

President flays attack  
F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: President Asif Ali Zardari Sunday condemned the incident of firing on the motorcade of Speaker of Azad Jammu and Kashmir Legislative Assembly. He said attack on the Speaker Legislative Assembly was cowardly and evil act. He prayed for the recovery of the persons who were injured in the attack.



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LAHORE: Minister of State for Finance and Revenue Ali Parvez Malik calls on Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif.

## Naqvi denies attending Anti-China event in US

ISLAMABAD (APP): Federal Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi denies attending anti-China event in US, said "he did not attend any anti-China event in the United States". He added that opponents are just spreading venomous propaganda.

While addressing the media in Houston, USA, Federal Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi clarified that he participated in a youth event, which was given a wrong impression through propaganda.

He emphasized that such propaganda does not matter as he did not attend any such event. He highlighted that the purpose of his visit was to develop an effective plan against terrorism



through cooperation with American politicians.

He stressed that the war against terrorism is not just Pakistan's fight but a collective battle. He warned that anyone who takes up arms against Pakistan will be dealt with iron hands.

The Interior Minister

expressed concern that the members of US House of Representatives are being incited against Pakistan.

He advised politicians to refrain from harming Pakistan's interests. He stated that the meetings with Congress members were very positive.

## One killed, several injured in Khuzdar

F.P. Report

RAWALPINDI: At least one person was killed and seven injured in an explosion near a passenger bus traveling from Khuzdar to Rawalpindi on Sunday, officials said.

The blast occurred on the M-8 Motorway when a passenger bus travelling from Khuzdar to Rawalpindi passed by an explosives-laden vehicle.

Out of the 13 passengers onboard, eight sustained injuries, with one succumbing to their wounds.

Authorities have shifted the body to the Combined Military Hospital (CMH), while the injured are receiving treatment at Trauma Centre Khuzdar.

Levies officials confirmed that the explosives were planted in a stationary vehicle on the roadside, strategically targeting the passenger bus. No group has claimed responsibility for the attack so far. Authorities are investigating the attack, and enhanced security measures are expected to be implemented in the coming days.

The incident comes amid a surge in violence in Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, where militant activities have intensified in recent months.

Earlier this month, a blast in Turbat killed four people and injured 32, with the Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) claiming responsibility.

According to the CRSS Annual Security Report 2024, last year was one of the deadliest in recent history for Pakistan, with over 2,500 violence-related deaths. Balochistan recorded 782 fatalities, making it one of the hardest-hit regions in the country.

## Govt to lower electricity prices in April: Tanveer

LAHORE (APP): Federal Minister for Industries and Production Rana Tanveer Hussain announced on Sunday that the government is set to decrease electricity prices in April, a move expected to benefit the agriculture sector significantly.

Speaking at a gathering at Muridke, the minister emphasized that the government is working tirelessly to develop the agricultural sector. He highlighted ongoing discussions with countries like Belarus and China to foster agricultural advancements in Pakistan.

Rana Tanveer said that Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif is striving to make Pakistan globally competitive in agriculture. As part of this effort, young Pakistani researchers are being sent to China to enhance their expertise in

agricultural research, he added. Despite these efforts, the minister expressed concern that Pakistan's per-acre production remains stagnant at 30/maund, underscoring the need for transformative measures.

Criticizing the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), Rana Tanveer stated that the party has consistently focused on Pakistan's destruction, causing severe

damage to the agricultural sector. He accused the party's founder of continuing to harm the nation. However, he asserted that the public has rejected the PTI, marking the end of its political relevance.

He reiterated the government's commitment to reviving both industrial and agricultural sectors, viewing them as critical components for Pakistan's economic progress.



# MPs meet PM, discuss issues of their constituencies

LAHORE (APP): Member of National Assembly (MNA) Abdul Ghaffar Wattoo and Member of the Punjab Assembly (MPA) Fida Hussain called on Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif here on Sunday and discussed with him issues of their respective constituencies. MNA Usman Awaisi also met the premier, separately.

The parliamentarians also discussed with the prime minister overall political situation in the country. Former federal minister

Khawaja Saad Rafique and Prime Minister's Youth Programme Chairman Rana Mashhood Ahmad Khan also called on the PM and exchanged views on the political situation of the country.

**PM condemns firing on AJK speaker convoy**  
Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif on Sunday strongly condemned firing on the convoy of Azad Jammu & Kashmir (AJK) Legislative Assembly speaker. He prayed for early

recovery of those injured in the firing incident. He said that attack on the Azad Jammu & Kashmir Legislative Assembly speaker and his convoy was a coward act. He directed the authorities concerned to arrest the attackers at the earliest.

**Former deputy mayor calls on PM**  
Former Deputy Mayor of Lahore Nazir Khan Swati called on Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif here on Sunday. During the meeting

country's overall political situation came under discussion.

State Minister for Finance and Revenue, Ali Pervaiz Malik called on Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif, here on Sunday.

During the meeting, key discussions were held regarding matters related to the Ministry of Finance and Revenue.

The two leaders also exchanged views on the overall national and political situation in the country.

## Illegal occupation in IIOJK Shameful for India to call itself a republic: Muqam

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Federal Minister for Kashmir Affairs, Gilgit-Baltistan and SAFRON Engineer Amir Muqam has said that it is shameful for India to call itself a republic despite its illegal occupation of occupied Jammu and Kashmir.

In his special statement regarding the celebration of India's Republic Day as a black day, the Federal Minister said that on the one side, India is celebrating Republic Day today, and on the other side, it has usurped the fundamental rights of Kashmiris.

India is committing the worst atrocities in occupied Jammu and Kashmir. It is regrettable that India has been illegally depriving the people of Jammu and Kashmir of their right to self-determination for more than seven decades and is subjecting them to oppression, violence and barbarity.

Despite these atrocities,

the spirit of the Kashmiri people is unbreakable and their struggle for freedom cannot be suppressed.

He said that he calls on the international community to stop India from committing atrocities and human rights violations in occupied Jammu and Kashmir.

Pakistan will continue to provide full political, diplomatic and moral support to the brave Kashmiri people in their just struggle and right to self-determination.

He said that the United Nations has passed a resolution to grant the Kashmiris the right to self-determination, therefore it is the duty of the international organization to implement its resolutions and grant the Kashmiris their right to self-determination.

He said that the Indian army is breaking mountains of atrocities in occupied Kashmir and has usurped the political, religious and democratic rights of the Kashmiris.

## About 70 people killed in attack on hospital in Sudan's Darfur region

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP): Around 70 people were killed in an attack on the only functional hospital in the besieged city of El Fasher in Sudan, the chief of the World Health Organization said Sunday, part of a series of attacks coming as the African nation's civil war escalated in recent days.

The attack on the Saudi Teaching Maternal Hospital, which local officials blamed on the rebel Rapid Support Forces, came as the group was experiencing apparent battlefield losses to the Sudanese military and allied forces under the command of army chief Gen. Abdel-Fattah Burhan.

That includes Burhan appearing near a burning oil refinery north of Khartoum on Saturday that his forces said they seized from the RSF. Saudi Arabia's Foreign Ministry denounced the

attack as "a violation of international law."

International mediation attempts and pressure tactics, including a U.S. assessment that the RSF and its proxies are committing genocide, and sanctions targeting Burhan, haven't halted the fighting.

WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus posted the death toll in the hospital attack in El Fasher on the social platform X.

Officials and others in the capital of North Darfur province had cited a similar figure Saturday, but Tedros is the first international source to provide a casualty number. Reporting on Sudan is incredibly difficult given communication challenges, the indiscriminate violence faced by civilians and exaggerations by both the RSF and the Sudanese military.

"The appalling attack on Saudi Hospital in El

Fasher, Sudan, led to 19 injuries and 70 deaths among patients and companions," Tedros wrote. "At the time of the attack, the hospital was packed with patients receiving care."

Another health facility in Al Malha was also attacked Saturday, he added.

"We continue to call for a cessation of all attacks on health care in Sudan, and to allow full access for the swift restoration of the facilities that have been damaged," Tedros said. "Above all, Sudan's people need peace. The best medicine is peace."

Tedros didn't identify who launched the attack, though local officials had blamed the RSF for the assault. Sudan's Foreign Ministry also accused the RSF of launching a drone attack targeting the hospital's emergency ward, describing the assault as a

"massacre."

U.N. official Clementine Nkweta-Salami, who coordinates humanitarian efforts for the world body in Sudan, warned Thursday that the RSF earlier had given "a 48-hour ultimatum to forces allied to the Sudanese Armed Forces to vacate the city and indicated a forthcoming offensive."

"Since May 2024, El Fasher has been under RSF siege," she said. "Civilians in El Fasher have already endured months of suffering, violence and gross human rights abuses under the prolonged siege. Their lives now hang in the balance due to an increasingly precarious situation."

In a statement on Sunday night, the RSF alleged that the Sudanese military and its allies attacked the hospital in El Fasher, but offered no evidence to support the claim.

# Israel blocks thousands of Palestinians from northern Gaza

CAIRO (Reuters): Tens of thousands of Palestinians waited at roadblocks to return to their homes in northern Gaza on Sunday, voicing frustration after Israel accused Hamas of breaching a ceasefire agreement and refused to open crossing points.

A day after a second exchange of Israeli hostages held in Gaza for Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails, the holdup underlined the risks hanging over the truce between the militant group and Israel, longtime adversaries in a series of Gaza wars.

U.S. President Donald Trump's Middle East envoy, Steve Witkoff, will travel to Israel on Wednesday to oversee the Gaza ceasefire, Israel's Channel 13 reported on Sunday, citing two Israeli officials.

In central Gaza, columns of people were waiting along the main roads leading north, some in vehicles and some on foot, witnesses said.

"A sea of people is waiting for a signal to move back to Gaza City and the

north," said Tamer Al-Burai, a displaced person from Gaza City. "This is the deal that was signed, isn't it?"

"Many of those people have no idea whether their houses back home are still standing. But they want to go regardless, they want to put up the tents next to the rubble of their houses, they want to feel home," he told Reuters via a chat app.

On Sunday, witnesses said many people had slept overnight on the Salahuddin Road, the main thoroughfare running north to south and on the coastal road leading north, waiting to pass the Israeli military positions in the Netzarim corridor running across the centre of the Gaza Strip.

Al-Awda Hospital officials said one Palestinian was killed and 15 others wounded by Israeli fire, from soldiers apparently trying to prevent people coming too close along the coastal road. The Israeli military said it was looking into the report.

Cars, trucks and rickshaws were overloaded with mattresses, food, and



the tents that served as shelters for over a year for those in the central and southern areas of the enclave.

Under the agreement worked out with Egyptian and Qatari mediators and backed by the U.S., Israel was meant to allow Palestinians displaced from the north to return to their

homes.

But Israel said that Hamas' failure to hand over a list detailing who of the hostages scheduled for release were alive or to hand over Arbel Yehud, an Israeli woman taken hostage from her kibbutz home during the Hamas attack on Israel on Oct. 7, 2023, meant it had violated

the agreement.

As a result, checkpoints in central Gaza would not be opened to allow crossings into the north, it said in a statement. Hamas blamed Israel for the delay and accused it of stalling.

Mediators were holding intensive talks to resolve the dispute and see Yehud freed earlier than the next

scheduled swap on Saturday, a Palestinian and an Israeli official said.

An official with the Gaza militant group that is holding her, Islamic Jihad, said such an accommodation has been agreed but the Israeli official said talks were still ongoing, though progress had been made.

On Saturday, Trump

instructed the U.S. military to release 2,000-pound bombs that his predecessor Joe Biden had ordered to be withheld from delivery to Israel over concern about their impact on the civilian population of Gaza.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu thanked Trump for giving "Israel the tools it needs to defend itself, to confront our common enemies and to secure a future of peace and prosperity".

Trump also called on Egypt and Jordan to take on more Palestinians from Gaza either temporarily or permanently, and saying "we should just clear out the whole thing".

"It's literally a demolition site, almost everything is demolished and people are dying there," he told reporters after a call with Jordan's King Abdullah.

In response, an official of Hamas, the Palestinian militant group that runs Gaza, echoed longstanding Palestinian fears about being driven permanently from their homes.

Palestinians "will not accept any offers or solu-

tions, even if (such offers) appear to have good intentions under the guise of reconstruction," as announced in the proposals of U.S. President Trump," Basem Naim, a member of the Hamas political bureau, told Reuters.

Many of the stranded Palestinians on the roads leading north also rejected Trump's proposed solution.

"If he thinks he will forcibly displace the Palestinian people (then) this is impossible, impossible, impossible. The Palestinian people firmly believe that this land is theirs, this soil is their soil," said Magdy Seidam.

"No matter how much Israel tries to destroy, break, and to show people that it had won, in reality it did not win."

The Israeli military issued warnings to Palestinians not to approach its positions in Gaza and said soldiers had fired warning shots on several occasions but said "as of now, we are unaware of any harm caused to the suspects as a result of the shooting."





## Pakistan Customs achieves significant success, says Chairman FBR



KARACHI (APP): Chairman Federal Board of Revenue (FBR), Rashid Mahmood Langrial on Sunday said that Pakistan Customs has achieved significant success in modernizing its performance, including the implementation of the Pakistan Single Window (PSW) and Faceless Customs Assessment (FCA) System, which have made the trade process faster, transparent and easier, resulted in significant increase in revenue and enabled the clearance of export goods in a short time.

The Chairman FBR said this while addressing as chief guest in the ceremony held to mark International Customs Day-2025 at the

Customs House Karachi.

Referring his recent interactions with the traders' community, Rashid Mahmood Langrial said that the traders' bodies in Karachi are glad because of introduction of FCA System by Pakistan Customs. The Chairman FBR declared the World Customs Theme-2025 "Customs delivering on its commitment to efficiency, security and prosperity" as very important for Pakistan Customs as it strives to make itself a modern, dynamic and future-thinking institution.

On the occasion, the Chairman FBR also hoisted the flag and, laid wreaths at the Martyrs' Monument

and recited Fateha.

Earlier, in his opening remarks, Collector Customs Enforcement Karachi, Moinuddin Wani thanked Chairman FBR, Rashid Mahmood Langrial, Member Customs Operation (FBR), Junaid Jalil and other guests for their presence.

At the end of the ceremony, Member Customs Operation (FBR) Junaid Jalil in his address, thanked Chairman FBR Rashid Mahmood Langrial and other guests for attending the ceremony.

He reiterated the commitment that in the future as well, Pakistan Customs will continue to play its active role in combating

smuggling and stabilizing the country's economy and promoting as well as facilitating business activities across the country.

Junaid Jalil lauded the Customs officials for playing their role in stabilizing the country's economy by utilizing their capabilities and expressed the hope that they will play their role in the same way in the future as well. He highly appreciated and expressed gratitude to the organizers of the event.

Later, Chairman FBR Rashid Mahmood Langrial distributed certificates of appreciation among the officers on their outstanding performance.

It may be noted here that, International Customs Day is celebrated all over the world on January 26. Like in previous years, this year too, World Customs Day was celebrated in all the Collectorates of Customs across Pakistan including the grand ceremony at the Customs House Karachi under the auspices of the Collectorate of Customs Enforcement Karachi.

The event was attended among others by the Consul Generals of Oman, Indonesia, Kuwait, and the representatives of Russian and UAE consulates, chief commissioners, chief collectors, collectors, other senior officers of Customs, representatives of law enforcement agencies, business and social figures.



LAHORE: People gather on Mall Road to protest and mark Black Day, standing with Kashmiris on India's Republic Day. —APP Photo

### Deputy PM Ishaq Dar visits Data Darbar

LAHORE (APP): Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Senator Ishaq Dar visited the shrine of great Sufi saint Hazrat Abu al Hasan Ali bin Usman Al-Hajveri (RA), known as Data Gunj Bukhsh, on Sunday.

He reviewed the pace of ongoing development work at the shrine and also reviewed various facilities being provided to the visitors. The deputy PM directed the relevant authorities to swiftly execute project of installing umbrellas on pattern of Masjid-i-Nabvi.

Punjab Auqaf Secretary Dr Tahir Raza Bukhari briefed Ishaq Dar about the ongoing development works at shrine. The foreign minister also offered Fateha at the grave of the great Sufi saint and prayed for peace and prosperity of the country.

Twenty umbrellas of 26x26 feet would be being installed in the courtyard of Data Darbar mosque. These umbrellas would be operating hydrologically and automatically, being installed at a cost of Rs 650 million.

### IGP orders strict enforcement of Kite Flying Act

LAHORE (APP): Inspector General of Police (IGP) Punjab Dr. Usman Anwar has ordered strict enforcement of the Kite Flying Act across Lahore and the province, instructing all senior police officers to intensify crackdown on kite-flyers, sellers and manufacturers.

According to the details, the Punjab Police spokesperson said that this year, 481 offenders have been arrested, and 468 cases registered for violations of the Kite Flying Act across Lahore and the province.

### CM's Apna Ghar programme 9,000 people get interest-free loans

LAHORE (APP): Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif has hailed the remarkable success of the Apni Chhat, Apna Ghar programme, under which more than 9,000 people across Punjab have received interest-free loans totalling Rs. 8.5 billion.

In her statement on Sunday, she said: "Seeing the houses built under this program brings me immense joy, as if I am building my own home." She said that Apni Chhat, Apna Ghar program would emerge as Pakistan's most successful housing initiative.

The CM emphasized her vision for a Punjab where no one remains homeless,

stating, "Everyone deserves the happiness of having their own roof. The state is like a mother, and mothers feel deeply for their homeless children."

She assured that the program operates transparently, with loans granted purely on merit. Beneficiaries receiving loans of Rs 1.5 million will repay the principal in nine years with monthly installments of Rs 14,000. "This initiative has achieved a unique record by disbursing Rs 8.5 billion in microfinance loans within just a few months," she noted.

The CM shared that more than 400,000 applications and documents have been submitted via the Apni

Chhat, Apna Ghar portal in record time. In the first phase, 5,000 loans have been distributed, with over 5,000 houses nearing completion. In Phase-II, construction has begun on homes financed through 3,000 additional loans.

Three impartial microfinance institutions are verifying applications received through the portal to ensure fairness. The CM directed relevant authorities to complete the construction of 100,000 houses within one year and 500,000 houses in five years. For the convenience of applicants, a dedicated web portal (acag.punjab.gov.pk) and helpline (0800-09100) have been launched.

## Campaign against profiteers continues

KARACHI (APP): The city administration's campaign against illegal profiteers continues in all seven districts under the supervision of deputy commissioners.

Commissioner Karachi Syed Hassan Naqvi has directed all deputy commissioners to strictly enforce the official prices of essential food commodities.

According to a handout issued by the commission-

er office on Sunday, 54 profiteers have been arrested, and 44 shops have been sealed for violating official prices.

Fines exceeding Rs 4.2 million have been imposed on shopkeepers found guilty of overcharging. The officers have checked prices at over 3,600 locations.

The deputy commissioners are personally overseeing the efforts, and

few are also in field for checking prices along with concerned officials.

Karachi Commissioner Syed Hassan Naqvi has praised the district administration's efforts and directed them to continue the campaign without showing leniency to profiteers.

According to details, in District South, 17 Profiteers were arrested, and three shops were

sealed.

In District East, 5 profiteers were arrested, and 6 shops were sealed. In District West, 13 arrests were made, and 1 shop was sealed. In District Central, 4 arrests were made, and 3 shops were sealed. In District Kemari, 2 arrests were made, and 14 shops were sealed. In District Korangi, 13 profiteers were arrested, and 13 shops were sealed.



### HEADQUARTERS NORTHERN AIR COMMAND, PAF - PESHAWAR

#### PRE-QUALIFICATION AND REGISTRATION OF LOCAL SUPPLIERS / CONTRACTORS FOR SUPPLY OF RATION ITEMS : FY 2025-26

Applications are invited for pre-qualification / registration of reputable, well-experienced, financially-sound and Income Tax - registered firms / contractors, with Directorate of Ration, Air Headquarters, Islamabad, for supply of Ration items (Dry Ration like Sugar, Atta, Lentil Seeds, Rice, Milk Powder, Cooking Oil, Tea Leaves, Green Tea, Condiments whole and Fresh Ration like Meat, Fruit & Vegetables etc). Both Dry / Fresh supplies would be delivered to PAF Bases at Peshawar, Kohat, Mianwali, Kamra, Murid, Kalar Kahar, Skardu and Risalpur.

Interested parties may apply on Company / Firms letterhead from **27 January, 2025 to 15 February, 2025**, during working hours (0830 Hrs to 1300 Hrs), along with the following information:-

- Owners / Partners Name, Address, Telephone, Mobile numbers and Fax number of the company. The properties / Owner / partners should be Pakistani National.
- Six months summary of their Bank accounts.
- Profile of the company, Status of the Firm, whether proprietorship / partnership / public or private limited company; Partnership deed, in case contractor are other than proprietary/ limited / General order suppliers.
- Proof of property, in case of partnership / proprietary.
- Memorandum and articles of association, in case of Ltd concern.
- Attested copies of CNIC of owner / partners / witnesses of the company are to be attached with the application.
- Details of registration with major organizations, along with details of agreements / contracts.
- Fiencial status duly verified / name of bankers and certificate of financial stability.
- Sales Tax and Income Tax - registration certificate, details of Income Tax Returns and copy of assessment / payment of Income Tax.
- Legal action details, if any.
- Any additional information, related to the subject.
- Affidavit regarding correctness of documents and information, therein.

Applications duly marked with "Pre-qualification / registration" of Local supplies contractors for ration items" in sealed envelopes are to be submitted to undermentioned offices for concerned ration items, by 15 February, 2025. Applications received after last submission date will not be entertained.

S No	Base / Unit	Ration Group	Contact No
(a)	Headquarters Northern Air Command, PAF Peshawar (SO Support)	All commodities of Dry Ration	Tel: 091-9210777 Ext: 2061 / 2069 Cell # 0323-9410711
(b)	PAF Base, Peshawar (O i/c Catering Flight)	Fresh Ration	091-9210777 Ext: 3843 / 3845 Cell # 0315-7470757
(c)	PAF Base, Kohat (O i/c Catering Flight)	Fresh Ration	0922-9260092-97 Ext: 5219 / 5221 Cell # 0326-8013894
(d)	PAF Base, MM Alam (Mianwali) (O i/c Catering Flight)	Fresh Ration	0459-232051 - 56 Ext: 5219 / 5221 Cell # 0309-6235789
(e)	PAF Base, Minhas (Kamra) (O i/c Catering Flight)	Fresh Ration	0572-9316215 Ext: 3847 / 3849 Cell # 0320-2112150
(f)	PAF Academy, Asghar Khan (Risalpur) (O i/c Catering Flight)	Fresh Ration	0923-631391-97 EXT: 3843 / 3845 Cell # 0336-1997963, 0326-8130885
(g)	PAF Base, Murid (O i/c Catering Flight)	Fresh Ration	0543-553994 Ext: 3861 / 5221 Cell # 0326-8002800
(h)	PAF Base, Kallar Kahar (O i/c Catering Flight)	Fresh Ration	0543-58830809 Ext: 2271 / 3845 Cell # 0323-9419721
(j)	PAF Qadri (Skardu) (O i/c Catering Flight)	Fresh Ration	05815923078 Ext: 3881 / 3849 Cell # 0355-9455701

#### Note:-

- Any information, if found incomplete / false at any stage, will result in immediate rejection of the application.
- Staff Officer (Support) Headquarters, Northern Air Command and O i/c Catering Flight of respective PAF Bases may ask for any further information / details, if required and reserves the right to accept or reject the applications, on technical grounds.
- Selected / shortlisted parties / Firms would be required to fill up registration forms with complete details, within 7 days of confirmation.

