

President returns country
F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: President Asif Ali Zardari on Wednesday returned here after completing his two-day visit to Portugal to express condolence on the demise of Prince Karim Aga Khan. While in Lisbon, the president met with Prince Rahim Aga Khan to offer Fateha and the President of Portugal Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa.



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Country witnesses surge in foreign remittances: PM

— directs ensuring availability of food items at affordable prices during Ramazan; Govt making tedious efforts to achieve sustainable economic growth

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif on Wednesday emphasized that provision of the essential food items to the people at affordable prices was top priority of the government.

He also directed the relevant authorities to prepare a comprehensive strategy to ensure availability of food items at affordable prices during the holy month of Ramazan. He said the federal and provincial governments should collaborate to ensure provision of eatable items at reasonable prices to the common man.

The prime minister was chairing the meeting of the cabinet at the PM House. The cabinet, on the recommendation of the Ministry of National Education and Vocational Training, approved the appointment of Dr. Hassan Al-Amin (BS-21) as the Director of the National Institute of Pakistan Studies at Quaid-e-Azam University, Islamabad. The cabinet was informed that his appointment was made on merit through a transparent system.

The cabinet, on the recommendation of the Ministry of Finance, approved the appointment of Tahira Raza as a non-executive member of the State Bank of Pakistan for a period of five years. Likewise, the cabinet, on the recommendation of the ministry of religious affairs and interfaith harmony, approved the strategy of interfaith harmony policy and religious tolerance.

The cabinet was told that a sub-

PM reaffirms Pakistan's dedication to strengthening collaboration with IAEA

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif on Wednesday reaffirmed Pakistan's dedication to further strengthening its collaboration with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to harness the full potential of nuclear technology for peaceful purposes, ensuring continued benefits for the people of Pakistan and the global community.

Director General of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Rafael Mariano Grossi paid a courtesy call on the prime minister at the PM House. During the meeting, they discussed the peaceful applications of nuclear technology in various sectors, including cancer diagnostics and treatment, agriculture, food preservation, water management, and industry. PM Office Media Wing said in a press release. The prime minister commended the IAEA's initiatives in promoting nuclear energy as a key solution for mitigating climate change and emphasized Pakistan's commitment to leveraging nuclear technology for sustainable development. During the meeting, the prime minister noted that, as one of the founding members of the IAEA, Pakistan has maintained a productive and mutually beneficial partnership with the Agency spanning over several decades. With the IAEA's support, Pakistan had made significant progress in nuclear power generation, industrial development, healthcare, and agricultural advancements, contributing to the country's socio-economic growth, he added. The DG IAEA appreciated Pakistan's constructive and longstanding engagement with IAEA and said that the organization would continue to work with Pakistan in the same spirit.

committee presented the recommendation after reviewing the strategy of interfaith harmony policy and religious tolerance. Dialogues and conferences with regard to the religious tolerance would be held and public awareness campaigns would also be run under the policy.

An action plan regarding the safety of the rights of religious minorities is also part of the policy. Furthermore, under the religious tolerance strategy,

measures would be taken to prevent hate material and literature besides preparing a plan of action to resolve various sectarian differences. On the recommendation of the ministry of religious affairs and interfaith harmony, the cabinet approved appointment of Laila Ilyas Kalpana and Satwant Kaur as female members of the Evacuee Trust Property Board.

(Continued on Back Page)

NEPRA okays cut in power prices

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The National Electric Power Regulatory Authority (NEPRA) has approved a reduction in electricity prices by Rs. 1.23 per unit for a month.

According to a notification issued here, the reduction is applicable for the month of February and is a result of the monthly fuel adjustment for December, according to NEPRA. The relief will be reflected in the electricity bills for February. However, the reduction will not apply to lifeline electricity and electric vehicle charging stations.

K-Electric consumers will also benefit from the price reduction of Rs. 1.23 per unit, as part of the monthly fuel adjustment for November. Karachi's electricity consumers can expect relief in their February electricity bills. NEPRA has issued a notification regarding the reduction in electricity prices.

The price reduction will provide relief to electricity consumers across the country, including Karachi, for the month of February. The power companies had filed a petition seeking a reduction of Rs 52.12 billion in the tariff, which is part of the second quarterly adjustment for the current fiscal year. The request included a reduction of Rs. 50.66 billion in capacity charges, Rs. 2.66 billion in transmission and distribution losses, and Rs. 2.69 billion in operation and maintenance expenses.

KP govt clears liabilities of Rs78.5b, revenue goes up

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has cleared the inherited liabilities to the tune of Rs.78.5 billion and increased the provincial revenue by over 49 per cent while the surplus budget during the last six months has crossed Rs. 169 billion.

This was revealed during the 23rd meeting of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Cabinet held at the Civil Secretariat Peshawar with Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Ali Amin Khan Gandapur in the chair. Besides, provincial ministers, advisors, special assistants, Chief Secretary, Additional Chief Secretaries, Senior Member Board of Revenue, and administrative secretaries attended the meeting.

The achievement has been made possible despite the fact that it has established a debt management fund to pay off debts and has added Rs 30 billion to this fund besides numerous welfare initiatives. All this happened due to the proper financial management and commitment of the government. In his opening remarks, Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Ali Amin Khan Gandapur stated that the draft Ramadan Package of the Provincial Government was almost ready and will soon be presented to the cabinet next week.

He said that each and every parliamentarian will send a list of five thousand poor people from his constituency who will be given Rs.10, 000/- each as part of the said package. He emphasized that all parliamentarians should ensure the names, photo copies of the CNICs, and easy paisa accounts to reach the concerned offices in time.

He also said that local administration should be timely mobilized so that no profiteer exploits the general public at large during the holy month of Ramadan. He also stressed ensuring transparency in these processes. It was also revealed that the 26th meeting of the cabinet will review the one year performance of each and

every Provincial Department.

The cabinet approved the provision of Rs. 1,212.96 million as a non-ADP scheme for the treatment of haemophilia patients in the province. The scheme will be funded by 50 per cent each by the provincial government and Roche Pakistan. It was further revealed that currently, there are 850 haemophilia patients registered in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, out of whom 65 children are unable to get treatment due to the high cost of medicines.

The cabinet approved Rs 19,374 billion for the construction of Buner-Karakar Tunnel in Buner district and a bridge over the Indus River in Torghar district. The construction of Karakar Tunnel will significantly reduce the travel time between Buner and Swat, while the bridge will reinforce the bonds of close relations among the people of all these divisions, i.e. Malakand, Hazara and Mardan.

The cabinet also approved the re-appropriation of the unspent amount of Rs. 781.485 million from the scheme 'Development of Tourists Spots in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa' to the scheme 'Rehabilitation of Flood Damaged Rural Roads under the Counter Value Funds. Thus, the said fund will now be utilized for construction of tourist roads.

It also approved the provision of a grant of Rs. 100 million to the Sports and Youth Affairs Department for the revival of the Youth Endowment Fund. This fund will be used for capacity building of youth organizations, financial assistance for participation in national and international conferences, cash prizes for outstanding youth, and other youth related activities. The cabinet also approved the release of a grant of Rs. 80 million for Cadet College Mammad Gat (Mohmand) and a grant-in-aid of Rs. 80 million for Peshawar Model School and College. It also approved the increase in the fixed pay package for the chairman and members of the FATA Tribunal, to bring it at par with other tribunals in the province.

Raja said the 2 (1)(d)(1) was first mentioned in 1975 F.B. Ali case. He called the Army Act a "black hole." If any amendment is made, fundamental rights will be abolished.

Justice Mandokhail asked the counsel if a member of the Armed Forces commits a crime while sitting in his home, will the Army Act apply? Raja explained to him that if a military personnel flies a kite at his home in Punjab, he would be tried under the civil law as kite flying is prohibited in the province. He said there are two issues in the case: one is of Article 175; and as far as fundamental rights are concerned, they will not be suspended.

Justice Mandokhail put another question to him that if a soldier marries a second wife without the consent of his first wife, what will happen?

Advocate Raja asked the justice "will the case be sent to a military court?" Justice Afghan, in a lighter tone, addressed the advocate that he has affiliation with a political party. When the party was in power [in 2020], the Army Act was amended and the party vehemently supported that.

Raja replied that at that time, he was not a part of the PTI; "I have always been on the opposition side." It may be recalled that Pakistan Army (Amendment) Act, 2020 amended the Pakistan Army Act, 1952. It "provides a measure to President of Pakistan, acting on the advice of Prime Minister, to extend the tenure of Chief of Army Staff (COAS) by three years. It also set an upper age limit of 64 years for the COAS."

Justice Mazhar asked him why should the Supreme Court look at

The Frontier Post

124 bunkers demolished
F.P. Report

PARACHINAR: A total of 124 bunkers have been demolished in Kurram district, while the beautification and renovation of Bagan Bazaar are in progress. According to the district administration on Wednesday, the demolition of bunkers from both sides is ongoing. So far, 124 bunkers have been dismantled. Alongside this, the beautification of Bagan Bazaar is proceeding rapidly.



ISLAMABAD: Director General of International Atomic Energy Association, Mr. Raphael Mariano Grossi called on Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif.

Govt abolishes aviation ministry

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Under its much-touted rightsizing strategy aiming to reduce expenses and boost institutional performance, the federal government has abolished the Ministry of Aviation and merged it into the Ministry of Defence.

The defence ministry has issued a letter regarding the merger to notify the development to all ministries and divisions after completing the implementation of statutory regulatory orders (SROs) given by the Cabinet Division on February 4.

The letter, sent to all provincial chief secretaries including top officials of the Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) and Gilgit-Baltistan (GB), stated that the defence ministry should be approached for all aviation matters in future. Through this merger, the incumbent government was eyeing saving Rs145 million annually.

The decision was taken last month after the federal government turned down a proposal to create a separate transport division by merging aviation, railways and communication divisions. The PM Shehbaz-led administration received a new recommendation on January 10 for merging the aviation ministry with the defence ministry, which was previously managing aviation matters until 2013, more aligned with the strategic goals as part of the rightsizing programme. The federal government has formulated a rightsizing programme by abolishing various ministries and their attached departments to reduce expenditures and improve the efficiency of the government.

Saif removed

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Barrister Dr Saif has been removed from his position as PTI Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's general secretary for information.

Following his appointment as provincial president, Junaid Akbar has been making structural changes within the party. He has assigned the role of provincial information secretary to Malik Adeel Iqbal, while Advocate Zeeshan has been appointed deputy information secretary. According to the official notification, both appointments have been formally approved and announced.

COAS stresses national unity against terrorism

F.P. Report

RAWALPINDI: General Syed Asim Munir, NI (M), Chief of Army Staff (COAS), addressed a gathering of young university and college students, representing youth from all across Pakistan.

During his interaction, COAS encouraged the students to strive for excellence in their academic pursuits and to develop skills that would enable them to contribute positively to the country's progress. He also shared perspective on the impact of external environment on Pakistan, especially the threat from trans-border terrorism.

The Army Chief praised the youth for their energy, creativity, and ability to innovate, stating that they are the future leaders of Pakistan. COAS highlighted the role of the Pakistan Army in safeguarding the coun-



try's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

He honoured the sacrifices of people of Pakistan in nation's struggle against the menace of terrorism, and appreciated their resolute support to the Armed

Forces and LEAs. Emphasizing the need to imbibe 'Pakistania', COAS highlighted the significance of Pakistan's history, culture, and values in the intellectual development of our youth.

IMF have concerns about our judicial system: Fazl

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam-Fazl (JUI-F) Chief Maulana Fazlur Rehman on Wednesday said that the International Monetary Fund (IMF) delegation's meeting with the judges of the superior judiciary is an unprecedented event in the history of Pakistan and the world.

Maulana Fazlur Rehman said that a strong economy is linked to justice and fairness, adding that it appeared that the IMF has reservations about Pakistan's judicial system. The JUI-F chief made these remarks while speaking to the media after a book launch event in Islamabad.

During the interaction, a journalist asked about the outcome of the opposition parties' meeting. In response, Fazl said that they attended a dinner hosted by Mahmood Khan Achakzai, and when the political leaders sit together, many discussions naturally take place.

Expressing concerns over the current government, he said it is a product of electoral fraud and is managed by the establishment. He also demanded that the Chief Election Commissioner should step down. When asked about the IMF delega-

tion's meeting with superior court judges, the JUI-F chief reiterated that such a meeting is an unprecedented event in Pakistan and global history. He noted that Parliament previously had a role in judicial appointments, which has now been restored.

He also raised concerns over the 26th constitutional amendment, stating that while his party initially advocated for the formation of a constitutional court, the establishment of a constitutional bench is not a bad start. He suggested that if the constitutional bench is allowed to function properly, it could yield positive outcomes.

He criticized the government for its lack of progress on the registration of religious seminars, stressing that both Federal and provincial governments should fulfill their responsibilities without external pressure. He maintained that the proper procedure is for federal legislation to be followed by corresponding provincial laws. Regarding the performance of the Chief Election Commissioner, he accused Sikandar Sultan Raja of failing in his duties, alleging that the Election Commission acted as a pup-

pet of the establishment. Commenting again on the IMF delegation's meeting with Pakistani institutions, Maulana Fazlur Rehman remarked that it was a unique event in Pakistan's history. He reiterated that economic prosperity is tied to justice and fairness, suggesting that the IMF appears to have concerns about Pakistan's judicial system.

6 SC judges likely to take oath today

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Six newly appointed judges to the Supreme Court (SC) are likely to take oath of their office today. Chief Justice of Pakistan (CJP) Justice Yahya Afridi will administer oath to the newly appointed judges at the Supreme Court building.

The ceremony will be attended by sitting judges of the Supreme Court (SC), the attorney general of Pakistan, the Supreme Court, Pakistan Bars office-bearers and lawyers.

Any amend to Army Act cannot abolish fundamental rights, SC told

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Advocate Salman Akram Raja on Wednesday submitted before the constitutional bench of the Supreme Court that any amendment to the Army Act cannot abolish fundamental rights of a citizen.

Advocate Raja was arguing before a seven-member bench hearing an intra-court appeal against the trial of civilians in military courts as counsel for convict Arzam Junaid. He said according to the law, the crime must be related to the Army Act.

The bench, headed by Justice Amin-ud-Din Khan, includes justices Jamal Khan Mandokhail, Muhammad Ali Mazhar, Justice Hassan Azhar Rizvi, Musarat Hilali, Naem Akhtar Afghan and Shahid Bilal Hassan. At the outset of the hearing, Advocate

that the ordinance was introduced to maintain the regime at that time?

Advocate Raja responded that the Official Secrets Act has been existing since 1923, and trials under it have been taking place since before 1967. Justice Mandokhail remarked that at that time, it was a one-man show. Justice Afghan asked Advocate Raja to note down the questions and answer after the break. Justice Mandokhail said if someone in the civil service commits a crime, he is removed from the job. The civil service does not have the authority to punish. In the Armed Forces, on one hand, he may be dismissed, and on the other, he will also be punished. He sought explanation on whom the Army Act applies.

Justice Mazhar asked the lawyer if a spy is caught, where will trial take

place? Justice Hassan Azhar questioned if a civilian gives secrets to an enemy country, where will he be tried? Salman Akram responded that the trial would be conducted under the Official Secrets Act.

The counsel submitted that there is nowhere in the world where the Constitution grants fundamental rights and someone take them away with the twist of a finger. It cannot happen that a commanding officer says, 'I need the accused; hand them over to me,' Justice Mazhar observed that the five-member bench had abolished Section 2D. After its abolition, spies cannot be tried in a military court. There are also civilian employees in the Army. If a civilian employee spies for an enemy country, where will their trial take place? Raja replied that he is subject to the Army Act.

Govt taking steps for development, welfare of youth: CM’s aide

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Special Assistant to the Chief Minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa for Prisons, Humayun Khan, has said that the provincial government is taking all possible steps for the development and welfare of the youth and in this regard, promoting the youth of the province to higher and modern knowledge, which is among our top priorities and in accordance with the vision of the founder PTI, the current government is investing in the better future of the youth so that they can serve the country and the nation in a better way. He expressed these views while addressing the sixth edition of the Matrix Pakistan Youth Summit held at the University of Agriculture Peshawar as the chief guest.

In his address, Humayun Khan said that the role of youth is of utmost impor-

tance in the development of any country, that is why we are equipping the youth with modern skills and preparing them for competition at the national and international levels which is the first priority of the government. He said that the youth are the future of our country, therefore, it is the need of the hour to expose them to modern fields like technology, e-commerce and artificial intelligence so that we can make them capable of meeting the challenges of the present day.

He also urged the youth on this occasion to increase their skills, acquire expertise in modern sciences and play an active role in the development of the country. The Special Assistant, while appreciating the organization of the Youth Summit at the University of Agriculture Peshawar, said that the agricultural economy is the backbone of Pakistan, and we need to

further develop this sector through modern research, smart farming and technology. The government is also providing full support to young scientists, researchers and entrepreneurs so that they can play their role in increasing the country's agricultural production by acquiring expertise in modern agricultural techniques. On this occasion, Humayoun Khan also awarded 18 prominent youth of the province with the "Pride of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Award". This award was given to the youth in recognition of their outstanding performance and services.

He congratulated the awardees and said that such youth are the pride of our province, and their achievements are a beacon of light for other youth. This sixth edition of the Matrix Pakistan Youth Summit consists of three-day events, in which sessions, workshops, exhibitions and

networking opportunities are being provided on various topics. Thousands of youth, experts, representatives of government and private institutions and people from the education sector are participating in this summit and the aim of the event is to expose the youth to modern technology, make them aware of opportunities like entrepreneurship and freelancing and highlight their role in the development of the province. The Matrix Pakistan Youth Summit is proving to be a wonderful platform for the youth not only of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa but also of the entire country, where they are getting guidance, opportunities and the opportunity to acquire modern skills to fulfill their dreams. This summit, held under the patronage of the government, is a reflection of the commitment to the welfare and development of the youth.



PESHAWAR: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Minister for Sports and Youth Affairs, Syed Fakhar Jihan, Advisor for Finance Muzammil Aslam and Special Assistant to the Chief Minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa for Communication & and Works Sohail Afridi visited Arbab Niaz Stadium

Fakhar, Muzammil visit Arbab Niaz Stadium

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Minister for Sports and Youth Affairs, Syed Fakhar Jihan, Advisor for Finance Muzammil Aslam and Special Assistant to the Chief Minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa for Communication & and Works Sohail Afridi, on Wednesday, jointly visited the Arbab Niaz Stadium in Peshawar and reviewed the ongoing construction work at the stadium.

Secretary of Sports and Youth Affairs, Muhammad Zia ul Haq, Secretary of Communications and Works Department, Dr. Muhammad Israr along with Additional Secretary of Sports Pir Abdullah Shah, Director General of Sports Abdul Nasir Khan and other senior officials from the department as well as the Superintendent Engineer, Executive Engineer and other staff from the Department of C&W, consultants for the stadium construction project and relevant contractors were also present during the visit.

The provincial minister and other government representatives were briefed about the remaining work in the final phase of the stadium's construction. The Executive Engineer from C&W provided details about the completed work and progress toward finalizing the project.

During the visit, the Provincial Minister for Sports stated that the construction work on the Arbab Niaz Stadium is nearing completion and is in its final stages. He instructed that to expedite the remaining work for the timely handover of the stadium, work should continue in three shifts while progress in this regard should be reviewed on a daily basis.

The Provincial Minister also mentioned that soon PSL matches will be held at this stadium and the people of the province will soon be able to witness international cricket here. He further emphasized that the people of the province will soon see national and international players and heroes playing at this important stadium, which after years of waiting, will finally be ready for cricket enthusiasts.

Advisor for Finance Muzammil Aslam, on the occasion said that the Arbab Niaz Stadium is an important ground for cricket in the province and there will be no issues from the government's side in ensuring the swift completion and handover of the project.

International Day of Preventing Violent Extremism Event focused on promoting peace

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The Department of Criminology, University of Peshawar, in collaboration with the KP Centre of Excellence on Countering Violent Extremism and Students' Societies, University of Peshawar, organized a one-day event to commemorate the International Day of Preventing Violent Extremism.

The event focused on the theme "Preventing Violent Extremism Through Education: Teaching Tolerance, Promoting Peace."

The event commenced with the recitation of the Holy Quran, followed by the national anthem.

Dr. Basharat Hussain, Chairman of the Department of Criminology, University of Peshawar, delivered the welcoming speech. He highlighted the crucial role of education in countering violent narratives and empowering youth to develop resilience against intolerance and extremism.

He spoke about how education serves as a powerful tool in shaping young minds, promoting peace, and fostering critical thinking to challenge extremist ideologies. His address under-

scored the responsibility of academic institutions in creating awareness and nurturing a culture of tolerance.

Dr. Ayaz Khan, Chief Coordination Officer of the KP Centre of Excellence on Countering Violent Extremism, was the Guest of Honour and the keynote speaker. In his address, he emphasized the importance of understanding different perspectives in addressing violent extremism.

He elaborated on the role of education as a fundamental pillar in preventing extremism and creating peaceful communities.

He spoke about various educational strategies that contribute to this effort, including the implementation of peace education programs designed to instil values of coexistence and mutual respect.

He also discussed the significance of youth engagement in countering extremist narratives, encouraging students to take an active role in promoting tolerance.

Dr. Khan further highlighted the growing importance of digital literacy in the fight against violent extremism.

He explained how extremist ideologies often spread through digital platforms and stressed the

need for equipping young people with the skills to critically analyze online content, recognize misinformation, and counter radical propaganda.

He reiterated that education is not just about formal schooling but also about fostering critical awareness, dialogue, and inclusivity in all aspects of life.

The session was followed by an interactive discussion where students engaged with the speakers, raising thought-provoking questions about the challenges in preventing violent extremism and the effectiveness of various educational approaches.

The discussion provided an opportunity for students to gain deeper insights into the complexities of extremism and the role they can play in promoting peace within their communities.

The event concluded with a shield distribution ceremony, where the esteemed guests were honoured for their contributions.

The ceremony served as a token of appreciation for their dedication to the cause of preventing violent extremism through education and for their commitment to fostering a society built on tolerance and understanding.

National Women’s Day celebrated with enthusiasm at UoP

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The Department of Social Work, University of Peshawar enthusiastically celebrated National Women's Day. The event was organized in collaboration with Bolo Helpline, a subsidiary of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Directorate of Social Welfare, Special Education and Women Development, at the Sahibzada Abdul Qayyum Museum Hall, with many female students in attendance.

A panel discussion was held featuring distinguished speakers, including Ms.

Amina Durrani (Director, KP Commission on Women's Rights), Ms. Rukhshanda Naz (Women's Ombudsperson), Ms. Anila Naz (Superintendent Police, AIG Gender Office), Ms. Khushnoodi Zakirullah (Advisor, KP Bar Council's Legal Aid Unit), Mr. Zakaria (Head of UNFPA KP Office), and Mr. Shakeel Ahmed (Chairman, Department of Social Work, University of Peshawar). The discussion was moderated by Dr. Imran Ahmed Sajid, a lecturer from the Department of Social Work. The Chief Guest, Minister for Social Welfare

Syed Qasim Ali Shah, encouraged students to be the voice of change and guide the government. Vice-Chancellor Prof. Dr. Muhammad Naem Qazi thanked all the distinguished guests and highlighted the university's role in women's welfare.

In recognition of their services, Shield of Women Leader awards were presented to notable women from the University of Peshawar and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, including Prof. Dr. Shumaila (Dean, Faculty of Life & Environmental Sciences), Prof. Bushra Khan (Head,

Planning Department), Prof. Iram Irshad (Head, Department of Psychology), Prof. Aneesa Qamar (Head, Department of Physics), Prof. Imrana Amy (Head, Art & Design), Prof. Shahla Gul (Vice President, Teachers' Association), Prof. Shahla Nazneen (Syndicate Member), Prof. Shazia Shah (Principal, College of Home Economics), Prof. Mehnaaz Gul (Head, Journalism), and Dr. Samira Fareed (Deputy Provost). Additionally, Ms. Sehr and Mr. Faisal Mushtaq from Bolo Helpline were also honored.

