

Umar Ayub bail extended
Humayun Khan

PESHAWAR: The Chief Justice of Peshawar High Court has extended the protective bail of Umar Ayub, the Opposition Leader in National Assembly, until February 25, on Monday. The counsel Alam Khan Adeenzai Advocate, informed the court that the petitioner is facing multiple cases registered in various police stations in Punjab and Islamabad following the protests on November 24.



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ISLAMABAD: Senator Irfan Siddiqui called on Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif.

Convoy carrying essential goods reaches Parachinar

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: A convoy of 120 vehicles loaded with essential goods has successfully reached Parachinar on Monday. The convoy, consisting of food items and other supplies, made its way from Hangu to Parachinar, where relief efforts continue for the victims of Kurram.

At the same time, the distribution of financial assistance to those affected is ongoing. According to district admin on Monday, during the last tribal council meeting on January 25, elders from Lower Kurram participated, but the elders from Upper Kurram and Parachinar refused to attend. A follow-up government delegation with the elders from Upper Kurram and Parachinar is expected soon.

Efforts are on to ensure law and order in Kurram and to secure the routes are continuing. The convoy was sent from Hangu with tight security measures. DPO Hangu, Muhammad Khalid Khan, confirmed that the convoy had reached Parachinar safely.

The district administration has ensured the safety of the convoy, with the police and local administration providing security, while security forces are available for assistance. Strict security measures are in place to prevent any

RPO ensures safe delivery of food supplies

Syed Adnan

PESHAWAR: In a remarkable display of leadership and dedication, Regional Police Officer (RPO) Kohat, Abbas Majeed Marwat, successfully ensured the safe delivery of a convoy of 120 vehicles carrying essential food supplies to various villages in the Kurram District, including Parachinar. This timely initiative has provided much-needed relief to the residents of the region.

RPO Abbas Majeed Marwat, accompanied by officers from the Pakistan Army and Commissioner Kohat Division, Muatasim Billah Shah, conducted a thorough visit to the areas of Ochit Kalli, Manduri, and Bagan in Lower Kurram. During this visit, the team assessed the damages caused by recent disturbances and reviewed ongoing efforts to restore normalcy.

Speaking on the occasion, RPO Marwat emphasized that every possible step is being taken to ensure peace and stability in Bagan, Ochit, Manduri, and other adjoining areas of the Kurram District. "The implementation of the Kurram Peace Agreement is being ensured in its entirety, and we remain committed to maintaining law and order," he stated. The collaborative efforts of the RPO Kohat, law enforcement agencies, and civil administration have been instrumental in fostering peace and addressing the challenges faced by the region. Abbas Majeed Marwat's proactive approach and unwavering commitment to the welfare of the people of Kurram District have earned him widespread praise and respect. This initiative not only highlights the resilience and resolve of the Kohat Police under RPO Marwat's leadership but also underscores the importance of coordinated efforts to bring stability and relief to conflict-affected areas.

untoward incidents. Additionally, over 4,000 overseas citizens and more than 3,000 students from Upper Kurram are awaiting a passage. Thousands of people are currently stranded

on both sides. Meanwhile, a convoy of 70 vehicles carrying food, fruits, vegetables, household goods, and medicines also departed from Tall towards Parachinar.

PTI rejects Ayaz Sadiq's invitation for negotiations

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: National Assembly Speaker Speaker Ayaz Sadiq reached out to PTI leaders Omar Ayub and Asad Qaiser via telephone, inviting them to participate in negotiations.

According to sources, Ayaz Sadiq said dialogue is the key to resolving differences and urged Omar Ayub to attend the meeting scheduled for today. However, Omar Ayub declined the invitation, stating that negotiations could not proceed until a judicial commission was formed.

PTI has decided not to attend tomorrow's meeting. Earlier, National Assembly Speaker Sardar Ayaz Sadiq called the next meeting of the dialogue committee to find a way forward between the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf and the government on January 28.

As per the notification issued by the NA Secretariat, the speaker called the session on the said date in the committee room of the parliament house. This will be an in-camera meeting which will be chaired by Sardar Ayaz Sadiq. Earlier, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Chairman Barrister Gohar Ali Khan said talks with the government had been put on "hold" by part founder Imran Khan due to not meeting their demands.

FO reaffirms commitment to 'One-China' Policy

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan has categorically rejected baseless and unfounded allegations to target Pakistan-China friendship.

Responding to media speculations, Foreign Office Spokesperson Shafqat Ali Khan reaffirmed Pakistan's unwavering commitment to the foundational principle of the One-China Policy saying this is a consistent cornerstone of Pakistan's foreign policy and remains unchanged.

The Spokesperson emphasized China is Pakistan's all-weather strategic partner. He said this relationship is characterized by mutual trust, shared values, support on issues of core concern and a commitment to regional and global stability. Condemning the attack on Saudi Hospital in Al-Fareesh, Sudan, Pakistan has extended its deepest sympathies to the victims and their families.

SC withdraws show-cause against Additional Registrar

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Supreme Court withdrew the contempt notice against Additional Registrar (Judicial) Nazir Abbas wherein referred the matter to Chief Justice of Pakistan Justice Yahya Afridi for constitution of full court on the powers of committees that decide to fix cases before benches.

Announcing a 20-page verdict in the matter, two members bench of the Justices Mansoor Ali Shah and Justice Aqeel Ahmed Abbasi said, "We find that he [Additional Registrar (Judicial)] did not deliberately avoid the fixation of the cases before the bench as directed in the court order [...] The show-cause notice issued against him for contempt proceeding is discharged."

The case is concerned with the legal conundrum arising out of erred fixing of cases — which included a challenge to the vires of Custom Act 1969 — by Additional Registrar

(Judicial) Nazir Abbas, who wrongly fixed cases meant for the Supreme Court's constitutional bench instead of a regular one.

During the subsequent hearings, it was revealed that the case was not fixed for hearing and was, instead, later transferred to the constitutional bench, after which the two-member bench comprising Justice Shah and Justice Aqeel Ahmed Abbasi issued a show-cause notice to Abbas.

Announcing the verdict, the Bench accepted the additional registrar's argument — submitted before the court in his reply to the show-cause notice — that he had no authority to constitute the bench of judges and at most inform the competent authority, which he did in a timely manner.

"Upon examining the case of the present alleged contemner, the Additional Registrar (Judicial) of this Court, we find that he did not deliberately avoid the fixation of the cases before the

Bench as directed in the court order. "There is no evidence to suggest that he had any personal interest in the matter or had connived with any of the parties to the case, nor did he act with the intention of causing damage to any of the parties to the case. There is no indication of mala fide intent in his actions," stated in the verdict.

Court admits pleas challenging 26th Amendment's legality: While accepting much awaited identical pleas for regular hearing — prayed for top court's finding to determine legality of the 26th Constitutional Amendment, an eight-member Constitutional Bench of the Supreme Court sought the federation response in the matter. A Bench of Justice Aminud Din Khan, comprising Justices Jamal Khan Mandokhail, Muhammad Ali Mazhar, Ayesha Malik, Hassan Azhar Rizvi, Musarat Hilali, Naeem Akhtar Afghan and Shahid Bilal also issued notices for reply to respondents in response to a plea.

KP CM backs talks with Kabul to end terrorism

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: A consultative meeting titled "National Unity Against Terrorism" was hosted by Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Ali Amin Khan Gandapur, at Pakhtunkhwa House Islamabad on Monday.

The meeting was attended by representatives from various political and religious parties, including Jamaat-e-Islami, Jamiat Ulama-e-Pakistan, Majlis Wahdat-e-Muslimeen, Tehreek Minhaj-ul-Quran, Islamic Tehreek, Central Ulama Council, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf, and others. Prominent leaders present at the meeting included Barrister Gohar, Asad Qaiser, Muhammad Ali Durrani, Professor Ibrahim, Liaqat Baloch, Sahibzada Abu-al-Khair, Muhammad Zubair, Syed Nasir Abbas Shirazi, Allama Arif Hussain Wahidi, and Sahibzada

Zahid Mehmood Qasmi, among others.

Addressing the participants, Chief Minister Gandapur stated that the meeting was convened on the directive of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf Chairman Imran Khan with the aim to have consultation on creating a comprehensive national policy to combat terrorism, sectarianism, ethnic division, and lawlessness, ensuring the rule of law across the country. The Chief Minister thanked all participants, emphasizing the urgent need for national unity in light of the challenges facing Pakistan.

"Due to past policy failures, the country is now grappling with terrorism, sectarianism, ethnic division, and lawlessness," he said, adding that it is time to think about the kind of country we want to leave for future generations; and if we aim to leave a better Pakistan, we must formulate



and implement a robust policy against terrorism, sectarianism, and other divisive issues.

He further highlighted the role of religious scholars in fostering unity and countering sectarianism stating that any effort against terrorism cannot succeed without public support whereas the role of religious scholars is crucial in ending sectarianism, and political and religious parties must rise above political affiliations to

ensure the supremacy of law.

The Chief Minister also praised the efforts of Barrister Muhammad Ali Saif and Muhammad Ali Durrani in bringing together such a diverse group of leaders. He expressed hope that this meeting would lay the foundation for lasting peace and national unity. He said that the proposals shared during this meeting will shape the way forward; and a committee will be formed to ensure their imple-

mentation, followed by a follow-up session to be held soon in Peshawar, with an aim to involve more stakeholders.

Regarding Afghanistan, Gandapur reiterated his stance that dialogue is the only solution to resolving issues with the neighboring country. He also revealed plans to send a delegation to Afghanistan, comprising representatives from various sectors.

Participants of the meeting com-

mended the Chief Minister for his initiative, describing it as a significant step toward addressing national challenges. They urged other provincial and federal governments to follow suit. "Tackling terrorism, sectarianism, ethnic prejudice, and lawlessness requires a united national front," they noted.

The session concluded with a joint declaration, and participants emphasized the need for continuity in such consultations to achieve sustainable peace and national integration.

Recommendations for future initiatives included improving relations with Afghanistan and involving scholars from all schools of thought to resolve key issues, such as those affecting the Kurram region. Further meetings were proposed to be held in Peshawar and other provinces as well.

Govt negotiation body failed
F.P. Report

JHELUM: Former federal minister Fawad Chaudhry has stated that government negotiation committee has failed to reduce political tensions. Fawad said the government couldn't even arrange a meeting with the PTI founder. He stressed that the government needs to lower the political temperature. He suggested including Mehmood Achakzai and Maulana Fazlur Rehman in negotiations.

Talks among parties spirit of democracy — PM assures ease of doing business, facilitation to businessmen, investors

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif Monday said that contacts and negotiations among political parties were the spirit of democracy.

He was talking to Senator Irfan Siddiqui, senior leader of Pakistan Muslim League (N) and spokesman for the government committee which held negotiations with Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf. These contacts help in preparing a joint strategy to resolve issues facing the country and nation, he added.

The prime minister said avoiding negotiations was an undemocratic attitude which created tension and also damaged the atmosphere of national solidarity. He said Pakistan did not need agitation, tussle and confrontation but needed harmony and understanding so that a joint strategy could be adopted for building the economy and for eradication of terrorism.

The prime minister said with the grace of Allah, the country was making progress and its dignity had also risen at the international level. "We will not allow anyone to create obstacles in the way of progress and prosperity through undemocratic behaviors," he added. Senator Irfan Siddiqui informed the prime minister in detail about the negotiations with the PTI committee.

Meanwhile, the Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif assured extensive efforts of the incumbent government to ensure ease of doing business and trade facilitation to businessmen for reviving economic growth.

The prime minister, addressing the inauguration of six-star Movenpick Hotel in the federal capital, expressed optimism about the country's economic revival and reiterated the government's commitment to fostering progress across various sectors. "It is a proud moment for Pakistan that a state-of-the-art international hotel has been launched. I commend the Centaurus Group for their nation-building efforts and thank the Movenpick management for bringing world-class hospitality to our country," said the Prime Minister.

He highlighted the government's efforts to stabilize the economy, noting that inflation has reduced below 5 per cent, and the banking policy rate was under 13 per cent. He revealed

that further reductions are expected following the State Bank of Pakistan's (SBP) meeting.

He emphasized the growth in exports, particularly in the IT sector, and outlined the government's vision for economic development in agriculture, industry, IT, mining, and minerals. Addressing the challenges faced by the industrial and agricultural sectors due to high power tariffs, the Prime Minister assured participants that the government was working tirelessly to bring substantial reductions in energy costs in the coming months.

"A competitive industrial sector is essential for economic growth, and we are committed to easing the cost of doing business," he said. PM Shehbaz reaffirmed the government's stance on downsizing and rightsizing public entities to reduce government expenses.

Announcing a new initiative for the privatization of Pakistan International Airlines (PIA), he invited Pakistani investors to participate in a transparent bidding process. "Just as banks were successfully privatized during the 1990s under Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and are now thriving, PIA too will be transformed into a world-class airline, just as it was in the 1960s," he stated.

He assured the audience that Pakistan is on track to conclude its final IMF program. The prime minister highlighted ongoing efforts to remove obstacles to foreign investment, noting that initiatives to improve the ease of doing business will soon be launched. "Pakistan will resurrect as a great nation through the collective efforts of stakeholders and nation-builders," he said.

The prime minister lauded the Centaurus Group for its contribution to nation-building and expressed hope for more such investments in the future. Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif reaffirmed his government's commitment to fostering economic stability, promoting commerce, and ensuring Pakistan's resurgence as a progressive and thriving nation.

The Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif also directed the Pakistan Railways to provide improved travelling facilities to passengers through the public-private partnership.

The prime minister, chairing a meeting to discuss the matters pertaining to the Pakistan Railways,

called for a strategy to attract customers by offering them competitive rates and facilities, according to a PM Office press release. He asked the Railways to utilise its land for commercial purposes in collaboration with the private sector and also formulate a strategy to enhance trade activity in the region, particularly with the Central Asian states.

The prime minister also instructed to utilise the services of professional and capable manpower and replace the conventional railway system with the modern one using the latest technology. He also called for measures to ensure the profitability of the freight as well as the passenger services.

During the briefing, it was told that the 2022 floods had inflicted a Rs10 billion loss to Pakistan Railways as rail tracks remained inundated for 35 days. After the 2022 floods, Pakistan Railways improved its functioning and also earned a profit equaling the initial cost through its freight operations as the department had almost 8% share in the freight market. The meeting was told that 18% of unnecessary workforces has been dismissed as part of the rightsizing process. Besides, work on the communication linkage of Thar Coal was going on swiftly.

Federal ministers Dr Ahsan Iqbal, Muhammad Aleem Khan, Muhammad Aurangzeb, Khawaja Muhammad Asif, Jam Kamal Khan, Ahad Khan Cheema and Sardar Awais Leghari, and relevant senior officers attended the meeting.

Moreover, the Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif directed the relevant authorities to further strengthen the legal framework to curb human smuggling. The prime minister, chairing the maiden meeting of the task force formed to curb human smuggling asked the interior ministry to extend cooperation to the law ministry for the purpose.

Calling for a swift enforcement of the Federal Prosecution Act 2023, he asked the Federal Investigation Agency to submit the data on human smugglers collected during the investigation to the Foreign Office to ensure their early extradition. The prime minister ordered the issuance of red warrants of proclaimed offenders in human smuggling cases, emphasising collective effort to do away with the menace.

SBP brings policy rate down to 12%

F.P. Report

KARACHI: The State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) on Monday announced cut in key policy rate by 100 basis points (bps) to 12 percent from 13pc in line with expectations of the business community. The policy rate will now be 12pc after being slashed by 1,000bps from 22pc since June 2024.

The Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) of the bank took the decision, which SBP Governor Jameel Ahmed announced at a press conference. The SBP governor said the decision was taken with careful consideration. "Although inflation is expected to decline next month, core inflation remains a pressing concern," he stated. Ahmed highlighted strong remittance inflows and robust export growth as key factors supporting the current account. He also pointed out that last week's T-bill auction indicated market expectations of a rate cut, with yields on the 12-month tenor falling to 11.38%. "Keeping these factors in mind, we adopted a cautious approach," he stated, highlighting that remittance trends and export numbers were encouraging, particularly in view of the current account situation.

Regarding foreign exchange reserves, the governor affirmed the

central bank's commitment to achieving \$13 billion in FX reserves by June-end. In a subsequent statement, the SBP noted, "Inflation continued its downward trajectory, reaching 4.1% year-on-year in December, driven by moderate domestic demand, favorable supply-side dynamics, and a positive base effect."

The statement further projected a temporary decline in inflation in January, with a gradual uptick expected in the following months. However, core inflation remained high. The SBP also reported a gradual improvement in economic activity, as reflected by high-frequency indicators. Despite this, the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) highlighted key challenges: real GDP growth fell below expectations, the current account posted a surplus in December 2024, but FX reserves dipped due to low financial inflows and high debt repayments.

Additionally, tax revenues, despite increasing in December, remained below target, and global oil prices showed heightened volatility. Given these factors, the MPC concluded that a cautious monetary policy stance was essential to maintain price stability. Earlier, analysts and experts expressed hope that the committee would cut the rate by 100 basis points (bps) to 12 percent as positive steps

by the government had eased inflationary pressures.

In December last, the central bank slashed the policy rate by 200 basis points (bps) to 13 percent. The SBP slashed policy rate by 900bps in the past five MPC meetings. "Headline inflation declined to 4.9 percent y/y in November 2024, in line with the MPC's expectations. This deceleration was mainly driven by the continued decline in food inflation and the phasing out of the impact of the hike in gas tariffs in November 2023," the SBP had announced in an official statement.

"However, the Committee noted that core inflation, at 9.7 percent, is proving to be sticky, whereas inflation expectations of consumers and businesses remain volatile. To this effect, the Committee reiterated its previous assessment that inflation may remain volatile in the near term before stabilizing in the target range. "At the same time, the growth prospects have somewhat improved, as reflected by the recent uptick in high-frequency indicators of economic activity. Overall, the Committee assessed that its approach of measured policy rate cuts is keeping inflationary and external account pressures in check while supporting economic growth on a sustainable basis," said the committee.



LAHORE: An illuminated view of Jamia Masjid Babul Islam decorated with colorful lights in connection with Shab-e-Miraj Celebrations. —APP Photo

Governor unveils innovative Low-Cost Housing Scheme

KARACHI (PPI): Governor Sindh Kamran Khan Tessori has announced the launch of a "Low-Cost Housing Scheme" under the Governor Initiatives in collaboration with Saima Builders, aimed at providing affordable housing to underprivileged families.

According to a statement by Sindh Governor today, speaking at the 40th-anniversary celebration of Saima Group of Companies, Governor Sindh said, "This initiative will help middle-class families build their homes within their budgets."

Addressing the media at the event, Governor Sindh Kamran Khan Tessori expressed concern about the economic and social challenges faced by the people of the province. He emphasized that the housing project would directly benefit the public,

ensuring affordability for all. He also announced consultations with various stakeholders to design a comprehensive plan for the scheme.

The Governor stated, "Efforts are being made to restore Karachi's vibrancy and ensure the province's development in every possible way." Highlighting the ongoing initiatives, he mentioned that 50,000 students are currently enrolled in modern IT courses at Governor House. Additionally, programs like the Free Laptop Scheme, distribution of rations to the needy, Bell of Hope, Motorbike Distribution Scheme, and funding for small and large-scale businesses are also in progress.

Earlier, Governor Sindh Kamran Khan Tessori participated in a ceremony held at Saima Green and cut the cake to mark Saima Group of

Companies' 40th anniversary.

Meanwhile, Olympic gold medalist Arshad Nadeem met with Governor Sindh Kamran Khan Tessori at Governor House to discuss the promotion of sports under the Governor Initiatives. During the meeting, Arshad Nadeem congratulated the Governor on the successful organization of the Karachi Marathon.

Arshad Nadeem commended the Governor Initiatives, calling them a significant milestone in promoting sports across the province. Governor Sindh Kamran Khan Tessori emphasized that due to a lack of resources, many talented athletes are unable to progress. He assured that all talented athletes in the province would receive every possible support and encouraged them to approach the Governor House for assistance.

PU marks 100 years of Lahore cinema industry

LAHORE (APP): On the occasion of the completion of 100 years of cinema Lahore, the first three-day International Conference on Creative Arts was organized in collaboration with Punjab University Department of Graphic Design, British Council and other institutions at College of Art and Design.

The conference was attended by Vice Chancellor Prof Dr Muhammad Ali, Eminent British artist Elaine Shemilt, renowned director Syed Noor, renowned comedian Iftikhar Thakur, eminent personalities from the film and theater industry, Vice Chancellor Lahore College for Women University Dr. Uzma Qureshi, Vice Chancellor Home Economics University Dr. Faleha Kazmi, teachers and students in large numbers.

Chinese delegation, Kirmani discuss agriculture cooperation

LAHORE (APP): A delegation of China's (Beijing) Company BGI Group led by its Chairman Dr Wang Jian met with Punjab Agriculture Minister Syed Ashiq Hussain Kirmani here on Monday.

Punjab Agriculture Secretary Iftikhar Ali Sahoo was also present in the meeting. During the meeting, matters related to organic fertilizers, cotton seeds, premium seeds for rice and maize were discussed.

Syed Ashiq Hussain Kirmani said, "Punjab is keen to benefit from China's advanced agricultural research and technology to promote agricultural technology in the province."

He said, "We want to benefit from China's experience in GMO technology and gene editing to boost

cotton production in the province." He said it was the need of the hour to use hybrid seeds with new advanced varieties which were resistant against insects, diseases and climate changes.

The Punjab government would provide full support for the promotion of organic fertilizers and mutual experience sharing on agricultural lands. He further said that to achieve higher per-acre yield and better quality for soybean, maize and rice, premium seeds from BGI group were required. The minister said that both countries have close and friendly relations and collaboration in establishing modern agricultural research and laboratories was essential.

Punjab Agriculture Secretary Iftikhar Ali Sahoo said that visits of agricultural scientists and experts from both countries would be arranged to promote advanced agricultural research enabling them to benefit from each other's experiences.

Dr Wang Jian said that the BGI Group was committed to developing crop varieties suitable for desert climates through genomics technology to protect crops from drought.

He assured that his company would fully cooperate in the development of Punjab's agricultural sector. A pilot project would be launched in Punjab to increase agricultural production with lower production costs through the use of organic fertilizers, he added.

Awan files petition in SHC for reforms in judicial infrastructure

KARACHI (PPI): Prominent Supreme Court advocate and human rights activist Zia Ahmed Awan today filed a constitutional petition in the Sindh High Court (SHC) under Article 199 of the Constitution of Pakistan for solution to the grave challenges facing Karachi's judicial infrastructure and the difficulties litigants encounter in accessing justice.

The petition mentioned the flaws in the judicial infrastructure and presented practical solutions for reform. Several prominent lawyers have pledged to advocate for this petition.

Informing about the details of the petition while addressing representatives from print, electronic, and digital media at a press conference held at the Sindh High Court's media corner, Mr Awan, accompanied by his fellow lawyers, stated that this constitutional petition identified several critical issues within Karachi's judicial infrastructure, including poorly distributed courts, rampant corruption, a slow and ineffective bailiff system, ineffective security systems, lack of fire safety equipment, insufficient restroom facilities, and inadequate provisions for differently-abled individuals.

Elaborating on the background of the reforms proposed in the petition, he cited the initiative by former Chief Justice Qazi Faez Isa to relocate all federal courts in Karachi to one building. He said: "Qazi Faez Isa's vision laid the foundation for improving judicial processes and enhancing coordination among courts." He also mentioned the ongoing work under the leadership of Lahore High Court Chief Justice Neelam Munir for establishing a central judicial complex in Lahore as an exemplary model.

"Regionally, India also has central judicial complexes in Delhi and Mumbai, where special programs for

witness protection have been initiated, along with facilities like ramps, designated seating, and accessible washrooms for people with disabilities. All these steps serve as guidance for the proposed reforms in Karachi's courts," Awan informed.

He further explained that developed countries like the United States and the United Kingdom already have such systems in place in their judicial systems. Regarding the recommendations outlined in the petition, Awan explained that it suggests consolidating Karachi's courts into a central judicial complex.

