

Bilawal leaves for US
F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan People's Party Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari on Wednesday departed for the United States via Dubai. As per details, Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, after a brief stay in Dubai, will depart for the United States (US) to attend President Donald Trump's breakfast. Bilawal is also scheduled to visit Germany after attending Donald Trump's breakfast.



@thefrontierpost

First national English daily published from Peshawar, Islamabad, Lahore, Quetta, Karachi and Washington D.C

www.thefrontierpost.com

Vol. XXXIXII

No. 03

Regd. No. 241

RAJAB 30 1446 -- THURSDAY, JANUARY 30 2025

PESHAWAR EDITION

12 PAGES

PRICE. 30



ISLAMABAD: A delegation of US investors led by Mr. Gentry Beach called on Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif.

Envoys present papers to President

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Non-Resident envoys of Angola, Jamaica, Luxembourg, Uruguay & Malta presented their diplomatic credentials to President Asif Ali Zardari during a ceremony held at Aiwan-e-Sadr on Wednesday.

The President received credentials from the Ambassador-designate of Angola Julio Belarmino Gomes Maiato; the Ambassador-designate of Jamaica, Arthur Williams; the Ambassador-designate of Grand Duchy of Luxembourg, Roland Reiland; the Ambassador-designate of Oriental Republic of Uruguay, Mr Beraldo Roque Nicola Flaniguen, and the High Commissioner-designate of Republic of Malta, Mr Raymond Bondin.

Welcoming the envoys, the President congratulated them on their appointments and expressed the hope that they would play their role in further strengthening bilateral relations with Pakistan in the areas of trade, economy, investment, culture, and people-to-people contacts. Earlier, the envoys were accorded a guard of honour by a contingent of the Pakistan Armed Forces upon their arrival at Aiwan-e-Sadr.

Saif blames Nawaz for talks failure

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Khyber Pakhtunkwa Information Adviser Barrister Muhammad Ali Saif on Wednesday blamed former premier Nawaz Sharif and Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz for the failure of dialogue held between the government and PTI.

In a statement, Saif alleged that the elder Sharif had given Irfan Siddiqui the target to end the talks in failure, adding that Siddiqui and Rana Sanaullah's statements laid bare the lack of seriousness of the government.

"The inability to form a judicial commission has made it clear that the government had ill intentions from the start of the talks. Had it formed the JC, its fake mandate would have been exposed as well," he added. He accused the elder Sharif of complicating the political landscape, adding that the former premier was seeing his survival in political chaos.

Smooth processes to facilitate investors PM assures conducive environment

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Wednesday reaffirmed his government's unwavering commitment to facilitating foreign investors by ensuring a conducive business environment, streamlined processes, and robust institutional support.

The prime minister, in a meeting with an international investors delegation, led by leading US investor Gentry Beach, underscored the country's unique appeal as a global investment destination, highlighting its strategic geographical location, skilled and youthful workforce, and rapidly expanding consumer market.

Discussing Pakistan's dynamic investment landscape and promising economic potential, he expressed gratitude for the delegation's keen interest in exploring business opportunities in Pakistan. Gentry Beach commended Pakistan's immense economic potential and conveyed his delegation's enthusiasm to explore diverse investment opportunities across key sectors, including mining and minerals, renewable energy, infrastructure development, and technology.

He acknowledged the government's pro-investment policies and expressed confidence in the nation's future growth trajectory. This high-level engagement reflects the government's proactive efforts to attract foreign direct investment, foster sustainable economic growth, and generate employment opportunities for the people of Pakistan. Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar, Federal Ministers Muhammad Aurangzeb, Abdul Aleem Khan, Attaullah Tarar, Minister of State Ali Prevaiz Malik and SAPM Tariq Fatemi were also present in the meeting.

PM says China's success story a beacon of inspiration; extends greetings on Chinese New Year: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Wednesday extended greetings to the Chinese people and

President Xi Jinping on the Chinese New Year and said that China's success story served as a beacon of inspiration and confidence for Pakistan.

"China's awe-inspiring renaissance stands as one of the defining themes of the 21st century...For us, China's success story serves as a beacon of inspiration and confidence," the prime minister said in a televised message on the occasion of the Chinese New Year and Spring Festival starting on January 29 to mark the end of winter and the beginning of spring.

He said that over the last many decades, China's remarkable journey of progress and development was a testament to the wisdom and foresight of its visionary leadership, particularly President Xi Jinping. The prime minister said that Pakistan and China shared an enduring bond of friendship — a relationship that has been nurtured from generation to generation.

"Our close ties, rooted in mutual trust and shared aspirations, have now transformed into a comprehensive strategic partnership. This "iron brotherhood" continues to be a cornerstone of Pakistan's foreign policy, reflecting the deep respect and admiration our nations hold for each other."

Prime Minister Shehbaz said that the Chinese New Year signified the transformation and the promise of new beginnings. The Year of the Snake, a symbol of wisdom and vitality, reminds us of the importance of resilience and collective strength as both the nations take on challenges and strive for a brighter future, he added.

He reiterated that Pakistan and China stood united in their unwavering commitment to a better world. "Together, we will continue to make meaningful contributions to global peace, prosperity, and harmony," he said and wished that the new year brings good fortune and continued success to both nations and further strengthens the unbreakable bonds.

Govt removes FIA DG, KP IGP

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) Director General (DG) Ahmed Ishaque Jehangir and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Inspector General (IG) of Police Akhtar Hayat have been removed from their posts.

The federal government removed DG FIA Ahmed Jehangir and reassigned as an Officer on Special Duty (OSD) in the Establishment Division. Sources have revealed that the failure of several FIA officials and other authorities concerned in stopping the cases of human trafficking led to his dismissal.

"With the approval of the Federal Government, Mr Ahmad Ishaque Jehangir, a



BS-21 Officer of [the] Police Service of Pakistan, presently serving as Director General, Federal Investigation Agency (FIA), under [the] Interior Division, is transferred and posted as OSD in Establishment Division, with immediate effect and until further orders," a notification read.

The reshuffle reportedly comes in the wake of ongoing controversy of the

human smuggling from Pakistan as more and more cases of illegal migration and migrant boat tragedies have become alarmingly frequent. Sources said that Jehangir's removal was approved by Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, reportedly for slow pace of investigations in the boat capsizing incidents and large scale illegal migration.

Multan gas tanker blast: Death toll rises to 10

F.P. Report

MULTAN: Four more persons succumbed to their injuries at Nishtar Hospital on Wednesday, increasing the death toll to 10, two days after a gas tanker exploded in Multan and left dozens seriously injured. The deceased include a child and a youth who were under treatment at Nishtar Hospital's Burns Unit, said the hospital administration. The officials added that 26 others are under treatment, including 15 in critical condition. The horrific explosion in the LPG tanker had occurred in the wee hours on Monday triggering a massive fire. Firefighting teams with ten vehicles managed to douse the fire after hours-long efforts.

Following the explosion, debris from the shattered vehicle landed on nearby residential areas, causing significant destruction. According to police, at least 20 houses surrounding the incident site were reduced to rubble, while 70 were partially damaged.

Multan's City Police Officer (CPO) Sadiq Ali told media that gas had been leaking from one of the valves of the tanker truck parked in the Industrial Estate. The terrifying incident prompted complete sealing of the affected site with Commissioner Amir Karim Khan ordering officials to prepare a list of LPG containers in the division and banning the presence of gas tankers in heavily crowded areas.

He also instructed teams to raid illegal CNG and LPG refilling shops and seal those operating without proper equipment. The commissioner ordered fitness inspections of school and passenger buses and the registration of cases against individuals involved in illegal gas refilling operations.

Later in the day, the Multan deputy commissioner also formed an inquiry committee tasked with submitting a report on the incident within 48 hours. He stated that the district administration would take strict measures to prevent incidents like this in the future.

ATC seeks report in May 9 cases

F.P. Report

RAWALPINDI: The Anti-Terrorism Court (ATC) Wednesday issued directives to district prosecution to file complete police report known as Challan of 13 cases relating to May 09 events.

Judge of the ATC Rawalpindi Amjad Ali Shah passed the orders after hearing cases in the matter against former federal interior minister Sheikh Rashid, Zartaj Gul, Seemabia Tahir, Rashid Shafiq, and other accused who appeared before the court.

After marking attendance of all the accused persons the court adjourned the hearing until February 20, with no proceedings taking place the previous day either.

SC seeks records of trials in military courts

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The seven-member Constitutional Bench of the Supreme Court of Pakistan on Wednesday continued hearing of the intra court appeals against the trial of civilians in military courts, which will continue tomorrow.

Counsel of the Ministry of Defense produced a record of trials in military courts regarding May 9. The court asked for records of trials other than May 9 and returned the copies of the record after examining it. The Supreme Court bench is headed by Justice Amin ud Din Khan and comprising on Justice Jamal Khan Mandokhail, Justice Muhammad Ali Mazhar, Justice Hasan Azhar Rizvi, Justice Musarrat Hilali, Justice Naeem Akhtar Afghan and Justice Shahid Bilal Hasan.

Justice Hasan Azhar Rizvi, after having a glance over the record provided, asked the Counsel that the trials regarding May 9 have apparently nothing to do with the state security. The trial is conducted with enough details. Why is it not possible to make the record public, so everyone knows what happened on May 9? 'It is the decision of the authorities', responded Counsel for the Ministry of Defense Khwaja Haris.

Justice Naeem Akhtar Afghan remarked that he has heard appeals against the judgements of the military courts as Chief Justice Baluchistan. The judgments are not simply written on a plain paper that who is guilty and who is not. The GHQ provides complete record of the whole proceedings containing all details of the evidence and procedures of the trial.

Justice Hasan Azhar questioned either family of the accused and media is allowed to see him or not? 'The law allows family and media to see the accused but circumstances, due to security reasons, usually do not allow to do so', responded

Counsel of the Ministry of Defense.

Justice Musarrat Hilali remarked that we are dealing with a society that is difficult to deal with. The question is how the military courts will impact the rights of a common citizen? Defense Counsel Khwaja Haris, argued before the Court that the trials in military courts are conducted in a free and fair way. Public are allowed to witness the proceedings. All requirements of free and fair trials are met with.

As the proceedings initiated, Justice Musrat Hilali observed that the question, yesterday, was, and today is how the investigation is done before framing a charge? Justice Mazhar, while adding to this, said investigation should take place before framing the charges. 'The law is clear about a trial and a fair trial', responded Khwaja Haris. 'The accused is provided defense lawyer on government expenses if he can't afford one. The Army Act and the rules provide protection to the rights of the accused' he added.

Justice Mandokhail remarked that the entire control of anti-narcotics is with the Army. The Army asks the Chief Justice of the concerned High Court for provision of a session judge when trial of an accused is required. Does it happen in the military courts? 'Military Courts are kept out of Article 175 of the Constitution', responded the Defense Counsel. He presented record of the trial before the court in seven envelopes containing copies for each member of the bench and said that the accused were asked before the trial if they have objection over the presiding officer. None of them objected to the officer presiding the trail. If an accused confesses to the crime, concessions are granted under the Islamic Law. The Supreme Court then adjourned the proceedings for tomorrow and directed representatives of the Bar to appear before the Court well prepared.

President gives assent to three bills

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The PECA (Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act) bill, signed into law by President Asif Ali Zardari, has sparked significant controversy in Pakistan, particularly within the journalist community. This law is designed to regulate electronic crimes and online activities, but it has faced criticism for its broad scope and potential to limit freedom of expression, especially in the media.

Journalists and activists argue that the law gives excessive power to authorities, particularly in regulating social media and online content. Critics point out

that it could be used to target political opponents, suppress dissent, and silence independent journalism.

The law includes provisions that allow authorities to arrest individuals accused of defamation or spreading false information online, which raises concerns about the potential misuse of these provisions for political and personal agendas.

The signing of the bill into law has led to protests from journalists and media organizations, who have taken to the streets to voice their opposition. They believe that the law could have a chilling effect on free speech and lead to

increased censorship in the country. Additionally, there are concerns that the vague language of the law might result in arbitrary arrests or the closure of online platforms that criticize the government.

In the context of Pakistan's media landscape, which has already faced pressure from various governments over the years, the PECA law has been seen as another tool for curbing press freedom. The bill's controversial nature has made it a focal point of debates surrounding the balance between national security, freedom of speech, and the role of the media in a democratic society.

Ten bunkers demolished in Kurram

F.P. Report

PARACHINAR: Implementation on a peace agreement in Kurram district is underway as 10 bunkers already demolished and a new operation is set to take place today to dismantle more illegal bunkers.

According to district admin on Wednesday, two additional bunkers were destroyed yesterday, bringing the total count to 10. Authorities have con-

firmed that further operations will continue to eliminate more bunkers.

The district administration has identified over 250 illegal bunkers in the region. The ongoing operation aims at dismantling bunkers established by both parties involved in the conflict. Law enforcement agencies, including the district administration and police, are actively supporting the operation.

Additionally, officials have confirmed that a con-

voy of 120 vehicles safely arrived in Kurram and Parachinar yesterday, ensuring secure passage for residents. All available resources are being utilized to maintain peace in the region, the administration added.

Meanwhile, the food shortage in Kurram district continues to persist as citizens have urged the government to send at least 500 truckloads of essential supplies to address the crisis.

Dozens 'killed' in India's Kumbh festival stampede

PRAYAGRAJ (Reuters): Dozens of people were killed in a pre-dawn stampede at the Maha Kumbh Mela in northern India on Wednesday, police sources and a Reuters witness said, as tens of millions gathered to take a dip in sacred river waters on the most auspicious day of a six-week Hindu festival.

Bodies were still being brought to the local Moti Lal Nehru Medical College hospital morgue more than 12 hours after the tragedy at the world's biggest gathering of humanity, although authorities were yet to officially announce the casualty numbers. Nearly 40 bodies were brought to the morgue, three police sources told Reuters. A Reuters witness counted 39 bodies inside the morgue. One of the three police sources and a fourth officer said all 39 were stampede victims.

"More bodies are coming in. We have nearly 40 bodies here. We are transferring them out as well and handing over to families one by one,"

one of the sources said. There were 15 ambulances outside the morgue and about half a dozen people looking inside for their loved ones.

Senior police officer Vaibhav Krishna said when he was reached for comment that police could not give the official numbers because they were busy with crowd management. Distraught relatives queued up to identify those killed by the stampede, which occurred when crowds surged towards the confluence of three rivers, where immersion is considered particularly sacred.

Some witnesses spoke of a huge push that caused devotees to fall on each other, while others said closure of routes to the water brought the dense crowd to a standstill and caused people to collapse due to suffocation. "There was commotion, everybody started pushing, pulling, climbing over one another. My mother collapsed...then my sister-in-law. People ran over them," said Jagwanti Devi, 40, as she sat in an ambulance with

the bodies of her relatives.

Saroja, who had traveled for the festival from the southern city of Belagavi and gave only her first name, blamed police for the deaths of four members of her family. "Police didn't make proper arrangements. They are responsible for this," she wailed. Police have said they are doing all they can to manage the vast crowds.

An official at Prayagraj's SRN Hospital, where some of the injured were taken, said those who died had either suffered heart attacks or had comorbidities like diabetes. "People came in with fractures, broken bones [...] Some collapsed on the spot and were brought dead," said the official, who did not want to be named. Prime Minister Narendra Modi offered condolences to "devotees who have lost their loved ones", without specifying the number of dead.

Yogi Adityanath, chief minister of Uttar Pradesh state where the festival city of Prayagraj is located, said the

stampede was set off when some devotees tried to jump barricades put up to manage crowds. At the scene after the stampede, some people sat on the ground crying, while others stepped over belongings left by those trying to escape the crush.

The Hindu festival is the world's largest congregation of humanity, expected to draw some 400 million over its six weeks, according to officials, compared with the Haj pilgrimage in Saudi Arabia which drew 1.8 million last year. By Tuesday, nearly 200 million people had attended the 2025 festival since it started two weeks ago, officials said, adding that more than 50 million people had taken a holy dip until 2pm (0830 GMT) on Wednesday alone.

Devout Hindus believe taking a dip at the confluence of three sacred rivers — the Ganga, the Yamuna, and the mythical, invisible Saraswati — absolves people of sins and, during the Kumbh, it also brings salvation from the cycle of life and death.

Attendees this year ranged from Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and Home Minister Amit Shah to Adani Group Chairman Gautam Adani and celebrities like Coldplay's Chris Martin and actress Dakota Johnson, who local media reported reached Prayagraj on Tuesday.

Modi was expected to visit the festival next month. Authorities had expected a record 100 million people to throng the temporary township in Prayagraj on Wednesday, and had deployed additional security and medical personnel along with AI-software based technology to manage the crowd. A Rapid Action Force (RAF) — a special police unit called in during crisis — was deployed to bring the situation under control after the stampede and rescue efforts were underway, officials said.

A senior state official said earlier on Wednesday that at least seven people had died and 10 more had been injured, declining to be named as he was not authorised to speak to media.

Social media posts spoke of heavy traffic congestion on roads leading into Prayagraj as authorities tried to manage the crowd, leaving several people stranded. "I planned this trip for over a year, but I've been stuck in traffic for 19 hours," American travel blogger Drew Binsky said on Instagram, where he has more than 1.2 million followers.

Opposition parties criticised the federal and state governments and blamed the stampede on what they called "mismanagement" and "VIP culture". "VIP culture should be curbed and the government should make better arrangements to meet the needs of common devotees," Rahul Gandhi, leader of the main opposition Congress party said on X, referring to politicians and celebrities being treated differently. A similar stampede had broken out on the most auspicious day of the festival when it was last held in 2013, killing at least 36 pilgrims, mostly women.

CM to establish PSPA to illegal housing societies

LAHORE (APP): Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif chaired a special meeting to discuss the future of housing societies in the province, here on Wednesday.

During the session, the proposal for a uniform colour and design scheme for commercial and residential areas was reviewed, alongside recommendations to make housing societies more eco-friendly, walkable, and aligned with modern urban planning standards.

The CM issued directives for the swift disposal of pending applications in the housing sector and emphasized the need for daily updates on the progress of the Lahore Development Plan. The meeting also reached a key decision in principle: the creation of the Punjab Special Planning Authority (PSPA), aimed at eliminating illegal housing societies across the province. Under this initiative, commercial, residential, and agricultural lands will be categorized, with a focus on establishing district land use plans and zoning. These plans will be reviewed every four years to ensure they meet evolving needs and standards.

Additionally, the meeting agreed on the formation of a District Special Planning Committee in each district, led by the respective Deputy Commissioners. The committees will include representatives from essential service providers such as WAPDA, Sui Gas, and WASA. A system to track violations will also be put in place, with the District Digital Wall to monitor and identify illegal land usage. Based on digital data, decisions regarding fast-track approval of applications may also be made.

CM Maryam Nawaz stressed the importance of town planning in securing a stable future for urban development. "Due to poor planning strategies, illegal housing societies are being constructed in urban areas, compromising the integrity of our cities," she remarked.

A briefing was provided during the meeting, revealing that millions of rupees have been saved, thanks to the introduction of e-tendering in the Lahore Development Plan. The meeting also included a progress report on 414 schemes under Phase-I of the Lahore Development Plan.

Sindh govt and Iran’s Khorasan Razavi engage in MoU signing ceremony

F.P. Report

KARACHI: In a significant step towards fostering economic cooperation and cultural exchange, the Government of Sindh led by Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah and the delegation from Iran’s Khorasan Razavi province, led by H.E. Dr Gholam Hossein Mozaffari, signed multiple Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs).

Chief Minister Murad Ali Shah said that the agreements aim to enhance bilateral trade, technological collaboration, and cultural partnerships between the two regions.

The ceremony was attended by the Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah, along with his cabinet members, high-ranking officials, business leaders, and representatives from both nations. Key parties involved in the agreements included the Karachi Chamber of Commerce and Industry (KCCI), the Khorasan (Mashhad) Chamber of Commerce, Industry, Mines, and Agriculture (MCCIMA) and Science and Technology Park of Khorasan Razavi, I.R. Iran, and Science and Technology Department, Government of Sindh, I.R. Pakistan

The MoUs/agreements are designed to strengthen bilateral trade and create economic and investment opportunities in several key sectors, including Agriculture, Livestock, Poultry, and Fisheries, Industry and Mining, Tourism and Health Tourism, Technical Engineering and Construction, Transport and Transit, Financial Cooperation through Banking and Insurance, Technological Transfer and Development CM Murad Shah said that the major focus of the MoUs is to build strong relationships between industrialists, businessmen, and entrepreneurs from both regions, enabling them to work together for mutual economic growth.

PAF BASE, KOHAT PUBLIC AUCTION

1. A Public Auction of Salvage store is going to be held on **18 February, 2025** at 1000 Hrs at PAF Base, Kohat on “As is, where is” basis.
2. **Inspection of lots:** Will be allowed at 0800 Hrs.
3. **Terms & Conditions:-**
 - (a) The lots will be presented for auction on “As is, where is” basis, without any guarantee or warranty. PAF Base Kohat will never accept any levy for any fault or defect after auction.
 - (b) The bidder will appear in auction on the basis of his own judgement.
 - (c) After inspection, the bidder will be responsible for any fault or defect in the lots.
 - (d) PAF Base, Kohat will never be responsible for any dues, levy or tax etc for successful bids.
 - (e) The authorities have the rights to accept or reject any bid, “Partially or Fully”, on technical grounds.
 - (f) PAF Base, Kohat will never be responsible for any advance payment, levy, tax etc for successful bids.
 - (g) 25% of total amount is to be deposited at the end of the bid and the remaining amount to be deposited within 06 working days. In case of Non-payments of dues within due dates, 25% already paid amount will be forfeited
 - (h) Tax will be charged, according to the current Govt rules.
 - (j) The successful bidder will be responsible for clearance of lots from the vicinity of PAF Base, Kohat, within 11 working days; otherwise, will be levied, in accordance with the law.
 - (k) Decision about all issues regarding auction will be final and acceptable for all the concerned people and Non-challengeable, at any forum.
 - (m) The auction will be conducted through Govt Auctionier “Zohaib Gul & Co”, Mobile No. (03255730919”. For additional query or information, please contact on Tel Ext {0922-920092 (3890)}
- Note:** Mobile Phone, Camera and arms are strictly prohibited.

OFFICER IN-CHARGE
LOGISTICS SQUADRON
PAF BASE, KOHAT

OFFICE OF THE ASSISTANT DIRECTOR (SENIOR), LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTION & RURAL DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT TEHSIL HEAD QUARTER DIR, DISTRICT DIR UPPER

NOTICE INVITING TENDER

Sealed tenders based on MRS-2024 (Bi-Annual/ Non MRS-items as per approved PC-I for the below mentioned works out of "District Development Initiative (DDI) ADP#931/240310 for the year 2024-25" are hereby invited on the basis of Single Stage Single Envelope Procedure from the Government contractors registered with PEG, enlisted with C&W Department as per Centralized Enlistment Policy of the Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa for the current financial year 2024-25.

