

CJP calls JCP meeting
F.P. Report
ISLAMABAD: Chief Justice of Pakistan (CJP) Justice Yahya Afridi has convened four separate meetings of the Judicial Commission of Pakistan (JCP) for the appointment of additional judges in high courts. It reports in media that CJP will convene a meeting on January 17 to review appointments of additional judges for Islamabad and Balochistan High Courts.

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Tremors jolt Sibi
F.P. Report
SIBI: Tremors were felt in Balochistan's Sibi city and surrounding areas on Friday. The magnitude of earthquake was recorded at 4.7, with a depth of 18 kilometres. The epicentre of earthquake was 22 kilometres in the southeast of Sibi. No casualty was reported in the incident which created panic, prompting people to dash out of their homes while reciting Quranic verses.

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Pakistan to continue its journey towards peace: PM

— vows to combat challenge of misinformation, fake news on social media

Saqib Mushtaq

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif on Friday vowed to tackle the growing challenge of digital media including the fake news and misinformation on social media platforms, calling it inevitable for elimination of terrorism and extremism from the country.

"On digital front, the venom against Pakistan is being spitted through social media from some elements abroad. This is also a big challenge, which is supported by distorted facts and twisted reality," the prime minister said while chairing the meeting of the Apex Committee of National Action Plan.

The meeting was attended by Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar, the federal cabinet members, chief ministers of all provinces, Chief of Army Staff and other high officials. The prime minister

ter said that certain questions were being raised by distorting facts and twisting the reality on social media that were denting the state's image.

"If we don't counter this challenge, all efforts (to eliminate terrorism and extremism in the country) will go waste," he said expressing the confidence that the government would overcome such challenges. The prime minister recalled how fake news were spread with regard to martyrdom of personnel of Rangers on November 26.

The sacrifices of the Armed Forces are immense which would not go waste and Pakistan will continue its journey towards peace, stability and prosperity, he added. PM Shehbaz Sharif on the occasion congratulated the nation as Pakistan assumed non-permanent membership of United Nation Security Council.

He emphasized that some Khawarij intruders were living in

Pakistan, especially in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa to disturb the country's peace. The prime minister pointed out that the agenda of prosperity and development was discussed in the previous day's meeting where it was agreed that without bringing peace and stability in the country, economic development, was not possible.

The government, he said was determined to completely eliminate Fitna Al-Khawarij from the country to ensure socio-economic development of the country. The prime minister stressed that the federal government, the provinces and all relevant stakeholders in collaboration with the Pakistan security forces should make a comprehensive plan in this regard. He pledged that with unity of thought and action, the government will implement such plans in letter and spirit, to resolve all challenges faced by the country.



ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif chairing the meeting of Apex Committee of National Action Plan.

KP CM vows to defeat terrorism

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur vowed to defeat terrorism with the support of all the provinces and federal government.

He was talking to media after attending the National Action Plan's apex committee meeting in Islamabad on Friday. "We'll not allow terrorism in this country. The law and order situation was discussed in detail in today's meeting," the chief minister said.

He added that all the provinces pledged to defeat the monster of terrorism to ensure peace in the country. The chief minister said that it was first meeting after the episode of Nov 26 and he expressed his reservations. He also acknowledged the sacrifices of armed forces, FC and security agencies in combating terrorism.

"We'll go to the last extent to eliminate terrorism and establish peace," Gandapur said. He added that the situation of Kurram and Afghanistan was also discussed in the meeting. "The issue in Kurram is not linked with terrorism. It is a conflict between two groups," said the chief minister. Gandapur expressed gratitude to the members of Jirga for their role in resolving issues in Kurram. He said that the roads in Kurram would be opened soon and people will get relief.

Pak achieves IMF-set key tax targets

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan has successfully achieved the key tax targets set by the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

Pakistan achieved a tax-to-GDP ratio of 10.8%, exceeding the target of 10.6pc for the ongoing fiscal year, which will pave the way for Islamabad to get second tranche of the loan programme. Finance Adviser Khurram Shehzad highlighted that Pakistan's achievement represents the highest half-yearly tax-to-GDP ratio in the past four years. During the first half of the fiscal year, tax collection reached 94% of the targeted Rs6009 billion, he added.

The FBR officials confirmed that the IMF is satisfied with the progress, eliminating the immediate need for additional tax measures to meet the annual targets. Between July and December, Rs5,624 billion were collected in taxes, marking a 26% increase compared to the previous year and a 35% rise in December alone.

Despite Rs385 billion shortfall in the half-yearly target, significant improvement was noted in tax revenues in Pakistan. The annual tax collection goal is Rs12,970 billion, and officials are confident of meeting this target without introducing a mini-budget. To cover the shortfall, Rs7,346 billion is projected to be collected in the second half of the fiscal year, the FBR officials stated.

Poverty increases by 7% in Pakistan: WB

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: A recent World Bank report has negated the government's tall claims of a thriving economy of Pakistan.

PML-N led government after boasting in 2024 about the country's economic progress, claiming that inflation is under control and commodity prices are decreasing. However, the World Bank's findings tell a different story.

The report has exposed the harsh reality of poverty

in the country, which has increased by 7% in 2024. World Bank in its findings "Poverty Projections for Pakistan" suggested that in 2024, the poverty rate stood at 25.3 percent, an increase of seven percentage points compared to 2023.

This alarming rise in poverty has resulted in approximately 13 million more people falling into poverty, adding to the already struggling population. Moreover, the World Bank stated that "In addition to the projected

increase in poverty, poor households face disproportionately higher welfare losses and get pushed deeper into poverty".

"In Pakistan 21.9 percent of the population lived below the national poverty line in 2019. Since then, the COVID-19 pandemic, devastating floods in 2022, and a macro-fiscal crisis with record inflation have profoundly impacted economic activity and income-earning opportunities, leading the rise in poverty rate to 24.6 percent" the report added.

SBP injects Rs2.43 trillion in market

F.P. Report

KARACHI: The State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) injected Rs2,429.65 billion in the market through reverse repo purchase and Shariah Compliant Mudarabah based Open Market Operations (OMO) on Friday.

The SBP conducted Open Market Operation, Reverse Repo Purchase (Injection) on January 03, 2025 for 7-day and 28-day tenors and, as per results issued, accepted an amount of Rs2,245.65 billion offered through 23 bids.

The central bank received 10 bids for 7-day tenor cumulatively offering

an amount of Rs1,455.8 billion at the rate of return ranging between 13.04 to 13.09 percent while 13 bids were received for the 28-day tenor offering an amount of Rs1,145.65 billion at the rate of return ranging between 13.04 to 13.08 %.

The central bank accepted an amount of Rs1,100 billion offered through 10 quotes for 7-day tenor at 13.04% rate of return. Total amount offered at 13.04% was Rs427 billion, out of which SBP accepted Rs100 billion on pro rata basis. The SBP also accepted all the 13 quotes offered for 28-day tenor amounting to Rs1,145.65 billion at

13.04% rate of return.

Meanwhile, SBP also conducted Shariah Compliant Mudarabah based Open Market Operation for the 7-day and 28-day tenors and injected Rs184 billion into the market while accepting the 5 quotes offered. The central bank received 4 bids for 7-day tenor quoting an amount of Rs179 billion at the rate of return ranging between 13.08 to 13.10 % and one bid for 28-day tenor amounting to Rs5 billion at 13.08% rate of return. The SBP accepted all the 5 quotes for 7-day and 28-day tenors with the entire offered amount at 13.08% rate of return.

South Korean presidential guards prevent arrest of Yoon

SEOUL (Reuters): South Korea's presidential guards and military troops prevented authorities from arresting impeached President Yoon Suk Yeol on Friday in a tense six-hour stand-off inside Yoon's compound in the heart of Seoul.

Yoon is under criminal investigation for insurrection over his December 3 martial law bid that stunned South Korea and led to the first arrest warrant to be issued for a sitting president. "It was judged that it was virtually impossible to execute the arrest warrant due to the ongoing stand-off," the Corruption Investigation Office for High-ranking Officials (CIO) said in a statement.

CIO officials and police evaded hundreds of Yoon supporters who gathered in pre-dawn hours near his residence today, who adopted the "Stop the Steal" slogans popularised by US President-elect Donald Trump's supporters, to block the arrest. Officials from the CIO, which is leading a joint team of investigators, arrived at the gates of the presidential compound shortly after 7am (2200 GMT Thursday) and entered on foot.

Once inside the compound, the CIO and police were outnumbered by cordons of Presidential Security Service (PSS) personnel, as well as troops seconded to presidential security, a CIO official told reporters. More than 200 PSS agents and soldiers blocked the CIO officers and police, he added.

While there were altercations and PSS agents appeared to be carrying firearms, no weapons were drawn, he said.

Yoon, who has been isolated since he was impeached and suspended from power on Dec 14, was not seen during the stand-off, he said. South Korea's defence ministry said the troops involved were under the control of the PSS. The CIO called off the effort to arrest Yoon around 1:30pm due to concerns over the safety of its personnel and said it "deeply regretted" Yoon's non-compliance.

The CIO said it would consider its next steps. The police, who are part of the joint investigation team, have designated the PSS chief and the deputy as suspects in a criminal case for obstruction of official duty and issued summons for them to appear for questioning on Saturday, Yonhap news reported. Insurrection is one of the few criminal charges from which a South Korean president does not have immunity.

Yoon's arrest warrant, approved by a court on Tuesday after he ignored multiple summons to appear for questioning, is viable until January 6. In a statement after the arrest effort was suspended, Yoon's legal team said the CIO had no authority to investigate insurrection and it was regrettable that it had tried to execute an illegal warrant in a sensitive security area. The statement warned police

against supporting the arrest effort.

The presidential office filed a criminal complaint against three broadcasters and YouTube channel owners for unauthorised filming of the presidential residence, which it said was "a secured facility directly linked to national security". The current warrant gives investigators only 48 hours to hold Yoon after he is arrested. Investigators must then decide whether to request a detention warrant or release him.

Kim Seon-taek, a Korea University law professor, said targeting the PSS leadership may allow the investigators to sap the service's ability to put up resistance so they can try again to execute the warrant, which is "a rough way" to proceed. A better way, he said, would be for acting President Choi Sang-mok to exercise his power to order the PSS to cooperate. Later today, the CIO said it would ask Choi to give that order. Choi's office issued no comment on the arrest attempt.

Yoon sent shockwaves through Asia's fourth-largest economy and one of the region's most vibrant democracies with his late-night announcement on Dec 3 that he was imposing martial law to overcome political deadlock and root out "anti-state forces". Within hours, however, 190 lawmakers had defied the cordons of troops and police to vote against Yoon's order.

Dialogue key for democracy, says Fazl

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Maulana Fazlur Rehman, leader of Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam-Fazl (JUI-F), on Friday stressed that dialogue between political parties is crucial aspect of the democratic process, as avoiding talks or refusing negotiations harms democracy.

Maulana said that while speaking to Senator Irfan Siddiqui, spokesperson for the government negotiation committee and Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PML-N) leader, who visited him at his residence to inquire about his health.

Maulana Fazlur Rehman reiterated that mutual discussions and negotiations are the only way to address key national issues. He further emphasized the need for political harmony to ensure Pakistan's stability and unity across all sectors.

Senator Irfan Siddiqui updated Maulana Fazlur Rehman on the progress of negotiations with Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI). He also commended Rehman's role in amicably resolving the issue of religious seminaries' registration.

Country can't afford politics of confrontation, says Shujaat

F.P. Report

LAHORE: Prominent businessman and social figure Malik Kamran Munir met with Pakistan Muslim League chief Chaudhry Shujaat Hussain at his residence in Lahore. The party's Central Information Secretary Ghulam Mustafa Malik was also present at the meeting.

Malik Kamran Munir announced his joining in Pakistan Muslim League on this occasion. Talking on the occasion Chaudhry Shujaat Hussain said joining of youth and business community in the Muslim League is welcome. Chaudhry Shujaat Hussain said the government and the opposition should come on the same page to solve the country's problems.

The people and the country cannot afford the politics of confrontation. Chaudhry Shujaat said. He said everyone will have to work together for the development and prosperity of Pakistan. On occasion, Mustafa Malik said we welcome Malik Kamran Munir to the party.

Mustafa Malik said the Muslim League has a clear agenda for political and economic stability. Malik Kamran Munir said Chaudhry Shujaat Hussain has made immense contributions to the country and the nation.

Saif: Travel for convoy on Kurram Road complete

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Advisor to the Chief Minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa for Information and Public Relations, Barrister Dr. Saif has stated that all travel and security arrangements for the convoy on Kurram Road today, Saturday, have been finalized.

As per the Apex Committee's decisions the area will be cleared of weapons and bunkers as per the agreed terms to ensure peace and stability in the region.

Furthermore, both parties involved are required to submit a comprehensive and coordinated plan for surrendering arms within 15 days.

Dr. Saif emphasized that public display and use of weapons will be strictly prohibited, and no one will be allowed to collect funds or donations for purchasing

arms. Additionally, under the terms of the agreement, the construction of any new bunkers will be strictly banned.

All existing bunkers in the area must be dismantled within one month. After their demolition, any party initiating aggression or unlawful activities will be deemed a terrorist group and will face strict legal consequences. He further reassured the public that these measures aim to restore long-term peace and build trust among the communities in the affected region.

Meanwhile, local peace committees comprising tribal, political, and community leaders have been established to restore peace in Kurram. The committees, inclusive of members from all sects, have ensured the safe passage of essential goods.

The first convoy of vehi-

cles carrying food and supplies will depart from Thall to Parachinar on January 4, 2025, at 10am, under police protection. This initiative follows a peace agreement finalized on January 1, in which local leaders pledged to set aside personal and tribal disputes to ensure safety. Additional law enforcement agencies will be on standby for emergencies.

Kurram's ongoing issues are primarily linked to local land and tribal conflicts, often mistakenly portrayed as sectarian violence. Commitments made include disarming within 15 days and dismantling bunkers within a month. The peace committees comprise 27 members from Lower Kurram, including former MNA Pir Haider Ali Shah, and 48 members from Upper Kurram, led by ex-Senator Sajjad Hussain Turi.



ISLAMABAD: Senator Irfan-ul-Haq Siddiqui, spokesperson of government negotiation committee, meeting with JUI-F Chief, Maulana Fazlur Rehman.

Achakzai seeks remedy against 'stolen mandate'

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Pashtunkhwa Milli Awami Party (PkMAP) Chief Mahmood Khan Achakzai has demanded the restoration of the Constitution and remedy against the stolen general election mandate.

Speaking alongside Majlis Wahdat-e-Muslimeen (MWM) leader Allama Raja Nasir Abbas during a media talk on Friday, Mahmood Khan Achakzai stressed the need for a roundtable conference involving all institutions to address the country's pressing issues. He reiterated his demand for the restoration of the constitution and the return of the stolen mandate.

Speaking on the occasion, Allama Raja Nasir Abbas stated that former prime minister Imran Khan emphasised that the rule of law is essential for the country's progress.

"However, the nation is facing political, economic, and various other crises, with the current government's incompetence pushing the country further into turmoil," he held.

He criticised the leadership, saying the imposition of inept individuals led to the country's destruction. He also pointed out that Pakistan alienated neighbouring countries, first India and now Afghanistan, highlighting that former foreign minister Bilawal Bhutto and Finance Minister Ishaq Dar had not even visited Afghanistan, a crucial neighbour and brotherly nation. The MWM chief further remarked that the issue in Kurram could have been resolved within a week, but its delay reflected the shared incompetence of the provincial government and institutions. He also condemned the fascist actions of the PPP-led government

in Karachi, where protesters were brutally suppressed.

Omar Ayub calls for immediate release of Imran Khan, other PTI leaders: PTI leader Omar Ayub on Friday called for immediate release of party founder Imran Khan, other leaders and workers from jail.

He told media that his party's stance on negotiations with the government is evident as it has conveyed its demands regarding release of PTI leaders and judicial probe into May 9 and November 26 incidents. He stressed that party leaders should be given access to Imran Khan, who has been detained in Adiala Jail for months. He said the PTI founder has been unlawfully detained in baseless cases. He emphasized that uncertainty will continue to prevail in the country until the supremacy of the constitution and law is established.

Sharjeel directs swift action to clear obstacles in Red Line BRT project



F.P. Report

KARACHI: Sindh Senior Minister Sharjeel Inam Memon has reiterated his directive to promptly remove obstacles in the Red Line BRT project and expedite its progress. A high-level meeting on the Red Line BRT project was held in Karachi, chaired by Sindh Senior Minister and Provincial Minister for Information, Transport, and Mass Transit, Sharjeel Inam Memon. The meeting was attended by Secretary Transport Asad Zamin, Chairman Planning and Development Najam

Commissioner Karachi Hassan Nagvi, CEO Trans Karachi Tariq Manzoor Chandio, DIG Traffic Ahmed Nawaz Cheema, and other relevant officials. The meeting was also attended online by representative of Asian Development Bank Lloyd Wright and international consultants. During the three-hour session, participants discussed in detail the obstacles and immediate solutions to the issues facing the Red Line BRT project. The meeting discussed delays in relocating utilities, including water supply lines and installations

by K-Electric, the National Telecommunication Corporation, and Pakistan Telecommunication Company Limited. It also reviewed the ongoing construction activities in Lot 1 and Lot 2, updating the progress with project contractors. He was briefed during the meeting by Trans Karachi CEO Tariq Manzoor Chandio about the hiccups in the project, particularly about the lack of adequate response from utility providers with regard to shifting their installations. Sindh Senior Minister Sharjeel Inam Memon set a

strict deadline of five days for all stakeholders to address the issues and ensure smooth progress. Senior Minister Sharjeel Inam Memon also directed officials to coordinate with Civil Aviation to commence work near the airport. During the meeting, the infrastructure adjustments of K-4 and K-E were identified as major causes of the project's delays. Speaking on the sidelines of the meeting, Sindh Senior Minister Sharjeel Inam Memon stated that further delays in the Red Line BRT project are unacceptable. "We must finish the work before the schedule," he said. For speeding up the construction works, he ordered that the work be continued in three shifts: morning, evening, and night, so that the work continues round the clock. He also termed the Red Line BRT a flagship transport project for Karachi to revolutionize its transport system and provide modern, efficient, and environment-friendly mass transit solutions. He added that, once finished, the Red Line BRT would provide easy travels to thousands of commuters daily.

CM Maryam welcomes \$ 700m Chinese investment in Punjab

LAHORE (APP): A high-level Chinese delegation met Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif's at Punjab House, Islamabad on Friday. The delegation was comprised of Chengdu General Coordinator for ICT Hub Ms. Scarlett and Deputy CEO Huawei Mr. Yu Ray. Chengdu expressed its consent to make an investment worth 700 million dollars and she gave its principle approval. E-taxi service will be launched soon with the cooperation of Chengdu. A Chinese company will also establish a 'Computing Centre' in Lahore Nawaz Sharif IT City. In the meeting, it was agreed to establish a Data and Cloud Centre in Nawaz Sharif IT City.

The Punjab government will provide land and building for establishing a Data and Cloud Centre. It was agreed to establish the first e-commerce platform in Pakistan. The Chinese company will also impart training to the Pakistani youth for online worldwide trading. Smart control room, smart traffic control, smart transport, smart sanitation centre will be established in Lahore with the Chinese cooperation. The Punjab CM, Provincial Transport Minister Bilal Akbar and the delegation were briefed about the latest digital centre during their visit to China. An AI Industry Centre will also be established in Phase Two to

introduce the youth with the artificial intelligence technology. The Chinese government will also provide assistance for platform service capacity building in Punjab. Providing assistance in local investment for the establishment of industries was also reviewed in Phase Three. A collaboration will be made to introduce Pakistani youth with the modern technological requirements. CM Maryam Nawaz Sharif said, "We want to make Punjab the biggest artificial intelligence centre with the cooperation of China. Punjab will soon become an IT hub in the region and we want our youth to excel and surpass in the IT sector."

Governor Tessori seeks HSC exam result scrutiny

KARACHI (PPI): Sindh Governor Kamran Khan Tessori has taken serious notice of students' dissatisfaction with the Karachi Intermediate Board examination result. According to a statement issued from Sindh Governor House today, Mr Tessori sought a detailed report from the Chairman of the Karachi Intermediate Board. Expressing concern over the issue, the governor said that there was an urgent need for a thorough scrutiny of the examination results. He directed the relevant authorities to address students' concerns promptly and ensuring that their apprehensions are resolved effectively. Tessori reiterated that the grievances of Karachi's students must not be ignored. He stated that the students had previously raised similar concerns, and any injustice against them would not be tolerated under any circumstances.

No progress in talks with PTI: Siddiqui

ISLAMABAD (APP): Spokesperson for the government's coalition dialogue committee, Senator Irfan Siddiqui, on Friday revealed that no progress has been made in the ongoing talks with Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) as the party has yet to present its demands. Talking to a private news channel, he disclosed that two key points were agreed upon with PTI during initial discussions. The first was the submission of the party's demands, and the second was permission for the negotiating team to consult with PTI's founder for further guidance, he added. "Despite holding consultations with their founder, the PTI team has failed to finalize or present its demands," Siddiqui said. Addressing rumors of an alleged offer made by the government to PTI, he categorically denied any such development. "No offer has been extended by the coalition dialogue committee or any government official," he clarified. Siddiqui emphasized that further consultations and negotiations would only proceed once PTI formally submits its demands, which is a necessary step to advance the dialogue process.

LDA seals another 26 properties

LAHORE (APP): Lahore Development Authority (LDA) on Friday sealed another 26 properties besides demolishing several illegal constructions and signboards here in the city. Following the directives of the Director General LDA, Tahir Farooq, the LDA had intensified its efforts to combat illegal commercial buildings and encroachments across the city. In a series of coordinated actions under the supervision of Chief Town Planner Asad ul Zaman and Chief Town Planner II Azhar Ali, LDA teams targeted various areas, including Khayaban-e-Firdousi, Johar Town, BOR, Gulberg and Garden Town. Illegal constructions were demolished and signboards were removed from properties in Khyaban-e-Firdousi (Johar Town) and BOR while illegal shops and a private bank's non-converted property were also demolished. Multiple properties in B Block, Johar Town were also targeted.

NA Committee calls for regularisation of railway land

LAHORE (APP): The National Assembly's Standing Committee on Railways Friday stressed the need to regularize railway land and lease out commercial properties to enhance revenue generation. A meeting of the National Assembly's Standing Committee was held on under the chairmanship of Rai Hassan Nawaz Khan at the Railway Headquarters Lahore. During the meeting, CEO of Pakistan Railways Amir Ali Baloch briefed the committee on the performance of the organization, its operational matters and other sectors. The meeting was attended by committee members Abrar Ahmed, Wasim Qadir, Zulfiqar Sattar Bachani, Ramesh Lal, Muhammad Ilyas Choudhry, Syed Shah Ahad Ali Shah, Muhammad Jamal Ahsan Khan, Shafqat Abbas and Ahmad Saleem Siddiqui, along with senior Railway officers including Chairman Pakistan Railways Syed Mazhar Ali Shah, CEO Amir Ali Baloch and IG Railways Rao Sardar Ali. Amir Ali Baloch provided a detailed briefing on the facilities being offered on passenger trains, including the introduction of modern dining cars, water dispensers and Wi-Fi on

the Green Line, Shalimar, and Karakoram trains. He also highlighted the launch of e-ticketing, refund policies, internet services and a Rabta app, which have significantly improved passengers' trust in the railway services. The committee expressed satisfaction with these developments. Additionally, the committee was briefed on the efforts to remove encroachments and lease railway land, as well as address issues related to 'Kachi Abadis'. Committee members stressed the need to regularize railway land and lease out commercial properties to enhance revenue generation for Pakistan Railways. In response to a question on the Quetta Railway Station suicide bombing, IG Railways Rao Sardar Ali shared detailed information about the attack. He informed the committee that compensation for the martyrs and injured was in its final stages. He suggested the construction of security walls at railway stations, the installation of walk-through gates, increased personnel for railway police and the allocation of funds for the Quick Response Force (QRF). The committee approved these suggestions and assured that the issues related to personnel and scales would be addressed.

Chairman Rai Hassan Nawaz Khan expressed the committee's commitment to sending recommendations to the government for improving railway services. He also approved the minutes of the previous meeting, praising the informative railway station visit that had taken place earlier on Thursday. He appreciated the cleanliness system at the Police Helpline Centre and the Executive Washrooms built under the Public-Private Partnership at Lahore Railway Station. Furthermore, he proposed a special grant for the renovation of Lahore Railway Station, which was supported by the committee members. He instructed the railway authorities to expedite the ML-1 Project and ensure timely train operations. The meeting focused on reviewing the performance and progress of Pakistan Railways and included comprehensive briefings, site visits, and discussions on improving railway operations. On the first day, the committee was given detailed briefings on the functioning of various departments of Pakistan Railways. The meeting concluded with a unanimous commitment to work towards strengthening Pakistan Railways and improving its services for the public.