Awan stated: "This complex would feature modern facilities, including specialized arrangements for differently-abled individuals, enhanced security measures, and comprehensive systems for witness protection. The complex aims to streamline access to justice for litigants, lawyers, and judicial staff, while also reducing unnecessary delays in judicial proceedings."

Discussing additional proposals, Awan emphasized the need for eliminating encroachments within court premises, improving sanitation, and ensuring proper parking arrangements until the central judicial complex is constructed. He stressed the importance of creating a safe environment for female lawyers and litigants and suggested providing green spaces and facilities to reduce stress and promote mental well-being for judicial staff.

He also highlighted the urgent need to install modern fire safety systems, including fire extinguishers, alarms, and emergency exits, to safeguard lives and minimize potential damage. The petition further recommends establishing a polyclinic and an emergency medical unit within court premises to ensure access to basic healthcare. Additionally, the availability of

clean and sufficient restroom facilities and accessible infrastructure, such as ramps, wheelchairs, and elevators for differently abled and elderly individuals, has been prioritized.

Awan also highlighted the flaws in the bailiff system in Karachi's judiciary and recommended measures to address them in his petition. He stated that the role of the bailiff in the judicial system is of great importance as they ensure compliance with and enforcement of court orders. Zia sats several issues persist in the current bailiff system, including insufficient training, corruption, limited resources, and lack of modern technology.

"These problems lead to delays in enforcing court orders and ineffective performance. Our recommendations include providing modern training programs for bailiffs, ensuring the availability of necessary resources and facilities, and promoting the use of technology," he added.

Further discussing corruption, Awan stated that establishing a sub-office based on anti corruption within the High Court's MIT branch immediately, followed by the creation of a separate branch at the Central Judicial Complex, is also part of the recommendations in our constitutional petition to address this issue within the judicial system.

He stated that this constitutional petition is a crucial step toward removing obstacles in the path of justice for Karachi's citizens and modernizing the judicial infrastructure. He emphasized that collective efforts and public support could turn these reforms into reality.

"Access to justice is a fundamental right of every citizen, and the involvement of lawyers and the public in this endeavor is of utmost importance," Awan concluded.

World Bank VP calls on CM, discusses infrastructure, environmental initiatives

LAHORE (APP): A high-level delegation led by Martin Raiser, the World Bank's Regional Vice President for South Asia, called on Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif at CM's office here on Monday.

During the meeting, Martin Raiser commended Punjab's efforts in environmental improvement, declaring the province a 'Regional Champion' for its effective measures in this area.

The discussion also focused on joint initiatives for poverty alleviation, further advancements in IT and infrastructure, and resolving environmental challenges. Both parties agreed to accelerate the ongoing World Bank projects in Punjab, while also launching new ones to address these key sectors.

Martin Raiser praised Punjab's public welfare projects, noting that they align well with the World

Bank's country partnership framework. He expressed the World Bank's full support for improving environmental conditions and sanitation systems in the province.

The delegation acknowledged the government's decision to merge the Population Welfare Department with the Health Department, calling it a positive move. Martin Raiser expressed optimism that this merger would enhance service delivery for the people of Punjab.

Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif expressed her gratitude for the World Bank's continued collaboration in the province's development. She highlighted several key projects, including the launch of the Punjab Clean Air Program with World Bank's support, aimed at tackling environmental pollution. The program will introduce electric buses, rickshaws,

and bikes, alongside the establishment of Vehicle Inspection Stations. The CM emphasized that eliminating pollution is vital for Punjab's survival, and the World Bank's ongoing support is crucial to this effort.

The CM also mentioned the introduction of special training programs to equip Punjab's youth with skills to engage in the global IT market. She further reiterated the province's commitment to enhancing education, health, tourism, and environmental projects with continued support from the World Bank.

World Bank VP Martin Raiser reaffirmed the Bank's commitment to strengthening its partnership with Punjab, particularly in the areas of education, IT, and climate change adaptation. He commended Punjab's exemplary steps in addressing these challenges.

CS orders transparency in Ramzan Package

LAHORE (APP): Punjab Chief Secretary Zahid Akhtar Zaman on Monday instructed all deputy commissioners to gather authentic data of deserving individuals to ensure transparency in the Nigahban Ramzan Package. He emphasized that those in need must receive their rightful share.

The directive was issued during a video link meeting at the Civil Secretariat, which was attended by the CEO of Urban Unit, Chairman PITB, CEO of Punjab Social Protection Authority, and other relevant authorities.

All divisional commissioners and deputy commissioners participated virtually.

The chief secretary stressed that registration in the Punjab Socio-Economic Registry (PSER) is mandatory to receive the Ramzan package and urged the deputy commissioners to complete the registration by February 15.

He reminded the officers that it is their duty to ensure that the needy receive their due assistance with respect and dignity under the Ramzan Package, calling on them to carry out their responsibilities with a spirit of public service.

Senior civil judges receive e-procurement training

LAHORE (APP): Punjab Information Technology Board (PITB), in collaboration with Punjab Procurement Regulatory Authority (PPRA), on Monday organized an e-Procurement orientation and training session for all the senior civil judges of Punjab at the Punjab Judicial Academy, here.

PPRA MD Waqar Azim conducted a detailed interactive session on the PPRA legal framework as part of the training session.

The PITB e-Procurement team provided the orientation of the PITB developed system covering different modules. The session concluded with an interactive Q&A activity.

In this regard, Chairman PITB Faisal Yousaf commented, "The e-Procurement system incorporates modern techniques to ensure secure, efficient government procurement."

Under this system, vendors from any location can submit bids online, making the procurement process more convenient and accessible."

The judges appreciated the system's ability to enhance transparency, accountability and simplification of tendering processes for both procuring agencies and suppliers.

The E-Procurement System is being implemented in various government departments across Punjab. As part of this, training sessions are being delivered jointly by PITB and PPRA to acquaint the concerned staff members with its functionality, scope and benefits.

Radio remains an unyielding pillar of communication

KARACHI (APP): In an era of rapid technological advancement, radio remains an unyielding pillar of communication in Pakistan, especially in under served regions where it serves as a vital force in public discourse, cultural representation, and emergency response.

Commissioner Karachi Hasan Naqvi expressed these views while speaking at the culmination ceremony of the Frequency training program, stresses radio's critical role in national efforts like polio eradication campaigns, voter education during

elections, and crisis management during emergencies, said a statement on Monday.

He commended radio's unique capacity to swiftly disseminate essential information, ensuring that even the most remote communities remain informed during times of need.

The Global Neighborhood for Media Innovation (GNMI), in collaboration with the U.S. Consulate Karachi, organized the Frequency training program for 122 radio professionals in Karachi, Sukkur, Hyderabad, and Quetta from 20 to 27

January 2025.

The training program saw enthusiastic participation from prominent radio stations, including Radio Pakistan, Sindh Police FM 88.66, Mera FM 107.4, Hot FM 105, FM 101, SMIU FM 96.6, FM 93 Gwadar, JEAY FM, Chiltan FM, SKY FM Quetta, and Ziauddin University FM.

Attendees explored innovative strategies for content creation and received certificates of completion at the program's conclusion, celebrating their commitment to advancing the medium.

Lahore police intensify anti-narcotics operations

LAHORE (APP): Under the supervision of Capital City Police Officer (CCPO) Bilal Siddique Kamyana, Lahore Police have intensified anti-narcotics operations in 2025, resulting in significant achievements.

A total of 914 suspects have been arrested, and 888 cases registered during various operations targeting drug dealers.

According to a statement issued by the Lahore Police spokesperson on Monday, the police seized 641 kilograms of hashish, 72 kilograms of opium, 12 kilo-

grams of heroin, 14 kilograms of ice, and 5,916 liters of liquor from the suspects' possession. The arrests were carried out across multiple divisions, with City Division apprehending 179 suspects, Cantt Division 203, Civil Lines Division 96, Sadar Division 141, Iqbal Town Division 123, and Model Town Division 172.

CCPO Bilal Siddique Kamyana has directed the officers to further accelerate efforts against drug dealers and smugglers. He underscored the importance of

collaboration with educational institutions to protect students from the growing threat of drug abuse. He also ordered daily search and combing operations around schools and colleges, alongside a strict mandate to ensure harsh penalties for those involved in drug trafficking.

Reaffirming the Lahore Police's resolve, the CCPO stated that all-out efforts are being made to rid the provincial capital of drugs, with the ultimate goal of making Lahore a drug-free city.

Minister inspects construction projects

LAHORE (APP): Punjab Minister for Communication and Works (C&W) Sohaib Ahmad Bharth conducted an extensive inspection of construction projects and highway conditions across Lahore and Gujranwala divisions.

The visit focused on ongoing infrastructure developments, monitoring overloading on roads, and overseeing security and safety measures.

During the inspection, the minister conducted surprise checks on under-construction highways, BHU (Basic Health Unit) revamping projects, flyovers, and staging units. He also inspected the enforcement of axle load regulations on highways to prevent road damage due to overloading.

The minister also reviewed several key projects, including the revamping of a BHU in Burki, Lahore, and the ongoing construction of the highway from Lahore to the Economic Zone in Kasur. He also evaluated the work at the Sandu Taarar BHU in Hafizabad, expressing dissatisfaction with the progress. The minister issued a three-day deadline for improvements, particularly on the emergency room wall, store room wall, paint, and window panels.

Malik Sohaib Ahmad Bharth took strong action against the overloading of trucks and dumpers on roads. He instructed the DC Hafizabad to deploy teams from the Transport Department immediately to prevent further overloading and protect newly constructed roads from damage.

The minister also reviewed the construction

progress on various roads, including the Sheikhupura-Hafizabad and Khanqah Dogran roads. He directed the immediate commencement of work on the flyover project at the Gujranwala-Kot Sarwar road and ordered the Communication and Works (C&W) Department to release funds for the project.

The minister conducted a visit to the Vocational Training Institute at the Quaid-e-Azam Business

Park and assessed the quality of work at a staging unit. He checked doors, window panels, materials, and finishing work at multiple construction sites, including the 10-kilometer road from Kala Shah Kaku to Kot Pindi Das, the 21-kilometer stretch from Jhabran, and the 29-kilometer road from Sheikhupura to Sharpur.

He also assessed the security situation and patrolling on highways to ensure the safety of road users.



PAF BASE, KOHAT TENDER NOTICE

1. Pakistan Air Force Base, Kohat invites sealed bids from firms / contractors, registered with Income Tax and Sales Tax Departments for collection and removal of scrap of fired / dropped bombs HE, practice bombs, Fire Bombs, Rocket Head and Mortars, expended bullets and empty cases, ejected from any aircraft over the Lachi Firing Range (Lachi), Kohat and cultivation of range, as per requirement, for the period, from 01 July, 2025 to 30 June 2027 (2 Years).
2. Bidding documents, containing detailed Terms & Conditions, procedure for submission of bids, Bid-security, Bid-validity, opening of bid, evaluation criteria, clarification / rejection of Bids, performance guarantee etc are available for the interested bidders, at the office of the O i/c Personnel Squadron, PAF Base, Kohat.
3. The bids, prepared in accordance with the instructions in the bidding documents, must reach at office of the O i/c Personnel Squadron, PAF Base Kohat, on or before **13 February, 2025** at 1000 hrs. Bids will be opened on the same day at 1200 hrs. This advertisement is also available at PPRA's website: www.ppra.org.pk.
4. The competent authority reserves the right to accept / reject any or all tenders, on technical grounds.

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

Barakwal directs to launch of research on tobacco crop

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Provincial Minister for Agriculture Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Sajjad Barakwal, has directed the immediate initiation of research on tobacco crops at Swabi, Charsadda, and Tarnab farms to develop high-quality, high-yielding varieties. Highlighting tobacco as a significant cash crop in the region, the Minister emphasized the need to maximize benefits for landowners by introducing modern agricultural practices.

The directives were issued during a meeting of the Coordination Committee of the Agriculture Department,

chaired by the Provincial Minister. The meeting was attended by Secretary Agriculture Atta-ur-Rehman, Director Generals of all Agriculture Department wings, and other senior officials.

The meeting was informed about the progress made in digitizing the department's operations. Under the Human Resource Management Information System (HRMIS), the digital record of staff across all wings has been developed, allowing performance evaluations through advanced technology. The initiative aims to enhance accountability and ensure efficient service delivery to farmers. Similarly, the

department's resources have been digitized through the Assets Management System to promote transparency and optimize resource utilization for public benefit.

Commending these advancements, the Minister praised Project Director Syed Aqeel Shah and his team for their efforts. He urged all Director Generals to expedite the implementation of these systems to bring innovation and efficiency to the agriculture sector.

In addition, the Minister instructed all wings to intensify efforts for the development of agriculture across the province. He called for the formulation of recommendations on

agricultural policy and crop zoning in collaboration with the University of Agriculture Peshawar. These recommendations, along with a comprehensive action plan, will be presented in the next Coordination Committee meeting.

The Minister also emphasized the importance of promoting modern technology, including advanced seed production and mushroom cultivation, to support farmers and boost agricultural output. Collaboration between agricultural research and extension departments was suggested to raise awareness and increase the cultivation of high-value crops.



PESHAWAR: Provincial Minister for Agriculture Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Sajjad Barakwal chairing a meeting of the Coordination Committee of the Agriculture Department.

PDA Food and Cultural Family Festival concludes

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: During the last day of the Peshawar Development Authority (PDA) of Food & Cultural Family Festival at Central Park Regi Model Town, Peshawar to provide quality entertainment to the residents of Peshawar, while promoting critical social issues, including Child Protection.

The Directorate of Social Welfare (MDs) with the support of UNICEF, set up dedicated Child Protection Pavilion to highlight ongoing child protection interventions through Child Protection Units and Child Protection Vans. The stalls theme, 'From harm to hope: A journey of Protection and healing chil-

dren, aimed to raise awareness, sensitize the public, and generate dialogue about the challenges faced by vulnerable children, particularly those living on the streets.

Artwork by street children was displayed alongside IEC materials on the importance of psychosocial support, community-based child protection case management, and other interventions. Moreover, a dedicated space for families and children to experience and learn about the benefits of psychosocial support services was setup. Through this stall, the department aims to educate and advocate with public on preventing child protection violations and bringing these pressing issues to the fore-

front in a culturally engaging environment, to inspire public dialogue and action.

During the closing ceremony Riaz Mehsud - Commissioner Peshawar Division was the chief guest for the event. He visited child protection pavilion and appreciated child protection intervention for street children. The applicability of Psycho social Support, recreational, social worker kits were appreciated by the Commissioner. Art work by street children were applauded as an artistic expression of these vulnerable children voices through creativity. Customized Child Protection Van was visited by the Commissioner and appreciated the CP van

innovative intervention.

Voices of street children in shape of letters from Peshawar street children were presented to the commissioner. He promised to place the frame in his office and extended interest in detail meeting with the Department and UNICEF to work collaboratively for the protection of street children.

Commissioner Peshawar division appreciated the efforts of the Directorate of Social Welfare with the support of UNICEF in advancing child protection. A special thanks to the Director General of PDA for providing a creative platform to engage families and communities in such a meaningful and impactful way.

Rifaqat appointed project director

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Rifaqat Khan Appointed Project Director for PEHL 911 Initiative Peshawar, January 27, 2025: The Additional Chief Secretary



of the Home and Tribal Affairs Department has officially assigned Mr. Rifaqat Khan, Deputy Director (BPS-18) of the Provincial Security Secretariat, as the Project Director and Drawing and Disbursing Officer (DDO) for the "PEHL 911" project under the Annual Development Program (ADP) Scheme No. 617/240330. Mr. Khan has been entrusted with this additional responsibility to oversee the execution of the "PEHL 911" initiative, which aims to enhance emergency response services across the province. This appointment comes with immediate effect, highlighting the department's confidence in his expertise and leadership skills.

Dr. Muhammad Tahir defends Ph. D thesis

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Muhammad Tahir defended PhD thesis in Management Sciences at Iqra National University, Peshawar.

His research dissertation titled "The Impact of Six Risk Premium Factors on Excess Portfolio Returns in the Non-Financial Sector of Pakistan" presents an in-depth analysis of the effects of six significant risk premium factors on excess portfolio returns in Pakistan's non-financial sector.

His research has provided valuable theoretical and practical insights into the fields of Multi-Factor Asset Pricing Models and Portfolio Management.

During the PhD defense seminar, Dr. Muhammad Tahir successfully defended his dissertation and provided well-reasoned and comprehensive answers to the questions posed by the participants and all members of the examination committee.

This remarkable achievement stands as a clear testament to his academic diligence, expertise, and dedication. The research was completed under the guidance and supervision of the following esteemed advisory and review committee.

Action taken against violators by traffic police

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The City Traffic Police Peshawar has taken legal action against 290 people who committed violations during the ongoing campaign against overloading in school vans and other passenger and cargo vehicles.

A press release issued by a spokesman of City Traffic Police quoting Chief Traffic Officer (CTO) Harsoon Rasheed Khan as saying that due to overloading of cargo and passenger vehicles, there is not only a fear of accidents, but exceeding the required limit also causes irreparable damage to the roads. has gone Chief Traffic Officer Haroon Rashid K

According to the details, on the special instructions of Haroon Rasheed Khan, the City Traffic Police Peshawar cracked down on passenger vehicles, freight vehicles, and especially vehicles carrying school children during the ongoing campaign against overloading.

During the current campaign, legal action was taken against 290 perpetrators by the traffic police. According to Chief Traffic Officer Haroon Rashid Khan, the purpose of the campaign is not only to ensure the safety of people's lives and property from accidents. It is to protect, but also to protect the roads from damage caused by freight vehicles, he added

Noreen Shah defends her Ph.D thesis

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Noreen Shah, a Ph.D scholar, has defended her thesis successfully in English literature at Qurtuba University of Science and Information Technology, Peshawar.

Professor Dr. Samina Ashfaq, Qurtuba University Peshawar, supervised the Scholar. Dr. Liaqat Iqbal from Abdul Wali Khan University was the external examiner in the thesis defense. This thesis critically examines Pakistani writer Sabyn Javeri's short story collection Hijabistan through the lens of radical feminism, utilizing Michael Foucault's theories on discourse, power, and knowledge.

The primary objectives of this study are threefold: to identify the key themes and modes of radical feminist discourse in Hijabistan, to critically analyze how these elements challenge Pakistan's traditional socio-cultural and religious beliefs, and to explore the intersections between Foucault's theories of Power/Knowledge, the Order of Discourse, and radical feminist theory in the context of Pakistani literature.

It argues that Javeri's works reflect significant misconceptions about Pakistani society and advance a singular agenda of disseminating radical feminist principles.

Workshop for project team on pedagogy of care for refugee educators ends



F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The Area Study Centre (Russia, China & Central Asia) University of Peshawar hosted a comprehensive capacity-building workshop for the project team working on the "Pedagogy of Care" initiative. This

groundbreaking project focuses on empowering 50 refugee educators from District Dir Lower and District Peshawar through an 8-month hybrid training program aimed at fostering care-centered teaching practices.

The capacity-building training brought together

13 project team members from the University of Malakand and the Area Study Centre, who were trained in essential skills including qualitative data collection, qualitative data analysis, and navigation of Learning Management Systems (LMS). These competen-

cies are critical to the effective implementation and monitoring of the project.

The workshop concluded with a certificate distribution ceremony, where the esteemed Vice Chancellor of the University of Peshawar, Dr. Muhammad Naeem Qazi and Principal Investigator of the project, Dr. Muhammad Ali Dinakhel awarded certificates to the participants. Speaking on the occasion, Dr. Qazi lauded the efforts of the project team and emphasized the importance of building teacher capacity to support the educational needs of refugees.

This capacity-building workshop reflects the University of Peshawar's commitment to advancing education for vulnerable communities and fostering professional growth among refugee educators in Pakistan.

CM to inaugurate Peshawar Uplift Program Phase-II projects

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Under the public agenda of Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Ali Amin Gandapur, development projects aimed at enhancing the beauty of the provincial capital, Peshawar, and providing facilities to the public have entered their final stages.

These projects, part of the Peshawar Uplift Program Phase-II, include the Hayatabad Jogging and Cycling Track, which will be opened to the public immediately after its inauguration.

The Commissioner of Peshawar Division, Riaz Khan Mehsud, highlighted these developments during a visit to ongoing projects under Phase-II of the Peshawar Uplift Program. He stated that CM Gandapur is set to inaugu-

rate all completed projects next month, with the Hayatabad Jogging and Cycling Track being a key addition to promote healthy activities among residents.

Several development projects have already been completed under this program, including renovations at the historic University of Peshawar.

Other initiatives include the construction and beautification of the Peshawar Zoo (Pulosai) Road, restoration of the historic Agriculture Institute, renovation and preservation of the historic Revenue Department archives, and the construction of monuments along University Road to enhance its aesthetic appeal.

Commissioner Riaz Mehsud also conducted a trial walk at the Hayatabad Jogging and Cycling Track and reviewed other projects nearing completion.

He emphasized that these development initiatives will not only add to the beauty of Peshawar but also provide much-needed facilities to the public.



Stunting in Children: Govt lackluster approach sparks concerns in KP

PESHAWAR (APP): Amid chirping birds in tall canopy trees signaling the dawn of a new morning at Mohib Banda village on River Kabul, the sunrays casts it's relatively warm glow on mud house of Kamal Khan (30), a determined fruit seller whose life changed after joining the painstaking business following an untimely death of his father due to pancreas cancer.

Taking control of his father's business in 2015 despite difficult financial position, Kamal concentrated on the sale of organic produce from the bustling Chamakani market at Peshawar from where he brings fresh fruits and vegetables daily to his hometown town in Nowshera.

Defeating poverty with share will power, Kamal who bought a rickshaw for transportation of fruits and vegetables was now

all smiles after seeing people's overwhelming response to organic fresh fruits and vegetables useful in combating stunting in children and lactating mothers.

Khan sells a variety of organic fruits and vegetables including apples, orange, ladyfinger and potatoes in his shop to cater the rising consumers' demand for quality nutritious food and balanced diet in the wake of skyrocketing price-hike in KP that unnerved consumers.

"As spring approaches, the demand for organic produce surges," he said, adding some times he visited twice to Chamkani market for more fresh fruits and vegetables.

However, he highlighted the financial risks that come with selling of perishable goods during harsh winter, rainy and hot summer.

Dr. Samiullah Khan, a

children's specialist at the Government Hospital Pabbi Nowshera, emphasized the critical role of a balanced diet in combating malnutrition, particularly stunting in children, lactating mothers and elderly citizens.

"Healthy dietary practices must start early in children life and breastfeeding is essential for proper growth and cognitive development of the newborn," he reiterated.

He said that dietary guidelines suggested that total fat intake should not exceed 30% of daily calories, with saturated fats kept below 10%, warning that excessive salt intake can lead to hypertension and increase risk of the heart diseases.

Declaring malnutrition as silent killer, Dr. Saimuallah said that it poses a significant threat to children's over health and cognitive development besides affect their physical growth.

Pakistan has ranked second in the region for stunting, with 40% of children are being affected by this condition annually due to socioeconomic imbalances, poverty and lack of excess to quality medical treatment.

Alarmingly, many children especially in less developed districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa including merged tribal districts, Tank, Batagram, Kohistan and Chitral do not meet essential micronutrient needs due to high rate of poverty there.

The studies indicated that upto 70% of children fall short on calcium, iron, zinc, and vitamin A, with a staggering about 50% suffering from vitamin C deficiency.

Dr. Samiullah highlighted the pervasive issue of iron deficiency, which affects nearly half of children under five years of age, leading to developmental delays and

increased chances of pneumonia and other fatal ailment due to weak immunity.

As per National Health Survey of Pakistan report, one in three children are malnourished, with nearly 40 percent facing stunting and low weight at birth and five years of age.

The root causes of malnutrition include repeated use of unbalanced diets, vivacious poverty, limited access to healthcare and food insecurity.

Darya Khan, Provincial Coordinator at Nutrition International in Peshawar, said Govt was encouraging organic farming to address challenge of malnutrition especially in children and pregnant mothers.

He noted that people, who consumed regularly inorganic foods are more susceptible to various health issues and became victims of strokes, stomach disorders, piles and cardiovascular and cardio

thoracic diseases.