S #	Work Name	Estimated cost in (Million)	Bid Security @2% Rupees	Last date/ time of submission of Tender forms	Date & time of opening of bid	Time of completion
ADP NO.931/240310 DISTRICT DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE (DDI) DIR UPPER. DEVELOPMENT SCHEMES OF NA-05						
1	Construction PCC Road at Dislawar	3.0	60000	20-02-2025 11:00 AM	20-02-25 12:00 PM	As per Work Order
2	Construction PCC Road at Mitwara	2.0	40000	-do-	-do-	-do-
3	Construction PCC Road at Gal	2.0	40000	-do-	-do-	-do-
4	Shingle Road Dando Top Kandaro Nehag	2.5	50000	-do-	-do-	-do-
5	Construction of PCC Road at Malo Khan Banda	3.5	70000	-do-	-do-	-do-
6	Construction of Sanitation work at Jamia Masjid at Pataw	2.5	50000	-do-	-do-	-do-
7	Construction of Janazgaah at Akhgram	3.5	70000	-do-	-do-	-do-
8	Construction/Remaining Works at Janazagah at Jugahaban	3.0	60000	-do-	-do-	-do-
9	Construction of Janazagah at Dheri Baba oormandi	3.0	60000	-do-	-do-	-do-
10	Construction Janazagah at Usheri	3.0	60000	-do-	-do-	-do-
11	Drinking Water Supply Scheme at Rehankot C/O Ijaz	1.0	20000	-do-	-do-	-do-
12	Construction of Dug Wall at Kotkay	3.0	60000	-do-	-do-	-do-
13	Salvation of Tablighi Markaz Sahibabad	10.0	200000	-do-	-do-	-do-
ADP NO.931/240310 DISTRICT DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE (DDI) DIR UPPER. DEVELOPMENT SCHEMES OF PK-11						
1	Construction of PCC Road & Street Pavement VC Jabbari Gorkhali Rs. 1.00 (M) Shingle Road Jabbari Rs.0.50 (M) Retaining Wall Irtan Korona Rs.0.50 (M)	2.00	40000	20-02-2025 11:00 AM	20-02-25 12:00 PM	As per Work Order
2	Construction of PCC Road VC Amrit Palam Rs.2.00 (M)	2.00	40000	-do-	-do-	-do-
3	Const: Retaining Wall Ahmad Khan Samkot Rs.0.50 (M), Retaining Wall Cricket Ground Namlai Khawar Rs.0.20 (M)	0.70	14000	-do-	-do-	-do-
4	Construction of PCC Road VC Sadiqa Rs.1.50 (M)	1.50	30000	-do-	-do-	-do-
5	Const: Dug Well Muhammad Zeb Chairman Sadiqa Rs.0.50(M)	0.50	10000	-do-	-do-	-do-
6	Construction of PCC Road VC Almas Rs.1.5 (M)	1.50	30000	-do-	-do-	-do-
7	Construction of PCC Road VC Usheri Khass Rs. 0.50 (M), PCC Road Galkor Rs.0.50 (M), PCC Road Dabar Rs. 0.50 (M) PCC Road Kandaro Rs. 0.50 (M)	2.00	40000	20-02-2025 11:00 AM	20-02-25 12:00 PM	As per Work Order
8	Construction of PCC Road Aligasar Rs.1.50 (M), Street Pavement Aligasar Rs.0.50	2.00	40000	-do-	-do-	-do-
9	Construction of PCC Road & Street Pav: Neshan Banda Sengaram Tall Kandaw	2.00	40000	-do-	-do-	-do-
10	Construction of PCC Road & Street Pavement VC Jabbar Rs.3.0 (M)	3.00	60000	-do-	-do-	-do-
11	Construction of PCC Roads & Street Pavement VC Dam Jabbar Rs. 2.5 (M)	2.50	50000	-do-	-do-	-do-
12	Const: PCC/Retaining Wall Aziz Ullah Jabbar 0.50	0.50	10000	-do-	-do-	-do-
13	Construction of PCC Road Sawani Payeen Shah Zeb Korona Rs.0.8 (M), Street Pavement Kataporta VC Sawani Rs. 0.5 (M)	1.30	26000	-do-	-do-	-do-
14	Const: 2 No Suspension Bridge VC Ganshal Rs. 1.00 (M)	1.00	20000	-do-	-do-	-do-
15	Construction of PCC Road Duroo Rs.1.50 (M)	1.50	30000	-do-	-do-	-do-
16	Const PCC Road Samang Rs.2.00 (M)	2.00	40000	-do-	-do-	-do-
17	Construction of PCC Road & culvert at Jetkot C/O Haji Ubaid Rahman Rs. 1.00 (M)	1.00	20000	-do-	-do-	-do-
18	Const: Retaining Wall Kilot Bridge Rs.3.0 (M)	3.00	60000	-do-	-do-	-do-
19	Construction of Shingle Road Dramdala Rs. 1.00 (M), Street Pavement Bacha Uddin Korona Rs.0.30 (M), Street Pavement Dramdala Rs.0.50 (M)	1.80	36000	-do-	-do-	-do-
20	Construction of PCC Road Doag Payeen C/O Sahib Zada Rs.1.00 (M)	1.00	20000	-do-	-do-	-do-
21	Construction of PCC Roads VC Mina Doag Rs.2.00 (M)	2.00	40000	-do-	-do-	-do-
22	of PCC Road Petaw Badarkani Muhammad Arif Korona Rs.1.50 (M)	1.50	30000	-do-	-do-	-do-
23	PCC Road & Street Pavement Sayah Sheringal Mahakano Korona Rs.0.50 (M) Retaining Wall Tanveer 0.80 Ahmad Korona Rs.0.30 (M)	0.80	16000	-do-	-do-	-do-
24	Const: Shingle Road Narkoon Vic Narkoon Rs.1.00 (M)	1.00	20000	-do-	-do-	-do-
25	Const: Shingle Road Qawani Kareen Rs.1 Shingle road Masjeed Mohalla Kalay Rs. 1	2.00	40000	-do-	-do-	-do-
26	Const: Shingle Road Kass Kanan Khail Rs. 1.00 (M)	1.00	20000	-do-	-do-	-do-
27	Const: Shingle Road Aman Khawar Rs. 1.00, Shingle Road Shergah Bala Rs. 1.00 (M)	2.00	40000	-do-	-do-	-do-
28	Const: Shingle Road Banju Rs.1.00 (M)	1.00	20000	-do-	-do-	-do-
29	Shingle Road Jehand Parent Rs.1.5(M, Street Pav: Sher Khan/Gul Zamin Korona 0.5	2.00	40000	-do-	-do-	-do-
30	Const: Shingle Road Dambarkon Rs.1. (M.PCC Road & Retaining Wall Rimai 1 (M)	2.00	40000	-do-	-do-	-do-
31	Const: Shingle Road & Retaining Wall Kandyawal Dadband Rs.0.80 (M) Street Pavement Beyar Usman Korona Rs. 0.50 (M)	1.30	26000	-do-	-do-	-do-
32	Const: Shingle Road & R/ Wall Barikot to Junkass Rs.1, Retaining Wall Bada Rs.0.5 (M)	1.30	26000	-do-	-do-	-do-
33	Const: Shingle Road Janya Rs.3.00 (M)	3.00	60000	-do-	-do-	-do-
34	Construction of PCC Road & Street Pav: VC Kalkot Rs.1.00 (M), Retaining Wall Malak Mutabar Khan Kalkot Rs.0.5 (M), Street pavement Zahoor Islam Kalkot Rs.0.4	1.90	38000	-do-	-do-	-do-
35	Const: Shingle Road & Retaining Wall Makara Rs.2.00 (M)	2.00	40000	-do-	-do-	-do-
36	Const: Shingle Road Chechelo Lamoti Rs.0.50 (M), Repair of MHP Lamoti C/O Sultan Member Rs.0.5 (M), Retaining Wall Isbat Korona Lamoti Rs.0.5 (M)	1.50	30000	-do-	-do-	-do-
37	Construction of PCC Road VC Haji Shah Rs.1.50 (M)	1.50	30000	20-02-2025 11:00 AM	20-02-25 12:00 PM	As per Work Order
38	Const:/PCC Road & Street Pavement VC Thall Rs. 0.5 (M)	0.50	10000	-do-	-do-	-do-
39	Drinking Water Supply Scheme at Kumrat VC Kunwal Rs.0.5 (M)	0.50	10000	-do-	-do-	-do-
40	Construction of PCC Road & Street Pavement VC Kumrat Rs. 2.00 (M)	2.00	40000	-do-	-do-	-do-
41	Const: PCC Road Janger Jan Rs.0.50 (M)	0.50	10000	-do-	-do-	-do-
42	Const: Retaining Wall Mubarak Zeb Korona Rs. 0.50 (M)	1.00	20000	-do-	-do-	-do-
43	Const: Street Pav: Jawehd Jan Rs. 0.5 (M), PCC Road & Street Pav: Samkot Batal/Shomai Rs. 1.50 (M)	1.80	36000	-do-	-do-	-do-
44	Const: Street Pavement VC Sadiqa Rs.1.50 (M)	1.50	30000	-do-	-do-	-do-
45	Const: Street Pavement Usheri Khass Rs.0.5, Street Pavement Galkor Rs. 0.5 (M)	1.00	20000	-do-	-do-	-do-
46	Street Pav: at Tarpatar Rs. 0.5 (M, Shingle Road Uryakhaill C/o Malak Abdul Ullah Rs. 5	1.00	20000	-do-	-do-	-do-
47	Const: Retaining Wall Uryakhaill Bridge Rs. 1.5 (M), Ret/W/ Masjid Targatar Rs. 0.5	2.00	40000	-do-	-do-	-do-
48	Const: Street Pavement VC Katan Bala Rs.1(M), Ret/W/ Masjid VC Katan Bala Rs.1	2.00	40000	-do-	-do-	-do-
49	Const: Street Pavement Ganshal Payeen Rs. 1.00 (M)	1.00	20000	-do-	-do-	-do-
50	Street Pavement Malook Khawar Rs.1.00 (M)	1.00	20000	-do-	-do-	-do-
51	Const: Street Pavement Sundri Vic Sundral Rs.1.50 (M)	1.50	30000	-do-	-do-	-do-
52	Const: Const: Retaining Wall Sher Khan Korona Rs.0.50	0.50	10000	-do-	-do-	-do-
53	Street Pav: Banankhela=0.5 Street Pav: Jetkot Rs.0.50 (M), PCC Road Pashrak 0.4	1.40	28000	-do-	-do-	-do-
54	Const: Street Pav: VC Patrak Khass Rs. 3 (M), Retaining Wall Masjeed Batal Rs.0.5	3.50	70000	-do-	-do-	-do-
55	Const: Street Pavement Saisan/ Chundagall/ Tapanday Rs. 2.50 (M)	2.50	50000	-do-	-do-	-do-
56	Const, Shingle Road & Retaining Wall VC Shonga Rs.2.00 M	2.00	40000	-do-	-do-	-do-
57	Const: Street Pavement Riaz Khan Shalbhand Rs.0.50 (M) Shingle Road Azar Korona Rs. 0.50 (M), Shingle Road VC Shalbhand Rs. 1.00 (M)	2.00	40000	-do-	-do-	-do-
58	Const: Street pavement Mubarak Zeb & Rehman Ghani S8 galkor Rs.0.5 (M), Street pavement Raheem Gul Nishan Banda Rs. 0.4 (M)	0.90	18000	-do-	-do-	-do-
59	Drinking Water Supply VC Jabbari Gorkhali Rs.0.5 (M)	0.50	10000	-do-	-do-	-do-
60	Drinking Water Supply VC Amrit Palam Rs. 1.00 (M)	1.00	20000	-do-	-do-	-do-
61	DWSS at VC Barkand Rs. 0.5 (M) Dug Well Ayoub Chairman Barkand Rs. 0.50 (M)	1.00	20000	-do-	-do-	-do-
62	Drinking Water Supply VC Samkot Batali Shomal Rs.0.5 (M)	0.50	10000	-do-	-do-	-do-
63	Dug Well Ijaz Chairman Almas Rs.0.50 (M) Dug Well Khair Khass Rs.05 (M) Dug Wall Masjeed Almas Rs.0.50(M) Zada Almas Rs.0.50 (M) Dug Well Ishaq Chota Almas Rs.0.50 (M)	2.00	40000	-do-	-do-	-do-
64	Dug Well Gul Sher Chairman Galkor Rs.0.50 (M)	0.50	10000	-do-	-do-	-do-
65	Dug Well Anwar Zeb Malak Tarpatar Rs.0.50 (M), DWSS at VC Tarpatar Rs.0.5 (M)	1.00	20000	-do-	-do-	-do-
66	Dug Well Yousaf Chairman Aligasar Rs.0.50 (M), Water Supply Aligasar Rs. 1.00 (M)	1.50	30000	-do-	-do-	-do-
67	Drinking Water Supply VC Neshan Banda Rs.1.00 (M)	1.00	20000	-do-	-do-	-do-
68	Dug WellZabih Ullah Jabbar Rs.0.50 (M), Dug Well Nazif Ullah Jabbar Rs.0.50 (M)	1.00	20000	-do-	-do-	-do-
69	DWSS at Katan VC Katan Bala Rs.0.5 (M) Dug Well Said Zareen Katan Bala Rs. 0.50 (M) Dug Well Fazal Amin Chairman Rs. 050 (M)	1.50	30000	-do-	-do-	-do-
70	Dug Well Tajbar Dagor Rs 0.50 (M),Dug Wall Aziz Ullah Achar Rs. 0.50 (M), Dug Well Ali Khan Chairman Achar Rs.0.50 (M)	1.50	30000	20-02-2025 11:00 AM	20-02-25 12:00 PM	As per Work Order
71	DWSS at Achar Bala Rs. 0.7 (M) Water Supply Achar Payeen Rs. 0.70 (M)	1.40	28000	-do-	-do-	-do-
72	Drinking Water Supply Dagor Rs.0.7 (M)	0.70	14000	-do-	-do-	-do-
73	Drinking Water Supply VC Sawani Rs. 1.50 (M)	1.50	30000	-do-	-do-	-do-
74	Drinking Water Supply VC Ganshal Rs.2.00 (M)	2.00	40000	-do-	-do-	-do-
75	Dug Well Said Raziq Duro Rs. 0.50 (M), Dug Well Naseer Chairman Rs. 0.50 (M), DWSS at Doon Bala/Payeen C/O Naseer Chairman Rs. 1.00 (M)	2.00	40000	-do-	-do-	-do-
76	Dug Well Shakir Ullah Rs.Nazim Sheringal Rs.0.50 (M)	0.50	10000	-do-	-do-	-do-
77	Drinking Water Supply VC Guryal Rs. 1.50 (M)	1.50	30000	-do-	-do-	-do-
78	Drinking Water Supply VC Shatkass Rs.2.00 (M)	2.00	40000	-do-	-do-	-do-
79	Drinking Water Supply VC Malook Khawar Rs.1.00 (M)	1.00	20000	-do-	-do-	-do-
80	Drinking Water Supply VC Badarkani Rs. 1.00 (M)	1.00	20000	-do-	-do-	-do-
81	Drinking Water Supply Babozo Doag Bala Rs.1.0 (M)	1.00	20000	-do-	-do-	-do-
82	Drinking Water Supply VC Doag Bala Rs. 1.00 (M)	1.00	20000	-do-	-do-	-do-
83	Drinking Water Supply VC Shaahoor Rs.2.00 (M)	2.00	40000	-do-	-do-	-do-
84	Drinking Water Supply VC Gumi Kandaw Rs.1.00 (M)	1.00	20000	-do-	-do-	-do-
85	Drinking Water Supply VC Narkoon Rs.1.00 (M)	1.00	20000	-do-	-do-	-do-
86	Drinking Water Supply VC Sundral Rs.0.50 (M)	0.50	10000	-do-	-do-	-do-
87	Dug Well C/O Aziz ur Rahman Pashrak Rs.0.5 (M)	0.50	10000	-do-	-do-	-do-
88	const: Water Tank Wardag Mohala Rs.0.30, Water Bore VC Patrak Khass Rs. 0.50	0.80	16000	-do-	-do-	-do-
89	Dug Wall Tahana Patrak Rs. 0.50 (M), Dug Well Patrak Hospital Rs. 0.5 (M)	1.00	20000	-do-	-do-	-do-
90	Dug Well Bahadur Haji Korona Rs. 0.50 (M)	0.50	10000	-do-	-do-	-do-
91	Drinking Water Supply VC Beyar Rs. 0.50 (M), Dug Well Iyazul Said Beyar Rs.0.50 (M)	1.00	20000	-do-	-do-	-do-
92	Drinking Water Supply Shalbhand VC Shalbhand Rs. 1.00 (M)	1.00	20000	-do-	-do-	-do-
93	Drinking Water Supply at Barikot VC Barikot Rs. 0.70 (M)	0.70	14000	-do-	-do-	-do-
94	Drinking Water Supply VC Kalkot Rs. 1.0 (M)	1.00	20000	-do-	-do-	-do-
95	Drinking Water Supply VC Haji Shah Rs.0.50 (M)	0.50	10000	-do-	-do-	-do-
96	Drinking Water Supply VC Thall Rs. 0.5 (M)	0.50	10000	-do-	-do-	-do-
97	Dug Well Javid Khan Chukytan Rs. 0.50 (M), Dug Well Rs.0.50 (M) Aziz Khan Dir Rs.0.50 (M), Dug Well Jamil ur Rahman Rs. 0.50 (M)	1.50	30000	-do-	-do-	-do-
98	DWSS Sia jabber Rs.0.5 (M), Dug Well C/o Sana ullah Jabber Rs.0.5 (M), Dug Well Nasar Khan Samkot Rs.0.5 (M), Dug Well zahair-shah jabber Rs.0.5 (M)	2.00	40000	-do-	-do-	-do-
99	Dug Well Malak iqbal Ushery Rs.0.5 (M) Dug Well Amin Ullah Tarpatar Rs.0.5 (M), Dug Well Anwar zeb korona Tarpatar Rs. 0.5 (M)	1.50	30000	-do-	-do-	-do-
100	Drinking Water supply scheme Shah jabber Rs.0.5 (M)	0.50	10000	-do-	-do-	-do-
101	Const: Protection wall at maidan Nalaha=1.0 const: of water channel MHP Maidan 1 (M)	2.00	40000	-do-	-do-	-do-
102	Solarization near DHQ Hospital area and residential Colony	1.00	20000	-do-	-do-	-do-
103	Repair/rehabilitation/missing facility of UPS Sheringal Rs.0.5 (M), Repair/rehabilitation/missing facility of Igra Model school jabbar Rs. 0.3 (M)	0.80	16000	-do-	-do-	-do-
104	Const, Retaining Wall Cricket Ground Mina Doag Rs. 0.50 (M), Const: Retaining Wall at Doag Dura Rs. 0.5 (M)	1.00	20000	20-02-2025 11:00 AM	20-02-25 12:00 PM	As per Work Oder
105	Construction Janazagah at Almas Rs. 0.50 (M)	0.50	10000	-do-	-do-	-do-
106	Const: Madrasa Samang C/O Umar Rahman Qari, 0.5 Const: Madrasa Suldam Rs.0.5	1.00	20000	-do-	-do-	-do-
107	Const: Masjeed Pengas Rs. 1.00 (M)Const: of Masjeed Amin Khan Rs. 0.40 (M)	1.40	28000	-do-	-do-	-do-
108	Construction of Masjeed Gujar Abad C/O Zafar Rs.0.50 (M)	0.50	10000	-do-	-do-	-do-
109	Construction of Masjeed Shetkoon C/O Taj Muhammad Member Rs.0.5 (M)	0.50	10000	-do-	-do-	-do-
110	Tameer Masjid katan clo malak tajbar kham Rs.0.5 (M)	0.50	10000	-do-	-do-	-do-
111	Construction of Bar Room Sheringal Rs. 1.00 (M)	1.				
112	Construction of Jarga Hall at Thall Rs.2.00 (M)	1.00	20000	-do-	-do-	-do-
ADP NO.931/240310 DISTRICT DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE (DDI) DIR UPPER. DEVELOPMENT SCHEMES OF PK-13						
1	Const: of PCC Road Mohalla Chumra Katan Payeen clo Masjid Rs.1	1.000	20000	21-02-2025 11:00 AM	21-02-25 12:00 PM	As per Work Oder
2	Construction/PCC Road Village Shaw c/o Amin	2.000	40000	-do-	-do-	-do-
3	Construction/PCC Road Village Shaw clo Kamal Salari Rs.1.5(M)	1.500	30000	-do-	-do-	-do-
4	Const: /PCC Road village Kass clo Akhter Munir Rs.1.0(M)	1.000	20000	-do-	-do-	-do-
5	Const: /PCC Road Mohallah Qallian Payeen c/o Shah Rasool Rs.2.0 (M)	2.000	40000	-do-	-do-	-do-
6	Construction/PCC Road Mohallah Relezn clo Mubarak Zeb Rs.0.5(M), PCC Road Mohallah Muhammad Amin Kalay c/o Kadar Rs.1.0(M)	1.500	30000	-do-	-do-	-do-
7	Retaining Wall Mohallah Kaisho c/o Anwar, Fazal Rahman Rs.1.0(M)	1.000	20000	-do-	-do-	-do-
8	Const: of Culvert Muhlla Gero Khawar clo Ibrahim, Dawood Rs.0.6(M)	0.600	12000	-do-	-do-	-do-
9	Construction of Road Mohallah Faran pull clo Wazir Shahzad-1.0(M)	1.000	20000	-do-	-do-	-do-
10	Retaining Wall Mohallah Unkar clo Habib ullah Nazim Rs.0.5(M)	0.500	10000	-do-	-do-	-do-
11	Construction/PCC Road Chiragale c/o Hani Chahmain Rs.1.5(M)	1.500	30000	-do-	-do-	-do-

Kundi for healthier lifestyles to combat rising heart disease rates

PESHAWAR (APP): Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Faisal Karim Kundi, on Wednesday initiated a symposium on heart disease prevention and safety measures at the Governor House and stressed that raising awareness about adopting a healthy lifestyle is a pressing need in today's society.

The event was attended by prominent personalities, including Dr. Miqdad Ali Khan, Head of the Cardiology Department at Rahman Medical Institute (RMI), Dr. Chiragh Hussain, Associate Professor at Hayat Medical Complex, heart disease specialists, doctors, and medical students, among others.

In his opening address as the chief guest, Governor Faisal Karim Kundi welcomed health experts to the Governor House, emphasizing the importance of tackling this highly sensitive and prevalent health issue.

Governor Kundi urged both private and public institutions to organize similar programs to address health concerns. "To build a healthi-

er society, everyone must contribute their part. We must ensure that the public has access to the best health-care services," he said. He further said that cardiovascular diseases have become a silent epidemic not just in Pakistan, but around the world. Governor Kundi highlighted the importance of modern research and technology in combating heart diseases, and encouraged making lifestyle changes to prevent the spread of this health crisis.

He concluded by reiterating that promoting healthy activities is key to fostering a healthy society.

Meanwhile, a meeting of the 36th Board of Governors of the Institute of Management Sciences (IM Sciences) was held under the chairmanship of Governor Faisal Karim Kundi.

During the meeting, the Director of IM Sciences presented detailed updates on the institute's new initiatives, including the Women Center of Excellence, the National Center for Branding, the National Growth

Center, the Software House, a 900 KW solar system, and the acquisition of 20 kanals of land for further expansion.

The Board of Governors also received updates on the success of the institute's weekend programs, which have been well-received. In addition, recommendations from the Executive Committee and the Academic Council were presented for approval, along with the minutes of a committee's review on the absence of five faculty members, which was also put forward for approval.

Further discussions included the recommendations of the Finance and Planning Committee's meetings, which were likewise presented for final approval. Governor Faisal Karim Kundi, in his address, emphasized the importance of quality education as the key to progress in the modern world. "It is crucial that educational institutions align with modern technology and research to stay relevant," he said.



PESHAWAR: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Ali Amin Khan Gandapur administering oath to the newly elected cabinet of Peshawar Press Club.

Tordher visits KPEZDMC F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Special Assistant to the Chief Minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa on Industries Abdul Karim Tordher on Wednesday, visited the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Economic Zones Development and Management Company (KPEZDMC) Head Office, here at Hayatabad in Peshawar, to review the Company's performance over the past six months.

During the visit, company's management gave a detail briefing regarding the company's various wings and Cluster Development Department.

Officiating Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Aadi Salahuddin and other key management officers attended the meeting.

The discussion focused on key achievements, challenges faced and strategies to accelerate industrial growth in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

The CEO highlighted significant progress in infrastructure development, investment facilitation and industrial expansion despite challenges.

On this occasion, the Special Assistant appreciated the Company's efforts for industrialization.

To address critical issues related to energy and financial sustainability, the Special Assistant instructed KPEZDMC management to coordinate with the Advisor Finance to Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and the Special Assistant on Energy and Power.

He reaffirmed the Government's commitment to strengthening the industrial sector and creating a business-friendly environment to drive economic prosperity.

Dr. Ilyas visits Baghe-Naran with PCP Patients F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The Chief Executive of Paraplegic Center Peshawar, Dr. Syed Muhammad Ilyas, accompanied long-term admitted patients and their caregivers on a recreational visit to Bagh Naran in Hayatabad. During the visit, the patients explored various sections of the vast park, including the zoo and the newly developed green spaces constructed under the City Improvement Project.

The patients showed special interest in the tour of Bagh Naran and the zoo and also participated in various games. Dr. Ilyas Syed stated that, in accordance with global public health standards, the center regularly organizes sports competitions and recreational and cultural trips for people with spinal cord injuries.

These activities, held in collaboration with medical staff, aimed to provide relaxation, motivation, and enjoyment to the patients, he added.

Dr Ilyas Syed emphasized that such initiatives would not only enhance the rehabilitation and recovery process but also strengthen the patients' determination and morale.

CJ PHC excuses to hear cases against ex federal minister

Humayun Khan

PESHAWAR: The Chief Justice of Peshawar High Court (PHC) Justice Ishtiaq Ibrahim has excused himself from hearing a petition filed by the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) against Pakistan People's Party leaders and former federal minister Arbab Alamgir and his wife Asma Alamgir, on Wednesday.

PHC's bench comprising Chief Justice Ishtiaq Ibrahim and Justice Ijaz Anwar heard the case while Deputy Prosecutor General NAB Muhammad Ali informed the court that Arbab Alamgir and his wife are public representatives who have been accused of possessing assets beyond their known sources of income.

Deputy Prosecutor General NAB Muhammad Ali stated that the couple's assets within Pakistan are valued at 340 million rupees. However, they also own assets worth 2.8 billion rupees in foreign coun-

tries, including the United Arab Emirates, Singapore, and the United Kingdom. He added that a Mutual Legal Assistance (MLA) request has been sent to the governments of these countries through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The Deputy Prosecutor General NAB further stated that if the value of these foreign assets is added to their Pakistani assets, the total value exceeds 5 billion rupees. This makes it a case for the National Accountability Bureau (NAB).

