

Minor girl affected with polio
F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The National Institute of Health (NIH) Islamabad has confirmed the presence of the polio virus in a 9-month-old girl from Tank district in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, raising the total number of polio cases in the country to 69. The virus was detected in a 9-month-old girl from Union Council Tana in Tank. Samples from the affected child were sent to the polio laboratory.

Bilawal meets UAE envoy
F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Chairman PPP Bilawal Bhutto Zardari Wednesday met with ambassador of UAE Hamad Obaid Ibrahim Al-Zaabi, at Zardari House, Islamabad. During the meeting, they discussed to promote bilateral relations and strengthen Pakistan-UAE ties. They agreed on the importance of solidifying Pakistan-UAE relations, focusing on mutual interests and cooperation.



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Commitments with IMF to be fulfilled: PM

— says govt committed to ensure optimum healthcare facilities to people; Comprehensive integration of economy via an e-governance system slated for implementation

F.P. Report

KARACHI: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Wednesday said the government was committed to ensure optimum healthcare facilities to people, as these were the foundation for a thriving society and hallmark of clinical excellence, professionalism and ethics.

Addressing at the launching ceremony of the Aga Khan University Manual of Clinical Practice Guidelines AKU Auditorium, the PM said it was an honour and privilege to be here at the Aga Khan University, a beacon of knowledge and innovation with its unwavering commitment to excellence in medical education, research, and patient care.

Aga Khan University (AKU) Manual of Clinical Practice Guidelines-a groundbreaking, US GRADE-endorsed resource providing evidence-based recommendations that are expected to directly improve healthcare outcomes for over 21 million people in Pakistan and avert an estimated 280,000 deaths annually.

Prime Minister said the launch of the AKU Manual of Clinical Practice Guidelines was a landmark achievement that reflected this institution's resolve to elevate standards of healthcare. PM also commended the legacy of the Aga Khan family towards supporting initiatives for the social and economic uplift of our country.

He said AKU's Manual of Clinical Practice Guidelines was a valuable resource that could serve as a guiding manual for hospitals and health facilities to provide people with the high-quality, evidence-based care they deserve, which was also the vision of his government. He expressed the optimism that the University would continue to work closely with government institutions and professional organizations to ensure that such practice guidelines were widely distributed and readily accessible.

The prime minister said country's healthcare system was unfortunately riddled with many hurdles and challenges, such as limited access to qual-

ity care in rural areas, shortages of skilled professionals, and the dual burden of communicable and non-communicable diseases. The quality healthcare for all Pakistanis had always been a critical priority for him, as reflected in Punjab's exemplary track record during his tenure as Chief Minister, he said, adding "from establishing world-class tertiary care hospitals like

Sheikh Zayed to equipping every district with advanced diagnostic tools such as MRI machines, we made significant strides." He said Pakistan Kidney and Liver Institute and Research Center (PKLI) had also been launched, with the aim to provide advanced care, promote prevention, offer top-tier education, and foster research to bridge science and clinical practice for all, irrespective of specific distinctions.

He said PKLI was the first public sector hospital in South Asia to achieve the highest accreditation in healthcare awarded by Joint Commission International (JCI). More than 1200 kidney and liver transplants have been performed successfully to date, with 75% of the patients receiving free or subsidized treatment, he added. He said "institutions of global standards and international prestige like AKU and PKLI give us hope, bridging the gap between the many challenges we face and solutions we need, and empowering our healthcare system to evolve and respond to the needs of every citizen."

PM Shehbaz said "in today's rapidly advancing world, the integration of modern technology, artificial intelligence, and tele-medicine into healthcare is no longer a luxury - it is a necessity." "By embedding the best practices outlined in this manual into these advancements, we can revolutionize patient care, expand access to remote regions, and enhance outcomes for millions of Pakistanis," he added. The prime minister said he firmly believed that partnerships and collaborations between visionary institutions like Aga Khan University

and the public sector were pivotal for transforming the healthcare landscape of Pakistan.

Shehbaz Sharif also congratulated the authors, researchers and contributors of this manual and said the AKU team's hard work and dedication to improving clinical practices will have a lasting impact on Pakistan's healthcare system. "These efforts are investments in our nation's future - a future where every citizen, regardless of their background, has access to affordable healthcare." He said the Aga Khan University had established itself as a shining example of what can be achieved with vision, passion, and perseverance.

Earlier, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif launched the AKU Manual of Clinical Practice Guidelines, a groundbreaking resource, tailored to Pakistan's diverse healthcare landscape. The launch event was attended by Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Senator Mohammad Ishaq Dar, Governor Sindh Muhammad Kamran Khan Tessori, Chief Minister Sindh, Syed Murad Ali Shah, Federal Minister for Finance & Revenue Muhammad Aurangzeb, State Minister for Information Technology and Telecommunication Shaza Fatima Khwaja, Coordinator to Prime Minister on National Health Services on Regulation & Coordination Dr. Malik Mukhtar Ahmad Bharath, Chairman of the Aga Khan University Board of Trustees Dr Sulaiman Shahabuddin, Zakir Mahmood and President Aga Khan University (AKU) Dr. Sulaiman Shahabuddin, President of Aga Khan University (AKU).

This manual reflects years of rigorous research and dedication to address Pakistan's lack of standardised clinical practice guidelines. Using the GRADE-ADOLOPMENT methodology, it integrates global best practices with local expertise to ensure relevance. The initiative seeks to improve patient outcomes, reduce burden on tertiary care system, and strengthen the country's healthcare

Premier vows to convert macro economic stability into sustainable growth

F.P. Report

KARACHI: The Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, vowing to take forward the agenda of economic stabilization and reforms, on Wednesday said that the vigorous collective efforts has resulted in macro level stability and now we have to convert it into sustainable economic growth. The prime minister was addressing to a ceremony held here at the Pakistan Stock Exchange to mark the exceptional performance of PSX and becoming the top stock market in the world. The ceremony was attended by Deputy Prime Minister Muhammad Ishaq Dar, Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb, Federal Information Minister Atta Tarar, Governor and Chief Minister Sindh, Chairperson PSX Shamshad Akhtar and distinguished business and trade personalities.

The prime minister felicitated the PSX for achieving the tail-winds and stressed on sustaining the momentum as our actual target is economic growth with prudent utilization of immense natural resources and skills and expertise of experienced business and trade leaders so that we could lead the country to path of progress and prosperity and preventing the economy from the boom and bust cycles. He said Karachi the city of lights is nerve center of Pakistan's economy and feed back and suggestions of the investors of the city would prove beneficial for boasting the growth. The government will welcome tangible proposals and recommendations by the business community for actualizing the export led growth. Shehbaz Sharif underscored the significance of progressive taxation and structural reforms and said that Pakistan had a target of enhancing the tax to GDP ratio to 10.6 percent under the commitments with IMF but we have taken the ratio to 10.8% that is a major achievement. Expressing satisfaction on significant decrease in the policy rate from 22% to 13%, he noted that there was more space available to further decrease it but any such move must be made in a prudent and cautious manner. He highlighted the growth opportunities in agriculture, mines and minerals sectors and said foreign investors who recently visited the country shown interest to bring investment and technology to Pakistan. We want to utilize the natural resources for promoting manufacturing in the country and employment generation with a strategy of taking the Pakistan to new heights, he maintained.

infrastructure.

Dr Adil Haider, Dean of AKU's Medical College and Editor-in-Chief of the manual, explained, "This manual is more than a guide, it is a movement to transform healthcare in Pakistan. With nearly 140 guidelines addressing 80% of conditions seen in healthcare institutions in the country, this initiative is a giant leap toward ensuring every patient receives high-quality care."

The launch coincided with an exclusive Healthcare Leadership Roundtable held in collaboration with AKU. Led by the Prime Minister the event convened 30 of the country's most senior healthcare leaders, policymakers, and stakeholders at AKU's Stadium Road campus to engage in a high-level dialogue to advance healthcare policy, strengthen infrastructure, and promote the adoption of evidence-based practices to address pressing healthcare challenges. Reflecting on this momentous occasion, Dr Sulaiman Shahabuddin, President of AKU, stated, "At AKU,

we believe that healthcare is a collective responsibility. The roundtable represented a significant step towards building a stronger, more integrated healthcare system in Pakistan. By uniting key players from both the public and private sectors, we aim to shape a unified and forward-thinking vision for the country's healthcare delivery."

Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar, Federal Minister for Finance and Revenue Muhammad Aurangzeb, Federal Minister for Information and Broadcasting Attaullah Tarar, Federal Minister Dr Khalid Maqbool Siddiqui, State Minister Pervez Malik, Coordinator to PM on Health Dr Mukhtar Ahmed Bhart, Sindh Governor Kamran Khan Tessori, Chief Minister Sindh Syed Murad Ali Shah, President Aga Khan Foundation Sultan Ali Alana and experts in health sector were present on the occasion.

Meanwhile, Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif also said

that Pakistan has attained favourable macroeconomic indicators and now it is incumbent upon government functionaries, investors, exporters, and all stakeholders to collaborate synergistically for further strengthening the economy while the comprehensive integration of the entire economy via an e-governance system would be executed.

He said this while sharing his views at the inauguration ceremony of Faceless Customs Assessment System (Central Appraising Unit), at South Asia Terminals Pakistan (SAPT), during his day-long visit to the port city. Deputy Prime Minister Ishaq Dar, Federal Minister for Finance and Revenue Senator Muhammad Aurangzeb, Federal Minister for Maritime Affairs, Qaiser Ahmed Sheikh, Federal Minister for Information and Broadcasting Attaullah Tarar, Minister of State for Finance, Revenue, and Power, Ali Perez Malik and other notables were also present on the occasion.



KARACHI: Chief Minister of Sindh, Syed Murad Ali Shah receiving Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif during arrival at Port City.

Convoy of of relief items dispatched to Kurram: Saif

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The Advisor to the Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa for Information and Public Relations, Barrister Dr. Saif, has stated that the provincial government has initiated relief operations in the affected areas of District Kurram to provide much-needed relief to the local population. As part of these efforts, a convoy of 40 vehicles carrying essential supplies has been successfully dispatched to District Kurram.

Barrister Dr. Saif informed that a convoy of 10 vehicles has already reached the Bagan area, while another convoy of 30 vehicles has arrived in Parachinar and Upper Kurram. He added that the government is consistently taking solid steps for the relief of the affected popu-

lation, and these convoys are a key part of those efforts.

Dr. Saif explained that these relief operations were made possible after successful negotiations late last night. The negotiations, in which the Grand Jirga, Kurram Peace Committee, and local peace committees played a pivotal role, led to an agreement with local protesters to remove barriers and allow the transportation of relief goods.

He emphasized that the restoration of peace and order in the region is a top priority for the provincial government, and all necessary measures are being taken to fulfill the needs of the affected people. Dr. Saif also announced that additional relief convoys will soon be dispatched to ensure that all basic needs

of the affected communities are adequately met.

Commending the cooperation of local elders in maintaining peace, Dr. Saif said that the role of Jirgas and peace committees is a significant step toward long-term stability in the region. He assured that the government will further strengthen this collaboration and adopt a strategy to involve all stakeholders in the process.

Dr. Saif reassured the public that the government is not only focused on relief activities but is also making comprehensive plans for the long-term development and stability of the affected areas. He stated that development cannot be achieved without peace, and the government is committed to ensuring complete tranquility in the region.

Shehbaz visits Sharjeel residence F.P. Report

KARACHI: Prime Minister Shabbaz Sharif visited the residence of Sindh's Senior Minister, Sharjeel Inam Memon, during his trip to Karachi.

On the occasion of the visit to the residence of Sindh's Senior Minister and Provincial Minister for Information, Transport, and Mass Transit, Sharjeel Inam Memon, Deputy Prime Minister Ishaq Dar, along with Federal Ministers Muhammad Aurangzeb, Mosaaddi Malik, and Atta Tarar, accompanied Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif.

Sindh Chief Minister Murad Ali Shah and Governor Sindh Kamran Tessori also accompanied the Prime Minister to the residence of Senior Minister Sharjeel Inam Memon. On this occasion, senior PPP leader Syed Khurshed Shah, Senator Naveed Qamar, Nisar Ahmed Khuhro, Speaker of the Sindh Assembly Syed Owais Qadir Shah, Provincial Minister Saeed Ghani, Special Assistant Qasim Naveed Qamar, MNA Col (Retd.) Asad Aslam Niazi, and others were also present.

Senior Minister Sharjeel Inam Memon and his son, Rawal Sharjeel Memon, warmly welcomed Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif upon his arrival at their residence. During the meeting, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif congratulated Senior Minister Sharjeel Inam Memon on the birth of his grandson. In response, the Senior Minister expressed his gratitude to the Prime Minister for the honor of hosting him.

Imran allowed to speak with sons F.P. Report

RAWALPINDI: An Anti-Terrorism Court (ATC) approved a plea filed by PTI founder Imran Khan, seeking a permission to speak with his sons Sulaiman Khan and Qasim Khan. ATC Judge Amjad Ali Shah, who conducted the hearing inside Adiala Jail, also allowed a medical checkup for Imran Khan.

Can all civilians be treated like criminals who attacked APS: SC

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Justice Musarrat Hilali on Wednesday remarked that the trial of civilians in military courts was for the criminals like who attacked APS. Can all civilians be treated the same way?

She gave the remark during the hearing of a case related to civilians' trial in military courts by the Constitutional Bench of the Supreme Court. Justice Hilali said the Constitution of Pakistan is not suspended. The lawyer replied that fundamental rights remain, and there are court decisions.

She asked the lawyer whether all fundamental rights are suspended when one comes under the Army Act. Justice Jamal Mandokhail asked if the military court will try those [civilians] who attack army soldiers. Khawaja Haris responded that this case is not about determining who can be tried in the future. Justice Mandokhail remarked that it is said that the parliament is supreme, "but in my opinion the Constitution is supreme."

The justice observed that parliament indeed has the power to make laws defining what constitutes a crime. If parliament wishes, it can make a law stating that looking at someone with a crooked eye is a

crime. Parliament also has the constitutional responsibility to establish the court where this crime will be tried. The Constitution of Pakistan grants parliament this authority and responsibility. As proceedings started, Khawaja Haris, the counsel for the Ministry of Defense, argued that the judicial decision is based on Articles 8(5) and 8(3), and that both sub-articles are entirely different and cannot be combined.

Justice Mandokhail stated that according to the Constitution, rules can be suspended but not abolished, and rights cannot be suspended under Article 5. Khawaja Haris argued that Article 233 has two parts: one deals with the Armed Forces and the other with civilians.

The counsel read the decision which declared the military trial of civilians void and stated that the F.B. Ali case had already settled that civilians could also be tried by military courts. He argued that the majority decision misinterpreted Articles 8(3) and 8(5). He said that it was wrongly stated that the F.B. Ali case was of a different nature, as the trial was held after his retirement. The judgment stated that his case was different because he was not retired when the crime occurred.

Justice Mandokhail remarked that in this case, the suspects of May 9 riot

are not part of the Armed Forces. These days, the term "ex-servicemen" is used, but they were not even ex-servicemen. Let us use the term "civilian." The justice asked him whether civilians can be tried under the Army Act. Is this only for specific civilians? The counsel replied that the general impression is different, but the justice intervened and repeated his question: "can civilians be tried or not?"

Justice Naem Akhtar Afghan said that the five-member bench had declared some provisions of the Army Act void. If we also keep these provisions void, civilians cannot be tried in special courts. If we reach another conclusion, we will have to decide which civilians can be tried in special courts. Justice Afghan stated that there have been amendments to the Official Secrets Act in 2023. He asked how these amendments should be considered.

Justice Mazhar stated that there are some questions that will be taken up tomorrow and the hearing was adjourned. The seven-member Constitutional Bench, headed by Justice Ameenuddin Khan, and included Justices Jamal Mandokhail, Muhammad Ali Mazhar, Syed Hassan Azhar Rizvi, Musarrat Hilali, Naem Afghan, and Shahid Bilal Hassan, is hearing the case.

Tibet quake survivors trapped under rubble at risk of dying from hypothermia

BEIJING (Reuters): More than 400 people trapped by rubble in earthquake-stricken Tibet have been rescued, Chinese officials said on Wednesday, with an unknown number still unaccounted for in freezing weather a day after a strong tremor rocked the Himalayan foothills. People trapped or those without shelter are at risk of rapid hypothermia and may only be able to live for five to 10 hours even if uninjured, experts say. Twenty-four hours after the tremor struck, those trapped under rubble would have endured a night in sub-zero temperatures, adding to the pressure on rescuers looking for survivors in an area roughly the size of Cambodia. Temperatures in the high-altitude region dropped as low as minus 18°C (0°F) overnight.

Footage broadcast on state television CCTV showed families huddled in rows of blue and green tents quickly erected by soldiers and aid workers in settlements surrounding the epicentre, where hundreds of aftershocks have been recorded. At least 126 people were known to have been killed and 188 injured on the Tibetan side, state broadcaster CCTV reported. No deaths have been reported in Nepal or

elsewhere. The epicentre of Tuesday's magnitude 6.8 quake, one of the region's most powerful tremors in recent years, was located in Tingri in China's Tibet, about 80km (50 miles) north of Mount Everest, the world's highest mountain. It also shook buildings in neighbouring Nepal, Bhutan and India. The quake was so strong part of the terrain around the epicentre slipped as much as 1.6 metres (5 feet 3 inches) over a distance of 80km (50 miles), according to an analysis by the United States Geological Survey.

Chinese authorities have yet to announce how many people are still missing. In Nepal, an official told Reuters the quake destroyed a school building in a village near Mount Everest, which straddles the Nepali-Tibetan border. No one was inside at the time. German climber Jost Kobusch said he was just above the Everest base camp on the Nepali side when the quake struck. His tent shook violently and he saw several avalanches crash down. He was unscathed.

"I'm climbing Everest in the winter by myself and [...] looks like basically I'm the only mountaineer there, in the base camp there's nobody," Kobusch

told Reuters in a video call. His expedition organising company, Satori Adventure, said Kobusch had left the base camp and was descending to Namche Bazaar on Wednesday on the way to Kathmandu.

No avalanches have been observed on Everest so far, state-run Xinhua news agency reported on Wednesday, citing Chinese scientists. But damage round the epicentre was extensive. An initial survey showed 3,609 homes had been destroyed in the Shigatse region, home to 800,000 people, state media reported late on Tuesday. More than 14,000 rescue personnel had been deployed.

Over 46,500 people affected by the quake have been relocated, and 484 tourists in Tingri have been safely transported to the city of Shigatse, local officials said at a press conference on Wednesday. Tuesday's quake was the worst in China since a 6.2 magnitude earthquake in 2023 that killed at least 149 people in a remote northwestern region. In 2008, an 8.0 magnitude earthquake hit Sichuan, claiming the lives of at least 70,000 people, the deadliest quake to hit China since the 1976 Tangshan quake that killed at least 242,000.

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa CM honors Hassan Nisar for Digital Empowerment Efforts

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Hassan Nisar, CEO of Metrix Pakistan, was recognized by the Chief Minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Ali Amin Gandapur, for his exceptional contributions to digital innovation and his efforts to promote education and technology in underserved regions of the province.

The Chief Minister appreciated Nisar's achievements and presented him with an official award and a cash reward as a token of recognition for

his impactful work.

Over the past eight years, Hassan Nisar has established himself as a key figure in Pakistan's growing digital sector.

Under his leadership, Metrix Pakistan has undertaken numerous initiatives aimed at bridging the digital divide, particularly in rural and underprivileged areas. The organization focuses on empowering communities through technology education and innovative solutions to address social and economic challenges.

Hassan Nisar's work has

earned him recognition both nationally and internationally. Alongside multiple awards from the KP Government, he is also a recipient of the Hamaray Heroes Award by the Pakistan Cricket Board, among other accolades.

These honors reflect his consistent contributions to fostering digital literacy, combating misinformation, and promoting responsible use of social media.

Metrix Pakistan has become known for its focus on projects that empower youth through digital skills training, inspire entrepre-

neurship, and encourage sustainable growth. These efforts are particularly impactful in regions where access to technology and education has traditionally been limited.

This recognition adds another milestone to Hassan Nisar's career, further cementing his reputation as one of Pakistan's leading entrepreneurs in the digital space.

His continued efforts to use technology as a tool for empowerment and progress remain an important contribution to the region's development.