STEVTa to upgrade 30 institutes as model training institutes

KARACHI (APP): Sindh Technical Education and Vocational Training Authority (STEVTa) in an important meeting has formally decided to designate five institutions from each of the six divisions in the province as model institutes. Special Assistant to the Chief Minister of Sindh, who is the Chairperson of STEVTa, Junaid Buland, chaired the meeting with senior officials of the authority held at STEVTa's headquarters here, said a statement on Friday. Munawar Ali Mithani, Managing Director of STEVTa, Zulfiqar Jatoti, Director of Human Resources, and Yusuf Baloch, Director of Academics and Training also attended the meeting. Junaid Buland said that the selected institutions will now become part of the Sindh government's comprehensive strategy to

increase technical and vocational training opportunities for the youth of the province. He said that these institutes will provide vital training to young people in fields such as engineering, IT, and other key areas. He said that this initiative aims to raise educational standards and meet the growing demand for skilled youth in key industries. "This step is crucial in equipping our youth with the necessary skills to succeed in today's job market. The leadership of the Pakistan People's Party has always strived to improve the economy of Sindh, and it is Bilawal Bhutto's vision to skill our youth. He said that we are committed to modernizing these institutions, upgrading their infrastructure, and ensuring that they provide training tailored to industry needs." Junaid Buland further mentioned

that new courses would also be introduced as part of the initiative to establish 30 model institutes, which would align with the demands of current industries. "We are not just focusing on the buildings, but also updating teaching methods and resources to ensure these institutes provide high-quality vocational education," he stated. He said that this initiative also includes establishing relationships with local industries to create apprenticeship programs and better employment opportunities for graduate students. In addition to infrastructure development, the transformation of these training institutes into model institutes is expected to have a significant impact on the economic development of youth of Sindh, he said.

Azma Bokhari criticises PTI, highlights govt's achievements

LAHORE (APP): Provincial Information Minister Azma Bokhari has accused the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) of relying on lies to gain attraction. She said that this strategy negatively impacts vulnerable children who fall prey to their false propaganda. Bokhari emphasized that rioters should face no leniency and must be held accountable for their actions. The minister also outlined several key initiatives under the Punjab government, including a project aimed at providing solar systems to 100,000 people in the province. With an investment of 10 billion rupees, the initiative's full financial plan is already in place. However, consumers with faulty meters or those involved in electricity theft are excluded from this scheme, as are defaulters. Bokhari highlighted the government's success in tackling inflation, noting that it has now dropped to 4%. She credited Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and Chief Minister Punjab

Maryam Nawaz for their roles in this achievement. "Our government hasn't just complained about inflation; we've actively worked to reduce it," she said. She also underscored that the leadership prioritizes merit, stating, "Our leadership has the word 'merit' in its dictionary." During the press conference at the Directorate General of Public Relations (DGPR), Bokhari mentioned that Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz launches a new programme every week, ensuring that the province's initiatives are not merely replicas of other regions. The Punjab government is also moving towards solarizing 8,000 electricity-operated tube wells, with a budget of 2.5 billion rupees allocated for the project, she added. In addition, she shared positive developments in the agriculture sector, particularly in shrimp farming. A 100-acre shrimp farm in Muzaffargarh is now operational, capable of producing shrimp twice a year. To date, the farm has pro-

duced 120 metric tons of shrimp, which has been exported to various countries, she added. Bokhari also reiterated her concern over the children involved in the May 9 chaos, urging that those who have been released from jail and are preparing to repeat such incidents should face strict consequences. "They should not be pardoned under any circumstances," she asserted, stressing that any form of relief would be denied to them in the future. Further criticizing PTI, Bokhari claimed that its members are "experts in lying" and "habitual of speaking lies without any shame." She accused PTI founder of spreading rumors while incarcerated. Concluding her remarks, she assured the public that the Punjab government has established an effective department to monitor and control the prices of essential goods. "In Punjab, any increase in the prices of food items is unacceptable," she stated firmly.

اشتهار برائے اجارہ خط

وقف اراضی محال کا لٹلے مردان

محکمہ وقف خیر بہختونخواچی زیر انتظام اراضی مقام فیصلہ جات عدالت عظمی پاکستان قیوداوی اراضی تقریباً 36110 کنال واقع محال کا لٹلے منتہی جاتی مل مردان فیصلہ شدہ ریٹ اجارہ دینے کا حق ہے۔ جس کیلئے مندرجہ ذیل حرازمین کو اجارہ دیکھنے کیلئے اطلاع دی جاتی ہے۔

Actual Tillers / دفکاران وخیٹنر ز (دو افراد) جو محکمہ وقف کے ساتھ مقدمہ بازی میں مخالف رہے ہیں۔ (مدرجہ بالا افراد اپنی زیر قبضہ زمین کی مکمل تجدید شدہ ریٹوریکارڈ بشمول فردہل شرم کرداوی، نکس اور نقشہ تصوری دفتر فیضطر اوقاف صوبہ خیبر بہختونخوا (عمید گاہ) چارسدہ وڈپشاور ایک ہفتہ کے اندر اجارہ دیکھنے کیلئے حاضر ہو۔ بصورت عدم قبل محکمہ وقف کے قوانین کے تحت کاروائی مکمل میں لائی جائیگی۔ نوٹ: مزید معلومات شرکا ورضاء دفتر خیبر اوقاف تحت جاتی مل مردان ودفتر فیضطر اوقاف صوبہ خیبر بہختونخوا (عمید گاہ) چارسدہ وڈپشاور سے دفتر اوقات کار کی جاسکتی ہیں۔

المشتہر

دفتر فیضطر اوقاف صوبہ خیبر بہختونخوا،

واقع (عمید گاہ) چارسدہ وڈپشاور فون نمبر: 091-9330427

INF (P) 23/25

OFFICE OF THE ASSISTANT DIRECTOR (SENIOR) LOCAL GOVERNMENT & RURAL DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT, TEHSIL (HQ) DIR DISTRICT MARDAN

NOTICE INVITING E-BIDDING

Sealed tenders for the below mentioned Scheme are hereby invited on the basis MRS 2024 (Bi-A) single stage single envelope procedure from the government contractors registered with PEC in the relevant category and having registration enlistment renewal for the current financial year as per following schedule.

W#No.	Work Name	Estimated cost in (Million)	Earnest money @2% in Rupees	Last date / time of submission of Electronic Tender forms	Date & time of opening of electronic bid	Time of completion
01	Solarization of Masjid at Kohi Barmool, Qasmi, Alo & Kharki.	5.00	100000	23-01-2025 12:00 PM	23-01-2025 01:00 PM	As per work order
02	Repair Work at Masjid Sher Abad & Masjid Miangoan Kili	2.6	52000	23-01-2025 12:00 PM	23-01-2025 01:00 PM	As per work order

TERMS AND CONDITION:-

- The Financial bidding will be through E-bidding System. Tender form and BOQ can be filled and downloaded by the original contractor available on the official website of LG&RDD, DG Office (www.lgkp.gov.pk) Khyber Pakhtunkhwa after one day of Publishing of NIT.
- The bidders are required to fill Electronic Bids online and attach Scan copy of Bid Security in shape of original Call Deposit in the name of Procuring Entity and submit a hard copy of the same printed electronic bid form to the concerned AD Office Mardan.
- Sealed bids send through registered mail/Courier service should reached up-to the specified time and date as mentioned.
- The contractor or his representative may be present at the time of opening of electronic bids opening.
- The call deposits i.e. Bid Security for the work / contract must be prepared after publishing of NIT, before closing time of the Electronic bid apply.
- The contractors quoting their bids up to a limit of 10% below Engineer estimate shall submit Bid security @2% only of Engineer Estimate.
- The contractor quoting their bids more than 10% below up to 20% below on Engineer's Estimate shall submit along with their bids 8% Additional security of Engineer estimate in addition to 2% bid security. If the bid is not accompanied with the required amount of Additional security, then the bid shall be considered as non-responsive and the 2% bid security shall be forfeited in favor of Government and the second lowest bidder and so on will be considered accordingly.
- In case, a contractor quoting bid more than 20% below shall submit with his bid an additional security on Engineers Estimated cost equal to the differential amount of submitted bid and Engineer Estimate along with detailed rate analysis. In case of more than 20% below bids, if the bid is not accompanied by the detailed rate analysis and/or required amount of additional security, then the bid shall be considered as Non-responsive. All the securities submitted along with such non-responsive bid shall be forfeited in favor of Government and the second lowest bidder and so on will be considered accordingly as per KPPRA Notification No. 6058-71 Peshawar, the May 10, 2022.
- In case detailed rate analysis submitted with the bid is, in view of the procuring entity, not convincing, the Head of the procuring entity may declare such bid as non-responsive without any forfeiture of bid securities and record reason thereof.
- The procuring entity may offer the contract to the next lowest bidder after due diligence in the context of financial difference between such two bids or may advertise procuring opportunity afresh. (KPPRA Notification NO. S.R.O (14)/Vol-I-24/2021-22: 6058-71 Peshawar the May 10, 2022)
- Any Electronic bidder who provide false, or materially inaccurate or incomplete or do not send information in hard form will be disqualified as per KPPRA Act Section 29(1) read with KPPRA Rule (43). Furthermore, the Procuring Entity/Executing Agency will recommend and sent cases for Debarring / Blacklisting and will take action in light of Approved Procedure/mechanism as per KPPRA Act Section 29(2) read with KPPRA Rule (44).
- Electronic bids will remain valid for 90 days from the closing date of bids. (as decided by the procuring entity / executing agency in light of standard bidding documents).
- The firms/contractors who wants to participate in tendering process may approach Directorate General LG&RDD Peshawar within two days before closing time of electronic apply for uploading their names on the official website i.e. (www.lgkp.gov.pk).
- All Bidders are required to be registered with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Revenue Authority, established under the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Finance Act, 2013 (Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Act No. XXI of 2013), for works, consulting and non-consulting Service as listed in Scheduled-II of the Act.
- In case the bid become a tie the contractor shall be decided through a free toss which shall be final.
- The PEC and KPPRA Registration (Active tax payer) must be valid for current Financial Year.
- The time limit of each work shall be as per work order issued to successful bidder and the contractor will have to start work within 15 days' time period after the issuance of work order failing which the work be cancelled and security/additional security (if any) will be forfeited.
- All applicable taxes will be recoverable as per directives of the government in vogue.
- The procuring entity may reject any or all bids after communicating the reasons for rejection at any time prior to the award of contract.
- Any addition made in terms & conditions in the NIT advertised in the newspaper will be implemented as per KPPRA Rules.
- Work order will be issued subject to release of fund.
- All material testing and all sorts of tests will be performed by contractor on the demand of procuring entity.
- Bidders may obtain bidding documents and further information from the office of Assistant Director (Senior) LG&RDD Tehsil (HQ) Mardan on any working day before closing date.
- The same terms and conditions should be considered for the advertisement.
- In light of the letter No. Director (LG/3-16/ADP2023/17482 dated Peshawar 18th Oct, 2024. The duplicate copy of the Bid costing more than 2 million may be submitted to the Director General LG&RDD Sector 20, B5 opposite NESPAK Office Phase-V Hayatabad Peshawar before closing time of Bid.

INF (P) 15/25

Assistant Engineer (Senior), LG&RDD Tehsil (HQ) Mardan

Assistant Director (Senior), LG&RDD Tehsil (HQ) Mardan

Governor Kundi rejects NRO for politicians, stresses accountability

PESHAWAR (APP): Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Faisal Karim Kundi on Friday dismissed the possibility of any political leader receiving an NRO (National Reconciliation Ordinance) and made it clear that no such concessions were forthcoming and stressed accountability.

Talking to media during his visit to Peshawar Press Club to congratulate the newly elected cabinet of PPC and Khyber Union of Journalists (KhUJ).

President PPC M. Riaz, KhUJ Kashifuddin Syed and other cabinet members were present on this occasion. Commenting on the ongoing political deadlock, Governor Kundi said that there appeared to be little progress in the negotiations between the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party and the government. While expressing concerns, he added that prayer was the only recourse, emphasizing that dialogue was the key to resolving all issues.

Governor Faisal Karim Kundi discussed a range of issues concerning the province, including developments in Kurram, political tensions, and security concerns.

Governor Kundi expressed hope that a recently signed agreement in Kurram would be implemented effectively.

He also urged the provincial government to facilitate thousands of employees working in different areas and requested pathways for them to return to their native areas.

The Governor acknowledged the support extended by the provincial governments of Sindh, Punjab, and Balochistan for the people of Kurram and thanked them for their assistance.

He expressed satisfaction with the government's establishment of a rule of law in the Kurram. However, Governor Kundi condemned the recent use of tear gas and baton charges on protesting representatives of local bodies.

He announced that a convention for the local government representatives would be held at the Governor's House to discuss their demands and resolve ongoing issues.

He called on the provincial government to address the deteriorating security situation in Bannu, Kohat, Dera Ismail Khan, and Tank by taking immediate action.

Regarding security, Kundi questioned how those responsible for the province's instability could chair the apex committee and expressed his reservations about its functioning. He proposed including the Leader of the Opposition in the apex committee, stressing that without opposition participation, the committee would lack credibility.

Kundi also pointed out that the PTI government has failed to address the challenges in the province since it took power in 2013.

He criticized the provincial government for not maintaining peace and order, highlighting the poor security situation.

Regarding the proposed withdrawal of military forces from the province, the Governor questioned the capabilities of the provincial police to maintain law and order in the absence of the army.

He also clarified that a Governor's Rule could not be imposed arbitrarily.

In a further political comment, Kundi mentioned the pressure the current Chief Minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is facing from another Chief Minister who has also been involved in provincial affairs.



PESHAWAR: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Governor Faisal Karim Kundi in a group photo with the editors of Peshawar-based newspapers.

KP utilizes 55.72% of uplift Funds: Muzzammil

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Advisor to the Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa for Finance and Inter-Provincial Coordination Muzammil Aslam, has said that the province has made significant progress in utilizing its annual development funds. According to Aslam, 55.72% of the funds allocated for the first six months of the fiscal year 2024-25 have been utilized.

Aslam revealed that a total of Rs. 190,000 million was allocated for the first six months, out of which Rs. 79,584 million has been released. He added that Rs. 44,352 billion has been utilized, which is 55.72% of the total funds allocated.

The advisor also provided a breakdown of the funds allocated and spent for different regions. He said that for the ADP settled districts, Rs. 120,000 million were allocated, out of which Rs. 60,948 million have been released and Rs. 33,467 million have been utilized, which is 55% of the total funds.

Similarly, for the ADP Merged districts, Rs. 30,000 million were allocated, out of which Rs. 8,719 million have been released and Rs. 5,115 million have been spent, which is 59% of the total funds.

Mr. Aslam also announced that for the AIP, Rs. 40,000 million were allocated, out of which Rs. 9,916 million have been released and Rs. 5,769 million has been spent, which is 58% of the total funds.

The advisor attributed the significant progress in utilizing development funds to the provincial government's commitment to improve infrastructure and services in various regions.

Trials completed for Peshawar Zalmi Talent Hunt

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The trials for the Peshawar Zalmi Talent Hunt, organized by Peshawar Zalmi and the Zalmi Foundation in Peshawar, have been successfully completed. As part of the first phase, 100 outstanding players have been shortlisted.

The first day of trials saw participation from over 10,000 aspiring cricketers at the Arbab Niaz Stadium. The trials continued for two more days at the Hayatabad Sports Complex, where the best players were selected.

Renowned former Pakistani cricketers, including Inzamam-ul-Haq, Mohammad Yousuf, Kamran Akmal, and Umar Gul, along with Peshawar Zalmi's Director of Cricket, Mohammad Akram, supervised the trials and finalized the shortlisted players.

Over the next two days, practice matches will be held at the Hayatabad Sports Complex. These matches will serve as an additional selection round to identify more top-performing players.

The shortlisted young cricketers will not only be given the opportunity to participate in Peshawar Zalmi's pre-PSL camp but also stand a chance to be included in the Peshawar Zalmi squad for the upcoming Pakistan Super League (PSL).



UET Peshawar students visits KP Assembly

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly hosted a comprehensive educational visit for the students of the University of Engineering and Technology (UET), Peshawar. This initiative aimed to provide students with an in-depth understanding of parliamentary affairs, legislative processes, and the historical and operational significance of the Assembly.

The delegation was warmly welcomed and given an extensive tour of the Assembly's key sections. They were introduced to various aspects of its functioning, including the legislative framework, procedural rules, and administrative structure.

The Assistant Secretary of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly delivered a detailed briefing, shedding light on the institution's history, the legislative process, and its critical role in governance.

Following the initial briefing, the Special Secretary of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly, Syed Waqar Shah, engaged with the students, addressing their queries with detailed explanations. He emphasized the vision of Speaker Babar Saleem Swati, who initiated such educational programs to cultivate awareness among the youth regarding parliamentary functions and their importance in the democratic system.

"These visits are not merely a learning opportunity but a platform to inspire the younger generation to actively participate in the nation's development. Understanding the legislative process equips them to identify and address national challenges effectively," Syed Waqar Shah remarked.

He highlighted that the Assembly is a "public forum where policies and decisions shaping the future of citizens are deliberated and finalized."

The visit included a guided tour of significant areas within the Assembly premises, such as the Assembly Hall, Speaker and Deputy Speaker's chambers, and galleries. The students observed the layout and operations of these spaces, gaining valuable insights into the day-to-day workings of the legislature.

The students expressed their gratitude for the initiative, stating that the experience enhanced their understanding of governance and legislative responsibilities. This visit marks another milestone in the Assembly's efforts to strengthen the connection between academic institutions and democratic institutions.

The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly remains committed to fostering knowledge and awareness among the youth, equipping them to take on leadership roles and contribute meaningfully to the country's future.



PIC performs over 2000 heart surgeries in 2024

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Peshawar Institute of Cardiology (PIC), the only dedicated cardiac hospital in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, on Friday announced the year 2024 as highly successful by performing over 2,000 cardiac procedures, including 1,901 open-heart surgeries (236 on children), thus becoming one of the largest heart centers in Pakistan.

The hospital's annual performance report highlights a significant impact on cardiac care in the region.

According to the spokesperson Miss Riffat Anjum, In 2024, PIC's outpatient department (OPD) received over 69,489 patients, including over 10,363 children. The hospital performed 15,143 angiographies and angioplasties. PIC also provided a beacon of hope for children with congenital heart defects, successfully closing atrial septal defects (holes in the heart) in 811 children using minimally invasive devices.

PIC's emergency department treated 16,895 cardiac patients, including 653 children.

Under the Sehat Card Plus program, 19,701 patients received free angiography, angioplasty, surgeries, and other treatments. In a significant advancement, PIC performed 16 transcatheter aortic valve implantations (TAVI), a minimally invasive procedure, setting a new standard for cardiac care in the province.

PIC also provided exceptional care to patients from other provinces of Pakistan and neighboring Afghanistan.

Approximately 1,100 Afghan patients received OPD consultations, and 300 underwent angiography, angioplasty, cardiac surgery and other cardiac treatments, She added.

The hospital's state-of-the-art facilities, including cardiac MRI, CT scans, ultrasound, X-rays, and general MRI, benefited 35,756 patients. PIC's internationally (CAP) accredited laboratory conducted over 556,706 tests.

In 2024, PIC Achieved several national and international recognitions and milestones. The hospital became the first in South Asia to introduce TherOX super saturation oxygen therapy. PIC also gained national recognition for its minimally invasive valve replacements and other procedures on both children and adults.

Ongoing reforms in food dept to ensure transparency: Toru

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Minister for Food Zahir Shah Toru has emphasized ongoing reforms in the food department to ensure transparency, aligned with the vision of former Prime Minister Imran Khan.

Addressing a press conference in Peshawar, the minister highlighted efforts towards restructuring and digitization of the department, noting that most of its operations have already been digitized, with the remaining processes expected to follow soon.

Senior officials from the food department were also present during the briefing.

Toru revealed that when he assumed office, food department warehouses housed 141,000 metric tons of wheat, including 77,762 metric tons imported from Ukraine in 2021.

This stock was procured by the previous caretaker government from PASSCO (Pakistan Agricultural Storage and Services Corporation) in 2023. To examine the quality of this wheat, 30 samples were sent to PCSIR and Qarshi Laboratories. However, the results from the two laboratories were contradictory, raising concerns over the usability of the stock.

Zahir Shah further said in light of these discrepancies, the provincial cabinet constituted a committee comprising microbiologist, agricultural expert, food scientist, and food safety specialist to further examine the wheat's quality. The committee has forwarded the samples to the National Laboratory of Microbiology in Faisalabad, and results are expected next week. The findings will guide the decision on whether the wheat is fit for human consumption or not. The minister assured that the issue of wheat quality would be resolved comprehensively without any pressure.

He criticized the previous caretaker governments for supplying substandard wheat to the public and asserted that, for the first time in the province's history, the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf government is providing high-quality wheat and flour to citizens.

He further stated that, according to international standards and the Pakistan Standards and Quality Control Authority (PSQCA), wheat containing aflatoxins (fungal toxins) up to 20 parts per billion (PPB) is deemed safe for human consumption.

Minister Toru also affirmed that the wheat procured during the last procurement campaign is of excellent quality and stored securely, ensuring the continued provision of premium flour to the public.

KP allocating 70% share in new schools for girls: Tarakai

PESHAWAR (APP): KP Minister for Elementary and Secondary Education, Faisal Khan Tarakai has said that the provincial government is taking revolutionary steps for women education and making efforts to provide best educational opportunities for girls also.

Presiding over a meeting of the Girls' Cadet College Mardan here on Friday, he said that the provincial government has decided to allocate 70% share in the new schools for construction of girls' schools to enable women to play their due role in the national development.

The provincial minister said that Girls Cadet College Mardan will relocate to their own newly constructed building soon. He said that despite financial hardships, funds have been released for the college building and all required preparations in this regard have been completed.

He directed that in case of the shifting of the college to its own building, space for the admission of high number of girls is created. Therefore, a new entry test for the remaining girls will be conducted in the month of March, saying that the strength of 184 girls for admission in Grade 8 would be met in any circumstances.

The provincial minister directed the Special Secretary Elementary and Secondary Education, Qaiser Alam to visit the concerned collect to supervise the construction work and other matters as soon as possible.

Beside unanimous approval of the budget for the college, the Board of Governors also approved an ad hoc relief allowance of 25% for employees of BPS 1 to BPS 16 and 20% ad hoc relief for the employees of BPS 17 and above. Similarly, a PhD allowance was also approved for one of the employees of the college.

The board also approved the recruitment of two employees selected on merit and directed the fixation of one year probation period for them.

Uraan Pakistan to pave way for economic prosperity with revolutionary plans: Ikhtiar Wali

PESHAWAR (APP): Uran Pakistan program is widely praised in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa where economic experts termed it a significant step forward to put the country on the path of economic and industrial development on fast track basis. Under the leadership of Prime Minister, Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif, the economic position of Pakistan is growing stronger with each passing day, and is improving beyond the expectations of international organizations. Ikhtiar Wali Khan, PMLN KP spokesman said this while talking to APP here Friday. He said that the Uran Pakistan was a landmark initiative that would revitalize the national economy and give upward push to industrial development besides opening the gates of foreign investment. He said that the rate of inflation was at the lowest level of 4.1 percent during the last 81 months and the country's economy that was at the verge of default in past was now included in one of stable economies, which signified PMLN government's prudent policies on economic front. The foreign receipts in the financial year 2025 are 15 billion Dollars and the figure is hoped to increase to 35 billion dollars at the end of the current financial year, he expressed. "Pakistan stock exchange in on a most positive trend as compared to last 22 years and regarded as second best stock exchange of the world and first in Asia. The policy rate has been brought to 13 percent from 22 percent and record increase was witnessed in import and export in first six months i.e. 10.52 percent and 6.11 percent respectively. Under 'Uraan Pakistan', five more long term economic plans have been targeted for 2035 while target has been set to take target of national GDP to one trillion till 2035 besides fixation of 6pc growth rate in next 5 years.



In brief

Snowfall increases public miseries F.P. Report

SHANGLA: A light winter drizzle in Shangla has brought an end to a prolonged dry spell; however, the anticipated snowfall in the severe cold weather has not occurred. The rainfall has increased the intensity of the cold, but the region continues to face acute water shortages as a record decrease in natural spring water reserves persists. Details reveal that since Thursday evening, light rain and drizzle have ended the extended dry period in Shangla. However, the severe cold weather has failed to deliver the expected snowfall. This light precipitation has, nonetheless, added to the intensity of the cold. The residents of Shangla, a mountainous region heavily reliant on natural springs for drinking water, are facing severe water shortages. Almost 90% of the population depends on these natural springs for drinking water. Whenever the region experiences reduced rainfall or snowfall, the residents face significant challenges in accessing potable water. Unfortunately, Shangla remains the only district without a dedicated water supply and sanitation agency or department.

Action against illegal constructions F.P. Report

TOBA TEK SINGH: Chief Officer District Council Toba Tek Singh said that any illegal housing society, commercial buildings, those who construct, markets and petrol pumps do not deserve any concession because these people cause a loss of crores of rupees to the Government of Punjab by not passing the map. He added that our teams work in the field on a daily basis and during checking, if any such constructions are found without approvals, immediate action is taken against them and they are sealed. Anwar Baig Sial said that I Warming such people that if any such constructions are found from the Government of Punjab which not approvals. FIR will be filed against them along with full action on this occasion. District Officer Planning Hafiz Shoaib, Inspector Muhammad Muzaffar, Inspector Ali were also present. Meanwhile, the seventh and first digital agriculture census of Pakistan was inaugurated by Additional Deputy Commissioner General Zeeshan Labbha Masih. District Officer Shahzad Raza Ansari and other relevant officers were also present in the opening ceremony. Additional Deputy Commissioner General Zeeshan Labbha Masih said Speaking on the occasion, he said that digital agriculture census is a milestone in obtaining accurate and comprehensive information about the agricultural sector in the country through modern technology.