The Accountability Court has sent this case to the Anti-Corruption Central, but NAB wants it to be transferred back to NAB.

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. After the initial hearing, the Chief Justice excused itself from hearing the case and directed it to be transferred to another bench. The court postponed the hearing of the case until February 20.

PHC dispose of Asad Qaiser plea: A divisional bench of Peshawar High

Court (PHC) comprising Justice Syed Arshad Ali and Justice Waqar Ahmad disposed of a petition filed by former Speaker National Assembly Asad Qaiser, seeking the removal of his name from the Exit Control List (ECL), on Wednesday.

The petitioner's lawyer informed the court that Asad Qaiser is a member of the National Assembly, and the government has enlisted his name in the ECL. He wanted to travel abroad but was unable to do so due to his name being on the ECL.

The lawyer argued that Asad Qaiser's name was included in the ECL without any justification, and this decision was unconstitutional and illegal. He requested the court to order the removal of petitioner's name from the ECL.

The Deputy Attorney General informed the court that Asad Qaiser's name has been removed from the ECL. He can now travel abroad without any restrictions. PHC disposed of the petition after hearing the arguments.

WSSP and UNICEF to enhance partnership

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Water and Sanitation Services Peshawar (WSSP) and UNICEF have principally agreed to strengthen partnership and collaboration for improved civic services and establish a joint committee for planning. Both organizations have also expressed their commitment to exploring the potential of initiating small-scale projects to ensure better water and sanitation services to the public of Peshawar.

This agreement was made during a meeting between a UNICEF Pakistan delegation, led by UNICEF Chief Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) Pakistan, Cindy

Kushner, and WSSP Chief Executive Officer Yasir Ali Khan. The delegation included UNICEF WASH Specialist Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Farooq Khan, WASH Officers Rehman Ullah, Fida Hussain Shah from Islamabad, and WASH Officers from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Dr. Wassaf Syed and Usama Khalid.

The WSSP management briefed the delegation on potential areas of collaboration, including underground containers, fleet tracking systems, water suction trucks, water consumption pattern survey, rainwater harvesting, solarizing tube wells, technical

designing, water and energy efficiency, and social mobilization etc.

Yasir Ali Khan proposed forming a joint committee for better service delivery planning and emphasized the need for collaborative efforts to systematically launch projects. He also highlighted the importance of UNICEF's technical support in this regard.

Delegation head Cindy Kushner stressed the importance of setting priorities and stated that, UNICEF would assess the possibilities of providing assistance in relevant areas based on WSSP's suggestions.

Earlier, the delegation was briefed on WSSP's mandate, operational matters, and projects completed with UNICEF's support.

KPPSC crucial to provide competent human resources

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Provincial Minister for Law, Advocate Aftab Alam has stated that role of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Public Service Commission (KPPSC) is crucial for providing competent and suitable human resources to carry out government affairs. He emphasized that the KPPSC should consider the element of time in the timely execution of government work and the recruitment of required staff.

He expressed these views while presiding over a meeting of the Ministers' Committee regarding the performance of the KPPSC at the Civil Secretariat in Peshawar on Wednesday.

The meeting was attended by Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Minister for Elementary and Secondary Education, Faisal Tarkai and Advisor for Finance and Inter-Provincial

Coordination, Muzammil Aslam. Officials from the KPPSC, including the Secretary, Director of Examinations, Members KPPSC, Deputy Secretary of Higher Education, Deputy Secretary of Finance and officials from the Law Department also participated in the meeting.

The Advisor for Finance highlighted the need to reduce the time frame for recruitment processes in various departments, introduce digitization and artificial intelligence in the organization, address paper archives and improve coordination with departments regarding vacant positions.

Minister for Law, Advocate Aftab Alam, stressed the importance of KPPSC having its own data bank for the effective conduct of examinations and suggested collaboration with the ETEA.

Minister for Elementary and Secondary Education, Faisal Tarkai, issued directives to expedite the recruitment process for administrative and teaching positions in his department.

Secretary of the Public Service Commission, Zakaur Rehman Khattak, indicated that after the appointment of the new Chairman, the KPPSC would seek cooperation from the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Information Technology Board and ETEA for the implementation of technology and computer applications.

Senior legal expert from the Law Department, Barrister Raees Ahmed, proposed making the Provincial Management Service examinations more objective, similar to the Graduate Assessment Test (GAT) and Medical and Dental College Admission Test (MDCAT) and suggested amendments to related laws.

Railway workers union to oppose proposed privatization: Riaz

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Railway Workers Union Open Line, Peshawar Division, General Secretary Riaz Kashmiri stated that a joint protest demonstration was held by Railway Workers Union Workshop CBA and Railway Workers Union Open Line at the Railway Headquarters in Lahore in favor of their demands, on Wednesday.

Railway Workers Union Workshop CBA's Mian Khalid Rana, Masoom Razwan, Satti

Sakhi Khan, and Railway Workers Union Open Line's Chaudhry Anwar Gujjar, Zafar Ejaz, Malik Arif Sheikh, Qaiser Suleman, and others participated in the protest. They strongly condemned the privatization of railways, cuts in pensions, and other benefits.

Railway authorities assured the protesting unions that all issues would be resolved through negotiations.

Meanwhile, Railway Workers Union Workshop and Railway Workers Union Open Line

have called an emergency meeting in Karachi on February 20 to discuss the current situation and devise a future course of action.

The meeting will discuss the privatization of railways and other issues, and will be attended by representatives from various divisions, including Quetta Division's Ghulam Nabi Brohi and Hamid Jamali, Peshawar Division's Rahim Taj Shinwari and Riaz Kashmiri, Rawalpindi Division's Mubarak Hussain and Tahir Bhatti, Sukkur Division's Imtiaz

Katpar, and Karachi Division's Mushataq Jadoon, Abbas Laghari, Baz Muhammad Arif Mashwani, Mulla Bakhsh Bachu, Rana Shazad Gul, Hassan Rahmu, Sarwar Chaudhry, Junaid Awan, and others.

It is worth noting that the All Pakistan Affected Employees Action Committee, which comprises around 72 federal departments, has assured Railway Workers Union Open Line of its full cooperation and support in their struggle.

Appellant Authority accepts plea of SIDB's project employees

PESHAWAR (APP): The Appellate Authority, the Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has accepted the representation of 110 employees working in the Small Industries Development Board (SIDB) and directed the Secretary Industries Department and the Managing Director (MD) to submit the case of regularization of the employees of the project titled 'The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Women's Skill & Entrepreneurship Development Programme and the Readymade Garments' to the E s t a b l i s h m e n t Department for further processing at their end within thirty (30) days of the order under intimation tot he Chief Minister's Secretariat.

These directives have been issued in response to the representation made by Mr Tahir Shah and 109 other employees working in the SIDB under the concerned programme in various districts of Khyber

Pakhtunkhwa under section 31 of the Provincial Ombudsman Act, 2010 against the findings/recommendations of the Provincial Ombudsman.

The appellant had claimed that they have time and again requested the authorities concerned at SIDB for inclusion of their project; which they claimed was of perpetual nature, and could have been included in the Regularization Act 2018, but in vain. The said project was closed on June 30, 2021.

For the redressal of their grievance, the appellant requested the Provincial Ombudsman Khyber Pakhtunkhwa through a complaint instituted on January 9, 2024 to issue directions to the SIDB for forwarding the case of regularization of their service to the E s t a b l i s h m e n t Department for consideration in the same way as employees of other perpetual nature projects which were regularized in the year 2018.

However, their plea was rejected by the Provincial Ombudsman, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa on July 9, 2024.

The aggrieved employees with the findings/recommendations of the Provincial Ombudsman, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the appellants filed a representation u/s 31 of the Provincial Ombudsman Act, 2010.

After amendments in the Provincial Ombudsman Act, 2010 and upon changing of the Appellate Authority from the Governor to the Chief Minister, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the appellants were granted an opportunity of personal hearing while the representative of the Agency was also present during the proceedings.

The arguments of the appellants and representative of the Agency were heard at length and the record was also accordingly perused.

In light of the arguments of the appellants and representatives of the

Agency, the Appellate Authority transpired that the project titled 'the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Women's Skill & Entrepreneurship Development Programme and the Readymade Garments' was initiated by the SIDB in the year 2002.

Accordingly, twenty-four (24) number of Dastkari Centres were established across Khyber Pakhtunkhwa for granting trainings to women in the trade of sewing, embroidery and knitting under the said project.

The appellant authority has found that the continuity of such project indicates its perpetual nature, therefore, it would be appropriate if the same is assessed by the Committee constituted in the Establishment Department Govt of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa for the purpose of regularization of the employees of perpetual nature projects under the Regularization Act in the Year 2018.

KPFA cracks down on substandard food items

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Food Safety and Halal Food Authority has launched a large-scale crackdown on substandard and harmful pops, chips, nimco, and seasoning powders. A special 15-day testing campaign was conducted, during which 462 samples of various food products were collected and analyzed for quality standards.

Following laboratory results, the Food Safety teams took immediate action, sealing 13 production units in Peshawar Division, 3 in Mardan, 7 in Malakand, and one each in Dera Ismail Khan and Bannu. Heavy fines were imposed on violators, and further legal proceedings were initiated under the Food Safety Act.

While releasing details, spokesperson of the Food Authority said that the testing campaign

involved a detailed analysis of ingredients in pops, chips, nimco, and spices. The results indicated excessive levels of aflatoxins, free fatty acids, peroxide value, and moisture in several samples, making them substandard and hazardous for human consumption.

The spokesperson extended that 27 seasoning powder and spice samples were found to contain aflatoxins exceeding national and international safety standards. Aflatoxins, caused by fungal contamination, are known to be carcinogenic.

The spokesperson added that the test results revealed out of 175 pops samples, 82 were deemed substandard, while 8 out of 24 nimco samples failed to meet food safety standards.

Similarly, 29 out of 160 seasoning powder samples and 29 out of 103 curry powder samples were found to be of poor quality.

Overall, 46.2% of

pops, 33.3% of nimco, 18.1% of seasoning powders, and 28.1% of curry powders failed quality assurance tests.

"The Food Authority food safety teams took immediate action based on these findings, launching a crackdown on manufacturers of substandard and hazardous food items. Several production units were sealed, heavy fines were imposed, and further legal action was initiated under the Food Safety Act", said the spokesperson.

Wasif Saeed, Director General of the Food Authority described the campaign as the first of its kind in the history of KP, uncovering a significant number of substandard food products. Wasif assured that such testing campaigns would continue to ensure the supply of safe and quality food to the public.

He also issued a directive that all unregistered food businesses must register with the Food

Authority within a month, warning of legal action against non-compliant businesses.

KP Minister for Food, Zahir Shah Toru, emphasized that protecting public health is one of the top priorities of provincial government, leaving no room for compromise. Toru clarified that the campaign was not intended to harm businesses but to improve food quality and ensure consumer safety. He urged all food manufacturers and vendors to adhere strictly to food safety standards, warning of severe action against violators.

The Food Authority officials also appealed to the public to report any instances of substandard food being sold so that immediate action could be taken.

Officials reaffirmed that the crackdown on adulterated and substandard food products would continue without discrimination, with no leniency for those endangering public health.



In brief

Drive against chips, snacks F.P. Report

MARDAN: Food Safety & Halal Food Authority has intensified crackdown against the pops/snacks/ chips, Nimko & spices produced and distributed both in loose & packed form in the market. Throughout Mardan, a total 31 samples have been collected that comprises 16 pops/snacks, 04 nimko & 11 spices samples. Out of 31 samples, 13 samples of pops/chips/nimko & spices were failed, the two of which are detected with higher aflatoxins levels & the rest 11 were failed due to moisture, per oxide value & free fatty acid profile. Upon aflatoxins detection, 02 units were sealed by the Food Authority Operational teams with seizure of almost 900kgs of spices & chips & imposition of hefty fines. Fines as per KP-FS&HFA Act have been imposed on the remaining 11 units upon the failure of other quality testing parameters. The whole drive was highly appreciated amongst the public as it was the major concern of the public since the inception of Halal Food Authority. Meanwhile, Additional Assistant Commissioner Katlang held 'Kuli Katcheri' in which officers of district departments, elected chairman and elders of the area participated. In this open court, the public presented their problems, which the Additional Assistant Commissioner heard and promptly resolved many problems and issued immediate orders to the concerned departments for other problems. AAC Sahar Anwar said that the aim of the present government is to provide facilities to the people to solve their problems and for this, open kachehri are being organized in different areas.

Police arrests three accused Syed Waliullah Shah

NOWSHERA: Police arrested three accused and recovered arms from their possession in the premises Raisalpur police station. According to details, a clash broke out between two parties over a dispute in Zando Bandah area of Raisalpur Police Station, after an engagement ceremony. The raid team arrested three accused, Sanaullah, Tahir and Bilal, residents of Zando Bandah, and recovered arms from them. Cases have been registered against the accused, and investigations have been initiated.

ADC visits govt schools F.P. Report

TOBA TEK SINGH: Additional Deputy Commissioner General Zeeshan Labbha Masih visited Government Girls High School 319 JB and Government Boys Elementary School 319 JB Toba Tek Singh, on Wednesday. During the visits, the Additional Deputy Commissioner meet with the students of the schools, teachers and members of the school council. ADC General reviewed the performance of the students. He appreciated the presence of cleaning of schools and the presence of basic facilities and called for further improvement of the quality of education under government policy. Monitoring of educational institutions is proof of the Chief Minister's commitment that quality education in the province is the right of every child. The purpose of these visits is to make public schools in accordance with public expectations and to ensure the goals of development in the field of education.



LANDI KOTAL: Students and members of civil society holding narcotics awareness walk. - F.P. photo

Modern online exam center setup at GKMC

F.P. Report

SWABI: Gajju Khan Medical College (GKMC), Swabi, has set up a state-of-the-art online examination center for Khyber Medical University (KMU) MBBS professional exams, aligning with modern educational standards. The facility was formally inaugurated by the Vice Chancellor of Khyber Medical University (KMU), Prof. Dr. Zia-Ul-Haq.

In line with KMU's directive to conduct MBBS exams online, GKMC has successfully established this center, which is fully equipped with modern facilities and can accommodate over 80 students simultaneously, says spokesperson.

According to spokesperson, the inauguration ceremony was attended by VC KMU, KMU's Controller of Examinations, Dean & CEO GKMC Prof. Dr. Shams Ur Rehman, and senior faculty members.

Speaking on the occasion, VC KMU, Prof. Dr.



Zia-Ul-Haq emphasized that the online examination system will enhance efficiency, save time, and promote a paperless environment. He commended GKMC's achievements and congratulated the college administration, faculty, and examination center team for their efforts in implementing this modern system.

The VC KMU further stated that this examination center would serve as a regional hub for KMU in Swabi, facilitating online exams for other affiliated colleges as well. On this occasion, Dean GKMC highlighted that adapting to modern examination systems is essential, and

GKMC has taken a major step forward. He added that the new facility is equipped with 80-plus computer systems, high-speed internet, a digital library, and advanced research tools, providing students with a high-quality academic environment.

It is worth mentioning that a mock examination was conducted from 10:00 AM to 12:00 PM to test the functionality of the new online examination center. The spokesperson further stated that the upcoming MBBS professional examination, scheduled for February 2025, will also be conducted online at this newly established center.

Awareness walk against narcotics menace held

F.P. Report

LANDI KOTAL: An awareness Walk against Narcotics menace conducted at Charwazgai, Tehsil Landi Kotal on Wednesday. The activity was organized under the auspices of students of a private college and was attended by people from different walks of life.

Addressing on the occasion Tehsil Chairman Haji Shah Khalid, in-charge officer of Landi Kotal police station Islamuddin and others said that narcotics was a curse that created hurdles to develop a healthy society therefore time had come to make the tribal society free of drugs.

It is ironic that a large number of locals especially, the youth community addicted to ice smoking, suffers from their active participation in the progress of the country, they remarked. They stressed upon the parents not to leave their children on the mercy of God but have a close check on them to restrain them from being part of bad companies.

Drugs peddlers and dealers deserved zero tolerance, they added and said it was the duty of every single member of civil society to join hands with anti-narcotics forces to wipe out the curse of Khyber and the country. The participants were carrying placards inscribed with slogans in favor of their demands.

Facilitates for tribesmen demanded

F.P. Report

WANA: A grand Jirga of the nine major tribes of the Ahmadzai Wazir held in Wana, in which large number of tribal elders, religious scholars, and business figures participated.

During the Jirga, a unanimous resolution was passed, stating that all Ahmadzai Wazir tribes would make every possible effort to protect their interests at the Angoor Adda Gate and resolve the issues faced by the local community. They pledged not to neglect providing all necessary facilities to their people at the border.

The elders and religious scholars highlighted that the tribes living in the Birmal area have proven their patriotism beyond doubt. The elders also noted that the tribes of Angoor Adda have made great sacrifices against powerful forces to safeguard the country's security.

Furthermore, they acknowledged the unwavering patriotism of the Wazir tribes residing across the border in Afghanistan, stating that they have made the greatest sacrifices in Pakistan's defense. The Jirga participants strongly urged the government to provide all necessary facilities to the Wazir tribes at the border gate.

Five killed in road mishap

F.P. Report

LARKANA: A resident of Larkana on his return from Dubai to Karachi Airport met with a head-on collision between a coach and a car on the Indus Highway near Manjhand, Toddi Phatak, resulting in the death of five people including two brothers and one critically injured.

According to the details, Waris Ali Jatoi, Shauck Ati Jatoi, Eidan Khan Jatoi, Noor Ali Jatoi and the car driver Azizullah Jatoi, who were returning from Dubai, died while Munawar Ali Jatoi was seriously injured and was shifted to the hospital for medical treatment.

KP govt approves Rs180m for bridge and road projects

F.P. Report

LOWER DIR: The chairman district development and advisory committee (DDAC) Lower Dir, MPA Ubaid ur Rehman has said the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government has approved Rs 30 million for Balambat Bridge while Rs 150 million for reconstruction and extension of Munda Samarbagh Road.

Talking to local journalists at Munda here on Wednesday, the lawmaker said that both the projects had been tendered and work on them would start soon. He said the Balambat Bridge over the Panjkora River was a key bridge in the district that connected upper parts with the rest of the district. He said the government had approved Rs 30 million for its repair work.

The lawmaker said that Rs 150 million had been approved for reconstruction and extension of Munda to Samarbagh road. Mr Ubaid said that he was well aware of the issues faced by local

residents and he would continue his efforts to resolve them one by one. He said that former lawmakers had ignored the area in development but the Pakistan Tahreek Insaf government would not disappoint the people of Dir.

Nurses' role: Lauding the services of nurses for their humanity, speakers at a function held at Timergara have declared them as backbone in the entire health system across the globe. The Dir College of Nursing and Allied Health Sciences Timergara organized a farewell and welcome party at the college here on Wednesday. A total of 22 nurses were awarded with honorary shields and prizes for their successful completion of nursing courses. According to the college administration, a total of 50 fresh nursing students were enrolled for a four-years nursing course in the college.

The function was addressed by district health officer Dr Muhammad

Nisar, former provincial minister Muzafar Said, educationist Muhammad Rahim Haqqani, managing director of the college Usman Ali and others. The speakers said that nurses across the globe played a key role in saving the lives of people during peace and wars. They said that nurses occupied an important position in the entire health system.

One of the speakers said that hundreds of nursing positions were lying vacant in Pakistan and nurses had enough opportunities to get jobs as compared to other technologies. "That is why the majority of qualified youth wish to get enrolled as a nurse", he said, adding the government should take practical measures to resolve issues faced by nurses during education and after the completion of their courses. The speakers also appreciated the role of the private sector in promoting medical education in the country and said the government should facilitate all such institutions.

PTI activist shares son's forced departure with minister

F.P. Report

CHARSADDA: Mohammad Siyar, a prominent political figure in Charsadda, met with the provincial minister for labour Fazal Shakur Khan to discuss the current political situation facing by Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI).

During the meeting, Siyar Khan expressed deep concern over the political environment for PTI workers and supporters across the province, especially in the district. He shared that his son, Naemullah, had been a dedicated Youth President and an active worker for PTI in



Charsadda. He described Naemullah's commitment to the party and his significant sacrifices for its cause.

However, Siyar Khan noted that in recent times, Naemullah's life had been put in serious danger due to the crackdown on political workers. "His only 'sin,' as I see it, was his unwavering support for PTI," Siyar Khan stated. "This led to threats to his life, forcing him to leave Pakistan for his safety."

The meeting highlighted the challenges faced by political workers in the current environment and raised concerns about the impact of political repression on the future of party activism in the region.

Chickenpox outbreak affects 50 children

F.P. Report

KARAK: As many as 50 children have been affected due to outbreak of Chickenpox in Mir Hassan Khel, Wana. The health department took measures to control the outbreak within 24 hours.

According to details, a sudden outbreak of chickenpox (Lakra Kakra) broke out in Mir Hassan Khel, Wana, in the Takht Nusrati tehsil. The outbreak affected more than fifty children in a single village. As soon as the information was received, DHO Dr. Muhammad Shoaib sent health teams under the leadership of Dr. Qudratullah to the affected area of Mir Hassan Khel and organized a free medical camp where the health teams not only treated all

the children but also provided free medical care to the children.

They provided free medicines and examination facilities to the affected children, and also visited several adjacent schools to educate students and teaching staff about the contagious disease and preventive measures, thereby preventing the disease from spreading further in the area. They also received the prayers of the public.

DIG directs crackdown against outlaw activities: Deputy Inspector General of Police Kohat Region visited Karak and orders police to take strict action against drugs and crimes. According to the details,

DIG Kohat Abbas Majeed Khan Marwat welcomed by District Police Officer Karak Shahbaz

Elahi, Deputy Commissioner Karak Shakeel Ahmed Jan and SP Investigation Muhammad Ashfaq Khan, and a well-dressed police contingent presented him with a guard of honor.

Annual Arts & Science exhibition held: The annual Science and Arts Exhibition was organized at Paradise Group of Schools and Colleges, Karak. In which the students displayed their creative talents to the fullest.

The special guests of the event were Additional Deputy Commissioner Finance Shahid Rafique and DSP Headquarters. He inspected the various stalls set up in the school and appreciated the hard work of the students after seeing the models prepared by them.

Drought leading Shangla towards water scarcity

F.P. Report

SHANGLA: Like other parts of the country, Shangla is also facing severe water shortages due to the lack of winter rains and routine snowfall. Springs and wells have dried up, and the water levels in rivers and streams have significantly decreased. This has led to an acute shortage of water for drinking and for powering local flour mills and micro-hydropower stations.

The reduction in water availability has also caused

a significant drop in electricity production from these local hydropower plants. Unlike previous years, this year's absence of rains and snowfall has resulted in record drought conditions, which are severely affecting natural springs. Experts fear that the ongoing dry spell may negatively impact the upcoming wheat and other crop seasons.

Local elders have described this as the longest drought in their memory. Two weeks ago, the area received minimal winter

rainfall, but the usual winter rains and snowfall have not yet occurred. Educated and informed residents attribute this situation to climate change.

The residents of Shangla are urging the government to take immediate steps to address the severe shortage of drinking water. They have demanded the establishment of the Water and Sanitation Services Program (WSSP) in Shangla to ensure the provision of clean drinking water to the local population.

Rescue 1122 holds one-day training session

F.P. Report

D I KHAN: Rescue 1122 held a one-day training session for teachers of 25 schools to equip them with skills for tackling emergencies.

The training program was arranged in collaboration with a non-governmental organization at Government Higher Secondary School, Paharpur

following a request from the district education department.

The Rescue 1122 training team provided comprehensive information about emergency services, including how to call 1122, basic first aid, personal safety, fire safety measures, and precautions during natural disasters such as earthquakes. Participants which also

included were also given practical training through hands-on sessions to equip them with the skills to respond effectively in emergencies. Syed Irfan Shah, Project Manager of the organization thanked all the participants for their active involvement and praised the Rescue 1122 team for organizing such an excellent training program.

Child Protection Center at Hafizabad inaugurated

F.P. Report

HAFIZABAD: Under the directives of Chief Minister Punjab, Maryam Nawaz, the Chairperson of the Child Protection Bureau and Member of the Provincial Assembly (MPA), Sarah Ahmad, officially inaugurated the Child Protection Unit in Hafizabad, on Wednesday.

Addressing on this occasion, Chairperson Sarah Ahmad extended her heartfelt gratitude to Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz for her steadfast support in establishing the Child Protection Unit. She emphasized that the unit, established in collaboration with UNICEF Pakistan, will serve as a critical referral center for child protection, offering essential services to homeless, abandoned, and vulnerable children. The facility aims to safeguard children in Hafizabad from abuse, exploitation, and neglect, ensuring their safety and well-being.

