

Relief goods dispatched
F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The NDMA, in collaboration with UN agencies dispatched a humanitarian relief consignment to Kurram here Tuesday. The convoy of 11 trucks with relief items provided by UNICEF, UNHCR and IOM, departed from Peshawar on Tuesday. The relief consignment included essential items such as health and hygiene kits and tarpaulins to support the affected communities.



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Partnerships, skill development vital to empower youth: PM

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Tuesday reiterating his government's strong commitment to youth empowerment, called for fostering partnership, supporting entrepreneurship and prioritizing youth's education and skill development to pave the way to a resilient Commonwealth and a prosperous future.

"By ensuring that youth remain central to governance and decision-making processes, we can lead the way in fostering partnerships, supporting entrepreneurship, and prioritizing education and skills development. This will ensure that our future is in the hands of an empowered young generation," the prime minister said addressing the inaugural session of the Commonwealth Asia Youth Alliance summit here. The prime minister welcomed the participating delegates from several nations and said that as a founding member, Pakistan attached great importance to the Commonwealth and its institutions which served as an important platform for consensus-building and fostering partnerships.

The opening session of the international summit was attended by the delegates from 12 countries, federal ministers, diplomats, 113 new members of National Youth Council, students and academicians from across the country. With over 60% of the Commonwealth population under the age of 30, the future rests in the hands of the youth. These hands must be empowered and equipped through vigorous training and access to modern technology. This will enable them to carve out a peaceful, progressive, and prosperous future."

He said Pakistan with a youth bulge of around 70% of the popula-

tion under the age of 30, fully understood the potential as the challenge could easily be transformed into great opportunities. Emphasising the undeniable role of youth in development, he told the international gathering that he always prioritized the productive employment of youth as a key focus area and devoted significant efforts to this goal.

He said that the government was committed to empowering youth through transformative initiatives such as the Youth Program empowering millions of boys and girls across Pakistan. Referring to his term as Punjab chief minister, Shehbaz Sharif mentioned the launch of the Punjab Education Endowment Fund to provide stipends to high achievers for education, the establishment of Daanish Schools which were now being expanded to Islamabad, Azad Kashmir (AJK), and remote areas of Balochistan.

Moreover, around 600,000 laptops were distributed to high achievers which during the COVID time proved to be valuable sources for distance learning as well as earning. A fresh program had been launched for laptop distribution to high achievers from Balochistan, Gilgit-Baltistan (GB), and AJK, coming from humble financial backgrounds, he added. Urging the youth for dedicated efforts and contribution to nation-building, he advised, "Dream boldly, act courageously, work tirelessly, and have faith and spirit of conviction. Remember, it is you-our sons and daughters-who are the pioneers of our future. Through your knowledge and experience, you will unlock untapped potential, ensuring Pakistan's well-being, progress, and prosperity."

Earlier, the prime minister also administered the oath to the members of the National Youth Council and

gave away the Climate Champion Awards to 20 youth who had positively contributed to environmental preservation. In his address, Chairman of Prime Minister's Youth Program (PMYP), Rana Mashood Ahmad Khan welcomed the guests from 12 countries and also congratulated 113 new members of the third batch of the Prime Minister National Youth Council (NYC).

He shared that 49 boys, as many girls, two transgenders and 13 candidates from overseas diaspora were selected through interviews conducted by a panel of professionals and leaders. The PMYP chairman said that CAYA summit would provide an effective platform to strengthen the dynamic role of young leadership and facilitate dialogue.

He said that the establishment of the Commonwealth Asia Youth Secretariat was a positive development reflecting trust in Pakistan's youth. To promote the rich heritage and scenic beauty of the country, a video on Pakistan's tourism potential was showcased in the event, captivating the audience with stunning visuals of the nation's diverse landscapes.

A video message from the Commonwealth Secretary-General Patricia Scotland was also played, who acknowledged the Government of Pakistan's strides in youth development and its significant contributions to the Commonwealth community. The event also featured the formal inauguration of the Commonwealth Asia Youth Alliance Secretariat in Pakistan as well as the SPARK Magazine of PM Youth Program. A session was also held on leadership capacity building, stakeholder management, and resource mobilization which discussed the issues like child marriage and other challenges, besides the youth empowerment.



ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif officially launches the magazine of Prime Minister's Youth Program, titled 'Spark.'

SC reinstates Additional Registrar F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Supreme Court Registrar's Office has issued an official order reinstating Additional Registrar Nazir Abbas.

According to reports, the case revolved around the registrar's failure to schedule a hearing on a matter related to the powers of constitutional and regular benches. A two-member bench, comprising Justice Syed Mansoor Ali Shah and Justice Aqeel Ahmed Abbasi, had reserved its verdict in the case.

The issue at hand was related to the incorrect assignment of cases by Additional Registrar Nazir Abbas, who fixed cases meant for the Supreme Court's constitutional bench instead of a regular one.

Senate approves PECA amends bill

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Senate on Tuesday passed controversial amendments to the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (Peca) Bill, 2025, amid a walkout by journalists from the press gallery and protests by the opposition.

The amendments adds Section 26(A) to Peca, which seeks to penalise perpetrators of "fake news" online. It says anyone who intentionally spreads, displays, or transmits false information likely to cause fear, panic, or unrest in society may face up to three years' imprisonment, a fine of up to Rs2 million, or both. The bill now awaits the president's assent to become law.

The bill was moved by Minister for Industries and Production Rana Tanveer Hussain on behalf of Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi. As the bill was introduced, Leader of the Opposition in the Senate, Shibli Faraz, spoke out against it, highlighting that the laws were made to protect people, while the purpose of said bill was "to target a specific political party".

"When a new law is introduced, its intent is scrutinised. Whether it's social media or any other medium, it should operate within specific boundaries," Faraz said. "The purpose of this bill is to target a specific political party." He added: "Laws are made to protect people, not to oppress them. It takes time to craft a law properly."

Faraz appeared to be referring to the manner in which the National Assembly rushed the contentious amendments to Peca last week, which drew opposition protests and triggered a walkout by journalists. PPP members had voiced their support during the voting. Meanwhile, Federal Minister Rana Tanveer Hussain replied to the senator after the bill was passed, saying that the bill was neither set in stone, nor was it aimed at journalists. "This law will not deal with TV newspapers but social media," he said, adding that it also "can be improved".

"Journalists have nothing to do with this bill," he added. According to the

report issued by the Senate Standing Committee on Interior, the bill "primarily seeks to modernise ... the legislative framework for combating cybercrimes in Pakistan", while the interior secretary emphasised that the bill was written in good faith and aimed to "protect the general public ... and to make the in-field act more effective to protect people's rights". After the committee's approval, now only the senators have to vote for the bill to be sent to the president who would sign it into law.

In Section 26A of the amended law, the term has been explained as any information disseminated by a person that "he knows or has reason to believe to be false or fake and likely to cause or create a sense of fear, panic or disorder or unrest in general public or society". Separately, the National Assembly had also passed "The Digital Nation Pakistan Bill, 2024" which was moved by Minister of State for Information Technology and Telecommunication Shaza Fatima Khawaja.

The bill aims to create a digital identity for citizens — to centralise social, economic and governance data — and to provide for the transformation of Pakistan into a digital nation, enabling a digital society, digital economy and digital governance. Meanwhile, a press release by the Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists (PFUJ) announced a nationwide protest today at 3pm.

"We had appealed to the government of Pakistan and elected representatives to consult all stakeholders before passing the amendments from Senate of Pakistan... We reject these amendments, as they go against the spirit of the Constitution. "Therefore, the PFUJ urges and appeals all union of journalists to organise strong protests at 3pm tomorrow at their respective press clubs, demonstrating unity and sending a strong message of rejection to the government and authorities behind these amendments," the press release said.

Dialogue in doldrums as PTI committee stays away

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: National Assembly Speaker Ayaz Sadiq on Tuesday postponed the fourth round of negotiations between the government and the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) due to absence of the opposition party representatives.

Earlier, the speaker reached out to PTI leaders Omar Ayub and Asad Qaiser over telephone, inviting them to participate in the negotiations. However, Omar Ayub declined the invitation, stating that negotiations could not proceed until a judicial commission was formed.

PTI Chairman Barrister Gohar categorically announced a few days earlier that the PTI was no more part of the dialogue as Imran Khan had refused to proceed further over government's failure to form a judicial commission to investigate May 9 and Nov 26 incidents.

Ayaz Sadiq, on behalf of the government, still summoned the fourth sitting despite reservations by the PTI. The NA speaker briefly spoke and said the government believed in dialogue and expected that the PTI representatives would join them to carry the talks forward. He said political matters should be solved through dialogues and there were no preconditions in such matters. He said the government side expected that the PTI would reconsider its move and join the dialogue process therefore, it was not disband-

ing the committee for now. Regretting the government's failure to constitute judicial commissions within the seven-day deadline, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Chairman Gohar Ali Khan clarified on Tuesday that his party was not holding dialogue with any other quarter.

"It's unfortunate that talks could not proceed further. We sat with the government with an open heart. Our demand was that the judicial commission should be announced within seven days," Gohar said talking to media outside the Adiala jail in Rawalpindi. He said the negotiations would have moved forward, had judicial commissions been formed.

The PTI and the ruling coalition have been engaged in talks aimed at defusing political tensions in the country for nearly a month. Both sides have held three rounds of talks so far. However, the dialogue process hit a snag as the Khan-founded party quit negotiations over the government's failure to form the judicial commissions to probe the May 9, 2023 violent protests and a crackdown on party protesters in Islamabad on November 26 last year, within seven days, as per their demands.

The PTI chief said his party has been striving for the rule of democracy and Constitution for 27 years. He said they were maintaining contacts with political parties in this regard as they wanted to take all the stakeholders

into confidence over the 26th Constitutional Amendment as well as independent judiciary. Gohar said they would make every effort including protest for the formation of judicial commission.

On speculations about Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur's role in the party after Junaid Akbar replaced him as the party's KP president, the PTI chairman apprised media that the party founder dismissed rumours about Gandapur as false. "The party founder said Ali Amin Gandapur himself came to him and said he was not getting enough sleep due to heavy work load," he said, adding that the post of party's provincial president was changed on the KP chief minister's recommendation. The PTI founding chairman had categorically stated that disinformation was being disseminated against Gandapur, he maintained.

On the other hand, speaking to media outside the Supreme Court, PTI Senator Hamid Khan said the PTI would hold a of series conventions in Lahore, Islamabad and Karachi. "We will hold protests and conventions," he said, adding their struggle was constitutional and they had multiple options with them. Struggle for every organisation would not be of low scale, hence the lawyers should mentally be prepared, he said. Hamid said the PTI and the common men would finally have the last laugh in this struggle.

Govt to challenge Justice Mansoor's verdict F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The federal government has decided to challenge Supreme Court (SC) justice Justice Mansoor Ali Shah's verdict in the contempt of court case against the apex court's Additional Registrar Nazir Abbas.

During the hearing of the case related to the Customs Act on Tuesday, Attorney-General for Pakistan (AGP) Mansoor Usman Awan informed the constitutional bench of the SC about the government's decision. "We have decided to file an appeal against the decision."

The SC had on Monday disposed of the contempt of court case against the additional registrar and referred the matter of determining the powers of constitutional and regular benches to the chief justice of Pakistan (CJP) for the formation of a full court. According to media reports, Justice Mansoor Ali Shah, while announcing the reserved verdict, withdrew contempt proceedings against the additional registrar (judicial) for not fixing a case regarding the jurisdiction of regular benches.

The case, reserved for the judgment on January 23, centered round the additional registrar's failure to schedule a matter regarding the jurisdiction of constitutional and regular benches, rather it was transferred to the constitutional bench for further hearing.

The case was originally heard by a two-member bench comprising Justice Mansoor Ali Shah and Justice Aqeel Ahmed Abbasi. During the hearing, Justice Mansoor Ali Shah noted that the bench deliberated on two questions — one about delisting cases and the other about invalidating a court order through an administrative order.

The SC judge remarked, "The court did not find any such proof that showed that the additional registrar (judicial) had any personal interest in the case." Noting that neither was any evidence found of any "ill-intent" of the SC official, the senior judge announced the withdrawal of the show-cause notice on the contempt of court against Abbas.

Weapons surrender crucial for peace in Kurram: KP CS

Syed Adnan

KOHAT: Chief Secretary Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Nadeem Aslam Chaudhary, has emphasized the need for surrendering all illegal weapons to ensure permanent peace, safe travel, and the enforcement of law in Kurram district.

Addressing Kurram Grand Jirga participants at the Commissioner House, Kohat, on Tuesday evening, the Chief Secretary underscored the critical role of community cooperation in resolving conflicts. The meeting was attended by IGP Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Akhtar Hayat Khan, GOC Kohat Zulfiqar Ali Bhatti, Commissioner Kohat Division Syed Mutasim Billah Shah, RPO Kohat Abbas Majeed Marwat, Deputy Commissioner Kohat Abdul Akram, and prominent parliamentarians

from Kurram district.

The Chief Secretary stated that while the ongoing conflict in Kurram appears to involve two groups, extremist elements are attempting to exploit the situation to fuel hatred. He called upon both parties to identify and isolate such elements to prevent them from succeeding in their malicious designs.

Highlighting the government's commitment, Nadeem Aslam Chaudhary reiterated that the Kohat Agreement will be implemented at all costs, with full cooperation from all concerned parties. "Understanding and tolerance are imperative to protect our areas and people. This situation must not be taken lightly," he added.

The Chief Secretary further assured that the rule of law will be upheld without exception. "Strict legal

action will be taken against anyone violating government orders or laws. FIRs are not mere formalities; they will be executed, and culprits will face severe punishment," he warned.

Emphasizing unity and collective responsibility, he called on the youth of Kurram to actively participate in peacebuilding efforts and urged both sides to work closely with the government to maintain law and order in the region.

Earlier, the Chief Secretary along with IG Police visited Hangu district, where he reviewed the facilities at a temporary relief camp established for families evacuated from certain villages in Kurram. Expressing satisfaction with the arrangements, he met with displaced citizens and assured them of the government's commitment to addressing their needs.

2 jawans martyred, 8 Khwarij killed in militants attack, IBO

F.P. Report

RAWALPINDI: Khwarij attempted to attack a security forces' post in general area Gultistan in Qila Abdullah District of Balochistan.

The attempt to enter the post was effectively thwarted by own troops, which forced the khwarij to ram an explosive laden vehicle into the perimeter wall of the post. Own troops fought bravely and in ensuing fire exchange, all five khwarij including two suicide bombers were sent to hell.

However, during the intense fire exchange two brave sons of soil, Naik Tahir Khan (Age 39 years; resident of Tank District) and Lance Naik Tahir Iqbal (Age 26 years; resident of Karak District), having fought gallantly, paid the ultimate sacrifice and embraced shahadat.

Sanitization operation is being conducted in the area and the perpetrators of this heinous act will be brought to justice. Security forces of Pakistan are determined to eliminate the menace of terrorism and such sacrifices of our brave men further

strengthen our resolve.

Meanwhile, the security forces conducted an intelligence based operation (IBO) in general area Jani Khel, Bannu District on reported presence of khwarij.

According to a statement issued by the Inter Services Public Relations (ISPR) on Tuesday, during the conduct of operation, own troops effectively engaged khwarij location, as a result of which, three khwarij were sent to hell, while nine khwarij got injured. Sanitization operation is being conducted to eliminate any other Khwarij found in the area, as security forces of Pakistan are determined to wipe out the menace of terrorism from the country.

President Asif Ali Zardari and Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif paid tribute to the security forces for successful operation against Khawarij in Bannu district. In separate statements issued here, the president and prime minister praised the bravery of the security forces for killing three Khawarij terrorists and injuring nine

during the anti-terrorism operation.

President Zardari said, "Pakistan's brave forces are determined to protect the country's borders at all times. Operations against terrorists will continue until the complete elimination of the menace of terrorism." He underlined that the entire nation stood with its security forces in the war against terrorism.

Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif commended the officers and personnel of the security forces for the successful operation against the Khawarij in Jani Khel area of Bannu district. The prime minister praised the professional skills of the officers and personnel of the security forces for killing three terrorists and arresting nine during the operation.

"We salute the unwavering resolve of the Pakistani Armed Forces to completely eradicate the menace of terrorism from the country. The entire nation stands shoulder to shoulder with the Pakistani Armed Forces in the fight against terrorism until it is eradicated," the prime minister said.

Sindh govt to assume management of Green Line, Orange Line bus services

Muhammad Naeem Khan

KARACHI: The Sindh government has finalized preparations to assume management of the Green Line and Orange Line bus services in February 2025. A high-level meeting, chaired by Sindh Senior Minister and Provincial Minister for Information, Transport, and Mass Transit Sharjeel



Inam Memon, was held in Karachi to review the formalities for transferring the management of the Green Line bus service from the federal government to the Sindh government. The meeting also deliberated on transferring the operations of the Orange Line bus service to the Sindh govern-

ment. The meeting was attended by Secretary Transport Asad Zamin, MD Sindh Mass Transit Authority Kamal Dayo, CEO Trans Karachi Tariq Manzoor Chandio, as well as consultants for the Green Line bus service and operators of the Orange Line bus service. During the meeting, Senior Minister Sharjeel Inam Memon stressed the importance of ensuring a smooth transfer of operations and instructed the consultants to expedite the required actions. He also directed Secretary Transport Asad Zamin to review the legal aspects for introducing reforms in the project agreement.

Speaking on the sidelines of the meeting, Senior Minister Sharjeel Inam Memon stated that the Green Line project was initially scheduled to be handed over to the Sindh government by the federal government in January. He added that the Sindh government is fully prepared to assume operations of the Green Line bus service in February 2025. He mentioned that there had been complaints about the federal government entering into costly contracts for the Green Line. Following the handover, the Sindh government will review these contracts. He emphasized that the Green Line project is a vital service for the passengers of Karachi, and the Sindh government is committed to enhancing its performance and quality. Senior Minister Sharjeel Inam Memon stated that their priority is to provide the public with a reliable and comfortable public transport system. He added that the Sindh government aims to modernize and expand public transport projects to cater to the growing needs of urban centers. He stated that after the transfer, the Sindh government will introduce operational improvements and upgrades to ensure that the Green Line bus service remains a model of sustainable urban transit.

Advisor Federal Ombudsman to resolve public grievances in Malir

F.P. Report

KARACHI: On directives of the Federal Ombudsman, the senior advisor (In charge) Regional Office Karachi Mr. Amir Ahmed Shaikh, and Senior Advisor Syed Anwar Haider on Tuesday, held a Khulli Awami Katchehri (open public meeting) at Deputy Commissioner Office District Malir. Officers from Federal Ombudsman, Deputy Commissioner Saleemullah Odho, Additional Deputy Commissioners and officers from various federal and provincial departments attended the public gathering.

On the occasion, numerous complaints were lodged against SSGC, NADRA, Land Department, Karachi Water and Sewerage Corporation, K-Electric, local government institutions and other agencies. The complainants hailing from dif-

ferent areas including Gadap, Bin Qasim, Ibrahim Hyderi, Murad Memon Goth and other localities raised issues about land, unjustified bills by SSGC and K-Electric and disruptions in supply of natural gas, water and electricity to the consumers despite payment of hefty bills, encroachments and other civic problems. The Senior Advisor, Syed Anwar Haider, on the occasion, directed the officials from concerned departments to address public grievances promptly and said that government functionaries will be made accountable if they fail to resolve the public complaints. He assured prompt actions on the legitimate issues voiced by the residents of District Malir and said that federal Ombudsman Secretariat is mandated to listen to and recommend remedial measures on grievances of

citizens regarding over 180 departments and organizations of the federal government while complaints pertaining to provincial departments and institutions were forwarded to relevant forums. He assured the public that Federal Ombudsman works efficiently to redress the complaints of public against Federal Institutions in 60 days while implementation on the decisions was also ensured through efficient follow-up. The ombudsman have legal authority to initiate action against the negligent officers, he informed and encouraged the public to use this platform for their fair and just complaints against federal institutions. On the occasion, Mr Saleemullah Odho Deputy Commissioner Malir welcomed such gatherings to resolve public issues and pledge to arrange such exercises in the future as well.

CEC opens digital services
F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Sikandar Sultan Raja here on Tuesday inaugurated the Election Commission's digital services, aiming to digitize operations and enhance public engagement for greater efficiency and transparency in Pakistan's electoral processes. The focus was on how these facilities will be vital for enhancing daily operations, allowing staff and the public to easily access services. The new digital services encompass various internal modules and two mobile apps designed to cater to the diverse needs of the Election Commission and voters. Key features and modules include the Legal Case Management System (LCMS), Training Information Management System (TIMS), Human Resource Management System (HRMS) and HRMS-Admin, Monitoring and Reporting System (MRS), Integrated Office Record Management System (IORMS), Complaint Management System (CMS) Mobile App, ECP Staff Mobile App (EPAM), Scheduler, and Telephone Directory.



QUETTA: A massive fire erupted on oil tanker at Joint Road in Hazarganji area.

One shot dead in Karachi
F.P. Report

KARACHI: A man was shot dead by unidentified persons while he was going to buy uniform for his son from a shop on University Road in Karachi. Local police registered a first information report (FIR) on an application of the victim's brother. As per the FIR, Farhan Qasim along with his brother reached Maria Uniform shop located at Scheme No 33 on University Road at 3.30 pm in a Revo car. Suddenly two motorcyclists appeared from frontside and opened fire on Farhan. During the firing, Farhan received one bullet in his forehead and he was seriously injured.

Punjab Food Authority busts fake turmeric supply unit

F.P. Report

LAHORE: In a crackdown by the Punjab Food Authority (PFA), a unit in Lala Pak Colony engaged in the illegal production of adulterated turmeric and spices has been shut down here on Tuesday. Under the direct instructions of the Director General (DG) of the Food Authority Asim Javed, a team of food safety inspectors raided the spice production facility, where they discovered alarming health risks. During the raid, authorities seized 480 kilograms of adulterated turmeric and chilli powder. The seized products were found to be mixed with harmful non-standard ingredients and prohibited colours. Samples of the spices failed the mandatory quality tests, prompting immediate action. As a result, the production at the unit has been halted, and a formal case has been registered against the owner. DG Food Authority, Asim Javed, highlighted the grave risks posed by such standard products, stating, "Adulterated turmeric and chilli powder can lead to severe health issues, including gastrointestinal diseases." He further emphasized the unsanitary conditions of the facility, with the turmeric found resting on filthy floors. The unit was

also found lacking essential records, medical and proper hygiene standards. The fake spices were intended for sale in the suburbs and streets of Lahore, Asim Javed urged the public to avoid purchasing open spices and to make sure they choose nutritious and safe food options. He also warned that adulterating basic essentials would not be tolerated, stating, "We will uproot the businesses of those who harm society by contaminating food products." Reference Notice Inviting E-Bidding No.INF (P) 221/25 published in daily newspaper dated 18/01/2025 and published on KPRA website for the scheme namely "Improvement, Rehabilitation & Construction of new Bridges.(AIP) (02-Bridges, NWTD Share).SH: 1: Construction of RCC Bridge Hassan Khel Bridge, Spinwam.SH: 2:Construction of Koram Bridge, Datta Khel." Corrigendum is hereby issued under the mentioned date and Term/ conditions. 1. Last date for submission of electronic tender form will be 06/02/2025 at 12:00 hour instead of 05/02/2025 at 12:00 hour. EXECUTIVE ENGINEER INF(P)334/25 Highway Division, NWTD Miranshah Phone# 0928-313511



HANGU: Chief Secretary of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Nadeem Aslam Chaudhry inspecting arrangements at a relief camp for Kurram victims.

PPP team calls on Punjab Governor

F.P. Report

LAHORE: Senior leaders of the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) met with Governor Punjab Sardar Saleem Haider Khan at the Governor House Lahore. Mr. Imtiaz Safdar, Azizur Rehman Chan, Naveed Cheema, Abrar Hussain Shah, Rai Waqas, Allama Yousaf Awan, Edwin Sahutra and others were present in the meeting. During the meeting, Punjab Governor expressed concern over the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA) and its implications for journalists. Speaking on the occasion, Governor Sardar Saleem Haider Khan said that the Pakistan Peoples Party believes in the stability of the country's institutions, complete independence of the judiciary and the media. He said that the PPP will not be a part of any bill that hinders freedom of the press. Governor emphasized that the PPP has always made sacrifices for democracy and freedom of the press, and will continue to raise its voice against the PECA Act at all forums. The Punjab Governor said that Bilawal Bhutto Zardari will soon visit Lahore and meet party workers and leaders. He said that the PPP will regain its lost position and political power in Punjab. The Punjab Governor said that the PML-N should not ignore the PPP after coming to power. He said that the PML-N should implement the agreements made with the PPP. The Punjab Governor further said that he will not tolerate injustice with anyone in Punjab, including PPP workers. He said that the PPP is rapidly gaining popularity throughout Pakistan, including Punjab. The Punjab Governor said that the next Prime Minister of Pakistan will be Bilawal Bhutto Zardari.

