

President leaves for Lisbon
F.P. Report

KARACHI: President Asif Ali Zardari has left for Lisbon, Portugal, on Sunday. He will meet Prince Rahim Agha Khan to extend his condolences on the passing away of late Prince Karim Aga Khan IV. During the visit, the President Asif Ali Zardari will also meet Mr Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa President of Portugal.



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KARACHI: Pakistan Navy Sea King helicopter demonstrating during opening ceremony of 9th multinational maritime exercise Aman 2025.

Dar, Iranian FM discuss Middle East situation

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan has extended all-out support to Iran for convening an extraordinary meeting of foreign ministers of Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) to deliberate upon the proposed displacement of Gaza population.

Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Senator Muhammad Ishaq Dar received a telephone call from Foreign Minister of Iran Seyyed Abbas Araghchi late Saturday night, during which the two ministers exchanged views on the situation in Middle East with a particular focus on the continuing plight of Palestinians in Gaza.

Commenting on the proposal to displace the people of Gaza, the deputy prime minister termed it deeply troubling and unjust, emphasizing that the Palestinian land belongs to the Palestinian people and the only viable and just option is the two-state solution, in accordance with the UN Security Council resolutions.

Pakistan shall continue to support the establishment of a sovereign, independent, and contiguous Palestinian state based on pre-1967 borders, with Al Quds Al-Sharif as its capital, Dar added.

Dar also conveyed Pakistan's support for convening of an extraordinary OIC meeting of Foreign Ministers to deliberate upon this issue. The two ministers agreed to maintain close contact on these developments in the days ahead. Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi also in a phone conversation with his Egyptian counterpart

Pakistan condemns Israeli PM's remarks about Palestinian state

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan has strongly condemned, in unequivocal terms, the recent statement by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu suggesting that the Palestinian people should establish a state in Saudi Arabia.

In a statement on Sunday, Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar said that the remarks of Israeli Prime Minister are irresponsible, provocative and thoughtless, which are not only deeply offensive but also undermines and disregards the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people to self-determination and an independent State on their own historical and legitimate territory. The Deputy Prime Minister said Pakistan stands in solidarity with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and commends its steadfast support for the Palestinian people and their just cause. He said any attempt to undermine Saudi Arabia's unwavering position and misrepresentation of its commitment to the Palestinian cause are deeply regrettable.

Dar said Pakistan firmly believes that the Palestinian people have an inalienable right to establish an independent and sovereign state based on the pre-1967 borders, with Al Quds Al Sharif as its capital. He said proposal that seeks to displace or relocate the Palestinian people from their ancestral homeland is unacceptable and constitutes a blatant violation of international law, United Nations resolutions and the principles of justice and fairness. He said the government of Pakistan reiterates its unflinching support for the Palestinian cause and will continue to work closely with Saudi Arabia and other members of the international community to advocate for the rights of the Palestinian people and to achieve a just, comprehensive and lasting solution to the Palestinian issue. The FM urged the international community to denounce this provocative remark and hold Israel accountable for its continued attempts to undermine the peace process.

Badr Abdelatty late Saturday called for the immediate emergency meeting of OIC over Gaza.

During the phone call, the two top Iranian and Egyptian diplomats discussed bilateral ties, and recent developments in the region especially the situation in Palestine and Gaza.

Araghchi pointed to the position of

Egypt in supporting the legitimate and inalienable rights of the Palestinian people and described the illegal US plan to forcibly displace the Palestinian people from the Gaza Strip as a part of a conspiracy to annihilate Palestine in a colonial manner and as a serious threat to the stability and security of the region.

Public mandate was stolen on Feb 8: Saif

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Barrister Dr. Saif, Advisor to the Chief Minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa on Information and Public Relations, has stated that the public gathering in Swabi has served as a referendum against the form 47 government. The massive turnout of people has validated the theft of the public mandate by the fake government.

Dr. Saif said that people from across the country had made it clear that Pakistan belongs to Imran Khan and that the public mandate was stolen on February 8. He added that the previous night was extremely difficult for Nawaz Sharif, Maryam Nawaz, and the entire PML-N, as despite Maryam Nawaz's attempts to intimidate people, a large number of citizens came out in support of PTI in Punjab.

Dr. Saif said that all efforts to suppress PTI leadership and workers had failed. He stated that the people have made it clear that they will not rest until Imran Khan and all political workers were released. "The public is standing shoulder to shoulder with Imran Khan for true freedom, and soon the power of the people will bring an end to the fake government" He added.

Prince Karim Aga Khan laid to rest

ASWAN (Reuters, AFP): Prince Karim al-Hussaini Aga Khan IV, the 49th hereditary Imam of the Ismailis, was laid to rest in Egypt's Aswan city at a private burial ceremony on Sunday, according to a statement issued by the community.

In the statement, the community said Prince Rahim al-Hussaini Aga Khan — the 50th hereditary Imam — and his family were present during the ceremony. "The Governor of Aswan facilitated and participated in a dignified procession through the city to the banks of the River Nile," it said.

Shah Karim's casket was transferred by boat in a ceremonial crossing to the mausoleum of Mawlana Sultan Mahomed Shah. The casket was carried by hand to the hilltop mausoleum, where Shah Karim's body was interred. After the ceremony, leaders expressed condolences to the family, and the Governor of Aswan presented Prince Rahim with a symbolic key to the City of Aswan as a mark of respect.

A new mausoleum for Mawlana Shah Karim will be constructed as his final resting place on land adjacent to the existing structure, the statement added. Prince Karim Aga Khan, renowned for his triumphs in horse racing, immense wealth, and global development work, breathed his last in Lisbon, Portugal, at the age of 88 on Tuesday.

A day earlier, Prince Karim's funeral was held in Lisbon, Portugal, which was attended by several Heads of States, including Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and Spain's King Emeritus Juan Carlos. Following Prince Karim's demise, the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN) announced Prince Rahim al-Hussaini Aga Khan was named the 50th hereditary Imam, as per the late Imam's will that was read in the presence of his family and senior community leaders.

The late spiritual leader of the Ismaili community left behind three sons, Rahim Aga Khan, Aly Muhammad Aga Khan, and Hussain Aga Khan, and a daughter, Zahra Aga Khan. Karim was born in Switzerland and spent his childhood in Nairobi and graduated from Harvard University with a BA Honors Degree in Islamic History. He assumed imamat at the age of 20 years in 1957 after succeeding his grandfather, Sir Sultan Mahomed Shah Aga Khan III.

PM approves abolishing son quota in jobs

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif approved abolishing the son quota for recruiting a family member of an employee who passed away while in service.

PM Shehbaz approved changes to the job policy under the Prime Minister's Assistance Package, the sources said, and added that the policy previously allowed a family member of a deceased government employee to be offered a government job.

The Prime Minister has now approved changes to this policy, effectively barring the children of deceased government employees from receiving government jobs.

This policy change is reportedly in line with a Supreme Court decision, following which the Establishment Division has issued directives to all ministries and divisions to implement the changes.

The sources confirmed that all other benefits and facilities available to civil servants under the Prime Minister's Assistance Package will remain unchanged.

The decision will not apply to the children of martyrs from law enforcement agencies or those who have sacrificed their lives in the fight against terrorism. Additionally, the decision will not affect the recruitment of heirs of civil servants who were hired before the change in policy.

Shehbaz to participate in WGS in UAE: On the invitation of Vice President and Prime Minister of the United Arab Emirates and Ruler of Dubai Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif will pay a two-day official visit to the United Arab Emirates (UAE) from 10-11 February to participate in the World Governments Summit (WGS) in Dubai.

"The Summit will bring together a

large number of Heads of State/Government, global policymakers, and leading private sector figures to discuss the future of governance, innovation and international cooperation," Foreign Office spokesperson said in a press statement on Sunday.

This marks Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif's second visit to the UAE since assuming office in March 2024. He would be accompanied by a high-level delegation including Deputy Prime Minister/ Foreign Minister Senator Mohammad Ishaq Dar and other key members of the cabinet, reflecting Pakistan's strong commitment to deepening its engagement with the UAE and other global partners, it was added.

During his visit, the Prime Minister will deliver a keynote address at the WGS, highlighting Pakistan's vision for inclusive economic growth, digital transformation and governance reforms. He would also hold bilateral meetings with the UAE leadership as well as engage with Heads of State/Government from participating countries and leading CEOs of major multinational companies.

"Pakistan and the UAE share a deep-rooted brotherly relationship built on mutual trust, understanding and a long-standing mutually beneficial cooperation. The UAE remains one of Pakistan's key economic and strategic partners, with strong collaboration across multiple sectors," the spokesperson said. Pakistani diaspora in the UAE, which is the second largest Pakistani expatriate community worldwide, continues to play a pivotal role in the development and success of both countries, serving as a bridge between the two nations.

"The Prime Minister's visit underscores Pakistan's unwavering commitment to further strengthening its ties with the UAE, fostering greater economic collaboration and exploring new avenues of partnership for mutual prosperity," it was further added.

PML-N leaders rendered lots of sacrifices: Tarar

F.P. Report

LAHORE: Federal

Minister for Information and Broadcasting Attaullah Tarar said on Sunday that the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) and its workers had witnessed tough times in past. Talking to the media here, he said that the PML-N workers had faced jails, court and police stations. He said that everyone was witness to the arrest of Mian Nawaz Sharif, Shehbaz Sharif and Hamza Shehbaz, adding that during hearings in courts, the PML-N leaders were kept away from media.

Sacrifices of party workers could not be forgotten, he said and added that the

PML-N leaders had given a lot of sacrifices for democracy. Attaullah Tarar said that hardships, which PML-N President Muhammad Nawaz Sharif and his family had faced could not be described in words.

He said that the desire would always remain alive that Mian Nawaz Sharif should have spent time with the late Kalsoom Nawaz, her wife, during her last moments. He said, "We pay tribute to all our workers who have passed away."

The federal minister said that it was very sorrowful that Syed Hassan Asghar, affectionately known as 'Gudu Shah' had passed away. He said that it was government's top priority to solve problems of the party

workers. He said that he wanted that if today workers organising committee was formed, then a party worker should be the head of that committee.

Attaullah Tarar said that recommendations of the organising committee would be implemented. He said that the late Chaudhry Ateeq and Gudu Shah had rendered a lot of services for the party.

He said that there should be secretariat where details of workers regarding their joining of party should be maintained, adding that he would talk to party's Lahore president in this regard. PML-N leaders Khawaja Saad Rafique and Pervaiz Rashid also spoke.

IMF scoping mission visiting Pakistan: Ministry

FP. Report

ISLAMABAD: In line with this commitment, a three member International Monetary Fund (IMF) scoping mission is visiting Pakistan to undertake the Governance and Corruption Diagnostic Assessment (GCDA), finance ministry said.

The focus of the mission will be to examine the severity of corruption vulnerabilities across six core state functions, the ministry said in a press statement issued here Sunday aimed at adding clarity to reports circulating in the media regarding the visit.

These include fiscal governance, central bank governance and operations, financial sector oversight, market regulation, rule of law, and AML-CFT. The mission will mainly engage with organizations like Finance Division, Federal Board of Revenue, State Bank of Pakistan, Auditor General of Pakistan, Securities & Exchange Commission of Pakistan, Election Commission of Pakistan and Ministry of Law & Justice.

The GCDA report will recommend actions for addressing corruption vulnerabilities and strengthen-

ing integrity & governance, which will assist the government in bringing about reforms for promoting transparency, strengthening institutional capacities and achieving inclusive & sustainable economic growth.

"The Government of Pakistan appreciates the technical support of IMF in this regard," the press release added. It said, the IMF has long provided advice and technical assistance that has helped to foster good governance, such as promoting public sector transparency and accountability.

Traditionally the IMF's main focus has been on encouraging countries to correct macroeconomic imbalances, reduce inflation, and undertake key trade, exchange, and other market reforms needed to improve efficiency and support sustained economic growth. While these remain its main focus in all its member countries, however the IMF has found that a much broader range of institutional reforms is needed if countries are to establish and maintain private sector confidence and thereby lay the basis for sustained growth.

According to the statement, IMF identified that

promoting good governance in all its aspects, including ensuring the rule of law, improving the efficiency and accountability of the public sector, and tackling corruption are essential elements of a framework within which economies can prosper.

In 1997, the IMF adopted a policy on how to address economic governance, embodied in the Guidance Note "The Role of the IMF in Governance Issues". To further strengthen the implementation of this policy, the IMF adopted in 2018 a new Framework for Enhanced Engagement on Governance (Governance Policy) that aims to promote more systematic, effective, candid, and evenhanded engagement with member countries regarding governance vulnerabilities-including corruption-that are critical to macroeconomic performance.

Under this policy and framework, IMF offers to undertake Governance and Corruption Diagnostic Assessment (GCDA) with member countries to analyze and recommend actions for addressing corruption vulnerabilities and strengthening integrity & governance in IMF member countries.

Jirga demands peace
F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: A Peace Pashoon Jirga was held in district Karak to address the worsening law and order situation. The jirga took place in Takhte Nasrati the other day and witnessed active participation from leaders and workers of various political parties, district administration and police. The jirga was convened by the locals, with elders running a campaign for several days to ensure its success.

Security forces kill 7 Khwarij

F.P. Report

RAWALPINDI: Security forces killed seven Khwarij in two separate engagements in KP. "On night 8-9 February 2025, security Forces conducted an intelligence-based operation in the general area Maddi, Dera Ismail Khan District on the reported presence of khwarij. During the conduct of the operation, own troops effectively engaged the khwarij location, as a result of which, three khwarij including Kharij Rehmat were sent to hell, while two khwarij got injured" said an ISPR news release.

Another intelligence-based operation was conducted in the general area of Mir Ali, N Waziristan. In the ensuing fire exchange, four Khwarij were effectively neutralised by the security forces, while three khwarij got injured. Sanitization operations are being conducted to eliminate any other Kharij found in the area, as the security forces of Pakistan are determined to wipe out the menace of terrorism from the country.

In letter to CJP, Zafar urges deferment of JCP meeting

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Senator Ali Zafar, member of Judicial Commission of Pakistan, has written a letter to Chief Justice Yahya Afridi requesting him to postpone the commission's meeting.

He said the session be deferred until the issue of seniority is settled in the Islamabad High Court. In the letter, he said due to the recent transfer and posting of the judges, the seniority list of the IHC has changed. These development, he opined, could have serious effects on the justice system.

It was added in the letter that this whole pattern appeared to be planned efforts to affect the pleas of Bushra Bibi and Imran Khan. Senator Zafar proposed that postponing the Judicial Commission meeting until the seniority issue is resolved would be appropriate. Alternatively, if the meeting is unavoidable, the recently transferred judges

should not be considered, he wrote.

A day earlier, four judges of the apex court have written a letter to the chief justice, demanding the postponement of the Judicial Commission meeting scheduled for February 10. They stated that the appointment of new judges should be halted until the 26th Constitutional Amendment case is decided.

Justice Mansoor Ali Shah, Justice Munib Akhtar, Justice Ayesha Malik, and Justice Athar Minallah authored the letter. In the letter, the judges urged that at the very least, appointments should be delayed until the constitutional bench decides on the request for a full court. They also stated that new judicial appointments should be put on hold until the seniority of Islamabad High Court judges is determined.

The letter highlighted that the constitutional

bench might call for a full court in the 26th Amendment case, which could create a dispute over which judges would constitute the full court. The judges pointed out that three judges were transferred to the Islamabad High Court, and according to the Constitution, they were required to take a fresh oath.

The letter argued that without taking the oath, the status of these judges remains questionable. Despite this, the seniority list of Islamabad High Court judges has already been altered. The judges warned that bringing in new judges under the current circumstances would create an impression of "court packing." They questioned why the judiciary was being put in this situation. The judges directly asked the chief justice whose agenda and interests were being served by placing the court in this situation.

Only Parliament or SC can repeal 26th amendment: Justice Mazhar

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Supreme Court Justice Muhammad Ali Mazhar has stated that the 26th amendment could only be repealed by a parliamentary decision or a Supreme Court ruling.

In a 20-page note issued in the bench powers case, Justice Mazhar agreed with the constitutional bench's decision. He emphasised that only a constitutional bench has the authority to review the constitutionality of laws, and a regular bench cannot interpret constitution-

al matters.

Justice Mazhar supported the withdrawal of previous orders issued by a two-member bench. He further stated that the 26th amendment remains part of the constitution, and its provisions are clear and transparent. "We cannot turn a blind eye to this amendment. Yes, it has been challenged, and notices have been issued to the parties. A decision on whether to refer the case to a full court will be made on merit," he wrote.

Justice Mazhar reiterated that until

the amendment is formally annulled, all legal matters must proceed under its framework. He also clarified that only a minimum of five-member constitutional bench has the authority for constitutional interpretation, not a regular bench. Regarding a tax-related case, he noted that all fundamental orders have been revoked, rendering subsequent proceedings ineffective. He further supported the constitutional bench's decision to withdraw orders previously issued by Justice Mansoor and Justice Aqeel Abbasi.



LAHORE (APP): Prime Minister's Youth Programme (PMYP) Chairman Rana Mashhood Ahmad Khan reaffirmed on Sunday the government's unwavering commitment to quality education, calling it a top priority.

Speaking at an annual student awards ceremony, hosted by a local private school here, he highlighted that under Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's leadership, Pakistan is progressing towards development and prosperity.

He reiterated that providing quality education remains the government's foremost priority, with revolutionary measures being implemented to equip students with essential tools for success. "The youth are our greatest asset. Together, we will fulfill the dreams of Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah and Dr. Allama Iqbal for Pakistan's development," he stated.

Praising Punjab's initiatives under Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif, Rana Mashhood lauded the focus on educational reforms, particularly enhancing Information Technology (IT) skills. He described the merit-based laptop distribution programme as a crucial step in empowering students with modern knowledge and digital access. The establishment of IT labs across Punjab, with investments worth billions, further underscored the provincial government's dedication to preparing students for a digital future.

"We are committed to ensuring that no child, whether in traditional, technical, or IT education, is left behind," he added.

He assured that every effort was being made to provide children, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, with education and employment opportunities. "Our goal is to create avenues for youth employment, ensuring prosperity for families and communities. We are working closely with private educational institutions to facilitate job creation," he added.

Reflecting on national progress, Rana Mashhood acknowledged the sacrifices made by Pakistan's elders and expressed confidence in the country's future.

"Our enemies have tried to weaken Pakistan, but we remain steadfast. This country was built to last, and we will transform it into an economic powerhouse," he declared.

Discussing economic recovery, he noted that a year ago, under the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), Pakistan was on the verge of economic collapse, facing fears of default. However, due to Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's leadership, the nation is now on the path to stability. "Inflation has dropped from 40pc to 4pc, the stock market has hit record highs, remittances have increased, and interest rates have fallen from 23pc to 11pc," he stated.

He highlighted growing foreign investments, with countries including Saudi Arabia, UAE, Qatar, China, and Russia committing billions of Dollars to Pakistan. "Under the PMYP, the government is providing easy loans to youth, and this year, 500,000 children will be sent abroad for employment," he announced. Additionally, a "Mina Bazaar" is set to be organised this month to create job opportunities for women. "With the collaboration of private institutions, we will ensure education reaches every child because where there is education, there is prosperity," he asserted.

Rana Mashhood condemned external attempts to destabilise Pakistan, stating that efforts to push the country into economic turmoil had failed. "The conspiracies to turn Pakistan into Sri Lanka and push it into bankruptcy have been thwarted. The journey of public service will continue," he affirmed.

The event included a student tableau performance, which was well received by attendees. At the conclusion, Rana Mashhood distributed awards to students who excelled in their exams.

The ceremony was attended by former MPA Mehr Ishtiaq Ahmad, Muhammad Owais, Zainul Abidin, Shehzad Ahmed, Advocate Khuram Rafiq Shah, Yameen Mughal, Amir Shah, Malik Zeeshan, and other political and social figures, along with students and teachers.

KARACHI (INP): Sindh Governor Kamran Khan Tessori has said that the Akhuwat Foundation and personalities like Dr. Amjad Saqib, are a ray of light in the darkness. No one has been able to do the work that Amjad Saqib was doing in 77 years. If wealthy people spend only 10 percent of their money on the needy, there will be no poor in the country.

Addressing a fundraising ceremony organized by Akhuwat Foundation at the Governor House, he said Akhuwat Foundation founder and chairman Dr. Amjad Saqib and Akhuwat Foundation Karachi president Danish Aman were also present in the occasion.

The Governor said that by providing Rs 300 billion, Dr. Amjad Saqib, has solved the problems of 3 crore people. However, the problems of 21 crore people are still unsolved. He said that despite the passage of 77 years for the purpose for which Pakistan was created, those problems have not been solved.

He said that behind every success there is a woman's hand, its practical form was seen in the form of providing the first loan of Rs 10,000 to a woman under the Akhuwat Foundation. The Sindh Governor said that in the past two and a half years, I have often heard that I am being removed. I enjoy hearing this.

Governor Kamran Tessori donated Rs 2 million to the Akhuwat Foundation on his behalf. Addressing the ceremony, Founder and Chairman of Akhuwat Foundation Dr. Muhammad Amjad said that the journey that started with Rs 10,000 has now reached Rs 3 trillion and 6 million families. 300,000 people have joined our journey. The loan repayment rate is 99 percent.

Akhuwat Foundation has 800 offices in 400 cities of the country and 8,000 workers are serving in them. Dr. Amjad said that there are only 2 branches of Akhuwat Foundation in Karachi. They want to have 100 offices here too. He said that students from all parts of the country are studying in the university established in Lahore and their number is 15 to 20 thousand, who are educated without any fee.

Sindh governor welcomes international poets to Karachi

KARACHI (PPI): Sindh Governor Kamran Khan Tessori has said that international Mushairas play a vital role in promoting literature globally, as poetry serves as a bridge between different languages, civilizations, and cultures.

According to a statement by the Governor House today, Mr Tessori said that poetry had always stood against oppression and in favor of love. Speaking at the 30th International Mushaira as the chief guest, the governor welcomed poets from around the world to Karachi and appreciated their outstanding poetry. He also commended the organizers for arranging this prestigious literary gathering.

The Sindh governor highlighted that Mushaira is an ancient tradition that spreads the message of love and unity. He asserted that it is not just about reciting poetry but about touching hearts and emotions.

Moreover, Mushairas effectively reflect social issues, making them an essential platform for intellectual discourse.

Tessori remarked that despite linguistic differences, the emotions expressed in this gathering have created a sense of unity. He stressed that the world today desperately needs peace and brotherhood, and international Mushairas serve as a powerful reminder to prioritize humanity. He concluded by reaffirming his commitment to keeping this literary tradition alive.

LAHORE (APP): The three-day Jashan-e-Punjabi Festival at Alhamra Arts Centre, The Mall, concluded on Sunday with a spectacular tribute to Punjab's vibrant traditions, music, dance, and art.

The festival drew thousands of locals and international visitors, all eager to experience the spirit of Punjab.

The festival grounds were transformed into a lively cultural hub, with colorful stalls displaying traditional Punjabi art and crafts across the lush-green lawns and halls of Alhamra. The pleasant winter sunshine added to the charm, creating a perfect setting for families, art enthusiasts, and cultural explorers. From folk music and energetic dance performances to thought-provoking discussions and hands-on work-

shops, the festival offered something for everyone, fostering a sense of joy, unity, and cultural pride.

At the closing ceremony, organisers highlighted the festival's role in promoting harmony and cultural appreciation. Alhamra Chairman Razi Ahmed described Punjab's culture as a treasure trove of music, dance, literature, and art, highlighting the importance of preserving the heritage for future generations. Alhamra Executive Director Syed Taqueer Haider Kazmi echoed the sentiments, stating that the festival embodies "a profound vision of cultural cohesion and collective spirit". He praised the Punjab government, organisers, and contributors for their dedication in making the event a success.

As the festival reached its grand

conclusion, attendees departed with cherished memories and a deeper appreciation for Punjab's rich traditions. The final day encapsulated the essence of celebration, as Alhamra's vibrant lawns became a hub of energy, camaraderie, and artistic expression. The rhythmic beats of the 'dhol' and the soulful melodies of Punjabi folk instruments created an enchanting atmosphere, while children's laughter filled the air.

The closing ceremony was a poignant moment of unity, weaving together heritage, artistry, and shared joy. More than just an event, the Jashan-e-Punjabi Festival was an experience that rekindled cultural pride, strengthened connections, and illuminated the enduring legacy of Punjab's traditions.

KARACHI (PPI): Welcoming the ban on daytime entry of dumper trucks in the megacity, Pasban Democratic Party (PDP) Chairman Altaf Shakoor said Sunday that one step is not enough as Karachi needs drastic reforms in its whole transport system.

According to a statement by PDP, Mr Shakoor highlighted more than 50 percent of vehicles in the megacity are motorcycles because people don't have enough commuting facilities available. He expressed concern that the government has been delaying the revival of the crucial surface rail-based system, Karachi Circular Railway (KCR) for decades for the reasons known to them.

He said without revival and expansion of KCR, the basic problems of the commuters could not be resolved. Mr Shakoor said almost 80 percent of drivers in the megacity, especially bikers, didn't have valid driving licences while traffic police were more interested in bribery.

He said: "Heavy traffic of dumpers and trucks are operated by drivers who mostly have no driving

us, and it is a joy to see them start their families," she stated. The initiative primarily aims to support underprivileged and marginalised communities, reinforcing the government's commitment to social welfare.

She said that caring for daughters and offering them support is a cherished tradition in Punjab. "This is both a cultural and social responsibility that we hold dear," she added.

The Punjab government remains dedicated to improving the lives of women and marginalised communities, empowering families, and ensuring every daughter has the opportunity to build a bright future.