She highlighted that the

establishment of Child Protection Units across Punjab marks a significant step forward in strengthening child protection mechanisms in the province. She said that the inauguration of the Child Protection Unit in Hafizabad reflects the government's commitment to prioritizing child welfare and protection, ensuring a safer and brighter future for the children of Punjab.

She underscored the unit's role in providing comprehensive support to abused and abandoned children, empowering them to become productive members of society. Additionally, she announced that the Child Protection Bureau will conduct extensive awareness campaigns in Hafizabad to promote child rights and foster a protective environment for children.

The Chairperson also revealed plans to expand the reach of the Child Protection Bureau to all districts of Punjab, ensuring that child protection

services are accessible province-wide. She expressed her appreciation to Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz, the Chief Secretary of Punjab, the Secretary of the Home Department, and other collaborating departments for their unwavering support in making this initiative a reality.

Former Member of the National Assembly (MNA), Saira Afzal Tarar, was also present at the inauguration ceremony. She commended Chairperson Sarah Ahmad for her efforts in establishing the Child Protection Unit in Hafizabad, noting its importance in addressing the needs of vulnerable children.

The event was attended by key stakeholders, including Child Protection Officer from UNICEF, Zahida Manzoor; Director General of the Child Protection Bureau, Aftab Ahmad Khan; Director Admin Waqar Azeem, Director Program, Usman Akram; and representatives from various government departments.



Climate change made LA fires worse

LOS ANGELES (BBC): Climate change was a major factor behind the hot, dry weather that gave rise to the devastating LA fires, a scientific study has confirmed. It made those weather conditions about 35% more likely, according to World Weather Attribution - globally recognised for their studies linking extreme weather to climate change.

The authors noted that the LA wildfire season is getting longer while the rains that normally put out the blazes have reduced. The scientists highlight that these wildfires are highly complex with multiple factors playing a role, but they are confident that a warming climate is making LA more prone to intense fire events.

"Climate change increased the risk of the devastating LA wildfires," said Dr Clair Barnes, from Imperial College London, the study's lead author.

"Drought conditions are more frequently pushing into winter, increasing the chance a fire will break out during strong Santa Ana winds that can turn small ignitions into deadly infernos." The Santa Ana winds are strong and gusty east or north-easterly winds that blow from inland California towards the coast. Around 30 people have died and more than 10,000 homes have been destroyed in the fast-spreading, destructive fires that broke out in early January.

This new study looks at what are termed the fire-prone conditions that can lead to dangerous conflagrations. It's been carried out by a team of researchers from World Weather Attribution (WWA), a global group that publishes rapid analyses of climate-related weather events. They use climate models to simulate how the warming that has occurred since the middle of the 19th century is influencing heatwaves, droughts, floods and fires.

The widespread burning of coal, oil and gas in the wake of the industrial revolution has driven billions of tonnes of planet-warming gases into the atmosphere. Acting like a blanket, these gases have driven up temperatures by around 1.2C since then. By using climate models and statistical methods along with real world obser-



ations, the WWA group have been able to show how much of an influence climate warming has had on extreme events. In the case of the LA fires, they found that the hot, dry conditions that drove them are expected to occur once every 17 years.

This is an increase in likelihood of around 35% compared to a world that hadn't experienced warming. "We actually see that the models show very much the same results that the [real world] observations have," said Dr Friederike Otto, the head of World Weather Attribution.

"So there, in this combined index, we are quite confident about the result... we have actually a signal that we can say that we definitely can attribute that, also quantitatively." The researchers also examined other important variables that can lead to wildfire including the length of the fire season.

By analysing weather observations, the scientists found that this has increased by around 23 days since the world began warming, around 1850. The team say that this means the dry conditions and the Santa Ana winds that are crucial for the spread of fires, are increasingly overlapping. Another key element is drought. Dry conditions in the LA area over the October to December period are now about 2.4 times more likely than before humans starting using fossil fuels on a large scale.

The researchers are clear that cli-

mate change increased the probability of the hot, dry conditions that gave rise to the fires. However, the authors are more cautious about the link between rising temperatures and the longer fire season or decreased rainfall, saying that the models did not show a significant connection. Despite these reservations, the conclusion is that a warmer world increased the chances of the devastating wildfires occurring - as more fossil fuels continue to be burnt, those chances will continue to rise.

"Overall the paper finds that climate change has made the Los Angeles fires more likely despite some statistical uncertainty," said Prof Gabi Hegerl, from the University of Edinburgh, who was not part of the study team. "This is a carefully researched result that should be taken seriously," she said in a statement. The new work builds on research that was published while the fires were still burning fiercely. That study linked the wildfires to what's termed "climate whiplash." The idea is that very wet years are followed almost immediately by very dry ones, which increases the risk of fires. This is what happened in L.A., when two wet winters were followed by an extremely dry autumn and winter this year - the wet weather promoted the growth of grass and shrubs that became the fuel for the fires that took off in the gusting Santa Ana winds.

S Sudan lifts nationwide curfew

JUBA (Reuters): South Sudan has lifted a nationwide curfew imposed more than 10 days ago after a night of deadly rioting in the capital over the alleged killing of South Sudanese people by the army and allied groups in neighbouring Sudan, its spokesperson said.

Riots erupted in Juba and elsewhere in the country on Jan. 16 and 17, with protesters angry about what they believed was the involvement of Sudan's military and allied groups in the killing of South Sudanese citizen in Sudan's El Gezira. The Sudanese army condemned what it called "individual violations" in the area after human-rights groups blamed it and its allies for ethnically-targeted attacks against civilians accused of supporting the rebel Rapid Support Forces.

"This is to inform the public that the curfew declared on January 17, by the Inspector General of Police is lifted," police spokesperson John Kassara Koang Nhial, told Reuters. "The reason the curfew was lifted is because the security status has improved and the angry demonstrators, who were actually trying to make some violence, also got calm and each and every one went back home."

Rebels closer to taking key DR Congo city

DR CONGO (BBC): Rebels appear to be edging closer to taking control of the key city of Goma in the east of the Democratic Republic of Congo following reports that they had captured its airport. The Congolese government has insisted that it is still in charge as fighting in parts of the city continues. Warehouses with food and medical supplies have been looted, aid agencies say.

The clashes between M23 rebels and the army and its allies have left hospitals overwhelmed by casualties and bodies lying on the streets, according to the UN. Growing anger over the rebel offensive led to protesters targeting foreign embassies in the capital, Kinshasa. Calls for peace talks end the fighting are mounting.

Neighbouring Rwanda has been accused of backing the Tutsi-led M23 as it made a rapid advance in recent months across the mineral-rich region. Rwanda has consistently denied this. The lakeside city of Goma, on the border with Rwanda, is a vital transport and trading hub close to large sources of minerals that are essential in the manufacture of mobile phones among other things.

Following a meeting, the African Union (AU) called on the M23 to lay down its arms. The AU's peace and security commissioner, Bankole Adeoye, condemned the "violence by M23 and all other negative forces, and calls for full respect of DR Congo's sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity", a statement from the AU on X said. As diplomats were discussing the situation, the rebels seemed to be gaining ground in Goma. "They have taken control of the airport, M23 fighters are there," a security source told the AFP news agency.

More than 1,200 Congolese soldiers have surrendered and are confined to the [UN base] at the airport." Earlier, Adelheid Marschang, of the World Health Organization's emergency response co-ordinator for the Democratic Republic of Congo spoke of "hundreds of people in hospital, most admitted with gunshot wounds". Speaking to reporters in Geneva, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) said its hospital in Goma had 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. In Kinshasa, angry crowds targeted the French, Kenyan and Ugandan embassies among others.

Exhausted Palestinians arrive in Gaza City to no homes, killed family

GAZA: There are many stories among the tens of thousands of people walking along Gaza's al-Rashid Street, heading for the north. In the crowds is a man with a white beard walking with determination alongside his family. In one hand, he carries a blanket and a few meagre possessions. In the other, he holds onto his adult son, who has Down Syndrome.

Rifaat Jouda doesn't pretend that he isn't tired. He started his journey in the morning in southern Gaza, in Khan Younis's al-Mawasi, where his family had been displaced for 15 months during Israel's war on Gaza. The aim was to reach Gaza City, a journey finally possible since Israel allowed Palestinians in the southern Gaza Strip to travel, after a ceasefire began on January 19.

But it's a long walk - some 30 kilometres (18.6 miles) along a coastal road - and Rifaat's family were forced to stop to rest every hour. "The journey has been exhausting and very difficult," Rifaat tells Al Jazeera, after finally reaching Gaza City. "Despite that, we were determined to return."

Before the war began 15 months ago, the majority of Gaza's population lived in the north, centred around the enclave's biggest urban area, Gaza City. But that is also where Israel has focused its attacks, and issued forced evacuation orders early on in the war, telling people to flee to "safe zones" in central and southern Gaza. That led to the majority of Gaza's approximately 2.3 million population displaced in those central and southern areas, below a corridor carved out of central Gaza that Israel called Netzarim. While the destruction was overwhelming in the north - approximately 74 percent of Gaza City's buildings have been damaged or destroyed in the war - the supposed safe zones were

not spared, and the areas people had fled to were also devastated - 50 percent of buildings in central Gaza's Deir el-Balah were damaged or destroyed, while in southern Gaza, it was 55 percent of buildings in Khan Younis and 48 percent of buildings in Rafah.

The constant Israeli attacks - which killed at least 47,300 throughout the war - forced Palestinians to flee from place to place and made many feel that they should never have left Gaza City and the north in the first place. "The days of displacement were the hardest and most exhausting," Rifaat says. "We cannot imagine continuing our lives as displaced people away from our homes."

"Anyone who sees these crowds understands well that no plans for forced displacement will succeed, no matter what happens," he adds, before suggesting that he may even be able to return to Ashdod - a city just north of Gaza but now in Israel - from which his family were forcibly displaced in 1948 during what Palestinians call the Nakba, or "catastrophe", with the creation of Israel. Displacement is a central motif for Palestinians - owing to the 1948 Nakba when at least 750,000 Palestinians were forced from their homes. Many people in Gaza itself are refugees, their families originally from towns and villages now part of Israel. And so, particularly after the experience during the current Gaza war, many regret ever having left their homes in the north.

Sami al-Dabbagh, a 39-year-old heading back to Sheikh Radwan in northern Gaza, explains that he was displaced to several different areas before settling in central Gaza. The father-of-four, having walked on foot for hours, says he will never make the same mistake again. "We will never repeat the experience of displacement, no matter

what happens," al-Dabbagh says. It's a sentiment shared by another man travelling up to northern Gaza, Radwan al-Ajoul.

"Displacement has taught us never to leave our homes again," he says, as he carries his belongings on his shoulder. The 45-year-old father of eight has been living in Deir el-Balah, but like al-Dabbagh, he is also from Sheikh Radwan. "The feeling of returning is indescribable, especially since the conditions are no different between the north and the south," he says. Conversations on al-Rashid Street are fleeting - the people walking here have been moving for hours, trying to keep track of their family members, helping those weaker than them, and carrying the few belongings they have been able to keep a hold of after more than a year of war and displacement.

But the details shared reveal the loss that Palestinians in Gaza have had to endure. Khaled Ibrahim, 52, came from Khan Younis and is headed to Beit Lahiya, north of Gaza City. His family - he has four children - have no home to return to. He plans to set up a tent instead.

But more than a home, he has lost those closest to him; Ibrahim's wife, granddaughter, and two of his brothers were killed in a bombing near their tent in Khan Younis last June. "Our lives are hard. We have lost everything in every way," Ibrahim says. Another returnee, Nada Jahjouh, has also lost family. One of her sons was killed during Gaza's Great March of Return - in 2018, before the war. Another was killed in May during an Israeli attack. She now has one son and a grandson left - whom she carries as she walks. "We are exhausted, physically and mentally," Jahjouh says. "I feel very sad returning without my sons. My joy is incomplete." — Aljazeera

US SC rejects challenge to Mississippi lifetime ban

WASHINGTON (Reuters): The US Supreme Court declined to hear a challenge to Mississippi's lifetime ban on voting by people convicted of a wide range of felonies, a policy adopted in 1890 during the Jim Crow era that stands as one of the toughest such restrictions in the nation.

The justices turned away an appeal of a lower court's decision rejecting a lawsuit that claimed that the ban - a provision of the Mississippi constitution that applies even after a sentence has been completed - violates the US Constitution's 14th Amendment promise of equal protection and Eighth Amendment bar on cruel and unusual punishments. The class action suit was brought in 2018 by six Mississippi men - including white and Black plaintiffs - who lost the right to vote even though they have completed their sentences for various felonies, including grand larceny and receiving stolen property.

The case centers on Section 241 of the Mississippi Constitution, which denies people who have been convicted of a range of felonies the right to vote for life. The range of crimes include murder, rape, bribery, theft, forgery and arson, but lawyers for the plaintiffs have said it

applies regardless of the seriousness of the felony, even "writing a bad check for \$100 or stealing \$250 worth of timber." Section 241 was adopted by a state constitutional convention with the racist intent to undermine the electoral power of Black people after they gained the right to vote following the 1861-1865 US Civil War that ended slavery in states including Mississippi. The provision removed crimes thought to be "white crimes" and added those thought to be "black crimes," according to court papers.

Following the end of the post-Civil War reconstruction period, policies of racial segregation and disenfranchisement of Black people were broadly enforced by white leaders in numerous US states including Mississippi using what were called Jim Crow laws. More than 58% of currently disenfranchised Mississippi residents who have completed their sentences are Black, according to lawyers for the plaintiffs, adding that Mississippi and Virginia are the only two states that continue to "permanently disenfranchise first-time offenders who were convicted of non-violent and non-voting-related felonies." Black people make up 38% of the state's

population, according to US census statistics.

A three-judge panel of the New Orleans-based 5th US Circuit Court of Appeals, which hears cases from Mississippi, in 2023 ruled 2-1 in favor of the claim by the plaintiffs that the ban violates the Eighth Amendment. "Mississippi stands as an outlier among its sister states, bucking a clear and consistent trend in our nation against permanent disenfranchisement," Judge James Dennis wrote in the opinion. In 2024, however, the full 5th Circuit reconsidered the case and voted 13-6 to uphold the ban. The Supreme Court in 2023 declined to hear a separate constitutional challenge to Section 241, prompting a dissent by liberal Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson, who wrote that the remaining crimes from the provision's "pernicious origin still work the very harm the 1890 convention intended - denying Black Mississippians the vote."

A convicted felon's voting rights can be restored in Mississippi only by a two-thirds vote of the state legislature - something that happened just 18 times between 2013 and 2018, according to the plaintiffs, or a pardon by the governor.

Europe's biggest fire festival lights up Shetland

BRUSSELS (BBC): The streets of Lerwick are once again filled with fire and smoke as Shetland holds its world famous Up Helly Aa fire festival. The event, which is traditionally held on the of January, celebrates Shetland's Norse heritage.

Thousands of visitors travel to the UK's most northerly islands each year to watch the evening torchlit procession through Lerwick, which reaches its climax when the replica of a Viking long ship is set on fire. Women and girls made history last year when they joined the main "squad" at the head

of the procession for the first time in more than 140 years. More than 40 groups, locally known as "squads", march through the streets of Lerwick during the evening torchlit procession at Europe's biggest fire festival.

At the head of the crowd is the "Jarl Squad" led by its chief, the Guizer Jarl. Its members, who become Vikings for the day, wear custom-made suits, axes and shields. They also have to build their own replica galley - a Viking long ship - that will be set on fire at the end of Up Helly Aa. This year, they named it Byssen. For

Calum Grains, who had to wait 17 years to take up his position as the 2025 Guizer Jarl, in January is always a special day. "Up Helly Aa is such a great community event - it marks the end of that winter period and we are starting to look forward to the new year again," he said.

"It's one of these huge things that make Shetland unique." Calum led his 61-member squad through the streets of Lerwick to showcase Byssen to the crowds of onlookers before heading to the local care homes and schools to sing and dance for the excited audience.

Immigration officers say ‘the worst go first,’ but now there’s no ‘free pass’

SILVER SPRING, Md. (AP): A week into Donald Trump's second presidency and his efforts to crack down on illegal immigration, federal officers are operating with a new sense of mission, knowing that "nobody gets a free pass anymore."

A dozen officers from Immigration and Customs Enforcement gathered before dawn in a Maryland parking lot, then fanned out to the Washington suburbs to find their targets: someone wanted in El Salvador for homicide, a person convicted of armed robbery, a migrant found guilty of possessing child sexual abuse material and another with drug and gun convictions. All were in the country illegally. "The worst go first," Matt Elliston, director of ICE's Baltimore field office, said of the agency's enforcement priorities.

The Associated Press accompanied the officers, who offered a glimpse of how their work has changed under a White House intent on deporting large numbers of immigrants living in the US without permission. People considered public safety and national security threats are still the top priority, Elliston said. That is no different from the Biden administration, but a big change has already taken hold: Under Trump, officers can now arrest people

without legal status if they run across them while looking for migrants targeted for removal. Under Joe Biden, such "collateral arrests" were banned. "We're looking for those public safety, national security cases. The big difference being, nobody has a free pass anymore," Elliston said. The number of collateral arrests has fluctuated, he said. Across Maryland, ICE had arrested 13 people. Of those, nine were targets and the other four were people ICE came across during the course of the morning. Of those "collaterals," one had an aggravated theft conviction. Another had already been deported once, and two others had final orders of removal.

The administration highlighted the participation of other agencies in immigration operations over the weekend, including the FBI, the Drug Enforcement Administration and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, which are part of the Justice Department. Emile Bove, the acting deputy attorney general, observed arrests in Chicago, a sign of the Justice Department's growing involvement. ICE's daily arrests, which averaged 311 in the year ending Sept. 30, stayed fairly steady in the first days after Trump took office, then

spiked dramatically to 956 to 1,179. If sustained, those numbers would mark the highest daily average since ICE began keeping records. Trump also has lifted long-time guidelines that restricted ICE from operating at "sensitive locations" such as schools, churches or hospitals. That decision has worried many migrants and advocates who fear children will be traumatized by seeing their parents arrested in the drop-off line at school or that migrants needing medical care won't go to the hospital for fear of arrest.

Elliston pushed back on those fears, saying it's been exceedingly rare for ICE to enter one of those locations. In his 17 years on the job, he said he's gone into a school only once and that was to help stop an active shooter. He said the removal of other guidelines that had restricted ICE operations at courthouses makes a bigger difference in the agency's work. But getting rid of the sensitive locations policy does affect ICE in more subtle ways.

For example, at one point, the team stopped at a parking lot in hopes of catching a Venezuelan gang member who was believed to be working as a delivery driver at a nearby business. Across the street was a church, and one street over was an elementary school, which under the previous

guidance would have made it off limits to park to do surveillance. What has not changed, Elliston said, is that these are targeted operations. ICE has a list of people they're going after as opposed to indiscriminately going to a workplace or apartment building looking for people in the country illegally. "I really hate the word 'raids' because it gives people the wrong impression, as if we're just arbitrarily going door to door and saying, 'Show us your papers,'" he said. "Nothing could be further from the truth."

In the week since Trump returned to office, Elliston said he's constantly been on the phone, trying to dispel rumors about what ICE is doing and who is getting arrested. Since starting his job in 2022, Elliston said he's worked to build relations with elected officials and law enforcement agencies across Maryland, a state where many communities have sanctuary policies limiting their cooperation with federal immigration authorities. Elliston has reached out to cities to educate them about what ICE does and whom officers pursue. He also tries to build relationships with city officials so they feel more comfortable letting authorities know when migrants who have been detained are going to be released. That way ICE can get them.

Russia wipes out three generations of a Ukrainian family

MOSCOW (BBC): Teddy bears - large and small - are clustered around the grave of Adam Buhayov as if keeping him company. But the 17-month-old is not alone. His mother Sophia Buhayova, 27, is buried in the grave with him, in a bleak and windswept cemetery in Ukraine's southern city of Zaporizhzhia.

Adam's great-grandmother, Tetiana Tarasevych, 68, is in the grave right beside them. All three were killed together on 7 November last year by a Russian attack in a war that has devoured Ukraine since 2022 - but which no longer dominates the international agenda. Some of Adam's last moments were captured by Tetiana in a video on her phone. The two of them were out on a walk with Adam's mum Sophia. Blond-haired, blue-eyed

Adam wears a red anorak and a woollen hat, with a Mickey Mouse sticker on the front. "Don't take off your hat," Tetiana tells him gently, "you will be cold". He does it anyway.

One hour later the trio were at home, about to get to bed to eat, when a Russian guided aerial bomb sliced through their block of flats. Adam, Sophia and Tetiana were killed, along with six other civilians. Sophia's mother Yulia Tarasevych, 46, now struggles to carry on - without most of her family, without her past and her future. She is slight, and swamped by a heavy black coat and by grief. "I don't know how to live," she says. "It's hell on earth. I lost my mother, my daughter, and my grandson in one second." The closest she can get to them now is at their graves. "My dear Mum," she says

weeping, and stroking a photograph of Tetiana - a doctor like her - attached to a wooden cross. One step brings her to the grave of Sophia and Adam. She leans down to touch his photo, calling him "my little kitten". Then she speaks directly to a photo of Sophia - a black and white image of a young woman with long dark hair. "My beautiful daughter," she cries, "I am sorry I could not save you." Sophia's father, 60-year-old Serhiy Lushchay, is by her side - a robust figure who shares her loss and her sorrow. "We visit the graveyard often," Yulia says, "and we will as long as we live, because it truly makes it a little easy for us".

Every time they come, there are more graves stretching out into the distance. The cemetery is expanding "at a staggering

pace," Yulia says. Rows of blue and yellow flags, marking the graves of fallen soldiers, pierce the sombre grey sky. Zaporizhzhia, where the family lived, is a regular target for Russian forces. It is a strategically important industrial city, near front-line fighting. Europe's largest nuclear power plant - about 55km (34 miles) from the city - is held by the Russians. On the day of the attack that killed Sophia, Tetiana and Adam, Yulia called her daughter from western Ukraine, where she was on a work trip. "I told her to be careful. Bombs had been falling over the city since the morning. She said: 'Thank you mum, don't worry. Everything will be fine with us.'" Serhiy was at work when he heard something had happened. He too called his daughter, but there was no reply.

The Frontier Post

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

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China springs an Artificial Intelligence shock

A Chinese startup in Hangzhou has put out a new version of generative AI called DeepSeek, using chips of a lower sophistication because of the restrictions imposed on chips by the United States, and it has overtaken ChatGPT, which had come into the market in November 2022.

ChatGPT had shaken up the world as it were, and there began a fierce competition between the big tech companies like Microsoft and Google to get ahead with a more sophisticated version to dominate the market.

The Chinese have done what they seem to know best. They have adapted the AI contrivance and turned out a cheaper one, and DeepSeek has already been downloaded more than ChatGPT on Apple Store. Even as the valuations of the mostly American tech companies soared and investors poured in hundreds of millions of dollars to produce a better version of ChatGPT, the unknown Chinese startup had achieved a commercial breakthrough with the claim that it had invested a mere \$6 million.

It is not a surprise that the share prices of the tech companies in New York had tumbled down. Futures on Nasdaq 100 lost 4 per cent, S&P 500 lost 2 per cent. Share prices of chipmaker Nvidia fell by 11 per cent, of Oracle by 8.5 per cent, and AI data analytics company Palantir lost 6.5 per cent. The markets are in a panic, and when the panic subsidies, which it will, normalcy would be restored.

But the time of speculative valuation of AI companies is over. But things are yet to be established, to be confirmed. We still need the feedback from DeepSeek as there was from ChatGPT.

Jon Withaar, a portfolio manager at Pictet Asset Management said, "We still don't know the details and nothing has been 100% confirmed in regards to the claims, but if there truly has been a breakthrough in the cost to train models from \$100 million + to this alleged \$6 million number this is actually very positive for productivity and AI end users as cost is obviously much lower meaning lower costs of access." That is a good caveat.

Whether DeepSeek lives up to the hype or not, what has happened is that the market for AI devices has opened up. It is no more the monopoly of the American tech giants and their investors with deep pockets. The American monopoly of AI has been broken. And from China, the pricing down of AI devices could recur in Japan and South Korea.