Three arrested

PISHIN (INP): Three hunters were arrested for illegally killing Markhor in Bostan region of Pishin, Balochistan. According to Deputy Commissioner, Zahid Khan, authorities in Bostan conducted an operation that led to the recovery of a Markhor, illegally hunted in the region. Three individuals, identified as Izhar Khan, Masoor Khan, and Saddam Khan, have been arrested on charges of illegal hunting of Markhor. According to the DC, two of the arrested individuals are working for the Balochistan Constabulary and the Water and Sanitation Authority (WASA). The accused allegedly hunted the Markhor in the restricted area of Taktou.

PTI govt faces criticism for neglecting Malakand Division



Shafi Ullah

MINGORA: Inayat ullah Khan, Ameer Jamaat-e-Islami Khyber Pakhtunkhwa North and former provincial minister, has strongly condemned the PTI provincial government's biased attitude towards the population of 10 million in Malakand Division. Speaking at a press conference at Swat Press Club, Khan accused the government of violating the rights of the people by closing ongoing development projects worth over Rs 42 billion and withholding funds.

Khan expressed his outrage over the government's

decision to terminate development projects in the districts of Swat, Buner, Shangla, Dir, Malakand, Chitral, and Bajaur, stating that this move has insulted the mandate of the people of Malakand Division. Despite the people giving PTI a mandate three times in a row, the party has failed to deliver justice to the people, Khan lamented. The former provincial minister also criticized the government's treatment of local government representatives, who were lathi-charged and subjected to severe torture. Khan expressed regret that these representatives, who had

staged sit-ins in Islamabad, were now being deprived of their democratic rights.

Khan warned that if the government fails to release funds and restore previously approved development projects in Malakand Division, Jamaat-e-Islami will launch a full-scale protest movement against the government. He also hinted at the possibility of an all-party conference to address the issue.

The press conference was attended by prominent leaders, including Naib Ameer Syed Bakhtiar Maani, Muhammad Amin Naib Ameer, and General Secretary Muhammad Haleem Bacha.

Sharp decline reported in dengue cases

F.P. Report

LAKKI MARWAT: A significant decline in the dengue cases was reported in Lakki Marwat district as only four positive cases surfaced during December, taking the tally of confirmed cases to 210 in the outgoing year.

It was revealed by a health department official at a meeting of the dengue control and prevention committee. Deputy Commissioner Zeeshan Abdullah chaired the meeting attended among others by additional ACs Gohar Ali Khan, Muhammad Arif and Azmat Ali Khan, DHO Dr Abdugul and officials of line departments.

The district health office's medical entomologist Jameel Khan told the meeting that since the start of season, the district had reported a total of 210 confirmed cases, 14 in September, 42 in October and 150 and four in November and December respectively. He said that no case was reported from Jan to August during the outgoing year. He said that a total of 153 cases were reported from Ghaznikhel tehsil, 38 from Lakki tehsil, 18 from Serai Naurang tehsil and one dengue case was reported from other parts of the district. The official claimed that the changing weather, temperature dip and an effective dengue control strategy helped to curb the spread of vector borne disease in the district.

He also said that an effective surveillance of dengue control activities and full support by the district administration, its line

agencies and other stakeholders enable the health department to bring a significant drop in infections. "Under the dengue surveillance and case response mechanism, the health workers inspected 89451 houses and 96817 outdoor sites to eliminate mosquito breeding places", he maintained.

The deputy commissioner directed the health and municipal authorities to conduct fumigation and indoor anti-dengue spray regularly. He asked the authorities to adopt a proactive approach to kill mosquitoes before they bite people and spread dengue and other viral diseases.

"Responding to an epidemic after its prevalence is not a better solution to control the situation", he said, adding that the health department should not wait for directives from the provincial government or district administration to launch anti-dengue drives and preventive measures.

Police continues crackdown: Lakki Marwat and Karak police have arrested several key members of the gangs of bike thieves and drug barons and seized a stolen motorcycle and a large quantity of narcotics from them. A resident Jabir Ahmad lodged a report with Lakki city police, complaining that unknown bike lifters have stolen his motorcycle parked outside a bank on the main bus stand. DPO Muhammad Jawad Ishaq took notice of the incident and directed Lakki circle DSP Zafullah Khan to trace the bike thieves and ensure their arrest", said police officials.

They said that following the directives of the local police authorities the city police swung into action and captured the suspect with the help of human intelligence and modern technology. "The arrested suspect identified as Rizwanullah, a resident of Bannu is the ringleader of bike lifters' gang and he has confessed to his involvement in the bike theft incidents", they claimed, adding that the cops also recovered the stolen motorcycle from his possession and shifted him to the police station.

Meanwhile, Karak police launched an offensive against drug traffickers in parts of the district on the special instructions of District Police Officer Shahbaz Elahi. Officials said that the deputy superintendents of police (DSPs) and SHO's led the operations.

They said that a police party rounded up two suspects including Zaeerullah and Muhammad Aamir and seized five kilogram hashish from them in the Sabirabad area. Officials said that in a separate action, the police also foiled a narcotics smuggling bid in the mountainous terrain of Terri and captured a drug peddler identified as Saifullah. They said that the law enforcers recovered 3685 gram hashish from the arrested suspect and shifted him to the concerned police station. They said that Karak city police also held a proclaimed offender Ibrahim and another suspect Salim and seized 4400 gram hashish and 207 gram ice (crystal meth) from them.

Court awards sentences for killing three persons F.P. Report

LOWER DIR: The court of Muhammad Sajid, additional session judge II Lower Dir, on Friday sentenced one Shamshad 70 to undergo rigorous imprisonment for life and Rs 500,000 to be paid to legal heirs of the deceased as compensation.

The court also sentenced Shamshad's three sons; Shafi ur Rehman 21, Ihsanullah 30 and Anwar Zaib 38, all residents of Nagri Bala village in Talash, to undergo rigorous imprisonment for ten years in a triple murder case. The accused were also convicted and sentenced for one year imprisonment for damaging a tractor of the complainant party. According to the court order the prosecution proved the charges against the accused party successfully; however the death penalty was avoided because the prosecution did not prove the alleged motive.

Three persons identified as Habib ur Nabi, Sultan Zaib, Sultan Nabi were killed while one Abdar Khan was injured when the convicted persons opened fire on them on Nov 16, 2021 at Nagri Bala area in the jurisdiction of Talash police station.

Chicken prices hiked artificially

F.P. Report

HAFIZABAD: Artificial increase in broiler chicken meat prices in Hafizabad. Citizens were worried. According to details, the meat of broiler chicken in Hafizabad city, which was being sold for Rs.500 per kg a few weeks ago, has now exceeded Rs.700 per kg. While the prices of eggs and mutton and beef are also increasing, but all the Price Control Magistrates of the District Administration are engaged in fake activities instead of controlling the inflation.

It is pertinent to mention that instead of going to the field themselves to achieve the target of fines, the Price Control Magistrates send their clerical staff to the markets to impose fines, which makes inflation in the city uncontrollable. The mafia is robbing the citizens with both hands by extracting the rates of their own choice, which has made the claims of the PML-N government to reduce inflation a joke in the eyes of the people.

DPO commits for police's welfare: District Police has implemented the vision of IG Punjab Dr.

Usman Anwar, which includes the welfare of the police force and equipping the police with modern technology and encircling the accused in the entire district have a record recovery from the accused by adopting full energy and innovative strategies.

According to sources, the professionalism of DPO Hafizabad Faisal Gulzar not only united the police of district with strong nerves to fight the accused bravely, but also helped bring the accused to justice.

Continuing the same sequence, sub-inspector Ali Raza (in-charge of Chowki Solangi Awan) along with his team has recovered 07 motorcycles and 06 agricultural motors from the possession of 2 members of Nazakat alias Zakri group while making a complaint against the recorded accused. Further investigation of the accused is going on under the supervision of DSP Sadar Circle. DPO Hafizabad Faisal Gulzar while congratulating the entire team said that the series of ongoing promotions by IG Punjab has created a new wave of work among police officers, the results of which are visible.

Tribesmen holds protest for Dr. Afia release F.P. Report

WANA: A protest demanding the release of Dr. Afia Siddiqui was held in Lower South Waziristan's district headquarters, Wana. The protest saw participation from various political and social leaders, including Jamaat-e-Islami General Secretary Abdul Wahab, senior Jamaat-e-Islami leader Saif-ur-Rehman Tayyab, Ejaz Wazir, Mumtaz Khalil Ghazi, and Shah Hussain Wazir, President of the Dr. Afia Siddiqui Team, Lower South Waziristan.

Protesters chanted slogans against the government and held placards and banners demanding Dr. Afia's immediate release.

Addressing the protest, Saif-ur-Rehman Tayyab highlighted the plight of Dr. Afia Siddiqui, who has been enduring unimaginable hardships during her 21-year imprisonment in the United States. He condemned this as a blatant violation of human rights and urged the government to ensure her release through diplomatic channels.

Protesters stressed the need to highlight Dr. Afia's case on an international level to secure justice. They called for effective and serious diplomatic efforts to address this issue. The protest was attended by political workers and social leaders who united in their call for immediate action by the government.

Shah Hussain Wazir emphasized that Dr. Afia Siddiqui's prolonged imprisonment is a grave human rights violation and a matter of national pride and dignity. He urged the government to leverage its diplomatic resources fully and also appealed to the international community to play its part in ensuring justice. The protest reflected a collective demand for Dr. Afia's freedom, underscoring the urgency of swift and effective measures to address this pressing humanitarian issue.

DC inspects Divisional HQs hospital F.P. Report

KOHAT: Deputy Commissioner Kohat has paid a surprise visit to the Divisional Headquarter Hospital Kohat under the Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Program "Awami Agenda", where he beside the Emergency facilities, also inspected various wards and checked the attendance of staff and necessary record.

Deputy Commissioner Kohat, during his visits reviewed the medicines situation, cleanliness conditions and other arrangements and directed the authorities concerned to ensure provision of best and timely treatment to the patients. He further directed the staff to be remained present in the hospital at all times, behave well with the patients, further improve public services and cleanliness in the hospital.

Deputy Commissioner Kohat also met the relatives of the patients and inquired about the medical facilities being provided in the hospital and the behavior of the medical staff. He directed the hospital administration to continue the supply of free medicines to the patients and adopt a courteous attitude towards the patients.

Accused killed in encounter F.P. Report

MARDAN: In the police encounter, the accused was killed by the firing of his own colleagues, a policeman was injured, the search for the accomplices continues. According to the police, station Jabar, police station Katlang, and police station Dagar Bunir, wanted ad accused Kashif resident Sawalder, wanted in various serious cases, was arrested. Accused Kashif was involved in more than 30 cases of murder, attempted murder, robbery, and other serious crimes and was wanted by Khyber Pakhtunkhwa as well as Punjab police.

During the investigation, the police recovered a Kalashnikov, a large amount of ammunition, and cash on the identification of the accused. During further investigation, the accused identified his four accomplices, who were immediately raided by the police in the area of Darangona Jabar.

Bahawalpur releases annual performance report

F.P. Report

BAHAWALPUR: District police Bahawalpur releases annual performance report for 2024. A total of 24056 cases were registered across the district, out of which 17242 cases were challenged, and more than Rs 250 million was recovered and handed over to the original owners. DPO Asad Sarfaraz Khan

According to the details, Bahawalpur Police has released a performance report for the year 2024, according to which a total of 24056 cases were registered across the district, and 17242 cases have been challenged. 30549 accused were arrested, 23 gangs were traced and arrested, from which 388 new and old cases were traced. Bahawalpur Police recovered 09 vehicles, 571 motorcycles, and other stolen items and cash worth more than Rs 250 million last year and handed them over to their owners.

78 cases of National Action Plan were registered. Similarly, 1690 cases were registered against drug peddlers, from which 11054 grams of heroin, 72320 grams of opium, more than 20 mn of hashish, 11303 grams of crystal ice, more than 277 mn of cannabis, 55645 liters of alcohol, and 148 barrels of charcoal were recovered.

839 cases were registered against illegal weapons, and 02 Kalashnikovs, 39 rifles, 140 revolvers, 25 repeater guns, 738 pistols, Mausers, 13 carbines, and 12508 rounds were recovered from the possession of the arrested accused. In a crackdown against the declared accused, 5256 accused were arrested while 889 court fugitives were arrested.

Similarly, in the last year, 136048 citizens were provided services by the police in all the service centers of Bahawalpur district. According to the vision of Justice at your doorstep, more than 490 open courts were organized in offices, police stations, and mosques, where the problems and complaints of citizens were immediately redressed. Bahawalpur Police never forget its martyrs. In this regard, 06 plots, gifts, and cash were distributed to the families of martyred police officers. DPO Asad Sarfaraz Khan personally attended the weddings of the daughters of martyred serving police officers and gave gifts. Similarly, MOUs were signed with various major colleges and academies to further improve the educational standard of the children of martyred police officers and serving and retired police officers.

08 Inspectors, 65 Sub-Inspectors, 15 Assistant Sub-Inspectors, and 78 Head Constables were promoted and were called to the office, and badges were applied to them. In line with the policy of the Punjab



government to protect the rights of minorities, in 2009, people were provided facilities at Meesaq Centers. To maintain the law and order situation, more than 300 police officers and employees performed Islamabad Rawalpindi dharna duty. 2500 officers and employees performed duty in Muharram-ul-Haram, 2100 in Ramadan, and more than 1300 officers and employees performed duty on Eid Milad-un-Nabi (PBUH).

More than 15 Friends and Volunteers of Police internship programs were organized to make students of schools, colleges, and universities aware of police work, from which more than 1296 students benefited and were given certificates.

1157 men and 471 women benefited from the driving schools and obtained driving licenses. Taking action against mobile thieves, 1112 mobiles were recovered from the e-gadget app and handed over to their owners.

To strengthen transgenders socially, a shelter home and school were re-established in which 87 transgenders were admitted. Accommodation, medical, food, and education facilities were provided, from which more than 458 transgenders benefited.

To provide decent employment to transgenders, jobs were arranged for 15 transgenders. Driving licenses were issued to 78 transgenders. 37 transgenders were admitted to driving schools free of charge. More than 271 transgenders were given free ration. 49 transgenders were given free medical treatment. More than 2200 people benefited from the protection center. 1198 people suffering from the scourge of drug addiction in society were treated free of cost at the Police Drug Rehabilitation Center Bahawalpur.

All 24 police stations of the district have been converted into Special Initiative Police Stations. Similarly, 7601 applications were received in the Virtual Women Police Station, on which 1524 cases were registered and 6074 applications were resolved in a good manner.

Kh Asif criticized for remarks against Ghaznavi

F.P. Report

LOWER DIR: Jamaat-e-Islami former district chief Izzul Mulik Afkari has said that poverty in Pakistan is continuously increasing and rich people are becoming richer. Talking to local journalists at Munda here, Mr Afkari, who also remained an MPA, said that the poverty ratio had increased by 7% in the last one year, as 13 million more people had gone below the poverty line.

The former lawmaker said that governments were increasing their privileges for MPs and ministers instead of solving public problems. "The Punjab government has increased the salaries of ministers and members of the assembly by 1000%, while the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government has also increased salaries despite debts", he said, adding neither the treasury nor the opposition benches were doing good for masses. He demanded the federal and provincial governments to take practical steps for the uplift of poor masses.

The JI leader condemned the federal minister Khawaja Asif for calling Ahmed Shah Abdali and Mahmood of Ghazni as "looters" and termed it an

attempt to distort history. He said that the current rulers themselves were setting new records of plundering. He asked Khawaja Asif to publicly seek an apology from the whole Pukhtun nationality.

Awaz II programme: Speakers at a forum have urged for collective efforts to uplift the vulnerable and oppressed communities and ending violence against women, transgenders and minorities groups. The forum was arranged by Awaz II, a British Council programme working on women and children rights, in collaboration with the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) at a local hotel in Timergara.

The government officials from the Rural Development Department, Youth Affairs, Social welfare department and sports attended the forum. The Awaz II programme project director Hameed Afridi, district coordinator Imranullah, district officer social welfare Muhammad Zeb and others spoke on the occasion.

The speakers said that collective efforts were needed to uplift the oppressed communities. They said that issues faced by vulnerable communities

should be identified through coordinated efforts, so that the concerned departments resolve them amicably. They also urged the stakeholders to make the public aware regarding the hazards of under-age marriages and gender discrimination in society.

Certificates' distributed: A total of 26 seminary's students were awarded with certificate and honorary shields on completion of their courses at Hadiqat ul Uloom Haya Serai. The Jamaat-e-Islami provincial deputy chief and prominent religious scholar Maulana Dr Muhammad Ismail was chief guest. The function was also addressed by former MNA and JI district chief Maulana Asadullah, head of the seminary Maulana Salimullah and Maulana Sher Bahadar also spoke on the occasion.

The speakers demanded the government to make the process of seminaries' registration and opening a bank account easier. They appreciated the role of religious seminaries in Pakistan and said that millions of male and female students were getting free education at those institutions without any government support.

Police arrests two alleged robbers

F.P. Report

SUJAWAL: In a major development made by on Friday Sujawal police arrested two accused reportedly involved in robbing polish tourist couple on 29th December at Sujawal-Badin bypass Addressing a news conference at SSP office the district Police Chief said that in line with the directives issued by DIG Hyderabad modern techniques were used to track down the accused involved in the offence.

Police conducted a raid at the hideouts of suspects on Friday and arrested two suspects identified as Maqbool

Hathiyar and Nadeem Ubauro while their ally Imran managed to escape Police recovered two mobile phones from the arrested suspected allegedly belonging to the Polish tourists tourists, Kowalczyk Jakuo Tomasz (aka Jacob) and his spouse Scantamburlo Mae Elisabeth (aka Merry).

"We will put all our efforts to ensure Justice in this high-profile case", vowed SSP Sujawal adding that the hard work of Sujawal police paid off. Further discussing about the initiatives taken by the Sujawal police he said that the team of IT experts of

Sujawal police played an instrumental role in attaining a major breakthrough in this case. The incident he said had damaged the reputation of Police but by the grace of Allah Almighty the reputation of police force revived.

Later SSP Sujawal and his team presented traditional Sindhi caps and Ajrakas to the Polish tourist couple and ensured cooperation in future as well. Kowalczyk Jakuo Tomasz from Poland and his wife Scantamburlo Mae Elisabeth from France, were cycling along the bypass when the robbers halted them at gunpoint and robbed them of valuables.



UK’s biggest ever dinosaur footprint site unearthed

LONDON (BBC): The UK's biggest ever dinosaur trackway site has been discovered in a quarry in Oxfordshire. About 200 huge footprints, which were made 166 million years ago, criss-cross the limestone floor. They reveal the comings and goings of two different types of dinosaurs that are thought to be a long-necked sauropod called Cetiosaurus and the smaller meat-eating Megalosaurus.

The longest trackways are 150m in length, but they could extend much further as only part of the quarry has been excavated. "This is one of the most impressive track sites I've ever seen, in terms of scale, in terms of the size of the tracks," said Prof Kirsty Edgar, a micropalaeontologist from the University of Birmingham. "You can step back in time and get an idea of what it would have been like, these massive creatures just roaming around, going about their own business." The tracks were first spotted by Gary Johnson, a worker at Dewars Farm Quarry, while he was driving a digger. "I was basically clearing the clay, and I hit a hump, and I thought it's just an abnormality in the ground," he said, pointing to a ridge where some mud has been pushed up as a dinosaur's foot pressed down into the earth.

"But then it got to another, 3m along, and it was a hump again. And then it went another 3m - hump again." Another trackway site had been found nearby in the 1990s, so he realised the regular bumps and dips could be dinosaur footprints. "I thought I'm the first person to see them. And it was so surreal - a bit of

a tingling moment, really," he told BBC News. This summer, more than 100 scientists, students and volunteers joined an excavation at the quarry which features on the new series of Digging for Britain.

The team found five different trackways. Four of them were made by sauropods, plant-eating dinosaurs that walked on four legs. Their footprints look a bit like an elephant's - only much much bigger - these beasts reached up to 18m in length. Another track is thought to have been created by a Megalosaurus. "It's almost like a caricature of a dinosaur footprint", explained Dr Emma Nicholls, a vertebrate palaeontologist from the Oxford University Museum of Natural History. "It's what we call a tridactyl print. It's got these three toes that are very, very clear in the print." The carnivorous creatures, which walked on two legs, were agile hunters, she said. "The whole animal would have been 6-9m in length.

They were the largest predatory dinosaurs that we know of in the Jurassic period in Britain." The environment they lived in was covered by a warm, shallow lagoon and the dinosaurs left their prints as they ambled across the mud. "Something must have happened to preserve these in the fossil record," said Prof Richard Butler, a palaeobiologist from the University of Birmingham. "We don't know exactly what, but it might be that there was a storm event that came in, deposited a load of sediments on top of the footprints, and meant that they were preserved rather than just being washed away." The team studied the trackways in detail

during the dig. As well as making casts of the tracks, they took more than 20,000 photographs to create 3D models of both the complete site and individual footprints. "The really lovely thing about a dinosaur footprint, particularly if you have a trackway, is that it is a snapshot in the life of the animal," Prof Butler explained. "You can learn things about how that animal moved. You can learn exactly what the environment that it was living in was like. So tracks give us a whole different set of information that you can't get from the bone fossil record."

One area of the site even reveals where the paths of a sauropod and megalosaurus once crossed. The prints are so beautifully preserved that the team have been able to work out which animal passed through first - they believe it was the sauropod, because the front edge of its large, round footprint is slightly squashed down by the three-toed megalosaurus walking on top of it. "Knowing that this one individual dinosaur walked across this surface and left exactly that print is so exhilarating," said Dr Duncan Murdock from Oxford University. "You can sort of imagine it making its way through, pulling its legs out of the mud as it was going." The future fate of the trackways hasn't yet been decided but the scientists are working with Smiths Bletchington, who operate the quarry, and Natural England on options for preserving the site for the future. They believe there could be more footprints, these echoes of our prehistoric past, just waiting to be discovered.



DAMASCUS: People standing outside their homes at a residential area as members of the new security forces take part in an operation to detain militiamen affiliated with ousted president Bashar Assad in Homs, Syria.

Small caravan of migrants sets out from Mexico

TAPACHULA, Mexico (AP): A new caravan of migrants began walking from southern Mexico toward the US border, starting out from the city of Tapachula near the border with Guatemala. The majority of the migrants are from Venezuela, but they also include people from Guatemala, El Salvador, Peru and Ecuador. They've said they are tired of being blocked from crossing Mexico by the government.

Though previous caravans have said they intend to reach the border - something that was almost never achieved - the migrants in the new caravan appear to be less clear about where they were headed. President-elect Donald Trump has pledged to prevent migrants from entering the United States and stage mass deportations of those already in the country. Many of the migrants said they were simply tired of being bottled up in Tapachula - a city tired of hosting thousands of migrants and one where they cannot find much work.

Giscarlis Colmenares, a 29-year-old from Venezuela, has been waiting for almost three months for an asylum appointment through the US CBP One app.

Colmenares said her immediate goal was to reach Mexico City to find "work, so that we see whether we can get, ahead, or stay here and earn enough money to return to Venezuela." An improvised migrant camp in downtown Mexico City was already full to overflowing with migrants. Some recognized the difficulties involved in reaching the US Douglas Ernesto, from El Salvador, trudged along with the caravan, with his wife and 10-year-old son.

Victims’ families seek answers in New Orleans attack

NEW ORLEANS (BBC): Just hours before the clock struck midnight on New Year's Eve, Jack Bech got on a phone call with his older brother Martin - an avid outdoorsman and former football star mostly known to friends and teammates as "Tiger". Jack, 22, was in Dallas visiting family members, while Tiger, a 28-year-old former Princeton alumnus who lived in New York, was in New Orleans, getting ready to celebrate the New Year.

"We just thought it was going to be another conversation," he told the BBC. "I was showing him what we were eating, and he was showing us what he was eating." The two brothers would never speak again. "I hung up the phone, and that was the last time I ever spoke with him," Jack recalled. Tiger was among the 14 people killed when an attacker ploughed through a crowd on Bourbon Street in New Orleans. The attacker, 42-year-old army veteran Shamsud-Din Jabbar, was killed in a gunfight with police after he drove a pickup truck into the crowds, according to authorities. Though he posted videos online proclaiming allegiance to the Islamic State group before the attack, FBI officials said they believe he was acting alone. While the identities of all the victims have not been made public yet, a picture is slowly emerging of a group of mostly young people, many of whom - like Tiger - were Louisiana locals. Jack - who remembers his brother as his best friend, role model and inspiration - says that the close-knit Bech family will never be the same. Most of the family is in the town of Lafayette, about 136 miles (218km) away from New Orleans. "This is something we're going to have to deal

with. Every time we wake up, and every time we go to sleep, it's going to be something," he added. "Every holiday, there's going to be an empty seat at the table." But Tiger said that his brother "wouldn't want us to grieve and mourn". Instead, he has encouraged his family to remember him as "a fighter". "He'd want us to keep attacking life...he'd want us to go and be there for each other," he said. "I told my family that instead of seeing him a couple of times a year, he'll be with us every moment," Jack added. "Whenever we're waking up and we're going to sleep and we're walking, when we're at work, doing whatever, he'll be with us." Among the other victims of the attack in the early morning hours of 1 January was Matthew Tenedorio, an audio-visual technician at New Orleans' Caesars Superdome. Tenedorio, who just turned 25 in October, had spent the earlier part of his evening at his brother's home in the town of Slidell, about 35 minutes away from New Orleans. With him were his father and mother - who just recently recovered from cancer.