PESHAWAR: Chief Minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Ali Amin Gandapur presenting letter of appreciation to Hassan Nisar, CEO of Metrix Pakistan.

Sohail presides E-Khuli Kacheri to address public grievances

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Muhammad Sohail Afridi, Special Assistant to the Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa for Communication and Works (C&W), presided over an E-Khuli Kacheri where he personally addressed the issues and grievances of the public. Utilizing phone calls, social media platforms, and other communication channels, Muhammad Sohail Afridi listened to the problems

faced by the citizens and assured them that their concerns would be resolved promptly. Secretary C&W and all the concerned chief engineers were also present in the e-khuli kachhari.

Special Assistant to Chief minister Muhammad Sohail Afridi emphasized the government's commitment to providing relief to the public, stating, "We are here to serve the people and ensure their issues are addressed without delay." He further directed the relevant authorities to take

immediate action to resolve the concerns raised by citizens during the session.

Muhammad Sohail Afridi also announced that such E-Khuli Kacheris would continue to be organized in the future to maintain a direct line of communication with the public and address their grievances effectively.

The initiative reflects the government's resolve to create a responsive and accessible administration that prioritizes the well-being of its citizens.

PHC issues contempt notice on Yasin Khalil plea

Humayun Khan

PESHAWAR: The Peshawar High Court's two-member bench comprising of Justice S.M. Atique Shah and Justice Fahim Wali has issued notices to the relevant authorities including district administration for demolishing the plaza owned by former Member Provincial Assembly Yasin Khalil, despite court orders to the contrary, on Wednesday.

The court heard the Contempt of Court (COC) petition filed by Yasin Khalil, in which he stated that he is a member of a political party and the current provincial government is targeting him for political revenge.

As a result, the district administration demolished his property, worth millions of rupees, despite the Peshawar High Court (PHC) ordering it to be reopened after it was previously sealed.

According to the petition, the district administration demolished the plaza, which included several flats, by violating PHC's orders.

This action has caused significant financial loss to the petitioner, and he has requested the court to take actions against the relevant authorities in the contempt of court's jurisdiction.

The court, after hearing the arguments, issued notices to the relevant authorities and sought a response regarding the demolition of the plaza.

The court has also sought an explanation for why the authorities demolished the plaza despite the court's orders.

RTI paves way for citizen's participation in climate governance

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: RTI is not merely a legal tool; it is a key that unlocks citizens engagement into governance. By granting access to information, it ensures transparency and openness in government initiatives for mitigating Climate Change, as it bounds institutions to provide citizen-requested information within the stipulated time period. It was stated by Syed Saadat Jahan, Deputy Director Communication, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa information Commission (KPIC), while addressing

the participants of a workshop titled "Climate Change Mitigation, Adaptation, and Social Accountability to Enhance Citizens' Participation in Climate Governance", collaboratively arranged by non-governmental organizations; Transparency International-Pakistan and SAHARA Foundation, here at TMA Office in Peshawar on Wednesday. Representatives of various government institutions and members of civil society organizations were the participants of the workshop.

Highlighting the critical

role of RTI in fostering meaningful citizen participation in Climate Governance, Mr. Jahan said that RTI is imperative for fruitful outcomes of government initiated programs, as it guarantees the right execution of plan and policies. Mr. Jahan encouraged the participants to utilize RTI for improving good governance.

In the workshop participants were provided with RTI application forms, while Mr. Jahan enlightened them on the procedure of logging information requests to public entities.



Host Tourism: An ambitious project to alleviate poverty in KP's rural areas

PESHAWAR (APP): Pakistan's tourism industry is continuously on the rise, with the country being widely hailed as "tourism's next big thing" due to its diverse treasures.

Particularly, Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, with its breathtaking landscapes, Gandhara civilization, snowfall features and rich natural beauty, holds immense tourism potential, especially in its northern districts needed Govt patronage for bolstering rural economy and alleviation of poverty for masses' benefits

Blessed with plenty of adventure tourism and snow sports opportunities, including being the home to stunning mountains peaks of Falak Sair, Elum, Trich Mir and its picturesque snow clad valleys and Gandhara civilizations, alongside regions such as Malakand and Hazara, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa was going to become a hub of winter tourism after launching of host tourism project.

However, the lack of affordable accommodation and poor connectivity remains a challenge that hinders tourism growth in KP.

Additionally, issues like the threat of terrorism, inadequate roads infrastructure, socio-cultural

and language barriers continue to pose obstacles in way of the sustainable tourism.

Despite these challenges, KP northern areas including Swat, Chitral, Dir, Mansehra and Abbottabad hold a unique potential, particularly for the promotion of snow sports, adventure, heritage and eco-tourism.

To capitalize on KP's tourism wealth and foster the region's socioeconomic growth, the provincial government is going to launch the Host Tourism Project (HTP) aims at financial empowerment of local communities by promoting community-based accommodations to tourists.

Saad Khan, spokesperson for the Culture and Tourism Authority of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, said that under the landmark program, local residents in tourist areas will be provided loans of up to Rs 3 million from the Bank of Khyber for the construction or renovation of at least two rooms attached to their houses, specifically for hosting tourists.

"The government's focus areas for the project include scenic spots such as Kalam Swat, Kumrat Valley in Upper Dir, Laram Top in Lower Dir, Upper Chitral, Kower Chitral, Galiyat Abbottabad, and

upper Kagan Mansehra. These locations, rich in natural beauty and mountains treasures, have been identified as ideal for tourism expansion," he said.

Saad Khan shared that beneficiaries of this Qarz e Hasna (interest-free loan) scheme should be permanent residents aged between 20 and 55 of these areas.

He said special encouragement is being given to women entrepreneurs and educated families.

The government has also stipulated that the rooms constructed or renovated under the scheme must be used exclusively for tourism-related accommodation for a period of at least 10 years.

Professor Dr Zilakat Malik, former Chairman of Economics Department at University of Peshawar said that the host tourism project was very important in term of generation of jobs and revitalization of the rural economy.

He said that travel & tourism market in Pakistan is growing due to proudent pro tourism policies of the Govt and is likely to grow by 6.75% (2025-2029) resulting in a market volume of over US\$5533 million in 2029.

Dr Zilakat said that SAARC countries were earning millions of dollars

from tourism despite its limited tourism potential compare to Pakistan and suggested use of digital media for tourism boost in the home of K2.

Besides the host tourism project, KP Culture and Tourism Authority spokesman said that new camping pods at Larum Top and Shahin Bin Shahi Lower Dir, Kumrat Dir Upper, Broghal and Sorlaspur at Chitral Upper, Shangla, Samana Haripur, Sulatharn Swat and Kalam would give upward push to promotion of winter sports in KP.

The KP government has planned construction of three new ski resorts in Kaghan, Chitral and Swat while Battakundi-Lalazar chairlift and the proposed cable car project at Dir-Chitral on completion would make the region a tourism hub.

The development of waterfalls of Sajkot, Noori, Chajjian Haripur, Jarogo Swat, Lanchar Dir, Umbrella Abbottabad and four integrated tourism zones (ITZ) would increase Pakistan's tourism capital.

This key initiative is expected to create sustainable income opportunities for local families, promote ecotourism tourism, and play a pivotal role in alleviating poverty in rural areas of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Reforms initiated in dept to provide better services to public: SACM

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Special Assistant to the Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa for Forests, Wildlife, Environment, and Climate Change, Pir Musawar Khan, met with people from Malakand and other areas at his office in the Civil Secretariat, Peshawar, yesterday. During the meeting, members of the delegation shared their problems and concerns with him. He took

immediate action to resolve some problems on the spot and issued instructions to the heads of relevant departments for the resolution of other problems.

While speaking with the people, Pir Musawar Khan stated that resolving public issues is their top priority and that he is fully aware of the challenges faced by the public.

He further mentioned that, with the special interest of the Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, a

network of developmental projects will be established across the province, including in Dargai, Malakand, to ensure the public benefits in a true sense.

A timeframe will be determined for the completion of these development projects.

He highlighted that the government is focusing on every sector, including health, education, and energy. He said that distribution of solar systems among deserving households in the

province would begin soon.

Pir Musawar Khan emphasized that reforms have been initiated in various departments to improve service delivery to the public.

The government is actively working to promote merit and curb corruption in the province. He urged the public to cooperate with the government in promoting afforestation and combating illegal deforestation to support forest development.

Transport Department signs MoU with KPIT Board

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Special Assistant to the Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa for Transport Haji Rangeez Ahmed has said that the Transport Department is being completely digitized, the Transport Department is going to be developed on modern lines, in this regard, on Wednesday the Transport Department and KPIT Board have signed an MoU regarding the digitization of Transport Department including Driving Licenses. He expressed hope that this digitization

will prove to be a milestone in revenue generation of the province.

He expressed these views during an even at KPIT Board Office Hayatabad Peshawar .

On this occasion, a Memorandum of Understanding MoU was also signed between the Transport Department and the KPIT Board. The meeting was attended by Special Assistant for Science, Technology and Information Technology Shafqat Ayaz. Secretary Transport, MD KPIT Board, Director Transport and other senior officials were present on the occa-

sion.

Before the MOU ceremony a meeting was held where MD KPIT Board provided briefing on the digitization of the Transport Department. The MD KPIT Board informed the meeting that the complete digitization of the Transport Department will be completed in one year and six months, while the driving license will be digitized in four months. The meeting was informed that the mobile application, "Dastak", will be used to obtain the online driving license.

On this occasion, Special Assistant for

Transport Haji Rangeez Ahmed has said that the digitization of driving license will ease the licensing process, while this system will also eliminate the role of the third man. He has said that digitization will also eliminate issues like fake licensing and fake medical certification. He has said that special concessions will be given to overseas Pakistanis in the digitization of driving licenses. He further said that the provincial government of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf will take similar practical steps in other matters to provide better services to the people.

Sports Minister, PA body chairman visit Arbab Niaz Stadium

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Minister for Sports and Youth Affairs, Syed Fakhar Jihan along with the Chairman of the Provincial Assembly's Standing Committee on Sports and Youth Affairs Shafiullah Jan and other members of the committee and MPAs, including Muhammad Riaz Khan, Muhammad Usman, Tariq Awan and Samiullah, on Wednesday, visited Arbab Niaz Cricket Stadium in Peshawar to review the ongoing construction work at the stadium.

During the visit, Secretary of Sports and Youth Affairs, Matiullah, Director General Sports, Abdul Nasir Khan, Deputy Secretary Assembly, Amjad and officials from the departments of Communication & Works and Sports were also present.

On this occasion, the committee was briefed in detail by C&W Department about the completed civil works and the remaining tasks for the stadium.

The Executive Engineer of Mega Projects, Riaz Bangash, provided the briefing and stated that the Arbab Niaz Stadium is being developed according to modern and international standards. With features such as lighting and other facilities, it will be a unique stadium with a design tailored to these specifications.

The briefing further highlighted that the external civil work of the stadium will be completed by 30th January and a total of 80% of the physical civil work has already been completed.

Similarly, the full civil work for the stadium will be completed by 15th February, after which the stadium will be open for

sports activities.

It was told that PCB officials also visited the stadium and expressed satisfaction over the ongoing construction work.

The committee was informed that, equipped with advanced technical facilities, this stadium will be a world-class venue, setting a new standard in the country. The lighting system being installed will follow the design of Dubai's stadium standards.

On this occasion, the Provincial Minister for Sports, Syed Fakhar Jihan shared his thoughts, mentioning that he visited the stadium on the third day of taking office and following his instructions, the developmental work on the project is progressing rapidly.

He assured that there will be no financial hurdles in this project and alongside release of new funds the old liabilities

worth of 12 million rupees, have already been released in term of the same project.

He further stated that the provincial government is fully focused on this project and it will be completed on schedule time and will ready for sports activities.

The Chairman of the Committee, Shafiullah Jan, also expressed his views, emphasizing that the primary goal is to complete this important cricket stadium of the province as soon as possible, enabling it to host PSL and international cricket matches.

The committee instructed that this stadium, being of great significance for international cricket in the province, should have its ongoing work completed within the set timeline.

The committee members also reviewed the construction work of the stadium during the visit.

KMU, DAI Fleming Fund join hands to fight AMR

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: A significant step was taken today in the fight against Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR) in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa with the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between Khyber Medical University (KMU), Peshawar and the DAI Fleming Fund Country Grant Pakistan.

The MOU is dedicated to enhancing AMR surveillance capacities, crucial for effectively managing and mitigating AMR's impact in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. It emphasizes capacity building within KMU, providing substantial support in laboratory training for antimicro-

bial stewardship and the establishment and maintenance of a biorepository/biobank, complete with necessary technical assistance and IT software management solutions. Prof. Dr. Zia ul Haq, Vice Chancellor of KMU, and Prof. Dr. Yasar Mehmood

Yousafzai, Director of the Public Health Reference Laboratory at KMU, represented the institution at the signing ceremony. The Fleming Fund Country Grant was represented by Dr. Fayaz Ahmad, Technical Advisor, and Ghulam Farooq Khan, Provincial

Lead of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

The MOU underscores a shared commitment between the parties to bolster the One Health approach to AMR, which integrates efforts across human, animal, and environmental health sectors.





In brief

Two killed, lady DEO injured F.P. Report

LAKKI MARWAT: At least two people were killed, and a woman was injured in a collision between a truck and a car in Darra Pezu on Indus Highway in Lakki Marwat district. Rescue 1122 informed on Wednesday. According to the spokesperson for Rescue 1122, the car of Ghulam Fatima, the Female District Education Officer (DEO) of South Waziristan, collided with a truck in the Darra Pezu area. As a result, the driver, Alauddin, and clerk, Tamizuddin, died on the spot, while DEO Ghulam Fatima sustained serious injuries. Rescue sources reported that the deceased, Tamizuddin, belonged to Landi Jalandhar, and Alauddin was from Dera Ismail Khan. The injured DEO Ghulam Fatima was shifted from District Headquarters Hospital Lakki Marwat from where she was referred to Peshawar for further treatment.

Role of orphan center hailed F.P. Report

MARDAN: Commissioner Mardan Nisar Ahmed visited Al-Islah Orphan Care and Welfare Center while Chairman Inayat Rahman of the institution and other officials welcomed and briefed about facilities including education and residential at the institution, on Wednesday. The chairman said that at present one hundred orphan boys and girls are staying in the Mardan campus of the institution while there are also branches in Islamabad and Abbottabad. Secretary to Commissioner Mardan, Additional Deputy Commissioner Relief, ACR and Social Welfare Officer Shoaib Khan were also present on occasion. Commissioner Mardan distributed warm clothes and sweaters among the orphans on behalf of a non-governmental organization Salwa Charity. Commissioner appreciated the role of supervisors, assistants and board members of the institution for better arrangements for the education and training of orphans and assured their full support at the government level for the expansion and development of the institution. Commissioner Mardan Nisar Ahmed visited different parts of Al Islah Center and reviewed the facilities provided to the orphans residing in the institution. He also interacted with the children and encouraged them. On this occasion Chairman Inayat Rahman of the institution presented the shield to the Commissioner Mardan Division.

Tribesmen body meeting held F.P. Report

WANA: The initial meeting of the committee formed regarding the Angoor Adda crossing held at Wana in the premises of Spin Masjid, on Wednesday. The meeting was attended by Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam leader Abdullah Nadeem, Maulana Sabirullah, Malik Boz Gul, Malik Shahryar, Malik Rasool Zaman, Saif-ur-Rehman from the Chamber of Commerce and Industry, along with journalists and business personalities. The meeting involved a detailed discussion on opening the Angoor Adda Gate, initiating commercial activities in the region, and addressing the issues faced by tribes settled in Angoor Adda. A collective prayer was also offered for the resumption of trade activities at the gate and for the welfare of the tribes.



HYDERABAD: Workers busy preparing the metal iron boxes at their workplace.

Family alleges negligence, demands justice

Shafi Ullah

MINGORA: A grieving family from Kanju area of Swat has come forward with serious allegations against Luqman Hospital Saidi Sharif, accusing the private healthcare facility of negligence and incompetence that led to the death of their loved one. Sher Malik, accompanied by his orphaned nephews Muhammad Noor, Ahmed, and niece Iman, held a press conference to demand justice and accountability from the hospital administration.

According to Malik, his brother Noor Khaliq was taken to Luqman international Hospital on December 18 for a kidney stone operation. However, due to the absence of a specialist doctor and the negli-



gence of trainee staff, timely treatment was not provided, resulting in Khaliq's tragic death. Malik alleged that the hospital staff is "playing with the health of people" and demanded better monitoring and the presence of specialist staff to prevent such incidents.

The family claimed that the hospital administration discharged Khaliq in critical condition at 1:00 am night, making false statements, which they described as "tantamount to playing with human health

and life." Despite being treated by surgeon Samiur Rehman, the family alleged that proper facilities were not provided, even though treatment was done on a health card.

The family has appealed to the government and higher authorities to conduct a thorough investigation into the hospital's negligence and incompetence. They demanded severe punishment for those responsible and justice for their loved one's untimely death.

Unknown culprits killed donkey cart rider Syed Waliullah Shah

NEWSHERA: Unidentified motorcyclists shot killed a person named Abbas while riding a donkey cart at Charat Road in Bhatat Camp Nowshera, the culprits escaped from the crime scene, on Wednesday.

The deceased was identified as Abbas. Police have registered a case against unidentified murderers and initiated an investigation, but the motive behind the murder remains unknown.

According to details, unidentified motorcyclists fired indiscriminately at the donkey cart rider on Charat Road in Bhatat Camp, Nowshera, resulting in his instant death. The culprits managed to escape after committing the crime.

Rescue 1122 Nowshera reported that the deceased, Abbas, was a resident of Dag Basud and police have registered a case against unknown culprits and initiated an investigation.

Procession routes inspected F.P. Report

TOBA TEK SING: Assistant Commissioner and Administrator Municipal Committee Kamalia inspected procession routes regarding birth of Hazrat Ali (R.A) and reviewed security arrangements, on Wednesday.

During the visit Assistant Superintendent of Police Kamalia was also present. Assistant Commissioner Iqra Nasir while addressing the participants said that Kamalia is a peaceful city in which people of all schools of thought respect each other and all scholars and peace committee members have played a key role in establishing peace. Which is commendable.

Assistant Commissioner Iqra Nasir and ASP Zainab Ayub also inspected the routes of the main procession taken out with reference to the birth anniversary of Hazrat Ali (R.A) and reviewed other arrangements including security.

ADCR Syed Jamil Shah promoted to BPS-18: Syed Jamil Haider Shah, currently serving as the Additional Deputy Commissioner Revenue in Toba Tek Singh, has been promoted to Grade 18 in the Provincial Management Service. Syed Jamil Haider Shah is a skilled and experienced officer known for his dedication and exceptional administrative abilities.

PFA checked 16,326 food points in 2024 F.P. Report

BHAKKAR: Punjab Food Authority (PFA) checked 16,326 food points in year, 2024 to ensure standard food items to people in district, said authority's annual report on Wednesday.

The authority issued notices to 7565 food operators to improve food quality during the said period. The authority's teams imposed fine worth Rs 8.25 million on various food points for violating SOPs during the periods, the report said, adding 11 cases had been registered against the shops' owners for violations.

PPAF leads way in promoting social cohesion and unity

F.P. Report

QUETTA: The Pakistan Poverty Alleviation Fund (PPAF), in collaboration with the Prime Minister's Youth Program, Paigham-e-Pakistan, and the Centre for Peace and Development (CPD), organized a seminar to commemorate the Gurmurab (birthday) of Guru Gobind Singh Ji Maharaj. Held at the Gurdwara Sri Guru Singh Sabha, Tahir Khan Road, Quetta, the event highlighted interfaith harmony and social cohesion as essential pillars for sustainable development.

The seminar brought together representatives from various faiths, government and private sectors, and civil society to foster dialogue, inclusivity, and unity among communities. This seminar underscored the collective commitment of PPAF, its partners, and stakeholders to promote inclusivity, mutual respect, and collaboration among diverse communities, paving the way for a more united and cohesive society. Dr. Atta Ur Rehman, the chief guest of the event, emphasized the importance of fostering a culture of unity in Pakistan.