Aurangzeb for climate financing

F.P. Report

KARACHI: Federal Minister for Finance and Revenue, Senator Muhammad Aurangzeb on Tuesday highlighted the critical need for climate financing to combat the vulnerabilities posed by climate change. Virtually addressing the 3rd Pakistan Climate Conference (PCC) organized by the Overseas Investors Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OICCI), he commended Overseas Investors Chamber of Commerce and Industries for organizing this vital conference to confront the urgent climate challenges Pakistan faces. Ranked among the top 10 most climate-vulnerable countries globally, and with damages from the devastating 2022 floods exceeding \$30 billion, the urgency for sustainable solutions and financing has never been crucial, he added. Highlighting the role of innovative financial tools in addressing the climate crisis, the Minister noted the

importance of tapping into international funding mechanisms and fostering private-sector participation. He said, "Mobilizing sufficient climate finance demands enhanced access to international funding sources like the Green Climate Fund and the Adaptation Fund." He continued, "The success of Pakistan's first green Eurobond in 2021, which raised \$500 million, illustrates our capacity to attract sustainable investments. Expanding such initiatives, alongside tools like green bonds, sustainability-linked loans, and carbon credits, will empower the private sector to play a leading role in climate action." Muhammad Aurangzeb also pointed out two major challenges facing Pakistan amid ongoing economic reforms: population growth and climate change. He reiterated the government's resolve to integrate climate considerations into national economic planning. "The Ministries of Finance, Climate, and Planning will

work together to bring Pakistan onto a sustainable pathway of growth and resilience," he stated. Concluding his address, he reassured stakeholders of the Ministry of Finance's dedication to creating an enabling environment for green investments and said, "Our commitment is unwavering. Through fiscal reforms, regulatory support, and capacity building, we aim to attract both international and domestic investments in green projects to secure a sustainable future for Pakistan." The two-day conference provided a platform to policymakers, environmental experts, and business leaders to tackle Pakistan's escalating climate crisis and propose solutions for mitigation and adaptation. The conference included panel discussions and expert presentations on topics such as climate finance, the economic impacts of climate change, advancing circularity, decarbonization, and fostering public-private partnerships for climate resilience.

PBM, HMR join forces to empower women

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Bait-ul-Mal (PBM) and Hum Mashal-e-Rah Foundation (HMR) joined forces on Tuesday to empower underprivileged and differently-abled women, helping them become self-sufficient and respected members of society through a newly signed Memorandum of Understanding (MoU). The partnership, unveiled at a ceremony in Islamabad, focuses on helping these women become self-sufficient and respected members of society by providing job opportunities and enhancing

their professional skills. The event was graced by PBM Managing Director, Senator Capt. Shaheen Khalid Butt, who served as the Chief Guest. Also in attendance were Amnah Aftab, Chairperson and Founder Director of HMR Foundation, and Amir Shahzad, CEO of Punjab Charity Commission, along with other distinguished guests. The MoU outlines the collaboration between the two organizations to implement an effective delivery mechanism at PBM's Business Facilitation Center. This center supports women trainees from

Women Empowerment Centres, aiming to enhance their skills and provide meaningful job opportunities. In his address, Senator Shaheen Khalid Butt described the event as a milestone for women empowerment, stressing the important role women entrepreneurs play in the country's socio-economic development. He paid tribute to the hardworking women across Pakistan and expressed his commitment to offering PBM's services to impoverished yet determined women pursuing self-reliance and economic independence.

HABIBMETRO

NOTICE OF BRANCH CONVERSION

The following conventional branches of HABIBMETRO will be converted into Islamic Banking Branches in or before **June, 2025**. Kindly contact your respective branch staff for further information and clarification.

S. No.	Branch Code	Branch Name	City/Province	Branch Address
1	1-74	DHA Phase-I Branch	Karachi, Sindh	Plot No. 147, World Business Centre, DHA Phase-I, Korangi Road, Karachi.
2	4-48	Fazilpur Branch	Rajapur, Punjab	Plot No.132/20/1, Khatooni No.125, Main Indus Highway, Fazilpur, District Rajapur, Punjab.
3	6-66	Gulbahar Branch	Sialkot, Punjab	Khasra No.893/575, Khewat No.159, Khatooni No.211, Gulbahar Kalan, Tehsil & District Sialkot, Punjab.
4	2-65	Iqbal Road Branch	Rawalpindi, Punjab	Plot No. E-160/161, Mohammadi Plaza, Iqbal Road, Rawalpindi.
5	6-69	Kahna Noh Branch	Lahore, Punjab	Khasra No.1513, Khewat No.563, Khatooni No.1557, Kahna Noh, Main Ferozpur Road, District Lahore.
6	2-17	Kasur Branch	Kasur, Punjab	Railway Road, Kasur.
7	6-2	Kuri Road Branch	Islamabad	Khasra No.1405/1231/2, Mouza Rehanna, Main Kuri Road, Jinnah Avenue, Islamabad.
8	3-27	Askari V Malir Cantt. Branch	Karachi, Sindh	Commercial Centre, Sector E, Askari-V, Malir Cantonment, Karachi.
9	6-84	Bagh Branch	Bagh, Azad Kashmir	Khewat No.285, Khasra No.1019, Mouza Bagh, Tehsil & District Bagh, Azad Kashmir.
10	6-85	Saidpur Road Branch	Rawalpindi, Punjab	Plot No. F-763, Saidpur Road, Satellite Town Scheme, Rawalpindi.
11	4-65	Chaklala Scheme-III Branch	Rawalpindi, Punjab	Plot No.67, Survey No.159/67, Bazar Area, Chaklala Scheme-III, Rawalpindi.
12	6-51	B-17 Branch	Islamabad	Plot No.26, Shopping Markaz, Multi Garden Housing Project, B-17 Multi Professional Cooperative Housing Society, Islamabad.
13	6-18	Patang Chowk Branch	Peshawar, KPK	Property No. BAN-9071-A, Ring Road, Patang Chowk, Tehsil & District Peshawar, KPK.
14	6-52	Chamkani Branch	Peshawar, KPK	Khewat No.150, 211, Khatooni No.613, 615, Khatta No.430, 432, Main GT Road, Chamkani, Tehsil & District Peshawar.

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Minister highlights role of youth in national development

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Minister for Higher Education, Meena Khan Afridi, emphasized that the progress and development of a nation depend heavily on the education and active participation of its youth. He expressed confidence that the younger generation would play a pivotal role in the country's advancement, as well as in upholding and protecting the constitution.

The minister was speaking as the chief guest at a farewell ceremony held in

honor of the graduating students of Frontier Law College, Peshawar. The event was attended by notable dignitaries, including Prosecutor General NAB Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Muhammad Ali, the college's founder Akhtar Ali Shah, Principal Syed Yahya Zahid Gillani, Justice (Retd) Nasir Ali Mahfooz, faculty members, and a large number of students.

During the ceremony, the minister distributed certificates and shields among the graduating students, recognizing their

academic achievements. Faculty members were also honored with shields for their outstanding contributions to the college.

Addressing the students, Meena Khan Afridi urged them to enter practical life with a firm commitment to protecting the constitution and contributing to society within the framework of established rules. He advised them not to confine their education to obtaining a degree but to strive for excellence in their respective fields.

"Practical life is both challenging and rewarding.

Your dedication and commitment to your profession will determine your success. Follow the teachings of the Holy Prophet (PBUH) to develop a strong sense of humanity," the minister remarked. I will also urge the youth to study the philosophy of Allama Muhammad Iqbal, the minister said.

The ceremony concluded with the presentation of a commemorative shield to the provincial minister by the college principal and founder in recognition of his contributions to education and higher learning.



PESHAWAR: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Minister for Higher Education, Meena Khan Afridi giving certificates during farewell ceremony held in honor of the graduating students of Frontier Law College, Peshawar.

PTI's dialogue boycott A threat to democracy's core principles

PESHAWAR (APP): The decision by the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) leadership to unilaterally halt negotiations with the government committee has drawn widespread criticism across Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Experts and political analysts argued that this irrational move of PTI leadership strongly contradicted the very essence of democratic governance, which rests on dialogue, tolerance, cooperation, and compromise.

The PTI's abrupt decision has raised significant concerns regarding its commitment to democratic norms in Pakistan where democracy had derailed four times due to wrangling between political forces by not accepting the each others mandate.

By withdrawing from talks, the experts asserted that PTI is undermining the principles of democracy, which emphasized peaceful resolution of all issues through an open discussions in the parliament and dialogue process.

"This illogical move by the PTI marked a stark deviation from the foundational tenets of democracy, which stressed the importance of dialogue and resolving differences through peaceful negotiations," said Ikhtair Wali, the spokesperson for the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Speaking to APP, Ikhtair Wali deplored the PTI's irrational action, describing it as a pressure building tactics to get relief for the convicted PTI founder that would further entrench political polarization in the country.

"PTI's leadership had failed to reciprocate the goodwill gesture extended by the Government Committee, calling their decision "highly deplorable." The lack of willingness to engage in dialogue, Wali argued, showed a disregard for the democratic process and promotes division rather than political unity.

Professor Dr. A.H. Hilali, a political analyst, emphasized the necessity of a grand dialogue among political forces within a democratic system, stating that democracy thrived on compromise, debate, and collective decision-making.

"In a democratic government, the doors to dialogue should always remain open. Political dialogue is crucial to resolving constitutional and parliamentary issues," Dr. Hilali remarked, stressing that the PTI's boycott was an unfortunate rejection of these core values.

Many observers viewed that PTI's move as a retreat from democratic ideals, opting for confrontation rather than cooperation for face saving after conviction of its founder in £190million Al Qadar Trust case.

This, according to experts, risked the deepening political divisions and instability within the country. By choosing not to engage in dialogue, PTI's leadership tried to jeopardizing efforts to bridge the growing divide between political factions through dialogue.

Dr. Hilali pointed out that democracy was not just about winning elections, but about fostering an inclusive political system where disputes are resolved through peaceful means. "PTI's decision to halt dialogue signalled a troubling trend towards exclusivity and confrontational politics, which can only harm the democratic framework," he added. Concerns also abound about the potential negative precedent this decision may set in Pakistan.

The experts worried that if political parties begin to reject dialogue in favour of unilateral actions for personal motives, the very fabric of Pakistan's democracy could be weakened, eroding public trust in political institutions and governance besides political tolerance.

Former Minister Wajid Ali Khan reminded that the 1973 Constitution clearly defined the powers of all state institutions, including the legislature, executive, and judiciary.

He stressed that for Pakistan to progress on the path of democracy and rule of law, these institutions must operate within the constitutional framework and political parties should respect people's mandate.

Wajid Ali urged PTI to reconsider its hasty decision and engage with the government committee to re-initiate a meaningful political dialogue to address the pressing existing challenges.

He warned that deviating from the constitution could lead to severe political crises, and even trigger societal instability.

Manzoorul Haq, former ambassador and political analyst, echoed similar sentiments; underscoring that Pakistan has been facing a difficult political, economic, and legal situation for over seven decades and can not afford political stability further in the wake of geopolitical and strategic challenges in the region.

"It is imperative that political and religious leaders, as well as heads of state institutions, work in harmony to ensure the country's economic prosperity," he stated.

According to Manzoor, political wrangling serves no purpose other than to destabilize the nation, which is already grappling with serious economic challenges.

He called on both the government and opposition leaders to come together for a meaningful dialogue that could steer Pakistan towards a more stable and prosperous future.

The experts urged PTI to return to the core democratic values of dialogue, mutual respect, and collaboration—values that are essential for the nation's stability and growth.

Dr. Fazal Rehman completes PhD

PESHAWAR (APP): Dr Muhammad Fazal Rehman, the Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's PRO, Regional Incharge of the Press Information Department, completed his doctorate.

He defended his research thesis on "Public Relationing in the Light of Islamic Teachings" at Gomal University.

The external Examiner for the thesis was Professor Dr. Abdul Ghaffar from Islamia University Bahawalpur, while the Supervisor was Professor Dr. Muhammad Abdullah Abid.

Professor Dr. Hafiz Abdul Majid, Head of the Department of Islamic Studies Gomal University, along with other experts, was also present during the defense.

On his success, Dr. Fazal Rehman attributed his achievement to the blessings of Allah, the prayers of his parents, the hard work of his teachers, and the support of his friends.



Free flow of info an elusive dream in Pakistan: Farah

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Free flow of information has largely been an elusive dream in countries that has oscillated between dictatorial and short-lived democratic regimes. Enactment of Right to Information Laws and its proper implementation gives citizens ease access to information to public record, on Tuesday.

This was stated by Chief Information Commissioner Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Farah Hamid Khan while addressing to the participants of the 93rd Pre-Services Course for Probationary Officers of the Provincial Management Services, Govt of KP here at Pakistan Provincial Services Academy at Peshawar.

She added that the KP Assembly adopted an RTI law in 2013 which is also an important first step for governments implementing Sustainable Development Goals target 16.10.2. RTI law makes sure people can access information held by government bodies, often requesting authorities to have specific public officials and working procedures in place.

Chief Information Commissioner said, so far, RTI legislation has been adopted by 127 countries. The session aimed at sensitizing the participants to their responsibilities under the law. It also touched various other relevant aspects, such as, the human right dimension of the right to information, the Islamic perspective of access to information.

The Chief Commissioner also focused on the practical aspects of access to information.

Reclaimed land to have services club in Peshawar

PESHAWAR (APP): Under the public agenda of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur, a decision has been made to construct a modern services club on 34 kanals of reclaimed land at the junction of Ring Road and Hayatabad Khwar.

The project, part of the Peshawar Uplift Program Phase-II, would be supervised by Commissioner Peshawar Division Riaz Khan Mehsud, said a press release issued here by office of the commissioner.

The club would be modeled after the Peshawar club and would include a family park, restaurant, jogging track, restrooms, tennis courts, a swimming pool, and other recreational facilities.

Commissioner Mehsud had instructed the project engineer to expedite the preparation of the PC-1 report for timely execution.

Speaking on the initiative, Commissioner Riaz Khan Mehsud emphasized the importance of promoting healthy activities as part of the "Clean and Green Peshawar" campaign.

He added that similar projects will be launched in other suitable locations across Peshawar.

PHC dismisses BRT contractor bail petition

Humayun Khan

PESHAWAR: A divisional bench comprising of Chief Justice Peshawar High Court (PHC) Justice Ishtiaq Ibrahim and Justice Ijaz Anwar has dismissed protective bail application filed by Syed Masood Hussain Shah, a former contractor of the Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) project, who is pro-claimed by the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) Lahore in connection with the Orange Train project case, on Tuesday.

The counsel informed court that

the petitioner would be arriving at Peshawar Airport from London and sought protective bail, fearing arrest by NAB Lahore. The lawyer argued that since Shah's arrest was imminent, he should be granted protective bail to enable him to approach the relevant court and seek relief.

However, Deputy Prosecutor General NAB Muhammad Ali opposed the application, stating that the petitioner Syed Masood Shah had previously obtained similar relief from the Peshawar High Court twice but failed to appear before the court.

NAB's prosecutor argued that Shah's actions amounted to an abuse of process and that he should approach the Lahore High Court instead, as the case falls within its jurisdiction. He pointed out that the Lahore Development Authority (LDA), which is the relevant authority in the case, falls under the jurisdiction of the Lahore High Court.

After hearing the arguments, the court dismissed the protective bail application, holding that Shah should approach the Lahore High Court for relief.

KP achieves record revenue collection: Muzzammil Aslam

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Advisor to the KP Chief Minister Muzzammil Aslam has said that the KP government has achieved a 49 percent increase in revenue collection compared to the previous financial year. In the first half of the current financial year, the provincial government collected Rs 42,397 million in tax and non tax revenue, up from Rs 28,435 million during the same period last

year. Advisor on Finance and Interprovincial Coordination Muzammil Aslam chaired a high level meeting at the Finance Department to discuss tax and non-tax revenue of all departments of KP government. The meeting was attended by Additional Secretary Asif Rashid, Additional Secretary Tauseef Khalid, Deputy Secretary Hamid Raza, and other officials. Advisor on Finance said

that the KP government had set a target of collecting Rs 93,500 million in revenue for the current financial year.

Mr. Aslam revealed that the government has achieved 90.7 percent of this target in the first half of the current financial year, compared to 66 percent during the same period last year.

The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Revenue Authority (KPRA) achieved the highest of 114 percent,

collecting Rs 24,035 million in tax revenue. The Excise and Taxation Department collected Rs 2854 million, achieving 100 percent of its target. The Transport and Mass Transit Department collected Rs 624 million, exceeding its target by 151 percent.

This impressive revenue collection is a testament to the KP government's efforts to strengthen its financial position, Advisor Finance said.

Shakoor inaugurates digitization of Employees Social Security Institutions

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Minister for Labour, Fazal Shakoor Khan, on Tuesday formally inaugurated the digitization of Employees Social Security Institution (ESSI). The Provincial Minister was accompanied at the inauguration by Secretary Labour Department, Captain (Retd.) Mian Adil Iqbal, Vice Commissioner ESSI, Director Medical, and other officials of the Labour Department. The Provincial Minister

reviewed the digitization process at the Employees Social Security Hospital of Kohat Road, Peshawar, and inspected various sections of the hospital. He also visited the hospital's medical store, inquired about the available medicines, and inspected the laboratory.

The Minister thoroughly briefed on the ESSI digitization process. During the briefing it said that the data of every patient visiting the hospital would be digitized and would be saved in the system.

This would ensure that all patient records remain accessible in the hospital's database for future visits while doctors will also have complete knowledge of the availability of medicines in the hospital.

On this occasion, the Provincial Minister directed the concerned officials to take further steps to improve the ESSI digitization process. He stated that with the digitization of ESSI, all records and data will be available at the click of a button.

He emphasized that the

Labour Department would continue to implement revolutionary reforms for the welfare of workers and is committed to providing maximum facilities to laborers. The Minister highlighted the critical role of workers in stabilizing and strengthening the economy. He also announced that the Labour Department will soon introduce the "E-Mazdoor Card," which will address many issues faced by laborers and provide them with a wide range of facilities via the e-card.

UNHCR donates CT Scan machine to Institute of Kidney Diseases in Peshawar

PESHAWAR (APP): UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency has donated a state-of-the-art CT Scan machine to the Institute of Kidney Diseases (IKD) in Peshawar – bringing relief for patients in the city.

The hospital was in need of better diagnostic tools to serve its community more effectively, and this life-saving machine is already making a difference in patients' lives, reads a press release issued here on Tuesday.

Providing medical practitioners with advanced coloured imagery, the CT machine has improved the visualization of the affected area, making it easier to detect the patient's medical issue, and improve diagnosis for better surgical planning and/or treatment.

Patients at IKD Peshawar no longer need to travel to expensive private laboratories where an advanced CT scans can cost up to 10,000 Pakistani rupees.

In addition to the financial implications, it often took days to get results, delaying diagnosis and costing patients precious time until their treatment could get underway.



PESHAWAR: Chief Traffic Officer Haroon Rashid Khan is presenting a certificate of appreciation and a cash prize to Traffic personnel Muhammad Yousuf for securing first position in the provincial-level bodybuilding competition.



In brief

Govt MC High School a bacon of education F.P. Report

TOBA TEK SINGH: The Principal Government MC High School Kamalia Rana Zafar Hussain said that we are providing best education to the students in the school so that the children can read their future. He further said that we have 1125 Students. 21 EST and 10 SST teachers who play a role in providing best education to Students. Rana Zafar Hussain said that the result of our school is the best results every year. This is the result of the hard work of teachers and students. "We are trying to provide the students with best education so that they can read and make their place," he said that Getting education creates consciousness in human beings. If parents are also educated, they also educate their children so that our child can do something for himself by writing. He said that our school was also many student who holds high positions nowadays. This is the result of his hard work. In the End, Rana Zafar Hussain said, "We will work hard day and night to provide best education to our students." On this Occasion, Teachers Chaudhry Tariq Jutt, Muhammad Ramzan, Yasin, Muhammad Amir, Mohsin Zubair, Muhammad Nadeem, Tariq Habib and Muhammad Shahid were also present.

Employees hold protest F.P. Report

BUNER: Class IV employees from different government's departments in the district arranged protested at district headquarter Chowk in favor of their demands. The president Khushal Khan and others said that the provincial government has done injustice to the poor employees by deducting their pension adding class four have been affected more. They announced that the employees will join the employees grand alliance protest in Peshawar scheduled on 12 February. The speakers repeated the class IV employees will fully participate in the protest demonstration to raise their voice against this oppression. They have appealed to the DEO Buner to release firewood funds to the class four employees.

Woman gives birth to quintuplets F.P. Report

BANNU: A woman in Bannu has given birth to quintuplets and all the newborns and mother were in good health. According to Surgeon Dr. Waheed Rehman on Tuesday, the woman delivered five healthy babies simultaneously, including three boys and two girls. Doctors have placed the newborns in oxygen boxes as a precautionary measure, however both the mother and the babies are reported to be in good health.

Gas accumulation claims bride's life F.P. Report

MINGORA: A newlywed bride lost her life while the groom was left unconscious due to gas accumulation and suffocation in their room in Amankot, a suburban area of Mingora city in Swat district. Mingora police informed on Tuesday that the couple, who had tied the knot just 12 days ago, had left a gas cylinder burning overnight. The cylinder fire burnt all the oxygen in the room, resulting in death of the bride and unconsciousness to the groom. The victim couple was shifted to Saidu Sharif Hospital for medical treatment.

Kundi flays KP govt's failure to deliver

F.P. Report

D I KHAN: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Governor Faisal Karim Kundi expressed concerns over the plight of people in the province, saying, the PTI-led provincial government had completely failed to deliver on all fronts.

He expressed these views during a visit to the residence of Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) Tehsil President Syed Taqeer Shah in Mathpur, Paharpur Tehsil. The Governor was welcomed by local PPP leaders, including former Nazim of Paharpur, Haji Ayub Khan Marwat, Tehsil General Secretary Chairman, Junaid Tariq Qureshi, Liaqat Ali Sajjadi, and Manager Jalal Khan.

The Governor met with PPP officials and workers, listened to the public's concerns, and assured them of his support in resolving their issues. Talking to the media, the governor said that the provincial government had done nothing so far to address issues facing the people at all fronts. Moreover, he reiterated his earlier claim about the presence of "Mir Sadiq and Mir Jafar" within PTI, now proven true after the removal of their partu's provincial president Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Governor Kundi also highlighted the progress of the Chashma Lift Canal project, noting that three surveys had already been conducted, despite some individuals prematurely claiming the inauguration of the project when funds had not yet been received.

He expressed his gratitude to Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, PPP Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, and WAPDA Chairman for their special interest in the project. He assured that the work on Chashma Lift Canal would be inaugurated this year. He also announced that land acquisition for the construction of an international airport in Dera Ismail Khan had been completed, with the Section-4 land acquisition process underway.

He informed that there was a plan for the inauguration of the Band Korai Grid Station, which would resolve the long-standing power issues faced by the residents of Paharpur. Governor Faisal Karim Khan Kundi mingled with PPP officials, workers, and the local community, reaffirming his commitment to addressing their concerns and ensuring their well-being.

Meanwhile, the Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Faisal Karim Kundi stressed the need for forging unity among all the stakeholders to achieve Saraiki province.

He was addressing as the chief guest at the 8th 'Annual Azeem Saraikistan Talent Award Show-2025' organized by the Saraikistan Students Movement (SSM) and Saraiki Youth Parliament Dera Ismail Khan, held here at the Gomal University's Auditorium Hall.

The Governor said the Saraiki language was the most widely spoken language in the country, used extensively across all four provinces of the country. He resolved that the PPP would continue to stand with the Saraiki brothers and sisters to resolve their issues.

He emphasized the need for unity to achieve the creation of a Saraiki province and expressed disappointment that the parliamentarians who secured votes in the name of the Saraiki province in the 2018 elections did not raise the issue effectively in the parliament.

He highlighted the efforts of the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP), which had already passed a resolution in both national and provincial assemblies in favor of the Saraiki province. Faisal Karim Kundi stated that PPP had not only advocated for the rights of the Saraiki people but has also taken significant steps to lift the ban on student unions.

He said that PPP leaders in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, such as Ahmed Karim Kundi and Ihsan Khan Miankhel, had already presented a resolution in the provincial assembly on this matter. Speaking on the occasion Chairman of the National Assembly Committee for Defense, Fatehullah Khan Miankhel, called Gomal University a great gift from Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, acknowledging the university's significant role in the region's development.