His cousin, Christina Bounds, told the BBC that his family "begged" him not to go into New Orleans, fearful of the large crowd and potential dangers. Despite their pleas, he went, along with two friends. When the news broke, his mother eventually got a hold of one of them. "They said they were walking down Bourbon, and saw a body fall," she said, noting that they now believe it was a body thrown into the air by the attacker's truck. Amid screams and gunshots, Tenedorio was separated from his friends. His family says he was shot, and believe he was killed during

the exchange of gunfire between the attacker and police officers on Bourbon Street. The BBC is unable to independently verify this claim. According to Ms Bounds, the family's tragedy has been made more painful by the slow, nearly non-existent trickle of communications they've had with local authorities.

"We couldn't get any information when my aunt [Tenedorio's mother, Cathy] showed up at the hospital," she said. "There has been no information from doctors, hospitals, or cops. Nobody." "They have zero information, and that's the part that's pissing everybody off. We don't even know what happened," Bounds added. "Was he carried out by the EMS? Was he in an ambulance? Did he die instantly?" These answers, she added, would "help people accept" what happened. "But now it's like total shock," she added. "It's not registering."

The family has started a GoFundMe page to gather funds for Tenedorio's funeral expenses - which Ms Bounds said have been made difficult by his mother's significant medical bills during her cancer diagnosis. Another cousin of Tenedorio's, Zach Colgan, remembers him as a "goofball" who was quick to make a joke, cared deeply about animals and was an avid storyteller. "He cared. He was definitely a people person. A happy-go-lucky guy," Mr Colgan told the BBC. "It's sad that a terrorist attack took him...no family should ever have to bury their son, especially for something so senseless." Mr Colgan, who has experience working with law enforcement in Louisiana, says he believes officers have done the best they can in an extremely hectic casualty situation.

‘Treat us like humans’: Fishing wars trap Indians in Sri Lankan waters

NEW DELHI: When Ashoka* heard boots approaching, he began to shiver in fear. The 23-year-old was in the engine room of his boat, as three Sri Lanka Navy (SLN) men boarded the vessel. When Ashoka, an Indian fisherman from Pamban Island at the southernmost tip of India, came out on the deck, he saw the officers beating and pushing the eight fishermen on his boat, using guns, iron rods and wooden logs. The ordeal continued for an hour, with one of the uniformed men yelling, "Beat them hard, harder", recalls Ashoka, who was beaten too.

The fishermen - all Indians - were later handcuffed and chained, the steel edges cutting into their skin and causing itching. Chained together, none of them could move; otherwise, they would all fall. The fishermen were taken to a navy camp in Karaikal, north of Sri Lanka. Fifteen days later, two men - whom the fishermen would later learn were from the Indian embassy in Colombo - visited and gave them towels and soap. The men were finally released a month after they were arrested.

That was 2019, and the fishermen had been arrested off Katchatheevu, an uninhabited island that comes under Sri Lanka's territory, for fishing in that country's waters. Yet horrors of Ashoka's experience have only become more and more commonplace since then - peaking in 2024, with a spike in the number of Indian fishermen arrested by Sri Lanka, amid mounting tensions over allegations that military authorities mistreat them in custody. A record 535 Indian fishermen were arrested by Sri Lanka in 2024 - nearly double the previous year - according to Indian govern-

ment data. As of November 29, 141 Indian fishermen remained in Sri Lankan jails, with 198 trawlers confiscated.

In September, five fishermen who had crossed into Sri Lankan waters returned to Pamban with tonsured heads after they were arrested, and - according to the fishermen - were treated like convicts. They had to pay fines of 50,000 Sri Lankan rupees (\$170) each to secure their release. Protests erupted within the fishing community in the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu, where Pamban falls, against their government over frustrations that New Delhi has not been able to ensure their security. Meanwhile, in Sri Lanka, three other Indian fishermen were sentenced to six months of imprisonment along with fines. The SLN and the country's Ministry of Foreign Affairs have not responded to Al Jazeera's emails requesting comments on the allegations that Sri Lankan officers mistreat arrested fishermen. "I wish they would treat us like humans," says Ashoka.

The Gulf of Mannar, an inlet of the Indian Ocean connecting India and Sri Lanka, is rich in biodiversity and a source of livelihood for both countries' fishermen. Katchatheevu, a tiny island in the Palk Strait, a stretch of ocean that divides the two countries, was historically a common fishing ground for Indians and Sri Lankans. The fishing rights of Indians in the region were scrapped in 1976 after the island was ceded to Sri Lanka by India in 1974. Today, Katchatheevu is a site of frequent arrests of Indian fishermen. For Indian fishermen in Pamban, crossing the maritime border into Sri Lankan waters is a matter of survival. The

catch on the Indian side has been declining amid climate change, increasing plastic pollution in the sea and the rampant use of mechanised trawlers over decades. Trawlers, which scrape the seabed in their search for fish, destroy the seafloor habitat, including coral reefs. This in turn disrupts breeding cycles. Marine experts also blame trawlers for sea pollution from abandoned nets and fuel spills.

The seabed on the Indian side is rocky, and the international border near fishing sites like Rameswaram in Pamban starts at a distance of only 12 nautical miles (about 22km) from the shore, reducing the fishing area for Indian fishermen. To these fishers, the waters just across the maritime border are legitimate territory to sail into. "That's our fishing ground. Fishermen cross the border knowing well that they might get arrested or even die. If fishermen return without any fish, they cannot survive," says P Jesuraja, president of an association of fishermen with mechanised boats in Ramanathapuram district in Tamil Nadu. Often, though, fisherfolk enter Sri Lankan waters without intending to go there, he added.

"Almost half the time fishermen drift into the Sri Lankan side due to water currents or if it is very dark or raining," Jesuraja says. In many ways, experts and fishers accept that India has contributed to this crisis through policies it first pushed seven decades earlier. Starting in the 1950s, backed by international funding, India encouraged the use of trawlers. The result was a spike in the incomes of Indian fishermen but at the cost of destroying coral reef formations. — Al Jazeera

‘It was destiny’: How Jimmy Carter embraced China and changed history

LONDON (BBC): On a bright January morning in 1979, then US president Jimmy Carter greeted a historic guest in Washington: Deng Xiaoping, the man who unlocked China's economy. The first leader of Communist China to visit the United States, Deng had arrived the previous evening, to light snow and a welcome by the US vice-president, the secretary of state and their spouses.

It was the start of a diplomatic relationship that would forever change the world, setting the stage for China's economic ascent - and later, its rivalry with the US. Establishing formal ties with China was among Carter's more remarkable legacies, during a turbulent presidency that ended with one term. Born on 1 October, the same date as the founding of the People's Republic of China, "he liked to say it was destiny that brought him and China together", said Yawei Liu, a close friend of Carter's. Even after leaving office, he painstakingly cultivated a close bond with the Chinese people - but that was affected as ties between Washington and Beijing cooled.

Yet he remains one of a small group of US statesmen cherished by Beijing for helping to bring Communist China out of isolation in the 1970s. Beijing has expressed its condolences, calling Carter the "driving force" behind the 1979 agreement. But the Chinese internet has gone much further, referring to him as "Meirenzhong" or the "benevolent American", giving him a title that was once reserved for emperors. Carter's first encounter with China was in 1949, while the country was suffering the final convulsions of a bloody decades-long civil war. As a young US naval officer, his submarine unit was dispatched to Qingdao in eastern China. They were to aid Kuomintang troops who were fending off a

Communist siege by Mao Zedong's army. Just kilometres away behind enemy lines was a Chinese commander named Deng Xiaoping. When they finally met decades later, it was as leaders of their respective countries. It was an earlier US President, Richard Nixon, and his secretary of state Henry Kissinger who had laid the groundwork for wooing what was then Mao's China. With Beijing and Moscow at loggerheads, they had sensed an opportunity to draw away a Soviet ally. But those efforts culminated under Carter - and Deng - who pushed for deeper ties. For months, the US president dispatched trusted negotiators for secret talks with Beijing.

The breakthrough came in late 1978. In the middle of December, the two countries announced that they would "recognise each other and establish diplomatic relations from January 1, 1979". The world was surprised and Beijing was elated, but the island of Taiwan, which had long relied on US support against Chinese claims, was crushed. Carter is still a controversial figure there.

Previously, the US had only recognised the government of Taiwan, which China viewed as a renegade province. And for years US support for Taiwan had been the sticking point in negotiations. Switching recognition to Beijing meant the US had finally acknowledged China's position that there was only one Chinese government - and it was in Beijing. This is the One China policy, which, to this day, forms the cornerstone of US-China relations. But the pivot raised inevitable questions about US commitment to its allies. Uneasy with Carter's decision, Congress eventually forced through a law codifying its right to provide Taiwan with defensive weapons, thus creating a lasting contradiction in US

foreign policy.

Still historians agree that 1979 signalled an extraordinary set of moves that reoriented global power: not only did it unite the US and China against the Soviet Union, but also paved the way for peace and rapid economic growth in East Asia. But Carter could not have done it without his special relationship with Deng Xiaoping. "It's a pleasure to negotiate with him," Carter wrote in his diary after spending a day with Deng during his January visit, according to Deng's biographer Ezra Vogel. "The two of them followed common sense, there were actually significant similarities in their no-nonsense personalities," said Dali Yang, a professor of political science at the University of Chicago. "There was something really unique between the two men that really established trust."

Deng Xiaoping had survived three political purges under Mao to emerge as one of China's most consequential leaders. Historians credit his vision, self-assurance, frankness and sharp wit in no small part for this crucial diplomatic win. He sensed the opportunity Carter offered, Vogel writes - to both thwart Soviet power and to kickstart the modernisation that had begun in Japan, Taiwan and even South Korea.

He knew it would elude China without US help. Deng's visit to the US began with a warm first meeting at the White House, where he chuckled while revealing his Qingdao connection to Carter, according to Chinese reports. He was exuberant as the two clasped hands in front of cameras in the Rose Garden, saying: "Now our two countries' peoples are shaking hands." Over the next few days, Deng staged a whirlwind charm offensive on the Americans as he toured several states with Carter. In one famous image, Deng is seen grin-

ning as he dons a cowboy hat at a Texan rodeo. "Deng avoids politics, goes Texan," read a local newspaper headline. Carter described Deng as "smart, tough, intelligent, frank, courageous, personable, self-assured, friendly", according to Vogel.

He later wrote in his diary the trip was "one of the delightful experiences of my Presidency... to me, everything went right, and the Chinese leader seemed equally pleased." "Carter was really a catalytic agent for what was more than a diplomatic rapprochement - it was a dramatic moment of signalling," said Orville Schell, the director of the Asia Society's Centre on US-China Relations who, as a journalist in 1979, covered Deng's trip. "He introduced Deng to the country and actually to the world. It made what had been a contentious relationship to something very congenial. The way Carter and Deng interacted, these were signals that it was okay to both peoples to set history aside and start a new relationship."

Under Carter, China was granted "most favoured nation" trade status, boosting its economy and creating jobs. Within a year, two-way trade between the two countries doubled. Throughout the next decade China became an important trade partner not just for the US but also the world, which was "extraordinarily important" for China's growth, noted Prof Yang. Carter's connection with China endured long after his presidency ended. In the 1990s his non-profit group The Carter Center played a significant role in China's nascent grassroots democracy where - on the invitation of the Chinese government - it observed village elections, trained officials and educated voters.

Unusually for a former US president, Carter returned several times to

China on personal visits. On one trip, he and his wife Rosalynn helped to build shelters for victims of the 2008 Sichuan earthquake. His commitment to humanitarian work, his humble background as the son of a peanut farmer, and "folksy style" - which stood in contrast to the formal public personas of Chinese leaders - endeared him to many Chinese, according to Prof Yang: "He will be seen as a role model of a leader who cares, not just in rhetoric but also in actions." "Everywhere he travelled in China, people showed their warm feelings for him... The Chinese people really liked him for his courage and his honesty," said Dr Liu, a senior adviser with the Carter Center. He accompanied Carter on several trips, including a 2014 tour where he was feté by local officials and universities. In Qingdao, the city put on a surprise fireworks show for his 90th birthday. In Beijing, Deng's daughter hosted a banquet and presented a gift - a copy of the People's Daily front page of the 1979 communique. "Both were moved to tears," Dr Liu recalled.

That was to be his last visit. As the US-China relationship grew rockier, so too did Carter's ties with the Chinese leadership, particularly after Xi Jinping took power. On the eve of his 2014 visit, top government officials instructed universities not to sponsor his events, prompting a last-minute scramble to change venues, Carter noted. A state dinner held for him at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing was sparsely attended, recalled Mr Schell.

Notably, it was hosted by then vice-president Li Yuanhao, while Xi was said to be entertaining another dignitary elsewhere in the complex. "He wouldn't even come to tip his hat to Carter. That really showed the state of relations," Mr Schell said. "Carter

was really very angry. Two of his aides told me he even felt like leaving early because he felt disrespected." The Carter Center's activities in China were eventually curtailed, and a website they maintained to document the village elections was taken offline. No clear explanation was given at the time, but Dr Liu attributed this to China's growing suspicion of foreign organisations following the 2010 Arab Spring. Though Carter said little about the snub publicly, it would have been felt no less acutely, given the lengths he had gone to advocate for engagement.

It has also raised questions whether his approach on human rights with China - he characterised it as "patience" but others criticised it as soft-peddling - was justified in the end. Carter often "made a tremendous effort... not to stick fingers into China's eyes on the human rights question," Mr Schell noted. "He did temper himself even when he was out of office, as The Carter Center had a real stake in the country." Some see his decision to engage with Communist China as born out of an American sincerity at the time. Following the violent chaos of the Cultural Revolution, there was "a disbelief among many Americans - how could the Chinese be living in angry isolation?" Prof Yang said.

"There was a genuine desire among American leaders to really help." Others say that in attempting to shore up support against the Soviets, the US set the course for China's rise and ended up creating one of its greatest rivals. But these actions also benefited millions of Chinese, helping to lift them out of poverty and - for a time - widening political freedom at the local level. "I think all of us from that generation were children of engagement," Mr Schell said.

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Russia's silent majority are victims too

VICTIMHOOD can be a tricky thing. Nobody doubts that ordinary Ukrainians are victims of this war. Russia's political opposition, in exile, prison or dead, are also viewed as victims. But what of the country's silent majority? What of the millions who stayed in Russia, kept their heads down and focused on living their ordinary lives, rather than the war and the online space it occupied? Many things have changed in Russia since 2022. But one of the main constants has been the average Russian citizen's desire for peace and ending the war. The majority have not been militantly opposed to or cheering the war effort on. Instead, they have been focused on living in the present, trying to salvage what remains of normality and longing for its imminent return – what some are calling the silent majority.

They are not happy with the war or satisfied with the current situation and have few ways of expressing that. Many do feel guilt on a certain (very private) level. One thing hard not to notice in Russia throughout the conflict is how that silent majority has simply hunkered down and carried on. The war is very much in the background now. When I leave my building every morning, the same middle-aged man is defrosting his car, mothers are walking with strollers and children are heading to the local school. When you eavesdrop on their conversations or stop to say hello, they sound normal – not like indoctrinated quasi-fascists, as some scholars are suggesting. They sound like any other school child whose teacher is just trying to get through the copious material thrown at them by the school director. The mothers just want their children to grow up in safety and comfort. Cheering on an expensive war pushing up the price of baby food is hardly a means of achieving that.

The war may come to an end in 2025. Negotiations are likelier than at any point since early 2022. And make no mistake, a peace agreement is inevitable. When the war ends, however, on whatever terms, Russia and its population of 146 million will still be there. It will not disappear or suddenly go away. The man defrosting his car as I write these words is not likely to have a huge epiphany when it does. His life has hardly changed since 2022. The increased number of women publicly wearing hijabs in our city is not doing so as a passive sign of resistance. By living here, watching life unfold how it does, the more one cannot help but think something that many in the West will find unpopular. The war is not their fault. Tens of millions of innocent Russians are victims too. Their freedoms have been curtailed, their movements and opportunities restricted. Did they deserve that by virtue of where they were born? A classic liberal would argue not.

Like millions across the world, the average Russian is just trying to feed and raise their families, and get through the month. Many colleagues in academia have questioned from the comforts of the West, their tenured positions and with nothing to lose why many Russians do nothing to oppose the regime. What they neglect when arguing from their moral high ground is that those people I spoke of earlier do have a lot to lose being critical online. They have about as much power to topple the regime and change its course on the war, as the average Westerner does. There will be blame to go around. Russian officials and the security apparatus, who carried out the decisions to invade Ukraine and suppress its own population, are obvious contenders. On the Ukrainian side, President Volodymyr Zelensky and his generals will have to answer for decisions they made. Kyiv's Western allies clearly could have done more to support Ukraine, yet did not.

Russia's silent majority will not want to be blamed and they must not be. They personally did not harm anybody or choose the war. Unlike routine acts of everyday life, the war was not their personal fault or responsibility. Collective guilt is too controversial; thousands protested, millions left and staying silent was, in its own way, an act of defiance by refusing to enter the discourse. Guilt by association is also not a tenable position. Not every Soviet citizen was responsible for the Stalinist Terror. Not every Russian citizen can be responsible for the war, especially not on the basis that they refused to cheer on Ukraine and their own country's defeat. Blaming those who are faultless will only cause resentment where there was none to begin with. In the long term, it will not make the world safer or more peaceful. Then comes one of liberal democracy's sore spots that Ukraine, Georgia and even Moldova will have to reckon with on its European journeys: those people in the silent majority will still have a right to have an opinion – as will the pro-Russian segments of their populations. Dismissing these views or people will not make them, nor those in power, more rational.

If the West were serious, it would try to reach out to Russia's silent majority, who can be won over. The Russian population at large do not hold the same positions as those in and around the Kremlin currently. Most of the population wants Russia to be an open, peaceful country, especially to the West. Make no mistake, westerners, their companies, money and popular culture will be welcomed back with open arms one day. Moreover, this part of Russian society will want to be welcomed back, too. Not doing so only will push the Kremlin into a closer alliance with the likes of China and North Korea. Moreover, it is absolutely naive to assume that Russia's social and economic problems will be fixed automatically by the sudden absence of Putin and the return of democracy. Although it stands a much better chance, we have been here before and there is no guarantee of success. Democracy will need to involve this silent majority beyond Moscow and the big cities – felt on the local level – seen to be actually working and fixing the people's problems. If not, that silent majority will simply resign themselves, remaining disillusioned and ambivalent. Gleb Pavlovsky once predicted what the end of the Putin regime would look like: it would collapse in a day and be replaced by something exactly the same. He may be proven right. If he is, that is the fault of those in power, not Russian society.

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German town could decide future of EU reliance on Russian nuclear fuel

Dmitry Gorchakov

CURRENTLY, 19 nuclear power units with Soviet-designed VVER reactors operate within the EU, all of which use Russian nuclear fuel. All operators of these plants' operators have already signed new contracts with alternative suppliers — the US company Westinghouse or the French company Framatome.

However, Framatome intends to supply Russian fuel assembled under a Rosatom license in the coming years. These plans have sparked heated debates that have brewed for some time. On November 20-23, 2024, a public hearing was held in Lingen, Germany to discuss proposals for the licensed production of Russian nuclear fuel for VVER reactors in the EU. Framatome plans to expand production at the Lingen fuel fabrication plant, operated by its subsidiary Advanced Nuclear Fuels (ANF) in collaboration with the Russian company TVEL, a subsidiary fully owned by state-owned Rosatom. After ANF's submitted license expansion application to the Lower Saxony Environment Ministry became publicly available in early 2024, approximately 11,000 objections were filed against the plans for expansion and cooperation with Russia.

To address these objections, the Lower Saxony Ministry for the Environment organized a meeting of 400 people between November 20-23. However, it remains unclear what decision will be made on the fate of the license and when.

After Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 and the imposition of extensive sanctions on various sectors of the country's economy, the issue of reducing Europe's dependence on Russia's nuclear industry became critical. Currently, 19 nuclear power units with Soviet and Russian-designed VVER reactors operating in Finland, the Czech Republic, Bulgaria, Slovakia, and Hungary use Russian nuclear fuel. The only alternative supplier for these reactors is currently Westinghouse, which has already assisted Ukraine's transition away from

Russian fuel for half of its nuclear units before 2022 and now supplies fuel for all nine operational units under Ukraine's control.

The French nuclear fuel manufacturer Framatome does not yet possess its own technology for producing fuel for VVER reactors. However, it does have a long history of collaboration with Rosatom. Notably, in the early 1990s, the French nuclear fuel giant Areva (later Framatome) organized the licensed production of nuclear fuel for Western European nuclear power plants at the Russian MSZ plant in Elektrostal. Over several decades of cooperation, several thousand Russian-French fuel assemblies were produced for NPPs in Germany, Switzerland, Sweden, the Netherlands and Britain.

Furthermore, enriched uranium and fuel pellets (used to assemble fuel rods) are still being supplied from Russia to the plant in Lingen to produce fuel for Western nuclear power plants. Since there are currently no sanctions or restrictions on the import of these products from Russia to the EU, such deliveries continued even after 2022. For example, according to data from the German authorities, three shipments of fuel pellets were sent from the MSZ plant to Lingen throughout 2023 and 2024.

In January 2023, Framatome and Russia's TVEL jointly established European Hexagonal Fuel SAS, registered in France, to license Russian fuel technologies. In March 2023, Framatome applied for permission to produce hexagonal fuel assemblies for VVER-1000 reactors in Lingen. This initiative eventually received over 11,000 objections and led to public hearings in November 2024, while the Ministry for the Environment has yet to respond.

Critics of the project cite security threats as one of their main objections since Russian specialists will be present at the plant to deliver and commission equipment, as they were in the spring of 2024. Critics worry that granting Russians access to a German nuclear fuel production facility could be exploited by Moscow for

industrial espionage or even sabotage, as these people will be employees of the Rosatom state corporation which is actively involved in military operations in Ukraine and the occupation of the Zaporizhzhia NPP. According to several German anti-nuclear organizations, this could provide the Kremlin with intelligence to carry out provocations or sabotage at European nuclear power plants.

Christian Meyer, the Lower Saxony Environment Minister who is responsible for deciding on the license application, has repeatedly said publicly that he shares protestors' concerns and takes the security threats associated with potential collaboration between the plant and Rosatom structures very seriously.

However, the question remains why after more than a year and a half of reviewing the application, the license still has not been denied. Perhaps the complexity of the legal justification and German thoroughness prevent making the simple, swift and obvious decision to deny the license, especially given the current political climate.

Along with the specific security concerns raised, it is worth considering the role and prospects of this production within the broader context of the West's nuclear industry and energy sector's move to sever ties with Moscow. How necessary, really, is this joint project with Russia for Europe and the French company?

Russia and Rosatom's economic motives are understandable. The export of nuclear fuel for European VVER reactors brought Rosatom approximately 300–700 million (\$310-731 million) annually. A licensing deal with Framatome could retain at least part of this revenue, as direct deliveries of Russian fuel are expected to cease in the near future.

Currently, the only alternative supplier of nuclear fuel for VVER-1000 and VVER-440 reactors is the North American company, Westinghouse. The company has its own licensed technology and many years of experience supplying

fuel for VVER-1000 reactors in Ukraine. In 2024, this fuel began to be loaded into a power unit at the Kozloduy NPP in Bulgaria, with deliveries expected to a unit in the Czech Republic by the end of the year.

Fuel for the continent's 15 VVER-440 reactors was developed later. Still, Westinghouse began delivering fuel to two units at the Rivne Nuclear Power Plant in Ukraine in late 2023, and starting in mid-2024, ahead of schedule, to the Loviisa Nuclear Power Plant in Finland. The French company Framatome, the world's second-largest supplier of nuclear fuel after Westinghouse, does not yet have its own independent technology for VVER reactor fuel despite working on its development since 2018. According to the company's plans presented at the PWR Prague 2024 conference, the development of its fuel for VVER-1000 reactors is scheduled to be completed in 2025, and for VVER-440 reactors in 2028.

At the same time, Framatome has already signed contracts to supply fuel for VVER-440 reactors in Slovakia and Hungary from 2027. Plans were also announced to supply fuel for the VVER-1000 reactors of the Temelin NPP in the Czech Republic from 2024 and for Unit 6 at the Kozloduy NPP in Bulgaria from the end of 2025.

Thus, for both types of VVER reactors, Framatome will not be able to complete its own fuel development on time, lagging behind by at least 1-2 years, and will only be able to fulfill its contractual obligations on schedule by using licensed Russian fuel assemblies. The only exception may be the fuel supply to Bulgaria next year.

