanwhile, earlier, Chief Minister (CM) Punjab Maryam Nawaz Sharif had announced the outsourcing of approximately 14,000 government schools under the Public Schools Re-organisation Programme (PSRP).

According to the PRSP, in the first phase, around 5,800 schools are being outsourced, that are under monitoring and supervision by the Punjab Government.

Punjab School Education Department (PSDE) sources in this connection informed that Punjab has 50,000 schools, adding it is difficult to ensure constant oversight of every institution. The sources said that on the directions of the Punjab CM, the stakeholders, who will manage the outsourced schools will now be part of the Punjab government’s team.

Domestic workers thief gang busted

LAHORE (APP): A domestic workers’ thieves gang, which had stolen gold ornaments, has been traced with the help of Smart Safe City Gujranwala’s cameras.

According to details, a complaint was made on the 15 emergency helpline regarding the theft of 80 tolas of gold by a domestic worker. Upon receiving the complaint, the search for the suspects began using Safe City Gujranwala’s cameras. The suspects were seen traveling in an auto-rickshaw in the footage. Initial investigations revealed that three women fled in the rickshaw with two other accomplices.

The spokesperson for the Safe Cities Authority stated that the three women and two men could be seen in the video escaping in the rickshaw. The virtual patrolling officer of Safe City Gujranwala provided all evidence to the relevant police, who subsequently arrested the gang after a search.

Further legal action is underway against the suspects. Citizens are advised to thoroughly check the police records when hiring domestic workers.

15 dead in road accidents

LAHORE (APP): At least 15 people were killed and 1,322 others injured in 1,223 road accidents in Punjab during the last 24 hours.

As many as 587 people with serious injuries were shifted to different hospitals, while 735 victims with minor injuries were treated at the incident site by rescue medical teams. The data analysis showed that 700 drivers, 66 underage drivers, 166 pedestrians, and 471 passengers were among the victims of road traffic crashes. The statistics showed that 209 accidents were reported in Lahore, which affected 230 people, placing the provincial capital at top of the list, followed by Faisalabad with 85 accidents and 80 victims, and at third Multan with 72 accidents and 81 victims.

PTI should not backtrack from talks: Talal Chaudhry

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) Senator Talal Chaudhry on Friday called upon the Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI) to continue participating in the ongoing talks, saying the party should not back away as it was well-acquainted with the case.

Speaking with the private news channel he noted that the PTI had already demonstrated confidence in the judges and courts on two separate occasions.

Senator Talal stated that it is abundantly clear that the PTI chairman and his wife will not be able to evade the ongoing case. Notably, the PTI leadership has repeatedly asserted that

any potential punishment will not hinder the negotiation process.

Senator Talal Chaudhry observed that the perception of a potential National Reconciliation Ordinance (NRO)-style deal for the opposition has all but evaporated in the wake of the 190 million pound case decision.

Ministry of Law & Justice concludes workshop on ADR



F.P. Report

KARACHI: A two-day training workshop on Arbitration designed and funded by the Ministry of Law and Justice, under its newly established International Mediation and Arbitration Centre (IMAC), concluded today at Sindh Judicial Academy.

Judicial officers, lawyers, and professionals from different sectors participated in the workshop. The trainers provided expert insights into best practices in arbitration.

Mr. Justice Muhammad Iqbal Kalhoro of the High Court of Sindh graced the occasion as a Chief Guest. He appreciated the efforts of the IMAC and the Ministry of Law & Justice in promoting ADR.

While addressing the backlog of cases, he underscored the significance of ADR mechanisms in expediting dispute resolution and alleviating the burden on courts. He proposed that arbitration laws should be amended to better align with the complexities of the modern world.

The Ministry of Law & Justice, following the

Public Notice

In the Court of Syed Zamarrud Shah Judge Banking Court-II Federal Judicial Complex Phase-7 Hayatabad Peshawar

Case No:234/1 Next Date: 20-2-2025 Suit for recovery of Rs.17,52,302/- Bank Alfalah Mingora Branch Swat Vs: Waqatullah

Notice Versus: Waqat ullah S/o Abdul Ahad R/o Mohallah Landi Kass, Near Hamid General Store, Mingora Tehsil Babuzai, District Swat

Office Address: Waqatullah Construction Company, Azam Khan Plaza Mingora Swat. Where is the plaintiff Bank has instituted a suit for the recovery of Rs.1752302/- against you under section 10(2) of the Financial institutions (Recovery of Finances) Ordinance 2001, you are hereby summoned to obtain leave of the court to appear and defend the suit within 30 days after receipt/ be passed in favour of the plaintiff Bank with costs. Issue today on 13-1-2025 under my signature and seal of the court.

Judge | Banking Court-II Peshawar

OFFICE OF THE TEHSIL MUNICIPAL OFFICER
TEHSIL MUNICIPAL ADMINISTRATION CHITRAL
CORRIGENDUM

Reference to the Advertisement INF(P)3576/24 published in various newspapers including Daily Frontier Post on January 03, 2025 where for the work at Serial No. 1 “Provision of Pipe on Need Basis in Tehsil Chitral” At Serial 95 “Provision of DWSS Pipes for Lower Chitral” and at Serial No. 112 “DWSS Kuru and Arkal” the following terms and conditions are added as Mandatory.

- The bidder who bid for the work must have experience in the same nature of work i.e having at least 3 contracts completed 8” dia G.I Pipe and above of drinking water supply scheme.**
- The Bidder must have completed at least 3 schemes of Drinking Water Supply Scheme having cost equal to the total amount of work to be tendered.**

All others terms and conditions are fully intact. INF(P) 218/25

Tehsil Municipal Officer, Chitral

GOVERNMENT OF KHYBER PAKHTUNKHWA
COMMUNICATION & WORKS DEPARTMENT HIGHWAY DIVISION
NORTH WAZIRISTAN Tel: No. 0928-313511
NOTICE INVITING E-BIDDING
Single Stage Two Envelope E-Bidding System)

Communication & Works Department Highway Division North Waziristan invites electronic Bids from the eligible Firms/Bidders Enlisted in accordance with KPRA Procurement Rule-2014 for the following works.

S #	Name of Work	Require d categ - ory of PEC	Bid Security	Tender Fee @ 0.03%	Last date & time of bids submission	Date & Time of Opening of Technical Bids	Date of opening of financial bids	Period of completion
1760/195305-Improvement, Rehabilitation & Construction of new Bridges. (AIP) (02-Bridges, NWDT Share)								
1	SH-1 Construction of RCC Bridge Hassan Khel Bridge, Spinwam	C-2 and above + CEO2	2% of the Engineer Estimate	Rs.181000	05.02.2025 12:00 hour	05.02.2025 12:30 hour	Date of opening of financial bid will be announce after the approval of Technical bids from the competent authority	As per Work Order
2	SH-2: Construction of Koram Bridge, Datta Khel	C-2 and above + CEO2	-do-	Rs.152000	-do-	-do-		-do-

- Instruction to bidders (bid documents) can be downloaded from C&W website www.cwd.gko.pk as well as KPRA website www.kopra.gov.pk.
- The bidders should submit their E-bids as per KPRA Notification No. SRO (14)/Vol: 1-24/2021-22 dated 10/05/2022/6058-71.
- Complete detail of Bid Security in shape of CDR i.e. Bank Name CDR Number(s) and Date(s) must be submitted electronically along with E-bid on the E-bidding system.
- All the bidder are required to be registered with the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Revenue authority, established under the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Finance Act, 2013 (Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Act No.XXI of 2013).
- Bids should be in sealed envelopes clearly marked “Technical Bid” and “Financial Bid”.
- Qualification criteria, Bidding Documents, Terms & Conditions and any other information regarding single stage two envelope e-bidding process may be obtained from the office of the undersigned on any working day.
- Venue of bids opening is office of the Executive Engineer Highway Division District North Waziristan, Miranshah

EXECUTIVE ENGINEER INF(P)221/25
Highway Division North Waziristan

UNIVERSITY OF PESHAWAR
CORRIGENDUM
CHANGE/EXTENSION IN THE BID SUBMISSION DATE

Invitation to Bid for Provision of Furniture Items/Computer & Other Allied Equipment and Networking Accessories for Department of Computer Science

Reference the subject Invitation to Bid, it is for the information of all concerned that the Bid for the Provision of Furniture Items/Computer & other Allied Equipment and Networking Accessories for Department of Computer Sciences may be read as follows:

Tender No	Description	Tender Fee	Pre-Bid Meeting	Tender Submission Date & Time	Tender Opening Date & Time
01/2024-25	Furniture Items	Rs.3,000/-	22.01.2025 (Wednesday)	28.01.2025 (Tuesday) Upto 10:00AM	28.01.2025 (Tuesday) Upto 10:30AM
02/2024-25	Computer & Other Allied equipment / Networking Accessories	Rs.3,000/-	22.01.2025 (Wednesday)	28.01.2025 (Tuesday) Upto 10:00AM	28.01.2025 (Tuesday) Upto 10:30AM

All other terms and conditions mentioned in the advertisement will remain the same.

The Treasurer | University of Peshawar

OOFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE ENGINEER
IRRIGATION DIVISION, SOUTH WAZIRISTAN
TRIBAL DISTRICT AT TANK
NOTICE INVITING E-BIDDING

Irrigation Department Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Irrigation Division South Waziristan Tribal District at Tank Invites Electronic Bids from the Eligible Firms / Contractors enlisted with Irrigation Department Khyber Pakhtunkhwa who have renewed their registration for the CFY (2024-25) and having registration with Pakistan Engineering Council for the CFY (2024-25) in the relevant category in accordance with KPRA Procurement Rules 2014 on **Single Stage Single Envelop** procedure for the following works.

Last Date & Time of Tender Submission : 30-01-2025 (11:30 AM)

Date & Time of Opening : 30-01-2025 (12:00 PM)

Completion Period : As per work order

Required Category of PEC : CE-04

ADP No.	Name of Work/Sub Work	Estimated Cost (Rs. In M)	Earnest Money + Stamp Duty with tender fee (In Rs.)
A DISTRICT DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVES IN KURRAM, NORTH WAZIRISTAN AND SOUTH WAZIRISTAN UPPER & LOWER R, ADP No: 979/240312 (2024-25)			
1	Construction of Irrigation Channel for Shalam Area Spin Tanai Tehsil Wana	75.00	1541250
2	Construction of Irrigation Channel at Aziz Kach Lower Waziristan	30.00	627750
3	Construction of Irrigation Channel at Arshad Haron Walidak Area Lower Waziristan	20.00	424750
4	Construction of Weir at shalam Spin Tanai Channel Tehsil Wana	75.00	1541250
B REHABILITATION OF DAMAGED IRRIGATION INFRASTRUCTURE IN MERGED DISTRICTS, ADP No: 1920/240059 (2024-25)			
1	Rehabilitation of Check Dams / Channels and Protection Walls in Various Places of Noor Syed Kaches Lower Waziristan	20.00	424750
2	Rehabilitation of Irrigation Channel Wassan Khel Wacha Dhana Tehsil Birmal Wana, Lower Waziristan	5.000	120250
C CONSTRUCTION OF IRRIGATION TUBE WELLS / LIFT IRRIGATION SHCEMES AND SOLARIZATION OF EXISTING IRRIGATION TUBE WELLS IN MERGED AREA, ADP No: 1914/210588 (2024-25)			
1	Construction of Solar Based Irrigation Tube Well for the land of Yasiren Kach Tehsil Wana	2.2064	51100
2	Construction of Solar Based Irrigation Tube Well for the land of Toji Khel Tehsil Wana	2.2064	51100

TERMS & CONDITIONS FOR E-BIDDING:-
(Irrigation Department Website: www.Irrigation.gkp.pk for E-Bidding Procedure and other requirements)

- The Bids shall be submitted electronically through E-Bidding on or before the fixed date / time.
- The Bidder Shall submit the bids with requisite documents through registry / courier services including 2% bids security of the estimated Cost + Stamp Duty in the shape of call deposit (Original) in sealed envelope before closing date and time.
- For **Additional Security** in case abnormally low bids KPRA Notification S.R.O. (14)/Vol: 1-24/2021-22, Dated 10th May, 2022 shall be enforced.
- The procuring entity may reject all bids at any time prior to the acceptance of a bid, the procurement entity shall upon request communicate to any contractor who submitted a bid, the ground for rejection of all bids as per KPRA Rules 47(1).
- Tender shall be opened on advertised date and time in the presence of bidders or their representatives who may like to attend the session. In case of any unforeseen reason, public holiday, unrest or force majeure on the bid submission / opening date, the tender shall be opened on the next working day at the same place and time.
- The bid security shall be forfeited if a bidder withdraws his bid, with in the validity period thereof or, in the case of a successful bidder, who repudiates the contract or fails to furnish performance security.
- All federal and provincial duties / stamp duty / taxes including sales tax will be recoverable as per directive of the Government issued from time to time.
- Call deposit of schedule banks shall be acceptable. No Bank cheque or pay order shall be acceptable.
- If any document submits along with bid documents found false / Bogus the registration of the contractor firm shall stand cancelled/ black listed.
- Incomplete, conditional and bids without 2% of earnest money or without additional security (if applicable) shall be considered as non-responsive.
- All bidders are required to be registered with the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Revenue Authority, established under the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Finance Act, 2013 (Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Act No: XXI of 2013) for works, consulting and non-consulting services as listed in Schedule-II of the Act bid.

Executive Engineer, INF(P) 214/25
(Irrigation Division)
South Waziristan Tribal District at Tank
Fax / Phone No: 0963-512385



PESHAWAR: Commissioner Peshawar Division Riaz Khan Mehsud chairing a meeting regarding improving the facilities at general bus stands.

Improvement of Peshawar bus terminals directed

E.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Under the public agenda of Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Ali Amin Gandapur, all bus terminals in Peshawar are to be improved on an emergency basis. Passengers are to be provided with basic facilities and every possible convenience. Corrupt officials stationed at bus terminals will

be removed immediately, and honest and reputable employees will be appointed in their place. Strict compliance with government-approved fares will be ensured. A list of bus terminals lacking basic facilities is to be prepared within 24 hours. Recommendations for providing immediate relief to passengers and implementing the official fare schedule will be pre-

pared by all relevant departments and submitted by January 21. These directives were issued by Commissioner Peshawar Division, Riaz Khan Mehsud, while presiding over a meeting focused on improving the state of bus terminals and ensuring facilities for passengers. The meeting was attended by the Deputy Commissioner Peshawar, officials from the Transport

Department, Traffic Police, Capital Metropolitan, and other relevant authorities. During the meeting, Commissioner Riaz Khan Mehsud formed a committee under the leadership of the Deputy Commissioner Peshawar and directed the utilization of all resources to provide immediate relief to passengers. Another meeting has been scheduled for Tuesday, January 21, to review progress.

Hamas' victory in Gaza highlighted in JI rallies

E.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Jamaat-e-Islami Pakistan marked a day of gratitude across the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa on Friday, celebrating the ceasefire agreement in Gaza as a historic victory for Hamas. The call for the observance came from Jamaat-e-Islami chief, Engineer Hafiz Naeem ur Rehman, following nearly a year and a half of conflict between Hamas and Israel.



Speakers highlighted the immense toll of the conflict, accusing Israel of using its full military might, including airstrikes and heavy artillery, to devastate Gaza. They underscored Hamas' resilience and the sacrifices of the Palestinian people, which forced Israel into a ceasefire. "Hamas remains a strong and present force in Gaza, standing with the

people despite the unprecedented challenges," one speaker declared. Similar gatherings took place throughout the province. In Charsadda, a rally led by provincial Jamaat-e-Islami leaders began at the Islamic Center and concluded at Farooq Azam Chowk. Addressing the crowd, Provincial Ameer Abdul Wasi commended Hamas and the Palestinian people for their unwavering sacrifices in defending the Holy Land and Al-Aqsa Mosque. "Hamas has proven that no power can overcome the spirit of jihad and martyrdom," Wasi said. Similarly, rallies were held in Mardan, Swabi, Mohmand and Khyber Districts and cherished the victory of Hamas and Palestinian people.

KP Assembly, SBBWU sign landmark MoU

E.P. Report

PESHAWAR: In a significant development aimed at fostering academic collaboration and promoting experiential learning, the Provincial Assembly of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Shaheed Benazir Bhutto Women University (SBBWU), Peshawar, signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) today at the Speaker's Chamber of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly. The signing ceremony was held in the esteemed presence of the Speaker of the Provincial Assembly, Mr. Babar Saleem Swati. The MoU was formally signed by the Secretary of the Assembly, Mr. Kifayat Ullah Afridi, and the Vice

Chancellor of SBBWU, Prof. Dr. Safia Ahmed (T.I.). Deputy Speaker Ms. Suriya Bibi, Special Secretary Syed Waqar Shah, and other senior officials were also present at the event. This partnership marks a milestone in bridging the gap between academia and legislative processes. It aims to provide students with an in-depth understanding of governance, public policy, and legislative procedures through various initiatives. Under the MoU, the Assembly will offer internships and training opportunities to students of SBBWU and its affiliated institutions, allowing them to observe and actively participate in legislative

processes. Furthermore, the two institutions will jointly organize workshops, seminars, and conferences on topics such as constitutional law, governance, and public policy, fostering a culture of academic and practical knowledge-sharing. In addition, students will have the opportunity to conduct legislative research under the supervision of Assembly members and officials. This will include providing legal analysis and recommendations on various legislative and governance topics. The Assembly has also committed to sharing relevant legislative materials and data to support academic research efforts.

Speaker Babar Saleem Swati lauded the collaboration as a progressive step toward empowering the youth of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa with the knowledge and skills required for future leadership roles. He emphasized the importance of such partnerships in creating a more informed and engaged society. This MoU, valid for three years, highlights the shared commitment of both institutions to nurturing talent and enhancing academic and practical synergies. It stands as a testament to the Provincial Assembly's dedication to engaging with the academic community and fostering a deeper understanding of legislative processes.

Mandatory training for government pilgrims begins

First workshop scheduled in Peshawar on Saturday

PESHAWAR (APP): The Ministry of Religious Affairs and Interfaith Harmony on Friday announced the commencement of mandatory training sessions for government-designated Hajj pilgrims across the country. According to the ministry spokesperson Muhammad Umar Butt, the first training workshop will take place on Saturday, January 18, 2025 in Peshawar. The first phase of the mandatory Hajj training program will conclude on February 27. Nationwide, training will be conducted at 147 designated locations to ensure comprehensive coverage. Participation in these training workshops is mandatory for all government Hajj pilgrims. Attendance will be recorded through a QR code system available in the Pak Hajj mobile app. Overseas Pakistanis intending to perform Hajj are required to undergo training at the respective Hajj camp prior to their journey. The ministry has urged pilgrims to strictly follow the schedule and ensure their participation in the assigned training workshops to facilitate a smooth pilgrimage experience. In addition, the ministry has intensified its preparations for Hajj 2025, with the fitness tests for assistants entering the final stages of planning. Under the supervision of Joint Secretary Hajj, Sajjad Haider Yildirim, comprehensive arrangements for the fitness tests are underway. As part of these preparations, a trial run was conducted at the Shalimar Ground for the ministry's employees to determine the optimal timing for the fitness tests. Notably, the trial run saw active participation from Joint Secretary Hajj Sajjad Haider Yildirim, Deputy Secretary Nasir Aziz Khan, and other senior officials.

Oxford, Cambridge experts discuss educational cooperation with Governor

PESHAWAR (APP): Research experts from Oxford and Cambridge Universities on Friday met with Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Faisal Karim Kundi, at the Governor House and discussed international cooperation opportunities to enhance education, skills development, and capacity building. The delegation was led by Shehzad Khan Tarakai. During the meeting, the Governor and the experts talked about creating projects that would provide better educational facilities to the people of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and offer training aligned with global standards. Governor Faisal Karim Kundi emphasized that this collaboration would open new opportunities for the province's students and youth, ultimately contributing to the region's progress. The delegation members assured that they would design practical initiatives based on an understanding of the province's needs, aiming to increase educational and employment opportunities.

Meanwhile, Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) District General Secretary of Lakki Marwat, Qasimullah, and District Information Secretary, Advocate Javed Iqbal called on Governor, Faisal Karim Kundi. During the meeting, the delegation expressed deep concern over the deteriorating law and order situation in the province. The delegation also thanked Governor Kundi for appointing Advocate Javed Iqbal as a member of the selection board for

Khushal Khan Khattak University Karak. Governor Faisal Karim Kundi assured the delegation that the workers of the party are an asset, and the doors of the Governor House are always open to them. He further said that the provincial government is playing a criminal role in the province's worsening security situation. The delegation praised Governor Kundi for his commitment to fighting for the rights of the province and taking an active interest in resolving public issues.

Revolutionary initiatives taken by KP Youth Affairs Directorate

Syed Adnan

PESHAWAR: The Directorate of Youth Affairs, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, under the leadership of Director Dr Nauman Mujahid, has achieved significant milestones within just eight months, setting new standards for youth development across the province. These initiatives have focused on empowering the younger generation, fostering their skills, and creating opportunities for their growth and development. Among the notable achievements is the establishment of Youth Development Centers in multiple districts, providing skill-enhancing training and capacity-building programs. These centers have become vital platforms for nurturing talent and innovation. Thousands of young individuals have benefited from specialized skill development programs, including courses in digital skills, entrepreneurship, and freelancing, equipping them with tools to succeed in the modern economy. New business grants and loan schemes have been introduced to support aspiring entrepreneurs, enabling them to turn their business ideas into reality and contribute to the province's economic progress. Under the Directorate's leadership, work on several Jawan Marakiz (youth centers) has progressed, with centers in Swabi, Mardan, and Dera Ismail Khan nearing completion. Leadership and environmental camps were successfully organized to engage youth in constructive activities, while a large-scale monsoon tree-planting campaign contributed to sustainability efforts. Partnerships with Bank of Khyber and Akhuwat were strengthened to advance the Ehsaas Naujawan program to promote youth employment and financial independence. The Directorate

also took possession of the Chapra Youth Hostel and expanded the Batakundi Youth Hostel with a new building, enhancing facilities for young travelers and students. In the coming months, the Directorate plans to sustain and expand these initiatives, focusing on new programs and collaborations. Certification programs in partnership with academic institutions will offer market-oriented training to tap into online opportunities. The Peshawar Youth Complex is set to be completed, serving as a centralized hub for youth activities. A Merged Area Youth Internship Program will be launched to provide opportunities specifically for youth from merged tribal areas. A Volunteers Youth Skills Development Program will be introduced to enhance the capabilities of volunteer youth. Efforts are also underway to attract international donors, including the United Nations, to support youth development programs. Additionally, an MoU will be signed with Friends of Paraplegics, a non-governmental organization led by persons with disabilities, to promote inclusivity and empowerment for all. Director Nauman Mujahid's proactive approach has not only provided the youth of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa with constructive opportunities but has also boosted their confidence and contributed to the province's overall development. These efforts align with the vision of Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur, who has emphasized creating more opportunities, promoting modern technology, and introducing initiatives like the Youth Parliament. The Directorate of Youth Affairs continues to empower the youth and pave the way for a brighter and more sustainable future in the province.



