

Second Mpox case detected
F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The KP on Thursday reported its second Mpox case of the year, bringing the total number of cases in the province to 11. According to Health Advisor Ihtesham Ali, the provincial health department identified the second Mpox case of the year at Bacha Khan International Airport. Since 2022, a total of 11 Mpox cases have been reported in the province.



@thefrontierpost

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

www.thefrontierpost.com

Vol. XXXIXII

No. 04

Regd. No. 241

SHABAAN 01 1446 -- FRIDAY, JANUARY 31 2025

PESHAWAR EDITION

12 PAGES

PRICE. 30

PM vows to uphold martyrs' sacrifices

— federal cabinet ratifies ME Green Initiative charter to restore 200 million hectares land, plant 50b trees

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Thursday reaffirmed the government's commitment to honoring the sacrifices of the nation's martyrs and advancing Pakistan towards prosperity and security.

The prime minister, in his televised opening remarks at the meeting of the federal cabinet, said that prior to the meeting he attended the funeral prayers of Major Hamza Israr and Sepoy Muhammad Naeem, who embraced martyrdom in an intelligence-based operation (IBO) in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Paying tribute to the fallen soldiers, he highlighted the unwavering dedication of Pakistan's law enforcement agencies and security forces to safeguarding the nation. He reiterated that it is the collective responsibility of the government and the people to honor and uphold the sanctity of these sacrifices.

"Major Hamza Israr, only 29 years old, sacrificed his life in defense of the country," the Prime Minister remarked. "I met his grieving parents, who shared that their son always aspired to attain martyrdom. Such bravery and patriotism must never be forgotten."

During the meeting, Prime Minister Sharif stressed that achieving Pakistan's vision for development and security requires a steadfast commitment from all segments of society. He expressed the government's resolve to maintain national security while ensuring economic and political stability. Addressing political matters, the Prime Minister shed light on recent efforts to engage with the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) for dialogue. He stated that despite a genuine effort to initiate discussions, the opposition party backed out at the last moment.

"A committee was formed, and extensive talks took place as per their demands," he said. "A final meeting

was scheduled for January 28 in response to their written request, yet they withdrew at the eleventh hour." The prime minister also recalled his own political struggle in 2018 when he protested against alleged election rigging. "Back then, Imran Khan Niazi assured me of a House committee to probe the matter, but nothing came of it. Nevertheless, I am still prepared, with a clear heart and intention, to advance dialogue for the nation's progress."

He told the meeting that the State Bank of Pakistan's decision to lower the policy rate by one percent. This move is aimed at fostering economic growth and stability in the country. Shehbaz Sharif also voiced concern over the rise in human trafficking incidents, which have led to the loss of many precious lives offshore and tarnished Pakistan's global image. "This issue is being closely monitored, and the Ministry of Interior has been taken on board," he assured. "We will not relent until human trafficking is completely eradicated."

The federal cabinet also ratified the charter of the Middle East Green Initiative that would enable restoration of 200 million hectares of land and plantation of 50 billion trees. During the meeting, the officials of the Ministry of Climate Change informed the forum that Pakistan was among the founding members of the Charter and therefore the Ministry had recommended the forum to accord its approval.

The cabinet approved the Off-the-Grid Captive Power Plants Levy Ordinance 2025 on the recommendation of the Petroleum Division. The forum was briefed on the statement made in Parliament in 2020 regarding the pilots of Pakistan International Airlines.

The meeting was informed that the statement made by a former federal minister regarding the pilots of Pakistan International Airlines was irresponsible

and exaggerated, which not only severely affected the image of the country and the national airline, but also caused serious damage to the national exchequer. The cabinet approved the formation of a fact-finding committee to review the said statement, which would probe motives behind it and also estimate the loss caused to the national airline.

The federal cabinet approved the agreement between the Government of Pakistan and the European Union on the recommendation of the Ministry of Commerce regarding the distribution of tariff rates quota. The federal cabinet approved the reorganization of Accountability Court-III, Islamabad and its conversion into Special Court (CNS-III), Islamabad, on the recommendation of the Islamabad High Court and the proposal of the Ministry of Law and Justice.

The federal cabinet also approved the additional charge of Chairman Karachi Port Trust, Rear Admiral Habib-ur-Rehman, for a maximum of two months. Prime Minister Shehbaz directed to complete the process of appointing a regular Chairman of Karachi Port Trust immediately.

The federal cabinet approved a 25 percent reduction in the provincial quota in medical and dental colleges managed by the federal government. The initiative was taken in the context of extremely low quota for students domiciled in the Islamabad Capital Territory in provincial medical and dental colleges so that students domiciled in Islamabad could get better opportunities for education in such institutions. The federal cabinet, on the recommendation of the Rightsizing Committee of the federal government, has approved an amendment to the Rules of Business, 1973 regarding the merger of the Ministry of Kashmir Affairs and Gilgit-Baltistan and the Ministry of Frontier Affairs.

75 Pakistanis moved to Rwanda from violence-hit Goma: FO

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Following the recent escalation of conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), around 150 Pakistanis were stranded in the city of Goma, confirmed the Foreign Office on Thursday.

In a statement, FO Spokesperson Shafqat Ali Khan said that with the active engagement of Pakistan's high commissioner in Kigali, the Rwandan authorities have allowed the entry of stranded Pakistanis into Rwanda. "So far around 75 Pakistanis have moved to Rwanda," he added.

M23 rebels captured Goma, a city of two million people and capital of North Kivu province, on Monday. The rebels advanced south on Wednesday in an apparent attempt to expand their area of control. They marched along the western side of Lake Kivu and neared Kavumu, where Bukavu's airport is located.

In the statement, the spokesperson said that the high commission in Kigali arranged accommodation and food for the affected Pakistanis. The high commission is also reaching out to the Pakistani community to identify and reach out to any other citizen in difficulty, Shafqat added.

"There is likelihood of more Pakistanis crossing over to Rwanda in the coming days," he said, adding that the high commission staff was in contact with every individual who had asked for assistance and help. Furthermore, the diplomatic staff was also reaching out to Pakistanis in the border city of Bukavu, he added. The group's capture of most of Goma, the capital of North Kivu province, is a dramatic escalation in a region that has seen decades of conflict involving multiple armed groups. Rwanda says its primary interest is to eradicate fighters linked to the 1994 genocide but is accused of seeking to profit from the region's reserves of minerals used in global electronics.

Major among 2 martyred, six terrorists killed in IBO

F.P. Report

RAWALPINDI: Six Khwarij were killed during an intelligence-based operation in Mir Ali area of North Waziristan. Security forces conducted an intelligence-based operation in Mir Ali area of North Waziristan District on reported presence of Khwarij. During the conduct of operation, own troops effectively engaged their location and killed six Khwarij.

However, during intense fire exchange, Major Hamza Israr, a brave officer who was leading his troops from the front and Sepoy Muhammad Naeem, fought gallantly and embraced Shahadat. Sanitization operation is being conducted to eliminate any other Kharji found in the area. The security forces of Pakistan are determined to wipe-out the menace of terrorism from the country and such sacrifices of our brave soldiers further strengthen our resolve. President Asif Ali Zardari and Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif have appreciated the officers and jawans of the security forces for killing six Khwarij in Mir Ali area of North Waziristan.

In their separate messages, they paid homage to Major Hamza Israr and Sepoy Muhammad Naeem who embraced martyrdom while valiantly confronting the Khawarij terrorists during the operation. Both leaders also expressed sympathy with the families of martyrs and prayed for patience to bear their loss.

The President expressed resolve to eliminate terrorist elements and defend the country will remain unwavering. In a statement, the Prime Minister vowed that great sacrifices rendered by sons of the

land would not let to go waste and hideous designs of the anti-state elements would be crushed. Shehbaz Sharif reiterated that security forces are fully active for complete elimination of terrorism from the country.

The funeral prayer of Major Hamza Israr Shaheed (aged 29, resident of District Rawalpindi), who embraced martyrdom while valiantly defending the motherland in Mir Ali, was solemnly offered at Chaklala Garrison, Rawalpindi.

The Prime Minister of Pakistan, Shehbaz Sharif, along with Deputy Prime Minister & Foreign Minister Senator Muhammad Ishaq Dar, the Defence Minister, the Information Minister, and General Syed Asim Munir, NI (M), Chief of Army Staff (COAS), attended the funeral. A large number of senior serving and retired military officers, soldiers, and the bereaved family members of the fallen hero also paid their respects.

While honouring the sacrifices of Pakistan's valiant martyrs, the Prime Minister reaffirmed the nation's unwavering commitment to eradicating terrorism. He emphasized that such supreme sacrifices strengthen national resolve and reinforce the collective faith in ensuring a peaceful and secure Pakistan for future generations. He further declared that the entire nation stands in steadfast solidarity with the Armed Forces and Law Enforcement Agencies in their resolute fight against terrorism. Following the funeral rites, the mortal remains of Shaheed Major Hamza Israr were transported to his native hometown, where he will be laid to rest with full military honours.

Zulfiqar assumes charge as new KP IGP

Syed Adnan

PESHAWAR: Zulfiqar Hameed officially took charge as the new Inspector General of Police (IGP) Khyber Pakhtunkhwa today at the Central Police Office, Peshawar. Upon his arrival, a smartly turned-out police contingent presented him with a guard of honor. He also laid floral wreaths at the Police Shuhada (martyrs) memorial and offered prayers for the departed souls, as well as for the unity and security of the nation.

Prior to this appointment, Zulfiqar Hameed was serving as Additional IGP Special Branch, Lahore. He joined the police force as an Assistant Superintendent of Police (ASP) on November 1,

1995 and later received training at the National Police Academy in 1997. Over his 29-year career, he has served in key positions in Punjab, Balochistan, and Sindh and worked with various security institutions, gaining extensive experience in law enforcement and counter-terrorism. His previous postings include serving as SP City Rawalpindi, DPO Nankana Sahib, AIG Operations & Finance, and SSP Investigation Lahore. Upon promotion to DIG rank, he led CTD Operations Lahore and held the position of Regional Police Officer (RPO) in Sheikhpura, Sargodha, and Gujranwala. In 2019, he served as Chief Capital Police Officer (CCPO) Lahore and DIG

Investigation. Additionally, he has held key positions such as Additional IGP Operations & Internal Accountability Lahore, Investigation, Training, and Special Branch Punjab. During his tenure in Balochistan, he served as Commandant Balochistan Constabulary and DIG Headquarters. A British Chevening Scholar, Zulfiqar Hameed has attended several national and international seminars and training programs, enhancing his expertise in modern policing strategies. Addressing senior police officials at the Central Police Office, IG Zulfiqar Hameed emphasized that police welfare is his top priority, recognizing that the force has suffered greatly due to terrorism.



ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif chairing the federal cabinet meeting.

PECA comes into force

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The controversial Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA) Amendment Bill 2025 came into force as the government issued its gazette notification on Thursday. The law ministry also issued the gazette notification of Digital Nation Bill 2025.

A day earlier, President Asif Ali Zardari approved both the bills after their passage from the National Assembly and Senate. It has been proposed in PECA that the cybercrime wing of FIA would be dissolved while a new investigation agency would be constituted. A fine of Rs2 million would be imposed for disseminating fake news.

A person would also be given three-year prison sentence for spreading fake news. The section 37 of PECA deals with the illegal online content. The section will deal with any content against the judiciary, armed forces and Islam.

Civilians' trial in military court Is May 9 more serious than terrorist attacks: Justice Rizvi

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Justice Jamal Khan Mandokhel observed on the Thursday that his remarks during the hearing of the intra-court appeals against the trial of civilians in military courts on Wednesday was misquoted. Justice Mandokhel is part of a seven-member constitutional bench of the Supreme Court which is hearing the appeals. Headed by Justice Amin-ud-din Khan, the other members of bench are justices Muhammad Ali Mazhar, Justice Hassan Azhar Rizvi, Musarat Hilali, Naeem Akhtar Afghan and Shahid Bilal Hassan.

The justice observed that his remarks were reported in the media that two judges called the decision of eight judges wrong. "Many judges contacted me regarding this news. I do not care about the media, but the record should be straight," Justice Mandokhel added. He said that he made this statement in a general sense. He had said that two people call the decision of eight judges wrong. "In my yesterday's observation, I mentioned individuals, not judges. Some media colleagues misquoted it," the justice clarified.

Continuing his arguments, Defense Ministry's counsel Khawaja Haris Articles 175 of the constitution deals with the setting up and functioning of courts. The military

courts do not come under the purview of the article, he added. Military courts are formed under a separate law, the counsel said.

Justice Mandokhel observed that the powers of the courts formed under Article 175 are extensive. The jurisdiction of the court formed under a specific law is limited. The 21st amendment decision clearly states that military courts were formed in a war situation. The constitution had to be amended to try civilians, the justice remarked.

Advocate Haris argued that there was no need for an amendment for the trial of civilians. More crimes were added to the Army Act through the amendment. Justice Rizvi observed that the 21st amendment also mentioned attack on Mehran and Kamra bases. Where was the trial of those who attacked the GHQ held, he questioned the counsel.

Two aircraft worth billions of rupees were destroyed [in the attack on Mehran naval aviation base in May 2011]. Is the crime of May 9 more serious than these terrorist attacks? Justice Rizvi asked Advocate Haris. The counsel replied that all the terrorists who attacked the Mehran base had been killed. Justice Rizvi inquired whether there was no investigation after that; who they were, where they came from and how? Did the file of the Mehran base attack case close after the terrorists were killed?

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Traders expressed full trust on Bilawal: Sharjeel

F.P. Report

KARACHI: Sindh Senior Minister, Sharjeel Inam Memon, has strongly reacted to Khalid Maqbool Siddiqui's statement, saying that the Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM) criticizes the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) to revive its dead politics. He stated that for the people of Karachi, MQM has become a nightmare of the past. According to him, MQM criticizes only to provoke a response, hoping to increase its political stature.

In a statement, Sindh Senior Minister and Provincial Minister for Information, Transport, and Mass Transit, Sharjeel Inam Memon, further said that they do not take any statement from any MQM leader seriously.

He said that the luncheon held in honor of Karachi's traders was a successful gathering. The purpose of the luncheon was to identify and resolve the issues faced by traders and to work together with them to put Pakistan on the path of development.

Sharjeel Inam Memon said that

traders have expressed full confidence in Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari and thanked him for ensuring that they no longer receive extortion slips or find bodies in sacks. He added that traders are no longer forced to give up animal hides, nor do they face frequent strikes.

Senior Minister Sharjeel Inam Memon said that the top priority of the Pakistan Peoples Party and the Sindh government is to make Sindh, as well as the entire country, a prosperous and developed nation.

Murad orders all necessary facilities in place before Aman exercise

F.P. Report

KARACHI: British Deputy High Commissioner Sarah Mooney met Sindh Governor Kamran Khan Tessori for a farewell meeting at Governor House. Discussions revolved around bilateral relations, trade partnerships, diplomatic collaboration, and mutual interests.

According to a statement by Sindh Governor House today, Tessori commended Sarah Mooney's contributions and extended his best wishes for her future endeavors. He emphasized the strong ties between Pakistan and the United Kingdom, expressing a desire to further enhance cooperation. He also acknowledged Britain's vital role in Pakistan's education, trade, and social development.

Sarah Mooney reflected on her time in Pakistan, describing it as memorable and rewarding. She highlighted the concerted efforts made to strengthen bilateral relations and praised Governor's IT Initiative, which she termed a commendable step towards youth empowerment.

Upon her arrival at Governor House, the departing envoy received a Guard of Honor. She also participated in a flag-hoisting ceremony and planted a tree as part of the ongoing afforestation campaign. Before concluding her visit, she penned her remarks in the Governor House guestbook, expressing gratitude for the hospitality and collaboration.

Nephew of ex-AJK PM shot dead

MUZAFFARABAD (INP): The nephew of former Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) prime minister Raja Farooq Haider, Raja Naqash, who was an employee at Government Boys Inter College, was gunned down at Hatyan Bala.

Police said they had arrested Osama, who was sitting along with Naqash on a motorcycle and was his nephew. The Force said that Osama had initially said that the firing took place at 8:30 PM. But he informed the police at 2:00 AM.



VIENNA: Chairman Senate, Syed Yousaf Raza Gilani shaking hands with Andrea Eder-Gitschthaler, President of Federal Council of Austria.

Bahria Town has no direct connection with Sindh govt, tells mayor

F.P. Report

KARACHI: Mayor Karachi Barrister Murtaza Wahab has said that two leaderships are running in Karachi: one that only talks and holds press conferences, and the other, which is our leadership, works and fulfills its promises.

According to a statement by Karachi Metropolitan Corporation today, the journey of Karachi's development started under the "teer"(arrow) symbol of Bilawal Bhutto. Our promise is our intention, and the entire leadership of the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) is before the public.

Our manifesto was to serve the people and to soon end the sense of deprivation in Karachi, including Lyari. KMC has written a letter to all departments regarding road cutting to ensure the proper use of funds. Bahria Town has no direct connection with the Sindh government, and its payment is being made to the Supreme Court under the court's decision. We will never support illegal constructions or China cutting. Lyari is the pride and honor of the PPP.

He made these remarks

after inaugurating the renovation and upgradation of the Bakra Piri Pumping Station in the Singho Lane area of Lyari. Deputy Mayor Karachi Salman Abdullah Murad, Parliamentary Leader of the City Council Karamullah Waqasi, Deputy Parliamentary Leader Dil Muhammad, local leadership of PPP, and members of the City Council were also present on this occasion.

Wahab said that the inauguration of development works in Keamari was done yesterday, and today it is being done in Lyari. The long-standing sewage problem of Lyari was solved by PPP. New machinery has been brought to the Bakra Piri pumping station. The PPP chairman, Bilawal Bhutto, promised to lay the K-3 pipeline in Lyari, and the work on the elevated line infrastructure has started. The promise made by Bilawal Bhutto regarding the K-3 pipeline will be fulfilled soon.

He further stated that in terms of road cutting, around 1.25 billion rupees have come to Lyari Town, and these funds will be

used soon for the construction of roads here. We will stop the theft of water in Lyari. The work to bring additional water to Karachi through a new canal from the Hub Dam is also in progress, and by August, an additional 40 million gallons of water per day will be available, solving the water scarcity issue in many districts of Karachi, including Lyari. He emphasized that the PPP will continue to work for the people, and this is proven by the fact that whenever the PPP has had power, it has served the people. PPP has established a university in Lyari, the National Institute of Cardiovascular Diseases center, and built the high-quality Kakri Ground in Lyari. Lyari has always been the stronghold of PPP and will remain so. If anyone is envious of this, let them be; the truth remains. Every worker of the PPP is working and will continue to work on the manifesto of public service.

Mayor Karachi added that we do not support illegal constructions, and the Sindh Building Control Authority is under the control of the Minister for Local Government.

Meeting held to reform fisheries sector in Sindh

F.P. Report

KARACHI: A meeting was held under the chairmanship of the Minister for Law and Home Sindh, Zia-ul-Hassan Lanhjar, to discuss the introduction of positive amendments in every aspect of the existing rules and regulations for the Fishermen Cooperative Society. In this regard, further necessary instructions were given.

On this occasion, the Secretary of the Cooperative Department provided a detailed briefing on the previous rules and regulations, the objectives of necessary amendments, and other related matters.

The Sindh Law Minister stated that the formulation and implementation of new rules and regulations,

including positive amendments to the current rules and regulations of the Fishermen's Society, is being initiated. He mentioned that the tenure of the caretaker administrator would be at least six months, and new constituencies related to fishing areas would also be included in the amendments. Membership will be determined based on these new constituencies, and the registration period for each member will be 3 months. He further added that two seats for women would be reserved in each of the 11 constituencies of the Fishermen cooperative Society.

He directed that a comprehensive draft of the amendments to the new rules and regulations for the Fishermen cooperative

Society be prepared and sent as soon as possible for review and further necessary action.

Earlier, after mutual suggestions, consultations, and discussions, all the participants of the meeting unanimously supported the necessary amendments to the rules and regulations of the Fishermen Cooperative Society, calling them the need of the hour.

The meeting was attended by Members of the National Assembly, Abdul Qadir Patel, Agha Rafiullah, as well as Provincial Assembly members Mahmood Alam Jamot, Asif Khan, Advisor to the Chief Minister of Sindh Liaquat Ali Askani, Secretary of Law, Secretary of the Cooperative Department, and others.

Construction work of Naulong Dam to begin next year

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The National Assembly Standing Committee on Water Resources was informed on Thursday that the construction work of Naulong Dam in Balochistan was set to begin next year and the project would be completed till 2031.

Chaired by Khalid Hussain Magsi, the Committee discussed scrutiny of the budgetary proposals of the Ministry of Water Resources relating to Public Sector Development Program (PSDP) for the financial year 2025-26; The Committee expressed displeasure over

the late submission of the brief for members' perusal. Syed Ali Murtza, Secretary of Water Resources briefed the Committee on budgetary proposals for the Public Sector Development Program (PSDP) 2024-25. He told, the Ministry of Water Resources has conducted a thorough review of its budgetary proposals, ensuring alignment with national development goals and efficient resource utilization.

The proposed PSDP 2025-26 outlines key funding priorities for ongoing and new initiatives in water management, irrigation, and hydroelectric power generation, he said and added, it

categorizes projects based on strategic importance, feasibility, and impact on water sustainability.

Additionally, the document evaluates past performance for the year 2024-25, identifying delays and inefficiencies from previous PSDP cycles to enhance future planning, the Secretary told. The Project Director of Naulong Dam briefed the Committee that the much-anticipated Naulong Dam project on the Mula River in Balochistan was progressing towards implementation, marking a significant milestone in the region's water and energy infrastructure.

ISSI hosts seminar on international year of peace and trust 2025

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad (ISSI) organised a seminar titled "International Year of Peace and Trust: Cooperation for Peace," in collaboration with the Embassy of Turkmenistan and the UN Resident Coordinator Office in Pakistan. The event included speeches by H.E. Atadjan Movlamov, Ambassador of Turkmenistan to Pakistan; Mr. Mohamed Yahya, UN Resident Coordinator in Pakistan; and Ambassador Syed Haider Shah, Additional Secretary (UN and OIC) Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The working session featured talks by Ambassador Masood Khalid, former Ambassador of Pakistan to China; Ms. Ammara Durrani, Assistant Resident Representative UNDP; and Dr. Maria Saifuddin Effendi, HOD Department of Peace and Conflict Studies, NDU.

In his welcome remarks, Ambassador Sohail Mahmood congratulated Turkmenistan on playing a leadership role globally in steering the process of advancing the objectives enshrined in UNGA Resolution 78/266 declaring 2025 as the International Year of Peace and Trust. He emphasized that peace is not merely the absence of conflict but rather is a dynamic and participatory process which requires dialogue, mutual understanding, and the ability to accept and respect differences. Ambassador Mahmood noted that the resolution's emphasis on preventive diplomacy, peaceful settlement of disputes, and peace as a lived experience is pertinent to the contemporary international environment, which is beset by divisions, discord and conflict. He highlighted the genocidal war in the Middle East, con-

flict in Europe, and the unresolved Jammu and Kashmir dispute, and stated that the UN and international community must fulfil their obligations towards ensuring just and lasting solutions of these issues.

Ambassador Sohail Mahmood added that the International Year of Peace and Trust also serves as a moment of reflection on the contributions of various actors to the global peace agenda including women, youth, regional organisations, civil society, academia and the private sector. He also emphasised Pakistan's role in promoting international peace and security, noting that the country has a proud history of contributing to global peace efforts from UN peacekeeping to advocating peaceful resolution of disputes. These efforts are rooted in the belief that dialogue and diplomacy are the most effective means of addressing conflicts and building sustainable peace. As an elected member of the security council for the term 2025-26, Pakistan would remain in the vanguard of the efforts for promoting these objectives, he underlined.

Ambassador Atadjan Movlamov noted that we are witnessing a complexity in global politics. In this backdrop, Turkmenistan advocated to consolidate international efforts for purposes of peace and trust by introducing a General Assembly resolution on "International Year of Peace and Trust 2025." The resolution projected fundamental principles and commitments of the UN charter, particularly peaceful settlement of disputes. Turkmenistan also adopted a special program called "The Concept of Activities and Priorities of Turkmenistan within the Framework of International Year of Peace and Trust 2025." Turkmenistan sees the implementation of the

resolution as a global-scale event and a genuine opportunity for the qualitative transition of a new stage in international relations.

Mr. Muhammad Yahya, the UN Resident Coordinator, remarked that the unanimous support for the International Year of Peace and Trust is an achievement in the contemporary international relations. He also noted that Pakistan has been instrumental in supporting the resolution and commended the country's diplomatic efforts. He noted that in an increasingly fragmented and intolerant world, the need for building peace and trust is becoming imperative. Peace and security are one of the three key pillars of the United Nations, along with sustainable development and human rights.

Ambassador Syed Haider Shah during his address commended the efforts of Turkmenistan for promoting peace and neutrality and expressed hope that the initiative for the International Year of Peace and Trust will result in inculcating the culture of peace across the globe. He noted that without building trust and commitment to international principles we cannot see lasting peace in the world. Conflicts in different parts of the world including in Kashmir, Ukraine, Gaza, Africa, etc., are problematized by the fact that the solutions do exist without implementation.

Ambassador Masood Khalid commended Turkmenistan for initiating the UN General Assembly Resolution proclaiming the International Year of Peace and Trust. He noted that the 'Doomsday Clock' is set at '89 seconds to midnight' now, symbolizing the severe existential threats the world faces. Factors like nuclear risks, climate change, AI-driven military advance-

ments, and failures in global governance contribute to this dire assessment. The silence of powerful nations on these atrocities undermines their claims of championing democracy and human rights, leading to a global decline in moral consciousness.