"Promoting home-based agriculture can significantly improve nutrition level of Pakistan's 241 million population for whom provision of healthy diet was a big challenge," he argued. The longevity of life and health of communities in remote areas, such as Hunza and Swat, illustrated the benefits of organic and balanced diets.

The cultural shift toward organic food cultivation is gaining traction in urban centers like Islamabad, Lahore, Peshawar and Karachi, Darya Khan said, adding that organic farming has experienced an annual growth rate of 15% in Pakistan over the past decade which was a positive sign.

Dr. Zilakat Malik, former Chairman of the Economics Department at the University of Peshawar, said that approximately \$3 billion

annual losses occurs into country due to micronutrient deficiencies, accounting for 1.33% of the nation's GDP.

He said that stunting in children and pregnant mothers increased in KP due to increase of poverty rate after 2022 floods that affected agriculture and livestock immensely.

He called for an urgent intervention, such as promoting sustainable agricultural practices, enhancing women's access to education and income, and strengthening healthcare systems besides financial support to poor families during pregnancies for better mother-child health.

Dr. Ihtesham Ali, advisor to the Chief Minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa on health, highlighted the government initiatives to promote balanced diet and combat malnutrition.

Under the Ehas Nashonoma program, he said that financial support

is provided to poor families, with special focus on girls and lactating mothers.

He said that Rs2500 per month for newborn girls and Rs2000 for newborn boy are being given to poor parents for two years.

Additionally, he said that health records are maintained for beneficiaries to monitor the growth and health of children under two years to combat malnutrition.

The CM aide said the promotion of healthy diets and sustainable agriculture farming practices was imperative to defeat stunting.

By prioritizing nutrition and investing in food, education and healthcare, he said the common goal of healthy children and prosperous Pakistan could be achieved for which all segment of the society have to play a positive role to combat stunting in children.



In brief

Elderly man shot dead F.P. Report

D I KHAN: An elderly man was reportedly shot dead by unknown assailants here in the limits of Gomal University police station on Monday. According to Rescue 1122 spokesman, a 70-year-old man was shot dead by unknown assailants near Baloch hotel in Noon-Nawab area. The Rescue team, after receiving information about the incident, rushed to the site and shifted the body to hospital. The deceased was identified as Malik Kheir Muhammad, a resident of Qureshi Morr. The local police also reached the site and launched investigation.

Man, daughter shot dead

FAISALABAD (INP): A man and his daughter were shot dead by their rivals in an ambush in the jurisdiction of Dijkot Police Station in Faisalabad on Monday. Police sources said that the investigators were trying to ascertain the real motive behind the gruesome murders. Accused Amin and his colleagues targeted the father-daughter duo over a minor dispute erupted between them. Regional Police Officer (RPO) Faisalabad Dr. Mohammad Abid Khan after taking notice of the incident also sought a detailed report. The RPO formed special police squads to arrest the culprits. He said that they are investigating the case from different angles. He assured the heirs of the victims that an exemplary punishment will be awarded to the culprits involved in this crime. He said that all necessary measures will be adopted to provide justice to victim's families on priority basis. Further investigation was underway.

Dinner for journalists hosted F.P. Report

DADU: Sindhi Adabi Sangat (SAS) hosted a dinner for the selected journalists of Mehr Press Club, demanding the arrest of the killers of the martyred journalists, and the cancellation of the decision to draw 6 canals from the Indus River. The ceremony was presided over by renowned writer and poet Johar Brohi. The special guests were Mehr Press Club President Badar Sahool, General Secretary Akbar Kandharo, Akbar Panhwar, Muhammad Ali Sheikh, Jamil Mahesar, Ghulam Hussain Panhwar, Waheed Mahesar, Faqir Azim Janori, Murtaza Panhwar, Sono Depar, and Zaheer Abbas Panhwar. A large number of writers, poets, political and social leaders participated in the ceremony. In his presidential address, renowned writer, poet and researcher Johar Brohi said that despite the storm of social media, newspapers are read and the importance of books remains. Literature is related to journalism and journalism is related to literature.

Horse race concluded F.P. Report

TOBA TEK SINGH: A horde race was held at Lahore Club on January 5, 2025. Horses from all over Pakistan participated in this race. Apart from this, the brilliant horse HIGH VOLT bred by Bhutta Stud Farm Kamalia won new year cup at Lahore race club and he won Rs and 3 million by beating all horses from Pakistan. Bhutta stud farm and racing incorporation owned by Chaudhry Aftab Hussain Bhutta is leading thoroughbred horse breeding and racing facility in Pakistan and Canada who imported horses from Europe and North America.



CHINIOT: Federal Minister for Maritime Affairs, Qaiser Ahmed Sheikh talking to media persons.

Kohat press club elects new cabinet

Sahibzada Afridi

KOHAT: Noor Muhammad Bangash elects President of Kohat Press Club. Kohat Press Club elections for the year 2025 were held at Kohat under the supervision of the President District Bar Association Kohat Dr. Ameer Ajam Advocate and Deputy Director Information Kohat Irshad Afridi.

Chairman of the Election Committee was Muhammad Ismail Khalid while Sahibzada Afridi and Munawar Orakzai were its members. 29 members of the press club participated in the election.

Noor Muhammad Bangash and Mutamaz Bangash contested for the presidency.

Noor Muhammad Bangash was declared President by getting 22 votes while his opponent Muntaz Bangash



got only 7 votes. Faisal Nadeem and Zahir Khan Bangash contested for the post of Press Club General Secretary, in which Faisal Nadeem got 19 votes and Zahir Khan Bangash got 10 votes. Similarly Basit Gilani was elected as Joint Secretary defeating his rival Ejaz Orakzai.

Five candidates Wazir Ali, Isar Ali, Allah Dad, Abid Hussain and Qazi Noor Khan contested for the four seats of executive members, in which Allah Dad, Wazir Ali, Isar Ali and Abid Hussain were declared successful.

Finance Secretary of Press Club Faizan Banuri, Vice President Kamran Khan Bangash and Liaison Secretary Aleem Haider were elected unopposed. Furthermore, Kohat Union of Journalists candidates for president Farhan Ahmad Bangash Vice President Yasir Shah, General Secretary Khalid Makki, Finance Secretary Fayaz Mohammad Bangash, Joint Secretary Bashir Jan and two members of Majlis Amalia Mohammad Sajid and Shakoor Ahmed have also been elected unopposed.

Three die, two hurt in firing in Bara F.P. Report

BARA: Including a police official, three persons killed and two others got injured in unknown armed persons firing over business dealing in jurisdiction of Bara police station near Qambarabad Chawk, Bara Bazaar on Monday.

The police force rushed to the site, cordoned off the area and collected evidence of the site. According to the police official, a quarrel might erupt between two parties over monetary dispute and after exchange of hot words unknown armed persons opened indiscriminate firing.

As a result three persons were killed while two seriously wounded, police official said. The deceased were identified as Abdul Wali (police person), Muhammad Afzal and Qismat while Muhammad Hasan and Abid were seriously wounded. The injured and bodies were shifted to Bara health center for medico-legal formalities, police said. As per the police, a case was registered against unknown killers and investigation was kicked off, police said.

Father, son killed over property issue F.P. Report

CHARSADDA: In Charsadda district, a father and his son were killed and three others seriously injured when their car was ambushed and fired at on Monday.

Police said, the incident occurred in the jurisdiction of Mandani police station near Mandani Khwar over a property issue. The armed assailants ambushed the car and started indiscriminate firing, killing Marifat Shah and his son. Three individuals were critically injured in the attack. The deceased and injured were immediately shifted to the hospital, while an FIR for the incident was registered at Mandani police station.

Woman killed, four children hurt F.P. Report

BUNER: Wife of Qari Nisar, a resident of Kander Katai Amazi, died on the spot, and Qari Nisar along with four children critically injured when their car went out of control and fell into a deep ditch in the limits of Babaji Kundu, City Police Station Swari Buner on Monday.

The rescue team has shifted the body of the woman and the injured to the district headquarters hospital. The rescue and police have confirmed the incident and said that the members of the ill-fated family were traveling in a motor car when the car went off the road and fell into a deep ditch at Babaji Kundu, as a result, the woman died on the spot. Qari Nisar who was on driving seat with along with four children received serious injuries. While the motor car was damaged.

The local residents and the riders of vehicles running on the road reached the spot and took part in the rescue operations and the rescue 1122 team arrived on receiving the information and took part in rescue activities as well and transported the dead body and the injured to the hospital.

26th amend passed to ensure supremacy of constitution: Muqam

F.P. Report

MINGORA: Federal Minister for States and Frontier Regions, Gilgit Balistan and Kashmir Affairs, Engr Amir Muqam here Monday said that the judicial reforms introduced through 26th constitutional amendments were aimed to ensure supremacy of law and constitution besides strengthening democracy in the country.

Addressing the Swat Bar Association here, Engr Amir Muqam that the 26th constitutional amendment has been passed by the political parties with consensus aimed at providing relief to the masses. He said that increasing the number of judges in the supreme court would help clear the rising cases backlog.

Engr Amir Muqam said that great responsibilities rest on the bench and bars to provide speedy justice to the litigants. He said that the people of Malakand had rendered great sacrifices for the country and held their sacrifices in fight against terrorism in high esteem. The Federal

Minister said that he had raised voice on every forum for rights of people of Malakand and took credit for exempting Malakand division from taxes keeping in view of their long sufferings due to terrorism and floods in the past. He said progress and prosperity of the nation was linked with peace and the Govt would make no compromise on peace and rights of masses.

Engr Amir Muqam criticized the PTI leadership over unilaterally ending talks with govt committee, adding Govt started negotiations with PTI with open heart and sincerity that was unfortunately not reciprocated well by the PTI leadership.

Later talking to reporters, Engr Amir Muqam clarified that there was no difference among political parties of the ruling alliance and 'we all are united to take the ship of democracy forward.' He said the Govt would complete its five years term and address people's problems.

He said KP would have achieved record development today had PTI Govt

not stopped PMLN Govt projects. He supported the stance of providing uninterrupted electricity to the consumers with zero line losses and 100 percent recovery. To another question, Engr Amir Muqam said that the Kurram problem needs an inclusive approach by all stakeholders, and great responsibilities rest on the KP Govt to bring durable peace there. He said the entire nation was standing shoulder to shoulder with its valiant security forces to wipe out of terrorism.

He said that 'we would continue support to the relevant security organizations till restoration of durable peace to the Kurram tribal district. Engr Amir Muqam said that provinces have no mandate to talk directly with any country as only the Federal Govt has the authority to hold negotiations with a foreign state on any issue. The Federal Minister said that he was well aware of the problems of the lawyers community and assured to take their issues with relevant authorities.

Principal, teacher booked for torturing students in Narowal

F.P. Report

NAROWAL: Police registered a first information report (FIR) against principal and teacher of a private school located in Dhabliwala area of Narowal for torturing students, on Monday. As per the FIR, over a dozen students suffered injuries from torture unleashed by principal Umar Rasheed and teacher Mohammad Talha. A video clip surfaced on social media showing the students were being roughed up by the teachers.

The footage showed that the teachers were armed with sticks when they started beating students

mercilessly while on the other hand the students were trying to save them from torture.

After taking notice of the video, Punjab education department approached the police for registration of the FIR, which was lodged on behalf of Assistant Education Officer (Men) Mohammad Zaman Bajwa. DPO Narowal Naveed Malik said that a teacher was arrested by a police team of Saddar while search to apprehend the other accused was under way. Disheartened farmer offers free cauliflower: In a viral incident mirroring a similar one in Narowal, a

farmer in Shakargarh vegetable market gave away cauliflower for free after being disheartened by its plummeting price of Rs50 per maund. Reports reveal that the farmer distributed over a maund of cauliflower at no cost and even offered cold drinks along with the vegetables, leaving citizens in the market rushing to fill their bags with the free produce. Frustrated by the unstable market prices, the farmer urged authorities to take steps to stabilise rates in vegetable markets, as the viral incident highlighted the dire financial challenges farmers are facing.

Govt commits for service delivery at doorsteps

F.P. Report

HAFIZABAD: Member Provincial Assembly, Aoun Intisar Bhatti has said that the Punjab government 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.

DC commits for hygiene environment: 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 Solid 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.

Special event held at Jail: 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.

Political leaders congratulate Wana press club cabinet

F.P. Report

WANA: The personal secretaries of MNA Constituency 42, Zubair Khan Wazir, and MPA PK-110, Ajab Gul Wazir, Wali Muhammad Wazir, and Arshad Haroon Wazir, congratulated the newly elected president of the District Press Club Wana, Shahzada Wazir, and his cabinet members.

On behalf of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) parliamentarians, they extended their congratulations and goodwill to the newly elected cabinet of the Press Club Wana for the year 2025.

Wali Muhammad and Arshad Haroon presented garlands to the newly elected cabinet of the District Press Club Wana and conveyed their best wishes. On this occasion, the guests emphasized the importance of the press club, encouraging its

members and elected cabinet to highlight political issues. They also praised the positive role of journalists from the District Press Club Wana. Wali Muhammad Wazir assured complete support and cooperation in resolving the issues of the press club and journalists.

He stated that the provincial government of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf is prioritizing the resolution of issues faced by press clubs across the province and that PTI parliamentarians will provide full assistance in this regard. He further remarked that the media is the fourth pillar of democracy and that journalists play a crucial role in highlighting societal issues.

During the event, the newly elected cabinet members expressed their gratitude and reaffirmed their commitment to fulfilling their jour-

nalistic responsibilities efficiently. They also announced their participation in the completion ceremony of regional development projects and pledged fair media coverage.

Admn hold grand Jirga to redress grievances: The administrative headquarters of South Waziristan Lower, hosted a significant grand jirga aimed at resolving long-standing issues related to the Angoor Adda Gate and the tribes residing in the area. The jirga brought together representatives from the nine major tribes of the Ahmadzai Wazir, including prominent tribal elders, religious scholars, and a large number of local tribespeople.

During the gathering, the participants unanimously resolved to continue their efforts to address the challenges faced by the community on a priority basis.

Govt postgraduate college looted

Syed Waliullah Shah

NOWSHERA: A theft incident occurred at the Neelab Hall of Government Post Graduate College Nowshera, where the thief stole a UPS, a speaker's MP Feir, and valuable cables.

The college's security team, with the help of CCTV cameras, identified the thief and reported the incident to the police. The police prompt-

ly arrested the thief and recovered the stolen items.

According to the report filed by the college's Chief Security Officer, Tariq Fazal, the incident occurred on the night of [date]. Fazal stated that when he arrived at his office, the college staff informed him that unknown thieves had entered the Neelab Hall and stolen the UPS, speaker, and cables.

The Nowshera Cantt

Police registered a case and, after reviewing the college's CCTV footage, identified the thief as Irfan, son of Abdul Jameel, a resident of Badrashi. The police promptly arrested Irfan and recovered the stolen items. The recovered items include a UPS, a speaker's MP Feir, and valuable cables. The police have taken the thief into custody and are investigating the incident further.



BRUSSELS: Protesters waving Palestinian flags during a demonstration called by a dozen pro-Palestinian organisations in support of the Palestinian people.

Int'l peacekeepers killed as fighting rages around Congo's key city

GOMA, Congo (AP): Fighting with M23 rebels in eastern Congo has left at least 13 peacekeepers and foreign soldiers dead, United Nations and army officials said. M23 has made significant territorial gains in recent weeks, encircling the eastern city of Goma, which has around 2 million people and is a regional hub for security and humanitarian efforts.

The UN Security Council moved up an emergency meeting on the escalating violence. Congo requested the meeting, which had originally been scheduled for Monday. Congo's army said it fended off an M23 offensive towards Goma with the help of its allied forces, including UN troops and soldiers from the Southern African Development Community Mission, also known as SAMIDRC.

"The Rwandan-backed M23 is clearly exploiting the presidential transition in the US to advance on Goma - putting thousands more civilians at risk," Kate Hixon, advocacy director for Africa at Amnesty International US, told the Associated Press. Congo, the United States and UN experts accuse Rwanda of backing M23, which is mainly made up of ethnic Tutsis who broke away from

the Congolese army more than a decade ago.

Rwanda's government denies the claim, but last year acknowledged that it has troops and missile systems in eastern Congo to safeguard its security, pointing to a buildup of Congolese forces near the border. UN experts estimate there are up to 4,000 Rwandan forces in Congo. The burning wreckage of a white armored fighting vehicle carrying UN markings could be seen on a road between Goma and Sake, where much of the fighting was concentrated in recent days. Two South African peacekeepers were killed, while a Uruguayan Blue Helmet was killed, a UN official told The Associated Press. The official spoke on condition of anonymity because they weren't authorized to speak on the matter publicly.

Additionally, three Malawian peacekeepers were killed in eastern Congo, the United Nations in Malawi said. Seven South African soldiers from the SAMIDRC were also killed during clashes with M23 over the last two days, South Africa's department of defense said in a statement. Uruguay's military in a statement

issued identified its member killed in Congo as Rodolfo Álvarez, who was part of the Uruguay IV Battalion. The unit, according to the statement, is working "uninterruptedly to comply with the United Nations mandate, as well as to guarantee the evacuation of non-essential civilian and military personnel from the city of Goma."

"Various measures have been taken to improve the security of our troops, who are operating in adverse conditions," the military said. It added that four Uruguayan peacekeepers were also injured. Three of them remained in Goma while a fourth one was evacuated to Uganda for treatment. Since 2021, Congo's government and allied forces, including SAMIDRC and UN troops, have been keeping M23 away from Goma.

The UN peacekeeping force, also known as MONUSCO, entered Congo more than two decades ago and has around 14,000 peacekeepers on the ground. South Africa's defense minister, Angie Motshekga, was visiting the country's troops stationed in Congo as part of the UN peacekeeping mission the day the soldiers were killed.

Trump's Palestinian refugee idea falls flat with Jordan

DORAL, Fla. (AP): President Donald Trump's push to have Egypt and Jordan take in large numbers of Palestinian refugees from besieged Gaza fell flat with those countries' governments and left a key congressional ally in Washington perplexed.

Fighting that broke out in the territory after ruling Hamas attacked Israel in October 2023 is paused due to a fragile ceasefire, but much of Gaza's population has been left largely homeless by an Israeli military campaign. Trump told reporters aboard Air Force One that moving some 1.5 million people away from Gaza might mean that "we just clean out that whole thing."

Trump relayed what he told Jordan's King Abdullah when the two held a call: "I said to him, 'I'd love for you to take on more because I'm looking at the whole Gaza Strip right now, and it's a mess.'" He said he was making a similar appeal to Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sissi during a conversation they were having while Trump was at his Doral resort in Florida. Trump said he would "like Egypt to take people and I'd like Jordan to take people."

Egypt and Jordan, along

with the Palestinians, worry that Israel would never allow them to return to Gaza once they have left. Both Egypt and Jordan also have perpetually struggling economies and their governments, as well as those of other Arab states, fear massive destabilization of their own countries and the region from any such influx of refugees. Jordan already is home to more than 2 million Palestinian refugees. Egypt has warned of the security implications of transferring large numbers of Palestinians to Egypt's Sinai Peninsula, bordering Gaza.

Trump suggested that resettling most of Gaza's population of 2.3 million could be temporary or long term. Jordan's foreign minister, Ayman Safadi, said that his country's opposition to what Trump floated was "firm and unwavering." Some Israel officials had raised the idea early in the war.

Egypt's foreign minister issued a statement saying that the temporary or long-term transfer of Palestinians "risks expanding the conflict in the region." Trump does have leverage to wield over Jordan, which is a debt-strapped, but strategically important, US ally and is heavily dependent on for-

eign aid. The US is historically the single-largest provider of that aid, including more than \$1.6 billion through the State Department in 2023.

Much of that comes as support for Jordan's security forces and direct budget support. Jordan in return has been a vital regional partner to the US in trying to help keep the region stable. Jordan hosts some 3,000 US troops. Yet, new Secretary of State Marco Rubio exempted security assistance to Israel and Egypt but not to Jordan, when he laid out the details of a freeze on foreign assistance that Trump ordered on his first day in office.

Meantime, in the United States, even Trump loyalists tried to make sense of his words. "I really don't know," said Sen. Lindsey Graham, when asked on CNN's "State of the Union" about what Trump meant by the "clean out" remark. Graham, who is close to Trump, said the suggestion was not feasible.

"The idea that all the Palestinians are going to leave and go somewhere else, I don't see that to be overly practical," said Graham, R-S.C. He said Trump should keep talking to Mideast leaders, including Saudi Crown Prince

China tells Rubio to behave himself in veiled warning

BEIJING (AP): China's veteran foreign minister has issued a veiled warning to America's new secretary of state: Behave yourself. Foreign Minister Wang Yi conveyed the message in a phone call, their first conversation since Marco Rubio's confirmation as President Donald Trump's top diplomat four days earlier.

"I hope you will act accordingly," Wang told Rubio, according to a Foreign Ministry statement, employing a Chinese phrase typically used by a teacher or a boss warning a student or employee to behave and be responsible for their actions. The short phrase seemed aimed at Rubio's vocal criticism of China and its human rights record when he was a US senator, which prompted the Chinese government to put sanctions on him twice in 2020.

It can be translated in various ways - in the past, the Foreign Ministry has used "make the right choice" and "be very prudent about what they say or do" rather than "act accordingly." The vagueness allows the phrase to express an expectation and deliver a veiled warning, while also maintaining the courtesy necessary for further diplomatic engagement, said Zichen Wang, a research fellow at the Center for China and Globalization, a Chinese think tank.

"What could appear to be confusing is thus an intended effect originating from Chinese traditional wisdom and classic practice of speech," said Wang, who is currently in a mid-career master's program at Princeton University.

Rubio, during his confirmation hearing, cited the importance of referring to the original Chinese to understand the words of China's leader Xi Jinping. "Don't read the English translation that they put out because the English translation is never right," he said.

A US statement on the phone call didn't mention the phrase. It said Rubio told Wang that the Trump administration would advance US interests in its relationship with China and expressed "serious concern over China's coercive actions against Taiwan and in the South China Sea." Wang was foreign minister in 2020 when China slapped sanctions on Rubio in July and August, first in response to US sanctions on Chinese officials for a crackdown on the Uyghur minority in the Xinjiang region and then over what it regarded as outside interference in Hong Kong. The sanctions include a ban on travel to China, and while the Chinese government has indicated it will engage with Rubio as secretary of state, it has not explicitly said whether it would allow him to visit the country for talks.

Joint fight needed against Kurdish militants

ANKARA (Reuters): Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan said after talks in Baghdad that a joint battle using "all our resources" must be carried out to eliminate both Islamic State and Kurdish militants in the region. Visit took place amid repeated calls from Turkey for the Kurdish YPG militia in northeast Syria to disband following the fall of former Syrian President Bashar al-Assad last month, with Ankara warning it could mount a new cross-border operation against the group unless its concerns are addressed.

The YPG spearheads the US-allied Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF). Turkey considers them terrorists that are an extension of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), against which Ankara carries out regular cross-border military operations in northern Iraq's mountainous regions. Ankara and the West deem the PKK a terrorist organisation. Before the fall of Assad, the SDF was the United States' main local partner in the fight against Islamic State in Syria. Speaking alongside his Iraqi counterpart Fuad Hussein, Fidan said he had reiterated Turkey's expectation for Iraq to formally label the PKK a terrorist organisation, after Baghdad recognised it as a "banned organisation" last year.

Trump plans will be 'catastrophic' for Haiti: President

ROME (AP): The president of Haiti's transitional presidential council said the Trump administration's decisions to freeze aid programs, deport migrants and block refugees will be "catastrophic" for Haiti. Leslie Voltaire made the comment in an interview with The Associated Press in Rome following a meeting with Pope Francis at the Vatican. He visited the pope to ask for help for Haiti.

"I'm knocking on the doors of people who love Haiti. The pope loves Haiti, and he is eager to help," Haiti's interim president said. The pontiff and Voltaire discussed the dire situation in Haiti where gangs have killed civilians and operate across the Caribbean nation with impunity. Half of Haiti's 11.4 million people are already hungry, according to Voltaire, and losing humanitarian assistance will make the situation dramatically worse.