ISLAMABAD (APP): Deputy Commissioner (DC) Islamabad, Irfan Nawaz Memon has chaired a high-level meeting for addressing the issue of overlapping professional taxes in the federal capital.

The session aimed to streamline tax collection processes and reduce the financial burden on citizens caused by redundant taxation.

The meeting, attended by the Director of Excise, the Director of the Metropolitan Corporation Islamabad (DMA), and the Deputy Director of Operations from the Islamabad Food Authority, focused on reviewing the current tax collection mechanisms.

The discussion centered on eliminating overlaps in tax collection by different departments, ensuring that

no professional is subjected to double taxation.

DC Islamabad, Irfan Memon, emphasized the need for clear policies to define which department is responsible for collecting specific taxes.

He directed all relevant authorities to enhance coordination to prevent overlapping tax demands. This move is expected to simplify the tax payment process for citizens and reduce unnecessary financial strain.

The meeting also reviewed the tax collection practices of the DMA, Excise Department, and Food Authority. Participants discussed the challenges faced by citizens due to overlapping taxes and explored solutions to streamline the system.

The DC instructed officials to ensure that no individual or business is

taxed twice for the same service or profession.

Irfan Memon highlighted that resolving the issue of overlapping taxes would significantly ease the financial burden on residents. He also stressed the importance of making tax and penalty payments more accessible and convenient for citizens.

The Islamabad administration is now working on finalizing a policy to clearly define tax collection responsibilities across departments. This initiative aims to create a more transparent and efficient tax system, ensuring fairness and reducing confusion for taxpayers.

By fostering better coordination among departments, the district administration aims to create a more citizen-friendly tax system in the federal capital.

LAHORE (APP): Deputy Commissioner Syed Musa Raza on Sunday chaired a comprehensive review meeting of the first Catch-Up Day of the 7-day National Immunization Drive (NID) to assess the campaign's progress and effectiveness.

On the first day of the Catch-Up Day, the objective was to administer polio drops to 174,740 children under the age of five. According to the Deputy Commissioner, a total of 75,130 children were successfully vaccinated, making significant progress toward achieving the target.

Out of 23 reported refusal cases, efforts were made to convince parents, and 2 children were successfully administered the polio vaccine after persuading their parents.

DC Syed Musa Raza emphasized that today marks the second and final Catch-Up Day of the polio campaign.

He assured that the campaign would continue with full intensity to ensure no child remains unvaccinated. "The goal is to vaccinate all eligible children against polio, and we are committed to ensuring the safety of our children and their health," he said.

Teams have been deployed to go door-to-door, ensuring that children who missed out on the initial vaccination rounds are caught up during the Catch-Up Day. These teams are working diligently to ensure no child is left behind in the fight against polio.

The DC expressed gratitude towards the commitment and cooperation of the relevant institutions

licenses and training of basic traffic rules. Many of them also use drugs habitually which causes more traffic accidents."

He said the Lyari Expressway was constructed so that the heavy port traffic is bypassed without its entry in the city but the heavy traffic is not allowed to ply on this expressway. He said it is necessary to use this expressway also for heavy traffic after taking the needed precautions. He said inner city roads are almost half occupied by vendors. This could be witnessed by traffic jams at Liaquatabad market, where vendors occupy 60 percent of both sides of the road.

He said: "On New M A Jinnah Road, car showroom owners park their cars on footpaths and for this purpose, the whole service road is converted at the government's expense into a wide pavement exclusively used for parking cars, while people walk on the main road."

Shakoor said there are dozens of other sites in the city where shopkeepers, vendors, tea stalls, and other big or small businesses freely occupy roads and footpaths but the government officials do not take

action against them due to the factor of bribery.

He said green spaces of the Superhighway are occupied illegally by bus transporters who are constructing illegal compounds for these bus stands. He said all this is happening under the nose of the government, which has opted to remain silent instead of taking action. He said such mismanagement is never tolerated in Lahore due to the effective administration of their chief minister Maryam Nawaz.

The PDP chairman demanded stern actions against unlicensed and untrained drivers, roadside encroachments, and unruly traffic. He said modern technology like surveillance cameras should be used to monitor encroachments on busy roads, especially in market areas.

Shakoor said that encroachments are never possible without the patronage of corrupt government officials. He asked the Sindh government to introduce drastic reforms in the transport system of Karachi to facilitate citizens and check growing fatal traffic accidents.

Chinese company interested to setup steel mills in KP

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The Chinese Investment Company has contacted the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government to purchase 120 MW cheap hydropower from Chakdara Swat Corridor, showing interest in the energy sector for establishment of steel mills in the province. Meanwhile, a delegation of Chinese investment company “China Century Steel Mills” had a special meeting with the Special Assistant to Chief Minister KP for Energy Engr. Tariq Sadozai in his office.

Speaking with the delegation, Tariq Sadozai has said that the energy sector

in the province is of great importance and the economy can be further stabilized by using the natural resources of energy with the investment of the private sector.

He further added that Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Transmission and Grid System Company (KPT&GSC), which was established for the first time in the history of the province to utilize the electricity transmission system in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in a better way, that will soon create a new history by utilizing the cheap electricity generated by completed projects of PEDO, which is no less than an honor for the province

and its people he hoped.

Moreover, the Adviser Power Tila Muhammad while giving a briefing said that KPT&GSC will start 3 mega projects for the improvement of electricity transmission system in the province and in this regard, a 40 km long transmission line will be laid from Kalam to Madyen this year, which will cost Rs. 8 billion and will be completed in a period of 18 months.

Similarly, in the second phase, an 80-kilometer-long transmission line will be laid from Madyen to Chakdara, which is estimated to cost Rs. 16 to 18 billion. This project will be completed in 48 months.

While in the third phase, a modern system of transmission of the cheap electricity generated by the current 171 MW completed and another 1000 MW ongoing projects of PEDO through a LOOP will also be started, he concluded.

On this occasion, the Chinese investment delegation expressed interest in investing in the proposed projects for the improvement of the electricity transmission system.

Special Assistant Tariq Sadozai has welcomed the Chinese investment and called it a positive step towards the development and prosperity of the province.



PESHAWAR: Commissioner Peshawar Division Riaz Khan Mehsood presiding over a meeting regarding construction work of Peshawar-Sadr Link Road.

KP to raise awareness on AI among students

PESHAWAR (APP): The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government has decided to create awareness about artificial intelligence (AI) among its students.

The Higher Education Department of KP has formed a four-member committee to develop an awareness plan, and an official notification has been issued in this regard.

Official sources informed on Sunday, the committee will formulate a plan to raise awareness about AI in both public and private universities and colleges.

The convener of the committee will be Professor Dr. Shafiq Ur Rehman, Advisor to the Quality Assurance Cell of the Higher Education Department.

Provincial Minister for Higher Education, Meena Khan Afridi, stated that AI is now being utilized in various fields worldwide, making it essential for students in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa to be aware of its significance.

He further emphasized that the committee must submit its recommendations and awareness plan within a week, after which an implementation strategy will be devised based on their suggestions.

Accountability process announced

PESHAWAR (INP): Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Khyber Pakhtunkhwa President Junaid Akbar has announced the initiation of an accountability system within the party following its first public gathering.

Junaid declared that party members' efforts will now be closely monitored, and those who contribute actively will be recognised, while those who fail to do so will be identified.

Junaid Akbar has directed the preparation of a detailed report on the participation of workers in the recent Swabi rally, instructing all district and tehsil presidents to submit their reports within three days.

People rejected PTI show, says Muqam

PESHAWAR (APP): Federal Minister Engr Amir Muqam here Saturday said that people have rejected the flopped show of the Pakistan Tahrir e Insaf at Swabi that has unraveled the PTI leadership.

In a statement here, Engr Amir Muqam claimed that PTI was not a political party and its extremist politics were fully exposed before the masses.

He said that sons of PTI Chairman was enjoying life at UK while children of the

poor people are being provoked to violence.

Engr Amir Muqam said that people knew that PTI has wasted 3.5 years in centre and 11 years in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and failed to deliver for masses.

He claimed that PTI wants to repeat May 9 like chaos that exposed its negative agenda. The Federal Minister said that elements involved in May 9 violence was enemy of Pakistan.

Engr Amir Muqam advised CM KP to focus on

the province rather wasting time, saying that even the PTI Govt's ministers spoke on corruption and poor governance in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

He said that we strongly believed in better service of people and development while PTI's agenda was to create instability in the country.

Engr Amir Muqam said that people of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa wanted development and stability and not chaos.

Election 2024: A year later, still shrouded in controversy

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The 2024 general election remains the most controversial in Pakistan's history, with unresolved issues even a year after its conclusion.

said Abdul Wasi, Ameer Jamaat-e-Islami Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Central.

In a statement issued from JI's provincial headquarters Peshawar, he criticized the Election Commission for its incompetence in resolving the ongoing debate over Forms 45 and 47.

According to Wasi, despite winning candidates on Form 45, many were declared defeated the following day in Form 47. He emphasized that Khyber

Pakhtunkhwa has been without representation in the Senate for the past year, raising significant concerns about the Election Commission's performance.

The failure of the Election Commission to deliver results in line with the public mandate, even a year after the election, continues to fuel widespread discussion, especially regarding the contentious forms. Wasi warned that calls for new elections and withdrawal from Form 45 would only serve to bolster the current government and effectively validate the alleged rigging of February 8, 2024.

JI has consistently demanded the formation of a judi-



cial commission to scrutinize the election results, particularly those based on Form 45, in order to restore public trust. Wasi highlighted that Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's continued lack of representation in the Upper House underscores the serious shortcomings of the Election Commission, a situation that remains a critical concern for the province.



PESHAWAR: Mayor Haji Zubair Ali presenting shield to a child during a ceremony.

Vehicles carrying relief goods departs for Parachinar

PESHAWAR (APP): A convoy of 120 vehicles carrying relief goods has been dispatched from Tehsil Thall to Kurram and Parachinar.

According to the district administration on Sunday, the relief supplies include food items and other essential commodities.

It stated that the convoy was sent after clearance from security forces. Security personnel and representatives from the district administration are accompanying the convoy, which departed from Thall Cantonment towards Parachinar.

Deputy Commissioner Gohar Zaman confirmed that the convoy, consisting of both small and large vehicles, includes food supplies, medicines, and daily essentials.

Meanwhile, District Police Officer (DPO) Muhammad Khalid assured that strict security arrangements have been made for the convoy, with security personnel deployed at various points along the route.

Business leader Syed Nijat mentioned that another convoy carrying food supplies has also departed from Hangu to Parachinar, comprising over 100 vehicles. These include trucks loaded with food, medicines, and daily essentials.

Official sources reported that today's convoy does not include fuel tankers or gas cylinder transport vehicles. A separate convoy for petroleum and gas supplies is expected to depart tomorrow.

the supervision of Rafique Momand, Director of the Social Welfare Department. The initiative aims to curb begging in Peshawar by identifying, rescuing and rehabilitating individuals engaged in street begging, particularly vulnerable

groups such as juveniles and women.

A significant portion of the rescued individuals were juveniles, with 20 males and 13 females.

The presence of a high number of minors engaged in begging highlights con-

cerns related to child exploitation and forced begging networks.

Special arrangements are being made for their rehabilitation, including reintegration into families or placement in government-run shelters.



PESHAWAR: Director Social Welfare Department Rafique Momand briefed by Manager Dar-ul-Kafalas on ongoing campaign of 'Beggar Free Peshawar' during raids at University Road.

MMS provided to pregnant, lactating women in of KP

PESHAWAR (APP): In a significant step to combat maternal malnutrition, the Health Department of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa launched an initiative to provide Multi Micronutrient Supplements (MMS) free of cost to pregnant and lactating women across 12 districts of the province.

The supplements, which contain 15 essential vitamins and minerals, including iron and folic acid, aim to reduce anaemia in pregnant women, lower maternal mortality rates, and improve birth outcomes.

Dr. Fazal Majeed, Director of Nutrition in KP, highlighted the importance of the initiative, stating, these supplements are proven to enhance maternal health and ensure healthier birth weights for new born.

Each beneficiary receives a bottle containing approximately 90 tablets,

sufficient for a three-month course. So far, 243,136 women have been reached under the program.

The MMS supplements, recognized by the World Health Organization (WHO) as an essential prenatal nutrient, have been generously provided by the Junaid Family Foundation (JFF), a US-based non-profit organization dedicated to empowering vulnerable populations, particularly women, adolescents, and children.

JFF has donated one million supplements to Pakistan to address nutritional deficiencies and promote healthier, more productive communities.

Dr. Majeed emphasized that micronutrient deficiencies are widespread among women of reproductive age in low- and middle-income countries, with pregnancy exacerbating these issues

and posing risks to both mothers and babies.

"Micronutrients, though required in small amounts, are critical for normal body function, growth, and development," he explained.

The program's success has prompted plans for expansion across the entire province, with UNICEF stepping in to support its continuation. After the first quarter, UNICEF will supply the supplements to ensure broader coverage.

The nutrition crisis in KP remains severe, particularly among children under five. Alarming, 68.5 percent suffer from vitamin A deficiency, 49 percent are anemic, and 45.4 percent lack sufficient zinc. Additionally, half of the province's children under five are stunted, and one in six is wasted, reflecting the urgent need for sustained interventions.

Beekeeping becomes a lucrative business in rural areas

PESHAWAR (APP): Fixing steel-nail in wooden bee-boxes under a bare tree on a bank of River Kabul, Hussain Khan — a progressive beekeeper — is making determined efforts to prepare it before an onset of spring season.

As the sun rays bath the house of 35-year-old beekeeper, Hussain Khan start his Alto Car to reach his farmhouse constructed at Pashtoon Ghari village in Nowshera district where he along with co-beekeepers began fixing steel-nail in order to prepare 500 bee-boxes to take advantage of blossom of bee-flora plants and flowers buds.

"Following the untimely death of my parents, life was a nightmare for me as my relatives were pressing for huge amount borrowed for treatment of my Abu and Ammi, forcing me to leave my education incomplete and joined the painstaking beekeeping business," said Hussain with sobbing eyes while talking to APP.

"Initially, I purchased 50 bee-boxes in 2020 and by the grace of Allah Almighty, it increased to 500 boxes within four years due to my hard work and

commitment to the job, enabling me to return all the borrowed amount as well as established a bee-keeping farm house here," he said.

Hussain said that beekeeping was a cost-efficient profession and any person making Rs 500,000 investment can earn upto Rs100,000 per month.

Employing two laborers, Hussain was planning to go to Punjab and Azad Kashmir where an abundance of bee-flora plants was planted under the Prime Minister's Green Pakistan Program.

He urged the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government of the bair and phulai honey increased to Saudi Arabia, UAE, Kuwait, Oman, Yeman, Iraq, Qatar, Libya, Afghanistan, Malaysia, USA, China, Singapore, Azerbaijan, Mangolia etc due it's better taste and quality and called for better marketing to increase honey exports," he said.

He urged an issuance of cards to beekeepers for identification while migrating from one district/ province to another to avoid times, and bees loss during check-post.

KP government urged to

Balochistan, AJK and Gilgit Baltistan, attracting millions of indigenous and exotic honey bees every year.

The rural areas of Chakwal, Mianwali, Gujar Khan, Attock, Sargodha, uska, Rawalpindi, Jehlum, Pathoki, in Punjab, Karak, Kohat, Swat, DI Khan, Chitral, Peshawar, Nowshera, Charsadda, Bannu, Hazara, Malakand, Turbela, Haripur in KP, Quetta, Ziarat, Naseerabad, Kalat in Balochistan and Thatta, Sujawal, Mirpur Khas and Hyderabad in Sindh are most suited for beekeeping business.

"Our exports especially of the bair and phulai honey increased to Saudi Arabia, UAE, Kuwait, Oman, Yeman, Iraq, Qatar, Libya, Afghanistan, Malaysia, USA, China, Singapore, Azerbaijan, Mangolia etc due it's better taste and quality and called for better marketing to increase honey exports," he said.

He urged an issuance of cards to beekeepers for identification while migrating from one district/ province to another to avoid times, and bees loss during check-post.

KP government urged to

impose a ban on cutting of berry and palosa trees and award strict punishment to timber mafia to save thousands of bees from extinction.

Ifthikhar Khalil, former Director Apiculture/NTFP said Pakistan was a home to four famous honey bees including Apis Cerana (small bee), Apis Dorsata (wild bee), Apis Flori (little bee) and exotic Apis Mellifera having over 450,000 colonies with capacity to produce 12,000 metric ton honey per year.

Mellifera produces 20 to 25 kg honey per colony (box) against six to eight kilogram by native bees two times in a year. Apis Dorsata has the ability to produce 40 to 45 kg honey from each hive mostly in tall trees and buildings, adding around 120,000 to 150,000 wild bees were busy in a one meter-length and half-meter wide comb making 120 degree angle.

Ifthikhar said, "two queens in the same colony cannot live together as the younger queen often kills the elder or the latter leaves the colony in fear of sharing food."

"Bees collect pollen and nectar within five-kilometer

radius of hives and majority prefer to get food while staying close to their combs," he said, adding one bee produces 1/12th of a teaspoon of honey in her life time and flapping their wings 11,000 times per minute beside using her tiny hairs to take pollen and stomach to carry 70mg nectar.

However, he said there is every possibility of losing an average of five to ten kg out of 1000 kilogram of honey production if preventive measures were not taken.

"Wild bees are under heightened danger due to deforestation and climate change weather patterns and if proper attention was not given to their preservation and management of natural forests their population would vanish in a few decades."

He stressed the need for capacity building of beekeepers to face any situation like rising of food and nurseries of bee-flora plants. Admitting climate change's effects on the population of Apis Flori and Apis Dorsata commonly known as "Swat bees", he said Apis mellifera was imported from Australia in 1977 owing to her speedy

growth and increased power of honey production.

Research project was launched at Agriculture Research Institute Tarnab, Peshawar, Faisalabad and National Agriculture Research Centre Islamabad in 1979 to analyze mellifera's properties.

Ifthikhar said Apis mellifera was mostly vulnerable to bacteria attacks such as American and European foul brood diseases, which often causes substantial losses to beekeepers if not treated.

He said about Rs 43 billion revenues could be generated and over 100,000 new jobs to be created after achieving the 70,000MT honey target, adding 10,009 exotic bees has a potential of producing 100 tons honey per year with financial benefits of Rs75 million.

Annually, 10 tons of honey can be produced from indigenous bees with annual economic benefits of Rs38 million and collectively Rs113 million income from the beekeeping sector.

Ifthikhar said KP southern districts are most suited for beekeeping business where about 5.2 million bair trees could be planted in Karak,

Kohat, Bannu, Lakki Marwat, Tank and DI Khan.

He said that 15000 beekeepers and farmers would be trained under National Apiculture Up-scaling Program for Income and Rural Employment (ASPIRE) in the country including Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Under ASPIRE, he said the training and capacity building of these beekeepers and their certification would be achieved through National Vocational and Technical Training Commission (NAVTTTC).

Dr Naeem Khattak, former Chairman, Economics Department said that beekeeping was an effective business to combat unemployment in Pakistan.

As per Economic Survey of Pakistan 2023-24 report, he said about 4.5 million individuals are unemployed in the country, with the youth aged 15-24 having the highest unemployment rate of 11.1 per cent and this social problem could be addressed by promoting beekeeping.

He stressed the need for a national apiculture policy, establishment of high standards for bee products and equipment besides promotion of beekeeping as a pro-

ductive business operation and important component of forests and agricultural ecosystem to compete at international level.

Introduction of a national bee breeding program would help meet local demands for good quality queens and efforts should be made to promote commercial beekeeping, apiculture products and services.

Musawar Khan, adviser to the Chief Minister KP for forests said that bees are the lifeline of Pakistan and preference was being given to bees-favorite species in spring and monsoon plantations to make KP a land of honey.

The capacity of beekeepers through extensive training by NTFP experts would be enhanced. He said thousands of bees' boxes have been distributed among flood affected beekeepers and farmers in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

He said a new type of honey "Margalla" was introduced, mostly useful for asthma and allergy patients while "Ber and Kalongi" honey was also brought in markets keeping in view of its numerous health benefits for consumers.



In brief

Shelter home inaugurated F.P. Report

JHANG: Provincial Minister for Social Welfare and Baitul Mal Suhail Shokat Butt, accompanied by Divisional Commissioner Maryam Khan, Secretary Social Welfare Javed Akhtar Marmod, and Deputy Commissioner Jhang Ali Akbar Bhinder, visited Darul Amaan. During his visit, the minister inaugurated a newly built shelter home, demonstrating the government's commitment to providing safe and supportive environments for women in need. The minister inspected the facilities at Darul Amaan, including residential quarters, food services, security arrangements, and cleanliness standards. He expressed appreciation for the institution's management and cleanliness, emphasizing the importance of providing a secure and supportive environment for the women residing there. The minister also directed the authorities to ensure the complete security of the women at Darul Amaan and to provide them with opportunities to become financially independent, enabling them to support their families and children.

One killed in Timergara F.P. Report

LOWER DIR: One Khanullah was killed when unknown person opened fire on him due to unknown reason at Shalkandai area in the jurisdiction of Munda police station here the other day. The incident spread fear among locals and had given rise to various suspicions in the area. In this regard, a meeting was held in the hujra of Haji Abdul Zahir, in which Tehsil Chairman Munda, Haji Inayatullah, along with various elders were present. Dost Muhammad Khan and the family members of the deceased Khanullah consoled each other and removed all doubts. The family of the deceased Khanullah admitted that they had no doubts about Dost Muhammad Khan and his family in the killing of Khanullah. The elders demanded that the killers should be arrested as soon as possible and brought to justice.

STVTA organizes sports festival F.P. Report

LARKANA: Various sports programs were organized in Larkana under the supervision of Regional Director STVTA, Mureed Hussain Kakrani. The program aimed to attract students to sexual and physical activities and to promote a healthy environment. In this program, students from various educational institutions, Government Vocational Training School Shahabad Mahota and Vocational Training School Larkana, participated in large numbers and took full part in the badminton race. During the competition, the enthusiasm and enthusiasm of the students was palpable, where each team was showing its best performance. On this occasion, Engineer Tariq Hussain Abro, Khalid Hussain Bugti, Sports Officer Mash Zubaida Ghazal Abro, Chairman IMC Arbab Ali Qadri and others participated in the sports program in large numbers. Speaking to the media, the distinguished guests said that Mureed Hussain Kakrani, who was appointed by the Regional Director STVTA, has proved to be a wonderful sports program in the history of Larkana, which has On the other hand, Mureed Hussain Kakrani said that sports activities are not only important for physical health but also improve the mental peace and self-control of the students.

State's institutions urged to work in their constitutional domain

F.P. Report

LOWER DIR: Jamaat-i-Islami former chief Siraj ul Haq has asked all state institutions to work in their domain according to constitutional laws. He was addressing the annual khatam e Bukhari Sharif function at a local seminary in Shatai Balambat as chief guest. The seminary head Maulana Dr Abu Lubaba, Maulana Inayatullah Islahi, Maulana Ihsanullah Khalis, JI district chief and former MNA Maulana Asadullah and others also spoke on the occasion.

A large number of seminary students, teachers, JI workers, area elders and prayer leaders attended the function. The graduated female students were awarded with certificates while the guests were given shields.

Siraj alleged that the public mandate on Feb 8, last year was stolen and in return the country further moved toward chaos and de-stability. He said that Pakistan lost one of its arms in 1971 when a public mandate was not accepted. The JI former chief said that all state institutions should work within their domain as per constitution. He said the public had lost trust in elections due to unnecessary involvement of the establishment in the process. He said that Punjab was handed over to PML-N, Sindh to PPP and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa to PTI under a preplanned arrangement in the Feb 8 general polls last year.

Appreciating the role of



religious seminars, the JI leader said that they played an important role in modifying the society and spreading the teachings of Islam. Mr Haq said that it was the right time for the whole nation to seek apology and give up the interest based economic system. He said that the constitution should be strictly followed by all stakeholders for progress and development. He asked women to come forward and play their active role in reforming society.

Meanwhile, the JI Khyber Pakhtunkhwa North chief Inayatullah Khan chaired the party's provincial shura meeting at Timergara. Addressing the meeting he demanded the government to take practical steps for maintenance of peace in the region. The JI leader criticized both the federal and provincial governments for their failure to deliver according to the people's wishes. He said the KP government had dropped development projects worth of Rs 42 billion in Malakand division.

Mufti Rashid said the non-Muslims across the globe had proved that they were united against the Muslims regarding the Palestine and Gaza situation. He said that religious leaders had been preaching Islam for the last 15 centuries. He lauded the struggle of the JUI-F chief Maulana Fazl ur Rehman and said that he represented the entire Muslim community in the field of politics.

2 more coal miners killed in Dara Adam Khel mine

F.P. Report

SHANGLA: Another coal mine mishap killed two laborers from Shangla, identified as Rahman Ali and Sarbali Khan, in Darra Adam Khel's Kohistan area. The deceased were residents of Dherai and Pauran areas of Shangla. Their bodies were transported to their native villages on Sunday and laid to rest.

The frequent accidents in coal mines have become a norm, claiming the lives of many laborers from Shangla. The district has been plagued by poverty and lack of employment opportunities, forcing many young men to seek work in hazardous coal

mines across the country.

The recent spate of accidents has raised questions about the safety measures in place and the government's response to the crisis. The local lawmakers, who were elected to represent the people of Shangla, have been criticized for their lack of action and concern for the welfare of their constituents.

Instead of taking concrete steps to address the issue, the lawmakers have been accused of making empty promises and announcements, only to forget about the problem once the media attention dies down. The people of Shangla are fed up with the lack of progress and

the continued neglect of their area.