Ms. Ammara Durrani noted that five areas were identified by the United Nations for enabling multilateralism. These include sustainable development and finance, international peace and security, science and technology innovation, youth and future generations, and transforming global governance. She also noted that South Asia is described as a region with strong potential, however, the potential has never been met due to tensions and vested interests in the region.

Dr. Maria Effendi shared an academic perspective on UNGA Resolution 78/266, with a focus on the role of academia. She focused on three areas for people in academia to contribute to promotion of peace and trust. First, teaching and training human

resources to not only speak and write on peace but also to practice it as a value. Second, the role of civil society in promoting peace advocacy. Lastly, promoting policy-oriented research to bring meaningful change in academia and policy making circles.

Earlier, Dr. Talat Shabbir noted that Pakistan, as a staunch advocate of peaceful coexistence, has always supported international efforts aimed at conflict resolution and dialogue-based diplomacy. In this context, Turkmenistan's policy of permanent neutrality offers a unique model for strengthening global peace and stability.

In his closing remarks, Ambassador Khalid Mahmood, Chairman BOG ISSI, noted that the United Nations was principally founded with the aspiration to promote international peace and prevent coming generations from the scourge of war. He concluded stating that celebrating and recognising the importance of international peace should not be limited to just one year but rather should be celebrated every day and every year.

Notice of Tender For Supply of Oil, Fuel and Air Filters for Vehicles / Plant & Machinery

- Tender is invited for Supply of Oil, Fuel and Air Filters for Vehicles/Plant & Machinery at NLC Torkham Border Terminal District Khyber Agency.
- Tender will be awarded to following:-
 - Experience in supplies of Filters.
 - Lowest Bidder.
 - Financial Strength of Bidder.
 - Supplier Should be GST & Income Tax Registered.
- Further details of work may be collected from NLC Torkham Border Terminal.
- Tender documents must be deposited at reception room of **NLC Torkham Border Terminal District Khyber Agency on or before 1400 hours on 17 February 2025** which will be opened on the same day at **1500 hours**.
- NLC Reserves the right to cancel/ reject any or all offers at any time prior to the acceptance of a bid or proposal as per PPRA Rules. NLC upon request will communicate to any contractor who submitted a bid or proposal, the grounds for its rejection, but is not bound to justify those grounds.



Manager Operations
NLC Torkham Border Terminal,
District Khyber Agency
Tel No. 0924-240168

PUBLIC NOTICE Application for issuance of Letter of Administration / Succession Certificate by Mr. Gulnaz with regards to moveable & immovable assets of deceased Mr. Abdullah Anwar citizen number 1350362474679 has been received. Following are declared as legal heirs. 1. Gulnaz (Mother) 2. Anwar Lodhi (Father) On the above application the objections of public at large are invited. Any aggrieved person may approach in person the undersigned for submission of objection (if any) within fourteen (14) days after publication of this notice. INCHARGE SFU, NADRA MANSEHRA-SFU	PUBLIC NOTICE Application for issuance of Letter of Administration / Succession Certificate by Mr. Fazal Subhan with regards to moveable & immovable assets of deceased Mr. Khadi Gul citizen number 1560245941543 has been received. Following are declared as legal heirs. 1. Shabana (Daughter) 2. Shaheen (Daughter) 3. Fazal Subhan (Son) 4. Liaquat Ali (Son) 5. Bakht Subhan (Son) 6. Naimat Ali (Son) 7. Ilyas Ahmad (Son) On the above application the objections of public at large are invited. Any aggrieved person may approach in person the undersigned for submission of objection (if any) within fourteen (14) days after publication of this notice. INCHARGE SFU, NADRA SWAT-SFU	PUBLIC NOTICE Application for issuance of Letter of Administration / Succession Certificate by Mr. Rashid Mahmood with regards to moveable & immovable assets of deceased Mr. Ghulam Sarwar citizen number 1310145402993 has been received. Following are declared as legal heirs. 1. Abida Shaheen (Daughter) 2. Rukhsana Parveen (Daughter) 3. Nabeela Bibi (Daughter) 4. Tahira Jabeen (Daughter) 5. Saira Koser (Daughter) 6. Saif Ur Rehman (Son) 7. Rashid Mahmood (Son) 8. Anayat Ur Rehman (Son) On the above application the objections of public at large are invited. Any aggrieved person may approach in person the undersigned for submission of objection (if any) within fourteen (14) days after publication of this notice. INCHARGE SFU, NADRA ABBOTABAD-SFU	PUBLIC NOTICE Application for issuance of Letter of Administration / Succession Certificate by Mr. Rafiqat with regards to moveable & immovable assets of deceased Mr. Gulzar Khan citizen number 1310109633311 has been received. Following are declared as legal heirs. 1. Mahjabeen (Daughter) 2. Zubaida Jan (Spouse) 3. Saqib Shahzad (Son) 4. Waqas (Son) 5. Abrar Hussain (Son) 6. Rafiqat (Son) On the above application the objections of public at large are invited. Any aggrieved person may approach in person the undersigned for submission of objection (if any) within fourteen (14) days after publication of this notice. INCHARGE SFU, NADRA ABBOTABAD-SFU
PUBLIC NOTICE Application for issuance of Letter of Administration / Succession Certificate by Mr. Abdul Rehman with regards to moveable & immovable assets of deceased Ms. Nazneen citizen number 420004869626 has been received. Following are declared as legal heirs. 1. Mahmood (Daughter) 2. Ayesha (Daughter) 3. Abdul Rehman (Son) On the above application the objections of public at large are invited. Any aggrieved person may approach in person the undersigned for submission of objection (if any) within fourteen (14) days after publication of this notice. INCHARGE SFU, NADRA ABBOTABAD-SFU	PUBLIC NOTICE Application for issuance of Letter of Administration / Succession Certificate by Mr. Sayed Imran Shah with regards to moveable & immovable assets of deceased Mr. Sultan Hussain Syed citizen number 1730168715707 has been received. Following are declared as legal heirs. 1. Hina Arshad (Daughter) 2. Imtiaz Sultan Bukhari (Spouse) 3. Nadir Sayed Shah (Son) 4. Sayed Imran Shah (Son) On the above application the objections of public at large are invited. Any aggrieved person may approach in person the undersigned for submission of objection (if any) within fourteen (14) days after publication of this notice. INCHARGE SFU, NADRA MEGA CENTER PESHAWAR-SFU	PUBLIC NOTICE Application for issuance of Letter of Administration / Succession Certificate by Mr. Fawad Khan with regards to moveable & immovable assets of deceased Mr. Jawad Khan (Son) 5. Junaid Khan (Son) 6. Fawad Khan (Son) On the above application the objections of public at large are invited. Any aggrieved person may approach in person the undersigned for submission of objection (if any) within fourteen (14) days after publication of this notice. INCHARGE SFU, NADRA RING ROAD-DSFU	PUBLIC NOTICE Application for issuance of Letter of Administration / Succession Certificate by Mr. Aamir Bashir with regards to moveable & immovable assets of deceased Mr. Muhammad Bashir citizen number 173018908436 has been received. Following are declared as legal heirs. 1. Shafigat Khalid (Daughter) 2. Shazia Asif (Daughter) 3. Nadia Bashir (Daughter) 4. Aamir Bashir (Son) On the above application the objections of public at large are invited. Any aggrieved person may approach in person the undersigned for submission of objection (if any) within fourteen (14) days after publication of this notice. INCHARGE SFU, NADRA MEGA CENTER PESHAWAR-SFU
PUBLIC NOTICE Application for issuance of Letter of Administration / Succession Certificate by Mr. Mujtaba with regards to moveable & immovable assets of deceased Mr. Ghulam Mustafa citizen number 1330224306133 has been received. Following are declared as legal heirs. 1. Aisha Mustafa (Daughter) 2. Sana Amir (Daughter) 3. Amina Mustafa (Daughter) 4. Saman Mustafa (Daughter) 5. Nasreen Begum (Spouse) 6. Mujtaba (Son) On the above application the objections of public at large are invited. Any aggrieved person may approach in person the undersigned for submission of objection (if any) within fourteen (14) days after publication of this notice. INCHARGE SFU, NADRA HARIPUR-SFU	PUBLIC NOTICE Application for issuance of Letter of Administration / Succession Certificate by Mr. Ashgar Ali with regards to moveable & immovable assets of deceased Mr. Shoukat Ali citizen number 1730154010947 has been received. Following are declared as legal heirs. 1. Ahmad Ali (Brother) 2. Murad Ali (Brother) 3. Liaquat Ali (Brother) 4. Ashgar Ali (Son) 5. Fazilat Bibi (Sister) 6. Sajida Gul (Sister) 7. Zakia Naz (Sister) 8. Hameeda Bibi (Sister) 9. Zeenat Bibi (Sister) On the above application the objections of public at large are invited. Any aggrieved person may approach in person the undersigned for submission of objection (if any) within fourteen (14) days after publication of this notice. INCHARGE SFU, NADRA RING ROAD-DSFU	PUBLIC NOTICE Application for issuance of Letter of Administration / Succession Certificate by Mr. Hazoor Khan with regards to moveable & immovable assets of deceased Mr. Muhammad Ali citizen number 1330227771233 has been received. Following are declared as legal heirs. 1. Nighat Bibi (Mother) 2. Hazoor Khan (Father) On the above application the objections of public at large are invited. Any aggrieved person may approach in person the undersigned for submission of objection (if any) within fourteen (14) days after publication of this notice. INCHARGE SFU, NADRA HARIPUR-SFU	PUBLIC NOTICE Application for issuance of Letter of Administration / Succession Certificate by Mr. Shahid Muhammad with regards to moveable & immovable assets of deceased Mr. Sultan Muhammad citizen number 131019566459 has been received. Following are declared as legal heirs. 1. Zahida Bibi (Daughter) 2. Nasreen Bibi (Daughter) 3. Rasham Jan (Spouse) 4. Azeemah Zameed (Son) 5. Shahid Muhammad (Son) 6. Muhammad Haroon Khan (Son) 7. Muhammad Arshad (Son). On the above application the objections of public at large are invited. Any aggrieved person may approach in person the undersigned for submission of objection (if any) within fourteen (14) days after publication of this notice. INCHARGE SFU, NADRA ABBOTABAD-SFU UNBANK PAKISTAN PID(I)5166/24



PESHAWAR: Chief Secretary Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Nadeem Aslam Chaudhary chairing a meeting of the Provincial Task Force on Polio Eradication.

Challenging appointment of the DG NAB KP PHC issues notices to Chairman NAB

Humayun Khan

PESHAWAR: A divisional bench of Peshawar High Court (PHC) comprising Justice Ijaz Anwar and Fazal Subhan has issued notices to the Chairman NAB and DG NAB Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, seeking their response on a petition challenging the appointment of the DG NAB Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, on Thursday.

The counsel Shumail Ahmad Butt advocate informed the court that the petitioner named Ghazi Rehman is serving as Director Investigations in NAB and was being considered for promotion. However, on the day of his promotion, an inquiry was initiated against him, which was allegedly done to block his promotion.

Justice Ijaz Anwar asked who should be issued a notice in this regard. The lawyer replied that notices should be issued to the Chairman NAB and DG NAB Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, as it is a common practice that

whenever an employee approaches the court, the department initiates action against them.

Justice Ijaz Anwar observed that the inquiry has already been initiated and cannot be stopped at this stage. The lawyer clarified that they are not asking for the inquiry to be stopped but rather that no discriminatory action be taken against the petitioner.

The court issued notices to the Chairman NAB and DG NAB Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, seeking their response on the petition. The court also restrained NAB from any discriminatory action against the petitioner.

PHC grants protective bail to Khadija Shah

A divisional bench of Peshawar High Court (PHC) comprising Justice SM Attique Shah and Justice Sahibzada Asadullah has approved the protective bail of PTI leader Khadija Shah and directed to approach the relevant high court for details of the cases against her, on Thursday.

The counsel Alam Khan Adeenzai advocate informed the court that cases have been registered against Khadija Shah in Islamabad and Punjab, but no details have been provided. The lawyer requested the court to provide details of the cases, if any, against Khadija Shah.

During the hearing, Justice S M Atique Shah asked Khadija Shah if she held any public office, to which she replied that she did not currently hold any office, but her name was on the list for a reserved seat in the National Assembly.

The case regarding reserved seats is currently pending in the Supreme Court. The lawyer informed the court that Khadija Shah had previously been imprisoned and was currently residing in Peshawar.

Justice S M Atique Shah observed that everyone who approaches this court is respectable, and there is a judgment by the Chief Justice on a similar case, which cannot be overridden.

RTI a key for accountability, transparency F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Right to Information (RTI) laws become a symbol of a country's commitment to good governance. Good governance means that there are fair laws, rules and regulations which are enforced impartially.

The countries with access to information laws are also believed to be less corrupt because these have the added tool with which they can demand information and thus make the government more transparent.

This was stated by Muhammad Irshad, Information Commissioner, KP Information Commission while addressing to the participants of the training session arranged by the Commission in collaboration with Centre for Governance and Public Accountability on Right to Information for the newly designated Public Information Officers of the selected departments of district Peshawar.

Concluding the session, Irshad stated that the RTI Law has made it incumbent upon Government Departments of the KP to proactively disclose information of their workings which may be of interest to the public on their websites.

It has very few exemptions for disclosing information; and the process for asking information has been made very easy and public-friendly involving very little cost.

Prize distribution ceremony held F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: An annual prize distribution ceremony was held at Government Girls Degree College Nahqi, Peshawar, to encourage students who had made valuable contributions to the college in various fields. The event was graced by the presence of Director P&D Javed Akbar, Director Establishment Muhammad Iqbal, President of KPPLA Abdul Hameed Khan, and Assistant Professor of Government College Peshawar Nasir Khan. The college principal, Professor Noshaba Noreen, Director of Sports Sadia Gul, Professor Asia, other faculty members, and a large number of students also attended the event.

Kundi highlights positive role of social media in community engagement

PESHAWAR (APP): Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Faisal Karim Kundi on Thursday emphasized the positive impact of social media on fostering community engagement and empowering citizens.

Speaking at an event on 'use of social media' with renowned religious scholar Maulana Noman Bashir, along with other religious figures, including Osama Ajmal Qasmi and other here at Governor House.

The Governor lauded the efforts of Maulana Noman Bashir regarding social media platforms, their ability to connect people, raise awareness among people especially students.

Governor Kundi pointed to several initiatives where social media played a key role in creating transparent dialogues between government and people.

"Social media has proven to be a powerful tool in promoting civic participation, awareness campaigns to encouraging youth involvement in community development," the Governor said.

The Governor also acknowledged the challenges that come with the rapid spread of misinformation on these platforms, but stressed that with proper regulation and media literacy efforts, social media can be used to promote positive change.

"While there is a need for responsible use and vigilance, the benefits of these platforms in uniting our communities and amplifying voices cannot be underestimated," the Governor said.

"By embracing social media in a mindful and proactive way, we can enhance transparency, accountability, and collaboration across all levels of government."

The Governor's comments come as part of a larger initiative to explore innovative ways of engaging citizens through digital channels and further developing the role of social media in government outreach.

Maulana Noman Bashir emphasized the importance of fostering a culture of positive role of social media, brotherhood and tolerance among different sects and religions for peace and stability, particularly in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and praised the Governor's efforts in this regard.

He said that the improper use of social media can negatively impact university students by distracting them from their studies, reducing focus, and contributing to mental health issues such as anxiety and depression. It can also lead to a decline in academic performance and hinder personal development.

Governor Kundi further highlighted the crucial role of religious leaders in enhancing societal harmony and emphasized the need for their continued collaboration to establish lasting peace.

He reaffirmed his commitment to creating an environment of mutual respect, peace, and tolerance through dialogue with leaders from all faiths and sects.

Meanwhile, Governor Faisal Karim Kundi, has stressed the importance of restoring the province's culture, traditions, values, and lost grandeur.

Speaking at a meeting with the heads and administrative officials of the Arts and Design departments from Peshawar University, Shaheed Benazir Bhutto Women University, Sarhad University, and Iqra University, he highlighted the need for a concerted effort to play an active role in the revival of these elements.

Governor Kundi emphasized that the significance of fine arts in empowering women, engaging the youth, and showcasing the province's vibrant image to the world is undeniable.

He said that the young talent in the province, particularly those involved in the arts, is highly capable and requires proper guidance and support.

He also mentioned that the Federal Ministry of Information has pledged full cooperation to activate the Peshawar office of the Academy of Literature under its supervision.

He expressed a desire for the heads of the Arts and Design departments of local universities to take the lead in this initiative. He assured them that the Governor House would provide full support.

The participants of the meeting praised the Governor's vision and sentiments, particularly in fostering the new generation's enthusiasm and promoting the soft image of the province.

It was decided that all universities would submit their recommendations to the Governor House, which would be implemented with the cooperation of the federal government.

Additionally, it was decided that a special exhibition would be organized at the Governor House in February, where students from the relevant universities would showcase their artworks.

Special focus on girls' education: Minister

PESHAWAR (APP): During his visit, Faisal Tarkai inspected Government Girls Primary School No. 2 Badabair Horezi, Government Girls High School Khoida Khail Badabair, Government Girls Higher Secondary School Badabair, and Government Girls Primary School UC Maryanzai.

He reviewed the quality of education, infrastructure, basic facilities, and challenges faced by the schools.

The education minister interacted with students and teachers and listened to their concerns. He assured them of all possible measures for schools' infrastructure improvement.

Speaking on the occasion, Faisal Tarkai reiterated the provincial government's commitment to providing quality education. He emphasized that practical steps are being taken to enhance facilities in girls' schools. He further stated that 70% of new schools in the province are allocated for female students, highlighting the government's focus on girls' education.

The minister also assured that efforts are underway to provide free and quality education. He emphasized that full preparations are being made for the upcoming board exams, ensuring a transparent exams across the province.

KP first province to form climate change policy: Pir Musavir Khan

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Special Assistant to the Chief Minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa On Environment, Forests, Wildlife, and Climate Change, Peer Musavir Khan, stated that the provincial government is taking solid steps to control environmental pollution.

He added that Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is the first province to develop a policy on climate change, and a Climate Change Committee has been established to implement the policy. He shared these thoughts while chairing a high-level meeting during his visit to the Environmental Protection Agency. On this occasion, the Director General of the EPA, Samiullah, along with all regional and divisional officers, was present.

The Director General of the Environmental Protection Agency provided a detailed briefing to the Special Assistant on the ongoing reforms in the agency and the steps being taken to control environmental pollution. The Special Assistant was informed that the implementation of environmental protection laws in the province is the primary responsibility of the agency. The agency has established four regional offices in the province and regularly monitors the burning of waste in industrial units and hospitals.

It was also highlighted that brick kilns in the province are a major source of air pollution, which is why the process of transitioning these kilns to zig-zag technology is underway, with proper training being provided to the workers.

Furthermore, the Special Assistant was informed that nine cement industries and fifty steel industries have already adopted pollution control systems, and GIS mapping has been completed for 3,600 industrial units.

Additionally, the Special Assistant was briefed on the establishment of a public complaint resolution desk at the Peshawar headquarters, along with a special cell for resolving public complaints. A centralized monitoring committee has been formed to take effective action against violations of the rules set by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). The Environmental Protection Tribunal has also been activated, and it has already disposed of 3,800 cases referred by the agency.

In order to raise awareness about environmental protection and climate change, green clubs have been established at the school and college levels. The management information system at the Peshawar head office is in the final stages of implementation, and regional laboratories will soon be established in Abbottabad, Mingora, and Dera Ismail Khan.

The Special Assistant was also informed about actions taken against crushing plants and other industrial units. Pir Musavir Khan said that, under the leadership of the Chief Minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, important decisions were recently made to control air pollution and improve the air quality index in Peshawar and other cities. He inquired about the issuance of No Objection Certificates (NOCs) for industrial units and directed the relevant authorities to provide a complete record of NOC issuance delays, and to ensure that people have easy access to the NOC process.

He further emphasized the need to establish links with NGOs and donors working on environmental pollution and climate change, and to set up a cell for this purpose.

He also issued instructions to install cameras at the information desk in the office, link them with the main office, and take effective action against units causing air pollution. Additionally, he directed that the agency's laboratories be made fully functional.

Breaking barriers: The literacy challenge In rural Pakistan

Hassan Tassadaq Rasool

In the context of rural Pakistan, the aspect of literacy indeed poses a formidable challenge in terms of progress and development. Though several steps have been taken regarding the education reform, considerable portion of the population still lacks even the simplest skills of reading and writing. This problem has deep social, economic as well as cultural roots that prevent individuals to acquire education.

Inadequate infrastructure is one of the most fundamental factors leading to illiteracy in these areas. There are many villages that do not have schools, forcing children to travel long distances in order to attend classes. In some other areas, schools are broken down and not equipped with needed instructional materials as well as qualified teachers.

This lack of facilities worries parents about taking the children, especially the girls, to school because they fear the safety and effectiveness of the education system.

Cultural beliefs are also a major factor as to why people do not develop strong literacy levels. In somewhat remote areas, going to school for education and fully utilizing time and resources towards that goal is often disallowed for girls. There is a lesser sense of urgency or importance when it comes to educating the female children. This reduces the possibility of a large section of the population being productive. It also leads to the entrenching of poverty and inequalities in societies.

Economic issues also make the situation of literacy more complex. In regards to the rural area of Pakistan, most house-

holds expect their children to work for them and add to the family's income, for instance by working on the family farm or some other work.

Therefore, attending school can be seen, at times, by parents as spending money without potential benefits. Therefore, coming from these families, children are often brought up or raised with the mindset that they need to find work immediately, thus, work takes precedence before education.

Literacy improvement initiatives in the countryside of Pakistan are not one-directional. Both the government and 'non-governmental organisations' (NGOs) have started to appreciate the need for strategies focused on the enhancement of the community, which tackles the issues of concern in that particular area. Often, these pro-

grams include campaigns aimed at familiarizing the residents with the need for education.

There are new ways being developed to help the people with the universality of education. Mobile education units as well as internet based teaching are enabling people who live far away from civilizations or poorly developed regions to acquire control education. Simply put, these programs use resources like TV and the internet to teach kids who would otherwise go to school, but cannot because of who knows what, in a very easier and safer manner.

In order for these strategies to succeed, it is important to work with the local people. Allowing community leaders and parents to be involved in making decisions increases confidence and helps ensure that programs are appropriate for the population.

Literacy programs undergo paradigm shifts if the community members are involved in project activities or implementation rather than just being passive beneficiaries.

The struggles for literacy in rural Pakistan are many, yet there are reasons to be optimistic. Strategies for change can be designed and delivered in such a way that the results will be effective in producing a more educated and empowered citizenry.

Education is more than a basic human right; it is an opportunity and the catalyst for the development of rural areas. As for future development - in the present situation, overcoming the literacy challenge is a necessity for everybody.

Writer is 18-year old student currently pursuing his A-Levels at Aitchison College, Lahore.

KPEC is crucial regional connectivity project: Tordher F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Special Assistant to Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister on Industries, Abdul Karim Tordher has said that the Khyber Pass Economic Corridor (KPEC) is a crucial project to connect the whole region through communicational corridor. The project will not only promote trade and commerce rather the other subsidiary developmental projects will usher an era of progress and development in the area. He expressed these views while speaking during a briefing on the mega communicational project of KPEC here at Civil Secretariat on Thursday. Besides, Project Director (PD) Imran Zahoor, Economist Sadiq Hussain and Deputy Secretary (Industries) Aizaz Ullah the representatives of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Economic Zones Development and Management Company (KP-EZDMC) and other concerned departments also attended the briefing. On this occasion, the Special Assistant on Industries Abdul Karim Tordher was given a meticulous briefing on this World Bank (WB) funded crucial regional connectivity project and other subsidiary facilitative nature projects and progress on them. During the briefing, the Special Assistant was told that being a gateway to Central Asia, the project has been launched for communicational access to the countries of the region, whose aim is not only the promotion of investment rather also the provision of an easy road link with other countries of the region.



In brief

PTI wins all seats in erstwhile FATA F.P. Report

WANA: Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) leader Engineer Muhammad Luqman said that the PTI has won the general election in the former FATA (tribal districts) on 8th February. This victory is proof that PTI is the strongest and most organized party in the tribal districts. Engineer Muhammad Luqman stated that the highly educated MPA from South Waziristan, Ajab Gul, played a significant role in this victory. Ajab Gul Wazir is among the founding leaders of PTI FATA. Engineer Muhammad Luqman urged Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur, Provincial President Junaid Akbar, and Chairman Barrister Gohar Ali Khan to ensure the inclusion of MPA Ajab Gul in the provincial cabinet so that the problems of the tribal people can be resolved at their doorstep.

Encroachment drive inspected F.P. Report

TOBA TEK SINGH: An anti-encroachment operation is underway in Toba Tek Singh while Deputy Commissioner Muhammad Naeem Sindhvi visited Sabzi Mandi and Jhang road to assess the progress and directed officials to ensure complete removal of encroachments. DC emphasized strict action against violators and warned against re-establishment of encroachments. He stated that illegal encroachments disrupt traffic and business activities. He urged traders to cooperate with the administration for a clear and accessible market place. Citizens and the business community welcomed the operation, saying it would improve trade and ease movement. The district administration confirmed that the drive will continue, with strict legal action against offenders. Meanwhile, a two-day Dr. Siddique (Late) free medical camp has been organized from February 1 in The Public Medicare, Mohallah Islampur near Bismillah Chowk Kamalia. In which Doctor Nadia Akram (Gynecologist) will do free checkup of patients and sugar, HB and other tests will be free in this campus, apart from this, medicines will also be provided to the patients free of cost.