"Trump said that Haiti is a 'shit-hole,' so I don't think he will care about Haiti," Voltaire said, noting that thousands of people are already being repatriated from the Dominican Republic every week and gangs are terrorizing the populace. With the new US policies, "the situation will be catastrophic." During his first administration, President Donald Trump used bluntly vulgar language to question why the US would accept immigrants from Haiti and "shit-hole countries" in Africa. At the time, the White House did not deny his remark but issued a statement saying Trump supports immigration policies that welcome "those who can contribute to our society."

Voltaire said there are roughly 1.5 million

Haitians in the United States and roughly 150,000 who were accepted under a program called the "Temporary Protection System." "Trump says that he will expel all of them," Voltaire said, adding that Haiti, which is already struggling with hunger and internally displaced people, cannot handle the influx.

In a report released this month, the UN migration agency said internal displacement within Haiti has tripled over the last year and now surpasses 1 million people. The situation has been largely caused by gang violence in the Caribbean country. The new figure provided by the International Organization for Migration represents a record for Haiti. IOM said that "relentless gang violence" in Haitian capital of Port-au-Prince has fueled a near-doubling of displacement in the city and a collapse of health care and other services and worsening food insecurity. About 200,000 people have been forcibly returned to Haiti over the last year mostly from Dominican Republic.

Voltaire and his transitional government have been tasked with leading the country to general elections, an elusive goal but he is convinced they can make it happen by next November despite powerful gangs that rule 85% of the capital and are gaining ground in surrounding areas.

Nevertheless, Voltaire is positive that if Haiti's multinational police force is boosted with several thousand additional officers they can go ahead with elections this year.

Kenya is leading the multinational police force with a total deployment of more than 600, below the 1,000 officers the country's president pledged. An addi-

tional 150 Guatemalans and an advance team of eight Salvadoran troops have also arrived, but the force remains far below its anticipated strength of 2,500 officers. Voltaire said Benin has pledged an additional 2,000 soldiers. "We have to do a referendum on a new constitution and also the election at the end of November. I say that we can do the elections because we have like eight departments, like 80% of the country. We can do the election."

The power of gangs in Haiti has grown since the 2021 assassination of President Jovenel Moïse. Some gangs have even indicated they want to be part of the political process. Voltaire excluded that possibility. "I don't think they should be around the table. I think they are criminals." More than 5,600 people were reported killed across Haiti last year, according to the United Nations. The number of killings increased by more than 20% compared with all of 2023, according to the UN Human Rights Office.

Last week UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres warned that gangs could soon could overrun the capital, Port-au-Prince, leading to a complete breakdown of government authority without additional international support for the beleaguered national police. Voltaire said he asked the pontiff to organize an international conference of solidarity for Haiti. The Pope wrote "international conference" on a sheet of paper, Voltaire said, and later the Vatican Secretary of State, Pietro Parolin, told him the Vatican would try to convince Mexico and Canada to participate in funding a conference on Haiti.

Belarus frees American woman from detention

MINSK (AP): Belarus has "unilaterally" freed an American woman from detention, US Secretary of State Marco Rubio announced, as the Kremlin-allied country held an orchestrated election poised to give strongman President Alexander Lukashenko yet another term on top of his three decades in power.

Rubio's post on the X social network identified the US citizen as Anastasia Nuhfer. It said she was detained during former President Joe Biden's tenure, but did not specify when or why. Rubio's statement came following waves of prisoner releases by Lukashenko, often dubbed "Europe's last dictator." Belarus' oldest rights group, Viasna, says that over 1,250 people remain in detention over their opposition to the authorities.

Lukashenko's opponents, many of whom are imprisoned or exiled abroad by his unrelenting crackdown on dissent and

free speech, have called election a sham. The last election in 2020 triggered months of mass protests unprecedented in Belarusian history. The US State Department said later that Nuhfer was detained in early December 2024. It said that earlier this month, a consular officer from Washington was granted rare access to an American detainee in Belarus.

A former high-ranking Belarusian diplomat told AP that Nuhfer's arrest was linked to the 2020 protests, although he did not give details. The source, who spoke on condition of anonymity due to security concerns, said that Lukashenko himself offered to free the US citizen "as a gesture of goodwill," while declining to release any Belarusian opposition and rights activists. Nuhfer's release took the public and even Belarusian activists by surprise. Her name hadn't been publicly released and hadn't featured on lists of political prisoners. Pavel Sapelka of

the Viasna rights group, said that he and his colleagues had been unaware of her arrest or its circumstances.

Lukashenko's support for the war in Ukraine has led to the rupture of Belarus' ties with the US and the EU, ending his gamesmanship of using the West to try to win more subsidies from the Kremlin. But Artiom Shraybman, a Belarus expert with the Carnegie Russia and Eurasia Center, predicted that Minsk could try to ease its total dependence on Russia after the election, by again seeking to reach out to the West. "Lukashenko's interim goal is to use the election to confirm his legitimacy and try to overcome his isolation in order to at least start a conversation with the West about easing sanctions," Shraybman said. It was unclear what, if any, concessions Minsk has requested in exchange for releasing the US citizen.

Woman charged in fatal shooting of a Border Patrol agent

WASHINGTON (AP): A Washington state woman has been charged in the fatal shooting of a US Border Patrol agent in Vermont, which happened days after authorities began watching her and a German companion who also died in the roadside shootout, the FBI said.

Teresa Youngblut, 21, faces two weapons charges in connection with the death of Border Patrol Agent David Maland, 44, who died Monday during the shootout in Coventry, a small town about 20 miles (32 kilometers) from the Canadian border. According to an FBI affidavit, a border agent pulled over Youngblut and Felix Bauckholt on Interstate 91 to conduct an immigration inspection. At the time, Bauckholt appeared to have an expired visa, according to a Department of Homeland Security database, but investigators later confirmed that his visa was current, the FBI said.

Youngblut, who had

been driving Bauckholt's car, got out and opened fire on Maland and other officers without warning, the FBI alleges. Bauckholt tried to draw a gun but was shot, the affidavit states. At least one border agent fired on Youngblut and Bauckholt, but authorities haven't specified whose bullets hit whom.

"The events leading to this prosecution tragically demonstrate how the men and women of law enforcement regularly put their lives on the line as they try to keep our communities and our country safe," acting US Attorney Michael Drescher said in a statement. "We intend to honor them, and the memory of Border Patrol Agent Maland, by performing our prosecutorial duties so that justice may be done." Investigators had been performing "periodic surveillance" of Youngblut and Bauckholt since Jan. 14 after an employee at a hotel where they were staying reported concerns after see-

ing Youngblut carrying a gun and she and Bauckholt wearing black tactical gear, according to the affidavit. Investigators tried to question the duo, who said they were in the area looking to buy property but declined to have an extended conversation, the FBI said.

About two hours before the shooting, investigators watched Bauckholt exit a Walmart in Newport, which is just north of Coventry, with two packages of aluminum foil. According to the affidavit, he was seen wrapping unidentifiable objects while seated in the passenger seat. During a search of the car after the shootout, authorities found cellphones wrapped in foil, a ballistic helmet, night-vision goggles, respirators and ammunition, the FBI said. They also found a package of shooting range targets, including some that had been used, two-way radios, about a dozen "electronic devices," travel and lodging information for multiple states, and an apparent journal.

Philippines accuses China's forces of harassing fisheries vessels

MANIL (AP): Chinese coast guard ships and a Chinese navy helicopter harassed a group of Philippine fisheries vessels conducting a scientific survey in a hotly disputed area of the South China Sea, forcing them to cancel the operation, the Philippine coast guard said.

Beijing has repeatedly asserted sovereignty over most of the South China Sea and accused rival claimant states, including the Philippines, Vietnam and Malaysia of encroachment. China has demarcated its territorial claims with a 10 dashed-line printed on maps but has not provided the exact coordinates. The incident

took place near Sandy Cay, three small uninhabited sandbars flanked by an artificial island base of Chinese forces and a Philippines-occupied island in the Spratly archipelago, the coast guard said.

The Chinese coast guard ships approached two larger vessels, which maneuvered to avoid a collision, and a navy helicopter flew low over two smaller boats deployed by the ships, forcing the survey to be called off. A Chinese coast guard statement said that it drove the Philippine ships away after they entered the waters without China's permission and attempted to land on the cay - which

is called Tiexian Reef in Chinese - and conduct sand sampling.

Videos released by the Philippine coast guard show a Chinese coast guard ship sailing very close to a vessel officials identified as belonging to the Philippines. Another video shows a Chinese military helicopter hovering low over the rough seas near a vessel flying a Philippine flag. The latest flare-out of the long-simmering territorial disputes in one of the world's busiest trade and security passageways could test President Donald Trump's commitment to maintain America's role as a counterweight to China, which has increasingly carried

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Better trajectory for Sino-US ties

IN a telephone conversation with US Secretary of State Marco Rubio on Friday, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi expressed Beijing's hope and expectation that China and the United States can find the right way to get along in the new era.

Coming one week after Chinese President Xi Jinping spoke with Donald Trump shortly before his inauguration as the 47th president of the United States, the conversation between Wang and Rubio maintained the practical optimism for bilateral relations expressed by the two leaders.

So far, the Trump administration's statements regarding relations with China are distinctly different from those of its confrontational predecessor, with Trump saying that he looks forward to maintaining good relations with President Xi and emphasizing that the two countries can work together to solve many problems in the world. Likewise, Rubio said the US hopes to have candid communication with China, resolve differences, manage the bilateral relationship in a mature and prudent manner, and work together to address global challenges and maintain peace and stability in the world.

Wang said that the two heads of state having pointed out the direction and set the tone for China-US relations, it is now incumbent on the two sides to maintain communication, manage their differences and expand cooperation in line with the principles of mutual respect, peaceful coexistence and win-win cooperation, with a view to finding the right way for the two countries to get along with each other.

By opening his talks with Rubio with that call, Wang has unmistakably expressed Beijing's expectation that the new US administration, at the executive level, can work together with its Chinese counterpart to faithfully transform the consensus reached between the two heads of state into concrete actions, projects, programs and initiatives of cooperation, communication and coordination in various fields with a shared sense of responsibility and urgency.

That the talks between Wang and Rubio came three days after the latter hosted a meeting of the foreign ministers of Japan, India and Australia in Washington under the Quad framework is probably no coincidence. All three countries taking part in the Quad have markedly accelerated their respective efforts to repair ties with China since Trump won the 2024 US presidential election, and achieved remarkable progress. Their face-to-face talks with the new top US diplomat should have provided the latter with a firsthand knowledge of how unpopular the clique-building attempts of the former US administration were among its allies and, more importantly, Beijing's openness to work for the common good of the Asia-Pacific and beyond with all like-minded partners.

Both China and the US, two great countries, are pursuing their own dreams and are committed to making the lives of their people better. In the process, as Wang stressed, China has no intention to overtake or replace any country. But it will safeguard its legitimate right to development. Major countries shoulder their due international responsibilities to safeguard world peace and help all countries achieve common development.

As Xi said to Trump in their phone call on Jan 17, China and the US share extensive common interests and broad space for cooperation, and the two countries can become partners and friends, contribute to each other's success, and enjoy common prosperity, which will benefit both countries and the whole world.

It is inevitable that China and the US, two major countries with different national conditions, should have some differences. But the key to peaceful coexistence and win-win cooperation is mutual respect for each other's core interests and major concerns, and finding appropriate ways to solve issues.

It is thus to be hoped that the new US secretary of state will play a constructive role by acting accordingly on the common understandings reached between the two leaders for the future of the people of China and the US, as well as for the peace and stability of the world.

The two countries should step up their cooperation on the basis of mutual respect and do more great, practical and good things that are conducive to keeping the two giant ships of China and the US moving forward on the course of stable, healthy and sustainable development.

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Shame on world for allowing Gaza genocide

Chris Doyle

IT is hard to think of any moment when a major international institution has taken a decision of genuine import to challenge Israeli impunity. The UN Security Council has done so on occasions, but typically a US veto, or even just the threat of one, prevents this.

However, a year ago on Sunday, Jan. 26, the International Court of Justice decided to order legally binding provisional measures against Israel to protect Palestinians in Gaza from the possibility of genocide.

Such a grim anniversary merited great respect from those who cherish human rights. Yet no major leader commented. There were no laments about the failure to prevent genocide. The media generally ignored it, despite this being one of the most seminal judgments the court has ever made.

The case as presented by South Africa, involving just over six hours of forensic legal analysis and evidence, was powerful. It was still a jaw-dropping moment when the judges issued their historic verdict. Was Israel, for once, going to be held to account?

The decision of the 15 judges acknowledged there was a genuine risk that the rights of the Palestinian population in Gaza not to be exterminated could have been breached. For some, it was even controversial that the court determined that the Palestinians are a people with rights.

The South African submission demonstrated the intent of the Israeli leadership to destroy the Palestinian people "in whole or in part." Intent is the key factor in determining genocide, not any success in destroying large numbers of a specific group.

That was a year ago and the Israeli actions since have not softened, but rather got harsher. If there were any doubts about it being genocide last January, they have long since dissipated for many. The three months in northern Gaza before the recent ceasefire deal were the worst period of the entire genocide. Can anyone deny that the Israeli leadership's intent was not geared toward "causing serious mental and bodily harm" to the Palestinians there?

The International Court of Justice is the world's highest judicial body. Provisional measures are its trigger warning to the world to act. Nobody has done so, even after the court added further provisional measures in March and May. Instead, the arms have kept flowing. The countries that are supplying Israel with weapons are complicit in what it is doing.

Yet other states have joined South Africa, including European countries such as Ireland and Spain. Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, two of the world's largest human rights groups, have deter-

mined Israel has committed genocide. Holocaust and genocide scholars have warned of this as well.

One provisional measure was that all parties should prevent and punish incitement to genocide. As yet, however, not one of the Israeli leaders, from the president downward, have been punished for their genocidal comments. Following warnings from their lawyers, some have calmed their language, if not their actions. But not all.

Israeli Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich last week said that Gaza is "an animalistic society that sanctifies death." It is a rare thing to find a senior American or European politician who has demanded that the incitement stops and that those who have made such statements be punished.

A key charge against Israel was that it was using starvation as a weapon of war. The court ordered Israel to "take immediate and effective measures to enable the provision of urgently needed basic services and humanitarian assistance" in Gaza. Israeli leaders and anti-Palestinian groups have spent months spreading the lie that it was the UN and Hamas that was holding up aid, despite the evidence to the contrary.

From October 2023, Israel deliberately restricted the entry of lifesaving aid into Gaza. This is not conjecture. It was stated policy.

Compare the number of trucks getting into Gaza prior to the Jan. 15 deal with the days following. In the first six days after the deal, Israel allowed in 4,200 trucks, an average of 700 a day. In October last year, the average daily number was just 57. Israel turned off the tap and was able to turn it back on at will. The aid was waiting at the border.

In addition, Israel's deliberate denial of power meant Gaza's healthcare, water and sanitation systems could not function.

Some argue that the focus should now all be on implementing the Israel-Hamas deal. This is naive. Firstly, if Israel knew it had to take an International Court of Justice ruling seriously, then it would have changed its approach to Gaza a year ago. Secondly, this deal is, at best, a pause in the hostilities. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has not committed to ending military activity in Gaza and, in the meantime, has mounted a further invasion of the West Bank.

This was a historic ruling. The failure of powerful actors to take it seriously should shame them all. Even if you do not believe that Israel's actions do constitute genocide, it is impossible to deny that war crimes and crimes against humanity have been committed. By ignoring the International Court of Justice, these powers have not just facilitated this genocide but also other genocides to come.

Why India is pursuing ties with the Taliban

Talmiz Ahmad

INDIAN Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri, the country's most senior diplomat, this month met the acting foreign minister of the Taliban government, Amir Khan Muttaqi, in Dubai. This was India's highest level of interaction with the Taliban since the latter regained control of Afghanistan in August 2021. According to reports, the Indian official conveyed that India would consider participating in development projects in Afghanistan, providing substantial support to the country's health sector and for the rehabilitation of refugees, and expanding commercial and humanitarian links through Chabahar Port in Iran.

Applauding this important engagement, the Afghan Foreign Ministry in Kabul described India as a "significant regional and economic partner," affirmed its interest in strengthening "political and economic relations with India," reiterated that "there is no threat from Afghanistan," and sought the facilitation of Indian visas for traders, patients and students "in order to enhance diplomatic relations." No country has so far established formal diplomatic ties with the Taliban government, though at least 40 interact with Taliban officials, some through resident missions.

This interaction between the Indian foreign secretary and the Afghan acting for-

eign minister

was part of a carefully calibrated evolution of India's ties with the Taliban. Following the destruction of the Taliban "emirate" at Kandahar by US forces after the 9/11 attacks, India had supported the governments in Kabul led by President Hamid Karzai and later President Ashraf Ghani. It also provided development assistance valued at \$3 billion for infrastructure and education and health projects. This earned extraordinary goodwill for India among the Afghan people.

This period also witnessed heavy fighting between the Taliban and the Kabul government, which was backed by a US-led international coalition. India viewed the Taliban as an extremist movement. Hence, after the US' withdrawal from Afghanistan and the coming to power of the Taliban in Kabul in 2021, India ended its diplomatic presence and development assistance.

However, given the importance India attaches to its historic bonds with the Afghan people, in late 2021 it provided food and medical assistance in the war-devastated country. In June 2022, India reopened its embassy in Kabul. This has been described as a "technical team" and does not entail formal diplomatic ties with the Taliban government.

The latest bilateral engagement in Dubai signals a major upward trajectory in India-Afghanistan

relations.

It has largely been influenced by the Pakistani factor. Islamabad has watched the Taliban continue to provide sanctuary to the militants of Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan, who regularly conduct armed attacks in Pakistan, while disputing the sanctity of the 2,640-km Durand Line that divides Afghanistan and Pakistan.

In reprisal for attacks in Pakistan, its aircraft bombed Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan positions in Afghanistan in March and December last year.

The divide between the Pakistani and Taliban governments has provided India with the opportunity to explore the prospects of constructive ties with the Taliban and to revive its links with the Afghan people. In order to encourage a positive Indian response, the Taliban have reiterated that they will not allow their territory to be used by movements hostile to India.

Besides India's interest in reengaging with the Afghan people with health and welfare support and addressing its own concerns relating to extremist groups, improved ties with the Taliban will also serve India's longer-term geopolitical interests.

This pertains to using Chabahar Port to set up links with Afghanistan and the Central Asian republics. This vision of logistical connectivity has been in place for at least two decades but could not

be realized earlier due to the conflict in Afghanistan. These linkages, with considerable energy, trade and investment potential, can now be realistically pursued in areas of considerable strategic importance for India.

Though there is much value in the engagements being shaped with the Taliban, the situation is not without its uncertainties and challenges.

Firstly, the Taliban have not yet convinced India and large sections of the international community that they have shed their extremist persona.

Secondly, the movement is not a united house; it is made up of several diverse groups, some of which could oppose improved ties with India.

Thirdly, the Taliban do not control the whole country. There are motley opposition movements that could be instigated to revive armed conflict against the Taliban and plunge the country into fresh fighting.

The Taliban government is presently torn between its ideological commitments and attendant affiliations with like-minded extremist groups and the need to obtain external support to meet the development needs of its people. India's ties with the Taliban may be expected to move forward in line with continuing evidence that the Taliban are fulfilling their commitments on the terrorism issue and are capable of inclusive and effective governance.

On the Auschwitz anniversary, Europe cannot ignore its far-right problem

Farid Hafez

ON January 27, 1945, the largest Nazi concentration and extermination camp, Auschwitz-Birkenau, was liberated. An estimated 1.3 million people were deported to Auschwitz between 1940 and 1945 and 1.1 million of them were murdered.

As Europeans mark the 80th anniversary of this dark chapter of history, their leaders are releasing statements about the "civilisational rupture" the Holocaust represented and the need to "resist this hatred". Yet, many of these declarations do not seem to take stock of the political reality in Europe, in which the successors of the fascist and Nazi forces behind the Holocaust are now gaining popularity and even taking power.

Of course, far-right parties and figures have repeatedly paid their respects to Holocaust victims and pledged to combat anti-Semitism, but that does not mean they have relinquished their Nazi and fascist past. Rather, they have undertaken a strategic realignment which – with the help of the political mainstream – allows them to retain and propagate the same dangerous ideas of white supremacy and hatred. So how did we get here?

For decades, Europe's far right openly embraced anti-Semitism. Figures like Jean-Marie Le Pen, the founder of the National Front in France, and Jörg Haider, founder of the Freedom Party in Austria, disrupted the political consensus of post-war Europe by embracing Holocaust denial rhetoric.

They were vocal in expressing their hatred but they remained on the margins of political life.

However, over the past few decades, and especially with the start of the US-led "war on terror", the far right gradually shifted its rhetoric towards open Islamophobia. Far-right leaders, like Geert Wilders of the Party for Freedom in the Netherlands, portrayed themselves as defenders of Western civilisation against a new "enemy": the Muslims.

They adopted Christianity – and, symbolically, Judaism – as cultural markers to rally the majority who embrace the "values" of the "Judeo-Christian world" against their contemporary "other". They played on people's fears related to globalisation and immigration by using Islamophobic imagery, claiming Muslim communities are a threat and immigration from the East – an invasion.

This rhetoric not only reflects the framing of the Muslim world that the "war on terror" imposed but also fits into the narrative that Israel embraced in justifying its continuing oppression and occupation of the Palestinians. It is not surprising then that the far right finally embraced Israel.

While in the past, they questioned Israel's right to exist, referring to Palestine as Judea and Samaria.

In 2010, after a trip by far-right leaders from Austria, Belgium, Germany and Sweden, their parties signed the so-called Jerusalem Declaration, which expressed the commitment of these forces to Israel's "right to self-defence" from "Islamic forces".

This strategy of swapping anti-Semitic rhetoric and beliefs for Islamophobic ones, while embracing the violence of Israel, has proved to be quite successful.

As a result, today, at the 80th anniversary of the end of the Holocaust, the far right is the strongest it has been since World War II.

The political landscape of 2022-24 reflects this success. In 2022, Giorgia Meloni and her post-fascist Brothers of Italy won the Italian snap elections; she became the country's first far-right female prime minister.

In the 2023 Dutch elec-

tions, Wilders' far-right party came out first and after months-long negotiations, formed a coalition government.

In 2024, Portugal, which had long lacked strong far-right representation, saw the Chega party grow its parliamentary seats from 12 to 50. In France, the National Rally came in third in terms of parliamentary seats but won the popular vote. In the UK, Reform UK became the third largest party with 14 percent of the vote; it is currently polling at 25 percent, one percentage point behind the ruling Labour. In Germany, Alternative for Germany (AfD) claimed victory in elections in the state of Thuringia. In Austria, the Freedom Party won the national elections with 29 percent of the vote and is set to lead the government.

At the European level, the far right was able to form the third-largest group in the European Parliament called the "Patriots for Europe", following the elections in 2024. They adopted the slogan "Make Europe Great Again".

While the far right's rise is a victory for its own movements, it also reflects the failures of Europe's political establishment. Centre-right parties have largely embraced anti-immigration and Islamophobic politics, legitimising these positions rather than challenging them. Meanwhile, centre-left parties have struggled to address these issues effectively, leaving them vulnerable to the so-called culture wars. The mainstream's failures in government have led to growing socioeconomic discontent, especially among the working class, which the far right has also managed to take advantage of.

In a number of countries, the far right was excluded from government for years and served as a uniting factor for centrist parties in coalition negotiations. But that is no longer the case, as the growing number of coalitions that include the far right across Europe demonstrate. The time of this so-called cordon sanitaire is largely over.

This normalisation of the far right has emboldened it more and more to the point that its members are no longer shy about sharing publicly their extremist ideas. In Austria, the Freedom Party openly talked about "remigration" as part of its election campaign last year, while a member of the AfD called for a "Srebrenica 2.0 in Germany" among her peers.

These calls represent an updated form of the same anti-Semitic and racist ideologies that led to the horrors of the Holocaust. The defence of whiteness has simply switched its "enemy" from Jewish to Muslim people. The white supremacy and replacement theory remain the same and are at the core of today's far-right ideology.

The dramatic rise of the far right and its normalisation of racism and genocidal intent cast a long shadow over the European mainstream's insistence that the Holocaust was a "civilisational rupture", that it was unique and exceptional.