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Olympic Association Aqil Shah retires as Haroon Zafar elected President



Shahid Afridi

PESHAWAR: After serving in the sports sector for over 40 years former President of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Olympic Association Syed Aqil Shah has retired due to age as per regulations.

Haroon Zafar President of the Provincial Tug-of-War Association has been elected as the new President of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Olympic Association.

Squash legend Qamar Zaman has been appointed as Senior Vice President, while Sohail Bin Qayyum will serve as Vice President. Imtiaz Afridi and Masood Ahmed have been elected as members of the

Executive Committee.

The selections were unanimously made during a meeting of the Executive Committee of the Provincial Olympic Association in Peshawar. Syed Aqil Shah who has played a pivotal role in sports for over four decades voluntarily stepped down. However he will continue his services as the President of the Provincial Wrestling Association.

Rizwan-ul-Haq a former Executive Committee member vacated his seat after being elected as the Secretary of the Islamabad Olympic Association.

Additionally the resignation of Irshad Durrani left another

Executive Committee seat vacant. New members were elected to fill these positions.

During the meeting Executive Committee member and former MPA Shagufta Malik President of Pakistan Bodybuilding Federation and KP Bodybuilding Association Tariq Pervez, Advocate Amir Sabir and other members highlighted the contributions of Syed Aqil Shah, stating that his services to sports would always be remembered.

The committee also proposed renaming Hayatabad Sports Complex after Syed Aqil Shah and demanded the construction of a stadium

in his name. Additionally it was decided to organize the Syed Aqil Shah Games annually.

Newly elected President Haroon Zafar, Secretary Zulfiqar Butt and Squash legend Qamar Zaman paid tribute to Syed Aqil Shah's contributions.

Qamar Zaman acknowledged that Shah played a crucial role in promoting squash at the South Asian Games and Asian Games.

He also facilitated record-breaking international competitions, inter-provincial events and the successful organization of the National Games in Peshawar.

Zarar Haroon

AS Pakistan navigates the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, its economy faces a complex landscape marked by both recovery and significant challenges. While some sectors have shown resilience, others continue to struggle, revealing an uneven recovery trajectory that affects businesses and citizens alike.

The economic environment in post-pandemic Pakistan presents a mixed picture. On one side, GDP growth forecasts for 2024 reflect cautious optimism, with estimates around 4%, driven by pent-up con-

sumer demand, government support programs, and a rise in export activities. However, these figures conceal underlying issues that could hinder sustained growth.

Supply chain disruptions, a defining issue of the pandemic, continue to impact various sectors in Pakistan. The manufacturing and automotive sectors have particularly felt this strain, facing shortages in critical components such as semiconductors, which has delayed production and raised costs. In Pakistan, automotive production has been 15% below pre-pandemic levels, affecting both domestic sales and export opportunities.

Inflation remains a major concern, with the Consumer Price Index (CPI) rising at multi-year highs, exacerbated by increased global commodity prices and domestic supply chain bottlenecks. The State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) has raised interest rates multiple times to curb inflation, a necessary but challenging measure. High interest rates, while aiming to contain inflation, increase borrowing costs for businesses and consumers, which could further dampen economic recovery.

Pakistan's public debt burden has increased as the government took on additional debt to fund

pandemic-related stimulus measures. With higher debt servicing costs and a volatile exchange rate, the country faces mounting pressure on its fiscal stability. The depreciation of the Pakistani Rupee has made imports more expensive, particularly fuel and essential goods, which impacts local businesses and households directly.

The labor market in Pakistan has also undergone notable shifts post-pandemic. While the 'Great Resignation' seen in Western countries is less evident here, sectors like hospitality, retail, and construction face labor shortages, as many workers seek better conditions

and wages. In addition, the informal sector—which constitutes a large part of Pakistan's economy—continues to grapple with instability, with millions of workers affected by reduced job opportunities and income.

One positive aspect of the post-pandemic period has been the acceleration of digital transformation. Many Pakistani businesses have adopted digital tools, such as e-commerce platforms, mobile payment solutions, and remote work technologies. Pakistan's digital economy is growing, with projections suggesting significant growth, although it still faces challenges, especially for

small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) that struggle to access advanced technologies.

Bridging this digital divide has become essential. Government and private initiatives are supporting digital literacy and access, but more targeted efforts are required to help SMEs become part of the digital economy and benefit from increased resilience.

Pakistan's economy is also vulnerable to regional geopolitical issues. Rising energy costs, driven by global oil prices and regional conflicts, continue to strain Pakistan's import bill and create inflationary pressure. The country's dependence on

energy imports makes it susceptible to external shocks, and rising prices have increased electricity tariffs, affecting both industry and households. Additionally, Pakistan is also at risk from new COVID-19 variants that could disrupt economic activity and worsen existing challenges.

The path to a full economic recovery in Pakistan remains challenging. Policymakers must balance the need for economic stimulus with measures to control inflation and manage debt. Initiatives to support industries facing labor shortages, enhance digital infrastructure for SMEs, and stabilize the exchange

rate are essential to support sustainable growth. Furthermore, investment in renewable energy and local production capabilities can help mitigate external pressures and contribute to long-term economic stability.

As Pakistan adjusts to the post-pandemic landscape, the journey to recovery will be a complex one, influenced by both internal challenges and global dynamics. Effective policy interventions, resilient business practices, and strategic investments in technology and infrastructure will be crucial for building a stable and prosperous future.

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In brief

Cleanliness drive kicks off F.P. Report

LANDI KOTAL: A three weeks long cleanliness campaign has been launched in Landi Kotal on Wednesday under the directives of Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The inaugural ceremony was attended by Assistant Commissioner, Tehsil Municipal Officer (TMO), Tehsil Officer Infrastructure, Tehsil officer Regulation, local leader of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf, TMA workers and others. The drive began with awareness walk and practical cleaning efforts, highlighting the importance of maintaining a clean and healthy environment. Speaking on the occasion AC Adnan Mumtaz said that the initiative was part of the CM public service agenda, aiming to improve municipal services, ensure timely garbage collection and to create a pollution free environment. Special attention would be given to clean streets and drainage systems besides garbage heaps in surrounding areas would be collected and disposed of at designated points, he added. AC, urged tribesmen to cooperate with authorities by disposing of the waste and actively participate in the campaign to make Landi Kotal clean and beautiful.

Action against hate content F.P. Report

KARAK: District Coordination Committee directed immediate action against hateful and insulting content on social media under the PECA Act. He directed the concerned authorities to ensure immediate registration of unregistered madrasas in the district. Furthermore, it was decided to take necessary steps for mandatory registration of all warehouses, ambulances and registration of bike services, while orders were also issued for strict action against illegal petrol pumps and crushing plants. Meanwhile, a motorcycle accident occurred in Sapna Banda area due to over speeding. Mother and son were injured as a result of the accident. The injured identified as Ismat Ullah, age 18, resident of Chanda Khurram, Tehsil Banda, Dawood Shah Karak. Meanwhile, Commissioner Kohat Moatasim Ballah Shah visited Karak district. During this, he met with the elders of Karak district in the presence of Deputy Commissioner Karak Shakeel Ahmed Jan. The main objective of the meeting was to discuss the current law and order situation in Karak district.

Hike in meat price demanded F.P. Report

WANA: The butchers staged a protest, demanding an official approval for the price hike, arguing that the current rates were no longer sustainable for their businesses, on Wednesday. The butchers stated that the rising cost of livestock, transportation, and utilities had made it impossible for them to continue selling meat at previous prices. "We are struggling to keep our shops running due to the skyrocketing prices of cattle and other expenses. If prices are not increased, we will be forced to shut down our businesses," one of the protesters said. The butchers urged the district administration to intervene and revise the official pricing of meat to reflect market realities. They warned that if their demands were not met, they might resort to further strikes, potentially leading to a shortage of meat in the market.

Counseling Center at KUST inaugurated

Sahibzada Afridi

KOHAT: Kohat University of Science and Technology (KUST) has achieved a historic milestone by inaugurating the KUST



Counseling Center, a state-of-the-art facility dedicated to promoting mental well-being among students. This center aims to provide psychological support, address academic and social challenges, and help students overcome stress-related issues, ensuring a healthier and more productive educational experience.

The event was organized by the Department of Psychology in collabora-

tion with the District Youth Office Kohat and Dr. Asif Ali, Incharge Center for Human Resource and Career Development at KUST. The ceremony was held at Iftikhar Auditorium,



KUST, where Vice-Chancellor Professor Dr. Muhammad Naseeruddin, Deputy Commissioner Kohat Abdul Akram, and Assistant Commissioner Kohat Nimra Owais graced the occasion as chief guests. Prominent faculty members, including Dr. Zeeshan Bangash, Director of the Quality Enhancement Cell KUST, Dr. Faridullah Khan, Nadir Sarfaraz, Asad Habib, Dr.

Asif Ali, Dr. Farhat Ullah, and Dr. Faisal Mehmood, along with a large number of students, psychologists, and professionals from various educational and social sectors, participated in the event.

During the ceremony, mental health experts highlighted the growing need for psychological support in educational institutions across Pakistan. They emphasized that academic pressure, social challenges, and personal struggles are causing increased stress, anxiety, and depression among students.

The lack of professional counseling services has negatively impacted their academic performance and overall well-being. Students actively participated in the event by performing stage presentations, demonstrating various mental health challenges, and proposing practical solutions, making the session both informative and engaging.

Conference on impact of research on society begins

F.P. Report

KARAK: The 4th International Conference on the Impact of Research on Society commenced today at Khushal Khan Khattak University Karak (KKKUK). The two-day conference has been started here at KKKUK bringing together academics, researchers, and professionals to discuss the crucial role of research in addressing societal issues, problems and challenges.

The opening ceremony was graced by Prof. Dr. Muhammad Naseer Ud Din, Vice Chancellor KKKUK, as the Chief Guest, Registrar Dr. Ghani Ur Rehman, key note speakers from across the country, Heads of different sections and teaching departments including faculty members and a large number of students from various disciplines.

Chief Guest vice chancellor Prof. Dr. Muhammad Naseer Ud Din underscored the vital role of research in societal development and the responsibility of universities to contribute to positive change. Emphasizing the significance of research, he stressed that



research needs to be prioritized by the government and academia. He praised the organizing committee, the Department of LIS, for their efforts in organizing such a valuable event of global significance.

Earlier, in his welcome address, Dr. Saeed Ullah Jan highlighted the importance of research in understanding and solving pressing social issues and problems. He underlined the conference's aim to foster dialogue and collaboration among researchers from diverse fields. He also thanked the distinguished guests for their invaluable participation.

The conference features an impressive lineup of international and national keynote speakers including Teresa S. Welsh, Dr. Susmita Chakraborty, Dr. Arif Khan, Dr. Asad Ullah

Khan, Zakir Hussain, and M. Sakis Biswas and National keynote speakers including Prof. Syed Liaqat Ali, Muhammad Farooq, Muhammad Arshad, Mr. Raja Javed Iqbal, Syed Arif, and Dr. Asad Khan. They would share their insights and expertise on a range of topics related to the impact of research on society in different sessions scheduled for the two consecutive days.

The conference is organized by the Department of Library and Information Science at KKKUK in collaboration with Higher Education Commission and the Pakistan Librarians Society. The event provides a platform for researchers to present their work, exchange ideas, and explore potential collaborations for the betterment of the society.

C&W shares progress on developmental projects

F.P. Report

BUNER: Xen Communication and Works (C&W) has said that Swari bypass has been made usable for small vehicles from Krapa Road to Chanar Bridge while construction work has been started on Category D Hospital Gulbandi Chaghorzai, on Wednesday.

He has said that the Ra 61 crores approved for the Swari 10 km road project. He has also said that the effort is to start asphalt on this important bypass road

in order to make the people of the area facilitate. He claimed by completion of this project, it will open new avenues of development in the area.

XEN regarding the ongoing work on Gulbandi Category D Hospital in Tehsil Chaghorzai said that Minister Syed Fakhar Jahan Bacha has approved 49 crores rupees for this project, out of which 15 crores rupees of land purchased, land leveling and foundation work has been completed and the construction work of the building will be

started soon.

Responding to a question, XEN said that from its office the old arrears of the contractors are almost cleared while funds are available for new works and payment will be made on completion of the work. He has appealed to the people that the government is providing road and building facilities with limited resources, so people should keep an eye on its construction and identify flaws to the XEN office and also take care of these national assets for its durability.

Govt determines to maintain law, order

F.P. Report

KOHAT: Commissioner Kohat Division Syed Moatasim Billah Shah has said that all available resources and efforts will be used to maintain a peaceful environment in the entire Kohat Division and protect the peace and order from deterioration. He added that the anti-peace elements will be dealt sternly.

This he said while talking to the elites of the dis-

trict at Deputy Commissioner Office, Karak the other day. The main purpose of the meeting was to discuss the current situation of law and order in Karak district with the local elders. During the meeting, Commissioner Kohat expressed his determination to ensure peace and stability in Karak and assured the elders that there can be no compromise on the law and order situation.

On this occasion, the elders of Karak District

assured their full support for the efforts of the institutions and pledged full cooperation and support for the establishment of lasting peace.

They reiterated their commitment to stand by the institutions to ensure that Karak remains a peaceful and safe place for all the residents. At the end, the participants of the meeting expressed their commitment to work together for the common goal of peace and stability in Karak district.

Police send 21 drug addicts for rehab

F.P. Report

TANK: Tank police have launched a campaign to combat crime and drug abuse, sending 21 drug addicts for rehabilitation in Dera Ismail Khan.

The drive has been kicked off following instructions of DPO Tank, Aslam Nawaz Khan, who has been at the

forefront of efforts to tackle drug-related issues in the region.

He said that police organized a special transport facility in collaboration with the district administration to ensure the safe transfer of these individuals for rehabilitation. He added that Station House Officer (SHO) Shaheed Mureed Akbar police

station, Sher Afzal Khan and SHO Sami Ullah Khan of the City Police Station conducted the crackdown.

Quoting the DPO Tank Aslam Nawaz Khan as saying that the ongoing campaign against drugs was essential as it would help protect the youth from falling into the grip of addiction and contributing to a positive societal change.



QUETTA: Activists of Breaking Barrier Women Association holding placards during a rally.

Operation against mining mafia conducted Syed Waliullah Shah

NEWSHERA: The district administration conducted a major operation late at night, taking decisive action against elements involved in illegal mining. The purpose of this operation was to bring these elements within the ambit of the law, as they were not only causing losses to the government treasury by extracting resources from state land in an illegal manner but also promoting the illegal smuggling of natural resources.

The district administration received information that the mafia was illegally extracting sand from state land owned by the Pakistan Housing Authority (PHA). In response to this information, the administration launched an organized operation. The midnight operation, carried out under the cover of darkness, involved several officers and relevant agencies, which arrived at the scene and assessed the situation.

During the operation, five large dumpers were seized, which were being used for illegal sand extraction. As a result of this operation, two individuals were also arrested, who were found to be directly involved in this illegal activity. Cases have been registered against these individuals under relevant laws, so they can be punished according to the law.

The district administration has expressed its commitment to continuing operations against illegal activities in the city without discrimination. No one will be allowed to misuse government resources. Citizens are also urged to report any illegal activities to the relevant authorities so that timely action can be taken.

Police recover 300,000 kites F.P. Report

MULTAN: The Multan police recovered 300,000 kites besides thousands of twine/chemical thread spools, worth over Rs 10 million, during a raid at a kite factory here Wednesday, bringing two accused in police custody and breaking a link in the supply chain that had spanned across south Punjab.

City Police Officer (CPO) Multan Sadiq Ali Dogar told a news conference it was the biggest haul during the ongoing campaign against kite flying and businesses adding that two accused including Basharat and his helper Muhammad Ali were arrested. Recovery included 300,000 kites worth over Rs 10 million, 10,000 spools of twine/chemical thread.

He said, accused were engaged in preparation and supply of kites and twine to cities across south Punjab and were caught when the bulk of the banned products was ready to move to markets.

The CPO said that kite flying has become a risky pastime that has caused deaths of many people so far. He appealed the people to keep their children away from this dangerous habit. He commended SP City Hassan Raza Khakhi, DSP New Multan Rao Muhammad Saleem, SHO Shah Rukn-e-Alam Hamid Mahmood and their teams for carrying out a successful operation. SSP Operations Kamran Amir Khan, and SSP Investigations Rana Muhammad Ashraf were also present.

Bugti vows to make QDA profitable institution

F.P. Report

QUETTA: Balochistan Chief Minister Mir Sarfraz Bugti has expressed his commitment to make Quetta Development Authority (QDA) as a profitable and financially self-sustaining institution.

The Chief Minister instructed that the authority should operate in a way that generates its own resources, reducing dependence on government grants. "Development authorities in modern cities generating their own sources of revenue, and QDA would be structured in a similar manner," said the Chief Minister while presided over the meeting of the Quetta Development Authority (QDA), focusing on the city's development, infrastructure improvements, and initiating new projects.

The meeting was briefed by the Director General of QDA, Askar Khan, who provided a detailed overview of proposed projects and highlighted ongoing and future development plans for the city. On the beautification of the city

and public convenience, the Chief Minister directed that feasible and sustainable projects should be prepared to improve the civic services in Quetta.

Sarfraz Bugti emphasized that a sustainable strategy should be formulated for the development of Quetta in line with modern requirements, creating projects that benefit citizens and enhance the city's overall beauty. The Chief Minister also instructed a review of the proposed public park's preliminary design, ensuring that it meets modern standards and caters to public needs.

He stressed that the park should offer better facilities for the public and be transformed into a recreational space where citizens can enjoy quality time. The Chief Minister emphasized the need for adequate planning, noting that parking is a key aspect of development projects worldwide and must be given special attention in Quetta to resolve parking issues for the citizens.

Furthermore, the Chief

Minister urged the acceleration of public-private partnership projects for the greater public good. Sarfraz Bugti acknowledged that the government has limited resources and emphasized the importance of involving the private sector in development projects.

He instructed QDA to design projects that would attract private investors and, through this partnership, provide modern facilities to the public. The Chief Minister made it clear that the development of Quetta is the government's top priority, and practical steps are being taken in this direction.

The meeting was attended by Parliamentary Secretary for QDA Asfandyar Kakar, Chief Secretary of Balochistan Shakeel Qadir Khan, Additional Chief Secretary for Development and Planning Hafiz Abdul Basit, Principal Secretary to CM Babar Khan, Secretary Finance Imran Zarkoon, Chairman of the Public-Private Partnership Authority Dr. Faisal Khan, and other relevant officials.

UET Abbotabad's faculty calls for groundwater conservation

F.P. Report

ABBOTTABAD: The faculty members of the University of Engineering and Technology (UET), Abbotabad Campus, have praised the Choonia Water Treatment Plant initiative launched by the Local Government, Elections & Rural Development Department (LGE&RDD), recognizing its critical role in preventing the depletion of Abbotabad's groundwater reserves. Emphasizing the importance of water conservation,

The faculty urged the public to avoid water wastage and prioritize the use of surface water resources to safeguard underground aquifers for future generations. As part of outreach and awareness efforts, the students and faculty from UET's Architecture Department visited the under-construction Choonia Water Treatment Plant here today.

The exposure visit was organized by the Water and Sanitation Services Company (WSSC), Abbotabad, in collaboration with the Directorate of Media, UET Peshawar Chief Engineer Mohsin Shehzad of the City Implementation Unit under the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Cities Improvement Project (KPCIP) shared key

insights about the project. He stated that the plant would be the first of its kind in Abbotabad, set to provide clean drinking water to 36,000 households.

"This project is being developed under the KPCIP by the LGE&RDD with financial assistance from the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB)," said Engr. Shehzad. "It has been designed with the growing impacts of climate change in mind, ensuring that local communities and the natural environment remain protected for decades to come." Responding to students' queries, Engr. Shehzad explained that the plant would purify 6.85 million gallons (300 liters per second) of water daily, sourced from nearby mountain springs. The water will be transported via a 17-kilometer pipeline to the treatment plant, located on an elevated hill in Choonia, before being distributed across the city.

The facility is designed to meet Abbotabad's water demands until 2050. "This plant will play a pivotal role in preserving underground water reserves and will assist the Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in achieving Sustainable

Development Goal 6 (SDG 6), which focuses on clean water and sanitation," added Engr. Shehzad. Highlighting the region's growing water needs, he noted that from May 1 to July 31, 2024, more than 6.25 million domestic and international tourists visited Abbotabad and its surrounding tourist destinations, placing immense pressure on the city's water supply and underground resources. To address these challenges, the project incorporates advanced technologies, including a Supervisory Control and Data Acquisition (SCADA) system and water meters to ensure efficient water management and transparency.

Prof. Dr. Shabir Qureshi, Head of the Architecture Department at UET Abbotabad, applauded the project, stating, "provision of clean water is a fundamental right, crucial for ensuring a healthy society. The availability of safe drinking water is also vital for promoting tourism and fostering long-term economic growth in the region," adding, "such projects reflect a broader commitment to sustainable development and environmental stewardship, aligning with global best practices in urban planning and resource management," he remarked.

Residents flay prolonged load shedding in Shangla

F.P. Report

SHANGLA: A 'Kuli Katcheri' held by the Assistant Commissioner Alpuri at Government Centennial Model High School Alpuri, where a multitude of complaints from residents were addressed. The session, directed by the Deputy Commissioner Shangla, saw a large turnout as people voiced their concerns directly to government officials.

The following key issues were discussed in the presence of the Judge of Federal Ombudsman. Prolonged Power Outages: Many participants criticized the local power distri-

bution company, PESCO, for long periods of load shedding and inadequate services. They demanded an end to prolonged outages and immediate repairs to faulty lines and transformers.

Subpar Mobile Services: Residents expressed dissatisfaction with mobile companies like Telenor, accusing them of high charges and poor service. Complaints were also raised about PTCL's inadequate broadband services, with calls for immediate installation of fiber optics in the area.

Unhealthy snacks: Concerns were voiced over the sale of substandard

chips, snacks, and powders, which have reportedly led to the deaths of three children recently. Attendees demanded strict action against the responsible companies and the cancellation of their licenses.

Cleanliness awareness walk held: In a bid to promote cleanliness, a walk was organized in Tehsil Chakesar, led by Tehsil Chairman Bakht Alam Khan and Assistant Commissioner Chakesar. The walk, which commenced from the Assistant Commissioner's office and concluded at Chakesar Chowk, aimed to raise awareness about hygiene and cleanliness.



Kurds in new Syria want to preserve cultural rights

QAMISHLI (AP): Kurds in Syria were marginalized during five decades of Assad family rule, with many denied citizenship and wrongly described as Arabs. Now they are seizing the chance during the post-Assad transition to keep the cultural gains they made in the northeast enclave they carved out during the country's civil war.

Mothers can now give children Kurdish names. The Kurdish language is taught in schools. The new year, Nowruz, can be celebrated openly. The Kurds, one of the world's largest populations without a state of their own, have been feeling some control over their lives and want to make that permanent with a new government in power. But that depends on Syria's new leaders, and the outcome of an ongoing conflict between the Kurds and Turkish-backed rebels that's been overshadowed by the dramatic shift from Assad rule. Two months of fighting have left scores dead on both sides.