PESHAWAR: Provincial Minister for Higher Education Meena Khan Afridi being presented a shield by the Principal of City Girls College Gulbahar at the end of the Annual Sports Gala.

Muqam hails court verdict in £190 million scam

PESHAWAR (APP): Federal Minister for States and Frontier Regions, Gilgit-Baltistan, and Kashmir Affairs, Engr Amir Muqam, on Friday hailed the court verdict in the £190 million corruption case, stating that the person who accused others of being thieves was himself found guilty. Commenting on the PTI founder's conviction, Engr Amir Muqam said that the £190 million theft was proven today. He added that the plundering and robbery of the people of Pakistan's money had been confirmed, says a statement here. Engr Amir Muqam further stated that under the guise of slogans of honesty, the extent of the robbery was revealed. He claimed that Imran Khan had unlawfully used his powers to amass expensive rings, jewelry, and properties worth billions of rupees.



PESHAWAR: Gypsy girls guide their herd of sheep along the roadside at Charsadda Road.



In brief

Display of arms banned F.P. Report

KOHAT: Deputy commissioner Kohat has under section 144 Cr.PC imposed ban on the display of weapons in the limits of District Kohat with immediate effect for period of 30 days. The violation of this order is punishable under section 188 PPC. This was officially notified here on Friday.

Two killed in Karak F.P. Report

KARAK: Almost two people were killed by unknown persons in front of Banda Daud Shah Hospital. According to local sources, the incident took place when the victims were riding in their car. The incident as soon as the information was received, local police and rescue teams reached the spot and both the bodies were immediately shifted to Banda Daud Shah Hospital. Police have cordoned off the area and started an investigation. The reasons for the incident are yet to be known. The cause of death has not been determined, nor have the identities of the deceased been released. According to local sources, the incident could be the result of personal enmity or other factors. Police officials say that more information and evidence are being collected to determine the cause of the incident. The background of the incident can be clarified. The public has been requested to cooperate with the police and report any suspicious information. More details will be revealed after the initial police investigation.

Setup of Youth Development Unit F.P. Report

MARDAN: Deputy commissioner (DC) Mardan appreciated the youth development unit established by Assistant commissioner (AC) Takht Bhai Junaid Khalid during his visit to the sub division. The unit has been established under the "Awami Agenda" by chief minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. AC Takhtbhahi Junaid Khalid had established a youth development unit in tehsil complex Takhtbhahi for the uplift of youth of Takhtbhahi Sub Division. AC has already arranged anti-drugs seminars, free CSS and PMS seminars, free ILETS and GRE workshops, seminars on online earning, seminars on Seerat-un-Nabi (SAW), sports activities and many other events for the youth of Takhtbhahi sub division.

Tribesmen express pleasure F.P. Report

WANA: The Pak-Afghan crossing at Angoor Adda Gate is set to reopen for trade after 15 months of closure, marking a significant milestone for the region's struggling economy. The announcement, made by the Ahmadzai Wazir tribe and the organizers of an ongoing sit-in, aims to restore commercial activities between Pakistan and Afghanistan, offering a lifeline to local traders and businesses. While the decision has been welcomed by various quarters, the sit-in against visa and passport regulations remains in place. Protesters argue that the imposed requirements disproportionately affect tribes residing on both sides of the border, disrupting their lives and hindering long-standing cross-border connections. "We will not end our protest until these restrictions are lifted," declared one of the organizers, emphasizing the hardships faced by tribal communities.



BANNU: Activists of Jamat-e-Islami holding a banner during a rally in support of Israel-Hamas deal for ceasefire in Gaza. — F.P. photo

Ban on sale, purchase of state lands demanded

F.P. Report

LOWER DIR: A delegation of the Ex-State employees from the Lower and Upper Dir led by its general secretary Sarbiland Khan held a meeting with the Assistant Commissioner Samarbagh Zeeshan Najeeb and additional assistant commissioner Muhammad Yunus Khan in Samarbagh here on Friday.

The delegation informed the administration that state property was being sold illegally despite a ban on it. Speaking on the occasion Sarbiland Khan quoted the Supreme Court's decision and said that under it, state property should be protect-

ed from the land grabbers. He pointed out that some elements were selling the state land for illegal business purposes by declaring it out of the court's decision. He demanded the administration to stop these illegal activities and implement the apex court decision regarding the state lands. Sarbiland Khan said that state employees can go to any extent to protect their rights and the administration should ensure immediate implementation of court decisions to avoid further legal complications. The delegation informed the officials that according to the Supreme Court's

decision of 1974, the ex-state employees should be allotted lands for their services for the former Dir State. The delegation also expressed serious concerns over the illegal sale and purchase of lands at Ghari Khazana and demanded its immediate stoppage.

The delegation, while mentioning the land of Balambat, said that it should be handed over to the ex-state employees, as it was their legal right. They warned that if their demands were not met, they would be forced to approach the Supreme Court again for contempt of court.

DPO lauds media role for good governance F.P. Report

BUNER: A delegation Buner press club welcomed newly posted district police officer and held an introductory meeting regarding rule of law by ensuring transparency in governance due to watchdog role of media as well as the fourth pillar of modern's state.

In the meeting, important issues of Buner district including law and order situation, public police relations, illegal and black sale of red wire explosives for blast in marble leases and crush plants, overloading of trucks, traffic jams in markets, increasing number of professional female baggers and blackmailing of shopkeepers, increased numbers of transgender in Swari main business hub and the other important issues such as the continuous increase in the consumption of Ice-drug in the area were discussed in detail. There was a consensus on police measures and media cooperation to address these core issues due to which peaceful people of Buner district were facing difficulties and problems.

The commitments were made that the district of Buner will be cleaned in every way. The journalist community will play its journalistic role side by side with the police in creating a cradle of peace and preventing crimes. The newly appointed DPO Saud Khan expressed his commitment to take the media into confidence and try to solve the problems of the people if Buner and make Buner district a crime free and cradle of peace.

Former Minister inaugurates Services delivery center: Former Minister of C&W and Member Provincial Assembly Riaz Khan along with Deputy Commissioner inaugurated Services Delivery Center (SDC) at Jokhaila Chowk area of Tehsil Gadezai, district Buner, on Friday.

On this occasion, MPA Riaz Khan has also announced the establishment of a sub center of the SDC, next month for Salazarai sub tehsil too. In this SDC, all matters related to properties will be done under one roof and the people of the area will save time and money.

In the opening ceremony AC Gadezai Salazarai Nasir Ali Khan, Nazim Sher Alam Khan, TMO Anwar Shamim Khan, Tehsildar Naseeb Zay, Director Land Record Computerization Attaulah Khan, local elders and PTI activists participated in large numbers.

NCN-MTI, Swabi, students organize first Anatomy exhibition

F.P. Report

SWABI: The first-ever Anatomy Exhibition was held in the Nigar College of Nursing auditorium, where students showcased eight informative stalls highlighting various aspects of anatomy. The exhibits featured detailed models of the Human Eye, Human Ear, Human Heart, Skin, Neuron, Female Reproductive System, Human Digestive System, and Kidney.

The Principal of the Nursing College, Mr. Hizbullah, warmly welcomed the executive guests and provided a comprehensive briefing about the college's achievements and the students' outstanding performance.

Each team leader, accompanied by their team members, presented their projects to the Dean, Hospital Director, Medical Director, Nursing Director,



and Director of Finance, offering in-depth explanations of their work.

The Hospital Director, Nursing Director, Dean, and Medical Director conducted a detailed assessment of the projects and praised the students for their exceptional effort, dedication, and creativity.

Following the evaluations, shields were awarded to the top three project teams in recognition of their exemplary work. The event concluded with appreciation certificates

being distributed to all participating students. Additionally, the Principal presented certificates of appreciation to the esteemed guests, acknowledging their support and valuable participation.

After the exhibition, the executive team visited the Skills Lab, Laboratory, and other key facilities at the Nigar College of Nursing. They commended the principal's efforts in providing students with in-depth knowledge and a comprehensive education.

Residents appeal for provision of compensation

F.P. Report

KARAK: The residents of Karak appealed the provincial government to announce special financial assistance for the workers who died and were injured in the Emberi Kalla tragedy. All these victims belonged to the lower class, among whom was a cart driver. Some are chickpea vendors, and all are very deserving people.

The public and social circles of Takht Nusrati Tehsil of Karak District have appealed to the Chief Minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Sardar Ali Amin Khan Gandapur, Minister of Agriculture, Major Sajjad Barakwal, DEDIC Chairman Khurshid Khattak, and

Advisor to the Chief Minister. A strong appeal has been made through MNA Shahid Khattak to immediately announce a special grant for the families of the deceased and the injured.

This is a heartbreaking tragedy, in which all those who lost their lives and were injured There were people whose livelihood depended on hard work. The public is hopeful that the government will heal the wounds of these affected families and, feeling their pain, will take immediate relief measures.

Drug Inspector violates high-ups order: Ignoring the higher orders of the Health Department, Drug Inspector Lakki Marwat Dr. Rehmat Shah (BPS-17)

continued to work as a Pharmacist (BPS-17) in District Headquarters Hospital Karak despite the posting orders issued on January 9, 2025. Didn't charge.

Despite the passage of three days, the absence of a pharmacist has caused serious difficulties for the hospital administration and patients. DHQ Hospital Karak, where hundreds of patients come for treatment every day, is facing problems including the supply of medicines due to the lack of a pharmacist. Important matters are at a standstill and patients are facing severe distress, while the hospital administration also seems helpless in this situation.

Viable plan for mass transit system directed

F.P. Report

KOHAT: Deputy Commissioner Kohat Abdul Akram has directed the authorities concerned to prepare a comprehensive and viable plan for starting the Mass Transit System at the Divisional Headquarter Kohat and submit it at the earliest so as to make progress in this regard.

He gave these directions while presiding over a meeting held in his office on the proposed Mass Transit System in the Divisional Headquarter Kohat today. The meeting beside others, was also attended by the ADC (G), Officers of the District Administration and other concerned departments and institutions.

The meeting discussed in detail the various aspects of this important project and certain decisions were made in this respect. Deputy Commissioner Kohat directed the quarters concerned to immediately submit a comprehensive and workable plan of the routes and other arrange-

ments of the proposed Mass Transit Service. He said, keeping in view the rapidly growing population, this project is of great importance and it will have a positive and far-reaching impacts on the development and prosperity of the region.

Meanwhile, Deputy Commissioner Kohat also held an important meeting on the problems of the Hospitals, in which Rs.16 Million have been approved for the supply of Medicines and other facilities, out of which Rs.11 Million for DHQ Hospital Kohat and Rs.5 Million for Liaquat Memorial Women & Children Hospital have been allocated.

DC Kohat also issued directions to set-up Free Medical Camps under the supervision of Skin Specialist Doctors in the Lachi and Dara Adamkhel Tehsils of the district to effectively deal with Leishmaniasis disease and to ensure timely relief to the people.

Meanwhile, the Chairman DDAC Kohat Shafi Jan MPA has said that work on the installa-

tion of Town Pressure System (TPS) in Kohat is rapidly in progress that will permanently solve the gas problems in the entire Kohat city. He added, with the installation of 4 TPS, the issue of gas delivery in Jangal Khel area has been resolved and it has provided great convenience to the public.

This he said while visiting the sites of TPS along with the authorities concerned of the SNGPL on Friday. Shafi Jan MPA said, he and Shahryar Afridi MNA are closed to the resolution of gas problems in Kohat and striving hard to make the TPS fully operational at earliest.

He maintained that 17 additional TPS will be installed in the entire city, after which all problems related to gas pressure in the entire city will be solved permanently. He further said that the project of installing another TPS on OTS Road is nearing to completion, which will also solve the gas problems of the residents of OTS Road and the continuity of gas delivery will be ensured.

Mayor blames PTI govt for deprivation of Bannu

F.P. Report

BANNU: The construction and development of Bannu is the first priority. Unfortunately, the provincial government treats the southern districts including Bannu like a stepmother. It is open hostility with the people here. The government also deprives local government representatives of funds in one district of the southern districts including Bannu.

The conspiracy and provision of basic facilities to the people is the biggest setback. Despite the lack of resources, the municipal mayors and chairmen of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa are continuing to serve with funds from the federal government and A series of steps are being taken to get the development plan. There is hope of good news soon. Mayor Bannu Irfan Durrani expressed these views while addressing a meeting held in Tehsil Municipal Administration and talking to the media.

Focal person Shoaib Khan Surani was also present on this occasion. He said that for the past several years, Tehreek-e-Insaaf has deprived the entire province, especially the southern districts, of development and ignored the funds of the elected representatives of the local bodies of the districts

and has deprived millions of people who are suffering from problems. Development has been ignored, due to which the municipal mayors and chairmen of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa have become protesters.

Regular negotiations have been held and meetings have also been held with the government delegation under the leadership of Ahsan Iqbal, in which the local government representatives have been informed about the problems and problems faced by them and the provision of funds, who have assured to solve the problems.

and prolonged droughts. Groundwater, once abundant, is now rapidly depleting due to unregulated extraction. Poor water resource management and a lack of implementation of national water policies have left these communities vulnerable. The gravity of the crisis demands urgent action. If no steps are taken, these areas will face a severe water emergency in the near future, impacting agriculture, livestock, and daily life. This is a stark reminder that the solutions of the past must be revisited and adapted to the needs of today.

The reintroduction of collective water ponds is not merely a nostalgic nod to the past—it is a practical and sustainable solution to the current water crisis. These ponds can once again play a vital role in ensuring water security, but their revival must be guided by modern scientific methods to maximize their efficiency and utility. Traditional water ponds can be upgraded with modern rainwater harvesting systems, including filtration

Reviving indigenous water management practices in KP

Said Nasir

WATER is life, yet for the rural areas of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), the very essence of life is slipping away due to an acute water crisis. Once self-sufficient through traditional practices of rainwater storage in collective ponds, villages across the region are now grappling with depleted water resources. These ponds, which sustained human and animal consumption, agriculture, and household needs for centuries, have been abandoned in favor of boreholes, tube wells, and government-supplied water schemes. While these modern interventions brought convenience, they inadvertently disrupted an age-old balance, and the region is now paying the price.

For generations, villages across KPK maintained communal water ponds designed to store rainwater and serve as a lifeline for their communities. The water stored was used for

drinking, irrigating fields, and meeting everyday household needs. Villagers, united by a shared responsibility, regularly maintained these ponds to ensure their usability.

This system was not only practical but also environmentally friendly. Rainwater, instead of being lost as surface runoff, was collected and stored, replenishing the water table and ensuring a steady supply throughout the year. However, as modern technologies like tube wells and boreholes became accessible, these ponds fell into disrepair, their value forgotten. The result has been a growing dependency on underground water resources that are now being exhausted at an alarming rate.

The consequences of abandoning traditional water storage methods have been dire. KPK's rural areas are now facing significant water shortages, and the situation is expected to worsen with time. Climate change has aggravated the issue, bringing unpredictable rainfall

patterns and prolonged droughts. Groundwater, once abundant, is now rapidly depleting due to unregulated extraction. Poor water resource management and a lack of implementation of national water policies have left these communities vulnerable. The gravity of the crisis demands urgent action. If no steps are taken, these areas will face a severe water emergency in the near future, impacting agriculture, livestock, and daily life. This is a stark reminder that the solutions of the past must be revisited and adapted to the needs of today.

The reintroduction of collective water ponds is not merely a nostalgic nod to the past—it is a practical and sustainable solution to the current water crisis. These ponds can once again play a vital role in ensuring water security, but their revival must be guided by modern scientific methods to maximize their efficiency and utility. Traditional water ponds can be upgraded with modern rainwater harvesting systems, including filtration

mechanisms to ensure clean water for drinking and household use. Water from the ponds can be directed into recharge wells to replenish groundwater levels, ensuring long-term sustainability. To prevent water loss through seepage, the ponds can be lined with impermeable materials or clay, while regular maintenance schedules can be enforced to keep them functional.

Just as in the past, the management of these water ponds should be community-driven. Local ownership fosters a sense of responsibility and ensures that the ponds are maintained and used efficiently. The government of KPK must prioritize water resource management by including the revival of traditional practices in its development plans.

Policies should incentivize communities to adopt sustainable water management practices, including subsidies for rainwater harvesting systems and financial support for maintaining water ponds. Public

awareness campaigns can highlight the importance of rainwater harvesting and collective water management. Schools, mosques, and local councils can play a vital role in educating communities about the benefits of these practices.

The government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa must recognize the urgency of the water crisis and act decisively. Reviving and modernizing indigenous practices like collective water ponds should be a cornerstone of the province's water resource strategy. Policymakers must also address broader issues such as deforestation, soil erosion, and climate adaptation to create a comprehensive water management plan. Investment in these initiatives is not just an environmental necessity but also an economic one.

Ensuring water security will support agriculture, sustain livelihoods, and reduce the economic burden on rural communities caused by water shortages. Additionally, empowering local communities to manage their

water resources will foster a sense of unity and resilience in the face of environmental challenges.

The water crisis in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is a pressing issue that demands both a return to traditional wisdom and the application of modern science. The revival of collective water ponds, coupled with rainwater harvesting and groundwater recharge techniques, offers a sustainable path forward.

The government, civil society, and local communities must work together to implement these solutions and secure a water-abundant future for the province. Time is of the essence. As the threat of water scarcity grows, the opportunity to act diminishes. By learning from the past and embracing innovation, KPK can once again transform its villages into self-reliant communities where water is preserved, shared, and cherished—a legacy worth reviving for generations to come.

The writer can be reached at: saidnasir73@gmail.com



BEIJING: Chinese President Xi Jinping speaking with Sri Lankan President Anura Kumara Dissanayake during arrival ceremonies at the Great Hall of the People in China.

Trump team asks three US senior career diplomats to resign

WASHINGTON (Reuters): Aides to President-elect Donald Trump have asked three senior career diplomats who oversee the US State Department's workforce and internal coordination to step down from their roles, two US officials familiar with the matter said, in a possible signal of deeper changes ahead for the diplomatic corps.

The team overseeing the State Department's transition to the new administration, the Agency Review Team, has requested that Derek Hogan, Marcia Bernicat and Alaina Teplitz leave their posts, the sources said. While political appointees typically submit their resignations when a new president takes office, most career foreign service officers continue from one administration to the next. All three officials have worked in both Democratic and Republican administrations throughout the years, including as ambassadors.

Trump, who will be inaugurated Jan. 20, pledged during his presidential campaign to "clean out the deep state" by firing bureaucrats that he deems as disloyal. "There's a little bit of a concern that this might be setting the stage for something worse," one of the US officials familiar with the matter said. In response to a request for comment, a spokesperson for Trump's transition team said: "It is entirely appropriate for the transition to seek officials who share President Trump's vision for putting our nation and America's working men and women first. We have a lot of failures to fix and that requires a committed team focused on the same goals." A State Department spokesperson said the department has no personnel

announcements to make. Hogan, Bernicat, Teplitz did not respond to requests for comment.

Trump is likely to adopt a more confrontational foreign policy and has vowed to bring peace between Ukraine and Russia, and give more support to Israel. He has also pushed for unorthodox policies such as trying to make Greenland part of the United States and pushing NATO allies for higher defense spending. A diplomatic workforce that dutifully implements rather than pushes back will be key to achieving his goals, experts say. The decision to ask the three to step aside is reminiscent of staff shake ups at the State Department during the first Trump administration, when several key officials in leadership positions were removed from their jobs. According to two separate sources familiar with Trump's plans for the State Department, the administration plans to appoint more political appointees to positions such as assistant secretary, which are typically filled by a mix of career and political bureaucrats. These sources said Trump's team wants to get more politically appointed officials deeper into the State Department as there was a pervasive feeling among his aides that his agenda was "derailed" by career diplomats during his last term from 2017 to 2021.

The Agency Review Team is already interviewing candidates for such positions, said the two sources. According to the State Department website, Hogan is the State Department's executive secretary, the official that manages the flow of information between department bureaus and with the White House.

Bernicat is the director-general of the US Foreign Service and director of global talent leading the recruitment, assignment, and career development of the Department's workforce. Assistant Secretary Teplitz has been with the Department over three decades, serving overseas as well in Washington. Most recently, she has been implementing the duties of under secretary for management, which oversees more than a dozen bureaus responsible for issues from the budget to recruitment, procurement and human resources across the workforce.

"These are not policy positions. This is all the mechanics of the bureaucracy," said Dennis Jett, a professor at Penn State's School of International Affairs who spent 28 years in the foreign service. "But if you want to control the bureaucracy, that's the way you do it." Choosing who fills the three roles would allow Trump's team to divert resources to and from parts of the State Department, control the information gathered by the numerous bureaus and embassies and manage personnel decisions, he said. The requests for the officials to step down came as Marco Rubio, Trump's nominee for secretary of state, was testifying before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee for his confirmation hearing. On his campaign website Trump laid out how, in 10 steps, he would "shatter deep state" and "fire rogue bureaucrats and career politicians". The first of those steps is to reissue a 2020 executive order that would have removed employment protections for certain civil servants, making it easier to fire them.

Some immigrants already leaving US in 'self-deportations'

TRACY, Calif. (AP): Michel Bérrios left the United States a few days before the new year, giving President-elect Donald Trump's campaign for mass deportations a small victory before they even started.

A former leader of a Nicaraguan student uprising, Bérrios had been in the US legally, with nearly a year remaining under President Joe Biden's unprecedented use of humanitarian parole authority for citizens of certain vulnerable countries. But harsh talk during the US election campaign filled her with anxious memories of hiding from authorities back home.

Advocates and immigration experts who have noticed such departures say Bérrios' decision to leave the US, despite her legal status, shows how uncertainty and threats have led a growing number of people to leave before Trump takes office. There isn't data on these departures, but history has seen other eras of public backlash that drove

migrants - with or without legal status - out.