SZBST convocation held F.P. Report

LARKANA: The 19th convocation of Shaheed Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto Science & Technology (SZBST) University Larkana Campus was held in which 117 degrees were awarded to graduates, on Thursday. The special guests were Vice Chancellor IBA University Sukkur, Asif Ahmed Nawaz Sheikh, Zaheer Hussain Shajra, ZBST Vice President Admin and HR Dr. Imtiaz Qazi and other Education and Social Sciences Dr. Riaz Ahmed Sheikh, Head of Campus Dr. Zahida Abro, Registrar Dr. Muhammad Aqil, faculty members, students, their parents and people from different walks of life participated in large numbers. As many as 177 students of different programs were awarded degrees. On this occasion, the program was inaugurated by IBA University Sukkur Vice Chancellor Asif Ahmed Sheikh and others. 10 students who demonstrated outstanding performance and in the undergraduate program, students Bushra of Bachelor of Administration, Akash of BS Accounting and Finance, Abdul Qadir of BS Computer Science, Saeeda Haqiaqi of Master of Business Administration and Asadullah Soomro of Master of Project Management were awarded gold medals.

BISP to up beneficiaries to 10m under program

F.P. Report

LANDI KOTAL: Chairperson Benazir Income Support Program (BISP) Senator Rubina Khalid has said that because of an abundance of problems, Benazir Hunarmand Program is under process to launch in near future to equip youths with skill. With new registration of applicants, the number of BISP beneficiaries will be more than ten million. These views were expressed by the Chairperson while talking to the media persons during her visit to the BISP Center, Landi Kotal, on Thursday. She said that more than ninety three thousand families had benefited from the scheme she said and added the miseries of the womenfolk would be dealt with on priority.

The deserving ones are more while resources are limited, however the Benazir Hunarmand Program is in the pipeline to launch, Senator Rubina said. On a query, she added that with the implementa-

tion of Prevention Electronic Crime Amendment (PECA) Act, publishing and circulating of fake news will be curtailed although it will not affect the recognized journalists.

Earlier, the beneficiaries of the BISP appraised the visiting official of their problems and the local officials briefed her of the routine working of the center.

Senator Rubina Khalid, Chairperson of the Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP) also visit to the BISP Center in Bara and said that Benazir Hunarmand Programme is in its final stages. She stated the initiative aims at empowering women by enhancing their skills, enabling them to become financially independent and contribute to the country's economy.

She also announced an increase in BISP's financial assistance, raising the amount from Rs. 10,500 to Rs. 13,500. Additionally, allocations for the Nashonuma Programme and educational scholar-

ships have also been increased.

Senator Rubina Khalid inspected the facilities and interacted with women present at the center to listen to their concerns. She expressed dissatisfaction over public complaints and reprimanded the staff, directing them to perform their duties with honesty and dedication. Speaking to the media, she described BISP as one of the country's largest welfare programs, benefiting millions of underprivileged families and women across Pakistan.

She further announced the launch of a mobile survey in remote and underprivileged areas of Khyber District to ensure that more deserving women benefit from the program. She was accompanied by PPP Khyber District President Farhad Shabab, former Tehsil Chairman candidate Dr. Sher Shah, senior leaders Wilayat Afridi, Javed Afridi, Shams Afridi, Ikram Ullah, and members of the People's Students Federation.



LANDI KOTAL: Chairperson Benazir Income Support Program, Senator Rubina Khalid interacting with beneficiaries. — F.P. photo

Water supply into Balambat irrigation channel sought F.P. Report

LOWER DIR: Local political and social activists of the Balambat tehsil demanded the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government and concerned authorities of the irrigation department to release water in the Balambat Irrigation channel without any further delay. The demand was made during a multi-parties' conference arranged by the local chapter of the Jamiat Ulema Islam Fazl (JUIF) at a local hotel. Besides workers of the JUI-F and area elders, social and political activists attended the function.

The function was addressed by the JUI-F district chief Siarj ud Din, former tehsil nazim of Jamaat-Islami Imran ud Din advocate, Ihsanul Haq Tajik of the ANP, Hujaj Khan of the PTI, Haji Mashooq Jan of PPP, Gul Badshah of PML-N, Sher Hayat advocate and others. The speakers complained that the much-awaited Koto Hydro power project was not being started despite its completion.

The speakers said that the Balambat Irrigation channel had been closed for repair and extension work for the last three years due to which the farmers suffered hard. The speakers also expressed reservations over co-education at the postgraduate college Timergara and demanded the commencement of BS classes at the government girls' degree college Balambat. They said that all enrolled female students should be shifted to the girls' college.

The speakers also demanded proper investigations into the alleged irregularities and corruption in the Timergara Medical College and solid actions against the officials involved in it. Some of the speakers also demanded of the government to release funds for ongoing development projects and repair of roads. They complained the Balambat basic health units lacked doctors, so the health department should appoint doctors to the facility.

ASJ convicts killer of journalist

Anees Takar

CHARSADDA: Additional Sessions Judge (ASJ) Charsadda Nusrat Naz convicted Arshad Jamal to four death penalties for killing senior journalist and former General Secretary Charsadda press club, Ehsan Sherpao, on Thursday.

Additionally, the court found Sikandar Khan guilty of facilitating the crime by providing the weapon used in the attack and sentenced him to three years in prison. The case dates back to October 30, 2018, when the convicted killer Arshad Jamal, opened fire inside his home, killing his mother, sister-in-law and nephew.

Following the domestic killings, he stepped out of his house and fatally shot

journalist Ehsan Sherpao.

The tragic murder of Sherpao, a well-respected journalist, sparked outrage across the press community and civil society, with demands for swift justice. The case was prosecuted by Advocate Inamullah Khan.

During the investigation, the accused confessed to the crime, a confession that he later repeated before the court. The prosecution presented substantial evidence linking the accused to the murders, ultimately leading to his conviction.

The verdict was met with widespread approval from journalists and media organizations in Charsadda. Members of the Charsadda Press Club expressed satisfaction with the ruling, calling it a victory for justice.

Press Club President

Sabz Ali Khan Tarin remarked that the court's decision has provided relief to the family of the slain journalist and the entire journalist fraternity in the region. "The punishment of the murderer has restored faith in the judicial system. Justice has been served, and the sacrifice of our colleague, Ehsan Sherpao, has not gone in vain," he said.

The ruling marks a significant moment in the fight for press freedom and journalist safety in Pakistan. The conviction sends a strong message that crimes against journalists will not go unpunished. As the media community in Charsadda breathes a sigh of relief, the case serves as a reminder of the risks journalists face while carrying out their duties.

SACM assures redressal TEVTA employees' issues

F.P. Report

MARDAN: The cabinet members of All TEVTA Employees Association of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa met Special Assistant to the Chief Minister for Technical Education Tufail Anjum and Mansoor Qaiser Managing Director of TEVTA in which there was a detailed discussion on the problems faced by employees.

Special Assistant for Technical Education assured, all the problems of KP TEVTA employees are being worked on very seriously and INSHALLAH all the issues like C-P fund, service structure, mandatory training, creation of post for promotion of Employees PhD and M.P. allowance, EOBI, and death grant etc. will be resolved soon. The cabinet members expressed special thanks to Special Assistant for Technical Education Tufail Anjum and MD and offered to play every role in solving the problems of KP TEVTA.

DC arranges 'Kuli Katcheri' for minority: Deputy Commissioner Mardan held an "Kuli katcheri" for the minority community in TMA Hall Mardan. Members of the minority community from Mardan and surrounding areas and officers of various government departments attended.

On this occasion, the representatives of the Hindu, Sikh and Christian communities presented demands for the implementation of minority quota in government departments, an inquiry into the violation of quota in some departments and to solve the drainage problems from the Christian cemetery in Baghdada.

The 63 employees who were transferred from WSCCM to TMA asked that they be paid their salaries. The Christian community said that the honorarium of minority religious scholars should be released and work should be started on Cantt; Mandar in Yadgar Chowk.

PSF core committee met: A crucial meeting of the Former PSF Core Committee was held at Riaz Khan Tandar House, where important decisions were made regarding the grand welcome of Bilawal Bhutto Zardari in Peshawar and the revival of the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

7 profiteers held F.P. Report

SARGODHA: Seven shopkeepers were booked for profiteering from various parts of the city.

The price control magistrates inspected various points, including Kot Fareed, Gilwala and Rehmanpura, and arrested seven shopkeepers, including Mudassar, Altaf, Yasir, Muhammad Iqbal, Azmat, Muhammad Aslam and Khalid, for overcharging besides imposing fine.

Advisor Health inaugurates state-of-the-art NICU at hospital

F.P. Report

ABBOTTABAD: Advisor to Chief Minister on Health, Ihtesham Ali and UNICEF Chief Peshawar Radoslaw Rzehak inaugurated a state-of-the-art Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) at Women and Children Hospital, Abbottabad. The inauguration ceremony was attended by DHO Abbottabad Dr. Shakeel Sarwar, Regional Director Hazara Dr. Amir Israr, UNICEF Chief Peshawar Radoslaw Rzehak, and Health Specialist Dr. Inamullah Khan.

Advisor Ihtesham Ali formally inaugurated the NICU by cutting the ribbon. The unit has been established to provide specialized care for newborns in the region. Addressing the ceremony, the Advisor highlighted the importance

of NICUs in improving neonatal care. "This state-of-the-art facility, equipped with 45 beds, will serve the entire Hazara region," he stated.

He further mentioned the installation of an uninterrupted oxygen supply plant with UNICEF's assistance. The facility also includes dedicated units for Kangaroo Mother Care, intensive care, and infectious disease treatment. Advisor Health Ihtesham Ali has announced that the government plans to set up UNICEF-model Newborn Care Units in all district hospitals across Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

He stated that funds for this initiative would be allocated in the upcoming Annual Development Program (ADP). "These specialized units will play a crucial role in improving

neonatal care and reducing infant mortality rates across the province," he added. Acknowledging UNICEF's support, the Advisor expressed gratitude and highlighted the ongoing nutritional program at the hospital supported by the organization. He urged UNICEF to continue and further enhance its cooperation with the health department.

Speaking on the occasion, UNICEF Chief Peshawar Radoslaw Rzehak emphasized that the establishment of the NICU would significantly reduce neonatal mortality rates. "We have previously set up a similar NICU at Bacha Khan Medical Complex. UNICEF remains committed to supporting maternal and child healthcare in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, particularly in remote areas," he remarked.



ABBOTTABAD: Advisor to Chief Minister on Health, Ihtesham Ali and UNICEF Chief Peshawar Radoslaw Rzehak inaugurating a state-of-the-art Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) at Women and Children Hospital.

Water crisis in AJK: A wake-up call for action

Syed Ilyas Gardezi

THE scenic and mountainous region of Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK), long known for its lush green landscapes and abundant water resources, is now facing an increasingly dire water crisis. Over the past six months, the region has witnessed a significant drop in rainfall, contributing to the drying up of vital water sources, including streams, springs, and wells.

This persistent lack of water has sparked widespread concerns about the sustainability of water access, impacting local communities' daily lives, health, and overall well-being.

The absence of clean drinking water has emerged as one of the most immediate and alarming challenges faced by the residents of AJK. Pipelines that once supplied fresh, potable water are now dry, leaving communities scrambling to meet even the most basic water needs. The problem is further compounded by the rapid depletion of the region's groundwater table, with deep wells that were once reliable now running dry. This issue has not only caused inconvenience but has also triggered serious public health concerns. As access to clean water becomes increasingly limited, hygiene levels are dropping, heightening the risk of waterborne diseases

that disproportionately affect vulnerable populations, including children and the elderly.

The shortage of water is also severely impacting agriculture and livestock, both of which are the lifeblood of the local economy. Fields once rich in crops have turned barren, with farmers struggling to irrigate their crops due to the lack of water. The arid conditions have stunted crop growth, leading to lower yields and economic losses for rural communities that depend on agriculture for their livelihoods. Moreover, the depletion of pastures has made it difficult for livestock to survive, further exacerbating the economic strain on the population.

The water crisis is not confined to human settlements alone; the entire ecosystem is feeling the effects. Local wildlife and forests are facing significant stress as the region's streams and rivers run dry, leaving animals without natural water sources. The drying up of water bodies has led to a decline in biodiversity, with many species at risk of losing their habitats. Similarly, the scarcity of water has affected the region's forests, which rely on regular rainfall to thrive. The long-term implications of this disruption to the natural balance could be disastrous for AJK's unique biodiversity and the environment at large.

The underlying causes of the

water crisis are multi-faceted, combining natural climatic changes with human-induced factors. Experts point to a combination of environmental degradation, rapid urbanization, and climate change as key drivers of the region's water woes. One of the primary contributors is the increase in the number of motor vehicles in urban areas, which has led to rising temperatures and altered local weather patterns. With fewer people relying on mass transit, the resultant air pollution has aggravated the situation, contributing to more extreme and unpredictable weather events, including prolonged dry spells.

Additionally, deforestation has played a significant role in worsening the water crisis. In the past few decades, large swaths of forests have been cleared to make way for infrastructure development, agriculture, and urbanization. The loss of trees has had a direct impact on the local climate, reducing rainfall and diminishing the region's ability to regulate water cycles. Forests play a crucial role in maintaining water flow, as they act as natural buffers that absorb and release water into the ecosystem. Their destruction has disrupted this vital process.

Moreover, the construction of concrete buildings, which has become increasingly common in urban centers, has replaced tra-

ditional housing methods that were more in harmony with the environment. The widespread use of impermeable surfaces in urban areas has hindered the natural infiltration of rainwater into the ground, further depleting underground water reserves.

Another critical factor exacerbating the water crisis in AJK is the rapid decline of the underground water table. Over the years, there has been a noticeable reduction in rainfall and snowfall, which has traditionally replenished the region's aquifers. Without sufficient rainfall, the region's groundwater reserves are being depleted at an alarming rate. This unsustainable extraction of groundwater has left many communities in a vulnerable position, as underground sources that once served as a reliable backup are now running dry.

If these trends continue, the long-term consequences could be severe. Groundwater is a critical resource, particularly in a region where surface water sources are scarce or unreliable. The depletion of aquifers could lead to an even greater water scarcity crisis in the coming years, further complicating efforts to meet the growing demands of AJK's population.

The time to act is now. The government of AJK, in collaboration with environmental organizations, local communities, and other stakeholders,

must prioritize efforts to address the water crisis before it becomes irreversible. One of the most effective and sustainable solutions to the water shortage is the development of large-scale rainwater harvesting projects at the community level. These projects would allow communities to collect and store rainwater during the monsoon season, providing a much-needed buffer during the dry months. Such initiatives could significantly reduce the pressure on traditional water sources and provide a more reliable supply of water, especially in rural areas.

In addition to rainwater harvesting, there is a need for a widespread public awareness campaign focused on water conservation techniques and the responsible use of water. Local governments, NGOs, and community leaders should come together to educate residents about the importance of preserving water resources and adopting more sustainable practices. These efforts could include encouraging the use of water-saving technologies, such as low-flow taps and irrigation systems, as well as promoting the repair of leaking water pipes to minimize waste.

Educational institutions must also play a pivotal role in tackling the water crisis. Schools and universities should incorporate environmental education into their curricula, with

a focus on sustainable water management and the importance of rainwater harvesting. By instilling these values in young people, AJK can cultivate a generation that is better equipped to deal with the challenges posed by water scarcity and environmental degradation. Additionally, community-led initiatives to educate the public about the importance of protecting natural resources and preserving the environment could foster a collective sense of responsibility.

The water crisis in Azad Jammu and Kashmir serves as a wake-up call for both the government and the people to take immediate action. Without swift and effective measures, the region risks facing long-term water shortages that will affect not only human populations but also local ecosystems, agriculture, and wildlife. It is essential for all stakeholders to come together to develop and implement strategies to safeguard AJK's water resources, ensuring that future generations have access to the clean water they need to thrive. The time to act is now—before the region's water crisis spirals out of control.

The author is an experienced development practitioner with over 20 years of expertise in the development sector. He is a resident of Bagh, Azad Jammu & Kashmir and can be reached at: i.gardazi@gmail.com



Leader of rebels who toppled Assad named interim president

DAMASCUS (AP): The Syrian factions that toppled President Bashar Assad last month named an Islamist former rebel leader as the country's interim president in a push to project a united front as they face the monumental task of rebuilding Syria after nearly 14 years of civil war. The former insurgents also threw out Syria's constitution, adopted under Assad, saying a new charter would be drafted soon.

The appointment of Ahmad al-Sharaa, who was once aligned with al-Qaida, as Syria's president "in the transitional phase" came after a meeting of the former insurgent factions in Damascus, the Syrian capital. The announcement was made by the spokesperson for Syria's new, de facto government's military operations sector, COL. Hassan Abdul Ghani, the state-run SANA news agency said. The exact mechanism under which the factions selected al-Sharra as interim president was not clear. Formerly known as Abu Mohammed al-Golani, al-Sharaa is the head of Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, which led the lightning offensive that toppled Assad in early December. The group was once affiliated with al-Qaida but has since denounced its former ties.

In recent years, al-Sharaa has sought to cast himself as a champion of pluralism and tolerance and promised to protect the rights of women and religious minorities. The United States had previously placed a \$10 million bounty on al-Sharaa but canceled it last month after a US delegation visited Damascus and met with him. Top US diplomat for the Middle East, Barbara Leaf said after the meeting that al-Sharaa came across as "pragmatic."

Speaking at meeting, al-Sharaa, who was in military uniform, stressed the "heavy task and a great responsibility" that Syria's new rulers face. "If the victor is arrogant after his victory and forgets the favor of Allah upon him, it will lead him to tyranny," he said, according to a video released hours later.

Among the priorities for rebuilding Syria, he said, will be "filling the power vacuum legitimately and legally" and "maintaining civil peace by seeking transitional justice and preventing revenge attacks" in the wake of Assad's disastrous reign. Syrians took to the streets in Damascus and elsewhere to celebrate the announcement, honking car horns and in some cases firing in the air. Many expressed support for al-Sharaa.

"This person is someone who is intelligent and has a good understanding and he was the leader of the battle that freed Syria," said Abdallah al-Sweid, who was among those celebrating at Umayyad

Square in Damascus. "He is someone who deserves to be president." Others - even those who had rejoiced at Assad's ouster - appeared critical of the way the appointment was made and the lack of clarity on next steps.

"The problem is not in the decisions. The problem is in the timing, the previous promises and the confusion," said Mohammad Salim Alkhateb, an official with the National Coalition of Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces - a group formed by members of the opposition to Assad in exile. Qatar was the first to react to al-Sharaa's appointment, which had been expected, saying it welcomed decisions aimed at "enhancing consensus and unity among all Syrian parties." The statement added that this should help pave the way for a "peaceful transfer of power through a comprehensive political process."

Western nations, although they have moved to restore ties with Damascus after Assad was overthrown, are still somewhat circumspect about Syria's new Islamist rulers. Abdul Ghani, the spokesman, also announced that Syria's constitution - adopted in 2012, under Assad's rule - was annulled. He said al-Sharaa would be authorized to form a temporary legislative council until a new constitution is drafted.

All the armed factions in the country would be disbanded, Abdul Ghani said, and would be absorbed into state institutions. Since Assad's fall, HTS has become the de facto ruling party and has set up an interim government largely composed of officials from the local government it previously ran in rebel-held Idlib province.

The interim authorities have promised they would launch an inclusive process to set up a new government and constitution, including convening a national dialogue conference and invite Syria's different communities, though no date has been set. As the former Syrian army collapsed with Assad's downfall, al-Sharaa has called for creation of a new unified national army and security forces, but questions have loomed over how the interim administration can bring together a patchwork of former rebel groups, each with their own leaders and ideology.

Even knottier is the question of the US-backed Kurdish groups that have carved out an autonomous enclave early in Syria's civil war, never fully siding with the Assad government or the rebels seeking to topple him. Since Assad's fall, there has been an escalation in clashes between the Kurdish forces and Turkish-backed armed groups allied with HTS in northern Syria.

More Indians losing hope of improved quality of life under Modi

NEW DELHI (Reuters): More Indians are becoming less hopeful about their quality of life as stagnant wages and higher living costs cloud future prospects, a survey showed, in disappointing news for Prime Minister Narendra Modi ahead of this week's annual budget.

More than 37% of respondents in a pre-budget survey said they expect the overall quality of life for ordinary people to deteriorate over the next year, the highest such percentage since 2013, findings released by polling agency C-Voter showed. Modi has been prime minister since 2014. C-Voter said it polled 5,269 adults across Indian states for this survey.

Persistent eye-watering food inflation has squeezed Indian household budgets and crimped spending power, and the world's fifth-largest economy is expected to post its slowest pace of growth in four years. Nearly two thirds of survey respondents said inflation had remained unchecked and that prices had gone up since Modi became prime minister, while more than half said the rate of inflation had "adversely" affected their quality of life.

Modi, in the nation's annual budget this week, is expected to announce measures to shore up faltering economic growth, lift disposable incomes and placate a stretched middle class. Nearly half of respondents said their personal income had remained the same over the last year while expenses rose, while nearly two thirds said rising expenses had become difficult to manage, the survey showed.

Despite world-beating economic growth, India's job market offers insufficient opportunities for its large youthful population to earn regular wages. In the last budget, India earmarked nearly \$24 billion to be spent over five years on various schemes to create jobs but those programmes have not yet been implemented as discussions on the details drag on.

New Zealand reviews its aid to Kiribati

WELLINGTON (AP): New Zealand is reconsidering all development funding to the aid-dependent island nation of Kiribati, following a diplomatic snub from the island nation's leader, government officials said. The unusual move to review all finance to Kiribati was prompted by the abrupt cancellation of a planned meeting this month between President Taneti Maamau and New Zealand Foreign Minister Winston Peters, Peters' office told The Associated Press. It followed months of growing frustration from Australia and New Zealand - jointly responsible for more than a third of overseas development finance to Kiribati in 2022 - about a lack of engagement with the island nation. Tensions have risen since Kiribati aligned itself with China in 2019 and signed a series of bilateral deals with Beijing. The bond between Kiribati - population 120,000 - and its near neighbor New Zealand, a country of 5 million people, might not appear the South Pacific's most significant. But the acrimony reflects concern from western powers that their interests in the region are being undermined as China woos Pacific leaders with offers of funding and loans.

That has provoked a contest for influence over Kiribati, an atoll nation that is among the world's most imperiled by rising sea levels. Its proximity to Hawaii and its vast exclusive economic zone - the world's 12th largest - have boosted its strategic importance. Kiribati, one of the world's most aid-dependent nations, relies heavily on international support, with foreign assistance accounting for 18% of its national income in 2022, according to data from the Lowy Institute, an Australian think tank. About 10% of development finance that year came from New Zealand - which contributed 102 million New Zealand dollars (\$58 million) between 2021 and 2024, official figures show.



KYIV: Rescuers carrying body of a civilian who was killed when a Russian drone hit a city food factory in Mykolaiv, Ukraine.

Trump signs order to plan nation's 250th anniversary celebration

NEW YORK (AP): President Donald Trump is making plans to celebrate the 250th anniversary of American independence and create a new national sculpture garden while reviving efforts to harshly punish those who vandalize or destroy existing statues and monuments.

Trump signed an executive order establishing a White House task force to plan what he says will be a "grand celebration worthy of the momentous occasion of the 250th anniversary of American Independence," which the country will celebrate on July 4, 2026. Trump will serve as chair of the task force, which will include a long list of senior administration officials, including cabinet secretaries. The order also revives Trump's plans to build a "National Garden of American Heroes" with statues memorializing 250 historical figures.

Trump first announced plans for what he said would be "a new monument to the giants of our past" in a 2020 speech celebrating Independence Day at Mount Rushmore in South Dakota. It was to have featured sculptures of dozens of American historical figures, including presidents, athletes and pop culture icons. Trump himself curated the list of who was to be included - Davy Crockett, Billy Graham, Whitney Houston, Harriet Tubman and Antonin Scalia, among others.

No site was selected, however, and

the garden was never funded by Congress. President Joe Biden abolished the task force after his election. Trump's announcement had come at a time of conservative backlash against efforts to take down statues dedicated to Confederate leaders and slave owners in the wake of George Floyd's murder and subsequent protests.

The National Garden will honor American heroism after dozens of monuments to Americans, including Presidents and Founding Fathers, have toppled or destroyed and never restored," said a White House document on the order shared with The Associated Press ahead of the signing. Action also puts back into place an executive order Trump signed in 2020, and which Biden also overturned, that was aimed at protecting monuments, memorials and statues from destruction and vandalism.

Trump had signed the order during the protests over racial injustice that year after police thwarted an attempt by protesters to pull down a statue of former President Andrew Jackson in a park across from the White House. That earlier order had called on the attorney general to prosecute to the fullest extent of the law any person or group responsible for destroying or vandalizing a monument, memorial or statue. It called for the maximum prosecution of anyone who incited violence and illegal activity, and threatened state and local law

enforcement agencies with a loss if federal dollars if they failed to protect monuments.

Order cites "Recent examples of conduct necessitating reinstatement of this order" in the wake of the Oct. 7, 2023 attack on Israel by Hamas and Israel's subsequent invasion of Gaza, including a demonstration last June, when protesters demanding a ceasefire vandalized statues and structures around the White House with graffiti. Plans of the expected signing were first reported by Fox News. During his 2024 campaign, Trump had talked about creating a yearlong "Salute to America 250" celebration. He said that on his first day back in office he would convene a task force that would be responsible for coordinating with state and local governments to plan festivities, beginning this Memorial Day.