"We have made all these gains. There is no way we will abandon them, even over our bodies and the bodies of our children," said Amira Ali, a Kurdish woman from the northeastern city of Hassakeh whose husband is a member of the local police force known as, "Asayish," the Kurdish term for security. Shortly after the uprising against the Assad government began in 2011, the Kurds filled the vacuum created by the withdrawal of government forces from wide areas of Syria's northeast. The main Kurdish-led force now controls about 25% of Syria. An autonomous authority runs day-to-day affairs of the region that many Kurds call "Rojava Kurdistan," or "western Kurdistan."

Now Kurdish leaders are negotiating with the new authorities in Damascus on the future of their people, who made up 10% of the country's prewar population. They don't want full autonomy with their own government and parliament; they want decentralization, room to run their day-to-day affairs. The new authorities, however, are allied with the Turkish-backed armed groups that launched an offensive against the Kurds in December during the chaos around Assad's fall. The fighting between the Kurds and the coalition known as the Syrian National Army has forced about 100,000 people to flee their homes.

The conflict has major implications for Syria's future as its new government, led by the Hayat Tahrir al-Sham former Islamist rebel group, tries to consolidate control and begin rebuilding after nearly 14 years of civil war. Mazloum Abdi, commander of the US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces, the main Kurdish-led force, said the country should be a secular, civil and decentralized state that treats all citizens equally. Western countries have called on Syria's new rulers to respect minorities and women's rights. Abdi recalled the Syrian identity cards that described all its citizens as "Syrian Arab citizens," including non-Arabs like the Kurds. They want it to be changed to "Syrian citizens." "Kurds were persecuted by previous authorities," he said. He wants anti-Kurd laws to be abolished.

Abdi and others point out that the Kurds played an important role in defeating the Islamic State group as it rampaged across Syria and neighboring Iraq for years during Syria's civil war. The Kurdish-led SDF was

formed to fight the extremists, and in 2019, SDF fighters captured the last sliver of land they held, the eastern Syrian village of Baghouz. The SDF and other members of the US-led coalition continue the fight against IS sleeper cells. The SDF lost thousands of its members in fighting IS, as well as against the armed factions backed by Turkey. Ankara regards the SDF as an extension of the Kurdistan Workers' Party, or PKK, a Kurdish separatist militant group it has designated a terrorist organization.

Turkey has launched four incursions into northern Syria since 2016, capturing wide areas along its borders and displacing hundreds of thousands of people. It is not clear whether those incursions will stop after Assad's fall. The streets in northeast Syria are decorated with photographs of fallen Kurdish fighters. "God willing, the blood of these martyrs will not be wasted," said Amina Hussein, 57, as she lit incense on the grave of her son Dersim Sheikh, killed in 2015 while fighting IS. "Kurds have achieved a lot, and we should preserve this," she said on a cold morning in the SDF's Martyrs Cemetery, where hundreds of men and women are buried.

The offensive by the Turkish-backed armed groups is the latest challenge to Kurdish gains. The 70-year-old Goulieh Abdu has been displaced twice in the past two months by the fighting. Now she shelters in a compound once run by forces loyal to Assad after SNA shelling forced her to flee to the city of Qamishli. "I swear to God that displacement has killed us," Abdu said, sitting on a mattress next to a diesel heater on a cold January morning. "What did we do to be punished this way?"

At least \$53 billion needed to rebuild Gaza

NEW YORK (AFP): More than \$53 billion will be required to rebuild Gaza and end the "humanitarian catastrophe" that has gripped the war-ravaged territory, including \$20 billion in the first three years alone, the United Nations said.

The global body said in a report that a "political and security framework" must also be put in place so that recovery and rebuilding can begin, and a groundwork can be laid for a political process to quickly end the Israeli occupation "and establish a viable two-State solution." Much of Gaza -- including schools, hospitals and other civic infrastructure -- has been reduced to rubble by a withering Israeli military offensive following an unprecedented Hamas attack on October 7, 2023.

"The interim assessment offers an early indication of the enormous scale of recovery and reconstruction needs in the Gaza Strip," UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said in the document, cau-

tioning that it was not a full assessment.

"The report estimates the recovery and reconstruction needs in the short, medium and long term across the Gaza Strip at \$53.142 billion. Of these, the near-term needs in the first three years are estimated to be around \$20.568 billion," he added. In a resolution adopted in December calling for an immediate and unconditional ceasefire in Gaza, the UN General Assembly had asked Guterres to provide an assessment of the territory's needs within two months.

The report assessed that with "over 60 percent of homes" destroyed in the year-plus war between Israel and Palestinian group Hamas, the housing sector requires around \$15.2 billion. The commerce and industry sector will need an estimated \$6.9 billion, as will the health sector, according to the report.

Reviving the agricultural industry will take around \$4.2 billion, transport will require \$2.9 billion, water

and sanitation an estimated \$2.7 billion and education \$2.6 billion. The report also noted the particularly high costs of \$1.9 billion anticipated for the environmental sector "as a result of the massive debris laced with unexploded ordnance and the high cost associated with removal of debris."

The United Nations has estimated that the war has generated more than 50 million tons of debris, including human remains, unexploded ordnance, asbestos and other hazardous substances. "Critically, the Palestinian Authority must be at the center of planning for and the implementation of recovery and reconstruction in Gaza," Guterres said in the report, which was dated January 30. That was days before US President Donald Trump said he wanted to "take over" Gaza, redevelop the territory and oust the more than two million Palestinians living there. His plan has prompted a global backlash and has been rejected by Palestinians.

Dozens of runaway Congo soldiers face trial on violence charges

DR CONGO (Reuters): Congo authorities will put at least 75 soldiers on trial for fleeing the advance of Rwanda-backed M23 rebels into the eastern province of South Kivu and for violence against civilians, including murder and looting, the military prosecutor's office said.

The United Nations has reported mass violations including summary executions, gang rape and sexual slavery in the wake of a major M23 advance in late January that led to the capture of east Democratic Republic of Congo's largest city of Goma. M23 fighters, Congolese soldiers and pro-government militias were all implicated, the UN human rights office found. Congo has not commented on reports concerning its troops, but called on the UN to investigate violations it blames on M23 rebels and Rwanda.

Rwanda, which denies backing the group, has rejected any responsibility.

M23 rebels have not responded to requests for comment. Despite announcing a unilateral ceasefire, the Tutsi-led rebels have continued to march south towards the capital of South Kivu, Bukavu. Last week, they seized control of the town of Nyabibwe, some 70 km (40 miles) north of the provincial capital. The 75 soldiers facing trial were arrested for fleeing the frontline after Nyabibwe's capture. They are accused of rape, murder, looting and revolt, the military prosecutor's office told Reuters. Others have been arrested further south on the same charges are expected to join them in the dock, the office said.

A civil society source in Kavumu, a town 35 km north of Bukavu and home to the city's airport, said deserting soldiers had killed 10 people, including seven sitting in a bar. "Acts of looting by our uncontrolled soldiers who have fled in the face of the enemy are still being

recorded," said another civil society leader in the area, Leonidas Tabaro. Provincial army spokesman Nestor Mavudisa said the rogue soldiers should be punished and called on the population to remain calm. There did not appear to be a significant escalation in fighting over the weekend. Clashes were reported in a national park around 30 km from Bukavu, along with other sporadic exchanges of fire in the area. The well-equipped M23 is the latest in a long line of ethnic Tutsi-led rebel movements to emerge in Congo's volatile east. Congo's government says it is a Rwandan proxy, which the rebel group and Rwanda deny.

In an attempt to diffuse the crisis, African leaders held an unprecedented joint summit of Eastern and Southern African blocs last week and urged all parties to hold direct talks. Congo's government said that it had taken note of the decisions adopted during the summit.

Houthis ready to launch attacks on Israel

DUBAI (Reuters): The Houthis are ready to mount attacks on Israel if it resumes its assault on Gaza and does not commit to the ceasefire deal, the group's leader Abdulmalik Al-Houthi said.

The Houthis had attacked Israeli and other vessels in the Red Sea, disturbing global shipping lanes, in what they said were acts of solidarity with Gaza's Palestinians during Israel's war with Hamas.

"Our hands are on the trigger and we are ready to immediately escalate against the Israeli enemy if it returns to escalation in the Gaza Strip," Al-Houthi said in a televised speech. The Gaza ceasefire deal appears fragile after Hamas said it would stop releasing Israeli hostages over what the Palestinian militant group called Israeli violations of the agreement.

In response, Israel's Defense Minister Israel Katz instructed the military to be at the highest level of readiness in Gaza and for domestic defense. The Houthis, part of Iran's anti-Israel and anti-Western regional alliance known as the Axis of Resistance, have also launched missiles and drones toward Israel, hundreds of kilometers to the north.

Philippines kicks off election campaigning

MANILA (Reuters): Campaigning for the Philippines' midterm elections kicked off on Tuesday against a fractured political backdrop, heightened by a high-profile row among warring elites that culminated in last week's impeachment of Vice President Sara Duterte.

The impeachment could see Duterte removed from her post and banned for life from public office and comes amid an escalating feud between her and President Ferdinand Marcos Jr, whose once-powerful alliance propelled them to a landslide election victory in 2022. Their fallout has sent ripples through Philippine politics, turning the midterms into a high-stakes power struggle and a preview of a likely battle between their camps in the 2028 presidential race.

Marcos is limited to a single term under the constitution and is expected to groom a successor, while Duterte would be eligible to run in 2028 if she survives the impeachment. "The ones fighting in open warfare during the midterms are the same ones who won the historic unity victory in 2022. That's very significant," said political analyst and former presidential adviser Ronald Llamas.

"They secured the highest vote count in our history, and yet, almost immediately after winning, they began to unravel. This impeachment is just one episode in an unfolding saga that could rival any Netflix series." Up for grabs in the May elections are 317 congressional seats and thousands of local posts. But the biggest battle will be for 12 spots in the 24-seat Senate, a chamber packed with political heavyweights and wielding outsized influence. For Marcos, the elections are widely seen as a referendum on his leadership as he seeks to secure a legislative majority to push forward his administration's agenda.

But the stakes are equally high for Duterte, who faces an impeachment trial in the Senate expected in June. The election for the upper house will feature allies of Marcos and Duterte and will effectively decide half of the jurors in that Senate trial. For Duterte to be removed, at least 16 senators, or two-thirds of members, must vote to convict her. A survey by independent pollster Pulse Asia last month showed nine of Marcos' senatorial bets leading the race, but two Duterte loyalists were in the top 12, keeping the vice president's camp in contention. The trial looms as a pivotal moment not just for Duterte but for the political dynasty of her family, whose influence skyrocketed after father, Rodrigo Duterte, won the presidential election in 2016 on a promise to tackle crime and drugs.

'Hell worse than what we have already?' Gazans reject plans

CAIRO/RAMALLAH/GAZA (Reuters): With his Gaza home destroyed in Israel's military offensive, Shaban Shaqaleh had intended to take his family on a break to Egypt once the Hamas-Israel ceasefire was firmly in place. He changed his mind after US President Donald Trump announced plans to resettle Gaza's Palestinian residents and redevelop the enclave, and said they should not have the right to return.

The Tel Al-Hawa neighbourhood in Gaza City, where dozens of multi-storey buildings once stood, is now largely deserted. There is no running water or electricity and, like most buildings there, Shaqaleh's home is in ruins. "We are horrified by the destruction, the repeated displacement and the death, and I wanted to leave so I can secure a safe and better future for my children - until Trump said what he said," Shaqaleh, 47, told Reuters via a chat app. "After Trump's remarks I cancelled the idea. I fear leaving and never being able to come back. This is my homeland."

Palestinians fear that Trump's plan would enforce another Nakba, or Catastrophe, when they experienced mass expulsions in 1948 with the creation of Israel. Under Trump's scheme, Gaza's about 2.2 million Palestinians would be resettled and the United States would take control and ownership of the coastal territory, redeveloping it into the "Riviera of the Middle East". "The idea of selling my home or the piece of land I own to foreign companies to leave the homeland and never come back is completely rejected. I am deeply rooted in the soil of my homeland and will always be," Shaqaleh said.

Any suggestion that Palestinians leave Gaza - which they want to be part of an independent state also encompassing the West Bank with East Jerusalem as its capital - has been anathema to the Palestinian leadership for generations. Neighbouring Arab states have rejected it since the Gaza war began in 2023. After Hamas said it was suspending the release of Israeli hostages set out in the ceasefire deal



due to alleged Israeli violations, Trump said the Palestinian militant group should release all those it still holds by noon or he would propose cancelling the truce and "let hell break out". "Hell worse than what we have already? Hell worse than killing?" said Jomaa Abu Kosh, a Palestinian from Rafah in southern Gaza, standing beside devastated homes. One woman, Samira Al-Sabea, accused Israel of blocking aid deliveries, a charge denied by Israel. "We are humiliated, street dogs are living a better life than us," she said.

"And Trump wants to make Gaza hell? This will never happen." Israel began its assault on Gaza after the Hamas-led attack on Israel on October 7, 2023, that killed about 1,200 people while some 250 were taken hostage, according to Israeli tallies. The operation has killed more than 48,000 Palestinians, by Gaza authorities' counts, and obliterated much of the enclave. Some Gazans said Palestinian leaders must find a solution to their problems. "We don't want to leave our country but also need a solution."

Our leaders - Hamas, the PA (Palestinian Authority) and other factions - must find a solution," said a 40-year-old carpenter who gave his name as Jihad. In the occupied West Bank, Palestinians were also agast at Trump's words. "Does he own Gaza

to ask people to leave it?" said Nader Imam. "Regarding Trump I only blame the American people. How can a country like this, a superpower, accept a person like Trump? His statements are savage."

"What will Trump do? There is no fear, we rely on God," said another West Bank resident, Mohammed Salah Tamimi. The proposal shattered decades of US peace efforts built around a two-state solution and added pressure on neighbouring Egypt and Jordan to take in resettled Palestinians.

Both countries, who receive billions in aid from the United States, rejected the plan citing concerns for national security and their commitment to the two-state solution. For Jordan, which borders the West Bank and has absorbed more Palestinians than any other state since Israel's creation, the plan is a nightmare. Trump said he might withhold aid to Jordan and Egypt if they refused to cooperate.

Jordan's King Abdullah is set to meet Trump in Washington and is expected to express his rejection of the plan. "Jordan can never accept resolving this issue at its expense," said Suleiman Saud, the chairman of the Palestine Committee in Jordan's House of Representatives. "Jordan is for Jordanians, and Palestine is for Palestinians."

Smuggling gangs have taken hold, Cooper says during border debate

LONDON (BBC): People smuggling gangs "have been allowed to take hold", Home Secretary Yvette Cooper told the Commons during a debate on border security. She accused the last Conservative government of failing to strengthen border enforcement as fast as European countries and focussing on "failed gimmicks".

Her comments come as Labour's Border Security, Asylum and Immigration Bill, which scraps the Tory Rwanda plan and boosts police powers against smugglers, cleared its first vote in the House of Commons. Conservative shadow home secretary Chris Philp described the new plans as a "border surrender Bill" and claimed it creates a path to citizenship for illegal migrants. The debate came at the end of a heavily choreographed media push by the Home Office, which saw the department publish photos of illegal immigrants being deported for the first time.

Earlier, the Home Office also published footage of enforcement teams raiding 828 premises, including nail bars, car washes, and restaurants. They made 609 arrests - a 73% increase on the previous January. Some Labour MPs, particularly

on the left of the party, have argued the government should focus on talking about the benefits of immigration and push for creating safer immigration routes. Veteran Labour MP Diane Abbott, the shadow home secretary under Jeremy Corbyn, warned the new approach left Cooper in "danger of sounding like she's trying to stigmatise desperate migrants rather than building a fair system".

Home Office Minister Dame Angela Eagle told the BBC the government's approach was compassionate, and it had only released arrest footage to send a message about the realities of working illegally. Labour has been pushing its immigration crackdown to the forefront at the same time as Reform UK has been rising in the polls. Reform MP Richard Tice, said immigration is "the number one issue because it's out of control". He argued reducing immigration numbers "is of critical concern to the majority of British people".

As the Commons debate began, the Home Office released new figures showing, since Labour took power in July, the UK has removed 18,987 people, including criminals and

failed asylum seekers. We know that of these returns, only 5,074 were classed as enforced returns. This would suggest the remaining returns were voluntary. The new returns figure is higher than in the same period the previous year but lower than seven-month periods in 2010 to 2016, when returns topped 20,000. Reform UK leader Nigel Farage described the new figures as feeble when compared with the numbers that had entered the country.

The Borders Bill sets out Labour's plan to treat people smugglers like terrorists, a promise they made repeatedly in the general election campaign. Mirroring powers in the Terrorism Act 2000, the proposed new law would criminalise "precursor" offences - allowing officials to punish people for legal acts linked to illegal migration, like selling dinghies or outboard motors. The bill also creates a new crime of endangering another person during an illegal crossing in the Channel. This is to stop those aboard a dinghy refusing assistance.

Immigration enforcement teams would also get new powers to seize mobile phones. Some migrant rights groups criticise

measures they say criminalise vulnerable people rather than people smugglers.

Labour argues this will be a more effective way of clamping down on small boat crossings than the previous government's plan to deport asylum seekers to Rwanda. The bill also repeals most of the Conservative's Illegal Migration Act 2023, which laid the legal groundwork for the Rwanda policy. Under Labour's plans, a new Border Security Command will gain more powers and a new head, who will oversee closer links between intelligence, police, and border agents. The bill passed its first vote in the House of Commons by 333 to 109 but still faces months of debate and obstacles before it can become law. Labour's large Commons majority all but guarantees the bulk of the measures will pass.

MPs also rejected an attempt by the Conservatives to kill the bill, voting down their amendment by 354 to 115. Cooper framed the bill as a decisive step to restoring "credibility" to the UK's immigration and asylum system. "The gangs have been allowed to take hold for six years," Cooper said.

White House fires USAID inspector general

WASHINGTON (AP): The White House fired the inspector general for the US Agency for International Development, US officials said, a day after his office warned that the Trump administration's dismantling of USAID had made it all but impossible to monitor \$8.2 billion in unspent humanitarian funds.

The White House gave no reason for the firing of Inspector General Paul Martin, one of the officials said. The officials were familiar with the dismissal but not authorized to comment publicly and spoke on condition of anonymity. Inspectors general are typically independently funded watchdogs attached to government agencies and tasked with rooting out waste, fraud and abuse. The Trump administration earlier purged more than a dozen inspectors general.

Martin's office issued a flash report warning that the Trump administration's freeze on all foreign assistance and moves to cut USAID staff had left over-

sight of the humanitarian aid "largely nonoperational." That includes the agency's ability to ensure none of the funding falls into the hands of violent extremist groups or goes astray in conflict zones, the watchdog said.

The dismissal, which was first reported by CNN, is the latest action by the Trump administration affecting the aid agency, including efforts to pull all but a fraction of its staffers worldwide off the job. Trump and ally Elon Musk say its work is out of line with the president's agenda. A lawsuit filed alleged that the unraveling of USAID is stifling American businesses on hundreds of millions of dollars in unpaid bills for work that has already been done.

The administration's abrupt foreign aid freeze also is forcing mass layoffs by US suppliers and contractors for USAID, including 750 furloughs at one company, Washington-based Chemonics International, the lawsuit says. "One cannot overstate the impact of that unlawful

course of conduct: on businesses large and small forced to shut down their programs and let employees go: on hungry children across the globe who will go without; on populations around the world facing deadly disease; and on our constitutional order," the US businesses and organizations said.

An organization representing 170 small US businesses, major suppliers, the American Jewish group HIAS that aids displaced people abroad, the American Bar Association and others joined the legal challenge. It was filed in US District Court in Washington against President Donald Trump, Secretary of State Marco Rubio, acting USAID Deputy Administrator Peter Marocco, a Trump appointee who has been a central figure in hollowing out the agency, and Russell Vought, Trump's head of the Office of Management and Budget.

It is at least the third lawsuit over the administra-

tion's targeting of USAID and its programs worldwide. A lawsuit brought by federal employees associations has temporarily blocked the administration from pulling thousands of USAID staffers off the job. The funding freeze and other measures have persisted, including the agency losing the lease on its Washington headquarters.

The new administration terminated contracts without the required 30-day notice and without back payments for work that was already done, according to a US official, a businessperson with a USAID contract and an email seen by The Associated Press. They spoke on condition of anonymity for fear of reprisal by the Trump administration. For Chemonics, one of the larger of the USAID partners, the funding freeze has meant \$103 million in unpaid invoices and almost \$500 million in USAID-ordered medication, food and other goods stalled in the supply chain or ports, the lawsuit says.

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Displacement in West Bank bodes ill for Gaza

AMID widespread alarm over comments from US President Donald Trump about “buying” Gaza, “owning it” and displacing its people, an ongoing crackdown that began in January by Israeli forces in the occupied West Bank is showing in real time how such a policy could play out.

On Monday, UNRWA — the UN relief agency for Palestinians — reported that Israel’s Operation Iron Wall has so far displaced about 40,000 Palestinians, almost emptying several refugee camps in the northern West Bank. For some context, this is more than the entire population of Bethlehem. As one displaced Jenin resident, surveying his waterlogged hillside shelter, told The National yesterday: “Look at this and tell me what’s the difference between here and Gaza.”

Along with the accompanying destruction of Palestinian homes, economy and infrastructure — as well as movement restrictions and the continuing seizure of land for illegal Jewish settlements — Israel’s actions are a template for how the future annexation and depopulation of the Gaza Strip might look. It is a template that only the most radical would consider realistic or desirable.

The 15-month war on Gaza that followed the October 7 Hamas attacks on Israel undoubtedly energised several ultra-right members of the Israeli government. These were figures whose previous calls for the expulsion of Gaza’s people and their replacement with Israeli settlers were once considered fringe positions. Nonetheless, such extremists have been further emboldened because it is now the US — the world’s most powerful country — that is presenting a vision of Gaza shorn of its Palestinian identity and transformed into an ersatz real-estate opportunity. In the case of both Gaza and the West Bank, little consideration is being given to the fact that such policies are almost guaranteed to lock in conflict and volatility for future generations, not only between Israelis and armed Palestinian groups, but between Israel and an entire people who know from experience that to acquiesce to land grabs and forced displacement now would eventually spell the end of their country.

This fact is not lost on the Palestinian people. The office of Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas has accused Israel of “ethnic cleansing” in the West Bank and last week the Health Ministry in Ramallah said Israeli forces have killed at least 70 people in the territory since the start of the war, including 10 children, one woman and two elderly people. Similarly, Gazans have responded with understandable defiance to suggestions that they be forcibly moved to other Arab countries, with one resident telling The National: “When you have a rightful claim to something, no one — neither America nor Israel — can take it away”.

It is a sign of Israel’s divide-and-conquer approach to Palestine that Gaza and the West Bank are often discussed as if they were separate places. In reality, despite their unique situations and different political leaderships, they remain two parts of the same country. If 40,000 people are allowed to be displaced in the West Bank in one operation, it not only bodes ill for the future of Gaza’s more than two million people, it offers the threat of unending conflict that no redrawing of the map could contain.

US, EU clash over AI at Paris summit

THE differences between the United States and European countries over Artificial Intelligence (AI) were stated clearly by their respective representatives at the international summit on AI held at Paris on Monday and Tuesday.

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen stressed the fact that “AI (Artificial Intelligence) needs the confidence of the people and has to be safe. At the same time I know that we have to make it easier and we have to cut red tape and we will.” United States Vice President J.D.Vance, making the first policy statement for the Trump Administration at an international forum, said speaking of the potential of AI said, “...at this moment we face the extraordinary prospect of a new industrial revolution, one on part with the invention of the steam engine” and warned “But it will never come to pass if overregulation deters innovators from taking the risks necessary to advance the ball.” And strangely enough, Vance went on to assure that “AI systems developed in America are free from ideological bias” and that the US would “never restrict our citizens’ right to free speech.” It is strange indeed for an American vice president to declare on European soil that the American government will not restrict Americans’ right to free speech.