Trump and his allies are counting on this "self-deportation," the idea that life can be made unbearable enough to make people leave. "Because (the US) is not a Third World country like the ones many of us come from, I thought there would be a different culture here, and it was a rude awakening to realize that you and your family are not welcome," Bérrios, 31, said days before her departure. Self-deportation helps Trump to achieve his goals without the government having to spend or do anything. Trump has long said he wanted to deport millions of migrants but never deported more than 350,000 a year in his first term. Only 41,500 detention beds are funded this year, so carrying out massive deportations has significant logistical hurdles. "If you wanna self-deport, you should self-deport because, again, we know who you are, and we're gonna come and find you,"

Trump's incoming border czar Tom Homan has said. Bérrios had been living legally with her cousin in California, east of San Francisco, working at the front desk of an auto repair shop with Trump supporters, but she knew it was temporary - especially once Trump was elected. Anti-immigrant comments by her colleagues increased, and her discomfort grew. In Nicaragua, "I spent five years hiding. I had to change my routine. I had to completely change my life. I stopped visiting my parents, my friends," Bérrios said of President Daniel Ortega's crackdown on dissent. With Trump returning to power, "that uncertainty has returned."

Such fear is natural for anyone without permanent legal status, said Melanie Nezer, vice president for advocacy and external relations at the Women's Refugee Commission. People with temporary permission to live and work, like Bérrios, may see that status end soon. "Many,

many people are in this situation," she said. About 1 million people have temporary protected status and about another 500,000 like Bérrios have humanitarian parole granted to asylum-seekers from four countries: Cuba, Haiti, Nicaragua and Venezuela. Trump has said he wants to end both. Until 2018, Bérrios led a fairly normal life in Nicaragua, working at a call center in Managua. She studied marketing and hoped to pursue a master's degree in dance. Then changes to Nicaragua's social security system drove retirees to protest. When they were roughed up by police and Ortega supporters, students came to their aid. Deadly clashes followed, and university campuses became strongholds of resistance in what became a referendum on the government itself. The government declared the protesters "terrorists" and alleged they were organized by foreign powers, especially the United States.

Spain raises flag at Damascus embassy after 12-year closure

DAMASCUS (AFP): Spain raised its flag at Madrid's Damascus embassy, in the presence of its top diplomat more than a decade after suspending activity and as Western countries resume ties following Syrian president Bashar al-Assad's ouster.

Spain closed the mission in March 2012, a year after Assad began brutal repression of anti-government protests, triggering more than 13 years of war. "It is an honour for me to be here in person," Spanish Foreign Minister Jose Manuel Albares said at the embassy, where the

Spanish national anthem was played, an AFP correspondent reported.

"Raising the Spanish flag again is a sign of the hope we have for Syria's future, of the commitment we convey to the Syrian people for a better future." A statement from the foreign ministry ahead of the visit said Albares would meet representatives of Syria's new administration and of civil society. The trip comes more than a month after rebels led by Islamist group Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) ousted Assad. Top European officials, including foreign ministers from

France and Germany, have made a series of visits to meet with the country's new rulers. A transitional administration has been appointed until March and HTS, which has roots in the Syrian branch of Al-Qaeda, has sought to reassure minorities that they will not be harmed and the rule of law will be respected. Albares told public broadcaster TVE ahead of the visit that "the message that I want to send is a message of support to Syria". "But we also have red lines. Syria must be peaceful. Syria must be inclusive, and the rights of all must be respected,

including those of women, and ethnic and religious minorities," he added. "This will be my first official trip this year", Albares told TVE, adding he "wanted to start with one of the regions where Spanish foreign policy is most influential and where we work hardest to achieve peace". Albares's trip to Syria followed a visit to neighbouring Lebanon, where he announced a 10 million euro (\$10.3 million) aid package for the country's army, nearly two months into a ceasefire between Israel and the Iran-backed Hezbollah group.

Japan launches independent mission to NATO

TOKYO (AP): Japan formally inaugurated an independent mission to the NATO military alliance as Tokyo and NATO seek to bolster cooperation amid escalating tension from Russia, China and North Korea. Previously, the Japanese embassy in Belgium also covered NATO. The new mission is led by Osamu Izawa, who takes over the role currently filled by the ambassador to Belgium, Masahiro Mikami.

In Tokyo, Japan and NATO held high-level consultations to discuss regional security issues in East Asia and Europe, according to the Foreign Ministry. Since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 and closer ties between Moscow and Beijing, NATO has deepened its links with Japan and three other Indo-Pacific partners, Australia, New Zealand and South Korea, though not as part of the military alliance. Japan's Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba has advocated a NATO-like security framework in Asia, though he has not given details. Countries with shared security concerns are strengthening ties as competition escalates between the United States and China. Beijing has criticized NATO's growing ties with the Indo-Pacific partners, worried that Washington may move to form a NATO-like alliance in the region.

Blinken defends US policy on Gaza

WASHINGTON (AP): Outgoing Secretary of State Antony Blinken defended Biden administration policies on Israel's war with Hamas after a ceasefire agreement in Gaza was reached, facing protests that interrupted his final news conference at the State Department. He said he expected the deal - announced by President Joe Biden and Qatar - to be implemented over the weekend. He called it "a moment of historic possibility for the region and well beyond" even as Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said a last-minute dispute with Hamas was holding up Israeli approval.

"It's going to take tremendous effort, political courage, compromise to realize that possibility, to try to ensure that the gains that have been achieved over the past 15 months at enormous, excruciating cost are actually enduring," Blinken said. As he touted the deal, two people in the room accused him of complicity in Israeli violence against Palestinian civilians in loud outbursts that forced him to pause. One shouted, "Why aren't you in the Hague?" referring to the International Criminal Court based in the Dutch city, and the other called him "a monster." Blinken asked them to "respect the process." Both men were physically removed by Diplomatic Security officers.

While protests are common in large public gatherings, including just this week when Blinken delivered an address on the Middle East at a Washington-based think tank, they are rare, if not unprecedented, in the State Department briefing room. After recovering from the interruptions, Blinken said in response to other questions that the US has had "real differences" with Israel in how it has gone about defending its people and has "expressed those clearly at various points." But "we've mostly done it privately, precisely because we didn't want to feed into Hamas' clearly held views that if that pressure was mounting, and if there was daylight, they could do nothing," Blinken said. That "they could refuse to engage on the negotiations, hold back on a ceasefire and releasing the hostages, and thus perpetuate the suffering, the loss for the people that they purport to represent." Blinken and other members of the Biden administration have faced severe criticism for not imposing meaningful restrictions on the supply of weapons to Israel or pushing its key ally hard enough to ease a humanitarian crisis in Gaza.

Iraq wants Iran backed factions to lay down weapons

LONDON (Reuters): Iraq is trying to convince powerful armed factions in the country that have fought US forces and fired rockets and drones at Israel to lay down their weapons or join official security forces, Foreign Minister Fuad Hussein said. The push comes with a backdrop of seismic shifts in the Middle East that have seen Iran's armed allies in Gaza and Lebanon heavily degraded and Syria's government overthrown by rebels.

The incoming US Trump administration promises to pile more pressure on Tehran, which has long backed a number of political parties and an array of armed factions in Iraq. Some Baghdad officials are concerned the status quo there may be upended next, but Hussein played this down in an interview with Reuters during an official visit to London. "We don't think that Iraq is the next," Hussein said. The government was in talks to rein in the groups while continuing to walk the tightrope between its ties to both Washington and Tehran, he said.

"Two or three years ago it was impossible to discuss this topic in our society," he said. But now, having armed groups functioning outside the state was not acceptable. "Many political leaders, many political parties started to raise a discussion, and I hope that we can convince the leaders of these groups to lay down

their arms, and then to be part of the armed forces under the responsibility of the government," Hussein said. Iraq's balancing act has been tested by Iran-backed Iraqi armed groups' attacks on Israel and on US troops in the country they say are in solidarity with Palestinians during the Israel-Hamas war. A promised Gaza ceasefire has the government breathing a sight of relief, though uncertainty prevails over how the country may fare after Donald Trump becomes US president.

During the last Trump presidency, relations grew tense as he ordered the assassination of Iranian General Qassem Soleimani in Baghdad in 2020, leading to an Iranian ballistic missile attack on an Iraqi base housing US forces. "We hope that we can continue this good relationship with Washington," Hussein said. "It is too early now to talk about which policy President Trump is going to follow for Iraq or Iran." With Iraq trying to chart a diplomatic third-way, Hussein said Baghdad was ready to help diffuse tensions between Washington and Tehran if asked and noted previous mediation between Saudi Arabia and Iran that paved the way for their normalization of relations in 2023. Armed revolution in neighbouring Syria has been viewed with concern. The Islamist rebels now in power in

Damascus were among the Sunni Muslim militants that entered Shia-majority Iraq from Syria after the 2003 US-led invasion, fuelling years of sectarian war. Islamic State crossed the same way a decade later and undertook bloody massacres before being beaten back by a US-led international military coalition and Iraqi security forces and Iran-aligned factions. Iraq will only be reassured about Syria when it sees an inclusive political process, Hussein said, adding Baghdad would supply the country with grain and oil once it could be assured it would go to all Syrians. Baghdad was in talks with Syria's foreign minister over a visit to Iraq, he said. "We are worried about the ISIS, so we are in contact with the Syrian side to talk about these things, but at the end to have a stable Syria means to have the representative of all components in the political process." Baghdad and Washington last year agreed to end the U.S.-led coalition's work by September 2026 and transition to bilateral military ties, but Hussein said that the developments in Syria would have to be watched. "In the first place, we are thinking about security of Iraq and stability in Iraq. If there will be a threat to our country, of course it will be a different story," he said. "But until this moment we don't see a threat."

Syria's new administration condemns Israeli incursions

GHADIR AL-BUSTAN, Syria (AP): Officials in Syria's new de facto government hardened their tone against Israel's incursions into Syrian territory after an Israeli strike killed three people and wounded five others in the south of the country.

"Israel advanced into the buffer zone under the pretext of the presence of Iranian militias, but this excuse no longer holds after Damascus was liberated," Ahmad al-Sharaa, leader of Syria's new administration and formerly known as Mohammad al-Jolani, said at a press conference in the Syrian capital. For decades, the Syrian-Israeli border remained largely quiet under a 1974 Disengagement Agreement, which established a UN-patrolled demilitarized buffer zone between the two countries after a war they fought the year before.

However, after Syrian President Bashar Assad's ouster on Dec. 8, Israeli forces entered the buffer zone, calling it a temporary move to block hostile forces. The move drew criticism and protests from local residents and Arab countries. Sharaa, who was speaking alongside the visiting Qatari foreign minister, said Syria is ready to welcome international forces to the buffer zone, noting Qatar's "central role" in creating international pressure

on Israel to withdraw from the buffer zone. Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim Al Thani, Qatar's prime minister and foreign minister, condemned Israel's occupation of the buffer zone and said its forces "must withdraw immediately." Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu ordered Israeli troops to "take over" the buffer zone, home to several Syrian villages, on Dec. 17, would remain there until a new arrangement was established to ensure Israel's security. Israeli forces have also made incursions into areas outside the buffer zone, sparking protests.

"These areas belong to the Syrian people, not the regime, and we must defend our homeland. Israel must respect Syria's sovereignty just as they seek security for their own borders and homes," Syrian Foreign Minister Asaad al-Shibani said in an interview broadcast with Turkish network TRT. He urged the international community to pressure Israel to withdraw from captured areas and called for respect for Syrian sovereignty.

"Everyone must respect others if they want to ensure their own security," Shibani said. Israel has launched hundreds of airstrikes on Syrian government assets, including jets, tanks, and missiles, particularly after Assad's ouster. An Israeli

strike in the Ghadir al-Bustan village in Quneitra province killed three people and injured several others, according to local residents and the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a war monitor. Those killed included a local municipal official and security personnel linked to Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), the Islamist group that led the lightning offensive against Assad and is now leading Syria's new administration.

The Israeli military said that the strikes targeted vehicles carrying weapons. HTS has not officially commented on the attack. Nizar Mchel, a teacher from Ghadir al-Bustan, said the military and security forces of the new government had launched a campaign to confiscate unauthorized weapons. He said Israeli drones targeted a convoy of military vehicles involved in the operation, as they drove north of the village. At the funeral of Abdo Ali Kouma, a local official who was killed in the strike, scores of mourners carried his wooden coffin to the burial site, prayed for him, and laid him to rest. "I was having lunch with friends, including Kouma, before he left to go to his house," Kouma's cousin, Abed al-Rahman al-Bustani, told The Associated Press. Minutes later, Bustani said, he heard drones overhead and felt the strike.

Moldova's separatist enclave hopes Russia will resume gas supplies soon

CHISINAU (Reuters): Moldova's breakaway Transnistria region expects to receive Russian gas again soon to meet its needs, its leader Vadim Krasnoselsky said, two weeks into crippling power cuts in the Russian-backed enclave.

The prime minister of Moldova's pro-European central government said Russia was intent on bringing to power a Moscow-friendly government in the country. He said Moscow would probably provide volumes of gas too small to ensure electricity supplies to both rebel and government-held areas. Tens of thousands of people in Transnistria have been without gas or winter heating since Jan. 1, when Russia's Gazprom suspended gas exports to the region, citing an unpaid Moldovan debt of \$709 million that Chisinau does not recognise as valid.

Moscow blames the suspension of gas supplies on pro-Western Moldova and

Ukraine, which refused to extend a five-year gas transit deal that expired on Dec. 31 on the grounds that the proceeds help fund Russia's invasion. "I hope that as a result of these negotiations (in Moscow), in the near future gas will be supplied to Transnistria for electricity generation and to our citizens," Krasnoselsky told a news briefing in Tiraspol, the main city in the rebel area.

"The gas will be supplied as humanitarian gas in the volume necessary for the population of Transnistria, for heat and power generation and for industrial enterprises of Transnistria," he added. Russia has not yet commented on the issue. Krasnoselsky said there would be further negotiations to determine the start date for deliveries and their route.

Transnistria, a tiny pro-Russian and mainly Russian-speaking separatist region along the Dniester River and the border with Ukraine,

received about 2 billion cubic meters of Russian gas a year via Ukraine, using the fuel to heat homes and generate electricity, which it sold to the rest of Moldova. Moldova's authorities have said that despite a valid contract and the option of an alternative transit route, Gazprom is refusing to supply gas in order to destabilise its government ahead of this year's parliamentary elections.

The government has sourced alternative supplies from Europe and has offered to help Transnistria buy gas, but the offer was rejected by the separatist leaders there, who blame Moldova for the crisis. "The Kremlin regime has held the people there hostage, mercilessly, in the cold and darkness, because it wants to bring to power (in Moldova) pro-Russian groups that will plunge our country into conflict and destabilize public order," Moldova Prime Minister Dorin Recean told reporters in Chisinau.

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Rehmat Shah Afridi (Late)

Founder

Bilal Shah Afridi

Chief Executive

Jalil Afridi

Managing Editor

Printed and published by Mahmood Afridi at Moraka's Printers, 27 Abdara Road, University Town, Peshawar.

Peshawar Office: 091-5700095, 0300- 9009001

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

E-mail: fppeshawar@thefrontierpost.com

Lahore Office: 0335-4026284

Email: fplahore@thefrontierpost.com

Islamabad Office: 0321-5066253

Email: mahmoodafridi@thefrontierpost.com

Karachi Office: 021-32213411, 0300-8340907

Email: fpkarachi@thefrontierpost.com

*USA and Canada Toll Free Number 1-800-5905747

Why US, Europe must lift sanctions on Syria

FOR most people in the Middle East, the last noteworthy decision by the US concerning the region occurred around 70 years ago. In 1956, the US opposed the tripartite aggression by the UK, France, and Israel against Egypt, successfully pressuring the aggressors to resolve the crisis and withdraw their troops. Today, the US' image in the region is at an all-time low, perceived as complicit in enabling what many see as an Israeli genocide against the Palestinians in Gaza. With the exception of Ireland, Spain, and perhaps Belgium, the optics of European countries in the Middle East are not much better, particularly for Germany and the UK.

The recent toppling of the Assad regime by armed opposition groups on Dec. 8, 2024, offers the US and European countries a chance to reevaluate their approach and repair their reputation in the region. This moment calls for a reassessment of US and European policies, particularly concerning sanctions on Syria, the dismantling of the PKK/YPG terrorist group, and the withdrawal of US troops. The implications of Syria's ousted leader Bashar Assad's fall are profound, with the potential to strategically reshape Middle Eastern geopolitics for decades. Removing Assad cuts off Iran's ability to use Syria as a base for its expansionist ambitions. It may also deprive Moscow of its only military base on the Mediterranean, fundamentally altering regional power dynamics. To ensure that Iran does not regain its foothold, Russia cannot exploit military bases in Syria, and for millions of Syrian refugees and displaced citizens to return safely to their country, it is crucial to stabilize, unify, and rebuild the country while making it terror-free. Achieving these goals necessitates the removal of US and European sanctions on the new Syria.

Some Western experts advocate for the use of sanctions to impose a Western agenda on the new Syria, aiming to shape the transitional period according to their interests. This recommendation is dangerous; it could prompt similar actions by other nations, increase foreign interference, and create competing agendas that further destabilize Syria. It is important to note that the armed opposition groups succeeded in toppling Assad and his backers - Iran and Russia - primarily because foreign interference was minimal during the decisive 11 days of their military campaign. This experience should serve as a lesson for all interested nations, urging them to refrain from interfering in Syria's internal affairs and focus instead on aiding the country, which would ultimately serve their interests in many ways.

The US must confront its negative role in Syria, particularly during the Obama administration, which inadvertently empowered Assad and his allies by overlooking their actions in pursuit of a nuclear deal with Iran (the JCPOA), as well as the separatist, Marxist-Leninist, PKK/YPG terror group. The Biden administration had considered lifting sanctions on the Assad regime until shortly before its collapse. Now is the right time for the US to atone for its past mistakes and compensate the Syrians by lifting sanctions on the new Syria. On Jan. 6, 2025, the US Treasury issued a six-month general license authorizing certain transactions with the Syrian government, including energy sales. While this move is a step toward easing sanctions, it falls short of what is needed for genuine recovery and stability in Syria. Initially, the sanctions targeted Assad and his regime, which no longer exists; thus, the sanctions on the new Syria should also be removed. The economic conditions in Syria, exacerbated by years of conflict, have led to widespread poverty and food insecurity. Lifting sanctions would facilitate the importation of essential goods - food, medicine, and rebuilding materials - thereby alleviating civilian suffering and helping stabilize the situation. Removing sanctions would also attract international investment and aid, crucial for reconstruction and stabilization. Without removing sanctions, the risk of reigniting civil conflict increases, potentially allowing foreign interference and the recruitment of individuals for extremist and separatist agendas to fill the power vacuum.

If sanctions remain in place, international aid organizations and businesses will face legal and financial risks that prevent them from engaging in reconstruction efforts. This would prolong Syria's recovery and lead to increased migration, further destabilizing the region. Refugees may find themselves trapped, unable to return home or remain in host countries, exacerbating their plight. Continued sanctions would perpetuate severe economic challenges, leading to widespread instability and humanitarian crises. The Syrian economy would become isolated, hindering recovery and development, fostering corruption, a black market, and rising inflation, which would push more citizens below the poverty line.

Moreover, maintaining sanctions would facilitate the resurgence of the former regime's drug trafficking networks along borders with Lebanon and Jordan, complicating security dynamics and enabling Iran and Hezbollah to exploit these networks for their goals. Ongoing economic hardship might drive individuals toward extremist groups, presenting an alternative to a state that fails to provide basic services, thereby increasing regional instability. The US and Europe stand at a critical juncture in their Middle Eastern policy. By lifting sanctions and supporting the reconstruction of Syria, they would not only correct past mistakes but also pave the way for a more stable and prosperous region. The current situation in Syria offers the US and Europe a rare chance to rectify past mistakes and foster long-term stability in the Middle East.

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As Russia hikes payments for soldiers, their wives flaunt newfound affluence

Angelina Trefilova

ON New Year's Eve, 22-year-old Vika shared an unboxing of the new iPhone 16 with her Instagram followers. The phone, she said, was a gift from her husband, a serviceman fighting with the Russian army in Ukraine.

"As he [my husband] said: 'Only the best for my wife,'" Vika said of her gift, which costs hundreds of dollars more in Russia than in the US. Faced with a shortage of men willing to carry out its invasion of Ukraine, which has killed thousands of Ukrainian civilians, Russia has gradually hiked financial incentives for signing a military contract. This has given many men and their families an unprecedented means of upward social mobility, creating a new social class described by President Vladimir Putin as Russia's "new elite."

As these military households come into their newfound wealth, soldiers' wives and girlfriends are taking to social media to show off their comfortable new lives, often while espousing their pro-war, pro-Kremlin views. Russia banned Instagram soon after invading Ukraine in 2022, while TikTok banned new uploads inside Russia. But this hasn't stopped Vika and many other Russians from continuing to use the widely popular apps.

On Instagram, Vika shares tips for decorating the temporary military housing unit provided by the government for her serviceman husband in a Pinterest-inspired style. Vika selects home decor from popular Russian online marketplaces and documents her choices in her videos. Her unboxing videos usually open with her signature phrase: "As long as I have money, you'll have reviews." In 2025, Russian authorities are continuing to increase payments for contract soldiers participating in the war in Ukraine. From January, men who sign a military contract in the Samara region will receive a one-time payout of up to 4 million rubles (\$38,900) - the highest of any region in the country. In addition to these one-time payouts, which vary by region, military personnel also receive a monthly salary of at least 210,000 rubles (\$2,000). In the event of a soldier's death, their family is entitled to a "funeral allowance," which can amount to up to 5 million rubles (\$48,600), according to a presidential decree.

The substantial payouts to contract soldiers are part of the authorities' efforts to turn the military into the country's new elite, says historian Dmitry Dubrovsky.

"One of the key outcomes of the ongoing war is the attempt to construct a 'Putin Elite 2.0' to replace the original elite that emerged in the early 2000s, built on oil and gas revenues," Dubrovsky said. "This process began as early as 2014, when the 'heroes of the Russian Spring' gradually started integrating into Putin's regime. However, it became fully evident with the onset of the full-scale aggression [against Ukraine]." In addition to million-ruble payouts, the state also provides military personnel with subsidized mortgages and free university education for their children, including at prestigious institutions such as Moscow State University and the Higher School of Economics.

Nearly 15,000 soldiers who fought in Ukraine, as well as their children, were admitted to Russian universities under this program in 2024 - almost double the number from 2023. And increasingly, Ukraine war veterans are being appointed to political roles, though not on a wide scale. "The privileges of military personnel are evident in the growing practice of integrating 'veterans' into various political projects and regional administrations, often as deputy governors," says historian Dubrovsky. "Overall, the families of military personnel see themselves as part of a superior class, a perception eagerly reinforced by Putin's propaganda."