The ideologies and forces that led to the Holocaust have historically produced imperial genocidal violence outside of Europe. And they are still very much present in European politics.

That means the threat of such genocidal violence continues.

That is made quite apparent in the staunch support for the genocide in Gaza by some European countries and the denial that it is taking place.

In this context, the solemn statements released today to mark the anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz ring hollow. Eighty years after the end of the Holocaust, the resurgence of the far right is a chilling reminder of the fragility of European commitment to "never again".

After forcing Colombia to back down, White House claims America is respected again

DONALD Trump **claimed an early victory for a coercive foreign policy based on tariffs and hard power on Sunday after announcing Colombia had backed down in a dispute over migrant repatriation flights.**

The president had earlier unveiled swift and painful punishment, including huge tariffs, on the US ally in his most overt attempt yet to make an example of a nation that crossed him and to assert dominance in the Western Hemisphere.

The crisis erupted when Colombian President Gustavo Petro blocked US military flights carrying undocumented migrants from landing, in a hitch for the mass deportation operation meant to honor one of Trump's most high-profile campaign promises.

The US president jumped at a chance to show his supporters how tough he can be and to demonstrate to other countries in Latin America the price of resisting migrant repatriations.

After hours of tensions with Bogota, the White House said Colombia had agreed to accept migrant flights, including on military aircraft, and that tariffs would be held off pending its implementation of the deal.

"Today's events make clear to the world that America is respected again," White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt said in a statement late Sunday. "President Trump will continue to fiercely protect our nation's sovereignty, and he expects all other nations of the world to fully cooperate in accepting the deportation of their citizens illegally present in the United States."

Colombia's foreign minister soon confirmed that US deportation flights had resumed. Petro's reversal represents a concession to US power and to Trump's aggressive personal style. It is also likely to embolden administration officials who see tariff threats not simply as a traditional device in trade disputes but as a tool to intimidate other nations, including longtime US allies, across a broader set of issues.

Still, the spat with Colombia was also a reminder of how Trump's hardline approach will cause massive global disruption. The US president has already browbeaten Canada and Mexico over border issues, sought to force Denmark to sell Greenland, and threatened to take back the Panama Canal.

Four years of such tactics could harm US global relationships and harden attitudes to Americans among foreign populations. The Colombia dispute quickly got the attention of China, which is seeking to increase its influence in Washington's backyard — underscoring the potential downside for the United States if Trump chooses incessant confrontation that alienates key regional nations.

Trump's victory over Colombia capped the first

week of his presidency, during which he used intimidation as a device to stamp his power on the United States at home and to sharply change the nation's path abroad.

On Sunday, for instance, Trump's new administration launched a deportation blitz in Chicago that will spread countrywide in the latest highly visible sign of his desire to quickly get results.

White House border czar Tom Homan told CNN's Priscilla Alvarez Sunday that the new multi-agency approach on immigration enforcement was a "game-changer."

"Today's operation was all of government. President Trump has put all of government on this issue," he said. Nearly 1,000 people were arrested in the sweep Sunday, according to Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

This followed another stunning example of the new president wielding aggressive executive authority after he fired

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more than a dozen watchdog officials in key government agencies Friday night.

The purge is part of Trump's attempts to remake the federal government in line with a long-held conservative belief that the federal bureaucracy always frustrates Republican presidents as they try to implement electoral mandates.

But since the agency inspectors general report waste, fraud and abuse to Congress, the move is being criticized by Democrats as an abuse of power and a sign of Trump's cavalier regard for government ethics. And even some top Republicans complained the president should have complied with the law by giving Congress 30 days' notice of the dismissals.

"I think he should have done that," Sen. Lindsey Graham said on CNN's "State of the Union" on Sunday.

But the South Carolina Republican asked: "Is it OK for him to put people in place that he thinks can carry out his agenda? Yes. He won the election. What do you expect him to do, just leave everybody in place in Washington before he got elected?" Graham added: "He feels like the government hasn't worked very well for the American people."

Trump has hinted that he could be a transformational leader showing energy and

Stephen Collinson

focus and acting quickly to implement his campaign promises, especially on immigration. His agent of disruption in the Pentagon, Pete Hegseth, was sworn in as defense secretary Saturday after Vice President JD Vance cast the deciding Senate vote on his controversial confirmation.

But Trump has also taken steps that could alienate many of the swing voters who sent him back to power.

His blanket pardons of January 6, 2021, rioters — including those convicted of violent offenses — shocked many

Republicans. And his decision to strip security details from former aides who criticized him, including several who have been threatened by Iran, revealed an obsession with past grievances that sometimes distracts from his political goals.

Trump said last week that voters were more concerned with immigration

The leftist president even suggested that Trump considers "me an inferior race and I'm not, nor is any Colombian."

Ryan Berg, director of the Americas Program at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, said Petro may have had his reasons to pick an early fight with Trump — not least amid dissatisfaction with the existing trading relationship with the US, a longtime military ally. Berg added that Petro might think "he's going to benefit from juxtaposing himself to the United States and being seen as fighting for the dignity of Latin America."

Still, long-term 50% tariffs on Colombia from the US, its largest trading partner, could be disastrous. And hours before the White House announcement that Colombia had come around, Berg predicted that Colombia would have to quietly come to an agreement with Trump.

"They're in for a rude awakening if they think

they can just survive 50% tariffs and everything else that Trump said he was going to do — sanctions on banks and investments and everything else," he said. The head of the Colombo American Chamber of Commerce, Maria Claudia Lacouture, wrote on X that 25% US tariffs would be immediate and devastating. "We call for sanity, dialogue and common sense, prioritizing diplomatic channels to overcome this serious crisis in the shortest possible time. Calm is important for all the actors involved," she wrote.

US trade in goods and services with Colombia totaled \$53.5 billion in 2022, according to the US Trade Representative — a small fraction of America's commercial relationships with its top partners such as Canada and China. Still, a prolonged trade war with Colombia could have had one tangible impact: making breakfast in America more expensive if already soaring prices for eggs were accompanied by hikes in the price of a key Colombian export — coffee.

Trump's slap down of Petro is the most significant play yet from his administration on Latin America. Later this week, new Secretary State Marco Rubio will visit Panama, Guatemala, El Salvador, Costa Rica and the Dominican Republic with

US demands to halt migrant flows and increase deportations from US soil at the top his agenda.

More broadly, the next four years are likely to intensify a geopolitical contest between the United States and China for influence in Latin America. Trump has already alienated Panama by falsely claiming that Beijing controls the Panama Canal, and he's threatened to take back sovereignty of the key waterway between the Atlantic and the Pacific oceans.

It was no coincidence, therefore, that China's ambassador to Colombia chose Sunday afternoon — as diplomatic insults flew between Trump and Petro — to point out an interview in which he recalled that Colombia's foreign minister said last year that relations between Bogota and Beijing were at their "best moment" in 45 years.

And the reality that the rest of the world has a say — however aggressively Trump wields power — may also complicate his ambitious plans to reshape the Middle East following his weekend suggestion that he could "clean out" war-ravaged Gaza and send refugees to Jordan and Egypt. Such an idea, although embraced by the Israeli far-right, is a non-starter for the key US allies and could scupper his top regional goal — getting Arab states lined up alongside Israel in an anti-Iran front.

The administration's new multiagency immigration enforcement operation in Chicago started as ICE field offices have been told by the new administration to meet a quota of 75 arrests per day, according to two sources.

The Trump team last week told federal prosecutors to investigate officials in Democratic-run cities and states like Chicago and Illinois if they resist the new immigration enforcement efforts. This raised the possibility that the mass deportations could trigger the most serious clash between federal and state and local power in years.

Illinois Democratic Gov. JB Pritzker said on "State of the Union" that he shared the administration's goal of deporting violent criminals but raised doubts about the administration's approach.

"If that's who they're picking up, we're all for it," Pritzker said. But, he added: "They're going after people who are law-abiding, who are holding down jobs, who have families here, who may have been here for a decade or two decades." Whether that backfires politically remains to be seen.

After meeting on Monday with House Republicans, whose tiny majority has enormous implications for Trump's agenda, the president returns to Washington, where his desire to swiftly consolidate power means the second week of his second term will surely be as busy and jolting as the first week.

— CNN

In his first week back in office, Trump has already achieved one of his key goals

Raghida Dergham

IT has been an extraordinary week since Donald Trump was sworn in as the 47th president of the US. From his executive orders and unconventional partnerships to his declaration that God spared him from assassination attempts to fulfil his mission of making America great again, Mr Trump is dominating global headlines once again.

Even more remarkable is the extent to which world leaders — politicians, tech innovators, AI experts, and business moguls alike — are taking him seriously. Some do so out of fear of the consequences of challenging him, while others are betting on being a part of the potential benefits of his economic and political policies.

Either way, Mr Trump is no longer the man many dismissed as impulsive, chaotic, or irrational. Today, he is a leader making bold, independent decisions with confidence, leveraging his political savvy to implement unconventional policies. While he remains divisive at home and controversial abroad, Mr Trump has already achieved one of his key goals: commanding serious attention worldwide.

There is no need for psychologists or political scientists to understand Mr Trump's priorities in his second term. Indeed, he has articulated them clearly, using straightforward, firm, and often harsh language.

This began on his inauguration day, when he sat in the Oval Office signing executive orders with his bold signature in black ink, addressing journalists' questions with detailed knowledge and comprehensive explanations of complex issues.

When addressing the World Economic Forum in Davos, live from the White House, Mr Trump adopted a blunt tone with European nations and the financial world, and his message was unmistakably clear. Under his leadership, America's greatness would no longer come at its own expense rather the other nations benefiting from it would be expected to shoulder the financial burden.

To business leaders, he highlighted the advantages of manufacturing and producing in America, offering tax incentives. But for those unwilling to comply, he warned of steep tariffs. His message boiled down to this: America's greatness, and the pragmatic economic policies this demands, is what matters to him.

Without hesitation, his message was straightforward, as if it says: you are welcome as partners and investors in America, where opportunities and incentives await you.

However, if you choose otherwise, that is your choice — but be aware that tariffs and restrictions on your goods will not work in your favour.

Even with allies he

holds in high regard, such as Saudi Arabia — he called Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman a "great man" — Mr Trump prioritised American interests, calling for lower oil prices in line with his goal of boosting the US economy; and encouraging Riyadh to increase investments in his country from \$600 billion to \$1 trillion although this was framed as mutually beneficial for the two countries.

Mr Trump wants his legacy to be that of a peacemaker, as he declared in his inaugural speech, but he aims to achieve this through unorthodox methods not traditional diplomatic norms. As a businessman, he approaches negotiations with a deal-maker's mindset, the art of the deal, starting with maximalist demands but expecting others to eventually meet him halfway. For those unwilling to co-operate, his strategy is simple: blame them, isolate them, and impose punitive sanctions.

His approach to the Ukraine war reflects this philosophy. Free of lofty rhetoric or back room deals, Mr Trump sent a clear message to Russian President Vladimir Putin: the door for negotiation is open, but the cost of waiting would weigh heavily on Russia and her president, not on the US.

Mr Trump views financial pressure and imposed bankruptcy as a tool for deterrence but also as a means to avoid military confrontation, as exemplified by his strategy with Iran.

However, he has made it clear he would not hesitate to take military action if Tehran crossed the nuclear red line or continued supporting proxy groups such as Hamas in Palestine or Hezbollah in Lebanon.

In Yemen, Mr Trump has re-designated the Houthi movement as a "foreign terrorist organisation" and imposed severe sanctions to deter attacks on US interests, regional allies and to ensure maritime security in the Red Sea.

His messaging underscored Iran's direct responsibility for the situation in the Red Sea while hinting at the roles of China and Russia in leveraging Houthi alliances to secure their own strategic interests.

Strategically, Mr Trump has no intention of entangling America in wars during his presidency as he has a genuine aversion to them. He also refuses to dedicate his energy to conflicts he deems secondary to US interests, such as the Palestinian-Israeli conflict or the emerging Syrian question.

Instead, his focus lies closer home, such as on disputes with Mexico, or extends to grander ambitions, including his grand proposals involving Greenland, Panama and even Canada.

Still, Mr Trump's

vision does not necessarily lie in these lofty dreams but rather in his drive to reduce costly bureaucracy and replace it with administrative efficiency. He wants to transform the US into a more agile, resilient, and great power that is able to grow and reposition itself without being weighed down financially and materially by the cost of its dominance, as has often been the case in the past.

The new "Great America," which seeks to maintain global peace through a modern "Pax Americana," wants a world where other nations share the responsibility of funding their own peace.

Mr Trump plans to push Europe not only to pay its fair share within Nato but also to reform itself — eliminating excessive bureaucracy that stifles growth and addressing a chronic inefficiency when compared to the American work ethic.

Mr Trump's vision is also futuristic through unprecedented partnerships aimed, in part, at containing China's ambitions to dominate in technology and artificial intelligence.

Indeed, part of this vision is the "Stargate" project, a monumental \$500 billion initiative designed to build advanced AI infrastructure in the US over the next four years.

The companies leading this effort, including SoftBank and OpenAI, along with key participants such as Microsoft and Nvidia, reflect the ambition to pool expertise and resources in technology.

The project's primary goal is to secure the US a commanding lead in the global race for artificial intelligence development — a transformation that many have described as the greatest technological shift in modern history.

Although billionaire Elon Musk has voiced criticism of "Stargate," the point here is Mr Trump's grand vision. Indeed, the project represents a critical opportunity to reinforce America's leadership role while balancing national and international priorities.

Comparisons have been even drawn between "Stargate" and the New Deal, the landmark economic programmes introduced by former US president Franklin D Roosevelt in the 1930s. However, this time, the focus is technological, with artificial intelligence taking centre stage.

This is the new America under Mr Trump: a nation that inspires both anxiety and optimism among global leaders. It is the America he is poised to lead for the next four years. There is little point in trying to unravel the inner workings or to speculate about the role of the "deep state" in this vision because Mr Trump, in his own way, embodies a kind of simplicity and clarity of purpose.

— The National

Beirut and a visitor called ‘hope’

LEBANON **boasts a reputation in the Arab world that its years of deep crisis have not erased. An Arab politician and friend telephoned me a few days ago to express his delight with how Lebanon is making its way back to its sons and supporters after many long, painful years. My friend had, in recent years, been keen to avoid surrendering to the impression that Lebanon had lost the way to the future and become mired in the rubble of the past.**

He told me: "Lebanon does not deserve the punishment inflicted by its own people and others in recent decades. Yes, Lebanon is not a major player in the region. And yes, it does not boast natural resources that attract major countries. But Lebanon's failure will not be blamed on Lebanon alone, but on the entire Arab family that failed in saving this child, who was never a source of danger to others, but

rather an advocate of progress and coexistence."

He added: "There still remains a need for Lebanon and for the diversity that is a part of its identity and daily life. Lebanon is an experience in coexistence between segments that have different religious and intellectual identities. This is one of the secrets of its uniqueness, despite the challenges facing diversity in this difficult part of the world.

"I am contacting you to express my joy over the recent developments. Lebanon has chosen a president — Joseph Aoun — who has integrity and can be entrusted to lead it, given his commitment to the country's sovereignty, unity, constitution and institutions. I am delighted that the government will be formed by a man outside of the political class. Nawaf Salam is competent, honorable and respected internationally," he went on to say.

"With all my heart, I hope the Lebanese people

don't commit the sin of squandering this opportunity. I can confidently say that Arab countries are eager to help Lebanon restore normal life under the rule of state institutions and a revived economy. This is definitely possible. The Saudi foreign minister's visit to Lebanon reflects Saudi Arabia's push in that direction. The whole world is ready to help Lebanon. It is now up to the Lebanese people to help their country, abandon wars, quotas, wrong calculations and banking on foreign powers to uphold internal balances. I hope, with all my heart, that this opportunity is not wasted," he said.

I recalled how much was said of Beirut over the decades and how much the city meant to several Arab figures. Hazim Jawad, who led the Iraqi Baath party to power in 1963, once told me that the new rulers of Baghdad would await diplomatic mail from Beirut to read its newspapers and learn what its

most important journalists and writers had to say about the situation in Iraq

Hazim Jawad, who led the Iraqi Baath party to power in 1963, once told me that the new rulers of Baghdad would await diplomatic mail from Beirut to read its newspapers and learn what its most important journalists and writers had to say about the situation in Iraq and the region. The prevalent impression was that Beirut reflected the intensity of the heat in the region and the way the winds blow. So much importance was placed on Beirut that some Arab officials believed that the embassies of major countries were sending messages through this or that journalist. Others believed that Beirut was the place where coups were planned and the hub of intelligence agencies. Years ago, I heard about how Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al-Maktoum, now UAE vice president and ruler of Dubai, had visited Beirut when he was young and how he was attracted to its vitality, diversity, openness to the world and ambition to achieve progress.

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sages through this or that journalist. Others believed that Beirut was the place where coups were planned and the hub of intelligence agencies.

Years ago, I heard about how Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al-Maktoum, now UAE vice president and ruler of Dubai, had visited Beirut when he was young and how he was attracted to its vitality, diversity, openness to the world and ambition to achieve progress. As he left the Lebanese capital, he asked himself: When will Dubai be able to forge ahead on a similar path as Beirut?

Mohsen Ibrahim, former secretary-general of the Communist Action Organization in Lebanon, revealed to me that late Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser always asked about Beirut as if wanting to uncover the secret of its luster, despite the city's small size and meager natural wealth. He said that Nasser viewed Beirut as a testing ground for Arab leadership. He knew that the rallies that took place there were not being orchestrated by a director of intelligence, as was the case in Baghdad, Damascus and several other capitals.

Nasser used to ask about newspapers in Beirut, especially An-Nahar and its editor-in-chief Michel Abou Jawdeh. He perhaps used

to wonder at how a ruler or president would wake up to a surprising headline, as opposed to the headlines that were written by the ruling authorities themselves.

I am not one to yearn for the past. I know that Lebanon has changed, that the region has changed and so has the world. But this does not deny the Lebanese people their right to live under the rule of a normal state, in which a vacuum does not replace the presidency, where the government is not easily broken apart and where its parliament does not fall into a coma or run round in circles.

A normal state can rebuild the Lebanese houses based on equality between segments under the rule of its institutions. Coincidence would have it that my friend spoke to me just as the Lebanese people were being fired at while trying to return home to their villages in the south. It is evident that Benjamin Netanyahu's government is attempting to lure

Lebanon into a clash so that it can further deepen its tragedies.

Despite their pain, it is important for the Lebanese people to realize that there can be no salvation except through turning to the state, which alone can reclaim all of the country's territories, sovereignty and normal life, and whose sole concerns are stability and prosperity.

It is evident that the train is moving closer to Lebanon and that the Lebanese must gather the conditions to jump aboard, seizing the Arab and international support accorded to them. Missing the train will spell surrender and a slide into an even deeper and more dangerous abyss. The Lebanese people have no better choice than Lebanon. This has been demonstrated by old and new experiences. For the first time in decades, Lebanon is receiving a visitor called "hope." Let us hope that petty calculations will not drive it away.



PSX witnesses bearish trend, loses 1,360 more points

ISLAMABAD (APP): The 100-Index of the Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX) witnessed bearish trend on Monday, losing 1,360.16 more points, a negative change of 1.18 percent, closing at 113,520.32 points as compared to 114,880.49 points on the last trading day.

A total of 494,003,725 shares were traded during the day as compared to 632,039,226 shares the previous trading day, whereas the price of shares stood at Rs25.940 billion against Rs37.800 billion on the last trading day.

As many as 442 companies transacted their shares in the stock market, 97 of them recorded gains and

298 sustained losses, whereas the share price of 47 companies remained unchanged.

The three top trading companies were Sui South Gas with 51,651,701 shares at Rs39.53 per share, Cnergyco PK with 50,683,570 shares at Rs7.57 per share and WorldCall Telecom with 29,067,822 shares at Rs1.73 per share.

Unilever Pakistan Foods Limited witnessed a maximum increase of Rs395.46 per share closing at Rs21,995.45 whereas runner-up was Archroma Pakistan Limited with Rs43.51 rise in its share price to close at Rs478.56.

Mari Energies Limited witnessed a maximum decrease of Rs48.13 per share price, closing at Rs536.46, whereas the runner-up was Colgate-Palmolive (Pakistan) Limited with Rs40.10 rise in its per share price to Rs1,497.88.

Rupee sheds 08 paise against dollar
Pakistani rupee on Monday depreciated by 08 paise against the US dollar in the interbank trading and closed at Rs278.83 against the previous day's closing of Rs278.75.

However, according to the Forex Association of Pakistan (FAP), the buying and selling rates of the dollar in the open market stood at Rs277.90 and Rs281.30,

respectively.

The price of the Euro increased by 10 paise to close at Rs291.71 against the last day's closing of Rs291.61, according to the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP).

The Japanese yen came down by 01 paise and closed at Rs1.78, whereas an increase of Rs1.50 was witnessed in the exchange rate of the British Pound, which was traded at Rs346.79 as compared to the last day's closing of Rs345.29.

The exchange rates of the Emirates Dirham and the Saudi Riyal increased by 02 paise each to close at Rs75.91 and Rs74.33 respectively.



ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Finance and Revenue Senator Muhammad Aurangzeb in a meeting with a high-level delegation from Pakistan Business Council.

Gold prices decrease by Rs300/tola

ISLAMABAD (APP): The price of 24 karat per tola gold decreased by Rs300 and was sold at Rs289,100 on Monday against its sale at Rs289,400 on previous trading day, All Sindh Sarafa Jewellers Association reported.

The price of 10 grams of 24 karat gold also decreased by Rs257 to Rs247,856 from Rs248,113 whereas that of 10 gram 22 karat went up to Rs227,209 from Rs227,445.

The prices of per tola silver decreased by Rs14 to Rs3,395 whereas that of ten gram silver went down by Rs12 to Rs2,910.

The price of gold in the international market decreased by \$3 to \$2,767 from \$2,770, the Association reported.

LCCI hails SBP's decision

LAHORE (APP): The Lahore Chamber of Commerce and Industry (LCCI) Monday appreciated the State Bank of Pakistan's (SBP) decision to reduce the discount rate. This significant move aligns with LCCI's consistent demand and is being viewed as a much-needed relief for the business community but it must be at single digit. The decision is expected to lower the cost of borrowing, stimulate industrial growth and create a more favorable environment for trade and investment in the country.

LCCI President Mian Abuzar Shad and Vice President Shahid Nazir Chaudhry, in a media statement here, hailed the decision as a progressive step toward addressing the economic challenges faced by the business community. They noted that high interest rates had long been a significant obstacle, making borrowing unaffordable for businesses, especially small and medium enterprises (SMEs). The rate cut will ease this burden, enabling businesses to access credit on more favorable terms, thereby enhancing productivity and fostering economic stability.

The LCCI leadership highlighted that the timing of this decision is particularly critical, given the rising input costs and inflationary pressures that have constrained business activities. The reduction in the discount rate is expected to improve cash flow for industries, stimulate investment and boost export competitiveness. By alleviating financial strain, the move will encourage businesses to expand operations and create new employment opportunities, contributing to economic recovery.

Nestlé opens biomass boiler

MULTAN: Nestlé, as part of its commitment to Pakistan's vision for renewable energy, inaugurated a biomass boiler at its Kabirwala Factory, under its PKR 2 billion umbrella investment in renewable power and sustainability initiatives. It is part of Nestlé's efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions (GHG) in line with its 2050 Net Zero commitments, as well as the Pakistan government's UN climate change pledge.

Kamal, Farhadov held crucial meeting

ISLAMABAD (APP): Federal Minister for Commerce Jam Kamal Khan and Azerbaijan's Ambassador to Pakistan, Khazar Farhadov, held a crucial meeting to bolster economic cooperation between the two nations.

The discussion focused on preparations for Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's state visit to Azerbaijan, according to a release issued here Monday.

Highlighting the importance of people-to-people connections for fostering trade and investment, the meeting underscored the need for timely implementation of agreements. The Ambassador also shared plans to establish an Azerbaijan Trade House in Islamabad, Lahore and Karachi.

The Minister proposed organizing a business-to-business (B2B) forum dur-

ing the Prime Minister's visit, followed by a single-country exhibition in Azerbaijan later this year, possibly in July, to gauge the response to the PTA.