He said he wanted the plan to include a yearlong "Great American State Fair" in Iowa, featuring pavilions that would "showcase the glory of every state in the Union, promote pride in our history, and put forth innovative visions for America's future." And he said he wanted to launch "Patriot Games" - sports contests featuring high school athletes from across the country that he said would "allow young Americans from every state to show off the best of American skill, sportsmanship, and competitive spirit."

Fleet of abandoned ships keeps growing, leaving more sailors stuck at sea

GENEVA (AP): More ships than ever are being abandoned around the world by their owners, according to the United Nations' labor and maritime organizations, leaving thousands of workers stuck on board without pay or the means to travel home to their families.

Cases have doubled in the past three years, impacting more than 3,000 seafarers across some 230 ships in 2024, according to an Associated Press analysis of UN data. Last year's figures could rise even further given the time that can elapse before vulnerable, frustrated workers reach out to report their plight. By international guidelines, workers are considered abandoned if shipowners fail to pay two or more months of wages, provide basic supplies or otherwise stop communicating with the crew.

"The only leverage seafarers have sometimes is to stay on a vessel until they get paid," said Helen Meldrum, a ship inspector with the International Transport Workers' Federation, which advocates for ship workers' rights. It's

a phenomenon rarely visible from shore, and one hitting hardest the smaller shipping companies servicing less profitable trade routes. Many crews reporting a lack of pay are on corroded ships built decades ago. The top countries for cases last year were the United Arab Emirates, Turkey, Egypt and Saudi Arabia.

The worst cases have seen entire crews suffering weeks without adequate food or fresh water, or living on dark ships without electricity. Some workers languish on board for years, such as Abdul Nasser Saleh, whom the Associated Press profiled last year in a story exploring abandonment in US ports and abroad. The AP found that shipowners often stopped paying workers when their costs skyrocketed or business dried up. Owners commonly left ships docked in ports where crews lacked immigration paperwork to step foot on land or at anchorages only reachable by boat.

The number of abandonment cases in 2024 surpassed the earlier record set in 2023. Governments and

organizations like Meldrum's can report abandoned ships to the UN, which verifies the basic facts and petitions the owner and relevant authorities to find a resolution. Meldrum has recently been appealing to authorities for help getting proper food, fuel and back-pay for crews on three cargo ships run by a company called Friends Shipping. Workers on board the Sister 12, now moored off the coast of Yemen, have been confined to the ship for more than a year without receiving a paycheck, according to her review.

"They're essentially imprisoned on these vessels," Meldrum said. "It goes way beyond exploitation." Abdul Razaq Abdul Khaliq, a Syrian sailor on board the Sister 12, wrote to AP over WhatsApp that the ship was full of insects and the crew had to use seawater for bathing. Photos and videos he shared show the faucets spewing cloudy brown water, rust blanketing the deck and only a few rotting pieces of produce in the pantry. "(T)here is no food on the ship, there is no

water, there is no life," he wrote.

Friends Shipping, which has offices in Turkey and Dubai, has a pattern of abandonment linked to its fleet. Nineteen of the 22 ships listed on its website have been named in abandonment cases, according to UN data, though some of those ships may have since been sold. The company boasts a slogan of "We Make the World Smaller." Meldrum said Friends Shipping hires workers who are unaware of the company's reputation, then leaves them in such dire conditions that many are willing to go home at the first chance - even without pay. A new crew will be staffed and the same thing happens, she said. Friends Shipping didn't respond to AP's questions about abandonment on their fleet or the welfare of their crews. A person who responded to messages sent to the company's WhatsApp number in Turkey said that provisions were supplied to the crew on the Sister 12 and all workers on the ship would be disembarked, without providing details.

Western officials warn Ukraine over weapons procurement dispute

KYIV (AP): Western officials have warned Ukraine that an escalating rift between the defense minister and procurement chief may jeopardize trust in the country and urged the government to resolve the situation quickly so as not to disrupt weapons supplies. The conflict began last week when the Defense Procurement Agency's board unanimously voted to extend director Maryna Bezrukova's contract for another year.

However, Defense Minister Rustem Umerov overruled the decision, refusing to renew her contract. He accused her of poor performance and failing to deliver weapons and ammunition to front-line troops. The decision provoked an

outrage from lawmakers and anti-corruption watchdogs who said the minister's move was illegal because Bezrukova had her contract extended by the agency's supervisory board in January. They also came to Bezrukova's defense, saying she has been instrumental in creating greater transparency and reforms within the DPA, which has long faced corruption allegations.

Under Ukrainian law, Umerov's decision to go ahead with her dismissal is illegal. The incident comes at a politically sensitive time for Ukraine as the country's leadership is eagerly watching the Trump administration's next moves, and as Ukrainian troops continue to face challenges in holding

the line in the east amid fierce Russian attacks. In a statement posted on social media platform X, the ambassadors representing Group of Seven nations urged the government to resolve the situation "expediently and focus on keeping defense procurement going."

"Consistency with good governance principles and NATO recommendations is important to maintain the trust of the public and international partners," they said. Following Umerov's decision, the Anti-Corruption Action Center filed a complaint urging the National Anti-Corruption Bureau (NABU) to investigate him for alleged abuse of power. Local media reported that

NABU opened proceedings against Umerov at the Anti-Corruption Action Center's request.

Anastasiia Radina, a lawmaker and head of the Committee on Anti-Corruption Policy, called for Umerov's dismissal, a decision that ultimately will fall to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy. "What I see as a parliamentarian and as an observer is that his actions do not strengthen the agency and its independence. And that is just unacceptable for a country at war," she told The Associated Press. Meanwhile, Russia and Ukraine exchanged drone barrages overnight in an attempt to strike deeper into their enemy's territory.

Congo's defeated foreign mercenaries head home

GOMA (Reuters): Nearly 300 foreign mercenaries hired by the Democratic Republic of Congo government to counter a swift offensive by Rwandan-backed M23 rebels in the east have surrendered and were on their way home.

Goma, the largest city in eastern Congo, was captured by M23 earlier this week, cornering the mercenaries, remnants of Congo's army and its allied militias against Lake Kivu and the Rwandan border. With nowhere else to retreat to, they handed themselves over to United Nations peacekeeping troops in Goma, who then arranged for their transit home through neighbouring Rwanda.

"We are just relieved because we can go finally home ... it's a big relief," said one, identifying himself as a Romanian who had been in Goma for about two years. "Goma is devastated because of the war between the Rwandans and the Congolese," he told Reuters as he crossed the border to Rwanda, declining to give his name.

Rwanda denies backing the rebels but says it has taken what it calls defensive measures, and accuses Congo of fighting alongside perpetrators of the 1994 Rwandan genocide. Hired to bolster Congo's underpaid and disorganised

army, the mercenaries operated high-tech military drones that had long been effectively grounded by Rwandan air defences, according to an analysis by the International Crisis Group.

Congo employed the services of Agemira RDC, a subsidiary of a Bulgarian-based parent company, for logistics, as well as Congo Protection, led by a former member of the French Foreign Legion, for training, said Henry-Pacifique Mayala from Kivu Security Tracker (KST), which maps unrest in eastern Congo. With almost no coordination between the two military contractors, or other actors on the ground, the mercenaries' role made the conflict even worse, Mayala said.

Their record adds to a long history of Congo hosting hired guns whose efforts often ended in failure. Some older Congolese remember the use of mercenaries in the 1960s, including a group led by "Mad Mike" Hoare, who supported the failed attempt of the mineral-rich southern state of Katanga to secede from Kinshasa. Before crossing the border, one of the mercenaries was upbraided by M23 spokesperson Willy Ngoma in front of a gaggle of journalists, telling him he should not "have come for adventures in Congo,"

according to a video shared by Rwanda's New Times newspaper.

"We have a very rich country. But with greedy leaders. They recruited you, you receive \$8,000 per month and you are fed, while (Congolese soldiers) receive less than \$100," Ngoma said. Asked where he trained, the mercenary said it was with the French Foreign Legion, a unit of the French army that accepts volunteers from around the world. France's foreign and defence ministries did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

At the border crossing between Goma and its Rwandan twin city of Gisenyi, Reuters reporters saw dozens of burly men, many bearded, some in fatigues, lining up to be patted down by police and have their luggage examined by sniffer dogs. One man wore a shirt emblazoned with "regiment stranger des parachutistes", the French Foreign Legion's parachute regiment, which successfully fought in Zaire, Congo's former name, in 1978 to rescue European and local hostages held by a rebel group. Rwanda's army said it took in over 280 Romanian mercenaries and would transport them to the capital Kigali. The men boarded the buses in silence.

Brazil will not use its air force for US migrant deportations

BRASILIA (Reuters): Brazil will not use its air force planes to assist with the deportation of Brazilian migrants in the United States, the South American country's top diplomat said, just days after a major flare up in neighboring Colombia over the issue.

Colombia and the United States pulled back from the brink of a trade war caused by a spat over deportation flights utilizing military aircraft including US planes that transported shackled migrants. A day later, Brazil summoned a senior US diplomat to discuss the deportation of Brazilian migrants, after it condemned handcuffing of

deportees on a flight to repatriate migrants from the United States.

Brazil's Foreign Affairs Minister Mauro Vieira told journalists that its citizens cannot be handcuffed in deportation flights while in Brazilian territory, adding that officials plan to discuss with US authorities how to conduct deportation flights in a dignified way. Meanwhile, Colombian migrants returning home on Colombian military flights described being shackled during earlier US flights that were blocked by their country's leader in a dispute with President Donald Trump that nearly sparked a trade war.

Deportation flights between the US and Colombia resumed after the diplomatic drama over the weekend that provided clues as to how the Trump administration would deal with countries blocking large-scale plans to return migrants who entered illegally. Colombia's President Gustavo Petro initially refused to accept two US military planes with migrants, prompting Trump to threaten 25% tariffs on Colombian exports and other sanctions. Colombia then relented and said it would accept the migrants, but fly them on Colombian military flights that Petro said would guarantee them dignity.

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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Israel's UNRWA ban will create a destructive vacuum

IN October Israel's parliament, the Knesset, passed a controversial law banning all operations by UNRWA, the UN relief agency for Palestinians, in areas where Israeli law applies.

The ban comes into effect today – at the worst possible time for the 2.3 million residents of Gaza, as a ceasefire that halted a devastating 15-month war had presented UNRWA and other agencies with the opportunity to deliver them much-needed aid.

The impact of ending the provision of education, health care and other services in East Jerusalem and the occupied West Bank, as well as severely complicating the aid operation in Gaza, is certain to be profound and long-lasting. Such is the scope and scale of the organisation's role in providing support to millions of Palestinians living as refugees inside the occupied territories, as well as in Jordan, Lebanon and Syria.

The agency's origin story is essential to understanding how central, perhaps even ubiquitous, it has been to four generations of Palestinians. Established by the UN General Assembly in 1949, its mission was to carry out relief and development programmes – including providing food, health care and education – to the tens of thousands of Palestinians displaced by establishment of the State of Israel. The organisation has since grown, employing tens of thousands of Palestinian workers. In essence, it carries out the work of what a Palestinian state would provide its people.

Since the onset of Israel's latest, and most destructive, war in Gaza, UNRWA says it has provided food for almost 2 million people, primary healthcare consultations to 1.6 million of them, and water to more than 600,000. It has also managed more than 100 emergency shelters and provided mental health support for 800,000 residents – all of this during a conflict that left more than 47,100 people dead and displaced more than 90 per cent of Gaza's population.

UNRWA's existence has served to remind the rest of the world of the Palestinian cause. Israel's critics often say that this is in part why the country's political class has long sought to undermine the agency's work. Indeed, the ban follows previous, unsuccessful attempts by the Israeli government to have the organisation defunded, and even decommissioned.

After Hamas's deadly attack on Israel on October 7, 2023, Israel alleged that several UNRWA staff members directly took part in the raids. A recent internal investigation by UNRWA did find a few of its several thousand Palestinian employees were involved, but the extent of participation was nowhere near the scale Israel claimed. People who committed crimes should be held responsible, but not an entire agency.

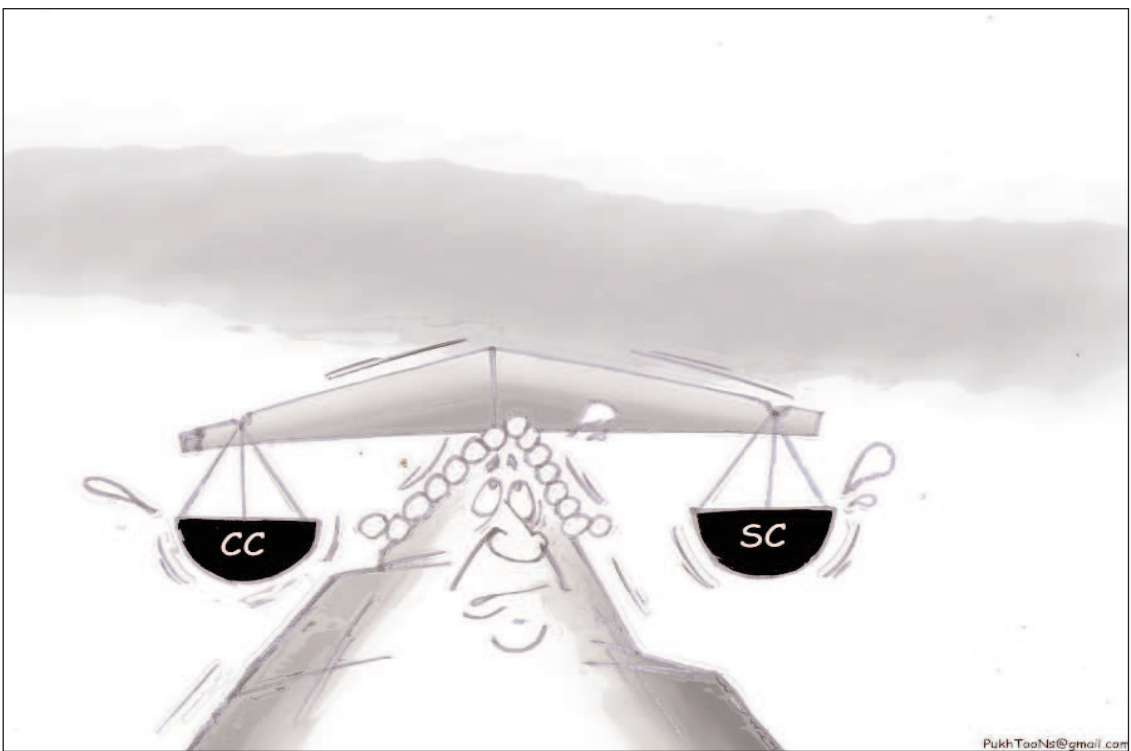
Nonetheless, the agency's impending closure in Israel is bound to make an already terrible situation for the Palestinian people decidedly worse. Given the scale of Gaza's devastation and increasing instability across the West Bank, a fully functional UNRWA is needed now more than ever. With its operations certain to be crippled, millions risk being further disempowered and impoverished. To an extent, it will also untether Israel from its moral responsibility for the dispossession of the Palestinian people that its forces – and the international community – oversaw from 1947 to 1949.

That same international community is watching from the sidelines, as Israel prepares to enforce its ban today. Having received support from the US, no amount of pressure from other countries is likely to deter it from going ahead with its plan. Yet the international community still has an imperative to act, and act quickly.

It needs to insist upon UNRWA's right to continue its work and, failing that, should rally around the idea of building a temporary, alternative agency capable of filling some of the vacuum that the UNRWA ban will inevitably leave – at least until a viable path to nationhood can be found for the Palestinian people. The rest of the world has a moral responsibility of continuing to support them, particularly in their most desperate hour.

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Pakistan Navy's contribution to regional maritime security

Madiha Amir

IN the contemporary era, technological advancements and global interconnectedness have reshaped international relations, expanding the concept of national security into a broader framework. Today, regional stability is increasingly intertwined with national security, as the internal turmoil of one state can create a ripple effect, destabilizing the entire region. The ongoing Israel-Palestine conflict, for example, demonstrates how regional stability can be compromised, leading to profound security challenges both for the region and the world at large.

Among these evolving security challenges, one domain has emerged as particularly critical: the maritime sector.

The Indian Ocean Region (IOR), with its complex geostrategic dynamics, has become a focal point for both traditional and non-traditional security threats.

The region's strategic significance is amplified by major initiatives like the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), which emphasize the importance of secure maritime routes for global trade and economic stability. As Pakistan's strategic location places it at the heart of these global maritime interests, the importance of safeguarding these sea lanes has become paramount.

The IOR is now a bat-

tleground for territorial disputes, naval rivalries, piracy, and the threat of maritime terrorism that directly affect Pakistan's security and its role in regional and global security frameworks. In this backdrop, the Pakistan Navy has assumed a pivotal role as a custodian of regional peace and stability.

As part of its commitment to promoting regional security, the Pakistan Navy actively contributes to UN-mandated Combined Maritime Task Forces (CMTF) 150 and 151, which address issues such as counter-piracy and maritime security in the region.

Beyond these initiatives, the Navy has distinguished itself through the AMAN series of multinational naval exercises, launched in 2007. These exercises embody Pakistan's vision of fostering regional cooperation, greater interoperability, and a united resolve for peace.

The AMAN exercises have grown into a flagship initiative for regional and extra-regional collaboration. The AMAN exercise has a motto of 'Together for Peace'. The exercise's primary focus is to promote peace and regional cooperation, enhance interoperability with regional navies, and display united resolve against terrorism and crimes in the maritime domain.

To date, eight exercises

have been conducted, with the ninth scheduled for February 2025. These exercises provide a platform for information sharing, dialogue, and mutual understanding among participating nations.

Through their sea phase, AMAN exercises focus on developing and practicing response tactics, techniques, and procedures against asymmetric threats. Onshore, cultural exchanges such as food galas and cultural shows promote camaraderie and goodwill among participants, showcasing the diverse heritage of the participating nations.

The exercises have grown in scope over the years, with the last edition, AMAN-8, saw participation from 50 countries.

This growing international interest highlights the success of the initiative and reflects the trust placed in Pakistan's leadership in advancing collective maritime security. This encouraged Pakistan Navy to conduct AMAN Dialogue alongside AMAN exercise and its inaugural session will be held in tandem with AMAN-25.

The aim of AMAN Dialogue initiative is to provide a dedicated platform to exchange views on pertinent regional security issues and solutions to address maritime security challenges at sea. The AMAN Dialogue will bring together heads of navies, coast guards, and

defense forces to share their thoughtful insights on maritime issues.

Pakistan Navy's efforts in the maritime domain are not limited to security concerns; they also support the broader economic and political interests of Pakistan and its partners. Initiatives like CPEC rely on secure maritime routes, underscoring the strategic importance of the Indian Ocean and Pakistan's coastal waters. By ensuring the safety of these critical sea lanes, Pakistan Navy contributes not only to regional security but also to global economic stability.

In conclusion, the Pakistan Navy has established itself as a key player in fostering collective maritime security in an increasingly complex and competitive global environment.

Through its active participation in international coalitions and leadership in initiatives like AMAN, Pakistan has demonstrated its commitment to countering both regional and global maritime threats. By promoting cooperation, enhancing interoperability, and fostering cultural understanding, the Pakistan Navy exemplifies Pakistan's dedication to ensuring peace and stability in the region. As the geopolitical dynamics of the IOR continue to evolve, Pakistan's proactive and visionary approach will remain essential for fostering mutual trust, stability, and shared prosperity among nations.

The rise and fall of an Italian household name

Ross Anderson

I blame myself: or myself and George Clooney, if we're going to spread the culpability around a little. Between us, the Hollywood hunk and I appear to have brought about the untimely demise of a veritable icon of Italian kitchen culture — which is rich in irony for someone who likes to spend summers in his opulent villa on the shores of Lake Como (that's George, obviously, not me).

Since 2006, the actor has been the public face of Nespresso, the automated push-button capsule machines that have revolutionized the world of coffee. It has been a match made in heaven: both Clooney and the product he promotes are rich, smooth, elegant and tasteful, illustrated in a series of clever, inventive and highly amusing ads for TV and cinema over nearly 20 years.

The marketing and media publication The Drum describes this relationship as "the ultimate brand-celebrity endorsement." It adds: "In an era in which many brand-celebrity partnerships are short-lived, Clooney's consistent presence has helped Nespresso maintain a stable and recognizable brand identity, fostering loyalty with its consumers."

Not half. The Swiss multinational Nestle launched Nespresso machines and capsules in 1986, initially pitched at business users and eventually domestic coffee lovers.

Growth was steady but slow, especially when competitors joined the market in the late 1990s. Then, in 2006, enter George — and Nespresso's annual revenue surged past \$500 million (\$621 million). After that, the only way was up. The global Nespresso capsules market was worth more than \$7 billion in 2023 and will pass \$12 billion by 2032, growing at 5.75 per cent a year.

However, where there are winners, there are often losers. In this case, the loser is Bialetti, the Italian kitchen appliance company founded as an aluminum workshop in 1919 and which has, since 1933, manufactured the famous stovetop moka coffee pot that bears its name.

Even if you have never used a Bialetti moka pot, you would know one when you saw it. It is a masterpiece of hydraulic engineering simplicity. The pot has three parts. First, a heavy-bottomed lower chamber, into which you pour cold water. Second, a screw-on upper chamber with a handle and a pouring spout. Finally, in the center of the upper chamber, a metal filter into which you tamp down the best quality ground coffee you can find. As the water heats and boils, it percolates up through the filter and the ground coffee and discharges into the upper chamber as liquid coffee, and thence into your cup.

The Bialetti will never produce the thick, smooth crema you find in a good espresso, but it is foolproof: the quality of the finished coffee it makes is in direct proportion to the quality of the ground coffee you put in it, and you can't say fairer than that. In 2010, it was estimated that 90 per cent of Italian kitchens had a Bialetti moka pot on the stove, which is pretty much the definition of a household name.

Although not for much longer, Bialetti has been in financial difficulties for years — since about 2006, in fact, a year that by now may be familiar to you. The company is now a whopping 90.3 million (\$93.9 million) in debt, up from just over 78.2 million in 2018, and has been looking for a buyer since 2023. It has now found one, in the shape of the Chinese investment vehicle Nuo Capital. In a tale awash with irony, that is another one: apart from the inexorable rise of Nespresso, another reason for Bialetti's misfortunes is that the moka pot market has been flooded with cheap, shoddy knockoffs manufactured in — yes, you guessed correctly, "Bialetti, Made in China" is not a phrase that is going to sell a lot of coffee pots. The end is surely nigh.

By now, you are undoubtedly wondering about my role in all this, alongside that of Clooney.

OK, I may have exaggerated it.

It begins with the fact that I can serve no useful purpose in the morning until I have had a double espresso, preferably two. In pursuit of the perfect shot, I have probably owned more coffee machines than Starbucks and Caffè Nero combined: Dalla Corte, Faema, Gaggia, La Pavoni, La Cimbali, I've had 'em all. If I had all the money back that I have spent on these contraptions, I could buy my own coffee plantation in Colombia. One by one, they drove me insane, they went on eBay and I returned to my first love, the Bialetti moka pot — until 2006 (that year again), when I purchased my first Nespresso machine.

It is about the law of diminishing returns. The Nespresso, although sneered at by coffee snobs and purists, makes really, really good espresso. There are professional barista machines that do it better — but only marginally, and that's after 30 minutes of faffing around with grinding the beans, tamping, adjusting the water temperature and pressure, and checking more dials and gauges than the flight deck of the space shuttle. The Nespresso takes 30 seconds from a cold start. No contest.

But still, the guilt. If Alfonso Bialetti were alive today, I would apologize. I'm sure Clooney would too. I'm told he's a really nice guy.

Arctic to become focal point for geopolitical tensions

Khaled Abou Zahr

FOR at least the past 20 years, there has been a recurring theme focused on the Arctic. Reports would highlight the receding ice and the potential opening of a new shipping route, which would open the door to greater competition between the world's biggest economies. This route, which was supposed to short-circuit the Suez Canal and put even more power into Russian hands, has so far failed to materialize.

The Arctic shipping lanes' availability are still too uncertain and proper planning cannot be done without knowing the exact times in the year that the ice will recede enough to allow ships to pass through. Researchers state that, by 2030, there will be passages available throughout the year due to a reduction in the amount of ice. Just like many predictions around climate change, we cannot be sure, but what we can be sure of is the resurgence of Russia as an influential power in the East.

So, it is not climate change or navigation routes that have reignited the debate around the Arctic, but Russia's new posturing over the last decade. The war in Ukraine has had an impact, but there is a clear will from Russia and maybe also China to reassert strong control over this territory. This is why we went from decades of collaboration and treating the Arctic like a space project, in which humanity collaborates in the hunt for new resources and benefits, to a new era of competition and even confrontation.

The five Arctic littoral states are Canada, Denmark, Norway, Russia and the US. China is considered a near-Arctic state. And there is undoubtedly, under the umbrella of potential new trade routes, growing col-

laboration and dialogue between China and Russia in order to establish greater control over the area. It is undoubtedly a strategic geographic zone as, even if access is unreliable due to the ice, it can still provide a direct route to Europe and the US.

Maritime routes are not the only interest, as natural resources are also of importance. It is estimated that the Arctic region holds 13 percent of the world's undiscovered oil reserves and 30 percent of its undiscovered natural gas. Moreover, minerals such as rare earth elements, nickel, platinum, gold and diamonds are believed to be abundant. It is worth noting that these minerals are key to the defense and tech industries.

Today, a UN convention determines each of the littoral country's territorial seas and, beyond this, their exclusive economic zones. But claims from countries such as Russia and Canada have been lodged with the UN to extend their control over certain areas based on various geological evidence.