He also opposed turning educational institutions into political battlegrounds and condemned the provincial government's move to impose a 45% tax on landowners. Governor Faisal Karim Kundi, MNA Fatehullah Khan Miankhel, PPP leader Malik Farhan Afzal Dhap along with faculty members, awarded shields to students for their outstanding achievements. The students also presented poetry and tableau in Saraiki, which added to the event's cultural vibrancy.

PTI workers conspiring against each other

F.P. Report

BANNU: Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf Bannu workers have started conspiring to weaken the party due to being ignored by the provincial minister and being limited his constituency. Provincial Minister Malik Pakhtun Yar Khan has started his arbitrariness in all sectors including government departments, while the opinions of the workers are not being accepted at any opportunity.

The provincial minister is only giving favors to one constituency and his own people, on which the City Workers' Alliance has been forced to openly rebel. These views were expressed by senior leaders of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf, officials of the City

Workers' Alliance, Nazim City Raheel Aslam, Malik Barkat Ali Khan, Imran Iqbal, Master Shaukat Khan Niazi, Zohaib Sheikh, Tahir Khan Ahmed Khan Shazeb Khan, Tariq Khan, Shahryar Khattak, Jahanzeb Saddar and others while talking to media representatives after the meeting and said that after the formation of the PTI government.

He has demanded from Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur, Provincial President Junaid Akbar Khan and other central and provincial leaders that the provincial minister Malik Pakhtun Yar Khan should be presented before the accountability committee established by Imran Khan and an explanation should be sought from him for bulldozing the opinions of

the workers, otherwise they will not hesitate to hold a rally against the provincial minister.

One FC personnel martyred: Baran Dam Frontier Constabulary Check Post Attacked by Armed Men, One Officer Martyred and Four Officers Injured According to details, unknown armed men attacked the Baran Dam FC Check Post near Bakakhel on Bannu Miranshah Road late last night with heavy weapons.

The firing between the armed men and the FC continued for a long time. Sepoy Khattab-ur-Rehman was martyred on the spot, while four FC personnel, Lance Naik Khanan, Sepoy Abdul Jabbar, Sepoy Laj Mir and Sepoy Sami, were among the injured.

Tribesman shot killed in D I Khan

F.P. Report

WANA: Unknown assailants shot killed Malik Sangin Toji Khel at Dera Ismail Khan. Malik Sangin was known in the region as a polite, brave, and straightforward individual.

The news of Malik Sangin's death has plunged the entire area into mourning, with people remembering his character and expressing their grief. His politeness and courage were often cited as exemplary, contributing to his popularity in the region.

The local community has strongly condemned this tragic incident and has called on the government to ensure the immediate arrest of the perpetrators.

Tribesmen hold protest: In South Waziristan's Upper, local residents staged a strong protest against the closure of the Tehsil Hospital in Mole Khan Sarai, located in Sarwakai Tehsil. A large number of citizens participated in the protest, demanding the immediate restoration of the hospital.

The protesters stated that the closure of the hospital

has caused severe hardships for the people of the area. Speaking to journalists, Malik Adnan explained that patients are forced to travel long distances to Tank for medical treatment, which is a challenging task for the poor population.

He emphasized that, in these times of inflation, it is the government's responsibility to provide healthcare facilities near people's homes. The protesters called on the government to reactivate the hospital immediately to alleviate the difficulties faced by the public.

Pine nut orchards, established by Pak Army transforming local economy: In South Waziristan, pine nut orchards established by the Pakistan Army have brought a significant and positive changes to the local economy.

Deputy Commissioner of South Waziristan Lower District, Mohammad Nasir Khan while talking to media said the other day that cultivation and trade of pine nuts have generated an economic benefit of approximately Rs. 14 bil-

lion for the local population.

He said, a video recorded during Eid-ul-Fitr in 2022, was misrepresented as in fact it showcases the success of these orchards adding that the plantations symbolize peace and development in the region, reflecting the success of ongoing initiatives.

He stated that in 2023 that pine nuts were being exported internationally, contributing Rs. 14 billion annually to local income. A processing plant is also under development, which will create employment opportunities for the youth and further strengthen the region's economy.

Local residents confirm that their pine nut business operates through mutual agreements and legal channels, benefiting both local communities and traders. Additionally, it serves as a major positive step for the national economy. These initiatives are the result of successful military operations against terrorism, which have established peace in Waziristan and provided a better standard of living for its residents.

Police arrest ring leader, recover stolen bikes

BAHAWALPUR (INP): The police have arrested a ring leader of a gang involved in heinous crimes and recovered four stolen motorcycles and cash from his possession. Acting on a tip-off, a

police party of PS Uch Sharif conducted raid at a den and arrested a gangster involved in highway robberies, bike lifting and other heinous crimes.

"Modern technology was

used to trace out the whereabouts of the ring leader," he said. He said that the police have recovered four stolen motorcycles and cash Rs 0.5 million from the possession of the suspect.



QUETTA: Activists of Balochistan Union of Journalists holding a protest against passage of PECA Act.

KP CM, ministers involved in corruption: JJ F.P. Report

BUNER: Former minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) North Emir Inayat Ullah has accused that the Chief Minister of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf, Ali Amin Gandapur and other provincial ministers are involved in corruption, on Tuesday.

According to him, all the evidences of corruption against the PTI KPK government team are with the institutions. He further said that Tehreek-e-Insaf has caused irreparable damage to Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province in its three terms. He alleged the KPK present rulers have excluded rupees 42 billions developmental schemes of the Malakand Division. He branded it sheer injustices with the people of this God and made disasters hit Division. Inayatullah Khan has given a warning that Jamaat-e-Islami will go to court against this abuse and if necessary, will also launch a protest movement on the streets.

On the occasion of the press conference, Provincial General Secretary (North) Muhammad Haleem Bacha, District Amir Engineer Nasir Ali Khan, former Speaker Bakht Jahan Khan and former leaders, former members of the assembly and former assembly candidates and key leaders were present.

During press conference, Inayatullah Khan has also mentioned an important program of Jamaat-e-Islami till 2033, on which, according to him, work is going on but avoided to expose it.

Attack journalists hold protest F.P. Report

ATTOCK: General Secretary of Attock Press Club, senior journalist, and columnist Hafiz Shehzad Akhtar has stated that the PECA Act has been controversial from day one.

Through its vague and oppressive black laws, this act is being used to suppress journalists, ordinary citizens, and those raising their voices on social media. He said that this law is equivalent to criminalizing criticism of the government, which is against the principles of a democratic state. No journalistic organization or institution supports or promotes fake news, and the government should develop the tolerance to accept criticism instead of targeting journalists.

Instead, it should focus on improving its policies. This oppressive law has instilled fear among those expressing their opinions on print and social media. The threats of harsh punishments and fines are an attempt to limit freedom of expression. The law is being misused against political opponents and journalists critical of government policies, which amounts to abuse of power. We demand that the undemocratic and unconstitutional provisions of the PECA Act be immediately repealed, and legislation be introduced to protect press freedom and freedom of expression.

This law not only curbs press freedom but also weakens the democratic foundations of Pakistan. We appeal to the journalist community and the public to raise their voices against this oppressive law and defend their rights.

Abasin Adabi Tolana marks its Silver Jubilee

F.P. Report

KOHAT: The Abasin Adbi Tolana Kohat arranged a grand function to mark its silver jubilee celebration and the launching of the book "Dard-o-Darman" written by Ayesha Mehr Afridi, a prominent Pashto poet from Tribal area of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Regional Information Office Tuesday said, the function was presided over by the prominent poet, writer and researcher Professor. Professor Aslam Taseer Afridi, a great literary figure from Khyber district, was the chief guest of the event while Shah Mehmood Ghaznavi from Peshawar and Regional Director Information Kohat Muhammad Irshad Afridi were the guests of honour.

Prominent poets, writers and intellectuals from across the province participated in the function. On this occasion, Chairman of Abasin Adbi Tolana Kohat Professor Mohabbat Khan Khattak along with the guests, remained present on the stage as a host. The

function formally started with the recitation from the Holy Quran by Maulana Abdul Halim Al Hakimi. Compare of the first sitting of the sitting was Ghulam Sher Afridi while the second sitting of Mushaira were Syed Masoom Shah Masoom and Kamosh Khattak.

Professor Mohabbat Khattak thanked the guest poets and writers and applauded the office-bearers and members of the AAT who have been engaged in the service of literature for the last 25 years. The President of Abasin Adbi Tolana Feroz Khan Sadiq while highlighting the performance of the Tolana thanked the Allah Almighty who gave courage to serve the language and literature for the past 25 years and InshaAllah this will continue in future also.

Speaking on the performance of the organization, Liaison Secretary Syed Masoom Shah said, InshaAllah the Abasin Adbi

Tolana Kohat will soon publish the book of the late president and patron late Hazrat ur Rehman Hazrat adding that with the cooperation of the district administration like other districts, books of poets and writers will also be published in Kohat.

Dr Raj Mohammad Afridi, while presenting a paper on the book said, Ayesha Meher, effectively represented the sorrow and pain of the women folk living in the tribal areas. Professor Aslam Taseer and Shah Mehmood Ghaznavi also paid tributes to Abasin Adbi Tolana Kohat for its meritorious services for literature and language beyond the division of color, race, region and language.

The author of the book, Ayesha Mehr Afridi, in her telephonic address thanked the participants of the event and the Abasin Adbi Tolana from the core of her heart and also presented her paper and received great applause from the audience.

Commissioner directs special cleanliness drive

F.P. Report

MARDAN: Commissioner Mardan on Tuesday directed the administrative officers to launch a special campaign for cleanliness and to conduct a strong campaign against disorderly traffic and illegal encroachments in their respective areas.

Commissioner said that no shortcoming will be tolerated in the timely completion of the said tasks. He was addressing the monthly performance and revenue meeting in his office. Deputy commissioners Mardan and Swabi, secretary to commissioner, assistant commissioners, TMAs and revenue officers participated in the meeting.

The meeting reviewed the implementation of various tasks assigned by the provincial government in Mardan and Swabi and the implementation of the public agenda of the Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in detail. Regarding the campaign against encroachment, Commissioner Mardan directed the government departments in both districts to compile the data regarding permanent illegal encroachment on their lands and hand it over to the

Deputy Commissioners so that immediate action can be taken against encroachments.

Commissioner Mardan directed to make the open katcheris productive and to set up a regular follow-up mechanism to resolve the public issues raised during these katcheris. He said that in order to protect the environment in both the districts, shifting the brick kilns to zig-zag technology as per the government policy, taking necessary steps in muhafiz khana to ensure the preservation of revenue records and improving the smooth traffic system be ensured.

Commissioner also directed to set up route allocation and registration system to limit the number of Cheng Chi and Taiz Rafatrickshaws. Commissioner Mardan said that apart from the presentation, the performance of the officers should be seen on the ground so that the public can get real relief.

Commissioner Nisar Ahmad emphasized on the measures to make both the district and tehsil headquarters of Mardan division and especially the entry point absorbent within two weeks and to improve the sanitation system in the government offices including roadsides and said that he himself would monitor this process.

DC redresses Bagh Dada graveyard dispute by consultation: Deputy Commissioner Mardan, resolved a long-standing dispute over a graveyard in Bagh Dada through his timely intervention and wise efforts. After mutual negotiations between the two parties at his office, an acceptable agreement was reached, on Tuesday.

DC Mardan Wazir far-sighted strategy and impartial role not only ended the bitterness between the people of the two villages but also resolved the graveyard issue through consensus, restoring peace and tranquility in the area. This successful mediation highlighted the local administration's effective strategy and commitment to resolving public issues, which is a source of satisfaction for the local people.

The elders of Bagh Dada and Haji Korona also expressed their gratitude to Dr. Wazir for his interest in resolving the issue and playing an effective role. This step is a testament to the administration's people-friendly policies and their determination to resolve issues.

World should fulfill its promise with Kashmiris

F.P. Report

ABBOTTABAD: The Convener of the All Parties Hurriyat Conference Azad Jammu and Kashmir (APHC-AJK) chapter, Ghulam Muhammad Safi, has stated that the movement for the right to self-determination will continue with full force until India's nefarious actions are removed from Indian illegally occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJK).

Ghulam Muhammad Safi, while addressing a Kashmir Solidarity seminar in Abbottabad, said that the international community has promised the Kashmiris the right to self-determination, and they should fulfill this promise of self-determina-

tion to Kashmiris. He further stated that despite the presence of over one million Indian troops in IIOJK, India is attempting to mislead the world by singing the tune of normalcy.

The Convener of APHC-AJK said that India is changing the demographic balance by settling millions of non-state residents in IIOJK while committing acts of murder and violence. Despite India's oppression, brutality, and excessive use of force, the resolve of the people of IIOJK has not faltered.

The Hurriyat leader emphasized that India has illegally occupied Jammu and Kashmir and is attempting to turn the Muslim-majority region into a

minority through illegal actions. He appealed to the United Nations to take notice of India's aggression and the grave situation in IIOJK.

He also welcomed the speech of Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif in Bhimber, AJK, and expressed gratitude for his efforts in informing the international community about the true situation in IIOJK and the atrocities being inflicted on the Kashmiri people.

Earlier, Ghulam Muhammad Safi, along with a delegation, met with Amir Jamaat-e-Islami, Abbottabad, Abdul Rahman Abbasi, and his colleagues at the Al-Khidmat Foundation in Abbottabad.



Irish president accused of ‘politicising’ Holocaust event

DUBLIN (BBC): Israeli Ambassador to Ireland Dana Erlich has accused the Irish president of "politicising" a Holocaust Memorial Day Commemoration in Dublin. The event marked 80 years since the liberation of the Nazi concentration camp Auschwitz, and was held to remember victims of the Holocaust.

A number of people were removed and others left the event in Dublin's Mansion House in protest as Michael D Higgins delivered his speech, which referenced the Israel-Gaza war. Erlich said comments made by President Higgins had "predictably" admonished the state of Israel. It follows comments from the Israeli Foreign Minister, Gideon Saar, who said President Higgins had "resorted to a cheap, despicable provocation" during the event.

Dana Erlich said that by referencing the war in Gaza in the manner that he did, at this particular event with no reference to any other conflict, the president "consciously chose to draw an analogy" between current events and World War Two. She added: "The concerns of the Irish Jewish and Israeli communities about Ireland becoming a hostile place, a place where they are reluctant to express their Jewish identity and heritage, are not being addressed sufficiently".

Erlich also accused President Higgins of ignoring "the obvious link between the Holocaust and the state of Israel and how our country became a refuge for survivors of the worst genocide in history". During his speech,

President Higgins described revenge as a "lessening of the human spirit" before referencing the Middle East moments later.

Audiences members walked out and others turned their backs when the president raised the war in Gaza. He said: "Those in Israel who mourn their loved ones, those who have been waiting for the release of hostages, or the thousands searching for relatives in the rubble in Gaza will welcome the long-overdue ceasefire for which there has been such a heavy price paid." President Higgins quoted both the Israeli peace activist Maoz Inon and the Palestinian peace activist Aziz Abu Sarah who, he said, each carried a near-unbearable grief and were asking people to listen to each other.

Some of those who turned their backs were removed from the building by security. In her statement, Dana Erlich expressed specific concern at this. "It was shocking to observe that attendees from the Jewish and Israeli community in Ireland, who chose to express disagreement with the president's comments in a dignified manner where forcibly removed from the memorial event and refused entry for the remainder of the commemoration."

She described it as an "ugly and regrettable scene" which has been viewed with "disbelief and disgust". The Minister for Foreign Affairs Simon Harris expressed his support for the president, who he said was "right" to mention the Middle East

during his speech. Mr Harris told reporters in Brussels that he thought the president was "clear in relation to obviously specific issues regarding the Holocaust and his absolute condemnation of the horror, the murder of the Jewish people, but also, I think, rightly mentioning the situation in the Middle East as well but also calling very much for hostages to be released".

Harris said he was conscious it is a "very, very sensitive time" and he didn't wish to say anything to distract from that. The tánaiste (deputy prime minister) added he was "not sure" if the president's speech was vetted by the Department of Foreign Affairs prior to delivery.

The president had rejected an earlier call from Dana Erlich to withdraw from giving a speech at the event following an accusation that he helped to nurture the "anti-Israeli atmosphere" in Ireland. In an earlier statement to Irish broadcaster RTE, President Higgins said he has strongly condemned anti-Semitism "again and again" throughout his career.

Last month, Israel's foreign minister announced that the country's embassy in Dublin would close over "the extreme anti-Israel policies of the Irish government".

Former Taoiseach (Irish prime minister) Harris said the decision by Israel to close its Irish embassy was "deeply regrettable". He also rejected that Ireland is anti-Israel. This followed the recognition of a Palestinian state by Ireland, along with Norway and Spain, in May last year.

Officials, residents attend commemoration

BERLIN (AP): Government officials and local residents attended a solemn Mass to honor a child and a man killed in a knife attack in Germany, an assault that amplified the debate about migration ahead of the Feb. 23 general election.

The ecumenical religious service at the Catholic Basilica of St. Peter and Alexander in Aschaffenburg, Bavaria, was briefly suspended for the tolling of the city's bells at the exact time that the attack took place on Wednesday, 11:45 a.m. Bavaria governor Markus Söder, Aschaffenburg Mayor Jürgen Herzing and Muslim imam Zischan Mehmood addressed the congregation that included rescuers, to express grief and disbelief at the loss of lives. German Interior Minister Nancy Faeser was also present.

"Compassion, solidarity and cohesion are more important than ever, because there are many dividers and agitators around us," Mehmood told the people gathered in and outside the church. "We must never allow grief and pain to tear us apart." Söder said the attack was a "senseless, brutal and disturbing crime."

"Good and evil are not a question of origin, nationality, ethnicity or faith," Söder said, and stressed that the killings should not lead to divisions because "incitement is the wrong answer." Before attending the service, Faeser and Söder laid wreaths at the site of the attack.

The attack is politically sensitive a month before Germany's national election as migration policy is among the top campaign issues. A 2-year-old boy of Moroccan origin, who was part of a group of kindergarten children, was killed, along with a 41-year-old German man who apparently intervened to protect the children in a city park. The arrested suspect is a 28-year-old former asylum-seeker from Afghanistan who had been told to leave Germany. Officials said he had received psychiatric treatment and there was no immediate indication that he was motivated by extremism.

He is being held in a psychiatric hospital, according to the German news agency, dpa. Bavarian officials said two adults and a 2-year-old Syrian girl were also wounded in the attack and hospitalized but there was no danger to their lives.

Thousands in Ireland still without power

LONDON (AP): Ireland called in help from England and France as repair crews worked to restore power to hundreds of thousands of people after the most disruptive storm for years. Even as the cleanup continued, more wet and windy weather hit the U.K., Ireland and France.

More than 1 million people in Ireland, Northern Ireland and Scotland were left without electricity after Storm Eowyn (pronounced AY-oh-win) roared through. In Ireland, which suffered the heaviest damage, the wind snapped telephone poles, ripped apart a Dublin ice rink and even toppled a giant wind turbine. A wind gust of 114 mph (183 kph) was recorded on the west coast, breaking a record set in 1945.

The state electricity company, ESB Networks, said that more than 300,000 properties in Ireland still had no power, down from 768,000. The Irish military was also helping out, but the company said that it could be two more weeks before electricity is restored to everyone.

Irish Minister for Social Protection Dara Calleary said authorities were "throwing everything at it." "We're bringing additional people from England today and we're looking for people from France, additional technicians," he told broadcaster RTE. "What we're focused on is getting our infrastructure back up, getting our power back up, getting our water and connectivity back up as soon as is possible."

Another 75,000 people were still without power in Northern Ireland, which is part of the United Kingdom and neighbors the Republic of Ireland. The national weather

DR Congo hospitals overwhelmed after Goma fighting: UN

DR CONGO (BBC): UN aid agencies have warned of a major humanitarian crisis in the Congolese city of Goma, with hospitals overwhelmed by casualties and bodies lying on the streets. Thousands of people have been fleeing "multiple active conflict zones", the UN refugee agency, UNHCR, said.

The aid agencies said their warehouses with food and medical supplies have been looted as M23 rebels continue to battle to take control of the city. Anger has been growing over the M23 offensive, and calls for peace talks to end the fighting are mounting.

"Hospitals are overwhelmed. There are currently hundreds of people in hospital, most admitted with gunshot wounds," Adelheid Marschang, the World Health Organization's emergency response coordinator for the Democratic Republic of Congo said. Speaking to reporters in Geneva, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) said its hospital in Goma received more than 100 wounded in just 24 hours, a number it previously received over the course of a month.

It said this had forced its staff to turn the hospital car park into a triage unit. The use of heavy artillery in densely populated areas is causing severe injuries, particularly among children, it added. Both the ICRC and the World Food Programme say their warehouses have been looted in recent days.

In the capital Kinshasa, angry protesters on Tuesday burned parts of the French embassy, to express discontent over the M23's offensive. They stormed the streets, burning tyres and disrupting traffic. Plumes of smoke could be seen billowing as parts of the embassy went up in flames. French Foreign Minister Jean-Noël Barrot said on X that the attack was "unacceptable", adding that the fire was now under control.

The Rwandan, Ugandan, Belgian and US embassies were also targeted, with some of the buildings being looted. Police fired tear gas to disperse the protesters. Some residents



preferred to observe a day of the "dead city", following a call by civil societies to stay at home in solidarity with Goma. The AFP news agency reported that at least 17 people had been killed in Goma and close to 400 wounded in the fighting, citing hospital reports. Civil society groups were quoted as reporting a higher death toll of 25.

On Tuesday, South Africa said that four more of its soldiers, who are in DR Congo as part of peacekeeping efforts, had died as a result of clashes with the M23. This brings the total number of South African casualties to 13. Malawi and Uruguay have also lost peacekeepers. South Africa's President Cyril Ramaphosa spoke to his Rwandan counterpart Paul Kagame, with the two agreeing on an urgent need for ceasefire and resumption of peace talks.

The African Union is also set to host an emergency meeting later on Tuesday. DR Congo President Félix Tshisekedi held a meeting with leaders of some state institutions to evaluate the situation in Goma. "Our soldiers and the [pro-government militia] Wazalendo continue to hold certain positions in the city" said Vital Kamerhe, the speaker of the National Assembly after the meeting.

He said the president would address the nation later on the matter, without giving specific details. Goma has been cut off from electricity and water, and Mr Kamerhe said the gov-

ernment was working hard to restore them to the city. He said the government was also seeking diplomatic and political solutions to the crisis. It came as the new US Secretary of State Marco Rubio condemned the M23 attack in a call with Tshisekedi.

In a statement, the US State Department said the Congolese leader agreed on the need to restart peace talks "as soon as possible" with Rwanda, which is accused of backing the rebels. Mr Rubio also spoke to Kenya's President William Ruto, agreeing to push forward peace talks. A meeting called by the Kenyan leader between Tshisekedi and Kagame has been scheduled for Wednesday. The Congolese government has also asked for another meeting of the UN Security Council – demanding that this time it take tough action against Rwanda.

During an emergency UN meeting, DR Congo demanded sanctions against Rwanda, saying its forces had crossed into its territory in what amounted to a "declaration of war". Following the meeting, the UN condemned M23 advances and the "ongoing flagrant disregard for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the DR Congo", including the presence of "external forces". Rwanda has in the past denied direct support for the M23, but the UN peacekeeping chief Jean-Pierre Lacroix has said there is no doubt its troops were supporting the rebels.

My opponents choose jail and exile, Lukashenko tells BBC

LONDON (BBC): I have reported on many elections. I have seen prime ministers and presidents roll up at polling stations, cast ballots and then take a few questions from reporters. But I have never seen anything quite like the scene at Polling Station 478 in Minsk.

Long-time leader of Belarus Alexander Lukashenko, once dubbed "Europe's last dictator", arrived to cast his ballot. Then, while Belarusians were still voting, candidate Lukashenko gave a four-and-a-half hour press conference live on state TV. It was an opportunity to quiz him on the controversial vote which his critics have denounced as "a sham".

"What wretched question have you prepared for me?" he asked. "Like you always do." "Good morning," I replied. "Good morning, Steve." "How can you call this a democratic election, when your main rivals are either in prison or

in exile?" I asked. "Some are in prison, and some are in exile. But you are here!" said Lukashenko.

"Everyone has the right to choose. That is democracy. Some chose prison, others chose exile. We never forced anyone out of the country."

In reality, it was the authorities' brutal crackdown on protesters after the 2020 presidential election that led to Alexander Lukashenko's staunchest opponents either being jailed or driven into political exile. Personal choice did not come into it. "You said recently 'We mustn't shut people's mouths' [silence people]," I reminded him.