The Ambassador assured support for a business delegation and suggested announcing the launch of Pakistan Azerbaijan Joint Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

Exploring trade opportunities, Minister Jam Kamal Khan suggested importing cotton from Azerbaijan for processing in Pakistan, with plans to export high-end garments to Cambodia.

The Ambassador offered to connect Pakistan with Azerbaijan's leading cotton producers and highlighted mutual trade opportunities in agriculture and technology.

Both sides celebrated the doubling of trade volume compared to the previous

year and emphasized building on this momentum.

The Minister invited Azerbaijan to participate in the upcoming Foodag exhibition in Lahore, while the Ambassador reaffirmed Azerbaijan's commitment to establishing strong trade and investment links by sharing contacts of prominent businesses.

The meeting concluded with a shared commitment to achieving successful outcomes, prioritizing the establishment of the Trade House and Chamber of Commerce as cornerstones of bilateral trade relations.

This collaboration marks a significant step toward deepening Pakistan-Azerbaijan economic ties, with both nations aiming to create long-term partnerships and explore new avenues for trade and investment.

Engro Fertilizers establishes Markaz Centres

F.P. Report

KARACHI: 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 attended 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 UGAI 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 UGAI 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.

Dr. Kabir delivered lecture to students at IBA



F.P. Report

KARACHI: IBA proudly hosted Prof. Dr. Mohammad Kabir Hassan, Hamid D. Habib Chair in Finance, Department of Finance, School of Business Studies (IBA-SBS), and Professor of Finance, Department of Economics and Finance, University of New Orleans, for a series of engaging lectures and discussions.

On January 24, 2025, Prof. Dr. Mohammad Kabir Hassan delivered a highly engaging guest lecture to over 120 undergraduate students at the IBA Main Campus on "Islamic Finance in the USA: Concepts, Institutions, and Prospects." He highlighted the evolution and growth of Islamic finance in the US, its unique opportunities, and its potential for foster-

ing financial inclusion. The session offered students valuable insights into the practical application of Islamic finance principles.

Later that day, Prof. Dr. Hassan addressed senior officials and industry experts at the State Bank of Pakistan, delivering an insightful talk on, "The Development of Government Sukuk Market." He explained the technicalities of various sukuk models, shedding light on their structure and operational challenges. The discussion emphasized the need for innovation and strategic reforms to strengthen the sukuk market and drive financial stability. He also met Mr. Saleem Ullah, Deputy Governor of the State Bank of Pakistan, to discuss the Islamization of Pakistan's financial sector.

On January 25, 2025,

Prof. Dr. Hassan delivered a talk to Shariah scholars on "Fiqh, Maqasid, and Economic Dimensions of Shariah Decision Making," focusing on Shariah governance standards issued by AAOIFI.

On January 27, he met with the IBA-SBS faculty to provide insights on publishing in high-impact journals, sharing strategies to enhance the quality and impact of research while addressing common challenges in the publication process. Additionally, Prof. Dr. Hassan delivered a public lecture at the IBA City Campus on "How to Change the Islamic Finance Industry for Growth and Development?" He highlighted the remarkable growth of Islamic finance, its global impact, and the urgent need for reform.

Hamdard Foundation partner with Team Karachi Welfare Society

F.P. Report

KARACHI: Hamdard Foundation Pakistan (HFP) partnered with Team Karachi Welfare Society in their welfare initiatives and participated as the main sponsor in Team Karachi's grand ceremony held on January 26 at the local hall of Korangi District, titled "Self-Reliance Employment Project." The event celebrated the graduation of 155 individuals, including 71 men and 84 women, from the Team Karachi Sewing Center. Ms. Sadia Rashid, President of HFP, graced the occasion as the chief guest and distributed certificates and sewing machines to the graduates who completed the skill course. The ceremony also provided 10 transport rickshaws and five loader rickshaws to needy individuals with the support of HFP.

Faisal Nadeem, Chief Operating Officer of Hamdard Pakistan, Abu Talib Bhutto, Group Director, and Syed Muhammad Arsalan, Director of HFP, also

attended the event.

In a keynote address, Ms. Sadia Rashid said: "The determination of the city's youth to improve the lives of their fellow citizens through their own efforts, coupled with their sense of responsibility, sincerity, and passion for serving humanity, is truly admirable and worth emulating. HFP envisions empowering the nation's youth by making them skilled and self-sufficient. Self-sufficiency, achieved through skill and hard work, is a blessing from Allah, enabling individuals to rely on Allah alone and free themselves from dependency on others."

She also said: "To fulfill this vision, HFP provides vocational training alongside education to children from 28 villages surrounding Madinat-ul-Hikmah through the Hamdard Village School. Vocational training not only fosters creativity and imagination but also brings blessings to one's efforts. While life may bring challenges, a skilled, talented, and

trained individual can face difficulties with courage and emerge stronger."

Faisal Nadeem said: "Aligned with Ms. Sadia Rashid's vision of a 'Healthy Skilled Pakistan,' HFP is actively engaged in public service with sincere intentions. Founded by Shaheed Hakim Mohammed Said, Hamdard is committed to serving humanity by producing and selling high-quality, affordable medicines and herbal products to generate resources for helping humanity. This visionary approach of Shaheed Hakim Mohammed Said has elevated Hamdard Pakistan into a leading herbal products manufacturer, making Pakistan one of the few countries with a comprehensive alternative healthcare system."

He also said: "The dedication and sincerity demonstrated by the organizers of Team Karachi in serving fellow desperate Karachiites are truly commendable and a source of pride for all of us. I pray for the continued success of Team

Karachi in achieving its noble goals."

Syed Muhammad Arsalan highlighted the numerous initiatives undertaken by HFP and informed the participants about its various education and skill development programs, which they can also benefit from. He emphasized a recently launched program in collaboration with the Berlitz Institute, where students not only receive professional training but are also provided with suitable employment opportunities after completing the course.

Team Karachi President, Saqib Zeeshan said: "The training and certificates obtained by the students from the sewing center will aid them in securing employment. He further stated that the provision of sewing machines to the graduates aims to inspire them to create dignified employment opportunities for themselves and to motivate them toward self-reliance. Several students undergoing training demonstrated exceptional performance."

Inaugural PayPak awards ceremony organized



F.P. Report

MURREE: ILink hosted the inaugural PayPak Awards Ceremony, an event that celebrated the winners of its highly successful Win Gold with PayPak campaign and unveiled its latest innovation, PayPak Pink. This momentous occasion recognized outstanding achievements while paving the way for a new era of innovation and inclusivity in Pakistan's digital payment ecosystem.

The ceremony was held at Ramada Murree, bringing together a distinguished audience, including PayPak issuers, acquirers, and partners, to commemorate the occasion. The event highlighted the collective success of the PayPak initiative, which has played a pivotal role in fostering financial inclusion and driving the adoption of digital payments across Pakistan.

A key highlight of the evening was the launch of PayPak Pink, a new variant

specifically designed to cater to the unique financial needs of women in Pakistan. PayPak Pink underscores ILink's commitment to empowering women and promoting inclusivity within the financial sector.

By offering secure and accessible digital payment solutions, PayPak Pink aims to redefine the role of women in Pakistan's financial ecosystem.

The event also announced the gold prize winners of the Win Gold

with PayPak campaign, celebrating their exceptional participation and contributions to the initiative's resounding success.

PayPak, an initiative of ILink, is Pakistan's first domestic payment scheme, dedicated to enhancing financial inclusion and reducing reliance on international payment networks. With a focus on security, reliability, and affordability, PayPak continues to lead the transformation of Pakistan's digital payment landscape.

Asian stocks mixed as tariff fears return, new AI programme emerges

HONG KONG (AFP/ APP): Asian markets fluctuated

Court Notice

In the Court of Javeria Sartaj Khan Additional District Judge Camp Court Totalay/Azafi Zila Qazi Buner at Totalay. A p p e a l . N o . 14 / C R I Institution.7/9/2023. Date of hearing. 7/2/2025 .Mst Zarmena VS Hakem Khan etc. Notice to no. 5.Gul Rez Khan s/o Mer Dil resident of Dhandar tehseel Khadukhel district Buner. Whereas in the above mentioned case the mentioned defendant can not be served in the ordinary way, it is, therefore, proclaimed that if the said defendant will/shall not appear personally or through dually authorized agent or pleader in the court at 8.30 am dated 7/2/2025 the proceeding will be taken ex parte. Given under my hand and seal of this Court.

Monday on fresh trade fears after Donald Trump's decision to impose huge tariffs on Colombia, in retaliation for its refusal to accept deportation flights from the United States.

Traders were also assessing the impact of a new, cheaper Chinese generative AI programme released last week that hit tech firms amid claims it can outperform big-name rivals such as ChatGPT.

Equities enjoyed a healthy run-up last week on the hope that Trump 2.0 will take a less hardball approach to global trade as he held off imposing stiff levies on China and other partners immediately on taking office, as he warned he would. His comments that he would "rather not" hit Beijing, and a signal of openness to a trade deal added to the optimistic tone.

However, news Sunday

that he would hit Colombian goods with a 25 percent tariff -- rising to 50 percent next week -- and revoke the visas of government officials set off alarm bells.

The move came after President Gustavo Petro blocked deportation flights from the United States. In response to Trump's decision Petro announced retaliatory levies of 25 percent on imports from the United States.

"Actions speak louder than words. The situation with Colombia just shows how little it takes for Trump to use tariffs as a negotiation tool," Dane Cekov at Sparebank 1 Markets.Traders were already gearing up for a big week that will see the Federal Reserve hold its first policy meeting of the year.

While it is widely expected to hold rates, investors will be keeping a close eye

on its statement and comments from Federal Reserve head Jerome Powell.

There is a concern that Trump's pledges to impose tariffs and slash taxes, immigration and regulations could reignite inflation and force the central bank to pause its rate cuts or even hike them again.

The move against Colombia sent the dollar up against most of its peers, piling on around one percent against the Mexican peso. Gold, a safe haven in times of uncertainty, was sitting just shy of its record high.

"This pivotal week kicks off in Asia, setting the stage for a global market spectacle intensely focused on the unfolding of Trump's economic agenda amidst key inflation reports and anticipated Fed guidance," said Stephen Innes at SPI Asset Management.



In brief

Tenpin Bowling C'ship begins next month

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Pakistan Ten Pin Bowling Federation (PTBF) is set to host the National Tenpin Bowling Championship from February 20 to 25 here at the Leisure City Bowling Club, Safa Gold Mall, F-7 Markaz. According to PTBF President Ijaz ur Rehman, preparations for the championship are already underway. The event will feature male and female players from across the country competing in eight categories, including Men's Singles, Men's Doubles, Ladies' Singles, Amateur, Deaf Men's Singles, Deaf Ladies' Singles, Team Event, and Tik-Tokers. The registration for the championship will commence on February 1. The finals are scheduled to take place on February 25. The winning bowlers will receive prizes at the conclusion of the championship. The PTBF aims to promote tenpin bowling in Pakistan and provide a platform for local talent to showcase their skills.

England name unchanged XI

LONDON (Agencies): England have named an unchanged XI for Tuesday's third T20 International (T20I) against India in Rajkot, a must-win game for the visitors who are 2-0 down in the five-match series. Brydon Carse, who replaced Gus Atkinson in the second T20I, was retained in the team by coach Brendon McCullum after the bowling all-rounder scored a quick 31 and took three wickets as England narrowly lost by two wickets. "Every time you pull on an England shirt, you try and put in a good performance, but you know that there's guys waiting in the wings," Carse told reporters after his fifth T20I appearance. The T20I series concludes on Sunday, to be followed by three One-Day Internationals as both teams prepare for the ICC Champions Trophy, which kicks off on Feb. 19. England XI: Jos Buttler (captain), Phil Salt, Ben Duckett, Harry Brook, Liam Livingstone, Jamie Smith, Jamie Overton, Brydon Carse, Jofra Archer, Adil Rashid, Mark Wood.

Nainggolan arrested in cocaine trafficking probe

B R U S S E L S (Agencies): Former Belgian international Radja Nainggolan was arrested on Monday as part of an investigation into cocaine trafficking via the port of Antwerp, the Brussels prosecutor's office said. Police arrested several suspects, including the footballer, after carrying out a series of morning raids across the country, the office told AFP. "The investigation concerns alleged facts of importation of cocaine from South America to Europe, via the port of Antwerp, and its redistribution in Belgium," prosecutors added in a statement. No further details were immediately made public. Antwerp-born Nainggolan, 36, came out of retirement last week to join a lower-tier Belgian side -- adding a final spell to a long career that saw him play 30 matches and score six goals for the national team. Having played for Italian teams Cagliari, Inter Milan and Roma, he had been without a club since last summer before signing with Belgian second-tier outfit Lokeren last week. He marked his debut with a goal at the weekend in Lokeren's 1-1 home draw to K. Lierse. He had previously returned from Italy to Belgium in the summer of 2021 to join Royal Antwerp.



MULTAN: Pakistan and West Indies team players poses with trophy, after West Indies leveled the two-match Test series by 1-1 against Pakistan at Multan Cricket Stadium. —APP Photo

Pakistan to overcome mistakes to improve performance: Masood

MULTAN (APP): aPakistan skipper Shan Masood on Monday said that it was a tough contest and Pakistan would overcome the mistakes to improve performance in the upcoming fixtures. Holding a press conference following his team's 120-run defeat to the West Indies in the second Test at Multan Cricket Stadium, bringing the two-match series to a 1-1 draw. He acknowledged the team's shortcomings and highlighted key lessons for the future. "We did not get the result we wanted," Masood admitted, "Batting in the fourth innings on this pitch was extremely challenging and credit to the West Indies as they bat-

ted brilliantly in their second innings and took the game away from us."

Reflecting on Pakistan's batting collapse in the first innings, Masood pinpointed critical moments that swung the match. "We were 119 for 4 and got bowled out for 154. That moment was decisive. On top of that, their lower-order partnership hurt us badly and widened the gap. He stressed the importance of collective responsibility for the defeat, rejecting the idea of blaming individuals. "This was a team sport, whether we win or lose, it was on all of us. Everyone has a role to play and it was never about one player."

Masood also highlighted recurring issues that need immediate attention, such as struggling to dismiss the opposition's tailenders. He said that getting the tail out quickly has been a concern for us and we need to address this in upcoming games. Praising Babar Azam's second-innings effort, he said, Babar was in great form and his dismissal was unfortunate. In conditions like these, one delivery can change everything. If he had stayed longer, the result could have been different," he maintained. The skipper emphasized the need for better preparation in similar conditions. He said that results

come quickly on pitches like this and we need to capitalize on opportunities, adapt to challenging situations, and make better use of domestic cricket to prepare our batters for these conditions.

The West Indies' victory marked their first Test win on Pakistani soil in 35 years, a historic feat that left Pakistan reflecting on missed opportunities. Despite the disappointment, Masood underlined the team's determination to learn and bounce back stronger. "Playing in these conditions was tough for any batter, but we have learned valuable lessons. We will come back better as a team," he concluded.

Brathwaite lauds team's grit after test win

MULTAN (APP): West Indies captain Kraigg Brathwaite expressed happiness over his team's efforts after their 120-run victory over Pakistan in the second Test, which leveled the series 1-1 at the Multan Cricket Stadium.

Talking to the media, Brathwaite highlighted the challenges his team faced on a difficult pitch and praised the players for their resilience and smart cricket. He said that the pitches in both matches were very challenging, especially for batters.

He said that they tried their best to score runs and a competitive total allowed us to win this match. It was not easy, but our batters showed bravery and that made the difference.

The West Indies captain emphasized the importance of partnerships and relentless bowling in their victory. "Our focus was on building partnerships and putting Pakistan under pressure with our bowling. The batters played bravely and the bowlers did the rest by taking all 20 wickets which was a complete team effort," he added.

Brathwaite acknowledged the unique challenges posed by the Multan pitch. He said that on this surface, batting averages were very low and it was incredibly tough to play here, but our players were smart as they understood the conditions, adapted well, and executed their plans brilliantly. Praising his bowlers, Brathwaite singled out veteran pacer Kemar Roach, stating "Kemar Roach was a champion bowler and his experience and skill were crucial for the team in this match."

The West Indies skipper also shared his thoughts on touring Pakistan, saying he and the team enjoyed the experience. "Islamabad was a beautiful place with great views and excellent food, we loved it. We enjoyed the tour overall," he admitted.

Raducanu loses in Singapore Open first round

SINGAPORE (Agencies): Britain's Emma Raducanu suffered a disappointing defeat against world number 101 Cristina Bucsa of Spain in the opening round of the Singapore Open.

The 22-year-old was playing for the first time since her 6-1 6-0 third round loss to Iga Swiatek at the Australian Open and the news her coach Nick Cavaday was stepping back from the role to "prioritize getting back to full health".

But in a gruelling encounter lasting three hours and three minutes and featuring 17 breaks of service, Bucsa came through 5-7 7-5 7-5 against the seventh seed in the pair's first meeting.

The Spaniard had served for the opening set at 5-4 up but Raducanu, ranked 56, rattled off the next three games to take control of the match.

The second set started with three consecutive breaks of service to leave Bucsa 3-1 and then 4-2 up but Raducanu continued



to battle and another run of three games in a row saw her go 5-4 up but Bucsa responded with the next three games to level the match.

Both players struggled to hold serve in the decider but although a weary-looking Raducanu dug deep to edge 5-4 ahead, Bucsa held and then broke her opponent at a crucial time to leave her serving for the match.

The British number two saved a couple of match points but Bucsa, the Olympic women's doubles bronze medallist, quickly earned another and this time Raducanu netted.

Bucsa will next face either Sijia Wei of China or Mananchaya Sawangkaew of Thailand in the last 16.

Meanwhile, British number five Jodie Burrage was beaten by Croatia's

Antonia Ruzic in the second round of qualifying at the Linz Open in Austria.

Burrage, who impressed in a second-round defeat by Coco Gauff at the Australian Open earlier this month, beat Serbia's Lola Radivojevic in the first qualifying round but lost 6-4 7-6 (7-1) to Ruzic, who is ranked 18 places below the Briton at 168th in the world.

Islamabad, Kashmir, Punjab victorious in Goalball C'ship

ISLAMABAD (APP): Islamabad, Kashmir, Punjab earned victories in the National Goalball Championship 2025 matches held here at Hamidi Hall of Pakistan Sports Complex.

The opening ceremony of the National Goalball Championship 2025 witnessed a vibrant start, attended by notable dignitaries including Mahar Shahid Iqbal, Chief Civil Defence, and Miyan Idrees, Director General of the Benazir Income Support Program.

Both guests applauded the remarkable efforts of the players, encouraging them to continue their

journey with determination and passion. The championship showcased thrilling matches on the opening day. In the Men's event, Islamabad triumphed over Kashmir with a score of 10-7; Punjab defeated KP by a margin of 12-7; Balochistan secured a victory against Sindh with a score of 7-4.

In Women's event, Islamabad achieved a dominant win against Punjab with an impressive score of 7-4; Islamabad also outperformed KP with a victory of 9-5. The event serves as a platform for identifying exceptional talent, as players from

both male and female teams will be selected for upcoming international tours. Speaking on the occasion, the President of the Pakistan Blind Sports Federation highlighted the significance of promoting blind sports in Pakistan.

He shared that the winning women's team of Kenya series, which previously visited Kenya, has requested a meeting with the Prime Minister and President of Pakistan to celebrate the players' efforts and underscore the importance of fostering blind sports at the national level.

India's Bumrah named Test cricketer of the year after sensational 2024



LONDON (AFP): India paceman Jasprit Bumrah was Monday named men's Test cricketer of the year

for 2024 by the International Cricket Council.

The right-arm quick returned to the five-day format in late 2023 following a lengthy absence due to a back injury.

Bumrah, 31, was the leading wicket-taker in Test cricket in 2024, topping the charts with 71, well clear of second-placed Gus Atkinson of England (52 in 11 matches).

His average across the year was a breathtaking 14.92 and he ended 2024 with a strike rate for the

year of just 30.1.

"Test cricket has always been a format I hold close to my heart, and to be recognised on this platform is truly special," said Bumrah.

"This award is not just a reflection of my individual efforts but also of the unwavering support of my teammates, coaches, and fans who continue to believe and inspire me every day.

"Representing India is a privilege I deeply cherish, and knowing my efforts bring smiles to

people around the world makes this journey even more special."

Bumrah beat England batsmen Harry Brook and Joe Root as well as Sri Lanka's Kamindu Mendis to the award, given by the game's governing body.

Smriti Mandhana made it a double success for India as she was voted women's one-day international cricketer of the year for the second time.

Afghanistan all-rounder Azmatullah Omarzai clinched the men's ODI award.

West Indies win Test in Pakistan for first time in 35 years

MULTAN (AFP): Spinner Jomel Warrican took five wickets as the West Indies won a Test match in Pakistan for the first time in nearly 35 years on Monday.

The West Indies won the second Test in Multan by 120 runs on day three to draw the series 1-1. Pakistan triumphed in the first Test by 127 runs, also in Multan.

Warrican finished with nine wickets in the match — 19 in the series — to give the hosts a taste of their own medicine on sharply spinning pitches.

The last time the West Indies won a Test in Pakistan was in Faisalabad in November 1990, having gone winless on their 1997 and 2006 tours.

Resuming on 76-4 and chasing 254, Pakistan's hopes of victory rested on Saud Shakeel but Kevin Sinclair had the left-hander caught in the slip for 13 to further dent the home team's fading chances.

Babar Azam top-scored with 31 while Mohammad Rizwan made 25 as Pakistan were bundled out for 133.

Warrican bowled nightwatchman Kashif Ali with a straighter one for one, leaving Pakistan in tatters at 76-6.

Rizwan added 39 for the seventh wicket with Salman Ali Agha before Warrican dismissed Salman leg before for 15 and bowled Rizwan to bring the tourists within two wickets of victory.

Gudakesh Motie, who took 2-35, removed Noman Ali for six while Warrican deservedly took the last wicket, bowling Sajid Khan for seven to seal the victory.

The defeat sent Pakistan crashing to ninth and last in the World Test Championship table while the West Indies finished eighth. Title-holders Australia face South Africa in the WTC final at Lord's in June.



Owen's 39-ball century leads Hobart to Big Bash title

HOBART (Agencies): Mitchell Owen smashed a scintillating 39-ball century to lead Hobart Hurricanes to their maiden Big Bash League title. Owen's century, which was the joint-fastest in BBL history, helped the hosts blaze to a seven-wicket victory over David Warner's Sydney Thunder with 30 balls to spare. The 23-year-old Tasmanian opener clobbered 11 sixes as Thunder's bowlers wilted under the onslaught.

Owen departed for 108 off 42 balls to leave Matthew Wade (32 off 17 balls) and Ben McDermott (18 off 12 balls) to steer Hurricanes to the trophy in front of a jubilant home support at Ninja Stadium in Hobart.

"It's an amazing feeling," said Owen. "I was doing what I've tried to do all competition — get us off to a good start so we could take it easy in the middle and thankfully I came off." Thunder were going well when openers Jason Sangha (67) and Warner (48) shared a 97-run opening stand before both were dismissed by Hurricanes captain Nathan Ellis (3-23).

Once again, fast bowler Riley Meredith, who has consistently bowled at speeds in excess of 90mph throughout the tournament, impressed with three middle-order wickets, including England's Sam Billings, who was bowled for 20. England's Chris Jordan was expensive, finishing with 0-47 from four overs for Hurricanes, but a total of 182-7 was never going to be enough once Owen found his groove. Victory was much deserved for Hurricanes, who finished top of the regular season table. It leaves Melbourne Stars as the only team yet to win a BBL title.

ICC CT 2025 tickets on sale from tomorrow

LAHORE (APP): The tickets for the group stage matches and the second semi-final of the ICC Men's Champions Trophy 2025 in Pakistan will go on general sale at 13hrs Gulf Standard Time (GST) and 14hrs Pakistan Standard Time (PST) on January 28 (Tuesday).

Pakistan is to host the ICC Champions Trophy 2025 with matches to be played at venues in Karachi, Lahore and Rawalpindi between February 19 and March 9 while the team India matches will played in Dubai, UAE under a hybrid model.