**SSO (Support & AD)**  
**Headquarters Northern Air Command, PAF**  
**66-The Mall, Peshawar- Cantt.**



UNIVERSITY OF  
ENGINEERING AND  
TECHNOLOGY, PESHAWAR

CALL FOR ONLINE REGISTRATION

## CONVOCATION 2025

The Convocation of University of Engineering and Technology, Peshawar may be held in the **3<sup>rd</sup> week of February, 2025** at the Convocation Hall, University of Peshawar. All those who have graduated (B.Sc., M.Sc. and Ph.D.) from UET Peshawar within the year 2024 and desire to participate in the convocation are required to register online/in person on or before **10<sup>th</sup> February, 2025 upto 4:00 pm**.

Online Convocation Registration Portal is available at [www.uetpeshawar.edu.pk/convocation2025.php](http://www.uetpeshawar.edu.pk/convocation2025.php). Candidates have to submit **Convocation Registration Fee of Rs. 1500/-** for graduates of UET Peshawar and **Rs. 3000/-** for graduates of affiliated engineering colleges (Non-refundable) in any branch of United Bank Ltd. throughout Pakistan in Account Number **205505522**. On successful fee deposit, the candidate will receive a sequence number/transaction ID, 4 digits bank branch code and date of transaction. This information will be used as authentication key for online registration.

### ENGINEERING A PROMISING FUTURE!



#### NOTE

Gown/Hoods can be obtained from the respective departments, for which graduates have to submit a security fee of Rs. 1500/- (Re-fundable).

Only registered graduates will be allowed for the full dress rehearsal (mandatory), which will be held a day before the Convocation.

#### CONTROLLER OF EXAMINATIONS

University of Engineering and Technology, Peshawar  
Email: [examination@uetpeshawar.edu.pk](mailto:examination@uetpeshawar.edu.pk)  
Ph: 091-9222270, 091-9222284, 091-9216796-8, (Ext. 3018)





PESHAWAR: Provincial Sports Minister Syed Fakhar Jahan speaking the awards distribution ceremony at the end of Tour de Peshawar Cycle Race.

## Fakhar announces construction of cycling velodrome

### F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Provincial Sports Minister Syed Fakhar Jahan has announced the construction of a cycling velodrome at Peshawar University which will be completed soon. He also revealed plans to organize the Tour de Kalam cycling race in June and the Inter-Provincial Games in February. Additionally horse race and polo competitions will take place in April. Efforts are underway to host Peshawar Zalmi's matches in Peshawar during the Pakistan Super League (PSL).

Speaking at the awards

ceremony of the Tour de Peshawar cycling race he stated that Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Ali Amin Gandapur has increased the prize money for the race. The winner will now receive PKR 150,000 instead of 100,000, the runner-up will get PKR 100,000 instead of 75,000, and the third-place cyclist will earn PKR 75,000 instead of 50,000. The smaller prizes of PKR 10,000 have been raised to PKR 20,000.

He further noted that the government has successfully organized several events including the Madrassa Games, Special Persons' Games, games for merged

districts, regional games, a horse and cattle show, marathon races, and auto-cross competitions. He added that Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur being a sportsman himself is working in line with PTI Chairman Imran Khan's vision.

Scholarships for gold medal winners of the Quaid-e-Azam Games will soon commence and monthly scholarships of PKR 25,000 will be awarded to gold medalists in the Inter-Provincial Games.

**Farman Khan Wins Tour de Peshawar Cycling Race**

Farman Khan of Sui

Southern Gas claimed the trophy in the Tour de Peshawar cycling race with Sui Southern Gas dominating the event by securing four positions.

The Tour de Peshawar race officially started from the Attock Bridge in Khairabad Nowshera with MPA Muhammad Idrees Khattak inaugurating the event by waving the flag to send off the cyclists. Additional Deputy Commissioner Nowshera Director Operations Sports Department Nematullah Marwat, Deputy Director Operations Sports Jamshed Baloch and other officials were also present.

## Strengthening bilateral trade relations BD High Commissioner's visit to Mohmand Chamber

### F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Bangladesh's High Commissioner to Pakistan, Mohammad Iqbal Hussain Khan, visited the Mohmand Chamber of Commerce and Industry and held detailed discussions with the local business community to explore avenues for strengthening trade and economic ties between the two nations.

The High Commissioner expressed his gratitude for the warm reception, stating that visiting Pakistan, particularly Peshawar, was an honor.

He emphasized the importance of fostering mutual love, respect, and cooperation to ensure a prosperous future for upcoming generations.

Addressing the gathering, Former Governor Haji Ghulam Ali remarked that this century is about trade, not conflict. He urged both nations to focus on a bright



future and leave behind the grievances of the past. Mohmand Chamber President Ameer Mohammad Khan echoed similar sentiments, highlighting the shared potential of Pakistan and Bangladesh, emphasizing that free trade could significantly transform the fortunes of both nations.

During the event, members of the business community presented proposals

and shared insights on enhancing trade between Pakistan and Bangladesh. The High Commissioner assured the participants of Bangladesh's willingness to collaborate in sectors such as agriculture, mining, and industry, emphasizing that both nations have immense potential for mutual growth.

The High Commissioner also underscored the importance of reestablishing land

and air routes and simplifying visa processes to facilitate business and trade. He assured his full support to the business community in promoting bilateral cooperation.

The event concluded with the presentation of commemorative shields, a traditional shawl, and a symbolic ring to the High Commissioner as a gesture of goodwill and appreciation.

## 136 Leeds College students donates blood

### F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: In a remarkable display of generosity and compassion, the students of Leeds College Peshawar donated 136 blood bags during the Annual Blood Camp 2025, organized by the Hamza Foundation Welfare Thalassaemia Center and Blood Services Peshawar.

This noble initiative, which took place at the Leeds College Peshawar, was held in collaboration with the Leeds College Blood Donor Society.

The camp was conducted under the supervision of Mr. Said Rasool sahib Director, and Mr. Arif Ahmed sahib, Coordinator of the Leeds College.

The enthusiastic participation of the students made this event a historic achievement, marking 19 years of dedicated service by the Hamza Foundation.

Medical Director HF, Dr. Tariq khan conducted the Medical Check up of the students, 11 students were medically unfit after detail check up.

136 healthy volunteer donors donated their blood for saving precious lives of 1504 registered patients of Thalassaemia and Hemophilia kids of Hamza Foundation.

In a heartfelt address to the students at the conclusion of the camp, the Director of the college, praised the students' spirit and commitment to this noble cause, emphasizing the importance of serving ailing humanity.

He encouraged the students to continue this tradition of altruism, underscoring that every donation could potentially save three lives.

The Principal also acknowledged the tireless welfare efforts of the Hamza Foundation.

Mr. Ijaz Ali Khan, the Founder Chairman of Hamza Foundation, expressed his gratitude to the Director, Principal, the blood donation team, and the dedicated volunteers.

He thanked everyone involved for their contribution to alleviating the suffering of those in need of blood transfusions.

To mark the occasion, Mr. Ateeq ur Rehman, RMO and Mr. Ibrarullah JMO of the Hamza Foundation, presented commemorative HF shields to Director Mr. Said rasool, Blood Incharge and other teaching staff as a token of appreciation for their kind support and collaboration. This successful blood donation drive stands as a testament to the deep-rooted spirit of giving blood at Leeds College Peshawar and its unwavering commitment to the humanity.

## BoK announces expansion plans 52 new branches to open in 2025

### Aziz Buneri

PESHAWAR: The Bank of Khyber (BoK) has unveiled ambitious plans to expand its operations and solidify its market presence in 2025. As part of its strategic vision, the bank will open 52 new branches across

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) and transition fully to Islamic banking, reflecting its commitment to providing modern, ethical, and inclusive financial services.

These announcements were made during the Annual Manager Conference (AMC) held in Lahore, where senior management and bank officials discussed their roadmap for 2025-2027. The conference celebrated the exceptional performance of 36 Branch and Area Managers, who were recognized with awards for their contributions.

**A Comprehensive Vision for Growth**

Speaking at the AMC, Managing Director Hassan Raza shared the bank's vision for the future. "We have developed a comprehensive plan to ensure we provide the best possible services to our customers. Our goal is to address staff concerns, resolve customer complaints, and strengthen our presence in underserved areas by frequently engaging with stakeholders through meetings and conferences," he said.

Highlighting the bank's robust growth strategy, offi-

cial emphasized the untapped potential in various provinces, positioning BoK as a leading financial institution capable of fostering economic development across Pakistan.

**Unlocking Market Potential**

Group Head Sher Muhammad Muhammad provided insights into BoK's market share in KP, revealing that the bank currently holds 10% of the region's deposits. "If we can increase our share to 40%, our total market deposits will reach Rs 640 billion," he noted.

Sher Muhammad also emphasized BoK's focus on addressing the unique needs of farmers and growers. "We've reached a consensus to solve their banking challenges and provide them with accessible financial solutions," he added. With 600,000 government employees receiving salaries and pensions through BoK, amounting to Rs 65 billion annually, the bank is a vital player in the province's financial ecosystem.

**Islamic Banking: A Key Priority**

BoK's Head of Islamic Banking, Abdullah Ghafar, shared the bank's commitment to fully transition to Islamic banking. With 123 branches already operational, the bank plans to further expand its network and tap into the growing demand for Shariah-compliant financial services.

"Our Islamic banking

deposits have reached Rs 94 billion, and our assets now stand at Rs 119 billion. This is just the beginning of a transformative journey," he stated.

**Digital Transformation for Modern Banking**

Recognizing the importance of digital innovation, BoK is also investing heavily in enhancing its online and digital banking services. Head of Digital Marketing, Fauziah Mahmood, shared the bank's plans to modernize its systems and offer state-of-the-art digital solutions. "Our goal is to provide seamless, customer-centric services that align with the demands of the modern banking era. We aim to introduce new services that will enhance convenience and accessibility for our customers," she said.

**A Bright Future Ahead**

With its robust plans for branch expansion, Islamic banking transformation, and digital innovation, the Bank of Khyber is poised to lead the way in meeting the financial needs of communities across Pakistan. The announcements made at the AMC reflect the bank's unwavering dedication to fostering economic growth, empowering customers, and ensuring inclusive access to banking services. As BoK gears up for 2025, its comprehensive strategy and customer-first approach promise to redefine banking in Pakistan, making it a trusted partner in financial progress.

## International Customs Day celebrated

### F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: A prestigious ceremony was held at the Collectorate of Customs, Customs House Peshawar, to mark International Customs Day. Member Taxpayer Services, Saeed Akram, graced the event as the chief guest.

Addressing the gathering, Saeed Akram stated that International Customs Day is celebrated every year under the auspices of the World Customs Organization (WCO). Each year, a specific theme is introduced, which guides global customs efforts. This year's theme, "Customs delivering on its commitment to efficiency, security, and prosperity," holds particular importance in the context of Pakistan.

He emphasized that the primary goal of Pakistan Customs is to facilitate trade, ensure national security, and curb illegal activities. Pakistan Customs plays a pivotal role in the national economy by contributing significantly to revenue collection.

Approximately 45% of the total revenue collected by the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) comes from Pakistan Customs, making its role vital for the country's development, security, and efficiency.

Saeed Akram highlighted that Pakistan Customs was the first in the region to initiate the automation of its systems, establishing the country's first fully automated collectorate. He noted that Pakistan introduced automation at a time when many developed countries lacked such advanced systems. This journey continued with the introduction of an indigenous automation program, further simplifying and enhancing trade processes.

Discussing the Single Window System, he explained that this platform integrates all departments involved in customs clearance under one roof. Instead of navigating through multiple departments, traders can now complete all necessary processes, including obtaining NOCs and other documentation, in

one place through the Single Window System.

Saeed Akram remarked that Pakistan Customs is not only a pioneer in automation but also a global leader in this field. He revealed that last year, FBR collected PKR 9.3 trillion in revenue and set this year's target at 40% higher than the previous year. He expressed gratitude that all efforts are underway to achieve this ambitious goal.

He further mentioned that Pakistan Customs plays a key role in the digital transformation of the FBR to ensure equal opportunities for all traders. He proudly stated that Pakistan successfully achieved its December 2024 target and is confident of meeting future goals as well.

In conclusion, Saeed Akram reiterated the collective commitment to putting Pakistan on the path to progress, envisioning a day when the country will be counted among the developed nations of the world, earning global respect and recognition.

## Heritage in ruins: The decline of historical sites in KP

### Asad Ullah Yousafzai

**KHYBER Pakhtunkhwa (KP), a province once glorified for its rich history and cultural importance, tussles with its heritage's slow erosion. With over 8,600 registered archaeological sites and thousands more unlisted, KP is home to relics of ancient civilizations, Mughal-era architecture, and Gandhara art. This treasure collection faces an uncertain future, jeopardized by neglect, urbanization, and poor enforcement of preservation laws.**

The majestic Mahabat Khan Mosque and the elegant Victorian design of the Peshawar Museum reveal much about a history deeply embedded in strength and cultural development. Nevertheless, these sites are gradually vanishing as historic buildings are demolished to make room for modern commercial projects, considerably eroding the province's identity. What we're witnessing is not progress but a troubling disregard for the cultural narrative that has characterized this region.

In 2007, the then Additional Chief Secretary convened a meeting to develop a strategy for protecting Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's heritage. This plan aimed to preserve historical structures, including "Muhafiz khanas," colonial-era homes, and British-era government buildings. Unfortunately, many of these structures have since been demolished, and those

that remain are at risk of deterioration due to a lack of ongoing preservation efforts and follow-up initiatives.

In the last five years, the Department of Archaeology has recorded damage to at least 113 historic sites in KP, including stupas, old cemeteries, and shrines. Peshawar, historically the center of the Gandhara civilization, has seen over 20 heritage buildings transformed into commercial properties. Those responsible for these actions frequently go unpunished, even with the Antiquities Act of 2016 in place.

The Antiquities Act classifies any item or location older than 100 years as national heritage, enforcing severe penalties for breaches, such as fines and imprisonment. Nevertheless, the enforcement of these regulations is often inconsistent. While FIRs have been filed at several police stations throughout KP, no convictions exist. These laws become formalities without accountability, failing to protect the province's invaluable cultural treasures. The sluggish pace of restoration initiatives for cultural landmarks in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), including the Mahabat Khan Mosque and the encroached remnants of Gor Khatri, highlights a lack of dedication to safeguarding these historical sites. Although substantial funds have been allocated for restoration efforts, bureaucratic obstacles, delays, and the inability to tackle encroachments have greatly impeded advance-

ment. Likewise, the historic locations in Swat, abundant in Buddhist artifacts, remain vulnerable to illegal encroachment and neglect.

Even after the former tribal districts were incorporated into the province, these regions still do not have archaeology offices or inspectors, resulting in many unprotected sites being vulnerable to exploitation by smugglers and illegal excavators.

This lack of attention weakens KP's historical identity and reduces its capacity as a spot for cultural tourism. Around the world, heritage tourism is a booming sector that attracts millions of visitors to admire meticulously maintained historical sites. KP's unique cultural heritage could be a foundation for the province's economic development, but the damage to these locations undermines this possibility. Historical landmarks represent more than mere physical buildings; they are emblems of shared memory, reflecting past generations' battles, victories, and heritage. When destroyed, these sites signify a loss of identity and cut the bonds that link communities to their history.

Prompt measures are essential for safeguarding KP's heritage. Enhancing the enforcement of the Antiquities Act should be a significant focus, which involves setting up archaeology offices in each district, creating advisory committees as legally required, and ensuring consequences for wrongdoers. The provincial government should spearhead the establishment of a Heritage

Board, comprised of archaeologists, historians, engineers, and artists, to supervise preservation initiatives.

Public awareness plays a vital role in heritage preservation. By integrating heritage preservation into educational curricula, schools can inspire future generations to take on this responsibility. Additionally, fostering collaboration among government agencies, private organizations, and local communities can establish sustainable restoration methods for our invaluable historical sites.

Additionally, the government must acknowledge the economic potential of cultural tourism. By investing in preserving and promoting heritage sites, KP can attract tourists, stimulate the economy, and create jobs while maintaining its historical identity.

The history of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is not merely a relic of the past; it serves as a guiding light for the future. Preserving this legacy is the responsibility of everyone-policy makers, communities, and individuals alike. If we neglect to protect our heritage today, we will leave future generations with a cultural void, deprived of the stories that define who we are. It is imperative to take decisive action. Preserving KP's heritage transcends local significance; it is a matter of national importance. We must act as guardians of history, as we owe it to ourselves and those who follow to ensure that the echoes of our past continue to resonate in the present and beyond.

*Writer is a lawyer*





## In brief

### Drive against encroachments

SARGODHA (APP): A vigorous drive against encroachments is continuing across the district, aimed at restoring public spaces and ensuring the smooth flow of traffic and daily activities. Assistant Commissioner Sargodha Amina Ehsan Tarar led anti-encroachment efforts at Shaheen Chowk and Goal Chowk areas. She also conducted operations at key areas including Fawara Chowk, Lahore Road, Shaheen Abad road, and Bomb Chowk, successfully removing illegal encroachments. Similarly in Sillanwali under the supervision of Assistant Commissioner Jamshaid Khan, encroachments across the Tehsil were removed successfully. This was part of broader efforts to remove encroachments along Jhamera Road Road, Sobhaga, and Shah Nikdur. In Shahpur, Assistant Commissioner concerned led operations at Purana Bazaar Bazaar, clearing the area of illegal structures and vendors. Assistant Commissioner Bhalwal also supervised anti-encroachment actions, contributing to the city-wide effort. Assistant Commissioner Bhera led operations to clear encroachments from prominent areas such as Salam Road, Ali Road, MM Alam Road, and Urdu Market.

### Action against overloading

BAHAWALPUR (APP): Police took action against transport overloading, graffiti and begging in the district. Official sources in the Bahawalpur police said that on the directions of the District Police Officer, Bahawalpur, Asad Sarfaraz Khan, sub-divisional police officers and station house officers constituted teams within their jurisdiction to take action against suspects involved in transport overloading, graffiti and begging. They said that Bahawalpur police registered six FIRs over graffiti and arrested four suspects, adding that eight FIRs were lodged for transport overloading. They said that teams of several police stations had taken 34 beggars into custody and registered cases against them.

### Self-defence training

MULTAN (APP): The Women University Multan (WUM) Security Wing, in collaboration with the Civil Defense Department, conducted a one-day self-defence training session. The hands-on training was led by Inspector Imran, accompanied by female officers, and aimed at equipping the participants with essential self-defence skills to enhance personal safety and build self-confidence. Vice Chancellor Prof. Dr. Kalsoom Pracha graced the event as the chief guest. Addressing the participants, she emphasized the importance of self-defence for everyone, regardless of gender or location. "This training reflects our commitment to empowering women and ensuring their safety, enabling them to thrive and contribute positively to society," she said. The focal person for the training, Chief Security Officer Mr. Arfan Haider, along with the trainers, encouraged participants to not only utilize these skills for personal protection but also to train their peers and other young women in their communities. Registrar Prof. Dr. Mamoon Khan, faculty members, and administrative staff actively participated in the event.

# Yousafzai tribe vows to unite all Pukhtuns

## F.P. Report

LOWER DIR: Speakers at a function have announced to unite all Pukhtun tribes for raising collective voice for their rights. The function was arranged by the Yousafzai tribe at a local wedding hall in Timergara here on Sunday.

The Yousafzai tribal elders from Dir Lower, Dir Upper, Swat, Malakand, Bunir, Swabi and Shangla districts, political and social activists attended the function.

The event was addressed by Malik Jehan

fight for their rights.

The speakers congratulated Malik Jehan Alam Yousafzai for his election as chief of the Yousafzai Aalami Jirga and said that he had the power and capabilities to unite different tribes.

They said the Yousafzai elders would repeat the history of their forefathers including Malik Ahmad Khan Baba and others who defeated the Mughals and British within their limited resources. They said the history of Yousafzai was full of great achievements for the freedom struggle

with the Shura members of Afghan refugees at the Chakdara camp along with Anjuman Tajiran Khawaja Faizul Ghafoor and members of local Islahi Jirga here on Sunday.

Earlier, Mr Yousafzai held a detailed meeting with the 'Shura' members of the Afghan refugees during which he was informed about the issues faced by the camp inmates. He assured the shura members to take up the issues faced by the Afghanis regarding education, clean drinking water, students' visas and patients seeking



Alam, former provincial minister Malik Jehan Zeb, former MPA Malik Behram Khan, Ahmad Ali Khan from Swabi, Malik Barkat Khan, Malik Ibrahim Khan, Rehmat Shah Sail and others.

Earlier the newly elected president of Yousafzai Aalami Jirga Malik Jehan Alam was warmly received at Chakdara on his arrival to the district after the election; and he was brought to the event in a vehicular procession.

The speakers said that the people of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa had the right over the resources. They said that a proxy war was being waged in the Pukhtun belt under a planned conspiracy.

They said that Pukhtun would no longer tolerate any proxy war on their soil. The speakers said that all Pukhtun tribes would be united under a single banner so that they could

and the tribe would continue its efforts to win rights for all Pukhtun.

In the meantime, the sons of the famous social worker late Dr. Sultan Muhammad, who was from Nagri Bala Nora Khail, Hayat Muhammad, Haji Javed Muhammad, and Suleman Muhammad Umar Khail, congratulated everyone on the successful jirga organized by the osazi yousafzai tribe. Additionally, Suleman Muhammad expressed gratitude to the elders and youth of the Yusufzai tribe for their efforts in organizing a successful gathering.

Meanwhile, renowned social and human rights activist Ikramullah Yousafzai has said that state and citizens should make collective efforts to maintain brotherly relations with neighbouring Afghanistan. He was talking to local journalists after attending a meeting

medical treatment in Pakistan with the authorities of UNHCR and the government of Pakistan.

Ikramullah said that Pakistan and Afghanistan, both had decades-old friendly relations which should be maintained. He said that a peaceful Afghanistan was necessary for a peaceful Pakistan.

He said that people to people contacts were also essential for states bilateral relations. He said that both the states should cooperate with each other to keep the region safe.

Meanwhile, a private hospital set up a free medical camp for Afghan refugees at Chakdara during which expert doctors including gynecologist Dr Sara Ehsan, Dr Maryam, Dr Khalid, Dr Zahid Hussain and others checked patients. The patients were also provided with free medicines and laboratory services.



HYDERABAD: Girls riding motorbike through the city roads. — INP photo

## Dry weather causing diseases

SARGODHA (APP): The number of patients with viral diseases like flu, chest infection and pneumonia increased during the last month as government and private hospitals and clinics witnessed a rush of the patients especially infants and children.

According to the doctors, the current very cold weather is the causes of viral infections especially chest infection and fever in rural and urban parts of the Sargodha region.