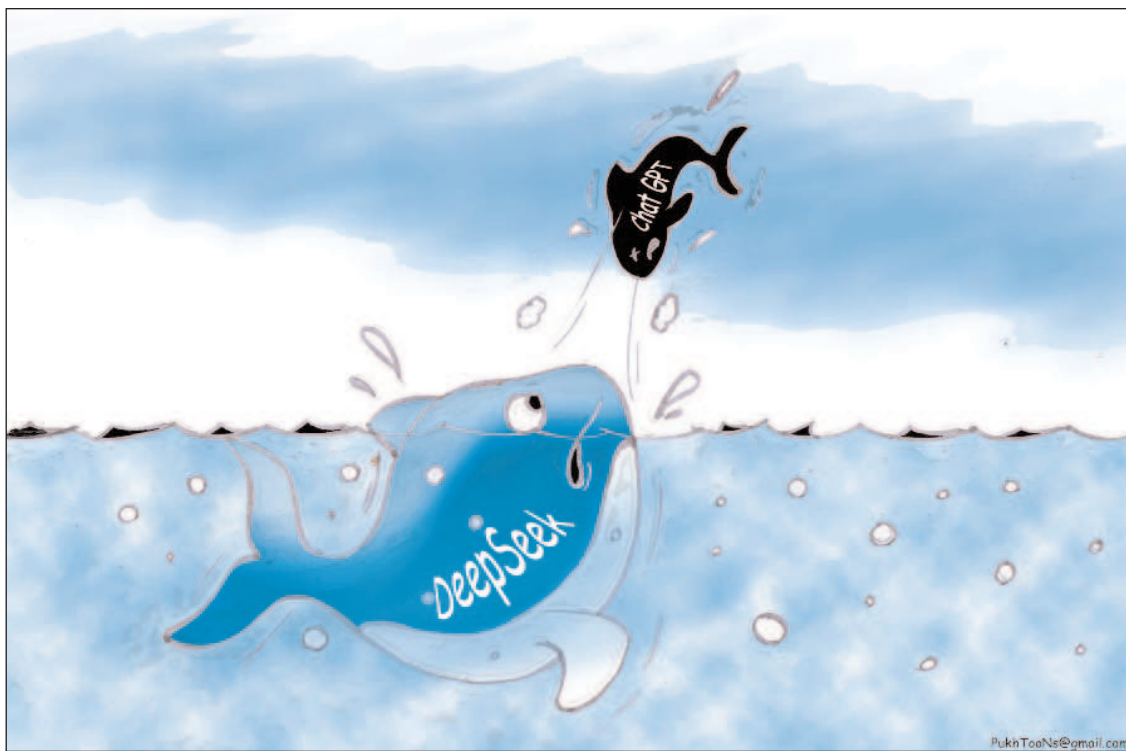
The threat of technology denial by the US will now become ineffective. But the dangers posed by AI devices in general do not vanish because they are now available at lower prices. The AI contrivances like ChatGPT and DeepSeek can be put to good and harmful uses, and there is need for regulation of some kind. What Sam Altman, the man who led the researchers who put out ChatGPT, had told the members of the US Senate still holds good: the need for regulation, for oversight.

What is also of great interest in the emergence of DeepSeek is that technology cannot remain a secret in the global economy. A new technology is of no use if its products do not sell in the world markets. And however encrypted the technology might be in a device, it will be broken through, and it will be reconstructed.

In more ways than one, global markets are free markets when goods and services are laid out in the open, and the users will find out the insides of the devices that they are using. It is good news for the people, and a sobering news for the tycoons who would want to make a killing with every new technological breakthrough. The radical aspect of DeepSeek is it is an open access device.

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A US-Hamas dialogue could shift us from war to peace

Rami G Khouri

LAST week, senior Hamas and United States officials expressed to the media their mutual willingness to engage in "a dialogue". The statements by senior Hamas leader Mousa Abu Marzouk and US presidential Middle East envoy Steve Witkoff most likely meant to test the waters for future diplomatic moves, perhaps due to their shared recognition that Israel's current war-making frenzy in the region, which could soon reach Iran, is bad news for all concerned.

US President Donald Trump has repeatedly shown his intention to end the wars in the Middle East and Ukraine, which detract from his bigger plans to reconfigure US global relations; and Hamas has taken an opportunity to demonstrate during the ceasefire that it is still in control of Gaza and remains an important political group among the Palestinians.

In this context, the sudden inclination by the US and Hamas towards "dialogue" should be taken seriously and explored carefully because it is possible and in the best interest of all concerned in the Middle East and beyond.

There is certainly a wide gulf between the two actors: Washington has been deeply complicit in Israel's genocidal devastation in Gaza, while the Hamas resistance movement is widely seen as a terrorist organisation by much of the West. But this is precisely why they must meet, talk, and accurately identify each other's positions and potential to shift from militarism to peacemaking. The ongoing ceasefire is an opportunity to

launch this process, which is why completing its three phases should now be the top priority.

Effective Israeli propaganda has long demonised Hamas in the West as a reckless and vicious terror group that wants to destroy Israel. The reality, however, is that Hamas has been a successful Palestinian national political organisation because it has combined the three critical dynamics that most of the world's 14 million Palestinians support: principled and sustained resistance against US-enabled Israeli colonisation and subjugation; political activism to forge a national political programme supported by all Palestinian factions; and pragmatism that constantly explores how to peacefully resolve the conflict with Zionism.

Understanding Hamas and its positions does not mean recognising it formally, adopting its views, or refraining from criticising its militancy, which usually reflects the global definition of permissible armed resistance to occupation, and occasionally fits the definition of terrorism against civilians.

Like most liberation movements, Hamas simultaneously practises militarism, resistance, terrorism and political pragmatism. Recognising and separating those strands is a key to engaging the movement on the path towards a peaceful resolution of the conflict with Israel – that is, if an Israeli government ever emerges that genuinely seeks a just permanent peace.

A US-Hamas dialogue now could clarify if both of them seek peace. My lifelong interactions with Palestinian leaders indi-

cate that the most important but unappreciated attribute of Hamas and the entire Palestine Liberation Organization leadership has been their longstanding willingness to establish a Palestinian state that would coexist peacefully with Israel within its 1967 borders adjusted by mutual consent.

Hamas has officially, informally and repeatedly expressed this view, which has been unanimously formalised in pan-Arab peace offers to Israel since 2002. These positions were reaffirmed again last week in an interview by senior Hamas official Basem Naim.

A peaceful resolution has never happened mainly because hardline Israeli leaders have consistently ignored these offers by Hamas and all other Palestinian groups.

The Canadian scholar Colter Louwerse shows in his research how US-Israeli defiance has been the main obstacle since the 1970s to implementing the international law-based consensus for a two-state resolution of the conflict. As he wrote in 2023: "In January 1976, the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) offered to negotiate the terms of this 'two-state' consensus. With Washington's support, Israel refused the good-faith Palestinian proposal [...]. Israeli-American bad-faith rejectionism is, in fact, the primary 'obstacle to peace'."

This rejectionism along, with relentless Israeli aggression, reflects the Zionist-Israeli aim since 1920 to evict as many Palestinians as possible from their ancestral lands and formalise exclu-

sive Jewish sovereignty over all of historic Palestine. As the conflict has worsened and expanded across the region, from the Arab side, the terms that Hamas accepted have remained on the table. They are tough, but realistic. They require Zionism to define its borders and end its colonial rampage in the region, and the Palestinians to formally accept statehood on just 22 per cent of historic Palestine.

All agreements that drop war in favour of peace are tough and demand rigorous changes in policy on all sides. The end of the South African apartheid regime and the US wars in Vietnam and Afghanistan are a few examples of how tough compromises for peace can be – but also how vital they are.

If Witkoff and Abu Marzouk were speaking for their respective governments, as I suspect they were, this is the time to move ahead with a US-Hamas dialogue and ignore the howlers all around, especially in the US and Israel, who will try to stop this important step from happening.

Any dialogue must above all avoid the mistakes of the 1993 Oslo Process and other peace-making attempts, which substituted endless talking sessions about concessions on both sides, while Israeli colonial expansions and annexations continued with explicit US support.

We must work overtime to take advantage of this opportunity, in the wake of expanding wars and much suffering, to shift the entire Middle East from its disastrous current path of militarism towards future coexistence among all states.

Historical GCC-Lebanon partnership should be restored

Dr. Abdel Aziz Aluwaisheg

SEVERAL high-level Gulf Cooperation Council officials have visited Lebanon recently to show support for newly elected President Joseph Aoun and Nawaf Salam, his pick for prime minister. Last Thursday, Prince Faisal bin Farhan visited Beirut, becoming the first Saudi foreign minister to do so in some 15 years.

At a joint press conference with Aoun, the Saudi minister expressed optimism about Lebanon's future and his confidence that Lebanon would be able to carry out the necessary reforms, long delayed because the country did not have a president for more than two years. Hezbollah's grip on Lebanese politics prevented the election of a new president and the adoption of economic and political reforms demanded by the international community. Prince Faisal suggested that "implementing reforms will enhance global confidence in the country."

The choice of Salam, an independent professional who was until recently the president of the International Court of Justice, is an important signal that Lebanon wants a break from the past, when pro-Iran figures dominated the country's politics.

Kuwaiti Foreign Minister Abdullah Al-Yahya and GCC Secretary-General Jassem Albudaiwi were in Beirut last Friday. They delivered similar messages to Lebanon's new leadership. Kuwait holds the current rotating presidency of the GCC and has been keenly interested in restoring Lebanon's close relations with the Gulf countries.

After his election on Jan. 9, Aoun pledged to establish "strategic partnerships" with the Gulf states, adding that his first foreign visit would be to Saudi Arabia, expressing hope that bilateral relations between the two countries would strengthen "in all areas." At last week's press conference, Aoun thanked the Kingdom for its efforts to assist Lebanon, particularly in ending the

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Kuwaiti Foreign Minister Abdullah Al-Yahya and GCC Secretary-General Jassem

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presidential impasse. Over the past two decades, Lebanon and the GCC countries became estranged as Hezbollah came to dominate Lebanon's political, security and economic systems, including its foreign policy, which became aligned with Iran's. It also dominated law enforcement and parts of the judiciary, frustrating investigations into its members and shielding them from accountability. During Michel Aoun's presidency (2016-2022), the Lebanese government acquiesced as Hezbollah became involved in the war in Syria and committing unspeakable atrocities there, as well as when Hezbollah supported, trained and armed terrorist groups, including the Houthis of Yemen and others opposed to GCC states. Attacks and kidnappings of GCC citizens in Lebanon became more frequent. The group also waged a drug war against the GCC states, while the government stood idly by. Relations with GCC states suffered as a result, the Gulf's investment and trade with Lebanon shrank and GCC tourists stopped going to Lebanon.

Yet, the GCC countries were concerned about the deepening political instability and the economic meltdown, which hurt ordinary citizens not connected to Hezbollah or its allies. In many cases, those who were hurt the most were opposed to its malign activities. GCC states joined like-minded countries in trying to end the country's malaise and in 2022 launched an initiative to help Lebanon get out of the abyss, but there was only limited success because of the inability or unwillingness of the Hezbollah-dominated government to cooperate.

By contrast, the newly elected president and his chosen prime minister are

determined to open a new page with the GCC countries, as with the rest of Lebanon's traditional friends and partners. They are aware of the serious rupture the hostile policies of the past have caused with the outside world, especially the GCC.

The GCC is equally keen to restore its historically solid partnership with Lebanon, politically, economically and culturally. When the GCC embarked on free trade negotiations two decades ago, Lebanon was the first country with which it concluded a deal. The agreement was signed in Beirut in May 2004, witnessed by the late Rafik Hariri. The signing was followed by a flurry of activities to enhance trade relations, but those efforts were dealt a serious blow when Hariri was assassinated in February 2005.

The GCC wants to resume those efforts and engage fully with Lebanon, not only on trade but in all areas, as Joseph Aoun said last week.

First, political reform is needed. In particular, the Lebanese factions need to make a concerted effort to reconcile and rebuild their country together, through dialogue and mutual respect without the use of force or threats. Completing the implementation of the Taif Accord would be a good start.

Second, the Lebanese government, army and security forces should be able to exercise full and sole authority throughout Lebanon. All relevant UN Security Council resolutions should be fully implemented.

Third, Lebanon should avoid interfering in the internal affairs of other countries, including the GCC states, Yemen, Syria and Iraq. Equally important, outside meddling in Lebanon's internal affairs should stop.

Fourth, there needs to be strengthened governance of Lebanon's export facilities to prevent the export of drugs to GCC countries.

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Drug traffickers and arms smugglers must be vigorously pursued, with cooperation on extraditing those responsible for these crimes.

Fifth, Lebanon should not be a base or haven for terrorists who want to destabilize the region.

Sixth, international support for Lebanon's defense and security forces is necessary to enable them to exercise their role throughout the country.

Seventh, the GCC is ready to engage with Lebanon in all fields, including the political, economic and security areas.

Eighth, economic reforms are urgently needed to restore confidence in the Lebanese economy and its institutions, including the central bank. Cooperation with international institutions is a must to help put in place the mechanisms to fight the endemic corruption and mismanagement inherited from the previous administration.

Ninth, together with the required reforms, it would be useful for Lebanon to establish a mechanism to coordinate with donors, investors and international institutions to make the business climate more hospitable and explore ways to quickly improve living conditions for ordinary Lebanese. The GCC will be ready to shoulder its share of these efforts.

Tenth, to ensure consistent follow-up, it would be useful to set up a joint GCC-Lebanon framework to coordinate on these issues.

For this formula to succeed, the ceasefire between Israel and Hezbollah needs to be sustained and national consensus needs to be restored. That lawmakers were this month able to reach agreement in the parliament to choose the president was a good sign that a new era has dawned on Lebanon.

Victory and defeat in Gaza

A ceasefire has finally come. After 15 months of relentless genocidal war, we are finally able to breathe a sigh of relief. Many of us have also been able to return to our homes or what is left of them.

While we enjoy our bomb-free time, the world appears to be engaged in a fierce debate about who won. Is Israel triumphant? Or is Hamas the one that can declare victory? Or are the heroic Palestinian people the winners?

I am a nurse, not a pundit, so I have no answers to offer. But let me tell you, dear reader: The world should not be deceived by our survival. Staying alive in Gaza is not synonymous with heroism. Escaping death is not a victory. We barely made it. Tens of thousands of Palestinians did not.

The genocidal war closed time into a circle. There was no beginning or end, no destination that we were moving towards. We just kept going in a circle, every day, returning to the beginning.

Every day, every family had to go out in search of drinking water, water for washing, food and something to make a fire with – the very basics. All of these took hours to obtain – if they were

obtainable at all. Bread – what we thought was a given, a right – became a struggle to find. Families ran out of money. Aid organisations ran out of rations. At some point, even bug-infested flour and expired canned food became a luxury.

This circle was broken only by illness or death. People would break the routine to bury their loved ones and grieve.

The outside world saw many images and videos of the violent deaths of Palestinian children, women and men at the hands of the Israeli army. But they did not see the other, silent, painful deaths of the chronically ill or those infected with treatable diseases.

We had people with infections die because of the absence of antibiotics. We had people with kidney problems die because at some point dialysis was only available from time to time and only in very few medical facilities. These deaths were not added to the official genocide death toll, and yet many of them were preventable.

In the alleys of the displacement camps, one would see the grieving survivors, sobbing or sitting silently. After escap-

Hadeel Awad i n g death, they too would go back into the circle of time.

After so many months of collective loss, oppression and longing, it felt like there was no more room in the heart for more escape from death. I, like many other Palestinians, became frighteningly calm, numb.

Not that long ago, we had been filling the earth with noise, smiles and hopes. But we could no longer recognise ourselves. "We are not like us. We are not us!" we thought.

The collective suffering was so absolute, so overwhelming that it felt there was no place to seek comfort, no one to tell what was happening on the inside because all were in that same dark place.

But the funny thing about mass pain and mass death, dear reader, is that they push you to cling onto life, despite everything – especially despite your occupier. Everything in Gaza called for your death, but you learned to make life out of it.

Indeed, we are no longer us, but we are not dead. New versions of us have been created to continue the struggle, to live more.

In the endless circle of time, people would still find ways to feel satisfaction or a sense of purpose. I did so by volunteering as a nurse at a makeshift clinic and going on long walks in search of coffee. These were my acts of defiance, of living.

Starvation took a toll, but I tried to see the other side of it. I often had a laugh that I finally achieved the weight loss I had so desired and had never managed to reach with all the healthy diets I had tried in the past.

I saw the white invade my mother's hair amid the harsh life in a tent. But we had a laugh about it, too. I knew these colours would not defeat her.

She loves colours and is the most skilled woman in subjugating them to fit her.

After 15 months of hell, we have emerged from our shelters and tents to see apocalyptic scenery. We are still counting the dead pulled from under the rubble – identifiable only by a shoe or a shirt.

I look through the destruction and I see us, the survivors. Death did not defeat us, not because we are heroes but because we are people who love life. Dear reader, is clinging onto life a victory?

— *Aljazeera*

Why Trump’s funding freeze is deepening fears that he seeks unlimited power

IT was the day that Donald Trump’s new strongman presidency crashed into reality.

His latest attempt to wield vast and questionable executive power – this time by temporarily halting federal aid – sparked nationwide confusion and fear with programs including Meals on Wheels and low-income housing assistance suddenly in limbo.

The methodical approach that characterized the intense opening week of Trump’s presidency yielded to chaos – reminiscent of the uproar that characterized his first term and helped him lose the 2020 election.

But most profoundly, the drama set off a momentous legal battle over the scope of presidential authority, which will shape the new administration and the separation of powers and is almost certain to land in the Supreme Court.

Trump’s brand as a bombastic disrupter reflects the disdain many Americans have for the Washington establishment. And he can fairly argue he has a mandate for change after an impressive election victory. Democratic claims that he’s bent on becoming a dictator have often been alarmist.

But the spending freeze – along with other key moves early in this presidency, including the firing of Justice Department prosecutors and a bid to repeal birthright citizenship – also reflects Trump’s view that the presidency has almost unlimited power and he can simply decide what is legal and what isn’t.

“The White House Counsel’s Office believes that this is within the President’s power to do it, and therefore, he’s doing it,” White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt told CNN’s Kaitlan Collins in the briefing room on Tuesday.

So, it only took a week and a day for Trump’s second presidency – rooted in his desire for total control – to present a grave challenge to the Constitution.

How a memo sparked nationwide chaos

This was a mess made in the White House.

The Office of Management and Budget set off a storm Monday night with a memo ordering a temporary pause in “all activities related to obligation or disbursement of all Federal financial assistance.”

The memo, obtained by CNN, made Medicare benefits or assistance to individuals exempt. But uproar ensued, leaving lawmakers, state governments, local leaders and NGOs scrambling and unsure which programs were included and which were safe.

In theory, programs ranging from those at the

Pentagon to small town America were under threat.

Attempts by Trump’s team to explain that the freeze was not as broad as it seemed, and that it was intended to allow officials to scrub funding for conflicts with his new policies – including on outlawing diversity, equity and inclusion – only made the situation worse. Leavitt couldn’t specify, for instance, in her debut briefing whether Medicaid was blocked. She later clarified that it was not, but the critical program’s portal was down in many states for much of the day.

“I suspect that the admin here has bitten off more here than intended to chew,” said Donald Kettl, former dean of the University of Maryland School of Public Policy. “I don’t think it really intended to shut down

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Ironically, the pandemonium focused attention on the critical societal role of many government programs that were thrown into uncertainty at a time when Trump plans to cut a scythe through federal spending. Tuesday might, therefore, have posed a political warning for Elon Musk, who is heading the new Department of Government Efficiency and plans to slash federal budgets. Trump seems to subvert the constitutional role of Congress But the deepest questions raised by the now partially stayed funding freeze arise from Trump’s latest attempt to wield unrestrained authority in a new presidency already characterized by dubious power grabs. In seeking to freeze loans and grants and align them with his priorities laid out in a blizzard of executive actions, Trump was seeking to redirect or halt funding already appropriated by Congress. “It is a direct challenge against Congress and its ability to be able to approve and authorize its expenditure of money,” Kettl said. Stephen Miller, White House deputy chief of staff for policy, told CNN’s Jake Tapper that the freeze was needed because bureaucrats were pushing out funds for “wicked and pernicious” policies. And Leavitt insisted that Trump was within his rights to analyze federal spending because it was “exactly what the American people elected President Trump to do.” One interpretation of Trump’s victory last year is that a plurality of Americans had lost confidence in the government and were angry at the volume and content of the Biden administration’s spending. But winning an election doesn’t give a president a right to simply ignore the law – indeed Trump swore an oath to uphold it just nine days ago. And the government spending in question was contained in laws passed by Congress – which, under the Constitution, controls the power of the purse. Trump has the chance to write and propose new laws but can’t simply ignore those on the books.

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Medicaid. I don’t think it intended to shut down aid to local schools. But the meaning of the language that came through ... is absolutely crystal clear,” Kettl said on “The Lead with Jake Tapper.”

By evening, a federal judge imposed a short-term halt on the aid freeze until Monday.

US District Judge Loren L. AliKhan summed up a surreal and baffling day after pressing a Justice Department attorney, saying: “The government doesn’t know the full scope of the programs that are going to be subject to the pause.”

Trump’s ‘shock and awe’ dissolves into confusion

There will be significant short-term political reverberations from Tuesday’s drama, which overlaid far more serious constitutional implications.

The confusion immediately overshadowed the disciplined rollout of Trump’s second term. The shock-and-awe approach of waves of presidential directives and orders has made it almost impossible for Trump’s critics to focus on individual items designed to quickly

Stephen Collinson

transform the nation. But the haste seemed to catch the OMB unprepared for disastrous consequences.

The president’s core support after an election in which he won all seven swing states is unlikely to be shaken. But Trump has only limited time to effect the massive change he seeks, and he lacks unlimited political capital, so perceptions of his presidency after a largely error free start remain very important.

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One interpretation of Trump’s victory last year is that a plurality of Americans had lost confidence in the government and were angry at the volume and content of the Biden administration’s spending.

But winning an election doesn’t give a president a right to simply ignore the law – indeed Trump swore an oath to uphold it just nine days ago. And the government spending in question was contained in laws passed by Congress – which, under the Constitution, controls the power of the purse. Trump has the chance to write and propose new laws but can’t simply ignore those on the books.

A similar disregard for the law was evident in the president’s summary dismissal of prosecutors

who investigated him under former special counsel Jack Smith. The career prosecutors are not political appointees and therefore enjoy civil service protections that govern the terms of their employment. Trump and his allies have long argued that large corps of liberal bureaucrats frustrate the goals of Republican presidents. And the dozen or so officials thrown out of the DOJ were told that they could not be trusted to carry out Trump’s agenda – even though prosecutors are meant to follow the law not political agendas.

The White House insists that the president’s Article Two constitutional powers mean he’s within his right to fire anyone. This is an argument headed for the courts too.

Trump’s effort to repeal birth right citizenship as part of his immigration crackdown also appears to fly in the face of the Constitution – which the president lacks the powers to amend.

Trump’s firing of more than a dozen watchdog officials from inside government agencies late last week seems to follow a similar principle – that

Tech giants ramp up the battle against online hate speech

Clare Duffy

TWO of America’s Big Tech companies are opening the door to more “free expression,” even if it means more hateful content. But in Europe, Big Tech companies are voluntarily cracking down.

It’s a reminder of just how divergent Europeans’ and Americans’ online experiences are becoming, as EU lawmakers forge ahead with tech safety and accountability legislation against an industry widely seen as too big and too out of control, while such proposals have languished, if not faced active resistance, on Capitol Hill.

Tech platforms including Meta’s Facebook and Instagram, X, Snapchat, TikTok, Twitch, LinkedIn and YouTube this week signed onto an updated European Union code of conduct promising to do more to combat online hate speech, which is often illegal in European countries.

Meanwhile, two of those same platforms — Meta and X — have made changes in the United States that they acknowledge could usher in more hateful speech, arguing that such changes promote freedom of speech and combat censorship. And across the industry, companies have shrunk teams whose entire job was to ensure the safety of their platforms, including from people who seek to foment hate and violence.

As part of the EU agreement, the companies agree to allow “monitoring reporters” — non-profits or public organizations with expertise on hate speech — to review their platforms and to act quickly on most of the content they flag, the European Commission said Monday.

The new code of conduct is voluntary, but tech companies can use their compliance to demonstrate that they are meeting obligations legally required by the EU’s Digital Services Act (DSA), which, among other things, mandates Big Tech platforms take meaningful steps to reduce illegal and harmful content.

“In Europe there is no place for illegal hate, either offline or online,” Henna Virkkunen, the commission’s executive vice president for tech sovereignty, security and democracy, said in a statement, adding that the commitments will help “ensure a safe digital space for all.” It’s one of a number of differences in US versus EU tech users’ online experiences that have accumulated over time, Isabelle Wright, director of technology and society at the Institute for Strategic Dialogue, told CNN.

“I think we’ve been heading in this direction for a while, but not just for hate speech, I think really for all categories of harm that most (other) Western nations cover in in their tech regulation,” Wright said. “It’s going to lead to an incredibly fractured information ecosystem between the US and

essentially every other Western democracy.”

Meta and X did not respond to requests for comment.

To be sure, Silicon Valley’s efforts have always been far from perfect. Meta’s platforms have been accused of playing a key role in the organization of the January 6, 2021, attack on the US Capitol and abetting genocide in Myanmar. And across the tech world, efforts to address harmful content like hate speech have always been targeted, at least to some extent, at placating advertisers obsessed with “brand safety,” terrified at the thought that their ads could be placed next to a comment section awash in inflammatory remarks and threats of violence. With advertising being the prime revenue generator for social media companies, the tastes of advertisers has historically set the tone.

But now even those efforts have been scaled back in the United States.