Interestingly as many as 60 countries have signed an international document that promised to “promote AI accessibility to reduce digital divides”, and also that “AI is open, inclusive, transparent, ethical, safe, secure, and trustworthy”, make AI “sustainable, for people and the planet” and also “protect human rights, gender equality, linguistic diversity, consumer rights, and intellectual property”. China was one of the countries that had signed the document after its open access AI device, DeepSeek, had ruffled the American AI biggies who have been overconfident of their monopoly over the new technology.

French President Emmanuel Macron, who had co-chaired the AI summit along with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, had declared that France was for a third way, which was different from the overregulation of the EU and the absence of any regulation in the US. He said that France was going to make a 100-billion euro private investment in AI, and that France will leave enough space for risks to be taken to make the necessary breakthroughs. But he was not willing to go to the American extreme of leaving the development of AI entirely to unfettered market forces. He was aware that right now it was the US and China who are fighting out the battle of who will lead the AI technology. He does not want Europe or France to be left behind and left out. And the European way is to be inclusive and pay attention to human rights and economic and environmental sustainability. He is aware of the fact that China and the US are not only battling for the next big breakthrough in AI, but they were also trying to take hold of the critical minerals that are needed to develop AI. Experts are agreed that China is moving ahead of the US in the matter of access to critical minerals.

The Paris AI summit is the third in a series of such meetings. The first two were held in Britain and in South Korea. France wanted to lead the European quest for AI. That is why, President Macron had declared that France was back in the AI race. He wants it to be a triangular contest between the US, China and France/Europe.

The European AI project stresses the theme of equitability, and acknowledges the fact that developing and poor countries must have access to the advantages created by AI. The new technology cannot be allowed to remain the monopoly of the rich and the powerful is the message of the Paris AI summit.

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A Palestinian national unity government is urgently needed

Daoud Kuttab

ONE of the many reasons US President Donald Trump made his outlandish remarks about taking over Gaza and removing its people was based on false information. Trump, — who seems to have only been briefed by his right-wing Cabinet and ambassadorial team, as well as Benjamin Netanyahu, who is wanted for war crimes — argued that there is no one that can govern Gaza. That falsehood has been created because the current settler-influenced Israeli government not only refuses to allow Hamas to govern the Gaza Strip but also rejects any role for the Ramallah-based Palestinian government.

Naturally, much can be said about the performance of the Palestine Liberation Organization’s leadership in Ramallah, but no one questions its legitimacy. In fact, the Israelis themselves recognize, deal with and sometimes honor the agreements signed with the PLO.

The second and third phases of the current ceasefire agreement include the need to finalize the prisoner exchange and end the Israeli army’s presence in the Gaza Strip and along the Egyptian border with Palestine. This will require an answer as to who will govern Gaza and thereby ensure that the Oct. 7, 2023, cross-border attack by Hamas’ military wing will not be repeated.

Various offers have been made in this regard but they have all failed to materialize. Israel has made it clear that it refuses any Hamas role, as well as any role for the legitimate Palestinian government based in Ramallah.

For its part, Israel has attempted to recreate what was known in the 1980s as the Village Leagues, which basically means appointing local tribal and large family leaders to run Gaza. No one from Gaza was interested.

Then Egypt offered a technocratic committee made up of people who are neither Hamas nor Fatah. The Palestinian leadership rejected this idea, fearing it would create a dual legal system, one in Gaza and one in the West Bank, thereby legitimizing rather than ending the split.

The PLO-Hamas split was caused when Hamas militants threw out the national guard security that was loyal to the Palestinian presidency and replaced it with what was then called the Executive Force, made up of armed Hamas personnel.

The fact is that Hamas cannot and is unlikely to rule Gaza not only because Israel will not agree to it, but also because the Strip will receive no reconstruction funds if the group continues to govern it. But while Hamas will not solely govern Gaza, there is no doubt that anyone doing so will need to have the acqui-

escence of the armed men of Hamas that have withstood and caused pain and damage to the Israeli army, and therefore could do the same to any invader that enters without their approval.

The above failures all make it clear that the best and most sustainable solution that will receive acceptance by the world community is some form of the current Ramallah-based Palestinian government. But for the Ramallah security forces to be able to govern the Gaza Strip, a political solution needs to be found to which Hamas will agree.

The general framework that many believe can work is for a national unity government to be formed in consultation with the political leadership of Hamas. Such a government need not have any Hamas members in it, but it would make sense if Hamas could be involved in the choice of the governing team and could reach an agreement with the PLO on the way a national unity government running the West Bank and Gaza would operate.

Such a unity government would require an agreement on the future efforts aimed at ending the Israeli occupation and ensuring the creation of an independent Palestinian state. Politically, Hamas agrees to a Palestinian state on the 1967 borders, but the big question is how to get to

that goal. Here, a major disagreement might arise, as Hamas will insist on the need for retaining some form of armed resistance to the occupation, while the moderate PLO leadership under Mahmoud Abbas has long opposed any form of militarization of the resistance, considering that the group has signed an agreement with Israel.

The Oslo Accords were supposed to be a five-year transitional period, but that has turned into more than 30 years. It is also true that the illegal Jewish settler population has quadrupled in size since the signing of the Declaration of Principles at the White House in 1993. On the other hand, the armed resistance that Hamas espouses has also proven disastrous to the Palestinian people, even though it has helped gain (due largely to the Israelis’ genocidal war) huge sympathy and solidarity around the world.

Palestinians need to remove any excuse or justification for delaying Israel’s withdrawal from Gaza in the next two phases by quickly reaching some sort of power-sharing plan that can include a national unity government to govern Gaza and help usher in funding for its reconstruction. This government also needs to be empowered to engage politically with Israel and the US to reach a permanent solution that can allow for the creation of an independent Palestinian state alongside Israel.

How Trump took an Israeli idea and presented it as his own

Xavier Abu Eid

US President Donald Trump’s latest statements that called for cancelling the ceasefire in Gaza have caused outrage across the Middle East and beyond. Although some analysts claim that he will not follow through on his threat, it has given Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu the support he needed to upend the deal and restart the war.

The statements came after the United States president repeatedly insisted that he will “clean out” Gaza and “own it”. These remarks — while downplayed by some — also served to encourage the Israeli government to violate the ceasefire agreement, which made Hamas announce the suspension of the captives’ exchange.

In calling for the end of the ceasefire and the ethnic cleansing of Gaza, Trump is once again taking Israeli positions and repackaging them as his own. While this is not a new practice in US diplomacy, Trump has taken it to a whole new level, presenting war, ethnic cleansing and annexation not as part of the problem but part of “the solution”.

Whether he intends to implement his plan or not, his rhetorical endorsement of what certainly constitutes an international crime, should be a reason for global concern. The normalisation of such crimes is extremely dangerous.

Yet, it should be also recognised that the foundation for Trump’s policy shift has been laid by previous US administrations and other Western governments which for decades have indulged in a flagrant double standard when it comes to Israel’s systematic viola-

tions of international law.

The US and other close friends of Israel, such as the United Kingdom, Germany, France, Canada and Australia, have had two options vis-a-vis Israel: either to hold it accountable under international law, or to grant its immunity and in this way threaten the very principle of an international rules-based multilateral order. They have largely opted for the second option.

This Western double standard has convinced Israel that it is positioned above any norms of international law and requirements of accountability. As a result, the violations of Palestinian rights have not stopped since the Nakba of 1948.

For decades, successive Israeli governments have engaged in colonisation, siege, collective punishment, mass detention, torture, home demolitions and forcible displacement against the Palestinian people. All of this has been largely tolerated and has not affected economic or political relations with the Western world.

The direct consequence of the West refusing to impose red lines on Israeli aggression is that the Israeli army was able to carry out a genocide in Gaza for 15 months undisturbed. And even when the International Criminal Court issued an arrest warrant for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Western countries indicated directly or indirectly that they were going to renege on their obligations under the Rome Statute to arrest him. Last week, France, Italy and Greece granted Netanyahu’s plane passage through their

airspace on his way to and from Washington, DC.

This Western indulgence has given Netanyahu a free hand in prolonging the genocide in Gaza and regional destabilisation.

But this is not just about his far-right government: The whole Zionist political spectrum is opposed to the implementation of the Palestinian right to self-determination, whether in the context of a single democratic state solution or the two-state solution, as reaffirmed by the Knesset in July with an almost unanimous vote opposing the recognition of the State of Palestine.

Israel’s denial of the Palestinian right to self-determination, tolerated by the West, means that the next logical steps can only be ethnic cleansing and annexation. The Israeli government’s move to start a brutal campaign in the occupied West Bank after a ceasefire was concluded in Gaza was a clear indication of this path.

Now Trump’s statements have only further incentivised Israel to continue its crimes in Gaza and to expand them in the West Bank. We are likely to see not only the resumption of genocidal violence in Gaza, but also concrete steps to carry out ethnic cleansing in the West Bank and annex vast areas there, including the Jordan Valley. More than 40,000 Palestinians have already been forcibly displaced from Jenin and Tulkarem — a criminal act met with international silence.

While Trump’s endorsement of Israeli plans for occupied Palestine is celebrated in Israel, it spells dis-

aster for the rest of the region. In particular, it goes against basic tenets of the national security of two close US allies, Jordan and Egypt, which have already made clear their outright rejection of Trump’s ethnic cleansing plan.

Jordan and Egypt will have to reassess their regional strategies, especially after Trump threatened them with cutting aid. Cairo, for example, may be forced to reconsider the Camp David Accords it concluded with Israel in 1979.

With his statements, Trump may be trying to put pressure on Saudi Arabia to normalise relations with Israel in exchange of preventing the ethnic cleansing of Gaza. Netanyahu has also jumped on the bandwagon and gone as far as suggesting forcibly expelling Palestinians onto Saudi territory.

However, the conclusion of the Abraham Accords has already demonstrated that normalisation does not cause Israel to concede to respect Palestinian rights. Instead, after a few Arab countries normalised relations with it in 2020, the Israeli government only hardened its positions, broke its political commitments and continued with its annexation process. Saudi Arabia is well aware of this.

Trump’s approach to the Palestinian question does not just ignore the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people but makes a mockery of international law. Beyond the damage this will do to the international legal order, it threatens the fragile stability in the Middle East. There needs to be an urgent international engagement to stop further crimes from being committed in Palestine.

EU resets relations with AI industry, but at what price?

Mohamed Chebaro

OF all the big summits I have reported on over the years, the ones that yield the least are those that carry the most pompous and wide-ranging agendas. The Paris Artificial Intelligence Action Summit, held this week, risks being one such event. It saw heads of state, top government officials, CEOs and tech company executives and scientists, in addition to other market and industry stakeholders and civil society from more than 100 countries, rub shoulders while grappling with the real-world impacts of AI.

Two years on from the emergence of OpenAI’s ChatGPT chatbot, AI has been fueling both immense hope and, at times, exaggerated fear, depending on which side of the equation you stand.

The Paris summit was the third such gathering. The first was held in 2023 in the UK and resulted in a nonbinding pledge by 28 nations to tackle AI risks. A follow-up meeting hosted by South Korea last year secured another pledge to set up a network of public AI safety institutes to advance research and testing.

Participants in Paris reaffirmed the fact that the world is experiencing a tech and scientific revolution the likes of which has rarely been seen before. But they did not offer much in terms of enabling people to live better, learn better, work better or care better. They again failed to bridge the gap between the stakeholders and developers of AI and the market, the consumer and regulators, particularly when geopolitics and state interests enter the fray. It technological prowess not always synonymous with military and political power?

And, as expected, the world stood divided once more, with the US and UK on one side and the EU, China and India on the other. The Paris meeting’s closing declaration agreed to prioritize regulation to make AI’s development

The organizers tried to get countries to commit to a more ethical, democratic and environmentally sustainable AI. But in the fragmented world in which we live, the time has not yet come to put competition aside in favor of the common good. The recent spat, when a cheaper AI model emerged in the form of China’s DeepSeek, is very telling about how the world is still too far apart to come together and agree on governance, regulations and due diligence to limit the harms caused by AI. The French, like many in the EU, wanted to use this summit to play catch-up and claim a share of the development and ownership of AI, as it has been concluded that the technology is not mere hype but a game-changer on all levels. And those who fail to tap into it could be left behind politically, economically, socially and even militarily. So, France and Europe in general are looking increasingly like they are in the process of abandoning their guardrails in the race to develop better-than-human AI through sheer computing power and Paris’ initial calls to direct AI toward solving society’s problems, particularly the ills of industry and the health sector, have become muted. It seems that alignment with the age of Trump 2.0 is high on the agenda of the old continent’s leaders, regardless of what they say. They are increasingly certain that the world has changed and the old norms of nominally respecting the rule of law and multilateral institutions and governance are increasingly irrelevant.

“open” and “ethical,” but neither the UK nor the US, which is home to the world’s largest AI companies, signed the agreement. The Americans claimed that regulation kills AI and the British insisted that the declaration did not sufficiently address “harder questions around national security.”

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It seems that alignment with the age of Trump 2.0 is high on the agenda of the old continent’s leaders, regardless of what they say. They are increasingly certain that the world has changed and the old norms of nominally respecting the rule of law and multilateral institutions and governance are increasingly irrelevant. The US does not shy away from asserting its desire to become the world capital of AI development through tapping its oil and gas reserves to feed this energy-hungry technology. Also, Donald Trump’s narrative points to a lukewarm approach to even light regulation, as he seeks to maintain America’s global supremacy and leadership through reducing regulatory barriers and building AI systems free of any ideological biases.

The EU, despite being a third entrant in a two-horse race led by Washington and Beijing, could have a shot at making an impact, but only if it reverses years of red tape and regulation aimed at protecting society from the excesses of AI technology and its potential harms.

DeepSeek’s release of its latest model last month stunned the world because of its ability to rival Western players like ChatGPT. It also escalated the wider geopolitical showdown between Beijing and Washington over tech supremacy. But it also showed the EU that there are possibilities for a new breakthrough that could tilt the balance toward Europe, effectively making AI a three-horse race.

The EU’s messaging around the summit has reflected a clear divergence from its former rhetoric in a bid to soften its narrative, as well as its rulebook. Henna Virkkunen, the European Commissioner for tech sovereignty, secu-

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ity and democracy, agreeing with the tech industry about the need to review the EU’s regulatory regime is unprecedented. Her calls to review overlapping regulations and remove the administrative burden from the EU’s tech industry have been applauded, but the question is how far will this go? Will the EU even do away with its AI Act, the world’s first comprehensive set of rules governing the technology?

If anything, the Paris summit sadly showed that making AI more sustainable for people and planet is out, as more of Europe’s productivity is dependent on being a leader in this emerging technology and using it to serve its member states, businesses and societies, while securing its independence in the tech realm in a way that serves national interests.

For now, it seems that the way forward for the EU is to attempt a lighter-touch approach to AI regulation. The worry is that weakening existing regulations might not be enough, as the world — led by Trump and his tech partners — is driving the agenda and both directly and indirectly pushing us toward more uncertainty, fewer human rights and AI that will ultimately challenge existing norms and human skills, rendering some jobs redundant and all workers less protected.

— Arab News

Musk shows why he’s such a powerful ally for Trump

ELON Musk’s Oval Office address showed why he’s a menacing foe for the federal government and why President Donald Trump is playing with fire by ceding him so much power.

A portrait of George Washington gazed from the wall as his distant presidential successor put on a show with his billionaire friend Tuesday afternoon. Musk, in a black MAGA hat, long dark coat and with his son X sometimes perched on his shoulders, was framed by an ornate window as snow floated down outside.

The pair made their strongest defense yet of Musk’s operation to purge the federal government, which is imperiling basic services and medical research and desecrating the world’s largest foreign aid mission that has saved millions.

Musk’s claims of spending abuses and frivolous programs were likely well received by the millions of Americans who view the Washington swamp with deep suspicion and welcome Trump’s onslaught on the government that he leads.

But the show was about more than a bid to tamp down growing political consternation over Musk’s Department of Government Efficiency. It was an unmistakable statement that true power in Washington lies not with the Congress or the courts, but somewhere in the rich mix of egos between the world’s most powerful man and the world’s richest person.

The spectacle was also an obvious demonstration of unity between Trump and Musk, amid constant speculation about the president’s tolerance for a performer who rivals his love for the spotlight.

And no one should miss this: Trump was immovably installed behind the Resolute Desk, as Musk stood to his right – in a rebuke of a Time Magazine cover that showed the Tesla chief in the seat where the buck stops.

Even so, there was just a sense, a couple of times, that Trump was distracted by X’s fidgeting. And the glibness and sense of

impunity radiating off Musk – who is neither elected nor confirmed by Congress and may be flouting the Constitution – was striking as he dominated a room that is sacred to American democracy.

There’s rarely been a more vivid demonstration of great wealth bringing great power. Musk was highly respectful of Trump, and they seem to enjoy one another’s company. But with his fortune and pyrotechnical platform on his X network, he’s going to take careful handling by the president.

The joint appearance came as a backlash grows to the blitzkrieg of the bureaucracy being led by Trump and his DOGE boys. The whizz kids sent into federal departments have already shuttered several agencies including USAID and the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau and are now eyeing bigger prey.

The effort is mired in multiple lawsuits. And some comments by top officials, including Vice President JD Vance, have provoked fears that the White House could trigger a constitutional crisis if it ignores rulings by judges to desist.

Musk made a passionate case that his initiative is validated by massive waste. He implicitly justified his effort to access Treasury payment systems by claiming he’d found decrepit accounting practices and pushed back at criticisms of his vast, unelected power being brought to bear at the heart of the government by claiming he was fighting to save democracy, not to destroy it. (This from a billionaire accused by some of America’s European allies of interfering in their elections and politics).

Trump also had a ready-made line to deliver. When asked if he’d accept rulings by judges who he complained have slowed his shock-and-awe start to his second term, the president said: “I always abide by the courts.” His comment may temporarily cool fears of a constitutional imbroglio. But this is a man who ignored court orders meant to tame his rhetoric during his crimi-

Stephen Collinson

nal hush money trial. Musk is a compelling speaker and clearly relished a chance to perform and persuade.

The head of Trump’s new Department of Government Efficiency was careful to show deference to the president – noting that he calls to make sure he’s doing what Trump wants. Still, the late afternoon joint media appearance suggested the White House felt it needed to reclaim the narrative on the DOGE story, as some GOP lawmakers get skittish about the impact of government spending cuts and layoffs among their voters, since federal workers aren’t confined to Washington, they are spread throughout the states.

Musk’s explanations might also have been intended to dispel the impression that he’s taking a sledgehammer to federal operations in secret, without meaningful oversight, and that he’s plagued by disastrous conflicts of interest. His willingness to stand and take questions from reporters was his first such act of openness.

“I don’t think there’s been, I don’t know ... a case (of) an organization (that) has been more transparent than the DOGE organization,” Musk insisted.

Musk’s presentation helps explain why, despite the uproar that it’s caused, Trump’s full-out assault on the federal government is a political winner, at least for now.

Americans voted for change last November. They were angry at a bureaucracy that many felt ignored their needs when Joe Biden’s presidency lapsed into inertia in its final months. Trump’s base wants exactly the kind of shake-up that he has initiated. Government has been unpopular among ideological conservatives for decades and the idea of huge spending cuts – in theory at least – is a popular issue. Federal government bureaucrats also make perfect victims since MAGA supporters see them as elites with lifetime jobs and fat guar-

anteed pensions who have skewed the political system. In this worldview, Democrats and members of the media who highlight Trump’s and Musk’s power grabs are seen as denizens of the same swamp defending the hated government. On Tuesday, Trump signed an executive order mandating that “agencies will be able to hire no more than one employee for every four employees that depart from federal service,” with exceptions for areas involving public safety.

“The people voted for major government reform and that’s what the people are going to get,” Musk said. “That’s what democracy is all about.”

Musk’s success so far is the fruit of his decision to pick the easiest targets – like USAID and CFPB. Foreign aid is rarely popular with voters, especially in an era when an “America First” president runs the White House. And the consumer bureau has been in the sights of Republican lawmakers for years.

But the next targets could be more politically painful for Trump and his base. He’s hinted that the Education Department is high on the list – and he could pull off a feat dreamed of by several GOP presidents with a closure. But any disruption to student loans or important education programs in the states could anger voters beyond those upset about the gutting of USAID.

Trump called on Tuesday for the dismantling of the Federal Emergency Management Agency, which he’s been softening up for months with his inflated claims that it failed North Carolinians after a hurricane hit last year.

A new system of sending disaster aid directly to states seems like a great money-saving idea that could cut through bureaucracy. But the loss of FEMA’s institutional knowledge and infrastructure could rebound politically against the White House if the response to a future natural disaster fails.

Musk is posing some searching questions for the federal government

and will inevitably find waste in such a large organization – even if many of his claims are not backed up by full weight of evidence to allow voters to judge for themselves.

But new cuts to the operating expenses of medical research institutions funded through the National Institutes of Health, which look good on paper, could sabotage a liaison between the federal government and US universities that has made the United States the global powerhouse for clinical breakthroughs. And red states, as well as blue ones, could lose out financially since state universities are vital economic engines and employers. A nuanced weekend statement by Alabama Sen. Katie Britt, in which she called for a “targeted” approach to saving taxpayer money used by NIH, hinted at the dilemma that might soon face GOP lawmakers.

The potential for Musk to become a source of scandal rather than its scourge also overshadowed the joint media appearance.

He claimed that since the billions of dollars in contracts his firms enjoy in federal conflicts were public, anyone could see if he was benefiting. That’s hardly reassuring coming from a tech mogul who is now overseeing agencies that oversee his companies.

Trump’s promise that “we wouldn’t let him” take advantage of his position was devalued by his unwillingness to address his own mammoth conflicts and the White House announcement Tuesday that Musk would only file a confidential disclosure form, as an unpaid special government employee.

“Transparency is what builds trust,” Musk said of DOGE’s social media campaign, apparently without noticing the irony of his personal situation.

Thus, an Oval Office show – designed to assuage concerns about the unelected, mercurial, tech visionary currently pulverizing the US government from the inside – only bolstered the caricature.

— CNN

Trump wants China to play a role in peace in Ukraine. Is Xi Jinping willing to help?

Stephen Collinson

AS the war in Ukraine grinds toward its fourth year, US President Donald Trump has made clear which world leader he thinks can help America end the conflict: Vladimir Putin’s ally Xi Jinping.

“Hopefully, China can help us stop the war with, in particular, Russia-Ukraine ... they have a great deal of power over that situation, and we’ll work with them,” Trump told political and business elites gathered at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland last month.

Trump expressed that hope, he has repeatedly said, in a call with the Chinese leader days before being sworn in last month – and it’s a subject that could be raised in the coming days as officials from around the world gather in Munich for an annual security conference.

While Trump may have complicated his plan to orchestrate peace alongside Xi by imposing a blanket 10% tariff on Chinese imports into the United States earlier this month, the war in Ukraine could be a rare issue of collaboration – especially as Beijing looks to avert deepening trade frictions.

“Given the stakes on US-China relations, if Trump prices China’s cooperation as the one critical issue that could improve US-China relations, I think China will be very tempted ... (and could) play a helpful role,” said Yun Sun, director of the China Program at the Stimson

In a Fox News interview earlier this week, the notoriously transactional Trump instead suggested that the US should be getting access to Ukraine’s rich natural resources in exchange for military assistance. He also suggested that Ukraine “may be Russian someday,” and said his administration has made “tremendous progress” in laying the groundwork for potential peace talks with Russia and Ukraine, without providing details.