The coal miners of Shangla are forced to risk their lives every day, working in hazardous conditions without proper safety equipment or compensation. The constant fear of accidents and the trauma of losing loved ones have taken a toll on the community. The recent accidents have claimed the lives of 12 laborers from Shangla, leaving behind grieving families and a community in shock. The people of Shangla are demanding action from the government and the lawmakers to address the issue and ensure the safety and well-being of the coal miners.

Joint protest held against PECA Amend



Shafi Ullah

MINGORA: A ceremony jointly organized by the Swat Press Club and The Awakening, a non-governmental organization focused on human rights, turned into a protest against the Prevention of Electronic Crimes (PECA) Amendment Act 2025. The event, held at the Swat Press Club, drew attention to concerns over the Act's implications on freedom of expression and human rights.

Irfan Hussain Babak, Director of The Awakening, and Niaz Ahmed Kan, President of the Swat Press Club, denounced the PECA Amendment Act 2025 as a blatant attempt to stifle

freedom of expression and basic human rights. They emphasized that freedom of expression is a fundamental right guaranteed by the Constitution of Pakistan, but the ruling class is trying to suppress it to conceal their failures.

Human rights lawyer Shaukat Saleem shed light on the constitutional history of freedom of expression, highlighting that the current PECA Act is being challenged by human rights and journalistic organizations for being in conflict with the constitution. Saleem noted that these organizations have approached higher courts to contest the Act.

The PECA Amendment Act 2025 has sparked wide-

spread criticism for its harsh penalties, including a three-year prison sentence and a fine of Rs. 2 million for broadcasting false news. SP Investigation Badshah Hazrat Khan, who participated in the ceremony, stressed that the state makes laws when necessary, but now it's essential to present facts and evidence to citizens and media representatives.

The ceremony culminated in a protest by journalists from the Swat Press Club, who raised banners and shouted slogans demanding the government withdraw the PECA Amendment Act 2025. This protest is part of a broader backlash against the Act, with many advocating for its review or repeal.

Mayor resolves 30 years old property dispute

F.P. Report

BANNU: Mayor Bannu Irfan Durrani and Safir Allah Khan of Ghoriwala, resolved a thirty-year-old property dispute between two families peacefully. The tribal elders embraced each other, on Sunday.

In Kot Beli area of Bannu, there was a property dispute between the families of Shah Faisal Khan,

Malik Noor Khan, Sulaiman Haider and the second party Dr. Saad and Dr. Tahir Saleem Khan for the past 30 years. Mayor Bannu Irfan Durrani, former Forest Department officer Safir Allah Khan, Bannu tribal leader Taimur Baz Khan, Director Khyber Medical University Fawad Abdullah, and Director CPEC Authority Malik Kashif Khan Kachhozai

worked day and night to bring about peace between the tribes. Meanwhile, the central spokesperson of Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam, Senator Hafiz Hamdullah, has said that the movement of Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam is a continuation of the Deoband scholars. JUI will thwart every move of the global establishment against religious schools.

QWP observes Hayat Sherpao's anniversary Sahibzada Afridi

KOHAT: Like other parts of the province, the 50th Death Anniversary of Shaheed Hayat Muhammad Khan Sherpao was also observed in Kohat. The ceremony was presided over by the Divisional Chairman Malik Hassam-ud-Din while Provincial Deputy Secretary General Qaumi Watan Party (QWP) Mahmood-ul-Islam Advocate was the Chief Guest. Party Workers and Watan Pal Students attended the anniversary in large number.

Mahmood-ul-Islam in his address, while highlighting the meritorious services of Shaheed Hayat Khan Sherpao for the Pakhtoons paid him glowing tributes. He said, after his martyrdom, Pakhtoons needs to have a brave and courageous leader like Hayat Sherpao, which is now available in the shape of Aftab Khan Sherpao and his son Sikandar Khan Sherpao.

Mahmood said, Sherpao family is capable to bring the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa out of the present critical situation and put it on the road to progress and prosperity. It is high time to strengthen the hands of the Sherpao family for the bright future of the province, he concluded.

Malik Hassam-ud-Din, District President QWP Kohat Pir Asif Shah, Shakeel Bangash, Arshad Khan Sherpao and Professor Muhammad Iqbal also addressed on the occasion and paid rich tributes to the services of Shaheed Hayat Muhammad Khan Sherpao.

Jirga resolves blood enmity F.P. Report

BUNER: The old enmity between the families of late Bakht Sher and late Muhammad Yusuf in Ghazikhanay village has turned into friendship due to the efforts of Jirga elders - Mian Syed Laiq Bacha, Shahjahan, Afsar Khan, Riaz Jan Shamsur Rahman Advocate, on Sunday.

It should be noted that the enmity between the parties started with the killing of one of the parties and then the killing of the other party over the cutting of fire wood from the common mountain.

In this regard, a big ceremony was held in the Ghazikhanay Bara Hujra Mosque, in which Jirga Mushran, dignitaries from all over the region and elders and youths of the village participated. The Jirga ensured by an oath to them that they will avoid making things worse in the future too.

On this occasion, Syed Barish from one party and Syed Rauf from the other party, have given a message to the Pakhtun nation through the media that for the sake of God, don't kill each other and don't create enmity because, young people are killed and the rest of the family gets stuck in the police station and courts proceedings because of enmity, and the family's business is damaged and the children's education is affected, and the housewives become mentally ill.

Trump statement flayed Syed Waliullah Shah

NOWSHERA: Former Provincial Minister and Chairperson of the social organization "Da Las Gul", Miraj Humayun Khan has strongly condemned the statement made by United States of America (USA) president Donald Trump regarding the relocation of Palestinians from Gaza, on Saturday.

In a press statement, issued by former minister termed Trump's statement as unjust and alarming, saying that it deserves strong condemnation from Muslims all over the world, regardless of their location. She emphasized that the land of Palestine belongs to the Palestinians and they cannot be displaced.

Former Minister Miraj Humayun further stated that Israel's obstruction of humanitarian aid is a violation of the ceasefire agreement. She appealed to the international community to break its silence on Israeli atrocities and ensure the implementation of the ceasefire agreement in Palestine, thereby granting the oppressed Palestinians their right to live.

Rabid dog bites 15 including 8 children

F.P. Report

WANA: A rabid dog went on a rampage, attacking nearly 15 individuals, including several children, and a number of animals, within just two hours. Shockingly, the dog is still at large, raising concerns among the local population.

According to local sources, the rabid dog's victims included approximately 11 children, who were among the most vulnerable to the potentially deadly disease. In total, 15 animals were also bitten. The injured children were immediately rushed to the District Hospital Wana, where initial first aid was administered. Minor injuries were treated on-site, and rabies vaccines were provided to those affected.

However, due to a significant shortage of rabies vaccines in the hospital, eight children, whose conditions were more severe, had to be referred to Dera Ismail Khan for further treatment. Hospital sources confirmed that while those children who were bitten on body parts other than the head were vaccinated at Wana's District Hospital, there was a critical shortage of vaccines for head bites. For those children who had been bitten on their heads, the hospital arranged for

ambulance transportation to Mufti Mehmoos Hospital in Dera Ismail Khan.

Local residents expressed their frustration and disappointment to the media, noting that despite Lower Waziristan being one of the larger districts, emergency services and essential vaccines were not readily available, especially for children in such a dangerous situation. The shortage of critical rabies vaccines has left the community shaken and concerned about the lack of preparedness for such emergencies.

In response to the incident, local political leaders have urgently called on the government to provide sufficient stocks of rabies vaccines at the District Hospital Wana. They stressed that such shortages are unacceptable and jeopardize the health and safety of the public, especially in a region already facing various challenges. The leaders have demanded swift action to ensure that the local hospitals are equipped with the necessary resources to deal with similar emergencies in the future.

PPP urges lawmakers to present performance: Pakistan People's Party (PPP) South Waziristan president, Amanullah Khan Wazir, has called on the

newly elected public representatives, MNA Zubair Khan Wazir and MPA Ajab Gul Wazir, to present a detailed annual performance report to the people, ensuring transparency and accountability.

Speaking to the media, he emphasized that citizens have the right to know about the work of their elected leaders, particularly regarding the resolution of public grievances and the status of development projects in the region. He pointed out that public representatives must demonstrate their commitment by keeping the people informed about the progress made on key issues.

Amanullah Khan further stressed that good governance is rooted in accountability, and elected officials should provide clear and transparent updates on their policies, initiatives, and future plans. He noted that public trust is essential for effective leadership, and by maintaining openness and responsiveness, representatives can take meaningful steps toward the development and prosperity of the region.

He urged the local leadership to actively engage with the public and address their concerns, ensuring that the mandate given to them is upheld with dedication and responsibility.

Three-day training workshop arranged

F.P. Report

KARAK: A three-day training workshop was held on Tehsil Development Plan. Officers of various institutions selected by the Planning and Deputy Commissioner of Karak Tehsil and male and female members of civil society participated in the workshop.

The workshop was organized in collaboration with CPDI and GIZ. On this occasion, CPDI Provincial Coordinator Ijaz Mahmood explained the aims and objectives of the workshop, while Master Trainer Khalfan Khattak said that public consultation at the grassroots level is very important in construction schemes for sustainable development. Projects initiated on the basis of public participation will reduce public problems and the desired results will be easily resolved.

Meanwhile, the respected Qazi family of Teri, who has been residing in Karachi for a long time, Qazi Waqasuddin, son of Qazi Riazuddin, who was in the mobile business in Karachi, was arrested by the police station in Saddar, which is in the district of Karachi South.

The police arrested him and his brother and due to the worst torture, Qazi Waqasuddin died, on which a complete strike was observed in the Saddar mobile market there and Terry's residences and the entire Khattak community protested vigorously and finally the Sindh Home Minister should take strict notice of this incident.

Moreover, on the instructions of District Police Officer Karak

Shahbaz Elahi, the security of police stations and outposts has been further tightened in the context of the current situation in Karak district. In this regard, several steps have been taken to ensure the efficiency of the police and the safety of the public.

Additional weapons and modern surveillance equipment have been provided for the security of police stations and outposts. Commandos who know how to use thermal vision weapons that are effective at night have been specially deployed so that any suspicious activity can be caught immediately. These thermal weapons are not only effective in the darkness of night, but they also have the ability to detect hidden threats in the area, which will be helpful in improving the law and order situation.

In addition, a new strategy has been formulated by DPO Shahbaz Elahi regarding the security of police stations and outposts at night. This strategy includes increasing the number of police personnel and providing large-range weapons to police stations and outposts so that any unexpected situation can be responded to immediately.

Modern technology is also being used to make the surveillance of police stations and outposts more effective, under which the surveillance system of police stations and outposts has also been made more effective. In addition, on the instructions of DPO Shahbaz Elahi, the training of police personnel is also being increased and POCIS personnel are also being trained in the use of modern

WSSCM to ensure hygienic environment F.P. Report

MARDAN: Chief Executive Officer of Water and Sanitation Services Company Mardan stated that provision of a clean and waste free environment to the citizens is the prime responsibility and all the available resources will be utilized for the improved service delivery. There is no compromise on absenteeism and negligence in work.

The company is in close coordination with the community for the establishment of a Model UC in Mardan and very soon it will become true. For the sustainability of the company steps have been taken on war footing and 25% of the revenue has been increased during the last quarter he stated.

He expressed these remarks during felicitation to the newly elected cabinet of Mardan press club, he congratulated the new President Riaz Khan Mayar, General Secretary Pervez Khan Afridi, Vice President Hidayat Ur Rehman Hoti, Finance Secretary Pervez Shaheen and Joint Secretary Amir Shoaib.



PABBI: Maulana Muhammad Qasim in a group photo with a student, Jawad Khan, after completion of Quran on Nazira. — F.P. photo



DAMASCUS: People stroll through the marketplace in the al-Hol detention camp in northeastern Syria's Hassakeh province.

Future looks dire for UN Palestinian refugee agency

BEIRUT (AP): The head of the UN agency for Palestinian refugees said that while an Israeli ban has not yet forced the agency to cease operations, it faces an "existential threat" in the long run.

"I have been very clear that despite all the obstacles and the pressure the agency is under, our objective is to stay and deliver until we are prevented to do so," Philippe Lazzarini, commissioner general of the UN Relief and Works Agency, also known as UNRWA, said in an interview with The Associated Press during a visit to Beirut. Israel last week formally banned UNRWA from operating on its territory. As a result, Lazzarini said, international staff have had to leave East Jerusalem because their visas expired, but in Gaza and the West Bank there has been no immediate impact on operations.

Even in East Jerusalem, he said, health care and other services provided by UNRWA "are continuing, though not necessarily at the same scope it used to be." UNRWA is also likely to face increased pressure from the United States under the new Trump administration.

US President Donald Trump in recent days proposed permanently resettling the approximately 2 million Palestinians in Gaza in neighboring Arab countries and suggested the United States taking long-term control of Gaza. Lazzarini called the proposal "totally unrealistic," adding, "We are talking about forced displacement. Forced displacement is a crime, an international crime. It's ethnic cleansing." Trump announced that Washington will not resume funding for UNRWA — which had already been halted since January 2024 when the Biden administration stopped it following accusations by Israel that UNRWA staffers in Gaza took part in the Oct. 7, 2023 Hamas-led attack on southern Israel that sparked the war in Gaza.

Israel had alleged that 19 out of UNRWA's approximately 13,000 staff in Gaza took part in the attack. UNRWA said it fired nine staffers after an internal UN investigation concluded that they could

have been involved, although the evidence was not authenticated and corroborated. While several other donor countries also suspended funding at the time, all but the US decided to resume funding.

Lazzarini called the loss of US support "a challenge," but said the agency is appealing to Gulf Arab countries and other donors to increase their contributions. He described his agency as the target of a "massive disinformation campaign" with a politically motivated objective of dismantling it. UNRWA's opponents believe the agency has prolonged the Israeli-Palestinian conflict by giving refugee status to the descendants of Palestinian refugees who fled or were forced from their homes in what is now Israel in 1948, thus maintaining for them, in theory, the right of return.

Lazzarini said those who think that UNRWA can simply be dissolved and its responsibilities handed over to other institutions are mistaken. UNRWA provides aid and services — including health and education — to some 2.5 million Palestinian refugees in Gaza and the occupied West Bank and east Jerusalem, as well as 3 million more in Syria, Jordan and Lebanon. Since the Israel-Hamas war began in October 2023, it has been the main lifeline for a population reliant on humanitarian aid in Gaza.

Lazzarini said that while replaceable by a functioning public institution, UNRWA provides essential public services that no other UN agency offers on such a scale. It has served as a "substitute in the absence of the state for the Palestinian refugees," he said. He argued that the only way to end the agency's mandate is as part of a political process resulting in a Palestinian state alongside Israel, so that "at the end of this process, the agency can hand over its services to an empowered Palestinian institution." The alternative, he said, is to "let the agency implode and abruptly end its activities, which would mean additional suffering for one of the most destitute populations in the region."

Eastern, Southern African leaders seek way out of Congo conflict

DAR ES SALAAM (Reuters): Leaders of Eastern and Southern African regional blocs met for an unprecedented joint summit to find a solution to a conflict in eastern Congo, where Rwandan-backed rebels' rapid advance since January has fanned fears of a wider war.

The M23 rebels last week captured Goma, the largest city in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo - the worst escalation of fighting in more than a decade that has left thousands dead. Despite announcing a unilateral ceasefire, they have continued to march south towards the city of Bukavu. Presidents, including

Rwanda's Paul Kagame, lined up on stage at the start of talks in Dar es Salaam. Congo's Felix Tshisekedi attended via video link.

"History will judge us harshly if we remain still and watch the situation worsen, day by day," Tanzania's President Samia Suluhu Hassan said at the opening ceremony. The first-ever summit of both Eastern and Southern African blocs points to the continents' deep concern over the crisis and the standoff between Congo and neighbouring Rwanda, which denies allegations it is fuelling the conflict with its own troops and weapons.

The two groupings have, so far, been broadly divided over the conflict, with the eastern bloc closer to Rwanda's call for dialogue and southern countries backing Congo and angry over the deaths of peacekeepers, experts and diplomats said. The leaders are seeking a breakthrough after two peace processes in Luanda and Nairobi stalled as tensions escalated.

The blocs' foreign ministers have recommended the summit consider calling for the cessation of hostilities, an unconditional ceasefire, and the reopening of Goma airport and other key routes for the delivery of urgently needed humanitarian aid.

Los Angeles Sheriff deputy found guilty

LOS ANGELES (AP): A Los Angeles County Sheriff's deputy who was recorded violently tackling and pepper-spraying a woman while she filmed a man being handcuffed was found guilty of excessive force, according to federal prosecutors.

Trevor James Kirk, 32, of Santa Clarita, went on trial after being charged with one felony count of deprivation of rights under color of law in the assault of the woman outside a supermarket in Lancaster in June 2023, the US Attorney's Office said. Kirk's lawyers did not immediately respond to an email from The Associated Press seeking comment.

Deputies went to the supermarket after receiving reports of robbers at the grocery store in Lancaster, 72 kilometers (45 miles) northeast of Los Angeles. The couple, whose names were not released, reportedly matched the descriptions of the robbers, the sheriff's department said. Body-cam video released by the sheriff's department shows the man sitting on a large rock on June 24, 2023, outside the store and holding a cake before deputies handcuff him as the woman stands a few feet away filming the encounter.

Kirk tried to grab her phone, but when the woman turned away, he threw her face-first to the ground, according to prosecutors. A bystander caught the arrest on cellphone footage. The woman's arrest followed several cases that have drawn scrutiny to the department amid allegations of excessive use of force by its deputies. The Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department said in a statement that Kirk has been relieved of duty without pay.

"These actions are completely contrary to the values and standards upheld by the Sheriff's Department. Law enforcement officers not only take an oath to uphold the law but are held to the highest standards of accountability and integrity. No deputy is above the law and any abuse of power which violates the public's trust will not be tolerated," Kirk faces a maximum sentence of 10 years in federal prison when he is sentenced on April 21.

Dozens of countries back ICC after Trump sanctions

LONDON (BBC): Dozens of countries have expressed "unwavering support" for the International Criminal Court (ICC) after US President Donald Trump imposed sanctions on its staff. A majority of member states, including the UK, Germany and France, said that the ICC was "a vital pillar of the international justice system".

Trump announced the sanctions after hosting Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu - the first foreign leader to visit him since returning to power. Last year, the ICC issued an arrest warrant for Netanyahu over alleged war crimes in Gaza - which Israel denies - as well as a Hamas commander. The US has condemned the court's "shameful moral equivalency" between Israel and Hamas.

The US and Israel do not recognise the authority of the ICC, the only global court with powers to prosecute individuals for genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes. It has also previously launched investigations into US citizens. The ICC counts 125 member states around the world, including the UK and many European nations. The UK, France and Germany were among the 79 signatories to a joint statement issued to condemn Trump's executive order. Australia, the Czech Republic, Hungary and Italy were among the absent.

Earlier, the ICC had called on its member states and global civil society to "stand united for justice and fundamental human rights." It pledged to continue "providing justice and hope to millions of innocent victims of atrocities across the world". The ICC last year issued arrest warrants for US-allied Israeli leaders, and a Hamas commander, over the war in Gaza.

ICC prosecutors have said there are "reasonable grounds" to suggest Netanyahu, his former defence minister Yoav Gallant, and Hamas's Mohammed Deif - who was killed last year - bear "criminal responsibility for alleged war crimes and crimes against humanity". But a White House memo circulated accused the ICC of creating a "shameful moral equivalency" between Hamas and Israel by issuing the warrants at the same time. Trump's order said the ICC's recent actions "set a dangerous precedent" which threatened to "infringe upon the sovereignty of the United States". It argued the ICC "undermines" the national security and foreign policy work of Washington and its allies.

The order also said the US and Israel "are thriving democracies with militaries that strictly adhere to the laws of war". The sanctions were announced while Netanyahu was on a visit to Washington. The list of affected individuals has not yet been announced, but the sanctions could target people who work in ICC investigations. Sanctions could include financial and visa restrictions placed on individuals and their families.

The court's technical and IT operations - including evidence gathering - could also be affected. Observers have voiced fears that victims of alleged atrocities may hesitate to testify. The court's inaugural chief prosecutor has told the BBC how the rest of the world responds will be most important. "It's a challenge for the all the state parties - for all Europe, UK, South Africa, Argentina, Brazil, Japan, New Zealand, Australia - are they going to let Mr Trump to become the global president?" Luis Moreno Ocampo told the BBC Newshour programme.

The UN has called for the measure

to be reversed, while European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said the ICC "must be able to freely pursue the fight against global impunity". But Israeli Foreign Minister Gideon Saar said he "strongly" commended Trump's executive order. He claimed the ICC's actions were "immoral and have no legal basis", accusing the court of not operating "in accordance with international law".

The US has repeatedly rejected any ICC jurisdiction over American officials or citizens, and has accused the court of placing constraints on Israel's right to self-defence, while ignoring Iran and anti-Israel groups. During his first term in office, Trump imposed sanctions on ICC officials who were investigating whether US forces had committed war crimes in Afghanistan. This included a travel ban and asset freezes against former chief prosecutor Fatou Bensouda.

Those sanctions were lifted by President Joe Biden's administration. But during his last weeks in office, Biden also criticised the ICC's warrant for Netanyahu, calling the move "outrageous" and saying there was no equivalence between Israel and Hamas. In response to efforts to what they described as attempts to challenge the ICC's authority, nine nations - including South Africa and Malaysia - launched the Hague Group last month in an effort to defend the court and its rulings. Trump's signing of his latest executive order follows his announcement of a plan for the US to "take over" Gaza, resettle its Palestinian population and turn the territory into the "Riviera of the Middle East". After Arab leaders and the UN condemned the idea, the US president restated it on his Truth Social social media platform.

Why is Trump punishing S Africa?

CAPE TOWN (AP): US President Donald Trump followed through on his promise to punish South Africa by signing an executive order stopping all aid to the country over what he called a human rights violation against a white minority group.

The Trump administration says a land expropriation law South Africa recently passed was "blatantly" discriminatory against its white Afrikaners, who are descendants of Dutch and other European colonials. The Trump administration said the South African government was allowing violent attacks against Afrikaner farming communities. It also accused South Africa of supporting "bad actors" in the world, including the militant Palestinian group Hamas, Russia and Iran.

Land distribution in South Africa has been a complicated and highly emotive issue with racial connotations for more than 30 years since the end of the apartheid system of white minority rule in 1994. It was thrust into the global spotlight after Trump and his South African-born adviser Elon Musk criticized the South African government's policies as anti-white, sometimes with false statements.

What is the law Trump is referring to? The new Expropriation Act gives the South African government scope to expropriate land from private parties, but only if it's in the public interest and under certain conditions. Trump referred to it last Sunday when he first announced his intention to stop funding to South Africa.

He said South Africa's government was doing "terrible things" and claimed land was being confiscated from "certain classes." That's not true, and even groups in South Africa who are challenging the law say no land has been confiscated. The South African government says private property rights are protected and Trump's description of the law includes misinformation and "distortions."

However, the law has prompted concern in South Africa, especially from groups representing parts of the white minority, who say it will target them and their land even though race is not mentioned in the law. The law is tied to the

legacy of the racist apartheid system, and colonialism before that, and is part of South Africa's efforts over decades to try and find a way to right historic wrongs.

Under apartheid, Black people had land taken away from them and were forced to live in designated areas for non-whites. Now, whites make up around 7% of South Africa's population of 62 million but own approximately 70% of the private farming land, and the government says that inequality needs to be addressed. Who are Afrikaners?

Afrikaners are a group of white South Africans descended mainly from Dutch settlers who arrived around 370 years ago. They speak Afrikaans, one of South Africa's 11 official languages, and make up many of South Africa's rural farming communities. Afrikaners were at the heart of the apartheid regime, and tensions between some Afrikaner groups and Black political parties have lingered after apartheid, although South Africa has largely been successful in reconciling its many racial groups and most Afrikaners consider themselves part of the new South Africa. Some examples of Afrikaners who gained international prominence include EFC fighter Dricus du Plessis, golfers Ernie Els and Louis Oosthuizen, and actor Charlize Theron.

Trump's executive order addresses serious human rights violations in South Africa, according to his administration, and says the South African government has allowed violent attacks on Afrikaner farmers and their families. Trump said the US will establish a plan to resettle white South African farmers and their families as refugees. How is Elon Musk involved?

The Tesla billionaire and Trump ally was born and raised in South Africa but left after high school in the late 1980s, when South Africa was still under the apartheid regime. He has for years criticized the current leadership in his homeland, accusing them of anti-white policies and ignoring or even encouraging a "genocide" with regards to the killings of some white farmers. Those killings are at the center of

claims by conservative commentators — and now amplified by Trump and Musk — that South Africa is allowing attacks on white farmers as a means to remove them.

The South African government has condemned the killings and says they are part of the country's desperately high violent crime rates across the board. Experts say there is no evidence of genocide and the killings make up a very small percentage of homicides. For example, a group that records farm attacks says 49 farmers or their families were killed in 2023, while there were more than 27,000 homicides in the country that year. Musk also accused South Africa this week of having "racist ownership laws," an apparent reference to his failure to get a license in the country for his Starlink satellite internet service because it doesn't meet affirmative action criteria. What does Trump's order do?

Trump's order stops hundreds of millions of dollars a year the US gives South Africa, most of it to help its HIV/AIDS response. The US gave South Africa around \$440 million last year and funds 17% of South Africa's HIV program through the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief. Parts of that funding had already been threatened by Trump's global aid freeze, but it will now all be stopped in a major blow to South Africa's health sector. South Africa has around 8 million people living with HIV — with 5.5 million of them receiving antiretroviral medication — and US funding is vital in supporting the largest national HIV/AIDS program in the world.