Elon Musk-owned X has seen an uptick in hate speech in recent years as it welcomed previously banned White supremacists and conspiracy peddlers back to the platform. Musk himself has also boosted racist conspiracies on the site.

And Meta earlier this month announced several major content moderation policy changes in the United States, including scaling back its automated systems for removing content that violates its policies. The systems will now be focused on checking only for illegal and “high-severity” violations such as terrorism and child sexual exploitation.

Meta also updated its hateful conduct policy to roll back protections for certain groups, including women and LGBTQ+ people. Users of Meta’s platforms will now, for example, be able to refer to women as household objects and suggest that transgender people are mentally ill, without fear that their comments will be removed or restricted by Facebook’s moderation team. (A Meta spokesperson noted that the company would continue to prohibit slurs, as well as attacks against certain groups, such as those based on ethnicity, race and religion.)

The platforms’ US moves may reflect the changing American political environment, where many Republican leaders have equated content moderation with “censorship.” Members of the incoming Donald Trump administration, including the nominee to lead the Federal Communications Commission, Brendan Carr, have also called for a reinterpretation of the tech immunity law Section 230. In essence, they want tech companies to be protected from lawsuits over what their users post only if they do little-to-no content moderation whatsoever.

Following Meta’s announcement earlier this month, Carr posted a gif of Jack Nicholson grinning and nodding in response to CNN’s Brian Stelter post on X with the news about the tech giant’s moderation policy.

When tech platforms announce changing policies or principles, Wright said, “the language they use to stand behind those indicates that they’ve put in, you know, a lot of a lot of thought and consultation into these processes. Yet when an administration changes, those principles seem to change like the wind in order to better align with the people who could potentially regulate them or disrupt their businesses.”

“I think what has become clear to the platforms is that the chances of any type of tech regulation in the US are slim to none,” Wright said.

But it isn’t just hate speech where Americans have a different experience. Europeans are protected in much broader ways, too.

Unlike Americans, Europeans are protected from having their personal demographic information, such as their race and political views, collected by tech companies without their consent, thanks to the General Data Protection Regulation. Nor can Big Tech firms stop app developers from communicating cheaper, off-platform offers to users because of the Digital Markets Act. The DSA also provides EU users with greater protections from targeted online ads. And Europeans may have less access to AI tools, including products from Apple and Meta, because of privacy regulations and an EU law aimed at safe and responsible development of the technology.

But that divergence has the potential to become less pronounced as tech leaders have cozier up to Trump in the hopes that the new administration will advance their interests.

Zuckerberg and Musk, as well as Google CEO Sundar Pichai, Apple CEO Tim Cook, Amazon founder Jeff Bezos, OpenAI CEO Sam Altman and TikTok CEO Shou Chew, were all seated prominently at Trump’s inauguration Monday.

Some of those Big Tech CEOs have already suggested they want Trump to pressure Europe into relaxing protections and regulations on the continent. Cook is said to have raised the issue of European regulations in a meeting with Trump at Mar-a-Lago following the election. And Zuckerberg has expressly said he will seek Trump’s help in pushing back on safety rules from the EU and elsewhere. In his policy announcement earlier this month, Zuckerberg said: “We’re going to work with President Trump to push back on governments around the world that are going after American companies and pushing to censor more.”

Entrepreneurship education can help MENA close the innovation gap

Arnab Neil Sengupta

THE countries of the Middle East and North Africa stand at a crossroads. The problems are many, but with a youthful population brimming with potential and a growing recognition of the importance of innovation, the region has an opportunity to catch up with the rest of the world in terms of technological advancement. Expanding enterprise, or entrepreneurship, education could be the key to unlocking this potential — by spurring sustainable businesses, reducing dependence on government support and promoting political and social stability through job creation.

For decades, the Arab countries of MENA and Iran have grappled with high unemployment rates, particularly among young people. According to the International Labour Organization, youth unemployment in the region remains among the highest globally. Many attribute the problem to

education systems that often prioritize rote learning over critical thinking, problem-solving and innovation. Entrepreneurship education, which teaches individuals how to identify opportunities, manage risks and create value, offers a potential solution to these challenges.

By introducing entrepreneurship education to schools, universities and vocational training programs, MENA countries can empower their youth to think beyond conventional career paths. Instead of viewing employment solely as a search for government jobs or positions in large corporations, young people can be inspired to create their own ventures. Such a shift is crucial in a region where the public sector is often overstaffed and private sector opportunities remain limited.

One of the most notable benefits of entrepreneurship education is its potential to drive innovation, particularly in technology. The global

economy is increasingly digital and regions that fail to adapt run the risk of being left behind. The sudden popularity of DeepSeek, a Chinese artificial intelligence chatbot reportedly made at a fraction of the cost of its rivals, not only raises questions about the future of America’s AI dominance, it also shows that by equipping students with the tools to innovate, governments anywhere can nurture homegrown startups that address local challenges while competing on the global stage.

To be sure, countries like Saudi Arabia and the UAE are already witnessing the emergence of tech hubs, but the ripple effect can only spread further with widespread entrepreneurial training. A culture of entrepreneurship, once established, can lead to the creation of sustainable and profitable businesses. Research shows that entrepreneurs with formal training are more likely to succeed than their untrained counterparts. They are better equipped

to develop robust business plans, understand market dynamics and adapt to challenges.

In a region where business failure rates are often high, such education can reduce the likelihood of failed ventures, which will ensure that investments of time and resources result in positive outcomes.

Another critical advantage of entrepreneurship education is its ability to reduce dependence on government support. For decades, many MENA economies have relied on state subsidies, public sector employment and energy revenues to sustain their populations. However, these models are looking increasingly precarious, particularly in the face of fluctuating oil and gas prices, growing fiscal pressures and the widespread adoption of green energy.

By cultivating an entrepreneurial mindset, governments can encourage individuals to become

self-reliant, which in turn can create a more dynamic and robust economy. In any case, the positive impacts of entrepreneurship extend far beyond the economy. Job creation is one of the most desirable outcomes of entrepreneurial activity and, in a region with a burgeoning youth population, is a necessity.

Startups and small businesses often serve as generators of employment, providing opportunities for young people to earn a living, gain experience and build their futures. Once young men and women find meaningful employment, they will contribute to economic growth and social stability, reducing the risk of political radicalization and unrest caused by unemployment and disillusionment.

Countries in the MENA region can look to successful models from around the world for inspiration. For example, the Organisation for

Economic Co-operation and Development countries have long integrated entrepreneurship education into their curricula, creating a culture of innovation that has given rise to global tech giants. In Asia, countries like Singapore and South Korea have embraced entrepreneurship as a catalyst for economic development, putting in place specific policies and programs to support aspiring entrepreneurs.

For MENA countries, implementing entrepreneurship education requires a comprehensive approach. Governments must prioritize curriculum reform, ensuring that entrepreneurship is a core component of education systems that can produce students capable of building AI web tools that can handle tasks such as math, coding and natural language reasoning. Partnerships with private sector entities can also play a vital role, providing mentorship opportunities, internships and exposure for students to

the real world of setbacks, disappointments and breakthroughs.

Experience shows that creating an ecosystem that supports startups — through access to funding, incubators and regulatory frameworks — is essential for translating education into action. Policymakers must also address cultural and societal barriers that may hinder entrepreneurship.

In many parts of MENA, as in other parts of Asia, there is a preference for stable, traditional career paths and entrepreneurial risk-taking is often discouraged. Changing these perceptions requires not only education but also visible success stories that can inspire others to follow suit. Highlighting Arab entrepreneurs who have succeeded against the odds can shift mindsets and create a more supportive environment for innovation.

The global economy is moving at breakneck speed, driven by technological advancements,

cross-border investments and changing mindsets. For MENA states to remain competitive and harness the potential of their youth, they must embrace entrepreneurship education as a strategic priority. This is not just about creating businesses, it is about building a future where innovation, self-reliance and opportunity — not crises, conflicts and chaos — define the region.

Looking ahead, expanding entrepreneurship education across MENA is far more than an economic imperative — it is a societal one. By equipping the next generation with the skills and mindset to innovate, governments of the region can chart a path toward sustainable growth, lower unemployment and greater stability. Entrepreneurship education offers a promising tool to leapfrog the competition and unlock the potential of the MENA region’s young demographic.

— Arab News



In brief

Pakistan, Kazakhstan foster closer ties

ISLAMABAD (APP): A significant meeting took place between Advisor to the Prime Minister on Political and Public Affairs Rana Sanaulлах and K a z a k h s t a n ' s Ambassador to Pakistan Yerzhan Kistafin on Wednesday. Parliamentary Secretary for Inter Provincial Coordination Kiran Imran Dar, also attended the meeting, said a press release. The discussion centered around bilateral issues of mutual interest and cooperation between Pakistan and Kazakhstan, with a focus on sports, tourism, regional cooperation, and culture. Rana Sanaulлах, who also holds the portfolio of Ministry of Inter Provincial Coordination, appreciated the efforts of Kazakhstan government in strengthening bilateral relations between both the countries. Cooperation in tourism and sports is expected to further solidify relations between Pakistan and Kazakhstan. A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on cooperation in sports is currently being worked on, with plans to sign the MoU during the Joint Inter Government Commission meeting. The Ambassador also highlighted the importance of the two countries' strategic partnership, announcing plans for Kazakhstan to send international coaches to Pakistan to train players.

DC vows to promote sports

HARIPUR (APP): Deputy Commissioner (DC) Haripur, Shozeb Abbas Wednesday has reaffirmed the district administration's commitment to promoting sports and ensuring the welfare of athletes. He expressed these views while addressing an open court session for athletes at Curtis Ground, Haripur. DC emphasized that sports centers serve as vital rehabilitation hubs for youth and the administration is utilizing all possible resources to enhance sports facilities. DC assured participants that their concerns regarding sports-related issues would be resolved. During the session, athletes and sports representatives highlighted challenges and proposed solutions to improve the sports landscape in the district. In response, DC Shozeb Abbas reiterated that youth are a valuable asset and the future architects of society. He stressed that promoting sports is crucial for maintaining peace and steering young people away from negative influences. The DC assured that the administration is actively working on initiatives to strengthen sports infrastructure and provide better opportunities for athletes across the district. The session was attended by Additional DC Dr Adil Ayub, District Sports Officer Tauseef Ahmed, District Youth Officer Farhad and representatives from various sports organizations, including hockey, badminton, body building, karate, gymnastics, athletics and stone lifting.

Athletics spectator killed

NEW YORK (Agencies): A spectator was killed after he was accidentally struck by a hammer thrown by an athlete at a high school indoor athletics event in the United States. The incident occurred on Sunday during the competition at the University of Colorado Colorado Springs campus. A spokesperson for the university said a spectator "was killed when a hammer thrown by a participant cleared certified barriers and struck him". The man who died, named by El Paso County Coronor's office as Wade Langston, 57, was the father of a competitor and reportedly died.

Chairman PCB visits Rawalpindi Cricket Stadium to see upgradation work

ISLAMABAD (APP): The upgradation work of main pavilion and media boxes of Rawalpindi Cricket Stadium has been completed while installation of chairs in enclosures is in final stage. Chairman Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) Mohsin Naqvi who visited Rawalpindi Cricket Stadium was briefed on the upgradation work, said a press release.

Chairman PCB inspected various parts of the stadium including pavilion, media box, VIP boxes and observed the finishing work. He expressed satisfaction over the progress on the upgradation project.

Naqvi also reviewed the proposed security arrangements for the teams and said that an ICC tournament is being held in Pakistan after a long time and all preparations are complete for the mega event.

The ICC Champions Trophy is set to begin from February 19, with three matches to be played at the Rawalpindi Cricket Stadium. At this venue, Bangladesh will play New Zealand on February 24, Australia to play against South Africa on February 25 while the hosts Pakistan will take on Bangladesh at the same venue on February 27.

Two new VVIP enclosures added to Gaddafi Stadium: Two new VVIP enclosures have been added at the base of the newly constructed pavilion building and named after two legendary cricketers — Zaheer Abbas and Majid Khan — at the upgraded Gaddafi Stadium Lahore.

Though quite small in size as compared to other enclosures, players will pass through these enclosures and provide a vantage point to the spectators perched at these enclosures to

watch their cricketing heroes in quite close proximity. The ticket price for these enclosures is expected to be Rs. 25,000 and above for the ICC Champions Trophy 2025 fixtures.

Gaddafi Stadium Lahore will host at least four matches of the ICC Champions Trophy including the second semi-final. The final may also be played at the venue if India do not qualify for the final and, in that scenario, the final of the ICC Champions Trophy will be played at the Dubai Cricket Stadium, UAE.

With the installation of new chairs, LED lights and SMD screens for cricketing action for the spectators, the stadium is ready to be presented to the global audiences although small adjustment still need to be made to the fabulous new structure. The Gaddafi stadium is all set to host the tri-nation featuring Pakistan, South Africa and New Zealand.

The moat, with small sized iron grill, around the playing field is an innovation which is meant to check intrusion of the spectators to the pitch besides serving as a reservoir to store water in case of rain and make the playing field ready for action in the shortest possible time. The moat is to be covered with a net so that the ball does not fall into the moat and disrupt action.

The more satisfying fact about the Gaddafi Stadium's preparations for the ICC Champions Trophy 2025 is the readiness of the turf and the pitches at the stadium. The pitches are in pristine shape and ready to host the matches at the stadium.

The debris of the demolished structures around the stadium has been removed and an army of men

has been working to lay the floors while the Parks and Horticulture (PHA) staffers have been working diligently on plantation of plants and green-belts around the stadium.

During the PCB Director Infrastructure Qazi Jawwad-led tour of the stadium here on Wednesday, the Director Infrastructure claimed that the pavilion and office building are completed and the Gaddafi Stadium was ready to host the Champions Trophy.

Director Infrastructure told the media that the work inside the stadium was complete and only furniture needed to be placed on different floors of the pavilion building which houses hospitality boxes while the exterior development was in progress. The roads have been re-laid around Gaddafi Stadium.

'Moving the debris is a big task and the Lahore Waste Management Company (LWMC) has been working for the last three days to move the debris,' he said, adding Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif will inaugurate the upgraded Gaddafi Stadium. 'If the tuff tiles in and around the stadium have not yet been laid fully, it does not mean the stadium is not ready, PCB's Director responded, adding the labourers were round the clock to lay tuff tile.

He further told the media that the construction during the upgradation was undertaken as per the international standards, adding that the Federal Works Organization (FWO) completed the task under the supervision and consultation of Nespak. He said Resident Engineer of the Nespak was present at the site during the upgradation work.

Khawaja, Smith tons power Australia to 330-2 in first Test

GALLE (AFP): Steve Smith stood unbeaten on 104 after crossing 10,000 Test runs and helped Australia pummel Sri Lanka alongside fellow centurion Usman Khawaja on day one of the opening Test on Wednesday.

Australia reached 330-2 in 81.1 overs when rain stopped play for the day after the tourists elected to bat first in Galle at the start of the two-match series.

Left-handed opener Khawaja, on 147, and skipper Smith put on an unbeaten stand of 195 to thwart the opposition attack in two wicketless afternoon sessions.

"We have played a lot of cricket in the sub-continent but not been able to put pressure on the opposition. But today, we definitely did that," Khawaja said.

He added, "Showed how fast we were scoring until they tried to bowl a bit negative line after tea."

Milestone man Smith got three runs off spinner Nishan Peiris to reach his third ton in four matches as he took off his baggy green and raised his bat to acknowledge the crowd's cheers.

Smith took the crease in the first session with 9,999 runs and calmly nudged his

very first delivery to mid-on for a single off Prabath Jayasuriya.

He became the 15th batsman to 10,000 Test runs and only the fourth Australian to achieve the feat after Allan Border, Steve Waugh and Ricky Ponting.

Smith survived an early reprieve in his knock when Jayasuriya grassed a sharp return catch in the same over, a chance Sri Lanka would come to rue.

He made the hosts pay dearly, crafting a sublime 35th Test century to reaffirm his stature as one of Australia's rock in the middle-order.

Head fires Khawaja reached his 16th Test hundred — his maiden ton on Sri Lankan soil — after a 17-match drought since his Ashes century in June 2023.

The ton came with a flick off fast bowler Asitha Fernando to the fine leg boundary, a stroke brimming with elegance and relief.

The 38-year-old had a few heart-in-mouth moments when a couple of edges fell just short of fielders and a reprieve on 74 when he nicked Jayasuriya to the keeper, but Sri Lanka chose not to review the on-

field decision.

Another opportunity slipped through Sri Lanka's fingers with Smith on 90 as Kusal Mendis, slow to react behind the stumps, spilled a bat-pad chance.

Earlier, Travis Head smashed 57 off 40 balls including 10 fours and one six to put Sri Lanka on the back foot right away.

"The wicket is not a usual Galle wicket. It's on the slow side," Sri Lanka's spin bowling coach Piyal Wijetunga told reporters.

"When the wicket is not helping the bowlers, you should try to show more discipline and I don't think we bowled well today."

Head, who replaced 19-year-old Sam Konstas as an opener for the Test, put on 92 runs with fellow left-hander Khawaja.

The hosts finally found a breakthrough when Head misfired an ambitious charge against Jayasuriya only to find the long-on fielder. Jeffrey Vandersay had Marnus Labuschagne caught at first slip for 20 with his left-arm spin. With three specialist spinners in the Australian XI, the tourists hold all the aces, especially with the pitch expected to deteriorate as the game progresses.

Noman attain career best in ICC Rankings

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistani left-arm spinner Noman Ali has attained career best position in the ICC Men's Test Bowling Rankings after outstanding performances in the second Test between Pakistan and the West Indies in Multan.

Noman, who became the first Pakistani spinner to take a Test hat-trick in a match haul of 10 for 121, has gained four spots to reach fifth position with 806 rating points, said a press release. He is only the 12th Pakistani bowler to go past the 800-point mark in Tests and the only one from his country in the top 20 right now.

Meanwhile, West Indies Jomel Warrican has also attained career best positions in the ICC Men's Test Bowling Rankings. Warrican won the Player of the Match award after finishing with nine for 70 in the second Test, moving up 16 places to 25th position. He has progressed a total of 28 places in the two Tests with a return of 19 wickets, that also won him the Player of the Series award. Kemar Roach (up one

place to 18th) and Gudakesh Motie (up six places to 58th) are the West Indian bowlers to move up the rankings while Sajid Khan (up two places to 21st) and Abrar Ahmed (up two places to 50th) are the Pakistan players to move up the list.

West Indies captain Kraigg Brathwaite's second innings half-century at the top of the order that contributed in a 120-run win, has lifted him eight places to 44th position while Pakistan's wicketkeeper-batter Mohammad Rizwan has moved back towards the top10, advancing from 17th to 15th position.

In the Men's T20I Rankings, Tilak Varma has reached a career-best second position after an unbeaten 71 in the second T20I against England. His 832 rating points are the fourth-best by an India batter in the format after Suryakumar Yadav, Virat Kohli and KL Rahul.

Varma, who is 22 years and 82 days at the time of reaching second position, is only 23 rating points behind top-ranked Travis Ahead and with a good chance of

becoming the youngest to top the T20I batting rankings. The mark is currently held by Babar Azam, who was 23 years, 105 days when he went top for the first time in January 2018.

In the bowling rankings, England's wrist-spinner Adil Rashid has ended Akeal Hosein's 44-day stay at the top after taking one for 14 and one for 15 in the second and third matches of the series, completing his four overs each time to help England narrow the lead to 2-1.

It is the second time the England leggie has topped the table, having occupied top spot for a year from December 2023 to December 2024.

Liam Livingstone (up five places to 32nd) and Abhishek Sharma (up 59 places to 40th) are other batters to gain after the series while Varun Chakravarthy (up 25 places to a career-best fifth position), Joffra Archer (up 13 places to sixth), Axar Patel (up five places to 11th) and Hardik Pandya (up eight places to 43rd) have moved up the bowling list.

Hamilton crashes Ferrari in pre-season testing



BARCELONA (Agencies): Lewis Hamilton has crashed his Ferrari during the team's pre-season testing programme in Spain.

The seven-time champion was unhurt after losing control of the team's 2023 car at the Circuit de Barcelona-Catalunya on Wednesday.

Ferrari declined to comment on the incident, which happened on Hamilton's second day of running at the Spanish track, where he is sharing the car with team-mate Charles Leclerc.

The incident happened as Ferrari seek to embed Hamilton into the team as effectively as possible before the start of the season at the Australian Grand Prix on 14-16 March.

Ferrari regard the crash as nothing abnormal as Hamilton learns the charac-

teristics of an unfamiliar car after 12 years with Mercedes, within the significant restrictions imposed on testing in F1.

Ferrari are running a limited programme in the 2023 car, the most recent model Hamilton is allowed to drive.

F1's testing restrictions dictate that current race drivers can complete a maximum of 1,000km (621 miles) of what is known as TPC (testing of previous cars) running.

Hamilton completed 30 laps at the team's Fiorano test track on 22 January before he and Leclerc moved on to this week's three days of running at Barcelona, home of the Spanish Grand Prix.

Ferrari are giving no details of the test, where Hamilton is learning

Ferrari's procedures and working methods and building an understanding with race engineer Riccardo Adami and the rest of the engineering group.

Ferrari will launch their 2025 car at Fiorano on 19 February, the day after F1's season launch event at the O2 in London.

Ferrari will give Hamilton further testing miles before the launch in a Pirelli-run tyre test.

The team will run for two days next week, also at Barcelona, on 4-5 February in a 2025 car modified to reflect the effect of the new regulations being introduced for 2026.

McLaren are conducting a similar Pirelli test at Paul Ricard in France this week as the Italian company seeks to define its 2026 product.



GALLE: Usman congratulates Smith on joining the 10,000-run club.

Sharma unhappy with Gavaskar's remarks on his form and future

NEW DELHI (Agencies): Indian cricket team captain Rohit Sharma has reportedly filed a formal complaint with the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) against legendary cricketer and commentator Sunil Gavaskar.

The dispute arises from Gavaskar's sharp criticism of Sharma's performance during India's Test series against Australia. According to sources, Rohit expressed dissatisfaction with Gavaskar's commentary, which he viewed as overly negative and detrimental to

his confidence.

The 36-year-old opener has struggled for form, scoring just 31 runs in three Tests before voluntarily dropping himself from the final Test in Sydney. His poor run of performances, coupled with India's 1-3 series defeat in the Border-Gavaskar Trophy, led to intense scrutiny from critics.

In a column for the Sydney Morning Herald, Gavaskar speculated that Sharma might step down as captain if his form did not improve. He suggested that selectors wouldn't need to

make that call, implying that Rohit could make the decision himself. This blunt assessment did not sit well with the Indian captain.

A source close to Rohit stated, "The captain has been under pressure, and external criticism from a cricketing legend like Gavaskar only adds to his burden. Rohit felt the remarks were unnecessary and could further dent his confidence."

Gavaskar, widely regarded as one of India's greatest cricketers, has always been known for his outspoken analysis.

However, his remarks questioning Rohit's future in red-ball cricket and leadership have ignited controversy.

The criticism intensified after India failed to qualify for the World Test Championship final, raising questions about Rohit's long-term role as captain. With tensions escalating, it remains to be seen how the BCCI will address the complaint and whether this public rift between Rohit Sharma and Sunil Gavaskar will have any further repercussions on Indian cricket.

Djokovic pulls out of Serbia's Davis Cup tie



PARIS (Agencies): Novak Djokovic has withdrawn from Serbia's Davis Cup first-round qualifier against Denmark due to a hamstring injury, the country's tennis federation has said.

The world No6 was set to represent Serbia over the course of three days from January 31 to February 2, with the first match taking place in Copenhagen.

However, Djokovic has been

forced to pull out after sustaining a hamstring injury in his Australian Open semi-final match against Alexander Zverev last week.

Djokovic retired from the match after losing the first set and was booed off by some sections of the crowd in Melbourne. The 24-times Grand Slam champion was less than impressed with the reaction of the crowd and took to social media to make his feelings known.

Djokovic posted a photo of an MRI taken of his left hamstring with the caption: 'Thought I'd leave this here for all the sports injury experts out there.' The 37-year-old also stated that he would like to keep working with Andy Murray as his coach despite his frustrating time at the Australian Open. Djokovic said: 'We both were disappointed with what just happened, so we didn't talk about the future steps. We are so fresh off the court.'

'I'll definitely have a chat with Andy and thank him for being here with me, give him my feedback

which is positive and see how he feels and we make the next step.

'We are still hotheaded and disappointed, so it's kind of hard to switch the page and start talking about what the next steps are.' The 37-year-old star finished by saying: 'I think we both need to cool off a little bit and then we'll have a chat.'

Djokovic was part of the Serbian team which lifted the Davis Cup in 2010 after beating France in a memorable final. Serbia will get their Davis Cup campaign underway on Friday, playing Denmark in a first-round qualifying tie. Serbia captain Viktor Troicki expressed his disappointment at Djokovic's absence but wish him well and backed his other players to perform. When asked about Djokovic's withdrawal, the 38-year-old said: 'We are weakened by not playing Novak, but we are still going for the win.'