According to a 2020 report from the Center for Strategic and International Studies, Russia has reopened 50 Soviet-era Arctic military posts, including 13 airbases, 10 radar stations and 20 border outposts. Other sources indicate that Moscow has deployed new hypersonic missiles and special brigades. Additionally, Russia maintains the world's largest fleet of icebreakers, including nuclear-powered vessels.

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In response, Washington in 2023 rebranded its Thule Air Base as Pituffik Space Base and expanded the operations of its Second Fleet in the North Atlantic. Canada, Denmark and Norway have also enhanced their respective Arctic defenses, but not close to the level of Russia.

China has also deployed icebreakers and is expanding its influence through scientific research stations and economic partnerships with Russia. However, this presence, just like in space, could become dual-use. Indeed, these infrastructure outposts and this fleet buildup could also be used for military purposes.

As a result, it is not surprising to hear President Donald Trump discuss the topic of Greenland. Unfortunately, Europe does not have the muscle to balance out a Russia-China alliance in this area. A Beijing-Moscow pact would allow it to dictate the future of the entire zone. While Denmark and Europe in general are trying to figure out how to best respond to Trump's plans for Greenland, they understand that they would be unable to protect it against Russia and China.

Most of the military protection for Denmark and Norway in the Arctic is provided by NATO. Moreover, both countries only spend about 1.6 percent of their gross domestic product on defense, well below the NATO target of 2 percent and Trump's stated future goal of 5 percent. This

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— Arab News

For Trump, is Gaza merely real estate to be developed?

IT'S hardly surprising that one of US president Donald Trump's initial forays into Middle East policy has been the suggestion – repeated over the weekend – that the Palestinian population of the Gaza Strip should be moved to Egypt and/or Jordan. The concept has been met with hosannas from the Israeli ultra-right, whose racist attitudes towards Palestinians are unabashed.

They want the entire population of the occupied territories removed to make way for Jewish settlers and permanent Jewish rule. But, this isn't merely a scandalous departure from decades of US policy towards the Palestinians – and civilians in conflict zones in general. It's also a deeply disturbing window into Mr Trump's attitudes towards the Palestinian people, their national cause and their individual and collective rights.

While Mr Trump and his officials attempted to clarify it could be either "temporary" or "long term" – Israel has never allowed substantial groups of Palestinians to return to any part of Palestine once they are removed. The idea that Israel would agree to see millions of Palestinians leave "Eretz Israel" and ever allow them to return en masse would require Israeli officials to have a completely different mentality as well as a different relationship with the Palestinians.

Israel's policy that goes back to the 1940s of refusing the return of Palestinian under almost any circumstances will almost certainly continue. The temporary would become long-term and long term permanent, as with the mass displacements during the 1947-48 and 1967 wars. Any "guarantees" stating otherwise from Mr Trump or anybody else would be unenforceable.

What's most significant about this non-starter of a policy idea is the extent to which it reveals that Mr Trump seems to view Palestinians, both as people and as a collective, as virtual non-humans. It would appear he sees them not as people with rights, concerns or interests, but as Lego pieces to be moved around for his, or Washington's, or Israel's convenience.

Mr Trump seems to regard at Palestinians as if they were obstreperous tenants in a New York property that he is looking to develop, who simply are in the way and must be gotten rid of. His son-in-law, Jared Kushner, in the past has waxed eloquent about creating beautiful beachfront property developments in Gaza, as if it were not one of the most squalid and overcrowded areas in the world, populated almost entirely by refugees from what became south-

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It's not going to happen, of course. Jordan has already taken far more than its fair share of Palestinian refugees from both the 1948 and 1967 conflicts, and that has created a degree of political instability in the country, which would only be exacerbated by further displacement. Jordan has also served as a home for Syrian and Iraqi refugees, but it cannot be a dumping ground for the persecuted peoples of the region.

the era of King Farouk and before full independence from British hegemony. There is virtually nothing the US could offer Egypt within the realm of possibility that is likely to shift Cairo on this matter. Mr Trump and others in Washington may believe that Egyptian and Jordanian dependence on Washington, military and other aid programmes, or assorted additional carrots and sticks might shift Cairo and Amman on this issue, but they will almost certainly be disappointed.

Unsurprisingly, Mr Trump has not consulted the Palestinians of Gaza, or any other Palestinians. But he won't find them any more enthusiastic, no matter how wretched living conditions in Gaza have become. Over 95 per cent of the Palestinian population of Gaza are already refugees from southern Israel, and the idea that they would be displaced

perate and besieged toehold.

Worst of all, Mr Trump's Gaza concept sends the worst possible signals about his potential policies towards Israeli annexation and expulsion plans in the occupied West Bank. The Israeli government contains several ministers who have made it clear that they view Mr Trump's reelection as the perfect opportunity to annex much, if not all, of the occupied West Bank – parts of Palestine far more central to their vision of Zionism than not only Gaza but much of Israel itself.

Mr Trump may disappoint them by pushing Israel to make some gestures towards eventual Palestinian statehood to secure a triangular agreement with Saudi Arabia. But if he can't shift the Israeli government on this, or even more ominously if he never tries, and if more than 2 million Palestinians can be removed from Gaza to make way for reconstruction or beachfront development projects or anything else, then surely large numbers of Palestinians in the West Bank can be removed to make way for a formalised and consolidated greater Israel (an expansion anticipated in Mr Trump's January 2020 "Peace to Prosperity" plan).

Mr Trump may be just musing, but he is musing as the new American president. Everything he says, especially when he repeats it at length, has considerable significance, if not as a policy proposal, then at least as an indication of how he is thinking.

And, from a Palestinian – or even just a human rights – perspective, these ideas about the cleansing of Gaza are exceptionally chilling. Unfortunately, they show that those of us who warned it wasn't true that US policy towards Gaza couldn't get any worse might be completely correct.

DeepSeek chaos suggests ‘America First’ may not always win

Matt Egan

wrote in a Substack post. “It is clear that the game has changed.”

That notion – that punishing restrictions may have had the opposite effect as the United States intended – is raising tough questions about the very foundation of the AI boom, the tech arms race between the United States and China and how the Trump administration should respond.

The AI house of cards theory Trump may be unswayed.

“I think Trump doubles down,” said Ed Mills, Washington policy analyst at Raymond James, noting that Trump has surrounded himself with China hawks, such as Secretary of State Marco Rubio. “His advisers around him point to more restrictions, not less.”

If Trump adds even more pressure on China over AI, proponents of a more hawkish strategy believe China's house of AI cards may crumble. Skeptics say it's not clear how much of a gamechanger DeepSeek is. They argue its success could have been made possible either stockpiling high-end chips before restrictions were imposed or by buying the semiconductors on the black market.

“It is either a Sputnik Moment or a Potemkin Moment,” Jeffrey Sonnenfeld, senior associate dean for leadership studies at the Yale School of Management, told CNN in an email. “It is either truly disruptive or deceptive, relying on hoarded Nvidia chips and others before the export sanctions.”

Sonnenfeld added that if it is a “Sputnik-style disruption, it is a blow to pure reliance on competitive private markets without government partnership and national industrial policies.”

Scale AI CEO Alexandr Wang told CNBC that he understands DeepSeek has 50,000 leading-edge chips that they “can't talk about, obviously, because it is against the export controls that the United States has

put in place.”

Art Hogan, chief market strategist at B. Riley Wealth Management, urged investors to take DeepSeek's claims “with a grain of salt” because there is no concrete proof to back them up.

“China is claiming it has come up with the silver bullet, but it could be like the guy in high school who says he has a girlfriend, but she's just at a different school,” Hogan said in a phone interview, noting that there has long been skepticism among Western economists about the veracity of China's economic statistics.

If DeepSeek did have access to leading edge chips, that supports the argument that the export controls should be toughened. Mills notes that there is a “very active” black market for high-end chips and enforcement of export controls has been uneven.

“This has been a game of whack-a-mole,” Mills said. “There are still glaring loopholes that need to be closed.”

For example, Mills pointed to the need for more robust enforcement and further restrictions on the flow of leading-edge computer chips.

Jake Sullivan, the US National Security Adviser under Biden, has acknowledged that the export controls are a work in progress.

“This is an iterative process. We learn, they learn. We learn, they learn,” Sullivan said in May during a fireside chat.

Sullivan also noted that China has tried to overwhelm export controls by projecting an air of inevitability to its AI ambitions.

“The PRC has embarked on a massive and relentless information campaign to basically say, ‘This is futile. Resistance is futile. We will break these controls,’” Sullivan said.

The stakes are massive.

Many in Washington were well aware that the United States is in an AI arms race. But that race may be a bit closer, and perhaps significantly cheaper, than previously known.

All about DeepSeek — The Chinese AI startup challenging US big tech

DEEPSEEK, a relatively unknown Chinese AI startup, has sent shockwaves through Silicon Valley with its recent release of cutting-edge AI models. Developed with remarkable efficiency and offered as open-source resources, these models challenge the dominance of established players like OpenAI, Google and Meta.

DeepSeek's innovative techniques, cost-efficient solutions and optimization strategies have had an undeniable effect on the AI landscape. What does this mean for leading AI companies in the U.S.?

Founded in May 2023 by Liang Wenfeng, a prominent figure in both the hedge fund and AI industries, DeepSeek operates independently but is solely funded by High-Flyer, a quantitative hedge fund also founded by Wenfeng. This unique funding model has allowed DeepSeek to pursue ambitious AI projects without the pressure of external investors, enabling it to prioritize long-term research and development.

DeepSeek's team primarily comprises young, talented graduates from top Chinese universities, fostering a culture of innovation and a deep understanding of the Chinese language and culture. Notably, the company's hiring practices prioritize technical abilities over traditional work experience, resulting in a team of highly skilled individuals with a fresh perspective on AI development.

DeepSeek's journey began with the release of DeepSeek Coder in November 2023, an open-source model designed for coding tasks. This was followed by DeepSeek LLM, a 67B parameter model aimed at competing with other large language models. DeepSeek-V2, launched in May 2024, gained significant attention for its strong performance and low cost, triggering a price war in the Chinese AI model market. This disruptive pricing strategy forced other major Chinese tech giants, such as ByteDance, Tencent, Baidu and Alibaba, to lower their AI model prices to remain competitive.

DeepSeek-V2 was succeeded by DeepSeek-Coder-V2, a more advanced model with 236 billion parameters. It is designed for complex coding challenges and features a high context length of up to 128K tokens. This model is available through a cost-effective API, priced at \$0.14 per million input tokens and \$0.28 per million output tokens.

The company's latest models, DeepSeek-V3 and DeepSeek-R1, have further solidified its position as a disruptive force. DeepSeek-V3, a 671B parameter model, boasts impressive performance on various benchmarks while requiring significantly fewer resources than its peers. DeepSeek-R1, released in January 2025, focuses on reasoning tasks and challenges OpenAI's o1 model with its advanced capabilities.

DeepSeek also offers a range of distilled models, known as DeepSeek-R1-Distill, which are based on popular open-weight models like Llama and Qwen, fine-tuned on synthetic data generated by R1. These distilled models provide varying levels of performance and efficiency, catering to different computational needs and hardware configurations.

While DeepSeek has achieved remarkable success in a short period, it's important to note that the company is primarily focused on research and has no detailed plans for widespread commercialization in the near future.

DeepSeek's Strategic Partnerships

DeepSeek's success is not solely due to its internal efforts. The company has also forged strategic partnerships to enhance its technological capabilities and market reach. One notable collaboration is with AMD, a leading provider of high-performance computing solutions. DeepSeek leverages AMD Instinct GPUs and ROCm software across key stages of its model development, particularly for DeepSeek-V3. This partnership provides DeepSeek with access to cutting-edge hardware and an open software stack, optimizing performance and scalability.

DeepSeek's Innovative Techniques

DeepSeek's success can be attributed to several key innovations:

Reinforcement Learning

Unlike traditional methods that rely heavily on supervised fine-tuning, DeepSeek employs pure reinforcement learning, allowing models to learn through trial and error and self-improve through algorithmic rewards. This approach has been particularly effective in developing DeepSeek-R1's reasoning capabilities. In essence, DeepSeek's models learn by interacting with their environments and receiving feedback on their actions, similar to how humans learn through experience. This allows them to develop more sophisticated reasoning abilities and adapt to new situations more effectively.

Mixture-of-Experts Architecture

DeepSeek's models utilize a mixture-of-experts architecture, activating only a small fraction of the parameters for any given task. This selective activation significantly reduces computational costs and enhances efficiency. Imagine a team of experts, each specializing in a different area. When faced with a task, only the relevant experts are called upon, ensuring efficient use of resources and expertise. DeepSeek's MoE architecture operates similarly, activating only the necessary parameters for each task, leading to significant cost savings and improved performance.

Multi-Head Latent Attention

DeepSeek-V3 incorporates multi-head latent attention, which improves the model's ability to process data by identifying nuanced relationships and handling multiple input aspects simultaneously. Think of it as having multiple “attention heads” that can focus on different parts of the input data, allowing the model to capture a more comprehensive understanding of the information. This enhanced attention mechanism contributes to DeepSeek-V3's impressive performance on various benchmarks.

Distillation
DeepSeek employs distil-

Janakiram MSV

lation techniques to transfer the knowledge and capabilities of larger models into smaller, more efficient ones. This makes powerful AI accessible to a wider range of users and devices. It's like a teacher transferring their knowledge to a student, allowing the student to perform tasks with similar proficiency but with less experience or resources. DeepSeek's distillation process enables smaller models to inherit the advanced reasoning and language processing capabilities of their larger counterparts, making them more versatile and accessible.

These innovative techniques, combined with DeepSeek's focus on efficiency and open-source collaboration, have positioned the company as a disruptive force in the AI landscape.

DeepSeek's Cost-Efficient Approach

DeepSeek's commitment to cost-efficiency is evident in its development and pricing strategies:

Reduced Training Costs

By leveraging reinforcement learning and efficient architectures like MoE, DeepSeek significantly reduces the computational resources required for training, resulting in lower costs. DeepSeek-V3, for example, was trained for a fraction of the cost of comparable models from Meta. While the reported \$5.5 million figure represents a portion of the total training cost, it highlights DeepSeek's ability to achieve high performance with significantly less financial investment.

Affordable API Pricing

DeepSeek's API pricing is significantly lower than that of its competitors. This makes its models accessible to smaller businesses and developers who may not have the resources to invest in expensive proprietary solutions. For instance, DeepSeek-R1's API costs just \$0.55 per million input tokens and \$2.19 per million output tokens, compared to OpenAI's API, which costs \$15 and \$60, respectively.

Open-Source Model

DeepSeek's open-source approach further enhances cost-efficiency by eliminating licensing fees and foster-

ing community-driven development. This allows developers to freely access, modify and deploy DeepSeek's models, reducing the financial barriers to entry and promoting wider adoption of advanced AI technologies.

DeepSeek's Impact on the AI Landscape

Competitive Impact
DeepSeek's introduction into the AI market has created significant competitive pressure on established giants like OpenAI, Google and Meta. By offering cost-efficient and open-source models, DeepSeek compels these major players to either reduce their prices or enhance their offerings to stay relevant. This heightened competition is likely to result in more affordable and accessible AI solutions for both businesses and consumers.

Additionally, DeepSeek's disruptive pricing strategy has already sparked a price war within the Chinese AI model market, compelling other Chinese tech giants to reevaluate and adjust their pricing structures. This move underscores DeepSeek's ability to disrupt well-established markets and influence overall pricing dynamics.

Impact on the AI Community

DeepSeek's commitment to open-source models is democratizing access to advanced AI technologies, enabling a broader spectrum of users, including smaller businesses, researchers and developers, to engage with cutting-edge AI tools. This accessibility fosters increased innovation and contributes to a more diverse and vibrant AI ecosystem. By promoting collaboration and knowledge sharing, DeepSeek empowers a wider community to participate in AI development, thereby accelerating progress in the field. Moreover, DeepSeek's open-source approach enhances transparency and accountability in AI development.

By making its models and training data publicly available, the company encourages thorough scrutiny, allowing the community to

identify and address potential biases and ethical issues. This openness leads to more responsible and ethically sound AI advancements.

Shift in Focus

The success of DeepSeek highlights the growing importance of algorithmic efficiency and resource optimization in AI development. Instead of relying solely on brute-force scaling, DeepSeek demonstrates that high performance can be achieved with significantly fewer resources, challenging the traditional belief that larger models and datasets are inherently superior. This shift encourages the AI community to explore more innovative and sustainable approaches to development.

DeepSeek's focus on efficiency also has positive environmental implications. As concerns about the carbon footprint of AI continue to rise, DeepSeek's methods contribute to more sustainable AI practices by reducing energy consumption and minimizing the use of computational resources.

Strategic Timing

DeepSeek's recent product launches, particularly the release of DeepSeek-R1, appear to be strategically timed to align with significant geopolitical events, such as President Donald Trump's inauguration. This timing suggests a deliberate effort to challenge the prevailing perception of U.S. dominance in the AI sector and to showcase China's burgeoning capabilities in the field. By synchronizing its releases with such events, DeepSeek aims to position itself as a formidable competitor on the global stage, highlighting the rapid advancements and strategic initiatives undertaken by Chinese AI developers.

Hugging Face Open R1 Replicates DeepSeek

Hugging Face has launched an ambitious open-source project called Open R1, which aims to fully replicate the DeepSeek-R1 training pipeline. This initiative seeks to construct the missing components of the R1 model's development process, enabling researchers and developers to reproduce and build upon DeepSeek's groundbreaking work.

The Open R1 project is

designed with a clear three-step approach:

Replicate the R1-Distill models by extracting a high-quality reasoning corpus from DeepSeek-R1

Reproduce the pure reinforcement learning pipeline used to create R1-Zero

Demonstrate the ability to transition from a base model to an RL-tuned model through multi-stage training

To support these efforts, the project includes comprehensive scripts for model training, evaluation, data generation and multi-stage training. By making the resources openly available, Hugging Face aims to democratize access to advanced AI model development techniques and encourage community collaboration in AI research.

Challenges for DeepSeek

Compute Gap

Despite its notable achievements, DeepSeek faces a significant compute disadvantage compared to its U.S. counterparts. This gap is further widened by U.S. export controls on advanced chips, which restrict DeepSeek's access to the latest hardware necessary for developing and deploying more powerful AI models.

Although DeepSeek has demonstrated remarkable efficiency in its operations, having access to more advanced computational resources could accelerate its progress and enhance its competitiveness against companies with greater computational capabilities. Bridging this compute gap is essential for DeepSeek to scale its innovations and compete more effectively on a global stage.

Market Perception

DeepSeek may encounter difficulties in establishing the same level of trust and recognition as well-established players like OpenAI and Google. Building a strong brand reputation and overcoming skepticism regarding its cost-efficient solutions are critical for DeepSeek's long-term success. To gain wider acceptance and attract more users, DeepSeek must demonstrate a consistent track record of reliability and high performance. Enhancing its market

perception through effective branding and proven results will be crucial in differentiating itself from competitors and securing a loyal customer base.

Competitive Landscape

The AI market is intensely competitive, with major players continuously innovating and releasing new models. To stay ahead, DeepSeek must maintain a rapid pace of development and consistently differentiate its offerings. This requires ongoing innovation and a focus on unique capabilities that set DeepSeek apart from other companies in the field. By prioritizing the development of distinctive features and staying agile in response to market trends, DeepSeek can sustain its competitive edge and navigate the challenges of a rapidly evolving industry.

Censorship

DeepSeek's models are subject to censorship to prevent criticism of the Chinese Communist Party, which poses a significant challenge to its global adoption. In countries where freedom of expression is highly valued, this censorship can limit DeepSeek's appeal and acceptance. Addressing these concerns is vital for DeepSeek's international expansion. Balancing the requirements for censorship with the need to develop open and unbiased AI solutions will be crucial. Finding ways to navigate these restrictions while maintaining the integrity and functionality of its models will help DeepSeek achieve broader acceptance and success in diverse markets.

DeepSeek's Future

DeepSeek's emergence as a disruptive force in the AI landscape is undeniable. Its innovative techniques, cost-efficient solutions and optimization strategies have challenged the status quo and forced established players to re-evaluate their approaches. While DeepSeek faces challenges, its commitment to open-source collaboration and efficient AI development has the potential to reshape the future of the industry. As the AI race intensifies, DeepSeek's journey will be one to watch closely.



MULTAN: Governor State Bank Jameel Ahmed addressing Chamber of Commerce and Industry members at MCCI.

PSX turns bullish, gains 1,719 more points

ISLAMABAD (APP): The 100-Index of the Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX) turned around to bullish trend on Thursday, gaining 1,719.04 more points, a positive change of 1.54 per cent, closing at 113,206.40 points as compared to 111,487.36 points on the last trading day.

A total of 483,939,931 shares were traded during the day as compared to 449,244,755 shares the previous trading day, whereas the price of shares stood at Rs26.103 billion against Rs28.186 billion on the last trading day.

As many as 441 companies transacted their shares in the stock market, 272 of them recorded gains and 118 sustained losses, whereas the share price of 51 companies remained unchanged.

The three top trading companies were Sui South Gas with 48,364,956 shares at Rs39.11 per share,

Waves Home Appliances with 33,226,540 shares at Rs12.78 per share and Bank Hakramah with 31,509,642 shares at Rs3.71 per share.

Unilever Pakistan Foods Limited witnessed a maximum increase of Rs286.49 per share closing at Rs22,387.00 whereas runner-up was Rafhan Maize Products Company Limited with Rs98.05 rise in its share price to close at Rs9,498.05.

Al-Abbas Sugar Mills Limited witnessed a maximum decrease of Rs35.19 per share price, closing at Rs 679.22, whereas the runner-up was Excide Pakistan Limited with Rs28.84 decline in its per share price to Rs781.36.

Rupee sheds 10 paise against dollar

Pakistani rupee on Thursday depreciated by 10 paise against the US dollar in the interbank trading and closed at Rs278.97 against

the previous day's closing of Rs278.87.

However, according to the Forex Association of Pakistan (FAP), the buying and selling rates of the dollar in the open market stood at Rs279.50 and Rs281.00, respectively.

The price of the Euro increased by 18 paise to close at Rs290.73 against the last day's closing of Rs290.55, according to the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP).

The Japanese yen went up by 01 paise and closed at Rs1.80, whereas an increase of 08 paise was witnessed in the exchange rate of the British Pound, which was traded at Rs347.33 as compared to the last day's closing of Rs347.25.

The exchange rates of the Emirates Dirham and the Saudi Riyal increased by 03 paise each to close at Rs75.95 and Rs74.37 respectively.

Pak's total liquid foreign reserves \$16.05 billion F.P. Report

KARACHI: The total liquid foreign reserves of Pakistan stood at US\$ 16,052.1 million while the SBP reserves recorded as \$ 11,372.4 million as of 24 January 2025.

The State Bank of Pakistan, informed in a statement issued here on Thursday, that liquid foreign exchange reserves held by the central bank "decreased by US\$ 76 million to US\$ 11,372.4 million due to external debt repayments" during the week ended on January 24, 2025.

Meanwhile, the break up of the foreign reserves position shows that, commercial banks held net foreign reserves of \$ 4,679.7 million during the period under review.

Total liquid foreign reserves held by the country, in the previous week ended on January 17, 2024, were \$ 16,189.3 million.

Among them foreign reserves held by the central bank were recorded as \$ 11,448.7 million while net reserves of \$ 4,740.6 million were held by commercial banks.

European stock markets rise before ECB rate call

LONDON (AFP/APP): European stock markets rose and the euro dipped Thursday, with the European Central Bank expected to cut interest rates as inflation eases and the eurozone economy stalls.

The ECB announcement will follow the Federal Reserve's decision to keep US borrowing costs on hold Wednesday as inflation, despite coming down, remains elevated in the United States.

Asian stock markets closed mixed in more holiday-thinned trading, with investors digesting broadly positive earnings from tech giants that came days after their valuations tumbled as Chinese firm DeepSeek took the global AI scene by storm.

The tepid performance in Asia followed a retreat on Wall Street but the volatility that greeted the start of the week disappeared.

Wednesday saw a broadly upbeat readout, with Facebook-parent Meta, IBM and Tesla posting healthy earnings, though Microsoft disappointed. Apple is due to report Thursday.

With the ECB seen certain to cut eurozone interest rates, focus will be on president Christine Lagarde's press conference.

Ahead of the central bank's announcement, official data showed the eurozone economy stalled in the last three months of 2024, performing worse than expected as top economies Germany and France contracted.

Analysts at Bloomberg and FactSet had forecast the single-currency area's economy to grow by 0.1 percent compared to the previous quarter.

Germany's economy retreated by 0.2 percent while French output shrank 0.1 percent, both worse than forecast, with both countries mired by political turmoil.

Kathleen Brooks, research director at XTB trading group, said US President Donald Trump's tariffs were also "the key threat for the eurozone economy right now".

'Prudent monetary policy played key role in restoring macroeconomic stability'

MULTAN (APP): The Governor State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) Jameel Ahmad said on Thursday that prudent monetary policy stance had played an important role in restoring macroeconomic stability.

While addressing the executive body of the Multan Chamber of Commerce and Industry (MCCI), he highlighted recent policy initiatives taken to enhance ease of doing business; including export and import facilitation, dividend repatriation, and support for freelancers and IT exporters, as well as strengthening the digital ecosystem.

The SBP governor noted that Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) financing rose from Rs. 543 bil-

lion in December 2023 to Rs. 638 billion in December 2024, while agriculture credit disbursement increased by 14.5 per cent year-on-year, reaching Rs. 1,266 billion in the first half of FY25.