Most of the patients especially children had contracted viral diseases like influenza, bronchitis, nasal allergy, asthma, soar throat, chest infection, pneumonia, dry cough and scabies. Flu-related diseases have caught a large number of people particularly children and infants as patients with such diseases are seen in great number at the government as well as private hospitals.

Child specialist Dr Abdul Jabbar told APP on Sunday the common cold and flu in children should not be taken lightly as these might lead to lower respiratory tract infections including pneumonia, while stressing the need to take additional care of the health of children in winter, adding that the parents

should dress their children in complete warm clothes.

"I also advised the parents not to overheat the children and just put on sweater and warm clothes as some times overheating is also not good for them." He said that one of the basic causes of various diseases is that people do not know how to safeguard their children. He said if proper care was not taken, complications such as ear and sinus infections, pneumonia and high fever might occur.

Dr Abdul Rehman, when contacted, said that most of the patients came here from the slum areas as the people complained that they could not keep their children warm because of electricity and gas load-shedding.

He said that severe cold and dry air may cause respiratory tract infections and as well trigger asthma among people of all age groups. "It is need of the time to create awareness among public regarding protection from infections," he said.

Dr Nasar Ranjha said that people should use green tea, coffee and tea to avoid viral infections. He said that people should pay more attention to the kind of shoes they wear. Shoes

should neither be too tight nor should they squeeze the toes; they should allow space for moving the toes but should not allow feet to be exposed to harsh weather, he said.

We should also avoid high heels daily and restrict them to occasional use, he stressed.

Dr Waqas Naeem, working in a government hospital, suggested that one should give one's feet a 30-second inspection daily to check for any peeling skin, unnatural moistness or to rule out any discoloration, redness, cracks or other abnormalities. Upon discovering any of the above-mentioned problems we should consult a doctor as soon as possible.

He said that foot care also depends on good posture. It is important to stand straight, with weight balanced on both feet and the toes pointing straight ahead. If sitting for long periods, ensure that you move your feet and ankles frequently to keep circulation active, he added.

To avoid diseases, experts suggest keeping the feet dry. Diabetics must take special care of their feet and in case they notice anything unusual they must consult a good doctor as soon as possible.



TIMERGARA: Participants of the Yousafzai tribe are listening to the speech of Malik Jahan Alam Khan Yousafzai newly elected chief of Yousafzai tribe at the jirga held in Tardoon Wedding Hall.

## Sindh govt will not compromise on single drop of Sindh's water

SUKKUR (APP): Spokesperson for the Sindh government and Mayor Sukkur Barrister Arslan Islam Shaikh has said that they will not compromise on even a single drop of Sindh's water.

Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah has formally raised this issue in the Council of Common Interests (CCI).

If the matter is not resolved through the CCI, the Pakistan People's Party is open to taking it to the constitutional court and even the court of public. This he said while addressing a press conference after inspecting the

lining and patching work of the Nara Canal. Deputy Commissioner Sukkur, Dr. MB Raja Dharejo, and Director Nara Canal, Ashfaq Noh Memon, were also present on the occasion.

He said that in line with the vision of President Asif Ali Zardari and Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, the work on patching and lining of 2 kilometers of Nara Canal is underway, which is being completed in a record time.

He said that an estimated cost of Rs 2.8 has been allocated for the project, and after the project is

completed, the capacity of Nara Canal will be increased from 13649 cusecs to 18000 cusecs.

The project, which began on January 7, 2025, aims to benefit 8-9 districts in Sindh and promote agriculture,' he added. He said that the goal is to complete the project by the first week of February, setting a record for swift completion. Once finished, the project will increase the capacity of the Nara Canal from 13649 cusecs to 18000 cusecs, ultimately boosting agricultural productivity in the region.

He added that within 21

days, 95% of the work has been completed, and the work will be completed and the canal will be opened by the first week of February.

He said that farmers from Khairpur, Naushahro Feroze, Nawabshah, Mirpur Khas, Sanghar, and Umerkot, among other districts, will benefit from this project.

Additionally, the growers of the tail-end areas will also gain advantages from this initiative. He said that, God willing the lining and patching of the 364-kilometer-long Nara Canal will also be launched in the future.

## Bengal tiger dies at Bahawalpur zoo

### F.P. Report

BAHAWALPUR (APP): A seven-year-old Bengal tiger, who was suffering from several diseases, died at Bahawalpur Zoo.

Curator of Bahawalpur Zoo, Dr. Usman Bukhari, confirmed that the Bengal tiger, who had been suffering from ailment for three to four years, had died at the zoo. "The tiger was ill and had stopped eating for last three days and died," he told media persons.

Dr. Bukhari said that the tiger had born at Bahawalpur Zoo in 2018 and it was seven-year-old when it died. He said that the Bengal tiger suffered cataract in its eye three years back and lost his one eye due to the disease. Later, the tiger suffered kidney and abdomen diseases. He had been suffering from kidney and abdomen diseases for the last few weeks, he said.

He said that a veterinary team of the Wildlife Department and Bahawalpur Zoo made hectic efforts for his recovery but in vain. He said that earlier, international non-governmental organizations working for animal rights were approached for cooperation for medical treatment of the Bengal tiger abroad.

Bukhari said that the body of the tiger was being shifted to Veterinary and Animal Sciences Department, Islamia University Bahawalpur, for postmortem.

## PFA discards expired food items

DG KHAN (APP): Punjab Food Authority raided a superstore in Kot Lal Eisan, recovering 40 kilograms of expired food items and 20 kilograms of banned Chinese salt.

The confiscated items, including expired dates, tea, and candies, were destroyed on the spot. The store was found in unhygienic condition, with dirt and pests contaminating storage areas, said official sources.

The authorities imposed a fine of Rs35,000 on the store owner for violating food safety regulations.

Officials stated that operations against sub-standard and prohibited items will continue to ensure public health and safety. Citizens were advised to avoid using Chinese salt due to its harmful effects.

## Punjab govt solving people's problems: Aoun

### F.P. Report

HAFIZABAD: Member Provincial Assembly, Punjab, Aoun Intisar Bhatti has said that the Punjab government led by Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif is taking all possible measures to address problems at their doorstep and upgrading living standard of masses in the province while the Punjab government is spending more than three billion of rupees for executing road sector development projects including reconstruction and habilitation of Lahore-Sargodha Road from Pindi Bhattian to Sukheki Mandi.

He expressed these views while talking to different delegations of people at Municipal Committee Sukheki Mandi, the other day. Former Chairman District Zakat Committee Hafizabad Nasrullah Khan Bhatti, ex-Member District Council Haji Ghulam Ali Bhatti, ex-Chairman MC Sukheki Mandi Ch. Nasir Qayyum Bhatti, ex-

Member MC Mallik Maqsood Ahmad and other workers of PMLN were also present on this occasion. MPA listened problems of people and assured them addressing of their grievances as soon as possible.

I desire to provide all basic needs of life to people of my constituency equal to Lahore, he expressed his determination.

Meanwhile, Deputy Commissioner Abdul Razzaq said that under 'Suthra Punjab Programme', work on cleanliness, renovation, construction of green belts and removal of encroachments is full swings besides construction of walking track in district complex for people.

He expressed these views while inspecting cleanliness work in different areas of the city and reviews standard and arrangements made for ensuring cleanliness in the city. He also checked ongoing operation against

encroachments in the city.

DC directed the officers of Municipal Committee and Solliid Waist Management Company to expedite cleanliness work in rural and urban areas to improve cleanliness in the district according to the expectations of people and Chief Minister of the Punjab Maryam Nawaz Sharif.

Meanwhile, Population Department Hafizabad arranged a special session at District Jail for creating awareness among jail inmates about adopting preventive measures to contain spread of AIDS and Hepatitis.

Addressing on this occasion, District Population Welfare Officer Atif Ali said that Population Welfare Department is holding special camps for treatment of mother and child and special measures are also being taken for better health of prisoners.

He said implementation on preventive measures was vital for saving people from AIDS and Hepatitis.

## Substandard corn seeds provided to farmers

### Anees Takar

CHARSADDA: The Agriculture Department officials exposed a fraud involving the distribution of substandard corn seeds and fertilizers among farmers in the flood-hit areas in Charsadda by NIDA Pakistan, a non-governmental organisation.

The scandal has left farmers devastated, costing them millions of rupees and jeopardizing their livelihoods.

Director of Agriculture Charsadda, Asar Khan, while addressing farmers in Nissata village, revealed that the NGO provided low-quality and expired

corn seeds along with substandard fertilizers to 96 farmers across eight union councils in Charsadda district. He said that these inputs were distributed for 768 kanals of agricultural land but failed to produce crops, resulting in significant losses for the farmers.

The farmers reported their grievances during training sessions organized by the Agriculture Department, stating that the seeds failed to germinate properly, and maize plants did not produce any yield. This led to a complete failure of their crops, wasting their time, effort, and money.

The Agriculture

Department investigated the matter and confronted the NGO, demanding an explanation from it. While the NGO admitted to its mistakes and pledged to be more cautious in the future, the damage to farmers' livelihoods remains irreparable.

Speaking on the occasion, Asar Khan emphasized the department's commitment to safeguarding the rights of farmers.

"We will not tolerate any exploitation of farmers. If anyone has complaints or concerns, they are welcome to approach the district office of the Agriculture Department for assistance," he added.

## Vice President Takht Nusrati Bar Association urges action against rising crime in karak

### Shafiuddin Shafqi

KARAK: Arshad Zaman Khattak Advocate, Vice President of the Takht Nusrati Tehsil Bar Association and member of the Central Committee of the Awami National Party, has expressed deep concern over the worsening law and order situation in Karak district. Highlighting the urgent need for improved security measures to combat rising criminal activities, he pointed out alarming trends such as kidnappings for ransom, extortion, murder, and acts of terrorism. He stated that recent months have witnessed a significant surge in these crimes, which has instilled widespread fear and anxiety among the local population. The Vice President of the Bar Association emphasized the need for local law enforcement agencies to take immediate and decisive action to curb criminal activities. He also stressed the importance of developing a comprehensive strategy to address the security challenges in the district and called on the police to intensify their efforts to maintain law and order effectively.





# Prosecutors indict impeached Yoon for insurrection



SEOUL (Aljazeera): South Korea's prosecutors have indicted impeached President Yoon Suk Yeol on charges of leading an insurrection with his short-lived imposition of martial law on December 3.

"The prosecution has decided to indict Yoon Suk Yeol, who is facing charges of being a ring-leader of insurrection," Democratic Party spokesman Han Min-soo told a news conference on Sunday.

"The punishment of the ringleader of insurrection now begins finally."

Under criminal investigation, he has been in custody since becoming the first sitting president to be arrested on January 15.

Yoon and his lawyers argued at a Constitutional Court hearing last week in his impeachment trial that he never intended to fully impose martial law but had only meant the measures as a warning to break political deadlock.

In parallel with his criminal process, the top court will determine whether to remove Yoon from office or reinstate his presidential powers, with 180 days to decide.

South Korea's opposition-led parliament impeached Yoon on December 14, making him the second conservative president to be impeached in the country.

Yoon rescinded his martial law after about six hours after legislators from the main opposition party, confronting soldiers in parliament, voted down the decree.

Soldiers equipped with rifles, body armour and night-vision equipment were seen entering the parliament building through smashed windows during the dramatic confrontation.

# Peru's disappeared: Dozens look for relatives lost to violence

AYACUCHO, Perú (AP) — The easiest thing might have been to let go. To refresh the flowers at her husband's grave and find comfort in retrieving his bones, a milestone in a country where 20,000 people disappeared between 1980 and 2000.

Lidia Flores chose a different path, though: to search for others who also went missing during Peru's most violent period.

"I can't stay calm when others, like I did, are crying," Flores said from her home in Ayacucho, a Peruvian city whose name translates as "nook of the dead" from the Quechua language.

Thousands more have disappeared thought Latin America under dictatorships, during armed conflicts or due to organized crime. Their wives, mothers and daughters have historically fought for justice, but Flores' case is distinctive because even after finding her husband's remains 40 years ago, her loss led her to commit to a greater cause.

For several years, she has presided over the National Association of Relatives of Detained and Disappeared Persons of Peru. Known for its Spanish initials, Anfasep, it was founded in 1983 and has about 140 members who advocate for truth and reparations.

"Sometimes I feel at ease, but then I wonder, why did this happen?" said Flores, who Peruvians rarely address by name. Most call her "mami" or "madrecita," an affectionate Spanish word derived from "mother," as if she cared for them all.

"I won't let go because I made a commitment," she added. "For as long as I live, I will demand justice for all and find out why my husband was killed."

Soon after Flores last saw him alive, Felipe Huamán was detained by members of the military dressed as civilians outside his house in July 1984. Flores found his remains a month later, guided by a stranger who saw a corpse matching his description.

Only days had passed since he was thrown down a hill, but stray dogs had gnawed at the remains. Flores took her 2-month-old baby out of her shawl, wrapped what was left of Huamán and climbed uphill, her baby in her arms, her husband's bones on her back.

She arrived at the prosecutor's office and requested a death certificate to bury him, but an official told her: "His body is not whole anymore. Throw him into the river or burn what's left of him and find

your peace." So she wrapped up the bones, went home and bribed a grave digger to bury Huamán at midnight, as she peeked and wept behind a tree.

Stories like hers are part of the aftermath of a brutal fight between the Peruvian government and the insurgency of Sendero Luminoso (or Shining Path), a Communist organization that claimed to seek social transformation through an armed revolution.

Founded in the 1970s by Abimael Guzman, the group turned violent a decade later. Older Peruvians still tell tales about donkeys strapped with explosives detonating in crowds, bombs placed under streetlamps to plunge cities into darkness and massacres that wiped out entire families.

The terror, though, was not merely unleashed by the insurgents. The armed forces were equally responsible for deaths and human rights violations.

Hundreds of men — many of them innocent — were captured by the military, often to face torture and execution. Others were slain and buried in mass graves by insurgents seeking to control communities by spreading fear.

Although hundreds of people have disappeared for other motives since then, the Truth Commission said this was the most violent period in Peru's history. More than 69,000 people are counted as "fatal victims" — about 20,000 classified as "disappeared" and the rest killed by insurgents or the military.

"In many ways, Peru is still dealing with the repercussions of the political violence from the late 20th century," said Miguel La Serna, a history professor at the University of North Carolina.

"Whole generations of adult men disappeared and that impacted the demographics in these communities. People moved out to escape the violence and some never returned," he added. "And that's to say nothing of the social, collective trauma that people experienced."

Those unsure of what happened to their relatives wandered the streets asking for clues and listened to radio news reports. Every time a discovery of remains was announced, they headed out to those locations and turned over corpses, hoping to spot a familiar face.

"Pig and dogs ate the bodies, but we got used to that," said Adelina García, whose 27-year-old husband, Zósimo Tenorio, disappeared in 1983. "I felt no disgust or fear."

The couple had just moved from a nearby town to flee the violence from Sendero Luminoso. They thought they would be safe in Ayacucho, where the armed forces patrolled the streets, but soon realized they were wrong.

"It was tough," García said. "Every night I thought: Tomorrow we won't wake up. Which of them will kill us? The insurgents or the military?"

She was sleeping when soldiers stormed into her home. They dragged Tenorio from their bed, called him a "terrorist" and took him away. They wrecked their belongings, stole their savings and hit García until she lay unconscious on the floor, next to her year-old crying child. "Even presidents have told us that it's been a long time and we should turn the page, but we can't do that," García said. "When a person dies, you hold a wake according to your religion, but for us, there's always a question: What if they're alive?"

After her husband vanished, a military captain told her that he was taken to Cabitos, an army base where a crematory oven was used to dispose of bodies and more than 130 people were executed. She could never corroborate it, though, so the search continues.

"My face might be wrinkled, but my heart is strong," García said. "I'll keep looking for justice and truth."

For relatives with missing loved ones, keeping a spiritual connection brings peace into their lives.

"I have faith in my dad," said Luyeva Yangali, who has prayed to her father, Fortunato, since he disappeared near Ayacucho in 1983. "I spoke to him at night as I did to God."

Her mother looked for him at first, but the family moved to Lima after the military tortured her for allegedly aiding insurgents and Yangali took over the task.

"I was 11 when my family was destroyed and we haven't recovered," Yangali said. "I think we never will."

Despite the work of forensic doctors, prosecutors and organizations like the International Committee of the Red Cross, only about 3,200 remains have been found. Some now fear that President Dina Boluarte might cut out the government's support to keep searching, but many others remain hopeful, watching a handful of Peruvians who finally had a chance to say goodbye.



OSWIECIM, POLAND: A view of the surveillance towers from a room of the House 88, the former residence of Auschwitz commandant, Rudolf Hoss on January 26, 2025 in Oswiecim, Poland. The house of the Auschwitz commandant during World War II, Rudolf Hoss, is opening to visitors for the first time. The house was the subject of the film "The Zone of Interest."

## Belarus strongman set to win a 7th term

MINSK (AP): The smiling face of President Alexander Lukashenko gazed out from campaign posters across Belarus on Sunday as the country held an orchestrated election virtually guaranteed to give the 70-year-old autocrat yet another term on top of his three decades in power.

"Needed!" the posters proclaim beneath a photo of Lukashenko, his hands clasped together. The phrase is what groups of voters responded in campaign videos after supposedly being asked if they wanted him to serve again.

But his opponents, many of whom are imprisoned or exiled abroad by his unrelenting crackdown on dissent and free speech, would disagree. They call the election a sham — much like the last one in 2020 that triggered months of protests that were unprecedented in the history of the country of 9 million people.

The crackdown saw more than 65,000 arrests, with thousands beaten, bringing condemnation and sanctions from the West.

His iron-fisted rule since 1994 — Lukashenko took office two years after the demise of the Soviet Union — earned him the nickname of "Europe's Last Dictator," relying on subsidies and political support from close ally Russia.

He let Moscow use his territory to invade Ukraine in 2022, and even hosts some of Russia's tactical nuclear weapons, but he still campaigned with the slogan "Peace and security," arguing he has saved Belarus from being drawn into war. "It's better to have a dictatorship like in Belarus than a democracy like Ukraine," Lukashenko said in his characteristic bluntness.

His reliance on support from Russian President Vladimir Putin — himself in office for a quarter-century — helped him survive the 2020 protests.

Observers believe Lukashenko feared a repeat of those mass demonstrations amid economic troubles and the fighting in Ukraine, and so scheduled the vote in January, when few would want to fill the streets again, rather than in August. He faces only token opposition.

"The trauma of the 2020 protests was so deep that Lukashenko this time decided not to take risks and opted for the most reliable option when balloting looks more like a special operation to retain power than an election," Belarusian political analyst Valery Karbalevich said.

Lukashenko repeatedly declared that he wasn't clinging to power and would "quietly and calmly hand it over to the new generation."

His 20-year-old son, Nikolai, traveled the country, giving interviews, signing autographs and playing piano at campaign events. His father hasn't mentioned his own health, even though he was seen having difficulty walking and occasionally spoke in a hoarse voice. "The successor issue only becomes relevant when a leader prepares to step down. But Lukashenko isn't going to leave," Karbalevich said.

# Brazil to demand explanations on 'degrading treatment' of deportees

SAO PAULO (Reuters): Brazil's Ministry of Foreign Affairs plans to seek explanations from the U.S. government over the "degrading treatment" of Brazilians on a deportation flight, the ministry wrote on X on Saturday night.

Last Friday, Brazilian deportees from the U.S. arrived in Brazil in handcuffs. Upon arrival, some of the passengers also reported mistreatment during the flight, according to local reports.

The plane, carrying 88 Brazilian passengers, 16 U.S. security agents, and eight crew members, was originally scheduled to arrive in Belo Horizonte in the southeastern state of Minas Gerais. However, it made an unscheduled stop in Manaus, the capital of Amazonas, due to technical problems, according to Brazil's Justice Ministry.



There, Brazilian officials ordered the removal of the handcuffs, and President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva designated a Brazilian Air Force (FAB) flight to complete their journey, the government said in a statement

Saturday.

The flight was the second this year from the U.S. carrying undocumented migrants deported back to Brazil and the first since U.S. President Donald Trump's inauguration, according to Brazil's feder-

al police.

Officials from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security and U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement contacted late on Saturday for comment did not immediately reply.

# Congo rebels close in on eastern city, forcing thousands to flee

GOMA, CONGO (Reuters): Rwandan-backed fighters closed in on eastern Congo's largest city of Goma on Sunday, forcing thousands of civilians to flee and grounding flights from the local airport as government forces battled to stop the rebels seizing the city.

The M23 rebel movement has made rapid advances this month in Democratic Republic of Congo's mineral-rich but conflict-riven eastern borderlands, raising fears that the fighting could spill over into a regional war.

The U.N. Security Council was due to meet a day earlier than planned on Sunday to discuss the crisis, diplomats said, after 3 U.N. peacekeepers - two South Africans and a Uruguayan - were killed.

Seven other South African soldiers and three from Malawi serving in a separate Southern African mission were also killed this week, South African and U.N. authorities said.

Three years into their current insurgency, the rebels, who the United Nations says receive backing from neighbouring Rwanda, now control more Congolese territory than ever before. Kigali denies supporting the group.

M23 fighters began moving on Goma, the capital of North Kivu province and home to about 1 million people, earlier this week and have vowed to seize the city.

Gunfire and artillery fire could be heard on the city's outskirts from early on Sunday, leading to panic in some areas, residents said.

By mid-afternoon, the rebels were approaching Goma's airport, two government soldiers said.

"We're at the Goma airport awaiting the attackers who are two or three km (1 to 2 miles) from here," one of the soldiers told Reuters.

Another Congolese military source, who asked not to be named, said government forces were "holding firm".

Officials at the airport said flights were no longer operating. The U.N. on Sunday told staff in Goma not to go to the airport and to stay sheltered.

Eastern Congo remains a tinder-box of rebel zones and militia fiefdoms in the wake of two successive regional wars stemming from Rwanda's 1994 genocide.

Well-trained and professionally armed, M23 - the latest in a long line of Tutsi-led rebel movements - says it exists to protect Congo's ethnic Tutsi population.

Congo's government, however, says the rebels are proxies for Kigali's expansionist ambitions in the region, an accusation the Rwandan government has long denied.

Congo severed all diplomatic ties with Rwanda amid this week's rebel offensive.

Congo's army said on Saturday Rwandan snipers were responsible for the killing of North Kivu's military governor on the front

line a day earlier.

A spokesperson for Rwanda's government did not respond to a request for comment.

Aid agencies are concerned about the conflict's impact on civilians, warning that the fighting will deepen what is already one of the world's worst humanitarian crises.

Several hundred thousand people had been forced to flee multiple zones of fighting since the latest M23 offensive began around Goma on Jan. 23, the office of the U.N. humanitarian coordinator said in a statement.

"Several sites on the outskirts of Goma, sheltering more than 300,000 displaced people, were completely emptied in the space of a few hours," the statement said.

The escalation in violence has forced the World Food Programme to temporarily pause emergency operations, its executive director said in a social media post on Sunday.

# Clear weather and drizzles expected for three days across UAE

ABU DHABI (Gulf Today): Rains are expected to fall on Monday, Tuesday and Thursday, according to the National Centre of Meteorology (NCM).