The information on ticket sales for the India matches to be played in Dubai, United Arab Emirates on 20th, 23rd February and 2nd March will follow shortly. In the meantime, fans can register their interest in tickets at PCB website.

Fans can now secure a place at the unmissable ICC Men's Champions Trophy 2025. Members of the ICC Family will enjoy exclusive early access, with a two-hour priority window to purchase tickets which is open now.

General stand ticket prices will start from 1,000 Pakistan rupees, with more premium seating available from 1,500 Pakistan rupees in different categories including, across the 10 matches taking place in Karachi, Lahore and Rawalpindi. Physical tickets will also be available for purchase from 3 February at designated TCS Express

centres across Pakistan, with details to be announced in due course.

Ticket information for the India matches to be played in Dubai, United Arab Emirates on 20 and 23 February and 2 March, will follow shortly. In the meantime, fans can register their interest in tickets at PCB website. ICC Men's Champions Trophy Final tickets — to be played on Sunday 9 March — will be available for purchase following the conclusion of the first semi-final in Dubai.

The thrilling two-week competition will see the world's top eight teams put it all on the line in 15 intense matches across 19 days, with every match counting in the pursuit of the iconic white jackets. ICC Chief Commercial Officer, Anurag Dahiya said: "We are thrilled to announce the official ticket on-sale for the ICC Men's Champions Trophy 2025. This is a significant moment for cricket in Pakistan, hosting their first global cricket tournament since 1996."

"The Champions Trophy promises to be an unmissable event where every match counts showcasing exciting cricket, featuring the world's best teams competing for the coveted white jackets. We encourage fans to not miss out and get their tickets now for the first Champions Trophy since 2017."

Tournament Director, Sumair Ahmad Syed said: "The ICC Champions Trophy 2025 is a monumental event, first in Pakistan since 1996, offering cricket fans an unparalleled chance to witness the game's finest stars live in action as they vie for one of the most coveted trophies in cricket. With Pakistan's state-of-the-art, newly upgraded stadiums as the stage, this short and sharp tournament in which every match counts promises unforgettable moments of skill, passion and drama. "The affordable ticket pricing ensures that fans from all walks of life can be part of this historic spectacle, making it a celebration for all generations of cricket lovers. This is a unique opportunity for families to come together, for parents to introduce their children to the magic of live cricket and to inspire a lifelong love for the sport. The energy, excitement and unforgettable memories of watching world-class cricket from the stands will be truly priceless. "We have made tickets not only affordable but also easily accessible through the official online platform and more than 100 outlets across Pakistan. I urge all fans to secure their tickets only through this authorised channel to ensure a smooth experience. "Join us in supporting the competing teams, including Pakistan, as they aim to defend their title on home soil. Let's unite, celebrate, and make this tournament a resounding success!"



In brief

Police hold 15 law breakers

RAWALPINDI (APP): The Rawalpindi Police on Monday held some 15 law breakers, including drug peddlers, liquor suppliers and illegal arms owners from across the district. According to a police spokesman, six accused were arrested during actions against drug peddlers with over 6 kilograms charas. The Cantt Police recovered 2.4 kg charas from accused Fazlullah, while the Naseerabad Police nabbed accused Asif with 1.22 kg charas and Tufail with 560 grams charas. Likewise, the Morgah, Civil Lines and Kahuta Police recovered 750 grams, 600 grams and 520 grams charas from accused Atif, Asif and Murad Ali respectively. Similarly, three liquor suppliers were arrested on the recovery of 40 litres of the contraband item. The Wah Saddar Police held accused Wali Raza with 20 litres and Hasnain with 10 litres of liquor, while the Saddar Baroni Police recovered 10 litres of liquor from accused Haroon Nasir. Meanwhile, six accused were captured for having illegal arms and ammunition. The Naseerabad and Wah Saddar Police recovered a 30 bore pistol each from accused Bilal and Imran respectively, while the Race Course Police held accused Wasim Akram and Hameedullah on the recovery of a 30 bore pistol from both of them. Similarly, the Gujjar Khan Police arrested accused Mudassar Abrar with a 12 bore rifle, while the Cantt Police recovered a dagger from accused Kamran.

CTP launch awareness campaign

RAWALPINDI (APP): City Traffic Police (CTP) Rawalpindi has launched a comprehensive awareness campaign to encourage use of safety helmets to ensure the safety of the motorcyclists. The aim of this campaign is not only to persuade the citizens to obey the traffic rules but also to ensure the safety of both the riders, said a CTP spokesman. He informed that on the directives of the Chief Minister Punjab, Chief Traffic Officer (CTO) Rawalpindi Beenish Fatima made the use of safety helmets mandatory for the motorcycle rider and the person sitting next to him on bike in Rawalpindi city from February 1. An awareness campaign has been launched in this regard and it will be strictly implemented from February 1, he added. On this occasion, the CTO said that ensuring the safety of the motorcyclists is top priority of the CTP and through this campaign, not only the motorcycle rider but also the person sitting behind is being made aware of the importance of using safety helmets and adopting other safety measures. He further said that this measure is not only necessary to prevent road accidents but also to ensure the safety of the lives of the citizens. During the awareness campaign, the message is being conveyed to the public through social media pages, circle officers, sector in-charges and field staff that it will be mandatory for both motorcycle riders to wear safety helmets and strict action will be taken against the violators from February 1, with a fine amounting to Rs 2000 and the motorcycles will also be impounded in police stations. The CTP has launched special campaigns to make the public aware of the benefits and importance of this measure. The field staff is directly informing the citizens, while the message is being widely disseminated through social media of the CTP (ctprwp).



ISLAMABAD: Representative in Pakistan, Abdullah A. Fadil, calls on the Coordinator to the Prime Minister for Climate Change, Romina Khurshid Alam. —APP Photo

Romina proposes African crop strategies to tackle food crisis

ISLAMABAD (APP): UNICEF Representative in Pakistan Abdullah A. Fadil met with Coordinator to the Prime Minister on Climate Change, Romina Khurshid Alam here on Monday. They discussed critical issues related to climate change, food security, and the protection of vulnerable populations, particularly children. The meeting underscored the importance of joint efforts between the government and international organizations to combat the impacts of climate-related disasters, including droughts and extreme weather events.

They emphasized the severe challenges posed by climate change, which have exacerbated food insecurity in Pakistan. Alam highlighted that food security is one of the greatest challenges of the future, as increasing droughts and climate variability threaten agriculture, disrupt food production, and exacerbate water shortages across the country.

To address this, she called for widespread promotion of climate-resilient agricultural practices, including the plantation of at least three fruit trees—avocado, orange, and banana—at every household. This initiative, she explained, would help meet the growing food security challenges while also contributing to environmental sustainability.

The meeting also included a discussion of global best practices, with Alam citing the example of African countries that have successfully integrated crops like banana, avocado, and citrus into their agricultural economies.

"These crops are now being exported to lucrative markets in Europe and the Middle East, providing African nations with significant economic benefits," she said. "We believe Pakistan can benefit from similar efforts to promote these crops domestically and increase exports."

Alam emphasized the importance of empowering young girls with climate-resilient skills. Referring to her recent meeting with Dr. Haddy, the head of the Islamic World Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (ICESCO), Alam underscored the need for green-skilled education programs for girls.

These programs, she noted, would equip young women with the tools to navigate the challenges of a changing climate and become leaders in climate action. Alam also discussed the disproportionate impact of climate change on children, who are particularly vulnerable due to their limited capacity to adapt to environmental stresses.

"What we have learned from floods in 2022, climate change-caused disasters in Pakistan is that the country, already one of the most climate-affected in the world, is experiencing intensified impacts, including extreme heatwaves, flooding, and shifting weather patterns," she stated.

"These disruptions are having a devastating effect on children, especially those living in poverty." Abdullah A. Fadil highlighted the Unicef's ongoing commitment to supporting the country's most vulnerable populations, especially children, by providing aid in health, education, water, and sanitation sectors. Both parties agreed that targeted interventions are crucial to mitigating the climate-related vulnerabilities faced by children and ensuring their future well-being.

They emphasized on the need for enhanced collaboration to develop sustainable and inclusive solutions to climate-related challenges and expressed their commitment to integrating children's needs into climate policies and actions, ensuring that the most vulnerable populations are not left behind in the fight against climate change.

CDA to transform Islamabad with major projects: Chairman

ISLAMABAD (APP): Chairman of the Capital Development Authority (CDA), Muhammad Ali Randhawa said on Monday that the future of Islamabad will be shaped by significant improvements in infrastructure and a strong emphasis on tourism development.

Speaking to a private news channel, he detailed his plans to transform the city into a modern urban center, aiming to enhance the quality of life for its residents while also boosting Islamabad's status as a key tourist destination.

He said that major infrastructure projects alongside initiatives to tap into the city's tourism potential, ensuring long-term growth and sustainability were his vision for the capital.

The Chairman outlined

several key infrastructure developments, including the construction of underpasses at Serena Hotel, Jinnah Underpass, and Srinagar Highway. These projects, along with improvements in the city's road structure, are almost complete, with architectural work underway.

He said that these projects would be finished in the next seven days. He also highlighted ongoing projects at F-9 and F-10 intersections, where a bridge and an underpass are under construction, with the bridge expected to be completed in a record 42 days.

He further said that the CDA is also planning various tourism initiatives, including the development of a safari park, zip lines, and cable cars. Discussions with partners like AV Tech

are in progress, and once agreements are finalized, these projects will be launched, he added.

Addressing the water supply issue in Islamabad, the Chairman acknowledged that water scarcity remains a challenge. The CDA has created a new Islamabad Water agency under its umbrella to tackle the city's water challenges.

This initiative has already received Cabinet approval, and coordination with donors is underway to ensure a long-term solution to Islamabad's water issues, he said. CDA is committed to improving the living conditions of Islamabad's residents by addressing these critical issues through collaborative efforts with other government entities, he added.

AST treated 29 million eye patients during last 30 years

ISLAMABAD (APP): Al Shifa Trust (AST) Eye Hospital has treated around 29 million patients in the last 30 years and performs 9,000 surgeries monthly at Rawalpindi, Chakwal, Kohat, Muzaffarabad, Sukkar and Gilgit's hospital.

President AST Major General (Retd) Rehmat Khan, talking to media men on Monday said that under construction Gilgit Baltistan (GB) hospital was providing services to the public while AST treats 80 per cent of patients free of cost.

The trust also runs one of the widest-spread outreach programs for the prevention of blindness in

the country. Rehmat said that school screening, free eye camps, awareness and primary eye care sessions were also arranged in far-flung areas of the country throughout the year.

He said that only the private sector could not cope with the challenge of the increasing number of eye patients, adding there was a need to mobilize resources at the Govt level as it has been revealed by the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics in its 7th Population and Housing Census-2023 that if the growing rate continues, Pakistan's population will double by 2050 reaching approximately 500 million.

Rehmat said that Al Shifa offered training of doctors and paramedics at its School of Ophthalmology. He added that approximately 4 per cent of the world's blind live in Pakistan while the combination of aging, sugar and a growing population has significantly increased the number of people with vision impairment.

There was an enormous financial burden of vision impairment in countries such as Pakistan which despite making many advances in addressing eye conditions could not progress enough to keep pace with the growing population's eye care needs, he added.

ANF seizes over 150 kg drugs in nine operations

RAWALPINDI (APP): Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF) while conducting nine operations across the country managed to recover over 150 kg drugs worth Rs 30 million and arrested 13 accused, said an ANF Headquarters spokesman here on Monday.

He informed that 4.5 kg hashish was recovered from two suspects arrested near Petaro Toll Plaza Jamshoro in Sindh. 600 grams heroin was recovered from a vehicle intercepted near a university in Islamabad and 2 suspects were arrested.

The arrested suspects confessed to selling drugs to the students of educational institutions. In third operation, 2 kg ice was recovered from the trolley bag of a passenger going to Dammam at Islamabad International Airport.

16 intoxicated tablets were recovered from the trolley bag of a passenger going to Sharjah at Multan International Airport.

40.8 kg hashish and 26.4 kg opium were recovered from the secret cavities of a vehicle rounded up near GT Road Toll Plaza Nowshera in Peshawar and an accused was arrested.

28 kg opium and 10 kg crystal heroin were recovered from Winder area of Hub in Balochistan.

5 kg ice drug and 20 kg hashish were recovered from two vehicles intercepted near New Sabzal Road in Quetta and 3 accused were arrested during the operation. In 8th operation, 2 kg ice and 10 kg hashish were recovered from two vehicles checked in Jinnah Town, Quetta and 2 accused were arrested.

In 9th operation, 980 grams ice was recovered from the possession of an accused arrested near Sakhi Sarwar Road in Dera Ghazi Khan. Cases have been registered against the arrested accused under the Narcotics Control Act and further investigations are under process.

IHCJA elects its new body

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Islamabad High Court Journalist Association (IHCJA) on Monday elected unopposed its new office bearers.

In the annual elections of the association, Hussain Ahmed Chaudhry was elected as the President IHCJA and Raja Shahzad for the post of Secretary.

Chairman Election Committee Sagheer Chaudhry. Members Aamir Saeed Abbasi and Sohail Rashid announced

the newly elected office bearers.

On this occasion, President of the Islamabad High Court Bar Association (IHCBA) Riasat Ali Azad, Secretary Shafqat Abbas Tarar and others were also present. According to the notification issued by the Election Committee, all the office bearers were elected unopposed.

Other office bearers who are elected include, Bilal Sheikh from PTV

Senior Vice President, Rauf Bazmi from 365 News Vice President, Farah Mah Jabeen from Hum News as Finance Secretary, Aun Raza from Sach TV as Information Secretary, Tahir Naseer from Dawn News Joint Secretary, Ambreen Ali from News One Joint Secretary Female, Owais Yousafzai of Geo News, Saqib Bashir of 92 News, Asad Malik of Dawn Daily, Hasher Warraich of 24 News, and Farrukh Ijaz

of ARY News were also declared successful for the governing body members. Meanwhile, Adil Aziz Qazi, Aleem Abbasi, Qamar Sabzwari of Islamabad Bar Council, President of IHCBA Riasat Ali Azad, Secretary Shafqat Abbas Tarar, President of Islamabad District Bar Association Chaudhry Naeem Gujjar and others congratulated the newly elected office bearers and expressed their best wishes.

Tarar assures resolution of Sindh, Balochistan water concerns in Senate

ISLAMABAD (APP): Minister for Law, Justice, and Human Resource, Azam Nazeer Tarar, assured the Senate on Monday that the water distribution concerns of Sindh and Balochistan would be resolved through consultations with coalition partners.

Responding to senators' concerns during the session, Tarar emphasized the government's commitment to prioritizing inter-provincial matters, particularly water distribution.

"The House of Federation will always prioritize addressing concerns that arise between provinces," Tarar stated, stressing the importance of cooperation and dialogue to resolve critical issues. He added that the resolution of water concerns

would involve consultations with all relevant stakeholders to ensure fair consideration of the needs and rights of all provinces.

The water issue, he said raised by Senator Sherry Rehman and others, was discussed at length in the House last week, with the federal government acknowledging Sindh's concerns.

Tarar further clarified that in a coalition government, unilateral decisions cannot be made without addressing the concerns of coalition partners. "Rest assured, the prime minister, a thoughtful and wise leader, is committed to working inclusively and has always strived to bring everyone on board," he said. "There will be no

rush, and no constitutional deviations will occur."

Earlier, Senator Bilal Mandokhel others raised a point of order, highlighting that while Balochistan is the largest province by area, its share in the canal system is minimal. Due to its mountainous terrain, the province relies heavily on groundwater for agriculture, with only a small part of Nasirabad Division benefiting from the canal system.

Law makers also pointed out that while the ruling party often proposes plans for the country's improvement, the opposition tends to disagree, even with beneficial proposals. However, he expressed concern that disagreements within the ruling party itself could lead to significant issues.

Govt unveils comprehensive support for investment in country

ISLAMABAD (APP): Ministry of Overseas Pakistanis and Human Resource Development (OP&HRD) was taking various measures to provide all possible facilities to Overseas Pakistan across the globe to invest for the prosperity and development of the country.

According to an official source, the government was committed to facilitate all business community of Pakistanis those are living abroad to invest in the homeland to boost the national economy.

The Government of Pakistan attaches high priority to the overseas Pakistanis and is keen to promote, nurture and sustain a mutually beneficial and symbiotic relationship between Pakistan and Overseas Pakistanis. Overseas Pakistanis can contribute much more than making foreign exchange remittances. Their role in image building, transfer of technology, and investment growth is important and with sustained efforts Overseas Pakistanis can

produce tangible results.

Today, in Pakistan, there are substantial investment opportunities with an active privatization initiative, large infrastructure-related investment projects (especially under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor), growth in local consumption and a largely untapped export potential.

With a massive diaspora of highly qualified Pakistani executives and a large reserve of domestic talent, capital investing in Pakistan is entering a sustained and rewarding phase. The growth and return potential in Pakistan has yet to be unlocked by domestic and international investors.

To facilitate Overseas Pakistanis for investment in Pakistan, an 'Investment & Facilitation Centre for Overseas Pakistanis' has been established at OPF, Head Office, Islamabad. The IFC is mandated to respond to queries on all investment related opportunities, regulatory framework and incentives offered in Pakistan.

Govt initiatives to foster youth solutions for modern challenges: Mashhood

ISLAMABAD (PPI): Chairman Prime Minister's Youth Program Rana Mashhood Khan says the government will fully facilitate the youth to develop indigenous ideas to cope with the modern challenge.

In an exclusive interview with the Radio Pakistan in Islamabad on Monday, he said Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif is the patron-in-chief of the recently established National Youth Council, representing the most talented young minds of the nation.

Rana Mashhood Khan said thousands of young girls and boys applied for the Youth Council from across the country and the Pakistani Diaspora abroad. One hundred boys and girls were selected from within the country and thirteen members from the overseas Pakistanis on merit basis.

He said the members of the council are the top achievers of their respective fields. The Chairman of Prime Minister's Youth Program said members of the advisory council in coordination with the youth of the

county will develop their ideas with consensus and government will implement them.

Highlighting government's full focus on environment and climate change issue, he said the government has already established clubs under the name of Green Youth Movement at all universities of the country. Under this campaign, he said the youth of the universities prepare different projects and create awareness regarding the green economy and environment challenges.



ISLAMABAD: Labourers busy in work at under construction Sareena Chowk Interchange during development work in Federal Capital. —APP Photo

UN report released

KABUL (Amu TV): Eighteen people, including 14 civilians, were killed and 61 others injured in seven armed attacks and explosions across Afghanistan in the last quarter of 2024, according to a quarterly report from the United Nations. Among the casualties, 55 of the injured were civilians. The report says in two attacks by the national resistance front (NRF) in Kabul and Takhar, one civilian was killed and 11 more, including children, were wounded.

Completion of hospital urged

PARWAN (TOLONews): A number of Parwan residents are demanding the completion of the province's 200-bed hospital project. They say that with the increasing population and seasonal disease outbreaks, the 100-bed hospital in Parwan is no longer sufficient to meet patients' needs. "Every day, many patients lose their lives while being transferred to Kabul and other provinces. We urge the authorities to prioritize the completion of this hospital," said Mirhaji Hufiani, a resident of Parwan.

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

Ministry offering investment opportunities

KABUL (TOLONews): On the International Day of Clean Energy, UN Secretary-General António Guterres stated that this year, renewable energy is projected to become the world's largest source of electricity generation. He emphasized that this transition could reduce energy production costs and help preserve the environment.

Economic affairs expert Abdul Ghafar Nizami, referring to the environmental impacts of renewable energy, said: "The industrialized countries of the world have caused the most environmental damage, while Afghanistan, despite its minimal contribution to climate change, should strive to play a more effective role in this field."

According to experts, the use of renewable energy not only helps reduce air pollution but is also economically viable.

They emphasize the need for increased investment in this sector.

"We must take immediate action to produce electricity. Afghanistan has significant potential in various sectors, including hydro, solar, and wind energy. Especially, windy areas like Salang can generate a large amount of electricity," said economic expert Mohammad Nabi Afghan.

Meanwhile, the Ministry of Energy and Water has also announced efforts to expand energy production from water, wind, and solar sources.

Matiullah Abid, spokesperson for the Ministry of Energy and Water, emphasized that investment opportunities in renewable energy have been provided in Afghanistan, and millions of dollars have already been attracted in this sector.

"The Ministry of Energy and Water has created favorable conditions for investors in renewable energy, and we hope these investments will increase," he added.

According to the ministry's data, Afghanistan currently generates 60 megawatts of electricity from solar energy and possesses significant potential for wind, solar, and hydroenergy production.

MoPH shuts down factories over violations

KABUL (TOLONews): The Ministry of Public Health's Directorate of Medicine and Food has recently shut down several food production factories due to non-compliance with hygiene standards and the use of unhealthy materials.

Officials from this department state that over the past year, more than 850 tons of substandard medicines and food items from the country's markets have been collected and destroyed.

One of these factories, which was engaged in sausage production, was closed after inspections revealed the use of unknown and unhygienic raw materials.

Sayed Nemat Hosseini, an expert in capacity building and public awareness at the Ministry of Public Health, said: "This factory was using meat without labels or specifications; neither its source nor its halal or haram status was known. Additionally, expired sausages were being reintroduced into the production cycle."

Furthermore, during these inspections, several pickle production factories in one of Kabul's districts were shut down for using industrial vinegar instead of edible vinegar.

Citizens of the country have welcomed this move and emphasized the need for stricter monitoring of food production.

"Our request to the Ministry of Public Health is that imported, and locally produced food items should be seriously inspected to prevent diseases," said Abid Hussain, a Kabul resident.

"Food products produced in Kabul and the provinces should be closely monitored to determine what ingredients they contain," Shuja, another Kabul resident, added.

According to the information provided by Shafiqullah Shafaq, Head of Food Analysis and Monitoring at the Directorate of Medicines and Food, eleven types of food items that posed a serious threat to public health have been identified in the past two months.

He stated: "Some of these products have been completely sealed off, while others that could be improved have been ordered to undergo corrections."

According to data from the Directorate of Medicines and Food, in the past year, more than 850 tons of expired medicines and food items from the markets have been collected and destroyed.

AFJC calls for immediate release of jailed journalist

KABUL (Amu TV): The Afghanistan Journalists Center (AFJC) on Monday called for the immediate and unconditional release of Rahim Saeedi, a journalist and media producer sentenced to three years in prison by the Taliban for alleged "propaganda" against them.

In a statement, the AFJC condemned Saeedi's conviction as unjust and urged the Taliban to consider his deteriorating health. The organization also called on the Taliban to end its crackdown on journalists, which has included detentions, harassment, and intimidation.

"We demand the immediate and unconditional release of Sayed Rahim Saeedi," the statement said. "The authorities must respect journalists' rights and allow media professionals to work freely, without fear of arrest, in accordance with the country's media laws."

Saeedi, the manager of the YouTube channel "Anar," was arrested in July 2024 alongside two colleagues, who were later released. Quoting sources, the AFJC said that Saeedi was targeted for creating content critical of the Taliban, including a screenplay about a girl's struggle for education under their rule.

The AFJC said that despite his family's efforts, including appeals for clemency to Taliban leader-

Polio vaccination drive launched in 16 provinces

KABUL (Amu TV): The new round of polio vaccination campaign began on Monday across six provinces of the country, including Kabul.

The Afghanistan Free from Polio initiative announced on social media that the three-day campaign will be conducted in Kandahar, Helmand, Uruzgan, Zabul, Paktia, Paktika, Khost, Ghazni, Nangarhar, Laghman, Kunar, Nuristan, Kabul, Baghlan, Herat, and Badghis provinces.

It urged the people to cooperate with vaccinators to ensure children receive the vaccine.

In 2024, Afghanistan reported 25 cases of wild poliovirus type 1 (WPV1). This marks an increase from the six cases reported in 2023.

In September 2024, the Taliban suspended door-to-door polio vaccination campaigns, opting instead for mosque-based vaccinations. This shift, coupled with restrictions on female



participation in vaccination efforts, has raised concerns about reaching vulnerable populations, particularly in conservative regions where female health workers play a crucial role.