"Pakistan's strength lies in its diversity, and we must celebrate this richness by promoting dialogue and understanding across all faiths. Today's event reminds us of the power of collaboration and shared values in overcoming challenges and building a prosperous, harmonious society," he stated. "Islam's principles of peaceful coexistence and mutual respect. "Islam promotes unity and compassion among all people, and today's event demonstrates how faith communities can collaborate to address common challenges," he further added.

Dr. Abdul Rehman Khan, Provincial Lead, PPAF, said that Pakistan, with its rich cultural and religious tapestry, is home to people of various faiths, each contributing immensely to the nation's progress and social cohesion. He underscored the organization's commitment to promoting social cohesion and sustainable development in Balochistan. "Today, as we come together to celebrate solidarity and unity, we reaffirm our commitment to fostering a society where diversity is

embraced, and all communities, regardless of their faith, can live in peace and harmony," he further added.

Welcoming participants, Dr. Nasrullah, CEO of CPD, highlighted the critical role of interfaith harmony in building resilient communities. "This celebration of Guru Gobind Singh Ji Maharaj's Gurmurab reflects the shared values of unity, compassion, and peace that bind us together. Such events enable us to bridge divides, build trust, and strengthen the bonds of our society," he said.

Jazbeer Singh, representing the Sikh community, shed light on Guru Gobind Singh Ji Maharaj's teachings, emphasizing their relevance to today's challenges. "Guru Gobind Singh Ji's life is a beacon of inspiration, encouraging us to rise above differences and work collectively for humanity's betterment," he remarked.

Priest Siman Bashir, speaking for the Christian community, reinforced the universal values of love and respect. "Through gatherings like this, we weave stronger social fabric, ensuring a peaceful coexistence rooted in mutual respect," he noted.

Qari Abdul Rasheed highlighted Islam's teachings of peaceful coexistence and respect for all faiths. "Our shared humanity transcends differences. It is imperative to uphold the dignity and rights of all people and celebrate the diversity that enriches our lives," he said.

Allama Hashim Mosovoe emphasized the need for proactive efforts in fostering interfaith harmony. "Islam advocates peace and tolerance, ensuring the protection of all individuals' rights, regardless of their faith or background. Celebrating diversity strengthens our collective resolve to address differences through dialogue," he said.

Sudheer Kumar, Head of the Hindu community, added, "Faith and culture inspire us to work for collective progress and harmony. Events like this showcase how communities can unite to promote mutual respect and shared goals." The event also featured a vibrant cultural performance by Sikh children, showcasing their community's heritage and adding to the spirit of celebration and unity.

Three separate protests held in Larkana

F.P. Report

LARKANA: Several protests held in Larkana in favor of their respective demands including the retired employees of Municipal Corporation, in which innocent children, were present in front of Press Club yesterday against the non-receipt of increased pension amount.

On this occasion, Sarjeena Masih, Bilqis Masih, Kamla and others protested and said that we are young retired employees of the Municipal Corporation, while we have completed our service at

different times and retired, but a few months ago, the Sindh government had issued a notification to increase the pension of retired employees of the local government, which is not being given to us in the amount of pension we are receiving, which is complete injustice.

On the other hand, Nadeem Chandio, Dildar, Zaferullah Chandio residents of village Lashkari Chandio of district Qambar Shahdadt, who were left behind by the survey and staged a protest in front of the Press Club. They said that due to the dangerous

rains during Shawal 1445, a flood situation had arisen due to which our houses were completely destroyed, due to which our names were not included in the survey list.

Meanwhile, Mumtaz Ali Junejo, a resident of Dokri city in Larkana, reached the Press Club and protested before the media, saying that I am extremely poor. I had my own place in Mohammad Chhuttal Junejo, village of Dokri, but my brothers have evicted me from my house and are refusing to give me a share of the place.



HYDERABAD: A person throwing food for pigeons on footpath at Jail Road.

Student killed as car hits bike near Thatta

F.P. Report

THATTA: A student was killed in a road accident near Thatta on Wednesday. According to a report, the incident took place when the car struck the motorcycle of a student from the private TCF school. The student, identified as Waris Samo, aged around 13, a resident of Goth Yusuf Samo, suffered severe injuries. He was rushed to the Makli Civil Hospital for treatment, where he succumbed to his injuries shortly after arrival.

The driver of the car, however, managed to escape with the vehicle. The news of Waris Samo's death deeply shocked his family and the local community, creating an atmosphere of grief and mourning as his body was brought back to his village. The police have started an investigation into the incident and efforts to locate the driver were underway.

Thatta police seize 3,500 packs of Indian gutka, arrest supplier: Police in Thatta on Wednesday thwarted an attempt to smuggle Indian gutka into the region, arresting the supplier and seizing 3,500 packets of the banned substance.

The operation, conducted on the orders of SSP Thatta, was led by SHO Muhammad Ali Damrah of Gharo Police Station. The action took place on the Ari Camp Link Road in Gharo, where police intercepted a Khyber car (PL-

9991) attempting to deliver the gutka.

The police arrested the driver, Moez Ahmed, a resident of Korangi, Karachi. Two mobile phones were also recovered from his possession in the operation. A case has been registered against the suspect under the Gutka Act at Gharo Police Station. Further investigation into the case has been started.

Gutka has been banned in Pakistan since 2011. Despite the ban, illegal trafficking and distribution of Gutka remain a persistent issue in various parts of the country. In recent years, authorities have stepped up efforts to curb the smuggling and sale of such harmful products.



Migrants left stranded in troubled resort

ACAPULCO, Mexico (AP): About 100 migrants from various countries wandered directionless and disoriented through the streets of the troubled Pacific coast resort of Acapulco. After walking for a couple weeks through southern Mexico with hundreds of other migrants, they accepted an offer from immigration officials to come to Acapulco with the idea they could continue their journey north toward the US border. Instead, they found themselves stuck.

Two weeks ahead of President-elect Donald Trump's second inauguration, Mexico continues dissolving attention-grabbing migrant caravans and dispersing migrants throughout the country to keep them far from the US border, while simultaneously limiting how many accumulate in any one place. The policy of "dispersion and exhaustion" has become the center of the Mexican government's immigration policy in recent years and last year succeeded in significantly reducing the number of migrants reaching the US border, said Tonatiuh Guillén, former chief of Mexico's immigration agency.

Mexico's current administration hopes that the lower numbers will give them some defense from Trump's pressures, said Guillén, who left the administration of former President Andrés Manuel López Obrador after Trump threatened to impose tariffs over migration during his first presidency. Acapulco would seem to be a strange destination for migrants. Once a crown jewel of Mexico's tourism industry, the city now suffers under the thumb of organized crime and is still struggling to climb back after taking a direct hit from devastating Hurricane Otis in 2023. Mexican tourists enjoyed the final hours of their holiday beach vacations while migrants slept in the street or tried to find ways to resume their journeys north.

"Immigration (officials) told us they were going to give us a permit to transit the country freely for 10, 15 days and it wasn't like that," said a 28-year-old Venezuelan, Ender Antonio Castañeda. "They left us dumped here without any way to get out. They won't sell us (bus) tickets. They won't sell us anything." Castañeda, like thousands of other migrants, had left the southern city of Tapachula near the Guatemalan border. More than a half dozen caravans of about 1,500 migrants each have



set out from Tapachula in recent weeks, but none of them made it very far. Authorities let them walk for days until they're exhausted and then offer to bus them to various cities where they say their immigration status will be reviewed, which could mean any number of things.

Some have landed in Acapulco, where about a dozen sleep at a Catholic church near the immigration agency offices. Several dozen gathered outside the offices looking for information, but no one would tell them anything. Castañeda, who had just received money from his family and was desperate to leave, picked a van driver he judged to be the most trustworthy among various offering rides for up to five times the normal price for a bus ticket to Mexico City. Some migrants have discovered the permits authorities give them allow them to travel only within the state of Guerrero, where Acapulco is located. Other migrants have better luck.

The latest migrant caravan broke up after hundreds received free transit permits to go anywhere in Mexico for a specified number of days. Cuban Dayani Sánchez, 33, and her husband were among them. "We're a little scared by the lack of safety getting on buses, that they're going to stop us," she said. Mexico's drug cartels frequently target migrants for kidnapping and extortion, though many migrants say authorities extort them too. Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum insists her immigration strategy has a "humanitarian" focus, and has allowed more migrants to leave southernmost Mexico. But some migration advocates note that migrants are being taken to violent areas.

It's a concern shared by the Rev. Leonardo Morales, the priest at the Catholic church in Acapulco near the immigration agency office. He said that in November two or three immigration agency buses arrived with migrants, including entire families. Last weekend, two more arrived carrying all adults. Even though Acapulco isn't on the usual migration route and was unprepared to receive migrants, several priests have coordinated support for them with water, food and clothing. "We know they're going through a very difficult time, with a lot of needs, they arrive without money," Morales said.

Migrants quickly realize that finding work in Acapulco is difficult. After Otis's destruction, the federal government sent hundreds of soldiers and National Guard troops to provide security and start reconstruction. Last year, another storm, John, brought widespread flooding. But violence in Acapulco hasn't relented. Acapulco has one of Mexico's highest rates of homicides. Cab drivers and small business owners complain - anonymously - of rising extortion. Large companies have balked at rebuilding under the current circumstances.

Honduran Jorge Neftalí Alvarenga was grateful to have escaped the Mexican state of Chiapas along the Guatemalan border, but was already disillusioned. "To an extent they lied to us," said Alvarenga, who thought he was going to Mexico City. "We asked for an agreement to send us to (Mexico City) for work" or other places like Monterrey, an industrial city in the north with more work opportunities. Now he doesn't know what to do.

Syria to receive ships from Qatar and Turkey

DUBAI (Reuters): Syria will receive two electricity-generating ships from Turkey and Qatar to boost energy supplies hit by damage to infrastructure during President Bashar al-Assad's rule, state news agency SANA quoted an official as saying.

Khaled Abu Dai, director general of the General Establishment for Electricity Transmission and Distribution, told SANA the ships would provide a total of 800 megawatts of electricity but did not say over what period. "The extent of damage to the generation and transmission stations and electrical connection lines during the period of the former regime is very large, we are seeking to rehabilitate (them) in order to transmit energy", Abu Dai said. He did not say when Syria would receive the two ships.

The United States issued a sanctions exemption for transactions with governing institutions in Syria for six months after the end of Assad's rule to try to increase the flow of humanitarian assistance. The exemption allows some energy transactions and personal remittances to Syria until July 7. The action did not remove any sanctions. Syria suffers from severe power shortages, with state-supplied electricity available just two or three hours a day in most areas. The caretaker government says it aims within two months to provide electricity up to eight hours a day.

Explosive fertiliser in Ivory Coast

IVORY COAST (BBC): Port authorities in Ivory Coast have dismissed safety fears about a moored boat loaded with 20,000 tonnes of ammonium nitrate, which is the same compound that caused a catastrophic blast in Lebanon four years ago. Ammonium nitrate is commonly used as an agricultural fertiliser, but is also potentially explosive.

Its presence in the waters off the busy city of Abidjan - home to more than six million people - has caused alarm among some residents. Part of this same cargo, which began its journey in Russia, ended up being dumped off the coast of England last year after it became contaminated by fuel oil following a rough sea voyage. A local MP in the county of Norfolk said that dump was "environmental terrorism". The remaining ammonium nitrate was then transferred to another ship - called the Zimrida - which reached Ivory Coast eight days ago.

"Following allegations of damage to the cargo transported and as a precaution to protect the population and property," the vessel will remain in the outer harbour, say port authorities. Ivorian officials insist that what is now left on board the Zimrida has been subject to the most stringent safety checks. Wary locals still remember the impact of the unloading of toxic waste at the port of Abidjan nearly two decades ago. Seeking to reassure the local population, officials invited the BBC and other journalists on board the Zimrida to see the cargo. Once inside the vast vessel and with all five of its holds opened up, hundreds of round, white bags containing the chemical are visible. The main indicator of its deadly potential is a fire truck parked outside on the quay. But when asked by the BBC why the goods still had not been unloaded, despite passing checks, port spokesman Aboubakar Toto said they were simply following protocol and waiting for the order to proceed. In a statement to the BBC, Paris-based environmental NGO Robin des Bois said it was dangerous for Abidjan port to be used as a "storage site" and that the goods should be sent onward to their buyer without delay. Ivorian authorities meanwhile say that ammonium nitrate deliveries are commonplace and that more than 40,000 tonnes of the compound were unloaded at the same port in 2024 without incident.

Saudi Arabia presses Florida man to give up US citizenship

WASHINGTON (AP): Saudi Arabia has forced a Florida retiree to try to renounce his American citizenship after jailing him over social media posts critical of the kingdom's crown prince, according to the man's son. The retiree, 74-year-old Saad Almadhi, is one of at least four dual Saudi-American nationals who accuse Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's government of pressuring them to give up their US citizenship, a US-based Middle East human rights group said.

The alleged tactic by a key strategic partner of the US, which has not been previously reported, tracks with similar efforts to silence even mild criticism, including the threat of imprisonment and exit bans like the one that has kept Almadhi from returning to the US after being released from more than a year in a Saudi prison. "There are Saudi princes that come to the US for routine medical checkups, so why can't an American citizen return home for his health?" Ibrahim Almadhi said of his father.

"It's all because we don't want to upset our ally's feelings," he said in an interview from Washington. "If this were Russia, Iran or North Korea, he would've been declared wrongfully detained months ago." The Saudi Embassy in Washington acknowledged receiving a request for comment on the allegations but did not otherwise respond. The Saudi government doesn't recognize dual citizenship. It regularly rejects criticism of its actions, saying they are part of a multiyear crackdown on corruption, terrorism and other security threats. The plight of the elder Almadhi and others could

complicate US efforts to turn the page on tensions arising from the 2018 killing of Washington Post columnist Jamal Khashoggi.

President Joe Biden in his 2020 campaign vowed to make pariahs out of Saudi royals after US intelligence officials concluded that the crown prince authorized the killing of the US-based journalist inside the Saudi consulate in Istanbul. The prince has denied any involvement. But once in office and confronted with a spike in gas prices that did lasting damage to support for Democrats, Biden softened his criticism. During a visit to Saudi Arabia in 2022, the president had an awkward fist bump with Prince Mohammed. Saudi-US relations are expected to warm further under President-elect Donald Trump, whose real estate empire and family have extensive business dealings with the world's top oil exporter.

A retired project manager who immigrated to the US in the 1970s, Almadhi was arrested in Saudi Arabia in 2021, when he arrived on a planned two-week visit to see family. Saudi officials confronted him with tweets he had posted over the past several years in the US, including one about Khashoggi's killing and another on the crown prince's consolidation of power. Almadhi was quickly sentenced to more than 19 years in prison on terrorism-related charges stemming from the tweets. Saudi Arabia freed him after more than a year but imposed an exit ban that keeps him from returning to his home in Boca Raton, near Miami. For months after his release, Almadhi received menacing phone calls from men his son

alleges were agents of the feared intelligence police, whose job it is to root out threats to the kingdom's rulers. Then, last November, they summoned Almadhi to a villa in Riyadh, where he was promised the exit ban would be lifted if he renounced his American citizenship, his son said.

Feeling helpless, Almadhi signed a document and followed instructions to try to return his American passport to the US Embassy, his son said. By law, Americans seeking to relinquish their citizenship must follow a lengthy process, and US officials must deem their actions voluntary. That had not happened in Almadhi's case, the State Department said, adding that he remains a US citizen and receives consular support. "The Department will continue to advocate for Mr. Almadhi with the Saudi government and hope he is soon able to rejoin his family in the United States," the agency spokeswoman said.

Abdullah Alaloudh, a senior director at the Middle East Democracy Center, a Washington-based human rights group, said he knew of three other dual US-Saudi citizens who reported being pushed to give up their US citizenship. He said they were not activists or vocal critics of the Saudi government. Alaloudh said Almadhi's case appeared the most egregious: "They are kind of forcing him." The group wrote to the Biden administration in December to ask it to make a final push for the "immediate and unconditional release" of Americans, US residents and their close relatives either imprisoned in Saudi Arabia or banned from traveling in what activists say are attempts to silence them.

Biden administration withdraws old-growth forest plan

BILLINGS, Mont. (AP): The Biden administration abruptly dropped its nascent plan to protect old-growth forests after getting pushback from Republicans and the timber industry. The move was announced by US Forest Service Chief Randy Moore in a letter to forest supervisors.

It brings a sudden end to a yearslong process to craft a nationwide plan that would better protect old trees that are increasingly threatened by climate change. The effort had been supported by some conservationists as one of the most significant forest preservation efforts in decades. President Joe Biden launched the initiative with an executive order on Earth Day in April 2022. The proposal went through extensive public comment periods and internal analyses by government officials and was due to be finalized any day. The plan would have limited logging in old-growth forests, with exceptions to allow logging in some old-growth areas to protect against wildfires.

But those exceptions were not enough for the timber industry and Republicans in Congress who bitterly opposed the administration's proposal. They said it wasn't needed since many forested areas already are protected. And they warned it could be devastating to logging companies that rely on access to cheap timber on public lands. GOP lawmakers introduced legislation while the administration's plans were still in the works to block them from going into effect. Moore said in his letter that much was learned from the first-of-its-kind effort to identify old-growth trees on public lands across the nation. He also acknowledged criticism from those who said the administration's approach to old-growth forests was flawed since they can vary greatly between different types of ecosystems.

"There is strong support for, and an expectation of us, to continue to conserve these forests based on the best available scientific information," Moore wrote.

"There was also feedback that there are important place-based differences that we will need to understand in order to conserve old-growth forests," Montana Republican US Sen. Steve Daines in a statement called the withdrawal of the old-growth plan a "victory for commonsense local management of our forests." Most old-growth stands fell to logging as the nation developed. Yet pockets of ancient trees remain, scattered across the US including in California, the Pacific Northwest and areas of the Rocky Mountains. Larger expanses of old growth survive in Alaska, such as within the Tongass National Forest.

There's wide consensus on the importance of preserving them - both symbolically as marvels of nature, and more practically because their trunks and branches store large amounts of carbon that can be released when forests burn, adding to climate change. Alex Craven, the forests campaign manager for the Sierra Club conservation group, said there was a "scientific necessity and public expectation" to protect old-growth and mature forests. "Those two facts make formal old-growth protections a matter of when, not if," Craven wrote in an email.

Wildfires in recent years decimated blocks of old-growth forest in states throughout the US West and killed thousands of giant sequoias. Wildfires, insects and disease have been the main killers of old-growth trees since 2000, accounting for almost 1,400 square miles (3,600 square kilometers) of losses, according to government research. Logging on federal lands cut down about 14 square miles (36 square kilometers) of old-growth forest - and timber industry representatives have said that figure shows further restrictions aren't needed. Bill Imbergamo with the Federal Forest Resource Coalition, an industry group, called the administration's proposal "legally dubious and ecologically flawed."

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Can Ghana's new president meet voters' high expectations?

GHANA (BBC): Ghana's former President John Mahama won last month's elections by a landslide but he will be under enormous pressure to meet the expectations of voters as he assumes office. After more than three years of economic misery, Ghanaians want a quick fix.

Mahama promised to create jobs and tackle corruption but that will be easier said than done. He swept back to power after eight years in opposition, running what political analyst Nansata Yakubu described as a "masterclass" in campaigning. Mahama defeated Vice-President Mahamudu Bawumia by 56.6% of votes to 41.6% to notch up the biggest margin of victory by a candidate in 24 years. His party, the National Democratic Congress (NDC), also managed to land an overwhelming majority in parliament, securing 183 seats out of

276. They are one seat short of the two-thirds majority needed to pass laws and approve budgets and contracts without the vote of MPs from the other side of the political divide. The result of one parliamentary seat is yet to be declared because of discrepancies. Four other seats are being challenged in court by the NDC. But voter turnout was lower than in the 2020 election, especially in some of the heartlands of Bawumia's New Patriotic Party (NPP), suggesting some people there - disillusioned with its performance in government - stayed at home. As Mahama's supporters celebrated his victory, Belinda Amuzu - a teacher in the northern city of Tamale, a stronghold of Mahama - summed up their hopes. "I'm expecting the new government to change the economy, so that the hardship will come down. He should also prosecute corrupt offi-

cials so that it will be a lesson to others," she told the BBC. "The hardship" has become a common phrase in Ghana since the economy hit rock-bottom in 2022, causing a cost-of-living crisis that shredded Bawumia's reputation as an "economic whizz-kid" - and led to his defeat at the hands of Mahama. However, during his state of the nation address, outgoing President Nana Akufo Addo said he was leaving behind a recovered economy. "We are handing over the country with gross international reserves of almost \$8bn (£6.4bn). This is more than the \$6.2bn my administration inherited in 2017," he said.