Monday's weather will be clear to partly cloudy and cloudy at times with a chance of drizzles on the islands and some coastal and northern areas, especially at night, but it will be humid at night and on Tuesday morning with a chance of fog or light fog over some inland areas. Light to moderate northwesterly to southwesterly winds will blow, turning to active at times offshore on Tuesday morning at 10 to 25 and up to 40 km/h, while the sea will have regular to moderate waves but may become rough at times in the Arabian Gulf compared to regular to moderate waves in the Sea of Oman.

Tuesday's weather will be clear to partly cloudy and cloudy at times with a chance of drizzles on the islands and some northern and coastal areas but will be humid at night and on Wednesday morning with a chance of fog or light fog over some inland areas.

Light to moderate northwesterly winds will blow, turning to active at times, especially offshore, at 15 to 25 and up to 40 km/h, while the sea will be rough to one of moderate waves in the Arabian Gulf compared to regular to moderate waves and rough at times in the Sea of Oman. Wednesday's weather will be clear to partly cloudy and cloudy at times in some northern areas but will be humid at night and on Thursday morning with a chance of fog or light fog over some inland areas.

Light to moderate northwesterly to northeasterly winds will blow, turning to active at times at 10 to 25 and up to 40 km/h, while the sea will have moderate to regular waves in the Arabian Gulf compared to rough to one of moderate waves in the Sea of Oman.

Thursday's weather is expected to be clear to partly cloudy and cloudy at times in the islands and some northern and eastern areas with a chance of rains but will be humid at night and on Friday morning with a chance of light fog over some inland areas.

Light to moderate northwesterly to northeasterly winds will blow, turning to active at times at 10 to 20 and up to 35 km/h, while the sea will have regular to moderate waves in the Arabian Gulf and the Sea of Oman.



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# AI has to be for everyone, not just ‘digital natives’

“HYPERCOGNITIVE”, “comfortable with collecting and cross-referencing many sources of information”, and capable of “integrating virtual and offline experiences”. These are just some of the epithets applied to the digital natives of Gen Z – those born between 1996 and 2010 who became the first generation to grow up with the internet, social media and smartphones.

These descriptions can be found in a report by US consultancy firm McKinsey and Company published in 2018, well before the increasing adoption of consumer-oriented artificial intelligence that is changing how companies do business, governments govern and scientists make new discoveries. Societies are reckoning with the shifting attitudes, demand and skillsets of humanity’s first – and growing – online generation, and they are now confronted by the powerful changes and opportunities presented by an AI that has truly left the computer lab behind is now a part of our everyday lives.

AI is impressive, complex and evolving. But it is not the stuff of science fiction any more. Last year’s announcement that US tech giant Microsoft is to invest \$1.5 billion in Abu Dhabi artificial intelligence and cloud company G42, the release of Falcon LLM – Abu Dhabi’s own large language model – and this week’s news that UAE-based technology fund MGX is involved in a \$500 billion plan to develop digital infrastructure in the US all indicate that AI isn’t going anywhere. If so, more people than ever will need to understand and use it – and as a consequence benefit from it.

This week, Abu Dhabi’s government launched its Digital Strategy 2025-2027 – this aims to transform the emirate into the world’s first fully AI-powered government by 2027. The programme will allocate Dh13 billion (\$3.5 billion) over the next two years to boosting digital infrastructure, automating government processes, and integrating sovereign cloud computing across all operations. The strategy is also expected to create more than 5,000 jobs.

Such a comprehensive embrace of AI means the lives of everyone who lives in the emirate will be touched by this digital revolution. The question now is how to make sure as many people as possible are au fait with such rapidly developing technology.

The rise of the internet and advanced technology over the past two decades has fuelled concerns about “digital literacy” – the ability of ordinary people to access, understand and use computers and online systems in their day-to-day lives. A 2023 report from the UN described digital literacy as being marred by a “great divide”. Although the speed of digitalisation in the past couple of decades has improved living standards and conditions in some parts of the world, the UN says, “groups of people are left outside of the current wave of innovations”.

As Unicef, the UN children’s charity puts it, this digital divide is not just about who has access to technology and who does not – “the gap also encompasses several other discrepancies, including the quality of digital infrastructure in rural communities, the speed of connectivity in remote areas, and the training and skills required to navigate such technology”.

It is notable therefore that Abu Dhabi’s approach to AI, one that has spent more than 10 years bringing together government, investors and universities, includes steps to make the technology as familiar and as accessible as possible. The new strategy emphasises citizen empowerment through AI training under the emirate’s AI for All programme – a commitment to the public that it will be part of the technological changes that are taking place.

Such steps to avoid an “AI divide” development are important.

This means including basic AI concepts in school education. A good example of this can be seen in this week’s news that the National Programme for Coders and Samsung Gulf Electronics have announced an expansion of their Galaxy AI Pioneers programme. This aims to bring AI education directly to classrooms across the country by training more than 4,000 students in Abu Dhabi and Dubai in AI-related skills such as coding, content creation and online safety.

But a comprehensive strategy also means making AI user friendly and effective. Gen Z may have a handle on such technology, but it shouldn’t be taken for granted that everyone is as comfortable in the online world. Truly making AI “for all” will be critical to its success.

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# When the symbols of Ukrainian resistance fade

Artem Chekh

Ukraine, a country whose sociocultural evolution reflects a blend of modern and traditional values, has always had a weakness for symbols. We have mastered the art of finding meaning where perhaps there is none, of seeing more than is there in reality.

And then the war with Russia gifted us with a whole host of new images: a Ukrainian tractor towing away a Russian tank embodied the heroism of farmers, while a kitchen cupboard left intact on the wall of a devastated building became an emblem of invincibility.

Then we had the collective figure of our fighter pilots known as the “Ghost of Kyiv”, the Russian warship Moskva, sunken by a stealth Ukrainian operation, and a shrapnel-pierced bust of the Ukrainian poet Taras Shevchenko, discovered in a small town outside Kyiv, to name just a few. At one time, they all seemed so important, so comforting in their ability to infuse the predictable consequences of war with a deeper meaning.

The first spring of the full-scale war intoxicated us with a desperate desire to be strong and indestructible. Everything became symbolic, from socks in shades of blue and yellow to the traditional braids of a girl inspecting car trunks at a checkpoint. The smallest details were reframed as an aesthetics of resistance, filling us with belief in our strength and invincibility. We created memes and invented symbols more quickly than we could incorporate them into our cultural code. We thought all this would save us. It probably did.

But all symbols have one thing in common – they die out over time. Just like the people who hold onto them, believe in them and live by them.

After the heroism of spring 2022 came summer, autumn, and winter. At some point, the terrible realisation dawned that we were in this for the long run. Ahead of us lay a huge amount of work, pain, torment and loss. We would lose loved ones, we would bury poets and filmmakers, we would grieve, then maybe argue, and, in the end, we would die. Not all of us. But some of us.

The roulette spins – red or black, life or death. You never know when the next missile will strike and who will be buried under the rubble. And you can’t calculate the trajectory of Russian rockets in order to take shelter in time either. It is a long game of survival.

We did not even notice when symbols started to fade, losing their significance and allure. A tractor towing away a tank? Give it a rest ... Now we speak about generators, blackouts and FPV drones, which are needed at the front on an industrial scale. A cupboard on a wall? It’s just a cupboard on a wall. As of mid-2024, Russia had destroyed or damaged more than 250,000 buildings. Every single one contained a cupboard – several, in fact. We’ve grown tired of gazing into the innards of obliterated apartments.

The Ghost of Kyiv? We’ve buried so many exceptional pilots who were living, breathing symbols. The warship Moskva? Over the past three years, we’ve sunk a third of the Russian Federation’s Black Sea Fleet, with the rest driven out of the Black Sea by the threat of our military capabilities.

As for me, I had some favourite symbols – or rather totems – of my own. I acquired one of them long before the first missiles flew

towards Kyiv one February night. It appeared in 2015, when I first took up arms to defend the territorial integrity of my country in the east.

Before leaving for the military training facility, I bought a metal mug with oranges painted on it at a Kyiv shopping centre. I grew to love that mug and foolishly took it with me everywhere, turning it into a fetish and imbuing it with special meaning.

It stayed with me throughout the 14 months I served in 2015–16, 10 of which were spent on the front line. It served me as no other object had ever served me before. Later, back in civilian life, I took it with me to the mountains, into the wilderness. For a long time, it served me in the studio where I worked as an artist.

And, of course, in early March 2022, I took it with me to the army. I told my brothers-in-arms stories about it, explaining its significance. My fellow soldiers knew how important this mug was and how much we had been through together, which is why, when we moved to a new position and I couldn’t find it, the entire unit rushed searching for it – for the mug that was so important to their commander.

In late spring 2023, when Bakhmut, which suffered one of the bloodiest battles of this large-scale war, finally bled to death and our troops, shaken, shell-shocked and spent, were withdrawing, my unit was thrown in as cover to distract the Russians from the forces leaving the city. We spent several days under constant fire with no prospect of reinforcements or leaving that trench that reeked of corpses.

When the order came to retreat, I abandoned every-

thing that could weigh me down, because we were facing a gruelling run over several kilometres under enemy bombardment and drones. There in that trench, scattered with the bodies of our soldiers and literally ploughed by shelling, I left my mug behind. My very own symbol of invincibility, my trusty totem, an heirloom my children will never inherit.

It was a shame. But the fractional increase in my chances of survival was more important. My life was more important to me than some ordinary household item, no matter how much symbolism I had invested in it.

Symbols die when drudgery sets in and heroism becomes routine. Fatigue has blurred the boundary between horror and habit. Over the past 18 months or so, it seems not a single new symbol has emerged. The number of memes and topical cartoons has drastically decreased.

We have finally grown tired of this military fervour, just as we have grown tired of this endless war. We have even grown tired of ourselves. And that is not a bad thing. People cannot live in a constant state of upheaval. We have become pragmatic and rational. We are the only symbols that we have.

Every person who remains unbroken, who carries on working and contributing, who holds the front line with every last ounce of strength, who donates every last penny to buy drones and off-road vehicles, who sources medical equipment across the globe, who tries to live their life in spite of everything. We are the symbols: Worn-out like old winter coats, but real.

We are the people who just carry on living and fighting.

# Trump seizes the initiative with ultimatum on Ukraine

Luke Coffey

During a presidential debate in Philadelphia last September with Vice President Kamala Harris, Donald Trump made a bold prediction about Ukraine. In response to a question from the moderator, Trump said: “That is a war that’s dying to be settled. I will get it settled before I even become president.” He also frequently claimed that he could end the war within 24 hours of entering the Oval Office.

However, since winning the presidential election in early November, Trump has changed his tone quite a bit on the issue of Ukraine. He even acknowledged that the situation is more complex and harder than he had originally thought, suggesting it could be even more difficult than brokering a ceasefire between Israel and Hamas.

While speaking to the press in the Oval Office on the evening of Jan. 20, the first day of his second term, Trump was asked if he could still meet his one-day deadline to bring the war to an end. He joked with journalists that he still had “half a day” left to achieve this.

It is clear that much of what Trump said over the past year was purely for the campaign trail. It is likely he never truly believed he could end the war quickly, and the conflict would have to be taken seriously, a point underscored by the people he has appointed to work on this issue. While in other government departments, such as the Department of Justice, Department of Health and Human Services, and the FBI, Trump has selected unconventional and unorthodox leaders, he has chosen more traditional and

orthodox appointees for his national security adviser, secretary of state, and special envoy for Ukraine and Russia. When it comes to Ukraine, two themes have already emerged from the second Trump administration. First, there is a recognition that resolving Russia’s invasion of Ukraine will take far longer than many around Trump expected. This has been made clear through public statements by senior Trump appointees, and by Trump’s directive giving his special envoy for Ukraine and Russia, Keith Kellogg, a retired lieutenant general, 100 days to find a solution to the war.

Second, and more surprisingly, Trump and his appointees have been more instinctively sympathetic to Ukraine’s position in the conflict. This has come as a surprise to many, especially given the perception that some vocal Trump supporters in the media have parroted Kremlin talking points about Ukraine. Kellogg has publicly supported the continuation of military aid to Kyiv. Pete Hegseth, Trump’s nominee for defense secretary, said during his confirmation hearing: “We know who the aggressor is. We know who the good guy is. We’d like to see (the resolution of the war be) as advantageous for the Ukrainians as possible.” Robert Wilkie, head of Trump’s Pentagon transition team, told the BBC in a recent interview that the president will tell Putin to stop the war in Ukraine or “we’ll give Zelenskyy everything he needs.”

Trump himself has also placed significant blame on

Moscow. In a message to the Kremlin posted on social media this week, he said: “I’m going to do Russia, whose economy is failing, and President Putin, a very big favor. Settle now, and stop this ridiculous war.” He demanded that Russia agree to a deal to end the conflict, suggesting that Moscow was the primary obstacle to progress. After threatening further economic sanctions and tariffs targeting Russia, Trump said: “We can do it the easy way, or the hard way — and the easy way is always better.”

This ultimatum from the US president to his Russian counterpart has placed Moscow in a difficult position. Some commentators and Russian media outlets have already expressed regret that Joe Biden is no longer in the White House. Meanwhile, while the situation remains dire for Ukraine on the front lines, there are reasons for optimism. President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has played his political cards well. While it was fashionable for Western leaders to criticize Trump over the summer, Zelenskyy continued to engage with Trump’s inner circle, securing a key meeting in late September in New York. Within 24 hours of Trump’s election victory, the two leaders spoke by phone. On a personal level, the two seem to get along well.

Also, six months after their audacious intervention into Russia’s Kursk region, the Ukrainians have successfully repelled multiple Russian counterattacks, some involving soldiers from North Korea. Kyiv’s ability

to hold territory inside Russia provides valuable leverage for any future negotiations. Zelenskyy worked tirelessly on the international stage, particularly with countries from the Global South, to craft a fair and just peace plan. Multiple Ukrainian-led peace summits have been held in locations such as Saudi Arabia, Malta, and Switzerland, with participation from dozens of nations. Meanwhile, Russia has struggled to secure meaningful support or consensus at international forums, including the recent BRICS summit in Kazan. Ukrainian diplomacy is paying off, framing the groundwork for potential future talks.

So, what comes next? There is no denying that Trump is sincere in his desire to end the war. The big question is how he will achieve this. Although US foreign aid has been suspended for 90 days pending further review by the new administration, it has been clarified that this does not apply to military aid for Ukraine. Open-source intelligence indicates that US cargo planes, presumably filled with aid for Ukraine, have landed at a Polish airfield near the Ukrainian border. For now, Trump has adopted a position of arming Ukraine, while pressuring Russia. Ultimately, Trump aims to appear competent and strong on the global stage. He understands that any resolution to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine that leaves Ukraine weaker or more vulnerable will be seen as a Russian victory and an American defeat. One week into the Trump administration, there is cause for cautious optimism on Ukraine. So far, so good.

# Saudi Arabia’s emergence as a global sports capital is a winning strategy

Dr. Azeem Ibrahim

At the World Economic Forum in Davos this week, Saudi Arabia’s minister of tourism delivered a compelling presentation about the Kingdom’s Vision 2030 agenda, including the ambitious goal of attracting 150 million visitors each year, up from the current 100 million.

This vision for national development, championed by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, underscores the country’s strategic pivot from being an oil-dependent economy to a diversified global hub for tourism, culture, and sport.

While the targets might have initially seemed overly ambitious, Saudi Arabia is proving the skeptics wrong by rapidly emerging as a global sports capital. This transformation represents not only an economic opportunity but also a significant expansion of Saudi soft power.

**Saudia has embraced this concept by using sport to help bridge divides and promote regional stability. For example, the Kingdom’s investment in football has attracted players and fans from around the globe, creating opportunities for cultural exchanges and mutual understanding. Similarly, by hosting international events it helps foster dialogue and collaboration among participating nations, positioning the country as a mediator and stabilizing force in the region. Saudia’s efforts present an unprecedented opportunity to reshape global perceptions and establish itself as a leader in the sports and tourism industries.**

Central to Vision 2030 is the recognition that traditional marketing efforts, such as travel magazine advertisements, are insufficient to reposition the country as a global destination.

Instead, the Kingdom has adopted a more dynamic strategy, leveraging the power of major sporting events to showcase its offerings to the world.

By hosting prestigious tournaments in golf, football, and other sports, Saudi Arabia has created a platform through which international audiences can experience firsthand the nation’s rich cultural heritage, modern infrastructure, and breathtaking natural landscapes.

This strategy aligns with a broader global trend in which sport is increasingly used as a tool for diplomacy and economic growth. What sets Saudi Arabia apart, however, is the scale of its investment and its ability to fund these events at a time when many of the traditional hosts in Europe and North America are struggling to justify the enormous costs involved.

Hosting these events is not only a matter of the prestige they bring, it is a calculated move to attract visitors, foster international partnerships, and promote cultural exchanges.

For decades, Saudi Arabia has been perceived by much of the world as an enigma: a land of vast deserts and oil wealth, shrouded in mystery. This perception belies the Kingdom’s rich history, diverse culture, and unmatched natural beauty. From the archaeological treasures of AlUla to the futuristic megacity of NEOM, the nation offers a blend of tradition and innovation that few countries can match.

By hosting global sporting events, Saudi Arabia aims to dismantle outdated stereotypes and reintroduce itself to the world. The strategy is straightforward yet ingenious: bring the world to Saudi Arabia and let visitors experience its transformation firsthand.

Events such as the Saudi International golf tournament and the Formula E motor racing championship, along with developments such as high-profile signings of major global football stars by Saudi Pro League teams, have already begun to shift perceptions. As fans and athletes share their experiences in the Kingdom, a more nuanced and positive narrative about Saudi Arabia is emerging.

But hosting large sporting events is not only a matter of national pride, it is a calculated economic strategy.

These events generate significant revenue through tourism, broadcasting rights, and sponsorship deals while creating thousands of jobs in hospitality, infrastructure, and event management.

Saudi Arabia’s investments in sports infrastructure, such as the construction of state-of-the-art stadiums and training facilities, further reinforce its commitment to become a global sports hub.

Additionally, the Kingdom’s willingness to invest billions in securing hosting rights for events, such as the Asian Winter Games in 2029 and its successful bid for the 2034 FIFA World Cup, underscores its financial muscle and long-term vision.

This level of investment is becoming increasingly rare in the countries that have traditionally hosted such events, many of which are grappling with tough

economic constraints. Saudi Arabia’s ability to fill this void positions it as a key player in the global sports landscape.

Beyond economics, sport plays a pivotal role in the Kingdom’s broader diplomatic strategy. Sports have a unique ability to transcend linguistic, national, and cultural boundaries, fostering dialogue and understanding among diverse groups. This power has been demonstrated throughout history, from the idea of “ping pong diplomacy” that thawed relations between the US and China in the 1970s to the role of the Olympics in promoting international cooperation.

Saudi Arabia has embraced this concept by using sport to help bridge divides and promote regional stability. For example, the Kingdom’s investment in football has attracted players and fans from around the globe, creating opportunities for cultural exchanges and mutual understanding. Similarly, by hosting international events it helps foster dialogue and collaboration among participating nations, positioning the country as a mediator and stabilizing force in the region.

Saudi Arabia’s efforts present an unprecedented opportunity to reshape global perceptions and establish itself as a leader in the sports and tourism industries. By hosting inclusive and sustainable events, the Kingdom can set new standards for the way in which major international sporting events are organized and carried out.

Under the leadership of King Salman and Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, Saudi Arabia is undergoing a transformation that few could have anticipated even a decade ago. The emergence of the Kingdom as a global sports capital is not merely a reflection of its financial resources but a testament to its vision and ambition.

By leveraging the power of sports to attract visitors, foster diplomacy, and showcase its cultural and natural treasures, Saudi Arabia is redefining its role on the global stage.

As Vision 2030 continues to unfold, the country is poised to become a major player in the international sports arena, in the process setting an example for the ways in which nations can use sport as a catalyst for economic growth, cultural exchange, and global influence. For a country once known primarily for its oil, this marks the beginning of a new chapter, one in which sport plays a central role in shaping its very identity and future.



# The guns have fallen silent in Gaza — but for how long?

Those few hours last Sunday when the start of ceasefire between Israel and Hamas was delayed were nerve-wracking. Would something go wrong again, and the firing resume as people caught a glimpse of light at the end of a long and very dark tunnel? When the truce eventually began after a two-and-a-half-hour delay that felt like two-and-a-half days, there was great relief, but this was coupled with the realization that bringing this horrific 15-month war to a complete end is going to be neither easy nor straightforward.

The understandable total distrust between the two sides is a major factor that will hinder any attempts to progress from this point, or even to adhere to the terms of the first phase of the ceasefire. Both sides are operating on the supposition that despite this agreement, each is still committed to annihilate the other. Moreover, this truce is not the result of an organic process within both leaderships that concluded that they had nothing to gain from continuing the war, but was more the case of a ceasefire externally encouraged — more accurately imposed — by the main mediators. Consequently, there is a genuine fear of insufficient commitment on the part of the warring sides to go through the entire process of ending the war. Instead, we can expect both sides to test each other's intentions, resolve, and patience every step of the way.

While the terms of the deal were hammered out with the help of the Qatari, Egyptian, and US mediators during the Biden administration, it was Donald Trump's arrival on the scene that made the difference. After all, a similar agreement was already on the table in December 2023, according to some, but as outgoing US Secretary of State Antony Blinken admitted, Biden

was not prepared to use his country's levers of power to persuade Israeli leader Benjamin Netanyahu to accept it. Trump, on the other hand, badly wanted it done and dusted before he entered the White House, and leaned on Netanyahu to get a result. What is frustrating and heart-wrenching is to imagine how many lives could have been saved, and how much suffering could have been spared had Washington taken this approach back then.

In this complex conflict, the role the US played,

***The stuttering start of the first phase, and the rather scarce details about what has been agreed on regarding the second phase, let alone the third phase, is creating room for those who want to derail further progress toward ending this war and who oppose the reconstruction of Gaza. Yet, the agreement leaves some hope for establishing a momentum. The first phase has now been achieved with minimum hiccups, a pause in the fighting, the release of the first group of Israeli hostages and of Palestinian prisoners, the entry into Gaza of hundreds of lorries carrying humanitarian aid, and the slow return of displaced Palestinians to their homes. Such hopeful signs should not lead to the expectation that negotiations on the second phase, which are set to start on the 16th day of the ceasefire, and which will aim to agree on ending the war and returning of the rest of the hostages, are guaranteed to proceed, let alone bound to have a positive conclusion.***

together with the regional mediators, is a crucial lesson on who was able to make a difference by at least bringing about a truce, and they will have to do more to maintain the momentum. While there are doubts about each side's commitment to this agreement, the mediators, like the rest of the international community, should remain highly vigilant and ensure that the conditions of the three-phase deal are followed to the letter. Adding to the complexity of this entire process is the discrepancy between what the

Yossi Mekelberg

public in Israel and Palestine wish to see happen and what best serves their leaderships' survival.