Without cooperation with Rosatom, Framatome risked losing these contracts, which could have either gone to Westinghouse or been extended with Rosatom. However, it remains uncertain whether Westinghouse could have expanded fuel production sufficiently within 2-3 years to meet the demand. Therefore, expanding the license for the Lingen plant is crucial for Framatome to fulfill its multi-million euro obligations under existing contracts, particularly in Slovakia and Hungary.

Palestine and power of boycott

Omar Suleiman

At home, my Palestinian-American children, who have never set foot in Palestine, often ask each other whenever they see a brand: "Is this on the boycott list?" It's a question that has become second nature to them, a reminder that the struggle for justice in Palestine is as much about principles as it is about action. This next generation, shaped by movements like Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS), is a proof that the Palestine cause remains transcendent and unsurpassable. The growing boycott movement is not just a tool for resistance—it is a moral imperative and the most powerful form of structural popular resistance in the world. 2024 showed us just how far this movement has come and how much further it can go.

The boycott movement gained extraordinary momentum in 2024, fueled by global outrage over Israel's escalating violence against Palestinians. Public protests turned into sustained economic resistance, with consumers actively disengaging from corporations complicit in Israel's apartheid policies. Starbucks is one example of a global brand that felt the economic pressure. Reports indicate that the coffee giant lost millions in revenue due to targeted boycott campaigns and protests in multiple cities. Activists pointed to the company's ties to pro-Israel lobbying groups, making it a symbol of consumer pushback against complicity. This financial hit illustrates the boycott's growing power, forcing even the largest corporations to reckon with their associations. Yet, the boycott's significance is not merely economic. It is Israel's fear of this movement that tells the real story. Laws have been passed across the United States attempting to suppress boycotts against Israel, exposing the fragility of a state that relies on global complicity to maintain its occupation.

In my home state of Texas, a Palestinian schoolteacher was fired for refusing to sign an oath promising she wouldn't boycott Israel. Her principled stand sparked outrage and inspired the 2021 documentary Boycott, which highlighted how these laws violate basic constitutional rights. Americans across the political spectrum, who otherwise might not have engaged with the Palestine cause, have started to question why they are being told they cannot boycott a foreign nation—especially one receiving billions in US tax dollars while our own communities struggle. Thus it is clear that the boycott movement is not new. Its roots lie in the anti-apartheid struggles of South Africa, where the strategy of economic isolation played a pivotal role in dismantling institutionalized racism.

The BDS movement, launched by Palestinian civil society in 2005, draws on this legacy, linking the fight for Palestinian liberation to broader struggles against injustice. It is a reminder that the struggle for freedom anywhere is connected to the struggle for freedom everywhere. This connection has found particular resonance in the

Global South. Nations with histories of anti-colonial resistance see the Palestinian cause as part of their own unfinished fights for dignity and sovereignty. By mobilizing these governments and their people, the boycott movement has the potential to amplify its impact, as it did in South Africa. The Global South's support reinforces a key truth: boycotts are not simply about consumer choices—they are about collective power.

Unlike armed resistance, boycotts target the economic and political infrastructure that sustains the occupation, forcing accountability from governments and corporations alike. The movement is effective, decentralized, and rooted in grassroots activism. This is precisely why Israel fears the boycott movement. It doesn't rely on political elites but instead mobilizes ordinary people—consumers, workers, students—around the world.

Israel's overreach in suppressing the movement, however, is backfiring. Laws criminalizing boycotts and targeting activists only draw more attention to the cause. They also raise serious questions for Americans who resent being told they cannot exercise their constitutional right to protest, especially against a foreign government. This overreach is inspiring not just Palestinian solidarity but a broader movement for free speech and justice.

To build on the successes of 2024, the boycott movement must focus on coordination, inclusion, and innovation. These are some suggestions on what can be done: Harnessing technology: Platforms like the Boycat App [1] are powerful examples of how technology can streamline activism. The app allows users to identify boycott-worthy companies and products, making participation accessible and informed. Investing in such tools can bring the movement to new heights.

Connecting struggles: Just as the anti-apartheid movement did, BDS must continue to link the Palestinian struggle to global movements for justice. Whether through alliances with indigenous rights activists, climate justice advocates, or labor unions, these connections strengthen the moral and political case for Palestine.

Centering stories: At its core, the boycott is about people. Sharing the stories of Palestinians—families displaced, farmers denied access to their land, children imprisoned—humanizes the movement and reminds the world that the struggle is not about body abstract politics but lives and futures.

The boycott movement has proven to be one of the most powerful tools of resistance against apartheid and oppression. It transcends borders and ideologies, uniting people in a common demand for justice. In 2024, it showed us its strength; in 2025, it must show us its resilience. For Palestinians and their allies, the fight is far from over. But as my children remind me every time they ask about the boycott list, the next generation of activists is already rising. They are learning that justice is not a moment—it is a movement. And it is one that will not be silenced.

Trump claims a mandate, but he won't have much time to fulfill it

Brian Alexander

IT is the season of remorse and regret for Democrats. The reelection of Donald Trump to a second, non-consecutive presidential term is, by conventional standards, one of the most unlikely events in recent political history.

Yet one thing that is not at all unconventional or surprising is the reaction among those of the vanquished party. Democrats have fallen into a predictable pattern of self-recrimination, finger-pointing and despair. The Democrats' losses of the House, the Senate and the presidency in November have resulted in a stream of punditry on why the party is a hopeless failure and doomed to the electoral wilderness, barring a radical course correction.

The 2024 victory of Trumpism has robbed Democrats of the will to resist and yielded fatalistic acceptance of a new American political reality,

reshaped in the image of the incoming president. This reaction is entirely predictable. Every election defeat brings a similar phenomenon, Democrats and Republicans alike. Today it is the Democrats, but an era of Republican minority wilderness has been proclaimed in 2002, 2012, 2020 and even 1994, the year they regained control of the House for the first time in 40 years.

And this is certainly not Democrats' first foray into the proverbial dustbin, as similar malaise emerged in the wake of 2004, 2010 and 2016. Yet, the vanquished party is always one election away from redemption. Just ask Donald Trump in 2024. Democrats, like all of us, are certainly in for a Trumpy ride in the months ahead. But it won't last. Despite the shock of his comeback, Trump reenters the presidency as a lame duck. The clock starts

ticking on the end of the Trump presidency from the moment he swears in on January 20.

Second terms are never a joy ride for presidents and already fissures between Trump and House and Senate Republicans are being seen. Trump may be packing the executive branch with loyalists this round, but early signals point to a far less docile Congress. What's more, Republican control of the House and Senate is by only razor-thin margins, and the party in power in the White House historically can look forward to poor performance in congressional midterms. Whatever the MAGA movement hopes to achieve in Trump's second term, it will need to do so fast, against the growing specter of difficult midterm fights and possible losses of congressional control in 2026.

Beyond Congress, in the era of the permanent campaign, Trump faces inevitable rivalry when members of the Republican Party begin jockeying for the 2028 presidential nomination. The returning president has proven masterful at vanquishing those who oppose him. However, with Trump no longer eligible to run, the nomination battle promises to be intense. Figures like Nikki Haley and Govs. Glen Youngkin (R-Va.) and Ron DeSantis (R-Fla.), who Trump might defeat in a head-to-head contest, won't be as easy to quash when he himself is not on the ballot.

Meanwhile, people who Trump has brought into his fold, such as JD Vance, Sen. Marco Rubio (R-Fla.), and Rep. Elise Stefanik (R-N.Y.) will have to consider moves outside the Trump tent as

the primary contest grows nearer. This all points to a looming internal Republican food fight for power and the future of the party. With a lame-duck president and a tenuous hold on Congress, Republicans won't have an easy time staying on message or keeping troops in line. Competition among rival figures seeking to rule in the post-Trump era will weaken whatever degree of party unity Trump has achieved.

The end of the Trump era is on the horizon and the Republican battle for ideological and electoral leadership is coming. Meantime, the Democrats, once they awaken from the nightmare months of November's defeat, should be waiting in the wings. There are those who claim that Trump's presidency will evolve into some kind of dictatorship and that the man's autocratic tendencies will drive his rule beyond the

expiration of his term in 2028. Certainly, we have reason to believe that Trump would wish that this were so. But this is simply not how the US Constitution works.

The 22nd Amendment, except for the most radical and flawed interpretations, strictly forbids a third term. Even conservative court judges have shown independence and ruled against Trump and MAGA Republicans, while plentiful, wield nowhere near the necessary power in Congress for either a coup or a Constitutional amendment. Trump may, as he promises, achieve a lot of his MAGA agenda. Depending on your political stripes, this may be a period of American greatness or American carnage. No doubt, it will be one full of headline-worthy surprises. But if Donald Trump thinks he can make America great again, he doesn't have much time to do it.

Joint actions define strategic depth of Beijing-Teheran ties

Abbas Araghchi

MY trip to meet with my old friend comes after the successful meeting of our two presidents in Kazan, Russia, on the sidelines of the first official participation of the Islamic Republic of Iran as a full member of BRICS, at a significant and historic moment in global and regional developments, and when the path for pragmatic cooperation between the two countries has expanded through the consensus reached between our two leaders.

It has been almost five years since I last visited Beijing in 2019, when I came to participate in the "Iran-China Joint Consultation on the JCPOA". At that time, I had good discussions with our Chinese friends; we responsibly worked to encourage the other parties to return to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action and adhere to their commitments. With a responsible and pragmatic approach, we demonstrated that nuclear issues are an inseparable part of the strategic cooperation between our two countries, and what makes an agreement lasting is "acting responsibly" and "adhering to commitments". It is emphasized that "when engaging with Iran as an important regional player, it must be done with respect, honor and on an equal footing".

China's achievements as a developing country open windows of hope for other developing nations, showing that through unity, solidarity and cooperation, they can overcome even the most difficult challenges. The concept of building a community with a shared future for mankind proposed by President Xi Jinping has created a historic and momentous trend for the global community. I believe it aligns well with the prospect of "convergence and consensus" of Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian. The Iranian president's initiative for convergence is an effort to honor the lega-

cy of our ancestors while bridging the future and simultaneously identifying opportunities within threats to illuminate the path for new collaborations. Our ancestors wisely believed that "the past is the beacon of the future" and that "behind every darkness, there is brightness".

The long-standing, authentic and comprehensive nature of the relations between Iran and China is a fundamental characteristic of the two countries' current relationship. It is a source of pride that the legacy of the past half-century of these relations, under the guidance of the wisdom of the two countries' leaders, has been accompanied by significant and valuable achievements. The presidents of today have defined a solid foundation for the bilateral relationship based on "shared values" and "ancient people-to-people connections", and have established firm pillars by emphasizing the principles of mutual respect, justice, equality, noninterference and win-win cooperation for development. These lay the groundwork for a model of comprehensive strategic partnership. By developing a comprehensive cooperation plan, both sides have strengthened mutual political solidarity and trust and solidified their cooperation in various fields on a strong foundation.

Iran and China have long been collaborating to promote multilateralism and the development of indigenous values, defending each other's fundamental interests in international forums. Their close political and defense coordination, exchanges of high-level and party delegation, cooperation under the framework of the Belt and Road Initiative, cooperation in implementing the Joint Trilateral Statement by the People's Republic of China, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the Islamic Republic of

Iran as the beginning of "a chain of reconciliation" in West Asia, their work within the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and BRICS to play a more active role in the international community, holding of intellectual and think tank dialogues, close cultural cooperation, and museum exchanges — especially the exhibition "Glory of Ancient Persia", which is currently on its third stop in the Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region after Beijing and Shanghai — are recent examples of pragmatic cooperation between the two countries. These efforts are in alignment with the implementation of President Xi's three global initiatives, and have played a crucial role in promoting multilateralism and strengthening economic, social, cultural and security cooperation.

Iran and China not only share common interests and concerns at the bilateral and regional levels but also at the trans-regional and international levels. Both countries firmly believe in the importance of multilateralism and the benefits of collective cooperation for the prosperity of the human community. They continue their close cooperation in multilateral frameworks such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and BRICS. Collaboration with other members and partners, aimed at welfare, development and security, and addressing new global challenges, is among the priorities for both Iran and China. I am confident that China's presidency of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization in 2025 will create new opportunities for collective cooperation.

The two countries will continue to work together, driving the twin pillars of development and security for both the region and the world with strong determination. The "Maritime Security Belt-2024" joint naval drills, which showcased high-

level cooperation and a shared effort to ensure maritime security, is another example of the pragmatic and strategic cooperation between the two countries.

We are witnessing unprecedented changes in the world. These changes have confronted countries with both opportunities and complex challenges, placing the world at a historic crossroad, where, inevitably, they must choose between confrontation or cooperation, exclusion or inclusion, closeness or openness, and chaos or peace.

Although some countries attempt to distort facts by falsely dividing the world into "democratic" and "nondemocratic" categories, and using tools such as "sanctions", "pressure" and "double standards" to restrict countries and force them to choose values and interests that align with their own, Iran and China will always stand on the side of development, prosperity, cooperation and friendship along with the countries of the Global South, and will stand on the right side of history countering unilateralism and bullying. This is because "confrontation and hostility" only weaken the collective interests of the international community, and in the end, no one will emerge victorious.

Iran and China, as two ancient Asian civilizations, are "friends in times of hardship" whose cooperation has withstood the test of time. Together, the two countries have reached "new heights" to fulfill their role as two responsible countries in ensuring peaceful development of the human community.

The next "golden 50 years of future relations between Iran and China" will show that this journey marks the beginning of a new chapter in strategic cooperation between the two countries, specially, as the wise Chinese ancestors said, "Actions speak louder than words."

IRNA

Our AI near-future

Charles Ferguson

WE are now two years into a transformation comparable in importance to the first industrial revolution. But with expert forecasts of the impact of artificial intelligence ranging from Panglossian to apocalyptic, can we really say anything yet about what it portends? I think we can.

First, neither nirvana nor human extinction will come anytime soon. Instead, we can look forward to many years of instability. AI technology will continue to make rapid progress, with ever more remarkable capabilities. We haven't even exhausted the current transformer-based models (which rely heavily on brute force computation), and enormous efforts are under way to develop better models, semiconductor technologies, processor architectures, algorithms and training methods. Eventually, we will get to artificial general intelligence systems that equal or surpass human intellect.

For now, though, AI remains remarkably limited. It cannot even cook a meal or walk your dog, much less fight a war or manage an organization. A malevolent superintelligence will not be taking over the planet any time soon. But how the AI revolution plays out — and the ratio of progress to pain — will depend on a series of races between the technology and human institutions. So far, the technology is leaving the human institutions in the dust.

I am very much an optimist about AI's potential benefits, and I see exciting and encouraging developments in education, art, medicine, robotics, and other fields. But I also see risks, most of which are not being addressed. What follows is a brief, necessarily simplistic, tour.

As was true during the first industrial revolution, the employment and income effects of AI will be capriciously distributed, often appearing with little warning. The overall trajectory of gross national product might look wonderfully positive and smooth, but underneath that clean curve will be a great deal of pain and anxiety for considerable numbers of people, at every level of society, along with new opportunities for many, and enormous fortunes for some.

Currently, AI is most suited to automating highly complex, but also highly structured, activities: navigating streets, classifying images, playing chess, using languages (both human and computer). But the actual effect of AI on a given human activity depends on three variables: the rate and degree of automation; the human skill levels associated with the activities that can (and cannot) be automated; and — crucially — how much additional demand will be created by the availability of inexpensive AI automation.

What this means in practice can be quite surprising. Consider some examples, starting with language translation. I recently spoke with two eminent AI experts, one after the other. The first argued that AI will soon eliminate human translators completely, because AI translation will be essentially perfect within five years. But the second expert argued that we will need more translators than ever. As AI enables the rapid, inexpensive translation of absolutely anything, there will be an explosion in translated material, with human oversight required to train and improve AI systems, and also to review and correct the most important materials.

Upon further investigation, I concluded that this second view is more accurate. There will be a huge explosion in what gets translated (in fact, there already is); and for some things, we will still want human oversight. Translation is not just for weather reports and menus; it is also for the FBI, the CIA, chemical companies, medical-device manufacturers, emergency-room doctors, world leaders, surgeons, airplane pilots, commandos and suicide-prevention hotlines. While human translators' roles will shift toward training, monitoring and correcting AI systems, we probably will need translators for a long time to come.

Similar questions arise in other fields. Many believe that software engineers' days are numbered, because AI is getting really good at doing what they do, using only nontechnical

human instructions. But others argue that this trend will drive a huge increase in the quantity and complexity of software produced, requiring many human specialists to conceptualize, organize, verify and monitor this massive body of code. Here, there is not yet a consensus about AI's net labor effects.

For lawyers, the future looks tougher. It is still early days, but I have already had numerous conversations that go like this: We needed an employment/investment/partnership/acquisition agreement, but our lawyer was taking forever, so we asked Perplexity (an AI service) to do it instead, and it works. We had a lawyer check it, and it was fine, so we don't need lawyers anymore, except to review stuff.

And, unlike language translation, it seems unlikely that AI will lead to a thousandfold explosion in legal work. So, I anticipate that lawyering will indeed come under pressure, with humans handling only com-

tion, but World War I. In 1914, many on both sides thought that the war would be relatively painless; instead, new technologies — machine guns, explosives, artillery and chemical weapons — brought horrific mass carnage.

And I fear that, at present, few political or military leaders understand just how deadly AI-driven warfare could be. AI will remove humans from many combat roles, but it will also mean that any humans who are in combat will be killed with extreme efficiency. Will this result in sanitized wars with no human combatants, or in unprecedented slaughter? The early evidence from Ukraine is not encouraging.

Inexpensive, AI-driven systems are also destabilizing the sources of national military power by rendering expensive human-controlled systems such as armored vehicles, ships, and aircraft extremely vulnerable to inexpensive AI-controlled weapons. Worse, this is occurring at the onset of a new cold war, and during a period of heightened domestic political instabili-

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plex cases that require highly trained experts. Conversely, in some other professions — accounting and auditing are often mentioned — AI will alleviate severe shortages of trained professionals.

Now consider driving. The current (and fully warranted) focus on autonomous vehicles has obscured something else: AI has already de-skilled driving as a profession.

Twenty years ago, an urban taxi driver had to be smart, alert, and have a superb memory. But now, London cabbies' legendary mastery of "the Knowledge" is no longer needed. The availability of AI-driven turn-by-turn directions on every phone has turned professional driving into mindless gig work for ride-hailing platforms. And when autonomous driving gets good enough (and it's almost there), these jobs will disappear completely.

Next, consider robotics (of which autonomous vehicles are, in fact, just one example). With generative AI, we are witnessing a revolution that will eventually affect all physical activity, from manual labor to housework to warfare. Venture-capital investment in robotics has sharply increased to billions of dollars this year, suggesting that the VC industry is making huge bets that robots will start to replace humans on a massive scale within the next five years. The first activities to be fully automated will be in highly structured, controlled environments — warehouses, fulfillment centers, supermarkets, production lines. Automation will take longer for unstructured activities near humans (like in your home, or on the road), but there, too, progress is being made.

Another domain where AI has made terrifyingly rapid progress is weaponry. Here, the relevant analogy is not the industrial revolu-

ty across the West. And what will AI mean for gun control? Will the Second Amendment of the US Constitution be interpreted to protect AI-controlled weapons that can be placed in a hotel room window and programmed to target everyone below, or a specific person, one week later?

A final concern is disinformation. While AI is already capable of producing somewhat realistic fakery in text, images, short videos and audio, many observers have taken comfort from the apparently minor role that AI fakes have played, up to now, in elections and the news media. But declaring victory would be dangerously premature. For now, it is easy enough for reputable news organizations, major internet platforms, and national intelligence services to determine what is real and what is fake. But AI technology is still in its infancy. What will happen a decade from now (or possibly sooner) when nobody will be able to say with certainty what is real?

These issues will play out in many domains. One obvious implication is that countries need to reinvent and strengthen their social safety nets and educational systems to navigate a world in which skills and entire professions will be appearing and disappearing fast and often. The anger we see among people left behind by the last 30 years of globalization is likely to seem mild compared to what AI could yield unless we prepare for it. Similarly, we need extremely stringent regulation of deepfakes, including labeling requirements and stiff criminal penalties for producing or distributing unlabeled ones. Welcome to the future. I hope we can get our arms around it, because it's coming whether we like it or not.

The Japan Times

America's 2024 journey in foreign affairs: On the verge of collapse with Joe Biden

Dr. Adam McConnel

AS US President Joe Biden's administration enters its last weeks, debates about his presidential legacy continue unabated. Biden's detractors label him as one of America's worst presidents [1]; his supporters, not surprisingly, claim the opposite. [2] Most commentators, because domestic policy is any president's focus, emphasize Biden's domestic policy initiatives as evidence of his greatness.

Foreign policy is a different matter, and even Biden's most committed supporters have difficulty finding silver linings in the black clouds that dominated foreign affairs during his tenure. Three foreign policy lowlights can illustrate how disastrous 2024 was for Biden and the Democratic Party:

In foreign policy, 2024 can be remembered as the culmination of both Biden's presidency and the downward spiral that the Democratic Party had been in for the past decade. When the New Year dawned this past January, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's policy of annihilation and mass murder in Gaza was already three months old. But because of the impending US election and the unrestrained, unquestioning support that most Americans display for Israel, Biden could not, and would not, do anything to rein in Netanyahu. Biden's policy towards Gaza was always marked by double talk. On the one hand, Biden and US

Secretary of State Antony Blinken constantly told the press and public that strong stances against Israeli excesses would be taken; on the other, Biden would never do the single thing that would truly curb Israel's ability to operate in Gaza — enact a weapons embargo. Even the one much-promoted US initiative to get humanitarian aid into Gaza, the pier project, was an embarrassing failure. [3] Eventually, Biden and the Democratic Party's failure to take a moral stand against Israel's Gaza policies would spark a wave of unrest on US university campuses, peel voters away from the party, and probably cause Kamala Harris's defeat in (at least) Michigan. This lack of ability to identify ethically correct policies, and of the will to insist on those that have been discerned, exposed the hollow heart, the moral emptiness, that now smother the Democratic Party's soul.

President Biden came to office in 2021 promising to reinvigorate global democracy by initiating annual "Democracy summits." From the beginning, however, Biden's pet project was contentious because his discourse clearly did not match the conferences' reality. Many countries with questionable democratic credentials were invited, while Türkiye, a democracy and a NATO ally, was pointedly excluded. South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol played prominent roles in the 2023 and

2024 editions of President Biden's Summit for Democracy. [4] In fact, Yoon's role was given so much attention that South Korea was made co-host for the 2024 edition, and Yoon made a joint statement with Biden. But in December 2024, Yoon declared martial law in South Korea, then retracted it, which did not save him or his successor from being impeached, plunging South Korea into a type of political crisis the country had not seen since the 1980s. [5] Biden's insistence on promoting Yoon as a democratic stalwart once again exemplified his questionable judgement. Yoon's popularity waned during his tenure because of his policies, and a number of controversies have plagued his administration. [6] Apparently, Washington's intense concern with China warps its judgement of Beijing's neighbors in the same way that the focus on Israel distorts Washington's ability to identify its true interests in the Eastern Mediterranean.

Early December's stunning events in Syria collapsed several more illusions that had entranced the Democratic Party for more than a decade, as well as the Biden administration. Former President Barack Obama infamously chose not to institute a no-fly zone that could have protected Syria's rebels, and his train-and-equip program disintegrated after a half-hearted attempt proved fruitless. At the same time, Obama made nego-

tiating a deal concerning Iran's nuclear weapons program a centerpiece of his attempt to build a presidential legacy. But why Obama chose Iran as his interlocutor was never totally clear. Iran's activities across the Eastern Mediterranean made it a pariah state for most people in the region; generally, only Shia and groups espousing varieties of Shi'ism — such as the Bashar al-Assad regime's Arab Alawites/Nusayris — saw Tehran as a viable regional actor, or took the religious regime in Iran seriously.

The crisis in South Korea, and the jubilation and renewed hope in Syria, illustrate Biden's (and Obama's) flawed and visionless policies well enough. But Türkiye has also replaced the US as the focus of the region's democratic aspirations. Ankara does not just speak the rhetoric of democracy; it also provides the training, advice, resources, and even weaponry to help democracy emerge from the ruins of the region's dictatorships, and to remedy historical injustices.[11] So, after Trump's inauguration, Biden can go eat gummi- es with James Carville. [12] Eight years ago, when Trump shocked the world by defeating Hillary Clinton, I feared disasters; now, I'm left thinking only "at least we don't have Biden for four more years." The downward spiral in American politics thus continues, gaining momentum like Gogol's Russian troika, and now with four more years of the Trumpian circus and an opaque, ominous future.

AA

How Mexico can strike back if Trump follows through on his threats

Scott Morgenstern

PRESIDENT-ELECT Donald Trump has made clear his intent to supercharge his "America First" approach to foreign policy in his second term — and Mexico looks set to be at the tip of the spear. While many of Trump's predecessors have also followed a "realist" strategy — that is, one in which relative power is at the forefront of international relations and diplomatic success is viewed through how it benefits one's own nation — the incoming president has displayed an apparent unwillingness to consider the pain that his plans would inflict on targeted countries or the responses this will engender.