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has disbursed about \$1.9bn to support the country's economic recovery since Ghana signed onto the programme in 2022. However, opposition MPs disagree

with Akufo Addo's assessment. "The people of Ghana have already given their verdict on the true state of the nation and that verdict was very clear. Economic hardship, huge debt overhang, high youth unemployment, hopelessness and more," said minority MP Emmanuel Armah Kofi Boah. Ghanaian economist Prof Godfred Bokpin told the BBC the challenges facing the next government were huge.

"What Ghana needs right now is credible leadership, lean government and efficiency in public service delivery. Without that, there cannot be a future," he said. Mahama has promised to bring down the size of the cabinet from more than 80 to around 60, but Prof Bokpin argued it should be even smaller while political analyst Dr Kwame Asah-Asante stressed the need for appointments to be on merit rather than loyalty.

Trump's Ukraine envoy postpones planned trip to Kyiv

KYIV (AP): An upcoming trip to Kyiv by US President-elect Donald Trump's special envoy for Ukraine and Russia has been canceled but will be rescheduled. Ukrainian Foreign Minister Andrii Sybiha said. The planned meetings between Keith Kellogg, a highly decorated retired three-star general who has long been Trump's top adviser on defense issues, and Ukrainian officials are "extremely important," Sybiha told reporters in the Ukrainian capital.

"I am confident that this meeting will take place in its own time," he said during a news conference with

his visiting Icelandic counterpart. "We are in contact to clearly define the timeline for its organization and to ensure that the meeting is as meaningful as possible." Trump's arrival in the White House on Jan. 20 injects another measure of uncertainty into how the almost 3-year-old war might unfold and whether it can end in the foreseeable future. Ukraine relies on Western - and especially US - military backing to keep fighting. But Trump has criticized the billions of dollars the Biden administration has spent on Ukraine. He has also said he could end the war in 24 hours, though he hasn't

elaborated on how he might do that.

Ukrainian officials are eager to sway Trump on sticking with Ukraine. President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has praised Trump's "strength" and said the American president's "unpredictability" could work in Ukraine's favor. Ukrainians have expressed hope tinged with pragmatism about Trump's election victory last November. The war is draining the resources of both sides, though military analysts say the conflict is less sustainable for smaller Ukraine, and the war's recent trajectory has not been in its favor.

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Trump threatens force to control Greenland, Panama Canal

PRESIDENT-ELECT Donald Trump on Tuesday said he would not rule out the use of military force to seize control of the Panama Canal and Greenland, as he declared US control of both to be vital to American national security. Speaking to reporters less than two weeks before he takes office on Jan. 20 and as a delegation of aides and advisers that includes Donald Trump Jr. is in Greenland, Trump left open the use of the American military to secure both territories.

Trump's intention marks a rejection of decades of US policy that has prioritised self-determination over territorial expansion.

"I'm not going to commit to that," Trump said, when asked if he would rule out the use of the military. "It might be that you'll have to do something. The Panama Canal is vital to our country." He added, "We need Greenland for national security purposes."

Greenland, home to a large US military base, is an autonomous territory of Denmark, a longtime US ally and a founding member of NATO. Trump cast doubts on the legitimacy of Denmark's claim to Greenland, according to the Associated Press. The Panama Canal has been solely controlled by the eponymous country for more than 25 years. The US returned the Panama Canal Zone to the country in 1979 and ended its joint partnership in controlling the strategic waterway in 1999.

Earlier, Trump posted a video of his private plane landing in Nuuk, the Arctic territory's capital, in a landscape of snow-capped peaks and fjords. "Don Jr. and my Reps landing in Greenland," Trump wrote. "The reception has been great. They, and the Free World, need safety, security, strength, and PEACE! This is a deal that must happen. MAGA. MAKE GREENLAND GREAT AGAIN!"

In a statement, Greenland's government said Donald Trump Jr.'s visit was taking place "as a private individual" and not as an official visit, and Greenlandic representatives would not meet with him.

Trump, a Republican, has also floated having Canada join the United States, but he said he would not use military force to do that, saying he would rely on "economic force."

Promising a "Golden age of America," Trump also said he would move to try to rename the Gulf of Mexico as the "Gulf of America," saying that has a "beautiful ring to it."

Trump also used his press conference to complain that President Joe Biden was undermining his transition to power a day after the incumbent moved to ban offshore energy drilling in most federal waters, the Associated Press report adds.

Biden, whose term expires in two weeks, used his authority under the federal Outer Continental Shelf Lands Act to protect offshore areas along the East and West coasts, the eastern Gulf of Mexico and portions of Alaska's Northern Bering Sea from future oil and natural gas leasing. All told, about 625 million acres of federal waters were withdrawn from energy exploration by Biden in a move that may require an act of Congress to undo.

But Biden's team has extended access and courtesies to the Trump team that the Republican former president initially denied Biden after his 2020 election victory. Trump's incoming chief of staff Susie Wiles told Axios in an interview published on Monday that Biden chief of staff Jeff Zients had been "has been very helpful."

In extended remarks, Trump also railed against the work of special counsel Jack Smith, who oversaw now-dropped prosecutions over his role in the Jan. 6 insurrection at the Capitol and possession of classified documents after he left office in 2021. The Justice Department is expected to soon release a report from Smith summarising his investigation after the criminal cases were forced to an end by Trump's victory in November.

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Uraan Pakistan: Charting the course for a resilient and equitable future

Muhammad Mohsin Iqbal

THE 13th Five-Year Plan (2024-2029), aptly titled "Uraan Pakistan," represents a bold and comprehensive strategy aimed at steering Pakistan towards sustainable development, economic resilience, and societal progress. At a critical crossroads in its history, Pakistan seeks to leverage lessons from earlier plans while addressing systemic obstacles that have previously impeded progress. By critically analyzing past shortcomings, this new plan aspires to achieve transformative growth and equitable development.

Among the most influential planning milestones in Pakistan's history, the vision of Dr. Mehboob-ul-Haq stands out as a cornerstone. Dr. Haq's Pakistan Five-Year Plan (1983-1988) is celebrated for its revolutionary approach to prioritizing human development over mere economic expansion. As an esteemed economist and architect of Pakistan's developmental blueprint, Dr. Haq championed poverty alleviation, enhanced healthcare, better education, and equitable development as central tenets. His strategy aimed to foster inclusive growth, ensuring that industrial and agricultural advancements translated into tangible benefits for marginalized populations.

Despite significant strides in literacy rates and healthcare access, Dr. Haq's plan encountered formidable challenges. Political instability, frequent leadership changes, and governance inefficiencies stymied its full implementation. Nonetheless, the foundational ideas of poverty reduction and rural development laid during this era continue to influence contemporary policy-making.

The subsequent Five-Year Plans, particularly the 11th (2013-2018) and 12th (2018-2023), sought to build upon these earlier efforts by emphasizing economic growth, infrastructure development, and social welfare.

The 11th Plan prioritized macroeconomic stability, industrial expansion, and human resource development. Reforms targeting energy, education, and health sectors yielded incremental successes, yet the plan's broader objectives were hampered by political turbulence, economic unpredictability, and gaps in policy execution. Key areas such as energy crises, underfunded human capital, and delayed infrastructure projects remained unresolved.

The 12th Plan aimed to stabilize the economy, reduce poverty, and enhance governance. However, its ambitious target of achieving 7-8% annual GDP growth was derailed by external and internal factors, including the COVID-19 pandemic, which devastated the global economy. Inflation, rising fiscal deficits, and insufficient foreign direct investment further compounded these challenges. Despite

setbacks, advancements in health and education provided a silver lining. Yet, structural flaws such as corruption, mismanagement, and ineffective policy implementation continued to hinder progress.

A recurring theme in the incomplete implementation of past plans has been political instability and lack of continuity in governance. Successive administrations often sidelined or revised existing plans, leading to fragmented efforts and inconsistent execution. Governance inefficiencies, bureaucratic red tape, and corruption have also played significant roles in undermining developmental initiatives.

Delays in infrastructure projects, poor inter-departmental coordination, and inadequate resource allocation have been persistent obstacles. Moreover, the absence of

improve healthcare and education systems, empowering youth to contribute meaningfully to the nation's development.

A defining feature of the 13th Plan is its emphasis on inclusive growth. The plan aspires to ensure that developmental benefits reach all segments of society, particularly marginalized groups such as women and rural communities. By addressing issues of poverty, job creation, and social mobility, the plan aims to create a more equitable distribution of resources. Recognizing the pressing challenge of climate change, it incorporates measures to promote green technologies, water conservation, and sustainable agricultural practices. Environmental stewardship is central to the plan's vision, reflecting Pakistan's commitment to combating pollution, deforestation, and resource depletion.

Moreover, the government must focus on fostering an enabling environment for private sector participation. Public-private partnerships can play a pivotal role in accelerating infrastructure development and technological innovation. Encouraging investments in renewable energy, digital infrastructure, and skill development will help create a more resilient and competitive economy.

Education and healthcare remain central to the 13th Plan's vision. By investing in quality education and vocational training, the government can equip the workforce with the skills needed for a rapidly evolving global economy. Simultaneously, strengthening the healthcare system through increased funding, improved access, and better facilities will enhance overall societal well-being and productivity.

Environmental sustain-

Despite significant strides in literacy rates and healthcare access, Dr. Haq's plan encountered formidable challenges. Political instability, frequent leadership changes, and governance inefficiencies stymied its full implementation. Nonetheless, the foundational ideas of poverty reduction and rural development laid during this era continue to influence contemporary policy-making. The subsequent Five-Year Plans, particularly the 11th (2013-2018) and 12th (2018-2023), sought to build upon these earlier efforts by emphasizing economic growth, infrastructure development, and social welfare. The 11th Plan prioritized macroeconomic stability, industrial expansion, and human resource development. Reforms targeting energy, education, and health sectors yielded incremental successes, yet the plan's broader objectives were hampered by political turbulence, economic unpredictability, and gaps in policy execution. Key areas such as energy crises, underfunded human capital, and delayed infrastructure projects remained unresolved. The 12th Plan aimed to stabilize the economy, reduce poverty, and enhance governance. However, its ambitious target of achieving 7-8% annual GDP growth was derailed by external and internal factors, including the COVID-19 pandemic, which devastated the global economy. Inflation, rising fiscal deficits, and insufficient foreign direct investment further compounded these challenges.

Despite setbacks, advancements in health and education provided a silver lining. Yet, structural flaws such as corruption, mismanagement, and ineffective policy implementation continued to hinder progress. A recurring theme in the incomplete implementation of past plans has been political instability and lack of continuity in governance.

Successive administrations often sidelined or revised existing plans, leading to fragmented efforts and inconsistent execution. Governance inefficiencies, bureaucratic red tape, and corruption have also played significant roles in undermining developmental initiatives.

robust accountability mechanisms allowed inefficiencies to persist unchecked.

Economic challenges have further exacerbated these issues. Pakistan's reliance on foreign loans and aid has left it vulnerable to global economic fluctuations. High levels of external debt, an unstable currency, and an underdeveloped industrial base have constrained the country's capacity for self-sustained growth. Persistent trade deficits and low export volumes have compounded these problems, making it difficult to achieve ambitious growth targets.

Despite these hurdles, the 13th Five-Year Plan, "Uraan Pakistan," offers a renewed vision for a brighter future. Its central focus is on fostering a knowledge-based economy, promoting environmental sustainability, and enhancing social infrastructure. By prioritizing innovation, digital transformation, and sectoral advancements in information technology, renewable energy, and agriculture, the plan seeks to position Pakistan as a competitive player in the global economy. Key initiatives aim to

However, the success of "Uraan Pakistan" hinges on addressing past mistakes and fostering a culture of accountability and good governance. The lessons from earlier plans underscore the importance of political stability and policy continuity. Achieving the plan's objectives will require a unified approach involving federal and provincial governments, private sector stakeholders, and civil society organizations.

Strengthening governance frameworks, combating corruption, and implementing transparent monitoring mechanisms are essential to prevent delays and inefficiencies. Economic sustainability is another critical area that demands attention. Reducing reliance on foreign debt and promoting domestic industrial growth are imperative for long-term stability.

The plan must prioritize building a robust, export-oriented economy driven by innovation and technology. Efficient and transparent allocation of financial resources, coupled with rigorous oversight, will be crucial for achieving the desired outcomes.

ability, a cornerstone of "Uraan Pakistan," requires a concerted effort to address pressing challenges. Developing and implementing policies for water conservation, afforestation, and renewable energy adoption will help mitigate the adverse effects of climate change. Collaborating with international partners and leveraging global best practices can further strengthen Pakistan's environmental strategy.

In conclusion, the 13th Five-Year Plan represents a beacon of hope for Pakistan's future. By learning from past experiences and adopting a holistic approach, "Uraan Pakistan" has the potential to transform the nation into a model of sustainable development and inclusive growth.

Achieving this vision will require unwavering political will, effective governance, and active participation from all sectors of society. Through collective effort and a commitment to progress, Pakistan can soar to new heights of prosperity, fulfilling the aspirations of its people and securing a brighter future for generations to come.

The GCC's 10 priorities in Syria

Dr. Abdel Aziz Aluwaisheg

THE Gulf Cooperation Council has been among the first to respond positively to the changing conditions in Syria. Held just days after the first major incursion by the rebels into areas controlled by the Assad regime, the GCC's annual summit witnessed extensive discussions on the developments. The summit's Dec. 1 communique spelled out some of its concerns at the time.

On Dec. 26, GCC foreign ministers held an emergency session focused on Syria. The organization made its position clearer in a detailed statement issued afterward. A visit to Damascus by a high-level GCC delegation followed, during which the new Syrian leadership reassured the visitors of its desire to forge a close partnership, focused on mutual interests and restoring Syria's historical ties to the Gulf.

Over the past several

to meet with UN Special Envoy Geir Pedersen or comply with UN Security Council Resolution 2254, which mandated a political solution to the Syrian crisis. Similarly, he failed to fulfill his obligations to the Arab League after he was allowed to return to the organization.

Sixth, the GCC is ready to work with international partners to support stabilization and early recovery, which needs to be done urgently. The war in Syria has wreaked havoc on its economy and people's livelihoods: gross domestic product declined from \$68 billion when the war started in 2011 to \$9 billion 10 years later — an 87 percent drop. The annual income of the average Syrian is about \$400, a fraction of what it was before the war. Exports also shrank from more than \$12 billion to less than \$2 billion during the same period, a drop of 85 percent. As a result, food insecurity soared, from about 1 per-

Clearly, the fight had drained out of Trudeau after some of his closest allies in cabinet abandoned him, and the party that once celebrated his youthful exuberance now considered the Liberal boy wonder a loser and a liability. Faithful readers know of my longstanding antipathy and, at times, disgust of a prime minister who struck me, from the first, as a dauphin whose hollow acts of performative nonsense were a trite substitute for conviction and intelligence. But much of the international press was smitten by Trudeau's craven persona and empty antics, heralding him as a shining antidote to United States President-elect Donald Trump's politics of anger and grievance. Trudeau was a "progressive" fraud. Rather than mounting a sustained and determined challenge to the status quo, he devoted his almost 10 years as prime minister to defending it at home and abroad.

weeks, the GCC has articulated several priorities in Syria.

First is the need for all to respect Syria's sovereignty, political independence and territorial integrity. In practice, this means ending outside interference in its internal affairs and allowing the Syrian people to sort out their differences. Israel has to refrain from attacking Syria, Iran has to stop meddling, Russia has to respect the wishes of the new rulers and Turkiye and the US have to defer to Damascus on settling the Kurdish issue in northeastern Syria. Biden administration officials have indicated that they will do that and it is hoped that the Trump administration will do the same. Russia has also said that it will respect Syria's decisions regarding its presence in the country.

By contrast, Israel has intensified its attacks on Syria and it seized new territory in December, in addition to the Golan Heights it has occupied since 1967. Some Iranian officials have indicated they will continue their divisive approach to Syria by fomenting sectarian strife. Turkiye's position has been ambiguous and will likely depend on how the Kurdish issue is settled.

Second, the GCC will support an inclusive transition, away from the Assad era's divisive and sectarian politics. Accountability for the former regime's atrocities is essential, but it needs to be combined with national reconciliation and inclusion of those who did not commit human rights violations. Syria should celebrate its rich cultural diversity, while avoiding the confessional or ethnicity-based power-sharing systems that have plagued some of its neighbors for decades, allowing fair and meaningful merit-based participation for all.

Third, the GCC supports Syria's decision to dissolve all militias and armed groups, ensuring that only government forces are allowed to bear arms, while upholding the rule of law and providing protection for all.

Fourth, the Gulf bloc believes that Syria's security is integral to regional security and hence has welcomed statements by the new rulers that the country will no longer pose a threat to its Arab neighbors and will instead contribute positively to regional peace and security.

Through its long-time alliance with extremist forces in Iran, the Assad regime had harbored terrorists working against the Gulf states and waged a drug war against them.

Fifth, the GCC applauded statements that Damascus would engage positively with the international community and with the Arab world, thus reversing Assad's disregard for the UN and the Arab League. Assad had refused

cent before the war to about 48 percent in 2022, according to UN figures. Much of Syria's infrastructure lies in ruins, including roads, electricity, schools, hospitals and homes.

Gulf states have rushed relief supplies to Syria, but that only goes so far. The GCC is calling for an international conference to mobilize resources to provide humanitarian and development aid. Equally important, the conference should provide technical assistance to rebuild state institutions.

Seventh, the GCC recognizes the need for the safe, voluntary and orderly return of refugees and internally displaced persons to their homes. Next to the killings and injury of hundreds of thousands, displacement has been the cruellest feature of the war. According to UN figures, about 7.25 million Syrians were displaced within Syria's borders in 2023, while more than 4.8 million were refugees abroad. In total, more than 12 million people have been made homeless, about 52 percent of Syria's population of 23 million. The pace of their return will depend on how fast security and basic services are restored and infrastructure is repaired, including health, education, electricity and water facilities.

Eighth, the GCC expressed support for the UN secretary-general's call for a new mission to assist Syria in transitioning to normality after the devastation of the 13-year war. This process can be more productive by being Syrian-led. The new authorities have announced plans to hold a comprehensive national dialogue, which is a very promising step toward restoring national unity and social cohesion.

Ninth, the GCC has called on the international community to do its part to help Syria open a new page and prevent a return to the chaos of the civil war. This includes lifting sanctions and providing substantial funds for stabilization, early recovery and for encouraging the private sector to resume its indispensable economic role.

The global community should work with the new authorities to combat terrorism and prevent a resurgence of Daesh. More work needs to be done to repatriate the remaining foreign terrorist fighters and their families to their home countries. The US and Turkiye need to wrap up the conflict in the northeast, where they are supporting opposing factions, and the US needs to restrain Israel.

Finally, the GCC supports the regional reintegration of Syria, so that it can play a constructive role in restoring peace and security, instead of being an agent for destabilization and mischief during decades of self-induced estrangement from its neighbors.

Trump's threats to Greenland, Canada and Panama explain everything about America First

Trump's disregard for the other peoples' patriotism could also poison America's longest lasting friendships. Not to mention frighten entire populations. "The majority in Greenland find it quite scary and quite uncomfortable ... that the US, in a disrespectful way, is showing that they would like to be buying Greenland or controlling Greenland," Aaja Chemnitz, a member of the Danish parliament and a Greenland resident, told CNN's Erin Burnett. "Greenland is not MAGA. Greenland is not going to be MAGA."

— CNN

In what has been called an attempt to silence pro-Palestinian campaigners, the UK introduced a new extremism definition in March last year that blocks “extremist” groups from receiving government funding and meeting offi-

“As president, I have

Marco Rubio — a surprising pick for Trump's secretary of state given his traditionalist foreign policy leanings — is on the same

Trump's disregard for the other peoples' patriotism could also poison America's longest lasting friendships. Not to mention frighten entire populations. "The majority in Greenland find it quite scary and quite uncomfortable ... that the US, in a disrespectful way, is showing that they would like to be buying Greenland or controlling Greenland," Aaja Chemnitz, a member of the Danish parliament and a Greenland resident, told CNN's Erin Burnett. "Greenland is not MAGA. Greenland is not going to be MAGA."