"But your rivals haven't just been kept off the ballot. Some of them have been jailed. There are currently more than 1,200 political prisoners in Belarus. Isn't it time to open the prison cells and release them? People like Maria Kolesnikova, Sergei Tikhanovsky..." "You keep

going on about Maria to me. My God," Lukashenko sighed.

"OK, I'll answer your question...Prison is for people who have opened their mouths too wide and who have broken the law. Don't you have prisons in Britain and America?" "In any country, if you break the law, you must bear the consequences," he continued. "The law is strict but it is the law. I didn't invent it. You need to abide by it."

"You need to abide by the law," I interjected. "But these people are in prison for criticising you." "Ignorance of the law does not absolve you of responsibility before it." Although prominent opposition figures were not allowed to run, Alexander Lukashenko's name was not the only one on the ballot. There were four other candidates. But they came across more like spoilers than serious challengers.

"We spoke to some of the other candidates," I told

Lukashenko. "One of them, the Communist Party leader, openly supports you. Another is full of praise for you. It's a strange election, isn't it, with opponents like this..." "Steve, this is a whole new experience for you!" he replied, to laughter and applause from local journalists in the room. "That's true," I said. "I haven't seen an election like this before."

"The Communists' policy based on justice is the same policy that we're promoting," argued Lukashenko. "So why would they vote against me?" The European Union's foreign policy chief Kaja Kallas has characterised this presidential election in Belarus as a "blatant affront to democracy". Not that Alexander Lukashenko seems to care. "I swear to you," he told me, "I couldn't care less whether you recognise our election or whether you don't. The most important thing for me is that the people of Belarus recognise it."

US puts Colombia tariff, sanctions threat on hold

WASHINGTON/BOGOTA (Reuters): The US and Colombia pulled back from the brink of a trade war after the White House said the South American nation had agreed to accept military aircraft carrying deported migrants.

US President Donald Trump had threatened tariffs and sanctions on Colombia to punish it for earlier refusing to accept military flights carrying deportees as part of his sweeping immigration crackdown. But in a statement, the White House said Colombia had agreed to accept the migrants after all and Washington would not impose its threatened penalties.

"The Government of Colombia has agreed to all of President Trump's terms, including the unrestricted acceptance of all illegal aliens from Colombia returned from the United States, including on US military aircraft, without limitation or delay," it said. Draft orders imposing tariffs and sanctions on Colombia would be "held in reserve, and not signed, unless Colombia fails to

honor this agreement", it added.

In a statement, Colombian Foreign Minister Luis Gilberto Murillo said: "We have overcome the impasse with the US government". "The government of Colombia... has the presidential plane ready to facilitate the return of Colombians who were going to arrive in the country this morning on deportation flights."

The draft measures included imposing 25% tariffs on all Colombian goods coming into the US, which would go up to 50% in one week; a travel ban and visa revocations on Colombian government officials; and emergency treasury, banking and financial sanctions. Trump also said he would also direct enhanced border inspections of Colombian nationals and cargo. A State Department spokesperson said the United States had suspended visa processing at the US embassy in Bogota.

Colombia is the third largest US trading partner in Latin America, while the US is Colombia's largest trading partner. Colombian

President Gustavo Petro earlier condemned the military deportation flights and said he would never carry out a raid to return handcuffed Americans to the US "We are the opposite of the Nazis," he wrote in a post on social media platform X.

But he also said Colombia would welcome home deported migrants on civilian planes, and offered his presidential plane to facilitate their "dignified return". Trump declared illegal immigration a national emergency and imposed a sweeping crackdown since taking office. He directed the US military to help with border security, issued a broad ban on asylum and took steps to restrict citizenship for children born on US soil. Mexico also refused a request last week to let a US military aircraft land with migrants.

Trump has said he is thinking about imposing 25% duties on imports from Canada and Mexico on Feb. 1 to force further action against illegal immigrants and fentanyl flowing into the US.

Italy sends 49 more migrants to Albania

SHENGJIN, Albania (AP): An Italian navy ship arrived Tuesday in Albania with 49 migrants intercepted in international waters for processing of their asylum applications at special Albanian centers, in the third such attempt following hurdles earlier raised by Italian courts.

Italy's Interior Ministry did not specify the nationality of the migrants brought to the port of Shengjin, 66 kilometers (40 miles) northwest of the capital, Tirana, but Italian media said they were from Bangladesh, Egypt, Ivory Coast and Gambia. The attempt at processing in Albania follows two previous failures in October and November, when Italian judges refused to approve the detention of two small groups at the Albanian centers, built under a contentious agreement between Italy and Albania. The courts ruled that the migrants' countries of origin weren't safe enough for them to face the possibility of being sent back by the centers.

The cases have been referred to the European Court of Justice, which earlier established that asylum applicants could not undergo a fast-track procedure that could lead to repatriation if their home countries are not deemed completely safe. The European court hearing on the case is scheduled for Feb. 25.

Italian Premier Giorgia Meloni's government has vowed to reactivate the two centers in Albania after they remained dormant following the Italian courts' decisions. Meloni's position was partially backed by a ruling in late December by Italy's highest court, which said Italian judges could not substitute for government policy in deciding which countries are safe for repatriation of migrants whose asylum requests are rejected.

The decision does allow lower courts to make such determinations on a case-by-case basis, short of setting overall policy. The migrants are to be checked in at a reception center at the port

of Shengjin before being taken to the Gjader accommodation center, about 22 kilometers (14 miles) to the east.

The November 2023 agreement allows up to 3,000 migrants intercepted by the Italian coast guard in international waters each month to be sheltered in Albania and vetted for possible asylum in Italy or repatriation. Italy has agreed to welcome those migrants who are granted asylum, while those whose applications are rejected face deportation directly from Albania.

The agreement to outsource the housing of asylum-seekers to a non-European Union member country has been hailed by some countries which like Italy are experiencing a high level of migrant arrivals, but human rights activists have criticized the deal as setting a dangerous precedent. So far this year, 3,704 migrants have arrived in Italy, more than double the number in the same period last year, when 1,305 arrived.

Navy submarine name change is woke nonsense, says Shapps

LONDON (BBC): The Royal Navy has announced it is changing the name of a new submarine from HMS Agincourt to HMS Achilles, in a move branded "woke nonsense" by former Defence Secretary Grant Shapps.

It follows reports of concern within the Ministry of Defence that the original name for the vessel - which is being built in Barrow, Cumbria - may have offended the French. Agincourt refers to a battle England won against France in 1415, as part of the Hundred Years' War.

The Royal Navy said the submarine would instead be named HMS Achilles and that the change had been under discussion for more

than a year. A spokesperson said Achilles particularly appropriate as the world prepares to mark the 80th anniversaries of Victory in Europe and Victory over Japan days - both of which take place this year.

A previous vessel named HMS Achilles received battle honours during World War Two. Another ship with the name took part in the Battle of Trafalgar in 1805, when the Royal Navy defeated a French and Spanish fleet. Gavin Williamson, a Conservative former defence secretary, first announced the name Agincourt in 2018 for the under-construction vessel, the seventh of the Astute Class submarines to be commissioned. There had

previously been suggestions it could be named Ajax.

A Navy statement said the name change had been under discussion for more than a year and "was proposed by the Royal Navy Ships Names and Badging committee and approved by His Majesty the King". But the switch has caused controversy, not least because the announcement came shortly before the Sun news paper was due to publish a story on internal debates over its planned name.

In a post on X, Shapps said "renaming HMS Agincourt is nothing short of sacrilege". He said the original name signified a defining moment in British history. "Under Labour,

woke nonsense is being put ahead of tradition and our Armed Forces' proud heritage," the former Conservative MP said.

There has been no public comment from French authorities. Changing the name of Royal Navy vessels is relatively rare but not without precedent. In 1939, a Royal Navy corvette due to be named HMS Pansy became HMS Heartsease just before it was launched. All of the Navy's Astute Class submarines bear a name beginning with the letter A: HMS Astute, Ambush, Artful, Audacious and Anson are all in active service. Alongside HMS Achilles, HMS Agamemnon is also under construction.

French residents rescued from flooded homes by boat

RENNES, France (AP): Residents in western France used boats to escape their flooded homes as rivers and waterways broke their banks after successive storms battered Normandy and Brittany.

The national weather

service had issued flood and wind warnings as Storm Herminia hit Spain, France on parts of the UK.

Normandy and Brittany were already waterlogged after the passage of last week's Storm Eowyn — which left two people dead

from fallen trees and more than 1 million people without electricity in Ireland and Britain.

Storm Herminia caused road closures in some areas of France. About 400 people were evacuated from homes in and around the

city of Rennes, at the heart of the hardest-hit region. The mayor called it the city's worst flooding in more than 40 years, and said in a statement that the waters weren't expected to start receding until Wednesday.

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Trump's 'clean it out' comment risks undermining his own work towards Gaza peace

FEW words carry as much weight around the world as those spoken by an American president. Just a week into his new term in office, US President Donald Trump's remarks to reporters aboard Air Force One that it was time to "clean out" Gaza renewed concerns about the future of Palestinians whose land is under threat.

Mr Trump's comments were accompanied by his observation that the war has turned the Palestinian enclave into "a demolition site" and a suggestion that Arab states take in its civilians. Taken in context, it was unclear whether the President was suggesting the temporary hosting of the population in nearby countries to help clear out Gaza's rubble, or prescribing what many Palestinians have long feared – a permanent Israeli occupation and the exile of Gaza's population.

The notion of "cleaning" the Gaza Strip, in any case, echoes troubling remarks made by Mr Trump's son in law and former foreign policy adviser, Jared Kushner, last year, in which he suggested Israel "clean up" the territory's "very valuable waterfront property" by moving Palestinians to the Negev Desert.

At a time when Gaza's ceasefire, skilfully prodded into existence by Mr Trump himself, is showing progress, the President's choice of words has created confusion and some concern. Hamas has begun returning Israeli hostages it kidnapped in its attack on Israel 15 months ago. Israel, for its part, has released detainees including children and opened the coastal road to allow tens of thousands of displaced civilians to return to their homes in northern Gaza.

But extremists in Israel have already seized upon Mr Trump's remark to promote their agenda of Gaza's erasure and permanent Israeli settlement in the enclave. Itamar Ben-Gvir, the former national security minister who leads the anti-Arab Jewish Power Party, praised Mr Trump's "initiative to transfer residents from Gaza to Jordan and Egypt".

While Jewish Power left the governing coalition this month, other serving Cabinet ministers such as Bezalel Smotrich, Minister of Finance, seem to agree with Mr Ben-Gvir's views. Furthermore, the idea of Gaza forming part of a future Palestinian state – indeed, the idea of Palestinian statehood at all – is moribund in Israeli politics. All of this poses a serious risk to a peaceful future.

The response to Mr Trump's comments from Jordan and Egypt has been forceful. Jordanian Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi put it bluntly: "The solution to the Palestinian problem lies in Palestine." The Egyptian Foreign Ministry, meanwhile, said in a statement that any transfer of Palestinians would "threaten stability and risks escalating the conflict in the region".

For months, Amman, Cairo and a host of other Arab capitals have worked diligently, in co-operation with the US and Israel, to carve pathways towards a sustainable end to the Gaza war and long-term peace based on a two state solution. In all scenarios, Palestinian statehood – which includes territory in both Gaza and the occupied West Bank – is fundamental. And by and large, the international community agrees – more than three quarters of UN member states already recognise the state of Palestine.

As Mr Trump's role in instigating the Gaza ceasefire shows, in addition to efforts under his predecessor to secure a ceasefire in Lebanon, Washington continues to wield the influence required to do good in the Middle East – when its policy machinery is pointed in the right direction. To prevent any chance at peace from unravelling, Mr Trump must build on the fragile successes of recent months, and be careful not to undermine them.

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Weaving trust, catalyzing willingness Exercise Aman as a springboard for greater maritime cooperation

Sohail A. Azmie

EXERCISE Aman is poised to begin soon, marking the 9th edition of this significant biennial event, which has been held in Karachi since 2007. Over the years, much has been discussed about the exercise, but it's important to ask: what does it truly accomplish that matters on a regional or global scale? One might argue that there are numerous other multinational maritime exercises, such as RIMPAC, KAKADU, MALABAR, IMDEX, KOMODO and JOINT Warrior, which also involve the participation of multiple nations. So what makes Exercise Aman distinct? While it shares similarities with these high-profile exercises, the key difference lies in its unparalleled ability to provide a platform that brings together diverse nations. The true impact of Exercise Aman is not just in the naval drills or intellectual discourse, but in its power to unite countries with varying geopolitical interests and military orientations. It's rare to see China, Russia, the United States and Iran side-by-side anywhere else. This gathering of such disparate powers on one platform is not only rare but essential in today's complex global landscape, creating opportunities for dialogue, understanding and cooperation where it would not normally exist.

As I previously discussed in my Op-Ed, 'United by tides, knotted by oceans,' published in The Nation on November 5, 2024, navies have the ability to come 'closer and operate together,' irrespective of political barriers that may at times seem hard to transcend. Exercise Aman, in my perspective, could be thought of paving way for 'weaving trust' and

'catalyzing willingness' for 'greater maritime cooperation.' Because this is what is mostly needed for the current and emerging challenges and not the hardcore naval warfare tactics, which basically are essential for fighting traditional wars. Aman is not about fighting wars, but about finding ways to keep the seas securer, safer and freer.

'Weaving trust' in the context of Exercise Aman is a deliberate process of building relationships that are strong, resilient and enduring. Each participating nation contributes a thread to a fabric of mutual understanding, respect and collaboration. Trust is woven as navies from diverse geopolitical backgrounds once gather at one place. For example, during the AMAN-21 exercise, over 45 countries, including the US, China and Russia, came together despite their stark strategic differences. Another constituent of weaving trust is the interoperability. We often think in technical terms when we refer to 'interoperability,' but it has a human dimension too. Aman facilitates trust-building by allowing naval professionals from different navies to work side by side, sharing best practices and developing a mutual understanding of operating procedures. This is human interoperability. And such an interoperability, in great measure, reduces misconceptions, misunderstandings and miscommunication, cumulatively enabling weaving of trust among the participating parties.

'Catalyzing willingness' is about the transformative power of Exercises Aman, which inspires the participants to take proactive roles in maritime cooperation by committing resources, energy and intel-

lectual capital toward objectives that affect us all. Tangible benefits of collaboration, e.g., maritime domain awareness is important for smaller nations like Tanzania and Djibouti, which lack resources, find value in the cooperation as professed by Aman to protect their maritime interests. Coming to Aman builds confidence among the participants to undertake riskier yet necessary operations, such as handling illegal fishing, human/ narco smuggling and arms trafficking. Another conspicuous factor that makes Aman a bit different from rest of the international maritime exercises is its inclusivity, which promotes an 'egalitarian approach' to maritime cooperation, e.g., in the Aman Dialogue, the smaller states are likely to be given an equal voice, which certainly will result in the enhanced willingness to participate and cooperate in pursuit of common good. While delving into ways for catalyzing willingness, sometimes a question may arise, whether Aman is an end or a means to an end? Of course, it is a means to an end. The end for some could be a state of maritime security that keeps the seas stable, and for some Aman could lead to more focused bilateral engagements among the participants who may have interacted for first time at Aman's platform.

Weaving trust and catalyzing willingness, as the two 'operational' lines of effort of Aman are ultimately linked to the clearer end state of 'greater maritime cooperation.' But the key question is as what really has been the practical manifestation of greater maritime cooperation or what it could be in the future? I'd say if I have to

pick three concrete domains, it would be: information sharing, practitioners' exchange of real-world challenges and capacity building. Aman participants have regularly been briefed/ shown Pakistan's Joint Maritime Information & Coordination Centre, which now remains integrated with 8 international agencies/ departments. Commencing with this year's edition, Aman Dialogue is all about listening and sharing views with the naval leaders around the world on the challenges that they continue to face or expected to confront at seas and what may possibly be done to deal with it. This newer aspect of Aman is definitely the practical form making space for further cooperation. Smaller navies get to know how things are changing and from where they can get support for their capacity building. Aman actually helped states like Djibouti, Sri Lanka, Iraq, Bahrain and Qatar to explore avenues for training, technological collaboration and operational refinement.

Exercise Aman is more than just a series of maritime drills; it embodies a unique opportunity for participants to transcend political divides and build partnerships. By focusing on human interoperability, inclusivity and tangible outcomes, Aman suggests recouring to a more unified and resilient maritime community. As the exercise continues to evolve, it remains an important mean for international cooperation at sea aiming for a more secure and stable maritime future for all.

The writer is an Islamabad-based researcher; his areas of interest include: maritime security, climate change and astropolitics. He can be reached at voxocanus@outlook.com.

Gaza's new model for Palestinian unity

Dr. Ramzy Baroud

EVEN those of us who have long emphasized the importance of the Palestinian people's voice, experience and collective action in Palestinian history have been shocked by the cultural revolution resulting from the Israeli war on Gaza.

By cultural revolution, I mean the defiant and rebellious narrative evolving in Gaza, where people see themselves as active participants in the popular resistance, not just mere victims of the Israeli war machine.

When the ceasefire came into effect on the 471st day of the Israeli genocide, Gazans rushed to the streets in celebration. Media outlets reported that they were celebrating the ceasefire, but judging by their chants and songs and the symbols on display, they were celebrating their collective victory, steadfastness (sumud) and resilience against the powerful Israeli army, supported by the US and other Western countries.

Using basic means, they rushed to clean their streets, clearing debris to allow the displaced to search for homes. Though their homes had been destroyed – 90 percent of Gaza's housing units have been damaged, according to the UN – they were still happy, even to sit on the wreckage. Some prayed atop concrete slabs, some sang in large, growing crowds and others cried but insisted no power could ever uproot them from Palestine.

Social media was flooded with Gazans expressing a

mix of emotions, though they were mostly defiant, expressing their resolve not just in political terms but also in other ways, including humor.

Of course, the body-builders returned to their gyms to find them mostly destroyed. Rather than lament their losses, they salvaged machines and resumed training amid collapsed walls and ceilings punctured by Israeli missiles.

There was also the father and son who composed a song in the "ahazej" style, a traditional Levantine vocalization. The son, overjoyed to find his father alive, was reassured by his father that they would never abandon their homeland.

As for the children – those who were not among the 14,500 killed, according to UNRWA – they resumed their childhood. They claimed destroyed Israeli tanks in Rafah, Beit Hanoun and elsewhere as their new playgrounds.

One teenager, pretending to be a scrap metal salesman, yelled, "One Israeli Merkava tank for sale," as his friends filmed and laughed. He finished by saying, "Make sure you send this video to (Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu," before moving on, unfazed.

This does not mean Gaza is free of unimaginable pain, which is difficult for the rest of the world to fully comprehend. The emotional and psychological scars of the war will last a lifetime and

never fully recover from the trauma. But Gazans know they cannot afford to grieve in the usual way. So, they emphasize their identity, unity and defiance as a way to overcome their grief.

Parallel to its military assault on Gaza since Oct. 7, 2023, Israel has invested heavily in attempting to divide the Palestinian people and shatter their spirit.

In Gaza, its warplanes dropped millions of flyers on starving refugees, urging them to rebel against Palestinian factions by providing Israel with the names of "troublemakers." The Israeli army offered large rewards for information, but little was achieved. These flyers also called for tribal leaders to take control of their areas in exchange for food and protection. To punish those who resisted, Israel systematically killed clan representatives and councilors who tried to distribute aid throughout Gaza, especially in the north, where famine was devastating.

Against overwhelming odds, Palestinians remained united. When the ceasefire was declared, they celebrated as one nation. With Gaza destroyed, Israel's actions obliterated the Strip's class, regional, ideological and political divides. Everyone in Gaza became a refugee: the rich, the poor, Muslims, Christians, city dwellers and refugee camp residents were all equally affected.

The unity that remains in Gaza, despite one of the most horrific genocides in

modern history, should serve as a wake-up call. It proves that the narrative that Palestinians are divided and need to "find common ground" is false.

The old notion of political unity through a merger of the Palestinian Authority and various Palestinian factions is no longer viable. The reality is that the fragmentation of the Palestinian political landscape cannot be solved through mere political agreements or negotiations between factions.

However, a different kind of unity has already taken root in Gaza and, by extension, across Palestinian communities throughout the Occupied Territories and the rest of the world. This unity is visible in the millions of Palestinians who have demonstrated against the war, chanted for Gaza, cried for Gaza and developed a new political discourse around it.

This unity does not rely on talking heads on Arabic satellite channels or secret meetings in expensive hotels. It needs no diplomatic talks. Years of endless discussions, "unity documents" and fiery speeches have only led to disappointment.

True unity has already been achieved, as felt in the voices of ordinary Gazans who no longer identify as members of a faction. They are Gazawiyya. Palestinians from Gaza, and nothing else.

This is the unity that must now form the foundation of a new discourse.

Pakistan's winter drought: A wake-up call for climate action

Muhammad Mohsin Iqbal

PAKISTAN is currently grappling with an alarming drought during the winter season, with rainfall significantly lower than in previous years. Traditionally, the regions of Galiyat, Malika-e-Kohsar Murree, and the northern areas are blanketed in snow by this time, but this year, they remain barren. According to the Meteorological Department, rainfall over the past three months has been critically scarce, raising serious concerns about the country's climate patterns and environmental stability.

One of the primary reasons for the decrease in rainfall is the global phenomenon of climate change. Rising global temperatures have disrupted traditional weather patterns, leading to unpredictable and extreme weather events worldwide. Pakistan, despite contributing minimally to global greenhouse gas emissions, is one of the most climate-vulnerable countries. The melting of glaciers, erratic monsoons, and now, insufficient winter rainfall highlight the pressing impacts of this crisis. The warming atmosphere retains more moisture, altering the distribution and intensity of precipitation. This could explain why regions that previously experienced heavy snowfall are now witnessing dry spells.

Environmental pollution is another critical factor exacerbating the situation. Urbanization, industrial emissions, and vehicular pollution have significantly increased the concentration of pollutants in the atmosphere. These pollutants interfere with cloud formation and precipitation processes, further reducing rainfall.

Moreover, Pakistan's air quality has deteriorated to hazardous levels, especially in urban areas like Lahore, which not only impacts human health but also disrupts ecological balance.

Deforestation is yet

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another major contributor to this crisis. The large-scale cutting of trees, whether for urban development, agriculture, or timber, has disrupted the natural water cycle. Forests play a vital role in maintaining humidity levels and attracting rainfall. The loss of tree cover has not only led to soil erosion and desertification but has also reduced the ability of ecosystems to regulate weather patterns. Pakistan's forest cover is already far below the global standard, and continued deforestation will only worsen the situation.

The recent decline in rainfall has also been linked to the growing phenomenon of droughts in Pakistan. The country has faced recurring droughts over the past five years, particularly in regions like Sindh and Balochistan, where water scarcity has become a persistent issue. The agricultural sector, which forms the backbone of Pakistan's economy, is particularly vulnerable. Reduced rainfall impacts crop yields, threatens food security, and increases dependence on groundwater, further depleting already strained water resources.

A review of Pakistan's weather patterns over the past five years reveals a worrying trend. Rainfall during both summer and winter seasons has become increasingly erratic, with some years experiencing devastating floods while others suffer from prolonged dry spells. This inconsistency poses a significant challenge to water management and agricultural planning. The unpredictability of monsoons and the lack of winter rains this year are clear indications that Pakistan must prioritize climate resilience and sustainable environmental

practices.

To address the immediate and long-term implications of this crisis, several emergency measures must be implemented. First, a national reforestation campaign should be launched to increase forest cover, particularly in drought-prone regions. Second, water conservation practices must be promoted at all levels, from individual households to industries. Rainwater harvesting, efficient irrigation techniques, and the rehabilitation of water reservoirs can help mitigate the impact of reduced rainfall. Third, stricter regulations are needed to curb environmental pollution, including transitioning to cleaner energy sources, enforcing vehicular emissions standards, and promoting public awareness about the importance of environmental preservation.

Additionally, Pakistan must actively participate in global efforts to combat climate change. This includes honoring international commitments, such as the Paris Agreement, and advocating for financial and technical support from developed nations to enhance climate resilience. Collaboration with neighboring countries on shared water resources and regional climate strategies can also play a crucial role in addressing this crisis.

There are Quranic injunctions regarding drought and the hadiths, including the prayer of istisqa, shed light on the occurrence of rain and drought. These spiritual practices emphasize the need to turn to Allah in times of difficulty, seeking His mercy and guidance. The Quran states, "And We send down blessed rain from the sky and bring forth thereby gardens and grain from the harvest" (Surah Qaf 50:9). This verse highlights Allah's mercy in providing rain as a blessing and a source of sustenance. Another verse declares, "He causes it to reach whom He wills of His servants" (Surah Ar-Rum

30:48), emphasizing that rainfall is entirely under Allah's control. The hadith also addresses the significance of rain and the response to drought. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) performed the prayer of istisqa during times of drought, supplicating for Allah's mercy and rain. In one narration, he said, "O Allah, give us rain, a beneficial rain, a rain that will bring water, life, and prosperity" (Sunan Abu Dawood). These teachings remind us of the spiritual dimension of drought and the importance of collective repentance and prayer.