In a series of meetings in Europe this week US Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth, Secretary of State Marco Rubio and Trump’s envoy to Ukraine and Russia, Gen. Keith Kellogg will be urging their European and NATO counterparts to take on a much greater role in supporting Ukraine, defense officials and people familiar with the matter told CNN.

Members of the Trump administration are also set to meet with Ukrainian officials in the coming days, with sources telling CNN that Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent is expected to travel to Kyiv for discussions about the country’s critical mineral deposits, while Kellogg is also set to visit the country following meetings in Munich.

Zelensky has said he is willing to negotiate with Putin – but only if the US and Europe continue to support Ukraine and “provide security guarantees,” while Russia in recent days reiterated that

US-led West is declining while they are on the rise.

Xi also sees Putin as a potential source of economic and diplomatic support if Beijing were ever to invade Taiwan, some observers say. Xi’s ambition to take control of the self-ruling democracy may be another key reason why he would be wary of any move that could harm that relationship.

The Chinese leader may also be enjoying the war’s role as a distraction for the US away from a focus on Asia and Taiwan – something the Trump’s cohort, including Vice President Vance, have pointed out.

As a US senator, Vance last year argued that the US supplying Ukraine with air defense systems could hurt its ability to aid Taiwan’s defense if China were to attack the island that it claims as its own. Working with Trump to pressure Putin to a negotiating table – whatever the terms of a deal – would also mark a stark shift in Beijing’s approach to the conflict so far.

Xi and his officials have used the war as a platform to promote a vision for a China-led world, one where the American alliance system has been dismantled or weakened.

“China focuses on building a coalition of non-Western nations, including influential developing countries like Brazil, to leverage the Ukraine conflict toward reshaping global security architecture and advancing an alternative vision

China has long sought to position itself as a potential peace broker in the conflict –promoting its own vaguely-worded proposal to settle the war. But in the West, its bid has so far been overshadowed by another reality: Beijing’s abiding support for Putin’s Russia. The stakes would be high for Xi to risk damaging that partnership, which the Chinese leader has built up as a critical part of his broader goals to counter pressure from the West and reshape a world order in China’s favor. And a negotiating table where Xi has a prominent seat is also one where Putin, not Trump, has a staunch partner – a reality that Washington would have to navigate carefully if it doesn’t want to risk isolating European allies or reach a solution that’s unacceptable to Ukraine, analysts say. “The real outcome that Beijing would like to avoid is a very much weakened Russia,” said Chong Ja Ian, an associate professor at the National University of Singapore. “Because then ... (Beijing) would be lacking one major partner.” The future of the conflict is expected to feature heavily on the agenda of the upcoming Munich Security Conference beginning Friday in Germany, where US Vice President JD Vance is set to meet with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky. Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi will also lead a delegation from Beijing. Looming over the gathering is a dramatic tone shift in Washington’s approach to the war. Trump has questioned American aid to the embattled country, which his predecessor Joe Biden and US NATO allies have seen as critical to defending not just Ukraine’s sovereignty and territorial integrity, but the rules-based world order.

Center think tank in Washington. At the same time, she added, Beijing will be wary of undermining its alignment with Russia.

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it would only accept a peace that saw Ukraine give up ambitions to join NATO and cede regions annexed by Russia.

But while Trump is pushing for a swift end to the war, his administration has yet to lay out specifics on what kind of peace terms they are hoping to see agreed upon.

How much Trump would look to work alongside Xi – and whether the Chinese leader is amenable – may also depend to an extent on those parameters, observers say. Western leaders in the past have tried, without success, to persuade Xi to push Putin toward a peace in line with the one advocated for by Zelensky and Ukraine.

Even as China has claimed neutrality in the conflict and called for peace, it’s emerged as a key diplomatic and economic lifeline for Russia throughout the war, including by sending it dual-use goods NATO leaders have said are feeding Russia’s defense sector and enabling its military. Beijing defends its trade as part of normal relations with Russia.

It’s likely that in Trump’s eyes, all that gives Xi leverage over Putin. But close observers of China’s foreign policy say it’s not so straightforward. “Can China threaten to cut off the supply (of essential goods to Russia)? It can’t, because China cannot afford a completely failed Russia,” said Liu Dongshu, an assistant professor focusing on Chinese politics at the City University of Hong Kong. He pointed to Beijing’s calculus that its relations with the US and Europe have already soured to such an extent that they have no choice but to continue to back their only powerful diplomatic ally.

Xi and Putin memorably declared their “no limits” partnership weeks before Russian tanks rolled over Ukraine’s sovereign borders – a pledge made based on their shared opposition to NATO and a view that the

of world order,” said Tong Zhao, a senior fellow at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace in the US.

Beijing will have little incentive to engage in substantial cooperation with Washington for now, said Zhao, noting that its officials would, however, wait and see what benefits could be gained from any potential, broader deal-making with Trump.

That said, the current American president – a NATO critic, who has repeatedly voiced personal admiration for Putin and Xi – may be a more appealing negotiating partner for both strongmen. Trump before taking office called for an “immediate ceasefire and negotiations” – a position that jives with Beijing’s stated stance on the war that has been criticized by the West as helpful to Russia. He’s also in recent weeks echoed Moscow and Beijing’s talking points, sympathizing with the Kremlin’s view that Ukraine should not be part of NATO and that the war continued because America “started pouring equipment” into Ukraine.

US lawmakers and some members of Trump’s administration remain tough on both countries. But Trump’s stance raises the question of whether there is a deal that Beijing, Moscow and Washington could orchestrate that would please all three – and what that could mean for Ukraine and the future of the conflict.

“You can see how each could take something from (certain peace deals) – Putin can save face, Xi and Trump can claim to be peacemakers,” said Robert Ward, director of geo-economics and strategy at the International Institute for Strategic Studies in Britain.

But there’s a risk in any agreement where Russia is left in possession of the parts of Ukraine it’s now occupying that this becomes “a conflict that isn’t an end, it’s just a lull,” he said.

UN’s concern over the Rohingya crisis is growing

LAST Friday’s meeting between UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres and Dr. Khalilur Rahman, the high representative for the Rohingya to the chief adviser of Bangladesh, was an extraordinary diplomatic event that underscored the UN’s heightened alarm over the deteriorating Rohingya crisis. Normally, a UN secretary-general would only meet with a premier or head of state, not an adviser or representative. The fact that Guterres made this exception suggests that the UN is deeply concerned about the worsening conditions facing the Rohingya both in Bangladesh’s camps and within Myanmar’s Rakhine State.

This meeting highlighted three critical issues: the severity of the ongoing humanitarian crisis, the urgent need to secure international funding to prevent an impending famine, and the necessity of securing high-level UN backing for the Rohingya summit that will be held in Bangladesh this year.

Rahman’s discussions with Guterres focused on the dire humanitarian conditions in Rakhine State, where violence, displacement and food insecurity have reached alarming levels. With Myanmar’s internal conflict escalating and the Rohingya community remaining stateless and vulnerable, their plight is becoming increasingly unsustainable. The risk of famine looms large over Rakhine, exacerbating an already desperate situation where basic aid is scarce and access for humanitarian organizations is severely restrict-

ed. The situation is equally grim in Bangladesh, where nearly 1.2 million Rohingya refugees are housed in overcrowded camps. Resources are stretched thin and conditions are deteriorating as international donor fatigue sets in. The World Food Programme has already had to cut rations due to funding shortfalls, putting refugees at

Yossi Mekelberg

of Rohingya families.

If this trend continues, the consequences will be disastrous. Hunger and malnutrition will rise sharply, leading to an increase in preventable deaths. The lack of educational opportunities will leave an entire generation of Rohingya youth without prospects for the future, further

One of the most pressing issues Rahman raised was the declining external funding for Rohingya support. With international aid commitments waning, Bangladesh is struggling to maintain even the most basic provisions for the refugees. The reductions in aid have already led to cuts in food distribution, healthcare services and education programs in the camps, severely impacting the well-being of Rohingya families. If this trend continues, the consequences will be disastrous. Hunger and malnutrition will rise sharply, leading to an increase in preventable deaths. The lack of educational opportunities will leave an entire generation of Rohingya youth without prospects for the future, further entrenching the cycle of despair. Without renewed funding and a commitment to humanitarian assistance, the situation risks spiraling out of control. The upcoming UN International Conference on Rohingya Muslims and other Minorities of Myanmar presents a critical opportunity to mobilize the international community. Rahman rightly emphasized the necessity of securing Guterres’ support to ensure that this conference results in concrete action rather than just diplomatic rhetoric. Having the UN secretary-general fully engaged in the process is crucial for leveraging global influence and ensuring that key stakeholders, including donor nations and regional actors, commit to sustainable solutions.

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crucial for leveraging global influence and ensuring that key stakeholders, including donor nations and regional actors, commit to sustainable solutions. This includes not only continuing humanitarian aid but also renewed efforts to push Myanmar’s military leadership and ethnic groups toward a peaceful resolution that allows for the safe, voluntary and

However, it is not just the UN that must take the lead on this. The Organization of Islamic Cooperation can also play a crucial role in addressing the Rohingya crisis. As a collective voice for Muslim-majority nations, the OIC has the diplomatic leverage to pressure Myanmar’s government to recognize the Rohingya’s rights and ensure their safe return. It can also mobilize humanitarian aid for refugees in Bangladesh, where Rohingya communities face dire conditions due to dwindling international support.

Moreover, the OIC has been instrumental in bringing legal action against Myanmar at the International Court of Justice, holding the country accountable for genocide.

By expanding economic and political pressure, member states can push for a sustainable resolution. Working with the UN, the OIC can advocate for inclusive governance in Myanmar, ensuring Rohingya representation in future political settlements.

A coordinated approach between the OIC and the UN is essential to securing justice, aid and long-term stability for the Rohingya.



Incentivizing local industries is critical for economic growth: SCCI

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Sarhad Chamber of Commerce and Industry president Fazal Moqem Khan highlighted KP's important potential sectors for attracting local as well as foreign investment and called for incentivizing and providing facilities to industry and businesses for sustainable economic growth.

He was speaking to members during a visit of a five members delegation of Board of Investment of Gilgit Baltistan here at the chamber house on Wednesday.

The Bol Gilgit Baltistan delegation was headed by its Chairman Fatehullah, while member Gilgit Baltistan Assembly Javed Ali

Manwa, Director General Bol GB Shahid Ali, President Khosh Noor, accompanied him on the occasion.

The meeting also attended by SCCI senior vice president Abdul Jali Jan, vice president Shehyar Khan, former presidents Haji Muhammad Asif, Fuad Ishaq and Zahidullah Shinwari, member of the chamber's executive committee Aftab Iqbal, Ashfaq Ahmad, Mujeeb Rehman and Ihsanullah, Rashid Iqbal Siddiqui, Ishtiaq Muhammad, Faiz Rasool, Saddam Gul, Fazal e Wahid, Ismail Safi, Khalid Gul Pakhtunyar, Secretary General SCCI Muqtasid Ahsan KPBOIT officials Iqbal Sarwar and Raees Anjum and others.

On the occasion, a

detailed multimedia presentation was run, highlighting the role of the chamber, its origin, main function, features, future plan and initiatives for welfare and addressing of the business community.

Similarly, another multimedia presentation was given by officials from Bol GB, in which four key sectors including tourism, agriculture, minerals and hydropower generation were identified for investment.

Fazal Moqem stressed investment from other regions and abroad can only woo when local investors and industries would have provided facilities and incentives.

Chairman Bol invited KP investors to make investment in the afore-stated

four key sectors of Gilgit Baltistan while a member of GB Assembly also underscored the need of further establishing close contacts between the business community of GB and SCCI to strengthen bilateral trade and commerce relations.

SCCI chief stated KP is the lucrative destination for local as well as foreign investment wherein ample opportunities existed to make investment in various potential sectors, notably oil, gas, hydropower generation, match, marble and others.

Moqem assured on the occasion that joint initiatives would be made to strengthen business to business contacts and promote mutual economic and trade ties between SCCI and Bol of Gilgit Baltistan.

100-Index of Pakistan Stock Exchange loses 85 points

ISLAMABAD (APP): The 100-Index of the Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX) witnessed bearish trend on Wednesday, losing, 85.44 points, a negative change of 0.08 percent, closing at 112,924.94 points as compared to 113,010.38 points on the last trading day.

A total of 669,597,325 shares were traded during the day as compared to 486,935,003 shares the previous trading day, whereas the price of shares stood at Rs27,904 billion against Rs30,381 billion on the last trading day.

As many as 441 companies transacted their shares

in the stock market, 172 of them recorded gains and 211 sustained losses, whereas the share price of 58 companies remained unchanged.

The three top trading companies were B.O. Punjab with 195,542,381 shares at Rs11.91 per share, Bank Makramah with 46,593,400 shares at Rs4.18 per share and PTCL with 30,235,783 shares at Rs24.77 per share.

Unilever Pakistan Foods Limited witnessed a maximum increase of Rs508.57 per share closing at Rs23,923.99 whereas runner-up was Rafhan maize Products Company Limited with Rs93.25 rise in its share price to close at Rs9,458.30.

Ismail Industries Limited witnessed a maximum decrease of Rs47.81 per share price, closing at Rs1,852.19, whereas the runner-up was Bata Pakistan Limited with Rs38.91 decline in its per share price to Rs1,861.27.

Rupee sheds 09 paise against dollar

Pakistani rupee on Wednesday depreciated by 09 paise against the US dollar in the interbank trading and closed at Rs279.25 against the previous day's closing of Rs279.16.

However, according to the Forex Association of Pakistan (FAP), the buying and selling rates of the dollar in the open market stood at Rs279.75 and Rs281.25, respectively.

The price of the Euro increased by Rs2.05 to close at Rs289.71 against the last day's closing of Rs287.66, according to the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP).

The Japanese yen came down by 02 paise and closed at Rs1.81, whereas an increase of Rs3.41 was witnessed in the exchange rate of the British Pound, which was traded at Rs347.91 as compared to the last day's closing of Rs344.50.

The exchange rates of

the Emirates Dirham and the Saudi Riyal increased by 02 paise each to close at Rs76.02 and Rs74.46 respectively.

Gold prices decrease by Rs1,600 per tola

The price of 24 karat per tola gold decreased by Rs1,600 and was sold at Rs301,500 on Wednesday against its sale at Rs303,100 on previous trading day. All Pakistan Sarafa Gems and Jewelers Association reported.

The price of 10 grams of 24 karat gold also decreased by Rs1,372 to Rs258,487 from Rs259,859 whereas that of 10 gram 22 karat came down to Rs236,955 from Rs238,212.

The prices of per tola silver and that of ten gram remained unchanged and close at Rs3,312 and Rs2,839.

The price of gold in the international market decreased by \$16 to \$2,888 from \$2,904, the Association reported.

Energy, industry and transport:

Russia-Pakistan focuses on cooperation: Khorev

ISLAMABAD (APP): Ambassador of Russia to Pakistan, Albert P. Khorev has said that Russia and Pakistan will focus on cooperation in energy and industry, including the modernization of the Karachi Steel Mills, agriculture, and transport, in 2025.

Russia stands ready to intensify cooperation with Pakistan on the use of international transport corridors "North-South" and "Belarus-Russia-Kazakhstan-Uzbekistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan" the Ambassador said in a release issued.

Ambassador of Russia to Pakistan, Albert P. Khorev, said this in an interview with the state-owned news organization of Russia, "TASS News Agency". In this context, the modernization of the Quetta-Taftan railway line is currently being considered, and increasing maritime cargo transportation also holds promise, he said.

He said that both Russia and Pakistan are committed

to strengthening peace and stability in Afghanistan and countering terrorist threats emanating from its territory. "We support Pakistan's counter-terrorism efforts and reaffirm our focus on strengthening constructive cooperation with Pakistan and Afghanistan," he said.

Russian envoy said that dialogue on a wide range of common concerns and challenges is already underway within the Moscow Format of Consultations and other multilateral fora that bring together Afghanistan's neighbours.

He said that amid fundamental transformations in global politics and economy, cooperation within the SCO, one of the largest and most important regional organizations, which is now establishing itself as one of the new centers of power, is becoming increasingly relevant.

"We attach great importance to cooperation with Pakistan in enhancing the SCO's economic potential,

strengthening industrial cooperation, establishing independent financial institutions and payment mechanisms, expanding transport and logistics capabilities and regional inter-connectivity, as well as countering new challenges and threats," he said.

The Ambassador said that Russia also enjoys constructive cooperation with our Pakistani partners in the United Nations and shares positions on many topical issues on the international agenda, such as information security, prevention of an arms race in outer space, etc.

He said that Russia welcomes Pakistan's willingness to become involved in the work of BRICS. At this stage, Pakistan's participation in the activities of the New Development Bank, which has proved to be an effective mechanism for financing infrastructure and sustainable development projects in BRICS and developing countries, looks promising, he said.



PESHAWAR: President Sarhad Chamber of Commerce and Industry Fazal Moqem Khan presenting a shield to Chairman Board of Investment of Gilgit Baltistan Fatehullah.

'Documentation key to sustainable economic growth'

LAHORE (APP): Con- venger Federation of Pakistan Chamber of Commerce and Industry regional committee on food, Shahid Imran said on Wednesday that to achieve sustainable growth, the government must promote digital documentation, encourage business registration and implement policies that incentivize formal economic participation.

Talking to a delegation of industrialists here, he said documentation plays a crucial role in ensuring sustainable economic growth in Pakistan. A well-documented economy allows for better governance,

increased transparency, and improved economic planning. Without proper documentation, economic activities remain informal, leading to tax evasion, corruption and inefficient resource allocation.

He said one of the key benefits of documentation was enhancing the tax base.

Pakistan faces a significant challenge of low tax compliance, with a large

portion of the economy operating in the informal sector. Proper documentation of businesses, transactions and incomes can help bring more people into the tax net, increasing government revenue. This, in turn, enables the government to invest in infrastructure, education, healthcare and other sectors essential for long-term growth.

Shahid Imran highlighting its importance said documentation improves access to financial services. Many small businesses in Pakistan struggle to obtain loans due to a lack of proper records.

By maintaining financial documentation, businesses can build credit histories, making it easier for them to secure funding for expansion. This leads to job creation and economic stability. Documented economies attract foreign investment.

Investors seek transparency and accountability before investing in any country.

Proper documentation of economic activities assures investors of a stable business

environment, leading to increased foreign direct investment, he concluded.

Lost Documents

I. Saqib Khan son of Nawab Khan, have lost my original documents in Taru Jabba Market. The documents including Form-B, Provisional Certificate (Secondary School), Domicile Certificate, DMC BA 1st Part, DMC DAE 1st Year, DMC DAE 2nd Year, DMC DAE 3rd Year, Diploma Certificate of Associate Engineer (DAE), DMC Board of Intermediate and Secondary School, Mardan, Character Certificate (Matric).

If found, please return to: Saqib Khan son of Nawab Khan resident of village Taru Jabba, Tehsil Pabbi district Nowshera. Contact: 0333-0941919

COURT NOTICE

In the court of sidra jalal civil judge-III judicial Magistrate II tehsil matla district Swat. Case #.73/1. Institution 10/06/2024. Next Hearing date 26/02/2025. Fida Ali khan VS Jehanzeb khan. Notice to defendant. 1) Jehanzeb khan. 2) Aurangzeb sons Shahjehan.3/1) Azeem khan Husband Bacha Amal.3/2) Bacha ali.3/4) sangeen Bacha.3/5) shah khalid 3/6) Shahzeb sons Azam khan.3/4) Fatma daughters Shahjehan khan r/o Gawara. tehsil matla district Swat .

Whereas the above named cannot be served in ordinary manner it is therefore proclaimed or through dually authorized agent or pleader in the court on 26/02/2025. at 8.00 am. Ex-parte proceeding will be initiated against you.

COURT NOTICE

In the court of sidra jalal civil judge-III/Illaqa Qazi Matta swat. Case #.193/1. institution 14/12/24. Next Hearing date 26/02/2025. Muhammad Amin VS Nadia .Notice to defendant. 1) Mst. Nadia(Noodia) daughter Amer Badshah r/o Pir kalay tehsil matla district Swat. Presently Abroad Greece.Unan.2) Muhammad Ayub s/o Amer Badshah r/o Pir kalay tehsil matla district Swat.

Whereas the above named cannot be served in ordinary manner it is therefore proclaimed or through dually authorized agent or pleader in the court on 26/02/2025. at 8.00 am. Ex-parte proceeding will be initiated against you. seal of the court.

COURT NOTICE

In the Court of Javeria Sartaj Khan Additional District Judge II /Azafi Zila Qazi Buner at Daggar. Appeal.No.8/CR Institution.22/5/2024. Date of hearing. 12/3/2025 .Naseb Gul etc VS Wazer Muhammad etc.Notice to No.24/2.Khalid Khan son.24/4.Mst Shazia Bibi d/o Mst Luqman Zari. 27.Mir Afzal son .28.Mst Gul Chihra d/o Hazrat Kgan.36.Sarwar Khan s/o Merdullah Khan.39. Umer Zada.40. Sheren Zada.41.Kamran.42.Imran.43.Rahim Zada sons. 44. Mst Ghwara d/o Sahib Zada.45.Madar Khan s/o Farman Khan resident of Sura tehsel Mandanr district Buner.

Whereas in the above mentioned case the mentioned defendants can not be served in the ordinary way, it is, therefore, proclaimed that if the said defendants will/shall not appear personally or through dually authorized agent or pleader in the court at 8.30 am dated 12/3/2025 the proceeding will be taken ex-parte. Given under my hand and seal of this Court.

COURT NOTICE

In the court of Muhammad Haroon Senior Civil Judge (Family Court) Malakand at Batkhela Case No 148/FC of 2024 Next date: 14/02/2025 Mrs. Bushra Bibi Versus Mr. Imran s/o Bakht Zamin Proclamation Against Legal heirs: Imran S/O Bakht Zamin Resident of Zalam Kot District Malakand.

In the above title case the service of you above named defendants is not possible with ordinary means, hence you are hereby informed through this proclamation to attend this court on 14/02/2025 at 08:00am in person or through appointed agent/attorney or through counsel, otherwise you shall be place and proceed against ex-parte.

COURT NOTICE

In The Court Of Dua Mehreen Civil Judge VI Kohat Suit no.67/1 Date of hearing.03-03-2025 Titled:- Noor Agha Vs Sardar Khan Notice against:- Sardar Khan Son of Saeed Muhammad R/o Ghamkol Camp no.3.Teshil and District Kohat Presently R/o (now.in.Abroad Saudi Arabia Riyadh. +966551726860) (Defendant) Whereas the above plaintiff has instituted a civil suit against you Defendant in which date of hearing 03-03-2025 is fixed for your appearance Since your intimation/service is not possible through ordinary means/mode therefore you Defendant is intimated through this publication to appear before this court by person or by pleader on date fixed 03-03-2025 otherwise court shall be proceeded in accordance with law order Issued on.04-02-2025 (Court of C.J VI Kohat)

COURT NOTICE

In the Court of Javeria Sartaj Khan Additional District Judge II /Azafi Zila Qazi Buner at Daggar.Appeal.No.10/CR Institution.22/5/2024. Date of hearing. 12/3/2025 .Naseb Gul etc VS Hakim Shah etc.Notice to No.24/2.Khalid Khan son.24/4.Mst Shazia Bibi d/o Mst Luqman Zari. 27.Mir Afzal son .28.Mst Gul Chihra d/o Hazrat Khan.36.Sarwar Khan s/o Merdullah Khan.39. Umer Zada.40. Sheren Zada.41.Kamran.42.Imran. 43.Rahim Zada sons.44.Mst Ghwara d/o Sahib Zada.45.Madar Khan s/o Farman Khan resident of Sura tehsel Mandanr district Buner.