He also appreciated the role of the MCCI and called on the business community to invest in future technologies and explore non-traditional markets to diversify the overall exports of the country. He said that many countries of the world were exporting non-traditional items these days, adding that "our business community should also explore new forex by exporting non-traditional items". The environment is very conducive for business, Jameel

Ahmad said, recalling that some 11,000 applications were pending with the central bank for opening LCs in 2022 but "we have passed through the troubled times now". The SBP chief highlighted a number of policies initiated by the central bank with support of the government for business fraternity for improvement in the economy.

SBP Deputy Governor Saleemullah, MCCI SVP Mohsin Masood Khawaja, former president, Khawaja Muhammad Younus SBP Director Abid Qamar, Deputy Director, Faheem Arshad, presidents of banks and other officials were present.

Earlier, in his welcome address, MCCI President Bakhtawar Tanvir Sheikh

shed light on a number of challenges faced by the world and Pakistan economy dynamics were changed in COVID-19 and post-COVID scenario. He lauded the government and the SBP policies to stabilise the economy of the country, adding that the policy rate was 22pc in July last year which had reduced to 12pc now. He informed that economic indicators were going in a very positive direction now and added that the business fraternity was hoping that SBP would bring the interest rate to single digit at the earliest.

Later, a question-answer session was also held wherein Jameel Ahmad replied to a volley of questions by the businessmen.

Azerbaijan expresses interest to invest on motorways in Pakistan

ISLAMABAD (APP): Federal Minister for Communications, Privatization and Board of Investment Abdul Aleem Khan along with a high-level delegation held talks with Minister for Digital Development and Transport Rashad Nabiye in Baku, Azerbaijan.

In the meeting, it was decided that delegation from Azerbaijan will visit Pakistan in February to review feasibility and other opportunities for investment in Pakistan especially in the projects of Motorways M-6 and M-9 Sukkur, Hyderabad, Karachi, said a press release issued here Thursday.

Furthermore, options for business-to-business and government-to-government collaboration for the construction of highways between Pakistan and Azerbaijan were also considered in the meeting. The federal minister called on the Minister of Transport of Azerbaijan Rashad

Nabiye and said that it was imperative to improve the means of transportation from Pakistan to the Central Asian States and especially both countries Pakistan and Azerbaijan can make significant progress in this regard.

The minister said that there was considerable scope for bilateral cooperation in the field of communications to improve logistics. He added that there were historical, religious and deep friendly ties between Azerbaijan and Pakistan which need to be further strengthened.

Azerbaijani Minister Rashad Nabiye said that his country was looking for significant progress in bilateral cooperation and investment with Pakistan and the visit of this delegation led by Federal Minister Abdul Aleem Khan will bring positive progress in this regard. The meeting also discussed matters of mutual investment between

the two countries under Public-Private Partnership.

In this meeting, the Chairman of the National Highway Authority gave a briefing on the projects of M-6 and M-9 Motorways while negotiations were held with Azerbaijani officials on mutual partnership with Pakistan on rail, road and other means of communications.

Coordinator of SIFC Lt. Gen. Sarfaraz Ahmed and

Federal Secretary Petroleum Momin Ali Agha were also present from Pakistan in the meeting with high level delegation. It is worth mentioning that Federal Minister for Communications, Privatization and Board of Investment Abdul Aleem Khan has arrived in Baku, Azerbaijan today where he is expected to hold meetings with other Ministers and key government officials, as well.

Gold prices up by Rs1,600 per tola to Rs290,300

ISLAMABAD (APP): The price of 24 karat per tola gold increased by Rs1,600 and was sold at Rs290,300 on Thursday against its sale at Rs288,700 on previous trading day. All Sindh Sarafa Jewellers Association reported. The price of 10 grams of 24 karat gold also increased by Rs1,372 to Rs248,885 from Rs247,513 whereas that of 10 gram 22 karat went up to Rs228,152 from Rs226,895. The prices of per tola silver increased by Rs59 to Rs3,450 whereas that of ten gram silver went up by Rs50 to Rs2,957. The price of gold in the international market increased by \$15 to \$2,778 from \$2,763, the Association reported.

IBA hosted seminar on future of Alternate Dispute Resolution

F.P. Report

KARACHI: IBA Karachi proudly hosted a landmark seminar titled "The Way Forward for the ADR Movement in Pakistan", organized by the ADR International Center (ADRIC) at IBA, in collaboration with the Malaysian International Mediation Centre (MIMC). The event, held at IBA City Campus, brought together distinguished legal experts, representatives from international ADR centers, and key stakeholders to discuss the future of dispute resolution via mediation in Pakistan.

Dr. S Akbar Zaidi, Executive Director IBA, warmly welcomed Justice Mansoor Ali Shah, Head of the ADR Committee and Senior Puisne Judge of the Supreme Court of Pakistan, and Honorable Justice Jawad Hasan, Judge of the Lahore High Court, as Guest of Honors & Keynote speakers. He acknowledged Honorable Justice Mansoor Ali Shah's transformative influence on his perspective regarding Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR), recognizing him as a strong advocate and a pioneer in ADR and climate justice.

Justice Mansoor Ali Shah discussed upcoming legislative reforms set to reshape Pakistan's ADR landscape. He highlighted the introduction of a new arbitration law, which will replace the outdated 1940 legislation, aiming to minimize court interference and create a more efficient dispute resolution framework. He also commended IBA's efforts in ADR training, recognizing the role of IBA-ADRIC and its collaboration with the MIMC in promoting ADR education.

Justice Hasan highlighted Pakistan's recent progress in institutionalizing ADR, particularly in state-owned enterprises. He highlighted a significant legal development where Section 134 was amended to mandate mediation for state-owned enterprises, eliminating the option for appeals. This marked a groundbreaking shift in

which will replace the outdated 1940 legislation, aiming to minimize court interference and create a more efficient dispute resolution framework. He also commended IBA's efforts in ADR training, recognizing the role of IBA-ADRIC and its collaboration with the MIMC in promoting ADR education.

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Court Notice

In the Court of Javeria Sartaj Khan Additional District Judge II /Azafi Zila Qazi Buner at Daggar Appeal. No. 90/13 Institution 4/9/2024.Date of hearing 12/2/2025 .Israrudn VS Abdul Rehman. Notice to Abdul Rehman s/o Akbar Khan resident of Pacha Kalay tehsel Gadezai district Buner.Whereas in the above mentioned case the mentioned defendant can not be served in the ordinary way, it is, therefore, proclaimed that if the said defendant will/shall not appear personally or through dually authorized agent or pleader in the court at 8.30 am dated 12/2/2025 the proceeding will be taken ex- parte. Given under my hand and seal of this Court.

Court Notice

In the Court of Jawad Bin Dawood Civil Judge II. Alaga Qazi Buner at Daggar.Suit No. 85/1. Institution 17/2/ 2020. Date of hearing 1/2/2025. Hazrat Hamdi VS Muhammad Iqbal . Notice to No.3.Taj Hamdi s/o Hazrat Hamdi resident of Elai tehsel Daggar district Buner at present abroad.Whereas in the above mentioned case the mentioned defendant can not be served in the ordinary way, it is, therefore, proclaimed that if the said defendant will/shall not appear personally or through dually authorized agent or pleader in the court at 8.30 am dated 1/2/2025 the proceeding will be taken ex- parte. Given under my hand and seal of this Court.

Court Notice

In the court of sidra jalal civil judge-III/ judicial Magistrate II. Matta district Swat. Case #.18/1. Next Institution 15/02/2024. Next Hearing date. 15/02/2025. Abdul Ahad VS Abdul Qayyum. Notice to defendant.(1) Abdul Qayyum(4) Muhammad Rahim(5) Muhammad Naeem sons Gul R/o.s Gatt Ghari tehsil matta district Swat. Whereas the above named cannot be served in ordinary manner it is therefore proclaimed it is therefore proclaimed or through dually authorized agent or pleader in the court on 15/02/2025. at 8.30 am. Ex- parte proceeding will be initiated against you. Issued today on 23/01/2025 under my signature and seal of the court.

Court Notice

In the Court of Irum Bashir, Civil Judge - V, Swabi, Sakhwat Shah VS Shams-ul-Wahab Suit Number: 35/1, Institution Date : 03-06-2023, Hearing Date : 24-02-2025, Notice to: Defendant (13) Kheraz son Sher Wahab, (29) Mati-ur-Rehman son Hamesh Gul heirs dependent (5) Mst. Siaba 5/1 Kamil 5/2 Tilla Muhammad sons Mst. 5/3 Tajamul daughters Siaba late, R/o Manri Payan, Teh, & Distt. Swabi. The service through ordinary means is difficult, so you are informed to attend the Court on 24-02-2025 personally, through counsel or attorney to avoid ex-parte proceeding.

Court Notice

In the Court of Irum Bashir, Civil Judge - V, Swabi, Raziq Dad VS Said Johar. Suit Number: 55/1, Institution Date : 03-02-2024, Hearing Date : 26-02-2025, Subject: Dakhalayati Notice to: (1) Said Johar (2) Muhammad Tariq (3) Javed Akhtar sons Safarash Khan, (1) Asad Zia son Mst. (5) Sunny (6) Marwa (7) Munza daughter (8) Mst. Naseem widow Zarwali Khan, (9) Abdullah son (10) Mst. Sana, (11) Saba Gul (12) Lubna, (13) Fida (14) Amna daughter (15) Mst.Khamid widow Inayat Khan, (16) Mst. Nargas, (17) Answer Zia, (18) Ghazala daughter Said Rehman, (19) Fazal Rehman son Mirza Khan (Heirs Mst. Begum Jan widow Awal Khan) (20) Muhammad Aqeel, (21) Muhammad Hamid, (22) Muhammad Hashim sons Khaliqdad, (23) Mst. Mukhtiar Begum widow Khaliqdad, (24) Ansar Hayat son Fazal Hayat R/o Kala, Teh, & Distt. Swabi. The service through ordinary means is difficult, so you are informed to attend the Court on 26-02-2025 personally, through counsel or attorney to avoid ex-parte proceeding.

Court Notice

In the court of sidra jalal civil judge-III/ Ilaqa Qazi/ judicial Magistrate II. Matta district Swat.Case #182/1. Institution 26/11/2024. Next Hearing date. 17/02/025. Syed Murtaza etc. Vs Dost Muhammad etc. Notice to defendant.(1) Dost Muhammad khan.(2) Jehanzeb khan.(3) Jehan sher khan (Late).(3/1) Mst. Iran widow (3/2) Mst. Aziza Begum widow.s.(3/3) Jehangir khan.(3/4) Alamgir khan sons Jehan sher khan.(4) Ihsan ullah khan.(5) Ihtisham ullah khan sons Muhammad Nisar khan.(6) Nemat Abdul Qadir khan (late) s/o Muhammad Nisar through Heirs below(6/4) Mst. Shahida widow.(6/2) sulaman khan.(6/3) Mst. Sana khan.(6/4) Mst. Husna.(6/5) Mst. Sapna daughters Nemat Abdu qadir khan.(7) Akram ullah khan s/o Muhammad Nisar khan.(8) Ghazi Abdul Ghani(Late) through Heirs.(8/1) Mst. Laila khan widow.(8/2) Zarak khan son.(8/3) Mst. Saba Munir khan.(8/5) Mst.Zarsh khan (daughters) Ghazi Abdul Ghani.(9) Inam ullah khan(Late).(9/2) Mst. Jamala (widow).(9/2) Muhammad shiraz khan.(9/3) Muhammad Riaz khan sons.(9/4) Mst. Sadia.(9/5) Mst. Mullanai. 9/6) Mst. Sonia khan daughters Inam ullah khan.(10) Bacha sardara.(11) Mst. Bacha Hilal widow.s. Gululam Muhammad khan (Late).(12) Jan Muhammad.(13). Shah Muhammad khan.(14) sahib Nawab.(15) Jan Nawab.(16) Muhammad Anwar khan. (17) Mst. Tasleem daughters and sons Gululam Muhammad khan.(18) Mst.Sahib Begum (widow).(19) Akram ali khan.(20) Shujaat ali khan sons Sultan Muhammad khan.(24) Haroon Bacha.(25) Noor Muhammad khan sons Faliqoos khan r/o Baidara tehsil matta district Swat. Whereas the above named cannot be served in ordinary manner it is therefore proclaimed or through dually authorized agent or pleader in the court on 17/02/2025. at 8.30 am. Ex- parte proceeding will be initiated against you. seal of the court.



ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Industries and Production, Rana Tanveer Hussain chairing a Cabinet Committee meeting on closure of Utility Stores Corporation operations.



PCB elated with overwhelming response to ICC CT tickets

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) has expressed satisfaction with the public response to ticket sales for the ICC Champions Trophy 2025 beginning next month (February).

Tickets for Pakistan vs New Zealand (February 19, Karachi), Australia vs England (February 22, Lahore), Pakistan vs Bangladesh (February 27, Rawalpindi) matches are completely sold out, said a statement issued here.

Initially, the PCB had made 30% of tickets available for online sale. Meanwhile, the tickets will be available for physical purchase starting February 3 at TCS Express Centers, with over 100 outlets across the country.

PCB officials have expressed satisfaction with the public response

to ticket sales, noting that tickets sold out within hours. This strong demand reflects the excitement of Pakistani cricket fans.

The PCB has reassured fans that it will ensure as many spectators as possible can attend the matches, demonstrating its commitment to supporting Pakistani cricket enthusiasts.

Pakistan Women's camp to begin in Multan on Sunday

The Pakistan Cricket Board has announced a 27-day training camp for the Pakistan women cricketers in Multan to prepare for the ICC Women's World Cup Qualifiers 2025.

The camp will begin on Sunday, 2 February at the Inzamam-ul-Haq High Performance Centre, while the players and support staff will assemble on Saturday.

A total of 31 players,

including PCB's 16 centrally contracted women cricketers, have been invited to the training camp, which involves regular sessions on fitness training, skill enhancement and seven 50-over practice matches throughout the month of February.

The players will use the high-quality facilities available at the Inzamam-ul-Haq High-Performance Centre, while the matches will be played at the Multan Cricket Stadium.

Head coach of Pakistan Women's team and former Test cricketer Mohammad Wasim, who took up the role in July 2024, will lead the camp.

Pakistan will feature in the ICC Women's World Cup 2025 Qualifiers along with Bangladesh, Ireland, Scotland, Thailand and West Indies, in a bid to qualify for the mega event. The finalists of the tournament will join the

top six teams of the ICC Women's Championship 2022-25 for the eight-team ICC Women's World Cup.

List of players invited to the camp:

Batters – Aliya Riaz, Ayesha Zafar, Eymen Fatima, Gull Feroza, Gull Rukh, Hafsa Khalid, Iram Javed, Natalia Parvaiz, Sadaf Shamas, Saira Jebeen, Shawaal Zulfiqar, and Sidra Amin.

Wicketkeepers – Muneeba Ali, Najiha Alvi and Sidra Nawaz

All-rounders – Fatima Sana, Omaira Sohail, Rameen Shamim, Syeda Aroob Shah, and Tuba Hassan

Spinners – Ghulam Fatima, Mahnoor Aftab, Nashra Sundhu, Sadia Iqbal, Tania Saeed, and Umm-e-Hani

Pacers – Diana Baig, Fatima Khan, Tasma Rubab, Waheeda Akhtar and Zaib-un-Nisa Niaz



GALLE, SRI LANKA: Sri Lankan team enjoys after taking wicket of Steve Smith of Australia after he was dismissed by Jeffrey Vandersay during day two of the First Test match.

SL crumble after Khawaja, Inglis set up mammoth Australia total

GALLE (ESPNCricinfo): Usman Khawaja's maiden Test double century and a rapid ton from debutant Josh Inglis decimated a flagging Sri Lanka before Australia's attack breathed life into a slow Galle surface late on day two.

After stand-in captain Steven Smith declared Australia's innings on 654 for 6 midway through the final session, Sri Lanka's top order fell apart and they lost three wickets inside the opening 10 overs. Sri Lanka reached 44 for 3 when rain ended the day's play prematurely with Australia enjoying a firm grip on the first Test.

Exhausted after spending 154 overs in the field, openers Oshada Fernando and Dimuth Karunaratne were dismissed within the first five overs.

With Mitchell Starc selected as Australia's only frontline quick, there was intrigue over who would share the new ball with him. Left-arm spinner Matthew Kuhnemann, playing in his first Test match in almost two years, was an inspired choice and claimed Fernando lbw for 7 in his first over.

Bowling from around the wicket, Kuhnemann trapped him on the flap of his front pad as Fernando reviewed in vain. Kuhnemann was mightily pleased when the decision was upheld having made a speedy recovery from a thumb injury sustained in a BBL match on January 16. Sri Lanka slid further when Karunaratne edged a short-of-a-length delivery from Starc to gully, where substitute fielder Nathan McSweeney completed a catch on the juggle having desperately turned around and dived after the ball bobbed over his head.

Having had little to do in the recent series against India, offspinner Nathan Lyon completed Australia's near perfect day with the wicket of Angelo Mathews, who was brilliantly caught by a diving Travis Head at short leg.

Australia have completely capitalised on winning a favourable toss and batting first on a slow sur-

face amid stifling humidity as they amassed their highest ever total against Sri Lanka.

Khawaja finished with 232 off 352 balls and fell early in the second session dominated by Inglis, who became the first Australian debutant to score a Test century since Adam Voges - his Western Australia coach - in 2015.

England-born Inglis reached his century off just 90 balls and he jumped high before punching the air with his proud parents visibly emotional in the terraces. He joined Michael Clarke and Shaun Marsh as Australian century-makers on Test debut in Asia.

Inglis showcased his proficiency against spin with decisive footwork either by skipping down the track or rocking back deep into the crease. His aggressiveness and maturity, having captained Australia in ODI and T20I cricket recently, reinforced why the selectors were keen to shoehorn him in the side.

Inglis, the Western Australia wicketkeeper playing as a specialist batter, celebrated his milestone with incumbent keeper Alex Carey at the crease before he fell on 102 having faced 94 balls.

Khawaja had earlier notched his highest Test score, overtaking his 195 not out against South Africa at the SCG in 2023 when rain forced an Australia declaration.

Khawaja and Smith were the fulcrum of Australia's massive first innings, combining for a 266-run partnership. Smith was the only wicket to fall in the morning session after being trapped lbw for 141 by legspinner Jeffrey Vandersay, Sri Lanka's most threatening bowler.

Smith added 37 runs to his overnight tally after a momentous opening day where he became the fourth Australian to reach 10,000 Test runs en route to a 35th century.

The 38-year-old Khawaja celebrated his first Test double century just before lunch as he kneeled down and bowed

to the turf as the fans, many of whom are Australians, applauded with gusto.

He had earlier overtaken Justin Langer's 166 in Colombo in 2004 as the highest score by an Australian in Sri Lanka. Having struggled against spin earlier in his career in South Asia, Khawaja has become only the second Australian after Allan Border to make Test centuries in India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

Khawaja has wound back the clock after an 18-month Test-century drought, having most recently against India struggled at the hands of tormentor Jasprit Bumrah.

Sri Lanka utilised just their four frontline bowlers with sole quick Asith Fernando bowling just 15 overs. Left-arm spinner Prabath Jayasuriya was effectively blunted with 3 for 193 off 60 overs in a far cry from when he claimed 12 wickets against Australia on the same ground in 2022.

Sri Lanka's attack were unable to counter Australia's aggressive approach and stem the flow of runs. Their tardy performance in the field on the opening day, where they missed several opportunities to dismiss Khawaja and Smith, proved costly.

Australia resumed on 330 for 2 with play starting 15 minutes early after rain ended day one prematurely. After resorting to a defensive leg-stump tactic late on day one, Jayasuriya attacked the stumps and aimed to skid the second new ball on.

But after four overs, Smith had enough and showed his first signs of aggression by skipping down the wicket as the partnership passed 200 runs. Khawaja unfurled the reverse sweep to good effect on day one, but was lucky on his first attempt in the morning's play when he only just cleared Peiris over short third for a boundary.

A third straight wicketless session loomed for Sri Lanka until Vandersay deceived Smith with a delivery that straightened

down the line and hit him on the back pad. Vandersay's enthusiastic appeal was initially turned down, but the decision was overturned on review in a massive relief for Sri Lanka.

After waiting almost 100 overs, Inglis finally entered the crease as he chewed gum furiously awaiting his first delivery in Test cricket. He started in fine fashion with a boundary after whipping Vandersay through mid-on and was at ease against spin.

He showcased his confidence by skipping down the track and launching several blows down the ground to race to 44 at a run a ball pace by tea.

Fernando was handed the ball after the interval for the first time in the day's play and tried to provide a spark for his flagging team. But his short delivery was treated with disdain by Inglis, brought up on the WACA's fast and bouncy surface.

Inglis reached his half-century off 51 balls to become the third Australian debutant in as many Tests to reach that landmark, following in the footsteps of Beau Webster and Sam Konstas.

Shortly after the pair reached their 100-run partnership, Inglis was given out lbw on 58 off Nishan Peiris after being struck on the back leg having missed a reverse sweep. But he reviewed immediately and the decision was overturned with a nick on the bottom of the bat detected.

Inglis remained unfettered and continued attacking, but Khawaja's indefatigable knock finally ended when Jayasuriya enticed an edge to wicket-keeper Kusal Mendis.

Inglis reached his ton with a push through the off-side before providing a simple catch to cover as Jayasuriya's toil was again rewarded.

Australia ground Sri Lanka into the ground before Smith finally declared and batting suddenly became extremely difficult for the beleaguered home team.

FIH creates dedicated website page for athletes

ISLAMABAD (APP): As part of its Empowerment and Engagement Strategy, the International Hockey Federation (FIH) has dedicated a page 'Athletes' Corner' for athletes with a wide range of useful information on its website.

The page includes a wide range of useful information for athletes on topics such as athlete welfare, mental health, career development, safe-

guarding, anti-doping, prevention of match manipulation, statistics, access to photos and a link to Athlete365, the official community for elite Athletes and Olympians, said a press release.

An introduction to the FIH Athletes Committee is also available. It reflects FIH's ongoing commitment to supporting athletes, ensuring they have the tools needed to succeed and thrive.

FIH President Tayyab Ikram said, "Athletes are at the centre of everything FIH does. Not only do we have to provide them with the best playing field for them to excel on the pitch, but we also have a duty to support them off the pitch and listen to their challenges, concerns and ideas.

The Athletes' Corner portal has been tailored for this, precisely. I can only encourage all ath-

letes to make full use of this relevant resource and to initiate constructive feedback and debate that will help us in our permanent quest to grow the game."

The portal will be continuously enriched with new content and will urge athletes to express their opinions in order to make it a very interactive platform. It is a major tool to empower and engage with athletes the way forward.



ORLANDO, FLORIDA: Moriya Jutanugarn of Thailand plays her shot from the 13th tee during the first round of the Hilton Grand Vacations Tournament of Champions 2025 at Lake Nona Golf & Country Club on Thursday in Orlando, Florida.

Fans fill stadium for Virat Kohli's first domestic match in 12 years

DELHI (BBC): Thousands of fans filled a stadium in the Indian capital, Delhi, as Virat Kohli made his much-anticipated return to domestic cricket after more than 12 years.

The 36-year-old star batter turned out for Delhi on Thursday in the Ranji Trophy match against the Railways team at the Arun Jaitley stadium.

Kohli's return follows the national cricket board's directive for contracted players to play domestic cricket after India's 3-1 Border-Gavaskar Trophy loss to Australia.

It also comes amid a personal lean patch in Test cricket, where the former Indian captain has struggled for consistency in recent years.

One of India's greatest batters, Kohli has redefined modern cricket with his aggressive and technically sound batting. With more than 27,000 international runs across formats, he has been the backbone of India's middle order for more than a decade.

But his red-ball form has dipped in recent years. Kohli

averaged 54.97 in Test cricket until 2019, but since 2020, it has dipped to 30.72 - and just 22.47 in his last 10 Tests. Since the start of 2024, his average of 23.2 is the ninth lowest among players with a minimum of 10 innings. Kohli's return to the domestic circuit has already generated immense excitement, with fans and experts alike keen to see whether this move helps reignite his form.

Domestic cricket refers to professional competitions played within a country, featuring teams that represent states, regions, or clubs. These tournaments, like the Ranji Trophy, are held during the cricket season.

However, due to the packed international cricket calendar, many top players, including Kohli, prioritise international matches and the hugely lucrative annual Indian Premier League over domestic cricket.

A large crowd gathered outside the stadium on Tuesday after word spread that Kohli would join the Delhi team for training ahead of the game.

Reports said even TV and

YouTube journalists - a rare sight before a domestic match - were present. "He joined his Delhi team-mates for football drills, bouts of laughter, and 100m sprints, before it was time to hit the batting nets," ESPNcricinfo reported. Long queues have been reported outside the stadium as fans have been let in free to watch the game.

Akash Kumar told news agency ANI that he had been standing outside the stadium for almost five hours before the match began and that he had never seen such a crowd for a domestic match.

The captain of the Delhi team, Ayush Badoni, said everyone in the team was "excited and motivated" by Kohli's arrival.

Pratham Singh, the captain of the opposing Railways team, said it was inspiring for them to see Kohli and that they would be "more motivated to do better" in this match.

Fans will have to wait a bit to watch Kohli bat as Delhi won the toss and chose to bowl.

India's red-ball domestic Ranji Trophy season, running from 5 January to 10 March, features 32 teams.

Kohli made his domestic debut in 2006 at 18, scoring just 10 runs in his first match. Over the next six years with the Delhi team, he notched five centuries and as many fifties. His last domestic appearance was in 2012.



Manchester City survive another Champions League scare

MANCHESTER (BBC): Manchester City survived a huge scare as they scraped into the Champions League play-offs with victory over Club Brugge at Etihad Stadium.