— CNN



LARKANA: A vendor preparing traditional Balochi Chicken Sajji outside his restaurant.

ICCI to collaborate with authorities

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ICCI) is actively working to eliminate drug abuse in the capital city, aiming to create a healthier, cleaner, greener, and more eco-friendly environment.

This was highlighted by the ICCI Acting President Abdul Rehman Siddiqui, during a meeting of the ICCI Sub-Committee on Anti-Narcotics said a press release. He expressed concern over the rising use of drugs, particularly among youth, and emphasized the responsibility of all citizens to expose and fight the drug trade.

He praised the efforts of state agencies like the ANF and the police in combating

drug trafficking at all levels. He urged these agencies to adopt stricter measures against those involved in the illicit trade.

As far as the ICCI is concerned, it is committed to raising awareness through seminars, walks, and sports events to sensitize the community, he added.

Acting senior vice President Nasir Mehmood Chaudhry said that by working together with relevant authorities, ICCI aims to create a safe and secure environment that fosters business growth and prosperity. This collaborative approach is expected to yield positive results and contribute to the overall development of Islamabad.

Raja Tariq Mehmood Kiyani, Director of Legal at

ANF Headquarters, emphasized that youth are the primary victims of drug abuse and stressed the importance of immediate actions to protect their future. He reassured that ANF will fully cooperate with the ICCI in its efforts to curb the menace at all levels.

M. Ethsham Chaudhry, Convener of the Anti-Narcotics Sub-Committee, affirmed the committee's commitment to eliminating anti-state elements involved in the drug trade.

Malik Mohsin Khalid, Executive Member and co-convenor of the committee, welcomed the guests and outlined the Chamber's efforts to support the business community and the public's well-being.

RCCI, CCP organize session

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Rawalpindi Chamber of Commerce and Industry (RCCI), in collaboration with the Competition Commission of Pakistan (CCP), organized a session on "Competition Law."

Dr. Kabir Ahmed Sidhu, Chairman, Competition Commission of Pakistan (CCP), who was the chief guest on the occasion, also held a meeting with RCCI President Usman Shaukat and Group Leader Sohail Altaf and discussed matters related to close and continued cooperation between the organizations, said a press release issued here on Wednesday.

SVP Khalid Farooq Qazi, Executive Committee members, and RCCI members were also present on the occasion.

Stock Exchange stays bearish, loses 1,904 points

ISLAMABAD (APP): The 100-Index of the Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX) continued with bearish trend on Wednesday, losing 1,904.23 points, a negative change of 1.64 percent, closing at 114,148.46 points as compared to 116,052.68 points on the last trading day.

A total of 116,052.68 shares were traded during the day as compared to 792,770.655 shares the previous trading day, whereas the price of shares stood at Rs32.466 billion against Rs39.694 billion on the last trading day.

As many as 464 companies transacted their shares in the stock market, 118 of them recorded gains and 293 sustained losses, whereas the share price of 53 companies remained unchanged.

The three top trading companies were WorldCall

Telecom with 520,199,852 shares at Rs1.79 per share, Cnergyico PK with 41,301,063 shares at Rs7.00 per share and Fauji Foods Limited with 34,830,810 shares at Rs17.64 per share.

JDW Sugar Mills Limited witnessed a maximum increase of Rs82.27 per share price, closing at Rs904.95, whereas the runner-up was Rafhan Maize Products Company Limited with Rs67.77 rise in its per share price to Rs8,954.94.

Hallmark Company Limited witnessed a maximum decrease of Rs68.23 per share closing at Rs789.61 followed by Nestle Pakistan Limited with Rs61.85 decline to close at Rs7,282.23.

Rupee sheds 06 paise against dollar

Pakistani rupee on Wednesday depreciated by 06 paise against the US dol-

lar in the interbank trading and closed at Rs278.72 against the previous day's closing of Rs278.66.

However, according to the Forex Association of Pakistan (FAP), the buying and selling rates of the dollar in the open market stood at Rs278.75 and Rs280.25 respectively.

The price of the Euro decreased by Rs2.29 to close at Rs288.01 against the last day's closing of Rs290.30, according to the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP).

The Japanese yen remained unchanged to close at Rs1.76, whereas a decrease of Rs2 was witnessed in the exchange rate of the British Pound, which was traded at Rs347.51 as compared to the last day's closing of Rs349.81.

The exchange rates of the Emirates Dirham and the Saudi Riyal increased

by 02 and 03 paise to close at Rs75.88 and Rs74.25, respectively.

Gold prices up by Rs1,000 per tola

The price of 24 karat per tola gold increased by Rs1,000 and was sold at Rs277,000 on Wednesday against its sale at Rs276,000 on previous trading day, All Sindh Sarafa Jewellers Association reported.

The price of 10 grams of 24 karat gold also increased by Rs858 to Rs237,483 from Rs236,625 whereas that of 10 gram 22 karat also went up to Rs217,693 from Rs216,907.

The prices of per tola and ten gram silver remained constant at Rs3,350 and Rs2,872.08 respectively. The price of gold in the international market increased by \$10 to \$2,652 from \$2,642, the Association reported.

‘Unity in business community essential to stabilize economy’

ISLAMABAD (APP): United Business Group (FPCCI) Secretary General Zafar Bakhtawari stated that cooperation and unity within the business community are essential to stabilize Pakistan's economy.

He emphasized that businesses and personal brands should be built with hard work and integrity.

He expressed these views while addressing the Islamabad Chamber of Small Trade and Small Industries (ICSTSI) during his recent visit.

Zafar Bakhtawari congratulated the newly elected Chairman of the Founders Group of ICSTSI, Saqib Abbasi, and presented him with a bouquet. Acting President ICCI Nasir Mahmood Chaudhry, Acting Vice President Raja Naved Akhtar Satti, Executive Committee members Zulqarnain Abbasi, Roheil Anwar Butt, Malik Mohsin Khalid, former Executive Member

Imtiaz Abbasi, Imran Bukhari, Tahir Abbasi, and Nisar Mirza were also present. Upon their arrival at ICSTSI, Qazi Ilyas, Rao Javed, Sardar Zaheer, Sajid Iqbal, Rizwan Siddiqui, and others warmly welcomed the delegation led by Zafar Bakhtawari, said a press release issued here on Wednesday.

In his speech, Zafar Bakhtawari paid tribute to the services of Taj Abbasi and Qazi Ilyas and extended his best wishes to Saqib Abbasi and Owais Satti. He stressed the importance of creating unity to make traders role models. "We must unite; only then will our voice be heard. We need to work together to improve our country's economy," he said. He praised ICSTSI for consistently working for the betterment of the business community and congratulated Saqib Abbasi on becoming the new Chairman of the Founders

Group, expressing hope that he would play a vital role in the chamber's growth.

Saqib Abbasi, in his address, stated that the primary goal is to promote unity within the business community. "As we embark on this new journey, it is essential to understand that only through collective efforts can we progress towards success and development.

As business leaders, it is our duty to create opportunities for others and grow together," he said.

He thanked Zafar Bakhtawari for visiting their chamber and offering valuable words and support. He also acknowledged the remarkable leadership of Qazi Ilyas during his tenure and expressed commitment to carrying forward the legacy built on his hard work.

ICSTSI's outgoing Chairman, Founders Group Qazi Ilyas, highlighted the importance of hard work

and cooperation among chamber members in his speech. He urged, "Today, we must work together for the development of the city.

If we unite, we will not face difficulties, and we can achieve our goals." He thanked Zafar Bakhtawari and his delegation and expressed hope for their continued support for the chamber's future growth.

Newly elected President of ICSTSI, Owais Satti, emphasized in his address that the focus should be on advancing the city with unity. "If we all work together, it will not only strengthen the city but also the nation's economy," he said.

The participants of the meeting reaffirmed their commitment to cooperation and unity and agreed that they will collectively work for the economic development of the country.

The business community will be further united and activated to improve the national economy.

Shipping activity at Port Qasim

KARACHI (APP): Shipping activity was report at the port where four ships, Maersk Pittsburgh, MSC Laussane-VI, Bitumen Kosai and African Plover scheduled to load/offload Container, Bitumen and Rice, berthed at Qasim International Container Terminal, Multi-Purpose Terminal-1 & 2 and Grain Terminal respectively on Tuesday.

Meanwhile four more ships, APL Mexico City,

GFS Ruby, Maersk Cairo and Al-Jassasiya carrying Container and LNG are also arrived at outer anchorage during last 24 hours.

A total of ten ships were engaged at PQA berths during the last 24 hours, out of them four ships, Maersk Pittsburgh, MSC Laussane-VI, Tonda and Tivoli Park are left the port on today morning while another Gas oil carrier 'Hafnia Excellence' is

expected to sail on today afternoon.

Cargo volume of 183,352 tonnes, comprising 135,169 tonnes imports cargo and 48,183 tonnes export cargo carried in 4,072 Containers (2,211 TEUs Imports & 1,861 TEUs Export) was handled at the port during last 24 hours.

There are 21 ships at Outer Anchorage of Port Qasim, out of them six ships, Maersk Cairo, APL

Mexico City, Pacific Sky, Asia Unity, Al-Jassasiya and Beauty Jasmine scheduled to load/offload Container, Fuel oil, Palm oil, LNG and Coal are expected to take berths at QICT, FOTCO, LCT, PGPCL and PIBT respectively on Wednesday 8th January, meanwhile three more container ships, X-Press Mekong, Hyundai Hong Kong and Torrente are due to arrive at outer anchorage on Thursday.

Fatima Fertilizer celebrates sixth Kissan Day as a national triumph for Pakistan's farmers

F.P. Report

KARACHI: Fatima Fertilizer marked the sixth Kissan Day with a landmark celebration in Islamabad, uniting policymakers, stakeholders, and farmers to honor the pivotal role of agriculture in Pakistan's economy. The event reflected on the remarkable success of Kissan Day as a national celebration and its evolution into a meaningful platform advocating for the welfare and recognition of farmers across the country.

What began as a visionary initiative by Fatima Fertilizer in 2019 has now become a national movement, officially recognized by the Federal Government. Kissan Day, celebrated on December 18, honors the resilience and commitment of Pakistan's farmers, highlighting their struggles and achievements. This day stands as a testament to the nation's dedication to supporting its agricultural community.

The event was graced by

distinguished guests, including Rana Tanveer Hussain, Federal Minister for Food Security & Industries, Khalid Khokhar, President Pakistan Kissan Ittehad, Ms. Florence Rolle, FAO Representative in Pakistan, and General Shahid Nazir, Director General GCIP, who all spoke on the importance of supporting Pakistan's farming community.

Mr. Asad Murad, Chief Operating Officer Fatima Fertilizer, in his opening remarks, said, "Today, as we celebrate the sixth Kissan Day, we pay tribute to the real heroes of our society - Pakistan's farmers. They are the backbone of our nation, and their tireless efforts form the foundation of our economy and food security. At Fatima Fertilizer, through our initiative 'Salam Kissan,' we reaffirm our commitment to empowering farmers, not just by recognizing their struggles but by providing the support and solutions they need to thrive. The resilience and innovation of

our farmers inspire us every day, and together, we are building a future where technology and tradition work hand in hand to enhance agricultural productivity and prosperity."

Speaking about the occasion, Rabel Sadozai, Director Marketing and Sales, Fatima Fertilizer, said, "Farmers are vital to Pakistan's economy, and Kissan Day is our tribute to their unwavering resilience and commitment. At Fatima Fertilizer, we are steadfast in our mission to support farmers through innovation, advocacy, and by amplifying their voices. Together, we aim to drive sustainable growth in the agricultural sector."

Major General Shahid Nazir, Director General at Green Pakistan Initiative also graced the occasion and said, "Farmer community has a crucial role towards protecting the national food security." He also noted that, "fellow lands measuring about 18200 square kilo meters if brought under cultivation

can not only contribute towards food security but also create the export surplus which can help earn precious foreign exchange for the country"

Rana Tanveer Hussain, Federal Minister for Food Security & Research, attended the event as the Chief Guest, and addressed the occasion by saying, "Pakistan was once a leader in agriculture in the region, but today, we lag behind. Research and innovation are the keys to reversing this trend." He also acknowledged the role of private companies such as Fatima Fertilizer in facilitating the farmers in protecting the food security by increasing the crop yield.

The event emphasized the need for actionable solutions to address the pressing challenges the farming community faces. Discussions revolved around equitable pricing of agricultural inputs, the adoption of modern farming techniques, and the promotion of climate-resilient practices. Fatima Fertilizer



reaffirmed its commitment to collaborating with policymakers and stakeholders to address these issues through tangible solutions and continued innovation.

Fatima Fertilizer has been a pioneer in driving agricultural innovation and inclusivity in Pakistan. Through initiatives like the Salam Kissan program, the company has introduced digital farming tools and

knowledge-sharing platforms to empower farmers. Moreover, the Sarsabz Tabeer program has championed the inclusion of women in agriculture, providing them with the resources and training necessary to contribute effectively to the sector.

As Pakistan navigates the challenges of climate change and economic transformation, Fatima Fertilizer's

journey from proposing Kissan Day to celebrating its sixth iteration underscores its dedication to building a resilient agricultural future. The company's long-term vision includes driving policy reform, advancing technological adoption, and fostering an inclusive environment for farmers, ensuring food security and economic prosperity for generations to come.

China's lithium reserves jump to 2nd

BEIJING (APP): China has made significant strides in lithium exploration, emerging as the world's second-largest holder of lithium reserves.

The China Geological Survey under the Ministry of Natural Resources said Wednesday that the country's lithium reserves have increased from 6 percent to 16.5 percent of the global total, propelling it from sixth to second place in the world rankings.

A world-class spodumene-type lithium belt spanning 2,800 kilometers in west China has been discovered. The lithium resources found in the Qinghai-Xizang Plateau's salt lakes have also seen substantial growth, positioning China as the third-largest salt lake lithium resource base globally.

Moreover, Chinese researchers have overcome significant technical challenges in extracting lithium from lepidolite, a mineral with high lithium content that has been difficult and costly to

process.

Lithium is a critical element for a wide range of emerging industries, including electric vehicles, energy storage systems, mobile communications, medical treatments, and nuclear reactor fuel.

China's increased domestic lithium exploration is expected to reduce its reliance on foreign supplies and contribute to a more balanced global lithium market, experts said.

Chinese yuan weakens to 7.1887 against USD Wednesday

The central parity rate of the Chinese currency renminbi, or the yuan, weakened 8 pips to 7.1887 against the US dollar Wednesday, according to the China Foreign Exchange Trade System.

In China's spot foreign exchange market, the yuan is allowed to rise or fall by 2 percent from the central parity rate each trading day.

The central parity rate of the yuan against the US dollar is based on a weighted average of prices offered by market makers before the opening of the inter-bank market each business day.

China to expand scope of consumer goods trade-in program

China announced Wednesday a raft of measures to expand the scope of consumer goods trade-in program amid stepped-up efforts to boost domestic demand and spur economic growth.

The categories of home appliances eligible for government subsidies will be increased from eight in 2024 to 12 in 2025, with microwaves, water purifiers, dishwashers and rice cookers added to the trade-in list, Zhao Chenxin, deputy head of the National Development and Reform Commission, said at a press conference.

In response to actual needs, the number of air conditioners eligi-

ble for subsidies per consumer will be increased from one to three, according to Zhao.

To ensure the delivery of subsidies, the central government has recently earmarked 81 billion yuan (about 11.3 billion US dollars) for the consumer goods trade-in program this year, said Fu Jinling, an official with the Ministry of Finance.

Consumers will be able to enjoy subsidies of up to 500 yuan apiece while purchasing digital products such as mobile phones. A broader range of passenger vehicles will also be added to the trade-in program.

China will also increase funds for equipment upgrades in key areas through the issuance of ultra-long treasury bonds in 2025, Zhao said, adding that funding support will be expanded to cover more areas including electronic information and protected agriculture, with focuses on high-end, intelligent and green equipment.

Stocks diverge on renewed US inflation fears

LONDON (AFP/APP): Stock markets diverged and the dollar rose Wednesday after data pointed to a robust US economy, further denting hopes of several more cuts to interest rates in the world's biggest economy.

The latest readings added to worries about a fresh uptick to US inflation, already on traders' radar owing to Donald Trump's pledges to slash taxes, regulations and immigration when he returns to the White House this month.

"A mixture of macro fears for inflation and concerns about what the next Trump presidency may hold are dominating markets," said Kathleen Brooks, research director at trading group XTB. Asian stock markets closed mostly down Wednesday while the bulk of European indices gained nearing the half-way stage.

All three main indices on Wall Street ended in the red Tuesday, with the Nasdaq and S&P 500 each shedding more than one percent.

Tech firms, which had led a surge on Monday, were again the key drivers of action, with chip titan Nvidia tanking after a disappointing product presentation. A closely watched survey of the crucial US services sector saw a pick-up in December, with the prices component soaring far more than expected to hit the highest level since last January. A separate report showed job openings also outstripped forecasts in November to touch a six-month high.

Tuesday's readings made the case for the Federal Reserve to slow its pace of rate cuts, having lowered them three times last year thanks to easing inflation.

Focus now turns to Friday's release of the key non-farm payrolls report, which will provide a fresh snapshot of the US economy.

The Fed has already lowered its outlook for rate cuts to two reductions this year, down from the four forecast in September.

"But speculation is brewing that this could be reduced to just one if price pressures persist," said Susannah Streeter, head of money and markets at Hargreaves Lansdown.

In Europe, German industrial orders fell more than five percent in November, official data showed Wednesday, in the latest sign of headwinds facing the continent's largest economy.

On the corporate front, shares in British energy giant Shell slid 1.5 percent on a weak trading update ahead of its full year results, capping gains on London's benchmark FTSE 100 index.



In brief

PCB appoints Rafia as Head of Women's Cricket

LAHORE (Monitoring Desk): Former deputy commissioner of Lahore, Rafia Haider, has been appointed as the head of women's cricket. PCB Chairman Mohsin Naqvi has approved the appointment, after which Rafia Haider took charge of her office. According to sources, the former deputy commissioner was appointed as the head of women's cricket after the approval of the PCB chairman. According to sources, Rafia Haider has joined the PCB on deputation, as the post of head of women's cricket was vacant after Tania Malik's resignation. Rafia Haider has previously served as the deputy commissioner of Lahore. According to sources, Ms Haider has initiated regular work after taking charge of her new office. Reportedly, ASP Shehrbano Naqvi was also among the candidates for the women's cricket position.

Root, Babar retain top spots player rankings

DUBAI (Monitoring Desk): The International Cricket Council (ICC) has released the latest rankings for Test, ODI, and T20I players. In the Test rankings, England's Joe Root continues to dominate as the world's top-ranked batsman. Pakistan's skipper Babar Azam climbed five places to 12th, while Mohammad Rizwan improved two spots to 19th. Captain Shan Masood made an impressive leap, moving up 12 places to 45th in the Test batsmen rankings. Australia's Travis Head maintained his top position in the T20I batsmen rankings, with Babar Azam advancing one place to sixth. However, Pakistan has no place among the top 10 T20I bowlers. In ODIs, Babar Azam firmly holds the number one spot in the batsmen rankings, followed by India's Rohit Sharma in second place and Shubman Gill in third. Meanwhile, Fakhar Zaman slipped one place to rank 18th in the ODI standings.

Abbottabad team achieves silver

A B B O T T A B A D (APP): The Abbottabad Table Tennis Club has brought pride to the city as its boys' and girls' teams secured second place in the All Pakistan Inter-Board Championship, earning silver medals. The achievement is a testament to the dedication and hard work of the young players and their coaching staff. Coaches Raheel Ziauddin and Syed Imad expressed their delight, stating, "The players put in tremendous effort, and their dedication paid off. This success reflects their commitment and determination." The coaches also emphasized the importance of consistent training and support to further nurture these young athletes. Senior players Zahid Khan and Sajid Rafiq Mughal praised the outstanding performance of the team. They announced plans to organize a dedicated training camp aimed at refining the players' skills and boosting their confidence for future competitions. "The training camp will provide them with the necessary techniques to improve their game and represent the region even more effectively," they added. However, they highlighted the need for greater support from the sports department. "If the sports department steps forward to sponsor these players and provides essential equipment such as rackets and balls, the results could be even more impressive," Zahid Khan said.