Trump's proposed policies threaten Mexico in three key ways: First, his goal of deporting millions of migrants would put tremendous pressure on Mexico's economy and society as the country tried to absorb the influx. This would be exacerbated by his second threat, a sharp increase in tariffs, which could devastate the critical export sector of Mexico's economy. And third, Trump has floated the idea of using US military power to confront narcotrafickers within Mexico — which would directly impinge on Mexico's sovereignty and could generate more violence on both sides of the border. But Mexico has several options to push back on Trump by imposing high costs on US interests.

Indeed, Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum has already signaled how she may counter Trump's policies. The most obvious tools are

ending cooperation on drugs and immigration and imposing tariffs of her own. She could also revoke some of the decades-old tax and labor privileges that have benefited US businesses operating within Mexico. And finally, she could play the "China card" — that is, in the face of worsening US-Mexico ties, Mexico could turn to Washington's biggest economic rival at a time when Beijing is seeking to assert more influence across Latin America.

Sheinbaum has said she wants to avoid a trade war, but Trump's threats have led her nonetheless to talk about how a trade war would begin. This trade war, plus other costs Sheinbaum could impose on US investors, would also likely foment a coalition of opposition within the US.

If Trump abrogates trade deals and imposes tariffs, he might convince investors to spend their next dollars in the US. But if Mexico imposes tariffs, business taxes or investment restrictions, what would happen to investors' farms and factories already in Mexico? Past experience suggests that any disruption to supply chains or US export markets would awaken strong business opposition, as analysts and business groups have already recognized.

Trump is not immune to pressure from US businesses. During his first administration, companies successfully opposed Trump's attempt to close the border, arguing that slowing the flow of immigrants also meant slowing trucks full of goods.

On the issue of border and immigration, while Trump has issued threats, Sheinbaum has stressed the importance of cooperation. Currently the Mexican government expends significant resources to patrol its own southern border, not to mention dealing with the many potential migrants who gather in its northern cities.

Mexico could demand more support from the US in exchange for this work plus the costs associated with welcoming back the estimated 4 million Mexicans who are currently in the US without proper documentation. The deportation of undocumented immigrants that Trump has repeatedly promised would require other types of cooperation, such as processing border crossings, and Mexico could slow-walk this process. Mexico has already signaled that it will withhold processing of non-Mexicans.

The two countries have a history of collaboration in addressing the illegal drugs trade — but here too there have also been tensions. For example, toward the end of Trump's first term, a Mexican general was arrested in the US on drug charges. After a diplomatic uproar, he was returned to Mexico and released. In late November, Sheinbaum noted that she and Trump had discussed security cooperation "within the framework of our sovereignty." But Trump's campaign rhetoric seemed less concerned with Mexico's sovereignty, floating the idea of sending troops to the border or even

deploying them within Mexico to counter narcotrafickers. That would clearly enrage Mexico, with consequences that would extend far beyond a willingness to cooperate on the issues of drug trafficking.

One country that stands to benefit should US-Mexican relations deteriorate is China — an issue that Mexico could exploit. China is now the first or second trading partner with nearly every country in Latin America, including Mexico. The value of US-Mexico trade is over \$100 billion a year, but the growth of Chinese imports into Mexico has been limited somewhat by rules-of-origin provisions in the North American Free Trade Agreement and its Trump-era successor, the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement.

A US-Mexico trade war could weaken or end any incentive to keep Chinese goods out. Further, if the doors to the United States are narrowed through tariffs and hostile rhetoric, China's car parts and financial services would clearly become even more attractive to Mexican businesses. A US-Mexican trade war, in short, would augment Beijing's access to a market on the US border.

In sum, if Trump goes through with his threats, the result will be costs to consumers and businesses, plus a new opportunity for China. This is likely to foment a coalition of industries, investors and consumers and foreign policy experts concerned with China — many parts of which supported Trump's campaign.

The Los Angeles Times



Joint body to be formed to address grievances regarding property tax



F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Sarhad Chamber of Commerce and Industry and Department of Excise and Taxation and Narcotics Control, Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa decided to form a joint committee to address traders' grievances about property tax and other issues.

The decision came during an awareness/consultative session on property tax jointly organized by SCCI and Department of E&T Khyber Pakhtunkhwa at the chamber house.

The proposed committee will present apprehensions of traders regarding collec-

tion of property taxes of various slabs and would suggest reducing them in an appropriate manner with a mutual consensus.

Fazal Moqem Khan, president of the chamber chaired the session.

Besides, the chamber senior vice president Abdul Jalil Jan, E&T Department Director Revenue Said ul Ameen, Excise and Taxation senior officers Muhammad Iqbal, Shakeel Khan, Ashfaq Ahmad, Zahid Iqbal, former presidents Fuad Ishaq, Faiz Muhammad Faizi, Anjuman e Tajran KP chairman Shaukat Ali Khan, former senior vice president Muhammad

Naem Butt, former vice president Javed Akhtar, member of the SCCI' executive committee Haji Abdul Nasir, Ashfaq Ahmad and Affaf Ali Khan, Fazal e Wahid, Syed Ejaz Ali Shah, Rashid Iqbal Siddiqui, Ihsanullah, Secretary General Muqtasid Ahsan, and traders, industrialists were in attendance in a large number.

Officials through a multimedia presentation briefed participants about imposition of various categories and slab property tax, KP Finance Act 2024, different relief measures for business community and residents through amend-

ments in the Act.

Both sides have agreed to initiate collective steps to avoid collection of excessive and double property tax and announced to form a joint committee, consisting of representatives from SCCI and E&T deptt for this purpose.

Earlier, Fazal Moqem in his introductory remarks said the business community wanted to pay taxes but irrational and unnecessary taxes were unacceptable.

He stressed the need to reduce the ratio of property tax and other levies and avoid disrespecting traders during actions for collection of taxes.

Fuad Ishaq and Shukat Ali Khan also spoke on the occasion, highlighting the traders' reservations, increase in the ratio of property tax and demanded the abolishment of unnecessary and unjust taxes.

Traders also presented comprehensive proposals for amiable resolution of the traders' issues.

Officials from E&T department agreed with recommendations of the participants and assured to remove all grievances of the traders and provision of facilities under one-window operation.



PESHAWAR: Advisor to the Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa for Finance and Inter-Provincial Coordination Muzammil Aslam talking to media during his visit to Peshawar Press Club.

Business community to contribute in economic development

ISLAMABAD (APP): The business community is committed to contributing to the country's economic development and prosperity through the growth of businesses.

However, obstacles to creating a business-friendly environment must be addressed by those in positions of authority, said Abdul Rehman Siddiqui, Acting President of ICCI, while addressing a delegation from Tarnol, led by Malik Shabbir Awan, the founder President of the Talagang Chamber of Commerce and Industry, which visited ICCI to offer congratulations.

Siddiqui recognized Tarnol as an important

business hub within the capital and emphasized that collective efforts could dismantle barriers, create opportunities, and lead the community toward greater prosperity.

He assured that ICCI would address issues such as encroachments, water shortages, poor road conditions, inadequate street lighting, and especially the law and order situation by bringing them to the attention of the relevant authorities for swift resolution to enable businesses to flourish in a peaceful and secure environment.

Zafar Bakhtawari, Secretary General of the United Business Group, praised ICCI's commit-

ment to improving the local business environment and expressed optimism that the chamber would succeed in establishing a favorable business atmosphere in the region.

On behalf of the former ICCI President, Chairman of the Clean and Green Islamabad Movement, and United Business Group core committee member Ahsan Zafar Bakhtawari, he announced that a water filtration plant would be installed in Tarnol to benefit both the business community and local residents.

Malik Shabbir Awan, the Talagang Chamber of Commerce and Industry's founding President, acknowledged ICCI's

efforts to foster an environment that is enabling entrepreneurship.

He stressed that collaboration within the business community could lead to transformative change. ICCI's Acting Senior Vice President, Nasir Mehmood Chaudhry, committed to working closely with stakeholders to address key challenges and promote economic growth in the region.

Malik Abdul Aziz, while expressing gratitude to the delegation for their visit, reaffirmed ICCI's commitment to resolving the business community's issues and supporting a conducive business environment.

PSX stays bullish, gains 467 more points

ISLAMABAD (APP): The 100-Index of the Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX) continued with bullish trend on Friday, gaining 467.33 points, a positive change of 0.40 percent, closing at 117,586.98 points as compared to 117,119.66 points on the last trading day.

A total of 935,783,268 shares were traded during the day as compared to 1,037,862,969 shares the previous trading day, whereas the price of shares stood at Rs 39.620 billion against Rs. 46.570

billion on the last trading day.

As many as 456 companies transacted their shares in the stock market, 167 of them recorded gains and 246 sustained losses, whereas the share price of 43 companies remained unchanged.

The three top trading companies were WorldCall Telecom with 73,230,816 shares at Rs 1.70 per share, Cnergyico PK with 57,326,691 shares at Rs.7.55 per share and Fauji Cement with 54,376,196 shares at

Rs.34.83 per share.

Al-Ghazi Tractors Limited witnessed a maximum increase of Rs.62.97 per share price, closing at Rs 692.63, whereas the runner-up was Mehmood Textile Mills Limited with Rs 45.94 rise in its per share price to Rs.665.00.

Unilever Pakistan Foods Limited witnessed a maximum decrease of Rs 227.69 per share closing at Rs 20,992.31 followed by Khyber Textile Mills Limited with Rs 45.46 decline to close at Rs.581.54.

Shipping activity at Port Qasim

KARACHI (APP): Four ships, Vienna Express, Dolphin-19, Renad and Medrose carrying Container, Palm oil, Gas oil and Coal, berthed at Qasim International Container Terminal, Liquid Cargo Terminal, FOTCO oil Terminal and Marginal Wharf-4 Terminal respectively on Thursday.

Meanwhile three more ships, SSL Brahmaputra, Haj Mohammad and Marangas Klymnos scheduled to load/offload Container, Cement and LNG are also arrived at outer anchorage during last 24 hours.

Nine ships were engaged at PQA berths during the last 24 hours, out of them four ships, Vienna Express, SSL Brahmaputra, Renad and Ginga Ocelot are expected to sail on Friday.

Cargo volume of 77,352 tonnes, comprising 54,576 tonnes imports cargo and 22,776 tonnes export cargo carried in 1,241 Containers (229 TEUs Imports &1,012 TEUs Export) was handled at the port during last 24 hours.

Nineteen ships at Outer Anchorage of Port Qasim, out of them five ships, Arinaga, Khairpur, SC Hong Kong, Marangas Klymnos, MSC Desiree and SSL Brahmaputra & another ship, Xpress Salween scheduled to load/offload Rice, Mogas, Chemicals, LNG and Container are expected to take berths at MW-1, FOTCO, EVTL, PGPCL and QICT respectively on Friday.

Meanwhile another containership 'APL Qingdao' is due to arrive at outer anchorage on Saturday.

CDNS achieves Rs 700 billion savings target

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Central Directorate of National Savings (CDNS) has realized a target of Rs 700 billion in fresh bonds and achieved 42.42 percent of the annual target for the first half of the current fiscal year, from July 1 to December 31st.

The senior official of CDNS told APP on Friday that the CDNS has set an annual target of Rs 1650 billion for the current Fiscal Year, 2024-25, which will promote the country's saving culture.

Similarly, the CDNS has set a target of Rs 170 billion in investment in Islamic finance for the Current Fiscal Year, which will lead to the growth of the Islamic economy in the country.

Replying to a question, he said that the CDNS has realized a target of Rs1.742 trillion in fresh bonds and exceeded 100 percent of the annual target

in the last fiscal year 2023-24, from July 1 to June 30.

National Savings has set an annual target of Rs 1.7 trillion for the year 2023-24; it is encouraging that this year, "We surpassed the 100 percent of the annual target."

The CDNS surpassed the annual target and achieved the target of Rs 1.6 trillion in fresh bonds in the previous fiscal year 2022-23, he said.

He said it was an Rs 200 billion additional annual target than the target of Rs 1300 billion for the previous financial year 2021-22.

The CDNS has set a reviewed saving target of Rs 1.4 trillion for the financial year (2021-22) which will promote a savings culture in the country, he said, adding that given the current market trend in the country, the ambitious target had been set to further improve the savings

culture.

The official said that work was being done on institutional reforms in CDNS and new reforms and innovations were being introduced. At this time Automated Teller Machine (ATM) has also been introduced in CDNS which will provide enough facilities to the users," he added.

The official said that the directorate had set a target of Rs 75 billion for the new financial year 2023-24 for Islamic finance bonds.

Replying to a question; he said the CDNS aimed to introduce new dimensions in the Islamic finance sector.

Islamic finance has a very important role in the global financial sector at this time and a large part of the economy of many major countries currently includes Islamic finance," he added.



MULTAN: Traders selling corn to at Fruit market. — APP photo

Wall St rises on tech boost, policy changes in focus

WASHINGTON (Reuters): Wall Street's main indexes moved higher on Friday as technology stocks rebounded from a losing streak, while investors geared up for potential policy shifts under the incoming Trump administration.

At 10:05 a.m. ET, the Dow Jones Industrial Average (DJIA), opens new tab rose 181.31 points, or 0.43%, to 42,569.94, the S&P 500 (SPX), opens new tab gained 47.44 points, or 0.81%, to 5,915.99 and the Nasdaq Composite (.IXIC), opens new tab gained 236.31 points, or 1.24%, to 19,519.58.

All 11 S&P 500 sectors

were trading in positive territory, with the information technology sector (.SPLRCT), opens new tab bouncing back 1.3% after falling for the past four sessions.

Nvidia (NVDA.O), opens new tab was driving gains on all three major indexes. Wall Street had a four straight session to the new year, with the S&P 500 and Nasdaq erasing early gains to close lower for a fifth straight session on Thursday, bucking a historical trend where markets rally in the last five sessions of December and the first two sessions of January.

All three major indexes were on track to log weekly declines of about 1% each.

Analysts have highlighted uncertainty surrounding the policies that President-elect Donald Trump's administration might roll out, especially with his Republican party holding sway over Congress. The newly elected Congress will begin its first session, opens new tab on Friday, with Trump set to take the oath of office on Jan. 20.

Trump's proposals, ranging from slashing corporate taxes and easing regulations to imposing tariffs and curbing illegal immigration, could boost corporate profits and energize the economy. However, they also pose certain risks

COURT NOTICE

In the Court of Iftikhar Ahmed Civil Judge XI Kohat. Suit no.758/1 Date of hearing,07-01-2025, Titled:- Noor Agha Vs Sardar Khan, Notice against- Sardar Khan Son of Said Muhammad R/o Gharnkol Sharif Camp no.2.District Kohat presently,R/o(now.in.Abroad Riyadh Saudi Arabia) (Defendant) Whereas the above plaintiff has instituted a civil suit against you defendant in which date of hearing 07-01-2025 is fixed for your appearance. Since your intimation/service is not possible through ordinary means/mode therefore you defendant is intimated through this publication to appear before this court by person or by pleader on date fixed 07-01-2025, otherwise court shall be proceeded in accordance with law.order Issued.on.30-11-2024 (Court of C.J.XI, Kohat)



In brief

Chota Haroon Kabaddi Club emerges victorious

MULTAN (APP): An exhilarating kabaddi match was held in the Chak No. 140/10-R, near Thatha Sadiqabad, attracting a massive crowd of passionate kabaddi enthusiasts. The highlight of the event was the presence of Sardar Bhupinder Singh, a distinguished guest from the USA, who graced the occasion with his presence. The friendly yet competitive match featured renowned international and national kabaddi players, showcasing their skills and thrilling the audience. The clash was between the Kartarpur Kabaddi Club and the Chota Haroon Kabaddi Club from Jahanian. After an intense and nail-biting contest, Chota Haroon Kabaddi Club emerged victorious, defeating Kartarpur Kabaddi Club in a closely fought match. Players from both teams displayed exceptional sportsmanship and skill, earning praise and cheers from the enthusiastic crowd. Sardar Bhupinder Singh, the guest of honor, distributed prizes among the winning and runner-up teams. Speaking on the occasion, Sardar Bhupinder Singh expressed his delight at visiting Jahanian, saying, "I am overwhelmed by the love and respect I have received from the people of Pakistan. The passion for kabaddi here is unmatched, and I am committed to encouraging players and promoting this traditional sport." The event concluded with a heartfelt acknowledgment of the local community's warmth and hospitality, leaving a lasting impression on the esteemed guest and all attendees.

Man City must 'think' about Kevin future

LONDON (AFP): Pep Guardiola admits Manchester City have to "think" about the future of injury-hit midfielder Kevin De Bruyne, who is out of contract at the end of the season. The 33-year-old has been frustrated by injuries over the past two seasons and has made just eight Premier League starts in the current campaign. De Bruyne, who joined City in 2015, is able to speak to foreign clubs from this month, with a view to leaving on a free transfer at the end of the season. The Belgium international has been one of the club's standout players over the past decade, winning six Premier League titles and the Champions League. Guardiola was asked on Friday if he had held talks with De Bruyne over potentially extending his stay but the City boss said it was "not my business". "He's had problems in the last year and a half, like this year many, many players, but of course when he is consistent and fit and he can play regularly he is a really important player for us, a decisive player," he said. The City boss said a decision on a potential deal would depend on a number of factors including performances and De Bruyne's age, adding: "I think the club has to think about it." City's Premier League title defence has collapsed in recent months -- last week's win against Leicester was just their second win in 14 games in all competitions. The English champions, who host West Ham on Saturday, are sixth in the Premier League, 14 points behind leaders Liverpool, having played a game more. Guardiola said it was difficult to complete deals in January and that City, who have suffered badly with injuries this season, must only sign players who suit the long-term ambitions of the club.



CAPE TOWN: Ryan Rickelton celebrates his second Test century.

Lahore to host 1st mega boxing championship on Jan 25; Usman Wazir

ISLAMABAD (APP): World youth boxing champion Usman Wazir on Friday announced that Pakistan will host its first major international boxing championship in Lahore on January 25, marking a significant milestone for the country's sports landscape.

During a press conference at the National Press Club, Wazir revealed that the championship will feature boxers from five countries: Indonesia, Iran, Thailand, France and Pakistan.

The event will showcase ten competitive fights with Pakistani amateur

boxer Khushal Khan representing the host nation.

"This is a groundbreaking moment for Pakistani boxing," Wazir emphasized. "Beyond cricket, we need to support and develop other sports and this championship is a crucial step towards that goal."

The boxer highlighted the event's potential to inspire young athletes and promote boxing as a competitive sport in Pakistan.

He expressed the hope of organizing similar international competitions in other cities, with Islamabad potentially hosting future events.

Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz and Punjab minister Sardar Saleem Haider Khan were urged to provide support and sponsorship to encourage youth participation in boxing.

Usman Wazir, who has previously competed in fourteen competitions, stated his commitment to raising Pakistan's international sporting profile through this championship.

The event promises to be a significant boost for Pakistan's sporting diversity, offering a platform for emerging boxing talent and international athletic exchange.

Niaz Khan's five-for hands Peshawar first innings lead

KARACHI (Monitoring Desk): Fast bowler Niaz Khan picked up 5-61 to help Peshawar bundle out Sialkot for 245 in 85 overs on the second day of the Quaid-e-Azam Trophy 2024-25 final at the UBL Sports Complex, Karachi on Friday. Peshawar gained a 13-run first innings lead safeguarding their position if the final ends in a draw.

Pacer Mohammad Amir Khan backed up his fellow fast bowler's heroics with three wickets for 38 runs in 21 overs. Niaz, who sent down 26 overs in the innings, took his tally of wickets to 35 in the tournament -- second best to Musa Khan (38) -- with his fourth first-class five-for.

Sialkot lost their prolific opening batter Azan Awaiz (18, 41b, 3x4s) and Ashir Mehmood (5, 7b, 1x4) early in the first session with 38 runs on the board in 14.3 overs after resuming from their overnight score of eight for no loss.

At this juncture, Mohammad Huraira (55, 127b, 5x4s, 1x6) joined forces with Mohsin Riaz (57, 130b, 11x4s) to stitch a dogged 102-run third-wicket partnership off 33.1 overs. With Huraira's departure in the 48th over, Sialkot slipped to 198-8 and then 245 all out, losing eight wickets for 105 runs.

Ahsan Hafeez Bhatti chipped in with 26 off 75 balls, batting at No. 6, while Shahzaib Bhatti's 47-ball 40, including three fours and as many sixes, while batting at No. 9, helped Sialkot erase much of the deficit. Apart from the pace duo of Niaz and Amir, skipper Sajid Khan dismissed one batter.

In turn, Peshawar only faced one over before the close of play scoring five runs and extending their lead to 18.

Scores in brief
Final - Day 2 of 5 -- Peshawar Region vs Sialkot Region at the UBL Sports Complex, Karachi

Peshawar lead by 18 runs in second innings with ten wickets in hand

Peshawar 258 all out, 80.1 overs (Zubair Khan 47, Nabi Gul 44, Maaz Sadaqat 32, Mehran Ibrahim 31, Niaz Khan 31, Sajid Khan 23; Amad Butt 4-51, Ali Raza 3-62, Shoaib Akhtar Jr 2-60) and 5-0, 1 over

Sialkot 245 all out, 85 overs (Mohsin Riaz 57, Mohammad Huraira 55, Shahzaib Bhatti 40, Ahsan Hafeez Bhatti 26; Niaz Khan 5-61, Mohammad Amir Khan 3-38).

Rickelton, Bavuma tons put South Africa in strong position

CAPE TOWN (AFP): Ryan Rickelton and Temba Bavuma hit centuries and batted South Africa into a strong position on the first day of the second Test against Pakistan at Newlands on Friday.

South Africa were 316 for four at the close of play. Rickelton (176 not out) and South African captain Bavuma (106) put on 235 for the fourth wicket after the pair came together with the total on 72 for three.

At that stage South Africa were in danger of wasting the advantage of winning the toss on a good batting pitch.

But Rickelton and Bavuma were seldom troubled as they posted a fifty partnership off 66 balls and scored consistently at better than four

runs an over throughout their stand.

It was the left-handed Rickelton's second Test century in three matches, following a shaky start to his Test career in which he had failed to register a half-century in his first 12 innings. He was in commanding form, striking 21 fours and a six off 232 balls.

Bavuma recorded the fourth Test hundred of a career in which he has made 24 half-centuries. He was out 15 minutes before the close, caught behind off occasional off-spinner Salman Agha. He hit nine fours and two sixes in a 179-ball innings.

Despite taking three wickets before lunch, it was a lacklustre performance by Pakistan, who only managed to bowl 80

overs in six-and-a-half hours and seldom looked threatening.

Pakistan opening batsman Saim Ayub suffered an ankle injury when he fell awkwardly in the outfield in the seventh over of the day. He was taken to the dressing room on a mobile stretcher and did not return to the field.

Pakistan's hopes rose when Aiden Markram was caught behind off Khurram Shahzad for 17 after he and Rickelton put on 61 for the first wicket.

Wiaan Mulder (5) and Tristan Stubbs (0) followed in quick succession shortly before lunch, caught behind off Mohammad Abbas and Agha respectively. But the rest of the day belonged to South Africa.

Djokovic out of Brisbane in shock defeat by Opelka

BRISBANE (Agencies): Top seed Novak Djokovic crashed out of the Brisbane International in a straight-set quarter-final defeat by Reilly Opelka.

Djokovic, chasing his 100th ATP title, went neck-and-neck with the American in the first set before Opelka eased to a 7-6 (8-6) 6-3 victory in one hour and 40 minutes.

Opelka, 27, will now face France's Giovanni Mpetshi Perricard, who beat Jakub Mensik 7-5 7-6 (7-5) to reach the semi-finals.

"[Djokovic] is the greatest tennis player ever. But it's difficult being in his position," said Opelka, who is ranked 293rd in the world. "The reality is we have nothing to lose against him, so you end up playing more freely and taking a lot more risks because it's your only chance. If you play your normal level, he wins every time."

Opelka, who was sidelined for almost two years since 2022 after undergoing hip and wrist surgeries, is looking to win his fifth career title in Brisbane.

"It was tough. There were a lot of uncertainties and doubt," added Opelka.

"I watched a lot of my friends on TV which was fun, motivating and kept



me interested in the sport. I also watched Novak become the greatest during that period."

Meanwhile, 24-time Grand Slam winner Djokovic will shift his focus to winning a 11th Australian Open (12-26 January) title under his new coach Andy Murray.

In the other Brisbane semi-final, defending champion Grigor Dimitrov, who received a walkover after Jordan Thompson retired hurt, will face Jiri Lehecka, who beat Nicolas Jarry 6-4 6-4.

Sabalenka sets up Andreeva clash
World number one Aryna Sabalenka reached the women's singles semi-finals by defeating Marie Bouzkova 6-3 6-4.

The top-seeded Belarusian will now face 17-year-old Mirra Andreeva, who beat former world number two Ons

Jabeur 6-4 7-6 (7-2).

The duo last met at the 2024 French Open where the Russian teenager upset Sabalenka 6-7 (5-7) 6-4 6-4 to become the youngest player since Martina Hingis in 1997 to reach a Grand Slam semi-final.