He went on to add: 'The Danes have a great player in Holger Rune, but our players are also great and I believe in my team.'



In brief

RWMC starts sanitation services

RAWALPINDI (APP): Member of the Provincial Assembly, Punjab Bilal Yamin Satti on Wednesday said that the provision of sanitation services to the residents of Tehsil Kotli Sattian would play a vital role in providing a clean environment to the people. He expressed these views while addressing the inauguration ceremony of the provision of sanitation services of Rawalpindi Waste Management Company (RWMC) under the 'Suthra Punjab Program' in Kotli Sattian. The services were started under the private-public partnership. Bilal said that world-class sanitation facilities would provide a hygienic environment to the residents, adding sanitation was not only the responsibility of the government but also the duty of the people to make their surroundings clean. He urged the citizens to cooperate with the sanitation staff, throw garbage in waste containers and avoid dumping it on roads, drains and open plots. The ceremony was attended by Assistant Commissioner Kotli Sattian Dr Emman Zafar, Chief Officer Kotli Sattian Imran Bukhari, CEO RWMC Rana Sajid Safdar and others.

Police continue awareness drive

RAWALPINDI (APP): The Rawalpindi Police on Wednesday continued the public awareness drive regarding the prevention and harmful effects of kite flying and aerial firing, besides conducting operations against kite sellers across the district. On the instructions of City Police Officer Rawalpindi Syed Khalid Hamdani, an awareness walk to sensitize the public about bad impacts of kite flying particularly on the youth and aerial firing was also organized in the limits of Cantt Police Station. According to a police spokesman, the Chonra Police arrested an accused Idrees with 135 kites and 13 strings, while the Ganjmandi Police nabbed two accused Rafael and Haider Ali on the recovery of 90 kites. During the awareness walk, which passed through different areas of the Cantt Police Station, pamphlets regarding the prevention and harmful effects of kite flying and aerial firing were distributed. A large number of citizens, including police officers and Anjuman Tajran members, participated in the awareness walk. The police officers also gave awareness lectures in various educational institutions in the areas of City and Waris Khan police stations to prevent kite flying and aerial firing. Through the pamphlets and lectures, it was informed that kite flying had been declared a non-bailable offence, punishable by imprisonment for 3 to 7 years. "Legal action will also be taken against the owners of the roofs from which kite flying and aerial firing are done," it was warned. Parents were urged to keep an eye on their children and prevent them from kite flying.

Meeting reviews registered cases

RAWALPINDI (APP): A meeting held at the Police Lines Headquarters Rawalpindi on Wednesday reviewed the progress of cases under investigation, registered at the police stations of Potohar Division. Chaired by the Senior Superintendent of Police Investigation and SSP Operations, it was attended by the Superintendent of Police Sattar, and sub-divisional police officers, station house officers and investigators of the Potohar Division. The SSP Investigation directed the senior officers to supervise the investigation of the cases and guide the investigation officers. Challans of the cases should be timely presented before the courts so that accused should not escape from punishment, he added.



ISLAMABAD: A European Union (EU) delegation led by Ambassador Olof Skoog met with Senator Azam Nazeer Tarar, Federal Minister for Law, Justice, and Human Rights, at the Ministry of Human Rights.

Negotiation remains sole pathway to amicable solutions: Aqeel

ISLAMABAD (APP): Prime Minister's legal adviser Barrister Aqeel Malik asserted on Wednesday that the government will exercise patience for the next 48 hours, awaiting a forward-looking negotiation process from the opposition party, emphasized PTI that negotiation remains the sole pathway to achieving amicable solutions in a democratic setup.

In an interview with a private news channel, Advisor to PM advised the opposition party, PTI to adopt a serious approach and refrain from using force or blackmail, instead urging them to come forward for negotiations if they are genuinely committed to finding a solution. Aqeel Malik also expressed admiration for the National Assembly Speaker's proposal for a platform for dialogue between the government and opposition parties, paving the way for negotiations and a peaceful resolution of issues. Responding to a query about the opposition alliance, he issued a stern warning, exuding unwavering confidence in the face

force or blackmail, instead urging them to come forward for negotiations if they are genuinely committed to finding a solution.

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of a grand alliance and categorically stated that JUI-F's deep-seated reservations against PTI would ultimately seal the alliance's fate, predicting its imminent downfall.

He categorically stated that despite PTI's plans for protests, the only viable path forward lies in constructive dialogue, a cornerstone of democratic processes.

Any political party genuinely committed to upholding democratic principles will inevitably opt for meaningful negotiations over confrontation-driven politics, he added.

ANF snubbed 7 drug traffickers

RAWALPINDI (APP): The Anti Narcotics Force (ANF) has launched a mega crackdown against drug smuggling in different cities of the country arresting 7 suspects in 7 different operations.

According to the details, 227,640 kg of drugs worth over Rs 25 million were recovered from the drug traffickers during the operations.

During the operation in Islamabad, 28.8 kg of opium and 98.4 kg of hashish were recovered from secret compartments of a car near Srinagar Highway Islamabad, and 2 suspects were arrested.

In another operation, 76 heroin-filled capsules were recovered from the stomach of a passenger going to Jeddah at Lahore Airport, whereas 38.4 kg of hashish was recovered from a car near Ravi Toll Plaza Lahore, accused arrested.

Moreover, 33.6 kg of hashish was recovered from a car near Kala Shah Kaku Toll Plaza Lahore, accused arrested.

During its raid near the Jamshoro Petrol Toll Plaza, 12 kg of hashish was recovered from the possession of the accused.

10 kg of ice was recovered from Turbat, Balochistan and 6 kg of opium was recovered from the possession of the accused near a park in Peshawar.

The spokesperson ANF said that cases have been registered against the arrested accused under the Narcotics Control Act and investigation has been initiated.

through drip irrigation, which can save more than 80 percent of water.

He further said, I myself water my lands through drip irrigation and I am saving 82.2 percent of the water. We will have to save groundwater, otherwise it will go down very low after some time. The federal minister said that to promote electric vehicles and motorcycles in the country, the price of electricity at charging stations has been reduced from Rs. 71 per unit to Rs. 39.70.

He said that if banks and international institutions are ready to provide loans, it will yield positive results.

Gov't promoting environment friendly power generation: Leghari

ISLAMABAD (APP): Federal Minister of Energy Awaiz Ahmed Leghari on Wednesday said that the current government was promoting environment friendly electricity generation from alternative sources instead of expensive imported oil.

Briefing the Senate Standing Committee on Climate Change, the federal minister said that before today, power generation plants were being set up under different policies, but now we have introduced a new system in which power plants will be set up through a competitive process.

He said that so far, the

Ministry of Energy had closed five factories running on expensive imported furnace oil. These factories used to generate 2,500 megawatts of electricity, he said, adding that these factories were not only polluting the environment but were also putting a heavy burden on the national exchequer.

Awaiz Leghari said that the closing of these factories saved billions of rupees for the national treasury. He said that converting electric tube-wells to solar energy in Balochistan can save 80 to 100 billion rupees annually. He said that our farmers should water their crops

Media workshop addresses Alarming rise in noncommunicable diseases

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Young Journalists Association (YJA) hosted a crucial workshop to discuss the increasing prevalence of noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) among the youth and the significant role the media can play in combating this alarming trend.

The event, held in collaboration with various health and media organizations, the other day, brought together prominent experts, journalists, and health professionals to brainstorm preventive measures and raise awareness.

President of YJA, Mohammad Yousaf Khan, emphasized the critical need for addressing NCDs, especially as they affect an alarming number of young journalists and professionals working in high-stress environments. "Many young journalists are falling prey to heart diseases, a growing concern that we must address collectively," Khan noted. "The workshop aims to discuss preventive measures and explore how we can empower the public through informed media coverage."

While moderating the workshop, Anila Bashir, Joint Secretary YJA apprised the participants that amid rising trend of diabetes, heart diseases and high blood pressure among

youth particularly members of journalists fraternity was evident.

It was imperative to have a focused group discussion where young journalists should join their heads to mull over best practices and strategies to address non communicable diseases (NCDs) increasing prevalence among youth, she added. The discussion was also informed by Shazia Mehboob from Deutsche Welle (DW), who highlighted the compounded threat posed by climate change and its direct correlation with the rise in health issues.

She also addressed the proliferation of fake health news on social media, stressing the responsibility of media professionals to safeguard the public from harmful misinformation.

PTV morning show host, Mahnoor Qureshi said public awareness regarding the health impacts of climate change is a serious concern for the future. The media's role has never been more crucial. "Journalists must ensure that the information they report is accurate and that follow-ups are conducted to maintain ongoing public awareness," Mahnoor said.

"This workshop has underscored the pressing need for more proactive media engagement in the fight against NCDs. Our

role as journalists is pivotal, and we must use our platforms to inform, influence, and inspire change," said Sonia Satti, Finance Secretary YJA. Sanaullah Ghumman, Secretary General of PANA (Pakistan National Heart Association), shared a sobering analysis of NCDs' impact on the nation. "Six out of ten deaths in Pakistan are due to NCDs, with cardiovascular diseases accounting for three out of every ten deaths."

Pakistan also has one of the highest obesity rates, and more than 40% of the population suffers from diabetes," Ghumman said. He attributed much of this to lifestyle factors, particularly unhealthy diets, and emphasized the need for preventive action.

He also pointed to alarming statistics from the World Health Organization (WHO), revealing that Pakistanis consume double the recommended amount of salt and sugar, contributing to a surge in obesity and diabetes. "These diseases are preventable through simple dietary changes," Ghumman urged.

"We need to advocate for warning labels on food items high in sugar, salt, and cholesterol, similar to the measures taken in Saudi Arabia, which has imposed a tax on sugary drinks to curb consumption."

PECA Act to protect genuine journalism; Danyal Ch

RAWALPINDI (APP): Parliamentary Secretary for Information and Broadcasting, Barrister Danyal Chaudhary, MNA on Wednesday reaffirmed that the government was committed for the freedom of speech and protection of the rights of the journalist community.

He said that PECA Act would protect genuine journalists and promote authentic news culture in the country. "There is no harm in PECA laws for the journalists, rather it will protect the journalists,

media owners and media industry", he said while talking to the media at the conclusion of a community walk, which was organized by Rawalpindi Cantonment Board, here at Bank Road Sadar.

Barrister Danyal underlined the need for rejecting fake news being spread by the so called social media activists, who pretend to be the journalists. "Those who propagate wrong information and give fake news will be questioned through PECA laws", he said.

The Parliamentary

Secretary said that the culture of defamation of opponents was being promoted on social media which, he said was not journalism and needed to be stopped.

Danyal further highlighted that people use social media platforms and act as media men to mislead the people.

To miscellaneous questions by the media reps, Barrister Danyal reiterated that the government would stand by the journalists community in case any flaws found contradictory to them.

Ayaz Sadiq extends greetings on Chinese New Year

ISLAMABAD (APP): Speaker National Assembly Sardar Ayaz Sadiq on Wednesday extended warm greetings to the people, leadership, and the Chinese community in Pakistan on the occasion of the Chinese New Year.

Expressing optimism for China's continued progress and prosperity, he said that the unbreakable bond of friendship between Pakistan and China will further strengthen in the coming year.

He conveyed his best wishes for the success and well-being of the Chinese people, reaffirming that the relationship between the two nations has stood the test of time.

"The ties between our two nations are built on mutual trust and respect. The relentless hard work and dedication of the Chinese people and leadership have transformed China into a global economic power in a short span," he said.

Highlighting the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) as a symbol of regional prosperity and development, the Speaker acknowledged China's valuable contributions to Pakistan's economic growth and bilateral cooperation.

"With each passing day, our friendship is becoming stronger. The new year will further enhance collaboration and partnership between Pakistan and China," he added.

Sukkur-Karachi motorway M-6 top priority: Minister

ISLAMABAD (APP): In a high-level meeting of the National Highway Authority (NHA) under the chairmanship of Federal Minister for Communications, Privatization and Board of Investment Abdul Aleem Khan, an inquiry committee was formed on the issue of protective fences around Motorways which will submit report within 10 days.

The minister told that the construction of Sukkur to Hyderabad Motorway M-6 was a top priority which would be built up to Karachi. He added that the Rs. 50 billion increase in the revenue of the NHA in a period of 6 months would be a deposit account and this money would be utilized on the projects from which more revenue could be generated, said a press release issued here Wednesday.

Abdul Aleem Khan further said that taking the revenue from Rs. 60 to 110 billion was a commendable

achievement and he intended to raise the revenue of NHA by Rs. 400 billion in the next 5 years and if the target of revenue was attained by June this year, then all NHA employees would get an additional bonus equal to one's salary.

While reviewing the projects of the NHA, Federal Minister for Communications Abdul Aleem Khan expressed that it has been decided to make the Sialkot-Kharan and Rawalpindi Motorway 6 lanes instead of 4 for which work will be started, soon. He directed the Federal Secretary for Communications to complete the repair work on the Motorways in February and to inspect them on the spot.

On the instructions of the Federal Minister for Communications it was decided to form a Committee for the commercial use of vacant lands owned by the National Highway Authority, in the

light of whose recommendations this property will be used to increase revenue, as well. The minister made it clear that there will be no likes or dislikes, the National Highway Authority should ensure that every work is done on merit and by implementing a uniform policy for all this organization should generate its funds in all circumstances.

During the meeting, the Federal Secretary for Communications and Chairman NHA informed the meeting that several projects were under completion to develop Pakistan's national road network on modern lines on which the pace of work was being further accelerated. In the meeting, it was decided to have these projects inaugurated by Prime Minister on their completion. Furthermore, Federal Minister for Communications Abdul Aleem Khan will also inspect these sites to check the base and stander of the work.

Gilani advocates closer parliamentary cooperation between Pakistan and Ireland



ISLAMABAD (APP): Chairman Senate Syed Yousaf Raza Gilani met with the newly elected Ceanm Comhairle (Speaker) of the Irish Parliament during his official visit to Ireland.

The Chairman Senate is leading a high level delegation to Ireland and Austria comprising Senator Fawzia Arshad, Senator Jam Saifullah Khan, Senator Nasir Mehmood, Syed Naveed Qamar, Chairman Standing Committee on Finance and Revenue, MNA, Ali Qasim Gilani, MNA, Ali Zahid, MNA, Fazal Muhammad Khan, MNA, Khawaja Izhar-Ul-Hassan, MNA, Saba Sadiq, MNA, Shezra Mansab Ali Khan Kharal, MNA, Malik Muhammad Ahmad Khan, Speaker of the Provincial Assembly of Punjab, Awaiz Qadir Shah and Speaker of the Provincial Assembly of Sindh, said a press release received here Wednesday.

The Chairman Senate expressed gratitude for the warm hospitality and emphasized the importance of strengthening parliamentary ties between Pakistan and Ireland. He noted that Speaker Verona Murphy was the first female Speaker elected in Ireland, highlighting the trust

placed in her leadership as an independent member. He acknowledged the significance of women in leadership roles and recalled that Benazir Bhutto, as the Muslim World's and Pakistan's first female Prime Minister, had visited Ireland in 1994.

It was the first-ever and only visit to date by any chief executive of Pakistan, further strengthening historical ties between the two nations. Discussions focused on enhancing inter-parliamentary cooperation, particularly in legislative exchanges, governance and transparency.

The Chairman Senate commended the Irish Parliamentary Budget Office (PBO) as a model for fiscal oversight and expressed Pakistan's resolve to establish its own PBO, inspired by best practices from Ireland.

Recognizing Murphy's background as an entrepreneur, he emphasized that Ireland's business delegations must visit and explore investment opportunities in Pakistan. He highlighted Pakistan's investor-friendly climate and the Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC), a one-window

operation designed to streamline and facilitate foreign investment across key sectors.

Both sides explored avenues for collaboration, including technical exchanges, workshops, and virtual forums on budgetary and fiscal policies. The Chairman invited an Irish parliamentary delegation to visit Pakistan, reaffirming commitment to continued engagement and democratic reforms.

The meeting concluded on a positive note, with both leaders expressing optimism for sustained cooperation and strengthened democratic institutions in both nations.

Earlier, Pakistan Ireland Business Council (PIBC) hosted a distinguished lunch event at the iconic Stephen's Green Club in Dublin.

The event was held in honour of the Pakistani Parliamentary Delegation, led by the Chairman Senate, Syed Yousaf Raza Gilani.

The gathering was attended by prominent figures, including Neale Richmond, the Foreign Minister of Ireland, and Aisha Farooqi, the Pakistani Ambassador to Ireland.

The event was presided over by Irfan Hameed, President of PIBC, alongside Roman Murphy, Chairman, and executive members such as Asim Sattar, Angela Canavan, Aisha Chaudhary and Faisal Mirza.

The luncheon served as a platform to strengthen diplomatic and economic ties between Pakistan and Ireland. Discussions focused on fostering collaboration in trade, investment, and cultural exchange, reflecting the shared commitment to deepening bilateral relations.

This event highlighted the pivotal role of PIBC in bridging the two nations and creating opportunities for mutual growth and partnership.

The presence of such high-profile delegations and dignitaries underscored the importance of continued dialogue and cooperation between Pakistan and Ireland.

Taliban arrest two clerics

KABUL (Amu TV): Taliban have arrested two religious scholars who had publicly criticized their leadership, sources told Amu on Wednesday. Mahmood Hasan and Abdul Qadir Qanit were detained a day after they voiced strong opposition to the concentration of power among Taliban leaders from Kandahar during a gathering in Kabul. Mahmood Hasan had called for an end to what he described as the Taliban's power monopoly in Kandahar.

Foreign graduates excluded

MAIMANA (Amu TV): Taliban have barred graduates of Uzbek and Turkmen language and literature programs from taking part in competitive government hiring exams in Faryab, according to sources who spoke with Amu TV. Several graduates said that when they arrived on Monday for biometric registration and exams for administrative and teaching positions, Taliban officials in the provincial examination committee refused to allow them to participate.

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

Afghanistan, Turkey & Turkmenistan discuss TAP-500 implementation



KABUL (TOLONews): The first trilateral meeting, attended by representatives from Turkmenistan and a Turkish company, was held in Kabul to initiate the practical implementation of the TAP-500 electricity project.

The TAP-500 project aims to transfer high-voltage electricity from Turkmenistan to Pakistan through the Afghan provinces of Herat, Farah, Helmand, and Kandahar.

According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, once this major project is implemented, in addition to supplying electricity to certain Afghan provinces, significant revenue from electricity transit will be added to the treasury of the caretaker government.

Zia Ahmad Takal, head

of public relations at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, stated that a joint secretariat will be established among various ministries to facilitate the practical commencement of this project. He also noted that both Turkmenistan and Turkey are keen to see the project completed.

Takal further stated: "In this meeting, hosted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Water and Energy of Afghanistan, Breshna Company, and the Ministry of Energy of Turkmenistan discussed the TAP-500 project, its practical implementation, and its roadmap."

Meanwhile, the Turkmen delegation also held meetings with the acting Minister of Energy and

Water and the head of Breshna Company to enhance coordination for the practical initiation of the TAP electricity project.

Hikmatullah Maiwandi, spokesperson for Breshna Company, stated regarding the meeting: "The purpose of this meeting was to expand cooperation and launch the TAP project in Afghanistan."

The former head of Breshna Company mentioned that the TAP-500 electricity project had not been implemented due to obstacles from Pakistan. However, Turkmenistan and Afghanistan are now striving to initiate the first phase within Afghan territory, which would benefit Afghanistan's economy.

Amanullah Ghalib, for-

mer head of Breshna Company, said: "The TAP project is of great importance, as it will transit Turkmenistan's electricity to Pakistan while also allowing Afghanistan to utilize the electricity in Herat and Kandahar provinces."

The TAP-500 project, alongside the TAPI pipeline project, is considered one of the major regional initiatives, aiming to transfer Turkmenistan's electricity to Pakistan via Afghanistan.

The implementation of this project was previously agreed upon between Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, and Pakistan under the former Afghan government, but practical work has yet to commence.

Gunmen kill 10 members of one family in Khost

KHOST (Ariana News): Local officials in Khost province in eastern Afghanistan say unidentified gunmen killed 10 members of one family, including women and children, on late Tuesday night.

Mustaghfir Gurbuz, spokesman for the Khost governor, told Ariana News that the incident happened in the village of Bukhane in Alishiro district.

Gurbuz said two people have been arrested by security forces in connection with the incident.

"After investigation, the arrested people will be handed over to the judicial and legal authorities," he said.

Officials have not yet released details on the identities of the deceased but sources told the media that three women were among the dead. The motive for the murder has not yet been determined.

Hundreds of acres of land freed from encroachment

KABUL (BNB): Authorities in Nangarhar province have announced the recovery of 800 jeribs (approximately 160 hectares) of land from illegal encroachment in Surkh Rod district.

Mawlawi Mohammad Wali Mohsin, Head of Agriculture, Irrigation, and Livestock in Nangarhar, confirmed the operation in the Karez Kharom area, carried out jointly with the district's police and military officials.

The operation was supported by the head of the judiciary and the deputy commander of the police.

As part of the operation, illegal structures on the seized land were demolished, and relevant assets were handed over to local law enforcement.

Mohsin emphasized that the government will not tolerate unlawful occupation of state-owned properties, and legal action will be taken against those involved in land grabbing.

Officials also urged the public to cooperate with the authorities in preventing further encroachments and assisting in the arrest of land grabbers. Since the re-establishment of the Islamic Emirate's rule, tens of thousands of jeribs of land have been recovered from illegal occupation across the country.

2m refugees deported

KABUL (Khaama Press): The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) has reported that at least 1.4 million Afghan refugees have returned to their homeland from Iran and Pakistan in 2024.

The organization stated that these refugees returned due to security threats, limited access to healthcare and education, restricted economic opportunities, and issues related to their residency documents.

Out of the 1.4 million returnees, 1.2 million were deported from Iran, while 136,800 Afghan refugees were expelled from Pakistan, with a small number returning from other countries.

As per the International Organization for Migration (IOM), approximately six million Afghan citizens are currently residing in Iran and Pakistan.

Akhundzada: We do not fear warnings from West or East

KABUL (TOLONews): Sheikh Hibatullah Akhundzada, the leader of the Islamic Emirate, has stated that he has no fear of warnings from Western or Eastern countries. In his speech at the graduation ceremony of Jihadiyah Madrasa in Kandahar, he added that the Westerners who came to the country did not leave voluntarily but were forced to withdraw from Afghanistan.

The leader of the Islamic Emirate said: "Whether the East or the West stands against us, they cannot harm us. This is our belief, and we stand firmly upon it. Whether they are from the East or the West, they are nothing! Should we now fear their news? Do we not believe in God's promises but instead believe in them? Will we be influenced by them? Never!"

Sheikh Hibatullah Akhundzada also emphasized that the current system was not granted as a gift or inheritance but was

established through the struggles of Afghans and must be preserved.

Sheikh Hibatullah Akhundzada, the leader of the Islamic Emirate, stated: "This system that exists today did not come by anyone's request, nor was it inherited or given to us out of friendship. This system was achieved through our blood; it was established through Jihad in the path of Allah."

Fazl Rahman Oria, a political affairs analyst, said: "Hostility and conflict between Afghanistan and Western countries benefit neither side. The interests of Western nations and Afghanistan's national interests require negotiations and agreements between the two sides so that the existing issues can be resolved."

The leader of the Islamic Emirate also advised the graduates of the madrasa to prioritize the preservation of Islamic values.

'Aid decline possibly due to women policies'

KABUL (TOLONews): Acting Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi has said that the Islamic Emirate seeks "respectful" relations with the new US administration.

In a recent interview with the BBC, Muttaqi said that political changes in the US have not only affected the Afghan currency but also caused instability in global currencies, including the Canadian dollar.

Muttaqi referred to the depreciation of the Afghan currency as a "propaganda wave." When asked whether US aid has been reduced due to the Islamic Emirate's policies towards women and girls, he acknowledged, "There are many factors involved, and this could be one of them."

Muttaqi also criticized the submission of a request by an International Criminal Court (ICC) prosecutor for the arrest of the Islamic Emirate's leader and the head of the Supreme Court, calling it unjust. He said that such actions would not affect the Islamic Emirate's engagement with other countries.

"These actions are largely provocative,



with political motives behind them, and are unjust. Afghanistan experienced two decades of war, with 200 to 400 casualties daily, yet no such decisions were made against anyone," he added.

Muttaqi remarked that the country is facing significant internal political and economic challenges. He emphasized the Islamic Emirate's willingness to address issues with Pakistan that are directly related to Afghanistan. He reiterated that the Islamic Emirate seeks balanced relations with neighboring countries and does not oppose one country to favor another.

50 aid groups halt operations in Afghanistan

KABUL (TOLONews): The Ministry of Economy told TOLONews that the operations of 50 aid organizations have been halted due to the suspension of United States aid to Afghanistan. Abdul Latif Nazari, the deputy minister of economy, called on the international community, particularly the United States, to avoid politicizing humanitarian assistance.