"I've now become a real-life Katyusha," posted Yekaterina from the small Siberian town of Khanty-Mansiysk, referencing the heroine of a Soviet wartime song about a woman waiting for her husband to return from the front. Yekaterina creates reels showcasing how she "lives in a state of waiting" with her daughter while her partner fights in Ukraine. In some videos, she tries on her husband's military uniform, and in others, they collaborate - her partner recording his part from the front lines. While her husband is at war, Yekaterina raises their little daughter alone.

"Our daddy isn't a coward; his best friend is his rifle. Daddy fights, and we sleep peacefully," she writes in an Instagram post, addressing her child.

Another woman, Lesya, also compares herself to Katyusha. At 19, she married Andrei, a serviceman who fought with the Wagner Group. She now has nearly 100,000 followers on TikTok. In her videos, Lesya displays "souvenirs" her husband brings back from the war, including a Ukrainian passport and a military patch from the Ukrainian Armed Forces. She frequently defends "traditional values" and expresses hope that Ukrainians will one day have a president "like Putin." Many of her videos are set to modern remixes of folk music, often filmed against the backdrop of the imperial Russian flag. Lesya's husband, Andrei, also has a TikTok where he shares stories about dealing with post-traumatic stress disorder after the war and mocks liberal views held by younger generations.

"I sit behind my computer all day, but I could sit behind bars for war crimes," Andrei laughs. Andrei's most popular TikTok video has nearly 1.5 million views. In the video, he shows off his collection of Wagner medals, including the Cross of Death for tough missions, the Medal of Courage and awards for the capture of Bakhmut and Vuhledar. "Men like you keep this country going, brother," one of his followers comments.

The Russian Union of Journalists, the country's largest professional organization of journalists, plans to launch courses on storytelling and media content promotion for soldiers like Andrei. To implement the project, they have requested 1.2 million rubles (\$11,700) from the government. But sometimes simply dating military personnel becomes a central part of one's blog. Anastasia from the Krasnodar region met her future husband through a "dating military personnel" group on the social network VKontakte. When she reached out to the man she liked, he was already at war.

Ten days after her first message, the soldier confessed his love to Anastasia. Shortly after, she went to occupied Luhansk to meet him for the first time. Anastasia, who documented every stage of the relationship on her Instagram Stories, said she believes her femininity helped her win over her military husband. Today, she posts pictures of the car and flowers he has gifted her, and shares tips on

maintaining a strong marriage with a serviceman.

Through Instagram, she sells online courses on femininity for 990 rubles (\$9.60). She also runs a Telegram channel called The Wild Nature of Women, where she shares the success stories of women who have taken her courses. "Once, I could only dream of this, and now it's my reality," Anastasia writes under a photo of herself holding a bouquet of roses. But sometimes, these blogs reveal the darker side of life with military men.

"Achievements for the year: got pregnant by my new husband, sent him to the special military operation for his misconduct, and gave birth to a son. I'm happy," wrote 23-year-old Mira in her end-of-year reflection post. By "misconduct," Mira is referring to her husband's gambling addiction. Over six months, he persuaded her to give him nearly half a million rubles. After debt collectors started calling Mira about his loans, she decided to file for divorce.

Soon after, her husband called to tell her he had signed a military contract and was leaving for the war in Ukraine. "Everything after that felt like a blur," Mira says. She personally bought a military uniform and first aid kit for her husband. During his deployment preparations, the couple reconciled and agreed to never discuss his gambling again. On March 13, Mira's husband was sent to the front. Over the past year, she has visited him at the training grounds three times. She shares her experiences on Instagram and asks her followers for life advice.

"If I heard a story like mine from someone else, I'd say the girl is out of her mind and clearly doesn't love herself at all," Mira says, describing herself. "How can someone keep choosing men so recklessly, time after time? This feels like a never-ending series, and I'm already waiting for the 'next episode of my life' to see how it will mess me up next." Dubrovsky believes that soldiers who took part in the war in Ukraine will only lose their privileges after the end of Putin's regime. "I see no other scenario. On the contrary, they are increasingly becoming 'respected members of society,' mimicking veterans of the Great Patriotic War [World War II] and, in essence, being equated with them," Dubrovsky said.

The Moscow Times

Lessons from Syria's volatile past for its uncertain future

Ammar Abdulhamid

SYRIAN history presents many lessons for Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, the radical Islamist group now leading a transitional process there, and those who wish to see a peaceful, secular and democratic Syria. In 1970, Hafez al-Assad took power in Syria after a coup he dubbed the "Corrective Movement." This was after years of intense conflict within the Baath Party, beginning with the 1961 coup ending Syria's union with Egypt.

A 1963 coup established Baath rule, ushering in a period marked by further coups, purges and the 1967 defeat against Israel in the Six-Day War, leaving the nation deeply fractured. Amidst this turmoil, the elder Assad emerged as a pragmatic leader, gaining support from key military, Alawite and Baathist figures, and aptly timed his seizure of power.

The current situation bears striking similarities to those formative years. Assad's rhetoric of not exporting the socialist revolution mirrors the disavowal of global jihad by the newly ascendant organization's leader, Ahmad al-Sharaa. Both figures sought to consolidate power by appointing an inclusive interim leadership - one that balanced the representation of different communities, while, in cooperation with a small clique, they wielded power behind the scenes.

With al-Sharaa, we must wait until the transitional government is formed to see this strategy in action. But his pragmatic approach so far strongly points in this direction. The transitional government that is likely to emerge soon will probably be diverse, but al-Sharaa is expected to continue relying on the small group he has admitted feeling more comfortable with - those who helped shape governance in Idlib, his longtime stronghold in northern Syria.

Even as Hafez al-Assad maintained a socialist discourse, he softened the secular tone of his predecessors' rhetoric, incorporating Islamic references to appeal to the broader population. Al-Sharaa remains grounded in his Islamist ideology, yet his analysis of Syria's needs and the regional context often adopts a more pragmatic secular tone. Assad softened some of his predecessors' hardline socialist policies, while al-Sharaa has embraced free-market economics and rolling back trade barriers. Both men initiated constitutional changes to secure their dominance. Assad waited three years before introducing his 1973 Baathist constitution. Al-Sharaa is asking for three years before introducing his constitution, which is likely to have a strong Islamist tone if he and his group have their way.

These parallels may not be coincidental. Islamists, despite despising Hafez al-Assad, long admired his pragmatic, calculating leadership. Al-Sharaa, whose father knew Assad personally, may well carry these lessons forward. Syria has faced such transitions before. Unless secular, pro-democracy advocates learn from the past, we risk falling into the

same traps. But today's context offers opportunities. Reconstruction requires significant foreign investment and long-term support, contingent on respecting communal rights, women's rights and individual rights. Secular advocates like myself must insist on a greater role in decision-making and emphasize that Al-Sharaa's refusal to adopt power-sharing will delay reconstruction and prolong Syria's suffering. The secular movement in Syria is far from small. The Druze (3 to 5 percent), Christians (3 to 5 percent), Alawites (8 to 12 percent) and Kurds (12 to 15 percent) all have a vested interest in supporting secularism for communal reasons. Beyond them, many Arab Sunnis are secular as well, with a significant portion belonging to secular leftist parties, though the exact percentage remains unclear. Together, these groups could make up more than half of Syria's population.

Under ideal conditions, a majority might favor a secular state in a national referendum, though current conditions make such a vote impractical. The four-year transitional period proposed by al-Sharaa could work to our advantage if we organize and act decisively. Failure to do so risks ceding this opportunity to his group's supporters, allowing them to further consolidate their hold on power. History underscores these stakes. When Baath officers staged their 1963 coup, the unity government already included equal representation for the Baath Party and the Muslim Brotherhood. The subsequent power struggle marginalized liberals and pushed the Islamists underground. Their return in the late 1970s culminated in the 1982 Hama Uprising, where Assad and his brother Rifaat bombed sections of the city, killing between 15,000 and 40,000 inhabitants, depending on the source. According to testimonies from survivors, many cold-blooded massacres occurred once Assad's troops moved into the city. Al-Sharaa's incipient regime represents a more radical form of political Islam than that espoused by the Muslim Brotherhood. However, the group has shown no interest in revenge for past atrocities by the Assad regime, father or son. This pragmatism is encouraging.

But is this approach a tactical ploy to buy time, as Assad did in 1970, or a genuine shift? If it's the former, Syria risks a new form of ideological authoritarianism with Islamism at its core. If it's the latter, a better-organized secular movement could leverage shared goals of peace and reconstruction to forge a workable arrangement, avoiding past mistakes. The US has a pivotal role here. Sanctions and international aid are powerful tools to encourage all sides to reach an agreement. By leveraging these, America can guide Syria's transition and secure a legacy of promoting stability and rebuilding in the region. President-elect Trump could oversee this entire transition successfully by the end of his second term, marking a significant element of his foreign policy legacy.

The Hill

People want to change the Constitution. What's next?

Zachary B. Wolf

THE right and the left don't agree on how they'd like to change the Constitution, but they do agree that changes need to be made. President Joe Biden, in his farewell address, called for an amendment "to make clear that no president, no president is immune from crimes that he or she commits while in office."

That's a clear nod to the Supreme Court's granting of new immunity to presidents at the request of President-elect Donald Trump in 2024 when he was facing federal prosecution. Separately, CNN has previously reported that Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand of New York made a last-minute push to convince Biden to certify an Equal Rights Amendment as the 28th Amendment. The amendment passed in the needed three-quarters of US state legislatures, but it took too long - decades instead of the seven years the amendment's authors originally

allowed. Trump, meanwhile, has promised to challenge the 14th Amendment with an executive order rescinding the principle of birthright citizenship. He's admitted that ending birthright citizenship could require going "to the people."

And there are several distinct efforts to call a full-on convention of the states, the first in American history, to propose amendments. Conservative efforts have targeted a Balanced Budget Amendment they've long envisioned or, more generally, to limit the power of the federal government. Supporters of new gun laws have called for a convention to consider an amendment related to firearms. What does it actually take to amend the Constitution? Here's a breakdown: It is usually a long and complicated process, which is laid out in Article V of the Constitution. Here's what it says: In plain English, that means first an amendment

has to be proposed, either by super majorities in the House and Senate or by a convention called by two-thirds, or 34, of the state legislatures.

After an amendment is proposed, it then has to be ratified by three-quarters, or 38, of the state legislatures or special conventions in the states. (By the way, that note about no amendment being made until after 1808 has to do with the importation of enslaved people and taxes, a reminder that the values of the Founding Fathers were unquestionably flawed on the issue of freedom.) Books have been written about the amendment process, and it's important to note that it's not at all clear how an Article V convention would go down. An interesting report by the Congressional Research Service raises some of the questions. Who would be the delegates? Could they consider multiple amendments? Would each delegate get a

vote or each state? While there is a clear desire to change elements of the nation's founding document, answering those specific questions feels a long way off.

The most recent amendment, the 27th, was ratified in 1992, more than three decades ago. But it was actually first proposed by Congress back in 1789 along with the 10 amendments that became the Bill of Rights. That amendment prohibits any law that changes the pay of lawmakers from taking effect until after the next election. It was revived, improbably, by a University of Texas student in the early 1980s, Gregory Watson, who was frustrated when he got a C on a paper he wrote about the languishing amendment. True story. Lawmakers, for the record, passed a law that automatically gives them cost of living bumps, but they have blocked those

since 2009, as we all learned when their first potential pay raise in more than a decade helped derail a bipartisan government spending bill last week.

The last newly suggested amendment to give 18-year-olds the right to vote in 1971, a product of outrage at the Vietnam War. Currently, more than half the states, 28, have some kind of call for a convention, according to the group Common Cause, which opposes a new convention.

And in California, lawmakers are nervously moving to claw back that state's multiple dangling calls for a convention - the first passed in 1911 and the most recent in 2023 - to guard against such changes during the Trump administration.

The nearly 33 years and counting since the most recent amendment is the third-longest dry spell in US history. The National Constitution Center breaks the periods of constitutional

change into distinct eras. The longest period between amendments, more than 60 years, was between the Founding Era early in the country's history, including the Bill of Rights and early tweaks to the electoral college system and the Reconstruction era after the Civil War, which gave rights to African Americans, among other things. In the Progressive era, Americans gave women the right to vote, imposed the income tax and required senators to be elected by voters.

But they also banned alcohol for 13 years, during Prohibition. Things have happened more slowly in the modern era, when Americans reclaimed their right to drink, abolished poll taxes, tinkered with presidential succession, imposed term limits on presidents, changed the voting age - and proved that Gregory Watson deserved an A on his college paper.

CNN

Trump team might step in to save TikTok from pending US ban

Rob Garver

WITH a pending law declaring the social media application TikTok illegal in the United States, set to take effect on Sunday, the incoming administration of US President-elect Donald Trump is signaling that it plans to try to find a way to prevent the service from going offline.

Under current law, the service's parent company, China-based ByteDance, must either sell TikTok to a non-Chinese firm or see it banned in the US. Representative Mike Waltz, who has been tapped to serve as Trump's national security adviser, told Fox News on Thursday that the president-elect has options available to postpone enforcement of the law while a possible deal is worked out to sell the company. That includes a section of the law allowing the president to give ByteDance a 90-day extension to finalize a sale.

"We will put measures in place to keep TikTok from going dark," Waltz said, "as long as a viable deal is on the table. Essentially that buys President Trump time to keep TikTok going." Also on Wednesday, several media outlets reported that Trump is considering issuing an executive order that would protect TikTok. The legality of such a move is unclear and is thrown further into doubt by the fact that the Supreme Court is poised to rule on a request by the company to overturn the law.

The high court heard arguments in the case last week and is expected to rule shortly. The outcome is not certain. However, in oral arguments, a majority of the justices appeared to favor upholding the law. Trump's attitude toward TikTok has evolved considerably over the years.

During his first term in office, he attempted to shut the service down in the US. Since then, though, he has used the service, with considerable success, to connect with his supporters. In a press conference in Florida last month, Trump said, "I have a warm spot in my heart for TikTok," and credited the app with helping him get his message out to younger American voters. Trump has denied that his change of heart about TikTok was influenced by a brief meeting in March with Republican megadonor and ByteDance investor Jeff Yass. Lobbying disclosure reports from 2024 show that ByteDance paid a former Trump campaign aide to lobby lawmakers in Washington in favor of TikTok, and that former senior Trump aide Kellyanne Conway has been paid to advocate for TikTok in Congress via the Yass-funded conservative group Club for Growth. Trump also said TikTok was not mentioned during his meeting with Yass.

In the years since TikTok took off, thousands of US-based content creators have developed large audiences on the app, and in many cases have been able to monetize their TikTok feeds. Many small businesses have found success advertising their products to TikTok users. Other TikTok personalities have parlayed fame on the app into broader celebrity that has led to lucrative product endorsements and other deals.

Some members of Congress have expressed concern that abruptly shutting the app down could have economic consequences. On Monday, Democratic Senator Edward Markey introduced legislation

that would delay the TikTok ban by 270 days. "Let me be clear: TikTok has its problems," Markey said in a statement released by his office. "Like every social media platform, TikTok poses a serious risk to the privacy and mental health of our young people. I will continue to hold TikTok accountable for such behavior. But a TikTok ban would impose serious consequences on millions of Americans who depend on the app for social connections and their economic livelihood. We cannot allow that to happen."

As the Sunday deadline nears, there have been a number of rumors about a possible sale of the company. Bloomberg reported on Wednesday that Chinese officials were considering the possibility of selling the service to billionaire Elon Musk, a close Trump adviser who already owns the social media service X, formerly Twitter. Another US billionaire, real estate developer Frank McCourt, told Reuters on Thursday that a consortium of investors he had formed has already made a formal offer to purchase TikTok, valuing the service at \$20 billion. However, it is far from clear that a sale is something the Chinese government is prepared to allow. Any sale worth the buyer's investment would have to include the "recommendation engine," TikTok's name for the algorithm that makes the service so popular and, many would say, addictive.

Last year in a court filing, TikTok characterized such a deal as unavailable. "Just as the United States restricts the export of US-origin technologies (e.g., certain computer chips), the Chinese government regulates the transfer of technologies

developed in China," the company argued in a court filing. "The Chinese government has made clear in public statements that it would not permit a forced divestment of the recommendation engine." A wildly popular service for sharing short videos, TikTok has an estimated 170 million US users. Federal officials have been concerned about TikTok for years because it collects vast amounts of information about its user base. They have argued that Chinese laws compelling domestic companies to cooperate with intelligence agencies could be used to force the company to share that data with the Chinese Communist Party.

US officials have expressed concern that China could misuse the private information about US users of the service. They have also warned that Beijing could use TikTok's powerful recommendation algorithm to shape public discourse in the US to the benefit of China.

In December, when a federal appeals court upheld the law mandating the company's sale or shutdown, Democratic Representative Raja Krishnamoorthi, one of the original sponsors of the law, released a statement expressing the thoughts of many of the law's supporters.

"With today's opinion, all three branches of government have reached the same conclusion: ByteDance is controlled by the Chinese Communist Party, and TikTok's ownership by ByteDance is a national security threat that cannot be mitigated through any other means than divestiture," Krishnamoorthi said. "Every day that TikTok remains under the Chinese Communist Party's control is a day that our security is at risk," Krishnamoorthi added.

What is future of Ukraine's mineral reserves?

Nick Trickett

terrible for its existing growth and fiscal model - or it will sell to Chinese buyers who can drive a hard bargain on price.

Even if it did develop the deposits, they would not provide much of a boon for an economy of Russia's size, development needs, and labor shortages without a new industrial policy and access to Chinese and Western cleantech IP. Fifteen years of elite skepticism cost Russia the chance to become an exporter of this emerging technology. Though it has increased copper production, Russia's Class I nickel is worth less now thanks to China-driven supply gluts from Indonesian mines. Furthermore, its platinum and palladium reserves become less important with each passing year since their primary uses are for combustion engines and car exhaust pipes.

For Ukraine, on the other hand, these reserves are strategically valuable because they could grant Kyiv a competitive advantage for cleantech and nuclear tech manufacturing. A post-war Ukraine could benefit from reshoring supply chains out of Germany, as Poland and other eastern European members of the EU. If Kyiv were to ensure rapid investment and development, it would likely look at primarily taxing miners' profits rather than extraction, significantly reducing the tax base from the sector in exchange for export earnings to bolster the hryvnia.

Estimating the value of the country's mineral wealth is a mug's game. Commodity markets are volatile and metals can be substituted with each other much more than fossil fuels as material science improves. It's easy to forget that in historical terms, these metals-centric energy systems are still new. One of the reasons electric vehicles lose their value so quickly is the sheer pace of innovation and improvements in range every year.

Some inputs are safe bets. We live in a period of rising defense spending, creating demand for titanium. Equally, the AI and big data revolution requires semiconductors that use neon gas, something Ukraine happens to have.

Ukraine also has gallium, a rare metal used in semiconductors, solar PVs, LED lights, circuitry, and power converters. China recently imposed export controls on gallium in response to US policy, exploiting its near-total control of refined gallium production. This could provide an opportunity for

Ukraine to become indispensable to global supply chains, but the market is quite small in financial terms.

Dangling mineral reserves as a carrot for long-term US commitments sounds reasonable but makes less sense than meets the eye. Though the US is incredibly mineral-rich, it takes decades to build new mines. The new Congress is likely to enact reforms to ease that process.

Assuming a peace deal is even possible, Ukraine will still have to compete with mineral-rich countries in Latin America, sub-Saharan Africa, the Asia-Pacific, Canada and Australia for Washington's affection. It will have to do so at a time when many metals markets are oversupplied with declining investment for new production.

Sadly for Kyiv, Europe has the most to gain from unlocking a new supply of minerals. Squeezed between the mercurial bellicosity of Trump and the mounting pressure of China's cleantech prowess and economic slowdown makes Beijing even more reliant on exports, the continent's reliance on trade for a large share of its GDP makes it an ideal partner for Kyiv.

Building mines in the EU is even harder than in the US. Onshoring mineral value chains provides opportunities for cost-savings and vertical integration. For all its tough talk and acknowledging the growing gap between Europe's financial support for Ukraine and that of the United States, there is not yet reason to believe European governments are willing to make even larger sacrifices to ensure Ukraine wins a fair peace.

Lastly, there is the essential matter of what the Ukrainian people themselves want to happen. Mineral wealth is always politically contentious, the site of conflict between local communities, labor, central governments, and major mining companies. These resources are valuable, not as bargaining chips, but as the foundations of new sectors in a post-war economy.

Russia may seek to deny mineral resources to Ukraine or exploit them. That would be a tragedy. Ukraine may seek to use its mineral wealth as a diplomatic object of negotiations for a just peace. That would be completely understandable in a war for national survival. Whoever controls these deposits faces the whims and disorder of rapidly changing markets that confound expectations and pose challenges.

Why did it take so long to arrest South Korean president Yoon Suk Yeol?

Shweta Sharma

SOUTH Korea's president Yoon Suk Yeol has finally been arrested and taken in for questioning, ending a stand-off lasting more than a month after his martial law declaration threw the country into a political crisis. Anti-corruption authorities launched a pre-dawn operation on Wednesday at around 4.30 am to arrest Mr Yoon, which finally saw him taken into custody. A similar attempt ended in failure earlier this month despite law enforcement agents trying to reach Mr Yoon for nearly six hours.

If found guilty of insurrection, Mr Yoon could receive a maximum sentence of life imprisonment. The death sentence is technically also a possibility, although analysts deem that to be a highly unlikely outcome. Hundreds of Mr Yoon's supporters have camped outside his residence to protest against his arrest for weeks, braving sub-zero temperatures. Now that he is in the custody of anti-corruption agents, Mr Yoon's legal process is expected to be closely watched both domestically and internationally, as a significant precedent for holding leaders accountable for alleged abuses of power while in office.

3 December 2024: Shortly before 10.30pm (1330 GMT), Mr Yoon stuns the country and the world by declaring on national television that he is imposing martial law to root out "anti-state forces" and overcome a political deadlock.

An hour later, the military issues a decree banning activity by political parties and lawmakers, and troops and police descend on the opposition-controlled parliament. Staffers use barricades and fire extinguishers to ward off special operations soldiers who arrive by helicopter and break windows as they enter parliament. Lawmakers

hop fences to avoid the security cordons and crowds of protesters gather.

4 December: In the early hours, 190 lawmakers unanimously vote to reject Mr Yoon's martial law declaration and troops begin to leave, defying the military's orders. About three and a half hours later, Mr Yoon gives another televised speech, announcing he is lifting martial law. The decree was in effect for about six hours. On the same day, the opposition party immediately vows to push for impeachment and file an official motion. US Deputy Secretary of State Kurt Campbell says Mr Yoon "badly misjudged" his decision to declare martial law, which was "deeply problematic" and "illegitimate."