Recent history has shown that Netanyahu's hold on power depends on maintaining and manipulating constant division and malaise within Israeli society, and keeping at least one conflict alive, albeit on the back burner. And, while in Israel's domestic politics there is never a shortage of contentious issues, after ceasefires were agreed with Hezbollah in Lebanon and

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The fragility of this agreement derives also from the weakness of both political systems involved. In response to Netanyahu's signing the deal, the Otzma

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# Growth is key to closing the ‘Africa Gap’

Africa, a continent abundant in natural resources and human capital, should theoretically be fertile ground for economic dynamism. Yet it grapples with profound challenges that perpetuate what has come to be known as the “Africa Gap.”

This economic disparity between Africa and the rest of the world is reflected in metrics, such as purchasing power parity and gross domestic product per capita, both of which lag significantly behind other regions.

Despite making remarkable strides, and a burgeoning youth population with increasing political agency, Africa's economies have not experienced the kind of transformative growth needed to close this gap.

The effects are daunting: By 2030, Africans are expected to constitute more than 80 percent of the world's poor. The urgent need to address this growing inequality is amplified by the potential socioeconomic unrest and climate vulnerabilities that accompany such stagnation.

Africa's staggering population increase presents an unparalleled opportunity for economic acceleration, if harnessed effectively. By 2070, the population of the continent is expected to double once more, solidifying its status as home to a significant proportion of the global population.

This burgeoning demographic, predominantly young and increasingly educated, holds the potential to drive transformative economic growth. For instance, average life expectancy has increased from 41 to 64 years since 1960, and university attendance has risen nine-fold since the 1970s.

Yet this demographic dividend remains at risk of being squandered if economies fail to evolve in tandem. Currently, Africa's GDP per capita, adjusted for purchasing power parity, is merely a quarter of the global average, and the region faces a growing economic disparity with East Asia, where average incomes are seven times higher.

The continent must therefore capitalize on its youthful demographic, which requires the creation of robust, dynamic private

sectors and the implementation of effective governance to usher in an era of entrepreneurial vigor and reform.

At a foundational level, however, African economies have historically leaned heavily on statist models characterized by protectionist barriers and an overreliance on commodities exports, which has hindered growth and made them acutely vulnerable to global price shocks.

For example, the heavy dependence on oil in countries such as Nigeria and Angola has led to punishing economic vulnerability, as a sudden fall in oil prices can cause significant fiscal deficits and economic instability.

***Without a shift away from these entrenched and stultifying economic strategies, the promises of resilience and equitable growth will remain out of reach. Additionally, infrastructure development must form part of a foundational strategy for bridging the economic divide between Africa and the rest of the world, yet it must be approached without the entanglements of crippling debt or onerous conditions. For too long, African nations have struggled under the burden of inadequate roads, unreliable power supplies, and limited technological access. The power of infrastructure to ignite economic transformation can be seen in the rapid ascent of China, where strategic investment in transport, energy, and telecommunications fueled unprecedented growth and lifted millions out of poverty.***

Meanwhile, although it accounts for a mere 2 percent of global economic activity, sub-Saharan Africa is home to a staggering 14 percent of the world's population, highlighting a severe imbalance and inefficiency within its economies.

Trade patterns in the region further illustrate these challenges, with intraregional trade accounting for a paltry 17 percent of total trade, compared with 69 percent in Europe.

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Africa stands at a similar threshold; by prioritizing robust infrastructure, the

can attract foreign investment and spur economic prosperity.

In contrast, nations marred by political tumult and opaque governance face stagnation. By promoting the principles of transparency and accountability, the continent can not only build trust but also ensure that scarce resources are efficiently allocated to key priorities.

Next, education and skills development are also essential requirements to help bridge the “Africa Gap” and harness this demographic dividend. Children in Africa are five times less likely to learn basic literacy and numeracy skills compared with their global counterparts,

which means millions are ill-prepared for a modern economy. This educational shortfall directly impairs economic productivity and innovation. The disparity in foundational education, for example, has hampered the employability and entrepreneurial potential of African youth, particularly in rural and conflict-affected areas where access to quality education remains severely limited.

Transformative initiatives, such as the African Union's youth-led manifesto and the World Bank's various educational programs, aim to reimagine education by focusing on inclusive, equitable, and skills-oriented learning. These efforts are designed to address the immediate needs of young people and align their capabilities with the evolving demands of

Yehudit party, which called it a “reckless deal” and a “surrender to terrorism,” quit the coalition with much fanfare and thereby left the government with a majority of just two in the Knesset. Its sister party, Zionist Religious, decided to vote in favor of the deal, but only after bemoaning how dangerous it is, and stayed in government, but it is still threatening to jump ship should the second phase of negotiations entail an end to the war.

As a result, the entire three-phase agreement has been left hanging by a thread. Can Netanyahu afford to lose his majority in the Knesset, which might lead to a general election he is unlikely to win? He would not like that in the middle of his corruption trial. To see out at least the first two phases of the deal, he can rely on the support of most opposition parties, but not necessarily for the full term of this Knesset which expires at the end of 2026. It is highly unlikely that Netanyahu could ever recover his low standing in the polls by claiming victory in Gaza when Hamas, despite the heavy losses it has sustained, still seems to govern the enclave, and it is even less likely that he will be given credit for the return of the hostages, whose ordeal he not only failed to prevent in the first place, but then for so many months blocked a ceasefire that would have seen their release.

This leaves the possibility for Netanyahu to look for the first opportunity to resume the war in Gaza, and by that bring Itamar Ben-Gvir, the former national security minister, back into government — a genuine option. For Trump, this will be an early test for his second administration and its commitment to end wars, leaving Netanyahu to face once again the choice between the stability of his coalition or falling out with Israel's first and foremost international backer.

the 21st-century job market.

Indeed, analogous to the transformative impact of India's focus on engineering and technical education that fueled its IT sector boom, Africa's economic resurgence hinges on strategic investment in, and the redesign of, educational systems to create a skilled and innovative workforce.

Lastly, regional integration, an elusive yet must-achieve milestone for the continent, stands as the keystone in efforts to bridge the “Africa Gap.” The African Continental Free Trade Area, which has been ratified by 48 out of 55 member states, envisions a unified market to bolster intra-African trade, challenge economic dependency, and dismantle the historic balkanization of the continent's economies. As more states align with the organization's tariff-reduction schedules, a transformative landscape with robust intra-African supply chains can emerge.

Within the East African Community, the example set by Kenya, which unilaterally liberalized rules on imports from its neighbors, demonstrates a pathway for regional heavyweights such as Nigeria and South Africa to spur similar growth by adopting more liberal import regimes. As a consequence of such a move, the continent's collective bargaining power on the global stage could significantly strengthen, mitigating dependency on external markets while amplifying Africa's economic sovereignty.

Closing the “Africa Gap” necessitates a multifaceted approach that prioritizes growth, free-market principles, infrastructure development, education, political stability, environmental sustainability, and regional cooperation.

By adopting policies that encourage economic freedom and innovation, Africa can tap into its potential, contributing not only to its own prosperity but to global economic stability and environmental sustainability.

As the continent stands on the precipice of change, the path to an economic renaissance is clear: embrace growth as the engine to drive forward a better collective future.

# US-Saudi ties set for new chapter in Trump’s 2nd term

Following Donald Trump's victory in the 2024 US presidential election, Saudi Arabia moved swiftly to reinforce its diplomatic ties through multiple channels. King Salman's congratulatory message highlighted “the excellence of the historic close relations between the two friendly countries and peoples.” The Saudi monarch emphasized the shared commitment to “strengthen and develop them in all fields.”

The diplomatic outreach continued as Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman personally called Trump to convey his congratulations. During the call, the crown prince emphasized “Saudi Arabia's aspiration to strengthen the historical and strategic relations between the two countries.” Responding to these warm sentiments, Trump expressed gratitude to the crown prince for his congratulations and acknowledged his goodwill toward the American people.

Beyond traditional diplomatic exchanges, Saudi Arabia demonstrated its pragmatic approach through informal channels. On Nov. 17, social media buzzed with images and footage of Yasir Al-Rumayyan, the governor of Saudi Arabia's Public Investment Fund, at UFC 309 in New York in the company of President-elect Trump and his newly appointed government efficiency czar Elon Musk.

This high-profile gathering, which also included several other key figures, signaled Riyadh's sophisticated approach to relationship building. By engaging with Trump's inner circle in casual settings, Saudi Arabia demonstrated its commitment to establishing personal connections with influential members of the incoming administration.

Saudi Arabia's current proactive diplomatic approach builds upon decades of US-Saudi relations. The Kingdom pursues a strategy aimed at creating resilient ties that can withstand shifts between Democratic and Republican administrations. This approach operates on two tracks: first, by deepening institutional cooperation between the two governments and, second, by cultivating broad networks among American political, economic and intellectual leaders. Through transparent engagement and emphasis on shared interests, Saudi Arabia works to steadily strengthen these relationships, while developing mechanisms to address any points of disagreement between the nations.

During Monday's inauguration of President Trump, Princess Reema bint Bandar, Saudi Arabia's ambassador to the US, highlighted the enduring bond between the two nations. She emphasized the deep historical ties spanning eight decades, noting how their strategic partnership has enhanced regional stability and security, while successfully navigating various political and economic challenges. The ambassador reaffirmed Saudi Arabia's commitment to continued collaboration with the US, stressing their shared goal of advancing the well-being of both peoples, the region and the global community.

In an interview with Al-Arabiya last October, then-presidential candidate Trump expressed his intention to collaborate with the crown prince on regional peace initiatives. Trump dubbed the Saudi leader a “visionary.” He commended the crown prince's achievements, saying that “he has done things that nobody else would have even thought about.” He said he is a “great guy” and lauded his approach to leadership.

Trump's laudatory remarks signal a clear diplomatic overture to Riyadh, indicating his readiness to cultivate stronger bilateral ties during his administration. By offering such explicit praise, he seeks to differentiate his approach from the more contentious stance adopted by Democrats, particularly contrasting with President Joe Biden's initial critical rhetoric toward the Kingdom during his campaign and early tenure.

Saudi Economy Minister Faisal Al-Ibrahim has emphasized the Kingdom's willingness to maintain continuity in Saudi-US cooperation, while expressing readiness to address global economic challenges alongside Trump's administration, especially the economic growth slow-

Hassan Al-Mustafa

down affecting the international community.

This economic focus reflects Riyadh's strategic assessment of Trump's business-oriented approach and his priorities: tackling US inflation, boosting employment, enhancing income levels, managing Chinese trade competition and navigating EU economic relations. The Kingdom aims to leverage economic cooperation as a primary channel for engaging with the incoming administration, viewing it as a pathway to secure advanced technology transfers and attract the foreign investment crucial for achieving the objectives of Vision 2030.

While economic engagement offers significant opportunities, it also presents potential areas of tension due to divergent priorities between Saudi Arabia and the incoming US administration. The Kingdom's critical infrastructure, while a pillar of Saudi foreign policy aimed at preventing military escalation in the Gulf region, has been articulated by Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan during the World

***Riyadh has established clear conditions for joining the Abraham Accords, centered on securing a verifiable pathway to peace that explicitly guarantees Palestinian statehood. This stance is interlinked with other Saudi priorities, including a US defense pact, civilian nuclear program development and additional bilateral agreements under discussion. The trajectory of Trump's approach to the two-state solution remains uncertain, with his administration's position on these fundamental issues likely to emerge in the early stages of his presidency. The scope of Middle East peace extends beyond the Palestinian issue, encompassing the complex Saudi-Iranian relationship, which saw notable improvement following the March 2023 Beijing Agreement. Through this diplomatic breakthrough, Riyadh aimed to establish a framework for managing bilateral tensions with Tehran, while seeking to curtail Iranian support for militant groups operating within Saudi territory and potential threats to the Kingdom's critical infrastructure.***

and the US. Trump's proposed policies — including new tariffs on Chinese exports, potential trade restrictions on EU and Canadian goods, expanded domestic oil exploration and economic pressure on China and Russia — may conflict with Saudi Arabia's existing international partnerships. The Kingdom maintains substantial trade and energy relationships with China, India, Russia and the EU, with China serving as its primary oil customer. Additionally, Trump's support for increased US oil production, aimed at lowering energy prices, could undermine Saudi Arabia's fiscal objectives by pushing oil prices below the Kingdom's budgetary targets.

These details are extremely important and influential, not just in Saudi-US relations but also in the latter's relations with the entire world.

The Middle East peace process represents another domain where Saudi-US engagement may simultaneously foster collaboration and reveal policy differences. The Kingdom advocates for a comprehensive peace framework grounded in ending Israeli actions against Palestinians, upholding international legal standards and establishing Palestinian sovereignty.

The crown prince has articulated this position unequivocally, declaring the Palestinian issue as Saudi Arabia's primary regional concern. He has firmly stated that the Kingdom's diplomatic recognition of Israel remains contingent upon the establishment of an independent Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital.

Meanwhile, President Trump has his own vision, this week saying that “I think Saudi Arabia will end up being in the Abraham accords.”

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The Saudi-Iranian diplomatic thaw, despite proceeding with measured caution, represents a strategic pillar of Saudi foreign policy aimed at preventing military escalation in the Gulf region. This position was articulated by Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan during the World

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Economic Forum annual summit in Davos, Switzerland, this week. He underscored Saudi Arabia's commitment to regional conflict prevention, while calling for constructive Iranian engagement in the Gaza ceasefire process. He also expressed confidence that the incoming US administration would not heighten regional military tensions.

Prince Faisal's remarks reflect Saudi Arabia's nuanced understanding of the complex dynamics between Washington and Tehran. His address acknowledged that progress in US-Iranian relations requires a pragmatic approach rooted in meaningful dialogue to address multiple interconnected challenges: Iran's nuclear program, its ballistic missile development and broader regional security concerns affecting both the Arab Gulf states and the wider Middle East. The foreign minister's message emphasizes Saudi Arabia's conviction that diplomatic engagement, rather than military confrontation, remains the most viable path forward in resolving these critical issues.

Despite Trump's rhetoric about potential military action against Iran — a stance aligned with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's preferences — his administration is likely to prioritize economic leverage over military confrontation. This approach would revive the “maximum pressure” strategy, using economic tools to extract concessions from Tehran. Such compromises, while politically costly for Iran, could prove essential in mitigating the regional instability stemming from the aftermath of the conflicts in Gaza and Lebanon.

Saudi Arabia aims to cultivate constructive engagement with the Trump administration while maintaining its strategic autonomy. The Kingdom will pursue this collaboration without compromising its core economic and political interests, its relationships with major powers like China and Russia or its fundamental prerequisites for normalizing relations with Israel. Drawing on its diplomatic experience, Riyadh possesses the capability to navigate these complexities through pragmatic solutions, trust-building initiatives and win-win proposals that advance mutual interests without generating friction with the incoming White House administration.





# Engro Fertilizers setup Markaz Centres

## F.P. Report

LAHORE: To support the government's efforts in ensuring the availability of high-quality fertilizers at official prices, Engro Fertilizers has inaugurated a Markaz Centre in Muridke. With this addition, the Company now operates four Markaz Centres in Muridke, Bahawalpur, Sargodha, and Sahiwal, benefiting farmers across these regions.

Rana Tanveer Hussain, Federal Minister for Industries & Production, and National Food Security & Research, graced the launch event of the Markaz Centre as the chief guest. The event was also attend-

ed by National Food Security & Research officials, provincial administrators, senior members of the farming community and Engro Fertilizers officials.

Addressing the gathering, Federal Minister Rana Tanveer Hussain reiterated the Government's commitment to the growth of Pakistan's agriculture sector and improving the livelihoods of farmers. He said that the Government and fertilizer industry are working together to ensure uninterrupted availability of fertilizers at controlled prices for the farmers.

He appreciated Engro Fertilizers for supporting the Government's initiative of setting up Markaz

Centres in various districts to help curb hoarding and price manipulation by intermediaries.

Speaking at the occasion, Ali Rathore, CEO of Engro Fertilizers, lauded the Government's focus on development of the agriculture sector and well-being of farmers. "To benefit our hardworking farmers and enhance the food security of Pakistan, Engro Fertilizers has always partnered with the Government for initiatives that uplift the agriculture sector. These Markaz Centres will offer relief to the farmers by ensuring timely availability of high-quality fertilizers at official prices. Additionally, these Markaz Centres

will serve as hubs for creating awareness about innovative products and technologies being offered by Engro Fertilizers that can help improve our crop yields and bring them in line with global benchmarks," he said.

He further highlighted the recent launch of the Uga app by Engro Fertilizers, Pakistan's first integrated agri e-commerce platform. Besides enabling direct purchase of fertilizers at official prices from the Company, the Uga App also integrates advanced drone technology and satellite imagery. These features allow farmers to monitor crops with precision, reduce input costs, and increase crop yields.



LAHORE: Federal Minister for Industries & Production and National Food Security & Research Rana Tanveer Hussain in a group photo during an inauguration ceremony of Engro Fertilizers.

## Balochistan a strategic trade gateway

LAHORE (APP): Convener Federation of Pakistan Chamber of Commerce and Industry (FPCCI) regional committee Food, Shahid Imran on Sunday highlighted Balochistan's strategic importance as a global business gateway and a key hub for trade with Central Asia and Europe, driven by its geographical advantages and abundant natural resources.

Talking to media here to a delegation of traders from Quetta, he highlighted FPCCI president, Atif Ikram Shaikh dedicated focus on Balochistan's development, stressing that inclusive growth and robust economic planning are critical for the province's economic prosperity. "Without economic development, we cannot achieve sustainable prosperity in Balochistan. We need to move beyond superficial Public Sector Development Programs (PSDP) and initiate projects that benefit all," he added.

Shahid Imran pointed out the need for enhanced infrastructure in Balochistan's industrial zones, citing the lack of basic facilities like water, electricity and gas as major obstacles to industrial growth.

He noted that while Hub industrial zone near Karachi has flourished others such as the Quetta Industrial Zone and the Bostan special economic zone, remain underutilized. He called for urgent attention to establish projects like expo centers, special economic zones and border markets.

"Balochistan holds immense transit potential and was a vital link for global trade routes. However, economic growth requires collective effort from all stakeholders. Without industrial development, challenges like unemployment and reliance on government jobs will persist," Shahid added. He also called for measures to improve trade relations with neighboring countries, like Iran and Afghanistan, including organizing a tri-lateral trade exhibition.

## Commemorative ticket to honour WCCIS

SIALKOT (APP): The Sialkot Chamber of Commerce and Industry (SCCI) announced the creation of a commemorative ticket in the honour of the Women Chamber of Commerce and Industry Sialkot (WCCIS) by the Pakistan Post. This remarkable initiative reflects our commitment to recognizing and empowering women in business and leadership, it said. President Sialkot Chamber of Commerce and Industry (SCCI) Ikram-ul-Haq specially appreciated the efforts of Chairman Post Office Committee SCCI Ahmed Imtiaz Khan in achieving the milestone.

## Travel & Adventure Show New York 2025:

# Pakistan tourism pavilion shined

## F.P. Report

NEW YORK: The Travel & Adventure Show 2025 kicked off in New York on Sunday. At this two-day event, Pakistan Tourism Development Corporation (PTDC) and the Trade Development Authority of Pakistan (TDAP) have jointly set up a Pakistan Tourism Pavilion in collaboration with the Consulate General of Pakistan, New York. A total of 13 Pakistani companies, all provincial tourism departments and PTDC have set up their booths at the Pavilion. The Pakistan Pavilion proudly received the award for Best Partner Pavilion at the Travel & Adventure Show 2025.

The Pakistan Pavilion, under the banner of the national tourism brand

"Salam Pakistan", was inaugurated by the Ambassador of Pakistan to the United States, Rizwan Saeed Sheikh, and the Chief Minister of Gilgit-Baltistan, Gulbar Khan. The Minister for Tourism and Law of Gilgit-Baltistan, Ghulam Muhammad, and the Minister for Planning & Development of Gilgit-Baltistan, Raja Nasir Ali Khan were also present. Additionally, the Consul General of Pakistan in New York, Aamer Ahmed Atozai, and the Trade & Investment Counselor in New York, Adnan Mahmood Awan and representatives of PTDC and provincial tourism departments attended the occasion.

The award-winning Pakistan Pavilion showcased Pakistan's breathtaking tourist destinations, rich

cultural heritage, and a wide range of tourism services. A large number of visitors attended the Pavilion on the first day of the show, expressing keen interest in mountaineering, adventure tourism, and religious tourism. Aftab Rana, Managing Director of PTDC appreciated the efforts of all the exhibitors under the joint tourism marketing program of PTDC to put up a nice show at this global platform to highlight the rich tourism potential of Pakistan.

Renowned as one of the world's largest and most influential tourism exhibitions, the Travel & Adventure Show serves as an unparalleled platform for tourism organizations to connect, collaborate, and showcase their unique offerings to a global audience.

# PRGMEA demands urgent measures

## F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Pakistan Readymade Garments Manufacturers and Exporters Association (PRGMEA) north zone chairman Dr. Ayyaz Uddin on Sunday called for taking urgent measures to strengthen Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) standards across Pakistan's industrial and business sectors.

While addressing a seminar, organized by the PRGMEA today, he recognized the importance of workers' safety and sustainable business practices, as the association has outlined key focus areas to enhance the nation's OHS framework.

Dr. Ayyaz Uddin said that the garment exporters have outlined key focus areas to enhance the nation's OHS framework, including the demand for a central database for OHS professionals, akin to the

Pakistan Medical and Dental Council (PMDC), to ensure standardized registration and certification. The PRGMEA proposes establishing a national database of certified and registered electricians to ensure all industrial and business entities employ qualified professionals. This measure will mitigate workplace hazards associated with electrical installations and maintenance.

We recommend introducing both generic and industry-specific OHS training modules via the National Vocational and Technical Training Commission (NAVTTTC) and the Technical Education and Vocational Training Authority (TEVTA). Tailored programs will equip workers with essential safety knowledge and industry-oriented skills. These programs should be made available to not only the compliance departments, but also to the HR departments of businesses.

"The PRGMEA also suggests implementing incentive programs for businesses that proactively adopt OHS measures. Incentives could include tax benefits, reduced insurance premiums, or recognition programs to encourage compliance and continuous improvement." To build a culture of safety from the ground up, PRGMEA recommends the inclusion of

specialized OHS modules in degree programs across all educational institutions. These modules will prepare future professionals with a strong foundation in workplace safety and hazard prevention.

Dr. Ayyaz Uddin stated that workers' safety is not just a regulatory requirement; it is a moral obligation and a strategic necessity for sustainable industrial growth. Through these initiatives, we aim to promote a safer, more productive workforce while aligning with international safety standards. Another priority sector highlighted is the revision of driving license testing criteria to align with UAE or UK standards. PRGMEA proposes the establishment of a DVLA-style department to ensure safety and carbon emissions control through MOT regulations, refresher programs for drivers, and the creation of safe driving clubs for both commercial and domestic drivers. Safety for all road users—drivers, vehicles, pedestrians, and cyclists—should be ensured by integrating these measures into educational programs. Furthermore, vehicle and driver registration, along with licensing and fitness certification, should be consolidated into a national database, with ongoing research supported by 30 leading universities in Pakistan.