Younis Khan to mentor Afghanistan in CT 2025

KARACHI (Monitoring Desk): Former Pakistan captain Younis Khan has been appointed as the Afghanistan cricket team's mentor for the upcoming ICC Champions Trophy 2025, starting from February 19, the Afghanistan Cricket Board (ACB) confirmed on Wednesday.

"Younis Khan will accompany the team during their conditioning and preparation camp in Pakistan, offering his mentorship services until the conclusion of the tournament," the ACB said in a statement. Younis Khan previously served as a batting coach for Afghanistan in April 2022.

"Since the Champions Trophy is being held in Pakistan, it was required to assign a talented and experienced player as



mentor from the hosting country.

We already had efficient experience with hosting countries' mentors in ODI World Cup 2023 and T20I World Cup 2024. Observing the conditions, therefore, we have appointed Younis Khan as mentor for our national team for the upcoming mega event and wish him best of the luck in his crucial assignment," ACB Chief Executive Officer Naseeb Khan said.

The Afghanistan team had previously benefited from the expertise of players from host nations in major tournaments in the last ODI and T20 World Cups.

The ninth edition of the ICC Champions Trophy will kick off on 19 February with host and defending champions Pakistan taking on New Zealand in the curtain-raiser in Karachi.

Younis will leverage his extensive coaching experience to assist Afghanistan by utilizing his knowledge of conditions in Pakistan.

The former captain is considered a legend in Pakistan cricket, having led the country to their only ICC T20 World Cup title in 2009. He is also the only Pakistani batter to cross the 10,000-run barrier in Test cricket.

Fakhar confident of returning for Pakistan at Champions Trophy

ISLAMABAD (AP): Fakhar Zaman is confident of returning to international cricket after eight months when Pakistan hosts next month's Champions Trophy.

Fakhar hasn't played international cricket since Pakistan's first-round exit from the T20 World Cup last June and subsequently missed out on central contract with the Pakistan Cricket Board for the first time in eight years.

"People don't know that after the T20 World Cup I got sick," Fakhar explained to the Vipers Voices podcast as he prepared to play ILT20 for Desert Vipers in the United Arab Emirates. "I was not part of the team because of my medical condition, but now [I'm] 100 percent [sure] I will play for Pakistan."

The veteran opening batter made headlines when he criticized the national cricket administration just before Babar Azam was controversially rested for the final two home test matches against England late last year due to his inconsistent form in red-ball cricket. The PCB issued Fakhar a show cause notice for his social media post in favor of Babar.

The post didn't go down well with PCB chairman Mohsin Naqvi, who also expressed concerns over

Fakhar's fitness.

"It cannot happen like that if selection committee is not playing one player, then other players start tweeting to express their displeasure," Naqvi told reporters at the time. "Players are not allowed to function like this, and we will never allow that. The main issue with [Fakhar] is his fitness test, that he was not able to clear."

In the absence of Fakhar, Pakistan won three away ODI series over the last two months, beating Australia, Zimbabwe and South Africa under the captaincy of new white-ball captain Mohammad Rizwan.

Back home, Fakhar returned to competitive cricket during the domestic Champions Cup T20 tournament last month and was the third highest-scorer with 303 runs in 10 games at a strike rate of 132.31.

"The plan was to get fully fit and play in the Champions Trophy," Fakhar said. "I am lucky to be fit right now. I started from the Champions Trophy 2017 and that went really well for me. Now I am very excited for the next edition also." Fakhar had a memorable tournament in 2017 when he scored a match-winning century in the final against India.

Pakistan's latest white-ball sensation, Saim Ayub,

made two ODI centuries in South Africa before he fractured his right ankle during the second test at Cape Town last week. Ayub has been ruled out of competitive cricket for at least six weeks, putting his participation in doubt for the Champions Trophy.

The PCB flew Ayub to London from Cape Town on Monday for treatment, and Fakhar said he hoped Ayub recovers in time as Pakistan prepares to host its first major ICC tournament next month in 29 years.

"I hope he [Ayub] will recover quickly," Fakhar said. "I was thinking to call Saim yesterday, just to talk to him about this injury. Believe me, he is such a great player that if he continues to play for the next four-five years, he will be among the top three players in the world." Fakhar will be playing for Desert Vipers in the ILT20 and was the top target for Tom Moody, who is director of cricket with the franchise. Fakhar said he was excited to play alongside West Indies T20 captain Sherfane Rutherford.

"He is one of the best cricketers in the T20 format and I really enjoy seeing him batting," he said. "I am very excited to be part of this team, and I want to share the crease with him. He is one of the best players, so I am very excited to play with him."



HAMILTON: Wanindu Hasaranga was bowled by Mitchell Santner for 1 off 3.

Martin Guptill confirms retirement from int'l cricket

WELLINGOTN (Agencies): Martin Guptill has officially confirmed his retirement from international cricket, having last played for New Zealand in October 2022. Guptill, 38, will continue to feature in T20 leagues around the world.

Guptill is currently in action for Auckland in the Super Smash, New Zealand's domestic T20 competition, and also signed up for the PSL draft, where Islamabad United have the option to retain him.

Guptill leaves the international stage as a white-ball great for New Zealand, having racked up 7346 runs in 198 ODIs - also signed up for the PSL draft, where Islamabad United have the option to retain him.

Guptill played 47 Tests from 2009 to 2016, though he

didn't have as much success in the longest format, scoring 2586 runs at 29.38.

"As a young kid it was always my dream to play for New Zealand and I feel incredibly lucky and proud to have played 367 games for my country," Guptill said in an NZC statement. "I will forever cherish the memories made wearing the silver fern alongside a great group of guys."

"I want to say a huge thanks to all my team-mates and coaching staff over the years, in particular Mark O'Donnell who has coached me since the Under-19 level and been a source of ongoing support and wisdom over my career."

"To my wife Laura and our beautiful children Harley and Teddy - thank you. Thank you Laura for the sacrifices you have made for me and our family. You've been my biggest supporter, my rock and my counsel through all of the ups and downs that come with the

game. I am eternally grateful.

"Finally, I'd like to thank all the cricket fans, here in NZ and around the world for all their support throughout the years."

Guptill had made an immediate impact on his ODI debut in January 2009, when he clattered 122 not out off 135 balls against West Indies in Auckland. Six years later in the 2015 ODI World Cup quarter-finals at home, Guptill smashed an unbeaten 237 off 163 balls against the same opposition. Only India's Rohit Sharma has a higher individual score in ODI cricket.

Guptill's explosive hitting at the top during the 2015 ODI World Cup - he scored a career-topping 547 runs - played a vital role in New Zealand making the final, which they lost to Australia at the MCG.

Four years later, Guptill was in the hot seat when New Zealand lost the 2019 ODI World Cup final to England at Lord's without actually losing it.

PCB moves tri-series against NZ, SA to Gaddafi, NBP stadiums

LAHORE (APP): The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) has decided to relocate the ODI tri-series involving New Zealand and South Africa to the Gaddafi Stadium in Lahore and the NBP Stadium Karachi, as the stadiums would be ready for inauguration by January 25.

The ODI tri-series was originally scheduled to be played at the Multan cricket stadium, Multan, as the above two stadiums were unavailable due to major upgradation and renovation work in anticipation of the ICC Champions Trophy 2025 to be hosted by the PCB from February 19 to March 9. Since the upgradation could take time, the PCB had decided to play the tri-series in Multan. However, the PCB met the deadlines

which enabled it to shift the ODI tri-series fixtures to Lahore and Karachi.

The decision to shift the matches to Lahore and Karachi reflects PCB's confidence and readiness in its preparations for the coveted international event in Pakistan after almost three decades. The PCB has ensured that the players and officials get the best facilities while the spectators' experience is enhanced many times than their last visit to the venues to play and watch cricket.

The ICC Champions Trophy matches are to be held in Lahore, Karachi and Rawalpindi in Pakistan - with four matches including a semi-final are to be hosted by the Dubai stadium under the hybrid model to accom-

modate India - and these stadiums are being upgraded to deliver world-class experience for players, officials, and fans. Gaddafi stadium, Lahore and NBP stadium, Karachi underwent major upgradation and renovation work while minor changes are planned for the Rawalpindi stadium.

In an update on the upgradation work at these stadiums by the PCB here on Wednesday evening, the PCB said that the spectator capacity at the Gaddafi Stadium has been increased to 35,000, with the installation of new chairs throughout the venue. It was further informed that 480 state-of-the-art LED lights have been installed to enhance broadcast LUX levels, ensuring superior viewing quality for

fans worldwide. Two giant digital replay screens - measuring 80 feet x 30 feet and 22 feet x 35 feet - will be installed before inauguration in the last week of January. Moreover, new players' and officials' hospitality enclosure has also been built at the Gaddafi stadium to be ready before January 25.

At the National Bank of Pakistan (NBP) Stadium, Karachi new players' and officials' hospitality enclosure has been added at the University End while 350 LED lights have been installed, ensuring optimal visibility for global audiences. Two digital replay screens have already been fixed, and 5,000 new chairs have been installed to enhance spectator comfort.

NZ crush Sri Lanka by 113 runs

HAMILTON (AFP): New Zealand ripped through Sri Lanka's top order Wednesday to win the rain-reduced second one-day international in Hamilton by 113 runs and clinch the series.

Sri Lanka spinner Maheesh Theekshana took a hat-trick as the home side posted 255-9 off 37 overs, but the tourists could only muster 142 all out off 30.2 overs in response. It followed New Zealand's comfortable nine-wicket win in Wellington to go 2-0 up in the series, with the third match to be played in Auckland on Saturday.

Sri Lanka's top order has misfired badly in both games. They slumped to 22-4 at Seddon Park, leaving little chance of reaching their target of 256 in a match reduced to 37 overs each because of early rain.

Kaminu Mendis top-scored with his ODI best of 64 off 66 balls, but fell to a spectacular running catch from Daryl Mitchell from the bowling of Will O'Rourke to seal Sri Lanka's fate. Janith Liyanage's 22 was the next best score in a Sri Lanka chase marred by two run-outs and a series of risky shots that didn't pay off.

O'Rourke was too quick for the tail, taking 3-31 off 6.2 overs while Jacob Duffy was responsible for some of the early damage, claiming 2-30, including the key scalps of Pathum Nissanka and Kusal Mendis. Sri Lanka captain Charith Asalanka said their run target should have been achievable. "I think it was a fair score for batsmen in this kind of small ground, and it's a fair pitch," he said. "I think again the bad batting in the power play cost us the game."

Earlier, recalled off-spinner Theekshana capitalised on some wayward New Zealand hitting to finish with 4-44 off eight overs. He removed Mitchell Santer and Nathan Smith with successive deliveries at the end of the 35th over. The hat-trick was completed -- all from mistimed lofted shots -- when Matt Henry was caught off the first ball of the final over.

It helped to pull back a New Zealand innings which threatened to surpass 300 when opener Rachin Ravindra raced to 79 off 63 balls and Mark Chapman scored 62 off 52. The pair put on 112 for the second wicket, ending when Chapman holed out to long-off from Theekshana.

Young's buzzer-beater seals win for Atlanta Hawks



LOS ANGELES (Agencies): Trae Young scored a dramatic buzzer-beater to earn the Atlanta Hawks a thrilling 124-121 win over the Utah Jazz in the NBA.

The game looked set for overtime when Collin Sexton's three-pointer for the Jazz made it 121-121 with four seconds remaining at the Delta Center in Salt Lake City.

But Young replied with a stunning effort from the half-court line just before the final buzzer sounded to signal end of play, earning victory for the Hawks.

Young finished with 24 points - including 10 in the fourth quarter - and 20

assists for Atlanta, while Lauri Markkanen matched his season-high 35 points for the Jazz. In Denver, Jayson Tatum top-scored with 29 points as the Boston Celtics beat the Denver Nuggets 118-106.

Kristaps Porzingis added 25 points for reigning champions Boston, who stay second in the Eastern Conference.

Russell Westbrook scored 26 points and nine rebounds in reply for 2023 NBA Championship winners Denver. The Dallas Mavericks ended a five-game losing run with a convincing 118-97 win over the Los Angeles Lakers. Quentin Grimes came

off the bench to score 23 points and nine rebounds for Dallas, who were without Luka Doncic and Kyrie Irving because of injury.

Anthony Davis scored 21 points and LeBron James added 18 for the Lakers, who drop one place to sixth behind the Mavericks in the Western Conference. Zion Williamson's comeback from injury was not enough for the New Orleans Pelicans, who lost 104-97 to the Minnesota Timberwolves.

Williamson scored 22 points on his return after missing the previous 27 games with a hamstring injury, but Anthony Edwards' game-high 32 points helped Minnesota to victory.

Elsewhere, the Charlotte Hornets ended a 10-game losing run with a 115-104 victory over the Phoenix Suns. Nikola Jovic top-scored with 20 points as the Miami Heat beat the Golden State Warriors 114-98 in San Francisco, while the Houston Rockets beat the Washington Wizards 135-112.

Opetaia stops Nyika with highlight-reel knockout



SYDNEY (Agencies): World champion Jai Opetaia defended his IBF cruiserweight title with a brutal fourth-round knockout win over David Nyika in Australia.

In arguably the biggest fight in trans-Tasman history, home favourite Opetaia, 29, floored New Zealander Nyika with an uppercut at the Gold Coast Convention and Exhibition Centre in Queensland.

An unsteady Nyika, 29, rose to his feet with just over a minute to go in round four. Opetaia unleashed another onslaught before a thunderous, highlight-reel left hook ended the fight.

The challenger required medical treatment on the canvas before walking out of the arena to applause from a 6,000 sellout crowd.

"He took the fight on two weeks notice. He came here to fight. He gave me a dogfight. I respect that," Opetaia, who has now won all 27 pro fights, said.

The Sydney-born fighter called for a unification bout against Mexico's WBA and WBO champion Gilberto Ramirez, while promoter Eddie Hearn suggested Opetaia could move up to heavyweight to face world champion Oleksandr Usyk within 18 months.

"We have to chase for greatness," Hearn said. "I

believe he is the only person who can genuinely give Oleksandr a fight."

Opetaia lights up Gold Coast

A scintillating Opetaia performance lit up the Gold Coast after the arena had earlier fallen into darkness during an undercard bout because of a lightning strike outside the venue.

The main event began at a terrific pace as both fighters traded thumping head and body shots in the opening two rounds.

Although he showed glimpses of world level ability the title shot proved to be a little premature for Nyika, who turned pro four years ago, as Opetaia's brilliance soon shone through.

A three-punch combination and an uppercut in the fourth was a sign of things to come, and Nyika never recovered from the first knockdown.

The referee could have stepped in after Opetaia landed a right hook flush on the backpedalling Nyika, with the away fighter already clearly hurt.

was celebrated in Auckland in January last year, with the Eden Park Outer Oval turning into the 'Martin Guptill Oval' for a Super Smash testimonial game, it felt like Guptill's retirement party.

But he returned for the 2024-25 Super Smash, starting the season with scores of 31 off 23 balls and 60 off 35 balls for Auckland. Tom Latham, who witnessed Guptill's most recent fifty from behind the stumps for Canterbury and has also opened the batting with him for New Zealand, paid tribute to the departing hero.

"On his day, Gup was world-class and his crisp ball-striking and timing could take down the best bowling attacks in the world," Latham said. "His numbers speak for themselves, but it was the matches he helped us win that I'll remember, along with the way he set the standard in the field. I wish him all the best for what the future holds and hope to see him around a cricket ground soon."



In brief

Reforms in housing sector under consideration

ISLAMABAD (APP): Federal Minister for Housing and Works, Riaz Hussain Pirzada said on Wednesday that proposals for reforms in the housing sector are under active review to address the growing challenges in this domain. Speaking informally with journalists, the minister said that a task force has been formed to compile a comprehensive report on the proposed reforms, which will be presented to Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif within the next two weeks. Key recommendations under consideration included the construction of high-rise residential buildings in various sectors of Islamabad, aimed at meeting the rising demand for housing in the capital city, he added. To alleviate the strain on government-provided housing, the task force is also exploring measures to streamline and enhance the hiring process for private accommodations, the minister added. He said, "The final decision regarding the implementation of these housing reforms will rest with the prime minister."

IRSA releases 32,800 cusecs water

ISLAMABAD (APP): Indus River System Authority (IRSA) on Wednesday released 32,800 cusecs water from various rim stations with inflow of 41,000 cusecs. According to the data released by IRSA, water level in River Indus at Tarbela Dam was 1475.38 feet and was 77.38 feet higher than its dead level of 1,398 feet. Water inflow and outflow in the dam was recorded as 16,600 cusecs and 10,000 cusecs respectively. The water level in River Jhelum at Mangla Dam was 1133.30 feet, which was 83.30 feet higher than its dead level of 1,050 feet. The inflow and outflow of water was recorded 5,600 cusecs and 4,000 cusecs respectively. The release of water at Kalabagh, Taunsa, Guddu and Sukkur was recorded as 26,500, 12,300, 6,700 and 6,200 cusecs respectively. Similarly, from River Kabul, a total of 14,000 cusecs of water released at Nowshera and 4,800 cusecs released from River Chenab at Marala.

Police hold 13 criminals

RAWALPINDI (APP): The Rawalpindi Police on Wednesday arrested 13 criminals including liquor suppliers, drug peddlers, illegal arms owners and a kite seller. A Rawalpindi Police said in a statement that a total of six accused were held arrested with over 60 litres of liquor. The Dhamial Police recovered 20 litres of liquor from accused Khurram Shahzad and six litres of liquor from Shahzbe, while the Naseerabad Police nabbed Manuel with five liters and Shahid with 10 litres of liquor. Similarly, the Civil Lines Police recovered 10 litres of liquor from Sikandar and eight litres of liquor from Sajjad Haider. Meanwhile, the Potohar Division Police, during its crackdown against drug peddlers, arrested three accused on the recovery of more than 03 kilograms hashish. The Taxila Police recovered 1.7 kg hashish from Abdul Wahab, and the Wah Saddar Police held Hamid Raza with 800 grams and the Airport Police arrested Adnan with 560 grams hashish. Similarly, the Wah Cantt, Rawat and Chontra Police arrested three accused namely Adeel, Aziz and Haris respectively with a 30 bore pistol each and ammunition. The Race Course Police nabbed accused Bilal, and recovered 85 kites and two strings from him.

British HC calls on Khawaja Muhammad Asif

ISLAMABAD (APP): British High Commissioner Ms. Jane Marriott called on Minister for Defence, Defence Production and Aviation, Khawaja Muhammad Asif here on Wednesday.

The Minister said that Pakistan attaches great importance to its relations

with Britain as Pak-UK relationship draws its strength from shared objectives for global peace and security. Large number of Pakistani diaspora in UK acts as a living bridge between the two countries, he added.

The Minister expressed the hope that continuous defence cooperation via

established forums would result in tangible progress in the field of defence cooperation between two countries, said a press release issued here.

They expressed satisfaction over ongoing collaboration between two countries and stressed the need for further strengthening of ties.

PMDC to revoke licenses of non-compliant medical colleges

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Sub-Committee of Senate Standing Committee on National Health Services Regulations and Coordination on Wednesday directed the Pakistan Medical and Dentil Council (PMDC) to revoke the licenses of private medical colleges upon non-compliance.

The committee meeting which was chaired by Senator Palwasha Mohammad Zai Khan discussed the hefty fees charged by the medical colleges and the steps taken by the PMDC in this regard.

The committee has received complaints from students of Sargodha Medical University stating that private medical col-

leges are charging hefty fees without providing state-of-the-art facilities.

The committee forwarded these complaints to the Health Ministry and recommended that the anonymity of the students be maintained.

Senator Palwasha Khan stated that the PMDC should take action against private medical colleges charging excessive fees.

The committee recommended that the PMDC reimburse students for the extra fees charged before introducing the fee structure for the year 2024-25.

The President of PMDC Dr. Rizwan Taj informed that the recommendations have been sent to Deputy Prime Minister regarding

the fee structure for the year 2024-25.

The committee also directed the PMDC to cancel the licenses of private medical colleges within two weeks if they fail to comply with the committee's recommendations.

Regarding the non-implementation of the rebate regulations by private medical colleges in Islamabad, the President of PMDC informed that the private medical colleges have agreed to rebate the amount claimed by the students.