5 December: Mr Yoon's People Power Party, although divided, decides to oppose his impeachment. Mr Yoon accepts the resignation of defence minister Kim Yong Hyun. Police investigate Mr Yoon, Mr Kim and the interior minister on accusations of treason and related crimes over the declaration of martial law after opposition parties and activists filed complaints.

6 December: PPP leader Han Dong-hoon says Mr Yoon must be removed from power for trying to impose martial law. Some party members urge Mr Yoon to resign to bring back stability in the government.

7 December: In an address to the nation, Mr Yoon apologises, saying he will put his fate in the hands of the PPP but stopping short of announcing his resignation. Meanwhile, a vote to impeach Mr Yoon fails as the PPP boycotts, depriving parliament of a quorum.

8 December: Prosecutors name Mr Yoon as the subject of a criminal investigation over the martial law attempt. Ex-defence minister Mr Kim is arrested.

9 December: The justice ministry bans Mr Yoon from leaving South Korea.

10 December: Kwak Jong-geun, commander of the Army Special Warfare Command, tells a parliamentary committee that Mr Yoon gave an order to "drag out" lawmakers from parliament after declaring martial law. Mr Yoon's office says it has "no official position" on who is running the country amid questions over PPP discussions for a caretaker government. Ex-defence minister Mr Kim, who has been arrested for his role, attempted to kill himself in custody, officials from the correctional service told parliament.

11 December: Police try to search Mr Yoon's office but are blocked from entering the building.

12 December: Mr Yoon says in another televised speech he will "fight to the end", alleging North Korea had hacked South Korea's election commission and expressing doubt over his party's landslide election defeat in April. The National Election Commission denies the claim.

Seven PPP members declare their intention to support impeachment, one short of the number needed for the motion to pass.

14 December: Mr Yoon is impeached by the parliament with the support of 204 of the 300 lawmakers in the one-chamber parliament. At least 12 PPP members vote to impeach. Mr Yoon's presidential powers are suspended, and prime minister Han Duck-soo becomes acting president. The Constitutional Court receives parliament's impeachment declaration. It will have six months to decide

whether to remove or reinstate him. 16 December: The Constitutional Court begins reviewing the impeachment case.

27 December: Parliament impeaches and suspends acting President Han, less than two weeks after suspending Mr Yoon. Finance minister Choi Sang-mok assumes the position of acting president. The court holds a first public hearing in Mr Yoon's impeachment case.

31 December: The Seoul Western District Court approves an arrest warrant requested by the Corruption Investigation Office for High-ranking Officials (CIO) after Mr Yoon failed to appear for questioning over insurrection allegations. Mr Yoon's lawyers say the arrest warrant is illegal and invalid because the CIO does not have the proper authority.

3 January: Presidential guards and military troops prevent law enforcement agents from arresting Mr Yoon in a tense six-hour stand-off at his compound in the heart of Seoul.

7 January: The Seoul Western District Court approves an extension of the arrest warrant after the CIO's failed attempt.

14 January: The Constitutional Court adjourns the opening session of Mr Yoon's impeachment trial within minutes, after the embattled leader does not attend court.

15 January: Mr Yoon is arrested after around 3,000 police arrive for a second arrest attempt. A motorcade drives Mr Yoon to the CIO offices, where he is brought in quietly through a back door. Mr Yoon says in a video message that he only handed himself in to avoid bloodshed, and the CIO says he refuses to answer questions. Authorities have 48 hours to question Yoon after which they must seek a warrant to detain him for up to 20 days or release him.

Continued attacks on immigrants distracts us

Pooja Sethi

AS the chair of the Travis County Democratic Party and an Indian American myself, I cannot remain silent while the far-right increasingly targets our communities. Once again, in the debate over immigration, the GOP misses the point - choosing to stoke division and scapegoat communities rather than address the real systemic challenges facing our country.

At the same time, Vivek Ramaswamy's recent comments praising immigrants while attacking American families highlight another dangerous trend: using cultural critiques to distract from the policies that truly impact working families. These distractions prevent us from focusing on the real solutions that families need - strong schools, good jobs and leaders who fight for them, not against them.

Ramaswamy claims that top tech companies hire immigrant engineers over "native" Americans because of a cultural failing in America. He argues that American families prioritize the prom queen over the math Olympiad champ, value jocks over valedictorians and indulge in reruns of "Friends" rather than fostering academic rigor. Meanwhile, he praises immigrant families for their supposed discipline and focus on excellence, implying this explains their success.

At first glance, this might seem like a celebration of immigrant

success. But make no mistake - this rhetoric is deeply harmful. It perpetuates the "model minority myth," which falsely paints immigrants as a monolith of success while dismissing the structural barriers they face. Worse, it fuels division, pitting immigrant communities against working-class Americans instead of addressing the systemic failures that harm us all.

The truth is that Ramaswamy's critique, like the far-right's growing hostility toward immigrants, is a distraction. The challenges America faces - whether in education, economic opportunity, or workforce competitiveness - are not cultural but structural. For decades, billionaires and far-right politicians have defunded public education, undermined teacher pay, and pushed school privatization schemes, all while stoking outrage over culture wars. These deliberate policy choices have weakened America's ability to cultivate the engineers, scientists and innovators our country needs.

How can we expect to compete globally when we defund the very institutions designed to support innovation? While countries like India invest heavily in education and technology, America has allowed its schools to crumble

under the weight of political gamesmanship. Instead of addressing these systemic failures, Ramaswamy blames "American culture" and proposes solutions - like eliminating the Department of Education - that would only make matters worse.

Meanwhile, the GOP has spent decades prioritizing corporate profits over the needs of working families. Their tax breaks for billionaires and corporations have drained resources from public schools, healthcare and infrastructure. They have blocked wage increases, gutted union protections and allowed critical industries to be outsourced. Instead of creating pathways for economic mobility, they have trapped working-class families in cycles of stagnant wages and rising costs, all while blaming immigrants and scapegoating marginalized communities. The far-right's hostility toward immigrants feeds a harmful narrative that immigrants are replacing US-born Americans, turning shared struggles into a competition for limited resources. Ramaswamy's praise of immigrant families only reinforces this myth, amplifying divisions while ignoring the systemic inequities that harm all working families.

The truth is simple: America's

strength lies in its diversity. Immigrants and US-born Americans alike are striving to build better futures for their families. The real problem isn't "culture" - it's policy. Decades of disinvestment in education, stagnant wages and a lack of affordable healthcare have made it harder for families to thrive.

The Democratic Party has consistently fought to address these systemic challenges. We are the party of working people, standing for strong public schools, good-paying jobs and affordable healthcare. We believe every child - whether they're the math Olympiad champ or the prom queen - deserves access to a quality education and a fair shot at success.

Families across the country have valid frustrations. They've seen wages stagnate and opportunities shrink. But their anger is being misdirected at the wrong people and the wrong party. Immigrants didn't cause these problems, and Democrats aren't the ones defunding schools. America doesn't need more finger-pointing, divisive rhetoric or myths about immigrant success - it needs real solutions. Families are tired of political posturing while nothing changes. Enough is enough. It's time for leaders to stop scapegoating and start rebuilding the systems that will allow all Americans to succeed.

In Panama, we're a laughing stock because of Trump

Jonathan Zimmerman

‘Our Country is a disaster, a laughing stock all over the World!’ That’s what Donald Trump wrote on Truth Social Jan. 2, after the deadly assaults in New Orleans and Las Vegas. Happy New Year, America - you’re a joke. Trump is right, but not for the reasons he imagines. When people around the world mock us, it’s not because of our “open borders” or “violent erosion of safety,” as Trump wrote. It’s because of Donald J. Trump. He is the joke.

I just got back from Panama, where lots of people make fun of Donald Trump. He recently threatened to take back the Panama Canal, which he said was over-charging American ships. He also said it was ruled by China. Panamanians know better. There is no evidence - none - that Americans pay more than other users of the canal. And while a Hong Kong-based firm does administer ports on either side of the canal, no one believes that China controls it.

Whenever I mentioned Trump, people laughed. "He's crazy," one of my guides declared, twirling a finger around his ear in the universal symbol of mental instability. "He doesn't know what he's talking about," an Uber driver said, smiling broadly. But threats of US force are no joke in Panama, where the history of American military intervention looms large. So while everyone I met thought Trump was a buffoon, they also took his warning seriously. When a clown raises his fist, you never know what to expect.

Maybe that's Trump's endgame, another guide suggested. If enough people believe he's unstable, Trump thinks, Panama will give him what he wants. Think again. Panama owes its independence to America, but it has also fought to protect itself from America. It's not about to give up now.

At the start of the 20th century, Panama was a province of Colombia. When Colombia rejected America's proposal to construct a canal, the United States supported the secession of Panama and protected it from Colombian attack. That cleared the way for "The Path Between the Seas," a monumental project that solidified America's status as a global power. But it also stoked tensions inside Panama, especially within the US-controlled Canal Zone.

I was in Panama on Jan. 9, "Martyr's Day," which commemorates a 1964 riot that started when students planted a Panamanian flag outside of a US-operated school. Twenty people - including three Americans - died, and hundreds were injured. Panamanians haven't forgotten. "Today is a day to remember our martyrs," said an 84-year-old retiree, who was a student during the riots, "but also to say to the world that Panama is sovereign and the canal is ours."

In 1977, Jimmy Carter signed an agreement pledging to relinquish control of the canal to Panama. I saw several statues in honor of Carter, whose recent death was widely mourned in the country. But Trump's threats also conjured

America's 1989 invasion of Panama to depose President Manuel Noriega, a former US ally who became an international drug kingpin. The attack led to the deaths of at least 500 people.

Nobody has forgotten that, either. "It is an open wound," a member of Panama's national assembly said earlier this month. And that has only strengthened Panama's resolve to resist any incursions by Trump. "He is a very arrogant man who thinks he can take whatever he wants," said Isabel Corro, president of a group of Panamanians who lost family members in the 1989 invasion. "It should not happen and we will not let it happen."

I hope she's right. Taking back the canal would violate America's treaty with Panama and a host of international laws. And it would further destabilize the world, encouraging other strongmen to take whatever they can. It would make it harder for the US to argue that Russia President Vladimir Putin should stay out of Ukraine, or that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has no business building more settlements in the West Bank. This isn't just about Trump and Panama. It's about all of us.

"He cannot just say, 'I'm going to buy this country, I'm going to invade this one,'" said Isabel Corro, whose stepfather was killed in the 1989 invasion. "The world is not some big flea market." That's exactly right. If Donald Trump continues to threaten the invasion of Panama - or the purchase of Greenland - he'll make us a laughing stock all over the world. And that's no joke.



Limelight to open flagship store in Mall of IMARAT



F.P. Report

KARACHI: IMARAT Group has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Limelight, one of Pakistan's leading fashion brands. This collaboration marks a significant milestone for the Mall of IMARAT, as Limelight prepares to open a flagship store within the mall, bringing international retail standards to this premier shopping destination.

Speaking about this collaboration, Shafiq Akbar,

Chairman of IMARAT Group, said that at IMARAT Group, we are committed to creating spaces that redefine standards and enrich lives, our partnership with Limelight is another step toward realizing this vision.

The Mall of IMARAT represents innovation and excellence, and having Limelight join us reinforces our commitment to bringing world-class retail experiences to Pakistan. Together, we aim to set a benchmark for the future of shopping, lifestyle, and

entertainment in the region.

Limelight, renowned for its contemporary designs and versatile collections, will offer an enhanced shopping experience tailored to fashion enthusiasts. By choosing the Mall of IMARAT for their newest venture, Limelight demonstrates confidence in the mall's vision of becoming a hub for high-end retail and lifestyle experiences.

The upcoming Limelight store is set to feature a wide range of

apparel, accessories, footwear, international standard interiors for an immersive shopping experience and latest trends designed to cater to diverse its valuable customers.

The collaboration between IMARAT Group and Limelight underscores the Mall of IMARAT's commitment to bringing renowned brands under one roof. This partnership aligns with the group's mission to elevate Pakistan's retail landscape by offering world-class shopping and leisure opportunities.

The Mall of IMARAT, strategically located in the heart of IMARAT Downtown, continues to attract leading brands and retailers, with Limelight joining its portfolio, visitors can look forward to an enhanced shopping experience that combines luxury, convenience, and style.

This partnership is a testament to IMARAT Group's dedication to transforming the Mall of IMARAT into a premier destination for shopping, dining & entertainment.

PSX turns around to bullish trend, gains 1,435 points

ISLAMABAD (APP): The 100-Index of the Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX) turned around to bullish trend on Friday, gaining 1,435.34 points, a positive change of 1.26 percent, closing at 115,272.08 points as compared to 113,836.74 points on the last trading day.

A total of 549,584,585 shares were traded during the day as compared to

469,440,511 shares the previous trading day, whereas the price of shares stood at Rs35,931 billion against Rs. 24,981 billion on the last trading day.

As many as 461 companies transacted their shares in the stock market, 264 of them recorded gains and 128 sustained losses, whereas the share price of 69 companies remained unchanged.

The three top trading companies were WorldCall Telecom with 101,934,297 shares at Rs 1.87 per share, Hub Power Company with 36,888,747 shares at Rs.137.40 per share and Hascol Petrol with 32,496,536 shares at Rs.12.90 per share.

Unilever Pakistan Foods Limited witnessed a maximum increase of Rs 398.00 per share closing at Rs

21,998.00 whereas runner-up was Hoechst Limited with Rs 86.38 rise in its share price to close at Rs.2,819.76.

JDW Sugar Mills Limited witnessed a maximum decrease of Rs.36.15 per share price, closing at Rs 889.21, whereas the runner-up was Mehmood Textile Mills Limited with Rs 25.66 rise in its per share price to Rs.653.86.

Transforming Karachi's waterfront TPL Properties unveils 'The Mangrove' project

F.P. Report

KARACHI: TPL Properties unveiled the highly anticipated concept of its project, "The Mangrove," during an exclusive event at the esteemed PC Marquee in Karachi on Thursday.

The event brought together esteemed guests from various sectors of society, celebrating a transformative vision for urban living in the city. "The Mangrove" is poised to redefine the landscape of Karachi's waterfront, representing a groundbreaking mixed-use development that combines residential, commercial, and retail spaces.

This ambitious project, supported by TPL REIT Fund I, is being developed by TPL Developments in collaboration with the internationally acclaimed architectural firm, SSH. Spanning over 15 million square feet, "The Mangrove" is strategically designed to overlook the serene mangroves, seamlessly blending the beauty of nature with modern convenience.

The development includes an IT Park, offices, and a hospitality zone, integrating state-of-the-art facilities and modern office spaces within a

nurturing environment. This area is designed to foster innovation and collaboration among businesses. Additionally, the Retail Zone features cutting-edge shops and dining options, presenting a dynamic mix of cafés and restaurants. This vibrant commercial hub aims to cater to the needs of the community while enhancing the overall lifestyle experience.

This innovative project aims to create a vibrant community that offers luxurious living spaces, modern commercial facilities, and an array of retail options. TPL Properties is committed to incorporating

ing eco-friendly elements throughout the development, ensuring that "The Mangrove" contributes positively to the environment while enhancing the quality of life for its residents.

The event served as a platform to showcase the unique features of "The Mangrove," highlighting its potential to transform Karachi into a model of sustainable urban development.

With its focus on harmony between nature and modernity, TPL Properties aspires to create a legacy that resonates with the aspirations of the city's diverse population.

SCCI raises issue of entry ban of goods-laden vehicles to industrial estate

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Following the proactive efforts of the Sarhad Chamber of Commerce and Industry, an alternative route has been identified for entry of goods-laden vehicles in Hayatabad Industrial Estate Peshawar so that it will resolve the issues of the business community.

According to the details, a delegation of traders led by SCCI president Fazal Moqem Khan held a meeting with Commissioner Peshawar Riaz Mehsud.

The delegation consisted of Siyar Khan, Arshad

Khan and Amjad Khan and others.

The meeting was apprised about apprehensions of the business community regarding the ban on entry of goods-laden containers to Hayatabad Industrial Estate Peshawar.

Commissioner Peshawar in the meeting directed officials concerned to resolve the issue by visiting the site.

By swiftly taking action, ADC F&P Peshawar Asghar Surani and SHO, RMT visited the main gate of RMT and reviewed the overall situation.

After analyzing the situation on the ground, the senior officials have identified a route for entry of containers behind the Hayatabad Industrial Estate Peshawar.

In this regard, a report will be submitted to Commissioner Peshawar to remove restrictions on entry of goods-laden vehicles to the Industrial estate Peshawar.

Fazal Moqem while speaking on the occasion took the issue, stressing upon the provincial government and local administration to take concrete steps for ease of doing business.

The SCCI chief also mentioned the increase of 'flight of capital' and 'brain drain' from the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa owing to the prevailing circumstances.

Moqem asked for provision of one window facilitation services to taxpayers and business community and ensure implementation of business-friendly policies at every level.

Earlier, members of the business community hailed SCCI for taking up and resolving the issue of the entry ban on goods-laden vehicles to Hayatabad Industrial Estate Peshawar.

President ICCI highlights private sector's potential for export-led growth

ISLAMABAD (APP): Nasir Mansoor Qureshi, President of the Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ICCI) has highlighted the critical role of the private sector in Pakistan's economic development. He emphasized that the private sector's role in reducing unemployment and poverty cannot be ignored. Furthermore, it fosters innovation and entrepreneurship by supporting start-ups and small businesses, thereby driving the creation of

new industries and opportunities.

In a statement issued here on Friday, Qureshi also noted the potential of the private sector in promoting export-led growth, particularly in industries like textiles, pharmaceuticals, mines and minerals, food processing, and IT to boost the foreign exchange earnings. He stressed the importance of public-private partnerships in delivering public services and infrastructure projects, benefiting from the combined strengths of

both sectors.

To fully tap into the private sector's potential, ICCI President called for policies that encourage entrepreneurship, innovation, and investment. He concluded by asserting that a collaborative effort between the government and private sector could unlock Pakistan's economic potential, foster growth, and pave the way for a prosperous future.

On their part, Senior Vice President Abdul Rehman Siddiqui and Vice President Nasir

Mehmood Chaudhry said that the private sector's ability to innovate and adapt to changing market trends can help Pakistan stay competitive in the global economy.

But the private sector in Pakistan faces challenges like access to finance, taxation, and political instability, which impacts its ability to create jobs, despite these challenges, the private sector remains a vital contributor to Pakistan's economy and job market, they added.



BEIJING: Ambassador of Pakistan to China H.E. Mr. Khalil Hashmi addressing B2B matchmaking meeting on Medical and Surgical equipment Industry hosted by the Embassy of Pakistan in Beijing.

Students in ICT lead rally against use of tobacco products

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Human Development Foundation (HDF) organized a student athletes led rally against the use of tobacco products and advocated for declaration of smoke free spaces in schools and colleges.

The rally took place at the National Sports Complex at the Annual Sports Gala arranged by Private Education Society (PES). The students showcased posters promoting smoke-free campuses and areas for children through posters and placards.

The event focused on raising awareness in younger generations about the harmful effects of tobacco products and misleading figures about heated tobacco products, such as vapes and tobacco pouches.

The event cautioned minors against the use and purchase of all tobacco products. The event brought together students, athletes, parliamentarians, education professionals, and leading schools from across ICT.

According to WHO, around 19 percent of adults aged fifteen and above currently use tobacco in any form. Tobacco kills over 163,600 people each year in Pakistan. Almost 31,000 of these deaths are due to exposure to secondhand smoke.

Human Development Foundation has been actively advocating against the use of tobacco products and for regulation of emerging tobacco products in Pakistan to protect youth from this menace.

Industrial growth declines by 1.25%

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Large Scale Manufacturing Industries (LSMI) in the country witnessed a negative growth of 1.25 percent during the first five months of the current fiscal year as compared to the corresponding period of last year, the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS) reported.

The LSM also dipped by 3.81 percent on year-on-year basis (YoY) in November 2024 when compared to the same month of last year and 1.19 percent on month-on-month (MoM) basis when compared to October 2024.

The provisional quantum induces of Large Scale Manufacturing Industries (LSMI) for November 2024, with the base year 2015-16, have been developed based on the latest data supplied by the source agencies.

The main contributors towards overall growth of -1.25% are, Food (0.23), Tobacco (0.39), Textile (0.40) Garments (1.76), Petroleum Products (-0.18), Automobiles (0.78), Cement (-0.61), Iron & Steel Products (-0.62), Electrical Equipment (-0.64), Machinery and Equipment (-0.25) and Furniture (-2.24).

To enhance book building process for investors

PSX and 1LINK sign agreement



F.P. Report

KARACHI: Pakistan Stock Exchange Limited (PSX) is pleased to announce the signing of an Agreement between PSX and 1LINK (Pvt) Limited (1LINK) to revamp the book building system of PSX. This groundbreaking development will allow participants to make payments online in excess of Rs 1 million through the 1LINK 1BILL platform utilising the revamped Book Building System (BBS) developed indigenously by PSX.

The revamped system features advanced functionalities with a user-friendly interface capable of catering to multiple Book Buildings simultaneously for all market participants. The upgraded BBS introduces a series of advanced features aimed at improving the overall experience of both institutional and high-net-worth individuals during the bidding process.

The Agreement formalised between PSX and 1LINK was signed by Mr. Farrukh H. Sabzwari, MD

& CEO of PSX, and Mr. Najeem Agrawalla, CEO of 1LINK. The signing ceremony was also attended by Mr. Imran Inayat Butt, Executive Director, Securities Market Division of SECP as well as senior management of PSX & 1LINK.

Speaking at the signing ceremony, Mr. Farrukh Sabzwari stated, "I extend my heartiest congratulations to the teams at PSX and 1LINK for the enhancement of the PSX Book Building System to facilitate investors in an IPO.

The revamping of this system is a major step forward for the capital market in terms of payment automation and limit enhancement for book building for an IPO.

This Agreement reflects PSX's commitment to modernise the capital markets by making it more accessible for participants and is aimed at enhancing convenience while ensuring greater transparency and efficiency".

Mr. Sabzwari added,

"PSX extends its gratitude to the Securities and Exchange Commission of Pakistan and the State Bank of Pakistan for playing an instrumental role in facilitating the development and implementation of this system. We also thank them for offering invaluable guidance for ensuring alignment with global best practices."