Whereas in the above mentioned case the mentioned defendants can not be served in the ordinary way, it is, therefore, proclaimed that if the said defendants will/shall not appear personally or through dually authorized agent or pleader in the court at 8.30 am dated 12/3/2025 the proceeding will be taken ex-parte. Given under my hand and seal of this Court.

COURT NOTICE

In The Court Of Dua Mehreen Civil Judge VI Kohat/Suit no.76/1 Date of hearing.03-03-2025 Titled:- Qudrat Khan(etc) Vs Mst Meena(etc) Notice against:-(16)Mst Aresha(17)Mst Sadia(18)Mst Saima Legal Heirs of Mst Zahida Dugther of Neka Jan R/o Gharl Dhodiwal Tehsil and.District Kohat Presently R/o (now.in.Abroad America USA)Defendants) Whereas the above plaintiff has instituted a civil suit against you Defendants in which date of hearing 03-03-2025 is fixed for your appearance Since your intimation/service is not possible through ordinary means/mode therefore you Defendants is intimated through this publication to appear before this court by person or by pleader on date fixed 03-03-2025 otherwise court shall be proceeded in accordance with law order Issued on.01-02-2025 (Court of C.J VI Kohat)

Chairman assures support to businesses by addressing harassment

KARACHI (PPI): National Accountability Bureau (NAB) Chairman Lt Gen (ret'd) Nazir Ahmed Butt, while assuring the business community of maximum relief in dealing with irrational cases, emphasized that NAB is fully committed to support businesses by intervening to address the harassment caused by any department.

According to a statement today, speaking at a meeting during his visit to the Karachi Chamber of Commerce & Industry (KCCI), Chairman NAB, while highlighting NAB's efficiency, informed that out of 14 cases of business community, 13 were resolved within six months, showcasing NAB's dedication to resolving matters swiftly. He encouraged KCCI to submit five general cases

along with five to six individual cases which would be prioritized by NAB for resolution so that relief could immediately be provided to the distressed members of the business community.

Director General NAB Javed Akbar Riaz, Chairman Businessmen Group Zubair Motiwala, President KCCI Muhammad Jawed Bilwani, Senior Vice President Zia ul Arfeen, Vice President Faisal Khalil Ahmed, Former Presidents KCCI Iftikhar Ahmed Sheikh, Majyd Aziz, Abdullah Zaki, Iftikhar Ahmed Vohra, Shamim Ahmed Firpo, Junaid Esmail Makda, Muhammad Idrees, Central Chairman PHMA Muhammad Babar Khan, President North Karachi Association of Trade & Industry Faisal Moiz and KCCI Managing Comm-

ittee Members along with Senior NAB Officials were present at the meeting.

Responding to concerns from the business community, Chairman NAB assured that under his leadership, the culture of fear and harassment had been completely eradicated at NAB. "New rules to prevent harassment of businessmen have been instituted at NAB" he said, adding that NAB's Businessmen Facilitation Desk will be enhanced by including members from KCCI, ABAD, and other relevant institutions.

He stressed the need for an enabling business environment and a level playing field, which NAB continuously strives to achieve despite occasional challenges. He also expressed optimism about Pakistan's future, pointing out the

advantages of the country's large population and growing consumer market, which present significant opportunities for long-term investment.

Chairman NAB also expressed confidence that Pakistan has the potential to become a trillion-dollar economy within the next six to seven years if the nation maintains its focus and dedication to growth.

He elaborated on the opportunities within Pakistan's agriculture sector, citing that rice exports alone had reached \$3.8 billion, while total agricultural exports touched \$9 billion. He noted that Pakistan had shifted from an agriculture-import-driven economy to an agriculture-export-driven one, a positive trend that should be leveraged.

On the matter of Pakistan's global competi-

tiveness, Chairman NAB emphasized that instead of depending on the GSP+ agreement, Pakistan must strive to become competitive on a level playing field with other nations. He highlighted the growing significance of artificial intelligence, cloud computing, and software as key drivers of Pakistan's growth in the global economy.

Chairman NAB also pointed out a concerning trend, noting that a large number of Pakistanis had left the country in the past year. Of these, around 25,000 individuals had probably moved substantial capital abroad to seek citizenship by investment. He stressed the need to reverse this brain drain and the flight of capital in order to retain the country's human and financial resources.

Speaking on the occasion, Chairman BMG Zubair Motiwala, while acknowledging the positive changes initiated by Chairman NAB since taking charge, pointed out that significant work still remains to be done, particularly in combating corruption and harassment, which continues to drive people to leave Pakistan.

He praised Pakistan's recent economic improvements, such as the stock market reaching new heights and the rise in IT exports, but expressed concerns over the trust deficit among the business community, which still hinders full economic recovery. He emphasized that Pakistan's IT sector has the potential to reach \$30 billion in exports, but this potential was being undermined due to harassment by numerous departments.



In brief

CJCS Open Golf C'ship 2025 begins

ISLAMABAD (APP): The 14th Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee (CJCS) Open Golf Championship commenced at Margalla Greens Golf Club, Islamabad on Wednesday, organized by the Services Sports Control Board, Joint Staff Headquarters. The week-long tournament features an impressive lineup of 435 golfers competing across seven diverse categories including professional and women's divisions. Tournament officials confirmed that players will compete throughout the week with the prize distribution ceremony scheduled for February 18, 2025. The championship represents a significant sporting event in the military's annual sports calendar, showcasing athletic talent from various service branches and skill levels.

ICC CT Tour reaches Hyderabad

HYDERABAD (APP): The ICC Champions Trophy, after traveling through various countries, continues its journey across different cities of Pakistan. On Wednesday, Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) officials brought the trophy to Hyderabad's Niaz Stadium. A large number of cricket enthusiasts and citizens gathered at the stadium to witness the trophy unveiling and capture photos with it. Deputy Commissioner Hyderabad Zain-ul-Abideen Memon along with political and social figures, town chairmen and local players attended the event. Speaking to the media, DC Zain-ul-Abideen Memon expressed his delight at the trophy's arrival in Hyderabad, highlighting the overwhelming response from cricket fans. He mentioned that PCB and ICC delegations also visited and inspected Niaz Stadium, expressing hope that the venue will once again host cricket matches as it did in the past.

Athletics C'ship on Feb 23

ISLAMABAD (APP): The SAFF Cross Country Athletics Championship is set to begin in Islamabad on February 23, bringing together athletes from all SAARC countries to showcase their talent. At a press conference held here at the National Press Club on Wednesday, Chief Organizer and Chairman of the Athletics Federation of Pakistan, Brig. (R) Sultan Mehmood Satti, announced the details of the event. He was joined by President of the Islamabad Athletics Association, Imran Khan, and representative of the main sponsor, Rudn Enclave, M. Rashid. The championship will take place at Fatima Jinnah Park F-9, with the first phase featuring an 8km race for youth and children under 20. The second phase will see participants over 20 years old competing in a 10km race. Teams from India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Maldives, and Bhutan and SAARC countries will participate in the event, with four players from each team eligible to compete. The first three players from each team will be counted for scoring purposes. The championship will feature individual and team prizes, including medals and two special prizes for participants. All teams are expected to arrive in Islamabad by February 22 and will be treated to a tour of the city's iconic landmarks, including the Faisal Mosque and Monument. A gala dinner and press conference with all teams are also planned.

Rizwan and Salman smash tons as Pakistan defeat South Africa in record chase

KARACHI (AFP): Mohammad Rizwan and Salman Agha cracked centuries to guide Pakistan into the tri-series final with a thumping six-wicket win over South Africa in Karachi on Wednesday.

Rizwan led Pakistan's highest successful chase in all one-day internationals of 353 in 49 overs with a magnificent 122 not out while Salman slammed 134 for his maiden century at the National Stadium.

Pakistan will now face New Zealand at the same venue on Friday in the final of the event which is a key warm-up for the Champions Trophy which starts next week.

The hundreds made by Rizwan and Salman overshadowed Matthew Breetzke's record of scoring most runs by a batsman in his first two one-day internationals of 150 and 83.

Breetzke's innings had set up an imposing South Africa total of 352-5.

Rizwan and Salman built a match-changing stand of 260, a new record for the fourth wicket for Pakistan, improving on the 206 scored by Shoaib Malik and Younis Khan against India at Centurion in 2009.

Their blistering innings should also erase doubts over the team's vulnerable batting

as they improved on Pakistan's previous highest successful chase of 349 against Australia in Lahore in 2022.

Rizwan hit nine boundaries and three sixes off 128 balls while Salman's 103-ball knock had 16 boundaries and two sixes.

Earlier, Breetzke followed his highest-ever debut score against New Zealand in Lahore on Monday with an attractive 84-ball 83, spiced with a six and 10 boundaries, after South Africa won the toss.

Breetzke bettered West Indian Desmond Haynes's aggregate of 195 runs in his first two matches in 1978 before he fell to a brilliant catch off spinner Khushdil Shah.

Pakistan's vaunted bowling attack failed to stop the tourists from scoring a big total, with skipper Temba Bavuma (82) and Heinrich Klaasen (87) also chipping in.

With wickets not falling, frustrated Pakistan fast bowler Shaheen Afridi angrily clashed with Breetzke as the batsman attempted to complete a run.

Shaheen made physical contact and exchanged words with his rival before umpire Asif Yaqoob separated the pair.

Bavuma and Tony de Zorzi (22), one of four



Salman Agha hit his maiden ODI hundred

changes in the South African team, put on 51 for the opening stand. The captain then built a second-wicket stand of 119 with Breetzke.

Bavuma was run out after cracking 13 boundaries in his 96-ball knock.

Klaasen lifted the tempo with a rapid 56-ball knock, smashing three sixes and 11 boundaries as the South Africans added 110 runs in the last 10 overs.

Kyle Verreynne and Corbin Bosch remained not out with



Mohammad Rizwan goes big

44 and 15 respectively to take South Africa past 350.

Brief Scores:

South Africa 352-5 (H. Klaasen 87, M. Breetzke 83, T. Bavuma 82, K. Verreynne 44 not out; Shaheen Shah Afridi 2-66) v Pakistan 355-4 in 49

overs (Salman Agha 134, Mohammad Rizwan 122 not out; W. Mulder 2-79)

Result: Pakistan won by six wickets

Toss: South Africa
Final: New Zealand vs Pakistan, Friday in Karachi.



LAHORE: International Hockey League teams are playing matches at the National Hockey Stadium. —APP Photo

Asalanka heroics power Sri Lanka to 49-run win over Australia

COLOMBO (AFP/APP): Sri Lanka pulled off a stunning comeback against world champions Australia to clinch a 49-run victory in the first one-day international on Wednesday after a century by captain Charith Asalanka.

Defending a modest target of 215, Sri Lanka bowled out the visitors for 165 inside 34 overs to take a 1-0 lead in the two-match series. Asalanka smashed a career-best 127 before chipping in with the crucial wicket of Alex Carey, while Maheesh Theekshana took 4-40 to help scuttle Australia's chase.

Opting to bat first, Sri Lanka found themselves in dire straits at 133-8 in the 33rd over, with Australia's four-pronged pace attack running riot. Asalanka's strike

rate was just shy of a run-a-ball and included 14 fours and five sixes. His ninth-wicket stand with Eshan Malinga was a stadium record of 79, even though the tailender made just a solitary run from 26 balls.

Asalanka refused to throw in the towel and was last man out when he was deceived by a cleverly disguised slower delivery from Sean Abbott (3-61).

The packed crowd rose to their feet to see him back to the pavilion while opposite number Steve Smith and wicketkeeper Alex Carey acknowledged his knock with a pat on the back. Australia's chase never really got going, with Asitha Fernando dismissing both openers cheaply before Sri Lanka's spinners tightened the noose.

Dunith Wellalage struck with his very first ball to clean up Smith, who had tormented Sri Lanka with back-to-back centuries in the Test series.

Smith misjudged a slog sweep and was out before he had settled in, a huge breakthrough that sent the crowd into raptures.

White-ball stalwarts Glenn Maxwell and Travis Head were rested to give other squad members match practice ahead of the Champions Trophy beginning February 19 in Pakistan and Dubai. Australia's bid to win that tournament has been dealt a major setback with their formidable pace attack of Pat Cummins, Mitchell Starc and Josh Hazlewood all ruled out. Sri Lanka did not qualify for the Champions Trophy.

ICC lineup of Men's CT ambassadors revealed

ISLAMABAD (APP): With a week to go until the first ball is bowled in the ICC Men's Champions Trophy 2025, the International Cricket Council (ICC) has revealed the lineup of Event Ambassadors that will feature to add to the fan experience.

Pakistan's 2017 winning captain Sarfaraz Ahmed features in an all-star cast that also boasts two-time champion, Australia's Shane Watson, Player of the Series in India's 2013 trophy-winning campaign, Shikhar Dhawan and New Zealand's legendary fast bowler, Tim Southee, said a press release.

With a wealth of experience in the Champions Trophy, over the course of the coming weeks, the lineup will provide fans with unrivalled insights into the competition through guest columns and match attendance, sharing their thoughts on what promises to be a thrilling event, where the world's best eight teams will

compete for the iconic white jackets.

Sarfaraz Ahmed said, "I will never forget how special it felt to don the white jackets and lift the trophy aloft as Pakistan captain back in 2017. Seeing the nation get behind us and celebrate that success is also something that's very close to my heart, so I am delighted to see the competition return to the cricket calendar and see my country given the opportunity to host such a special event."

"The format means that every game is so important, and I can't wait to play my part as an Ambassador and witness the tournament firsthand," Shikhar Dhawan said. "It is such a special feeling to be part of a Champions Trophy and to be given the opportunity to enjoy the upcoming edition as an Ambassador is an honour."

"Over the next few weeks, we'll see the best sides in the world competing for the white jackets knowing that one mistake or one

loss could spell the end of their hopes. It's the ultimate competition where it's all on the line, and that is what makes it such a thrilling spectacle."

Tim Southee said, "I am thrilled to be an Ambassador for the ICC Men's Champions Trophy 2025. It is an event that I always enjoyed playing in and one that always delivers on entertainment and drama."

"As a player, you're aware that every game, every ball and every moment matters in the Champions Trophy format, and with so much at stake, I can't wait to see how the action will unfold."

Shane Watson said, "The ICC Men's Champions Trophy is a truly unique event that has provided us with so many unforgettable moments down the years."

"With the top eight teams going head-to-head for the iconic white jackets, we are sure to see some extraordinary do-or-die cricket across three thrilling weeks."

Pakistan going strong in Asian Jr Squash C'ships

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan has made a strong start in the 22nd Asian Junior Squash Team Championships 2025, beating China 3-0 in their opening match at Hong Kong, China.

According to details, Pakistani talented team, led by Anas Ali Shah, Abdullah Nawaz, Nouman Khan, and Sakhi Ullah Tareen, showed great skill to secure a convincing win.

Meanwhile, Pakistan also secured a 2-1 win against India in their second match of the day at the Junior Squash Team Championships 2025.

Yusha Nafees (India) beat Nauman Khan (Pakistan) 3-1 9-11 11-5 11-5 11-8 (42m) while Abdullah Nawaz (Pakistan) defeated Sandhesh Palanivel Ravikumar (India) 3-0 11-9 11-7 11-8 (34m) and Anas Ali Shah (Pakistan) outplayed Arihant Kalamangalam Sunil (India) 3-1 3-11, 11-3, 11-5, 12-10 (49m).

The team's impressive performance has set them up for their next challenge. Next up, Pakistan will face Macau, China on Thursday.

Pakistan shines in Asian Road Cycling C'ship 2025

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistani cyclists made a strong impression at the Asian Road Cycling Championship 2025 in Thailand, bringing home multiple medals and showcasing the country's rising talent in the sport.

According to a press released, the team earned five medals, demonstrating their growing presence in the sport. Rabia Gharib, representing SSGC secured a historic gold medal. She won the women's master road race, becoming the first Pakistani woman to do so.

Zainab Rizwan, from Bikestan Cycling Academy Karachi won bronze in the same event. This marked Rizwan's second bronze medal of the championship.

Ali Ilyas won gold in the men's individual time trial. Gharib also earned a silver medal in the women's individual time trial. Rizwan's first bronze came in this same event.

These victories showcase the progress of Pakistani cycling. The Pakistan Cycling Federation (PCF) under Syed Azhar Ali Shah's leadership has worked to develop athletes and create opportunities for international competition.

Shah expressed pride in the team's performance. He noted the cyclists' talent and commitment. He believes continued support will help Pakistan become a strong force in Asian cycling.

Afghanistan team arrives for ICC Men's Champions Trophy 2025

LAHORE (APP): The Afghanistan cricket team on Wednesday reached Lahore to participate in the ICC Men's Champions Trophy 2025 in Pakistan and UAE from February 19 to March 9.

Led by Hashmatullah Shahidi, it is Afghanistan Men's maiden participation in the eight-team ICC marquee event. The other teams include England, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, Bangladesh, India and hosts Pakistan.

Afghanistan cricket team will play its first match of the CT25 against South Africa at National Cricket stadium, Karachi on February 21 while the other two matches will be

played against England and Australia at Lahore's iconic Gaddafi stadium.

Meanwhile, Afghanistan team also swapped injured spinner AM Ghazanfar with left-arm spinner Nangyal Kharoti to finalize its squad for the CT 25.

Afghanistan squad: Hashmatullah Shahidi (c), Ibrahim Zadran, Rahmanullah Gurbaz, Sediqqullah Atal, Rahmat Shah, Ikram Alikhil, Gulbadin Naib, Azmatullah Omarzai, Mohammad Nabi, Rashid Khan, Nangyal Kharote, Noor Ahmad, Fazalhaq Farooqi, Farid Malik, Naveed Zadran. Reserves: Darwish Rasooli, Bilal Sami.

Bumrah absence a chance for 'world-class' Shami: India coach



AHMEDABAD (AFP): Jasprit Bumrah's absence from India's Champions Trophy team will be an opportunity for "world-class" Mohammed Shami and other fast bowlers, coach Gautam Gambhir said Wednesday.

Bumrah was ruled out of the 50-over tournament starting February 19 in Pakistan and Dubai in a big blow to India's chances of landing the title.

India -- ranked number one in ODI cricket -- hammered England by 142 runs in the final match to sweep the series 3-0 in a perfect tune-up for the Champions Trophy. But Bumrah's lower back injury remained the talking point after India's triumph in Ahmedabad.

"If he's injured, he's injured, whether it's the captain, we can't do much about it," Gambhir told reporters.

"Obviously, we know that he's an important factor. But as I mentioned, people like Harshit (Rana), Arshdeep (Singh), Mohammed Shami, all these guys will put their hand up. It's a great opportunity for them to try and deliver for the country."

Fast bowler Harshit Rana was handed his ODI debut at the start of the series and he returned with

six wickets in the three matches. Left-arm quick Arshdeep Singh claimed two wickets in the only outing in the final match.

But it is Shami's return at the start of the white-ball series that has boosted India's morale ahead of the eight-nation Champions Trophy. Shami, 34, recovered from a heel injury to make his international return in the T20 matches after he went on a break following India's 2023 World Cup final loss to Australia. "Look, it's always good to have a world-class bowler back," said Gambhir.

"With his experience, with his quality, we all know what he can do with the ball in his hand." Shami returned with five wickets in T20s and ODIs after he was made to skip matches but bowled long spells with speed and precision.

"Obviously, we were trying to manage his workload," said the former India batsman. "That's the reason why we played him two T20s and two one-dayers. Hopefully, he's going to be fresh and ready to go in the Champions Trophy."

India begin their campaign against Bangladesh on February 20 before they clash with arch-rivals Pakistan three days later in Dubai.

PCB inducts great Hanif Mohammad into Hall of Fame

KARACHI (Monitoring Desk): Pakistan cricket great Hanif Mohammad was inducted posthumously into the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) Hall of Fame on Wednesday.

His son and former Pakistan national cricketer Shoaib Mohammad received the commemorative plaque and cap from Pakistan Cricket Board chairman Mohsin Naqvi in a ceremony held at National Stadium Karachi.

Hanif, who was among the initial inductees announced in 2021, had his formal induction ceremony delayed due to various factors. However, PCB chairman Mohsin Naqvi took the matter seriously and succeeded in inducting the great Hanif Mohammad into Hall of Fame.

Asian Taekwondo Open C'ships from Friday

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Pakistan Taekwondo Federation is set to host the Combaxx 7th Asian Taekwondo Open Championships 2025 from February 14 to 20 at the Liaquat Gymnasium of Pakistan Sports Complex.

Speaking at a press conference here at a local hotel, President Pakistan Taekwondo Federation Col (R) Raja Waseem Ahmed said the international event will feature 113 Poomsae athletes from 22 countries, along with 200 international delegates, including athletes, officials, and referees.

Additionally, the championship will witness fierce competitions in the Kyorugi category, comprising Junior Division 110 participants and Senior Division 302 participants. The championship promises to be one of the largest Taekwondo events in the region, with over 400 Kyorugi participants, further highlighting Pakistan's growing prominence in the global Taekwondo arena, he said.

The confirmed countries and their respective athlete strengths include Oman 2 athletes, Iran 15 athletes, Palestine 7 athletes, Afghanistan 31 athletes, Saudi Arabia 29 athletes, Kazakhstan 6 athletes, Egypt 11 athletes, France 5 athletes, Great Britain (GBR) 1 athlete, Morocco 2 athletes, Kenya 3 athletes, Mali 2 athletes, Portugal 1 athlete, UAE 3 athletes, Greece 1 athlete, Jordan 1 athlete, Andorra 2 athletes, Canada 1 athlete, Iraq 1 athlete, Uzbekistan 5 athletes, Tajikistan 4 athletes, Germany 3 athletes.

"This championship is a remarkable opportunity to showcase Pakistan's hosting capabilities while promoting Taekwondo at both junior and senior levels. With over 400 Kyorugi participants and 113 Poomsae athletes, the event will be a spectacular display of talent and sportsmanship," he said.



In brief

Six held for possessing illegal arms

RAWALPINDI (APP): Police have arrested six illegal arms holders and recovered arms and ammunition from their possession during a crackdown, said a police spokesman here on Wednesday. He informed that Pirwadhai police held Hamza on recovery of a 30 bore pistol and ammunition and Waris Khan police rounded up Asad Bashir for having a 9mm pistol with ammunition. Sadiqabad police netted Muneeb for possessing a 30 bore pistol and Cantt police held an accused namely Adnan with a 30 bore pistol. Civil Lines and Airport police arrested Haroon and Mohsin on recovery of two 30 bore pistols and ammunition. Police have registered separate cases against the accused and further investigations are in progress. SSP operations commended police teams and instructed to take strict action against those carrying illegal weapons.

Accused trying to kidnap twins arrested

RAWALPINDI (APP): The Saddar Baroni Police on Wednesday arrested an accused who had tried to kidnap a 5-year-old twin siblings. According to a Rawalpindi Police spokesman, the accused attempted to kidnap the children but had to flee as the later shouted for help. On receiving information about the incident, the Saddar Baroni Police took immediate action and arrested the accused, who was identified as Irfan Hameed.

ANF recovers 26 kg drugs

RAWALPINDI (APP): Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF) in three operations recovered over 26 kg drugs worth more than Rs 2.7 million and arrested two accused, said an ANF Headquarters spokesman here on Wednesday. He informed that 174 grams hashish was recovered from the possession of an accused near Teen Mila Chowk in Attock. The arrested accused confessed to selling drugs to the students of educational institutions. 2.4 kg ice was recovered from a parcel booked to New Zealand through a courier office in Karachi. In third operation, ANF team recovered 24 kg hashish hidden in a rickshaw near a hotel in Pishin area of Balochistan and an Afghan national was arrested. Separate cases have been registered against the arrested accused under the Narcotics Control Act and further investigations are under process.