Czech Republic's Bouzkova made a good start in the quarter-final by breaking serve in the first game, but three-time major winner Sabalenka fought back to win the opening set in 51 minutes.

She then wrapped up the second set in 53 minutes as she eyes an 18th career title.

"It's always tough battles against Bouzkova and I had lost the last one [in Washington]. I came into the match really focused and I'm happy I was able to put her under pressure and finish the match in straight sets," the 26-year-old said.

"[Andreeva] is a great player. We recently played an exhibition tournament in Abu Dhabi where I got to know her better. She is also a great person and I am really looking forward to playing against her." Russia's Polina Kudernetova and Ukraine's Anhelina Kalinina will meet in the other women's singles semi-final.

Hamilton 'excited for year ahead' after Ferrari switch

LONDON (AFP): Lewis Hamilton said Friday he "could not be more excited for the year ahead" as the seven-times world champion prepares for his first Formula One season with Ferrari.

Hamilton has joined the Italian giants from Mercedes, with whom he won six of his drivers' world titles. But the lure of racing for Ferrari, arguably the most celebrated team in Grand Prix history, proved too strong, with Hamilton hoping his move inspires others to seize new opportunities.

"I could not be more excited for the year ahead," Hamilton wrote on LinkedIn. "Moving to Scuderia Ferrari, there's a lot to reflect on. The Englishman, who turns 40

on Tuesday, added: "To anyone considering their next move in 2025: embrace the change. Whether you're switching industries, learning a new skill, or even just taking on new challenges, remember that reinvention is powerful. Your next opportunity is always within reach."

"Here's to 2025 -- a year of embracing new opportunities, staying hungry, and driving forward with purpose. Let's make it one to remember. Andiamo (Let's go)." Hamilton ended his post with the hashtag, "new job", alongside a picture of him karting in a red crash helmet as a child.

Hamilton, who made his name in Formula One with McLaren, has joined Ferrari after 12 seasons at

Mercedes and his first race for his new team will be the Australian Grand Prix in Melbourne on March 16.

He is due to unveil his 2025 car at Ferrari's season launch alongside team-mate Charles Leclerc on February 19 at the team's Maranello headquarters in northern Italy, with testing in Bahrain the following week.

Hamilton ended his two-and-a-half year winless streak at the British Grand Prix in July, but finished only seventh in the 2024 world championship, a mammoth 214 points behind title-winner Max Verstappen. Hamilton joins a Ferrari side that were narrowly beaten to the constructors' title by McLaren last year.

Bumrah strikes in feisty finale but Australia on top

SYDNEY (Agencies): Australia dismissed India for 185 on day one of the fifth Test but a fired-up Jasprit Bumrah struck with the final ball of the day to boost the tourists late on.

Bumrah had opener Usman Khawaja caught at second slip for two and turned to celebrate in the face of 19-year-old Sam Konstas, with India thinking both batters were wasting time in what proved to be the last over.

The tourists, who trail 2-1 in the best-of-five series and need to win to retain the Border-Gavaskar trophy, had earlier tentatively edged to their total on a lively Sydney pitch.

They left out struggling captain Rohit Sharma but the move did little to improve the fortunes of their top order as Scott

Boland took 4-31.

India were 72-4 when Boland dismissed Virat Kohli for 17 and 120-6 when Rishabh Pant, who top scored with a cautious 40, and Nitish Kumar Reddy fell to the seamer in consecutive balls. But Bumrah, captaining India in Rohit's place, hit three fours and a six in a 17-ball 22 to lift the total and his dismissal left time for India to have three overs at Australia before the close.

The hosts looked to have survived with Bumrah accusing Khawaja of wasting time in the final over, before exchanging words with Konstas as Australia ran the clock down to ensure there was not time for another over.

However, Bumrah had the last laugh as he dismissed Khawaja for a sixth time this series, the left-

hander poking an edge to KL Rahul, who took a fine low catch. It left Australia, who need only a draw to regain the trophy, 9-1. India need a win to remain in contention to qualify for the World Test Championship final later this year.

India find their fight late on

After the build-up to this series-finale was dominated by doubts over whether Rohit, who has scored just 31 runs across five innings the series, would keep his place he was duly dropped and India attempted to cautiously counter Australia's bowlers on a pitch offering bounce and seam movement.

Just 57 runs were scored in the morning session and only another 50 for the loss of Kohli in the afternoon.

Pant, heavily criticised

for throwing away his wicket in Melbourne, was repeatedly hit on the body and when he was tempted to finally miscue a pull India were in the 57th over with only 120 runs on the board. But if their batting was unusually subdued, the finale in the evening gloom was anything but.

Bumrah was initially irked by Khawaja holding play up by backing away and claiming he was not ready to face a delivery.

He offered words from the top of his run-up and Konstas, who had already charged his first ball while playing in just his second Test, responded with some of his own from the non-striker's end, to the point the umpire had to step between the pair.

Konstas then walked down the wicket to bump

gloves with Khawaja, as Australia further ran the clock down. Khawaja left the following delivery alone but when Bumrah straightened his line for the last the left-hander awkwardly poked forward.

After the catch was taken, Bumrah immediately turned to Konstas, although checked his celebration as his India team-mates rushed in to congratulate him -- an indication they remain up for the fight despite rumours of unrest in the camp beforehand.

Boland impresses as Kohli fails again

Rohit's absence resulted in Rahul being promoted to open but he chipped Mitchell Starc to square leg for four in the fifth over.

Nathan Lyon had Rohit's replacement in the XI, Shubman Gill, caught at slip

on the stroke of lunch but the rest of Australia's damage was done by the quick bowlers who were all impressive. Boland nicked off Yashavi Jaiswal in the eighth over and Australia thought the seamer had dismissed Kohli with his next ball as an edge was scooped up by Steve Smith at second slip and grasped by Manus Labuschagne. However, the third umpire deemed the ball was grounded as Smith took the initial catch -- a decision which left the former Australia captain perplexed.

Ultimately, it cost only 17 runs. Kohli's difficult run since a century in the first Test continued as he became Boland's second victim, departing to a catch behind the stumps for the sixth innings in succession.

Boland did not concede a boundary until his 18th

over -- evidence of his accuracy and India's tentative batting -- while his dismissal of Reddy was his 50th wicket in 13 Tests.

All-rounder Beau Webster, making his debut in place of the out-of-form Mitchell Marsh, bowled nicely for figures of 0-29 in 13 overs but India could have shown more intent against the tall seamer.

When the aggression did come it first came from Bumrah's bat and it gave the tourists a hint of momentum -- and he followed that with the ball, claiming the wicket of Khawaja, his 31st of the series. With good weather forecast for Saturday, however, Australia will still know they are on top, especially as the surface could be at its best for batting on day two.



In brief

Police arrest 12 land grabbers

RAWALPINDI (APP): Rawat Police in an operation managed to arrest 12 land grabbers, said a Police spokesman here on Friday. He informed that 12 accused namely Abdullah, Shafiq, Sumandar Khan, Gul Khan, Saboon, Asif, Ashfaq, Ismail, Farid, Azizur Rehman, Abdul Qadeer and Waqar allegedly involved in occupying a plot in Rawat area were rounded up. The accused also tried to implicate their opponents by injuring an accomplice Ramzan with firing. Rawat police are making efforts to arrest other accomplices of the accused, the spokesman informed. Superintendent of Police, Saddar said that the arrested accused will be charged with solid evidence. The land grabbers cannot escape the clutches of the law, SP Saddar, Muhammad Nabeel Khokhar added.

RWMC launch awareness drive

RAWALPINDI (APP): Under the CM's 'Suthra Punjab' Programme Rawalpindi Waste Management Company (RWMC) on Friday organized a cleanliness awareness campaign. During the campaign the teams visited Allah Wali and the Younis Shaheed mosques in Dhok Kashmirian and recognized the citizens regarding the program. According to the details, the teams distributed pamphlets in the mosques, which included the importance of cleanliness and details of the program to spread awareness among the public regarding cleanliness. In addition, the public was informed about the registration of complaints about cleanliness issues through helpline 1139, mobile app 'Clean Rawalpindi' and social media pages. The citizens were urged to register any cleanliness-related issue or complaint to get it resolved resolved timely. CEO RWMC, Rana Sajid Safdar emphasized the importance of this campaign and said, "Under the vision of the Chief Minister of Punjab, the campaign is not only creating awareness regarding cleanliness but is also providing information to the public about their rights and facilities. This is an important example of public partnership which is necessary to involve the community in the cleanliness process, he said.

CTP issues 434,161 challans

RAWALPINDI (APP): City Traffic Police (CTP) Rawalpindi issued 434,161 challans during last six months, said a CTP spokesman. He informed that CTP issued 210,240 challans during July to September 2024 imposing fines amounting to Rs 135.5 million, while in October to December 2024 quarter, this number increased to 223,911 and a fine of more than Rs 175.5 million was also imposed on the traffic rules violators. He said that the number of challans increased by 13,671 in last quarter and the amount of fines by more than Rs 40 million compared to the previous quarter. The spokesman said that CTP are making all out efforts to regulate traffic on city roads and there has been a clear improvement in the performance of the traffic police to facilitate the public and make the traffic system more effective in the city. He informed that on the directives of Chief Traffic Officer (CTO) Rawalpindi, Beenish Fatima, strict action in accordance with the law is being taken against the traffic rules violators to provide safe travel facilities to the public. "Implementation of the laws not only helps in preventing road accidents but also in establishing social order," he said adding, "Only by following the laws, we can establish a safe and better society."

Mohsin Naqvi announces upgradation of NPA

ISLAMABAD (APP): Federal Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi on Friday visited the National Police Academy (NPA) and announced its upgradation. During his visit, Interior Minister conducted a detailed inspection of the academy, hostels, and mess, and reviewed the facilities provided to the probationers.

He met with the under training officers and inquired about the facilities. He also visited the officers' mess, where he had a meal, checked its quality and praised food. He directed that high-standard residential facilities should be provided to the probationary officers and also sought the master plan of the National Police Academy.

Mohsin Naqvi stated that a new master plan for the NPA should be

prepared by an international consultant. He announced that a check of Rs. 250 million from the National Police Foundation would be handed over to the NPA soon. He added that NPA should be made a financially autonomous institution. He directed that the reorganization of the National Police Academy should be completed within three months. He also emphasized that all necessary measures must be taken immediately to grant the status of university to the National Police Academy.

Mohsin Naqvi underscored the need to update the ASPs' courses according to modern requirements. He also announced the addition of new courses on counter-terrorism, anti-riots, cyber, and other fields at the academy. He stated that the best officers would be appointed in the

National Police Academy like the Military Academy Kakul. He said that officers appointed in the police academy would receive better allowances and facilities. He stated that a model police station and training laboratories would also be established at the National Police Academy to provide training to the officers in this regard.

Federal Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi also chaired a high-level meeting to discuss the reorganization of the National Police Academy. He stated that the National Police Academy would be transformed into an international-standard institution, attracting officers from other countries for training. Commandant National Police Academy and relevant officials were also present on the occasion.



ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Interior Mohsin Naqvi meeting the under training officers during his visit to National Police Academy. —APP Photo

NADRA revamps services with technology push: spokesperson

ISLAMABAD (APP): NADRA Spokesperson Syed Shababat Friday said that NADRA Friday stressed the importance of national and civil registration awareness for public, unveiling plans to revolutionize services with cutting-edge technology and new offices nationwide.

"NADRA is committed to revolutionizing its services through cutting-edge technology and enhancing public awareness about the importance of civil registration," said Syed Shababat, NADRA Spokesperson said while talking to a private news channel.

He emphasized the importance of registering life events, such as deaths, marriages and births, with NADRA, stressing that it would greatly facilitate citizens in obtaining other essential documents and traveling.

Moreover, he highlighted the crucial role of the media in raising awareness about the significance of registering life events, appealing to the media to encourage citizens to take advantage of NADRA's services. By doing so, citizens would not only ensure their own convenience but also contribute to their safety and security.

He emphasized that these documents are vital for civil registration, which in turn plays a crucial role in national registration.

Essentially, identification documents serve as a bridge between citizens and government services, facilitating access to essential services and benefits, he added. Responding to a question, he revealed that to combat child trafficking and safeguard minors, NADRA is

set to incorporate advanced security features in the B Form registration certificate for children above 10 years, clarifying that this new measure will not be retroactive for existing B Form holders.

He pointed out that these enhanced security features will effectively prevent identity theft and misuse, thereby playing a vital role in curbing crimes such as fraudulent identity cards, illegal passport issuance and human trafficking.

To another question, he also encouraged mobile users to shift to digital platforms, advising them to visit NADRA's social media sites and website before physically visiting the office. By doing so, citizens can utilize the NADRA PAK ID website and mobile app to fulfill their document requirements, thereby avoiding office rush, he added.

ANF recovers over 10 kg drugs in five operations

RAWALPINDI (APP): Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF) while conducting five operations recovered over 10 drugs worth Rs 1.8 million and arrested five accused, said an ANF Headquarters spokesman on Friday.

He informed that 1.605 kg drug was recovered from the possession of an accused rounded up near a hospital in Korangi, Karachi.

The arrested accused confessed to selling drugs to the students of educational institutions.

3.6 kg hashish was recovered from the possession of the accused arrested near a mosque in Sector G-9, Islamabad.

3.6 kg hashish was recovered from a drug dealer arrested near Sona Khan Chowk, Quetta.

1 kg ice was recovered from the accused held near Bohana Chowk on Jhang Road, Faisalabad.

500 grams heroin hidden in 6 bags was recovered near Bahria Town in Islamabad and a suspect was arrested.

Cases have been registered against the arrested suspects under the Narcotics Control Act and further investigations are under process.

Amir Muqam criticizes at Imran's 'self-centered' politics

ISLAMABAD (APP): Federal Minister for Gilgit Baltistan and Kashmir Affairs and States and Frontier Regions, Engr Amir Muqam Friday strongly criticized PTI founder Imran Khan, stating that Khan prioritizes self-defense over the country's interests, questioning his commitment to the nation's well-being.

In an exclusive interview with a private news channel, he urged the PTI to engage in dialogue with the govern-

ment to address pressing economic issues and work towards the country's betterment, rather than pursuing self-centered politics.

While responding to a query, Muqam clarified that the government's negotiation committee does not have the authority to decide on the release of PTI founder Imran Khan, adding, instead, the decision will be made by the courts, emphasizing the importance of upholding

the rule of law and allowing the judicial process to run its course. He encouraged PTI to take the legal route, allowing the courts to determine Khan's fate.

Muqam also urged PTI to seize the negotiation opportunity and make the roundtable discussion a success as this approach can only lead to a mutually beneficial outcome, where both parties find common ground and work together to address pressing issues.

NSU Islamabad bid farewell to female graduates

ISLAMABAD (APP): National Skills University (NSU) Friday hosted a special ceremony to bid farewell to its outgoing female students from various technology programs.

These students, who have excelled in their respective fields, were praised for their dedication and hard work.

Prof. Dr. Muhammad Mukhtar, the Founding Vice Chancellor of NSU, highlighted the pivotal role of women in shaping the nation's future, describing daughters as blessings from Allah.

Speaking at the newly established Noo-E-Ilahi Garden, a dedicated and secure space for female students within the university premises, Prof. Mukhtar emphasised, "Daughters, like sons, are blessings

from God, and as a fatherly figure, I am immensely proud to see daughters from across the country thriving in technology programs at the NSU. These young women are the nation's future and will play a vital role in the country's much-needed, technologically skilled workforce."

The Noo-E-Ilahi Garden, strategically situated in front of the girls' hostels, represents a landmark initiative in fostering inclusivity and creating a nurturing environment for female students. The garden, with its lush greenery and serene atmosphere, is dedicated exclusively to the university's female students.

It is equipped with seating areas, study spots, and recreational facilities, encouraging them to connect and collaborate within

a safe and serene setting.

The farewell ceremony, organised by junior students, was a vibrant affair filled with joy and camaraderie.

Zara Obaid, the hostel warden, commended the university administration for its forward-thinking approach.

"Having a specified, secure space solely for girls and female faculty members is a unique and empowering initiative. It reflects the administration's commitment to the well-being of its female students."

The farewell ceremony, organised by junior students, was a vibrant affair filled with joy and camaraderie. The event reflected the university's emphasis on fostering a culture of respect, collaboration, and mutual appreciation.

ICT admin crackdown 20 arrested in anti-begging campaign

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) administration have intensified their campaign against begging, with 20 individuals taken into custody in the Lohibher area.

The initiative is part of a broader effort to address growing concerns over public order.

According to the spokesman of ICT administration here, the district administration of Islamabad, under the leadership of Deputy Commissioner Irfan Memon, has ramped up its anti-begging drive in the federal capital.

In the latest operation, 20 individuals were apprehended by police in the jurisdiction of the Lohibher police station.

The campaign aims to curb unlawful activities associated with begging, particularly in urban areas.

DC Islamabad has instructed officials to strengthen enforcement

efforts and carry out daily operations.

Speaking on the matter, Irfan Memon emphasized the importance of consistent action and called for public cooperation in addressing the issue.

"All magistrates have been directed to ensure regular operations to maintain order in the city," said Memon.

He urged citizens to support the district administration's actions against violators, helping to create a safer and more organized environment.

The anti-begging campaign is part of a wider initiative by the Islamabad administration to address public concerns related to urban nuisances.

Officials are committed to continuing these efforts with the support of local communities.

Meanwhile, the ICT administration urged the residents to report cases of begging and related activities for prompt action.

IRSA releases 28,100 cusecs water

ISLAMABAD (APP): Indus River System Authority (IRSA) on Friday released 28,100 cusecs water from various rim stations with inflow of 39,100 cusecs.

According to the data released by IRSA, water level in River Indus at Tarbela Dam was 1473.51 feet and was 75.51 feet higher than its dead level of 1,398 feet. Water inflow and outflow in the dam was recorded as 16,200 cusecs and 6,000 cusecs respectively.

The water level in River Jhelum at Mangla Dam was 1132.95 feet, which was 82.95 feet higher than its dead level of 1,050 feet. The inflow and outflow of water was recorded 4,800 cusecs and 4,000 cusecs respectively.

The release of water at Kalabagh, Taunsa, Guddu and Sukkur was recorded as 13,600, 20,600, 9,000 and 1,100 cusecs respectively. Similarly, from River Kabul, a total of 11,800 cusecs of water released at Nowshera and 6,300 cusecs released from River Chenab at Marala.



ISLAMABAD: WAPDA workers fixing electricity pylons on Srinagar Highway in the Federal Capital. —APP Photo

Iran executes two Afghan nationals

TEHRAN (Amu tv): Iran executed nine individuals, including two Afghan nationals, at Qezel Hesar Prison in Karaj, an Iranian rights group reported on Friday. The executions were carried out on Wednesday for charges including "premeditated murder" and "drug-related offenses," the group said. The two Afghan nationals were identified as Pacha, who was convicted on drug-related charges, and Amir, who was sentenced to death.

Balkh International Airport upgraded

KABUL (BNA): The Ministry of Transport and Aviation has activated the Instrument Landing System (ILS) and installed new airfield lighting at Mawlana Jalaluddin Mohammad Balkhi International Airport. These enhancements are designed to improve the safety and efficiency of aircraft operations, particularly during low-visibility conditions. According to a statement from the ministry.

Foundation stone laid for migrant settlement in Zabul

ZABUL (TOLONews): The foundation stone of a settlement for migrants in Qalat city, the capital of Zabul, was laid by Fasihuddin Fitrat, the Chief of Staff of the Ministry of Defense, along with local officials.

During the inauguration ceremony of the settlement, the Chief of Staff stated that, under the instructions of the leader of the Islamic Emirate, the distribution of residential plots for migrants is ongoing nationwide.

The foundation stone of the settlement, named after Sheikh Mati Baba, spans an area of 2,000 acres in the desert regions surrounding Qalat city, the center of Zabul province.

Fasihuddin Fitrat said: "God willing, this process will continue across Afghanistan, and the procedures approved by the Amir al-Mu'minin for addressing



migrant issues and their permanent settlement will be implemented."

Simultaneously, officials in Zabul assured the provision of basic living needs for returning migrants.

Mahmoodul Haq Ahadi, head of the Secretariat of the Commission for Resolving Migrant Issues, stated: "A permanent set-

tlement has been constructed for them; plots have been distributed. Homes, schools, and healthcare centers will be built to ensure proper attention to their needs."

Hizbullah Afghan, the governor of Zabul, remarked: "In Zabul, services are provided to all migrants, whether they are Mujahideen or ordinary people."

Migrants forcibly returned from Pakistan expressed that they currently face many challenges due to the lack of shelter, and with the construction of this settlement, their problems will be resolved.

Mahmood, deported from Pakistan, said: "When the forced deportation of migrants from Pakistan began, I was among those returned, and I am now living in Qalat."

Saadullah, also deported from Pakistan, said: "I am currently living in a rented house, which is very difficult for me."

According to information, since the forced deportation of Afghan migrants from Iran and Pakistan began, 5,000 migrant families have been resettled in Zabul, and the Islamic Emirate has provided initial assistance to them.



30 Rare Birds rescued in Bamyan

BAMYAN (TOLONews): The Bamyan Directorate of Environmental Protection states that 30 rare birds, whose hunting is prohibited, have been rescued from hunters and returned to their natural habitat.

According to this directorate, the hunting of these birds, known as Saira, is strictly prohibited by the National Environmental Protection Agency. The continuation of hunting and trafficking of these birds could lead to their complete extinction.

In recent years, the market for buying and selling these birds has grown in Bamyan, with hunters selling a single Saira bird for up to 10,000 afghani.

Mohammad Ibrahim Dadfar, head of the Bamyan Directorate of Environmental Protection, said: "Today, we rescued 30 Afghan Saira birds from sellers. This species is endangered, which is why we collected them from the market and released them back into nature."

Environmental experts emphasize that Bamyan, with its high mountains and suitable climate, is a unique habitat for wildlife.

They stress the need to prevent hunting and wildlife trafficking, as this could contribute to the development of the tourism industry.

Abbas, an environmental expert, said: "If these birds are not hunted or trafficked, their population can be preserved, and Bamyan's nature can flourish."

This flourishing can attract many tourists." Mohammad Amin, a resident of Bamyan, said: "These birds and other wildlife species, like native and mountainous plants, play an important role in nature and hold special significance."

Officials from the Bamyan Directorate of Environmental Protection also announced that nearly 200 loudspeakers, which caused noise pollution and disturbed city residents, have been removed.

Arghandi Kabul 500kV substation 60% complete

KABUL (ToloNews): The Ministry of Energy and Water stated that 60% of the Arghandi Kabul 500-kilovolt substation has been completed.

Matiullah Abid, spokesperson for the Ministry of Energy and Water, described the Arghandi substation as a significant project in the country. He mentioned that its completion would significantly address the electricity-related challenges faced by citizens.

Abid said: "The Arghandi Kabul substation, which converts 500 kilovolts to 200 kilovolts, is the first 500-kilovolt substation. Civil works have progressed by 95%, and the electrical works are 100% complete. Overall, 60% of the work has been completed."

The Ministry of Energy and Water added that with the completion of this substation and other projects such as Betkhak, Tarakhil, and Chintala,



1,000 megawatts of electricity from Turkmenistan will be transferred to Kabul.

Several economic experts consider the reconstruction and development of substations essential for improving electricity transmission.

Mir Shakir Yaqubi, an economic expert, told TOLONews: "The more substations there are, the higher the level of electricity transmission, improving public access to essential services, particularly electricity."

Previously, the Ministry of Energy and Water had estimated the total cost of this project, from Dasht-e-Khwaja Alwan to Arghandi Kabul, at \$183 million. The ministry had also stated that the project would be completed within two years, and by purchasing 1,000 megawatts of electricity from Turkmenistan, the power outages in Kabul and 13 neighboring provinces would be reduced.

Kunar reports completion of 129 uplift projects

KUNAR (BNA): Officials from the Department of Economy in Kunar province announced that 129 out of 239 development projects initiated in various parts of the province have been completed and are now operational. Mawlawi Abdullah Hamat, the Director of Economy in Kunar, told BNA that last year, 239 development projects worth 283 million Afghanis were launched in the provincial center and districts. Among them, 129 projects have been completed, while work on the remaining 110 projects is ongoing and expected to be completed soon. He added that hundreds of people were provided with employment opportunities during the implementation of these projects, and dozens of families are now benefiting from the completed initiatives. Residents of Kunar expressed satisfaction with the implementation of these projects.

Ghazni launches 58 development projects worth 450m Afs



GHAZNI (TOLONews): Local officials in Ghazni province say that 58 development projects are being implemented this solar year at a cost of 450 million afghanis in the province.

According to them, 30 of these projects are funded by the Ghazni Municipality, while the rest are being implemented by the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS).

Mohammad Nabi

Hamza, the mayor of Ghazni, stated: "This project, funded by UNOPS, has a budget of 7 to 7.5 million Afghanis, and an additional 240 million afghani are being financed from the municipality's budget."

Some individuals employed through these projects have said they have been able to cover the living expenses of their families. They have called on officials and aid organizations to assist in

creating permanent job opportunities. Mohammad Hashim, one of the workers, said: "The situation of some people is very bad, but through these projects, they earn a livelihood. We would be happy if more projects were implemented here."