The current drought and its associated challenges may also be seen through a spiritual lens. Many in Pakistan believe that natural disasters and climate anomalies are a reflection of divine displeasure, urging humanity to reflect on its actions. The Quran emphasizes the importance of being custodians of the earth, and neglecting this responsibility can lead to dire consequences. It is, therefore, essential for individuals and communities to adopt environmentally responsible behaviors while seeking forgiveness and guidance from Allah.

Pakistan stands at a critical juncture in its history, where environmental challenges threaten not only its economy but also the well-being of its citizens. The ongoing drought serves as a stark reminder of the need for urgent action to address climate change, environmental degradation, and water scarcity. By adopting sustainable practices, strengthening climate resilience, and fostering a sense of collective responsibility, Pakistan can navigate these challenges and ensure a stable and prosperous future for generations to come.

Trump sets about his retribution agenda with relish

FOR Donald Trump, revenge is a dish best served piping hot.

The president is wasting no time in following through on his frequent campaign trail vows for retribution – with a torrent of purges and pardons.

Trump’s sending a chilling message through the US government: officials who cross him, investigate his alleged abuses of power, or join his critics once they leave office must beware his fury. Their livelihoods and even their lives could be at risk. But those who act in his name, even violently, like January 6, 2021, convicts, can expect protection.

The reckoning gathered pace on Monday.

More than a dozen career officials, who worked on the Justice Department investigations into Trump and who should have civil service protections, were fired after being told they could not be trusted to “faithfully” implement his agenda.

In another development, the administration opened a “special project” to take concrete steps to probe prosecutors who oversaw criminal obstruction cases against certain January 6 defendants that were ultimately tossed because of a Supreme Court decision last summer.

These steps followed the dismissal of more than a dozen government agency watchdog officials known as inspectors general. It was lost on nobody that the official who informed Congress about Trump’s pressure on Ukraine to investigate Joe Biden, which led to Trump’s first impeachment, was an intelligence community IG.

Last week, Trump stripped security details from some former key officials, including former Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and former national security adviser John Bolton, who are facing threats from Iran after serving Trump during his first term.

Trump’s legal maneuvers came alongside an escalating initiative to strip the government of top layers of the civil service. In another shocking move, the administration put about 60 senior career officials at USAID on immediate leave, following Trump’s executive order that froze almost all foreign assistance.

As the president targeted government officials who did not break the law, Washington is still reeling from the pardons and commutations offered to thousands of January 6 rioters, some of whom who beat up police officers in 2021.

These moves show Trump is determined to learn from his first term, when he was often frustrated by the checks and

balances of government and believed he was thwarted by career officials.

A recurring question over the next four years will be whether the unprecedented actions from Trump are those of an anti-establishment disrupter that simply offend normal presidential decorum or whether they are illegal or corrupt.

Conservatives argue that Trump, after winning an election and saying exactly what he’d do with a second term, is well within his rights in gutting the government. Many Republicans before Trump felt that the federal bureaucracy actively thwarted right-wing policies that voters installed a president to pursue. And one reason Trump triumphed last November was his case that the federal government was failing the

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American people in multiple ways.

Many Republicans also agree with the president’s claims that the multiple criminal investigations against him over the last four years amounted to political persecution. Once that is accepted, the line between career and political appointees in the DOJ becomes blurred for many conservatives who believe the entire legal system is corrupted and biased.

Still, Trump’s recent efforts to apparently thwart accountability are extraordinary. In any normal political administration – one not characterized by a flood-the-zone strategy of incessant presidential power plays – any one of them would be a scandal. For example, former first lady Hillary Clinton’s firings in the White House travel office in 1993 spawned an ethics brouhaha investigated by the DOJ and the FBI that only ended in the last year of the Clinton administration with no charges.

Presidents might win mandates, but that doesn’t give them the right to break the law. Trump’s administration failed to give Congress the

Stephen Collinson

required 30 days of notice of the dismissals of the inspectors general, raising concern even among GOP senators. And while presidents often dismiss politically appointed prosecutors when they take office, career DOJ officials are supposed to be sheltered by legal protections.

Ken Buck, a former Republican congressman, told CNN’s Erin Burnett on Monday that the case of the dismissed career Justice Department employees was “unique,” motivated by political goals and was “wrong.”

The officials concerned, who are not accused of criminal wrongdoing, were notified by acting Attorney General James McHenry. He wrote: “Given your significant role in prosecuting the President, I do

not believe that the leadership of the Department can trust you to assist in implementing the President’s agenda faithfully.” The administration is not even hiding that this is retribution since it references the prosecution of Trump in former special counsel Jack Smith’s investigations into election interference and his hoarding of classified documents. Jennifer Rodgers, a CNN legal analyst, highlighted distinctions between Justice Department professionals in offices that are charged with carrying out political goals and prosecutors who work on criminal cases. “The president shouldn’t have an agenda for criminal cases. ... In the criminal realm, you are not supposed to have priorities, you are supposed to follow the facts, and apply the law, and charge who needs to be charged,” Rodgers, a former federal prosecutor, told Anderson Cooper. “Watchdogs or lapdogs?”

The history of Trump’s first term – when he, for instance, fired FBI Chief James Comey over the Russia investigation and turned on Attorney

General Jeff Sessions for recusing himself – hints at motives for his recent actions. It seems clear he’s trying to intimidate career officials who might investigate him or block his expansive use of executive power. He’s also sending a signal to aides in his new administration they could end up like Pompeo or Bolton if they turn on him.

The ouster of the inspectors general, meanwhile, may ensure that the waste, fraud and political abuses that watchdogs are supposed to investigate may go unmonitored.

Mark Greenblatt, a former Department of Interior inspector general who was fired by Trump, said the greatest concern was the erosion of independent oversight.

“The whole construct of inspectors general, it’s based on us being independent, that we’re not 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 went on: “This makes perfect sense to me. Get new people. He feels like the government hasn’t worked very well for the American people.”

Senate Judiciary Chairman Chuck Grassley has long been a supporter of IGs. And he issued a statement on Saturday asking for more details. But it would be a surprise if the veteran Iowa Republican comes down hard on the Trump administration.

Another Trump ally, Sen Tom. Cotton, said Sunday that inspectors general serve at the pleasure of the president and “he wants new people in there.” But the Arkansas Republican did express disquiet at the president’s treatment of Pompeo and Bolton and others targeted by Iran and asked him to reconsider. “It’s better to be safe than sorry, because it’s not just about these men who helped President Trump carry out his policy in his first term,” Cotton said on “Fox News Sunday.”

“It’s about their family and friends, innocent bystanders every time they’re in public. It’s also about the president being able to get good people and get good advice.” Trump was asked last week whether he would feel responsible if something happened to Bolton or Dr. Anthony Fauci, the former top infectious diseases official who faces politically motivated security threats because of his role in responding to the Covid-19 pandemic.

“No,” he replied. A president who escaped two assassination attempts and will be surrounded by Secret Service officers for the rest of his life added: “I think, you know, when you work for government, at some point your security detail comes off.”

Republicans who con-

trol both chambers of Congress have shown little appetite for checking Trump’s power, having declined to convict him in two impeachment trials. And senators who have balked at his controversial Cabinet picks have quickly faced threats of primary challenges.

Sen. Lindsey Graham encapsulated prevailing sentiment about Trump’s power when commenting on the case of the dismissed IGs on CNN’s “State of the Union” on Sunday. The South Carolina Republican said Trump should have given Congress 30 days notice before ousting the officials, to comply with the law.

But he added: “The question is, 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 went on: “This makes perfect sense to me. Get new people. He feels like the government hasn’t worked very well for the American people.”

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The UNRWA cautions to stop its work in Gaza

Michael Jansen

UNLESS there is international intervention, on Thursday, UNRWA, the 75-year-old agency which cares for Palestinian refugees, will cease to operate in Gaza, the West Bank and East Jerusalem. On October 30th, Israel’s 120-member Knesset adopted by 92 votes to 10 legislation revoking the 1967 agreement with UNRWA and banning Israeli contact with the agency. Israel will cease issuing agency’s staff work and entry permits and halt UNRWA coordination with the army. This allows aid, food, medicine, commercial goods, building and educational materials, and vehicles into coastal strip which has external access only through Israel and Egypt. Since Israel launched all out war on Gaza on October 7th, 2023, UNRWA has become the lifeline of the 2.3 million Gazans who have seen 47,000 of their number die, 110,000 wounded, 11,000 buried beneath of rubble of their homes and 1.9 million displaced.

At the time of writing, newly inaugurated US President Donald Trump has said nothing about UNRWA although he defunded the agency in August 2018 during his

While Israeli politicians have for many years campaigned against UNRWA, they stepped up their efforts following the 2023 attack on southern Israel by Hamas which killed 1,230 and kidnapped 151. The Israelis have accused UNRWA of collaborating with Hamas, which wrested control of Gaza from Fatah in 2007. In response, Israel clamped a tight siege and blockade on Gaza from land, sea, and air while Egypt granted limited and occasional passage of Gazans through its terminal at Rafah in the south. One Israeli Knesset member accused UNRWA of “educating kids to hate Israel and spreading antisemitism” while a former diplomat said UNRWA IS “a Palestinian organisation fully committed to the Jewish State’s destruction.” These charges are patently false. Palestinian hostility toward Israel has been caused by its 1948 expulsion of 750,000 Palestinians from their homes in 78 per cent of Palestine during its war of establishment and its occupation of the remaining 22 per cent in 1967. In December 1948, the UN General Assembly adopted resolution 194, paragraph 11, calling for Palestinians to return to their homes and receive compensation for their losses, but this resolution has been dismissed by Israel and ignored by the international community. If Israel had withdrawn from the territories conquered in 1967 as mandated by UN Security Council resolution 242 and a Palestinian state had emerged, UNRWA and allied UN agencies could have shut down after helping exiled Palestinians to return, build infrastructure, homes, public and commercial buildings and develop natural resources and farmland.

first term. He was the first US president to adopt such a punitive measure which deprived the agency of about one-third of its \$1.1 billion annual budget, Washington’s traditional contribution. Trump’s then UN ambassador Nikki Haley justified this move by saying UNRWA’s closure should remove the Palestinians’ “right to return” to lands and properties in Palestine after its conquest and ethnic cleansing by Israel. German foreign minister Heiko Maas criticised the idea that ending UNRWA by depriving it of finding, by saying, “The loss of this organisation could unleash an uncontrollable chain reaction.” His words are even more true today than six years ago.

There has been a brief window of opportunity to deliver urgently needed humanitarian aid since the January 19th ceasefire temporarily halted Israel’s 15-month war on Gaza. Hundreds of truckloads of supplies have entered Gaza unobstructed by Israel. However, UNRWA has been sidelined by Israel from assuming the major role in this endeavour.

tioning, there’s just not any other agency that can come in,” she said. “Unrwa does something like 17,000 health consultations a day in the Gaza Strip. It’s impossible for another agency to replace that.” Tens of thousands are sheltering in and around UNRWA schools which formerly educated half a million children.

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If Israel had withdrawn from the territories conquered in 1967 as mandated by UN Security Council resolution 242 and a Palestinian state had emerged, UNRWA and allied UN agencies could have shut down after helping exiled Palestinians to return, build infrastructure, homes, public and commercial buildings and develop natural resources and farmland. Instead of withdrawing, Israel drove another 250,000 Palestinians into Jordan.

Now that there is a 42-day ceasefire in Israel’s Gaza war, UNRWA is more essential than ever. Only UNRWA has the staff, dis-

tribution centres, warehouses and vehicles to deliver existential aid to Gazans who have begun to move back to locations where their homes once stood or, if they are lucky, a room or two remain. Palestinians have already begun to set up tents for homeless families in northern neighbourhoods savaged by Israeli bombs and shells.

According to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 92 per cent of homes, or 436,000, have been destroyed or damaged. Restoring the health system will be a “complex and challenging” task, stated World Health representative Dr. Rik Peeperkorn. Of the strip’s 36 hospitals, fewer than half are partially functioning. Thirty-million tonnes of rubble will have to be removed before beginning reconstruction which could cost \$40 billion. No one will pledge funds for reconstruction until Israel withdraws from Gaza and agrees not to obstruct this process, order is restored, and a capable Palestinian administration is in place.

Arab Americans and the second Trump presidency

MANY Arab Americans dropped the ball eight years ago, when Donald Trump first entered the White House, as, instead of focusing on their own needs, they were wound up into bitter political polarization. Their mistake was believing that one side, the Democrats, cared more for them than the other, the Republicans. It took Trump’s 2020 loss to Joe Biden and the latter’s subsequent presidency to expose the truth that neither side would take their concerns seriously.

Under Biden, whose election many Arab Americans celebrated, the Palestinian cause was put on a sidetrack that accommodated Israel’s needs. Biden talked about peace and fairness but did nothing to achieve them. He spoke about opening the doors to government to Arab Americans and giving them a voice, but in fact he silenced them.

Biden and his pro-Israel Secretary of State Antony

Blinken ignored the violence committed by Israeli settlers against Palestinian Christians and Muslims and only paid attention to the conflict when Palestinian extremists attacked Israel on Oct. 7, 2023.

There is a huge misconception among Arabs that America has a single standard when it comes to violence in the Middle East and especially in Palestine. That is not true. It is actually two standards: one for Israel and another for Palestine and the Arabs.

Israel’s needs are the highest priority for American politicians. That priority overshadows concerns politicians claim they have for US citizens who have needs, such as senior citizens, the homeless and military veterans, and even for fighting crime.

How is that possible? Well, the pro-Israel lobby has one of the most powerful political action committees in America and it places millions of dollars into the campaign coffers

of members of Congress.

Seniors, the homeless, veterans and the victims of crime do not have that power, nor do they have a lobby that fights for their rights as successfully as the pro-Israel lobby fights to make Israel America’s most important foreign policy concern.

I explain all this because, unfortunately, many Arab Americans are laboring under the misconception that policy decisions are made on the basis of right versus wrong or on the US Constitution and the rule of law. Sorry to disappoint you, but they are not.

The point is that, if you think there is a difference between Biden and the Democrats and Trump and the Republicans, then you are seriously mistaken. And that mistake will only make the situation facing Arab Americans and the issues they care for even worse.

Trump last week issued an executive order targeting extremists who try to enter the US. Some Arab groups immediately

denounced it as a restoration of the so-called Muslim ban from his first

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term.

In 2017, Trump issued a visa ban that targeted seven Muslim-majority nations. This move was an extension of a law that was signed off by President Barack Obama two years earlier. In 2015, Congress passed a law that placed immigration restrictions

Ray Hanania

on travelers who originated from or had recently visited Iran, Iraq, Sudan or

Syria. Two months later, the Department of Homeland Security expanded it to include three more Muslim-majority countries, Libya, Somalia and Yemen. The administration cited “the growing threat from foreign terrorist fighters” from those countries and

the mainstream media pretty much shrugged.

The point of Trump’s new order is to stop people who have not been properly vetted from entering the US. It targets any country that is in turmoil, witnessing conflict or does not have strong border controls.

So, instead of exaggerating the intent and attempting to fight Trump on it, why not recognize the order for what it is and discuss it in a respectful manner?

Trump responds to respect far better than he does to confrontation. He is the president. Arab Americans can throw down the emotional gauntlet and reignite the same confrontation that caused havoc during Trump’s first four years, while pretending that Biden and the Democrats were somehow better. But the Democrats were not better. They were just craftier with their rhetoric. Just ask the people in Gaza who suffered immeasurable violence and pain that was funded by the last administration.

Instead, Arab

Americans can pursue a new strategy, one that focuses on achieving goals that recognize and strengthen Arab and Muslim rights. This would be better than strategies that are driven by emotions over facts.

Many Arab Americans have a misconception that American politicians will support 100 percent of their goals and needs. They won’t. American politics is built on compromise. If a politician supports 70 percent of your priorities, that should be an acceptable and positive base from which to build.

Arab Americans often want everything at once and shun compromise. If they do not get 100 percent, they feel slighted. Shamed even. Israelis, on the other hand, have generally always taken what they could get — even if it was far less than what they believed they deserved — and built on it. Arab Americans should do the same. The goal is to achieve change, slowly, steadily and through com-

promise.

The choice is simple. Continue to criticize and attack Trump and push him further into the clutches of the Israeli bulldozer. Or be strategic. Keep the doors open to the president, who is one of the most powerful people in the world. Play to his ego and understand the intentions of what he says rather than interpreting the meaning of his rhetoric.

American politics is malleable. You can change it by working the system, by being smart.

Biden showed us that taking the word of a friendly political face is meaningless. When it comes down to the critical and most important moment, you want to be in a position to have influence and not be an outsider through your own choice of conflict.

Arab Americans who care about Palestine will work the system regardless of who is in the White House. Those that do not and foment an emotional response really only care about themselves.



PSX stays bearish, loses 1,489 more points

ISLAMABAD (APP): The 100-Index of the Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX) continued with bearish trend on Tuesday, losing 1,489.96 more points, a negative change of 1.31 percent, closing at 112,030.36 points as compared to 113,520.32 points on the last trading day.

A total of 517,804,378 shares were traded during the day as compared to 494,003,725 shares the previous trading day, whereas the price of shares stood at Rs29.209 billion against Rs25.940 billion on the last trading day.

As many as 438 companies transacted their shares in the stock market, 95 of them recorded gains and

280 sustained losses, whereas the share price of 63 companies remained unchanged.

The three top trading companies were WorldCall Telecom with 67,917,203 shares at Rs1.69 per share, Sui South Gas with 29,454,322 shares at Rs38.14 per share and Cnergyico PK with 28,426,632 shares at Rs7.36 per share.

Rafhan Maize Products Limited witnessed a maximum increase of Rs99.99 per share closing at Rs9,299.99 whereas runner-up was Lucky Core Industries Limited with Rs29.85 rise in its share price to close at Rs1,175.22. Hoechst Pakistan

Limited witnessed a maximum decrease of Rs66.70 per share price, closing at Rs3,000.00, whereas the runner-up was Pakistan Engineering Company Limited with Rs53.44 rise in its per share price to Rs707.83.

Rupee sheds 09 paise against dollar

Pakistani rupee on Tuesday depreciated by 09 paise against the US dollar in the interbank trading and closed at Rs278.92 against the previous day's closing of Rs278.83.

However, according to the Forex Association of Pakistan (FAP), the buying and selling rates of the dollar in the open market stood at Rs279.50 and Rs281,

respectively.

The price of the Euro decreased by 68 paise to close at Rs291.03 against the last day's closing of Rs291.71, according to the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP).

The Japanese yen went up by 01 paise and closed at Rs1.79, whereas an increase of 23 paise was witnessed in the exchange rate of the British Pound, which was traded at Rs347.02 as compared to the last day's closing of Rs346.79.

The exchange rates of the Emirates Dirham and the Saudi Riyal increased by 03 paise each to close at Rs75.94 and Rs74.36 respectively.



KARACHI: Chairman PAA Ahmed Kapadia, Secretary General APNS Sarmad Ali, Executive Director PAS Qamar Abbas and Shakeel Masud Secretary General PBA signing an MOU.

15% surge recorded in import of vehicles

ISLAMABAD (INP): Pakistan registered 15 percent increase in import of cars and other vehicles during first six months of the current fiscal year.

Pakistan witnessed 45 percent increase in import of heavy vehicles and buses. During first six months of current fiscal year, Pakistan imported buses and heavy vehicles amounting to \$156 million.

In first half of current fiscal year Pakistan manufactured 22 percent complete vehicles.

During first six months of current fiscal year import of motorcycles increased by 47 percent to reach \$1 million, while \$6,86,000 were spent on import of motorcycles during previous fiscal year.

The report further revealed that due to expansion of auto sector reasonable increase being witnessed in import of vehicles due to improvement in economic indicators.

A recent cut in interest rate also put a positive impact on import of vehicles and demands is increasing day by day.

As the government announced to remove ban on import of vehicles demands of completely manufactured vehicles increased.

9 Pakistani companies to join fair

KARACHI (PPI): Nine Pakistani companies are gearing up to showcase their products at Ambiente 2025, the world's largest consumer goods fair, scheduled from February 7-11 in Frankfurt city of Germany. This event will gather over 3,694 exhibitors from 81 countries, highlighting the latest in consumer goods across various sectors.

According to a statement by the Trade Development Authority of Pakistan (TDAP), leading Pakistani exporters such as Pakistan Souvenirs, Tariq Glass Industries Ltd, and Sharp Edge Enterprises will present their offerings at the event. TDAP will also host a pavilion featuring other notable participants like Anaya Salt, RM Salt, and Sana Traders.

The Pakistani exhibitors will display a wide range of products, including interior decor items and kitchen accessories, in strategically located halls within the fair.

PAA, APNS, PAS and PBA sign MOU

F.P. Report

KARACHI: The Pakistan Advertising Association (PAA), All Pakistan Newspaper Society (APNS), Pakistan Advertisers Society (PAS), and Pakistan Broadcasters Association (PBA) - four major stakeholders in Pakistan's media and advertising sector - have joined forces, signing a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to drive collective growth.

This landmark agreement marks a pivotal moment for Pakistan's media and advertising industry. By uniting under a shared vision, these key stakeholders will address

industry-wide challenges and promote sustainable growth and development. The partnership will enhance synergy, transparency, and professionalism across advertising, media, and marketing sectors.

The MoU underscores the commitment to resolving regulatory challenges, financial transparency, digital transformation, and ethical standards. By fostering mutual cooperation, it creates a robust framework to elevate operational efficiency and strengthen the ecosystem.

Together, these organizations will champion stakeholders' interests, promote innovation, and posi-

tion Pakistan's advertising and media industries on par with global standards.

Addressing the milestone event, Chairman PAA, Ahmed Hussain Kapadia, remarked, "The alliance represents a unified commitment to safeguard the interests of our industry and promote a collaborative environment where creativity and innovation thrive. Together, we aim to raise the bar of professionalism and ethics while advocating for fair policies and sustainable practices."

With this historic agreement, the stage is set for a new era of collaboration and growth in Pakistan's media and advertising landscape.

Iftikhar Malik calls for single-digit interest rates

LAHORE (APP): Former president SAARC Chamber of Commerce and Industry Iftikhar Ali Malik

emphasized that lowering the interest rate to a single digit is essential for reviving the national economy. In a statement issued here on Tuesday, he highlighted that high interest rates had stifled economic growth with increasing the cost of doing business and due to absence of investors interest.

He argued that a lower interest rate would encourage businesses to borrow, invest, and expand their

operations, ultimately leading to job creation and economic development.

A single-digit interest rate, according to Malik, would ease the financial burden on the private sector, particularly small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), which form the backbone of the economy.

Former president SAARC Chamber of Commerce and Industry Iftikhar Ali Malik urged the government and central bank to adopt a pro-growth monetary policy and create a conducive environment for invest-

ment instead of lowering rate by one percent.

Iftikhar Malik also stressed the importance of enhancing domestic revenue generation to ensure long-term economic stability.

Former president SAARC Chamber of Commerce and Industry Iftikhar Ali Malik called for bold reforms and effective policy making to restore investor confidence, stimulate economic activity, and place Pakistan on a sustainable path of growth and prosperity.

SCCI welcomes SBP economic indicators

SIALKOT (APP): Sialkot Chamber of Commerce and Industry (SCCI) President Ikram-ul-Haq welcomed the State Bank of Pakistan's updated economic indicators for FY25, signaling a positive step toward economic stabilization and recovery.

The revised targets reflect optimism and a commitment to fiscal and monetary reforms aimed at strengthening Pakistan's economic foundation, he said.

Ikram-ul-Haq highlighted the key revisions, stating, "The State Bank's decision to revise inflation projections downward to 5.5%-7.5% from the earlier estimate of 11.5%-13.5% will provide much-needed relief to

businesses and households. Additionally, the adjustment of the current account balance to -0.5% to +0.5% of GDP indicates substantial progress in stabilizing the external sector, while the GDP growth projection of 2.5%-3.5% reflects cautious optimism about Pakistan's economic recovery."

Commenting on the latest Monetary Policy announcement, Ikram-ul-Haq said, "The 1% reduction in the policy interest rate is a step in the right direction, but it falls short of the 2% reduction that was essential to ease financial burdens on businesses. To truly support growth and industrial activity, interest rates must be brought down to single

digits. Lower borrowing costs will encourage investment, stimulate economic activity, and provide a much-needed boost to SMEs, which are the backbone of our economy."