The executive order also said South Africa had taken an anti-American stance — even "led the charge" — on many issues, accusing it of supporting Hamas, Russia and Iran, and being too close to China's ruling Communist Party. South Africa has long been a supporter of Palestinians and a critic of Israel and has maintained close ties to Russia because of its help in fighting apartheid. Trump's order appears to require a significant shift in South Africa's foreign policy to allow the aid to start again.

‘We left pieces of our life behind’: Indigenous group flees drowning island

LONDON (BBC): "If the island sinks, I will sink with it," Delfino Davies says, his smile not fading for a second. There is silence, except for the swish of his broom across the floor of the small museum he runs documenting the life of his community in Panama, the Guna.

"Before, you could hear children shouting... music everywhere, neighbours arguing," he says, "but now all the sounds have gone". His community, living on the tiny low-lying island of Gardi Sugdub, is the first in Panama to be relocated because of climate change.

The government has said they face "imminent risk" from rising sea levels, which scientists say are likely to render the island uninhabitable by 2050. In June last year, most of the residents abandoned this cramped jumble of wooden and tin homes for rows of neat prefabricated houses on the mainland. The relocation has been praised by some as a model for other groups worldwide whose homes are under threat, but even so, it has divided the community.

"My father, my brother, my sisters-in-law and my friends are gone," says Delfino. "Sometimes the children whose families have stayed cry, wondering where their friends have gone,

he says. House after house is padlocked. About 1,000 people left, while about 100 stayed - some because there was not enough room in the new settlement. Others, like Delfino, are not fully convinced climate change is a threat, or simply did not want to leave. He says he wants to stay close to the ocean, where he can fish. "The people that lose their tradition lose their soul. The essence of our culture is on the islands," he adds.

The Guna have lived on Gardi Sugdub since the 19th Century, and even longer on other islands in this archipelago off Panama's northern coast. They fled from the mainland to escape Spanish conquistadors and, later, epidemics and conflict with other indigenous groups. They are known for their clothes called "molas", decorated with colourful designs. The Guna currently inhabit more than 40 other islands. Steve Paton, a scientist at the Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute in Panama, says it is "almost a certainty" that most, if not all, of the islands will be submerged before the end of the century.

As climate change causes the Earth to heat up, sea levels are rising as gla-

cers and ice sheets melt and seawater expands as it warms. Scientists warn that hundreds of millions of people living in coastal areas around the world could be at risk by the end of the century. On Gardi Sugdub, waves whipped up during the rainy season wash into homes, lapping below the hammocks where families sleep.

Mr Paton says, "it is very unlikely that the island will be habitable by 2050, based on current and projected rates of sea level rise". However, the first discussions about relocation began, more than a decade ago, because of population growth, not climate change. The island is just 400m long and 150m wide. Some residents see overcrowding as the more pressing problem. But others, like Magdalena Martínez, fear the rising sea:

"Every year, we saw the tides were higher," she says. "We couldn't cook on our stoves and it was always flooded... so we said 'we have to get out of here.'" Magdalena was among those who clambered into motor boats and wooden canoes last June, bound for new homes. "I brought just my clothes and some kitchen utensils," she says. "You feel like you are leaving pieces of your life on the island." The new

community, Isberyala, is - weather permitting - just 15 minutes by boat, followed by a five-minute drive, from Gardi Sugdub. But it feels like another world.

Identical white and yellow homes line tarmacked roads. Magdalena's eyes light up as she shows off the "little house" where she lives with her 14-year-old granddaughter Bianca and her dog. Each house has a small area of land behind it - a luxury not available on the island. "I want to plant yucca, tomatoes, bananas, mangoes and pineapples," she enthuses. "It is quite sad to leave a place you've been in for so long. You miss your friends, the streets where you lived, being so close to the sea," she says.

Isberyala was built with \$15m (£12m) from the Panamanian government and additional funding from the Inter-American Development Bank. In its new meeting house, which is roofed with branches and leaves in the traditional style, waits Tito López, the community's sayla - or leader. "My identity and my culture aren't going to change, it's just the houses that have changed," he says.

He is lying in a hammock, and explains that as long as the hammock keeps its place in Guna culture, "the

heart of the Guna people will be alive". When a Guna dies, they lie for a day in their hammock for family and friends to visit. It is then buried next to them. In the state-of-the-art new school, students aged 12 and 13 are rehearsing Guna music and dances. Boys in bright shirts play pan pipes, while girls wearing molas shake maracas.

The cramped school on the island has closed now, and students whose families stayed there travel each day to the new building with its computers, sports fields and library. Magdalena says conditions in Isberyala are better than on the island, where she says they had only four hours of electricity a day and had to fetch drinking water by boat from a river on the mainland. In Isberyala, the power supply is constant, but the water - pumped from wells nearby - is only switched on for a few hours a day. The system has at times broken down for days at a time.

Also, there is no healthcare yet. Another resident, Yanisela Vallarino, says one evening her young daughter was unwell and she had to arrange transport back to the island late at night to see a doctor. Panamanian authorities told the BBC that construction of a hospital in Isberyala

stalled a decade ago over lack of funding. But they said they hoped to revive the plan this year, and were assessing how to create space for remaining residents to move from the island. Yanisela is delighted that she is now able to attend evening classes in the new school, but she still returns to the island frequently.

"I'm not used to it yet. And I miss my house," she says. Communities around the world will be "inspired" by the way the residents of Gardi Sugdub have confronted their situation, says Erica Bower, a researcher on climate displacement at Human Rights Watch. "We need to learn from these early cases to understand what success even looks like," she says. As afternoon arrives, the school activities give way to the shouts and scuffles of football, basketball and volleyball.

"I prefer this place to the island because we have more space to play," says eight-year-old Jerson, before diving for a football. Magdalena sits with her granddaughter, teaching her to sew molas. "It's hard for her, but I know she's going to learn. Our unique ways can't be lost," says Magdalena. Asked what she misses about the island, she replies: "I wish we were all here."

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Shutting USAID and US

THE meaning of a decision is often best revealed by those it angers and those who applaud. That autocratic governments around the world have backed the Trump administration's move to shutter the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) speaks volumes about the significance of that decision. Fortunately, the uproar from the agency's many supporters has prompted the US government to reconsider. Elon Musk, head of the cost-cutting initiative that is examining every piece of the US government, says he is "feeding USAID into the wood chipper;" and President Donald Trump "agreed we should shut it down." Secretary of State Marco Rubio has suggested that USAID may continue, but under his control rather than as an independent agency.

Rescinding the closure is smart. It is impossible to overstate the value of USAID's work in boosting US power and influence in the world. USAID was established in 1961 by President John F. Kennedy to deliver health services, disaster relief and anti-poverty efforts. The logic behind its founding was simple: The world is safer when its poorest citizens have opportunities to live better lives and the countries that promote and make possible those dreams are viewed more positively. This is sometimes called "soft power." This thinking has been a pillar of Japanese foreign policy for the last 60 years. USAID is the world's largest single donor, disbursing \$72 billion in assistance in fiscal year 2023, and 42% of all humanitarian aid tracked by the United Nations in 2024. It has an extensive portfolio of programs and projects, from disease surveillance to war relief. According to one tally, it responded to 84 separate crises in 66 countries last year.

It cleans water and promotes democracy. Its officers have been deployed across the world, to war zones and peaceful nations. Its efforts have eased human suffering and extended lives, and has made in many cases the difference between life and death. In recent years, the agency has come under attack from conservative critics for supporting ideas and groups that oppose US interests. It has been charged with assisting radical Islamic and Palestinian groups, some of which backed or participated in the Oct. 7, 2023, terror attack against Israel. They also condemn programs that facilitate supposedly liberal or progressive values, such as diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives in Serbia and Ireland, among others.

USAID has also been attacked for funding efforts to promote democracy, human rights and good governance. These initiatives, which consumed a little over \$1.5 billion in 2023, support election monitoring groups, anti-corruption watchdogs, independent media outlets and human rights organizations, all of which infuriate the autocrats in their crosshairs. Sadly, there are some in the new administration who see those governments as allies and dismiss democracy promotion as well. Critics also argue that monies have just been wasted. They point to projects in Afghanistan that were never completed, efforts to fund tourism in Egypt and meals for al-Qaida-affiliated fighters in Syria. As the White House proclaimed, "Under President Trump, the waste, fraud and abuse ends now." Governments should aspire to efficiency, to cut waste and to ensure that funds spent advance the national interest. Secretary of State Rubio, who is now responsible for USAID, has called it "a completely unresponsive agency that is not aligned with American foreign policy." The Trump administration will, he added, ensure that "every dollar we are spending abroad is being spent on something that furthers our national interests."

Authoritarians around the world are rejoicing. Dmitri Medvedev, the former Russian president, called the decision a "smart move." Vyacheslav Volodin, chairman of the lower house of the Russian Duma, or parliament, called USAID a "criminal organization." Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban applauded the end of funding for "globalist" organizations. They are celebrating the hardship that their adversaries — independent media or nonprofit groups that promote democracy — will now face. The shuttering of USAID is part of a broader reassessment of foreign aid. Upon taking office, Trump signed an executive order that suspended all assistance so that the government could review programs. Rubio later sent a cable to all US missions abroad explaining that this could take at least three months. As the US pauses efforts to support the world's neediest populations, one of two things will happen. Either a need will go unfulfilled and they will experience greater suffering and deprivation or other nations will fill the gap. The government best positioned to exploit this opportunity is China. It has made support for the world's neediest citizens a pillar of its foreign policy. Estimates of its foreign aid range from \$5 billion to \$7.9 billion (in 2022), placing it somewhere between the 6th and 13th largest donor in the world. Other Western nations could step up but they are unlikely to do so as quickly as Beijing.

For Japan, the Trump decision to suspend aid is a blow. This country has long recognized the value of aid and development assistance as the stabilizing mechanism that it is. This expansive view of security reflects the restraints on military action that have long circumscribed Japanese foreign and security policy. It is a view that has aligned with that of regional governments. It has elevated Japan in their thinking and afforded this nation considerable status and prestige. Japan has provided support to 190 countries and regions. In 2022, the country's Official Development Assistance was third in the world, trailing the US and Germany. Yet the scale of the challenges and the growing need have made clear that success in this endeavor is only possible by working with other countries. As befits a security partnership worthy of the name, cooperation on foreign assistance has been a pillar of the Japan-US relationship. In their April 2024 summit, then-Prime Minister Fumio Kishida agreed with then-US President Joe Biden to set up a senior-level strategic dialogue to coordinate global diplomacy and development efforts, the capstone of years of cooperation. In August 2023, Tokyo agreed to work with Washington and Seoul to expand development policy coordination. Their declaration said they would cooperate to "accelerate the clean energy transition; mobilize financing for quality infrastructure and resilient supply chains, including through trilateral collaboration among our development finance institutions." This cooperation will be hard pressed to survive, for many reasons — the turmoil surrounding USAID is only one of them.

Even if USAID is resurrected, damage is being done. The US is again being exposed as an unreliable partner, one whose engagement is subject to political winds. The confusion that has surrounded the executive order has clouded the agency's future. It is likely to lose staff and partners even if it is resurrected. While every budget should be scrutinized for waste and inefficiencies, the many intangible benefits that USAID creates are hard to capture in crude balance sheets. That return on investment has been ignored by those who disagree with USAID projects. They are likely to learn quickly how much that is when they are forced to recoup their losses by other means.

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Courts may not be able to stop Trump

Stephen Collinson

THE new Trump presidency has arrived where it was always destined to land — in the courts. The White House suffered a pair of hitches Thursday in its drive to shred the US government using expansive and questionable executive power.

A federal judge in Massachusetts pushed a deadline for federal government employees to accept a deferred resignation offer until at least Monday. And two judges have now blocked, at least temporarily, Trump's bid to end birthright citizenship — a key tool in the new administration's new headline policy targeting undocumented migrants. And late on Thursday, two labor groups representing the US Agency for International Development (USAID) employees sued President Donald Trump over his attempt to shutter an agency that has helped save millions of lives and been a vital arm of US soft power. This came after sources told CNN that fewer than 300 of the agency's workforce of 10,000 are expected to keep their jobs.

These are far from the only cases filed to challenge Trump's presidential authority since he took office less than three weeks ago. The legal system is about to be clogged with multiple battles over his second presidency. But they are among the most significant early tests of the judiciary's capacity to constrain what many experts see as blatantly unconstitutional acts that have the capacity to fundamentally change the presidency and the political system. And they could also decide on the legality of the sweeping and opaque operation by Elon Musk and his team at the Department of Government Efficiency. "The courts, if they interpret the Constitution correctly, are going to stop Musk, are going to stop Trump," Massachusetts Democratic Sen. Ed Markey told CNN's Erin Burnett on Thursday.

"Article One is the Congress. Article Two is the president, Article Three is the judiciary. There is not an Article 3.5 where Elon Musk gets to do whatever he wants to do," Markey said. "They are trying to rewrite constitutional law in this country." Given Republican control of Congress, the confirmation of Trump ultra-loyalist Pamela Bondi as his

attorney general and the president's installation of members of his personal legal team at the top of the Justice Department, the independent court system may be the last bulwark against his instinct to wield expansive power.

Judge John Coughenour, who was appointed by Republican President Ronald Reagan, offered the most comprehensive summation of the stakes yet on Thursday in a hearing challenging Trump's attempt to cancel birthright citizenship. "It has become ever-more apparent that to our president, the rule of law is but an impediment to his policy goals. The rule of law is, according to him, something to navigate around or simply ignore, whether that be for political or personal gain," Coughenour said in Seattle. "In this courtroom and under my watch, the rule of law is a bright beacon which I intend to follow."

But the courts are unlikely to prove a fully satisfying answer to Trump's critics. Few of the cases that will arise may be as apparently unequivocal as the one on birthright citizenship. And while the administration would obviously prefer to prevail in as many cases as possible, even the act of waging legal battles will be seen by many Trump supporters as a show of strength. And administration officials also believe that, ultimately, large pieces of Trump's executive power project will win approval from the conservative majority on the Supreme Court, which he built during his first term. After all, the court has already shown itself to be sympathetic to his view of expanded presidential power, not least in its ruling that granted him substantial immunity for official acts, which arose from his now-shelved criminal election interference matter. Even if a substantial fraction of Trump's power tests end up being approved by the high court, he will considerably reshape the scope of the presidency. And in his second term, many of his executive orders appear far more carefully drafted than some of the hurried and legally imprecise actions of his early first term.

Some Republicans dismiss early court blows to Trump's agenda, arguing that the plaintiffs are mostly

picking favorable jurisdictions to file challenges. This is true, and it was a tactic also used by conservative groups that challenged Biden administration policies, notably on abortion. But in a way, the Trump administration is making a similar bet in confidently relying on conservative Supreme Court justices to approve even more presidential power. The paused deadline on federal employee resignations slowed, for now, the White House's attempt to obliterate large sections of the federal workforce and to dramatically trim the professional civil service.

Until the ruling, eligible federal workers had until 11:59 p.m. ET on Thursday to decide whether to take the offer, which, the administration says, would generally allow them to leave their jobs but be paid through the end of September. The lawsuit against Trump, Secretary of State Marco Rubio, who has been put in charge of USAID, and Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent asks the court to order the administration to reverse its decision to dissolve the agency.

"Not a single one of defendants' actions to dismantle USAID were taken pursuant to congressional authorization," the lawsuit said. "And pursuant to federal statute, Congress is the only entity that may lawfully dismantle the agency." The delay comes with huge questions over the resignation offer that are not just about its legality. Many workers are unsure whether the administration can be trusted with its promise to keep paying them if they leave their jobs. There is also uncertainty about whether the executive branch even has the legal authority to make the offer, since the workers' wages are part of money authorized by Congress, which under the Constitution, has the power of the purse.

An administration official told CNN Thursday that at least 65,000 employees have already accepted the package. That's a tiny percentage of the entire federal government workforce of at least 2 million people. The White House has said its target is for between 5% and 10% of employees to resign. The legal showdown on birthright citizenship may be an exception among Trump

cases in that it's not even certain the Supreme Court would take it up.

On Wednesday, US District Judge Deborah Boardman ruled that the executive order on the issue "conflicts with the plain language of the 14th Amendment, contradicts 125-year old binding Supreme Court precedent and runs counter to our nation's 250-year history of citizenship by birth." In the other case on birthright citizenship, Coughenour issued a nationwide preliminary injunction against Trump's order that expands the short-term block he previously imposed.

Chris Mattei, an attorney representing some of the agents, told CNN's Jake Tapper on Wednesday that his clients had simply been doing their duty and that it was chilling that they might now face retribution and could also be at risk of reprisals from January 6, 2021, rioters whom Trump pardoned and freed from jail. "Federal agents are used to being in danger. They are not used to being in danger from the actions of their own government," Mattei said. Three weeks in, the growing storm of lawsuits means some of this young administration's most extraordinary applications of unilateral presidential power could be reined in. But the litigation also conjures a scenario that no one wants to think about: what would happen if the administration refused to recognize court rulings — even one handed down by the Supreme Court?

This is a particularly acute matter because it's the Justice Department, which is now operating under Trump's firm hand, that's responsible for enforcing the law. The constitutional remedy for a president who breaks the law is impeachment, but Republicans have twice shown that they will not hold Trump to account in such trials, making moot this key check on power envisioned by the founders. "That is the doomsday scenario," Ryan Goodman, a former Defense Department special counsel and NYU law professor, told CNN's Burnett. "So far, they are complying with all the court orders, but what happens come the day that they do lose at the Supreme Court?" Goodman asked. "If they really want to push it, we are in a real constitutional crisis."

Trump's carrot-and-stick game

Mohsen Pakaein

IN a meeting with Netanyahu, Donald Trump announced that he was seeking to turn Gaza into the Rio of the Middle East and that "America will take control of the Gaza Strip." He also called on Jordan, Egypt, and other Arab countries to accept the Palestinians of Gaza and stressed that the residents of this coastal strip have no choice but to leave Gaza.

A look at these statements shows that, since the day Trump took office, he has been seemingly pursuing a carrot-and-stick policy to secure American interests. At first, he showed a harsh face by intimidating other parties, and after a few days, he announced that he had backed down from these issues and was seeking an agreement with the countries in question.

Also, he has taken several positions on the Gaza issue, all of which are contrary to international norms and regulations. These positions were so illogical that they were even criticized by the Democratic Party within the United States. Regarding the discussion of relocating the people of Gaza to Egypt or Jordan, this issue was also met with strong opposition from these countries from the very beginning. This plan was also met with opposition from the people of Gaza, who announced that 'we have resisted for years and there is no need for us to leave our country.'

However, one of the

points that was considered in these talks was a new discussion about the US announcing that if necessary, it would invade Gaza and build it and protect it for the Americans. In fact, this position adopted by Trump completely means opening up the country and violating the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Palestine.

These words are completely contrary to all international agreements and even resolutions that the Americans themselves previously signed. These statements by Trump were also criticized by the Democrats in the US, and several members of this party announced that Trump is again looking to invade other countries and such statements are contrary to his election promises. While Trump had said during the election that he would not incur new costs on the United States and would not attack other countries, now this threat, which means a possible US attack, is being used as a pretext to be criticized by the international community.

The opposition of the people of Gaza to this idea of ??Trump's, and the opposition of the people of Egypt and Jordan to this issue, is another kind of victory for the people of Gaza. In fact, this incident is a sign to Donald Trump that his extremism and global dictatorship will not succeed and the people of Gaza will stand up to America as well.

IRNA

America will never change

Hossein Jelveh

WHO expects the United States to change?! I have heard people say, or at least imply, that because it has been four years since he was last president, Donald Trump is a changed man. The 78-year-old presides over a government that uses the tentacles of its military across the world, including to assassinate foreign military officials, and that arm-twists other countries by using its economic and financial power. No US president will shy away from doing any of those things. Least of all Trump.

One can't expect US leaders to suddenly become righteous people and stop exploiting the power of the United States. One can't expect the US to stop being what it is. It is naïve and dangerous to think that any US president could have the interests of another nation in mind, or that they would refrain from doing what they could in the naked pursuit of their country's perceived interests, often to the detriment of other countries.

The United States is not a force for good, and it never will be. Countries pick and choose their friends and their adversaries. And they choose how to treat them. The Islamic Republic of Iran has chosen to treat America the way it has to be treated. Iran has resisted America. Where and when necessary, Iran has helped independent nations resist America. Iran has thwarted diplomatic, economic, political, and military plans of the United States. It has carried out strikes on US military

bases. It has shot down US drones. It has withstood the full power of the United States' economic and financial force. And it has negotiated with the United States. Iran sees America for what it is.

On Tuesday, January 28, Iran's Leader Ayatollah Khamenei emphasized that one shouldn't fall for the diplomatic niceties of the Americans. "Behind the diplomatic smiles," Ayatollah Khamenei said, "are their evil nature, enmities, and grudges."

Iran doesn't see America "as an opportunity" in the area of foreign policy. It sees the US as a "nuisance... that must be removed." That is to quote Vice-President for Strategic Affairs Javad Zarif, who by the way was the chief negotiator with the United States the last time around, when he negotiated an agreement that had its worst opponents say for years that it was "the worst" deal for them. That the United States is what it is and that it won't change doesn't mean that Iran shouldn't be able to potentially negotiate with it to advance its own interests. Iran is doing everything else in its power to neutralize American pressure; if diplomacy can also help do that, what should Iran shy away from doing that for? It will be one of many options to remove America's shadow from Iran's foreign policy.

And if the Iranian leadership decides the time is right to try diplomacy, no particular political minority in Iran should be allowed to scorn officials for that decision. Iran sees America for what it is, and does what is best for Iran.

Starmer, don't give seven Lefties Labour whip back

Tom Harris

WHEN reshuffles happen, MPs, whether they're already ministers or not, are known to sit by their phone or, in these days of mobile connectivity, regularly check to make sure they have a signal, lest the Prime Minister should call with news of a job or a promotion or a demotion or the sack. In these modern times that honoured tradition has been replaced, or at least augmented - at least in the Labour Party - by the anticipation of receiving a call informing them that they are to be readmitted back into the Labour fold. Or not, as the case may be.

For any MP in the position of the seven Labourites who were suspended from the party last year for voting against both the party whip and the two-child benefit cap, it is a matter of some moment. But the consequences for this Government and for Keir Starmer himself will depend on some astute

reading of the political tea leaves when it comes to the whipless seven. For the seven themselves, their future careers as Labour MPs are at stake.

The suspensions were initially made for a six-months period, but if their local constituency parties, during this suspension period, had initiated the process by which sitting MPs are reelected as candidates for the next general election, their names would not have been able to be considered. This is the real jeopardy of being suspended from the whip. You might enjoy, for a time, the adulation of the comrades in your local branch for sticking by your socialist principles, but even your fanbase won't have the option of placing a cross against your name when it comes to the choice of a Labour candidate in your constituency unless you have, by then, been welcomed back into the bosom of the party.

The problem for the Prime

Minister is that he raised expectations of a new era of internal party discipline, first by suspending his predecessors as party leader, Jeremy Corbyn, from the party on the grounds of anti-Semitism, and then, in Government, by authorising the suspension of these seven malcontents for voting against the party whip. Both actions were unprecedented.

It seemed that the Commons was no longer going to be used by "independent minded" Labour MPs to cock a snook at party discipline. Starmer, it appeared, meant business in a way that has eluded all his predecessors as party leader. But those six month sentences are now up. The MPs in question - John McDonnell, Richard Burgon, Ian Byrne, Rebecca Long-Bailey, Imran Hussain, Apsana Begum and Zarah Sultana - are even now waiting to hear formally about

their return to the Labour fold, even if they do not necessarily expect celebrations by their colleagues in the form of a party with balloons and cake.

But what, then? There will be no shortage of further difficult votes in the months and years ahead. As many Labour MPs - including serving cabinet ministers - have found, it's all very well to tell an audience of angry women who feel short-changed by the pensions system that Labour will ensure they are compensated - that's the easy part. It is far more difficult, and frequently necessary, to admit to those same audiences that your promises cannot be kept and that maybe - just maybe - they should never have been made in the first place. And when those votes arrive, whether on the Waspi women or the Middle East or on immigration or a hundred other difficult and unpopular topics that are the

bread and butter of government, what will those seven formerly whipless comrades do? How will they react to an order from the whips' office to disappoint this or that pressure group or party stakeholder with their vote?

In these days of unpredictable behaviour by an increasingly unhappy electorate, of course, the temptation of any rebel or potential rebel will be to assume that their personal magnetism and charisma was the main reason they were elected in the first place, and that they will cruise to victory the next time the polls open with or without the official approval of the Labour Party. And who's to say they will be wrong? Corbyn himself performed this feat last year in his Islington North constituency. Four other "pro-Gaza" MPs unseated official Labour candidates. And voters took a liking to at least five of those perennial, professional rebels in Reform UK.

But with due respect to the

seven currently without a whip, they are not Jeremy Corbyn, nor can they assume that their own electorates are as gullible as most Islingtonians. Consciously and deliberately losing the support of the party that put you into Parliament in the first place would be an act of grotesque folly for most, if not all, of them.

For Starmer, allowing them back into the fold would open him up to accusations of being soft on discipline, at exactly the time where he needs desperately to inject some iron into the souls and backbones of his parliamentary troops. Disposing of the seven for good, however, would indeed signal a new era of welcome discipline in the ranks. It would be a form of discipline that is already familiar to, and accepted by, almost every Labour councillor in the land. It's time the same regime was applied in our nation's most important political forum.

Youths’ disconnection from kin a cultural shift

Hu Xiaowu

THE rising trend of youths' disconnection from relatives' networks represents a profound transformation in Chinese society — one that is both a consequence of socioeconomic changes and evolving culture. In the past, kinship ties were essential to social life, especially in rural communities. But they are rapidly fading among urban youths today.