Pep Guardiola's Premier League champions knew only victory would suffice to avoid the abject embarrassment of slipping out of the top 24 places in the tournament's new format.

And they were left facing that grim prospect after Raphael Onyedika gave Club Brugge a shock lead as he turned in Ferran Jugla's cross just before half-time.

City needed a response with tension mounting, duly providing it against a Belgian side who showed enough to fully deserve their place in the play-offs.

Mateo Kovacic drove low past former Liverpool goalkeeper Simon Mignolet eight minutes after the break before Joel Odonez turned Josko Gvardiol's cross into his own net as City finally exerted a measure of con-

trol. City settled nerves even more when Savinho scored with a low shot that crept in past Mignolet at his near post as Guardiola was finally able to contemplate further progress in the competition Manchester City won in 2023.

Manchester City and their supporters went through the full range of emotions before the threat of Champions League elimination was finally banished at Etihad Stadium.

City were unconvincing for large parts of the game, the stadium stunned when Onyedika drove low past Ederson on the stroke of half-time, crowning the sort of counter-attack that had worried a visibly anxious Guardiola throughout the first half.

They needed renewed urgency and vigour after the break, Guardiola turning to the lively Savinho to replace the labouring Ilkay Gundogan.

The play worked as

Kovacic equalised quickly, but Club Brugge still posed a real danger until Odonez could only divert Gvardiol's powerful cross into his own net.

Manchester City relaxed. The Etihad relaxed. And it was a smiling Guardiola that greeted the final whistle with a mixture of relief and elation.

It has been a bumpy and uncomfortable ride - but at least City now have the opportunity to progress deeper into the competition.

There were some groans around the Etihad just after the final whistle when it was announced that Manchester City's play-off opponents would likely be either Bayern Munich or Real Madrid.

This path into the last 16 was confirmed minutes later - and it was easy to understand the concerns of City's fans after another nail-biting night, before even that play-off consolation prize was secured.

Their Champions League

campaign has been unconvincing, unpredictable and traumatic to the last after they went in at half-time scrambling for survival.

They will be boosted by being able to draft in new signings such as forward Omar Marmoush if they reach the knockout phase, but Guardiola the realist will know City will have to roll themselves back to something like their old selves if they are to reach the last 16.

Holders Real Madrid are showing the usual signs of post-New Year life as Kylian Mbappe settles to his task, while former City captain Vincent Kompany will not return to his old club with his Bayern Munich team in fear if their form this season continues.

City have the talent and capability to beat either opponent, but they must move up several levels - and quickly - if they are to take their Champions League interest beyond the play-off stage.



In brief

Jawad assumes charge as DIG

ISLAMABAD (APP): Muhammad Jawad Tariq officially took charge as the Deputy Inspector General (DIG) of Islamabad on Thursday, replacing Ali Raza, who has been posted as DIG Security and Headquarters. A public relations officer told APP that upon assuming his responsibilities, DIG Tariq emphasized the importance of upholding the rule of law and ensuring the safety of citizens. "It must be clear to everyone that we all have a shared responsibility to enforce the law and protect the lives and property of citizens. We must perform our duties with utmost dedication, and no one, including myself, is above the law," he stated. Meanwhile, Shoaib Khan has been appointed as the Senior Superintendent of Police Operations Islamabad.

Land mafia opens fire

ISLAMABAD (APP): Armed members of a land mafia opened indiscriminate fire on a police team in Margalla Orchard on Thursday as officers arrived to reclaim illegally occupied land. A public relations officer told APP that the incident occurred when Shehzad Town Police arrived at the scene to reclaim illegally occupied land in Margalla Orchard near COMSATS University. Fortunately, no casualties were reported. He said Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Operations Shoaib Khan promptly reached the location upon receiving information about the attack. Islamabad Police swiftly launched an operation, arresting the suspects involved in the firing and thwarting the land mafia's attempt. SSP Shoaib stated that the Islamabad Police remain vigilant against land grabbers and their accomplices, vowing that no illegal occupation of citizens' properties will be tolerated. SSP emphasized that strict legal action will be taken against violators without discrimination. "No one is above the law, and the police force will continue its indiscriminate operations against criminal elements," he added.

Police solve murder case

RAWALPINDI (APP): The R A Bazaar Police on Thursday solved the mystery of the dead body of Abdul Wahab found in the trunk of a car a few days ago as the close friends of the deceased turned his murderers. A Rawalpindi Police spokesman said in a statement that the deceased's friends Ali Hussain, Ghulam Habib and Farid had killed him after the exchange of hot words over a minor issue. The accused then dumped his body in the trunk of the car, which was later parked in the area of R A Bazaar Police Station. The police used all means including human intelligence to trace and arrest the accused.

CPO orders action

RAWALPINDI (APP): CPO Rawalpindi Syed Khalid Hamdani on Thursday took notice of the complaints against a private housing society and ordered the DSP Cantt to take action in this regard. The affectees of the housing society lodged their complaints with the CPO during his Khuli Kachery at the office of Sub-Divisional Police Officer Cantt. He directed that the district administration should also be contacted to resolve the problems of the society victims. Besides SSP Operations Kashif Zulfiqar, ASP Taxila and DSP Cantt, station house officers concerned were also present.

‘Pakistan can learn from China’s model of development’

ISLAMABAD (APP): Federal Minister for Maritime Affairs, Qaiser Ahmed Sheikh, highlighted China's remarkable economic and social progress, emphasizing its role as a model for development, during his speech at the Chinese Spring Festival New Year Celebrations organized by China Media Group (CMG).

The minister praised China for uplifting its people through a strong welfare system, eliminating economic disparities, and significantly improving living standards.

He stated that China has successfully removed the gap between the rich and poor and has become a global example of sustainable development.

He shed light on China's economic transformation, citing its \$3.5 trillion in exports, achieved through high-quality, affordable products and a business-friendly environment.

He emphasized that a strong focus on education and technical training has been key to China's industrial and technological advancement, along with ease of doing business, enabling rapid economic growth and global competi-

tiveness.

He noted that Pakistan, despite its potential, faces economic challenges. Pakistan has a 9-10% share in global poverty, but the government is taking initiatives to improve living standards and has successfully reduced the rising pace of inflation. He also highlighted that the government has set a \$35 billion target for remittances to boost economic stability.

Reflecting on Pakistan's economic journey, the minister pointed out that from 1947 to 1990, Pakistan was on a strong growth trajectory despite limited resources.

During that period, Pakistan's GDP was 50% higher than India's. He recalled that Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh once sought advice from Dr. Mahbub ul Haq regarding Pakistan's economic policies. However, post-1990, India's economy surged, growing 12 times faster than Pakistan's due to policy consistency and economic reforms.

Highlighting his own contributions to Pakistan's education sector, the minister mentioned his 35-year tenure as a Board Member of FAST University and his role in establishing its fifth

campus in Chinot. He stated that he has learned from China's education model, which prioritizes technical skills and innovation.

The minister reaffirmed the deep-rooted friendship between Pakistan and China, stressing that China's unwavering support has been instrumental in Pakistan's infrastructure and economic development.

He credited CPEC (China-Pakistan Economic Corridor) for revolutionizing Pakistan's connectivity, trade, and energy sectors.

He said that China's investment through CPEC has not only enhanced Pakistan's transportation network but also created thousands of jobs and boosted industrial growth.

He also emphasized Pakistan's strategic advantage due to its deep-sea ports, particularly Gwadar, which holds immense potential for regional trade.

The minister concluded by reiterating the need for policy consistency, investment in education, and industrial growth to follow China's path of progress. He asserted that China is a true model for development, and Pakistan can achieve similar success by adopting its strategic policies.

SP Dolphin directs officers to enhance patrolling

ISLAMABAD (APP): Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) Police's Superintendent of Police (SP) Dolphin, Iqbal Hussain, briefed the Dolphin Squad officers at Police Lines Headquarters on Thursday, emphasizing the need for more effective patrolling to curb crime in the capital.

An official told APP that during the briefing, SP Dolphin emphasized the need to make patrols more effective in combating crimes in Islamabad, particularly by positioning themselves strategically in areas with higher crime rates.

Encouragement was extended for arrests of criminals, and a strict zero-tolerance policy against corruption within the police force was underscored.

Furthermore, the SP Dolphin reiterated the importance of all police officers in the prevention and control of crimes, emphasizing their role in ensuring the safety of lives and property of the citizens.

The formation of the Dolphin Squad aims to instill confidence in citizens regarding their safety, not tarnish the department's reputation. It's essential for

officers to exhibit good conduct and adhere to clear policies aimed at crime control, he added. Officers were reminded of their duty to respond promptly to reports of crimes and to conduct searches for suspicious individuals or vehicles without license plates.

He further said that protecting the lives and property of citizens remains the top priority of Islamabad Police. He expressed the hope that all officers would play a vital role in ensuring the safety of citizens and enhancing the department's reputation.

Theatre training workshop concluded

ISLAMABAD (APP): The three-day Theatre Training Workshop for students and professionals concluded at the Pakistan National Council of the Arts (PNCA) on Thursday, equipping participants with valuable insights and practical knowledge about the performing arts.

The participants were registered online, with a total of 35 students enrolling for the workshop. Renowned theatre expert and PNCA Program Organizer, Muhammad Waqar Azim, moderated the sessions.

During the inaugural ceremony, PNCA Director General, Muhammad Ayoub Jamali welcomed the participants and reaffirmed the council's commitment to promoting theatre and the performing arts.

He emphasized that PNCA will continue organizing such workshops to

support and nurture artistic talent in Pakistan.

The first day of the workshop focused on the evolution of theatre worldwide, the history and development of theatre in Pakistan, and the social significance of drama.

The sessions also covered universal acting principles, their application across different media, and essential techniques for actors to enhance expressions and emotions.

On the second day, participants were trained in the role of body language in character development, with practical exercises to improve their performance. They also explored voice modulation, including the use of voice with and without a microphone.

The sessions introduced various theatrical approaches, including realism, symbolism, and abstract drama, to help actors shape their imagina-

tive and creative abilities.

The final day covered the technical dimensions of theatre, including lighting, set design, sound effects, musical effects, and costume selection. Prominent playwright and satirist, Aslam Mughal, along with Director of Bhitai Arts Council, Rafiq Essani, shared their insights and experiences with the participants.

As a culmination of their training, the participants staged a short play highlighting the issue of illegal migration, performed on the closing day.

At the closing ceremony, PNCA Performing Arts Division Director Samiullah Baloch, senior actor and playwright Aslam Mughal, and Director of Bhitai Arts Council Rafiq Essani distributed certificates among the participants, appreciating their enthusiasm and commitment to theatre.

CAYA Youth Summit 2025 delegates explore Pakistan’s cultural and historical landmarks

ISLAMABAD (APP): Delegates of the Commonwealth Asia Youth Alliance (CAYA) Summit 2025, currently underway in Islamabad, visited the Pakistan Monument, its adjoining museum, and the iconic Faisal Mosque as part of their cultural immersion program.

The visit provided the young leaders from Commonwealth nations an opportunity to experience Pakistan's rich history, cultural diversity, and architectural grandeur.

The delegation, led by Layne Robinson from Commonwealth Secretariat, comprising youth advocates, policymakers, and changemakers from across Asia, began their tour at the Pakistan Monument, a national sym-

bol that represents the unity and resilience of the Pakistani people.

The structure, shaped like blooming petals, stands as a tribute to the country's independence and sacrifices made for its sovereignty.

"The Pakistan Monument is more than just a structure; it tells a story of a nation's journey, struggles, and aspirations. Standing here, I feel a deep respect for Pakistan's rich history," remarked a delegate from Sri Lanka.

Adjacent to the monument, the delegates explored the Pakistan Monument Museum, which houses exhibits detailing the country's struggle for independence, cultural evolution, and historical milestones.

The museum's interactive displays, archival photographs, and life-size sculptures provided a vivid insight into Pakistan's past.

"As someone interested in history, this museum was a treasure trove of knowledge. It was fascinating to learn about the key figures in Pakistan's independence movement and see historical artifacts up close," commented a participant from Bangladesh.

Following the museum visit, the delegation proceeded to the Faisal Mosque, one of the largest and most striking mosques in the world.

Situated against the backdrop of the Margalla Hills, the mosque's modern yet spiritual architecture captivated the visitors.

"The Faisal Mosque is



ISLAMABAD: Women attending Migration Media Awards 2025 “Raising Awareness on Migration Through Media Report in Pakistan”.

Ayaz Sadiq felicitates newly elected office bearers

ISLAMABAD (APP): Speaker National Assembly Sardar Ayaz Sadiq has extended his heartfelt congratulations to the newly elected office-bearers of the Rawalpindi Islamabad Union of Journalists (RIUJ) as a result of their annual elections.

The newly elected office bearers include Tariq Ali Virk (President), Asif Bashir Chaudhry (General Secretary), Bashir Usmani (Senior Vice President), Ammar Barlas (Vice President), Nadeem Chaudhry (Finance Secretary), Raja Bashir Usmani, Afshan Qureshi, Asma Nawaz, Sobia Mushtaq, Aftab Jahan, Ali Akhtar, Tasleem Abbasi, Rana Farhan Aslam, Ghufan Chishti, Nawabzada Shah Ali, and Asad Sheer (Executive Body Members).

In his congratulatory message, Speaker National Assembly Sardar Ayaz Sadiq expressed that the success of the newly elected officials is a clear indication of the strong trust reposed in their leadership by the journalist community.

Speaker National Assembly Sardar Ayaz Sadiq expressed confidence that the new office-bearers will play a significant role in addressing the challenges faced by the journalist community of Rawalpindi Islamabad Union of Journalists (RIUJ).

Ayaz Sadiq has further stated that the contributions of the journalist community towards the restoration and strengthening of democracy are invaluable.

He reaffirmed his commitment that Parliament will continue to play an active role in promoting the welfare of the journalistic community and addressing their concerns.

Ayaz Sadiq also expressed hope that the newly elected office-bearers of RIUJ will continue to serve diligently in promoting democracy in the country and in raising public issues within the corridors of power.

He conveyed his best wishes for the future success and accomplishments of the newly elected officials of Rawalpindi Islamabad Union of Journalists.

Key export issues:

NA body calls for enhancing CSR allocation, action

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Standing Committee on Commerce has called for enhancing Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) allocation and action on key export issues in the country.

The Standing Committee on Commerce convened at the Parliament House, here under the Chairmanship of Muhammad Jawed Hanif Khan, MNA.

The Standing Committee on Commerce made several recommendations to improve the functioning of the Ministry of Commerce and the country's export sector. Among major discussions, the Committee urged the insurance companies operating under the Ministry's domain to increase their contributions to Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives and ensure these funds are effectively utilized.

The Committee also turned its focus to the Trading Corporation of Pakistan (TCP), urging swift action to resolve long-standing issues of receivables and pending debts, particularly those owed by various ministries and organizations. It was emphasized that clearing these liabilities is crucial for the financial health and operational efficiency of the TCP.

In response to concerns over the default of sugar mills, it was informed that the defaulters had been blacklisted. A pressing issue raised by Ms. Sharmila Shiba Faruqi Hashaam, through Calling Attention Notice, No. 20, was the disruption in rice exports, particularly the 72 interceptions made by the EU.

The Committee expressed deep concern over this matter. The Committee pointed to quality control issues, particularly in the inspection process, as the root cause of these challenges. It was revealed that the National Food Security Department has not been able to address these quality issues effectively, with the government proposing a new regulatory authority to ensure better oversight. The Committee noted that Punjab and Sindh together account for 5 million tons of rice exports, and the interceptions had a significant impact on these exports.

However, Secretary of the Ministry of Commerce clarified that no formal warning had been issued by the EU, dispelling any misconceptions regarding the issue. He explained that the lack of a national framework for food security had led to the proposal for a new empowered authority, which would be better equipped to handle such challenges with improved security and expertise.

The Committee also reviewed the government's ambitious target of \$ 60 billion in exports by the end of 2029.

Members expressed skepticism about the feasibility of achieving this target, urging the Ministry to provide more concrete details on the steps and strategies required to meet this goal. A more detailed plan will be expected at the next meeting.

The meeting was attended by MNAs, Muhammad Mubeen Arif, Mr. Usama Ahmed Mela, Muhammad Ali Sarfaraz, Ms. Shaista Khan, Rana Atif, Muhammad Ahmed Chattha Gul Asghar Khan, Muhammad Atif, Ms. Kiran Haider and Khurshid Ahmed Junejo in person whereas, Dr. Mirza Ikhtiar Baig, Asad Alam Niazi and Ms. Sharmila Sahiba Faruqi Hashaam, attended the meeting virtually.

Parliamentary Secretary on Commerce and other senior officers from the Ministry of Commerce, NICL, PakRe, SLIC and TDAP were also present in the meeting.

ANF arrests nine drug traffickers in operations

RAWALPINDI (APP): Anti Narcotics Force (ANF) in its continued operations against the drug traffickers has arrested 09 suspects arrested in 10 operations.

According to the spokesman ANF, crackdowns on drug smuggling in educational institutions and various cities of the country were conducted in which a total of 55.638 kg of drugs worth over Rs.8.7 million recovered in operations.

During operations in educational institutions, a total of 37 grams of hashish was recovered from the possession of two suspects near two different educational institutions in

Mansehra. The arrested suspects confessed to selling drugs to students of educational institutions.

A quantity of 104 grams of ice and 70 grams of hashish were recovered from the luggage of a passenger going to Australia, at Islamabad International Airport.

Moreover, 02 grams of hashish and 02 grams of ice were recovered from the clothes of another passenger going to Sharjah from Islamabad Airport.

The ANF through its intelligence based information followed a vehicle near Golra Morr in Rawalpindi and recovered 18 kg of hashish.

In another crackdown, 9.6 kg of hashish was recovered from the possession of 3 suspects, includ-

ing 2 women, near M-1 Motorway Islamabad. 16.8 kg of hashish was recovered from a vehicle near Tarbela Road in Attock, the suspect was arrested.

In Lahore, 08 kg of ice hidden in the shoulder bag of the suspect was recovered near Niazi Base, and 1.690 kg of weed was recovered from a parcel sent from Karachi through the Cargo Office in Lahore.

ANF also conducted an operation in Peshawar and recovered 1 kg of ice from a parcel sent to Gujarat at the Courier Office in Peshawar. The spokesman informed that cases have been registered against the arrested suspects under the Narcotics Control Act and an investigation has been initiated.

ITP launches campaign

ISLAMABAD (APP): Islamabad Traffic Police (ITP) organized a special flower and candy campaign to promote community policing and educate citizens about traffic laws on Thursday. According to police spokesman, during the campaign, Chief Traffic Officer Islamabad Muhammad Sarfraz Virk, Citizen Traffic Liaison committee, and Islamabad Traffic Police's education wing provided special information on driver safety and cautious driving in various neighborhoods.

Additionally, drivers involved in traffic violations were intercepted and instead of fines, they were informed of their mistakes with flowers and candies, aiming to sensitively communicate their errors and encourage adherence to laws in the future.

The purpose of this campaign is to raise awareness among drivers about compliance with traffic laws and promote positive attitudes.

CTO Islamabad, Muhammad Sarfraz Virk, said that through this campaign, Islamabad Traffic Police is fostering positive relationships with citizens and emphasizing the importance of traffic laws.

CTO expressed hope that this initiative would increase drivers' awareness of law compliance and reduce traffic accidents. Moreover, this campaign is ongoing in various areas of Islamabad and has received positive feedback from the public. Citizens have appreciated this initiative and hope it will lead to better enforcement of traffic laws.

Ambassador attends moot

KABUL (BNA): Mawlawi Nasir Ahmad Haqqani, the First Secretary and Acting Ambassador of IEA in Iran, participated in the International Conference on Artificial Intelligence and the Future of Civilization held in Tehran. The event, brought together a diverse group of attendees, including scientists, foreign ambassadors, and diplomats, alongside Iranian officials. Notable figures included Mohammad Mokhber, advisor and deputy leader of Iran.

MRRD holds workshop

KABUL (BNA): Acting Minister of Rural Rehabilitation and Development, Mullah Mohammad Yunus Akhundzada, addressed a three-day training workshop aimed at improving project execution in rural areas. In his opening remarks, Akhundzada highlighted the ministry's vital role in implementing development projects across all provinces. He urged provincial directors to prioritize the needs of the most vulnerable segments of the population during project execution.

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

\$1.5m contract signed to build 14 telecom sites

KABUL (TOLONews): The Afghanistan Telecommunication Regulatory Authority (ATRA) has signed a \$1.5 million contract for the establishment of 14 telecommunication sites in several provinces.

According to the spokesperson for the Ministry of Telecommunications and Information Technology, this contract has been signed between ATRA and several companies, under which 14 telecommunication sites will be built in Kabul, Kandahar, Paktia, Paktika, Khost, and other provinces.

Enayatullah Alokozay, the spokesperson for the Ministry of Telecommunications and Information Technology, stated: "These 14 telecommunication sites have been planned for areas deprived of telecommunication services. They will be operational within a year, and once activated, these areas will be covered by telecommunication services."

Meanwhile, citizens consider the establishment of telecommunication sites in remote parts of the country to be a significant step.

Ahmad, a resident of Kabul, told TOLONews: "The creation of around 14 telecommunication sites in various provinces, especially in remote areas, is a positive initiative as it reduces people's difficulties and provides employment opportunities."

Zmary Salangi, another resident of Kabul, said: "Telecommunication sites are indeed a sign of progress and can have a positive impact on the country's development."

According to statistics from the Ministry of Telecommunications and Information Technology, work is currently underway on more than 570 telecommunication sites across the country, with over 50 of them recently becoming operational.

Talks necessary to resolve problems, says Araghchi



KABUL (Ariana News): Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi has said that talks are necessary to resolve the problems between his country and neighboring Afghanistan.

He said that the fight

dialogue.

The diplomat said that during his visit to Kabul, IEA officials emphasized Afghanistan's commitment to ensuring Iran's water rights in accordance with the 1973 treaty.

Araghchi also said that Kabul and Tehran have agreed to work on a joint plan for the dignified return of Afghan migrants from Iran.

Araghchi visited Kabul on Sunday and met with senior officials of the Islamic Emirate, including the prime minister and acting ministers of foreign affairs and defense, to discuss strengthening bilateral relations.

Land distribution for industrial parks started

KABUL (TOLONews): Following the decision of the leader of the Islamic Emirate, the process of distributing land for industrial parks has begun in many provinces across the country.

In addition to allocating approximately 4,000 acres of land in four areas surrounding the capital, Kabul, separate allocations include 20,000 acres for the provinces of Kandahar, Nangarhar, and Balkh, 10,000 acres for Kunduz, and 1,000 acres for each of the other provinces, which are set to be distributed accordingly.

Raz Mohammad Yasar, the head of industry and trade in Parwan, stated: "By the decree of Amir-ul-Mu'minin, 1,000 acres of land have been allocated for the establishment of industrial parks in Parwan province, with 500 acres designated in Shinwari district and another 500 acres in Bagram district."

Factory owners see the land distribution for industrial parks as a significant step in supporting domestic production and facilitating industrial activities in the country.

Shahabuddin, a factory owner from Ghazni, said: "Now that we have heard this promising news, we hope the practical distribution of land begins as soon as possible so that industrial activities can flourish."

Mukhtar Ahmad, another factory owner from Ghazni, said: "This is excellent news for traders and for us. Having a suitable location for industrial parks will help us efficiently carry out our work."

While many factory owners have praised this initiative, they have also called for the resolution of existing challenges, particularly the shortage of electricity.

Yama Ahmadi Arsalan, the head of a manufacturing plant in Parwan, stated: "First and foremost, industrialists need support. Infrastructure, including electricity and water, must be provided so that factories can operate efficiently."

Ahmad Farid, another factory owner in Parwan, noted: "We have been investing and operating in this location for nearly 18 years. Land distribution alone cannot solve the problems of industrialists; all issues, especially the electricity shortage, must be addressed."

According to officials, approximately 5,000 small and large manufacturing factories are currently operating across the country, providing employment opportunities for more than 400,000 people.

Kabul Municipality collects 3.35 billion Afghanis in five months



KABUL (TOLONews): The Kabul Municipality has reported the collection of over 3.35 billion Afghanis in revenue over the past five months.

Officials of the department, in their five-month performance report, stated that during this period, 165 development projects

have been planned across 22 districts of Kabul City, of which 82 projects are currently underway, 18 have been completed, and the remaining are in the procurement phase.

Mohammad Qasim Afghan, Director of Planning, Policy, Monitoring, and

Evaluation at Kabul Municipality, said: "Many projects related to road maintenance and preservation have been initiated, and most of them have already reached the implementation stage."

The cultural advisor of Kabul Municipality stated that in the construction

Relatives of massacred family demand justice

KHOST (TOLONews): Thirteen members of a family, including women and children, were killed by unidentified gunmen on Tuesday night in the Ali Sher and Tere Zayi district of Khost province.

The relatives of the victims are urging authorities to arrest those responsible and bring them to justice.

According to them, the family had no enmity with anyone. The incident took place in the Bokhana area of Ali Sher and Tere Zayi district in Khost.

Teika Khan Mahir, a relative of the victims, stated: "We have no enmity with anyone and do not suspect anyone. A few suspects have been detained and taken to the district center, but further details will emerge after criminal investigations."

Meanwhile, local residents are calling for the identification and arrest of the perpetrators.

Sediqullah Siyar, a resident of Ali Sher and Tere Zayi district, said: "We urge security officials to arrest the perpetrators as soon as possible and execute them publicly so that no one dares to commit such crimes in the future."

Azim, another resident of the district, stated: "We ask the government to prevent such incidents. These kinds of events have negative effects on both the present and future generations."

The Khost security command has reported that five individuals have been arrested in connection with the incident.