According to Taliban-run Ministry of Public Health, over 6 million children under the age of 5 across 16 provinces will be covered by the campaign.

Efforts to combat the disease face challenges, particularly in southern provinces such as Helmand and Kandahar, where Taliban have previously imposed restrictions on door-to-door vaccination campaigns.

The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) has noted that Afghanistan remains one of the last countries where polio is endemic. In a recent report, UNICEF highlighted the critical role of vaccination campaigns and immunization services in preventing the disease.

Health experts emphasize that polio vaccination is key to eradicating the virus and protecting vulnerable populations, especially children, from its devastating effects.

Explosion kills one, injures five in Paktia

PAKTIA (Khaama Press): Local officials in Paktia province report that a child was killed and five others were injured following the explosion of an unexploded rocket shell left from past wars.

Muneeb Zadran, spokesperson for the Taliban police in Paktia, stated that the incident occurred on Sunday in the Gol Ghundi area of Zazi Aryub district when children were playing with the shell.

According to the statement, all injured children, including a girl, were taken to the hospital. Three of the injured children are in critical condition, and all victims are around ten years old.

Afghanistan remains one of the most mine-contaminated countries in the world, with leftover explosives from past conflicts continuing to claim lives, especially among children.

According to UNICEF, more than 500 children were killed or injured across Afghanistan last year due to landmine and unexploded ordnance explosions.

The presence of unexploded ordnance in Afghanistan continues to pose a serious threat to civilians, particularly children, who often unknowingly interact with these remnants of war.

Efforts to clear these explosives are crucial to preventing further tragedies and ensuring a safer environment for future generations in Afghanistan.

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TAPI project making rapid progress: Governor

HERAT (Ariana News): Herat's governor Maulana Islam Jar's press office said Monday progress around the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) project is progressing rapidly and that since early last month, 6 km of pipeline has already been laid in the country.

According to a statement issued by the provincial press office, Abdullayev, the General Director of the TAPI project in Afghanistan, met with Jar and updated him on the project's progress.

At the meeting, Jar assured Abdullayev of their full cooperation in providing necessary facilities to accelerate the TAPI project.

Last month, the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan's (IEA) spokesman confirmed the start of practical work on the Afghanistan section of TAPI.

The first phase of the project will reportedly take two years to complete.

According to TAPI project officials, once completed, 12,000 people in Afghanistan will have job opportunities, and Afghanistan's annual income from this project will be close to one billion dollars.

The TAPI pipeline is 1,821 kilometers long and will have an annual transport capacity of 33 billion cubic meters of natural gas, making it one of the largest regional infrastructure projects.

It is believed that the 90-day suspension of US foreign development aid to countries worldwide, particularly Afghanistan, has contributed to the rise in the dollar's value.

Yesterday, the US State Department also issued an order to halt these aid programs.

Abdul Ghafar Faizi Zadran, the spokesperson for the Sarai Shahzada Exchange Market in Kabul, stated: "During the winter, our trade declines, and another reason is that if any changes occur in the Western world or the US, such as the transition of power from Biden to Trump, opportunists and economic mafias take full advantage of the situation."

Abdul Wudood, a shopkeeper, commented on the rising prices of essential goods: "We used to buy a tin of cooking oil for 1750 to 1800 afghani, but now it costs us

Increase in dollar value impacting food prices

KABUL (TOLONews): In the past week, the value of the US dollar has increased by 6 afghani against the Afghan currency.

This rise has affected food prices. Noor Ahmad Agha, the acting head of the Central Bank, has met with representatives of the Money Exchangers' Union to maintain the stability of the afghani, prevent currency smuggling, and encourage the use of the afghani in daily transactions.

Noor Ahmad Agha has urged citizens to use afghani in their daily transactions to maintain currency stability.

He stated: "I ask our dear citizens to consider their national responsibility and use afghani in trade and not to pay attention to baseless rumors."

Currently, one US dollar is exchanged at 78.7 Afghanis in the country's markets.

Taliban view Iran's water rights as a 'religious and humanitarian duty'

KABUL (Amu TV): Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said after meetings with senior Taliban officials in Kabul that the Taliban regard Iran's water rights from the Helmand River as a "religious and humanitarian obligation" that extends beyond the terms of existing treaties.

Speaking to reporters, Araghchi noted, "The Afghan side [the Taliban] has a beautiful interpretation of water rights. They view it not just as a matter of a treaty but as a sacred duty."

Araghchi also addressed Iran's concerns over issues stemming from Afghanistan, including drug trafficking, terrorism, and migration, which he said have had serious consequences for Iran.

"We are sensitive to



Afghanistan's policies and developments, considering these challenges," he said.

According to Araghchi, water rights, migration, border security, and drug trafficking were key topics during discussions between the Iranian delegation and Taliban officials.

Araghchi arrived in Kabul on Sunday at the head of a political and economic delegation. During his visit, he held talks with Taliban foreign minister, Taliban chief minister,

WFP says aid cuts to Afghanistan leave millions hungry this winter

KABUL (Ariana News): The head of the World Food Programme in Afghanistan says the agency can only feed half the millions of Afghans in need after cuts in international aid and an impending freeze in US foreign funding.

Many people were living on just "bread and tea", WFP Country Director Hsiao-Wei Lee told Reuters.

Afghanistan was tipped to the brink of economic crisis in 2021 as the Islamic Emirate took over and all development and security assistance to the country was frozen, with restrictions also placed on the banking sector.

Since then humanitarian aid - aimed at funding urgent needs through non-profit organisations and bypassing government control - has filled some of the

Water release from Kamal Khan dam brings hopes to farmers

ZARANJ (Pajhwok): Farmers in northwestern Nimroz province have expressed satisfaction with the release of water from Kamal Khan Dam after six months of waiting. They are hoping to gain better agricultural yields in the coming year.

Water and energy department of the province released water from the Kamal Khan Dam three days ago.

Maulvi Abdul Qahar Nasir, director of the department, said that the decision to release water was made after repeated requests from farmers and residents. The water was released three days ago towards Zaranj city and is now flowing sufficiently through the Lashkari Canal to the districts.

He explained: "The dam had stored some water, along with a flood from the Helmand River. Initially, the spillways were opened to release 17 cubic meters of

water per second. After the water reached Zaranj, we reduced the flow to ensure it lasts for 25 days. Currently, 11 cubic meters per second is being released."

Without providing details about the amount of water in the dam, Nasir said it was released to help farmers start their planting season.

He added that additional rainfall and floods could extend water availability for several months, but for now, it is sufficient only for 25 days.

Farmers express relief and optimism

Mohammad Isa, a farmer from Kang district, described how the recent droughts had devastated crops over the past two years, leaving farmers with little to no harvests.

He said: "This is the season for planting wheat and barley, but we couldn't plant earlier because of water shortages. Now that water has been released, we

can finally start planting and hope for a good yield this year."

Bismillah Ishaqzai, a landowner from Shahzada village in Zaranj, said last year's lack of water turned his wheat, corn, and watermelon crops into weeds. "I own 100 jerbis of land, and my crops became food for animals due to water shortages. This year, I'm preparing my fields for planting, and the water brings new hope."

Haji Aminullah Baloch, another farmer from Chakhansur district, called the water release good news and urged authorities to support farmers with seeds and fertilizers.

He added: "In the past, farmers in Nimroz invested heavily in their fields, but droughts destroyed everything. Now that water is here, we need support to make the most of it."

Hafizullah, a resident of Kang district, highlighted the wider impact of water

availability: "In Nimroz, we lack factories, industrial zones, or a thriving border trade. With water, one piece of land can feed many families, provide jobs for hundreds, and improve lives. Even livestock owners benefit."

Agriculture department pledges support

Maulvi Sher Ahmad Rafi, Director of the Agriculture, Irrigation, and Livestock Department of Nimroz, acknowledged farmers suffered losses last year as many had been unable to plant crops or harvest yield.

"This year, the planting is going well. In areas like Barjok and Kang, no crops were planted last year due to water shortages, but with the arrival of water, we expect agricultural yields to improve significantly."

He expressed hope that next year's harvest would be much better and would bring about prosperity to farmers and the province.

The price increase is not limited to the dollar; the prices of essential goods have also risen:		
Type of commodity	Price last week	Current price
Sack of flour	1,350 Afs	1,560 Afs
Sack of rice	2,230 Afs	2,550 Afs
One liter of oil	100 Afs	108 Afs
One liter of fuel	58 Afs	62 Afs
One liter of gas	55 Afs	60 Afs



KARACHI: PPP Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, Senior Minister of Sindh Government Sharjeel Inam Memon met at Bilawal House; discuss political and administrative affairs of the province.

Senate panel okays PECA amend bill

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Senate Standing Committee on Interior approved Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA) amendment bill despite strong opposition from journalistic organizations.

The bill, which has sparked widespread criticism, was passed during a meeting chaired by Senator Faisal Saleem.

According to the reports, heated debate has been witnessed during the meeting with media bodies raising concerns over the bill's potential to curtail press freedom. The committee chairman questioned the failure of media organizations to submit written recommendations, urging them to do so for a more comprehensive review.

Senator Irfan Siddiqui - while addressing the committee - remarked that "In this country, one does not need a law to arrest someone." He referred to his own experience, where he had been arrested under the rent law being a tenant of a house.

Senator Kamran Murtaza also raised objections, arguing that the bill was rushed through without proper consultation or consideration of its potential flaws. Despite the protests, the Interior Ministry Secretary defended the bill, asserting that it was meant to safeguard the public from harmful online content.

The committee, however, pushed forward with its approval, stating that the bill, passed by the National Assembly, would proceed for further legislative processes. During the proceedings, media associa-

tions, including the Anchors Association, voiced their concerns, highlighting the lack of time to submit their suggestions for amendments.

Journalists pointed out several ambiguities in the bill, especially regarding the definition of "fake news," which they described as vague and open to misuse. The journalists' community expressed their stance on the matter, emphasizing that while they support a law against fake news, the current version of the bill, without proper safeguards, would only exacerbate the situation. They further stated that they, as victims of fake news, deserve a voice in shaping this legislation.

Senator Kamran Murtaza, along with Senators Irfan Siddiqui, Shaheed Awan, Omar Farooq, and others, participated in the committee meeting, while PPP Senator Palwasha Khan and Mir Hassan Domki were also present. The PECA Amendment Bill, which has been approved by both the National Assembly and the Senate Standing Committee, will now be forwarded to the Upper House for further deliberation. Meanwhile, media bodies continue to rally against the legislation, accusing the government of sidelining their input in a matter that directly affects their rights and freedoms. Earlier this week, the National Assembly had passed the PECA Amendment Bill 2025 with a majority vote, prompting protests and a walkout from journalists in the chamber. The Joint Action Committee of Journalist Organizations has already rejected the bill.

Operations against crime in Faqirabad

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The Faqirabad Division police in Peshawar have achieved significant success in combating serious criminal activities. Under the directives of SP Faqirabad Division Syed Talal Ahmed Shah, police uncovered organized gangs involved in car snatching, theft, and street crimes.

SP Faqirabad Said Recovery of Rs. 20.65 million, 2 vehicles, 13 motorcycles, and 50 mobile phones Arrest of 29 suspects, including two women involved in house burglaries exposure of 11 organized gangs responsible for various crimes.

The operations were led by DSP Investigation Sajid Mumtaz Khan, SDPO Gulbahar Sajjad Hussain, and SDPO Faqirabad Umar Afridi. These successful raids were carried out by SHO gulbahar Fawad Khan Rizwan Baraki sho Faqirabad Police Station and Javed Marwat Paharipura Police Station

During the raids, the police recovered weapons used in the crimes and confiscated items worth millions. The suspects confessed to several crimes committed in different areas of Peshawar. The recovered items, including cash, vehicles, motorcycles, and mobile phones, have been returned to their rightful owners.

The police have pledged to continue their operations to continue their operations with a zero-tolerance policy against street crimes, car snatching, theft, and other illegal activities. SP Syed Talal Ahmed Shah has emphasized that this proactive approach will remain steadfast to ensure the safety and security of Peshawar's residents.

Justice Ayesha recuses to hear case

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Justice Ayesha A. Malik of the Supreme Court on Monday recused herself from hearing of a case related to the constitutional status of Section 221-A of the Customs Act.

A SC eight-member constitutional bench led by Justice Aminuddin Khan took up the appeals regarding the constitutional status of Section 221-A of the Customs Act. During the hearing, Justice Ayesha Malik recused herself from the case, saying that she could not hear the case and would provide her reasons separately.

The Attorney General suggested that the case be postponed for a week while Barrister Salahuddin, the lawyer, submitted that there is a major controversy surrounding the matter and an order related to authority has also been issued. He urged that the Diwan Motors case be heard soon. Justice Aminuddin Khan observed that they would hear the case on Tuesday (today). Justice Ayesha Malik remarked that she would provide her reasons for recusing herself, to which Justice Muhammad Ali Mazhar responded, "That's fine, you may give your reasons".

PTI facing serious internal contradictions: Sharjeel

F.P. Report

KARACHI: Sindh Senior Minister Sharjeel Inam Memon has stated that, in accordance with the decision of the Sindh Cabinet, the process for appointing Vice Chancellors of universities has been improved. The new approach allows not only teachers but also professor, retired professionals, and experts in the relevant field to be considered as candidates for the position of Vice Chancellor. Under the existing system, any professor is eligible to be appointed as a Vice Chancellor.

The law enabling the appointment of professors as Vice Chancellors was also introduced by the Pakistan Peoples Party. While professors can still be appointed as Vice Chancellors, the criteria have now been broadened to include more options.

Addressing a press conference at the Social Media Directorate, Sindh Senior Minister and Provincial Minister for Information, Transport, and Mass Transit, Sharjeel Inam Memon, highlighted that former Vice Chancellors of Sindh University, such as Allama I.I. Qazi, Mazharul Haq Siddiqui, Nisar Siddiqui, and Mehran University's Muzaffar Shah, were bureaucrats who were appointed as VCs. He noted that the number of universities in Sindh has increased from 8 to 30. He questioned the course of action if the pool of applicants remains limited. Under the new procedure, the age limit for applicants is set at 62 years, and possessing a Ph.D. in the relevant field is mandatory. He urged all stakeholders to cooperate with the Sindh government.

He stated that yesterday, a business representative, made certain remarks in the presence of a federal minister. I would like to clarify that Punjab is also our province, and motorways are being developed there. However, I must point out that federal governments have predominantly been led by parties from Punjab, and their focus has largely been on developing motorways in that province. Meanwhile, Sindh has experienced significant neglect in terms of effective motorway infrastructure, a concern we have consistently raised. We have documented the disparities in federal projects allocated to Sindh and other provinces. If we are to compare the performance of Chief Ministers, we should consider their contributions to different mega proj-

ects.

For instance, in the energy sector, the Thar Coal project stands out as a significant achievement for Sindh. This project was initiated by the PPP government but was halted by the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz government. In 2008, when President Asif Ali Zardari's government returned to power, the Thar Coal project was revived. Today, Thar coal is recognized as the cheapest coal in the country, producing the most affordable electricity. Experts agree that Thar coal has the potential to generate electricity at the lowest cost nationwide.

Senior Minister Sharjeel Inam Memon highlighted that Sindh province leads in the health sector, citing unique models such as the National Institute of Cardiovascular Diseases (NICVD), the National Institute of Child Health (NICH), and the CyberKnife facility. He emphasized that free liver and lung transplants are being conducted at Gambat Institute of Medical Sciences in Sindh, a model unparalleled elsewhere. Notably, Sindh's CyberKnife unit is the only one worldwide offering free treatment. The Sindh government prioritizes human health and life.

He stated that the Sindh government is working on improving roads and that Sindh's universities are providing excellent educational services. Under the solarization project, the government is undertaking a unique initiative to provide affordable solar electricity to millions of people. Guided by Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari's vision, the construction of 2.1 million houses for flood victims, granting them ownership rights, stands as one of the Sindh government's most significant projects.

Senior Minister Sharjeel Inam Memon stated that the public has increasingly placed their trust in the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) in successive elections, resulting in higher vote counts. He acknowledged existing challenges and affirmed the Sindh government's commitment to addressing them. He commended President Asif Ali Zardari, Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, Ms. Faryal Talpur, and Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah for their exceptional contributions to Sindh's development. He noted that individuals from various provinces are coming to Sindh for employment and business opportunities, which serves as a significant testament to the Sindh gov-

ernment's performance.

He emphasized that all provinces are dear to the PPP, and Sindh warmly welcomes people from across the country. He mentioned that the Sindh government is currently entangled in a legal dispute before the Supreme Court concerning Rs. 180 billion in cess tax collected by the Excise Department. He emphasized that these funds are crucial for Sindh to continue serving its people effectively, especially given the province's limited financial resources. He expressed a hope that these funds would be released to facilitate ongoing development work in the region.

In response to a question, Senior Minister Sharjeel Inam Memon stated that the Interior Minister and the Sindh IG have already provided clarification regarding Chinese citizens. He emphasized that we value the safety of Chinese citizens more than our own lives. Some SOPs have been established regarding security, and we want everyone to adhere to these SOPs.

In response to another question, Senior Minister Sharjeel Inam Memon stated that a professor can certainly become a vice-chancellor, but if a better candidate can be found among administrative experts, they too have been given a chance. In response to a question, he said that at present, PTI is facing serious internal contradictions. We want them to come to the negotiating table and put an end to foreign conspiracies against the country. When their founder was punished, not a single person came out to protest.

In response to another question, Senior Minister Sharjeel Inam Memon said that he supports anti-encroachment operations. He explained that whenever such operations are initiated, compensation has to be paid. Sindh is the only province that also provides compensation for removing encroachments. There are attacks on the police during these operations, and the government has to make decisions based on public reaction. He emphasized the need to improve our mindset and cooperate in government actions against encroachments during anti-encroachment operations. In response to a question, Senior Minister Sharjeel Inam Memon said that the Pakistan Peoples Party received the NFC award during the tenure of President Asif Ali Zardari, which helped strengthen the parliament permanently.

Imran, Bushra challenge conviction in Al-Qadir Trust case in IHC

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Former prime minister and PTI founder Imran Khan and his wife Bushra Bibi on Monday filed appeals in the Islamabad High Court (IHC) against their conviction in the 190 million Pound case (Al-Qadir Trust case).

In their appeals, Imran and Bushra said that the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) misused its powers, and the trial court handed them prison terms in a rush, on the basis of an incomplete investigation.

They said the fact that neither the text of the agreement signed with the UK's National Crime Agency (NCA) was obtained nor the Agency officials were asked to cooperate with the investigators proved their point that the probe was incomplete. "The prosecution also failed to present proof against both of us," Imran and Bushra said.

The couple prayed to the court to declare the trial court's verdict dated January 17, 2025 null and void and order their acquittal. Imran Khan, 72, has been held in custody since August 2023 charged in around 200 cases that he claims are politically motivat-

ed.

The former cricketing star was sentenced to 14 years in jail and his wife to seven years this month in the latest case. "We have filed appeals today and in the next few days it will go through clerical processes and then it will be fixed for a hearing," Imran Khan's lawyer Khalid Yousaf Chaudhry told outside Islamabad High Court.

Imran Khan has been convicted four times since his arrest, with two convictions overturned and the sentences in the other two cases suspended. An accountability court found the pair guilty of "corruption and corrupt practices" over a welfare foundation they established together called the Al-Qadir Trust.

The court hearing for the case was postponed three times and his Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) said earlier it was being used to pressure him into cutting a deal with the government to step back from politics. Imran Khan alleged before the conviction that he had been "indirectly approached" about the possibility of house arrest at his sprawling home on Islamabad's outskirts. Bushra Bibi, a faith healer who married Khan short-

ly before he was elected in 2018, is being held at the same jail as her husband in Rawalpindi.

Meanwhile, a plea against acquittal of former premier Imran Khan and his wife Bushra Bibi in the illegal marriage case was filed on Monday in the Islamabad High Court (IHC). Additional Judge Azam Khan of the IHC conducted hearing on Khawar Maneka's plea.

Maneka, Bibi's former husband moved the petition through Zahid Chaudhry whereas Ali Bukhari, Shoaib Shaheen and Niazullah Niazi appeared on behalf of the PTI founder. Maneka's counsel told court that they had challenged the July 13, 2024 acquittal verdict of the additional sessions judge to which Khan's lawyer interrupted saying he wanted to explain something but the plaintiff had disclosed his mind before the defendant's argument. Shaheen asked the judge to transfer the case to another bench. "We had heard a review petition against an order earlier. We can send the file to the IHC CJ for constituting a new bench," the judge remarked. Later, the judge sent the PTI founder and Bibi's file to the IHC CJ for the formation of a new bench.

Five killed, 31 injured as LPG bowser explodes

F.P. Report

MULTAN: A tragic incident occurred in Multan's Industrial Estate when an LPG-filled bowser exploded, resulting in the death of five people and injuries to 31 others.

Rescue officials stated that the explosion caused fragments of the bowser to fall near Hamid Pur Chowk, damaging a number of houses. The blast also triggered a massive fire that engulfed surrounding warehouses and residential properties.

The rescue teams promptly arrived at the scene, initiating operations to evacuate affected residents and extinguish the flames. The area's electricity and gas supplies were immediately disconnected to prevent further damage.

According to Rescue 1122 sources, all 31 injured individuals were shifted to Nishtar Hospital for treat-

ment, while the deaths of five people were confirmed on the spot. Fire brigades, with the help of ten vehicles, managed to bring the fire under control after extensive efforts.

The fire brigade development authorities confirmed that the fire had been fully extinguished, and the operation to rescue and assist affected residents has concluded. Multan City Police Officer (CPO) Sadiq Ali stated that several houses were destroyed, and livestock perished in the blaze, adding gas leakage from the tanker persists, prompting authorities to evacuate the area. Among the injured, 13 were reported to be in critical condition.

The District Emergency Officer confirmed that an emergency has been declared at Nishtar Hospital, where the injured are receiving treatment. Electricity and gas supplies in the area have been sus-

pended as a precautionary measure, though Multan Muzaffargarh Road has now been reopened for traffic.

President Asif Ali Zardari and Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Monday condoled over the death of five people as an LPG bowser exploded in Multan which also left several others injured. In their separately issued statements, the president and the prime minister conveyed their condolences and sympathies to the bereaved families.

They prayed to Allah Almighty for peace for the departed souls, strength for the grieving families to bear the loss, and for the recovery of those injured in the incident. Prime Minister Shehbaz directed the authorities concerned to identify the reasons behind the explosion and take measures to prevent the recurrence of such incidents.

India, China agree to resume flights 5 years after stoppage

BEIJING (AFP): India and China agreed in principle on Monday to resume direct flights between the two nations, nearly five years after the Covid-19 pandemic and subsequent political tensions halted them.

The announcement came after a visit to Beijing by Indian foreign ministry secretary Vikram Misri and heralds the latest signs of a thaw in the frosty ties between the world's two most populous nations. Misri's trip to the Chinese capital marked one of the most senior official visits since a deadly Himalayan troop clash on their shared border in 2020 sent relations into a tailspin.

A statement from India's foreign ministry said a visit by a top envoy to Beijing had yielded agreement "in principle to resume direct air services between the two countries". "The relevant

technical authorities on the two sides will meet and negotiate an updated framework for this purpose at an early date," it said.

India's statement also said China had permitted the resumption of a pilgrimage to a popular shrine to the Hindu deity Krishna that had also been halted at the start of the decade. Both sides had committed to work harder on diplomacy to "restore mutual trust and confidence" and to resolve outstanding trade and economic issues, the statement said.

Around 500 monthly direct flights operated between China and India before the pandemic, according to Indian media outlet Moneycontrol. A statement from China's foreign ministry did not mention the agreement on flight resumptions but said both

countries had been working to improve ties since last year.

"The improvement and development of China-India relations is fully in line with the fundamental interests of the two countries," the Chinese statement said. India and China are intense rivals competing for strategic influence across South Asia. Flights between both countries were halted in early 2020 at the start of the pandemic.

Services to Hong Kong eventually resumed as the public health crisis receded but not to the Chinese mainland, owing to the bitter fallout of the deadly troop clash later that year. At least 20 Indian and four Chinese soldiers were killed in the skirmish in a remote stretch of the high-altitude borderlands along their 3,500-kilometre frontier.