To understand this trend, we need to examine several key factors, including the changing fabric of Chinese society, the pervasive influence of the internet, the complexities of urban life and the rise of individual autonomy among the youth.

China's shift from an agrarian society to an industrialized, urbanized society is the first reason behind the youths' disconnection from relatives. Rural life was built around strong family networks, where families supported each other and social and economic security was tied to the clan or village. Kinship was not just an emotional bond but a practical necessity. In rural communities, people spent their lives maintaining these networks, with kinship influencing all aspects of life.

But after the launch of reform and opening-up in the late 1970s, migration became a defining feature of Chinese society. Millions of people have left their hometowns to work, study or settle in cities, gradually replacing the traditional rural ties with interest-based social networks in urban areas.

For the younger generations growing up in cities, social life has become more fragmented and individualistic, leading to disconnection from the family networks their parents maintained in rural areas.

A crucial factor in this cultural shift is the rise of the internet and its pervasive influence, especially on

the youth. The internet has fundamentally changed how people live, work, socialize and even unwind. For young people, particularly those born in the 2000s, the internet is not just a tool — it is their environment. They are "digital natives" whose every action, from work to leisure, is increasingly mediated by technology.

In this digital world, even leisure time is an extension of the internet. Gone are the days when young people visited relatives on holidays or weekends. Today, they are more likely to stay connected online than engage in face-to-face interactions with family. This detachment is both physical and psychological. The constant pull of social media, online gaming and virtual communities has redefined socializing for the new generation. "Family time" has been replaced by "screen time", weakening kinship bonds.

In this sense, the internet has become both a unifier and a divider. It connects youths with the world at large but also isolates them from the very family networks that once defined their social existence. The disconnection from family, especially among those whose time is consumed by online activity, is a direct outcome of this digital transformation. Kinship is no longer the central force in shaping identity. Now, the virtual world defines them.

As more and more youths migrate to cities and towns, they are no longer bound by the same family networks that their parents and grandparents painstakingly maintained. Instead, their relationships are defined by academic ties, professional networks and shared interests. In urban areas, relationships often revolve around common goals, such

as education, career or hobbies, rather than family.

For many young people, especially those from single-child families, in cities, extended family bonds no longer play a central role. Instead, peer relationships have become more important. The rise of "de-ruralization", especially among younger generations of rural migrants in cities, has further weakened traditional family bonds. As a result, kinship is no longer the bedrock of individual identity.

Perhaps the most important reason for this shift is the increasing autonomy and individualism of today's youths. With each generation, the gap between the values of parents and children, their worldviews and life choices has been widening. This disconnect often leads to conflicts, as youths assert their independence and work to fulfill their personal aspirations, rather than those imposed by tradition.

The tradition of parents exercising control over their children's lives — in terms of their career, relationship and personal decisions — is outdated. For many young people, this imposition feels like an infringement on their individuality, leading to tension and, in some cases, the severing of familial ties.

While this generational disconnect may appear as a consequence of modernization, it has deep social and emotional impacts. Many parents feel a sense of loss as their children distance themselves from the family and relatives. Some see it as a betrayal of traditional values, while others worry their children would feel isolated in the future without the support of relatives.

On the other hand, many youths feel burdened by family expecta-

tions, and seek "independence" to protect their emotional well-being. The challenge facing Chinese society is how to balance these competing needs, and how to maintain family bonds while allowing youths the space they need to assert their individuality.

To rebuild the extended family ties among today's youths, we need to highlight the value of kinship. In today's world of individualism and nuclear families, anxiety and loneliness are common. This makes it necessary to fall back on the family for emotional support and stability. The same social platforms that have "alienated" the youths from family networks can play a crucial role in promoting family values and encouraging youths to reconnect with their roots. At the same time, both parents and children should adapt to the realities of modern life.

Also, youths must recognize the intrinsic value of family ties. While the digital world offers convenience and instant gratification, it cannot replace the emotional support and deep connections that kinship provides. Since the emotional bonds formed through kinship cannot be replaced by digital connection, youths must not be misled by the fleeting charm of online relationships.

In a rapidly changing society, where urbanization, digitalization and individualism are reshaping the social fabric, it is more important than ever to preserve and nurture the family as a source of support, warmth and continuity. Only by reconnecting with our roots — while seizing the opportunities offered by the modern world — can we ensure the family remains a cornerstone of Chinese society.

The China Daily

Trump has put America’s allies in an impossible position

Rob Picheta

FOR two weeks, America's friends held their tongues. Since his inauguration President Donald Trump had enjoyed a steady stream of warm words — and very little criticism — from leaders in Europe and the Anglosphere who, privately, might bristle at the noise and bombast he brings to the White House.

But that accord was never bound to last, and it shattered this week after Trump unleashed perhaps his most provocative foreign policy idea yet: taking Gaza under American control, relocating its Palestinian population, and redeveloping the enclave into the “Riviera of the Middle East.” The suggestion seemed to shred in an instant decades of Western policy-making, darting away from a “two-state solution” model that had been long-established, if glaringly elusive in terms of progress.

Nations rushed to reject it. America's allies in the region reacted with disbelief and concern about the impact the call would have on live diplomatic efforts, particularly the ongoing ceasefire and hostage negotiations between Israel and Hamas. Palestinians have expressed dismay at the prospect of leaving their homeland. In Europe, where the United States usually enjoys less complicated relationships, leaders varied in tone but were clear in their stance: They do not support this.

Still, Trump has left America's partners in a difficult spot. Criticizing the US is a last resort for many leaders — doing it so early in a presidential term is fraught with downsides. “My read is that they’re all gobsmacked. They didn’t see it coming,” Jon B. Alterman said of America's allies. Alterman, a former US State Department official, is now the director of the Middle East Program at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, a Washington-based think tank.

There are wider, more diffuse reverberations too. Trump's history of haphazard geopolitical interventions has already threatened to ideologically isolate the United States, bit by bit, among its global allies. His remarks on Gaza — whether they represent an idea, a plan, or something in-between — may accelerate that process. “This administration has not only an instinct but an appetite to be disruptive,” Alterman said. He predicted “a much deeper soul-searching in Europe, about how it wants to engage with a United States that is much more self-absorbed, and much less committed to supporting a multilateral system.”

Most Western nations are cautious of the unpredictability Trump brings to the White House, but they were more prepared for his second election win than his first. They expected a test like this. And their responses to Trump's Gaza plan highlighted how they might more broadly tackle Trump 2.0. The United Nations was robust, its secretary-general warning Trump against “ethnic cleansing.” France said the proposal would constitute “a serious violation of international law.” (The forced removal of a population is prohibited by the Geneva Convention.) Spain's foreign minister told radio station RNE that “Gazans’ land is Gaza.” In Western Europe, only Dutch far-right figurehead Geert Wilders broke ranks to endorse the plan. “Let Palestinians move to Jordan. Gaza-problem solved!” he wrote on X.

German President Walter Steinmeier said the suggestion was “unacceptable,” and the country's foreign minister, Annalena Baerbock, said it would “lead to new suffering and new hatred.” “As a career diplomat, my job was always to explain the interests of the US government in the best light possible. President Trump made that a tougher job,” Eric Nelson, Trump's former ambassador to Bosnia and later the associate director of the German-American Marshall European Center for Security Studies in Munich, told CNN. “It was very hard to anticipate what he was going to do next.”

“In Germany, the government reaction is as expected: they’re very dis-

missive,” he noted. An upcoming federal election has increased the incentive for the beleaguered German government to condemn Trump, who is widely unpopular in the country and across Western Europe. It is a dynamic Trump's team will be relaxed about. “They’re not going to expect Western capitals to break out in a chorus of ‘me too, sign us up!’,” said Nathan Sales, Trump's former Coordinator for Counterterrorism. “We don’t have to agree with our friends 100% of the time.”

Besides, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz and his government have little incentive to hold back: they likely won’t be in power next month to clear up the mess. But criticizing the US president is not easy for

urgency among America's allies to come up with something better. “He enjoys keeping people in reactive mode,” Nelson said.

“We’ve seen this play from President Trump many times before ... this is the art of the deal,” Sales added. “Most Western allies of the US are stuck in a rut when it comes to thinking about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict... in the first term, the Trump administration recognized that that path was a dead end.” But if unlocking an intractable diplomatic stalemate was the plan, it comes with risks that America's allies will not welcome. “Sometimes when you unfreeze things, you can unleash forces that are much more negative than you can even begin to contemplate,” Alterman said.

He predicted “a much deeper soul-searching in Europe, about how it wants to engage with a United States that is much more self-absorbed, and much less committed to supporting a multi-lateral system.” Most Western nations are cautious of the unpredictability Trump brings to the White House, but they were more prepared for his second election win than his first. They expected a test like this. And their responses to Trump’s Gaza plan highlighted how they might more broadly tackle Trump 2.0. The United Nations was robust, its secretary-general warning Trump against “ethnic cleansing.” France said the proposal would constitute “a serious violation of international law.”

everyone. Take Britain. America's steadfast ally is desperate for a productive relationship with Trump, and early signs indicate that a charm offensive from Prime Minister Keir Starmer is paying off. Trump said this week that Starmer had been “very nice,” and hinted the United Kingdom could avoid the tariffs he has threatened for the European Union. That is a monumental carrot for a British leader looking everywhere for a kickstart to economic growth.

Yet those bridges are built on sand. London is acutely aware that an ill-judged remark could upend months of work to appease Trump. At the same time, Starmer knows the pitfalls of appearing subservient to an American president; it's exactly what he once launched barbs at Conservative prime ministers for. That conundrum forces some delicate wordcraft. “On the issue of Gaza, Donald Trump is right,” Starmer's Foreign Secretary David Lammy told reporters in Ukraine this week, reciting the part of his answer intended for an audience of one. “Looking at those scenes, Palestinians who have been horrendously displaced over so many months of war, it is clear that Gaza is lying in rubble.” The rest was meant for everyone else: “We have always been clear in our view that we must see two states and we must see Palestinians able to live and prosper in their homelands in Gaza.”

A Labour MP told CNN he and his colleagues were “aghast” by Trump's suggestion. But he said there were too many factors — including a live ceasefire and a key trade relationship — to warrant criticizing the president publicly. The MP said he had “a lot of sympathy with (Starmer)” as he tries to (keep) the relationship as positive as possible. “Hard-balling allies is certainly an odd foreign policy approach,” the lawmaker added of Trump. “Will he do it with enemies?”

As with most of Trump's more provocative comments, his Gaza proposal was simultaneously derided and analyzed at home and abroad for hints of strategy. Those familiar with his thinking suggested that tossing out an unpalatable benchmark could — whether by design or not — create an

Among them is an American isolation on global issues that would create a vacuum of international leadership. “A number of countries are going to feel that they need a different relationship with Russia and China,” Alterman warned. “Partly so that they don’t rely on the United States, (and) partly because they don’t see the moral benefits of having a close relationship with the United States.” That danger is heightened in the context of Trump's moves to sanction, exit or criticize international agencies, and to dismantle the US Agency for International Development (USAID).

“People are confusing USAID with a charity,” Nelson said. “Americans are among the most charitable people in the world. But making strategic investments is an important way for us to support our friends and expand our influence.” This won’t be the last geopolitical rupture between Trump and Europe. Many are already eyeing possible negotiations to end Russia's war in Ukraine with interest; Trump has previously suggested ceding Ukrainian land to Moscow, and officials in NATO countries have long feared he may go public with a proposed arrangement that leaves Kyiv and European capitals scrambling.

They will seek to diffuse those fears next week, when several members of Trump's inner circle — including Secretary of State Marco Rubio, Vice President JD Vance and Ukraine-Russia envoy Keith Kellogg — are expected to travel to the Munich Security Conference in Germany. “I would hope that the administration would pursue a more balanced and calculated approach to Ukraine,” Nelson said. “One hopes that Trump would be very much relying on expert advice” on that conflict, he added.

On more issues than one, Trump's global honeymoon appears to be over. And if Western countries needed a reminder of the tumult he can inject into global affairs, they have it. “The Biden administration tried very hard to be reliable and predictable” on the world stage, Alterman said. “The Trump administration has exactly the opposite instinct.”

CNN

Trump vaccinating West against woke mind virus

Camilla Tominey

WITH his fake tan, bleached hair and unsubstantiated claims about immigrants in Springfield, Ohio, “eating cats and dogs”, it’s understandable why some regard President Trump as a figure of ridicule. Yet is there anything more laughable than the so-called leader of the free world having to declare publicly that there are only two sexes?

I wasn’t alone in cheering on the Commander-in-Chief as he signed an executive order banning transgender athletes from all women’s sports in the US, surrounded by girls in sports gear. Women’s rights activists including J’K Rowling joined the chorus of approval as Trump declared: “My administration will not stand by and watch men beat and batter female athletes.” Think Trump is mad? I’ll tell you what’s even more bonkers — the Left having a complete apoplexy when the septuagenarian was caught on tape suggesting women could be “grabbed” by their intimate parts while actively campaigning for rapists in dresses to access women’s prisons.

Even more insane than Trump? Treating teenage anxieties with puberty blockers and mastectomies; referring to breastfeeding mothers as “chest-feeders”; “de-gendering” life and language for a tiny proportion of the population. Like him or loathe him, what Trump has achieved in his first three weeks back in the White House has revealed the abject ridiculousness of the status quo in spectacular fashion.

His critics call him a “fascist” and warn that Trump 2.0 risks turning America into an autocracy, using the

levers of power for his own personal and political gain. They scaremonger about the threat he poses to “liberal democracy” suggesting that his leadership risks undermining the rule of law, human rights, transparency and accountability. Yet what they appear to overlook is that the West has been trapped in a self-imposed dictatorship where for years none of these principles have been honoured by the Left-leaning global elite.

Until Trump publicly clarified the biological truths the vast majority of us have believed in for centuries, we had been forced to accept the lie that men can be women and women can be men. Not only was this deceit rammed down our throats with no consultation whatsoever, we were also then silenced and, in some cases, cancelled. Similarly, we had discriminatory — and sometimes straightforwardly racist — “diversity, equality and inclusion” policies foisted upon us, again without being given a say.

Such was the extent of the thought policing that those questioning critical race theory and the notion that all white people are somehow “privileged” were silenced with false accusations of bigotry. That’s what autocracy really looks like, folks. You’ll be familiar with it because you’ve been forced to suck it up for more than a decade. I’m not suggesting that Trump is a bastion of the truth — or indeed anything approaching a moral arbiter. But it is surely wrong to suggest that everything he has been doing since returning to the Oval Office is solely for his own benefit.

Female athletes have gained from the transgender sports ban. Women

have gained from the protection of single sex spaces; law-abiding citizens have gained from the deportation of foreign criminals; legal immigrants have gained from the crack-down on illegal immigrants; anyone in favour of freedom of speech has gained from the ban on federal censorship; those in fuel poverty have gained from the review of energy production; even Democrat-supporting Californians have gained from the demand for more water to combat wildfires. Genuinely, who doesn’t gain from improving government efficiency, except those squandering other people’s hard-earned cash? Who loses? Divisive extremists who have imposed their minority views on the rest of us by accusing anyone who expresses dissent as prejudiced, in a bid to disguise their own inherent intolerance of others. Good riddance to those nutbags.

Debates will rage about Trump pulling out of the Paris Agreement and the World Health Organisation but at least we now have a test case for railing against the consensus rather than a continuation of the majority’s myopic, minion approach to membership of such initiatives. Trump’s modus operandi appears to be: if it’s broke, fix it, mindful perhaps of Einstein’s definition of insanity as “doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results”.

By comparison, Keir Starmer is the anti-Einstein. The Theory of Keiritivity appears to be, if it isn’t broken, then break it: the £187billion Chagos Islands giveaway, the assault on well performing academies, the

winter fuel allowance theft, the business-bashing Budget, the cosying up to the beleaguered EU, the workers rights for workers who already have enough rights. Which resembles more of a basketcase right now, Britain or America? There arguably couldn’t be a better example of the failure of the liberal consensus than in the Middle East — where Gaza and its people have been trapped in the brutal hands of Hamas.

The jury may well be out on whether Trump’s Make Gaza Great Again plan is madness or a masterstroke — but at least he’s moving the dial on a problem that Clinton, Obama and Biden did absolutely nothing to solve. What’s madder than nominating Trump for a Nobel Peace Prize for the Abraham Accords? Awarding one to Barack Obama, seemingly just for being elected.

Trump has certainly given the Israelis, the Jordanians, the Egyptians, the Saudi Arabians and the Iraqis more food for thought than your average G20 hot-air fest. The oil-rich Arab states have now been forced into asking themselves if they want Trump to benefit from Dubaiifying Gaza, or whether they should finally take the lead. As with the tariff war earlier in the week, it’s all a negotiation. To quote Trump’s 1987 best-seller The Art of the Deal: “My style of deal-making is quite simple and straightforward. I aim very high, and then I just keep pushing and pushing and pushing to get what I’m after.” Maddening though it may be to Trump’s detractors, he’s finally freed the West from the folly of groupthink.

The Telegraph

How Japan sparked Trump’s 40-year love affair with tariffs

Nada Tawfik

WHEN Donald Trump's fortunes took a downturn in the 90s and he needed to raise cash fast, he sailed his 282ft (85m) superyacht, the Trump Princess, to Asia hoping he could attract Japan's wealthy. It wasn't the first time the businessman had sought out Japanese buyers or lenders for his projects.

In the cut-throat world of New York real estate, Trump had a front-row seat from his Fifth Avenue skyscraper of Tokyo's buying spree in the 80s of iconic US brands and properties, including Rockefeller Center. It was then that his worldview on trade and America's relations with its allies was formed, and his fixation on tariffs, a tax on imports, began.

"He had a tremendous resentment for Japan," says Barbara Res, a former executive vice-president at the Trump Organization. He watched with jealousy as Japanese businessmen were viewed as geniuses, she says. He felt America wasn't getting enough in return for assisting its ally Japan with military defence. Trump often complained that he had difficulties doing deals with large groups of Japanese businessmen.

"I'm tired of watching other countries ripping off the United States." That Trump quote could've been pulled from 2016, but it's actually from the late 80s when he made an appearance on CNN's Larry King Live, around the time he first floated his name as a potential presidential candidate. Fresh from sharing his business philosophy in his 1987 book, The Art of the Deal, Trump went on a tirade against America's

trade policies in national interviews.

In an animated interview with Oprah Winfrey before a live studio audience on The Oprah Show, he said he would handle foreign policy differently by making the country's allies "pay their fair share". He added that there wasn't free trade when Japan was "dumping" products into America's market but making it "impossible to do business" there. Jennifer Miller, an associate professor of history at Dartmouth College, said others shared his concerns about the economy at the time.

Japan provided competition for US manufacturing, particularly in consumer electronics and cars. As US factories were shuttering and new Japanese brands entered the market, pundits were talking about Japan surpassing the US as the world's leading economy. "Trump is sort of symbolic of a lot of people who were kind of questioning American leadership in the American-led international order, and whether it actually served the United States," Prof Miller says.

Before his Oprah appearance, Trump had spent almost \$100,000 to release an "open letter" in full-page ads in three major US newspapers. The headline read: "There's nothing wrong with America's Foreign Defense Policy that a little backbone can't cure." In it, he said Japan and other nations had been taking advantage of the US for decades. He claimed "the Japanese, unimpeded by the huge costs of defending themselves (as long as the United States will do it for free), have built a strong

and vibrant economy with unprecedented surpluses".

Trump believed the obvious solution was to "tax" these wealthy nations. "The world is laughing at America's politicians as we protect ships we don't own, carrying oil we don't need, destined for allies who won't help," he wrote.

The ad served as a potent introduction to Trump's foreign policy vision, according to Prof Miller. One built on the zero-sum belief that allies are freeloaders and that the liberal internationalist approach which had dominated since World War II was weak and foolish in a competitive world. The solution, he argued, was a more aggressive, protectionist trade policy. "I think that's one reason he likes tariffs so much, is they fit not only with his transactional ideology but his sense of himself, which is very deeply rooted as this successful dealmaker," she said. "And the fact that tariffs can be threatened; they can be dangled over another country."

Clyde Prestowitz headed negotiations with Japan during the Reagan administration as counselor to the secretary of commerce. A longtime critic of free-trade policies, he said nobody who was intellectually serious was affiliated with Trump or his simplistic approach at the time. He argues that the president hasn't offered a real solution to the problems he's raised. "Tariffs are kind of a showy thing that you can say, look what I did, I banged those guys... so you know, you can be a tough guy. Whether or not they are effective in

any way is really open to discussion."

Mr Prestowitz believes the real problem then and now is that the US doesn't have a strategic manufacturing policy, despite complaining about unfair trade. Of course, fears of Japan's rise calmed over time and now it's an ally. Instead it's China that is the US's fiercest corporate competitor. This week Trump welcomed Japan's prime minister into the Oval Office as one of his first foreign visitors. But Donald Trump's governing philosophy is still the same as when he was a young real estate developer. He still believes just as strongly in tariffs as a tool to pressure other countries to open their markets and reduce trade deficits.

He says the president wants to galvanise domestic industry, in particular high-tech manufacturing. The administration, he explains, feels they can encourage more corporations to come to the US using tariffs, combined with deregulation, cheaper energy and lower corporate taxes, if enacted by Congress. "I think that President Trump understands something which is very important, being a businessman and being transactional, and that is free trade is great in theory but in the real world you need to have fair trade and that's a level playing field." He is betting Donald Trump is right. Few Republicans have publicly opposed the president as he demands loyalty to his agenda. Still, some who have remained silent understand that their constituents could be impacted by rising prices, and are hoping they can convince Trump not to follow through with his beloved tariffs.

BBC



Governor Kundi invites investors to explore business opportunities in KP province

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Faisal Karim Kundi on Sunday extended a warm invitation to investors and businessmen, urging them to explore and establish ventures in the province.

Governor Kundi highlighted the untapped potential of KP's diverse sectors, emphasizing commitment to creating a conducive environment for business growth and economic development.

He said that the call aims to boost investment, generate employment, and enhance the province's

overall economic standing.

In his address at the annual event of a private medical IT company, Governor Faisal Karim Kundi emphasized the significant role of youth in the future of Pakistan.

He said, "Our youth are the future of our country. Pakistani youth, through their hard work and abilities, are second to none in the world. We have great expectations from them."

Governor Kundi also extended an invitation to BellMedEx, a private medical IT company, to open its offices in Khyber

Pakhtunkhwa.

He stressed, "We wish to provide employment opportunities for the youth of our province. I encourage you to establish your offices in the southern districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. We will fully support your efforts."

Highlighting the province's welcoming environment for investors, Kundi assured, "The doors of the Governor's House are always open to investors, and we are committed to promoting investment in the province."

He further added, "The

people of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa are known for their hospitality and open hearts. The Governor's office will warmly welcome all investors looking to contribute to the development of the province."

Governor Kundi also praised BellMedEx for offering excellent employment opportunities to young Pakistanis.

He emphasized that, in order to transform Pakistan into a developed nation, it is essential to equip the youth with quality and modern education and training.



RIYADH: Minister of State for Information Technology and Telecommunications Shaza Fatima Khawaja addressing Pak-Saudi Forum.

SNGPL Task Force conduct raid in Bannu

F.P. Report

LAHORE: The Sui Northern Gas Pipelines Limited (SNGPL) Task Force, in collaboration with the regional team, conducted a raid at Kot Adil, District Bannu, to dismantle illegal gas connections. During the operation, the team came under gunfire; however, no casualties were reported. An FIR has been lodged against those involved in gas theft.

It is important to highlight that this is not the first instance of violence against SNGPL teams in Bannu. Similar incidents previously occurred in Zakarkhel and Sukkari during operations against illegal underground gas connections. These unauthorized connections and direct gas usage contribute to a significant loss of 38.17% under SMS Bannu.

Despite these challenges, the SNGPL Task Force in Bannu remains committed to eliminating gas theft. In the fiscal year 2024-25, the team has submitted 121 FIR applications to various police stations in District Bannu. As a result, 59 FIRs have been registered against offenders, while 65 applications are still under process.

PIAF hails govt pledge to reduce power tariff

F.P. Report

LAHORE: As the Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has made a pledge of reducing electricity tariff further for domestic and industrial consumers through power sector reforms the Pakistan Industrial and Traders Associations Front (PIAF) on Sunday hailed the commitment of the government to cut the cost of production.

PIAF Chairman Faheem Rehman Saigol, in a joint statement along with senior vice chairman Nasrullah Mughal and vice chairman Tahir Manzoor Chaudhary said that low-cost environment-friendly electricity should be provided to the industry.

Faheem Saigol pointed out that revisiting agreements with the Independent Power Producers led to savings for the national exchequer and reduced the price of electricity for consumers.

He said the reduction in deficits of power distribution companies (Discos) due to a campaign against electricity theft was made possible because of the hard work of the Ministry of Power and supporting institutions.

Nasrullah Mughal said it was a good sign that the ministry and the relevant departments were cooperating to rectify defects of the last seven decades.

He said that bringing down losses for Discos by speeding up the campaign against electricity theft is the right decision.

Tahir Manzoor Chaudhary pointed out that the performance of Discos improved after the appointment of board members with good reputations from the private sector.

More members of good reputation from the private sector should be appointed to the boards of the remaining Discos, he said, adding that the reduction in distribution losses resulted from reforms.

He continued that the tariffs for domestic and industrial consumers would be further reduced.

The meeting was also briefed on targets to improve power sector performance in the next three years.

It was said that the receipts of the Discos reached 93.26 per cent by December 2024 due to the reforms and the campaign against electricity theft.

PIAF leadership said that government's external financing needs will remain significant in the coming year, despite progress in rebuilding its foreign exchange reserves.