Street criminals' gang busted

RAWALPINDI (APP): The Race Course Police on Wednesday busted a two-member gang of criminals involved in street crimes. The police conducted an operation to arrest the two accused Ijaz and Aamir after gathering information about them, a Rawalpindi Police spokesman said. The police also recovered Rs41,900 in cash from the accused, which they had snatched from their victims.

Art exhibition inaugurated

ISLAMABAD (APP): An Art Exhibition was organised at Hazrat Ayesha Siddiqua Girls Degree College here on Wednesday, under the management of the Pakistan Model Educational Institution Foundation. Evacuee Trust Property Board Secretary Fareed Iqbal formally inaugurated the event. Addressing the inaugural ceremony, he stated that their educational institutions play a vital role in promoting art education. He emphasized that such activities not only enhance students' academic skills but also refine their educational capabilities.

Pakistan, Yemen enjoy strong bilateral ties: Chairman Senate

ISLAMABAD (APP): Chairman Senate Syed Yousaf Raza Gilani reaffirmed Pakistan's deep-rooted and fraternal relations with Yemen, emphasizing the shared cultural, historical and religious bonds between the two nations.

He expressed these views during a meeting with the Ambassador of Yemen, Mohammed Motahar Alashabi, in Islamabad on Wednesday. The discussion covered a wide range of topics, with a focus on enhancing bilateral relations, regional stability and economic cooperation.

Gilani warmly welcomed the Ambassador and reiterated Pakistan's unwavering support for Yemen in its efforts to achieve peace and stability. He highlighted Pakistan's ongoing commitment to providing support through scholarships, capacity-building initiatives and professional training for Yemeni students and officials.

He emphasized that Pakistan could extend its expertise to Yemen in key sectors such as climate change, information technology, agriculture, and defense. Regarding regional

dynamics, he underscored Pakistan's strategic significance as a nuclear power and highlighted its close ties with China and Türkiye.

While discussing the Afghan refugee situation the Chairman noted that Pakistan continues to host thousands of Afghan refugees, urging the global community to play its role in addressing this challenge.

The Yemeni Ambassador acknowledged the strong and valued relationship between Pakistan and Yemen and called for further cooperation in capacity building, scholarships, and international collaboration.

The meeting also reviewed Pakistan's steadfast support for a peaceful resolution to the Yemen conflict, aligning with UN Security Council (UNSC) and Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) resolutions. Gilani reaffirmed Pakistan's backing for key peace initiatives, including the Riyadh Agreement of December 2019, and reiterated Pakistan's active role in the OIC Contact Group on Yemen.

He stressed the need to expand trade relations and

explore investment opportunities between the two countries. He noted that Pakistan's institutions, including NADRA and private sector companies (particularly in IT and construction), could play a significant role in Yemen's reconstruction once peace is restored. He also highlighted the establishment of the Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC) to provide a one-window operation for investments in IT, agriculture, mining, and other sectors.

Emphasizing the importance of high-level exchanges, Chairman Gilani highlighted the creation of a Parliamentary Friendship Group in the Senate to strengthen people-to-people and inter-parliamentary relations.

He extended an invitation to Yemen's parliamentary and ministerial leadership for an official visit to Pakistan to develop a roadmap for future collaboration. He also invited the Ambassador to visit Multan to engage with the business community and explore opportunities for economic cooperation.



ISLAMABAD: Chairman Senate Syed Yousuf Raza Gillani in a meeting with the Ambassador of Republic of Yemen, Mohammed Motahar Alashabi. —APP Photo

NA pays tribute to women on National Women's Day

ISLAMABAD (APP): The National Assembly (NA) on Wednesday paid tribute to the women for their pivotal role in the nation's progress and their steadfast commitment to equality and justice.

A resolution, tabled by Shahida Rehmani, was passed by the National Assembly, stating: "On this historic day, February 12, 2025, as we commemorate National Women's Day, this Parliament pays tribute to the women of Pakistan for their immeasurable contributions to the nation's progress, their resilience in the face of adversity, and their unwavering commitment to achieving equality and justice."

The resolution emphasized that National Women's Day serves as a powerful reminder of the indispensable role of women in shaping society, strengthening families, empowering communities, and driving the socio-economic development of Pakistan.

The Women's Parliamentary Caucus honored Madr-e-Millat Fatima Jinnah, Begum Ra'ana Liaquat Ali Khan, and Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto, acknowledging their leadership and legacy.

The resolution further reaffirmed the commitment to building a nation where women are not only equal partners but also leaders, innovators, and change-makers, striving for a future where every woman in Pakistan can thrive without fear, discrimination, or inequality.

DIG orders crackdown on drug networks

ISLAMABAD (APP): Deputy Inspector General (DIG) Muhammad Jawad Tariq chaired a high-level meeting on Wednesday to review the crime situation and intensify action against criminal elements.

A public relations officer told APP that the meeting was attended by SSP Investigation Muhammad Arsalan Shahzaib, SP City Zone, SDPOs, SHOs of Kohsar and Margalla police stations, and investigation officers.

DIG Tariq directed officers to launch a decisive crackdown on illegal arms display, land grabbing, drug trafficking, and kite flying. He ordered strict action against offenders involved in serious crimes, emphasizing that absconding suspects must be arrested without delay. Strong evidence collection was stressed to ensure successful prosecutions.

Citywide patrolling is to be intensified, with law enforcement tasked with dismantling organized crime networks and apprehending their facilitators. Special attention will be given to curbing motorcycle and vehicle theft, ensuring swift arrests and the recovery of stolen property.

DIG Tariq also instructed officers to expedite pending investigations and submit case challans to courts without unnecessary delays. Addressing police conduct, he warned against corruption, misconduct, and abuse of authority, stressing the need for professionalism and discipline in public dealings.

Syedaal lauds security forces' efforts in restoring peace in Balochistan

ISLAMABAD (APP): He highlighted Balochistan's crucial role in Pakistan's national stability and progress, asserting that peace in the province is directly linked to the country's overall prosperity.

Acknowledging the hardships faced by the people of Balochistan, he reiterated the importance of addressing their concerns on a priority basis to facilitate the province's development.

The discussion also underscored the need for police reforms, with a focus on modernizing law enforcement, enhancing professional skills, and upgrading training programs for police officers.

Syedaal Khan stressed that equipping law enforcement agencies with modern technology and advanced tools is essential for effective crime prevention and

security management. He reaffirmed that the sacrifices of security personnel would not go in vain and vowed to ensure full government support for efforts aimed at maintaining peace in the region.

IG Balochistan briefed the Deputy Chairman Senate on ongoing security initiatives and police reforms, detailing efforts to train law enforcement personnel and equip them with modern technology to combat crime effectively.

In response, Syedaal Khan appreciated the IG's efforts and assured the government's full cooperation in maintaining peace. He expressed hope that collaborative efforts would help establish lasting stability in Balochistan, creating a conducive environment for the province's development and prosperity.

Ayaz Sadiq champions legislative reforms for marginalized communities

ISLAMABAD (APP): Speaker of the National Assembly Sardar Ayaz Sadiq on Wednesday emphasized that parliamentary forums, comprising representatives from all political parties are fundamentally established to advance public welfare and formulate legislation for the betterment of marginalized segments of society including children, women, and youth.

He stressed that the goal of these forums transcends the mere convening of donor-driven meetings. Their paramount objective is to craft substantive legislation that addresses the needs of marginalized communities, firmly rooted in the prevailing socio-economic realities.

He advocated for the imperative transformation of these forums into more purposeful and effective bodies, dedicated to fulfill-

ing their legislative mandates with integrity and impact. He commended the contributions of women parliamentarians in the legislative proceedings of the House.

Ayaz Sadiq lauded their pivotal role across all socio-economic sectors in Pakistan, acknowledging their significant contributions to the nation's development.

He further stated, "Women working in the National Assembly are permitted to leave before evening to maintain a balance between their professional responsibilities and family life." He also stressed on the need to support women in every socio-economic sector of the country.

ICT admin launches operation to clear illegal encroachments

ISLAMABAD (APP): The district administration of Islamabad on Wednesday initiated a large-scale anti-encroachment operation to remove illegal encroachments in which a total of 25 sheds, 62 illegal walls, 70 shutters, and 7 unauthorized washrooms were demolished.

The operation took place on New Mall Road Kuri Road, targeted both temporary and permanent encroachments.

The operation, conducted in collaboration with the Capital Development Authority (CDA) and local police, aims to restore public spaces and improve urban infrastructure.

In this operation, heavy machinery was deployed to demolish unauthorized structures, including shops, walls, and washrooms, which had been causing traffic disruptions and hindering pedestrian movement.

The drive, which began after repeated warnings to traders, was part of a broader effort to maintain the city's aesthetic appeal

and ensure smooth traffic flow, said the spokesman of ICT administration here.

In this regard, the district administration emphasized that the encroachments had not only marred the city's beauty but also created significant obstacles for pedestrians and vehicles alike.

Assistant Commissioner Nilore Uzair Ali Khan supervised the operation, ensuring that all illegal structures were removed efficiently. The use of heavy machinery facilitated the swift demolition of encroachments, and the debris was cleared from the site promptly. The reclaimed land will now be used for public purposes, as per the directives of the district administration, he said.

Deputy Commissioner (DC) Islamabad, Irfan Memon, stated that traders had been given multiple opportunities to voluntarily remove their encroachments before the operation began. However, after the deadline passed, the administration was left with no

choice but to take strict action.

He reiterated that such operations would continue across the city without any discrimination to ensure that public spaces remain free from illegal occupation.

The joint operation by the district administration, CDA, and police has been hailed as a significant step toward maintaining order and cleanliness in the federal capital.

DC Memon urged citizens and traders to cooperate with the administration in its efforts to keep the city encroachment-free. He emphasized that the removal of illegal structures is essential for the city's development and the well-being of its residents.

The district administration has vowed to continue these efforts, ensuring that no area of the city remains unaffected. The drive is expected to enhance the overall urban experience by improving traffic flow, ensuring pedestrian safety, and preserving the city's aesthetic appeal.



ISLAMABAD: Speaker National Assembly Sardar Ayaz Sadiq receiving Ambassador of Hungary, Bela Fazekas at Parliament House. —APP Photo

Govt to restructure, not close utility stores: Minister

ISLAMABAD (APP): Federal Minister for Industries and Production Rana Tanveer Hussain on Wednesday said that the government has no plans to close Utility Stores but intends to restructure them.

Responding to concerns highlighted by Raja Pervaiz Ashraf, he said, "We are not closing Utility Stores; we are restructuring them. Political appointments have been made in these stores."

He said that the future of regular employees of Utility Stores is secure.

The minister said that while Utility Stores were initially established to facilitate the public to provide cheaper daily used items, many were opened in unnecessary locations due to political considerations.

MPA Kardar leads charge against human trafficking

ISLAMABAD (APP): The government's crackdown on human trafficking intensified as MPA Uzma Kardar, convener of the Human Trafficking committee warned of zero tolerance for those involved in human trafficking.

He announced drastic measures to review policies, launch awareness drives, and issue strict directions to relevant departments to ensure safe and legal migration abroad.

In an interview with PTV, Kardar noted that this is the first Human Trafficking Committee formed under the leadership of the Chief Minister of Punjab. In the first meeting of the human trafficking committee, MPA Kardar said that all relevant departments, including the FIA, police, foreign office, social welfare department,

deputy commissioners, and international partners were also in attendance.

She emphasized that these stakeholders were strictly directed to remain vigilant and ensure that they would be held accountable for any negligence or lapses in their efforts to combat human trafficking.

Kardar stressed the dire need to change the mindsets of youngsters and raise awareness about the numerous projects and startup loan programs announced by Punjab to provide them with better opportunities and alternatives.

Kardar said that the management of all airports in the province has been put on high alert, with strict instructions to exercise zero tolerance for any negligence or lapses that could facilitate human trafficking.

Spring tree plantation drive launched at Margalla Hills

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Ministry of Climate Change and Environmental Coordination had kicked off spring tree plantation campaign in Margalla Hills National Park, marking a significant step towards environmental conservation.

Chairperson Islamabad Wildlife Management Board and Secretary Ministry of Climate Change, Ayesha Humera Ch, inaugurated the campaign by planting a sapling at the Trail 5 of the national park.

She was accompanied by the Joint Secretary of the ministry Muhammad Jamil, MoCC&EC Deputy Director Muhammad Saleem, Upscale Green Pakistan Programme and IWMB office-bearers.

The tree plantation launching ceremony was also attended by various

segments of the society including students, teachers, government officials, media personnels and members of the civil society organisations.

"Trees are the backbone of our ecosystem, and their conservation is crucial for protecting the environment from pollution," Secretary Ayesha Humira Moriani emphasised. "This year, we aim to expand the plantation campaign on a large scale, engaging communities and promoting sustainable practices."

Addressing the tree plantation ceremony participants, she said that this campaign highlights the importance of plants as the "lungs of our environment" and underscored the need for their community-based conservation and protection of the natural

resources of this biodiversity-rich national park.

Recognizing the critical role of future generations, the Ministry has actively involved school children in the plantation drive, she added. As part of the campaign, school children enthusiastically participated in planting fifty saplings, demonstrating their commitment to environmental stewardship.

Chairperson Islamabad Wildlife Management Board and Secretary Ministry of Climate Change, Ayesha Humera Moriani also urged all stakeholders including communities, civil society organisations and individuals to join hands with the government in this noble endeavour and contribute to a greener, more sustainable Pakistan.

ISIS claims responsibility

KUNDUZ (Amu TV): ISIS has claimed responsibility for the suicide bombing that struck outside a Kabul Bank branch in Kunduz on Tuesday morning, according to a statement from the group. The group has claimed to have killed “hundreds”, including Taliban commanders in the attack. The Taliban police command in Kunduz confirmed that the attack was a suicide bombing, stating that the assailant had explosives strapped to his body and detonated them near the bank.

The Frontier Post

AFGHANISTAN

Shaaban 14, 1446 — Thursday, February 13, 2025

Qatar condemns bombing

DOHA (Amu TV): Qatar condemned the suicide bombing near the Kabul bank branch in Kunduz City, which killed at least 25 people, according to sources. In a statement, Qatar’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs reaffirmed the country’s strong opposition to terrorism and violence in all forms, regardless of motives or causes. The attack, which occurred Tuesday morning near a Kabul Bank branch in the city of Kunduz, left at least 25 dead and 30 wounded, according to local sources.

Naw-e-Khairkhah Commercial Center opened



KABUL (BNA): Mawlawi Abdul Salam Hanafi, Deputy Prime Minister for Adm inistrative Affairs, stated at the inauguration ceremony of the Naw-e-Khairkhah Commercial Center that the development and progress of a country depend on the growth of trade and support

for the private sector.

According to a statement released from Prime Minister Office on Wednesday, that the Deputy Prime Minister first expressed happiness over the completion of the Naw-e-Khairkhah Commercial Center. He described the opening of this commercial

center as an important step for the growth and development of trade and investment in the country.

Mawlawi Abdul Salam Hanafi said, it is a clear fact that the development and progress of a country depend on the growth of trade and support for its private sector.

He added that the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan is working to ensure real growth in the economy, trade, and particularly the private sector. One example of these efforts is the signing of the contract for the construction of this center with the private sector, which has provided a high-quality working environment for traders and shopkeepers, as we all witness its inauguration.

He clarified that the contract for the Naw-e-Khairkhah Commercial Center is the first and largest project signed through public-private partnership in the early days of the victory.

This is a significant example of the private sector’s trust in the economic programs of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan and a clear demonstration of the Islamic Emirate’s commitment to supporting the private sector and creating opportunities for business and trade for citizens.

Taliban sign contract for stretch of highway

KABUL (Amu TV): Taliban officials at a ceremony in Kabul on Wednesday signed a contract for the construction of a 25-kilometer section of the Qaisar-Laman ring road.

The deal was awarded to the Noorzi Confidence Construction and Road-Building Company, according to Abdul Karim Fatah, the Taliban’s deputy minister of public works.

The contract is valued at 1.4 billion Afghanis (\$19 million) and will be executed in exchange for access to a chromite mine in Parwan province, he said.

The Qaisar-Laman road spans 233 kilometers and has been divided into five phases for construction.

The first two sections, covering a significant portion of the highway, were previously contracted to two foreign private companies under the former Afghan government in 2017, with an estimated cost of \$85 million.

Afghanistan’s national ring road stretches 3,360 kilometers, beginning in Kabul and looping through 16 provinces before reconnecting to the capital.

According to former Afghan government officials, over two-thirds of the country’s population lives within 50 kilometers of the highway, making its completion critical for economic development and connectivity.

Taliban reassign six officials

KABUL (Amu TV): Taliban have reassigned six officials to new positions, including three deputy ministers, a provincial governor, a police chief, and a central bank oversight director, according to a decree issued by Taliban leader Hibatullah Akhundzada.

The reshuffle, announced by Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid, includes Ubaidullah Aminzadeh, the former Taliban governor of Takhar, appointed as Taliban deputy minister of labor and social affairs.

Also, Zia-ur-Rahman Aryoubi, Taliban’s former deputy minister of mines and petroleum, reassigned as Taliban’s deputy minister for academic affairs at the Ministry of Higher Education.

Abdul Rahman Qanit, previously Taliban’s head of central bank oversight, now serving as Taliban’s minister for planning and policy at the Ministry of Mines and Petroleum.

Samiullah Hizbullah, formerly Taliban’s police chief of Kandahar, appointed as Taliban governor of Takhar.

Abdul Ahad, Taliban’s former governor of Helmand, reassigned as Taliban’s police chief of Kandahar.

And Lotfullah, previously Taliban’s deputy minister for academic affairs at the Ministry of Higher Education, now serving as Taliban’s head of central bank oversight.

Since returning to power in August 2021, Taliban have largely reassigned their officials within their own ranks, moving members from one post to another rather than appointing new figures.

EU, UNESCO call for inclusive education

KABUL (TOLNews): On International Day of Women and Girls in Science, the European Union (EU) and UNESCO have emphasized their support for the right to education for girls in Afghanistan. The EU stressed that education and scientific opportunities in the fields of technology, engineering, and mathematics are essential for Afghan women and girls.

The EU in Afghanistan said, “Women’s participation in education and in the workforce is not just a matter of equality — it is essential for the self-sufficiency, development, and prosperity of any nation. The EU remains committed to supporting women and girls, and all those whose rights are persistently violated in Afghanistan.”

UNESCO also declared its support for girls in Afghanistan, emphasizing the importance of access to educational environments

and inclusive learning.

UNESCO wrote: “Ensuring access to STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) education and opportunities empowers Afghan women and girls to shape a brighter future for all.

On this International Day of Women and Girls in Science, we advocate for inclusive learning environments where talent can thrive.”

On the other hand, girls who have been deprived of education once again emphasized the need to provide education opportunities for all girls.

“If I had stayed at home, I might have fallen into depression, and perhaps I wouldn’t have become the girl who wanted to reach her dreams. That’s why I opened the door to medical institutes and entered the world of medicine, becoming a nurse,” said Vida, one of the students.

“Unfortunately, on the day when the world celebrates International Day of Women and Girls in Science, Afghan girls are stuck at home, suffering from anxiety and emotional distress, mourning their lost dreams,” Howida, another student, told TOLNews.

Tafsir Siyahposh, a women’s rights activist, told TOLNews: “Basic sciences start from school, but today the doors of schools are closed. How can we claim to reach other sciences when we can’t even access basic education? We hope the doors of schools and universities open as soon as possible.”

In 2015, the United Nations General Assembly declared February 11 as the International Day of Women and Girls in Science. On this day, the world honors the achievements of women and girls in various fields, including science and technology.

Global investment fuels \$36.5m progress in Paktia



PAKTIA (BNA): Paktia has completed 270 development, humanitarian, and reconstruction projects worth nearly 2.9 billion Afghanis (\$36.5 million), officials announced at a press conference in Gardez.

Deputy Governor Sheikh Inamullah Salahuddin highlighted the Islamic Emirate’s contribution of 576.25 million Afghanis, with international partners providing \$33.22 million. He reaffirmed the government’s commitment to

advancing infrastructure, education, and agriculture.

Infrastructure and education upgrades

Gardez saw major improvements, with 75 reconstruction projects enhancing roads, bridges, and retaining walls.

Meanwhile, 48 education projects, including 17 new schools and two religious seminaries, were completed, according to Education Director Maulvi Abdul Qayum Farooqi.

Agriculture expansion

Over 215 greenhouses were built, 64 farmers established orchards, and 20,500 farmers received improved seeds, boosting agricultural output, said Agriculture Director Maulvi Syed Amin Hashimi.

Sustained development ahead

Officials pledged to continue investing in key sectors. “This is just the beginning,” Salahuddin stated. “We remain committed to ensuring long-term progress for Paktia.”

Dozens of healthcare centers shut down in Ghazni, Bamyan

GHAZNI (TOLNews): Local officials in Ghazni and Bamyan provinces have reported that dozens of healthcare centers in these provinces have ceased operations following delays in US humanitarian aid to Afghanistan.

According to local officials, 15 clinics, 3 small healthcare centers, 17 mobile medical teams, and 2 emergency health service centers in Ghazni and two other healthcare centers in Bamyan have shut down. Most of these facilities operated in remote areas.

Hamidullah Nisar, head of information and culture in Ghazni, stated: “A total

of 39 healthcare centers have been shut down, including 15 small clinics, three subsidiary centers, 17 mobile teams, one safety center, and two medical clinics. In total, 39 healthcare facilities in Ghazni have ceased operations.”

Saboor Sighani, spokesperson for the governor of Bamyan, said: “Unfortunately, after the suspension of US aid, residents of Bamyan have also been affected. With the cut in aid, two healthcare offices in Bamyan have closed. However, with the efforts of Islamic Emirate officials, one of these centers has resumed opera-

tions.” Meanwhile, residents of Ghazni and Bamyan have called for the resumption of healthcare services.

Din Mohammad Atayi, a resident of Ghazni, stated: “Sanctions in the health and education sectors should be lifted as much as possible, and facilities should be provided in these areas.”

Mahdi, a resident of Bamyan, said: “People are suffering greatly. Our request to the US and the international community is to reopen these healthcare centers.”

However, local officials have announced efforts to

resume operations in these centers.

The head of information and culture in Ghazni said: “The Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan is working to resolve these issues through domestic funding or alternative sources. We have so far reached an agreement with another organization to reactivate 10 of the closed clinics.”

In addition to the shutdown of healthcare centers in remote areas of Ghazni and Bamyan, the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) has also announced that some projects funded by US financial assistance have been suspended.

Gates Foundation-ANDMA discuss continued cooperation



KABUL (BNA): Mullah Nooruddin Turabi, the head of the Afghanistan National Disaster Management Authority (ANDMA), welcomed Ana Maria, advisor

to the Gates Foundation, Dr. Khushal Zaman, representative of WHO), and Rozzatullah Zia to discuss future collaborations.

During the meeting,

Mullah Turabi recognized the critical support the Gates Foundation has provided to the Afghan people over the years.

He expressed optimism

about the continuation of this partnership, particularly in areas such as disaster management, coordination of humanitarian aid, and public awareness campaigns regarding the dangers of landmines.

Ana Maria expressed her gratitude for the opportunity to meet with Mullah Turabi and emphasized the importance of cooperation among various organizations and institutions in supporting ANDMA’s efforts. She assured attendees that the Gates Foundation is committed to enhancing its collaboration with the authority.

31 inmates pardoned

BADGHIS (BNA): In a move aimed at giving prisoners a second chance, authorities have released 31 inmates from Badghis Central Prison and shortened the sentences of 18 others. The decision came as part of a special decree from Amir al-Mu’minin and was approved by the Supreme Court.