He emphasized the importance of consistent policy implementation, improved governance, and collaboration between the public and private sectors to achieve these economic targets.

"The Sialkot chamber remains committed to advocating for policies that drive economic recovery and growth, and it calls on all stakeholders to work together to promote a stable and growth-oriented environment for Pakistan," he added.

Saudi sovereign wealth fund's \$4b bond offering four times oversubscribed

RIYADH (Arab News): Saudi Arabia's Public Investment Fund has successfully priced a \$4 billion bond issuance, divided into two tranches.

The offering was met with strong demand, attracting global investors and resulting in an order book of approximately \$16 billion — four times the initial offering size, said a statement.

According to the statement, PIF issued \$2.4 billion in five-year debt instruments and an additional \$1.6 billion in securities with a maturity of nine-and-a-half years, under its Euro Medium-Term Note Program.

The sovereign wealth fund confirmed that the proceeds from the bond issuance will be used for

general corporate purposes.

The development comes just weeks after PIF closed its inaugural Murabaha credit facility, securing \$7 billion in funding. This marks a significant milestone in the fund's broader strategy to raise capital over the coming years.

"Strong demand from international institutional investors underscores PIF's diverse investor base, robust capital-raising strategy, and solid credit profile," said Ahmed Alobayyan, head of public markets, Global Capital Finance at PIF.

He added: "These factors ensure uninterrupted access to global capital markets and are vital to PIF's role in supporting

Saudi Arabia's economic transformation."

PIF further emphasized that the oversubscription highlights the effectiveness of its capital-raising approach and reinforces its strong financial position.

In November, credit rating agency Moody's upgraded PIF's rating from A1 to Aa3 with a stable outlook, a move that further underscores the fund's financial strength.

The US-based agency gives Aa3 for entities with high quality, low credit risk, and the best ability to repay short-term debts.

According to Moody's, the upgrade of PIF's rating reflects strong credit linkage between the sovereign wealth fund and the Kingdom's government.

In August 2024, the wealth fund had also obtained a \$15 billion revolving credit facility for general corporate purposes from a diverse global syndicate of 23 financial institutions from the US, Europe, and the Middle East as well as Asia.

PIF, at that time, said that this credit facility is offered for an initial period of three years and is extendable for up to two additional years.

A revolving loan is one that can be drawn, repaid and drawn again during the agreed lending period.

PIF manages \$925 billion in assets, and is set to increase that to \$2 trillion by 2030, a report from monitoring organization Global SWF forecast earlier in January.

SBP awards first Digital Retail Bank license to Easypaisa Bank

F.P. Report

KARACHI: In a landmark ceremony held at the SBP in Karachi, the Governor, State Bank of Pakistan (SBP), Jameel Ahmad, awarded the first Digital Retail Bank (DRB) license to Easypaisa Bank Limited (formerly Telenor Microfinance Bank Limited), authorizing it to commence commercial operations.

The DRB license to Easypaisa Bank Limited is expected to promote innovation, enhance financial inclusion, and ensure the availability of accessible and affordable digital financial services. The event was attended by CEOs of digital banks, members of the Executive Committee of the Pakistan Banks' Association, the Board of Directors and the senior management of Easypaisa Bank and senior executives of SBP.

Delivering the keynote address, the Governor, SBP underscored SBP's strategic role in establishing the

framework for digital banking in Pakistan and facilitating the development of digital banks through a structured licensing process.

He urged Easypaisa Bank Limited to draw inspiration from its sponsor, Ant Group, by prioritizing the digital transformation of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in Pakistan.

The Governor also highlighted the critical importance of achieving licensing milestones and encouraged digital banks to innovate and design customer-centric solutions tailored to the needs of individuals, micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs), and other underserved segments.

He emphasized that this focus would be instrumental in fostering financial inclusion and driving economic growth.

The Governor stressed upon the importance of addressing challenges associated with rapid technological advancements.

He highlighted two critical areas of digital literacy of customers and cyber security measures to protect customer trust and ensure the integrity of the financial system.

He also expressed his confidence that, with the issuance of this license, Easypaisa Bank Limited will prioritize the development of innovative, customer-focused, and affordable digital financial solutions, particularly for underserved and unserved segments of society.

He emphasized that such efforts will play a pivotal role in advancing the financial inclusion and digitalization objectives.

In January 2023, SBP issued No Objection Certificates (NoCs) to five successful applicants: HugoBank Limited, KT Bank Pakistan Limited, Mashreq Bank Pakistan Limited, Raqami Islamic Digital Bank Limited, and Easypaisa Bank Limited.

These entities were selected following a rigor-

ous evaluation process that assessed key criteria, including governance and fitness, industry expertise, financial capacity, business strategies, implementation frameworks, funding plans, and IT and cybersecurity infrastructure.

In September 2023, these banks received In-Principle Approval (IPA) to prepare for operational readiness. Subsequently, after fulfilling the required conditions, Easypaisa Bank Limited has now been authorized to commence commercial DRB operations.

The ceremony also featured remarks from the member of the Board of Directors of Easypaisa Bank who shared their vision and commitment to driving innovation in digital financial services. They expressed their gratitude to the State Bank of Pakistan for its support and reaffirmed their dedication to setting new benchmarks in customer-centricity and technological advancement in the financial sector.

Construction sector revival must for economic growth: PCJCCI

LAHORE (APP): The construction sector is often referred to as the backbone of Pakistan's economy and its revival is essential for boosting employment, driving economic growth and attracting investment.

Pakistan China Joint Chamber of Commerce and Industry (PCJCCI) President Nazir Hussain expressed these views in a think-tank session held here at PCJCCI Secretariat Tuesday.

He added that this critical sector influences 72 interconnected industries which play a central role in

driving economic growth, creating employment opportunities, and attracting significant investments. With the potential to unlock US \$100 billion in investments and create millions of jobs, the revival of the construction industry is vital for Pakistan's economic recovery.

He also stressed that supportive government policies will play a crucial role in unlocking the full potential of the construction industry. Tax reductions, affordable mortgage schemes, and streamlined regulatory processes are essential for creating an environment conducive to growth. By addressing sectoral barriers, the government can pave the way for increased investment and industrial development. These measures, coupled with CPEC's infrastructure projects, will lay the groundwork for sustainable

progress, he added.

Senior Vice President Brig. (Retd) Mansoor Saeed Sheikh shared that China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) provides an unparalleled opportunity to rejuvenate the construction industry and boost the nation's economy. As a flagship project of the Belt and Road Initiative, CPEC has been a driving force behind infrastructure development in Pakistan. From roads and bridges to industrial zones and housing projects, the partnership between CPEC and the construction industry promises to accelerate growth, attract foreign direct investment (FDI), and introduce advanced technologies. Additionally, CPEC's focus on enhancing regional connectivity will boost trade and commerce, creating a ripple effect across multiple sectors, he added.

Vice President Zafar

Iqbal said that construction sector's resurgence will have a far-reaching impact, invigorating a wide range of industries such as cement, steel, ceramics, real estate, and IT solutions. Core construction materials, energy providers, interior finishing, and smart technology are just a few examples of the 72 interconnected industries poised to thrive alongside a revitalized construction sector. This interconnected network will generate a multiplier effect, strengthening Pakistan's economic foundation and ensuring long-term resilience.

Secretary General Salahuddin Hanif shared that the revival of Pakistan's construction industry is not just a sectoral priority but it is a national imperative. Its growth will eliminate unemployment, boost industrial output, and enhance the quality of life for millions of Pakistanis.

AI fears weigh on tech stocks, as tariff talk boosts dollar

LONDON (AFP/APP): Japanese tech firms sank Tuesday following a rout on Wall Street after China's DeepSeek chatbot upended the artificial intelligence sector and sparked questions about huge investments by US titans.

The dollar rallied on a report saying Washington was considering universal tariffs on a range of goods, fanning fresh fears about a trade war.

Other Asian equity indices ended mixed in limited trade ahead of the Lunar New Year break.

European stock markets rose in morning deals and oil prices advanced, as traders awaited interest-rate decisions from the US Federal Reserve and European Central Bank due this week.

Tokyo-listed companies linked to the artificial intelligence sector tanked for a second straight day as investors tracked a rout on Wall Street that saw Nvidia crumble 17 per-

cent, wiping more than half-a-trillion dollars off its market capitalisation.

The retreat came after DeepSeek unveiled its R1 chatbot, which has apparently shown the ability to match the capacity of US AI pace-setters for a fraction of the investments made by American companies.

"The DeepSeek news has triggered a rethink on the AI revolution and arguably one of the pillars of the current US exceptionalism," said Rodrigo Catril, foreign exchange strategist at National Australia Bank.

"If R1 is as good as first impressions seem to suggest, then demand for sophisticated chips, infrastructure (think data centres) and energy may not be as large as originally thought."

Nvidia has been the standout company that has led the drive by investors to seek out all things AI, spending vast

sums of cash but seeing their share prices rocket.

The US chip firm has piled on about 1,900 percent in five years.

The DeepSeek bombshell also came on the heels of President Donald Trump's announcement of a new \$500 billion venture to build infrastructure for artificial intelligence in the United States.

Trump said the release of DeepSeek's model "should be a wake-up call for our industries that we need to be laser-focused on competing to win".

He argued that it could be a "positive" for US tech giants.

"Instead of spending billions and billions, you'll spend less, and you'll come up with hopefully the same solution," he said.

Sam Altman, the boss of OpenAI, which runs lead US chatbot ChatGPT, called DeepSeek "impressive".

Court Notice

In the Court of Jawad Bin Dawood Civil Judge II. Alaga Qazi Buner at Daggar.Suit No 10/12-2. Institution 13/9/ 2022. Date of hearing 22/2/2025. Norzamen VS Muner Khan. Notice to No. 1/2.Naem s/o Muner Khan resident of Bhali Kalay tehseel Gadezai 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 22/2/2025 the proceeding will be taken ex-parte. Given under my hand and seal of this Court.

Court Notice

In the Court of district Judge / Zilla Qazi Buner at Daggar.Civil Appeal No 59/14 Institution 26/11/ 2024. Date of hearing 30/1/2025. Muhammad Yusuf etc VS Muhammad Fared etc. Notice to No. 3/4.Iftikhar Ahmed.3/4.S.Zahor Ahmed 6 sons of Zenat Baha.5/3. Mumtaz Alam. 5/4. Muhammad Umer sons of Muhammad Ali Shah resident of Hisar tehseel Daggar district Buner at present abroad.Whereas in the above mentioned case the mentioned defendants can not be served in the ordinary way, it is, therefore, proclaimed that if the said defendants will/shall not appear personally or through dually authorized agent or pleader in the court at 8.30 am dated 30/1/2025 the proceeding will be taken ex-parte. Given under my hand and seal of this Court.



PESHAWAR: Newly crowned Mr. Peshawar 2025, Nisar Khan celebrating his victory with his trainer Mr. Hameed and fellow gym members by cutting a cake.

Neymar set for Santos after Al-Hilal deal terminated

SAO PAULO (BBC): Brazilian club Santos are in talks to re-sign Neymar after his contract with Saudi Pro League side Al-Hilal was cancelled by mutual consent.

The 32-year-old Brazil record goalscorer is expected to sign a short-term deal at the club where he began his career.

The termination of his contract at Al-Hilal was considered the biggest step, according to sources close to Neymar.

It ends an injury-hit spell in Saudi Arabia, where he played just seven times for the club he joined in a £77.6m deal in August 2023.

The attacker made two appearances this season, most recently as a substi-

tute in November.

Al Hilal said: "The club expresses its thanks and appreciation to Neymar for what he has provided at Al-Hilal, and wish the player success in his career."

Major League Soccer (MLS) club Chicago Fire also attempted to bring Neymar to the United States but he turned them down in favour of returning to Santos.

Fire had Neymar on their 'discovery list', meaning they were the only MLS team able to negotiate with him in the US.

Inter Miami had also been linked with reuniting Neymar with his former Barcelona team-mates Lionel Messi and Luis Suarez.

Neymar remains the world's most expensive footballer after his £200m move to Paris St-Germain in 2017.

Neymar had about seven months remaining on his contract, having joined Al-Hilal on a two-year deal with a reported wage of £129m a year.

He joined claiming he wanted to "write new sporting history", but had a prolonged spell on the sidelines after rupturing his anterior cruciate ligament (ACL) during Brazil's World Cup qualifier against Uruguay in October 2023.

He returned in October last year and although he played down an apparent hamstring issue in his second match back, he has not

featured since.

Neymar came through the famed youth system at Santos, where he scored 136 goals in 225 games, before a high-profile move to Barcelona in 2013.

He made 186 appearances across four seasons in Spain, winning two La Liga titles, the Champions League and the Club World Cup before his world-record move to PSG as a 25-year-old.

In Paris he won five league titles prior to his move to Saudi Arabia.

Shortly after the move he overtook Pele to become Brazil's all-time leading male goalscorer with 78 goals, but has not played for his country since his initial knee injury in 2023.

Wily Jomel Warrican learns on the go to undo Pakistan

L A H O R E (ESPNCricinfo): If you ask ChatGPT, or its newly ascendant competitor DeepSeek, what the perfect Test series looked like, the responses are lengthy, vague, and non-committal. Perhaps one day, when they learn how to limit them to four words or fewer, "Jomel Warrican in Pakistan" would suffice as the perfectly succinct response.

Warrican's dominance of this series has been uniquely legendary. He's taken the most wickets, of course, more than every other West Indian bowler combined. The best bowling figures in an innings, and in a match, belong to him. No one with more than two wickets could boast a better bowling average this his single-digit 9, none managed an economy rate as miserly as his 2.38. For good measure, he also has the highest batting average on either side across the series, the highest strike rate for anyone over 25 runs, and the fourth-highest run tally.

The smattering of Tests he has played in the sub-continent over the past decade have demonstrated his value on spin tracks. But nothing could quite prepare Warrican for what he found in Multan, where, ahead of the series, his captain Kraig Brathwaite had said he had never seen cracks appear this early in his 96-match Test career anywhere else. It gave the spinners more opportunities, but also greater responsibility.

It was a responsibility

that Warrican and his little band of spinners failed to live up to early on in the first Test. In the first 57 overs of the game, Pakistan had put up 187 runs, with spin managing just one wicket when Gudakesh Motie - who Pakistan believed was a greater threat than Warrican before the series - squeezed Shan Masood down the leg side.

By the time the West Indies spinners made their presence felt, Pakistan already had enough runs, and then never fell behind in the game. Warrican kept trying to find extra rip doing the same thing over and over, but ended the innings with just three wickets, two of them of tailenders.

The intelligence Warrican deployed over the remainder of the series, though, has been anything but artificial. "Speed's very important," he said at the post-match presentation after the second Test, where he was awarded both the Player of the Match and Series. "We worked out that the slower you bowled, the more effective you would be on these wickets. Once I got more information, I used it to my advantage."

From the second innings of the first Test onwards, Warrican was doing things slightly differently. The lines or lengths he was landing the balls at barely changed. But through the air, it was a different story. He fizzed some balls through, held others longer in his hand, and tossed some up. To the

right-hander, there was always the danger of the ones that carried on with the arm, making the most instinctively safe shot - the front foot forward defensive - feel uncomfortably perilous. Mohammad Hurraira and Babar Azam were the first two to fall this way in Pakistan's second innings, and Warrican never looked back.

"The variation in pace is effective when you're consistent," he said. "You vary the pace, and hit the same length over and over. The consistency is the key thing to everything in life."

Those were the first two of seven wickets Warrican took that innings, and started a run where he bagged 16 of the 30 Pakistan wickets that fell in the series since. But it wasn't just with the ball that he contributed significantly. Before this series, no side in Test history ever had Nos. 9-11 in their lineup contributing the second highest scores of an innings. In little over four days of cricket, West Indies managed it twice. Warrican was the top-scorer on one occasion, and the second-highest another time.

It wasn't exactly technically soundproof, but he ended up preying on any bowler who viewed him like a classic tailender. He smeared Sajid Khan and Noman Ali away when they pitched the ball up and full; no one hit more sixes than him all series. Warrican's signature shot, though, was the reverse sweep with the back of the

bat, one he used like a bludgeon rather than a surgical tool.

Sajid ill-advisedly decided to taunt him on the penultimate day when he missed one of these heaves, getting up close and giving him the "you can't see me" gesture. Warrican appeared unfazed.

"I just back my game plan," he said. "Once the ball is in my zone, I back myself to play it to the boundary. I also trust my defence, and try to rotate the strike. I had belief. I backed us to win the [second] game. The fightback we showed in the second innings, bowling out Pakistan for a cheap total. We knew once we batted well, we were in with a chance to win the game."

In a final twist of fate, it was Sajid who stood at the batter's end when Warrican, and West Indies, needed one more wicket to seal victory. Sajid had tentatively tried to push the ball into the on side, but, just like Babar and Hurraira in the first Test, didn't account for the arm ball. It pierced through the gap between bat and pad, and made a mess of his stumps.

Warrican gave him the same gesture, before raising his right leg and thumping his hand to his thigh: Sajid's own signature celebration. Right to the last moment of the series, it appeared, he had been gaining more information, picking up everything he saw in Multan, and ensuring he left with the last laugh.

Zone-VI Whites to face Zone-III Whites in Woodward Trophy U-17 final

KARACHI (APP): The final of the Woodward Trophy Under-17 inter-zonal cricket tournament will take place on Thursday, at the KCCA Stadium, with Zone-VI Whites set to compete against Zone-III Whites.

Zafar Riaz Bari, Director of Admin and External Affairs at Medicam Group of Companies, will be the chief guest at the event and will distribute the prizes

after the match. Nadeem Omar, President of the Regional Cricket Association Karachi, will preside over the ceremony.

The tournament is organized by the Regional Cricket Association Karachi, in collaboration with Medicam Group of Companies.

Both teams will finalize their playing squads from the following players before the match begins:

Zone-VI Whites:

Asad Omar (Captain), Soman Kabir, Talal Mehmood, Hamad Alam, Malik Ashtar, M. Azaan, Ariyan Khan, Muhammad Hasnain, Abdul Hayee, Murtaza Taqi, Niqab Shafiq, Faizan Khan, Abdullah Ahmed Butt, Yasir Hameed, M. Afhan, Noor Zaman.

Management: Naveed Al Amin (Manager), Adnan Kaleem (Coach).

Zone-III Whites:

Anas Balouch (Captain), Hamza OOn Wala, Haider Ali, Danyal Ali, Muhammad Waseem, Bilal Ageel, Aman Ahmed, Asad Ullah Khan, Ahsan Yaqoob, Nizam Uddin, Maaz Maqbool, Taimoor Rehman, Muhammad Ali Malik, Hayyan Raja, Muhammad Sunny.

Management: Mir Abdul Rehman (Manager), Syed Imran Azam (Coach).

PCB, USA Cricket mull cricket series in near future

LAHORE (APP): Chairman Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) Mohsin Naqvi on Tuesday met United States of America (USA) Cricket's Chief Executive Officer Johnathan Atkeison in Washington.

Chief Executive Officer Pakistan Super League (PSL), Salman Naseer was also present in the meet-

ing. PCB Chairman Mohsin Naqvi and CEO USA Cricket discussed possibilities of a tri-series between Pakistan, Canada and the USA.

Discussions regarding arrangement of bilateral series between Pakistan and USA men's and women's cricket teams also took place.

PCB Chairman Mohsin Naqvi assured the USA Cricket CEO of all possible support on the players development front. The PCB Chairman said that PCB was ready to provide full support for the promotion of cricket in the USA.

Mohsin Naqvi offered to train USA' cricket coaches in Pakistan. He

also invited Johnathan Atkeison to visit Pakistan during the ICC Champions Trophy 2025.

PCB Chairman Mohsin Naqvi said that there were immense opportunities for the promotion of cricket between Pakistan and the USA. The CEO USA Cricket thanked the PCB Chairman for invitation to the Champions Trophy.

Smith says Australia need to 'be proactive' on Sri Lankan pitches

SYDNEY (ESPNCricinfo): Sometimes it spins. At other times it goes straight. Be ready for both. This is stand-in captain Steven Smith's advice to Australia's less-experienced batters, as he prepares to lead them in a two-Test series against Sri Lanka in Galle. Of Australia's batters on tour, Smith understands the challenge ahead more than most - he has two hundreds in Sri Lanka, and averages 49.75 on the island.

"We have spoken about the differences in the surfaces," Smith said on Tuesday, the eve of the first Test on Australia's ongoing tour of Sri Lanka. "Last time we came, we played on one that spun from ball

one and the other one was pretty flat in the first innings, and then spun a lot in the second innings.

"So it's important to have plans for both kind of surfaces. Then if it is extreme from the outset, then you need to be proactive and follow different methods to score runs. You just have to adapt as quickly as possible to what you get."

In 2016, Smith had overseen a tour in which Australia's batters largely failed to pick the slider from the one that turned off the surface, thus going down 3-0 in the series. In 2022, however, their batters fared much better, even winning a Test on the more spin-friendly surface in that

series.

Among the more recent trends in countering the kind of spin often seen in Galle has been to focus on run-scoring, rather than on defence. Smith's own 145* the last time he was at this venue was memorable for how quick he was to move around the crease to create scoring opportunities. Reverse sweeps, slogs, paddles around the corner, and more frequent trips down the pitch - these have all become much more commonly employed.

"I think the game has changed a lot since I first came to the sub-continent," Smith said.

"Guys play different shots to put pressure on the bowlers. The game has

evolved a lot in the last ten years, and it's good to see some of the shots these guys play to take the game forward."

For Smith, this is a series that will almost certainly feature a major career milestone. He is one run away from becoming the fourth Australia batter to 10,000 Test runs. Smith only needed 38 more runs from the last Test of the home summer - in Sydney - to get to the landmark, but fell for 33 and 4 against India.

"I'll just try to put it out of my mind, to be honest," Smith said of the milestone. "I probably thought too much about it in Sydney. This time I'll just try to forget it and focus on job at hand."

McIlroy 'three goals' from career satisfaction

LONDON (BBC): Rory McIlroy has only three burning ambitions left in the game, and 2025 - with an enticing set of major venues - presents an opportunity to knock off two of them.

As he embarks on his latest season stateside, there is very little the 35-year-old from Northern Ireland has not achieved, amassing what modern jargon would call a vastly impressive body of work since turning pro in 2007.

Pretty much every golfer on the planet would be happy to swap careers. By a distance he is the UK's most prolific winner on American courses and he is a seemingly permanent fixture in the world's top three.

McIlroy is the pivot around whom Europe enjoys huge Ryder Cup success, appearing in five winning teams from seven contests. He has four majors to his name among more than 40 professional victories, with 26 of those coming on the PGA Tour.

In 2022 he became the first golfer to become a three-time FedEx Cup champion, the American circuit's season-long crown, and on Europe's DP World Tour no current member can touch him with six Race to Dubai successes including each of the past three years.

And yet, and yet.

He is regarded as an underachiever with a gaping hole in his otherwise glittering CV because he has yet to win the Masters at Augusta to complete the career Grand Slam.

For a decade he has been trying to land that coveted Green Jacket to satisfy a set that currently includes trophies from two US PGA Championships (2012 and 2014), The Open (2014) and US Open (2011).

The Masters is the one that he most wants, but he is also driven by the thought of winning an away Ryder Cup - for the second time - and adding Olympic glory. In fact, give him those and his appetite for golfing success would be finally sated. "Winning the Masters, winning an Olympic medal and another away Ryder Cup, they are my three goals for the rest of my career," McIlroy told BBC Sport.

Of course, this former Olympic sceptic has to wait for the Los Angeles Games in 2028 - perhaps his last realistic opportunity to grab a medal - but the other two objectives are firmly in his sights for this year. So, as he starts his 2025 PGA Tour season at Pebble Beach this week, McIlroy is tailoring everything to be in prime form when he tees it up at Augusta on the second Thursday of April.

"I've realised that all I can control is myself," he

said. "What's right for me right now is to fully focus on myself and to get the best out of myself and get back to winning the biggest tournaments in the world."

"I've been agonisingly close for the past few years, without being able to get it done and that that is the main focus of this year."

The fact that it is more than a decade since he last added to his list of major victories is one of the most startling statistics in the modern game.

He has achieved pretty much everything else, including winning the prestigious Players Championship in 2019 which was in the days when all of the world's best were competing at Sawgrass for the PGA Tour's flagship title.

But the Players is not a major. His slimmed down 2025 schedule, playing more sparingly in the US, is designed to glean success in the big four events that ultimately define careers.

"All of my practice, all of my prep, even the tournaments that I'm playing, it's all geared towards being ready for those four events," McIlroy said.