The government needs to repay over \$22 billion in external debt in the fiscal year 2025, including nearly \$13 billion in bilateral deposits.

Securing sufficient external financing remains a challenge, considering large maturities and lenders' existing exposures.

Last month, the country

agreed on a \$1 billion loan with two Middle Eastern banks at a 6-7% interest rate.

Pakistan's central bank chief earlier said the country aims to raise up to \$4 billion from Middle Eastern commercial banks by the next fiscal year.

To address its external financing needs from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and other multilateral and bilateral lenders, Fitch said Pakistan needs to continue implementing structural reforms, including those related to fiscal consolidation and improving its business environment.

Pakistan is undergoing reforms under a \$7 billion IMF program, which is up for its first review later this month. The program aims to help Pakistan address deep-rooted economic issues such as its large fiscal and current account deficits.

"Deteriorating external liquidity, for example linked to delays in IMF reviews, could lead to negative action.

Still, Fitch noted that Pakistan has made progress in rebuilding its foreign exchange reserves, outperforming targets set by the IMF. A Labor Department report showed job growth slowed more than expected in January.

Fitch also said that Pakistan's economic activity is now benefiting from stability and falling interest rates, expecting "real value added to expand by 3.0% in FY25.

Pakistan's finance minister, Muhammad Aurangzeb, expressed hopes for an upgrade in the country's credit rating, currently at CCC+ by Fitch and Caa2 by Moody's, both considered "junk" territory.

Pakistan's first-ever governance reforms report released

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Mishaal Pakistan, the Country Partner Institute of the World Economic Forum's New Economic and Societies Platform, has officially launched the first-ever Pakistan Reforms Report 2025.

This groundbreaking report is a first-of-its-kind initiative documenting over 120 key reforms undertaken by the Shabbaz Sharif Government since assuming office in March 2024.

Covering a comprehensive assessment period from January 2024 to the end of January 2025, the report provides an unprecedented, data-driven analysis of the government's policy and governance transformations.

For the first time in Pakistan, a comprehensive effort has been made to systematically document the government's reform agenda.

Over the past 11 months, more than 120+ reforms have been imple-

mented across multiple sectors, shaping the country's governance, economic policies, legal frameworks, and institutional efficiencies.

This initiative is crucial in providing an accurate and transparent account of policy transformations, allowing stakeholders—including policymakers, businesses, and international institutions—to engage with and evaluate Pakistan's evolving governance landscape.

By bridging the information gap, the Pakistan Reforms Report 2025 ensures that reforms are acknowledged and analysed and serve as a foundation for future governance advancements.

Unlike most international reports that capture data only from January to May every year, the Pakistan Reforms Report 2025 offers a full-year assessment, presenting a more accurate and holistic picture of governance, accountability, and inclusivity reforms.

Speaking at the launch

of the Pakistan Reforms Report 2025, Amir Jahangir, Chief Executive Officer of Mishaal Pakistan, the Country Partner Institute of the World Economic Forum, highlighted the significance of the report and said, "The Pakistan Reforms Report 2025 is an unprecedented initiative aimed at bridging the knowledge gap in governance reforms. While international assessments often focus on fragmented data, this report presents a full-spectrum analysis of how Pakistan has transformed under the Shabbaz Sharif administration." He further said, "By documenting reforms in a structured and accessible manner, we empower policymakers, businesses, and global institutions with the knowledge needed to engage with Pakistan's evolving governance landscape."

The Pakistan Reforms Report 2025 is an essential resource for policymakers, investors, academics, and development organiza-

tions seeking to understand Pakistan's evolving governance framework. Through extensive research, data collection, and stakeholder engagement, the report provides a structured, transparent, and comprehensive overview of the government's performance in key areas.

Mishaal Pakistan is an award-winning business intelligence, public policy, and strategic communications institution. As the Country Partner Institute of the World Economic Forum (WEF), Mishaal Pakistan contributes to several global competitiveness indices, including the Global Competitiveness Report, Global Growth Index, Global Gender Gap Index, Global Travel and Tourism Development Report, and the Network Readiness Index.

The organization has been at the forefront of media development, governance innovation, and digital transformation in Pakistan.

Averting economic default: A key achievement of Shehbaz's govt wins widespread admiration in KP

PESHAWAR (AP): In a significant shift following the 2024 General Election, the Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif-led coalition government has garnered widespread admiration for its decisive role in averting Pakistan's potential financial collapse.

The government's strategic and financial moves, including securing vital agreements with the IMF and diplomatic support, have proven crucial in stabilizing the country's economy during a time of the acute financial crisis in early months of 2022.

"At the time of Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's government assuming office in April 2022, Pakistan was on the verge of defaulting on its international debt obligations, with foreign reserves dwindling to critically low levels besides current accounts deficit was mounting," said Professor Dr Zilakat Malik, former Chairman, Economics Department at University of Peshawar while talking to APP.

He said the country was desperate for immediate financial relief and long-term economic stability at that time. Through a combi-

nation of tough fiscal policies and strategic international diplomacy, he said the government has been able to put the country's economy back on track, reducing the current account deficit and restoring international confidence.

He reiterated that if the Shehbaz Sharif government had not made tough fiscal decisions at that time, the likely default would have had disastrous effects on the nation's credit rating, leading to runaway inflation, mass unemployment, and social unrest.

Under the leadership of Shehbaz Sharif, key economic indicators have shown significant improvement. The government's efforts have led to an increase in exports, which reached about \$30.64 billion from \$27.72 billion, along with a record inflow of remittances from overseas Pakistanis.

The other notable initiatives included the launch of the Uran Pakistan mega project for economic sustainability and youth empowerment, implementation of universal health coverage, and the inauguration of the new Gwadar air-

port.

The government's fiscal reforms have also led to significant positive outcomes for economic recovery, with Pakistan saving Rs238 billion after suspending the costly agreement with Independent Power Producers (IPPs). Moreover, the improvement in the country's credit rating was also considered major achievement.

Addressing Pakistan's longstanding energy shortfall, the government has converted about 27,000 electric tube wells to solar energy, which is expected to enhance agricultural production while reducing power consumption.

"The reduction of inflation to record lows, coupled with the stock exchange reaching new heights and the increase of BISP stipends to Rs13,500, have directly benefited millions of Pakistanis," said Dr. Zilakat Malik.

Former Ambassador Manzoorul Haq said that the pivotal moment in averting Pakistan's economic default came with the government's focused diplomatic efforts and strengthened its bilateral relations with friendly

countries.

He said the Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif led successful diplomatic outcomes and negotiations with the International Monetary Fund (IMF), securing a vital loan package that included foreign exchange reserves helped to stabilize the currency and restored confidence of international monetary institutions.

The government also engaged with regional partners such as Saudi Arabia, China, and the UAE, securing essential financial relief to support infrastructure development, poverty alleviation, industrial and infrastructure development besides job creation.

In addition to securing the much needed financial aid, he said the government has successfully implemented vital tax reforms and rationalized subsidies, focusing on increasing revenue collection and cutting non-essential public sector expenditures.

These measures have helped stabilize the national economy and bridge urban-rural gaps, while efforts to curb smuggling and improve the business climate have positioned the country for speedy growth.

PML-N KP Information Secretary Ikhtair Wali emphasized the importance of these reforms, ensuring that the country does not face such a precarious economic situation again.

He accused the PTI Government's poor fiscal policies that put the country's at the verge of economic default.

"The measures we have taken are not just for short-term stabilization but also for long-term sustainable growth that was praised by international monetary institutions," he stated.

Former Ambassador Manzoorul Haq praised the Shehbaz Sharif government's foreign policy achievements, particularly the successful organization of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) conference in Islamabad.

He also highlighted the strong stance the Prime Minister took at the United Nations General Assembly on the Kashmir dispute, restoring international confidence in Pakistan.

Several prominent figures, including retired information officer Misal Khan, senior economist Sumbal Riaz, and property dealer Nasir Khan, have

also lauded the government's 11 months performance, which they say has raised the country's stature on the global stage.

Despite the remaining economic challenges, such as inflation, unemployment, and debt burden, experts believe the government's swift action has provided the country with a crucial window of opportunity for economic recovery vital for jobs creation and ensure daily use items to people at reasonable rate.

With foreign reserves stabilized and fiscal policies starting to bear fruits, Pakistan is now in a better position to attract much-needed international investment.

Experts remain optimistic about the future of Pakistani economy, pointing to the government's successful prevention of imminent economic default as a testament to the nation's resilience and hope for sustainable growth.

The road ahead may still be fraught with challenges, but Pakistan's quick recovery from a near-collapse represents a critical turning point and provides a solid foundation for the nation's long-term prosperity.

Saleem Memon for resolving traders issues at earliest

HYDERABAD (APP): President of Hyderabad Chamber of Small Traders & Small Industry (HCSTSI), Muhammad Saleem Memon, has taken immediate notice of the complaints received from traders of Latifabad and announced steps for resolving the issue.

The traders have raised concerns that representatives of both the Hyderabad Municipal Corporation (HMC) and the Town Municipal Corporation (TMC) are collecting taxes separately for the same signboards, causing severe inconvenience to the business community.

To address this matter, the Chamber has formally written to the Additional Chief Secretary of Local Government Sindh, Syed Khalid Hyder Shah, requesting immediate intervention. The letter urges the authorities to prevent both departments from harassing traders until the court delivers its verdict on the ongoing legal proceedings. Furthermore, the Chamber has demanded that, once the issue is resolved, all tax collection regulations and revised tax rates be shared with HCSTSI beforehand to ensure transparency and to take traders into confidence, preventing any future disputes.

Expressing deep concern over the situation, President HCSTSI stated that although the case is currently under judicial review, traders are still being subjected to undue harassment.

Limited lending for private sector, as banks' investment reaches Rs26tr

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce & Industry's Businessmen Panel (BMP) has stated that the massive investment in government papers leave little room for lending to the private sector, as the banks' investments in government papers reached Rs26 trillion by December 2024, contributing 57.6 percent to the central government's domestic debt.

The BMP Chairman and FPCCI former president Mian Anjum Nisar said that the government has been using taxpayers' money to pay unprecedented returns to the banks, urging the central bank to review its policies to facilitate the private sector.

The latest data issued by the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) revealed how banks' money runs the central government and how the banks earn record profits from taxpayers' money.

Mian Anjum Nisar said that it's not new that the government borrows from banks but the size of banks money has been increasing as domestic debts. The data also showed that the banks had been making record profits by getting high interest rates, like 22 per cent during the entire FY24, while the return on T-bills remained around this rate and sometimes even higher than the policy rate.

Moreover, the government borrowing from the SBP also increased by record highs during the

period, increasing inflationary pressures on the economy.

He observed that private sector has found no space to borrow from financial institutions, as banks are preferring to park their money in risk-free government securities in huge sums. He said that banking money's flow has now directed towards the government papers, which will definitely hit the economic growth adversely, affecting the investment landscape of the country too.

The BMP Chairman was of the opinion that the government's shift for borrowing from the central bank to commercial banks will likely result in banks making profits however this would hurt overall economic growth.

The State Bank of Pakistan's latest data shows that a low volume of private sector credit uptake means lower domestic investment, hindering business activity and economic growth and promoting unemployment in the country. He added the trend is alarming and a criteria of bad financial management of the country, as all the monetary aggregates tell us a sad story of the failure of the authorities.

The off take at the beginning of last financial year was much higher than the preceding year but disappointing economic situation along with the higher rates discouraged the private sector from borrowing additional funds during the later months. The central bank had justified massive rate

hikes throughout the fiscal year citing rising inflationary pressures.

With weaknesses in private capital inflows continue to persist, the Central Bank should cut policy rates to spur growth, as cut would infuse confidence in the business community and propel economy. The industry is expecting the cut in interest rate, which could help boost private sector growth.—INP

This massive investment in government papers left little room for lending to the private sector. However, in the second quarter of the current fiscal year, the banks had to increase lending to meet the advance-to-deposit ratio (ADR) limit to avoid the 15 incremental tax imposed by the federal government.

Banks suddenly increased their lending to the private sector, which reached around Rs1.3tr; now, this lending size is shrinking. To avoid tax on lower ADR, the banks lent Rs1.3tr to the non-banking financial institutions (NBFIs) as short-term lending.

The details showed that the banks' most significant investment was in the longer-term Pakistan Investment Bonds (PIBs). The total investment of PIBs till Dec 2024 was Rs26tr. Scheduled banks' investment in PIBs was Rs19.4tr while the rest of Rs6.332tr was invested by non-banks or corporate sector. The non-banks include insurance, funds, corporates and others.

The Islamic bonds,

sukuk, also attracted a total Rs5.757tr till Dec 2024 while the banks' investment in this bond was Rs3.2tr and non-banks invested the rest of Rs2.555tr.

However, the market treasury bills (MTB) attracted was much lower than the PIBs as it was about Rs9.961tr -- banks' invested Rs5.332tr while Rs4.622tr by others.

The total investment by the banks and non-banks at the end of Dec 2024 was Rs41.5tr; scheduled banks' i n v e s t e d (PIB + MTB + sukuk) Rs28tr and non-banks Rs13.5tr.

The government has budgeted an overall fiscal deficit of 6.9pc of GDP for 2024-25 against the revised 7.4pc for 2023-24.

The federal budget

deficit is projected at Rs8,500bn for 2024-25 against Rs7,506bn budgeted for 2023-24; it was revised upwards to Rs8,388bn.

The figures suggested that banking in Pakistan could not stimulate the economy. Instead, the banks have been making money by investing in government papers, and the government retires its debt with taxpayer's money. The government has always been quick to impose new taxes for higher revenue collection, but there is no check on spending.

Financial experts believe that the fiscal deficit would be much higher than the estimates given in the budget. The FBR is already short of Rs388bn from the target.



In brief

Kickboxing C'ship held

ISLAMABAD (APP): Islamabad Sports Board's registered Kickboxing Association, Islamabad Full Contact Martial Arts Association and Islamabad Kung Fu Association jointly organized a Kickboxing Championship here at the Amir Khan Boxing Hall of Pakistan Sports Complex in connection with the Kashmir Solidarity Day. More than 200 boys and girls from 18 clubs belonging to Rawalpindi, Islamabad, Bagh and Mirpur Azad Kashmir participated in the competitions held under kickboxing rules in a total of 6 per mile and more than 12 weight categories of miles. Pakistan Sports Board Deputy DG Shahid Islam and other distinguished guests congratulated the organizers Shaukat Khan, Jahangir Khan Janjua, Akbar Khan and Qamar Nadeem on the successful organization of this event and distributed medals and certificates among the winning players. While the team officials Shahan Intikhab Alam, Shafiq Qureshi, Farhad Shah, Malik Kamran, Noman Akhtar were also awarded the shield of high performance. They also appreciated the efforts of General Secretary Azad Kashmir Kickboxing Association Moeed Awan. Wushu Club from Kashmir won four gold medals, while SK Martial Arts from Islamabad won two, Cobra Martial Arts Academy two, Universal Club two, Islamabad's Oyama Dojo four while Islamabad's Double Dragon Club won four gold medals. In this kickboxing event held on Kashmir Day, Haris, Husnain, Osama, Saeed, Omaiss, Zayan, Hassan, Ali Shah, Shahzeb, Abdul Malik, Muhammad Maxal, Ushna, Iqra, Aliza, Muqaddasa, Abiha, Anam won gold medals while Aishan, Asim, Zayan, Momin, Rauf Khan, Syed Waqas, Asim, Ahsan, Aamir, Ayan, Abu Bakr, Fayaz, Ayesha, Samal, Ayris, Arishal, Maryam, Mehroma won silver medals.

National Padel C'ship in April

ISLAMABAD (APP): The National Padel Championship 2025, organized by the Pakistan Padel Federation, will be played in Karachi from April 11. According to Pakistan Pedal Federation (PPF) Secretary General Quratulain the Pakistan Padel Federation President Mohammad Mateen has also approved the National Padel Championship 2025 and preparations for the event have started in this regard. Instructions have been issued to the relevant departments, provincial and regional associations. The championship has three categories, including men, women and mixed competitions. Men and female players from all over the country will participate in these competitions. An amount of Rs One million has been earmarked for the championship which will continue till April 13 and prizes will be distributed among the players at the end. Free licenses for national level will be issued for all players for six months who will participate in the National Padel Championship. The PPF will also select the National team during this championship and will participate in the Asian Padel Championship in Saudi Arabia in October 2025.

Australia cruise to 2-0 series win over Sri Lanka

GALLE (AFP): Australia won the second Test against Sri Lanka by nine wickets in Galle on Sunday to sweep the series 2-0. Set a target of 75 to win, Australia lost only Travis Head as they romped to a commanding victory before lunch on day four. Steve Smith's men had earlier on Sunday bundled Sri Lanka out for 231, after the hosts had resumed on 211-8 from overnight. Sri Lanka's resistance lasted just 26 minutes, losing Kusal Mendis for 50 and Lahiru Kumara for nine. Spinners Nathan Lyon and Matthew Kuhnemann took four wickets each for Australia. The duo spun a web

around the hosts, making full use of a dust bowl tailor-made for turn. Kuhnemann, playing just his fifth Test, upstaged the seasoned Lyon, finishing as the leading wicket-taker of the series with 16. The left-arm spinner bowled impeccable line and length, a performance even more remarkable given that he had broken his right thumb just two weeks before the first Test. Sri Lanka's fragile batting meant their fortunes rested heavily on Kusal Mendis, who had already played a fine hand in the first innings with an unbeaten 85 runs. In the second innings, he carried on the fight, bring-

ing up his half-century with a crisp punch through covers off Lyon. However, the joy was short-lived. Off the next ball, Mendis was done in by extra bounce, top-edging an attempted flick straight into the hands of Steve Smith. The Australian skipper entered an elite club, becoming only the fifth player in Test history to complete 200 catches — alongside Rahul Dravid, Joe Root, Mahela Jayawardene, and Jacques Kallis. Australia celebrated a crushing victory in the first Test, with the innings and 242-run humiliation Sri Lanka's worst defeat in Test history.



GALLE: Australia pose with their silverware after the 2-0 series victory.

Azhar confirms three spin bowling options available for Pakistan squad

LAHORE (Monitoring Desk): Pakistan cricket team's bowling coach Azhar Mahmood has said the squad has three spin bowling options available. Speaking to media Azhar Mahmood said all-rounder Khushdil Shah has been included as both a batting and bowling option in the national team. He dismissed speculation regarding potential changes to the squad, clarifying that no discussions have taken place on this matter. He emphasized that team selection is the responsibility of the selectors, and no alterations are currently under consideration. Regarding fast bowler Haris Rauf, Mahmood mentioned that his condition remains uncertain and that further clarity will come after his MRI results. He further reinforced confidence in the squad, stating that the best available players have been selected. Addressing concerns over Babar Azam's form, Mahmood reassured that there is no need to worry, as the star batter has been consistently scoring runs.

Huraira wins bronze at Int'l Taekwondo Championship



ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistani taekwondo athlete Syed Abu Huraira Shah secured a bronze medal in the senior category at the International Taekwondo Championship in France on Sunday. According to event details, over 2,000 athletes from more than 20 countries participated in the prestigious competition. At just 19 years old, Huraira has already represented Pakistan in over six international tournaments, showcasing his dedication to martial arts. Huraira said that Master Syed Rehman Shah served as the coach for Pakistan's contingent, ensuring strong representation at the global event. In August 2024, Huraira Shah won a gold medal for Pakistan in Malaysia, further solidifying his reputation as a rising star in taekwondo. Meanwhile, Pakistan secured two bronze medals at the 11th SeongNam Open International Taekwondo Championship 2024, reinforcing the country's growing presence in international martial arts. Huraira, while speaking to APP online, expressed his gratitude to Karachi Mayor Murtaza Wahab for his continuous support in consecutive tournaments. Huraira also announced plans to participate in a two-day training camp in Germany and Switzerland before returning to Pakistan on February 19. Huraira said, "I am grateful to Mayor Karachi for his support, which has helped me reach this stage. I will continue striving to make Pakistan proud on the international stage.

Mbappe secures Real Madrid derby draw against Atletico

MADRID (Agencies): Kylian Mbappe secured Real Madrid a 1-1 draw against rivals Atletico Madrid which kept Los Blancos top of La Liga on Saturday. Julian Alvarez dinked home a controversial first half penalty for Atletico but Mbappe was in the right place at the right time to bundle home early in the second half on his first appearance in the tense derby clash. Reigning champions Real Madrid lead second-place Atletico by a single point, with Barcelona, third, given the chance to cut the gap on the top two when they face Sevilla on Sunday. Atletico shaded a close first half but were left holding on in the second period as the hosts stepped up a gear at the Santiago Bernabeu. "The team is disappointed because they think they deserved more... but we're happy because we're still leaders," Real Madrid coach Carlo Ancelotti told reporters. "In the second half we had total control, we had a lot of chances." Ancelotti opted to deploy his four key attacking players in Mbappe, Vinicius Junior, Jude Bellingham and Rodrygo Goes, in lieu of a more conservative approach. The star names got stuck in, not always a given in a defensive sense, and the first half was a hard-fought, intense battle with few clear openings for either side. Atletico were upset when Real Madrid midfielder Dani Ceballos was only booked for an ugly challenge on Pablo Barrios, but it was the hosts who were left raging when referee Cesar Soto Grado pointed to the penalty spot. Aurelien Tchouameni, covering at centre-back for Madrid with Antonio Rudiger and Eder Militao out among others, clumsily trod on Samuel Lino's foot in the box. After a VAR review Soto Grado awarded a controversial penalty to Madrid's frustration, with the incident happening after the ball had run past the duo. Los Blancos attacked Spanish refereeing earlier in the week after they were upset by a decision in a shock defeat last weekend, bringing heavy scrutiny on the officials ahead of the derby. Alvarez took the penalty, the first given against Madrid in La Liga this season, and cheekily executed a Panenka down the middle. "I can't say I wasn't a bit nervous (with the penalty), but I was sure, I knew what I would do, and it was a great goal for the team," Alvarez told Movistar. "Corruption in the federation," chanted Real Madrid fans in response to falling behind, buying into their club's stance. Ancelotti refused to talk about the refereeing but appeared exasperated on the sideline as Soto Grado pointed to the spot. - Madrid battle back -

Madrid pulled level early in the second half when Rodrygo broke loose on the right of the box and crossed for Bellingham. The England international's shot was blocked but Mbappe was on hand to turn home the rebound and score on his first Madrid derby appearance. Bellingham twice came close to putting Madrid ahead, nodding against the crossbar from Vinicius' cross and then heading straight at Atletico goalkeeper Jan Oblak from a similar position, kicking the post in frustration. Madrid played with far more fluidity in the second half and pegged Atletico back. Oblak made a smart save to deny Vinicius after the Brazilian winger burst through the gap between two Atletico defenders and pulled the trigger from a tight angle. The Slovenian goalkeeper also made fine saves from Rodrygo and Mbappe to ensure the two sides ended with a point apiece. "We had a good first half, but we weren't relaxed enough in front of goal to (score) more," said Simeone. "In the end it was a draw in which both teams think they could have taken more from it." Real Madrid face another big challenge on Tuesday when they travel to face Pep Guardiola's Manchester City in the Champions League play-off round first leg.

Du Plessis outclasses Strickland to retain title

SYDNEY (Agencies): South Africa's Dricus du Plessis outclassed Sean Strickland to retain his middleweight title by unanimous decision at UFC 312 in Sydney, Australia. The 31-year-old was the far busier and more effective striker as he claimed his second win over the American. Two judges scored the contest 50-45 with the other calling it 49-46 in Du Plessis' favour. "I told you guys, to knock him out is next to impossible. I wanted a submission, knockout or absolute domination over a five-rounder and that's what I gave," said Du Plessis. "I am a top three pound-for-pound fighter as of tonight and I'm coming for that number one spot."



received a mixed reception but was not fazed as he took control of the fight in the early stages. Strickland spent much of the contest methodically using his jab and front kick, with Du Plessis delivering more output and landing the more eye-catching strikes. The South African, who was making the second defence of his belt, mixed up his kicks and punches well, with Strickland's corner growing more frustrated as the rounds slipped by. A big moment came in the fourth round, as a huge right hand from Du Plessis appeared to break Strickland's nose, seeing the American quickly back off. With blood gushing down his face, he showed remarkable toughness to survive until the end of the fight, but was unable to deliver any significant damage to Du Plessis. In his post-fight interview, Du Plessis took aim at Perreira, asking "is there no one else?", in response to the Brazilian saying previously he would be interested in a future matchup. Weili ends Suarez's undefeated streak Two-time champion Weili was making the third defence of her second reign as she looked to add gloss to her status as one of the great-

est strawweights of all time. It was Suarez who came into the contest as the favourite, however, after winning the first 10 fights of her mixed martial arts career. Since making her UFC debut in 2016 the 34-year-old has dominated the majority of her opponents, earning five finishes in seven bouts in the promotion. Suarez took Weili down early - the first time in eights bouts she had surrendered a takedown - before controlling the action on the ground for the majority of the round, but it proved to be one of the few times she got the better of the champion. Weili took control in the second round, reversing a takedown and landing some pummelling shots on the ground, and she never looked back. Weili rocked Suarez with a big right midway through the fight, before continuing to defend takedowns and land at will. As the fight wore on, Weili's superior speed showed as she avoided any danger, before stamping her authority on the contest by controlling the remaining action on the ground. "I had a full camp for this fight so I was well-prepared. I respect Tatiana, she's very strong," said Weili.