Fida Mohammad, a resident of Ghazni, said: "If more work and business opportunities are created by companies and organizations here, people will be happier. This is a significant help from the government to the people."

Obaidullah, another worker, expressed: "We are happy because people are earning lawful income for their families through this work."

Local officials also announced that the survey for Ghazni city's detailed plan has been completed, and practical work to achieve urban order and beautify the city will begin soon.

Use of foreign currency declines in Nimroz, residents say

ZARANJ (Amu Tv): Residents of Nimroz province report a sharp decline in the use of foreign currencies, particularly the Iranian toman, in daily transactions. The change, they say, has eased financial losses and strengthened reliance on Afghanistan's national currency, the afghani.

Nimroz, located in southwestern Afghanistan along the border with Iran, has long seen foreign currencies in use, a practice common in the country's border regions. However, shopkeepers and residents in the provincial capital of Zaranj say the shift to afghani has significantly improved local business operations.

"Thankfully, our business is now conducted in afghani currency," said Gul Ahmad, a shopkeeper in Zaranj. "In the past, we



suffered significant losses due to fluctuations between afghanis and toman. It's much better now—95 percent of transactions are in afghanis, and toman are rarely used. We are satisfied and no longer experience losses."

For years, the use of the Iranian toman in Nimroz exposed traders and residents to frequent financial risks, as the

value of the toman fluctuated.

"In the past, when we bought goods, they were priced in toman, and we would lose money," said a local resident. "For example, we might purchase goods for 700,000 toman one day, only to find the exchange rate had shifted, and the same amount was worth 750,000 toman the next. This caused signifi-

cant losses." Economists agree that the increased use of the afghani is a positive development for the province's economy but caution that additional steps are needed to sustain this progress.

"Public awareness campaigns should encourage the use of the afghani and highlight its benefits for financial stability," one economist said. "Additionally, the government must systematically remove worn-out banknotes from circulation to ensure the afghani remains a trusted medium of exchange."

For residents of Nimroz, the growing reliance on their national currency is not just a matter of economic stability but also a step toward greater financial independence for the province.

Feminist groups urge boycott of cricket matches with Afghanistan

SYDNEY (Amu tv): A coalition of Australian feminist activists has called on the government to boycott all sporting events involving Afghanistan, citing the Taliban's restrictions on women's rights and the absence of a women's cricket team in the country.

The group, known as Feminist Women of Australia for Women's Rights, issued a statement on Thursday, declaring that "women are more important than cricket." The statement urged Australia to cancel all matches against Afghanistan's men's teams. "We call on Australia to cancel all its matches with Afghanistan's men's teams," the group said in a post on X.

This is not the first time sports organizations have taken a stand on the issue. Earlier, Cricket Australia canceled three one-day matches against Afghanistan, which were to be held in the United Arab Emirates, citing the lack of progress in forming a women's cricket team and the Taliban's broader restrictions on women's education and employment.

The movement to boycott Afghan sports teams has also gained traction in the United Kingdom. A group of women's rights advocates, operating under the name Women's Rights Network, has called on the British government to cancel its upcoming cricket match against Afghanistan.

According to a Fox News report, the network issued a statement urging the British government to not only cancel the match scheduled for Feb. 26 as part of the ICC Champions

League but to sever all sporting ties with Afghanistan.

"In fact, we are asking our politicians and sporting bodies to go further," the statement read. "We want Prime Minister Keir Starmer to mandate a complete boycott of all matches with Afghanistan in every sport. [The England cricket team] should cancel all matches against Afghanistan's men's cricket team in every tournament. Players and coaches should examine their consciences."

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Heavy snowfall closes key routes across Afghanistan

KABUL (Amu tv): Severe winter weather has forced the closure of major transportation routes in Afghanistan, including the Balkhab-Sar-e-Pul road in the north, the Herat-Torghundi highway in the west and the Salang Pass, Taliban officials said Friday.

Heavy snowfall and strong winds have rendered the Balkhab-Sar-e-Pul road impassable in the Qom Kotal area, according to Habibullah Masroor, a spokesperson for the Taliban governor in Sar-e-Pul Province. Crews have been dispatched to clear the road, but progress has been hampered by the severity of the conditions.

In the west, the Herat-

Torghundi highway has also been shut down due to heavy snow and high winds. The Taliban police command in Herat urged residents to avoid traveling on the highway until further notice, citing the risk of accidents.

The Taliban-led Ministry of Public Works previously announced the closure of the Salang Pass, a critical mountain corridor connecting northern and southern Afghanistan, due to similar conditions. Snow depths in the Salang Pass have reached up to 116 centimeters (46 inches) in some areas, according to ministry spokesperson Ashraf Haqshenas.

Every winter, heavy snowfall and poor infrastructure

lead to the closure of key routes across Afghanistan, particularly in rural areas. Residents have repeatedly raised concerns about the lack of essential services, including access to healthcare, during such closures.

Salang Pass closed due to heavy snowfall, storms: The Salang Pass, a critical mountain crossing in northern Afghanistan, has been closed to traffic due to heavy snowfall, storms, and drastically reduced visibility, said Ashraf Haqshenas, Taliban spokesperson for Ministry of Public Works.

He added that snow accumulation varied significantly along the highway. In northern Salang, snow depths

ranged from 45 to 97 centimeters (18 to 38 inches), while in southern Salang, they reached 78 to 116 centimeters (31 to 46 inches).

He said they were working to evacuate vehicles stranded in vulnerable areas on both sides of the highway. Travelers have been urged to remain in safe locations and to avoid traveling through the pass unless absolutely necessary.

The Salang Pass, a vital link between northern and southern Afghanistan, frequently faces closures during the winter months due to severe weather. Such disruptions often cause significant delays for commuters and challenges for the transportation of goods.



Israeli airstrikes kill Gaza head of police, 67 others

CAIRO (Reuters): Israeli airstrikes killed at least 68 Palestinians across the Gaza Strip, including at a tent camp where the head of the enclave's Hamas-controlled police force, his deputy and nine displaced people died, Gaza authorities said.

Israel said the deputy was the head of Palestinian group Hamas' security forces in southern Gaza. The attack occurred in the Al-Mawasi district, which was designated as a humanitarian zone for civilians earlier in the 14-month-old war between Israel and Hamas, which rules Gaza. The director general of Gaza's police department, Mahmoud Salah, and his aide, Hussam Shahwan, who were checking on residents of the camp, were killed in the strike, according to the Hamas-run Gaza interior ministry.

"By committing the crime of assassinating the director general of police in the Gaza Strip, the occupation is insisting on spreading chaos in the (enclave) and deepening the human suffering of citizens," it added in a statement. The Israeli military said it had conducted an intelligence-based strike in Al-Mawasi, just west of the city of Khan Younis, and eliminated Shahwan, saying he led Hamas forces in south Gaza. It made no mention of Salah's death.

"As the year begins, we got ... another reminder that there is no humanitarian zone let alone a safe zone" in Gaza, Philippe Lazzarini, head of the U.N. agency for Palestinian refugees UNRWA, said in a post on X. "Everyday without a ceasefire will bring more tragedy."

Thursday's death toll was among the highest of recent weeks. Other Israeli airstrikes killed at least 57 Palestinians, including six in the interior ministry headquarters in Khan Younis and others in north Gaza's Jabalia refugee camp, the Shati (Beach) camp, central Gaza's Maghazi camp and Gaza City. Israel's military said it had targeted Hamas fighters who intelligence indicated were operating in a command and control centre "embedded inside the Khan Younis municipality building in the Humanitarian Area".

Asked about Thursday's reported death toll, a spokesperson for the Israeli military said it followed international law in waging the war in Gaza and that it took "feasible precautions to mitigate civilian harm". The Israeli military has accused Gaza fighters of using built-up residential areas for cover. Hamas denies this. Hamas' smaller ally Islamic Jihad said it fired rockets into the southern Israeli kibbutz of Holit near Gaza.

The Israeli military said it intercepted one projectile in the area that had crossed from southern Gaza.

Israel has killed more than 45,500 Palestinians in the war, according to Gaza's health ministry. Most of Gaza's 2.3 million people have been displaced and much of the tiny, heavily built-up coastal territory is in ruins. The war was triggered by Hamas' Oct. 7, 2023 cross-border attack on southern Israel in which 1,200 people were killed and another 251 taken hostage to Gaza, according to Israeli tallies. Elsewhere in Gaza, the civil defence agency said a strike on Jabalia, in the north, killed at least 10 people.

The Israeli military, whose forces have been engaged in a sweeping operation in northern Gaza since early October, has not commented on the latest strike. It came a day after Israeli Defence Minister Israel Katz threatened to intensify strikes on Gaza in response to renewed rocket fire from the territory into Israel.

Katz also demanded the release of dozens of hostages still held in Gaza since the Hamas attack last year. The resumption of launches in recent days, though in far lower numbers than in the early stages of the war and causing little damage, represents a political blow for the Israeli government which has vowed to eliminate Hamas's military capabilities. On Thursday, the military said it intercepted one rocket that crossed from the southern Gaza Strip.

The October 7 attack last year that sparked the war resulted in the deaths of 1,208 people, mostly civilians, according to an AFP tally based on official Israeli figures. Israel's retaliatory response has so far killed at least 45,581 people in Gaza, the majority civilians, according to the Hamas-run territory's health ministry, figures which the United Nations considers reliable. UN experts denounced Israel's raid on an embattled hospital in northern Gaza, demanding an end to the "blatant assault" on health rights in the besieged Palestinian territory.

Reiterating charges that Israel is committing "genocide" in Gaza -- something the Israeli government strongly denies -- two independent United Nations rights experts said they were "horrified" by the raid last Friday on Kamal Adwan, northern Gaza's last functioning major hospital. "For well over a year into the genocide, Israel's blatant assault on the right to health in Gaza and the rest of the occupied Palestinian territory is plumbing new depths of

impunity," the experts said in a statement. Israel's diplomatic mission in Geneva dismissed the statement as "far removed from the truth", saying it "completely ignores critical facts and the broader context of Hamas's exploitation of civilian infrastructure for military purposes".

The Israeli military has repeatedly accused Hamas of using hospitals as command centres, something Hamas denies. The military "undertook every effort to protect civilians", the Israeli mission said, insisting its "actions highlight Israel's commitment to international law and the protection of civilian infrastructure, even under the most challenging circumstances".

Israel's military said it had killed more than 20 suspected militants and detained more than 240, including the hospital's director, Hossam Abu Safiyeh, describing him as a suspected Hamas militant. In their statement, Francesca Albanese, the independent UN special rapporteur on the rights situation in the Palestinian territories, and Tlaleng Mofokeng, special rapporteur on the right to health, said they were "gravely concerned" at Safiyeh's detention and demanded his "immediate release".

"Yet another doctor to be harassed, kidnapped and arbitrarily detained by the occupation forces," they said. "This is part of a pattern by Israel to continuously bombard, destroy and fully annihilate the realisation of the right to health in Gaza." UN special rapporteurs are independent experts appointed by the UN Human Rights Council but who do not speak on behalf of the world body.

The experts also highlighted "disturbing reports" that Israeli forces had allegedly carried out extrajudicial executions of some people near the hospitals, including a Palestinian man reportedly holding a white flag. They pointed to figures provided by the health ministry in Hamas-led Gaza indicating that at least 1,057 Palestinian health and medical professionals have been killed since the war erupted following the Palestinian militant group's October 7, 2023 attack inside Israel. The World Health Organization has repeatedly denounced the high number of attacks on healthcare staff and facilities in the war: 1,273 attacks on healthcare in Gaza and the West Bank have been recorded since the start of the war. WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus warned on X that the pace of desperately needed medical evacuations out of Gaza was "excruciatingly slow".



PESHAWAR: Governor of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Faisal Karim Kundi addressing a press conference at Press Club.

One killed as Russian drones hits Kyiv

KYIV: One person has been killed and four others were injured when Russian drones targeted the Ukrainian capital of Kyiv, military and civilian officials said, as Russia launched barrages across the country. The Ukrainian Air Force said its air defences shot down 60 out of 93 Russian drones launched at Ukraine since the early hours of Friday.

Moscow's forces have escalated aerial attacks across Ukraine in recent days, including a New Year's Day drone attack targeting central Kyiv that killed two people. In the latest barrage, a truck driver was killed by drone debris, according to Mykola Kalashnyk, acting governor for the Kyiv region.

He said the debris also damaged several houses, injuring four people, including a 16-year-old boy. The Ukrainian Air Force said that 26 other drones were "lost", in reference to Ukraine's use of electronic warfare to redirect Russian drones. In all, Russian drones targeted nine regions across the country including Kyiv, officials said.

Residential houses and commercial buildings were also damaged in the Donetsk region in the east and the Chernihiv region in the north, the military added. In all, Russian drones targeted nine regions across the country including Kyiv, officials said. Residential houses and commercial buildings were also damaged in the Donetsk region in the east and the Chernihiv region in the north, the military added. — Aljazeera

Nov 26 protest: ATC grants bail to 250

E.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: An Anti-Terrorism Court (ATC) on Friday granted bail to as many as 250 workers of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) in 13 cases registered in wake of November 26 protest.

However, the court rejected bail applications of 150 other accused. The court granted bail for Rs5,000 surety bonds by every accused and ordered their release. The ATC granted bail to 18 accused who were booked by the Bani Gala Police Station, while 43 accused were granted bail against whom Kohsar Police Station has registered cases. Bail of one accused was rejected. The court granted bail to nine accused in the case registered by Shazad Town Police Station, and 17 accused arrested by Noon Police Station. The court ordered their immediate release except one whose bail application was rejected.

The ATC denied bail to 25 accused in the case registered by the Aabpara Police Station, while bail was granted to 70 others. The ATC granted bail to 30 accused in the case from the I-9 Police Station, and 13 accused in the case from the Margalla Police Station, ordering their release, while the bail applications of two accused were rejected. In two cases registered at the Secretariat Police Station, bail was rejected to 120 accused, while applications of 10 accused were accepted. Bail was also granted to 25 accused booked by the Sihala Police Station and 30 accused in case registered by the Shams Colony Police Station. A total of 13 cases have been registered by 10 police stations against the accused.

Syria to include all sectors in new govt: FM

RIYADH (Reuters): Syria's foreign minister has told Saudi Arabian officials that the new leadership in Damascus wants to set up a government involving all parts of Syrian society following the overthrow of Bashar Al-Assad last month.

Minister Asaad Hassan Al-Shibani was making the first foreign trip by a member of Syria's new administration as Western and regional powers seek signs on whether it will impose strict Islamic rule or show interest in government. Al-Shibani and Syria's defence minister met with Saudi Defence Minister Prince Khalid bin Salman in Riyadh on Thursday.

"Through our visit, we conveyed our national vision of establishing a

government based on partnership and efficiency that includes all Syrian components, and working to launch an economic development plan that opens the way for investment, establishes strategic partnerships, and improves living and service conditions," Al-Shibani said in a post on X.

Since ousting Assad on December 8, rebels led by Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) have sought to reassure Arab countries and the international community that they will govern on behalf of all Syrians and not export revolution. HTS was Al-Qaeda's Syrian affiliate until it broke off ties in 2016. Saudi Arabia backed the rebels who fought Assad at the onset of the Syrian civil war.

More recently, Riyadh had embarked on a path of normalising ties with the Assad government, paving the way for Syria to return to the Arab League in 2023, in an effort to reduce Iranian influence in the country and to stem the flow of drugs, including the methamphetamine caption. A Saudi source close to the government told Reuters that the kingdom was committed to safeguarding the peace in Syria and that fostering stability was a top priority.

"At this critical juncture, our focus is on delivering essential humanitarian aid to the people of Syria, and we are exploring opportunities for expanded assistance in collaboration with regional partners," the source added.

The horror of Saydnaya jail, symbol of Assad excesses

BEIRUT (AFP): Saydnaya prison north of the Syrian capital Damascus has become a symbol of the inhumane abuses of the Assad clan, especially since the country's civil war erupted in 2011. The prison complex was the site of extrajudicial executions, torture and forced disappearances, epitomising the atrocities committed by ousted president Bashar Assad.

When Syrian rebels entered Damascus early last month after a lightning advance that toppled the Assad government, they announced they had seized Saydnaya and freed its inmates. Some had been incarcerated there since the 1980s. According to the Association of Detainees and Missing Persons of Saydnaya Prison (ADMSP), the rebels liberated more than 4,000 people.

Photographs of haggard and emaciated inmates, some helped by their comrades because they were too weak to leave their cells, circulated worldwide. Suddenly the workings of the infamous jail were revealed for all to see.

The foreign ministers of France and Germany — on a visit to meet with Syria's new rulers — toured the facility on Friday accompanied by members of Syria's White Helmets emergency rescue group. The prison was built in the 1980s during the rule of Hafez Assad, father of the deposed president, and was initially

meant for political prisoners including members of Islamist groups and Kurdish militants.

But down the years, Saydnaya became a symbol of pitiless state control over the Syrian people. In 2016, a United Nations commission found that "the Syrian Government has also committed the crimes against humanity of murder, rape or other forms of sexual violence, torture, imprisonment, enforced disappearance, and other inhuman acts," notably at Saydnaya. The following year, Amnesty International in a report entitled "Human Slaughterhouse" documented thousands of executions there, calling it a policy of extermination. Shortly afterwards, the United States revealed the existence inside Saydnaya of a crematorium in which the remains of thousands of murdered prisoners were burned.

War monitor the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights in 2022 reported that around 30,000 people had been imprisoned in Saydnaya where many were tortured, and that just 6,000 were released. The ADMSP believes that more than 30,000 prisoners were executed or died under torture, or from the lack of medical care or food between 2011 and 2018. The group says the former authorities in Syria had set up salt chambers — rooms lined with salt for use as makeshift morgues to

make up for the lack of cold storage.

In 2022, the ADMSP published a report describing for the first time these makeshift morgues of salt. It said the first such chamber dated back to 2013, one of the bloodiest years in the Syrian civil conflict. Many inmates are officially considered to be missing, with their families never receiving death certificates unless they handed over exorbitant bribes.

After the fall of Damascus last month, thousands of relatives of the missing rushed to Saydnaya hoping they might find loved ones hidden away in underground cells. But Saydnaya is now empty, and the White Helmets emergency workers have since announced the end of search operations there, with no more prisoners found. Several foreigners also ended up in Syrian jails, including Jordanian Osama Bashir Hassan Al-Bataynah, who spent 38 years behind bars and was found "unconscious and suffering from memory loss," the foreign ministry in Amman said last month.

According to the Arab Organization for Human Rights in Jordan, 236 Jordanian citizens were held in Syrian prisons, most of them in Saydnaya. Other freed foreigners included Suheil Hamawi from Lebanon who returned home after being locked up in Syria for 33 years, including inside Saydnaya.

Body hails Sindh govt's allocation for higher edu

E.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Senate Standing Committee on Federal Education and Professional Training on Friday appreciated the Sindh government's allocation of over Rs32billion for the higher education, noting that it is the only funding the Federal Urdu University of Arts, Sciences, and Technology (FUUAST) has received.

The Senate Standing Committee chaired by Senator Bushra Anjum Butt met here at Parliament House, also emphasized that the issues faced by students, workers, and retired employees at the FUUAST remain unresolved and demand immediate attention.

Senator Bushra Anjum Butt emphasized the need for a time-bound system to resolve the recurring issues of FUUAST, adding that proper systems are crucial

to ensuring smooth operations and addressing challenges effectively.

Chairman of the Higher Education Commission (HEC) apprised the committee that while an administrative allowance exists, persistent issues such as law and order disruptions and ongoing excuses about lack of resources hinder progress.

Uncollected funds allocated for colleges continue to grow, and the university's failure to provide accurate data exacerbates internal and governance-related problems, he added. The Chairperson of the Committee commented that across the country, similar challenges persist at universities, with provinces not taking responsibility, and salaries remaining unpaid. She said an audit policy, including both external and internal audits, is urgently needed.

Additionally, interim

Vice Chancellors should either have time-bound tenures or this practice should be reconsidered, as acting positions often cause significant challenges, she maintained. Senator Bushra emphasized the need to eliminate the interim Vice Chancellor position entirely and proposed forming a dedicated committee to develop actionable solutions. Proper resource allocation is essential to addressing these persistent issues effectively, she stated.

The Minister for Federal Education and Professional Training suggested that the Federal Ombudsman, the Vice Chancellor, and the HEC collaborate to resolve the matter, a suggestion which was endorsed by Senator Bushra. The issue was subsequently disposed of. Senator Ahsan called for clear guidelines to govern student unions.

NA body concerned over delays in road projects

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The National Assembly Standing Committee on Communications convened at Parliament House here Friday for its 6th meeting to discuss key infrastructure projects and ongoing issues in the sector.

Chaired by MNA Mir Shabbir Ali Bijarani, the Committee reviewed the Ministry's responses to previous recommendations and expressed concerns over delays in critical road projects aimed at improving national connectivity and road safety. The Committee approved the minutes of the previous two meetings.

The Ministry's responses to earlier recommendations were reviewed, with a focus on several major infrastructure projects aimed at improving national connectivity and road safety. These projects included the Khairpur-Larkana Bridge, the Hyderabad-Karachi Road congestion, and the necessity for pedestrian bridges at Kathore and Maymar Mor.

The Committee also examined progress on important bypasses such as Loralai and Zhob, as well as other roads including the Nokundi-Maskheal Road, Chitral-Chakdara Road, and the Pindi Gap to Khushalgarh Package 1. Additionally, discussions were held on the Lawari Tunnel N-45 North Pole approach road, roads connecting Chitral to Shandur and Kalkat, and the M-1 Indus River Service Area. The Committee stressed the importance of completing these projects on time to alleviate traffic congestion, enhance connectivity, and improve public safety.

The Ministry was directed to submit its budgetary proposal for the Public Sector Development Program (PSDP) for the upcoming financial year 2025-26 by January 31, 2025. The Committee urged the Ministry to focus on a smaller number of high-priority schemes to reduce the risk of financial losses, cost overruns, and delays caused by non-payment to contractors. The next meeting will include a proposal for ongoing schemes, ranked in order of priority, and suggestions for streamlining the process.

Pakistan Navy holds fleet annual competition parade

F.P. Report

KARACHI: Pakistan Navy Fleet Annual Efficiency Competition Parade was held at Pakistan Navy Dockyard, Karachi. Chief of the Naval Staff, Admiral Naveed Ashraf, graced the occasion as the Chief Guest. The event marked the culmination of a professionally rewarding and eventful operational year for the combatants of Pakistan Navy Fleet, including warships, submarines, and aviation assets.

Upon arrival, the Chief Guest was received by Commander Pakistan Fleet, Rear Admiral Abdul Munib, and a smartly turned-out contingent presented the Guard of Honour.

In his address, Chief of the Naval Staff expressed

complete satisfaction and confidence in the operational readiness of Pakistan Navy Fleet. He lauded the dedication and professionalism of officers and sailors in safely and efficiently achieving the operational objectives and milestones for the year 2024. The Admiral acknowledged the valuable contributions of Fleet towards maritime security and the protection of national and international Sea Lines of Communication. He highlighted Pakistan Navy's efforts to ensure the security of strategic maritime zones, particularly Gwadar Port and maritime projects under CPEC. Additionally, he elaborated on the evolving dynamics of the region, particularly the maritime security environment, which necessitate that Pakistan Navy remains

ever-ready to address any threats to the nation's maritime frontiers.

Earlier, in his welcome address, Commander Pakistan Fleet highlighted the operational achievements of the Fleet during the preceding year. He emphasized that the Fleet maintained a high level of combat readiness throughout the year, with its units participating in various bilateral and multilateral exercises in both home and foreign waters. Additionally, the Fleet undertook multiple Regional Maritime Security Patrols and Overseas Deployments. During the ceremony, Chief of the Naval Staff presented efficiency awards and trophies to the best-performing squadrons and units of Pakistan Navy Fleet Command.



ISLAMABAD: Chief of Naval Staff Admiral Naveed Ashraf addressing the parade during fleet efficiency competition.

FIA arrests six, including key human trafficker

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) has arrested six suspects including a highly sought-after human trafficker, in connection with the Libya boat tragedy. According to an FIA spokesperson, the suspects were apprehended during operations in various areas of Gujranwala and Gujrat.

Among the arrested is Khurram Shehzad, identified as a key operative for international agents based in Libya.

The FIA revealed that the accused charged a family Rs1mln to send a minor child to Europe via a boat.

During the raid in Gujrat, authorities recovered several passports from the suspect, further incriminating him in human trafficking activities.

Earlier, the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) Gujranwala zone arrested a notorious human trafficker wanted in connection with the Libya boat tragedy. As per details, the accused identified as Yasir Mehmood was on the Red Book's most-wanted list and had over five cases registered against him in Composite Circle Gujrat in 2023. Mehmood allegedly extorted millions of rupees from victims, promising to

smuggle them to Europe.

He would illegally transport people to Libya via Egypt and Dubai, where they were kept in inhumane conditions in safe houses. FIA used modern technology to apprehend Mahmood in Gujrat after multiple raids. An investigation has been initiated, and efforts are underway to arrest other accomplices. There have been two notable incidents of boats drowning off the coast of Libya in the Mediterranean Sea this year in which several Pakistanis had lost their lives. The first incident took place in February and the other in April.