Abdul Halim Haidar, the head of security for Khost security command, said: "At 7 AM, we arrested the suspected individuals. Five people have been detained in connection with this incident, and further investigations are ongoing."

Authorities at the Khost security command added that the investigation is continuing and the perpetrators will soon be brought to justice.

39 prisoners released

GHOR (BNA): A decree from the the Supreme Leader, has resulted in the release of 39 prisoners from the central prison in Ghor province. Among those freed are 36 men and three women, with several other inmates also benefiting from commuted sentences.

Officials responsible for prison affairs in Ghor confirmed to the Bakhtar News Agency that the Supreme Leader's directive facilitated these releases and sentence reductions.

The decision has sparked a wave of relief and appreciation among the freed prisoners, many of whom had been incarcerated for various offenses, including moral crimes, robbery, and drug trafficking.

sector, more than 417 building plans have been approved and distributed to the public, while 1,200 illegal construction projects have been halted.

According to Nematullah Barakzai, in an effort to reduce air pollution, the municipality has inspected over 2,300 high-rise buildings, bath-houses, and other smoke-emitting facilities, resulting in the closure of 767 units.

Barakzai further explained: "A thorough inspection has been conducted, and approximately 767 businesses have been shut down due to violations. These closures are temporary."

He also announced that construction of three vehicle overpasses, aimed at reducing traffic congestion in the areas of Manar-e-Nijat, Charrahi Baraki, and in front of the Kabul Governor's Office, will commence next month.

Meanwhile, traffic congestion and urban disorder continue to be significant challenges for Kabul residents.

Consultative meeting held to prevent natural disasters



KABUL (TOLONews): The National Disaster Management Authority held a consultative meeting in Kabul with the participation of district representatives and tribal elders to discuss measures for preventing natural disasters.

Sayiq stated, "According to the decree of Amir-ul-Mu'minin, we must implement preventive projects in all provinces and resolve the problems of our fellow citizens."

Kabul Governor Aminullah Obaid, who also attended the meeting, assured that existing challenges in the capital would be addressed. He emphasized that citizens should cooperate with the Islamic Emirate in efforts to reform society.

The governor of Kabul added, "We ask everyone to

provide full cooperation in this matter. All of you in your villages and districts should strive for the betterment of society."

Some district representatives present at the meeting pointed out that natural disasters cause financial losses and even human casualties every year. They stressed the need to mitigate these risks as much as possible. Water scarcity in Kabul was another critical issue highlighted during the discussion.

Sayed Atiqullah Hashimi, a resident of Char Asiab, said, "The people of Char Asiab suggest that if practical work on this dam begins, it will not only solve Kabul's drinking water problem but also irrigate thousands of hectares of land."

Several other participants urged the National Disaster Management Authority to build check dams, construct retaining walls, rehabilitate water reservoirs, and reconstruct roads and schools.

Lotfullah, a resident of Kalakan, said, "We feel at risk that one day there might be no drinking water left in this area. We are facing water shortages, and we request urgent attention to this issue."

In recent years, Afghan citizens have been struggling with droughts due to climate change, while in some regions, flash floods have caused severe damage, particularly affecting farmers.

IEA assures govt employees that they will get paid this month

KABUL (Ariana News): The Islamic Emirate said Thursday that US President Donald Trump's cuts to aid will not affect salaries of Afghan government workers.

This comes in the wake of rumors that government employees would not be paid for the solar month of Dalwa due to Trump's severe cuts to aid.

Since the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan's return to power in August 2021, the salaries of all government employees have been covered by the domestic budget, unlike in the past when donor money helped fund salaries.

In a post on X,



Zabihullah Mujahid, the spokesman for the Islamic Emirate, said that all 1.04 million government employees in Afghanistan will receive their salaries this month, as per usual.

He said the Ministry of Finance has assured the IEA that salaries will be paid.

"The country's budget has a domestic foundation, it has nothing to do with the arrival or non-arrival of foreign aid," he emphasized.

Mujahid's statement comes after rumors began circulating that the IEA has

suspended payment of salaries to government employees following Washington's foreign aid freeze.

Trump's move will however impact a wide range of humanitarian agencies and NGOs in the country.

Herat textile factory boosts local wconomy

HERAT (BNA): The Afghan White Gold Cotton factory in Herat province is making significant strides in the textile industry, producing over seven tons of yarn daily for export. Haji Zamarai Shirzai, the factory's head, shared insights with the Bakhtar News Agency on the operations and impact of the facility.

The factory sources its cotton from the western and southwestern provinces of Afghanistan, transporting the raw material for conversion into high-quality yarn. This production not only meets domestic needs but also caters to international markets, with exports heading to countries such as Iran, Turkey, and China.

Employing 220 workers across three shifts, the Afghan White Gold Cotton factory plays a crucial role in providing jobs and supporting the local economy.

Mawlawi Bashir Mohammad Seerat, the head of industry and commerce in Herat, emphasized the Islamic Emirate's commitment to achieving self-sufficiency in domestic production. He noted that the government is actively providing necessary facilities to investors to promote industrial growth, fostering an environment conducive to economic development.

72 cases of suicide recorded in one year

KHOST (TOLONews): Seventy-two people in Khost province committed suicide in 2024.

Local officials in the province said that 38 men and 34 women took their own lives, most of whom were young.

Abdul Halim Haidar, the head of security at the Khost security command, stated: "In the past year, 72 suicide incidents occurred in Khost. According to the information, 38 were men and 34 were women. The causes of these incidents include domestic violence, mental health issues, and sorcery."

Sher Gul, deputy head of the Khost Public Health Department, said: "Suicide incidents mainly occur due to mental stress among young people. We have launched various programs to prevent these incidents, and the most effective way is through sermons to raise public awareness."

Domestic violence, mental health issues, and other factors have been cited as the main reasons for these suicides.

Meanwhile, doctors in Khost stressed that individuals with mental illness need serious attention and special treatment.

According to them, family support and assigning small responsibilities to these individuals can be beneficial.

"A person who has suicidal thoughts needs trust, stability, and attention. Their concerns should be heard, and they should be reassured. Such individuals require a lot of love and

should be given small responsibilities to keep them engaged," said Imran Angez, a doctor in Khost.

Residents of Khost believe that creating job opportunities can help reduce and prevent suicide cases, especially among the youth.

"Suicide cases have increased. Young people in Khost or other provinces should not take their own lives. They should struggle and at least find a job to stay busy," Sayedullah Elham, a resident of Khost, told TOLONews.

According to health officials, many people suffering from mental illnesses turn to traditional healers, fortune-tellers, and shrines instead of seeking medical treatment in health centers.

Electricity company enhances power supply

BADAKHSHAN (BNA): The Badakhshan Electricity Company has made a significant investment in electrical equipment worth 138,411,837 Afghanis to bolster electricity supply in the Faizabad and Baharak districts.

The acquisition includes 1,208 poles, transformers, copper, and aluminum cables, along with various other essential items aimed at improving the region's power infrastructure.

Mawlawi Hikmatullah Akhundzada, head of Da Afghan BreshnaSherkat in the province, shared details with the Bakhtar News Agency regarding the ongoing challenges of power shortages in Faizabad, particularly during the winter months. He pointed out that the Shorabak power dam,

capable of generating excess electricity in the summer, has not been fully utilized, and efforts are being made to address this disparity.

The newly acquired equipment will be instrumental in enhancing the 20/04 kV network, facilitating better power distribution across several districts in Faizabad and Baharak.

KP CM decides to include rehabilitation of drugs addicts in Sehat Card scheme

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Ali Amin Khan Gandapur has decided in principle to include the rehabilitation of drug addicts in the Sehat Card scheme, and directed the relevant authorities to prepare a case and present it to the provincial cabinet for approval.

Once approved, rehabilitation centers for drug addicts will also be included in the Sehat Card panel, ensuring a more effective and organized rehabilitation process. This decision was made in the first meeting of the Provincial Task Force on Anti-Narcotics, held here with Chief Minister in the chair. Provincial cabinet members Mian Khaliq-ur-Rehman, Faisal Khan Tarakai, Syed Qasim Ali Shah, the Chief Secretary, senior officials of Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF), police, and other relevant departments attended the meeting.

The meeting has decided to accelerate actions against drug addiction, directing the police to launch a massive crackdown against drug dealers across the province. It was also decided that Police officers failing to take effective actions against drug traffickers will be removed from their positions, adding that a special meeting of the task force will be held in next 15 days to review the progress on anti-narcotics operations and assess the crackdown in all districts.

The participants raised concerns about poppy cultivation in certain areas of the province and a committee has been formed to persuade poppy farmers to switch to alternative crops, deciding that the government will provide seeds for alternative crops to encourage farmers to abandon poppy cultivation.

The meeting further decided the institutionalizing the whole process of rehabilitation; responsibilities of various departments and institutions in the rehabilitation process will be clearly defined, and a comprehensive plan will be submitted to the provincial cabinet for final approval. Similarly, strict action will be taken against individuals involved in drug trafficking, it was decided in the meeting.

Addressing the participants, Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur made it clear that there will be no leniency or forgiveness for those who push people into drug addiction and ruin their lives. He emphasized that maximum actions be taken against drug manufacturers, dealers and traffickers.

He also appreciated the ongoing

Implementation status of CM's 99-point public agenda reviewed

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: An important meeting of the district administration, held here on Thursday with Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Ali Amin Khan Gandapur in the chair, reviewed the implementation status of the Chief Minister's 99-point public agenda over the past six months, with a detailed assessment of the district administration's performance in this regard. A comprehensive briefing was also provided on the progress of the special responsibilities assigned to district administrations under the 99-point public agenda across all districts.

The meeting was attended by Additional Chief Secretaries Ikramullah Khan and Muhammad Abid Majid, Senior Member Board of Revenue Javed Marwat, relevant administrative secretaries, divisional commissioners, and deputy commissioners. The 99-point public agenda includes key areas such as good governance, cleanliness, quality control, revenue matters, food and price control, khuli kachehri, redressal of public grievances, service delivery, and other public welfare initiatives.

The Chief Minister, while addressing the participants, directed underperforming deputy commissioners to enhance their performance and show significant improvement before the next review meeting. He instructed that photographic evidence of implementation efforts under the 99-point agenda be provided. He emphasized that providing services and facilities to the people is a fundamental responsibility of the government, and no compromise will be made in this regard. The Chief Minister ordered that ongoing development projects be closely monitored to ensure quality of work and transparency, directing the commissioners and deputy commissioners to conduct random visits to hospitals, educational institutions, and other public service centers for this purpose. He directed that district officials must regularly visit service delivery centers to assess the quality of services provided to the public. The Chief Minister warned that officers neglecting their official duties will be identified and immediately removed from their positions. District administrations on this occasion, were directed to hold Khuli Kacharies regularly to address public concerns. Ali Amin Khan Gandapur stressed that billions of rupees are being spent on public services, and their benefits must reach the people.

rehabilitation program drug addicts in Peshawar, directing that drug addicts from other districts be shifted to rehabilitation centers in Peshawar. Additionally, he directed for special measures for the rehabilitation of drug-addicted prisoners.

Briefing the meeting about progress so far made under the "Drug-Free Peshawar" campaign, it was informed that three heroin-mixing factories have been destroyed in Peshawar by the Excise Department. Similarly, Poppy cultivation on 200 kanals in district Khyber, 112 kanals in district Mohmand, 45 kanals in Swabi and 13 kanals in Mansehra has also been destroyed.

As many as 1,141 kg of various narcotics were seized and burnt in 2024, with a market value of Rs 2 billion. From June 2024 to date, the Excise Department has confiscated 2,952 kg of hashish, 105 kg of heroin, 157 kg of opium, 37 kg of crystal meth (ice) and 248 liters of liquor. Whereas, 238 individuals involved in narcotics business arrested during the

same period.

It was also informed that special anti-narcotics awareness campaigns have been launched in educational institutions, yielding positive results. Besides that, narcotics control committees have been established in every university. The authorities told that the third phase of the Drug-Free Peshawar campaign is underway, targeting the rehabilitation of 2,000 drug addicts, adding that the first two phases of the campaign successfully rehabilitated 2,400 drug addicts.

Briefing about the performance of Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF), it was informed that the conviction rate for drug offenders in the last year was 81%. Similarly, 242 Pakistani nationals and 6 foreigners were arrested for drug smuggling by ANF Khyber Pakhtunkhwa last year. The Chief Minister commended the efforts of the ANF and expressed hope that ongoing measures will yield significant results in the fight against drug addiction.



ISLAMABAD: A banner installed on school gate against increase on tax deduction from teachers' salaries.

PPP rejects MQM leader remarks

F.P. Report

KARACHI: Bilawal House Spokesman and in charge of the Media Cell Bilawal House, Surendar Valasai, has termed MQM Chairman Dr. Khalid Maqbool Siddiqui's tirade against the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) as nothing more than the ramblings of a "paper politician" who has lost his mental balance.

According to the press release issued by the Bilawal House Media Cell, Surendar Valasai said that witnessing the rising popularity of Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari has driven so-called politicians like Dr. Khalid Maqbool to lose their composure. He said that PPP Chairman's assurance to Karachi's businessmen of complete protection from extortionists has left MQM sleepless. "Today's press conference by Dr. Khalid Maqbool Siddiqui & Company was, in reality, a gathering of politically orphaned individuals mourning their losses," he added.

The Bilawal House spokesperson remarked that whenever Dr. Khalid Maqbool Siddiqui and his associates appear on television screens, the people of Karachi are reminded of the dark era of gunny bag corpses. He questioned what MQM has given to Karachi apart from the May 12 tragedy, the Baldia Town factory fire, land grabbing, extortion, and targeted killings. "The people of Karachi have permanently buried MQM's politics of hatred, division, and terrorism," he added.

Pakistan Navy award ceremony held

F.P. Report

KARACHI: Pakistan Navy COMKAR Command Annual Efficiency Awards Ceremony 2024 was held at PNS JAUHAR, Karachi. Vice Chief of the Naval Staff, Vice Admiral Ovais Ahmed Bilgrami, graced the occasion as Chief Guest. Upon arrival, the Chief Guest was received by Commander Karachi, Vice Admiral Muhammad Faisal Abbasi.

In his address, VCNS expressed complete satisfaction in efficient achievement of assigned targets by COMKAR Command. He emphasized the significance of training in ongoing techno-strategic landscape embedded with Artificial Intelligence and Cyber Security. He acknowledged the role of COMKAR Command in providing professional and academic training to PN Officers and personnel, while focusing on their personality development and intellectual growth.

Saif reiterates importance of literature

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Barrister Dr. Muhammad Ali Saif Muhammad Literature's Role in National Progress at All Pakistan Iqra Literary Festival. Barrister Dr. Muhammad Ali Saif, Advisor to the Chief Minister on Information, underscored the fundamental role of literature in human progress while addressing the All Pakistan Iqra Literary Festival at Iqra National University, Peshawar, as the chief guest.

In his thought-provoking address, Dr. Saif highlighted that literature serves as the primary medium for the transmission of human experiences, knowledge, and intellectual evolution. He emphasized that all forms of human progress be it social, political, scientific, or philosophical are deeply rooted in literature. "If we analyze the course of human development, we find that every advancement is a product of thought, and literature is the vehicle that carries these thoughts across generations," he stated.

Dr. Saif elaborated on how literature manifests in various forms, including poetry, prose, visual and performing arts, and even music and dance, all of which contribute to shaping collective human intellect. He stressed that sustainable



national progress is directly linked to a society's literary depth and creative output. "A nation's literary depth is the barometer of its intellectual strength," he remarked.

He explained that new ideas drive the creation of new worlds, and intellectual progress is the foundation of all material advancements. Drawing parallels with modern scientific achievements, he cited the example of space exploration, emphasizing that such feats are first conceived in the realm of thought before materializing in reality.

Furthermore, Dr. Saif discussed the philosophical evolution of human consciousness, asserting that humanity has transitioned from understanding matter through spiritual means to a stage where matter itself is being explored through intellectual and spiritual refinement. He urged the youth to focus not only on acquiring information but also on strengthening their character, as strong character is the foundation of great thought.

"The strength of your intellect is directly propor-

tional to the strength of your character. Without a solid moral foundation, intellectual achievements remain superficial," he said, urging students and young scholars to embrace both knowledge and ethical integrity in their pursuits.

Concluding his speech, Dr. Saif reiterated the importance of literature in shaping national thought and preserving intellectual heritage for future generations. He expressed confidence that Pakistan's youth, through their literary and intellectual contributions, would play a crucial role in the country's sustainable development.

The All Pakistan Iqra Literary Festival brought together student delegates from all over Pakistan who participated in literary, artistic and intellectual activities including qirat/naat, competitions, declamation contests, bait-bazi, Fine arts competition, theatre performance, short films, photography exhibitions, essay writing contests, quiz competition, fostering intellectual dialogue and promoting literary culture among the youth.

Tehsil Mayors approached PHC for extension in tenure

Humayun Khan

PESHAWAR: Almost 30 mayors and nazims of various cities in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa have filed a writ petition in the Peshawar High Court (PHC) seeking three years extension of their term through amendments to the Local Council Act.

The petition filed by president of the Local Council Association Himayatullah Mayar and 29 other nazims through Babar Khan Yousafzai advocate argues that despite being elected through local government elections three years ago, they have been deprived of funds and administrative powers.

The petition names the provincial government, secretary of local government, and secretary of law as respondents. It claims that the provincial government had promised to provide them with powers and funds under the Local Government Act but failed to do so.

Instead, their powers and funds were withdrawn, and

they were forced to spend most of their time in court fighting for their rights. The writ argue that they were unable to fulfill the expectations of the public or carry out any development work due to the lack of funds and powers.

The writ requested for amendments in Section 79 of the Local Council Act to extend their term by three years and provide them with the necessary powers and funds to serve the public.

The petition also mentions that the Local Council Act has been repeatedly violated by the government, and the petitioners have had to approach the courts for relief. Despite promises made during the local government elections, the provincial government has failed to provide them with the necessary powers and funds.

The petitioners also point out that they were not administered the oath of office immediately after their election in 2022, and a petition was filed in the Peshawar High Court, which led to the administration of the oath. They

request the court to extend their term by three years, allowing them to complete their tenure and serve the public. They also request that the court provide them with the necessary funds and powers to carry out their duties.

Court directs to conduct Civil Judge exam by June, extends stay order against two-years' experience: A divisional bench comprising of Chief Justice Peshawar High Court (PHC) Justice Ishtiaq Ibrahim and Justice Ijaz Anwar has extended the stay order against the requirement of two years of law practice experience for civil judges and has issued notices to the parties involved, seeking their response, on Thursday.

The petition filed by Nouman Mohib Kakakhel advocate and informed the court that the Public Service Commission had advertised 112 posts for civil judges in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, but for the first time, it had introduced a requirement of two years of law practice experience.

30 bodies recovered from plane, helicopter collision in Washington

WASHINGTON (Reuters): An American Airlines regional passenger jet and a US Army Black Hawk helicopter crashed into the frigid Potomac River after a midair collision near Reagan Washington National Airport on Wednesday night, officials said.

CBS News reported that at least 30 bodies had been recovered so far, citing a police official. Two sources told Reuters multiple bodies had been pulled from the water. American Airlines confirmed that 64 people were aboard the jet: 60 passengers and four crew members. Three soldiers were aboard the helicopter, a US official said.

Relatives gathered at the airport said they were getting little to no information from officials about the incident, adding that they were hearing more about the incident from news reports. One woman told an airport official, "I don't know if she got on there or not," in apparent reference to a passenger on the crashed jet. She then collapsed in tears.

Hamaad Raza told local CBS affiliate WUSA that he was at Reagan airport waiting for his wife. "She texted me that she was landing in 20 minutes," he said. "The rest of my text didn't ... did not get delivered. That's when I realized that something might be up. I'm just praying that someone is pulling her out of the river right now."

The US Army said in a statement that it could "confirm that the aircraft involved in tonight's incident was an Army UH-60 helicopter out of Fort Belvoir, Virginia." There has not been a fatal US passenger airplane accident since February 2009, but a series

PM condoles deaths

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Thursday expressed grief over the loss of lives caused by a mid-air accident between a passenger plane and a military helicopter in Washington DC.

On his X timeline, the prime minister conveyed his condolences to US President Donald Trump and the American people at this difficult time. "Deeply saddened by the tragic news of a mid-air accident between a passenger plane and a military helicopter in Washington D.C. Our thoughts and prayers are with US President Donald Trump and the American people at this difficult time," he wrote. Prime Minister Shehbaz also conveyed his sympathies to the families of those who lost their loved ones and prayed for the safety of the survivors. According to reports, an American Airlines flight collided in mid-air with a helicopter in Washington DC. The plane crashed into the Potomac River. The jet was carrying 60 passengers and four crew members, and three US Army soldiers were on board the military helicopter.

of near-miss incidents in recent years have raised serious safety concerns.

In 1982, Air Florida Flight 90 crashed into the 14th Street Bridge over the Potomac River, killing 70 passengers and four crew members. Only four passengers and one crew member survived. A web camera shot from the Kennedy Center in Washington showed an explosion mid-air across the Potomac about 8:47 pm (0147 GMT) with an aircraft in flames falling rapidly.

PSA was operating Flight 5342 for American Airlines, which had departed from Wichita, Kansas, according to the FAA. "We're cooperating with the National Transportation Safety Board in its investigation and will continue to provide all the information we can," American Airlines CEO Robert Isom said in a video statement. Police said multiple agencies were involved in a search and rescue operation in the Potomac River, which borders the airport.

Dozens of police, ambulance and rescue units, some ferrying boats, staged along the river and raced to positions along the tarmac of Reagan airport. Live TV images showed several boats in the water, flashing blue and red lights. The airport said late on Wednesday that all takeoffs and landings had been halted as emergency personnel responded to an aircraft incident. US President Donald Trump said in a statement that he had been "fully briefed on the terrible accident which just took place at Reagan National Airport."

"May God bless their souls," he added. "Thank you for the incredible work being done by our first responders. I am monitoring the situation and will provide more details as they arise." FAA Administrator Mike Whitaker stepped down on Jan. 20 and the Trump administration has not named a replacement - or even disclosed who is running the agency on an interim basis.

Experts urge boosting tech policies, tapping into critical mineral wealth

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Centre for Aerospace & Security Studies (CASS), Islamabad, hosted a roundtable discussion on the 'Trump-Tech Nexus: Opportunities and Challenges Ahead,' analysing the implications of US President Donald Trump's second term on global technology, Big Tech regulations, Artificial Intelligence, and cybersecurity. The session brought together leading experts to assess how President Trump's policies, and strategic collaborations with tech leaders could reshape the global technological landscape and its potential impact on Pakistan.

Setting the stage for the discussion, CASS moderator Mr Mustafa Bilal opened the discussion by outlining the significance of President Trump's second presidency for global technology policy, emphasising its geopolitical and economic ramifications.

Ambassador Zamir Akram, Advisor, Strategic Plans Division,



GoP, provided a policy-focused assessment of the shifting geopolitical landscape in technology and underscored the unprecedented nature of the global tech confrontation, warning that generative AI could be as transformative as the industrial revolution or as dangerous as nuclear weapons. He highlighted that Pakistan must strategically navigate this geopolitical

divide, which has led to export restrictions on critical technologies and a tightening US-India partnership that indirectly impacts Pakistan's access to investments and tech transfers. He stressed that Pakistan's private sector should lead in digital transformation, as inefficiencies and multi-layered regulatory hurdles stifle growth.

He called for streamlined decision-

making processes and a regulatory framework that enables, rather than obstructs, technological advancements. On the opportunities ahead, Ambassador Akram pointed to Pakistan's rare earth mineral resources, noting that foreign investment in critical minerals such as lithium and copper must be actively pursued.

Air Vice Marshal Soban Nazir Syed (Retd), DG, National Aerospace Science and Technology Park (NASTP), highlighted NASTP's pivotal role in fostering startups in technology, AI, and emerging technologies, underlining its commitment to creating an ecosystem that nurtures innovation and entrepreneurship. He shared NASTP's initiatives in providing infrastructure, mentorship, and funding opportunities to accelerate research and development in critical tech domains. He further stressed the importance of public-private collaboration in ensuring Pakistan remains competitive in the global technology and AI landscape.

Founder & CEO of Algoryte, Mr Talha Bin Afzal noted that while support for Big Tech under President Trump seemed likely, hurdles in regulatory and legal battles could delay innovation. Mr Afzal noted that Pakistan faces significant challenges, including slower innovation, geopolitical risks, and limited access to advanced technologies due to export restrictions. Despite these challenges, he was optimistic that Pakistan has considerable opportunities in the global digital economy. With rising compliance costs elsewhere, Pakistan could emerge as an attractive destination for IT outsourcing. Increased access to international markets, coupled with adherence to ethical technology standards, could further strengthen its position. He urged a shift from the freelancer-driven economy to a structured technology sector, fostering a more stable and competitive digital ecosystem.

Thanking the speakers for their insightful presentations, Air Marshal

Javaid Ahmed (Retd), President CASS, acknowledged the need for Pakistan to strategically engage with the global tech ecosystems while adapting to evolving global regulations. He stressed that Pakistan must adopt a proactive, balanced approach, strengthening its regulatory framework, attracting foreign investment, and fostering local innovation to remain competitive. Concluding, he opined that Pakistan's high-tech future hinges on swift policy adaptation, private sector agility, and removal of administrative hurdles that hinder global tech partnerships. The roundtable was followed by an interactive question-and-answer session with experts from the academia and researchers. It concluded with a consensus that Pakistan must take proactive steps to secure its place in the global technology race. By addressing regulatory gaps and strengthening trade partnerships, the country can position itself as a key player in the evolving digital economy.