The committee also decided to visit the private medical colleges in Islamabad to observe the facilities provided to students in exchange for the hefty fees.

Around 382,118 job seekers registered with OEC

ISLAMABAD (APP): Around 382,118 job seekers registered with Overseas Employment Corporation (OEC) an attached department of Ministry of Overseas Pakistanis and Human Resource Development (OP&HRD).

An official source told APP here on Tuesday, he said that OEC was established year 1976, as a Public Sector recruitment agency, registered as a private limited company, under Companies Act, 1913 (now Companies Act, 2017, Section-42).

It is a Public Sector company governed under Public Sector Companies (Corporate Governance) Rules, 2013 of Securities & Exchange Commission of Pakistan (SECP). It's an Autonomous

Body under administrative control of Ministry of Overseas Pakistanis and Human Resource Development, he added.

He said that 144,600 emigrants dispatched so far while 95,692 overseas returned after completing their jobs contract from the different countries.

The source revealed that 25,106 Korean Language trained candidates, 118 Japanese language trained candidates and 200 IELTS trained nurses were also registered with OEC. Pakistan, the sixth most populous country of the world, possesses highly skilled, skilled/semi-skilled and unskilled workforce which can cater world's demand in different skill categories.

It was the responsibility

of OEC to promote overseas employment, facilitate overseas employers in selection of work force and provide competent, reliable and cost-effective human resource from Pakistan for international labour market. Overseas employment reduces unemployment in the country and it is an important source of foreign earnings/remittance which plays a major role in socio-economic development of the country, he added.

OEC, since its inception has facilitated more than 142,000 professionals in securing overseas employment in different countries.

OEC is committed to explore new avenues for exporting manpower and confident to extend our best services.

CDA chairman advocates for reform in private housing sector

ISLAMABAD (APP): Capital Development Authority (CDA) Chairman Muhammad Ali Randhawa on Wednesday stressed the need for stringent measures to regulate private housing societies in Islamabad.

The meeting, attended by senior officials from the Planning Wing, including Member Planning and Member Estate, focused on restructuring the Housing Societies Directorate and addressing violations by private developers.

The Chairman was briefed on the ongoing reforms and actions being

taken against non-compliance by housing societies. Officials reported that notices have already been issued to societies violating approved layout plans.

To enhance monitoring, Chairman Randhawa directed that surveys of all private housing societies be expedited.

He emphasized the use of satellite imagery and Google-based tools to oversee development activities and identify irregularities.

He also called for strict enforcement against societies failing to comply with approved layouts and

reiterated the importance of transferring amenity plots to the CDA.

Stressing the welfare of residents, Randhawa urged societies to ensure the provision of basic amenities such as water, electricity, and sanitation.

In an effort to protect the public from fraud, the Chairman instructed that the list of illegal housing societies be made publicly available on the CDA website. He also proposed launching awareness campaigns in the media to educate potential buyers about the risks associated with unapproved projects.

Romina inaugurates Pakistan's first green road initiative

ISLAMABAD (APP): Prime Minister's Coordinator for Climate Change, Romina Khurshid Alam launched first green road initiative at the Rawalpindi Chamber of Commerce and Industry (RCCI) on Wednesday.

In her address, Khurshid reaffirmed the government's commitment to combating climate change under Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif's leadership. She highlighted the country's focus on both short-term and long-term solutions, including renewable energy projects and the development of climate-resilient infrastructure.

She commended the climate initiatives spearheaded by Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif, emphasizing their

significance within Pakistan's broader climate strategy. "These initiatives are key to reducing our carbon footprint," she said.

Khurshid stressed the importance of collaboration between the public and private sectors to build a more sustainable future. She described the green road as a symbol of Pakistan's unwavering commitment to environmental preservation and climate action. "This marks a major step forward in creating cities that are not only economically prosperous but also environmentally responsible," she stated.

The green road, she explained, serves as an example of how green technologies and practices can be seamlessly integrated into urban infrastruc-

ture. It offers solutions to urgent environmental issues while enhancing the quality of life for citizens.

Ms. Khurshid outlined how this initiative aligns with Pakistan's broader climate goals, including reducing greenhouse gas emissions, expanding renewable energy use, and promoting sustainable urban development.

She also recognized the role of the Rawalpindi Chamber of Commerce and Industry in launching the project, noting the business community's vital contribution to fostering a green economy. "The private sector's participation in sustainability efforts is essential to driving the economic transformation we need," she emphasized. "I encourage businesses of all sizes to adopt green prac-



ISLAMABAD: H.E. Ms. Jane Marriott, British High Commissioner called on Minister for Defence, Defence Production and Aviation, Khawaja Muhammad Asif in federal capital. —APP Photo

Sayedaal meets Parliamentarians, civil society, media representatives

ISLAMABAD (APP): Deputy Chairman Senate Sayedaal Khan on Wednesday hold meetings with Senators, Members of the National Assembly (MNAs), civil society representatives, and media personnel at the Parliament House to discuss national development and economic stability.

Welcoming the participants, the Deputy Chairman highlighted the importance of collaboration among Parliament, civil society, and media. He said, "The involvement of media and civil society in the policy making process is crucial to ensuring societal participation and fostering transparency."

According to a news release, During discussions on the "Uraan Pakistan" project, Sayedaal Khan emphasized its role in enhancing exports and driving national progress. "This initiative is a significant step forward. Creating a conducive environment for investment and export growth must remain a priority," he remarked.

He also stressed the significance of public welfare initiatives, saying, "Economic stability combined with public welfare projects signals promising development. The efforts of Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and his team in steering the economy in the right direction are commendable."

Calling for unity and a collective approach, the Deputy Chairman said, "We must set aside our differences and work together for the greater good. Prioritizing national interests over personal gains is imperative for progress." He further added, "Peace, stability, and political reconciliation are essential to addressing the challenges facing the nation."

Prominent attendees included Senator Rana Mahmood-ul-Hassan, Senator Saeed Hashmi, MNA Tariq Fazal Chaudhry, and other representatives from civil society and the media, who engaged in meaningful discussions with the Deputy Chairman Senate.

ANF seizes over 65 kg drugs in eight operations

RAWALPINDI (APP): Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF) while conducting eight operations managed to recover 65.928 kg drugs worth Rs 10 million and arrested seven accused, said an ANF Headquarters spokesman here on Wednesday.

He informed that 1.4 kg hashish was recovered from a suspect rounded up near a bus stop in Islamabad.

30 intoxicated tablets were recovered from two suspects arrested near Bahria Town, Islamabad.

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

112 grams ice was recovered from a parcel sent to Maldives through a courier office in Islamabad.

In an operation, 3.6 kg opium and 48 kg hashish were recovered near F/17 Society in Islamabad. ANF conducted a raid in Gwadar Balochistan and seized 6 kg ice from a suspect.

2 kg heroin hidden in a vehicle was recovered on M-2 Islamabad and a suspect was arrested.

1.8 kg hashish hidden in a motorcycle near Iqbal Shaheed Toll Plaza Attack was seized in an operation and an accused was arrested.

3 kg ice was recovered from secret cavities of a vehicle near Baleli Quetta and an Afghan national was arrested during the operation.

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

DC directs authorities to provide relief to people

RAWALPINDI (APP): Commissioner Rawalpindi Division, Engineer Aamir Khattak on Wednesday directed the authorities to make all-out efforts to provide relief to the people.

Chairing a Divisional Coordination Committee (DCC) meeting held here, the Commissioner said that if a complaint is received

about the absence of a Patwari in his Patwar Circle at any place, the concerned Assistant Commissioner would be held responsible for it. He directed the Deputy Commissioners to submit a list of actions taken against corrupt officers and officials in Revenue and all other departments within the next 24 hours.

Deputy Commissioner Chakwal took action against 25 officers and officials of Revenue, Health, Education and Municipal Corporation during last five months. The

Commissioner was informed that the officers were suspended and action was taken against some officials under the PEDDA Act. In Murree, five officials, two of whom were from Revenue and three from Municipal Corporation, were suspended for their involvement in irregularities.

Engineer Aamir Khattak said that special solid waste control rooms should be established under 'Suthra' Punjab program in all tehsils. The officers concerned were also directed to ensure presence of solid waste officers in the control rooms, besides availability of required machinery, human resources and a plan to achieve the given target.

The Assistant Commissioner concerned should monitor proper working of the control rooms, Engineer Amir Khattak said adding, the

authorities should also ensure that every person is following the prescribed Standard Operating Procedures. Local residents and public representatives should also be included in this program, Engineer Amir Khattak ordered.

The Commissioner said that the cleanliness work under the ownership of the people should be completed successfully. "Our first priority is to provide relief to the citizens," he added.

Deputy Commissioners and Assistant Commissioners should hold 'khuli kutcheries', regularly to provide relief to the people and address their grievances, he directed.

Awareness banners about 'Khuli Kutcheries' should be displayed in the offices of the Commissioner, Deputy Commissioners and Assistant Commissioners to spread awareness, Engineer Amir Khattak added.

DIG assures swift action on MD APP's complaint

ISLAMABAD (APP): Deputy Inspector General (DIG) Syed Ali Raza on Wednesday assured swift legal action against the accused who allegedly issued

threatened Managing Director Associated Press of Pakistan (APP), during a Khuli Kachehri (open court) session held in Saddar, City, and Rural zones to address public grievances.

A public relations officer told APP that the sessions were attended by the Chief Traffic Officer (CTO), Superintendents of Police (SPs), Deputy Superintendents of Police (DSPs), and Station House Officers (SHOs).

He said citizens have actively participated, presenting their grievances, which were addressed on the spot with immediate directives issued for their resolution.

During the session, APP's Director Crime and Courts, Rashid Malik, expressed concerns about the delay in legal action against an individual who had threatened MD APP, Muhammad Asim Khichi, a Grade-20 senior Information Officer.

Rashid emphasized that despite a month passing since the incident, no legal action had been initiated. Director Crime also questioned the safety of ordinary citizens if a senior civil service offi-

cer like MD APP is not secure in the capital city.

Responding to the journalist's concerns, DIG Syed Ali Raza assured swift action and immediately directed the registration of a case within two hours. "Delays in justice will not be tolerated, and immediate steps will be taken to address such serious concerns," he stated firmly.

Participants praised DIG Raza for organizing the Khuli Kachehri, acknowledging it as a step towards ensuring accountability and strengthening trust between the police and the public.

DIG Raza also encouraged citizens to report issues within police stations without fear, reiterating the department's commitment to strict action against malpractice. "Police officers must work with honesty and dedication; only then will they remain part of the department," he remarked.

DIG further stressed that police offices remain open 24/7 for citizens, assuring that there is no room in the department for corrupt officers or those obstructing public service delivery. Citizens now look forward to seeing whether these commitments materialize into effective action.

'Spark' Magazine to help shape nation's future: Mashhood

ISLAMABAD (APP): Chairman of the Prime Minister Youth Programme (PMYP) Rana Mashhood Ahmed Khan on Wednesday said that Spark Magazine would not only inspire the youth but also help them realize their potential and role in shaping the nation's future.

Chairing the Editorial Board meeting of Spark magazine, an initiative of the PMYP, he reiterated the government's commitment to youth development through dynamic and creative avenues.

The Spark magazine aims to be a beacon of inspiration for Pakistan's youth and will serve as a platform to showcase stories of resilience, innovation, and achievements by young Pakistanis, alongside important news and content designed to empower and guide them.

The board discussed various aspects of the magazine, including its editorial vision, content themes, and strategies to engage young readers nationwide. The team expressed their resolve to make Spark a voice of the youth, reflecting their aspirations, challenges, and achievements.

The meeting concluded with a renewed determination to ensure the magazine's success as a cornerstone of the Prime Minister's Youth Programme, fostering hope and ambition among the younger generation.

WHO records 25 polio cases

KABUL (Khaama Press): WHO has reported that out of 25 confirmed cases of polio in 2024. WHO released a report indicating an increase in polio cases in Afghanistan compared to the previous year. According to the report, most of the confirmed polio cases were documented in the provinces of Balochistan. While the rise in polio cases in Afghanistan has become a major concern, challenges such as insecurity and restrictions have consistently hindered vaccination campaigns.

Fire engulfs Kabul market

KABUL (Amu TV): A fire broke out on Wednesday morning near a commercial market in the Pul-e-Khishti area of Kabul. Videos obtained by Amu and on social media show flames engulfing the back of a market known as "Mobile Center," a popular commercial hub in the city. The area is surrounded by electronics stores and shoe shops. As of now, Taliban have not issued any statement regarding the incident, and details about the cause of the fire or potential casualties remain unclear.

Taliban deny receiving billions in US aid

KABUL (Ariana News): The Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (IEA) has strongly rejected claims by Donald Trump that the ruling government is receiving "billions of dollars" from the United States. Hamdullah Fitrat, the IEA's deputy spokesman said: "The claims of billions and millions of dollars of aid to the Islamic Emirate from the US side are completely false and we strongly reject them."

This comes after Trump said at a press conference at Mar-a-Lago on Tuesday that the US pays "billions

of dollars essentially to the Taliban, Afghanistan." Trump implied that outgoing President Joe Biden's decisions had inflicted severe economic damage on the United States, estimating that losses totalled up to \$60 trillion. Fitrat meanwhile said America has not paid a single dollar to the Islamic Emirate, but has seized and frozen billions of dollars from the people of Afghanistan. The Islamic Emirate does not expect any help from America and has never asked for it, Fitrat said.

According to the IEA the money mentioned by Trump was to cover US expenses, including the withdrawal of troops and mass evacuation and resettlement process. "Perhaps some of it has been spent by international organizations in the name of humanitarian aid," Fitrat added. "If analyzed carefully, America has spent all this money to achieve its goals in the name of Afghanistan, and is trying to spread propaganda against the Islamic Emirate," said Fitrat.

Shaheen appointed as IEA's envoy

KABUL (Amu TV): Taliban have named Suhail Shaheen, the former head of their political office in Qatar, as their new ambassador to Doha, Zabihullah Mujahid, the Taliban's spokesperson, confirmed in a message to Amu TV on Wednesday. Mujahid provided no additional details regarding the future of the Taliban's political office but stated that Mohammad Naeem, who had been serving as their acting ambassador in Qatar, will now assume the role of their deputy ambassador. The appointments come as the Taliban continue their push for international recognition. Taliban have previously appealed to the United Nations and the Security Council to accept Shaheen as Afghanistan's permanent representative to the UN—a request that has gone unanswered for the past three years.

Since returning to power in August 2021, Taliban have faced considerable challenges in securing legitimacy from the international community, amid widespread criticism of their human rights record and restrictive policies toward women and minorities. The latest diplomatic appointments appear to be part of their broader efforts to improve their standing on the global stage. Qatari officials and the United Nations have yet to comment on the new appointments.

Coal prices drop in gov't centers

KABUL (TOLONews): Coal sellers in government centers say that currently one ton of coal is sold for 6,500 afghani.

These centers were recently established by the Northern Coal Company in collaboration with Kabul Municipality and the General Directorate of State-Owned Companies in all districts to facilitate access for the public. Buyers cite the lower price of coal compared to private sellers as the reason for purchasing from these centers. "People don't have jobs, and we are very pleased with the government's attention in this area," said Abdul Matin, a resident of Kabul. "Our request to the Islamic Emirate is to reduce prices because the people of Afghanistan are facing economic challenges," said Wasel Ahmad, a resident of Kabul.

Sellers in government coal distribution centers state that the price of one ton of coal has dropped significantly compared to last year. Currently, a ton of medium-sized or crushed coal is sold for 6,500 afghani. Nangialai Alizada, the head of the 9th district's government coal distribution center, said: "Compared to last year, there have been significant changes. The coal is of good quality, and its price is much more reasonable compared to last year."

However, private sector sellers claim that due to the closure of the Salang Pass and high tariffs, the price of one ton of coal has reached 13,000 afghani. Bobcat loader, 2 forklifts, 1 tanker, 2 cranes, 3 fire trucks, and 2 dump trucks. It is worth noting that the ministry's technical teams have previously repaired thousands of vehicles and light and heavy weapons, making them ready for use.

Ministry signs MoUs with int'l organizations

KABUL (BNA): The Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation signed four cooperation Agreements worth over 1.4 million US dollars with the organizations: Protection and Crisis Reduction, Social Welfare Rah Rahnord, the Canadian Institute for War-Affected Children, and the Norwegian Refugee Council. According to the Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation's media office, the signed agreements will see the aforementioned organizations use the funds in various sectors, including vocational and technical training, distribution of sewing tools and books, full and partial shelter repairs, providing entrepreneurship skills, coaching, distributing health packages, and food aid for



returnees in Kabul, Nangarhar, and Herat provinces. These MoUs were signed by Mullah Abdul Rahman Rashid, Deputy Minister for Technical Affairs and the Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation, along with representatives from the partner organizations.

Deputy PM Mawlawi Hanafi meets with officials, professors

KABUL (BNA): Mawlawi Abdul salam Hanafi, Deputy Prime Minister for Administrative Affairs held a meeting with several officials and professors from private universities in various provinces of the country. According to a statement from ARG, during the meeting, the professors and officials of the country's private universities expressed their satisfaction with the Islamic Emirate's attention towards improving the quality of educational institutions and supporting academic staff and specialists.

They stated that due to the efforts of the leadership of the Islamic Emirate, significant positive changes have occurred in terms of enhancing the capacity and empowering educational institutions, and the officials and professors of the country's universities are also cooperating with the officials of the Islamic Emirate in implementing development programs and ensuring quality. The officials and professors of private universities also referred to some issues concerning higher education, universities, and higher education institutions, and requested attention from the Islamic Emirate authorities in this area. Mawlawi Abdul Salam Hanafi, Deputy Prime Minister for Administrative Affairs appreciated the efforts and hard work of the officials, professors, and academic staff of the country in training the nation's youth. Deputy Prime Minister added that the Islamic

Emirate is making continuous and serious efforts in all fields, especially in improving the quality and provision of scientific services by educational and academic institutions, and in this regard, cooperation from these institutions with the relevant departments is essential. Mawlawi Abdul Salam Hanafi also mentioned that the officials of the Islamic Emirate would address the issues related to universities and higher education institutions as much as possible.

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Afghanistan participates in carpet & flooring EXPO 2025 in Turkey

KABUL (BNA): The Ministry of Industry and Commerce announced the opening of the largest International Carpet and Flooring EXPO 2025, Istanbul, Turkey. According to the Ministry of Industry and Commerce, the exhibition titled "Carpet and Flooring EXPO 2025" was inaugurated in Istanbul, Turkey, with the presence of representatives from the Ministry, the Consul General of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan in Istanbul, the Afghan Trade Attaché in Turkey, and the board members and CEO of the Union of Carpet Producers and Exporters of Afghanistan. This exhibition is the



largest international event aimed at attracting long-term customers, where 19 countries are showcasing

their machine-made and handmade carpets over four days. It is worth mentioning that eight companies

from Afghanistan's carpet sector are also displaying 227 square meters of their products in this exhibition.

Bamyan identifies 69 mines, 17 currently under extraction

BAMYAN (BNA): The Directorate of Mines and Petroleum in Bamyan has reported the identification of 69 mines in the province, with extraction processes currently underway in 17 of them. According to Bakhtar News Agency, Mawlawi Neyamatullah Abbas, the head of Bamyan's Mines and Petroleum Directorate, stated that efforts to extract minerals from other mines in the province are ongoing. Currently, 17 mines, including coal, decorative stones, precious and semi-precious stones, lead, and zinc, are in operation, providing employment opportunities for 434 individuals. He also mentioned the exploitation of lead and zinc mines in four areas: Bidag, Espei Maidan, Surkh Bomak, and Surtub, which cover around 18 kilometers and are divided into seven blocks. He indicated that the extraction work will soon be put up for tender. The head of the Bamyan

Mines Directorate highlighted efforts to establish processing factories for raw mineral materials to attract more workers to Bamyan's mines. He also reviewed the activities of the current year, including the control and monitoring of the exploration process of the antimony mine in the Jelmesh area of Sheber district, supervision of the contract conditions for the lead and zinc mine, coal mine contracts, the construction of a 45-kilometer

road from the Gandeh Kotel mine area to the old airport, and the establishment of a health center and drinking water network. Mohammad Zahir Naqibi, the General Manager of Geoscience at Bamyan's Mines Directorate, identified serious challenges in extracting Bamyan's mines, including a lack of infrastructure, essential roads, standard electricity, the cold climate, and the mountainous nature of the region.