# Confidence among accountants, finance professionals falls sharply

## F.P. Report

LAHORE: Facing a highly uncertain year ahead, amid a new US administration, heightened geopolitical tensions, and various domestic economic and political challenges, the latest ACCA (the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants) and IMA® (Institute of Management Accountants) Global Economic Conditions Survey (GECS) of over 1,800 finance professionals recorded a marked fall in confidence in Q4 2024. There was also a sharp deterioration in the Employment Index. On a more positive note, there were small gains in the forward-looking New Orders Index and the Capital Expenditure Index.

Confidence fell markedly in Western Europe and is at its weakest since Q3 2022. Strikingly, UK confidence is at a record low, amid the announcement of large tax rises for employers in the

recent Chancellor's statement. There were also quite material declines in confidence in Asia Pacific and North America. Ongoing concerns about the Chinese economy and the risk of an increase in US tariffs likely weighed on sentiment in the former. The fall in confidence in North America reflected a sharp deterioration in sentiment among Canadian respondents, with confidence in the US rising for the second consecutive quarter, reflecting the ongoing resilience of the world's largest economy.

Encouragingly, cost pressures no longer look elevated by historical standards in most regions, although Western Europe is the clear outlier, with almost three-quarters of respondents reporting increased costs in Q4. Central banks in the region need to be careful not to prematurely declare victory in their battles against inflation.

Jonathan Ashworth,

Chief Economist, ACCA, said: "The global economy proved quite resilient in 2024, aided by the strength of the US economy. The greater resilience of the Global New Orders and Capital Expenditure indices would suggest that the global economy is not set to lurch downwards imminently. Nevertheless, while the Global Confidence Index can at times be volatile, its sharp decline attests to the significant nervousness among companies, given the enormous uncertainty at the current juncture. Against such a backdrop, there are significant downside risks to global growth over the coming year."

Alain Mulder, Senior Director Europe Operations & Global Special Projects at IMA said: "Confidence in the US registered a reasonable gain after a large increase previously and is now slightly above its historical average. There were also improvements in the

other key indicators by varying degrees. This is clearly an encouraging sign, because the US is the only major engine of the global economy where activity is showing significant resilience at the present time."

Accountants identified their top three risk priorities at the end of 2024. Although economic risks remained the highest priority for the second year running, talent scarcity, regulatory change, and cybersecurity ranked much closer to the top than in Q4 2023. Responses in Q4 2024 showed noteworthy regional and sectoral nuances.

For example, Central and Eastern Europe was the only region to rank cybersecurity as its highest risk priority, while talent scarcity was most important in Asia Pacific and Western Europe. South Asia and North America also stood out for keeping geopolitics in their top three.

# PIAF wants speedy work on Pak-Iran pipeline amid rising gas prices

## F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Amidst continuous rising gas prices in the country, the Pakistan Industrial and Traders Associations Front (PIAF) has called for initiating speed work on 80-kilometer of the Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline project within its borders after a long delay and hoped that it would proceed expeditiously, as the project is bound to bring an industrial revolution in Pakistan.

PIAF Chairman Faheem Rehman Saigol in a joint statement along with senior vice chairman Nasrullah Mughal and vice chairman Tahir Manzoor Chaudhary, said the businessmen had already been pressing the government hard for procuring the required energy resource from whatever source suits to it to relieve the country of the mounting shortage of gas.

Faheem Saigol said that the Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline project began in 2013, and several deadlines have already been missed due to long-standing US sanctions against Tehran. According to reports, Pakistan was trying to negotiate with Tehran to avoid a whopping \$20 billion in liabilities as the long-stalled project's deadline approaches this year.

Last year, government also approached Washington, requesting a solution to the lingering imbroglio, but received no response.

Nasrullah Mughal said that we are convinced that Iranian source was the most feasible, financially as well as from the point of view of proximity. He observed the Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline would serve Pakistan's national interests and go a long way in mitigating the energy issues, asserting that an early completion of this mega project of national importance would be a great favour to the business community as its very survival was at stake at the moment. The availability of gas would also help government achieve economic targets. It is to be noted that in a landmark development, the Cabinet Committee on Energy had approved the initiation of work on the 80-km segment (Iranian border to Gwadar) of the Iran-Pakistan Gas Pipeline project, and deferred the filing of application for waiver of US sanction on the project due to geo-political situation.

A summary of Petroleum Division regarding IP Gas Pipeline was presented to the Cabinet Committee on Energy in its meeting, giving its nod to the recommendations of the Ministerial Oversight Committee

(MOC) for the IP Project.

The committee recommended to start work on the 80-km segment of the pipeline inside Pakistan i.e. from Pakistan border up till Gwadar in the first phase.

Tahir Manzoor Chaudhary said that the project will be executed by Inter State Gas Systems (Pvt) Ltd and will be funded through Gas Infrastructure Development Cess (GIDC). All the concerned divisions gave a positive nod to move ahead with the project to ensure gas supplies to the people of Pakistan, thereby addressing the increasing energy needs of the country. Pakistan has decided to kick-off construction work on 80 kilometre portion of Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline project- from Iranian border to Gwadar- to escape a potential penalty of \$18 billion, in case Tehran decided to move to the Paris-based International Arbitration for non-execution of the project. Initially, it has been decided that in first phase of IP project work on 80-km portion from Pak-Iran border to Gwader will be started.

The PIAF leaders said that the estimated cost of the 80-km Pak-Iran border to Gwadar portion of the project will be \$158 million and it has been decided to fund it through Gas Infrastructure Development

# ECC repeated hikes in gas tariffs leave industry uncompetitive

## F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: As the Economic Coordination Committee (ECC) of the federal cabinet has decided to approve upward revision in gas tariff for the industry by up to 26pc to generate Rs847b during current fiscal year the Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce & Industry's Businessmen Panel (BMP) has observed that the repeated increase in the gas and electricity prices to an un-bearable level has left the trade and industry uncompetitive.

FPCCI former president and BMP Chairman Mian Anjum Nisar said that the gas tariff hike has threatened the industrial sector, besides increasing unem-

ployment.

The Economic Coordination Committee (ECC) on Saturday decided to approve upward revision in gas tariff for industry captive power plants from 3000 rupees per MMBtu to 3500rupees per MMBtu to ensure required revenue for the gas sector during Fiscal-year2024-25. The Economic Coordination Committee also instructed the Petroleum Division to take necessary measures for the imposition of a grid transition levy on the captive power plants to enhance the energy sector efficiency.

The committee met to discuss a summary submitted by the Petroleum Division for an upward revision of the indigenous

gas tariff for industry (captive power) as well as non-protected domestic slabs.

The Oil & Gas Regulatory Authority (Ogra) requested the federal government to increase gas rates by up to 26 percent to generate about Rs. 847.33 billion during the current fiscal year. Under the new tariff structure, the average gas price has been set at Rs. 1,762.51 per MMBTU for Sui Southern Gas Company (SSGC), and Rs1,778.35 per MMBTU for Sui Northern Gas Pipelines Limited (SNGPL).

Mian Anjum Nisar said that the every government had poor economic policies that unleashed the free fall of rupee against the dollar, ensuing in in-put cost escalation to pull down the

manufacturing growth.

He warned that the continued escalation of gas prices could result in the closure of numerous industries, amplifying unemployment rates and diminishing Pakistan's export capabilities, appealing to the government to reverse this decision promptly and establish a fixed gas price of Rs1,800 per mmbtu for industries.

Emphasising the need for the government to explore and provide affordable energy alternatives for the industry, he stressed that such measures are crucial for ensuring the competitiveness of Pakistani products in the global market. As the industrial sector grapples with the ramifications of the gas price hike,

the BMP leader's stance advocates for the preservation of industrial stability and the prevention of potential economic setbacks for Pakistan.

The chairman condemned the recent increase in gas tariff as approved by the Economic Coordination Committee and demanded the government to take back the decision of hike in gas tariff in the larger interest of national economy and to save the industries from collapse. He warned that in case the decision is not withdrawn the industries will close down, resulting in decline in exports and mass unemployment.

In an appeal, he said that the business community was given assurance for 9

cents per KWh electricity tariff. The assurance brought a sigh of relief and hope for the business community that the new tariff will help in reduction of production cost and they will be able to continue production unabated and deliver export orders on time. However, contrary to the assurance given, POL, electricity and gas tariff are being increased constantly by the government. He said that currently, the national economy is passing through se-vere crisis. To run an industry is no more a profitable business. He questioned the caretaker prime minister as to how economy of the country can be stabilised and strengthened in the absence of industrial and business

activities? Unfortunately, the government has taken no step to provide competitive environment to industries, lower the cost of production and reignite the engine of national economy, which has left the industrial community in despair, he remarked.

He vehemently rejected the surge in gas prices, asserting that this decision poses a severe threat to the industrial sector, potentially leading to increased unemployment.

He expressed concern over the already elevated production costs in the region, rendering industrialists less competitive compared to their counterparts in neighboring countries. Showing their profound concerns many

industries, they claimed to have already stopped their production in the country with several others fearing a closure because of the unviable trade, which may also pulled the country's exports further down.

The rulers have raised gas tariffs to the highest ever levels by 118 percent from 2023 and added on with a 40 percent cost of RLNG. This move overall gave a steep rise of 191 percent to the gas prices to the historic levels, he added.

The exports industry is also compelled to pay the exorbitant gas price, which is tagged with the cross subsidy that the fertiliser, feedstock, domestic consumers and power generation sector enjoy, he pointed.





# Merciless Sinner wins back-to-back Melbourne titles



MELBOURNE (Agencies): Jannik Sinner underlined why he is the world's best men's player by securing back-to-back Australian Open titles with a merciless victory over Alexander Zverev.

Italian top seed Sinner delivered in the decisive moments to secure a 6-3 7-6 (7-4) 6-3 win over second seed Zverev. Despite an ongoing doping case hanging over him, Sinner has been able to block out the noise to claim a third Grand Slam title.

After sealing victory with a composed cross-court winner on his first championship point, the 23-year-old calmly raised his hands into the air before walking over to celebrate with his team.

"It's an incredible tournament for me, I hope I can keep it going," said Sinner, who is the first Italian player to win three majors. The straight-set win was a demonstration of Sinner's relentless baseline game, physical power and mental steeliness.

Zverev could not create a single break point in the match and grew increasingly frustrated as his game failed to trouble Sinner. The 27-year-old German becomes the sixth man in the Open era to lose his first three Grand Slam finals, having also been beaten at the 2020 US Open and 2024 French Open.

After slumping forlornly into his chair, a visibly upset Zverev hunched forward and covered his face

with a towel. "It sucks standing next to this trophy," said Zverev, whose speech was delayed by a heckling spectator. "I was hoping to be more competitive but Jannik was just too good - as simple as that."

Ruthless Sinner dominates again

Backing up the finest season of your career - and one of the most dominant in recent memory - is the challenge facing Sinner this year. The manner in which he has swept to the Australian Open suggests he is more than capable of reaching the same heights which led to two major trophies, six more ATP titles, a Davis Cup triumph with Italy and an overall record of 73 wins from 79 matches.

What makes his achievements even more extraordinary is the unsettling situation surrounding his ongoing doping case. It was announced in August that Sinner had tested positive for the banned substance clostebol, sending shockwaves around the sport.

While he was cleared of wrongdoing by the International Tennis Integrity Agency, the World Anti-Doping Agency has appealed against the decision and is seeking a one to two-year ban. In a difficult time, the tennis court has become his sanctuary.

Sinner's coping mechanism has been to try and "isolate" himself but his coach Darren Cahill provided a telling insight when he said nobody is "bulletproof".

However, Sinner has been as close to fully-armoured as he could have been in the circumstances.

He has swatted his way through the draw with relative ease, with the hot and humid conditions in his fourth-round match against Denmark's Holger Rune being his toughest opponent. The way in which he ruthlessly dismantled Zverev was a stark contrast to the fight he needed to recover from two sets down against Daniil Medvedev last year.

Calmly converting his first championship point - luring his opponent forward with a drop-shot before drilling a backhand past him - illustrated the ease he felt.



MULTAN: Kevin Sinclair had Babar Azam caught at the stroke of stumps.

# Pak face uphill battle as WI tightens grip in thrilling 2nd Test

MULTAN (APP): The second Test between Pakistan and West Indies has reached a gripping phase as Pakistan, chasing a target of 254, stumbled to 76/4 by the end of Day 2 in Multan. With six wickets in hand, the hosts still needed 178 runs to seal a victory, while the visitors were just six wickets away from a series-defining win.

Saud Shakeel, unbeaten on 13 and debutant Kashif Ali, struggling on 1, will have the daunting task of navigating a charged-up West Indies bowling attack on Day 3.

The chase began disastrously for Pakistan, as both openers, captain Shan Masood and Mohammad Harira, were dismissed for just 2 runs apiece, leaving the team in early trouble. Kamran Ghulam fought hard for his 19, while Babar Azam, the linchpin of Pakistan's batting, con-

tributed a fluent 31 before falling to an exceptional delivery. West Indies' bowlers were clinical, with Kevin Sinclair leading the charge by picking up two key wickets, while Jomel Warrican and Gudakesh Motie claimed one each, piling pressure on the struggling hosts.

Earlier in the day, West Indies put up a determined performance in their second innings, scoring 244 runs to extend their slender 9-run first-innings lead to a challenging target of 254.

Captain Kraigg Brathwaite anchored the innings with a composed 52, building a 50-run opening stand with Mikyle Louis before Louis fell cheaply for 7 to Noman Ali. Brathwaite's dismissal at 92 triggered a middle-order collapse, but crucial contributions from Tevin Imlach (35), Kevin Sinclair (28), and

Gudakesh Motie (18) ensured the visitors posted a competitive total.

Pakistan's spinners dominated with the ball, as Noman Ali and Sajid Khan claimed four wickets each, exploiting the turning track effectively.

Abrar Ahmed and Kashif Ali chipped in with a wicket apiece, wrapping up the West Indies innings but not before the visitors had set an imposing target.

The stage was now set for a high-stakes showdown in Multan. With Pakistan's batting under immense pressure and the West Indies bowlers brimming with confidence, the contest promises an electrifying finish.

Can Pakistan's remaining batsmen script a remarkable comeback, or will the West Indies bowlers clinch a famous victory? The drama unfolds on Day 3 of the second Test.

# Karachi hosts Special Olympics Pakistan Marathon 2025

KARACHI (Monitoring Desk): The 10th Special Olympics Pakistan Marathon Race 2025 was held in Karachi today, featuring competitive races across multiple categories.

Sindh Governor Kamran Tessori and Olympic medalist Arshad Nadeem were present at the event, alongside hundreds of enthusiastic participants.

The event, organised under the patronage of Governor Tessori, showcased remarkable performances by participants, with winners being announced for both men's and women's categories in each race.

The event featured races of 21.2 kilometres, 10km, 5km, and 1km, drawing participants from diverse backgrounds.

In the men's 21.2km half marathon, Qasim Bajwa emerged victorious, while Faizan Zulfikar secured second place, and Muhammad Sajjad finished third.

In the women's half marathon, Natasha Hassan triumphed, followed by Sahrish Khan in second and Kokab Sarwar in third.

The event also included 10km races where Mahnoor Fatima clinched the title in the women's category, and Shakir Usman claimed victory in the men's category. For the 5km race, Qandeel Sultan emerged as the women's champion, while Muhammad Ziaullah took the men's title.

Tessori, who graced the event, spoke about the importance of inclusivity and sportsmanship. "People are being given opportunities, and everyone must move forward together," he said addressing the media at the closing ceremony.

The governor announced that all future races would be organised under the Governor House's auspices, emphasising the government's commitment to fostering sports activities.

The marathon featured additional events, including a special children's walk, where children with special needs actively participated. Governor Tessori commended their spirit and paid tribute to their parents.

Tessori highlighted Pakistan's peace-loving nature, saying, "We have to show the world that we Pakistanis are peace-loving people." He further affirmed that the Governor House doors will always be open for sports activities.

Governor Tesori also mentioned his visit to Mian Channu to meet Arshad Nadeem and discussed his decision to support the Special Olympics marathon in Karachi.

Meanwhile, the federal capital also hosted the 5th Islamabad Marathon commenced with 5km, 10km, half, and full marathon races, attracting a large number of runners and spectators.

# Pak team to participate in Int'l Taekwondo training camp

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Pakistan team is in Sharjah, UAE, to participate in the 11th Sharjah International Taekwondo Training Camp, which underway till February 5. The camp has brought together teams from various countries, including Russia, Saudi Arabia, Kazakhstan, Ukraine, UAE, and Uzbekistan, with more nations expected to join in the coming days, said a press release. During the camp, CEO of the Pakistan Taekwondo Federation, Omar Saeed, met with Eng. Sulaiman Abdul Rehman Al Haji, Chairman of Individual Sports at the Sharjah Sports Club, and Coach Abdullah Hatim. Saeed expressed his appreciation for their unwavering support and contributions to the Pakistan National Team. The 11th Sharjah International Taekwondo Training Camp will provide a valuable opportunity for athletes to enhance their skills, engage in high-level training sessions, and foster international collaboration in the sport.

# Naqvi prioritises Saim Ayub's long-term fitness over Champions Trophy

HOUSTON (Monitoring Desk): Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) Chairman Mohsin Naqvi has emphasised that Saim Ayub's entire career could not be risked for one Champions Trophy. Speaking to the media in Houston, Mohsin Naqvi revealed that he was in contact with Saim Ayub on daily basis, and was personally monitoring his injury. He stated that Saim's plaster would be removed in the next couple of days, after which he would enter the recovery phase followed by rehabilitation. The PCB Chairman reiterated that Saim Ayub is a valuable asset for Pakistan cricket and expressed hope for his speedy recovery. Pakistan's opening batsman, suffered a right ankle fracture during the first day of the second Test match against South Africa. Doctors initially recommended a six-week rest period, ruling him out of the ongoing matches. Sources suggested that the selection committee had prepared its preliminary squad list. However, the final squad for the Champions Trophy, which must be announced by February 11, would only be decided after reviewing Saim Ayub's medical reports and consulting doctors. The finalised list would then be sent to PCB Chairman Mohsin Naqvi for approval.

# Gut-Behrami wins super-G in Garmisch, Vonn 13th

GARMISCH-PARTENKIRCHEN (AFP): Swiss Olympic champion Lara Gut-Behrami on Sunday won the World Cup super-G in Garmisch-Partenkirchen, while Lindsey Vonn finished 13th as she continues her comeback. In wet, slushy conditions marked by poor visibility which led to a short delay to the start the 33-year-old Gut-Behrami picked up her first win of the winter. Gut-Behrami, who won gold in the event at the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics, finished 0.35 seconds ahead of Norwegian Kaisa Vickhoff Lie. Speaking with reporters, the Swiss said the victory gave her "great joy", as she has already placed second three times in super-G events this winter. "If you make good speed and get in the mix for the podium, it's something. If you make good speed and you can still win, it's even better." Gut-Behrami said the "challenging" conditions brought out the best in her. "It's quite challenging, but last year I had some tough conditions and I won, so maybe I have to start thinking that in these conditions I'm not that bad." Italian veteran Federica Brignone, who won Saturday's downhill in Garmisch, finished a further three hundredths of a second back in third.

# Usman retains Bellator lightweight world title after epic win over Paul Hughes

DUBAI (Agencies): Usman Nurmagomedov beat Paul Hughes on Saturday night to retain his Bellator lightweight world title at the Coca-Cola Arena in Dubai.

The main event at the PFL Road to Dubai Champions Series produced a 25-minute battle between the prides of Dagestan and Northern Ireland, with Nurmagomedov staying unbeaten after receiving the nod from two of the three judges sitting outside the SmartCage (47-47, 48-46, 48-46). After the majority decision win, Nurmagomedov had nothing but respect for his opponent.

"This is for you guys, Paul Hughes, you are the man, brother you're tough, I underestimated this guy," Nurmagomedov said. "But I'm still undefeated, undisputed Bellator lightweight champion." Hughes also made it clear he would love a rematch in Belfast.

"It played out how I expected, I'm so gutted and disappointed I lost. I thought I won the fight, I probably left some in the tank, I need to leave everything behind next time. I really thought I was going to win," Hughes said. "The PFL believed in me and I believe in the PFL. We have to do the rematch in Belfast, it has to be in Belfast, I think I've earned this."

The PFL Road to Dubai Champions Series is the inaugural "Road to Dubai" event after the signing of a groundbreaking multi-year partnership between the Dubai Department of Economy and Tourism, Dubai Sports Council and the Professional Fighters League. The first-of-its-kind partnership will allow MMA world champions and the sport's biggest stars from the PFL to compete in title fights as Dubai becomes a marquee destination for the best of MMA.

All other Champions Series events will now be co-branded as "Road to Dubai" events, with each show build-



ing to the finale, set in the new fight capital. As part of the PFL's commitment to developing the sport of MMA in Dubai, rising Emirati star fighters will now have a pathway to become future PFL champions.

In the heavyweight co-main event of the evening, former Bellator light heavyweight world champion Vadim Nemkov (19-2) made quick work of Tim Johnson (18-11), needing only 3:08 to submit the former Minnesota National Guardsman. Originally scheduled to face Corey Anderson in a rematch, Johnson took the bout on short notice and brought the fight to Nemkov, but a rear-naked choke brought the bout to an end. Nemkov now has 14 straight wins under his belt.

Dagestan's Akhmed Magomedov (11-1) submitted Ireland's Nathan Kelly (11-3) via rear-naked choke in Round 2 in a featherweight main card bout on Saturday. Magomedov, who had not fought in almost two years, quickly shook off any rust. With the win, Dagestan moved to 2-0 against Ireland with the main event remaining.

England's Ibragim Ibragimov improved to 9-0 after a unanimous decision victory (30-27, 30-27, 30-27) against Kenny Mokhonoana (5-2).

Ibragimov's third win under the PFL banner shows that he is not only one of the best rising prospects on the European MMA scene, but globally as well.

The opening main card bout of the PFL Road to Dubai Champions Series featured Russia's Renat Khavalov (9-0) against Brazil's Cleiver Fernandes (9-2) at bantamweight. With Islam Makhachev and Khabib Nurmagomedov in his corner, Khavalov cruised to a unanimous (30-27, 29-28, 29-28) decision in his PFL debut.

Preliminary card results

Ahmed Samy (12-4) beat Tarek Suleiman (13-9) via TKO at 5:00 in Round 1

Mirafzal Akhtamov (8-0-1) beat Mike Thompson (7-3) via technical submission (head and arm choke) at 2:50 of Round 2

Hadi Omar Al Hussaini (6-1-1) beat Ruel Panales (5-3) via unanimous decision (30-27, 30-27, 30-27)

John Mitchell (10-2) beat Souhil Tairi (7-6-1) via unanimous decision (30-27, 30-27, 30-27)

Haider Khan (9-1) beat Mostafa Nada (9-4) via TKO at 3:18 of Round 1

Talal Alqallaf (3-0 AM.) beat Saeed Alhosani (4-3 AM.) via unanimous decision (30-27, 29-28, 29-27).

# Mbappe scores first hat trick for Real Madrid

BARCELONA (AP): Kylian Mbappe tucked the ball under his shirt as he raised both hands to return the applause to the Real Madrid fans who savored his first hat trick for his new club.

The France star had just led a 3-0 victory at struggling Valladolid that extended Madrid's lead of La Liga on Saturday, keeping it in position to retain the title just after the midway point of the campaign.