FG Polo win Jinnah Gold Cup 2025



LAHORE (Monitoring Desk): FG Polo clinched the 5th Jinnah Gold Cup 2025 trophy after defeating HN Polo 8-5 in the grand final. A large crowd, including families and polo enthusiasts, gathered at Jinnah Polo Fields to witness the first high-goal season final. Chief Secretary Punjab Zahid Akhtar Zaman was the chief guest, while former players, including Club Secretary Maj (R) Ali Taimoor, were also in attendance. The final featured an exhibition of vintage cars and an exciting tent-pegging display, adding to the event's grandeur. FG Polo dominated the match, with Raul Laplacette scoring four goals, while Mian Abbas Mukhtar and Raja Mikael Sami added one goal each. For HN Polo, Haider Naseem netted three goals, and Hamza Mawaz Khan

contributed two. The match kicked off at a blistering pace, with both teams showcasing exceptional polo skills and tactics. The intense battle saw each side convert two goals in the opening chukker, ending it in a 2-2 deadlock. HN Polo seized the early momentum in the second chukker, netting a field goal to take a narrow 3-2 lead. However, FG Polo responded in style, staging a strong comeback with a brilliant brace, reclaiming the advantage at 4-3. The third chukker was a masterclass by FG Polo, as they dominated the play, hammering in three consecutive goals to establish a commanding 7-3 lead. Their momentum carried into the fourth and final chukker, where they added yet another goal to extend their lead to 8-3. Despite a spirited late surge, HN Polo

managed to fire in two quick goals, narrowing the deficit to 5-8. However, their efforts came too late, as FG Polo held firm to clinch the grand final with a resounding 8-5 victory. Earlier in the thrilling subsidiary final, DS Polo secured a hard-fought 7-6½ victory over BN/Newage. Lao Abelenda led the charge for DS Polo with a stellar performance, emerging as the top scorer with five fabulous goals, while Ahmed Ali Tiwana contributed two crucial goals. Despite enjoying a half-goal handicap advantage, BN/Newage put up a fierce fight, with Marcos Solari netting impressive five goals, and Tito Ruiz Guinazu adding one to their tally. Raul Laplacette of FG Polo was named player of the final, while the best pony award went to Mian Abbas Mukhtar's mare.

Von Allmen upstages rivals to win world downhill gold



SAALBACH (AFP): Swiss tyro Franjo Von Allmen outpaced a host of more experienced rivals to clinch gold in the men's downhill at the World Ski Championships in Saalbach on Sunday. Von Allmen, 23, timed 1min 40.68sec down the 2.9km-long Schneekristall course as teammate and defending champion Marco Odermatt, winner of Friday's super-G, finished fifth. Austria's Vincent Kriechmayr, the 2021 world champion, claimed silver at 0.24sec, with another Swiss racer, Alexis Monney, rounding out the podium a further seven-hundredths adrift. "I wasn't feeling nervous at the start, put all the risk in, run on the limit -- it turned out really well," said Von Allmen. "I tried to handle the pressure, there was nothing to lose, just do my best performance." Turning to the Swiss team, Von Allmen added: "One day it's Marco the leader, one day me or Monney, we all pushed each other." Von Allmen, who says he lives to the motto of "Rock'n'roll and enjoy!" and is widely described by his teammates as "crazy", is a world junior silver medalist

in both speed events and the combined, and has slowly made a mark for himself on the World Cup circuit. He has finished inside the top 10 in his last seven World Cup races, with five podium finishes to his name, including second places in the downhills in Italy at Val Gardena and Bormio in December. They were topped in Wengen last month when he won the vaunted super-G on home snow. In partly cloudy conditions in Saalbach, with temperatures around 4C (39F), Von Allmen showed a finesse beyond his years as he negotiated the tricky course comprising 35 gates and a 912-metre vertical drop. Pedal to the floor Hitting speeds of 140km/h, the Swiss skier tackled three jumps of up to 40 metres with aplomb, cascading out of the heavy landings into a sleek traverse of the snaking terrain. Flying over the rollers, all the while battling crushing centrifugal forces, the partisan 15,000 crowd groaned as his first intermediate time was green, meaning he was faster than home favourite Kriechmayr. Von Allmen kept his foot firmly on the pedal and

held his nerve right through to the finish line, punching the air in delight with a clenched fist as he saw his time, later pretending to bite his nails in nervous anticipation as the rest of the 56-strong field made their own descents. Odermatt's bid for a fourth world gold went up in smoke after a slight mistake transitioning through one of the sweeping turns two-thirds down the course meant he lost valuable tenths of a second. He was 0.66sec off his teammate's pace, just behind Italian veteran Dominik Paris, in fourth at 0.45sec. Odermatt had delivered a masterclass to claim victory in the super-G here, but his aim of emulating Kriechmayr's speed double at the 2021 worlds in Cortina d'Ampezzo came to nothing. "Obviously I'm not perfectly happy, it was a good run in some parts, but not clean from the top to the bottom," Odermatt said. "I had two or three mistakes, and like this you cannot win a downhill at the world champs." Kriechmayr's silver was just recompense after tweaking his right knee in the downhill in Wengen last month, raising fears from his home fans that he might even miss these championships. But the 33-year-old ran effective stress tests on the knee in training and showed all his nous to claim another podium finish. Norway's Adrian Smiseth Sejersted, who grabbed a surprise bronze in the super-G, backed that up with a very creditable sixth place as five Swiss finished in the top 12.



In brief

Cracks down on illegal parking

ISLAMABAD (APP): Under the supervision of Chief Traffic Officer (CTO) Syed Zeeshan Haider, the Islamabad Traffic Police (ITP) launched an operation on Sunday against illegal parking in H-9 Bazaar. A public relations officer told APP that the operation was carried out on the special directives of Inspector General of Police (IGP) Syed Ali Nasir Rizvi. CTO Zeeshan said that illegally parked vehicles and motorcycles were removed from the area to ensure smooth traffic flow. CTO Zeeshan instructed officers on duty to take strict action against violators. "Citizens should park their vehicles and motorcycles only in designated parking areas," he emphasized. He said daily operations are underway in markets and commercial areas to curb traffic violations. "Strict action will be taken against those who fail to comply with traffic rules," the CTO added. Citizens appreciated the efforts of the CTO for improving the traffic system. "Further measures will be taken to maintain the smooth flow of traffic," Syed Zeeshan Haider concluded.

Police arrest 11 criminals

RAWALPINDI (APP): The Rawalpindi Police on Sunday arrested 11 criminals including drug peddlers and illegal arms owners in action across the district. According to a police spokesman, five suspects were held on the recovery of more than 5.5 kilograms of charas. The Wah Saddar Police recovered 1.8 kg charas from accused Khalid, while the Ratta Amral Police held accused Naeem with 1.5 kg of the contraband item. Similarly, the Westridge Police netted accused Sarfaraz with 1.3 kg charas, while the Naseerabad and Airport Police arrested accused Adnan and Zeeshan Javed respectively with 680 grams and 540 grams charas. Meanwhile, six accused were nabbed for having illegal arms and ammunition. The Waris Khan, Cantt and Wah Saddar Police recovered a 30-bore pistol each from accused Nabeel Mustafa, Abid Nawaz and Muhammad Buta respectively. Likewise, the Rawat Police held three accused Abdul Qadeer, Haris Ijaz and Abdul Sattar on the recovery of a 30-bore pistol from all.

Two nabbed, gang busted

ISLAMABAD (APP): Islamabad Capital Police Nilore Police station team arrested two wanted members of a criminal gang involved in numerous house burglary activities and recovered valuables from their possession, on Sunday. A public relations officer told APP that the Nilore police team used technical and human resources and succeeded in apprehending two wanted members of the house burglar gang. He said the police team also recovered the stolen valuables from their possession. The accused were identified as Waheed Ayub and Rizwan Ayub. Cases were registered against the nabbed accused and further investigation is underway, he added. Deputy Inspector General of Police (DIG), Muhammad Jawad Tariq also directed the officers for an effective crackdown against the accused involved in criminal activities and to take all possible measures to protect the life and property of the citizens. DIG further said that no criminal element will be allowed to disturb the peace of the people.

Mutually beneficial projects to further boost China-Pak relations

ISLAMABAD (APP): Charge d'affaires of Chinese embassy, Shi Yuanqiang on Sunday said that mutually beneficial cooperation in various fields will further strengthen the China-Pakistan strategic relationship.

Addressing the Chinese New Year celebration event, the Charge d'affaires of Chinese embassy said that mutual cooperation in various areas has advanced with high quality, laying a solid foundation for the in-depth development of China-Pakistan relations.

He said that in the year 2024, high-level exchanges between China and Pakistan were frequent, with the successful mutual visits of the two countries' Prime Ministers. He added the construction of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor has continued to deepen and solidify, evolving from the layout to a brand new phase of "upgraded version."

He said that the vast number of Chinese compatriots in Pakistan have been proactive and accomplished, striving for excellence in all walks of life, actively supporting and participating in various construction activities, contributing their wisdom and strength to the inheritance and deepening of the special friendship between China and Pakistan, and promoting mutually beneficial cooperation.

tion between the two nations.

He added at the beginning of the spring in 2025, at the invitation of President Xi Jinping, President of Pakistan paid a state visit to China from February 4th to 8th, achieving fruitful results.

This visit coincided with the significant year marking the 10th anniversary of President Xi Jinping's historic visit to Pakistan in 2015 and also at the joyous occasion of the Chinese people celebrating the Spring Festival, he added.

"It holds great significance for outlining the prospects of all-weather strategic cooperation between China and Pakistan and for steering the bilateral relations amidst the profound changes of the century."

He said, "Looking ahead to the new year, we will continue to comprehensively advance the construction of a strong nation and the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation through Chinese modernization, persistently promote high-quality development and high-level opening-up, and fully accomplish the goals and tasks set out in the 14th Five-Year Plan."

He said that the friendship between China and Pakistan will embrace a brighter future from a new starting point. "We hope that our

compatriots will continue to leverage their strengths, strive with determination, serve as bridges of China-Pakistan friendship and narrators of China's stories, enabling the Pakistani people to fully understand a real, objective, and multidimensional China."

He added these compatriots will be builders of China-Pakistan relations, further advancing exchanges and cooperation between the two countries in the fields of economy and trade, science and technology, culture, and more, and to be inheritors of the development of overseas Chinese communities, continuously enhancing the cohesion and centripetal force of Chinese compatriots in Pakistan.

He said that the Chinese New Year, the most ancient, richly connotative, and widely influential traditional festival of the Chinese nation, is also a significant moment for every Chinese people to bid farewell to the old and welcome the new, to reunite with family, and to share joy.

He extended New Year greetings to the overseas Chinese, employees of Chinese enterprises, and Chinese students in Pakistan. "I wish you all good fortune in the Year of the Snake, good health, family happiness, and success in all your endeavors."

First Mini Marathon Race held in Rawalpindi

RAWALPINDI (APP): The First Mini Marathon Race was held from Liaquat Bagh Sports Complex to Shahbaz Sharif Sports Complex here on Sunday in which around 4000 athletes participated. Muhammad Qasim won the first while Muhammad Usman and Babar Ali secured the second and third positions, respectively. The race was organized under the instructions of Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif.

According to the details, the marathon started at 9:00 am in which the participants were given a target of one and half an hour to the finishing line at Shahbaz Sharif Sports Complex.

Additional Deputy Commissioner General Dr. Hassan Tariq inaugurated the race whereas CEO Education Amanullah Khan, Deputy Director Information Tabinda Saleem, District Officer Education Ijazul Haq, District Sports Officer Muhammad Shams and a large number of spectators were present on the occasion. Sports shirts were distributed among all the athletes on behalf of the Chief Minister.

The prize distribution ceremony was held at the Shahbaz Sharif Sports Complex, with Chairman CM Inspection Team, Raja Muhammad Hanif MPA as the chief guest. He encouraged all the athletes participating in the marathon and said that there was no dearth of talent in Punjab.

"Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz is striving to promote sports in Punjab", he said and added that the new talent would emerge with the promotion of cultural and healthy activities in Punjab.

The chief guest gave a cash prize of Rs.50,000 to athlete Muhammad Qasim who won the first position in the race, while Rs.40,000 and Rs.30,000.0 to Muhammad Usman and Babar Ali who stood second and third positions, respectively.

President IPP approved new setup in Punjab



ISLAMABAD (APP): Istehkam-e-Pakistan Party (IPP) has decided to divide the province into four zones after South Punjab and Central President Abdul Aleem Khan has appointed Presidents and General Secretaries of Western and Northern Punjab.

According to the notification of the Party Secretariat, MNA Gul Asghar Baghor will be President of IPP North Punjab while former Provincial Minister Chaudhry Zaheeruddin will be the President of Western Punjab. Mian Farrukh Manika will be the General Secretary of Western Punjab and Mian Junaid Zulfiqar has been nominated as Vice President of Istehkam-e-Pakistan Party Punjab, said a press release.

The newly elected officials called on Party President Abdul Aleem Khan where Federal Minister Abdul Aleem Khan said that new office bearers of Istehkam-e-Pakistan Party have been

given task to organize Party in each district as it is a very important time that the IPP leadership should convey the message of prosperity, development and peace to every home.

He said that now there is no need for politics but public service without discrimination and the Istehkam-e-Pakistan Party is supporting the present Government in the Federal and Punjab for the betterment of the country. Federal Minister and President IPP Abdul Aleem Khan said that this Party will continue the journey of public service and make the country economically strong in the true sense to include it in the ranks of developed nations.

MNA Gul Asghar Baghor, Chaudhry Zaheeruddin, Mian Farrukh Maneka and Mian Junaid Zulfiqar received notifications from President IPP and Federal Minister Abdul Aleem Khan at the Party Secretariat and also called on him separately. Those

who held meeting with Abdul Aleem Khan included Atiq Ghuman from Hafizabad, Rana Usman from Lahore, Mian Hamza from Gujranwala and Rana Raheel from Rahim Yar Khan. A delegation of the Istehkam

Students Federation Punjab led by IPSF President Muhammad Afzal also held meeting with Abdul Aleem Khan whose delegation also included General Secretary Muhammad Saleem, Vice President Rana Naeem and Finance Secretary Naqash Afzal. The meeting held at the IPP Punjab Secretariat was attended by central party leaders Rana Nazir Ahmed Khan, Shoaib Siddiqui, Malik Zaman Naseeb, Rana Javed Iqbal, Taskin Khakwani and Arif Awan Advocate, who congratulated Federal Minister Abdul Aleem Khan on completing one year of the Government and his performance in the Ministry of Privatization, Board of Investment and Communications.

Women vendors in Islamabad empowering families, driving informal economy



ISLAMABAD (APP): For many individuals in Islamabad, women vending has become more than just a livelihood, it is a vital source of income and empowerment for some of society's most marginalized groups, including the unemployed, less educated, and those facing limited opportunities. In the bustling streets of the capital, these women are quietly playing an essential role in the local economy, often providing for their families and communities against the odds.

As dawn breaks over Islamabad, a group of determined women can be seen setting up their stalls, offering fresh fruits, vegetables, and other essential goods. One such vendor is 35-year-old Fatima, who has been selling clothes and women's essentials at Peshawar Mor Sunday Bazaar.

In an interview with APP, she shared her personal journey, explaining how starting her own stall was initially a struggle. But, driven by the need to provide for her children, she persevered. "Today, I am proud to say that, as the

breadwinner of my family, I am able to give them a decent education and a comfortable life," she said. Fatima's story reflects the resilience of many women vendors in Islamabad, who, despite facing long working hours, meagre profits, and numerous challenges, continue to work tirelessly for the well-being of their families. These women are not just surviving—they are thriving, becoming pillars of support for their communities.

Afshi Safdar, another vendor, offered an insightful perspective on the role of women in vending. "Women who lack formal skills or education often turn to vending as a last resort," she said. "However, I must say that vending has empowered us to take control of our finances. It's been a game-changer for us."

Afshi pointed out that the impact of these women extends beyond their immediate families. "We are the backbone of Islamabad's informal economy, providing essential goods and

services to hundreds of people every day," she added, emphasizing the indispensable role they play in the local economy.

In the words of Shakeela Sabeen, a regular customer, "I rely on these women vendors for my daily needs. They are always available, and their prices are affordable." Shakeela went on to note that vending is a challenging job that requires not only physical stamina but also expertise and strong negotiation skills. "It's a demanding profession that requires resilience, strategic thinking, and business acumen," she said.

These women embody the spirit of empowerment seen across South Asia, where women are increasingly entering informal sectors like vending as a means of securing financial independence. In countries like Pakistan, where women often face cultural and economic barriers to entering the formal workforce, these vendors represent an important shift.

They are not only overcoming social constraints but also challenging traditional gender roles, paving the way for future generations of women who aspire to achieve economic autonomy.

The stories of these vendors highlight an essential truth, women in South Asia, despite their challenges, are an unwavering force for change, showing that empowerment is not just about formal employment, but about the ability to create opportunity in the face of adversity.

PIA's return to Europe key to tourism revival: MD PTDC

ISLAMABAD (APP):The revival of Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) on its once-popular European routes is a major milestone for Pakistan's aviation and tourism sectors.

This move presents a golden opportunity to improve the country's global image, with the Pakistan Tourism Development Corporation (PTDC) working closely to ensure that the benefits extend beyond air travel.

Aftab ur Rehman Rana, Managing Director of PTDC, in an exclusive interview with APP expressed optimism about how the restoration of PIA's European flights will contribute to Pakistan's broader tourism goals.

"This revival is part of a larger strategy to promote the country's tourism potential," Rana said on Sunday.

"Increased connectivity will help showcase Pakistan's hidden treasures to the world, attracting not just tourists, but also investors and cultural ambassadors," he said. Rana emphasized that PTDC aims to foster a favourable perception of Pakistan internationally, with

PIA's return serving as a direct boost to the tourism sector.

"PIA's European routes will connect travelers to the beauty and culture of Pakistan, making it an attractive destination," he explained. The revival of PIA and the resurgence of tourism are intricately linked. PTDC has been working to shift Pakistan's image from one of negative stereotypes to a country with rich landscapes, diverse cultures, and deep history. Initiatives like the online visa policy for 126 countries, offering fast processing, are crucial to this transformation.

These efforts align with the broader goal of turning tourism into a sustainable industry. PTDC's statistics show that international arrivals reached 2.21 million in 2023, with a projected 15% increase in 2024. This uptick reflects growing global interest in Pakistan, driven by the country's natural beauty, hospitality, and heritage.

The return of PIA's flights to Europe will further fuel this growth by making travel to Pakistan easier and more reli-



able. "We're seeing more tourists from key markets like the USA, China, Germany, and the UK," said Rana. "With enhanced travel options through these European routes, we expect this growth to continue."

Pakistan is home to some of the world's most stunning landscapes, from towering mountains to lush valleys, and a rich cultural heritage. In 2019, CNN

and Forbes recognized Pakistan as an emerging travel destination, and in subsequent years, the British Backpacker Society named it one of the "friendliest countries" with some of the most breathtaking mountain scenery.

Through strategic reforms, PTDC has been building an ecosystem that supports both inbound tourism and local economic growth.

The streamlined online visa policy, which processes free visas within 24 hours for visitors from 126 countries, is designed to ensure a seamless experience once PIA brings international tourists to Pakistan.

PIA's history is a tale of both success and decline. Once a symbol of national pride, the airline was known for its world-class service, modern fleet, and ability to connect Pakistan globally. In the 1960s and 1970s, PIA was a respected name in aviation, admired worldwide.

However, over the years, mismanagement, financial crises, and poor policies led to the airline's downfall.

By 2020, PIA faced massive losses, with debts exceeding PKR 56 billion. Political interference, corruption, and failure to modernize further eroded the airline's position in the competitive global market.

The revival of PIA's European routes is more than just about restoring an airline—it's part of a broader effort to reclaim Pakistan's global reputation and boost its economy. As the airline resumes services to Europe, the aim is not only to attract more passengers but also to make Pakistan a more accessible destination for tourists.

Rana views this as a crucial moment for both PIA and the country. As Pakistan's tourism sector steadily recovers, PIA's revival could spark a new era of growth for both the airline and the nation's tourism industry. While the road to recovery remains long, there is hope that continued collaboration between government agencies, PIA, and the private sector will allow Pakistan's skies—and its tourism sector—to flourish once again.

213 children treated

KABUL (Pajhwok): About 213 children under five year were treated for malnutrition in the country in past one month, UNICEF said on Sunday. UNICEF representative in Afghanistan Tajudeen Ovewale wrote he had visited a refugee camp in southern Helmand province and. He said every child had the right to live a healthy life. In January, 213 children under five were treated for malnutrition in the country, he said, without going into details.

Taliban arrest four

KABUL (Amu TV): The Taliban's Ministry for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice said it had arrested four people in the northern provinces of Takhar and Faryab for reciting religious poetry, known as naat, in a style resembling music. In a statement, the ministry described the practice as "forbidden and a form of mockery." It added that the individuals had been previously warned to cease their performances.

2,500 people working in Herat's mines

HERAT (TOLONews): Officials from the Herat Directorate of Mines and Petroleum report that more than 2,500 workers are currently employed in the province's mines. They have pledged that in the near future, with the extraction of several major mines, thousands more job opportunities will be created. Saifullah Long, head of the provincial Mines and Petroleum Department, stated: "Currently, 1,800 people are working in 26 mines, with approximately 700 employed in large-scale mines. We hope this number will increase in the future." Some miners in Herat say that access to employment within the country has saved them from migrating to neighboring nations. Abdul Rahman, who works in the Sabzak coal mine in Karukh district, told TOLONews: "If such jobs increase, everyone will find work. It's a great opportunity; the salary is good, and we get to work in our homeland." Ramadan, another worker, said: "If similar mines are developed in Herat and other provinces, young people will have jobs and won't need to migrate abroad. The country's economy will also grow." Although mining is a demanding and exhausting job, many workers consider it their primary source of income and take pride in working within their own country rather than seeking employment elsewhere. Hussain, another miner, said: "This is work in our own homeland, and we don't have to depend on anyone. I am very happy to be working here and providing for my family every month." According to Herat's Mines and Petroleum Department, the province has six major mines and 36 small-scale mines. Currently, extraction is ongoing at one large mine, while five others are under exploration. Simultaneously, mining activities continue in all 36 small-scale sites.

Ghazni most traffic accidents last year

GHAZNI (TOLONews): Local officials in Ghazni report that since the beginning of the current solar year, 148 people have lost their lives, and 819 others have been injured in traffic accidents. According to Ghazni's Traffic Management Department, 310 road accidents occurred in the province this solar year. Noor Mohammad Rahbar, Ghazni's traffic director, provided details on the casualties: "Among the deceased, 112 were men, 16 were women, and 20 were children. Among the injured, 479 were men, 88 were women, and 104 were children." Many drivers and residents blame reckless driving, high beam headlights, and disregard for traffic laws as the primary causes of these accidents. Abdul Raziq, a Ghazni resident, criticized the driving conditions in the province, stating: "Untrained individuals are getting behind the wheel and driving on the roads. How is this allowed? The government must take serious action and stop these vehicles. Some people drive without licenses or permits—how is this legal?" Mahmood, a driver, called for a complete ban on highbeam headlights: "Highbeam headlights must be fully prohibited. Last night, I was traveling from Kabul at around 1 AM. The moment these lights hit my eyes, I lost my bearings—I couldn't tell if I was going uphill or downhill." Mohammad Yahya, another driver, warned about the dangers of these lights: "A total of 580 trucks, trailers, and heavy vehicles have regular headlights, but all of their high-beam lights are laser-based. We urge the Islamic Emirate to put an end to this issue." On December 19, 2024, two major accidents in central Ghazni and Andar District resulted in 52 fatalities and 70 injuries, highlighting the severity of the province's traffic crisis.

Retirees demand rights, says situation desperate



KABUL (TOLONews): In continuation of protests over unpaid salaries, a group of retirees gathered on Sunday to express their frustration with the dire economic conditions they face. These retirees say they have no source of income, making it impossible to meet even their basic needs. They call on the Islamic Emirate to pay their overdue pensions immediately.

even their families' most basic needs. Abdul Wasi, another retiree, said: "All these elderly people gathered here have families, yet they can't afford even their daily meals." Hafiza said: "I clean raisins for 120 afghani a day, but that amount is nothing. Just my rent alone is 3,000 afghani!" Although the Islamic Emirate has not recently commented on the payment schedule for retirees, its spokesperson, Zabihullah Mujahid, previously promised to establish a special commission and dedicated courts to facilitate these payments. Despite these assurances, the retirees—who spent their lives serving their country—are still waiting for the day they receive their rightful dues, hoping they will no longer have to plead for their daily bread.

Ministry urges US to return seized helicopters

KABUL (BNA):The Ministry of National Defense of Afghanistan has formally urged the United States to return several helicopters that were seized and transferred to US custody. In a recent statement, the Afghan authorities expressed their concerns about the handover of seven helicopters originally belonging to Afghanistan that were moved to Uzbekistan during the chaotic transition of power last year. The Islamic Emirate's Ministry of Defense emphasized that these helicopters were taken when officials of the former Afghan administration fled, asserting that their rightful place is in Afghanistan. The ministry stated that the ongoing transfer of these aircraft to the United States is unacceptable, as the Afghan people have the sovereign right to defend their nation and should have access to their own military resources. The statement further called on the US government to facilitate the return of the helicopters instead of creating barriers. The Ministry underscored that respect for the rights of the Afghan people should be a priority for neighboring countries and international partners. This plea follows Uzbekistan's recent announcement that it had transferred the seven American-made "Black Hawk" helicopters to the US military. These helicopters were reportedly handed over to Tashkent by Afghan officials after the Islamic Emirate seized control of Kabul.