Completion of 1,120 shelters for needy families

KABUL (TOLONews): The construction of 1,120 shelters across nine provinces in northern and northeastern Afghanistan, costing 407 million Afghanis and financially supported by the UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees), has been completed and handed over for use. Officials at the handover ceremony for some of these shelters in Jawzjan stated that the shelters were built for internally displaced families, returnee migrants, and families in need. Each shelter includes two rooms, a hallway, and a bathroom, with the cost of building each unit amounting to 350,000 Afghanis. Mustafa Noorzai, the head of the implementing organization in the north-

ern and northeastern zones, said: "The ACRA organization, with the assistance of UNHCR, has implemented 1,120 shelters in nine provinces. The total budget for the project is approximately 407 million Afghanis, and each shelter consists of two rooms, a hallway, and a bathroom." Amanullah Talha, the Director of Refugees and Repatriations in Jawzjan, added: "Today in Jawzjan, 111 shelters are being implemented by ACRA, funded by UNHCR, in the districts of Qush Tapa and Aqcha." Meanwhile, some families who have received shelters have called on the authorities to address their other challenges, particularly roads and schools.

Mohammad Yasin, a resident of Jawzjan, said: "Previously, I lived in a mud house, which collapsed. With this shelter built for me, 90% of my problems are solved. I am grateful to those who provided this help and hope they will also assist other needy families." Kherullah, another resident of Jawzjan, said: "In winter, it rained, and there were leaks. In summer, the children suffered from heat. Now that this room has been built for us, our problems are 100% resolved." According to officials, during the construction of these shelters in the nine provinces, work opportunities were provided for 3,500 skilled and unskilled laborers.

Dozens of military vehicles repaired



KABUL (BNA): The Ministry of National Defense has announced that technical teams from the 207th Al-Farooq Corps have repaired dozens of vehicles. According to a press release from the ministry, the professional personnel of the technical command

in the third brigade of the 207th Al-Farooq Army Corps have repaired and prepared for use 89 various military vehicles over the past three months. The repaired vehicles include 34 Humvees, 37 International trucks, 4 ambulances, 3 trailers, 1

Bobcat loader, 2 forklifts, 1 tanker, 2 cranes, 3 fire trucks, and 2 dump trucks. It is worth noting that the ministry's technical teams have previously repaired thousands of vehicles and light and heavy weapons, making them ready for use.

Afghan migrants in Iran complain about mistreatment and restrictions

KABUL (TOLONews): Some Afghan migrants in Iran complain about mistreatment and restrictions they are facing. They say that in addition to their economic challenges, issues such as the disconnection of SIM cards and higher bus fares have added to their problems. "The disconnection of SIM cards and bank cards is among the issues worth mentioning. According to the new regulations of the Ministry of Roads and Transportation, Afghan

migrants must pay higher amounts to use buses," said Asadullah Zairi, one of the migrants in Iran. "The situation for migrants in Iran is very bad. The Iranian government treats migrants in a very rude and inappropriate manner," said Farzana Khaleqi, another migrant. Meanwhile, some migrant rights activists say that Iran's focus on undocumented migrants has made conditions even more restrictive for them. "Our migrants are at risk of forced deportation,

and Afghan migrants in Iran are severely struggling with life challenges," said Nazar Nazari, a migrant rights activist. Recently, Sardar Qasem Rezaei, the Deputy Police Chief of Iran, stated that both fixed and mobile businesses for undocumented migrants are prohibited in the country. He also emphasized that efforts should be made to reduce the employment of undocumented migrants. An excerpt from an Iranian media report

states: "Preventative measures such as warnings and notices regarding the employment of unauthorized foreigners in businesses and public places have intensified, and greater efforts are being made to clear businesses of unauthorized foreigners." The challenges for Afghan migrants are not limited to Iran; Turkey and Pakistan are also among the countries where the deportation of Afghan nationals has intensified. Mohammad Jamal

Muslim, a migrant rights activist in Turkey, said: "Migrants face many difficulties, both in terms of employment and security, to the extent that they cannot move freely in their environment. Previously, an official from Iran's Ministry of Interior stated that in the past three years, at least three million Afghan nationals who had entered Iran illegally were deported. However, according to these individuals, due to problems in their country, they have returned to Iran.



PESHAWAR: Chief Minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Ali Amin Gandapur distributing cheques among special persons during launching of Financial Assistance Program.

Israeli strikes kill dozens in Gaza

CAIRO (Reuters): Israeli military strikes across Gaza killed at least 27 people on Wednesday, Palestinian medics said, as international mediators stepped up efforts to seal a ceasefire and hostage exchange deal between Israel and the Palestinian group Hamas.

An airstrike killed at least 10 people in a multi-story house in the Sheikh Radwan neighborhood of Gaza City, while another killed five in the nearby Zeitoun suburb, medics said. In Deir Al-Balah city in central Gaza, where hundreds of thousands of displaced Palestinians are sheltering, and in Jabalia, the largest of Gaza's eight historic refugee camps, a total of seven people were killed, they said.

Israel's military said it struck Hamas militants operating in a school in Jabalia, and that it took steps to minimize risk to civilians. Later on Wednesday, an Israeli airstrike killed five Palestinians inside the public garden in Gaza City, medics said. There was no Israeli military comment.

Such mass casualties are a daily occurrence in Gaza, where more than 46,000 Palestinians have now been killed in Israel's 15-month-long assault against Hamas, according to health officials in the enclave. As Israel continued its bombardments, the United States, Qatar and Egypt were making intensive efforts to reach a ceasefire deal, with

one source close to the talks saying this was the most serious attempt to reach a deal so far.

The outgoing US administration has called for a final push for a deal before President Joe Biden leaves office, and many in the region view president-elect Donald Trump's inauguration on Jan. 20 as an unofficial deadline. "Things are better than ever before, but there is no deal yet," the source told Reuters.

Trump's Middle East envoy Steve Witkoff said overnight he hopes to have good things to report about Israeli hostages held by the time Trump is sworn in as president. A deal would also involve the release of Palestinians held in Israeli jails. The Gaza Health Ministry meanwhile warned that Nasser Hospital and the Gaza European Hospital might stop operations in a few hours unless the Israelis stop restricting the flow of fuel to the hospitals.

It later said it received a limited amount of fuel that would delay a complete halt of operations until Thursday unless more fuel arrives. Israel denies hindering humanitarian relief to Gaza. The country launched its assault on Gaza after Hamas fighters stormed southern Israel on Oct. 7, 2023, killing 1,200 people and capturing more than 250 hostages, according to Israeli tallies.

Its Gaza campaign has laid waste to much of the

enclave. Most of the territory's 2.1 million people have been displaced multiple times and face acute shortages of food and medicine, humanitarian agencies say. On Wednesday, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies said heavy rains and flooding had left families living in damaged tents with up to 30 cm of water in them, "clinging on to survival without even the most basic necessities, such as blankets."

Israel and Hamas both accuse the other of blocking a ceasefire and hostage exchange deal by adhering to conditions that have torpedoed all previous peace efforts for more than a year. On Tuesday, Hamas stood by its demand that it will only free its remaining hostages if Israel agrees to end the war and withdraw all its troops from Gaza. Israel says it will not end the war until Hamas is dismantled and all hostages are free.

Meanwhile, the body of Youssef Ziyadne, an Israeli Bedouin taken hostage by Hamas-led fighters on Oct. 7, 2023, has been found in a tunnel in Gaza, along with evidence suggesting his son may also have been killed, the Israeli military said on Wednesday. It was not immediately clear how Youssef Ziyadne had been killed but Lt. Col. Nadav Shoshani said his death did not appear to have been recent.

Islamabad to host Global Summit

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training will host the two-day international conference on girls education in Muslims communities here on January 11-12.

The landmark global summit titled, "International Conference on 'Girls' Education in Muslim Communities: Challenges and Opportunities," aims to address the challenges and opportunities in advancing girls' education across Muslim communities worldwide; foster dialogue; and find actionable solutions to address the challenges, according to a curtain-raiser issues by the Foreign Office. The conference will provide an ideal platform for high-level discussions and collaborations.

The event will be inaugurated by Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif, who will deliver the keynote address at the opening session and reaffirm the nation's commitment to promoting girls' education and gender equity. The summit will bring together over 150 international dignitaries, including ministers, ambassadors, scholars and academia from 44 Muslim and friendly countries, representatives from international organizations including UNESCO, UNICEF, and the World Bank.

The speakers and panelists will share transformative success stories, showcasing innovative approaches to advancing education equity. The conference will conclude by a formal signing ceremony of the Islamabad Declaration, outlining the shared commitment of Muslim community to empower girls through education, paving way for inclusive and sustainable educational reforms, and a brighter future for generations to come.

FIA arrest key suspects

F.P. Report

ABBOTTABAD: As part of an ongoing crackdown against human trafficking networks, a team from Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) Crime Circle Abbottabad has arrested two key suspects involved in the Greece ship tragedy.

The operation was led by Sub-Inspectors Zia ul Islam and Tahir Khan, along with Head Constable Amir Nazir and FC Gul Khattak. The suspects, identified as Abdul Wasay alias Abdul Basit, an Afghan national, and Qari Jan, son of Muhammad Shoaib, a resident of Camp No. 13, Tehsil and District Haripur, were listed as human traffickers on the FIA's wanted list at serial number 84.

The suspects were allegedly involved in facilitating illegal human trafficking, including the tragic Greece boat incident. During the operation, authorities recovered an Android mobile phone from the accused, containing substantial evidence related to human smuggling and the Greece boat incident. The arrested suspects have been brought to the FIA Crime Circle Police Station in Abbottabad for further investigation. The progress report has been submitted to the relevant authorities for further action. The FIA team's efforts are part of a broader campaign to dismantle human trafficking networks and bring the perpetrators to justice.

KP govt launches financial assistance program

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government has launched a Financial Assistance Program worth Rs 370 million to support differently abled persons in the province. Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Ali Amin Khan Gandapur, formally launched this important program in a ceremony held here at Chief Minister's House on Wednesday.

The Chief Minister, on this occasion, distributed financial assistance cheques among special persons. Provincial Minister for Social Welfare Syed Qasim Ali Shah, members of the provincial assembly, high ups of Social Welfare department, and special persons also attended the event.

Under the Financial Assistance Program, 37,000 special persons from across the province are being provided with Rs 10,000 each.

Speaking at the ceremony, the Chief Minister directed that the term "disabled" would no longer be used in official documents, and instead, the term "persons with special abilities" would be adopted. He emphasized that these individuals possess unique and exceptional abilities and need opportunities to showcase their potential.

The Chief Minister further said that it is the responsibility of the state to support all vulnerable segments of society, including persons with different abilities. He highlighted that welfare initiatives for vulnerable sections of society are a key part of the vision of the founding chairman PTI. "During our tenure, no vulnerable group, including persons with special abilities, will remain without government support; the provincial government will take responsibility for the destitute and helpless people", he said and added that his government is working under a comprehensive strategy to assist the vulnerable segments of society.

He also shared that data on persons

with special abilities, widows, orphans, and other deserving individuals is being collected across the province. Similarly, in order to ensure sustainability, all welfare initiatives of the provincial government are being incorporated into the regular budget, said the Chief Minister.

He assured that there will be no shortage of financial resources for welfare initiatives and the support of vulnerable groups. He announced a program to provide electric wheelchairs to persons with special abilities, adding that in the first phase, electric wheelchairs will be distributed to special government employees and students in higher education institutions, followed by the provision of wheelchairs to special students in schools in the second phase.

Ali Amin Khan Gandapur also mentioned that the incumbent provincial government has increased the amount provided under the dowry fund from 25,000 rupees to 200,000 rupees and has doubled the amount given under Zakat fund. The Chief Minister maintained "We are introducing a Ration Card to assist elderly and widowed women, and a program for the welfare of orphans and abandoned children is also being initiated. Additionally, we are planning to build a state-of-the-art old-age home for destitute senior citizens, where all necessary facilities will be provided. For the transgender community, we are establishing shelters where they can live with dignity," he concluded.

KP CM inaugurates Police Facilitation Center: Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Ali Amin Khan Gandapur on Wednesday inaugurated newly established Police Facilitation Center in Sharqi Police station, during his visit to the police station. The Chief Minister on the occasion inspected various sections of the facilitation center and was briefed by senior police officials about the services and facilities being provided at the center.

Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur was informed that the establishment of the Police Facilitation Center would ensure the provision of all essential police services under one roof. These services include police clearance, character certificates, foreign registration, employee verification, domicile verification, reporting of lost or stolen items, tenant information forms, traffic information, and driving licenses. Additionally, services such as driving learner permits, police welfare admissions, tender information, recruitments in police, victim support, and legal advice will also be available at the center.

It was further informed that the Police Facilitation Center will operate as an integrated and online system, enabling citizens to access these services from their homes without having to visit the police station. This center is third one in the province, following the establishment of similar centers in Nowshera and Charsadda. In the next phase, these centers will be expanded to other districts of the province.

On this occasion, the Chief Minister directed the relevant authorities to immediately establish such centers in all divisional headquarters of the province. He emphasized that the incumbent provincial government is committed to providing maximum facilities to the public in all sectors, adding that the culture and overall environment of police stations will be made people-friendly, ensuring a sense of complete safety for citizens.

In his remarks, the Chief Minister lauded the role of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Police in ensuring the protection of people's lives and property, stating that the provincial government is providing resources on a priority basis to meet all requirements and align them with modern needs. Inspector General of Police Akhtar Hayat Khan Gandapur, and CCPO Peshawar Qasim Ali Khan were also present on the occasion.

Trump asks Supreme Court to halt sentencing in hush money case

FLORIDA (Reuters): President-elect Donald Trump has asked the US Supreme Court to prevent a New York state court from sentencing him for his conviction on criminal charges stemming from hush money paid to a porn star.

"This court should enter an immediate stay of further proceedings in the New York trial court to prevent grave injustice and harm to the institution of the presidency and the operations of the federal government," his lawyers wrote in a filing made public on Wednesday. A day ago, a New York appeals court denied his effort to halt sentencing scheduled for Friday in New York state court in Manhattan. In Wednesday's filing, his lawyers asked the US Supreme Court to immediately order a stay in the case, as he seeks an appeal to resolve questions of presidential immunity.

They said they had simultaneously asked the state's highest court for the same emergency relief. The Supreme Court ordered prosecutors to respond to the request by Thursday morning, sig-

nalling that the justices may act quickly on the matter.

Trump, who won another term in the White House and is set to take office on January 20, was convicted by a New York jury of covering up his former lawyer Michael Cohen's \$130,000 payment to adult film actor Stormy Daniels for her silence before the 2016 election about a sexual encounter she says they had. Trump has denied the encounter and any wrongdoing.

Steven Cheung, a spokesman for Trump, said in a statement his legal team had asked the Supreme Court "to correct the unjust actions by New York courts and stop the unlawful sentencing". A spokesperson for Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg, whose office brought the case, said prosecutors would respond in court papers.

The hush money case made Trump the first US president, sitting or former, to be charged with a crime and also the first to be convicted. Since the verdict, his lawyers have made two unsuccessful attempts to have the case tossed.

In scheduling Trump's sentencing for Friday, Justice Juan Merchan said he was not inclined to sentence Trump to jail and would likely grant him an unconditional discharge, which would place a judgment of guilt on Trump's record without any penalty such as custody, a fine or probation. Trump's lawyers have argued that the hush money case should be dismissed in light of the Supreme Court's landmark July 1 ruling that granted former presidents broad immunity from criminal prosecution for their official acts, in a case involving criminal charges over his efforts to undo his 2020 election loss to Joe Biden.

"By repeatedly admitting evidence of President Trump's official acts during trial, the trial court violated the principles of presidential immunity that this court enumerated," Trump's lawyers said in Wednesday's filing. They also contended that, as president-elect, Trump is immune from prosecution "in the brief but crucial period" between his November 5 election and his Jan 20 inauguration.

PHC suspends ECP notice seeking Gandapur assets

Humayun Khan

PESHAWAR: The Peshawar High Court (PHC) has suspended the notice issued by the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) on 20th November 2024 to Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur and has issued a notice to the ECP, seeking a response, on Wednesday.

PHC's two-member bench comprising of Justice S.M. Attique Shah and Justice Fahim Wali heard the petition filed by Ali Amin Gandapur's lawyers, Bashir Khan Wazir and Alam Khan Adenzai advocates.

The lawyers informed the court that the ECP had issued a notice to Gandapur, seeking details about his assets. The counsel argued that the ECP had previously issued a similar notice, which was suspended by the court.

However, Justice S.M. Attique Shah questioned why the petitioner didn't contempt of court petition against ECP despite the court's previous suspension

order. The lawyers replied that the new notice issued on November 20 was different from the previous one.

PHC suspended the ECP's 20th November 2023 notice and sought a response from the commission on the next hearing. The court issued a notice to the ECP, seeking a response.

Peshawar situation isn't better than Kurram: PHC observes during Barrister Saif plea: A divisional bench of Peshawar High Court (PHC) comprising Justice SM Attique Shah and Justice Fahim Wali has reinstated the protective bail application of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's government Advisor on Information Barrister Saif and stopped his arrest, on Wednesday.

PHC approved a subsidiary application and sought details of the cases registered against him, issuing a notice to the federal government to respond. The counsel Alam Khan Adenzai advocate informed the court that the petition was filed for the

reinstatement of the protective bail application, which was dismissed due to the petitioner's absence.


However, Justice S.M. Attique Shah remarked that Barrister Saif's presence was not necessary, and the court would reinstate the application. The court reinstated the protective bail application and stopped Barrister Saif's arrest.

During the hearing, Justice S.M. Attique Shah expressed concerns about the situation in the province, particularly regarding the youth. He stated that the youth are not being utilized properly, and the situation in Peshawar is not better than in Kurram district.

Justice SM Attique Shah also highlighted the issue of drug smuggling in the province and urged the government to take measures to control the situation. Barrister Saif informed the court that the government is taking steps to provide online business training to the youth and equip them with skills, but it would take some time.



ISLAMABAD: Air Marshal M Mughees Afzal (retired), Ambassador designated to Syria called on Chief of Naval Staff, Admiral Naveed Ashraf at Naval Headquarters.



یومِ شہید

105 YEARS

شہید حکیم محمد سعید

ولادت 9 جنوری 1920ء

شہید حکیم محمد سعید، ایک عہد ساز شخصیت، علم، بصیرت اور خدمت کی درخشندہ علامت جن کے افکار، قلم اور جدوجہد نے قوم کو شعور دیا وجود نے انسانیت کو معنی بخشے اور فراست نے کم کثیف منزلوں کا رست دکھایا

105 برس قبل روشن ہونے والے اس چراغ کی کو آج بھی علم، خدمت اور انسانیت کی راہوں کو روشن کر رہی ہے

آئیے، شہید سعید کے خوابوں کو حقیقت بنانے کا عہد کریں

یہ محض یاد ہی نہیں، ایک وراثت بھی ہے، کیا ہم اس کے اتین نہیں ہے؟

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Trudeau rejects Trump's idea

OTTAWA (Reuters): Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau dismissed a suggestion by US President-elect Donald Trump that he might use "economic force" to make Canada the 51st US state.

"There isn't a snowball's chance in hell that Canada would become part of the United States," he said in a post on X. "Workers and communities in both our countries benefit from being each other's biggest trading and security partner." Trump, speaking in Mar-a-Lago, was asked if he was considering using military force to acquire Canada.

"No, economic force," he responded. "Because Canada and the United States, that would really be something." Trump, who has long complained about Canada's trade surplus with the US, had earlier told reporters the border was an "artificially drawn line." Trump has threatened to impose a 25 per cent tariff on imports from Canada, which sends 75pc of all goods and services exports south of the border.

Earlier on Tuesday, Canadian Foreign Minister Melanie Joly said Trump's comments "show a complete lack of understanding of what makes Canada a strong country ... We will never back down in the face of threats." Trudeau announced on Monday that he would step down in the coming months, bowing to pressure from lawmakers alarmed by his Liberal Party's unpopularity. The next election must be held by Oct. 20 and polls predict a crushing win for the official opposition Conservatives.