Gone was the inconsistent play and missed penalties from Mbappe during his first months with Madrid following his move from Paris Saint-Germain. The France captain has started pouring in goals with back-to-back multi-goal games and has Madrid in pole position with Atletico Madrid and Barcelona stalled.

"I'm very happy for the hat trick but even happier for the win," Mbappe said in fluent Spanish. "It was very important to win after Atletico's result because that gave us a bit more pressure to take advantage of it."

Madrid's fourth straight triumph in the league combined with Atletico Madrid's 1-1

draw with Villarreal let Carlo Ancelotti's side open a four-point gap over its city rival. Barcelona were in third place at 10 points back before hosting Valencia on Sunday.

Madrid trailed then-leader Barcelona at one point, but since getting blown away in a 4-0 clasico debacle, they have found their stride and is in championship mode.

"My adaptation to the team is over. I feel comfortable on the field and you can see that from the way I am playing with my teammates," Mbappe said. "This gives us confidence, but you know that until the 38th round this is not over. We have to keep winning because there is a long way to go."

No contest in Valladolid

The game between the front-runner and the bottom side fit its billing as a mismatch.

Valladolid could draw only one save from Thibaut Courtois in the opening moments. It was all Madrid the rest of the way even though Vinicius Junior didn't play as he completed a two-game suspension.

Mbappe swept in Madrid's first

goal on the half-hour mark after a flowing team attack of quick passes to weave the ball through a packed Valladolid area that culminated in Jude Bellingham's assist for the France star.

He made it a double in the 57th by finishing off a three-against-two counterattack after Federico Valverde intercepted a Valladolid pass. Mbappe took a pass by Rodrygo and rifled in a low strike from the left side of the box.

Valladolid finished with 10 men after Mario Martin got a second booking in the 90th for a foul on Bellingham, sending Mbappe to the spot for his third.

That made it four games in a row with a goal across all competitions for Mbappe. In La Liga, Mbappe has 15, second only to Robert Lewandowski's 16 for Barcelona. He also scored twice last weekend against Las Palmas in a 4-1 win.

"Mbappe is giving us a lot. He has found his rhythm over the last couple of months and that is obviously a boost for us," Ancelotti said. Valladolid were five points from safety.

Atletico drop more points



Atletico's stalemate with Villarreal came a week after a shock 1-0 loss at Leganes.

Gerard Moreno, Villarreal's top scorer in club history, made it 120 goals for the Yellow Submarine in the 25th minute after the striker converted a penalty he earned when fouled by Reinildo.

Atletico coach Diego

Simeone rested Antoine Griezmann and midfielder Rodrigo de Paul for the first half. Then he made three changes at halftime, sending on De Paul and winger Samu Lino to kickstart his sluggish attack.

The moves paid off as the hosts pressed Villarreal into their box, and Lino rammed in a 58th-minute equalizer.

Simeone sent Griezmann on immediately after and the action stayed in Villarreal's area except for two chances for Villarreal's Ayoze Perez, who replaced Gerard. But Griezmann's header that bounced just wide in the 86th was the closest Atletico came to snatching a winner.

"We played a good game at a very tough ground against a team with a deep bench that is fighting for the league. We are happy," Gerard said for a Villarreal that stayed in fifth place.

Betis grab late winner

Cedric Bakambu headed in a stoppage-time winner to grab Real Betis a 1-0 victory at 10-man Mallorca.

Mallorca had opportunities until Omar Mascarell received a direct red card for a studs-first tackle of Betis' Jesús Rodríguez in the 73rd. The win came while Betis secured a loan deal for forward Anthony from Manchester United.

Garcia sustains Espanyol

Goalkeeper Joan Garcia made three saves to deny Sevilla standout Dodi Lukebakio and help Espanyol grind out a 1-1 draw at Sevilla.





## In brief

### CPO to hold Khuli Kutcheries

RAWALPINDI (APP): City Police Officer (CPO) Rawalpindi Syed Khalid Hamdani under Punjab government's open door policy will hold 'Khuli Kutcheries' here on Monday at 12 noon in Gujar Khan Police Station and at 3 pm in Rawat police station to address grievances of the people. According to a Police spokesman, Rawalpindi District Police on the directives of the CPO are taking all possible actions to address the grievances of the people. He informed that senior police officers are also holding 'Khuli Kutcheries' and the officers concerned are being directed to take action and submit detail report on the complaints submitted by the citizens in 'Khuli Kutcheries'. The CPO had warned that negligence on part of officials concerned would not be tolerated, he added. He said, the 'Khuli Kutcheries' were being held to provide the citizens immediate relief and address their complaints besides it also helped improve standards of policing. The officers were being directed to complete inquiries and send reports within given time frame, he said adding, all-out efforts were being made to ensure dispensation of speedy justice purely on merit to the people and improve service delivery standard in the district. The spokesman informed that the CPO was also holding 'Khuli Kutcheries' here to provide relief to the citizens.

### Police arrest kite sellers

RAWALPINDI (APP): Rawalpindi District Police on the directives of City Police Officer are making efforts to control kite flying and managed to arrest three kite sellers on recovery of over 3060 kites and 25 kite flying string rolls, said a police spokesman here on Sunday. He informed, that Sadiqabad police arrested two kite sellers namely Adeel and Khalid and recovered over 2000 kites and 20 kite flying string rolls. Gujar Khan police netted a kite seller namely Ethesham on recovery of 1060 kites and five kite flying string rolls. Separate cases have been registered against the accused and further investigations are under process. Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Operations directed the police teams to accelerate operations against kite sellers and flyers.

### Online shopping trend

ISLAMABAD (APP): The citizens of the twin cities of Rawalpindi and Islamabad are getting more interest in online shopping to avoid spending more time and saving travelling expenses. According to a survey conducted, the trend of online shopping was increasing in population, particularly in women. Citizens claimed that this practice is more convenient, and flexible, with time-saving benefits. "Online shopping gives me access to a global market, allowing me to purchase products from retailers around the world and it also reduces the need for physical stores and transportation," a customer Shahida Perveen said. She added, "I prefer online shopping which is growing rapidly and social networks have become increasingly important platforms." Sundus Ali another customer said that "Online shopping has made my life so much easier. I can shop from anywhere, at any time, and have my purchases delivered right to my doorstep." She said, "Online shopping saves time and effort, allowing me to browse and purchase products quickly."



ISLAMABAD: A large number of people participating in a protest demonstration in front of the Indian High Commission organized by All Parties Hurriyat Conference to observe the Indian Republic Day as Black Day.

## Social media empowers youth

ISLAMABAD (APP): The useful handling of social media platforms has empowered youth to earn sufficient money for supporting themselves and their families too. Nowadays social media has emerged as an effective platform for generating income, offering numerous opportunities and businesses ideas. The positive use of social media can lead to financial awareness for youth who are in search of new jobs and opportunities. Now they can earn money through different social media platforms while sitting at home as social media has engaged people to generate income, creating new opportunities and shifting traditional income streams.

A social media influencer Sana Tanveer shared her thoughts that "social media platforms have played a pivotal role in my success, enabling me to connect with a vast audience and generate significant income". She said, "After facing a prolonged period of unemployment, I have successfully leveraged social media to generate a handsome income from the comfort of my own home". She said, "Now I can support myself financially it is like a game changer for me".

"People love my cooking tips and recipes and I am loving the income that comes with it". She added. She continued that whether you are staying home, a student, or simply looking for a way to sup-

plement your income, social media offers a world of possibilities.

Sohail Tanveer another content creator said, "Previously, I worked at a hospital as a technician with limited resources, but now I have found success as a social media influencer, earning a substantial income".

He commented, "I inspire through moral stories, spreading positivity to make a difference in people's lives. Viewership of my content has crossed one million and all my struggles have finally paid off, he said. For many, social media has become a lifeline, providing a way to support their families and achieve financial stability, he expressed.

## PTI must stick to negotiations to find amicable solution: Ali

ISLAMABAD (APP): PML-N leader Ali Gohar Baloch has sternly urged that the PTI should honour its commitment, demonstrate sincerity and be persistent in negotiations with the government.

He underlined the importance of pursuing a feasible solution to address grievances instead of perpetuating discord.

Ali Gohar in his exclusive talk with PTV News emphasized that in the realm of politics, nothing is ever set in stone. Instead, he stresses that the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) must remain committed to negotiations as by doing so, the party can work towards finding an amicable solution to the ongoing challenges.

Gohar emphasized that the PTI party must exercise restraint and avoid making controversial or flippancy statements in public. This approach will help the party maintain a responsible and respectful tone, fostering constructive dialogue and avoiding unnecessary conflicts.

He attributes the breakdown in talks to a trust deficiency and irresponsible statements made by the party, adding, that this trust deficit likely stems from PTI's history of making provocative comments, which can derail constructive dialogue. PTI must adopt a more measured approach, focusing on building trust and fostering an atmosphere conducive to productive dialogue, he stressed.

Responding to a query, Ali Gohar also revealed that previously, the government allowed PTI to meet with the PTI founder during negotiations. He expressed optimism that if talks continue, PTI will again be permitted to meet with Khan without restrictions.

# Negotiation only way forward, says Afnanullah

ISLAMABAD (APP): PML-N Senator Afnanullah Sunday lambasted PTI's tactics to pressure the government, labeling them as failed attempts and emphasized that negotiation remains the sole viable path to clarity, cautioning PTI that refusal to engage in dialogue will only exacerbate the crisis.

Talking to a private news channel, Senator Afnanullah emphasized that negotiation is the only viable path forward, asserting that PTI's pres-

sure tactics are ultimately "doomed" to fail.

He stressed the importance of constructive dialogue in resolving political differences, highlighting it as the best way to move forward. By engaging in negotiation, political parties can work towards finding common ground and advancing the country's interests, he added.

"Chaotic politics will only create further consequences and no other political victory will be achieved through these

out-of-table tactics," Senator Afnanullah added.

Senator expressed his concerns about PTI's approach to resolving issues, stating that they are not serious about discussing problems and instead prefer confrontation.

Responding a query, Afnanullah clarified that PML-N respects and will abide by any court decisions, emphasizing that these matters have already been discussed and are now in the judicial domain.

## Govt promoting tourism sector in GB

ISLAMABAD (APP): The development and prosperity of Gilgit Baltistan were the top priority of the Federal Government and in this regard, various projects of development had been launched for the promotion of the tourism sector, health facilities, improvement in the education sector and mitigate the pressure of unemployment in this area.

An official source told APP that Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has recently announced a series of mega development projects for the development of the remote areas of the GB. He said the incumbent

regime also focused on developing the road network and connectivity of slum areas with each other to facilitate the local community. The local government also upgrading the basic health units in the far-flung areas of the GB, he said.

He underlined that tourism is a lucrative business of the local community and in this regard, GB government provides training facilities to the youth of the area. Tourism is the best source of income for the local population, as millions of tourists visit this area every year. He commended the fed-

eral government's efforts in promoting tourism and emphasized the need for its enhancement. He proposed the establishment of camping sites and tourism facilitation centers across all provinces aimed at facilitating tourists and promoting local attractions.

Furthermore, he highlighted the importance of extensive promotion of the Salam Pakistan portal, a dedicated platform designed to guide and assist tourists visiting Pakistan.

He stressed the significance of leveraging technology to provide seamless experiences for travellers.

## 100 students complete friends of police program

ISLAMABAD (APP): Islamabad Police's Friends of Police Program, aimed at promoting awareness about traffic laws and road safety, marked a significant milestone with the successful completion of its student volunteer batch, consisting of 100 students from prominent universities, on Sunday.

A public relation officer told APP that the program was initiated under the special directives of Inspector General of Police (IGP) Islamabad Syed Ali Nasir Rizvi, with students from leading universities actively participating.

The Islamabad Police's Friends of Police program, which seeks to educate citizens about traffic laws and road safety, celebrated the successful completion of its student volunteer batch," set it in one"

A formal ceremony was held at the Traffic Police

Headquarters in Faizabad, where Chief Traffic Officer (CTO), Muhammad Sarfraz Virk, welcomed the volunteers and commended them for completing their training. The ceremony was attended by university students and members of the Islamabad Police education team.

On the occasion, CTO Muhammad Sarfraz Virk emphasized the importance of shaping students' minds for a better society and highlighted the difficulty of changing public perceptions about the police. "We are presenting our processes and services to the public so that people understand the true role of the police," he stated.

"I do not believe in lofty claims but in working practically 24/7. Those who serve the public are chosen by Allah Almighty. The police department is the first to respond in difficult times. We are aligning

the police with the demands of the modern era," said CTO Virk.

He further added, "The Islamabad Police are the guardians of the blood of martyrs. Regardless of the color of the uniform, our commitment remains the same. We have built a lasting relationship with you. Our police culture comprises positive elements that must eliminate the negative ones."

The CTO emphasized the importance of the volunteer program in crime prevention, noting that volunteers play a vital role in spreading public information. "Join us in serving the public together," he said.

At the conclusion of the ceremony, certificates and awards were presented to the student volunteers, and the Islamabad Police reaffirmed their commitment to organizing such programs in the future.

## Building more water reservoirs vital

ISLAMABAD (APP): The ongoing severe winter drought, which has adversely affected winter sowing, particularly wheat in the country, is in fact a part of the larger trend of increasing climate variability that threatens to disrupt agriculture, exacerbate water shortages and elevate the risks of future droughts across the country.

But building more water reservoirs, restoring wetlands, and promoting drought-tolerant crop varieties can go a long way in mitigating recurring and intensifying drought risks in the country. This was stated by Muhammad Saleem Shaikh, a climate policy expert and spokesperson for the climate change and environmental coordination ministry, in a press statement issued here on Sunday.

He said that the country is currently grappling with a unusual winter drought because of 40pc below normal rains between September 2024 to January 2025, which has put productivity of winter crops and livelihoods of farming communities at risk.

Due to acutely low rains, water stress has already exacerbated further in cultivated lands in Punjab, Sindh, Balochistan, in particularly in rainfed regions, due to the limited supply of irrigation water from river system for Rabi crops, he added.

"If the rainfall situation does not improve anytime soon, wheat production may suffer up to 50pc," the ministry official Muhammad Saleem Shaikh warned, urging farmers to use water resources available for irrigation in any form more judiciously.

He highlighted that reduced water availability due to low rainfall was adversely impacting the growth of crops like wheat, a staple food as well as vital cash crops like potato, leading to fears of lower production and rising food prices and their shortages in future. He said that the ongoing winter drought conditions in the country underscore the urgent need for a unified response to address the

country's water crisis. "It is imperative that all stakeholders work together to build a sustainable future, strengthen water resilience and safeguard the livelihoods of millions of people depending on agriculture and water resources for survival," the ministry official emphasised.

He said that the national climate change policy has already highlighted that country's socioeconomic circumstances further augment its vulnerability to projected temperature increases, more variable rainfall patterns and a greater risk of more intense and frequent droughts.

"While droughts in future are likely to grow more frequent and intense in the country, large-scale infrastructure projects, such as the construction of water reservoirs and restoring wetlands for storing excessive flood and rainwater as a part of larger drought mitigation strategy are inevitable," the climate policy expert and spokesperson Muhammad Saleem Shaikh suggested.

Nonetheless, he cautioned that such water storing initiatives are unlikely to yield desired results as long as adequate investments in water conservation and efficient irrigation technology are not made and its dissemination to farmers is not ensured.

Pakistan is home to around 225 nationally-significant wetlands, which cover 0.78 million hectares (9.7% of the country's land area). Nineteen of these wetlands are declared as Ramsar sites for being wetlands of global significance due to unique landscape, biodiversity (flora and fauna) they harbour. But, unfortunately, many of them are degraded or blocked by encroachments.

"Restoration and sustainable management of degraded or encroached wetlands in the country can be a paramount drought and flood risk mitigation policy measure as well as for tackling the country's water security, stemming biodiversi-

ty loss and a vital step towards building country's flood and drought-resilience," the climate ministry official Muhammad Saleem remarked. Referring to national climate change policy recommendations for mitigation of drought impacts, particularly on agriculture sector, Mr. Shaikh emphasised that rainwater harvesting, groundwater recharge and the adoption of modern irrigation methods like drip and sprinkler systems are no longer optional; they are critical tools in our survival weaponry.

The ministry official also said that overall last a few years there has been adequate research on developing new drought-tolerant high-yield varieties of crops in the country in collaboration with international agricultural research organisations.

"Efforts should also be made by the country's agricultural scientists for plantation of such drought-tolerant food crop varieties through unhampered provision of such crop seeds to the farmers and dissemination of information among farmers through their agricultural extension department about its proper plantation for achieving desired crop yields," the climate change ministry official Muhammad Saleem Shaikh urged.

He also said that while the drought has already been acknowledged as a major climate risk and threat to the country's agrarian economy, various policy measures have been recommended for drought risk mitigation. "Tackling growing risk of droughts in the country will not be any herculean task for the country, if drought mitigation measures, as recommended in the national climate change policy, are implemented in true spirit by provincial authorities as well as federal and provincial agricultural, irrigation and water organisations as a unified response," the ministry's climate policy expert Muhammad Saleem remarked.

## Pink Bus Service gets thumbs up from civil society

ISLAMABAD (APP): Civil society organizations and women's rights activists on Sunday welcomed the launch of the Pink Bus Service in Islamabad, calling it a 'positive step' towards promoting women's empowerment and education.

They were of the view that this initiative is a testament to the government's commitment to addressing the transportation challenges faced by women in accessing educational facilities.

Executive Director of Community Empower Network Talha Khan said, "We commend the Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training for taking this proactive step towards promoting girls' education."

He remarked that the Pink Bus Service in

Islamabad has been a game-changer for women's empowerment and education in the region. He further stated that it will help reduce the dropout rate of girls from schools and colleges.

Zartasha Niazi Human rights activist said, "Pink Bus Service is a groundbreaking initiative that promotes women's rights and empowerment adding that it is a significant step towards creating a safer and more inclusive public transportation system."

She opined that the Pink Bus Service is a beacon of hope for women and girls who have been marginalized and excluded from public spaces. It is a reminder that their rights and dignity matter.

Fatima a student of F/6 model college said that "By travelling in women-only

buses, it reduces their risk of facing harassment and feel more secure during their journey."

She detailed her experience that "Honestly, getting to college used to be a real struggle for me before the pink buses came along," but now, I feel so much more at ease, and I always arrive on time."

"The Pink Bus Service is providing a safe and reliable mode of transportation for female students and teachers, enabling them to pursue their education without worrying about transportation costs or safety concerns," she stated.

The civil society has urged the government to expand this initiative to other parts of the country, particularly in rural areas where girls' education is severely impacted by lack of access to transportation.

## RDA accelerates operation against illegal construction

RAWALPINDI (APP): Rawalpindi Development Authority (RDA) has accelerated its ongoing operation against illegal construction, said a RDA spokesman.

Talking to APP he informed that RDA on the directives of Director General (DG) RDA Kinza Murtaza conducted an operation and sealed 10 illegal plazas and five houses in different areas.

RDA Enforcement Squad conducted targeted operations against unauthorized residential cum commercial buildings on Morgah Road, Gulshan-e-abad and Dhanyal Kalyal Road, Rawalpindi.

During the operation, 10 Plazas and five houses were sealed for various violations of approved building plans and regulations.

The spokesman informed that the owners of the properties violated approved building plans. Despite notices issued by the RDA, the owners continued to violate the rules and violated the Punjab Development of Cities Act 1976 and the RDA Building and Zoning Regulations 2020.

The properties were converted into illegal residential cum commercial establishments without the required approvals and No Objection

Certificates (NOCs). The authorities concerned had sent notices to the owners of the properties regarding the illegal construction, but there was no compliance with the authorities' directives, he added.

The DG had directed the Land Use & Building Control (LU&BC) Wing to take strict action against encroachments, unauthorized constructions, and illegal commercial activities in residential areas.

The Building Control Wing had also been directed to review and impose fines on the violators, he said adding, RDA is committed to upholding the city's planning and zoning laws to ensure orderly urban development.

The spokesman further informed that RDA took action against illegal construction activities at the Top City Housing Scheme. The Enforcement Squad of RDA sealed several illegally constructed and under-construction site and marketing offices of the housing scheme. The decisive move marks a significant step toward ensuring that all the construction activities in the area comply with established development regulations.

Taking action on the vio-

lations, the RDA aims to uphold the integrity of the region's urban planning and ensure that all construction projects are carried out legally in accordance with the prescribed guidelines.

The Authority is committed to upholding city planning regulations and ensuring that all development activities follow legal procedures.

"We are committed to maintaining the integrity of Rawalpindi's development standards and protecting the interests of the citizens," said DG RDA. The operation was conducted to curb illegal construction and enforce the law, she added.

The RDA is making efforts to maintain transparency, accountability, and regulatory adherence in the development of housing schemes, and the operation is part of its ongoing efforts to eliminate illegal construction practices in Rawalpindi. She also urged the developers and stakeholders to ensure compliance with all relevant laws and regulations to avoid such enforcement actions.

The RDA Enforcement Squad would continue to monitor the situation and take further necessary action in line with urban development laws, she added.



### Smuggling operation foiled

KABUL (BNA): The mobile monitoring employees of the General Directorate of Customs within the Ministry of Finance seized a staggering 135,774kg of illicit goods across various provinces, including Nimroz, Kandahar, Farah, Herat, Nangarhar, and Helmand, last week. According to a statement released by the Ministry of Finance, the confiscated items include a wide array of products intended for illegal importation into Afghanistan.

## The Frontier Post

Rajab 27, 1446 — Monday, January 27, 2025

### 3 people killed, 4 injured

KABUL (Pajhwok): The International Criminal Court chief prosecutor has said he is seeking the arrest of two senior Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan leaders over the treatment of women and girls in Afghanistan, inviting strong condemnation from the caretaker government in Kabul. Last week, UNAMA called the continued ban on girls' education in Afghanistan a matter of concern. The European Union and Denmark announced \$58 million in aid to Afghanistan.

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

### 4th pase of Herat-Khaf railway:

## Major progress achieved: Officials

HERAT (TOLONews): Local officials in Herat report that the construction of the first section of the fourth phase of the Herat-Khaf railway has progressed by more than 80%.

This section, which spans 43 kilometers, is expected to be completed in less than five months, officials said. Additionally, the final section of this project, extending to Herat's industrial park, commenced last year and is scheduled to be operational within the next year and a half.

Hazrat Quli Enteqami, an engineer working on the fourth phase of the Herat-Khaf railway, stated: "The groundwork has been completed, and we are making

daily progress of 300 to 350 meters in the track-laying process. The required materials are supplied from Iran, and there are no shortages in this regard."

Ahmadullah Muttaqi, head of information and culture in Herat, emphasized: "The Islamic Emirate is determined to complete this project within the next five months."

The Herat-Khaf railway plays a crucial role in importing raw materials from various countries and exporting Herat's manufactured goods, linking Herat's industrial park to global markets.

Hamidullah Khadem, head of the Herat Chamber of Industries and Mines,

said: "We hope to import raw materials for our factories through Iran and Turkmenistan and export our products worldwide via this railway."

The Herat-Khaf railway consists of four phases, with two sections already operational in Iran and one in Afghanistan.

The fourth phase of the project, spanning over 90 kilometers, has been divided into two smaller parts, with the first part already more than 80% complete. Construction of the final section, extending to Herat's industrial park, began six months ago and is expected to be operational within the next 18 months.