Mr. Najeem Agrawalla, CEO of 1LINK, stated, "This collaboration with PSX represents a major leap forward in transforming Pakistan's capital markets. By enabling seamless online payments during the IPO Book Building process, we are not just enhancing investor experience but also contributing to a more transparent, efficient, and accessible financial ecosystem. We are proud to be part of this milestone development".

The full rollout of the enhanced book building system is expected in the coming weeks, promising a seamless and efficient IPO experience for all stakeholders

Future Minerals Forum 2025 Pakistan emerges as premier mining destination

F.P. Report

KARACHI: At the Future Minerals Forum (FMF) in Riyadh, Pakistan made a significant impact, showcasing its vast untapped mineral wealth and positioning itself as a global mining powerhouse. The delegation's session opened with the screening of "Beneath the Surface: Pakistan's Mining Renaissance", a compelling film that highlighted the country's abundant reserves of gemstones, non-metallic minerals, industrial minerals, metals, and rare-earth elements.

The session continued with a high-profile panel discussion titled "Pakistan: The Mineral Marvel - Unlocking the Future of Mining", moderated by Mr. Imran Abbasy, Managing Director of Pakistan Petroleum Limited. The esteemed

panel featured Dr. Musadik Malik, Minister of Petroleum and Water Resources; Timothy Cribb, Project Director at Barrick, Reko Diq; and Mr. Asad Ahmed, Managing Director of Pakistan Mineral Development Corporation. Dr. Malik underscored the government's strategic focus on transforming the mining sector through comprehensive policy reforms, enhanced institutional capacity, and alignment with global shifts toward green energy.

With over 10,000 delegates visiting the Pakistan Pavilion at FMF 2025, the country's mining potential was on full display. Government representatives, state-owned enterprises, and private sector stakeholders engaged with investors and experts, showcasing diverse opportunities in mineral exploration and production.

A major milestone was achieved with the signing of four Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) between Wah Nobel Group and Saudi Gold Refinery. The agreements, witnessed by Dr. Musadik Malik, will enable Wah Nobel to provide cutting-edge drilling and blasting services to enhance mining operations in Saudi Arabia. The ceremony was attended by Mr. Ibrahim, Chairman of Saudi Gold Refinery, and Brigadier Shiraz Ullah Choudhry, CEO of Wah Nobel.

In addition, Dr. Malik conducted three key meetings at the Pakistan Pavilion, where he engaged US-based company delegates, utilizing a captivating 3D mineral map of Pakistan to highlight the country's rich mining potential.

During the closing ceremony, H.E. (Get the name from Sheheryar) presented a token of appreciation to the delegation, particularly praising the visually stunning and informative design of the pavilion, which effectively showcased Pakistan's mining industry.

Pakistan's participation, featuring a strategically located pavilion, attracted significant attention from stakeholders, fostering valuable collaborations and enhancing the country's profile as a leading mining destination.





In brief

Pakistan team prepares for U-19 WC

JOHAR BAHRU (APP): The Pakistan women's under-19 cricket team completed final preparations for their first World Cup match against the United States, scheduled for tomorrow (Saturday) at the Johor Cricket Academy Ground. The players practiced for four hours at Marlborough College Ground, focusing on running, batting, bowling, and fielding. Head coach Mohsin Kamal supervised the session, aided by coaches Muhammad Hanif Malik, Nahida Khan and Asfandiyar who provided valuable tips to the players. The match is set to take place at the Johor Cricket Academy Ground, starting at 2:30 PM local time. Team captain Komal Khan expressed confidence in her team's abilities, stating, "We will try our best to win the group matches." She added that the coaches have supported the players at every opportunity. Head coach Mohsin Kamal noted that the players' confidence is higher this time compared to previous competitions. "The World Cup is a big event, but our players' preparation is good," he said. The Pakistani team is ready to make a strong impression in the tournament.

Belgium sack national team coach Tedesco

B R U S S E L S (Agencies): Belgium's football association on Friday announced the sacking of national team coach Domenico Tedesco after disappointing performances at Euro 2024 and in the Nations League. "Unfortunately, the Red Devils did not perform as we hoped at Euro 2024, just as they did in the next Nations League campaign," the football association (RBFA) said on their website. Tedesco was appointed in February 2023 to replace Roberto Martinez and rebuild the squad as the country's "golden generation" departed. Tedesco's team qualified for Euro 2024 but were eliminated in the last 16 by France, who then beat Belgium twice more in the Nations League as the Red Devils finished third in their group. They face a relegation play-off against Ukraine in March. "I was always proud to be the coach of the Red Devils, we achieved great things together," Tedesco said. "This team is still at the beginning of its development and will cause a sensation in the coming years. I wish the players, the great employees of the federation and the fans all the best from the bottom of my heart." Five members of Tedesco's support staff and coaching team were also fired. "Domenico made an excellent start as national coach and proved that there are still great things possible, even after the send-off of the previous generation," said RBFA CEO Peter Willems. "He has integrated a number of young players into the team, and his successor can build on this. We would like to thank him and his team for the pleasant cooperation, their hard work and dedication, and wish them all the best for the future." The RBFA did not announce a timetable for appointing a successor but Belgian media named Frenchmen Rudi Garcia and Thierry Henry as leading candidates. Belgium kick off their 2026 World Cup qualifying campaign with a trip to North Macedonia in June.

Rizwan, Saud lead Pakistan's recovery in fog-delayed first test

MULTAN (APP): Mohammad Rizwan and Saud Shakeel displayed remarkable composure to rescue Pakistan's faltering innings on the opening day of the first Test against the West Indies, which began late due to fog. Pakistan, electing to bat first, found themselves in dire straits at 46/4 but Mohammad Rizwan (51 not out) and Saud Shakeel (56 not out) forged an unbeaten 97-run partnership to steer the hosts to a more respectable 143/4 by the end of the session. The pair stepped up when Pakistan's top order crumbled under the pressure of West Indies' pace attack, spearheaded by Jayden Seales who bowled a fiery 10-over spell, claiming three crucial wickets for just 21 runs in the early overs of the inning. The fall of wickets

began early for Pakistan with the first wicket falling at 16 runs when debutant Mohammad Huraire was dismissed for six runs. Skipper Shan Masood followed soon at 20, scoring just 11 runs. Kamran Ghulam was dismissed for five runs at 31 while Babar Azam lost his wicket at 46 after managing only eight runs, leaving the team in a precarious position. Mohammad Rizwan and Saud Shakeel's partnership injected stability and determination into the innings, countering the disciplined bowling of the West Indies. The resilience frustrated the visitors as they began to rebuild Pakistan's innings. The delayed start and low visibility due to morning fog added to the day's challenges. The match will resume tomorrow with

Pakistan hoping to build on their recovery, while the West Indies will look to capitalize on the early breakthroughs provided by bowling attack. The Multan Cricket Stadium, located at the city of saints, witnessed an enthusiastic crowd of spectators who turned up in large numbers despite the cold and foggy weather. Fans cheered passionately for both teams, creating a lively atmosphere with chants and banners supports the players. The city, known for its rich culture and hospitality welcomed the West Indies team warmly, with local supports also appreciating the visitor's performances. Tight security arrangements were in place throughout the venue to ensure a smooth and safe match experience for the players and spectators alike.



MULTAN: West Indies' Jayden Seales successfully appeals for leg before wicket (LBW) against Pakistan's Kamran Ghulam during the first day of the first Test cricket match between Pakistan and West Indies.

Haaland signs new Manchester City deal until 2034

LONDON (Agencies): Norwegian striker Erling Haaland has signed a new 9.5-year deal at Manchester City that will keep him at the Etihad until 2034, the Premier League champions announced on Friday. The 24-year-old striker's existing deal was due to expire in June 2027 but he has now committed his future to the club for the next decade. The Norwegian joined Manchester City from Borussia Dortmund in 2022 and has scored 111 goals in 126 games for the club. "I am really happy to have signed my new contract and to be able to look forward to spending even more time at this great club," said Haaland. "Manchester City is a special club, full of fantastic people with amazing supporters and it's the type of environment that helps bring the best out of everybody. "I also want to thank Pep, his coaching staff, my teammates and everyone at the Club as they have all helped me so much in the past couple of years. They have made this such a special place to be and now I



am City no matter what. "I want to keep developing, keep working to get better and look to do my best to try and help us achieve more success going forward." Manchester City's outgoing director of football Txiki Begiristain said: "Everyone at the club is absolutely delighted that Erling has signed his new contract. "The fact he is signed for so long demonstrates our commitment to him as a player, and his love of this club. "He has made an incredible impact already in his time here and his amazing numbers and records speak for themselves. "But in addition

to his outstanding natural talent and ability, Erling's dedication, professionalism, humility and desire to keep getting better sum up what we all strive to achieve at Manchester City. "He is one of the finest strikers in world football, but Erling is still very young and will only continue to improve working under Pep and his coaching team. If he works hard, which I know he will, he will create an incredible legacy at this football club. "Now he can focus on his game and continuing to play a huge part in helping us try to achieve even more success."

Swiss von Allmen claims maiden World Cup win

WENGEN (AFP): Switzerland's Franjo von Allmen claimed a surprise maiden win in the men's World Cup Super-G race at home in Wengen on Friday. The 23-year-old downhill specialist's risk-taking performance on the spectacular Lauberhorn piste sealed victory in 1min 47.65sec. "There are so many emotions, I just try to be in the moment," said von Allmen to the acclaim of the 27,500 spectators. "Especially as a Swiss guy, it's really something special." Austrian veteran Vincent Kriechmayr, 33, was second best at 0.10sec, having also finished second in Bormio last month. Von Allmen's compatriot Stefan Rogentin, bruised and sore after a fall in downhill training during the week, completed the podium at 0.58. Von Allmen had already been on the podium this season, finishing second in the downhill in Italy at Val Gardena and Bormio in December. His first podium was third in the Super-G a year ago in Garmisch-Partenkirchen, Germany. He becomes the seventh first-time winner on the men's World Cup tour this



season, including the fourth from Switzerland. Under bright sunshine and blue skies, von Allmen was nearly flawless, making up time on the technical middle section having trailed at the top of the course. "I think it was a solid run," said von Allmen, adding it was "not at all" perfect. "For once I did not make many mistakes, and had some fast skiing." Overall World Cup and discipline leader Marco Odermatt finished a disappointing seventh, missing the podium for the first time in his four Super-G races in Wengen. The 27-year-old Swiss had not finished outside the top five in a World Cup Super-G since March 2022. Joking he was happy

"not to be always in the limelight", Odermatt conceded "two or three small errors" cost him as he trailed at 1.04sec. Odermatt nevertheless retains the lead in the speciality ranking, 19 points ahead of Kriechmayr, with von Allmen sixth. And he also remains clearly at the head of the overall standings, 192 points ahead of Norwegian Henrik Kristoffersen who is not competing in the speed events. "If he doesn't make mistakes, he can win every race," said Odermatt of von Allmen who is eighth in the overall standings heading into Saturday's downhill in the Swiss resort. "Easier? I don't think so," von Allmen warned. "I try to put emotions down and focus again for tomorrow."

Ali Tareen steps up to revive Ihsanullah's career

LAHORE: Multan Sultans owner Ali Tareen has once again stepped forward to support fast bowler Ihsanullah, promising him a place in his President's Cup Grade-II team, JWD. The PCB-organized tournament is scheduled to take place in April and May. In addition, after discussions with Ihsanullah, Ali Tareen announced that Multan Sultans would provide the 22-year-old Swat-born pacer with all necessary facilities and resources to help him reclaim his place in the national side and make a comeback to the HBL PSL, where he represented the 2021 champions. "Ihsanullah is one of our own and we are committed to supporting him through these challenging times," said Ali Tareen. "He will now be on our payroll, which means he'll have the opportunity to resume competitive cricket. Moreover, Ihsanullah will have access to our Multan Sultans Academy in Lodhran, where our specialists will work closely with him to get his career back on track. "I have spoken to our fast-bowling coach Catherine Dalton, who is equally committed to helping Ihsanullah return to his best. We supported him in 2023 when he first sustained the injury and we will continue to fulfill our responsibility to him now. We are optimistic and confident that he will be back in action for Multan Sultans in the HBL PSL. "Our ultimate goal is to see him represent Pakistan and contribute to the national team's success in major matches. Ihsanullah is a valued member of the Multan Sultans family, and we will do everything in our power to support him."

India cricketers to curb family time on tour after Australia defeat

NEW DELHI (AFP): India's cricket board has capped the amount of time players can spend with their families on tour after a string of Test defeats including a 3-1 drubbing in Australia this month. The Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) issued new policies Thursday for the senior men's team detailing guidelines to "promote discipline, unity and a positive team environment". As part of the new guidelines, families will be allowed to stay with the players for a maximum of two weeks during overseas tours of 45 days or more.

Gauff, Sabalenka into Australian Open 4th round

M E L B O U R N E (Agencies): Coco Gauff still hasn't lost a match or even at set at the Australian Open -- or, actually, this season. She moved into the fourth round at Melbourne Park with a straightforward 6-4, 6-2 victory over 2021 US Open runner-up Leylah Fernandez on Friday night. While there have been plenty of surprises in the men's bracket, most of the top women, other than No. 5 Zheng Qinwen, have progressed through the draw without an issue. That includes Friday wins for No. 1 Aryna Sabalenka, who is the two-time defending champion in Australia, No. 3 Gauff, No. 11 Paula Badosa and No. 14 Mirra Andreeva. Naomi Osaka, a two-time champion in Australia, stopped playing because of a strained abdominal muscle after dropping the first set of her match against Tokyo Olympics gold medalist Belinda Bencic. However, No. 7 seed Jessica Pegula was ousted by world No. 55 Olga Danilovic in two sets. The Serbian player beat the US Open runner-up 7-6 (3), 6-1 after she hit 28 winners and saved all six break points she faced. It was

Danilovic's third career win over a top-10 player. A year ago, 2023 US Open champion Gauff had her best run in Melbourne, getting to the semifinals before bowing out against Sabalenka, who extended her winning streak at the tournament to 17 matches by eliminating Clara Tauson 7-6 (5), 6-4 on Friday. Like Gauff, Sabalenka is unbeaten in the early going in 2025. They could meet in the semifinals again this time around next weekend. Gauff needed just 75 minutes to get past Fernandez, a left-hander who was seeded 30th. Gauff was broken just once and compiled an 18-7 advantage in total winners. It was Gauff's second recent win over Fernandez, after beating her in the United Cup team competition. That is part of Gauff's 8-0 record, 16-0 in sets, so far this season. That made this one "harder," Gauff said, "because she knows what to expect, and I definitely think she played a little bit different today." That prompted Gauff to switch some things up, too, as she seeks her second major championship. She's tweaked her coaching staff and altered her

serving and forehand mechanics a bit after being a tad disappointed with her Grand Slam performances in 2024 -- even if the season did end with a title at the WTA Finals. "Tennis feels so high stakes, but it's really not. I'm so lucky to do what I do -- also get paid doing it," said Gauff, 20, of Florida. "My biggest thing I learned last year is just not to take anything for granted," Gauff said, "and just realized this time is going to go by so fast. ... I'm just trying to enjoy it while I'm here." Neither Sabalenka nor Tauson served all that well in Rod Laver Arena. Maybe it was the sun. Maybe it was the wind. Maybe it was slower court conditions. The first seven games of the match were all breaks, and Tauson was the first to hold, leading 5-3. But that's when Sabalenka began to get going. "I am super happy I was able to push myself," Sabalenka said. "I told myself, 'Well, girl, you are tough.' So many times, I thought I was done." Next for her is a matchup with 17-year-old Andreeva, a 6-2, 1-6, 6-2 winner against No. 23 Magdalena Frech.

Neymar: Mbappé was jealous of Messi at Paris Saint-Germain

PARIS (Agencies): Brazil striker Neymar said his former Paris Saint-Germain teammate Kylian Mbappé became "a little jealous" after superstar Lionel Messi joined the French club in August 2021 in a free transfer. Speaking in a podcast hosted by World Cup winner Romário released Thursday, the 32-year-old Brazilian, who has endured an injury-laden tenure with Saudi club Al Hilal, added that big egos affected the performances of PSG in big matches. Neymar made his comments after Romário asked whether Mbappé, who joined Real Madrid this season, "is annoying." "No, he is not. I have my things with him, we had a little fight, but he was fundamental for us when he arrived. I used to call him golden boy," Neymar said. "I always played with him, said he was going to be one of the best. I always helped, talked to him, he came to my place, we had dinner together. "We had some good years of partnership, but after Messi came he was a

little jealous. He didn't want to split me with anyone. And then there were some fights, a change in behavior." Mbappé joined PSG from Monaco in 2017, the same year Neymar moved from Barcelona to the French club in one of the biggest transfers in soccer history. Both were signed as the club sought its maiden Champions League title, which it is yet to win. Neymar said the team often struggled due to big egos, but he didn't name anyone. "It is good to have egos, but you have to know that you don't play alone," Neymar said. "There needs to be another guy by your side. [Big] egos were almost everywhere, it can't work. If nobody runs and nobody helps, it is impossible to win anything." Neymar didn't rule out returning to Brazil after his contract in Saudi Arabia expires in the middle of the year. ESPN sources have also said that three MLS teams, including Chicago Fire FC, are interested in signing him to the North American league.

Later on Thursday, his manager at Al Hilal, Jorge Jesus, said Neymar was free to decide his future for himself after confirming that he would not be registered for the second half of the Saudi Pro League season, in part because of his injury issues since joining the team. "The only thing I know is that Neymar is not registered at the moment," Jesus said after Al Hilal beat last-place team Al Fateh 9-0. "I don't know about the interest of others clubs, that's beyond my control. "The Saudi League is one of the best leagues in the world. Neymar can no longer perform at the level we are used to because unfortunately things have become difficult for him. "I don't know what will happen with Neymar's future. He is still under contract with Al Hilal, and it is up to him to decide what comes next. Ultimately, that will be a decision for him and the team management to make." Neither Mbappé nor Messi have reacted to Neymar's comments.

Gaddafi Stadium all but ready to challenge the best

LAHORE (APP): The Gaddafi Stadium Lahore is all but ready to be presented to the global audiences as a model cricketing facility, which would rub shoulders with the best venues of the world. The players' dressing rooms, hospitality boxes and offices have been created anew besides the enclosures for the spectators. The re-built enclosures present an image of a saucer with quality view of cricket action on the field

while the removal of the iron fence will also improve the view and connect the fans with their heroes more effectively. Everything looks to be overhauled in and around the Gaddafi stadium and an army of engineers and workers is at work round the clock. Green and white chairs are being fixed in the pavilions which have been imported to meet the international standards. Mercury lights have been

replaced with LED lights at the light towers and these are expected to be turned on in a day's time. The roads are being carpeted while the beautification work is also being undertaken at a rapid pace. PCB's Director Infrastructure Jawwad Qazi, during a tour of the local media of the upgradation work, told that the Gaddafi stadium will be ready for action by the end of January and host the tri-series matches against

South Africa and New Zealand from February 8. "ICC Champions Trophy matches will be played in the third week of February but the action will take place here in the first week of the February. PCB is resolute is its commitment with the ICC and the venue will be handed over in time," PCB Director Infrastructure responded. Qazi Jawwad dispelled every wrong impression created by a

certain section of media about the completion of upgradation work and readiness of the venue before the ICC Champions Trophy, adding that everything is in place and preparation are in the final stage to present to the cricket fans. He said the cricket field in the center is in pristine form and stadium will be ready well before the action takes place between Pakistan and New Zealand on February 8.

Director Infrastructure said that the PCB had completed the task within the shortest possible time and it was proud of its achievement. He said everything has been revamped except for the media boxes and the adjacent hospitality boxes at the stadium. He further said Gaddafi stadium has been infused a new life and it will entertain and inspire generations to come in a whole new way.



In brief

ANF recovers 174 kg drugs

RAWALPINDI (APP): Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF) while conducting 10 operations managed to recover 174.616 kg drugs worth over Rs 38.4 million and arrested eight suspects, said an ANF Headquarters spokesman here on Friday. He informed that 1 kg hashish was recovered from two suspects arrested near a university on the service road in Rawalpindi. The arrested suspect confessed to selling drugs to the students of different educational institutions. 116 grams weed was recovered from two parcels sent from the UK at a courier office in Rawalpindi. 6.8 kg ice drug hidden in ladies' clothes was recovered from a parcel sent to New Zealand through a courier office in Quetta. 90 kg hashish and 50 kg ice were recovered from an uninhabited area of Parni in Balochistan. 9.6 kg hashish was recovered from a suspect rounded up near a hotel in Sohrah Goth, Karachi. 5 kg ice drug, 1.2 kg hashish and 500 grams heroin were recovered from the possession of an accused held near M-1 Motorway Islamabad. 4.8 kg opium was recovered from a vehicle intercepted near Chenab Toll Plaza GT Road Gujrat and two accused were arrested during the operation. 2 kg hashish and 1.5 kg ice were recovered from the possession of an accused arrested near a petrol pump in Hyderabad Jamshoro. 1.1 kg heroin and 1 kg ice were recovered from an accused near Turkey Toll Plaza Jhelum. Cases have been registered against the arrested accused under the Narcotics Control Act and further investigations are under process.

GPPz targets 3.29 billion trees

ISLAMABAD (APP): Parliamentary Secretary for Climate Change, Ahmad Atteeq Anwer, informed the National Assembly that the government's flagship initiative, the "Upscaling of Green Pakistan Programme (GPP)" is underway with an ambitious target of planting 3.29 billion trees by 2028. Responding to questions during question hour he highlighted that since the program's inception in 2019, the plantation and distribution of 2.2 billion plants have already been achieved across the country. To further this effort, nationwide plantation campaigns are organized annually during the spring and monsoon seasons. The Parliamentary Secretary said that the government is actively considering the establishment of a new climate finance governance framework. This initiative aims to streamline processes and enhance access to climate finance, ensuring more effective resource utilization for environmental sustainability.

Seven criminals arrested

RAWALPINDI (APP): The Rawalpindi Police on Friday arrested seven criminals, including illegal arms owners, a proclaimed offenders and accused involved in illegal LPG decanting. According to a police spokesman, the Ratta Amral and Civil Lines Police recovered a 30 bore pistol each from accused Hikmatullah and Yousuf respectively, while the Dhamial Police nabbed accused Tauqir Nawaz with a 9 mm pistol and a 12 bore rifle. Meanwhile, the Bani Police managed to arrest a declared offender, Daniyal Nasir, wanted in a case of harming a citizen registered a year ago. The Saddam Baroni Police arrested three accused Muhammad Khan, Aizaz Rafique and Muhammad Almas for illegal decanting of liquefied petroleum gas (LPG).