Iran executes Afghan national

TEHRAN (Amu TV): Iran has executed two prisoners, including an Afghan national, on drug-related charges, the human rights organization Hengaw reported. According to the group, the executions were carried out on Sunday at Gorgan Central Prison in northern Iran. The individuals were identified as Abdul Hamid Kohkan, a 26-year-old Afghan citizen, and Gul Mohammad Gorgji, a 34-year-old Baloch citizen. Kohkan was reportedly arrested four years ago on drug charges and later sentenced to death. Gorgji, who was arrested five years ago on similar charges, was initially given a 20-year prison sentence, which was later changed to the death penalty for undisclosed reasons. Iran has one of the highest execution rates in the world, with more than 70 people put to death last year on various charges, according to human rights groups.

Taliban sign \$9.6 million contract for road linking Maidan Wardak, Logar



KABUL (Amu TV): The Taliban-led Ministry of Public Works has signed a contract with two companies to construct a 31.6-kilometer road connecting Maidan Wardak and Logar provinces, Taliban officials announced Sunday. Mohammad Ashraf Haqshanas, Taliban's spokesman for the ministry, said the project is valued at 713 million Afghanis (approximately \$9.6 million) and will be completed in two phases. The first phase will cover 17.4 kilometers, while the second will span 14.2 kilometers, he said. The planned route will pass through the Tangai Valley in Maidan Wardak, extend through the Babus area of Logar, and ultimately connect to Pul-e-Alam, the provincial capital.

Plummeting underground water in Bamyan fuels concerns

BAMYAN CITY (Pajhwok): Some residents in central Bamyan province have expressed concern over a significant decline in groundwater, saying drought and water shortages have hampered agriculture and access to potable water. Hassan Ali, a resident of Shahidan area, told Pajhwok Afghan News: "In the past two years, I haven't been able to cultivate some of my agricultural land due to the decline in groundwater and the drying up of several springs." He explained that water shortages are particularly acute during the summer, with farmers struggling to find enough water, even at night, to irrigate their fields. The persistent lack of water has forced many farmers to abandon traditional agriculture and shift to rainfed farming. However, Ali noted that this method is also facing restrictions from government authorities. Abdul Karim, another resident, added that the groundwater depletion has not only disrupted agriculture but is also hindering access to drinking water. He said, "In Sar-i-Asyab village, you used to find sufficient water by digging 10 meters into the ground, but now it's hard to find water even after digging 20 meters." Ali Ahmadi, an agricultural expert, warned that the continued decline in groundwater could lead to ecosystem destruction with far-reaching consequences, including the degradation of land, reduced soil quality, decreased agricultural production, higher farming costs, worsened food security, increased migration, and growing social problems. Prof. Torabaz Poyesh from Bamyan University stressed the importance of managing water resources and identified several factors contributing to the decline in groundwater levels, including reduced rainfall, increased well drilling, and overuse of water in recent years. He suggested several solutions, such as adopting drip irrigation, constructing check dams, creating small rainwater-harvesting pits, implementing artificial underground water recharge projects, cultivating drought-resistant crops, and providing training to farmers. He urged authorities to adopt careful planning and implement these measures to prevent further depletion of groundwater. In response to these challenges, local officials said that several measures and projects aimed at managing water resources. Mohammad Ibrahim Dadfar, the Director of Environmental Protection, acknowledged that climate change has had significant impacts across the country, including in Bamyan. However, he noted that the province has taken steps to mitigate these effects. These include distributing solar stoves to the public, providing environmental awareness to over 10,000 residents, and constructing seven check dams and thousands of small water wells over the past 11 months to manage natural waters and prevent environmental disasters.

Turkey arrests 29 Afghan migrants

KABUL (Khaama Press): Turkish police identified and detained 24 undocumented Afghan migrants after inspecting a cargo truck in the city of Amasya. The individuals were found hidden inside the truck, which was transporting raw rubber. According to the police report, the incident took place on Sunday, February 9. The truck, originally from Russia, had traveled nearly 800 kilometers through Turkey before being stopped in Amasya for inspection. Turkish media reported that the truck had entered from Russia and was transporting goods when it was intercepted. Police also arrested the truck driver for facilitating illegal migration. The detained migrants were processed under Turkish immigration laws and were transferred to deportation centers in Amasya. Authorities are now handling their cases according to legal procedures. Additionally, Turkish media reported the arrest of five more Afghan migrants who were found inside another cargo truck in the city of Tokat. These individuals had also entered Turkey illegally and were detained by authorities. Following their arrest, they were also sent to foreign nationals' deportation centers, where they are awaiting further legal action. The increasing number of such cases highlights the ongoing efforts of Turkish authorities to identify and detain undocumented migrants across the country. The large-scale operations for the detention and deportation of Afghan migrants have significantly increased in recent weeks across Turkey, Pakistan, and Iran. Authorities in these countries are intensifying efforts to identify and expel undocumented migrants. Afghanistan's nationals are the second-largest foreign population in Turkey after Iraqis, with their numbers reaching 139,251. The Turkish Interior Ministry previously reported that over the past five years, more than one million undocumented migrants have been arrested, with 175,786 detentions recorded in 2024 alone.

16 killed, 2 injured in Afghanistan last week

KABUL (Pajhwok): Last week, Radio Begum's broadcasts were suspended and seven Black Hawk helicopters, which had been transferred from Afghanistan to Uzbekistan, handed over to the United States. SIGAR claimed certain foreign groups were operating in Afghanistan, but the Islamic Emirate rejected the allegation as baseless. South Korea announced \$3 million in aid to Afghanistan. Casualties Last week, 16 people were killed and two others wounded in various incidents across Afghanistan. Local officials say one armed robber was killed in Kandahar and three others in Nimroz during clashes with security forces. One security official was also killed. In Parwan, a fight occurred between armed robbers and a house owner, resulting in the death of one thief. The house owner's wife was also killed while their son was injured. In Takhar, two robbers entered a house, killing a woman and a man. Last week, UNAMA and the Ministry of Interior said gunfire took place at the mission's compound in Kabul, killing a security an IEA guard and wounding a UNAMA worker. Moreover, unidentified gunmen killed a tribal leader in Faryab, while the bodies of a 43-year-old man and an elderly person were found in the same province and in Kandahar. Parwan police said during a joint operation by the police and intelligence personnel in Jangal Bagh area, two armed men were killed and three others captured alive. In the previous week, 21 people had been killed and five others wounded in various incidents across Afghanistan. Envoys meeting in Tajikistan Central Asia's special representatives and envoys have discussed socio-economic and political developments in Afghanistan in Dushanbe. The 6th meeting of special representatives and envoys of Central Asia states and the European Union for Afghanistan was held in Tajikistan on Wednesday. Tajikistan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs said the participants exchanged views on the socio-economic and political developments in Afghanistan since the last meeting in February 2024, as well as on the approaches of the Central Asian countries and the EU to assisting Afghanistan. IEA deputy spokesman Hamdullah Fitrat, said the caretaker government maintained good relations with the countries of the region and sought positive interactions with all countries. He added: "Other countries hosting such discussions and meetings should be assured there is now peace and stability in Afghanistan, efforts are underway for economic prosperity and regional states should cooperate with us in this endeavor, so that in the end, we can ensure regional stability and make it permanent. Afghanistan, being a war-torn country, needs to address its economic shortcomings, meet other requirements, and strengthen regional cooperation."

Foreign Affairs Maulvi Amir Khan Muttaqi was permitted to travel to the United Arab Emirates (UAE) from December 28, 2024 to January 7, 2025 for official meetings. Similarly, Minister of Hajj and Religious Affairs Noor Mohammad Saqib was exempted from travel restrictions to attend a Hajj Conference and the Makkah Exhibition in Saudi Arabia from January 13 to 16. On Tuesday, IEA spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid confirmed Minister of Interior Khalifa Sirajuddin Haqqani had returned home from his trip to the UAE. During his visit, Haqqani met UAE President Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan and discussed matters of bilateral interest. IEA scorns SIGAR claim The Special Inspector for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) has claimed that some foreign groups are active in Afghanistan, but the IEA denied the claim, stating that no foreign group exists in the country. In its latest report, SIGAR expressed concern over the activities of the Islamic State (IS), also known as Daesh, Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan. But Hamdullah Fitrat, the deputy spokesman for IEA, dismissed the claims as baseless and far from truth. In an audio message, Fitrat reiterated that there were no foreign groups in Afghanistan. He recalled: "Daesh had taken control of some areas during America's occupation but has since been suppressed by the caretaker government's security forces, effectively eliminating their strength." He said the few remaining IS members operated in secrecy and stayed in hiding, with their movements being closely monitored by intelligence agencies. According to him, sufficient security forces are there to combat the group, and effective measures have been taken to ensure stability. Black Hawk helicopters transferred to US According to reports, more than 40 aircraft and helicopters were transferred to Uzbekistan and Tajikistan

independently. Last week, UNAMA and the Ministry of Interior said gunfire took place at the mission's compound in Kabul, killing a security an IEA guard and wounding a UNAMA worker. Moreover, unidentified gunmen killed a tribal leader in Faryab, while the bodies of a 43-year-old man and an elderly person were found in the same province and in Kandahar. Parwan police said during a joint operation by the police and intelligence personnel in Jangal Bagh area, two armed men were killed and three others captured alive. In the previous week, 21 people had been killed and five others wounded in various incidents across Afghanistan. Envoys meeting in Tajikistan Central Asia's special representatives and envoys have discussed socio-economic and political developments in Afghanistan in Dushanbe. The 6th meeting of special representatives and envoys of Central Asia states and the European Union for Afghanistan was held in Tajikistan on Wednesday. Tajikistan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs said the participants exchanged views on the socio-economic and political developments in Afghanistan since the last meeting in February 2024, as well as on the approaches of the Central Asian countries and the EU to assisting Afghanistan. IEA deputy spokesman Hamdullah Fitrat, said the caretaker government maintained good relations with the countries of the region and sought positive interactions with all countries. He added: "Other countries hosting such discussions and meetings should be assured there is now peace and stability in Afghanistan, efforts are underway for economic prosperity and regional states should cooperate with us in this endeavor, so that in the end, we can ensure regional stability and make it permanent. Afghanistan, being a war-torn country, needs to address its economic shortcomings, meet other requirements, and strengthen regional cooperation."

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WEST BANK: A freed Palestinian prisoner greeted by loved ones after being released from an Israeli jail.

80 bunkers demolished in Kurram

F.P. Report

PARACHINAR: A total of 80 bunkers have been demolished in Kurram District as part of ongoing efforts to restore peace in the region. Additionally, compensation cheques were distributed to the families of martyrs.

According to the district administration on Sunday, 25 more bunkers were dismantled recently, bringing the total number of demolished bunkers to 80 since the implementation of the peace agreement. Heavy machinery is being used to carry out the demolition process.

The administration further stated that 14 more families of martyrs from Lower Kurram received compensation cheques worth one million rupees

each. Deputy Commissioner Kurram emphasized that so far, nearly Rs. 60 million have been distributed among the families of martyrs and other victims of terrorist incidents. He also mentioned that efforts are ongoing to collect data on affected individuals to ensure further assistance.

Meanwhile, Additional Assistant Commissioner (AAC) Lower Kurram, Azmatullah, has stated that the peace agreement in Kurram district is being implemented 100%, with law and order as the top priority.

The transportation of daily use supplies is carried out under strict security to designated areas. Speaking to the media on Sunday, AAC Azmatullah emphasized that the peace agree-

ment between both parties is being fully enforced adding that demolition of bunkers is ongoing on a daily basis.

He further mentioned that concrete bunkers are being destroyed using explosives, while other bunkers are being removed with heavy machinery. The Additional Assistant Commissioner also highlighted that supply convoys are being arranged as needed. The civil administration, police, Frontier Corps (FC), and the army ensure the safe transportation of essential goods to designated locations under tight security. He reaffirmed the commitment to reopening roads as per the peace agreement, stressing that maintaining law and order remains the administration's foremost priority.

Inaugural session of Aman dialogue 2025 held

F.P. Report

KARACHI: The two-day AMAN Dialogue, a maiden event conducted as an adjunct to Exercise AMAN 2025, commenced at Pakistan Naval Academy, Karachi. The dialogue, organized under the aegis of the Pakistan Navy, has brought together Chiefs/Heads of Navies, Maritime Organizations, and renowned academicians from around the globe. The inaugural session was attended by the Defence Minister of Pakistan, Khawaja Muhammad Asif, as the Chief Guest.

In his welcome address, Chief of the Naval Staff underscored the significance of the AMAN Dialogue and emphasized the need for sharing experiences among maritime nations to formulate actionable strategies for countering emerging maritime threats.

Delivering the keynote address, Senator Mushahid Hussain Syed applauded Pakistan Navy's efforts in promoting a collaborative approach to tackle complex maritime security challenges. He also highlighted Navy's contributions towards raising awareness about Blue Economy and supporting the socio-economic uplift of coastal communities at the national level.

Under the overarching theme, "Secure Seas, Prosperous Future," the AMAN Dialogue features multiple panel discussions and deliberations by Chiefs of Navies and heads of delegations on a wide range of topics, including maritime security, maritime cooperation, blue economy, and the impact of technology on maritime security. The dialogue provides an exclusive platform for global naval leadership, supported by renowned academia, to devise strategies for a secure maritime future.

On the sidelines of the AMAN Dialogue, Chief of the Naval Staff, Admiral Naveed Ashraf, held interactive meetings with Heads of Navies and Coast Guards attending the event. These meetings focused on contemporary maritime issues, matters of mutual interest, and prospects for enhanced maritime collaboration.

ANP to hold public meeting

F.P. Report

LOWER DIR: The Awami National Party Dir Lower has announced to demonstrate its political strength on the occasion of the death anniversary of Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan and Khan Abdul Wali Khan in Timergara on February 15.

An ANP statement on Sunday said that provincial leaders will address the anniversary gathering. In this regard, an ANP meeting was held at the residence of ANP Senior Vice President and former candidate for the Provincial Assembly Malik Sajjad Khan Yousafzai in Malikabad, wherein large number of officials, fellow lawyers, students and workers of the Pashtun Students Federation from across the district participated.

The meeting reviewed the preparations for the death anniversary of Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan and Khan Abdul Wali Khan in Timergara on February 15.

The organization was also discussed and it was decided to complete the party organization at the teshil, union council and village council levels soon.

Displacement of Palestinians from their land Saudi Arabia reiterates rejection of Israeli comments

RIYADH (Reuters): Saudi Arabia on Sunday reiterated its categorical rejection of statements regarding the displacement of the Palestinian people from their land, particularly those made by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

The Kingdom's Foreign Ministry said in a statement that it rejected "such statements that aim to divert attention from the continuous crimes committed by the Israeli occupation against the Palestinian brothers in Gaza, including the ethnic cleansing they are subjected to." The ministry likewise expressed its appreciation of the "condemnation, disapproval and total rejection announced by the brotherly countries" regarding the Israeli leader's comments.

"The Kingdom also points out that this extremist, occupying mentality does not understand what the Palestinian land means to the brotherly people of Palestine and their emotional, historical and legal connection to this land, and it does not think that the Palestinian people deserve to live in the first place, as it has completely destroyed the Gaza Strip, killed and injured more than 160,000, most of them children and women, without the slightest human feeling or moral responsibility," the Saudi Foreign Ministry statement said. "The Kingdom affirms that the Palestinian people have a right to their land, and they are not intruders or immigrants to it who can be expelled whenever the brutal Israeli occupation wishes."

"The Kingdom notes that the proponents of these extremist ideas are the ones who prevented Israel from accepting peace by refusing peaceful coexistence, rejecting the peace initiatives adopted by the Arab countries, and systematically practicing injustice toward the Palestinian people for more than 75 years, with dis-

regard to the truth, justice, law and the values established in the United Nations Charter, including the human's right to live in dignity on his land," the statement added. The Saudi Foreign Ministry also reiterated that the right of the Palestinian people "will remain firmly established and no one will be able to take it away from them no matter how long it takes."

It added lasting peace would only be achieved by "returning to the logic of reason and accepting the principle of peaceful coexistence through the two-state solution." Egypt earlier condemned as "irresponsible" statements by Israeli officials suggesting establishing a Palestinian state on Saudi territory, with its Foreign Ministry emphasizing that the suggestion was a "direct infringement of Saudi sovereignty." It added that the Kingdom's security was a "red line for Egypt."

The Jordanian Foreign Ministry described the Israeli remarks as "inflammatory and a clear violation of international law, relevant UN resolutions and state sovereignty." Spokesperson Sufian Qudah criticized what he described as Israel's continued provocative policies and rhetoric, stressing that such statements reflect an exclusionary and hostile approach that undermines regional stability, Petra reported.

Jordan, he added, stands in full solidarity with Saudi Arabia against these statements, urging international actors to take a firm stance against irresponsible rhetoric that threatens peace efforts. The UAE also strongly condemned and denounced Netanyahu's "reprehensible and provocative" statements regarding the establishment of a Palestinian state in Saudi Arabia and "affirmed

its categorical rejection of these unacceptable statements."

Jassim Al-Budaiwi, the secretary-general of the Gulf Cooperation Council, on Sunday condemned the Israeli statements, describing them as "dangerous and irresponsible." He noted that the GCC countries strongly supported Saudi Arabia's advocacy for the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people and the establishment of a Palestinian state within the pre-1967 borders.

Al-Budaiwi urged the international community to take a "serious and decisive" stand against aggressive Israeli statements that threaten the security and stability of the region. The Kuwaiti Ministry of Foreign Affairs also rejected Netanyahu's statements and expressed its support for Saudi Arabia in defense of its stability and sovereignty.

Bahrain said that these Israeli comments were "irresponsible," and the suggestion of establishing a Palestinian state on Saudi territory was "a flagrant violation of international law and the UN Charter." The Bahraini Ministry of Foreign Affairs added that Manama was fully supportive "of the brotherly Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and stands by its security, stability, and sovereignty."

It added that preserving the rights of Palestinians and preventing their displacement from their lands, alongside establishing a Palestinian state, was the only path to a just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East. Qatar also condemned Netanyahu's comment suggesting establishing a Palestinian state inside Saudi territory, the Qatari foreign ministry said in statement. Qatar, a key mediator in Gaza ceasefire negotiations between Hamas and Israel, described Netanyahu's statement as "provocative."

Israeli forces withdraw from key Gaza corridor

GAZA STRIP (AP): Israeli forces withdrew from a key corridor in Gaza on Sunday, Israeli officials and Hamas said, the latest commitment under a tenuous ceasefire that faces a major test over whether the sides can negotiate its planned extension.

Israelis' shock at the sight of three emaciated hostages released has added pressure on Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to extend the truce instead of returning to fighting when the ceasefire's first phase ends in early March. Israel and Hamas appear to have made little progress on negotiating the deal's second phase, which is meant to extend the ceasefire and lead to the release of more Israeli hostages held by Hamas. Talks had been due to start on Feb. 3.

Netanyahu was sending a delegation to Qatar, a key mediator, but it included low-level officials, sparking speculation that it won't lead to a breakthrough. Netanyahu is also expected to convene key Cabinet ministers this week. The 4-mile (6-kilometer) Netzarim corridor separating northern and southern Gaza had been used by Israel as a military zone during the 16-month war, but no troops were seen in the vicinity Sunday. As the ceasefire began last month, Israel began allowing hundreds of thousands of displaced Palestinians to cross Netzarim and return to the north. Separately on Sunday, the Palestinian Health Ministry said two women, one of them eight months pregnant, were killed by Israeli gunfire in the occupied West Bank, where Israeli troops have been carrying out an operation.

The ceasefire that began on Jan. 19 has held, raising hopes that the war that led to seismic shifts in the Middle East may be headed toward an end. But it remains fragile. On Sunday, civil defense first responders in Gaza said three people were killed by Israeli fire east of Gaza City. Israel's military noted "several hits" after warning shots were fired and again warned Palestinians from approaching its forces.

Cars heaped with belongings headed north through a road that crosses Netzarim. Under the deal, Israel should allow cars to cross unimpeded. The Israeli officials, who spoke on condition of anonymity because they weren't authorized to discuss troop movement with the media, did not say how many soldiers withdrew or to where. Troops remain along Gaza's borders with Israel and Egypt.

Hamas spokesperson Abdel Latif Al-Qanouna said the troops' withdrawal showed the militant group had "forced the enemy to submit to our demands" and that it thwarted "Netanyahu's illusion of achieving total victory." Israel has said it won't agree to a complete withdrawal from Gaza until Hamas' military and political capabilities are eliminated. Hamas says it won't hand over the last hostages until Israel removes all troops from the territory.

During the 42-day first phase of the ceasefire, Hamas is gradually releasing 33 Israeli hostages captured during its Oct. 7, 2023, attack that sparked the war in exchange for the release of nearly 2,000 Palestinian prisoners and a flood of humanitarian aid to Gaza. The deal also stipulates that Israeli troops will pull back from populated areas. In the second phase, all remaining living hostages would be released in return for a complete Israeli withdrawal from Gaza and "sustainable calm." But details beyond that are unclear.

Families of hostages gathered Sunday in Tel Aviv to again urge Netanyahu to extend the ceasefire. "We know that for a year, that they are dying there, so we need to finish this deal in a hurry," said Ayala Metzger, the daughter-in-law of hostage Yoram Metzger, who died in captivity. But Netanyahu is also under pressure from far-right political allies to resume the war after the first phase so that Hamas, which carried out the deadliest attack on Israelis in their history, can be defeated.

Complicating things further is a proposal by US President Donald

Trump to relocate the population of Gaza and take ownership of the Palestinian territory. Israel has expressed openness to the idea while Hamas, the Palestinians and much of the world have rejected it outright. The suggested plan has moral, legal and practical obstacles. It may have been proposed as a negotiation tactic by Trump to pressure Hamas or make an opening gambit in discussions aimed at securing a normalization deal between Israel and Saudi Arabia.

That deal appeared to be rattled on Sunday as Saudi Arabia condemned remarks by Netanyahu who said Palestinians could create their state there. Saudi Arabia said his remarks "aim to divert attention from the successive crimes committed by the Israeli occupation against our Palestinian brothers in Gaza, including the ethnic cleansing they are being subjected to."

Qatar on Sunday called Netanyahu's comments "provocative" and a blatant violation of international law. The war in Gaza, sparked by Hamas' attack that killed 1,200 people and took 250 hostage, has killed more than 47,000 Palestinians, according to local health authorities, who do not differentiate between fighters and noncombatants in their count. Vast parts of the territory have been obliterated.

Violence has surged in the West Bank throughout the war and has intensified in recent days with an Israeli military operation in the territory's north. The shooting of the pregnant woman, Sundus Shalabi, happened in the Nur Shams urban refugee camp, a focal point of Israeli operations against Palestinian militants. The Palestinian Health Ministry said another woman, Rahaf Al-Ashqar, 21, was also killed. Israel's military said its police had opened an investigation. Israel's Defense Minister Israel Katz announced on Sunday the expansion of the operation, which started in Jenin several weeks ago. He said it was meant to prevent Iran from establishing a foothold in the West Bank.

Trump says he has spoken to Putin about ending Ukraine war

MOSCOW (Reuters): US President Donald Trump said he has spoken to Russian President Vladimir Putin by phone about ending the war in Ukraine, the New York Post reported, the first known direct conversation between Putin and a US president since early 2022.

Trump, who has promised to end the war in Ukraine but not yet set out in public how he would do so, said last week that the war was a bloodbath and that his team had had "some very good talks." In an interview aboard Air Force One Trump told the New York Post that he had "better not say," when asked how many times he and Putin had spoken.

"He (Putin) wants to see people stop dying," Trump told the New York Post. The White House did not respond to a request for comment outside normal business hours. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told the TASS state news agency that "many different communications are emerging."

"These communications are conducted through different channels," Peskov said when asked by TASS to comment directly on the New York Post report. "I personally may not know something, be unaware of something. Therefore, in this case, I can neither confirm nor deny it." The conflict in

eastern Ukraine began in 2014 after a pro-Russian president was toppled in Ukraine's Maidan Revolution and Russia annexed Crimea, with Russian-backed separatist forces fighting Ukraine's armed forces.

Putin sent thousands of troops into Ukraine in 2022, calling it a "special military operation" to protect Russian speakers in Ukraine and counter what he said was a grave threat to Russia from potential Ukrainian membership of NATO. Ukraine and its Western backers, led by the United States, said the invasion was an imperial style land grab and vowed to defeat Russian forces.

Moscow controls a chunk of Ukraine about the size of the American state of Virginia and is advancing at the fastest pace since the early days of the 2022 invasion. Trump, author of the 1987 book "Trump: The Art of the Deal," has repeatedly said he wants to end the war and that he will meet Putin to discuss it, though the date or venue for a summit is still not publicly known.

Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates are seen by Russia as possible venues for a summit, Reuters reported earlier this month. On June 14, Putin set out his opening terms for an immediate end to the war: Ukraine must drop its NATO ambitions and withdraw its

troops from the entirety of the territory of four Ukrainian regions claimed and mostly controlled by Russia.

Reuters reported in November that Putin is open to discussing a Ukraine peace deal with Trump but rules out making any major territorial concessions and insists Kyiv abandon ambitions to join NATO. The Kremlin has repeatedly urged caution over speculation about contacts with the Trump team over a possible peace deal.

Leonid Slutsky, head of the Russian parliament's international affairs committee, was cited by the state RIA news agency as saying that preparations for such a meeting were at "an advanced stage" and that it could take place in February or March.

Putin last spoke to former US President Joe Biden in February 2022, shortly before Putin ordered thousands of troops into Ukraine. The two leaders spoke for about an hour then, the Kremlin said. Washington Post journalist Bob Woodward, in his 2024 book "War," reported that Trump had direct conversations as many as seven times with Putin after he left the White House in 2021. Asked if that were true in an interview to Bloomberg last year, Trump said: "If I did, it's a smart thing." The Kremlin denied Woodward's report.