"Augusta is Augusta. I've gone through my stats and there are a couple of things that were pointed out to me that I could definitely get better at - certain little shots around the greens,"

He famously blew a

four-shot final-round lead with a ruinous 80 at the 2011 Masters and he was runner-up without truly contending in 2022. He faded tamely when in the final pairing with champion Patrick Reed in 2018 in another of his four top-five Augusta finishes.

Some observers believe the home of the first major of the year is made for McIlroy's powerful game, but it has a way of finding him out technically and temperamentally.

'I've become a very good US Open player'

The same cannot be said of the venue for the year's second major, Quail Hollow, which will stage the US PGA Championship in May. McIlroy won his first PGA Tour title there 15 years ago and his most recent victory on the US circuit came at the same North Carolina layout only last May. "At Quail Hollow I've played some great golf," he said. "I've won four times there."

"I went up against Xander Schauffele, who went on to win two majors last year, and played some of my best golf in in that final round."

McIlroy is also looking forward to competing in the US Open on one of the championship's toughest tracks in Pennsylvania this June, despite missing the cut when it was last played there nine years ago.



GALLE, SRI LANKA : Steve Smith poses during a portrait session on Tuesday in Galle, Sri Lanka.



In brief

CPO to hold open court

RAWALPINDI (APP): City Police Officer (CPO) Rawalpindi Syed Khalid Hamdani under Punjab government's open door policy will hold 'Khuli Kutcheries' here on Wednesday in Naseerabad and Taxila areas. According to a police spokesman, 'Khuli Kutcheries' would be held at 12 noon in Naseerabad Police Station, 2 pm at Taxila and at 2.30 pm in SDPO Office, Taxila to address grievances of the people. Rawalpindi District Police on the directives of the CPO are taking all possible actions to address the complaints of the people, he added. He informed that senior police officers are also holding 'Khuli Kutcheries' and the officers concerned are being directed to take action and submit detail report on the complaints submitted by the citizens in 'Khuli Kutcheries'. The CPO had warned that negligence on part of officials concerned would not be tolerated, he said adding, the 'Khuli Kutcheries' were being held to provide the citizens immediate relief and address their complaints besides it also helped improve standards of policing. Senior Police Officers were being directed to complete inquiries and send reports within given time frame, he said and informed that all-out efforts were being made to ensure dispensation of speedy justice purely on merit to the people and improve service delivery standard in the district.

ANF recovers 19 kg drugs

RAWALPINDI (APP): Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF) in a crackdown on drug smugglers in different cities of the country managed to recover 19.659 kg drugs worth over Rs 3.2 million and arrested two accused, said an ANF Headquarters spokesman here on Tuesday. He informed that 18 grams cocaine, 10 grams ice drug and 8 grams weed were recovered from a parcel sent from the UK at a courier office in Rawalpindi. The accused was arrested on the spot during the operation. 4.6 kg ice was recovered from a parcel containing punching bags sent to Australia through a cargo office in Karachi. 15 kg hashish was recovered from an uninhabited area of Panjgur in Balochistan and in 4th operation, 23 grams heroin was recovered from an accused arrested from a passenger bus near M-1 Motorway, Islamabad. Cases have been registered against the arrested accused under the Narcotics Control Act and further investigations are under process.

Police arrest 3 kite sellers

RAWALPINDI (APP): Rawalpindi District Police on the directives of City Police Officer, Rawalpindi are making efforts to control kite flying and managed to arrest three kite sellers on recovery of over 300 kites and 5 kite flying string rolls, said a police spokesman here on Tuesday. He informed that New Town police arrested two kite sellers namely Shakirullah and Bilal for having 200 kites and 5 kite flying string rolls. Sadiqabad police also rounded up a kite seller namely Amirullah with 100 kites. Separate cases have been registered against the accused and further investigations are under process. SSP Operations Rawalpindi ordered the police teams to accelerate operations against kite sellers and flyers.

Romina highlights impact of youth in driving climate change solutions

ISLAMABAD (APP): Coordinator to the Prime Minister for Climate Change, Romina Khurshid Alam has lauded the instrumental role of youth in shaping both global and national climate action narratives.

Speaking at the National Youth Climate Summit here on Tuesday, Romina highlighted the significant contributions of young leaders who are not only raising awareness but also proposing actionable solutions to combat climate change.

"It is both inspiring and encouraging to see the commitment of our young leaders, who are raising awareness to protect our

planet from climate change impacts," said Romina.

She emphasized the crucial need to bridge the communication gap among provinces and stakeholders in addressing the urgent issue of climate change and highlighted the significant role of the media in raising awareness, stressing that all segments of society must be engaged in promoting climate change solutions.

She called for a collaborative approach, encouraging learning from best practices across different regions and sectors.

She proposed the establishment of green clubs and green societies as part of

the broader effort to foster sustainable solutions.

Romina also advocated for the inclusion of climate change education within school curricula, emphasizing the vital role academia plays in shaping future leaders who are equipped to tackle environmental challenges.

She emphasized that Pakistan stands at the forefront of the global climate crisis, being one of the most vulnerable countries to the effects of climate change, including unprecedented flooding, heatwaves, and water scarcity. These challenges, she said, require urgent and collec-

tion action.

Underlining the government's commitment, she noted, "The Ministry of Climate Change, under the leadership of the Prime Minister, is focused on prioritizing sustainable policies, frameworks, and programs that directly address these challenges."

She further added that Pakistan is working on strengthening climate adaptation frameworks, enhancing climate financing mechanisms, and promoting sustainable solutions in agriculture, energy, and urban planning.

"Our government firmly believes that climate

change is not just an environmental issue, it is a developmental challenge that affects every aspect of our society, economy, and well-being," Romina emphasized.

Romina acknowledged the remarkable contributions of youth in driving climate action, whether through grassroots initiatives, digital campaigns, or climate entrepreneurship.

"The youth have consistently demonstrated a remarkable ability to innovate, advocate, and lead. Their efforts are shaping the global and national narratives surrounding climate

action," she remarked.

The Ministry of Climate Change is committed to amplifying youth voices in policy dialogues, providing capacity-building initiatives, and collaborating with educational institutions to promote climate literacy and research, said Ms. Romina.

"This summit is a unique opportunity for young people to not only learn but also lead," she said, urging participants to network and collaborate with like-minded individuals passionate about climate action.

Romina called for collective responsibility in combating climate change,

stating, "Let us remember that combating climate change is not the responsibility of a single entity but a shared obligation that requires the combined efforts of governments, civil society, private organizations, and individuals."

She thanked the Pak Mission Society and participants for their dedication and passion, noting, "It is my privilege to join you at this pivotal event. This summit is a significant gathering that fosters collaboration and dialogue on one of the most critical issues of our time climate change."

Chairperson BISP holds live e-Katcheri session to complaints

ISLAMABAD (APP): Chairperson of the Benazir Income Support Program (BISP), Senator Rubina Khalid, conducted a live e-katcheri session on Monday via BISP's official Facebook page.

The session, lasting one hour and 10 minutes, provided a platform for 35 callers from across the country to directly share their concerns with the Chairperson.

Senator Rubina Khalid assured participants that all issues and complaints would be resolved promptly, directing her team to address them on a priority basis.

During the session, Senator Rubina Khalid emphasized that registration for the Benazir Income Support Programme is completely free of cost.

She clarified that there is no fee for the BISP survey and urged people to report anyone demanding money

under the program's name, labeling such claims as fraudulent.

She explained the program's survey guidelines, noting that households cannot be resurveyed before a two-year period.

She advised beneficiaries to avoid repeated requests for surveys or unnecessary visits to BISP centers, which can lead to inconvenience.

Senator Rubina Khalid also warned beneficiaries to trust only official messages and calls originating from the designated helpline number, 8171.

She urged participants to report fraudulent activities immediately to ensure transparency and accountability.

Addressing concerns regarding payments, the Chairperson appealed to deserving women to ensure they receive their full payments without any deduc-

tions. She encouraged them to report irregularities by contacting the BISP Helpline at 0800-26477 or by visiting the nearest BISP office.

Senator Rubina Khalid praised the integrity of individuals who voluntarily identified themselves as ineligible for the program's assistance, encouraging others to follow their example to ensure aid reaches the most deserving.

Reaffirming the program's commitment to transparency, she assured strict action against anyone involved in fraudulent practices or unauthorized deductions, emphasizing BISP's dedication to justice and accountability.

The live e-katcheri reflected BISP's efforts to engage directly with beneficiaries and address their concerns effectively, promoting transparency and trust in the program.

MCMC delegation visits Safe City Islamabad

ISLAMABAD (APP): A delegation of officers undergoing the Mid-Career Management Course at the National Institute of Public Administration (NIPA) Peshawar visited Safe City Islamabad on Tuesday as part of their study tour.

A public relation officer told APP that upon arrival, the delegation was warmly welcomed by SSP Safe City Muhammad Shoaib Khan and the Director IT, who provided them with a comprehensive tour of the facility.

He said during the visit, the delegation was briefed on the central system of Safe City Islamabad, the

Command and Control Center, the Online Women Police Station, modern high-tech cameras, and the Police Operations Center Hall. They were informed about the role and benefits of these systems.

The delegation was told that Safe City Islamabad is playing a significant role in various sectors through its modern technical projects, including the Police Operations Center, Emergency Control Center, Online Women Police Station, Dispatch Control Center, E-challan System, and the "Pukar" 15 helpline.

The delegation was also briefed on the performance

and effective utility of the Safe City cameras in the city. These advanced cameras play a key role in ensuring the safety and security of the city, preventing crimes, and protecting the lives and property of citizens.

Additionally, facial recognition cameras have also been installed at the city's entry and exit points, which play a crucial role in identifying suspicious individuals. The delegation appreciated the advanced technological system of Islamabad Police and its effectiveness. They also thanked the Safe City team for the successful visit.

FOSPAH hosts first Khuli Kacheri

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Federal Ombudsperson Secretariat for Protection Against Harassment (FOSPAH) here on Tuesday held an Open Court (Khuli Kacheri) to address women's property rights in Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) under the Enforcement of Women's Property Rights Act, 2020.

The Honorable Federal Ombudsperson, Ms. Fauzia Vigar, personally heard grievances from women, taking their complaints on the spot and providing them with guidance and practical solutions to secure their property rights. The complaints were largely

focused on women's property issues, including no entitlement in the mutation, being deprived of possession in their rightful share in inheritance, and unavailability of property records to claim their lawful right.

Naib Tehsildars, Zafar Iqbal and Qaiser Mehmood from the Revenue Office also provided their support in assisting complainants by handling documentation, printing required materials, and offering guidance to help women navigate the process of reclaiming their rightful properties. Assistant Deputy Commissioner of Revenue, Ms. Mehreen

Baloch, guided the complainants at the spot. Legal Advisor FOSPAH Malik Mujtaba Ahmed, was also present to assist the complainants on the laws of inheritance, partition, and land revenue. Volunteers from the Volunteer Leading Governance (VLG) and Teamup Pakistan were at the venue and assisted the people in filing the complaints.

Ms. Vigar emphasized the Government of Pakistan's unwavering commitment to safeguarding women's property rights, a cornerstone of gender equality and economic empowerment.

Encroachments cleared

ISLAMABAD (APP): Islamabad Traffic Police (ITP) on Tuesday launched a successful operation across various areas of the federal capital to remove illegal encroachments that were severely impacting the flow of traffic.

An ITP spokesperson told APP that the operation targeted key locations, including Bhara Kahu, Mandi Mor, Khanna Pul, and Lehrtar Road.

During the operation, police teams cleared illegal carts and other items obstructing the roadways, which had been causing significant traffic congestion.

He said under the special directions of Inspector General of Police (IGP) Islamabad Syed Ali Nasir Rizvi, the operation aimed to restore smooth traffic flow and ensure safe travel for commuters.

Chief Traffic Officer

Islamabad Muhammad Sarfraz Virk stressed the importance of continuing these efforts to tackle encroachments throughout the city.

"The removal of illegal encroachments is vital to enhance the traffic situation in Islamabad. These operations will continue in areas where traffic flow is still being hindered by unauthorized structures," said CTO Virk.



ISLAMABAD: Federal Secretary Commerce Jawad Paul Khawaja handing over a souvenir to EU Special Representative for Human Rights Ambassador Olaf Skoog.

Minister congratulates newly elected office bearers

ISLAMABAD (APP): Federal Minister for Information, Broadcasting, National Heritage and Culture Attaullah Tarar on Tuesday congratulated the newly elected office-bearers of the Islamabad High Court Journalists Association.

The minister for information congratulated Hussain Ahmed Chaudhry and Bilal Sheikh on their election as President and, Senior Vice President of the association respectively.

He also congratulated Rauf Bazmi, and Raja Shazad Ali on their election as Vice President, General Secretary respectively.

The minister for information also congratulated the other newly elected office bearers of the IHC Journalists Association.

"The government fully believes in freedom of expression," the minister said adding journalists played a key role in providing accurate information to the public.

Terming the role of court reporters in journalism as very important, Attaullah Tarar said like lawyers, journalists also have to be aware of the law. He expressed hope the newly elected office bearers will discharge their responsibilities in a good manner and raise the standard of journalism.

7 accused held for gambling on cockfight

RAWALPINDI (APP): The Rawat Police on Tuesday held seven accused red handed for gambling on a cockfight with stake money. The arrested accused were identified as Hamid, Shahid, Hasnain, Owais, Wasim, Ishtiaq and Daim, a Rawalpindi Police spokesman said.

Besides the bet amount Rs 40,000 and six mobile phones, three roosters were also seized by the police.

Meanwhile, the Wah Sadder Police arrested accused Kashif with 900 grams charas while the New Town Police recovered 550 grams charas from accused Hassan. The Naseerabad Police nabbed accused Abdul Hadi with 540 grams charas and Izhar with 10 litres of liquor.

The Kahuta Police recovered 10 litres of liquor from accused Rafiq and the Airport Police captured accused Athar Pervaz with six bottles of liquor.

Acting Senate Chairman meets NADRA Chief

ISLAMABAD (APP): Acting Senate Chairman Syeddaal Khan on Tuesday met with NADRA Chairman Lieutenant General Muhammad Munir Afsar to discuss the authority's services and its performance in detail.

Syeddaal Khan commended NADRA for its public services, particularly highlighting the challenges faced by residents of remote areas in Balochistan in obtaining national identity cards.

He emphasized that improving access to ID

cards in the province should be NADRA's top priority.

The Acting Chairman urged NADRA to streamline and expedite the ID card process in Balochistan, stressing that the agency's actions should reflect its commitment to serving the people of the province.

He called for a focused effort to eliminate the obstacles that residents face in acquiring identity cards in Balochistan's far-flung areas.

In response, the

NADRA Chairman briefed Syeddaal Khan on the ongoing projects in Balochistan and shared the steps that NADRA has taken to improve the situation.

Syeddaal Khan expressed confidence in NADRA's efforts and emphasized the importance of utilizing modern technology to ensure a more transparent and efficient process for obtaining ID cards.

He also suggested increasing the number of NADRA offices in Balochistan to further facilitate the public.

IGP holds khuli katchery, resolves public grievances

ISLAMABAD (APP): Inspector General of Police (IGP) Syed Ali Nasir Rizvi conducted a Khuli Katchery (open court) at the Central Police Office on Tuesday.

A public relation officer told APP that during the khuli katchery, he listened to the issues of citizens and police officers and issued directives to senior police officers on the spot for timely resolution of their concerns.

IGP Rizvi said that resolving citizens' issues on merit is our top priority.

Negligence and carelessness in duties will not be tolerated.

Citizens facing any issue related to the police can come to the Khuli Katchery. My office is always open for my citizens, the IGP said.

IG Rizvi further directed the officers to resolve the citizen grievances on merit within the stipulated time frame and report back to the Central Police Office.

He directed all Sub-Divisional Police Officers (SDPOs) and Station House

Officers (SHOs) to adhere to the designated office hours and prioritize resolving citizens' issues.

On this occasion, the IGP Rizvi said that the Islamabad Police are taking various measures for the facilitation of citizens. The daily holding of Khuli Katchery helps in resolving issues on a priority basis, he added.

Moreover, all zonal officers and SHOs are directed to meet citizens during the designated office hours and resolve their issues promptly and on merit.

ICT Police crack blind murder case; suspect held

ISLAMABAD (APP): Superintendent of Police (SP) Rural Zone Kazim Naqvi on Tuesday announced the swift resolution of a blind murder case, with the arrest of the main suspect and recovery of crucial evidence.

The case involved the brutal killing of a young man, whose mutilated body was discovered in a sack near a tunnel in the jurisdiction of Nilore Police Station.

Addressing a press conference at the Rescue 15 Field Office, SP Kazim Naqvi revealed details of the investigation. Muhammad Majeed, a resident of Pahont, had reported his son, Faisar Majeed, missing. He informed the police that his son had not returned home, his phone was switched off, and he suspected abduction.

Following the report, FIR No. 38 was registered at Nilore Police Station, and a comprehensive inves-

tigation was launched. On January 27, 2025, police discovered a sack containing a mutilated body near Assembly Dam Road, close to a tunnel. The body was later identified as Faisar Majeed.

A public relation officer told APP that taking immediate notice of the incident, Deputy Inspector General (DIG) Syed Ali Raza directed the police to use all available resources to apprehend the culprits.

Under the leadership of SP Rural Zone Kazim Naqvi, teams from the Nilore Police Station and the Homicide Unit conducted an in-depth investigation, employing advanced forensic and technical methods. Their efforts led to the arrest of Tanveer Hussain, and the motorcycle used in the crime was recovered.

SP Naqvi disclosed that the murder stemmed from financial disputes. The vic-

tim was a landlord, while the suspect was his tenant. Both were involved in business activities in the same marketplace, which escalated their disagreements, ultimately leading to the crime.

During the press conference, SP Naqvi commended the police teams for their swift and effective action, emphasizing Islamabad Police's commitment to solving even the most challenging cases.

"The swift arrest of the suspect underscores our dedication to ensuring justice and maintaining public safety," he stated.

He added that further investigations are underway to identify and apprehend additional accomplices in the case.

"Islamabad Police will continue to take strict action against all forms of crime and ensure that those responsible are brought to justice," SP Naqvi assured.

Funding cuts halt operations

KABUL (Amu TV): The American University of Afghanistan's (AUAF) Doha campus has ceased operations following a suspension of funding, two sources familiar with the matter confirmed on Tuesday. According to sources, all employees of the university have been issued suspension of work orders, and classes have been paused indefinitely. Classes, which were in session until recently, have now been suspended until further notice, sources said.

One dead in traffic accident

JAWZJAN (Amu TV): A traffic accident along the Jawzjan-Balkh highway left one person dead and eight others injured, according to Abdul Sattar Halimi, a spokesperson for the Taliban's police department in Jawzjan province of Afghanistan. The crash occurred in Khanaqah district, Halimi said, adding that the injured were transported to the provincial hospital, where their conditions were reported to be stable.

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

\$1.8m investment sparks factory growth

MAIDAN (TOLONews): Mohammad Khan Zawak, the head of Industry and Commerce in Maidan Wardak province, has announced the operation of eight production factories with an investment of approximately \$1.8 million in this province. These factories are engaged in the production of macaroni, biscuits, oil, and animal feed, creating job opportunities for hundreds of people, he said. The head of Industry and Commerce in Maidan Wardak said, "We hope that the initial work on the industrial park will begin next year and that land will be distributed to industrialists." Some industrialists in Maidan Wardak have called on officials to cooperate in establishing the industrial park and providing the necessary electricity. "If this park is not inaugurated and distributed in Maidan Wardak, we will be forced to go to Kabul or Herat to acquire land," said Abdul Halim Sarwari, one of the industrialists. "I am active in the production of animal feed and cottonseed, from which we produce soap. However, in residential areas, we do not have suitable locations for soap production, and we face many difficulties in carrying out this work," said Muzamel Naseri, another industrialist. Some workers at these factories have called on other investors to invest in the province to create more job opportunities. "We are happy that job opportunities have been provided for us here, and we ask other industrialists to establish similar factories," said Reza Mohammad, one of the workers. "For the youth who migrate illegally to other countries and lose their lives, job opportunities should be provided within the country," said Feroz, another worker. According to local officials, construction of the industrial park is underway on more than 1,000 acres of land in this province, and it is expected to be completed and handed over to industrialists in the next solar year.

Ministry dismiss UN concerns on women rights

KABUL (Amu TV): The Taliban's Ministry for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice rejected a new quarterly report by the UN about the human rights situation in Afghanistan, calling it "baseless" and rooted in "Western perspectives." The report highlighted serious concerns about the state of women's rights and freedom of expression in the country. In a statement, the Taliban's PVPV ministry claimed that women's rights in Afghanistan are protected "in accordance with Islamic principles and Afghan values." The Taliban also urged UNAMA to respect "the religious and cultural values of Afghan society" when drafting its reports. UNAMA's report, released on Monday, reviewed human rights conditions in Afghanistan between October and December 2024. It documented the far-reaching effects of the Taliban's restrictive policies, which have deprived nearly 40,000 women of their roles in the healthcare sector. Additionally, 36,000 midwives and 3,000 female students enrolled in medical training have been forced to abandon their education due to the closure of female-only medical institutions. The report also emphasized the severe curbs on free expression and media activities. Female journalists, in particular, face significant barriers, including restricted access to information and fieldwork. UNAMA noted that female reporters are frequently barred from attending Taliban press briefings or relegated to segregated seating areas when allowed to attend. One of the most contentious Taliban policies has been the prohibition of education for women and girls. This ban, enacted since the Taliban's return to power in 2021, has drawn widespread criticism both domestically and internationally. Afghan citizens and leaders of Islamic nations have condemned the policy as contrary to Islamic teachings and Afghan cultural values. In a recent meeting of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation in Islamabad, Mohammad bin Abdul Karim Al-Issa, Secretary-General of the Muslim World League, indirectly criticized the Taliban's restrictions, stating: "Declaring what is permissible to be forbidden is among the gravest sins."

Afghan, Turkmen and Turkish officials meet over key TAP-500 power project



KABUL (Ariana News): In line with the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan's (IEA) aim to implement major projects that have been on the cards for years, the ministry of foreign affairs this week hosted a meeting between Afghan officials, representatives of Da Afghanistan Breshna Sherkat (DABS), Turkmenistan and Turkey's Çalik Holding Group. The meeting aimed to initiate the implementation of the TAP-500 electricity transmission project. Discussions focused on developing a joint roadmap and action plan for the project. The meeting was attended by an Afghan delegation including officials from the Ministry of Water and Energy and the national electricity company, DABS; officials from Turkmenistan's Ministry of Energy and representatives from Çalik Holding Group. The TAP-500 project is designed to transmit high-voltage electricity from Turkmenistan to Afghanistan's provinces of Herat, Farah, Helmand, and Kandahar. If all domestic needs are met, then the electricity will be further exported to Pakistan, generating annual transit revenue for Afghanistan. Facilitate the implementation of the project, the Afghan side announced the establishment of a joint secretariat to coordinate efforts among various ministries and expedite the project's execution. The Representatives from Turkmenistan's Ministry of Energy and Turkey's Çalik Holding Group expressed satisfaction with the security and with the environment of cooperation on the part of Afghan officials. All sides agreed to form technical committees and hold regular meetings to finalize agreements and implementation plans for the TAP-500 project. Based on its economic-centric policy, Afghanistan reaffirmed its commitment to regional connectivity by highlighting progress on the CASA-1000 electricity transmission and TAPI gas pipeline projects. After years of delays, the TAP-500 project is now set to commence, marking a significant step forward for Afghanistan's energy sector and regional integration.

Reactions on suspension of refugee transfers



KABUL (TOLONews): The US Vice President JD Vance, in an interview with an American media outlet, defended Donald Trump's executive order suspending the Afghan refugee transfer program. Vance stressed that the security vetting of some refugee cases before entering the US were not conducted properly. He stated: "I don't agree that all these immigrants or all these refugees have been properly vetted. In fact, we know that there are cases of people who allegedly were properly vetted and then were literally planning terrorist attacks on our country." Meanwhile, Democrat US Senator Amy Klobuchar reacting to Trump's order suspending the Afghan refugee transfer program, stated that the US cannot abandon its "Afghan allies." The senator wrote on X that the order cancels flights for those who fought alongside US forces in Afghanistan. Amy Klobuchar: "The Trump administration is canceling flights for Afghans who fought alongside Americans in uniform." Meanwhile, the British government has announced that it does not intend to resettle hundreds of Afghan refugees stranded in Pakistan after Trump's suspension of evacuation flights to the US. Nazir Nazari, a migrant rights activist, told TOLONews: "Trump needs to consider the situation of refugees waiting for transfer in neighboring countries and take their problems into account." Meanwhile, several Afghan asylum seekers have urged the Trump administration to reconsider the suspension of the refugee transfer program to the US. Masihullah, an Afghan refugee in Pakistan, said: "Afghans living in Islamabad are facing mental, psychological, economic, and security challenges. Our request to the US government is to address the problems of Afghan refugees." This comes as Donald Trump, after returning to the White House for a second term, signed orders suspending most US foreign aid programs, a move that halted the relocation and resettlement of over 40,000 Afghan citizens to the US.

refugees stranded in Pakistan after Trump's suspension of evacuation flights to the US. Nazir Nazari, a migrant rights activist, told TOLONews: "Trump needs to consider the situation of refugees waiting for transfer in neighboring countries and take their problems into account." Meanwhile, several Afghan asylum seekers have urged the Trump administration to reconsider the suspension of the refugee transfer program to the US. Masihullah, an Afghan refugee in Pakistan, said: "Afghans living in Islamabad are facing mental, psychological, economic, and security challenges. Our request to the US government is to address the problems of Afghan refugees." This comes as Donald Trump, after returning to the White House for a second term, signed orders suspending most US foreign aid programs, a move that halted the relocation and resettlement of over 40,000 Afghan citizens to the US.