Abdul Ghafoor Haideri elected Chairman of Standing Committee on Housing

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Standing Committee on Housing and Works unanimously elected Moulana Abdul Ghafoor Haideri, a Member of the National Assembly (MNA), as its Chairman during a meeting held on Friday.

Muhammad Mushtaq, Adviser (Legislation), from the National Assembly Secretariat, welcomed the members and outlined the procedure for the election of the Chairman. Anwar ul Haq Chaudhary, MNA, proposed the name of Moulana Abdul Ghafoor Haideri for the position, and Zubair Khan Wazir, MNA, seconded his nomination. Following this, Moulana Abdul Ghafoor

Haideri was unanimously elected as Chairman of the Committee.

The Adviser (Legislation) and the Joint Secretary (Committees) congratulated the newly elected Chairman on behalf of the Speaker, Deputy Speaker, and Secretary General of the National Assembly. They assured him of complete support from the Secretariat for the effective and efficient functioning of the Committee.

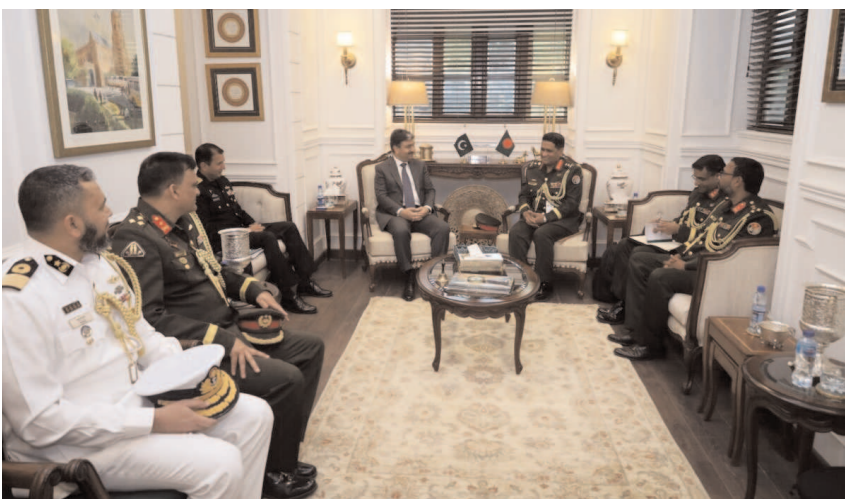
In his remarks, Moulana Abdul Ghafoor Haideri expressed gratitude to the members for their confidence and pledged to lead the committee's work with con-

sensus and dedication.

The members appreciated the Chairman's commitment and assured him of their full support in the legislative process. Dr. Tariq Fazal Chaudhry, MNA and Chief Whip of the ruling party, also congratulated the newly elected Chairman and extended his support to ensure the Committee's success.

The meeting was attended by MNAs Anjum Aqeel Khan (via Zoom), Anwar ul Haq Chaudhary, Nelson Azeem (via Zoom), Hassan Sabir (via Zoom), and Zubair Khan Wazir. Dr. Tariq Fazal Chaudhry and senior officers from the National Assembly Secretariat were also present.

PSO of Bangladesh meets Defence Secretary



RAWALPINDI (APP): Lt. Gen. S.M. Kamrul Hassan, the Principal Staff Officer (PSO) of Bangladesh's armed forces division along with delegation called on Secretary Defence, Lt. Gen. Muhammad Ali HI (M) Reid here Friday.

The Secretary Defence extended a warm welcome

to visiting dignitary and expressed that Pakistan greatly values its relations with Bangladesh, said a press release issued here.

The visiting dignitary conveyed goodwill gesture from people of Bangladesh and expressed Bangladesh's aspiration for vibrant days of cooperation between two countries.

The discussion was focused on expanding bilateral defence collaboration covering all domains.

Both sides expressed satisfaction over ongoing collaboration between two countries and aimed at strengthening the cooperation in mutually beneficial fields, it further said.

RDA conducts training for enhanced dengue prevention

RAWALPINDI (APP): The Rawalpindi Development Authority (RDA) here on Friday organized a comprehensive training session aimed at raising awareness about dengue prevention among its employees, as well as the general public.

The session, which took place at the RDA conference room, was led by the Additional Director General (ADG) RDA, Awais Manzoor Tarar, and focused on the critical importance of tackling dengue through effective community engagement and preventive measures.

The event was attended by senior officials, including the Director Administration and Finance RDA, Director Administration WASA, and officers from both RDA and WASA, along-

side team members from various housing schemes in the region.

During the session, the participants were educated on automated processes for indoor and outdoor surveillance, and the activities undertaken by health workers to detect and eliminate dengue larvae.

The emphasis was placed on identifying and addressing larvae hotspots within Rawalpindi as a key strategy to prevent the spread of dengue fever.

The training also covered the vital issue of regulating tyre markets and junkyards, known to be breeding grounds for the dengue-carrying mosquito.

The participants discussed measures to control these areas and ensure a collective and effective effort to combat the outbreak. The ADG emphasized the need for collec-

tive efforts to combat the disease. Awais Manzoor Tarar on the occasion said that the prevention of dengue is not just an individual responsibility; it requires a concerted effort from the entire community.

He urged the citizens to take necessary actions, including cleaning of water bodies and elimination of mosquito larvae.

Additionally, the concerns and questions raised by the participants were also addressed, ensuring that all the participants should fully understand their roles in supporting the health department's ongoing efforts. The goal of the session was to encourage prompt and coordinated preventive actions in the fight against dengue within Rawalpindi.

Azerbaijan envoy visits NUML to commemorate Black January

ISLAMABAD (APP): Ambassador of Azerbaijan to Pakistan, Khazar Farhadov visited the National University of Modern Languages (NUML) on Friday in remembrance of the tragic events of January 20, 1990, known as Black January.

The event, organized by the Azerbaijan Language and Culture Center, was held in solemn remembrance of the tragic events of Black January, to honour the martyrs who sacrificed their lives for Azerbaijan's independence.

During his visit, Ambassador Khazar Farhadov met the Rector NUML, Maj Gen (R) Shahid Mehmood Kayani HI(M), Director General NUML, Brig Shahzad Munir, Dean Faculty of Languages, and other senior officials were also present during the meeting. The Rector warmly welcomed the Ambassador, highlighting the strong and

historic brotherly ties between Pakistan and Azerbaijan. Both dignitaries emphasized the importance of further enhancing collaboration in education, particularly through exchanges between the universities of the two nations.

The Ambassador appreciated Pakistan's unwavering support for Azerbaijan on regional and international issues and praised the cultural and educational bonds shared by the two countries. The Rector expressed interest in initiating joint academic projects and cultural exchanges to strengthen mutual understanding and cooperation.

On this occasion, the Rector extended heartfelt condolences to the Ambassador and the people of Azerbaijan over the recent tragic airline crash, praying for the departed souls and their families. Following the meeting, the Ambassador participated in the commemorative event organized by the Azerbaijan Language and Culture Center at NUML. Students, faculty, and dignitaries paid homage to the martyrs of Black January through poetry, speeches, and heartfelt tributes.

The Dean of the Faculty of Languages, the Head of the Turkish Language Department and the Head of the Azerbaijan Department highlighted the significance of the sacrifices made during the fateful events of January 1990.

In his address, Ambassador Farhadov expressed gratitude to NUML for keeping the spirit of Azerbaijan's history alive and underscored the resilience and patriotism of those who laid down their lives for Azerbaijan's sovereignty. He lauded the role of the Azerbaijan Language and Culture Center at NUML in fostering a deeper understanding of Azerbaijan's culture and history among Pakistani students.



ISLAMABAD: Ambassador of Iran Dr. Reza Amiri Moghadam called on Speaker National Assembly Sardar Ayaz Sadiq at Parliament House. —APP Photo

Christian delegation visits NADRA headquarters

ISLAMABAD (APP): A delegation of Christian community, led by former federal minister Kamran Michael, visited NADRA Headquarters here on Friday.

The visit was aimed at discussing ways to improve the registration process for the Christian community and addressing the challenges faced in obtaining identity documents.

During the meeting with NADRA Chairman, Lieutenant General Muhammad Munir Afsar, Kamran Michael emphasized the need for increasing the frequency of NADRA's Mobile Registration Van (MRV) visits to areas with a high concentration of Christian residents.

The Chairman NADRA briefed the delegation about special registration campaigns for minority communities, including MRV operations. He assured that NADRA remains committed to supporting the registration of minority individuals and would increase the frequency of MRV visits to areas where they are most needed.

IRSA releases 29,700 cusecs water

ISLAMABAD (APP): Indus River System Authority (IRSA) on Friday released 29,700 cusecs water from various rim stations with inflow of 40,100 cusecs. According to the data released by IRSA, water level in River Indus at Tarbela Dam was 1477.63 feet and was 78.63 feet higher than its dead level of 1,398 feet. Water inflow and outflow in the dam was recorded as 14,600 cusecs and 10,000 cusecs respectively.

The water level in River Jhelum at Mangla Dam was 1135.35 feet, which was 85.35 feet higher than its dead level of 1,050 feet. The inflow and outflow of water was recorded 5,900 cusecs and 100 cusecs respectively. The release of water at Kalabagh, Taunsa, Guddu and Sukkur was recorded as 20,900, 22,90, 2,000 and 4,500 cusecs respectively. Similarly, from River Kabul, a total of 14,700 cusecs of water released at Nowshera and 4,900 cusecs released from River Chenab at Marala.

British High Commissioner to Pakistan visits NUST

ISLAMABAD (APP): British High Commissioner to Pakistan, Ms. Jane Marriott paid a visit to the National University of Sciences and Technology (NUST) with an aim to strengthen collaboration between the leading higher education institutions in UK and NUST.

Rector NUST, Dr. Muhammad Zahid Latif greeted the British High Commissioner upon her arrival at the NUST main office. During the meeting, the two sides expressed their commitment to strengthening collaboration between NUST and the leading higher education

and research institutions across UK. They particularly examined potential partnerships to enhance knowledge-sharing and drive impactful advancements in various fields.

Earlier, the High Commissioner, along with other members of the delegation, visited the National Science and Technology Park (NSTP) at NUST, and interacted with several startups, including LearnObots, Orbit-Ed and Vyro.

She expressed her admiration for the innovation-driven startups making meaningful contributions to sectors such as edu tech,

smart tech, energy tech, etc.

Later, the delegates visited NUST School of Interdisciplinary Engineering and Sciences (SINES), which houses 10 international laboratories. They also visited the Centre for Emerging Technologies (CENTECH) at NUST, wherein the briefing highlighted the center's leading work in AI, Chip Design etc.

Overall, the visit provided delegates with an opportunity to learn about the university's cutting-edge research capabilities and its emphasis on interdisciplinary collaboration across various scientific fields.

IGP takes action against senior officers for poor performance

ISLAMABAD (APP): Inspector General of Police (IGP) Syed Ali Nasir Rizvi chaired crime review meetings across all zones of the federal capital on Friday, making key decisions to improve police performance and ensure accountability.

An official told APP that during the meetings, the IGP Rizvi demoted the Station House Officer (SHO) of Sihala to the rank of Assistant Sub-Inspector (ASI) over poor performance.

Similarly, the

Investigation In-charge of Koral Police Station was transferred to the police lines for unsatisfactory work, while the Deputy Superintendent of Police (DSP) Investigations in Sawan Zone and Sub-Divisional Police Officer (SDPO) Koral were asked to provide explanations for their weak performance.

On the other hand, SHO Humak and the Investigation In-charge of Humak Police Station were commended for their exemplary work. Both officers were awarded

appreciation certificates and cash rewards of one lakh rupees each.

The IGP Rizvi emphasized that all officers must work with a spirit of public service to control crime effectively. "Officers delivering exceptional performance will be rewarded, while those failing to meet expectations will face consequences," he said.

The IGP concluded by urging all officers to adopt a people-centric approach and work diligently to uphold law and order in the district.

Ejaz highlights legal framework for resolving key issues

ISLAMABAD (APP): Ejaz ul Haq, a member of the government negotiation team Friday appreciated the peaceful atmosphere during the January 16 talks between the government and PTI, urging those unwilling to engage in talks to show flexibility as the government seeks to resolve issues through all legal means.

Talking to a private news channel, Ejaz ul Haq assured of the government's commitment to lawful means for issue resolution is a significant step towards promoting a peaceful and stable environment.

Ejaz ul Haq emphasized the importance of avoiding

a deadlock in talks, instead striving for positive outcomes through patience and flexibility from both parties.

Ejaz ul Haq stated that the demands presented by PTI could have been presented in a better manner.

Responding a query, he said that PTI wants to maintain its narrative while also showing flexibility, which is causing confusion.

Responding to another question, Ejaz ul Haq suggested that PTI can submit an application to the Supreme Court regarding the Judicial Commission, as it is unlikely that the government and opposition can come to an agree-

ment on the matter.

He also announced that a new sub-committee, comprising the Law Minister other allied parties and committee members, will be formed to scrutinize the legal implications of PTI's demands.

To another query, he said during negotiations, PTI alleged that some of its supporters were martyred or went missing during the protests, but the party failed to provide a list of the individuals in question.

He also optimistic that the negotiations would yield a positive outcome, ultimately strengthening the democratic process.



ISLAMABAD: A student creating wall art at Zero Point bridge in the Federal Capital. —APP Photo

IEA delegation heads to Iran to discuss prisoners

KABUL (Ariana News): A judicial delegation of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (IEA), led by deputy of the Supreme Court, Sheikh Abdul Malik Haqqani, departed for Tehran to discuss issues related to Afghan prisoners, the court announced on Friday. The primary objectives of the visit include strengthening judicial cooperation between the two countries, ensuring the rights of Afghan prisoners in Iran, fostering mutual goodwill.

Italy donates 4.5 million Euros to Afghanistan

KABUL (Khaama Press): The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) has announced that Italy has contributed 4.5 million Euros to Afghanistan's Humanitarian Fund. In a statement issued on Thursday, January 16, the agency expressed appreciation for this donation and mentioned that the funds would be used to provide essential assistance to the most vulnerable individuals in Afghanistan.

Taliban blocks Russian scholarships for Afghan students for second year

KABUL (Amu Tv): Scholarships to Russian universities for Afghan students have been canceled for the second consecutive year, following interference by the Taliban's Ministry of Higher Education, according to affected students. The scholarships, which included 500 slots for Afghan students, had moved into their implementation phase after results were announced in May 2024. Many students traveled to Kabul, incurring significant expenses for required procedures, including HIV tests and document submissions, according to students who spoke to Amu. However, on Thursday, the head of the Russian House of Science and Culture at the Russian

Embassy in Kabul informed a group of 15 student representatives that the scholarships had been canceled due to Taliban restrictions. "Our hopes and expectations have turned into a nightmare," said one student, expressing deep disappointment. "After so much effort, all we're left with is an uncertain future and despair." The students have appealed to the international community to intervene and help reinstate the scholarships. They claim the Taliban fears that studying in Russia might negatively influence the students' religious beliefs. Last year, the Taliban confiscated passports from 500 male students, preventing them from traveling to Russia. Although some

managed to travel through Iran, that option has reportedly been blocked this year by the Russian cultural center in Kabul. The Taliban's Ministry of Higher Education and the Russian Embassy in Kabul have not issued official statements on the matter. The move comes as the Taliban continues to restrict educational opportunities, barring women from schools and universities and now further limiting access to higher education for male students through international scholarships. The cancellation highlights the growing challenges faced by Afghan students under Taliban rule, as restrictions tighten on opportunities for education both at home and abroad.

Germany to resume deportation flights to Afghanistan

BERLIN (Amu Tv): Germany plans to resume deportation flights to Afghanistan in this year's summer, according to German media reports. The decision is part of broader efforts by the European Union to enforce stricter measures on irregular migration. The move comes amid heightened pressure from the EU to implement tougher policies for returning undocumented migrants. Magnus Brunner, a senior EU migration official, underscored the bloc's focus on deportations during a meeting with Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis. "The return of irregular migrants is one of the EU's top priorities," Brunner said, emphasizing the bloc's determination to enforce deportation policies more effectively. Greece, a key entry point for migrants into Europe, continues to face mounting challenges, including a significant rise in unaccompanied minors. Statistics reveal that the number of unaccompanied children arriving in Greece more than doubled last year, exacerbating an already strained system. The EU Migration and Asylum Pact, adopted in May 2024, introduced a suite of policies aimed at better managing migration. Its goals include strengthening border security, streamlining asylum processes, and fostering solidarity among member states. The pact also mandates that member states uphold human rights in the deportation process. Despite the EU's assurances, human rights organizations, including PACM (Protecting Asylum and Migrants), have expressed concern over the potential consequences of focusing heavily on deportations. Activists warn that such measures could push migrants toward more dangerous routes and increase the risk of human rights violations. "These policies need to focus on legal migration pathways instead of prioritizing deportations, which often lead to further hardship for vulnerable people," a PACM representative said. While asylum requests and irregular migration into Europe have reportedly decreased, questions remain about the human rights implications of these policies. Critics argue that measures prioritizing deportation may fail to address the root causes of migration and disproportionately affect the most vulnerable. Germany's decision to restart deportation flights to Afghanistan represents a significant step in the EU's migration policy. However, the long-term impact of this move on migrants' lives and human rights remains unclear.

Russia: NATO countries concealing war crimes in Afghanistan

MOSCOW (TOLONews): The Russian foreign ministry has accused Britain and other NATO member states of concealing war crimes and imposing restrictions on investigating war crimes committed by their forces in Afghanistan. Maria Zakharova, spokesperson for the Russian Foreign Ministry, stated that existing evidence demonstrates brutal actions by NATO member states against Afghan civilians. She said: "I would like to point out what has been secretly halted. Evidence literally shows the most brutal retaliatory actions against civilians, which NATO carried out with impunity during the occupation of Afghanistan from 2001 to 2021. During a closed investigation, a former British special forces officer admitted that the British Special Air Service (SAS) essentially had special authorization to kill Afghans." On January 9, 2025, the British government issued a warning to the media after new revelations about war crimes committed by its special forces in Afghanistan. The warning urged media outlets to avoid breaching reporting restrictions on investigations related to war crimes by its special forces.



Part of the British government's statement on January 9, 2025, reads: "The Independent Inquiry relating to Afghanistan published gist materials from seven special forces witnesses who gave evidence in closed hearings in the spring of last year. The materials were released with a Restriction Order, which included a warning that the media must not identify the individuals or give any information which could lead to their identification." "When it comes to human rights, the Afghan nation is also human, and this issue must be investigated," said Zalmay Afghanyar, a military affairs analyst. "If this action by Britain is implemented and investigations are halted, it signifies a dictatorship by Britain. But a dictatorship against whom? Against the British people themselves, because this matter concerns Afghanistan, yet an internal British entity initiated these investigations," said Asif Faqiri, a legal analyst. The British special forces have been accused of war crimes in Afghanistan between 2010 and 2013. To investigate these allegations, the UK launched a process called the Independent Inquiry on Afghanistan in February 2023.

45,000 jobs provided for Afghan returnees: Ministry

KABUL (TOLONews): In the past three years, job opportunities have been provided for more than 45,000 returnee migrants. The Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation stated that in order to economically support returning migrants, job opportunities have been created in both public and private sectors. Abdul Mutalib Haqqani, spokesperson for the Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation, said: "Work has been done to create job opportunities. Over the past three years, job opportunities have been provided for approximately 45,700 individuals in the public and

private sectors, as well as in professional training and economic development." However, some migrants who have returned to the country speak of their difficult economic conditions. Mohammad, a deported migrant, said: "We have no shelter. It's winter, the weather has turned cold, and we have no resources, especially heaters. Our request is for shelters and job opportunities to be provided for us." Mohammad Younus, another deported migrant, said: "Winter has arrived, but so far, no proper assistance has been given to us. Please support us, as winter is passing by."

Some activists in the field of migrant rights stress that organizations supporting migrants should engage in discussions with host countries to prevent the forced deportation of Afghan migrants. Asifa Stanikzai, a migrant rights activist, said: "There is an urgent need for Pakistan to develop a strategic plan for migrant challenges and issue residency documents to integrate migrants." According to the Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation, over the past three years, more than four million people have been returned to Afghanistan from neighboring countries.

Over 1,500 emerald mines discovered in Panjshir



PANJSHIR (Ariana News): Local officials in Panjshir have announced the discovery of over 1,600 emerald mines in the province, with extraction currently underway at 600 sites. Over the past year, the extraction of emeralds from 600 mines in Panjshir has yielded 100,000 carats, valued at approximately

\$6.9 million. Panjshir Governor Mohammad Agha Hakim expressed optimism that the development of the mining sector will provide significant job opportunities, particularly for the province's youth. Economic experts believe that increased investment in large-scale

mining could create tens of thousands of direct and indirect jobs, helping to reduce unemployment. Meanwhile, Panjshir residents are calling on the Islamic Emirate to expand mining contracts in the province, highlighting the area's wealth in emeralds, iron, lead, zinc, and gold.

HRW expresses concern over increasing restrictions on women

KABUL (TOLONews): Human Rights Watch (HRW) in its 2024 annual report expressed concern over what it describes as worsening human rights conditions in Afghanistan. According to the report, restrictions on women have intensified this year, with women in Afghanistan facing serious obstacles to employment, freedom of expression, and movement. The report states: "The situation in Afghanistan worsened in 2024 as the Taliban authorities intensified their crackdown on human rights, particularly against women and girls. Afghanistan remained the only country where girls and women were banned

from secondary and university education, while also facing significant barriers to employment and freedom of movement, assembly, and speech." "2024 was painful for us because we stayed at home; we couldn't attend courses or continue our studies," Anahita, a student, told TOLONews. "Our demand from the Islamic Emirate is to reopen all schools and universities for girls," said Beheshta, another student. The report also mentions that critical journalists were arrested, and additional restrictions were imposed on the media this year. Afghanistan's economic crisis is another aspect highlighted in the Human

Rights Watch report, stating that this crisis has left 23 million people in need of humanitarian aid. The report said: "The Taliban also detained journalists and critics and imposed severe restrictions on the media. Afghanistan's economic crisis left 23 million in need of humanitarian assistance; women and girls were disproportionately affected." "Instead of humanitarian aid, they should assist with large-scale projects to create long-term job opportunities," said Abdul Haseeb Safi, an economic analyst. Meanwhile, Zabihullah Mujahid, spokesperson for the Islamic Emirate, rejected the report, stating that ensuring citizens' rights within the framework of Islamic rulings is the responsibility of the interim government, and no one is allowed to violate individuals' rights. Mujahid commented: "The measures taken for our sisters are based on Islamic Sharia principles, and we are also seeking solutions for some social issues. However, no one's rights have been violated." This comes as the international community continues to link normalizing relations with the interim government to ensuring women's rights in the country—a condition the Islamic Emirate has consistently viewed as a means of applying pressure on the government.