For many of the freed prisoners, this marks a fresh start. “This gives me hope to rebuild my life and do things differently,” said one former inmate, grateful for the opportunity. Others echoed similar sentiments, vowing to make positive changes.

The decision has been met with support from local communities, who see it as a step toward reconciliation and stability. “Forgiveness leads to peace,” said a community elder. “When people are given another chance, they can become productive members of society.”

Local authorities praised the initiative, emphasizing that justice isn’t just about punishment but also about rehabilitation. “This isn’t just about reducing numbers in prison—it’s about giving people the opportunity to reform and reintegrate,” said a senior official.

Taliban bar delegates from traveling to Doha

KABUL (Amu TV): Taliban barred a group of 14 individuals from traveling to Doha to attend a meeting of the Afghanistan Future Thought Forum, sources confirmed to Amu TV.

According to one source, some members of the delegation were stopped inside a FlyDubai aircraft and forced to disembark, while others, who were set to fly with Air Arabia, were prevented from boarding altogether.

Among the 14 individuals, two were women, the source said. Those blocked from traveling include Faiz Mohammad Zaland, Aziz Ahmad Haneef, Nazar Mohammad Motmaeen, Injila Ahmadi, and Madina Mahbubi, while Jafar Mahdawi was the only member of the delegation allowed to reach Doha.

Sources suggest that the Taliban’s decision to block the delegation stemmed from two key factors: the presence of women in the group and internal power

struggles between the Haqqani network and figures loyal to Taliban leader Hibatullah Akhundzada.

Taliban forces affiliated with Akhundzada, who have recently taken control of Kabul International Airport, were reportedly behind the move to prevent the delegation’s departure.

The Afghanistan Future Thought Forum is a 30-member initiative comprising former government officials, civil society activists, and academics. The forum seeks to analyze Afghanistan’s key challenges and opportunities and provides policy recommendations to both the Taliban and the international community.

The forum has previously held several meetings worldwide, including January 2024 in Istanbul, Turkey, where discussions focused on the UN special coordinator’s report on Afghanistan, the mass deportation of Afghan refugees from Pakistan and

Iran, and the impact of Taliban restrictions on women’s healthcare.

Another event happened in February 2023 in Doha, Qatar, where participants called for an end to the Taliban’s bans on girls’ education and women’s employment, while emphasizing the need for inclusive governance to ensure lasting peace.

One session happened in May 2024 in Oslo, Norway, where discussions centered on women’s right to work and access to education.

Faiz Mohammad Osmami, one of the participants at the forum’s May 2024 meeting in Norway, told Amu that discussions focused on Afghanistan’s future and the exchange of ideas on key national issues.

The Taliban have not taken an official position on the Afghanistan Future Thought Forum, but their latest move to block delegates from traveling suggests growing unease with such gatherings.

ICRC: Nearly 1m patients received health services in Afghanistan

KABUL (TOLNews): The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has assessed the humanitarian situation in Afghanistan as critical, stating that last year, it provided health services, food aid, and support programs for farmers in the country.

The committee also emphasized the importance of awareness about the threats posed by unexploded ordnance and landmines. According to the report, the humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan has been caused by prolonged conflict, economic challenges, and natural disasters.

“People who are struggling should be helped, but

we also need to focus on the future to make Afghans self-sufficient so they no longer have to rely on others. We need to create job opportunities and employment for the people, as Afghanistan is an agricultural country, and with minimal resources, we can support many people,” said Mohammad Nabi Afghan, an economic expert.

The ICRC further reported that in the past year, over 964,000 patients received primary healthcare services in 47 Afghan Red Crescent health centers, 65% of whom were women and children. The committee also provided 312,371 doses of vaccines and mal-

nutrition services to 8,788 children suffering from malnutrition.

The report further mentions: “964,259 patients, (65% women and children), received primary health care at 47 health facilities of the Afghan Red Crescent Society that are supported by the ICRC. 215,274 patients were assisted in 7 ICRC-supported physical rehabilitation centres.”

“The services of the International Committee of the Red Cross have undoubtedly been effective in Afghanistan, and this organization needs to attract more aid as Afghanistan is currently facing a crisis in providing health services,”

said Seyed Abdullah Ahmadi, a doctor.

Additionally, in 2024, the Red Cross exchanged 155 messages between prisoners and their families and conducted awareness activities about the dangers of unexploded landmines in the country.

“Close communication with government leaders in terms of releasing prisoners and connecting with their families plays an important role. According to the 2024 report of the ICRC, some prisoners have been released and returned to their families,” said Najib-ur-Rahman Shamal, an expert in international relations.

Experts at CASS call for global dialogue on J&K’s ongoing struggle

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Centre for Aerospace & Security Studies (CASS), Islamabad, hosted a Catalyst Conversation reaffirming Pakistan's unwavering political, moral, and diplomatic support for the people of

facilitated demographic and political manipulation. She further noted that India's settler-colonial project in Jammu and Kashmir is being implemented through legal and administrative changes, demographic shifts, and technology-enabled repression.

Keynote Speaker, Ms. Farzana



Jammu and Kashmir. The discussion reinforced the need for sustained efforts in advocating for their fundamental rights and dignity on the global stage.

Session moderator and Research Associate at CASS, Ms. Shaza Arif, highlighted that generations of Kashmiris have suffered under repression, militarisation, enforced disappearances, and severe human rights violations. She pointed out the deteriorating situation following India's revocation of Articles 370 and 35A on August 5, 2019, which removed Kashmir's special status and

Yaqoob, Former Minister for Social Welfare and Women Development, Azad Jammu and Kashmir, reflected on the evolving dynamics of the Jammu and Kashmir conflict, noting that while it once carried significant costs for India, these have now diminished. She stressed that Pakistan had maintained a magnanimous attitude towards dialogue, but India had shown little interest in engagement, particularly on Kashmir. She also remarked that India's aggression had intensified over time, especially in its challenges to the Indus Waters Treaty, further exacerbating

tensions in the region. Despite this, Pakistan had remained steadfast in advocating for Kashmir on international platforms, including the UN, EU, and OIC. She highlighted that Kashmiris, deeply invested in Pakistan, placed more trust in Pakistan than in themselves, and the political leadership of Pakistan had displayed unity in supporting their cause.

Ms. Yaqoob further noted that while India had effectively leveraged its media and film industry to control the Kashmir narrative, Pakistan's coverage of the issue remained limited, with PTV being the primary broadcaster consistently reporting on Kashmir. She stressed the need for original and indigenous Kashmiri content to counter India's influence and raise awareness of the struggles faced by Kashmiris. She cautioned that future conflicts between India and Pakistan would likely centre on water disputes rather than land, reinforcing Quaid-i-Azam's assertion that Kashmir is Pakistan's jugular vein.

In his Concluding Remarks, Air Marshal Javaid Ahmed (Retd), President of CASS, noted the think tank's role in providing valuable insights to policymakers, particularly following the revocation of Article 370 in 2019. He observed that India was executing a calculated strategy on IIOJK and stressed the need for Pakistan to project its strengths more effectively and unite its intellectual resources to counter Indian actions.

The discussion was followed by a thought-provoking question and answer session, where participants talked about into the human cost of the conflict, shedding light on the profound struggles faced by individuals, families, and communities living under perpetual Indian occupation.



ISLAMABAD: Lt. General Jean Jacques Mupenzi, Rawandan Air Force Chief of Staff, called on Air Chief Marshal Zaheer Ahmed Baber Sidhu, Chief of the Air Staff, Pakistan Air Force.

Rwanda’s Air Chief visits Air HQs

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: A high-level defence delegation of the Republic of Rwanda led by Lieutenant General Jean Jacques Mupenzi, Rawandan Air Force Chief of Staff, called on Air Chief Marshal Zaheer Ahmed Baber Sidhu, Chief of the Air Staff, Pakistan Air Force, at Air Headquarters, Islamabad.

The visit marked a significant step towards establishing a foundation of longstanding Air Force to Air Force ties between both the countries through exploration of new avenues for cooperation in joint training initiatives. Upon his arrival, a smartly turned-out contingent of Pakistan Air Force presented Guard of Honour to Lieutenant General Jean Jacques Mupenzi.

During the meeting, Chief of the Air Staff shared insight into various ongoing modernization projects of Pakistan Air Force's operational construct, force goals and plans for the force structure with a keen focus on future warfare. The Air Chief reiterated PAF's unwavering support to provide capacity-building assistance to the Rwandan Air Force in upgradation of it's human resource, maintenance parameters and operational training.

Lieutenant General Jean Jacques Mupenzi expressed his profound admiration for Pakistan Air Force's professional training standards, modernized infrastructure and multi-domain capabilities. He noted that the PAF's commitment to excellence and innovation in military aviation serves as a model for air forces to emulate. The Rwandan Air Chief emphasized the need for a major overhaul and collaboration to enhance the capabilities of Rwanda's Air Force with the assistance from PAF to meet contemporary security challenges. The visiting dignitary also expressed a strong desire for a partnership with Pakistan Air Force aimed at establishing comprehensive training programs for basic-level training of aircrew and technical training of ground crew of Rwandan Air Force. The delegation also visited National ISR & Integrated Air Operations Centre and PAF Cyber Command, where they were given a detailed briefing on PAF's operational capabilities.

This visit of Lieutenant General Jean Jacques Mupenzi to Air Headquarters, Islamabad is testament to strong desire of Rwandan side to restructure their Air Force, utilising the professional expertise of Pakistan Air Force.

Gaza inalienable part of Palestine territory: China

BEIJING (APP): A Chinese Foreign Ministry Spokesperson said on Wednesday that Gaza belongs to the Palestinian people and it is an inalienable part of the territory of Palestine.

"China firmly supports the legitimate national rights of the Palestinian people, believes that the Palestinians governing Palestine is an important principle that must be upheld in the post-conflict governance of Gaza, and opposes the forced displacement of the people of Gaza," Guo Jiakun said during his regular briefing here.

He said that under the current circumstances, the international community, major countries in particular, needs to play a constructive role in implementing the ceasefire deal, and promoting the delivery of humanitarian aid to Gaza and reconstruction there.

5G services to be introduced, NA told

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The National Assembly was informed today that the government is going to introduce four new infrastructure cables and 5-G services to provide fast and reliable internet to users.

Responding to a question during the Question Hour in the House, Parliamentary Secretary on Information Technology and Telecommunication Sabheen Ghoury said the 5G services will be introduced in the country by mid this year.

The Parliamentary Secretary said the government is going to introduce four new cables to improve infrastructure. She said in addition to this, optical fiber cables are also being increased to ensure improved internet services in the country. Sabheen Ghoury further said 250 E-Rozgaar Centers would be established through the public and private sector across Pakistan within the next three years under PSDP project "Prime Minister's Initiatives-Support for Startups, Specialized IT Trainings and Venture Capital".

She said these centers are intended towards promoting twenty-five thousand freelancers and entrepreneurship and would generate around twenty million dollars. The Parliamentary Secretary added that fifty E-Rozgaar Centers would be made operational during the current fiscal year. The National Assembly also paid tribute to the women for their pivotal role in the nation's progress and their steadfast commitment to equality and justice.

A resolution, tabled by Shahida Rehmani, was passed by the National Assembly, stating: "On this historic day, February 12, 2025, as we commemorate National Women's Day, this Parliament pays tribute to the women of Pakistan for their immeasurable contributions to the nation's progress, their resilience in the

face of adversity, and their unwavering commitment to achieving equality and justice.

The resolution emphasized that National Women's Day serves as a powerful reminder of the indispensable role of women in shaping society, strengthening families, empowering communities, and driving the socio-economic development of Pakistan.

The Women's Parliamentary Caucus honored Madr-e-Millat Fatima Jinnah, Begum Ra'ana Liaquat Ali Khan, and Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto, acknowledging their leadership and legacy.

The resolution further reaffirmed the commitment to building a nation where women are not only equal partners but also leaders, innovators, and change-makers, striving for a future where every woman in Pakistan can thrive without fear, discrimination, or inequality.

Meanwhile, the Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly, Syed Ghulam Mustafa Shah on Wednesday, adjourned the House proceedings for 15 minutes due to a lack of quorum.

Soon after the Question Hour began, opposition members requested the chair to allow them to speak on a point of order. The Deputy Speaker reminded the House that the Speaker of the National Assembly Sardar Ayaz Sadiq had stated the previous day that it had been agreed upon that no one would be allowed to speak on a point of order during Question Hour.

Upon the Deputy Speaker's refusal, Sahibzada Muhammad Hamid Raza from the Sunni Ittehad Council pointed out the lack of quorum. Following this, the Deputy Speaker directed a headcount, and after confirming the insufficient attendance, he said that the House was not in order and adjourned the proceedings for 15 minutes.

Israel orders evacuation of another West Bank camp

WEST BANK: The Israeli

army issued a forced evacuation threat for Nur Shams refugee camp as it continues its deadly operation across the occupied West Bank. Israeli forces "stormed" the camp's al-Ayada neighbourhood on Wednesday, using loudspeakers at a mosque to tell residents to immediately leave the camp, which has been under Israeli siege since earlier this week, the Palestinian Wafa news agency reported.

The report added that Israeli forces deployed at the entrances to the camp fired "live bullets and sound bombs" to sow panic among residents, with soldiers "assaulting young men" and "expelling the elderly without allowing them to take their basic needs". The forced evacuation threat was the latest in a series of orders issued over the past four days since Israel launched operations in the camp.

Three weeks ago, Israel

launched its "Iron Wall" military operation across the West Bank, killing dozens of Palestinians and forcing at least 40,000 to flee their homes, according to the United Nations agency for Palestinian refugees (UNRWA). Launched just days after a ceasefire between Israel and Hamas was agreed in Gaza, the operation has seen Israeli forces raiding several refugee camps, including Jenin, Tulkarem, Far'a and Arroub, in a bid to clear them of residents.

"It's comprehensive and open war against the whole existence of the Palestinian people in the West Bank," Hamza Zubiedat, a land rights researcher based in Bethlehem, told Al Jazeera. UNRWA has described the nearly three-week military operation as "the single longest in the West Bank" since the second Intifada.

In addition to the large-scale military operations in refugee camps and cities in

the northern occupied West Bank, Israeli soldiers have also launched a series of smaller attacks. Wafa reported on Wednesday that Israeli soldiers assaulted three students in the town of Huwara, south of Nablus. The army also deployed tear gas and sound bombs against a number of students in al-Khader, south of Bethlehem, causing them to suffer suffocation-related injuries.

Israeli forces stormed Aqqaba town, north of Tubas, arresting two men. They also destroyed agricultural land with bulldozers in Funduq village, east of Qalqilya, and raided homes close to occupied East Jerusalem. Land-rights analyst Zubiedat stressed that Israel's assault goes beyond the camps, with Israel building "new walls" around Palestinian villages in the Jordan Valley, "isolating whole Palestinian communities" from the West Bank cities. — Aljazeera

Country witnesses surge

(Continued from Page 1)

The federal cabinet, on the recommendation of Revenue Division, also approved the signing of the initial draft of the convention between the Government of Pakistan and the Government of Iraq regarding the elimination of double taxation on income tax and capital, as well as measures to prevent tax evasion and tax non-compliance. The cabinet ratified the decisions made in the Economic Coordination Committee (ECC) meeting held on February 3, 2025.

The cabinet also ratified the decisions taken in the Cabinet Committee on Legislative Cases meeting held on February 7, 2025. The meeting also endorsed the decisions taken in the Cabinet Committee on State Owned Enterprises meeting held on February 11, 2025.

The prime minister made these opening remarks at the meeting of the federal cabinet chaired by him where he referred to his interaction with the Managing Director of the International

Monetary Fund (IMF) in Dubai who appreciated team Pakistan for its commendable efforts in implementing the IMF programme and amicably achieving economic indicators.

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif said the appreciation of the IMF chief was encouraging who praised the dedication of Pakistan economic team engaged in implementing the IMF programme. He added that the country witnessed a remarkable surge in foreign remittances that demonstrated the trust of the overseas Pakistanis in the current government.

The prime minister mentioned his father's example for hard work who always emphasised upon him and his elder brother for serving the nation with unmatched passion and relentless effort and reinvigorate their passion in testing times with self motivation.

Prime Minister Shehbaz also commented on his interactions with the heads of states of UAE, Sri Lanka and global investors. He informed that he had a detailed interaction with the

President of UAE featuring fruitful discussion on foreign investment prospects in Pakistan where the Army Chief General Syed Asim Munir was also present.

"Pakistan has presented the Palestine case in a befitting manner at the Dubai Summit as 50,000 innocent Palestinians have been killed which is a great tragedy," the prime minister said. He commented on the Libya Boat incident and regretted that many precious lives were lost. He directed the quarters concerned to ensure that this heinous crime come to an end.

While reprimanding the irresponsible statements of the Israeli prime minister, the prime minister said that Pakistan would continue to protect the sovereignty of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. He mentioned that the Turkish President was arriving in Pakistan on his two-day official visit later on the day. Prime Minister Sharif said President Recep Tayyip Erdogan was a great leader of the Muslim Ummah who always supported Pakistan.

ASJ orders registration of FIR against MNA

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Additional Session Judge Peshawar Abdul Qayyum Siddiqui has ordered the registration of a case against Member National Assembly (MNA) Noor Alam Khan for interfering in government affairs.

The petitioner, Assistant Engineer (G) SS and TL PESCO, filed a petition under section 22-A through their counsel, Mian Imad Khan Advocate. The petitioner stated that on August 31, 2024, MNA Noor Alam Khan forcibly entered the Sakhi Chashma Grid Station and inaugurated it, thereby interfering in government affairs.

The petitioner had previously filed a complaint with the relevant police station, but no action was taken. During this time, MNA Noor Alam Khan allegedly attempted to disrupt the petitioner's official duties, causing significant losses to PESCO.

After hearing the arguments, the court accepted the petitioner's request and ordered the SHO of Machni Gate police station to register a case against MNA Noor Alam Khan. The court also ruled that if the petitioner's report is found to be false during the investigation, action will be taken against them under section 182.

First arrest under amended PECA

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) Cyber Crime Wing Peshawar has arrested an accused under the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA), marking the first arrest since the recent amendment to the law.

The accused was taken into custody for hacking a woman's social media account and uploading her private photos on TikTok. According to FIA officials, the suspect used these images to blackmail the woman's husband and demand money.

He also threatened to upload more private photos on other social media platforms if his demands were not met. Reports indicate that the woman's husband had already transferred PKR 15,000 to the accused in an attempt to stop the harassment. The FIA Cyber Crime Wing conducted a raid in Swabi and successfully apprehended the suspect. Officials confirmed that digital evidence was recovered from the accused's phone, and further investigations are underway.

PHC disposes off 113% cases during Justice Ishtiaq’s tenure

Humayun Khan

PESHAWAR: Justice Ishtiaq Ibrahim has completed his 10-month tenure as the Chief Justice of the Peshawar High Court (PHC) before evaluation to Supreme Court of Pakistan. During his tenure, more than 23,000 cases were disposed of. Recently, Judicial Commission of Pakistan approved his appointment as Supreme Court's Judge.

Justice Ishtiaq Ibrahim was appointed as an ad-hoc judge of the Peshawar High Court on August 11, 2016, and took oath as the Chief Justice on April 15, 2024.

During his 10-month tenure, 20,438 cases were filed in the Peshawar High Court, and 23,317 cases were disposed of. The case disposal rate during his tenure was 113%.

As a PHC's judge, Justice Ishtiaq Ibrahim has decided 19,800 cases. Recently, he established special inheritance courts to expedite the disposal of inheritance cases and also initiated online cases in the Service Tribunal.

Justice Ishtiaq Ibrahim cancelled the summer vacations and established special benches to expedite the

disposal of cases. He also categorized cases to ensure their swift disposal.

After Justice Ishtiaq Ibrahim's appointment to the Supreme Court, the senior judges, including Justice Ijaz Anwar, Justice S.M. Atique Shah, and Justice Syed Arshad Ali, are in the line for the position of Chief Justice PHC.

Justice Ishtiaq Ibrahim took strict measures to ensure the security of judges and also implemented various reforms. He maintained good relations with the bar association during his tenure.

Syrian FM says Russia, Iran have sent new govt ‘positive indications’

LONDON: Iran and Russia have sent "positive indications" to the new government in Damascus but there remains an "open wound" over their support for the previous regime, Syria's foreign minister said on Wednesday.

Moscow and Tehran provided key military and political support to Bashar Assad after an uprising against the former president descended into a 13-year-long civil war. Assad fled to Russia in December after a lightning offensive led by Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham seized much of the country including the capital.

Asaad Hassan Al-Shaibani was appointed foreign minister by the HTS commander and now president of the Syrian Arab Republic, Ahmad Al-Sharaa. Speaking at the World Governments Summit in Dubai, Al-Shaibani said there had been clear messages of intent from Russia and Iran to respect his new govern-

ment, and the Syrian people.

But he added: "There is an open wound for the Syrian people and there are a lot of people who have suffered as a result of the relationship between the previous regime and these two states, and as a result, we need to give it some time for the Syrian people to be satisfied." Al-Shaibani said the Assad regime had exploited the relationships with Iran and Russia against the Syrian people and that the country needed to "shake off" this previous period.

"Any kind of respect to our freedom and sovereignty will be met with mutual respect and any kind of interference will be rejected." The positive indications Syria had received needed to be translated into "real policies based on mutual respect and the need to satisfy the Syrian people." Al-Shaibani also addressed Syria's relations with its neighbor Lebanon

— another country with which it has a complicated relationship.

Under the Assad dynasty, Syria imposed its will on Lebanon for decades and the Lebanese Hezbollah militia was another supporter of the former regime during the Syrian war. "We're not to be held responsible for the bad relations that existed with Lebanon under the previous regime," Al-Shaibani said. Lebanon's prime minister established a new government on Saturday after two years of political deadlock was broken by the election of President Joseph Aoun last month.

Al-Shaibani said the new Syrian government would respect Lebanon as a sovereign state and avoid interfering in its internal affairs. "The best proof of that is Lebanon being able to elect its president so swiftly without any interference by Syria," he said. — Arab News

Former BD gov’t behind possible ‘crimes against humanity’, says UN

NEW YORK (AFP): Former Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's government was behind possible "crimes against humanity" as it strived to hold on to power last year, says the United Nations. Before Hasina was toppled in a mainly student-led revolution last August, her government oversaw a systematic crackdown on protesters, involving "hundreds of extrajudicial killings", the UN human rights office said in a fact-finding report on Wednesday.

Publishing findings of its inquiry into events in Bangladesh between July 1 and August 15 last year, the UN rights office said it had "reasonable grounds to believe that the crimes against humanity of murder, torture, imprisonment and infliction of other inhumane acts have taken place".

These alleged crimes committed by the government, along with violent elements of her Awami League party and the Bangladeshi security and intelligence services, were part of "a widespread and systematic attack against protesters and other civilians ... in furtherance of the former government's [bid] to ensure its continuation in power", the report says.

Hasina, 77, who fled into exile to neighbouring India, has already defied an arrest warrant to face trial in Bangladesh for crimes against humanity. The UN team found that Bangladesh's security forces had supported Hasina's government throughout the unrest, which began as protests against civil service job quotas and then escalated into calls for her to stand down.

The rights office said the Hasina government tried systematically to suppress the protests with increasingly violent means. It estimated that "as many as 1,400 people have been killed" in those 45 days while thousands were injured. The vast majority of those killed "were shot by Bangladesh's security forces", the rights office said, adding 12 to 13 percent of those killed were minors.

The overall death toll projection in the UN report is far higher than the most recent estimate by Bangladesh's interim government of 834. "The brutal response was a calculated and well-coordinated strategy by the former government to hold onto power in the face of mass opposition," UN rights chief Volker Turk said in a statement.