20,000 addicts treated in 2 years: Herat Counter-Narcotics Directorate

HERAT (TOLONews): The Herat Counter-Narcotics Directorate says that in the past two years, nearly 20,000 addicts have been treated in this province. These addicts, who come from various provinces of the country, have returned to normal life after completing their treatment period at the specialized addiction treatment hospital in Herat. Meanwhile, some of the recovered individuals say they will never turn to drugs again. Mohammad Asif, a 50-year-old resident of Badakhshan, is undergoing treatment at the specialized addiction treatment hospital in Herat. He became addicted to drugs in an Iranian prison. Mohammad Asif, who was formerly a pilot for the Afghan Air Force and spent 18 years in an Iranian prison, told TOLONews: "During Doctor Najibullah's era, I trained as a pilot in Tajikistan and had 25 international flights in Afghanistan. But a tragedy led me to the Islamic Republic, where I spent a long time in Iranian prisons. The prison caused me to become addicted to drugs." Many people at the specialized addiction treatment hospital in Herat have had their lives darkened by drugs, like Mohammad Asif. They had been distanced from their families and society due to addiction. "I am a sports champion in Taekwondo, having won medals for Afghanistan from Russia, Pakistan, Bosnia, and Iran. I am a medalist for Afghanistan, bringing medals from four foreign countries," Abdul Karim, an addict undergoing treatment, told TOLONews. "There are many people here who are educated and literate, but drugs have done something that threw them into corners. Drugs distanced them from their families, relatives, society, and God," said Nematullah, another addict under treatment. Hayatullah Rouhani, the director of the Herat Counter-Narcotics Police, said: "Approximately 20,000 addicts have been treated in Herat, who were previously hospitalized in various camps and clinics. It's been about 16 months since we established a state-run hospital here, where they are being treated." According to local officials in Herat, most of the addicts treated in Herat became addicted in Iran. After returning to the country, they were gathered by the Herat Counter-Narcotics Directorate and treated in this hospital.

Taliban administer public floggings in 3 provinces

KABUL (Amu TV): Taliban carried out public floggings of three men in the provinces of Kunduz, Paktika, and Uruzgan, accusing them of "sodomy, theft, and moral corruption." The incidents are part of the Taliban's ongoing use of corporal punishment in public settings, which has drawn sharp international condemnation. In separate statements, the Taliban's Supreme Court said each individual received 39 lashes and was also sentenced to prison terms ranging from six months to six years. The punishments were carried out following the approval of Taliban courts, according to the statements. The individuals were flogged in Aliabad district in Kunduz, Khushamand district in Paktika, and Chenartu district in Uruzgan. Including these latest cases, the Taliban have flogged 31 people, including six women, in various provinces over the past month. Charges have ranged from theft and adultery to "moral corruption." The practice of public corporal punishment has provoked outrage from global human rights organizations, including the United Nations, which has called for an immediate end to such measures. Amnesty International has also expressed concern over the lack of fair trial standards and the inability of detainees to access proper legal representation under Taliban rule.

Agreements signed for 5 lead and zinc mines



KABUL (BNA): The utilization of five lead and zinc mining blocks in Yakawlang, Bamiyan, is set to commence soon. Mullah Hidayatullah Badri, the Acting Minister of Mines and Petroleum, has signed contracts for the development of these mining blocks with Afghan German, Al-Haramain, Gamma Eagle, Kandahar Khogyani, and Musa Sultan companies. The total investment for the project amounts to 1.797 billion Afghanis. According to a statement from the Ministry of Mines and Petroleum, Mullah Hidayatullah Badri emphasized that the contracts are for five years, conditional on adherence to mining regulations, procedures, and commitments. The Islamic Emirate holds a 51% share in this project. Additionally, in exchange for extraction rights, the contracted companies will implement developmental projects, including the construction of roads, water and electricity dams, the second and fourth sections of the Khaf-Herat railway, and a teaching hospital.

Dr. Naeem begins role as Deputy FM

KABUL(BNA): Dr. Mohammad Naeem has officially assumed the position of Deputy Foreign Minister for Administrative Affairs of Afghanistan. Appointed by the decree of His Excellency Amir-ul-Mu'mineen, may Allah protect him, Dr. Naeem was introduced to the directors, deputies, and staff of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs by Mawlawi Amir Khan Muttaqi, Acting Minister of Foreign Affairs. According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, prior to the Islamic Emirate's victory, Dr. Naeem served as a member of the Cultural Commission and the Political Office of the Islamic Emirate in Qatar. After the victory, he held the position of Acting Ambassador of Afghanistan in Qatar.

KABUL (Amu TV): Facing intensified international scrutiny and recent warnings from senior US officials, Taliban convened a meeting on Tuesday in Kabul titled "National Unity and Stability of the Islamic System." The gathering comes as Taliban continues to face widespread criticism over its human rights record and governance. Noorullah Noori, the Taliban's Minister for Borders, Tribes, and Ethnic Affairs, addressed the event, stating, "The people of Afghanistan have made countless sacrifices for the establishment of the current system." He emphasized the importance of public support for the Taliban government. Aminullah Obaid, the Taliban governor of Kabul, claimed that the Taliban's governance represents a "pure Islamic system unparalleled in the world." He added that Taliban officials are addressing public grievances and remain accessible to citizens, urging the population to support their rule. Mohammad Ali Jan Ahmad, the Taliban's Deputy Minister for Tribal Affairs, echoed these sentiments, calling on citizens to cooperate with the government to safeguard the "Islamic system." The meeting took place against a backdrop of growing global pressure on the Taliban. Last week, Karim Khan, the prosecutor for the International Criminal Court (ICC), requested arrest warrants for senior Taliban leaders, including Supreme Leader Hibatullah Akhundzada and Chief Justice Abdul Hakim Haqqani, accusing them of crimes against humanity, including gender-based persecution. Khan emphasized the involvement of specialized teams and international experts in advancing the investigation. Meanwhile, US

Taliban hold gathering amid mounting global pressure

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Secretary of State Marco Rubio issued a stark warning, referencing reports that the Taliban may have taken American citizens hostage. In a post on the social media platform X, Rubio stated, "If these reports are confirmed, we must immediately announce a far larger reward for the Taliban leadership—greater than what was offered for Osama bin Laden." Rubio's comments and the ICC's actions have sparked widespread debate within Afghan political circles. Rahmatullah Nabil, the former head of Afghanistan's National Directorate of Security, called Rubio's warning "serious," describing it as indicative of mounting international pressure on the Taliban. As the Taliban contend with increasing global condemnation, questions persist over their ability to navigate the challenges of international isolation while maintaining domestic control.

Taliban crack down on shops in Panjshir

PANJSHIR (Amu TV): Local sources in Panjshir Province report that Taliban have been sealing shops that remain open during prayer times, particularly in the Anaba market. Shopkeepers who fail to close their businesses or join communal prayers are also reportedly being detained, sources reported. According to these sources, the Taliban's morality police, known as PVPV enforcers, conduct inspections during the afternoon and evening prayers. Shops found open are sealed, and their owners are sometimes imprisoned. "The Taliban's morality police seal the shops of those who fail to close during afternoon and evening prayers, and they detain the shopkeepers who don't join the prayers," a source said. On Tuesday, the Taliban reportedly sealed a barber shop in the Anaba market for trimming a customer's beard. The Taliban's strict enforcement of their morality law requires men to maintain beards at least five-length and mandates attendance at all five daily prayers in congregation. Senior Taliban officials, including their supreme leader, have emphasized full adherence to these laws. Critics, including human rights advocates and Afghan citizens, argue that these measures severely restrict personal freedoms and subject individuals to harassment, imprisonment, and humiliation by Taliban enforcers. "This law not only infringes on individual liberties but also creates an atmosphere of fear and repression," said a human rights activist. The Taliban's policies, which have drawn widespread criticism domestically and internationally, continue to tighten restrictions on public life, leaving little room for dissent or personal choice.

Bilawal urges businessmen to collaborate with Sindh govt

F.P. Report

KARACHI: Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari hailed the Public-Private Partnership (PPP) model as a benchmark for driving economic growth and fostering nationwide prosperity. He urged the business community to collaborate with the Sindh government in forging sustainable partnerships. Highlighting the potential for transformative impact, he called on stakeholders to propose "win-win projects" aimed at advancing green energy, upgrading infrastructure, and enhancing essential utility services.

According to a press release issued by the Media Cell Bilawal House, Chairman PPP, while addressing a luncheon held in honor of the business community, appreciated their role in the development of Karachi and the country. He acknowledged the challenges faced by the business community and noted the significant improvements in Karachi's situation compared to pre-2008 conditions. He emphasized that the elimination of extortion, threats, and forced participation in political activities has allowed businesses to operate peacefully, thanks in part to the efforts of the PPP and Sindh Chief Minister Murad Ali Shah.

Bilawal acknowledged the existing challenges and reiterated his commitment to resolving them. He instructed the Chief Minister of Sindh to establish a special cell combining the Anti-Corruption Department and police to address the grievances of Karachi's business community. He urged businesspersons to report specific complaints and name officials involved, instead of making general allegations.

Chairman PPP highlighted his desire for the city's development and prosperity, emphasizing his commitment to supporting businesses. Addressing the traders, he stated, "I have never demanded extortion from you nor asked for donations. Tell me today if you have any complaints against me. Have I ever caused you any trouble? So why would I want

anyone else to trouble you in my name or in the name of my government?"

Highlighting his interaction with the trader community, Chairman said that working together can lead to better outcomes. He mentioned that providing employment opportunities to his voters is a part of his manifesto. He emphasized that for the public to have access to job opportunities, it is essential for the country's economy to thrive and for the trader community's businesses to flourish.

While discussing the Public-Private Partnership introduced by the Sindh government, Chairman said that Sindh is the only province where numerous projects under this model are not only running successfully but have also gained international recognition. "I want us to accelerate and further advance this Public-Private Partnership," he added. Referring to projects like the Jhirk-Mullah Katiar Bridge, healthcare initiatives, and Thar Coal, he said that these are not only prime examples of good governance but are also operating profitably and now generating revenue. "I want to explore more win-win opportunities of this nature, where the business community and the Sindh government work together to serve this province," he added.

Bilawal said that being the most populous city in the country, Karachi holds immense potential. He emphasized that all utility service-related issues faced by Karachi can be resolved under public-private partnerships. Highlighting the energy sector, he said that no other province has as much potential as Sindh. Criticizing the determination of electricity tariffs in Islamabad without consulting the business community or the provincial government, he called it a significant issue, adding, "It is you and I who bear the consequences of such policies."

Speaking about investment opportunities in the province, Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari said that Sindh has as much coal as Saudi Arabia has oil. He highlighted that Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto

envisioned the Thar Coal Project in the 1990s. "Imagine how beneficial it could have been for the country and the nation if Shaheed Bibi's hands hadn't been tied," he remarked. He pointed out that after the dismissal of Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto's government, everyone working on the Thar Coal Project, including experts and investors, were subjected to retaliatory actions by the Accountability Bureau.

He urged the need for increased private investment in Sindh's solar and wind energy sectors. Criticizing the federal government, he said, "They shamelessly claim that load-shedding has been eliminated, yet many areas in the country still suffer from power outages lasting up to 18 hours. We have lost confidence that we will ever get reliable electricity from the federal government."

Chairman PPP urged that solar and wind power parks can be established in every division of Sindh. He said that in the event of the federal government privatizing electricity distribution companies (DISCOs), the Sindh government should take over under a public-private partnership, adding that work has already begun on three projects, but more such projects will be included in the next financial year.

Terming water as a critical issue, Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari said that not only Pakistan but the entire world faces the threat of drought and famine due to global warming. He said that providing water to Karachi, given the rapidly growing population, is nothing short of a challenge. He emphasized that, like gas, the province has long been denied its rightful share of water. Pointing out the situation, he said that to meet Karachi's water needs, it was agreed in the 1991 Water Accord that additional water would be allocated to fulfill the city's requirements. However, to this day, not only has the additional water not been provided, but even the complete allocated share has not been delivered.



ISLAMABAD: Police officials scuffle with journalists during a protest organized by PFUJ against amendments in PECA Act.

PNS Yamama visits Jeddah, joins bilateral exercise

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The newly commissioned Pakistan Navy Ship YAMAMA visited Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, during its maiden voyage from Romania to Pakistan and participated in a Passage Exercise (PASSEX) with the Royal Saudi Naval Forces (RSNF).

Upon arrival at Jeddah port, the ship was warmly welcomed by senior officials of RSNF and representatives from Pakistan Embassy. During its stay, the ship's crew engaged in professional activities, including cross-ship visits, table-top discussions on maritime issues, and meetings with the RSNF leadership.

Following the port visit, PNS YAMAMA conducted a PASSEX with HMS Makkah. The exercise was designed to strengthen naval cooperation and enhance interoperability between the two navies. Both forces reaffirmed their commitment to ensuring maritime security and promoting regional stability. The visit of PNS YAMAMA to Saudi Arabia and its participation in the bilateral exercise further reinforced the strong brotherly relations and defence collaboration between Pakistan and Saudi Arabia.

PNS YAMAMA is the fourth Offshore Patrol Vessel (OPV) built for Pakistan Navy by DAMEN Shipyards, Galati, Romania. These versatile and state-of-the-art platforms are equipped with advanced technologies and designed to operate in contested maritime environments. They aim to maintain peace in the prevailing challenging times and project deterrence across all domains of warfare.

Qatar reiterates support for two-state solution

DOHA (AFP): Qatar reaffirmed its support for a two-state solution on Tuesday after US President Donald Trump repeated his call to move Palestinians from Gaza to Egypt or Jordan.

Foreign ministry spokesman Majed Al-Ansari did not reveal details of conversations with US officials, but said Qatar often didn't see "eye to eye" with its allies. "Our position has always been clear to the necessity of the Palestinian people receiving their rights, and that the two-state solution is the only path forward," Ansari told a regular media briefing when asked about Trump's comments.

"We don't see eye to eye on a lot of things with all our allies, not only the United States, but we work very closely with them to make sure that we formulate policy together," he added. Qatar, the US and Egypt jointly mediated the Gaza ceasefire and hostage-release deal that went into effect a little over a week ago, halting more than 15 months of fighting sparked by Hamas's October 7, 2023 attack on Israel.

On Monday, Trump repeated his wish to move Gazans to another country, after earlier saying he wanted to "clean out" the devastated Palestinian territory. The US president told reporters he would "like to get them living in an area where they can live without disruption and revolution and violence so much." Ansari said Qatar, which hosts the region's biggest US military base, was "engaging fully with the Trump administration and with envoy (Steve) Witkoff," the president's special representative for the Middle East.

Israel defies UN and vows to cut ties with UNRWA

UNITED NATIONS (AFP): Israel will cease all contact with the UN's Palestinian relief agency UNRWA and any other body acting on its behalf, its UN envoy said Tuesday, after repeatedly accusing the organization of undermining its security.

UNRWA's offices and staff in Israel play a major role in the provision of health care and education to Palestinians, but Israeli officials have long clashed with the agency. UNRWA claims to have brought in 60 percent of the food to have reached Gaza since the start of the war that followed the October 7, 2023 attacks on Israel.

"The legislation forbids UNRWA from operating within the sovereign territory of the State of Israel, and forbids any contact between Israeli officials and UNRWA," said the envoy, Danny Danon. He was speaking ahead of a UN Security Council meeting on Israel's passage of legislation ending the organization's legal footing in Israel within 48 hours.

"Israel will terminate all collaboration, communication and contact with UNRWA or anyone acting on its behalf," he said. Israel claims that a dozen UNRWA employees were involved in the deadly October 7, 2023 assault, and insists that other organizations can pick up the slack to provide essential services, aid and reconstruction — something the UN disputes. A series of probes, including one led by France's former foreign minister Catherine Colonna, found some "neutrality related issues" at UNRWA — but stressed Israel had not provided evidence for its chief allegations.

The agency's chief Philippe Lazzarini said UNRWA's "capacity to directly provide primary health care for millions of Palestinians, and to resume education for hundreds of thousands of children, far exceeds that of any other entity." He called Israel's actions against UNRWA a "relent-

less assault" that is "harming the lives and future of Palestinians across the occupied Palestinian territory."

"It is eroding their trust in the international community, jeopardizing any prospect for peace and security," he said. But the United States threw its weight behind the move of its closest Middle East ally, accusing Lazzarini of overstating the impact of the decision. "The United States supports the implementation of this decision," said Dorothy Shea, a United States representative to the UN.

"UNRWA exaggerating the effects of the laws and suggesting that they will force (out) the entire humanitarian response is irresponsible and dangerous," she said. "What is needed is a nuanced discussion about how we can ensure that there's no interruption in the delivery of humanitarian aid and essential services. UNRWA is not and never has been the only option." Hamas's October 7 attack on Israel resulted in the deaths of 1,210 people, mostly civilians, according to an AFP tally based on official Israeli figures.

During the attack, militants took into Gaza 251 hostages. Eighty-seven remain in the territory, including dozens Israel says are dead. Israel's retaliatory offensive has killed at least 47,317 people in Gaza, the majority civilians, according to figures from the Hamas-run territory's health ministry that the UN considers reliable. A ceasefire and hostage release deal between Israel and Hamas is now in place, intended to bring an end to the more than 15 months of war. The fighting provoked a deep humanitarian crisis, destroying hospitals and sparking outbreaks of infectious diseases while hundreds of thousands of Gazans faced starvation conditions and have depended on food aid. "We are determined, however, to stay and deliver until it is no longer possible to do so," said Lazzarini.

Russia, Ukraine forces face off in intense fighting

MOSCOW, KYIV: Ukrainian and Russian forces have reported fierce fighting across the front lines in eastern Ukraine. The Ukrainian military said on Tuesday that its forces were repelling Russian attacks in the Donetsk region while Moscow announced that it had taken control of a settlement in Kharkiv, extending the slow but steady progress it has been making on the front lines over the past year.

Kyiv reported that its forces were engaged in heavy fighting in the embattled towns of Chasiv Yar and Toretsk in Donetsk. "With the support of artillery, the enemy continues to storm our positions at the Kratomorsk and Toretsk sectors," the Khortytysa troop group, tasked with holding ground in key areas of the industrial region, said in a statement on social media.

"Heavy fighting continues in the urban areas of Chasiv Yar and Toretsk," the group added. Ukrainian military bloggers with links to the Ministry of Defence said Russian forces are advancing on the flanks of Chasiv Yar, a strategic hilltop town that was home to 12,000 people before the war. Toretsk is one of a string of mining towns in the Donetsk region, and Russian forces have been fighting for months to capture it.

The Ministry of Defence in Moscow said Russian troops have "liberated" the settlement of Dvorichna in Kharkiv. The village, which is located across the strategic Oskil River and had a pre-war population of more than 3,000, was seized by Russian forces at the start of their full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 before

being retaken by Kyiv months later in a swift counteroffensive.

But Ukraine's army has been pushed back over the past year, outgunned and out-manned by Russia's forces across the 1,000km (600-mile) front lines.

Meanwhile, both sides continue to launch drones and missiles across their shared border. Russian air attacks wounded eight people, set a private business on fire and damaged residential buildings around Ukraine, local officials said on Tuesday. Attacks were reported in Kharkiv and in the Black Sea port of Odesa, among other places. Ukraine's air force said it shot down 65 drones while 28 drones did not reach their targets, two returned towards Russia and Belarus, and one remained in Ukrainian airspace. — Aljazeera

PHC grants protective bails to two PTI's MNAs including Asad Qaiser

Humayun Khan

PESHWAR: A divisional bench comprising of Chief Justice Peshawar High Court (PHC) Justice Ishtiaq Ibrahim and Justice Ijaz Anwar has issued notices to the federal government, seeking a response regarding the disappearance of four brothers from Hayatabad, Peshawar one year ago, on Tuesday.

The petition filed by Gulalai Alkuzai while the counsel Mozzam Butt advocate argued that the four brothers, Muhammad Nasir, Usman Khan, Muhammad Zahir and Abdul Waris, were taken away by unidentified individuals in Law Enforcement Agency's uniform about a year ago. Despite filing a petition earlier, the brothers remain missing.

The petitioners are residents of Hayatabad, Peshawar, and are engaged in business, having invested billions of rupees in Pakistan. The lawyer claimed that the brothers' disappearance is a violation of their fundamental rights, as guaranteed by the Constitution.

The petitioner was pressured to invest Rs. 2 billion in Pakistan for the release of her brothers, which is a violation of Article 18 and Article 11 of the Constitution. The Constitution ensures the freedom to do business, and no pressure can be exerted on individuals in this regard.

The petitioners' lawyer argued that the disappearance of the four brothers has caused immense mental distress to their wives, children, and family members. Their property is also not secure, which is a grave injustice. The state has failed to provide protection to the petitioner under Article 4 of the Constitution. PHC issued notices to the federal government and other relevant authorities, seeking a response after initial arguments.

Court seeks response against enforced disappearance of four

Serbia's PM resigns as protests raise political pressure

BELGRADE: Serbian Prime Minister Milos Vucovic has announced his resignation amid large protests against corruption and President Aleksandar Vucic.

Vucovic said at a news conference on Tuesday that he had decided to step down to reduce tensions. Student-led demonstrations have been taking place since the deadly collapse of a train station canopy in the northern city of Novi Sad in November. The prime minister's announcement came as protesters ended a 24-hour blockade at a major intersection in the capital, Belgrade. The previous evening, with political pressure rising, Vucic hinted that he was ready to drop his hardline approach to the demonstrations and negotiate.

"To avoid further complicating things, so we do not further raise tensions in society, I made this decision," Vucovic said on Tuesday. Vucovic, who was mayor of Novi Sad in 2022 when the reconstruction of the station was launched by a Chinese firm, added that the immediate cause for his resignation was an attack on a female student in Novi Sad early on Tuesday by assailants allegedly from Vucic's ruling Serbian Progressive Party.

"Whenever it seems there is hope to return to social dialogue, to talk, ... it's like an invisible hand creates a new incident, and tensions mount

again." He also said the present mayor of Novi Sad, Serbia's second largest city, will also resign. The 50-year-old became prime minister in April after the Serbian Progressive Party won the most votes in elections marred by tensions.

Protesters on Tuesday morning packed up and cleared the Autokomanda junction, where several major roads and motorways come together in Belgrade, after camping out overnight. The blockade followed a call for a general strike on Friday that saw lawyers stop work and small businesses and schools close. The focus of the protests has expanded since November from the canopy collapse to accusations that it was the result of rampant corruption, to calls for an end to Vucic's reign, which has run for more than a decade, and early elections.

Student organisers continued to demand more action, including greater transparency surrounding the investigation into the collapse and the release of all documents linked to the renovation of the train station. More than a dozen people have been charged over the accident, including former Transport Minister Goran Vesic, who resigned days after it occurred. The government has released some documents on the roof collapse, but experts from the Faculty of Civil Engineering in

Belgrade said they are incomplete.

Other key demands include dropping charges against protesters arrested at rallies, an end to attacks on demonstrators and increased government spending on education. During the blockade, the largely student protesters were offered protection by farmers and bikers. The demonstrators have faced frequent violence as the rallies have persisted, and at least two have been hit by cars.

Vucic addressed the nation on Monday evening, defending his government's response to the accident in Novi Sad and promising to open dialogue with the protesters. He had previously dismissed them as being controlled by "Western foreign agents". However, the focus now turns to the possibility of snap elections.

Vucovic's resignation must now be confirmed by Serbia's parliament, which has 30 days to choose a new government or call snap elections. Pro-government media said Vucic will attend a cabinet session on Tuesday evening to decide whether a new prime minister-designate will be appointed or early elections called. Opposition parties said they would insist on a transitional government that would create conditions for free and fair elections after Vucic has faced accusations of irregularities during past votes. — Aljazeera