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WB: Food insecurity in Afghanistan at its worst in a decade

KABUL (TOLONews): The World Bank has announced that food insecurity in Afghanistan has worsened compared to a decade ago. In its latest report titled Global Economic Prospects, the World Bank stated that while hunger has relatively decreased in several countries, it has increased in India, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. The World Bank further added that the unemployment rate in Afghanistan remains high. Mir Shakir Yaqubi, an expert on economic issues, said: "Until comprehensive and inclusive programs are considered for creating job opportunities, naturally, the unemployment rate will not decrease. And if it does not decrease, it is evident that the poverty rate will rise." Poverty, unemployment, and overall economic challenges in Afghanistan have always been issues that



adopted various programs to reduce poverty and unemployment rates. Abdul Latif Nazari, deputy economy minister, said: "The causes of food insecurity and unemployment mentioned in the World Bank report are the closure of transportation routes during the winter season and seasonal unemployment. The Islamic Emirate has put important economic and job-creation programs on its agenda to reduce poverty and unemployment." The World Bank report on increasing food insecurity in Afghanistan comes as various United Nations agencies have previously expressed concern about the humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan. They have stated that, in the current year, more than half of the country's population urgently needs humanitarian aid.

In Kandahar, poverty leaves patients without access to medical care

KANDAHAR (Amu Tv): Many patients in Kandahar are forgoing medical treatment due to crippling poverty and widespread unemployment, deepening a public health crisis in one of Afghanistan's most vulnerable regions. Nesa, 12, suffers from liver inflammation, but her family cannot afford the cost of her treatment. "We simply don't have the money," her parents said, reflecting the struggles of countless families in the province. Abdul Ghafoor, a resident of Kandahar, shared a similar plight. "Both of my children are sick, and I can't afford their treatment," he said. "I can't pay for their operations or even basic medical care."

The stories of Nesa and others highlight a growing crisis where economic hardships and limited job opportunities prevent timely medical intervention. Families are increasingly calling for greater access to affordable healthcare. Khalilullah, another Kandahar resident, pointed to a folder of medical records documenting his heart condition. "I am sick and have no means for treatment," he said. "We're struggling to survive. If I manage to earn 50 afghanis, it goes toward feeding my children." Abdul Rasool, who looks for work on Kandahar's streets, echoed the despair. "I have no money," he said. "I stand by the road every day hoping

for a job. When I do find one, I earn maybe 100 or 200 afghanis, which only covers basic family expenses." The challenges faced by these families are emblematic of broader complaints from rural residents about the lack of access to healthcare. Poor-quality services and high medical costs have further compounded the situation. "Economic hardship has become a significant barrier to accessing healthcare," said one local observer. Poverty, already a persistent issue, has been exacerbated by the country's ongoing economic crisis. For many in Kandahar, the choice between paying for healthcare and meeting basic household needs remains a stark and painful reality.

Trade between Afghanistan and Iran increased by 84% last year



KABUL (TOLONews): Some Afghan traders attribute this increase to trade challenges with Pakistan, which have pushed many of them to focus on trade with Iran. They urge authorities to provide more facilities to enhance exports. Omid Haidari, a trader, told TOLONews: "Due to issues with transit and imports from Pakistan, our traders and investors have turned to Iran and

other countries, boosting trade with Iran. We need to create more opportunities for imports and exports." Azmuddin Khanjani, another trader, said: "Iran has imposed some taxes. If these are removed and more facilities are provided, it will positively impact Afghanistan's exports. There are challenges at ports, but fortunately, our exports to Iran

have recently increased." Key Iranian exports to Afghanistan last year included petroleum products, gas, eggs, light and heavy carbon materials, potatoes, tomatoes, powdered milk, and agricultural tractors. In return, Iran imported mineral stones, iron products, cotton, dried fruits, sesame seeds, and various legumes from Afghanistan.



KARACHI: Chairman PPP Bilawal Bhutto Zardari unveiling a special plaque at Sindh Assembly to commemorate holding of country's first Constituent Assembly.

PTI's 27 convicted workers file appeals

Humayun Khan

PESHAWAR: Almost twenty-seven convicted culprits for vandalism by a Field General Court Martial for attacking military installations during protests against the arrest of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Chairman Imran Khan on 9th May 2023, have filed appeals against their sentences.

The appeals were filed through advocates Qazi Anwar and Barrister Sarwar Muzaffar Shah. The accused have challenged their sentences in the Court of Appeals.

In the appeals, it is argued that the accused were arrested in connection with the events of 9th May and the subsequent registration of cases. They were tried in a military court, and the Field General Court

Martial announced their sentences on 4th January.

The appeals contend that the accused were not given a fair trial, and the military court did not follow the principles of transparency and justice. It is also argued that the trial of civilians in a military court is unconstitutional and illegal.

The appeals further state that the accused were denied their fundamental rights during the trial, and the court did not provide them with adequate opportunities to defend themselves. The appeals request the Court of Appeals to accept their petitions and acquit the accused of all charges. It is argued that the sentences handed down to the accused are illegal and that there is no evidence against them.

The appeals also argue that the accused are civil-

ians and that the Army Act does not apply to them. It is contended that the amendments made to the Army Act do not apply to the accused, as they were made after the events in question.

Furthermore, the appeals argue that the Pakistan Army is a state institution that operates under the Ministry of Defense and receives funding from the government. As such, it does not have the authority to try civilians in a military court.

The appeals also state that the accused have repeatedly requested access to the evidence against them but have been denied. The appeals argue that without access to this evidence, it is impossible to prepare a proper defense. The accused have been transferred to the Central Jail in Peshawar.

SBP injects over Rs10.37tr in market

F.P. Report

KARACHI: The State Bank of Pakistan (SBP), Friday, injected Rs10,377.75 billion in the market through reverse repo purchase and Shariah Compliant Mudarabah based Open Market Operations (OMO).

The SBP conducted Open Market Operation, Reverse Repo Purchase (Injection) on January 17, 2025 for 7-day and 28-day tenors and, as per results issued, accepted an amount of Rs9,941.25 billion offered through 29 bids.

The central bank received 28 bids for 7-day tenor cumulatively offering an amount of Rs9,933.25 billion at the rate of return ranging between 13.04 to 13.10 percent while one bid was received for the 28-day tenor offering an amount of Rs8 billion at 13.07% rate of return. The central bank accepted the entire amount offered through all the 28 quotes for 7-day tenor at 13.04% rate of return. The SBP also accepted the single bid for 28-day tenor with entire amount offered at 13.07% rate of return.

Meanwhile, SBP also conducted Shariah Compliant Mudarabah based Open Market Operation for the 7-day and 28-day tenors and injected Rs436.5 billion into the market. The central bank received 5 bids for 7-day tenor quoting an amount of Rs436.5 billion at the rate of return ranging between 13.08 to 13.12 % while no bid was received for 28-day tenor. The SBP accepted all the 5 quotes for 7-day tenor with the entire offered amount at 13.08% rate of return.

Macron calls for support to Lebanon

BEIRUT: French President Emmanuel Macron has emphasized the importance of "continuing to support Lebanon in asserting its sovereignty over all its territory." Macron was speaking from Beirut's Presidential Palace on Friday, where he met with President Joseph Aoun. Macron said: "Keeping Lebanon shielded from external interference is a prerequisite for the ongoing implementation of the ceasefire agreement, which was a diplomatic success."

He pledged to "continue supporting the army in its deployment in the south and working with Lebanon to demarcate its (land) borders along the Blue Line."

Macron's visit comes a week after Aoun was elected, ending a 26-month period without a president for his country and following Israeli assaults that have weakened Hezbollah militarily and reshuffled Lebanon's political landscape. During a joint press conference, Macron told Aoun: "You have ended the political vacuum that Lebanon experienced, and you are putting Lebanon on the path to recovery. You are the hope, and PM-designate Nawaf Salam embodies this hope. The Lebanese's election of you confirms their demand for change and the revival of Lebanon."

Macron also announced plans to organize an international conference during Aoun's visit to France in a few weeks to "mobilize funding for Lebanon's reconstruction." He said: "We will work on rallying the international community to support Lebanon in all sectors. UNIFIL's work must be strengthened to enable it to fulfill its mission." Aoun stressed the close links between the two presidents' countries, saying: "In the heart, mind, daily language, living history, and creative culture of every Lebanese, there is much of France."

Arab News

True strength of nations does not lie in guns: Bilawal

F.P. Report

KARACHI: Chairman Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) Bilawal Bhutto Zardari has said that the true strength of nations does not lie in guns or bullets but in their politics and cultural heritage. He stressed that nations that lose touch with their culture are destined to lag behind in progress.

According to a press release issued by the Media Cell Bilawal House, Chairman PPP underscored the historic role of the Sindh Assembly in Pakistan's creation during a special ceremony held at the Sindh Assembly premises to unveil a commemorative plaque marking the inaugural session of the country's first Constituent Assembly. He said, "The Pakistan Peoples Party believes that no individual, single power, or specific ideology alone builds a nation. It is through collective effort, hard work, and unity that nations are formed. Politics undoubtedly plays a significant role in this process." He further added that he is personally committed to playing his part politically to strengthen this role.

Bilawal remarked, "I believe that, beyond politics, culture plays an even greater role. Nations that forget or distance themselves from their culture eventually lose their identity." He emphasized that Pakistan has a long and ancient history, stating, "We can proudly claim that we are heirs to the Indus Civilization." He further noted that the people of this land laid the foundations for agriculture, irrigation, and modern living thousands of

years ago. "Even today, the historical sites in my hometown Larkana stand as a testament to that era," he added.

Chairman PPP underlined the significant contributions of the people of this region in the creation of Pakistan, saying, "We established this country—look at how we did it. Was a single bullet fired? Did Pakistan come into existence because our military was the most powerful at the time? No, it was the unity of the entire nation, including politicians, that led to the success of a historic struggle."

Discussing the challenges faced by the country, Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari stressed the need for unity and cultural revival to tackle modern-day challenges. "I am convinced that, just like in the past, the people of Pakistan and the inhabitants of this land will prosper. However, if we fight among ourselves and fail to understand that strength lies not in guns or bullets but in culture and politics, we may fall short of fulfilling the aspirations of the younger generation." He also commended the role of electronic media in promoting Pakistani culture, entertainment, and arts, emphasizing the need to further advance these sectors.

Chairman emphasized the need for greater efforts to promote Pakistani culture, entertainment, and the arts. He pointed out that Western nations are not powerful merely because of their armies, weapons, or wealth. "If they are superpowers, it is because they embraced their culture to the extent that even your children listen to their artists' music and watch their

movies and television shows. This is true 'soft power'—the struggle to win hearts and minds."

He lamented that had the vision of Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto for cultural promotion been followed, Pakistani films, songs, and art might today enjoy global recognition comparable to that of Western nations. Bilawal Bhutto Zardari expressed strong support for establishing a modern Media University in Karachi and directed the Sindh Chief Minister to expedite the project through public-private partnership. He said that while culture and art in the past revolved around pens and brushes, today, technology like computers, artificial intelligence, and digital space have taken over. "We want to equip our youth with modern facilities so they can represent Pakistan globally," he added. He envisioned a future where, alongside politicians, cultural representatives from every city and region of Pakistan contribute to the country's progress.

The event was attended by PPP Women's Wing President and MPA Faryal Talpur, PPP Sindh President Nisar Ahmed Khuhro, Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah, Speaker Sindh Assembly Awais Qadir Shah, along with ministers, assembly members, and a large number of media personnel. The ceremony concluded with Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari unveiling a commemorative plaque to mark the historic occasion of the inaugural session of the country's first Constituent Assembly.

No trump card will prevail, says Sharjeel

F.P. Report

KARACHI: Senior Minister of Sindh, Sharjeel Inam Memon, has stated that today is the most important day in the history of Pakistan. Another truth has come to light today—a person who had been deceiving the public for years under the guise of truth and honesty, with a mask of righteousness, now has that mask removed.

Addressing a press conference in Karachi, Sindh's Senior Minister and Provincial Minister for Information, Transport, and Mass Transit, Sharjeel Inam Memon, stated that the 126-day sit-in was an attempt to blackmail the state. He emphasized that this individual should not be associated with Pakistan or its people, adding that PTI continues to act against the state solely to benefit one person.

He stated that the punishment given to Imran Khan and his wife is a consequence of the very practices Imran Khan himself had implemented. Imran Khan used NAB to have his opponents arrested and targeted. If someone spoke against him on a TV program, they would receive a NAB notice the very next day.



Senior Minister Sharjeel Inam Memon stated that Imran Khan imprisoned the PPP President Asif Ali Zardari and Mrs. Faryal Talpur, as well as the leadership of the PML-N. He added that Imran Khan's plan was to dominate the country through NAB. Today, Imran Khan is facing the consequences of his wrongdoings. He referred to Imran Khan as a corporate criminal who stole watches from Toshakhana and sold them.

He stated that when Imran Khan's government ended, the first person to leave the country was Farah Gogi, who had been making decisions while based in Bani Gala. Imran Khan repeatedly claimed that Farah Gogi had no connection to him.

Senior Minister Sharjeel Inam Memon stated that today, Imran Khan has been sentenced to 14 years in prison, yet not a single per-

son has come out to protest. He noted that on May 9, the entire country was set on fire, institutions were attacked, and chaos ensued over a minor arrest. However, it has been four to five hours since the sentencing, and there is no unrest. He remarked that the one who used to instruct protests is now in jail, which is why there is no protest today.

He stated that since 2018, the founder of PTI has been waging a war against the state. These individuals have initiated a conflict against the nation. He added, "You are a thief; you cannot deceive the people. The cases against you are a significant charge sheet."

Senior Minister Sharjeel Inam Memon questioned, "Can PTI leaders defend Farah Gogi, the Malam Jabba case, and the KP BRT case?" He urged people to open their eyes, emphasizing that PTI's entire effort is focused on getting Imran Khan out of jail. Responding to a question, Senior Minister Sharjeel Inam Memon stated that the courts of Pakistan will operate in accordance with the country's laws, and no trump card will prevail.

BD forces commander calls on Naval Chief

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Principal Staff Officer (PSO) of the Armed Forces Division of Bangladesh, Lieutenant General SM Kamrul Hassan, visited Naval Headquarters, Islamabad, and called on the Chief of the Naval Staff, Admiral Naveed Ashraf.

During the meeting, matters of mutual interest, the regional maritime security environment, and prospects for enhanced bilateral naval collaboration between the two countries were discussed. Various avenues of cooperation, including training, exchange of visits, and conduct of bilateral naval exercises between the navies of Pakistan and Bangladesh, were also highlighted. The Naval Chief emphasized Pakistan Navy's initiatives to ensure maritime security and peace in the region through Regional Maritime Security Patrols. The visiting dignitary appreciated Pakistan Navy's role and contributions in promoting collaborative maritime security in the region.

The visit of Lieutenant General SM Kamrul Hassan, Principal Staff Officer, is expected to further strengthen and expand defence ties between the two brotherly countries, fostering collaboration and robust relations between their defence forces.

PHC postpones hearing

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: A divisional bench of Peshawar High Court (PHC) comprising Justice SM Attique Shah and Justice Sahibzada Asadullah has once again postponed the hearing of a petition filed by convict who were sentenced by a military court. The petition seeking their release after completing their sentences, on Friday.

During the hearing, the counsel Irfan Ali Yousafzai advocate informed the court that the petitioner's son, Imran, was taken into custody by security agencies in Swat on 17th February, 2011. Imran remained missing for three years, and a petition was filed in 2018 for his recovery. The petition was accepted in 2020. However, Imran was later sentenced to 14 years by a military court, which included the time he spent in detention under Section 382-B.

The counsel argued that despite completing their sentences, the convict has not been released. He also pointed out that other petitioners have filed similar petitions, raising the same issue.

The government's stance is that the case is pending in the Supreme Court, although the Peshawar High Court has already ruled in two separate cases that convicts who have completed their sentences should be released.

Putin, Iranian president sign strategic cooperation treaty

MOSCOW (Reuters): Russian President Vladimir Putin and his Iranian counterpart Masoud Pezeshkian on Friday signed a 20-year strategic partnership treaty involving closer defense cooperation that is likely to worry the West.

Pezeshkian, on his first Kremlin visit since winning the presidency last July, hailed the signing as an important new chapter in the two countries' relations, while Putin said Moscow and Tehran had many of the same views on international affairs. "This (treaty) creates better conditions for bilateral cooperation in all areas," said Putin, emphasising the upside for economic ties and trade, which he said was mostly carried out in the two countries' own currencies.

"We need less bureaucracy and more concrete action. Whatever difficulties are created by others we will be able to overcome them and move forward," Putin added, referring to Western sanctions on both countries. Putin said Russia regularly informed Iran about what was going on in the

Ukraine conflict and that they closely consulted on events in the Middle East and South Caucasus region.

Russia and Iran were the main military allies of Syrian President Bashar Assad, who fled to Moscow after being toppled last month. The West also accuses Iran of providing missiles and drones for Russian attacks on Ukraine. Moscow and Tehran say their increasingly close ties are not directed against other countries. Putin said work on a potential gas pipeline to carry Russian gas to Iran was progressing despite difficulties, and that, despite delays in building new nuclear reactors for Iran, Moscow was open to potentially taking on more nuclear projects.

Pezeshkian, whose words were translated by Russian state TV, said the treaty would create good opportunities and showed Moscow and Iran did not need to heed the opinion of what he called "countries over the ocean." "The agreements we reached today are another stimulus when it comes to the creation of a multi-polar

world," he said.

Moscow has cultivated closer ties with Iran and other countries hostile toward the US, such as North Korea, since the start of the Ukraine war, and already has strategic pacts with Pyongyang and close ally Belarus, as well as a partnership agreement with China. Immediate details of the 20-year Russia-Iran agreement were not available but it was not expected to include a mutual defense clause of the kind sealed with Minsk and Pyongyang. It is still likely to concern the West, however, which sees both countries as malign influences on the world stage.

Neither leader mentioned defense cooperation during their Kremlin press conference, but officials from both countries had said earlier that part of the pact focused on defense. Russia has made extensive use of Iranian drones during the war in Ukraine and the United States accused Tehran in September of delivering close-range ballistic missiles to Russia for use against Ukraine.

US Supreme Court upholds law banning TikTok

WASHINGTON (Reuters): The US Supreme Court on Friday upheld a law banning TikTok in the United States on national security grounds if its Chinese parent company ByteDance does not sell the short-video app by Sunday, as the justices in a 9-0 decision declined to rescue a platform used by about half of all Americans.

The justices ruled that the law, passed by an overwhelming bipartisan majority in Congress last year and signed by Democratic President Joe Biden, did not violate the US Constitution's First Amendment protection against government abridgment of free speech. The justices affirmed a lower court's decision that had upheld the measure after it was challenged by TikTok, ByteDance and some of the app's users.

"There is no doubt that, for more than 170 million Americans, TikTok offers a distinctive and expansive outlet for expression, means of engagement and source of community. But Congress has determined that divestiture is necessary to address its well-supported national security concerns regarding TikTok's data collection practices and relationship with a foreign adversary," the court

said in the unsigned opinion. The court added that "we conclude that the challenged provisions do not violate petitioners' First Amendment rights."

A statement issued by the White House statement suggested that Biden would not take any action to save TikTok before the law's Sunday deadline for divestiture. Republican Donald Trump, who opposed a TikTok ban, succeeds Biden on Monday. The case pitted free speech rights against national security concerns in the age of social media.

The court said it was giving "substantial respect" to the US government's national security concerns about China. The justices noted that evidence in the case reflected that China "has engaged in extensive and years-long efforts to accumulate structured datasets, in particular on US persons, to support its intelligence and counterintelligence operations." White House Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre in a statement reiterated Biden's position that "TikTok should remain available to Americans, but simply under American ownership or other ownership that addresses the national security concerns identified by Congress in

developing this law."

Given the timing, Jean-Pierre added, action to implement the law "must fall to the next administration." Trump's team did not immediately respond to requests for comment. TikTok also did not immediately respond to a request for comment. TikTok plans to shut US operations of the app on Sunday barring a last-minute reprieve, people familiar with the matter told Reuters on Wednesday.

Without a decision by Biden to formally invoke a 90-day delay in the deadline, companies providing services to TikTok or hosting the app could face legal liability. It is not immediately clear if TikTok's business partners including Google, Apple and Oracle will continue doing business with it before Trump is inaugurated. The uncertainty leaves open the possibility of a shutdown by TikTok on Sunday.

The Supreme Court acted speedily in the case, having held arguments on January 10, just nine days before the deadline set under the law. TikTok is one of the most prominent social media platforms in the United States, used by about 270 million Americans, including many young people.

In Syria, EU official announces 235m aid

DAMASCUS (AFP): EU crisis management chief Hadja Lahbib announced a 235 million euro aid package for Syria and neighboring countries on Friday during the first visit by a senior EU official since Bashar Assad's ouster. The trip comes two weeks after foreign ministers from France and Germany visited, calling for a peaceful, inclusive transition, amid a flurry of diplomatic activity by countries seeking to engage with war-torn Syria's new authorities.

"I come here to announce a new package of humanitarian aid of 235 million euros (\$242 million) in Syria and in neighboring countries," Lahbib told a press conference in Damascus after meeting Syria's new leader Ahmed Al-Sharaa. "Our funding will contribute to basic

needs like shelter, food, clean water, sanitation, health care, education and emergencies among others," she said.

Neighbouring countries including Lebanon have taken in millions of Syrian refugees over the years. "We count on the authorities to ensure unrestricted and safe access for humanitarian actors to all regions of Syria including those in hard-to-reach and conflict-affected areas" in the east, Lahbib added.

Sharaa's Islamist group Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham (HTS) led the rebel offensive that ousted Assad on December 8. An interim government has been appointed to steer the country until March 1.

HTS, which has roots in the Syrian branch of Al-Qaeda, has sought to reassure minorities that they will not be harmed and the

rule of law will be respected. "We are at a turning point and the decisions that will be taken in the coming days and months will be crucial," Lahbib said. "You are writing history, and we would like to encourage you to leave a positive trace. It starts with building an inclusive future for all Syrians," she added.

"Syria is rich in its diversity," she said of the multi-ethnic, multi-sectarian country. "We want to see a bright future for Syria and for that, we need to see the rule of law being respected, human rights, women's rights... What I've heard from the mouth of the current authorities (is) really encouraging... now we need action," she added. Lahbib's meetings were also expected to include discussions on the issue of lifting international sanctions on Syria.