"The suspension of activities by some aid organizations due to the halt in humanitarian operations by the new US administration affects humanitarian discussions. Therefore, we call on countries, including the United States, not to politicize humanitarian aid," Nazari said.

Meanwhile, Stéphane Dujarric, spokesman for the UN Secretary-General, voiced concern over the suspension of aid, emphasizing that people in Afghanistan, as well as other nations, depend heavily on these humanitarian efforts.

"I think every agency, as I said, is mapping out the impact. Humanitarian agencies are always looking for a new source of funding. What we do know is that the humanitarian needs around the world are growing exponentially. You see it year to year. It is incumbent that every member state and other sources of funding step up to meet the needs of the most vulnerable. We are of course concerned about what would happen in Afghanistan and many

other places where people rely hand to mouth on the World Food Programme," Dujarric said.

The World Food Programme (WFP) in Afghanistan has also warned that the suspension of US aid and reduced international funding have pushed one-third of Afghanistan's population into acute hunger.

Hsiao-Wei Lee, the head of the WFP in Afghanistan, said: "Any potential reduction in assistance for Afghanistan is, of course, concerning. And that assistance, whether it is assistance to WFP or another actor, the levels of need are just so high here in Afghanistan. And I certainly hope that any decisions made, any implementation of decisions made, take into consideration just, as I kind of mentioned earlier, it's the people and the needs of the people."

Meanwhile, Kabul residents have also called for the suspension of aid to be lifted. Abdul Razaq, a resident of Kabul, told TOLONews: "During the years of war, people endured immense hardships, and now they are still facing challenges. These restrictions imposed by the US are having a negative impact on us."

US President Donald Trump, on January 22, following his inauguration ceremony, signed an executive order to suspend US foreign aid, which includes Afghanistan.

Saudia to increase Hajj quota for Afghan citizens



KABUL (BNA): Sheikh Dr. Noor Mohammad Saqib, the Acting Minister of Hajj and Religious Affairs, met with Faisal bin Talq al-Baqmi, the Saudi Ambassador to Kabul.

The meeting, held in Kabul, focused on enhancing bilateral ties between the two Islamic countries and improving the organi-

zation of Hajj affairs for the year 1446 AH.

Minister Saqib emphasized the need for an increased quota of Hajj for Afghan citizens, highlighting the importance of allowing more individuals from Afghanistan to fulfill their religious obligations.

He also proposed that the Afghan endowment

lands located near the Holy Mosques be considered for alternative usage or settlement arrangements to facilitate Afghan pilgrims.

Ambassador al-Baqmi responded positively to the proposals, assuring the minister of Saudi Arabia's commitment to cooperating with Afghanistan in implementing these requests.

MoU signed to provide food supplies for vulnerable groups



KABUL (BNA): The Ministry of Martyrs and Disabled Affairs has officially signed a Memorandum of Understanding

(MoU) with the Qamar Charity Foundation to deliver essential food supplies to orphans, widows, and disabled individuals

across several districts in Kabul province.

The agreement, valued at 1.2 million Afghanis, was formalized in a cere-

mony attended by Mullah Sado Khan, Head of Foreign Relations and Planning at the Ministry, and Riaz Ahmad Safi, a representative of the Qamar Charity Foundation.

Under the terms of this partnership, food assistance including flour, oil, rice, and other vital items will be provided to 350 vulnerable individuals in the districts of Surobi, Deh Sabz, Paghman, Chahar Asiab, Bagrami, Musahi, and Khak Jabar.

The implementation of this project will be carried out in close coordination with the Directorate of Martyrs and Disabled Affairs in Kabul province, ensuring that aid reaches those who need it most.

90% of exploration completed for Jabal al-Saraj Cement Factory

KABUL (TOLONews): The contracting company of the new Jabal al-Saraj Cement Factory has announced that 90% of the first phase of exploration work has been completed, along with the drilling of 18 deep wells for mineral sampling in the designated areas of the factory.

The construction cost of this production facility is \$220 million, which has been contracted between the Ministry of Mines and Petroleum and a Qatari company.

Mohammad Idris Anwari, the governor of Parwan, stated: "The contracting company has completed 90% of the explo-

ration work within six months, ahead of schedule. We are hopeful that the remaining construction and technical work will be completed within two years."

The designated areas for the construction of this factory, located in Jabal al-Saraj district, contain sufficient mineral resources.

According to officials from the contracting company, 18 deep wells have been drilled for mineral sampling.

Mohammad Shoaib Shahzad, the exploration manager at Al-Falah Company, said: "We have identified areas that necessitate the establishment of

this factory, and our development process will continue in the future. Exploration is a continuous process that progresses alongside extraction and production. Our drilling points, sampling, and analysis efforts will also expand."

Meanwhile, Parwan residents are demanding a greater share of employment opportunities for locals in various sectors of the factory.

Saeed Mirzayi, a resident of Parwan, said: "Our biggest demand is that the local people, especially the residents of Jabal al-Saraj district, who are mostly poor and in need, be employed in this factory."

Hamed, another resident of Parwan, stated: "Most of Parwan's youth are unemployed, and they should be given job opportunities in the new cement factory, which has now started operations."

According to officials, the construction of the new Jabal al-Saraj Cement Factory is expected to be completed within the next two years, providing over 5,000 jobs.

They also stated that the factory will initially produce 3,000 tons of cement per day, with plans to increase production to 9,000 tons per day in later phases.

Ancient Fort of Bost now boasts its own library

HELMAND (Ariana News): In the hope of promoting the culture of reading books, Helmand's department of information and culture has installed a public library at the site of Afghanistan's historic Fort of Bost.

The library, which contains about 3,000 books, is housed in a shipping container that's been placed next to the Fort's famous 11th century decorative arch.

Visitors to the Fort can make use of the library and read the books on site. They have welcomed the ini-

tiative but say they would like to see a more permanent structure being built for the library.

They also said they hope the Fort complex is one day fully restored.

Helmand provincial officials have said an assessment has been carried out to determine the work that needs to be done to restore the Fort and its surrounding structures. They say restoration work could start next year.

Also known as Qala-e-Bost, the Fort dates back more than 3,500

years. It is located near Lashkargah city in the southern province of Helmand.

This historical landmark was once a thriving urban center and now stands as a testament to the region's rich cultural and architectural heritage.

The impressive ruins tell stories of a bygone era, featuring remnants of intricate carvings and ancient structures that showcase the artistry of the people who once inhabited this area.

The arch is part of the remains

of an ancient mosque.

The structures meanwhile include remains from periods of ancient Iranian, Greco-Roman, and ancient Indian domination.

From the ruins excavated it is believed that a strong fortress was constructed to protect the town, the irrigated farm land, and the trade route from invading armies.

It was constructed of mud and baked brick; its most notable feature was a deep well in the center of the mound, with seven galleries encircling its shaft.



ISLAMABAD: Ambassador-designate of Luxembourg, Mr. Ronald Reiland, presenting diplomatic credentials to President Asif Ali Zardari, at Aiwan-e-Sadr.

Inclusion of blacklisted company for medicine supply PHC suspends tender, seeks response from Health Dept

Humayun Khan

PESHAWAR: The Peshawar High Court (PHC) has suspended implementation of tender process for the supply of medicines to government hospitals in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa due to participation blacklisted company named Frontier Dextrins Limited, and ordered provincial health's department for submission of reply, on Wednesday.

PHC's divisional bench comprising of Justice Syed Arshad Ali and Justice Waqar Ahmad, heard the petition filed by a citizen, Waqar Ahmed. The petitioners' lawyers, Shumail Ahmed Butt and Abdul Rahim Jadoon, argued the case.

The counsel informed the court that the provincial government's health department purchases medicines worth billions of rupees every year for government hospitals, following a decades-old procedure. However, this year's tender notice omitted a crucial clause that barred companies found guilty of supplying substandard or fake medicines from participating in the bidding process.

The lawyers argued that this omission would allow blacklisted companies, including Frontier Dextrins

Limited, to participate in the tender process, putting the lives of millions of people at risk. They pointed out that other provinces, including Punjab, Sindh, and Balochistan, follow a stricter procedure, banning companies found guilty of supplying substandard medicines from participating in government tenders.

The court, after hearing the initial arguments, suspended the tender process and issued notices to the provincial health department, seeking a response. The court ruled that companies blacklisted for supplying substandard or fake medicines should not be allowed to participate in government tenders, and their bids should be rejected.

The petitioners' lawyers argued that the inclusion of blacklisted companies in the tender process would be a violation of fundamental rights, as it would put the lives of millions of people at risk. They requested the court to direct the health department to cancel the tender and re-initiate the process, excluding blacklisted companies.

Court confirms pre-arrest bail in alleged embezzlement: Anti-Corruption Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

Court's Judge Salahuddin has confirmed the pre-arrest bail of Chief Engineer Ishraq Ahmed and former Tehsil Municipal Officer (TMO) Yasser Jamshed, who are accused of illegally awarding Rs88 million contract.

According to prosecution, the two officers are accused of awarding the Rs88 million contract to a contractor who had submitted a higher bid, despite another contractor being willing to undertake the project at a lower rate.

The counsel Babar Khan Yousafzai advocate argued that the allegations against the defendants are unfounded, as the audit report had not been received at the time the contract was awarded, and the prices had not been displayed. He claimed that it is not possible for any illegal activity to have taken place, and that the audit report also confirms that the officers did not derive any personal benefit from the contract. Therefore, he argued, it is not justified to implicate the officers in this case. After hearing the arguments, the court confirmed the pre-arrest bail of the two officers and restrained the Anti-Corruption Department from arresting them.

Petitioner seeks stay order against PECA amends F.P. Report

LAHORE: A day after the Senate approved amendment in 'The Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act amid ruckus by opposition, a Lahore based journalist Wednesday invoked jurisdiction of Lahore High Court on the grounds that due process for the legislation has been compromised.

A member of the Lahore Press Club, Jafar Bin Yaar filed the petition as his counsel made a number of respondents including Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) and others. He substantiated the plea saying the National Assembly approved the Prevention of Electronic Crime Act (PECA) Amendment Bill last week, claiming the Lower House of the Parliament suspended its rules to fast-track the approval process of the bill.

He further submitted that under the PECA laws, individuals can face up to three years of imprisonment and fines for spreading fake information. He was of the opinion the law had been misused in the past. With the addition of new penalties under the Amendment, it is feared that the country's already limited freedom will be further restricted.

He alleged the controversial bill was introduced without consulting relevant stakeholders and journalist organisations, expressing fear that it would suppress the freedom of expression guaranteed by the Constitution. Terming the PECA Amendment Bill unconstitutional, he urged the court to declare it null and void.

Seeking a stay order in the matter the petitioner requested the court to direct the concerned authorities to suspend any actions taken under this controversial act till final adjudication of the petition in hand.

US team sees investment opportunities F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Head of the visiting US investors' delegation Gentry Beach asserted on Wednesday that there were great investment opportunities in Pakistan with an amazing base of intelligent people, which he said remained "overlooked" in the past, across diverse fields.

"We view Pakistan as one of the biggest global opportunities [. . .] I think you have an amazing base with intelligent people here in this country, which is very unique," he said while speaking to the media. Gentry Beach said he had remained very close to the Trump administration for a long time, and that now the US was entering a new era of peace and prosperity under President Donald Trump's leadership.

He said the leadership of both the US and Pakistan shared the same vision for peace and prosperity, noting that for the last four years, "we all have been under attack" and criticized the policies of the Joe Biden administration. "[. . .] These are the things that President Trump is cleaning up, and he has brought the right team to address them. I believe your leadership in this country is very aligned and like-minded, and I think it is very important that we build a strong bridge between both these groups," he said while recalling the strong historical ties between the two countries.

Gentry Beach also said that President Trump believed in economic diplomacy and that their ongoing visit was part of that effort. "We plan on investing billions of dollars in Pakistan across a number of different areas, including critical minerals and real estate [. . .] From a real estate perspective, we brought our real estate development partners, and I am going to build some of the most high-end and luxury properties ever seen in Pakistan." He also mentioned energy, technology, artificial intelligence, and raw areas that needed attention and investment.

CM KP launches PMIS in Prison Department

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Ali Amin Khan Gandapur on Wednesday, visited the office of the Inspector General of Prisons in Peshawar, where he formally launched the newly established Prison Management Information System (PMIS) and E-Visit App.

During the briefing by the relevant officials on this occasion, it was told that the Prison Management Information System has digitized all prison affairs. Through this system, the operations of all 39 prisons in the province have been interconnected, not only with each other but also with the judicial system. Similarly, the process of inmates' court appearances has been digitized, allowing virtual court hearings via video link.

The authorities informed that the E-Visit App has been introduced to facilitate online meetings between inmates and their families, eliminating the need for in-person visits to prisons. Now, families can connect with their incarcerated loved ones from the comfort of their homes. Regarding other reform initiatives, it was highlighted that Rs. 1.2 billion is being spent annually on inmate meals, and after seven years, the prison food menu has been revised to ensure a balanced diet.

Additionally, geysers and air coolers have been provided in prisons to protect inmates from extreme weather conditions. The prison regulations are being aligned with international standards. Furthermore, modern medical equipment and improved healthcare facilities are being provided for inmates. To promote physical and mental well-being, sports competitions have been introduced in prisons, and vocational training programs have



been launched to equip inmates with various skills. Moreover, the prison industry has been revitalized and linked with the market to provide financial benefits to prisoners. Officials also reported that 317 inmates from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, who were previously imprisoned in Punjab, have been transferred back to the province. Additionally, the provincial government is prioritizing the construction and development of prisons across the province. The completion of District Jail Swabi and Central Jail D.I. Khan will address the issue of overcrowding, while funds have been approved for a new prison in District Tank.

Similarly, five regional prison offices have been made operational to improve prison management. Rs. 1.39 billion has been allocated for modern security equipment in prisons. Additionally, modern interview rooms have been built to ensure safe and convenient inmate-family meetings. In order to enhance the professional competence of prison staff, the Prison Staff Training Academy in Haripur has been upgraded with modern facilities.

The Chief Minister commended the relevant officials for introducing the Prison Management Information System and implementing other reform initiatives. He stated that

today's event marks a new chapter in the journey of prison reforms. He emphasized that the provincial government is committed to reforming the prison system, just as it is improving other departments.

He expressed gratitude to the International Narcotics and Law Enforcement (INL) and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) for their cooperation, stating that this partnership is a milestone in enhancing the prison system and inmate welfare. The Chief Minister reaffirmed that providing a better environment for inmates across the province is a top priority. "We aim to establish a modern system based on justice, transparency, and humanity, and we will utilize all available resources to achieve this goal," he stated.

Meanwhile, the Chief Minister also visited the office of the Deputy Commissioner of Peshawar, where he formally inaugurated the newly established Service Delivery Center-II at the Mohafiz Khana. With the establishment of this new Service Delivery Center, the number of service counters has increased from 5 to 10, while the number of seats has been expanded from 20 to 60. Additionally, a comfortable waiting area has been provided for citizens.

Plane crash in S Sudan kills 20 people

KHARTOUM (AFP): At least 20 people have been killed in a plane crash in the north of South Sudan. Unity state's minister for information said. The aircraft came down near the oil fields in Unity state at about 10:30am (08:30 GMT) shortly after taking off for the capital, Juba, on Wednesday.

"The plane crashed 500 metres from the airport... 21 people were on board. As for now, there's only one survivor," Gatwech Bipal Both told AFP news agency. All of the passengers – 16 South Sudanese, two Chinese nationals and 1 Indian – are employees of the Greater Pioneer Operating Company (GPOC). Bipal added that the aircraft was on a routine mission to the area.

Earlier, the United Nations's Radio Miraya reported that the pilot and co-pilot were among those killed. Pictures shared on social media showed the crumpled aircraft upside down in a field, debris spread across the area. Overloading of planes is common in South Sudan, and was believed to have contributed to the 2015 crash of an Antonov plane in Juba that killed 36 people. In 2021 five people were also killed after a cargo plane carrying fuel for the UN's World Food Programme crashed near Juba.

Russia seeking to keep bases in Syria

MOSCOW (Reuters): Russia said on Wednesday it had held "frank" discussions with Syria's new de facto leader as it tries to retain its two military bases in the country, but it declined to comment on what he was demanding in return.

A Syrian source familiar with the discussions told Reuters that the new leader, Ahmed Al-Sharaa, had requested that Moscow hand over former Syrian president Bashar Assad, who fled to Russia when he was toppled by Sharaa's rebels in December. Syrian news agency Sana said Damascus also wanted Russia, which backed Assad in the country's civil war, to rebuild trust through "concrete measures such as compensation, reconstruction and recovery."

FO concerns over US arms presence in Afghanistan

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Spokesperson of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on Wednesday reiterated that the presence of US advance weapons in Afghanistan, left behind in the aftermath of the withdrawal of its troops in

August 2021, had been an issue of profound concern for the safety and security of Pakistan and its citizens.

Responding to media queries regarding the US decision to take back advance weapons left behind in Afghanistan, the spokesperson in a press statement said "These

weapons have been used by terrorist organizations, including the TTP, to carry out terrorist attacks in Pakistan. We have been repeatedly calling upon the de facto authorities in Kabul to take all necessary measures to ensure that these weapons do not fall into the wrong hands."

Russia nuclear plant targeted in drone attack

MOSCOW: A nuclear power plant was among targets during a massive Ukrainian drone attack, Russian officials have said. Moscow said on Wednesday that the country's energy infrastructure had come under attack by at least 100 drones overnight. Ukraine also reported strikes. The continuing barrages were accompanied by barbs from the two countries' presidents, suggesting little prospect of peace talks.

The Russian Ministry of Defence said on Telegram that 104 drones were involved in raids across western Russia, many targeting power and oil facilities. Local officials claimed that air defence systems had destroyed one drone that had attempted to strike the

nuclear power plant in the western region of Smolensk.

"According to preliminary information, one of the drones was shot down during an attempt to attack a nuclear power facility," Governor Vasily Anokhin said on the Telegram messaging app. "There were no casualties or damage." The Smolensk Nuclear Power Plant, the largest power generating plant in Russia's northwest, was working normally on Wednesday morning, RIA state news agency reported, citing the plant's press service.

Petrochemicals giant Sibur reported a fire at its oil refinery in the Nizhny Novgorod region about 800km (500 miles) from the Ukrainian border. Russia's air defences reportedly

destroyed drones over nine regions, including 11 over Smolensk, which sits on the border with Belarus. Nearly half were hit over Kursk, where Ukrainian troops have occupied several villages for months following an incursion.

Ukraine and Russia have been swapping drone and missile strikes on an almost daily basis, with energy infrastructure a particular target amid winter. Warnings that the fighting could spark a nuclear disaster have been sounded since Russia launched its full-scale invasion of its neighbour in February 2022. However, most of the concern has focused on Ukraine's Zaporizhzhia plant, which sits on the frontlines in the east of the country. — Aljazeera

Egypt 'cannot take part' in forced displacement of Gazans

CAIRO (AFP): Egyptian President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi said Wednesday that forced displacement of Gazans is an "injustice that we cannot take part in," after US President Donald Trump floated a plan to move Palestinians from the territory to Egypt and Jordan.

"The deportation and displacement of the Palestinian people from their land is an injustice that we cannot take part in," El-Sisi said during a news conference in Cairo with Kenyan President William Ruto. El-Sisi added that Egypt's historic position on the Palestinian cause "can never be compromised."

El-Sisi said Egypt supported "the establishment of a Palestinian state" and

was "determined to work with President Trump, who seeks to achieve the desired peace based on the two-state solution." "We believe that President Trump is capable of fulfilling this long-awaited goal of establishing a just and lasting peace in the Middle East," he said.

After the Israel-Hamas ceasefire came into force on January 19, Trump touted a plan to "clean out" the Gaza Strip, reiterating the idea on Monday as he called for Palestinians to move to "safer" locations such as Egypt or Jordan. Speaking to reporters on Monday evening, Trump said that he hoped El-Sisi "would take some" Gazans. "We helped them a lot, and I'm sure he'd help us," he said. "As they say, it's a

rough neighborhood, but I think he would do it, and I think the king of Jordan would do it too." Jordan too rejected the idea, saying: "Jordan is for Jordanians and Palestine is for Palestinians."

Since the start of the Israel-Hamas war in October 2023 both countries have warned of plans to displace Palestinians from Gaza into neighboring Egypt and from the West Bank into Jordan. El-Sisi has repeatedly warned that such a displacement would "eradicate the case for Palestinian statehood." Egypt is a key Arab ally of the United States and was the only country besides Israel to receive an exemption from Trump's foreign aid freeze this week.

Hamas accuses Israel of delaying Gaza aid

JERUSALEM (AFP): Hamas officials accused Israel on Wednesday of delaying aid deliveries to Gaza and jeopardizing a truce and hostage release deal, an allegation Israel dismissed as "fake news."

Since a ceasefire in the war in Gaza took effect on January 19, truckloads of aid have been allowed into the devastated Gaza Strip. The truce is hinged on the release of Israeli hostages taken during Hamas's October 7, 2023 attack, in exchange for 1,900 people held in Israeli jails.

Hamas has so far released seven hostages, with 290 prisoners freed in exchange. Three more hostages are due to be released on Thursday. But two senior Hamas officials accused Israel of slowing down aid deliveries, with one citing items key to Gaza's recovery such as fuel, tents, heavy machinery and other equipment.

"According to the agreement, these materials were supposed to enter during the first week of the ceasefire," one official said. "We warn that continued delays and failure to address these points will affect the natural progression of the agreement, including the prisoner exchange." Israel hit back at the accusation,

with a spokesman for COGAT, the Israeli defense ministry body that oversees civil affairs in the Palestinian territories, calling it "totally fake news." Between Sunday and 1100 GMT on Wednesday, "3,000 trucks entered Gaza," the spokesman said. "The agreement says it should be 4,200 in seven days," he added. As the text of the agreement that Qatar, Egypt and the United States mediated has not been made public, AFP was not able to verify its terms on aid. Both Hamas officials said group representatives raised the issue during a meeting with Egyptian officials in Cairo on Wednesday.

If all goes to plan on the hostage and prisoner releases on Thursday, a further three hostages are set to be released on Saturday. The agreement is intended to end more than 15 months of war between Israel and Hamas that erupted with the militant group's attack on Israel in 2023. The two sides are currently implementing the first 42-day phase of the agreement, which should see 33 hostages freed.

Next, they are due to start discussing a long-term end to the war. The third and final phase of the deal

should see the reconstruction of Gaza as well as the return of the bodies of any remaining dead hostages. The families of people still held in Gaza were holding out hope the truce would hold, with hundreds of people attending a rally in Tel Aviv on Wednesday to show support. "We have to be optimistic. We have to keep on trying and not give up," 27-year-old Shakked Fainsod said.

"If their families keep on fighting, then I don't have the privilege to stay home and not keep fighting as well." Despite the devastation wrought by the war, more than 376,000 displaced Palestinians have returned to northern Gaza, according to the UN humanitarian office OCHA. "I'm happy to be back at my home," said Saif Al-Din Qazaat, who returned to northern Gaza but had to sleep in a tent next to the ruins of his house.

"I kept a fire burning all night near the kids to keep them warm... (They) slept peacefully despite the cold but we don't have enough blankets," the 41-year-old told AFP. For many, the journey marked not just a return home but a confrontation with the harsh realities of the destruction wrought by the war.

Trump's freeze on US aid rings alarm bells

BERLIN/BANGKOK/LONDON (Reuters): Field hospitals in Thai refugee camps, landmine clearance in war zones, and drugs to treat millions suffering from diseases such as HIV are among the programs facing the chop as President Donald Trump contemplates massive cuts to US foreign aid.

Trump last week paused development assistance from the US Agency for International Development for 90 days to assess compatibility with his "America First" policy, setting alarm bells ringing among aid groups around the world that depend on US largesse. Humanitarian organisations and UN agencies say they could face drastic curbs on

their ability to distribute food, shelter and healthcare if the freeze becomes permanent.

The US is by far the biggest contributor to global humanitarian aid, supplying an estimated \$13.9 billion in 2024, accounting for 42% of all aid tracked by the United Nations., opens new tab Clinics at camps in Thailand providing shelter for about 100,000 refugees from Myanmar were ordered to shut after the US froze funding to the International Rescue Committee, according to a senior aid worker.

Washington said it would grant waivers to the freeze in some areas including emergency food assistance, according to a memo seen by

Reuters. Bangladesh's government said in a statement that the US had granted a waiver for emergency food aid to more than a million Rohingya refugees sheltering in Bangladesh. But the exemption does not apply to other humanitarian programming. A Bangladesh-based aid worker said organisations working on shelter, for example, would not be able to buy new materials for building and fixing homes for refugees.

The cuts will also affect the supply of lifesaving drugs for HIV, malaria and tuberculosis around the globe, which millions of people depend on, according to another memo seen by Reuters.