### Taliban to auction \$25 million

KABUL (Khaama Press): Following the rise of the US dollar against the Afghanistan's currency, the central bank, under Taliban administration, announced plans to auction \$25 million into the market.

The central bank stated on Sunday, January 26, that this amount of money will be introduced into the market on Monday to stabilize the exchange rate of the dollar against the Afghani.

The Taliban has called on private banks and money exchange companies to participate in this auction, which aims to curb the recent surge in the value of the dollar.

Just two days ago, the Taliban administration auctioned \$20 million in a similar attempt to control the dollar's rising value.

The exchange rate for one US dollar has recently increased, with the central bank reporting a selling rate of 80.86 Afghanis and a buying rate of 79.88 Afghanis in the market.

It is worth noting that the rise in the dollar's value coincides with Donald Trump assuming office as the new President of the United States.

Recently, President Donald Trump signed an executive order temporarily suspending all US foreign aid programs for 90 days. Reports suggest that this suspension aims to review the alignment of these programs with the US national interest.

Fluctuations in the dollar's value against the Afghani have always been a persistent challenge for the people. Citizens are now expressing concerns over rising prices in the country as the dollar's value increases.

The frequent auctions of US dollars highlight the challenges faced by the Taliban administration in stabilizing Afghanistan's economy. Despite these measures, the persistent volatility in exchange rates reflects deeper structural issues in the financial system.

Without a comprehensive economic strategy and international recognition, the Taliban's efforts may offer only short-term relief. Long-term solutions will require significant reforms, foreign investment, and renewed engagement with global financial institutions.

### Industrial park to be established

JOWZJAN (TOLONews): The Jowzjan Directorate of Industry and Commerce has announced the allocation of 1,000 acres of land for the establishment of an industrial park in Khwaja Dukoh district.

According to the directorate, the creation of this industrial park will play a vital role in boosting development and attracting investment to the province, with the Islamic Emirate providing all necessary facilities.

Niaz Mohammad Tawab, head of the Jowzjan Directorate of Industry and Commerce, said: "One thousand acres of land have been allocated by order of the Islamic Emirate's leadership. We are currently in Khwaja Dukoh district, which has been designated for Jowzjan's industrial parks."

Abdul Shakoor Saber, an economic specialist at the General Directorate of Land, stated: "We have completed the documentation for 1,000 acres of land, and the remaining administrative processes will be finalized in the next three days before being submitted to the central authorities."

According to officials from the Jowzjan Directorate of Industry and Commerce, an additional 1,000 acres of land in the Yetim Taq area of the Yemberghan city are also under review and are expected to be approved soon.

Meanwhile, several businesspeople have welcomed the land allocation for the industrial park, considering it beneficial for traders and investors, and have called for further facilitation.

## Iran's FM meets Taliban chief minister

— calls for strengthened ties



KABUL (Amu TV): Abbas Araghchi, Iran's foreign minister, met with Mohammad Hassan Akhund, the Taliban's chief minister, during a visit to Kabul on Sunday. The meeting emphasized diplomatic, political, and economic cooperation between the two neighboring nations, according to a Taliban statement.

The statement said that the Taliban's chief minister welcomed Araghchi and his delegation, highlighting the importance of such visits in fostering stronger bilateral relations between the "two brotherly Muslim nations."

Araghchi underscored the historical, religious, and economic connections between Iran and Afghanistan, according to the statement.

"We are pleased to see nationwide security in Afghanistan after four decades," he said. "High-level diplomatic engagement demonstrates Iran's strong ties with the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan."

He added that the stability and security of Iran are closely tied to Afghanistan's. "Recent developments in Afghanistan lead us to conclude that collaboration with the Islamic Emirate must expand further."

**Migration and water disputes**

The Iranian foreign minister also addressed issues concerning Afghan migrants in Iran and the long-standing Helmand River water dispute, the Taliban statement said.

He emphasized the need to use these challenges as opportunities for enhanced

cooperation. Araghchi reaffirmed Iran's commitment to facilitating the dignified return of undocumented Afghan migrants and called for the full implementation of the Helmand River Agreement to resolve water concerns.

**Calls for dialogue and cooperation**

The Taliban chief minister, Mohammad Hassan Akhund, welcomed "greater engagement" between the two nations and expressed a commitment to resolving disputes through dialogue, the statement said.

"Living in a spirit of brotherhood and maintaining ties will strengthen our relationship and promote the welfare of both nations," he said.

Akhund assured Iran that Afghanistan would act in

good faith regarding the water dispute, adding that his administration had no intention of harming Iran's interests.

He also urged Iranian authorities to treat Afghan migrants according to Islamic and fraternal principles.

The Taliban chief minister raised concerns about the treatment of Afghan migrants in Iran, pointing to incidents of detention and mistreatment, including executions, which have provoked public outrage.

He urged Iranian authorities to uphold good neighborly relations and treat Afghan citizens with kindness.

Iran's foreign ministry has not commented on the details of the meeting provided by the Taliban.

## Four-country rail corridor agreement extended for 2025

KABUL (TOLONews): The Ministry of Public Works said that the quadrilateral rail-economic corridor agreement among Afghanistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and China has been extended for the year 2025.

Mohammad Ashraf Haqshenas, the ministry's spokesperson, stated that the deputy minister of public works signed the agreement during his visit to Uzbekistan.

This corridor connects to the Hairatan-Mazar-e-Sharif railway after passing through China, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan.

Mohammad Ashraf Haqshenas said: "During the visit of Mohammad Ishaq Sahibzada, the Deputy Minister of Public Works of the Islamic Emirate, to Uzbekistan, the quadrilateral rail agreement among China, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Afghanistan was extended for the year 2025."

The ministry's spokesperson added that through this railway corridor, 4,200



containers of goods were transported between Afghanistan and China in 2024, and based on the new agreement, the volume of transportation among the partner countries will increase.

Abdul Nasir Rashtia, an economic affairs analyst, told TOLONews: "Whenever we connect with a railway network, we can gain two benefits; first, goods will enter the market at lower prices, and second,

we can transport export or import goods from one point to another in a shorter time."

Sayed Selab Samandar, another economic affairs expert, stated: "The extension of the quadrilateral rail corridor agreement among China, Afghanistan, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan can lead to the growth of the country's domestic industry and facilitate the development of Afghanistan's

products."

The deputy minister of public works in Uzbekistan called for the practical initiation of the Trans-Afghan project. In a meeting with Uzbekistan's Minister of Transport and other officials, discussions were held regarding the increase of commercial and export transportation via the Hairatan-Mazar-e-Sharif railway and the expansion of railway cooperation.

## Electricity shortage hampers industrial growth in Kunar

KUNAR (TOLONews): The lack of electricity in Kunar province has reduced industrial production by 50 per cent.

According to the Kunar Chamber of Commerce and Investment, this issue has inflicted millions in losses on factory owners and significantly slowed production processes.

The Manugi power plant in the Watapur district, which ceased operations due to technical problems two and a half years ago, has had a direct impact on industrial performance.

Ziaullah, head of the Kunar Chamber of Commerce and Investment, stated: "The power shortage has significantly affected factory operations, reducing activities by 50%, lowering profits, and increasing costs."

Meanwhile, industrialists in Kunar stress that resolving energy challenges will pave the way for new investments.

Mir Fareed Ahmad Yousufi, an investor, said: "Kunar, with its abundant raw materials, is an ideal

location for investment. I have come here to establish a factory to create job opportunities and utilize local resources."

Ezatullah Haqmal, another investor, said: "Unfortunately, the lack of electricity has forced some factories to shut down. Despite this, investors are still eager to operate here because Kunar offers a favorable industrial environment."

At the same time, local officials announce the imminent start of repairs on the Manugi power plant.

Shahabuddin Yasar, director of electricity in Kunar, stated: "Repair work on the Manugi power plant will begin in the coming days. The central government has assured us, and we assure factory owners that once the project is completed, 80% of their electricity issues will be resolved."

According to the Kunar Chamber of Commerce and Investment, there are currently around 30 large and small factories in the province, employing a total of 1,500 workers.

## Ministry outlines plans to enhance school systems



KABUL (BNA): Acting Minister of Education Mawlawi Habibullah Agha discussed educational challenges facing the Kabul province with Governor Mullah Aminullah Obaid.

The meeting focused on pressing issues within the education sector, with Governor Obaid highlighting

various problems affecting districts across the province.

In response, Minister Agha assured the governor that the Ministry of Education is taking these concerns seriously and is committed to investigating them thoroughly.

Minister Agha emphasized the ministry's dedication to enhancing the educational landscape throughout Afghanistan.

He announced the Ministry's plans in place aimed at providing improved facilities for schools, streamlining the education system, and elevating the overall quality of education.



# World Bank's VP, Gandapur discuss ongoing projects in KP

**F.P. Report**

ISLAMABAD: A delegation of the World Bank, led by Vice President for South Asia Martin Raiser, called on the Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Ali Amin Gandapur on Sunday at Pakhtunkhwa House Islamabad.

The meeting focused on various ongoing public welfare projects supported by the World Bank in sectors such as health, communications, tourism, hydropower, water resources, and rural development.

Both parties explored new opportunities to expand collaboration between the provincial government and the World Bank.

Member National Assembly, Faisal Amin Gandapur, Additional

Chief Secretary Planning and Development, Ikram Ullah Khan, and other officials were also present on the occasion.

Briefing about the World Bank assisted development portfolio in the province, officials informed that work is in progress on various various World Bank assisted projects worth \$1.9 billion across various sectors.

The World Bank team also shared details of the institution's Country Partnership Framework for Pakistan with the Chief Minister.

Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur highlighted his government's vision for poverty alleviation, social protection, and human capital development.

He appreciated the World Bank's cooperation

in public welfare initiatives and emphasized his government's commitment to implementing projects with long-term impacts on the province's development.

He reiterated the provincial government's focus on encouraging private sector investment and partnerships to accelerate economic growth and create employment opportunities.

The meeting also included detailed discussions on the implementation of the Chashma Right Bank Lift Canal (CRBC) and the Peshawar-Dera Ismail Khan Motorway projects, and the World Bank team expressed interest in collaborating on the CRBC project.

Chief Minister Gandapur underscored the significance of the proposed Peshawar-DI Khan

Motorway, describing it as a critical initiative not only for the province but for the entire country's economic development.

He also emphasized the CRBC project's importance for the province's food security, reaffirming the government's commitment to these flagship projects.

Ali Amin Gandapur assured the World Bank delegation of his government's intent to further strengthen collaboration in social sectors and vowed to address any hurdles hindering the progress of ongoing projects.

He noted that the provincial government views the World Bank's support as an essential component of its development strategy and is determined to enhance this partnership for the betterment of the region.



ISLAMABAD: Vice President of World Bank for South Asia Martin Raiser called on Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur.

## Pakistan Navy set to host 9th Aman Exercise and Maiden Aman dialogue

**F.P. Report**

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Navy is set to host AMAN-25; the ninth edition of multinational AMAN exercise from February 7 to 11. A key feature of this year's exercise will be the AMAN Dialogue, where Chiefs of Naval Forces, heads of Coast Guards, and senior leaders from around the world will convene to discuss regional maritime security and devise joint strategies to counter evolving maritime threats.

Around 60 countries will participate in AMAN-25, contributing with ships, aircraft, Special Operations Forces (SOF), Explosives Ordnance Disposal (EOD) teams, Marines, and observers. Delegations from across the globe will also attend the inaugural International AMAN Dialogue, which will take place alongside the exercise.

The AMAN series has been a hallmark of the Pakistan Navy's efforts to promote regional peace and cooperation.

Launched in 2007, the inaugural exercise saw the participation of 28 countries. By 2023, the number of participating nations had grown to 50, including major naval powers.

The motto of the AMAN series, "Together for Peace," reflects its core mission, while this year's theme, "Secure



and cooperation.

The AMAN series, "Together for Peace," reflects its core mission, while this year's theme, "Secure

Seas; Prosperous Future," emphasizes the importance of maritime security for global prosperity.

AMAN exercise consists of harbour and sea phases. During the harbour phase, activities such as seminars, operational discussions, counter-terrorism demonstrations, and pre-sail planning of evolutions at sea will be held.

The sea phase would include tactical maneuvers, exercises related to maritime security such as anti-piracy and counter terrorism, search and rescue, gunnery firings and air defence exercises.

Highlight of the sea phase will be the International Fleet Review, which will be witnessed by national and foreign dignitaries.

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## PTI urges govt to appointment CEC

ISLAMABAD (INP): Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) has said that the government should immediately and transparently appoint neutral CEC in consultation with PTI to revitalize the badly tarnished integrity of the electoral watchdog and ensure continuity of democratic processes in the country.

PTI Central Information Secretary Sheikh Waqas Akram asserted that the outgoing CEC's dark era left an indelible mark on the country's electoral landscape, therefore it was incumbent upon the government to ensure the timely and consensus-based appointments of CEC and other provincial heads of electoral body to shield the institution from further destruction.

PTI CIS stated that the outgoing CEC's tenure had severely damaged the reputation of the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP), thus allowing him to continue in the position would be a gross injustice, not only to the institution but also to the nation.

Waqas emphasized that his controversial tenure has had far-reaching and detrimental consequences for Pakistan's democratic processes, adding that the government should appoint impartial and competent individual through a transparent and consultative process, as mandated by the Constitution to restore the ECP's credibility and integrity.

He recalled that the Leader of the Opposition in National Assembly

Omar Ayub and the Leader of the Opposition in the Senate Shibli Faraz had already written letters to the Speaker of the National Assembly and the Chairman of the Senate, respectively for the immediate appointment of a new CEC.

Waqas urged that the government should constitute a parliamentary committee without any delay to oversee the appointments, as stipulated in Article 213 of the Constitution.

Sheikh Waqas Akram noted that the appointment of an impartial and credible person as a new CEC would be the first step towards healing the wounds inflicted on Pakistan's democracy and rebuilding nation's trust on the electoral watchdog.

## North Korea fires strategic cruise missiles

SEOUL (Reuters): North Korea conducted a strategic cruise missile test on Saturday, state media KCNA reported on Sunday.

According to the report, the country's leader Kim Jong Un oversaw the test, which described it as a test-fire of an "important weapon system".

The underwater-to-surface strategic cruise missiles travelled 1,500 kilometres and flew between 7,507 and 7,511 seconds before hitting their targets, KCNA reported.

In a separate KCNA report on Sunday, North Korea's foreign ministry vowed the "toughest counteraction" against the United States as long as Washington "refuses" Pyongyang's sovereignty.

The military alliance and joint drills between South Korea and the US were to blame for the growing tensions in the region, the ministry said in a statement carried by KCNA.

The statement came as US President Donald Trump said during an interview on Thursday that he would reach out to Kim again after the two developed a working relationship in Trump's first term.

North Korea's war deterrence means were being "perfected more thoroughly", Kim was quoted as saying, while the leader also vowed to continue efforts to strengthen the military.

## Trump aid freeze strands Afghan visa holders

SHENGJIN, Albania (Reuters): Ali Amini was just days from starting a new life in the United States when President Donald Trump halted aid for resettling Afghan refugees last week, a move that Amini worries could put his life in danger if forced to return home.

After processing in Albania, he had a flight booked for Tuesday and his bags were packed when

Trump suspended state aid needed to transport tens of thousands of Afghans who have been granted visas.

"I don't know if we will ever get on that plane and, if so, whether it will go to Kabul or the United States," Amini said from Shengjin, a coastal town in northern Albania where he is sheltering along with 300 compatriots.

Trump's pause on foreign aid has led to the sus-

pension of flights for over 40,000 Afghans approved for special U.S. visas and at risk of Taliban retribution, Shawn VanDiver, head of the #AfghanEvac coalition of U.S. veterans and advocacy groups, told Reuters on Saturday.

Amini arrived in Albania more than a month ago and had secured visas in Tirana, the capital, for his wife and three children, the youngest being six months old.



ISLAMABAD: Members of All Parties Hurriyat Conference, led by Convener Ghulam Muhammad Saffi, holding a protest demonstration on the occasion of Indian Republic Day observing the day as Black Day.

## US teacher put on leave after allegedly calling Palestinian child an extremist

WASHINGTON (Reuters): A public teacher in Pennsylvania was put on leave after allegedly calling a Palestinian American middle school student an extremist, the school district and a Muslim advocacy group said.

**Why It's Important**  
Human rights advocates say there has been a rise in anti-Muslim, anti-Palestinian and antisemitic hate in the US since the start of Israel's war in Gaza following an Oct. 7, 2023, attack by the Palestinian militant group Hamas.

The Central Dauphin

School District said on Saturday it had learned about the allegations that the teacher made the derogatory comment last week in an after-school program.

"The teacher involved in the alleged incident is on administrative leave pending our investigation," the district said in a statement, adding it had no tolerance for racist speech.

The Council on American Islamic Relations said the allegation was that the teacher had remarked, "I do not negotiate with terrorists,"

when the Palestinian American student asked for a seat change.

The district and CAIR did not name the teacher or the student. CAIR said it was in touch with the child's parents.

Recent US incidents involving children include the attempted drowning of a 3-year-old Palestinian American girl in Texas and the fatal stabbing of a 6-year-old Palestinian American boy in Illinois.

Other incidents include the stabbing of a Palestinian American man in Texas, the beating of a

Muslim man in New York, a violent mob attack on pro-Palestinian protesters in California and the shooting of three Palestinian American students in Vermont.

Incidents raising alarm over antisemitism include threats of violence against Jews at Cornell University that led to a conviction and sentencing, an unsuccessful plot to attack a New York City Jewish center and physical assaults against a Jewish man in Michigan, a rabbi in Maryland and two Jewish students at a Chicago university.

## Jl announces protests against expensive electricity on Jan 31

LAHORE (INP): Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) has once again announced its plan to take to the streets against rising electricity prices.

During a press conference at Idara Noor-e-Haq, JI leader Hafiz Naeem-ur-Rehman declared that protests and sit-ins will be held across Pakistan on January 31. He warned the government that if electricity bills are not reduced, the party will launch a larger, more powerful movement.

Hafiz Naeem demanded a review of agreements with Independent Power Producers (IPPs), questioning why the public and industries have not benefited from the termination of agreements with five IPPs. "Our single agenda is to lower electricity bills," he emphasised.

Rejecting the recent salary hike for parliamentarians, Hafiz Naeem criticised the government, saying, "They increased their salaries but did nothing for the people. In the current

review of agreements with Independent Power Producers (IPPs), questioning why the public and industries have not benefited from the termination of agreements with five IPPs.

"Our single agenda is to lower electricity bills," he emphasised.

Rejecting the recent salary hike for parliamentarians, Hafiz Naeem criticised the government, saying, "They increased their salaries but did nothing for the people. In the current

economic crisis, this decision is unjustified."

He also criticised the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) for stepping back on the election issue, stating that while the PTI had all Form 45s, its demand for fresh elections only gave relief to the government.

Hafiz Naeem also called Maulana Fazlur Rehman's demand for new elections incorrect. Additionally, he expressed his opposition to the PECA Act, asserting that it violates fundamental

rights.

Meanwhile, The Jamaat-e-Islami on Sunday rejected the controversial Prevention of Electronic Crimes (Amendment) (PECA) Bill, 2025. The JI Ameer, Hafiz Naeem ur Rehman, has said that the passage of such legislation without consultation with stakeholders, has been aimed at curbs on the freedom of expression.

"Everyone has to join hands to also address the issue of the fake news," Hafiz Naeem called.

## Trump says Jordan, Egypt should take more Palestinians from Gaza

ABOARD AIR FORCE ONE/Cairo (Reuters): U.S. President Donald Trump said Jordan and Egypt should take more Palestinians from war-ravaged Gaza, a suggestion rejected by Hamas, the Palestinian militant group that runs the enclave.

Asked if this was a temporary or long-term solution for Gaza, where Israel's military assault has caused a dire humanitarian situation and killed tens of thousands, Trump said on Saturday: "Could be either."

Israeli Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich, who has repeatedly called for the return

of Jewish settlers to Gaza, welcomed Trump's call as "an excellent idea" and said he would work to develop a plan to implement it.

But a Hamas official reacted with suspicion, echoing long-standing Palestinian fears about being driven permanently from their homes.

Palestinians "will not accept any offers or solutions, even if (such offers) appear to have good intentions under the guise of reconstruction," as announced in the proposals of U.S. President Trump," Basem Naim, a member of the Hamas political bureau, told Reuters.

Another Hamas official, Sami Abu Zuhri, urged Trump not to repeat "failed" ideas tried by his predecessor Joe Biden.

"The people of Gaza have endured death and refused to leave their homeland and they will not leave it regardless of any other reasons," Abu Zuhri told Reuters.

Palestinian analyst Ghassan al-Khatib said Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza, as well as the Jordanians and Egyptians, would reject Trump's plan: "I don't think that there is a place in reality for such an idea."

Washington had said last year it opposed the

forcible displacement of Palestinians.

Rights groups and humanitarian agencies have for months raised concerns over the situation in Gaza, with the war displacing nearly the entire population and leading to a hunger crisis.

Washington has also faced criticism for backing Israel but has maintained support for its ally, saying it is helping Israel defend itself against Iranian-backed militant groups like Hamas in Gaza, Hezbollah in Lebanon and the Houthis in Yemen.

"I said to him I'd love you to take on more because I'm looking at the whole Gaza strip right

now and it's a mess, it's a real mess. I'd like him to take people," Trump, who took office on Jan. 20, said after a call on Saturday with Jordan's King Abdullah.

"I'd like Egypt to take people," Trump told reporters, adding he would speak to Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi on Sunday.

"You're talking about a million and half people, and we just clean out that whole thing," Trump said.

The population in the Palestinian enclave prior to the start of the Israel-Gaza war was around 2.3 million.

"It's literally a demolition site, almost every-

thing is demolished and people are dying there, so I'd rather get involved with some of the Arab nations and build housing at a different location where they can maybe live in peace for a change," Trump said.

Smotrich, who said only "out-of-the-box thinking" could achieve peace, said Trump's plan would give Palestinians "the opportunity to build new and better lives elsewhere".

"With God's help, I will work with the prime minister and cabinet to develop an operational plan to implement this as soon as possible," he said. Most of Gaza's 2.3 mil-

lion population have been internally displaced by the war. On Sunday, many of those rejected Trump's suggestion, saying what war couldn't achieve, politics would be too weak to do. Some called him "arrogant".

"If he thinks he will forcibly displace the Palestinian people (then) this is impossible, impossible, impossible. The Palestinian people firmly believe that this land is theirs, this soil is their soil," said Magdy Seidam.

"No matter how much Israel tries to destroy, break, and to show people that it had won, in reality it did not win."

The latest bloodshed in the decades-old Israeli-Palestinian conflict was triggered on Oct. 7, 2023, when Hamas attacked Israel, killing about 1,200 people and taking around 250 hostages, according to Israeli tallies.

Israel's subsequent military assault on Gaza has killed more than 47,000 people, according to the Gaza health ministry, and led to accusations of genocide and war crimes that Israel denies.

A ceasefire went into effect a week ago and has led to the release of some Israeli hostages held by Hamas in exchange for Palestinian prisoners held by Israel.