

Cut in PoL prices proposed  
F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Oil and Gas Regulatory Authority (OGRA) forwarded a summary to the federal government seeking Rs2.49 reduction in petrol price for next fifteen days. According to details, the incumbent government already decided to provide relief to general public after decrease in price of crude oil in international market.



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# Pakistan's reference in Indo-US statement misleading: FO

## F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan on Friday calling its reference in the Indo-US joint statement as "one-sided, misleading, and contrary to diplomatic norms" said that it could not cover up India's sponsorship of terrorism, subversion, and extrajudicial assassinations in the region and beyond.

Foreign Office spokesperson Shafqat Ali Khan, at his weekly press briefing, said that Pakistan's reference had been included notwithstanding its counterterrorism cooperation with the US. He said that such references could not shift international attention from the stark reality of India being a safe haven for perpetrators of hate crimes against Muslims and other minorities.

"The joint statement fails to address India's non-compliance with UN Security Council resolutions, which is a key source of tension and instability in the region, nor does it take cognizance of the grim human rights situation in Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir. Regrettably, this amounts to an abdication of international responsibility," he remarked.

The spokesperson reiterated Pakistan's commitment to contributing constructively to regional and global efforts to promote peace and stability and bringing the fight against terrorism to its logical conclusion. He also expressed Pakistan's concerns over the planned transfer of advanced military technologies to India as it could cause military imbalances in the region and undermine strategic stability.

He urged the international partners to take a holistic and objective view of the issues of peace and security in South Asia and refrain from endorsing positions that are one-sided and divorced from ground realities. Spokesperson Shafqat Khan condemned the Israeli prime minister's recent statement about the establishment of a state for Palestinian people in Saudi Arabia calling it "irresponsible, provocative, and thoughtless"

offending and disregarding the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people to self-determination and an independent state on their own historical and legitimate territory."

"Pakistan stands in solidarity with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and any attempt to undermine Saudi Arabia's unwavering position and misrepresentation of its commitment to the Palestinian cause is deeply regrettable," he stated. He said that in his telephonic conversations with counterparts from Iran, Egypt, Türkiye, Malaysia, Saudi Arabia, and UAE, Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar termed the proposal to displace the people of Gaza deeply troubling and unjust and conveyed Pakistan's support for convening an extraordinary OIC meeting of Foreign Ministers to deliberate upon this issue.

Apprising the media of a boat tragedy in Libya involving Pakistani nationals, he said that so far 16 dead bodies had been recovered, and the Pakistani nationality of the victims had been confirmed based on their passports. "There are 37 survivors, including one in the hospital and 33 in police custody. Around 10 Pakistanis were reported missing in the accident, and three of the survivors are in Tripoli and are being looked after by the embassy."

The spokesperson expressed concern over the death of two Kashmiri youths in Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir due to the high-handed approach of Indian forces, and suicide by another after severe torture by police in Kathua District and coerced confession of links with militants despite being innocent. "These incidents must be investigated, and the culprits must be held to account," he emphasized.

Spokesperson Khan told the media that DPM Dar would participate in the high-level meeting of the UN Security Council in New York on February 18, 2025, to be chaired by Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi. Regarding the visit of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan to

Pakistan, he said at the 7th session of the Pakistan-Turkey High-Level Strategic Cooperation Council, both sides agreed to further strengthen cooperation in all spheres, including defense, trade and investment, banking, finance, education, health, energy, culture, tourism, transport and communication, agriculture, water, and science and technology.

Besides, the joint working groups have been renamed as standing committees and new joint standing committees, namely on security, defense and intelligence, health, and science and technology, have been established under the HLSCC mechanism. Moreover, the two sides underscored the need for the resolution of all outstanding disputes between Pakistan and India, including the core dispute of Jammu and Kashmir, in accordance with the relevant UN Security Council resolutions and the wishes of the Kashmiri people.

Referring to Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's UAE visit to attend the World Governments Summit, he said in the sidelines meetings with the leadership of UAE, Sri Lanka, Kuwait, and Bosnia and Herzegovina, they discussed ways to deepen bilateral cooperation and explore opportunities to enhance partnerships in areas of mutual interest, including trade, investment, infrastructure, and energy.

To a question, the spokesperson ruled out any ban on UAE visas for Pakistani nationals; however, he said it was any country's sovereign prerogative to allow anyone to enter their soil. Asked to comment about a letter the PTI wrote to the IMF, the spokesperson said it was regrettable if anyone tried to undermine Pakistan's economic prosperity. He said that during his recent UAE visit, Prime Minister Shehbaz had a "fruitful" meeting with IMF Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva. Regarding Ukraine, he said Pakistan would welcome any initiative to revive peace in Ukraine as the conflict had also affected Pakistan, like other parts of the world.

## Israel, Hamas to release more captives

GAZA: Three captives are to be released by Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad in exchange for 369 Palestinians held in Israeli jails as part of the ceasefire in Gaza. The captives to be released on Saturday were identified as US-Israeli Sagui Dekel-Chen, Russian-Israeli Alexandre Sasha Troufanov and Argentinian-Israeli Yair Horn.

While the names of the Palestinians to be released have not been announced, Israeli media reported that 333 were arrested in Gaza and will be sent back to the besieged enclave, 10 will be released in the occupied West Bank, one in occupied East Jerusalem and 25 will either be sent to Gaza or Egypt. In the southern city of Rafah in Gaza, Al Jazeera's Hani Mahmoud reported that Palestinians have been following the announcement of the releases closely. "Today's news is sending more optimism among the people," he said while noting apprehension and concern in the past few days.

Al Jazeera's Nour Odeh, reporting from Amman, Jordan, said the release of the three captives gives more hope to other Israeli families whose relatives are still being held in Gaza. "For now, the ceasefire is holding. There is some hope. And the families of the Palestinians are waiting for the list of prisoners, who will be included and will see their loved ones tomorrow," Odeh said on Friday. "Another sigh of relief for the mediators but radio silence from the Israeli government."

So far, 21 captives, including 16 Israelis, have been released by Hamas since the ceasefire began on January 19. After the release of more captives, the ceasefire is expected to move to its second phase on March 1 although it is still unclear how that will proceed, Odeh noted. During that phase, the release of Israeli soldiers is expected although the details have yet to be negotiated, she added. — Aljazeera



ISLAMABAD: Resident Coordinator of United Nations in Pakistan Mohamed Yahya called on Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif.

## PM hails work carried out by UN country team

Saqib Mushatq

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif on Friday emphasised the need to further strengthen collaboration with the United Nations in the areas of sustainable development and climate change. He reaffirmed Pakistan's strong political commitment to advancing the objective of combating climate change in close collaboration and partnership with the international community and the UN. The prime minister was talking to UN Resident Coordinator in Pakistan, Mohamed Yahya, who paid a courtesy call on him.

During the meeting, the prime minister appreciated the important work being carried out by the UN Country Team in Pakistan. He conveyed his warm regards for UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres, while fondly recalling his strong leadership in galvanising global support for Pakistan during the 2022 floods.

The prime minister underscored that climate financing remained a crucial component of addressing the impacts of climate change, and expressed the hope that the developed nations would fulfill their commitments in that regard. He said that Pakistan would continue

working closely with the UN on important issues in the areas of climate change, including for the implementation of various projects.

The prime minister also emphasized the need for addressing the financing gap to achieve Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), as well as for increasing the voice and representation of developing countries in the international financial institutions through reform of the global financial architecture. Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Muhammad Ishaq Dar, Minister for EAD Ahad Khan Cheema, Minister for Planning Ahsan Iqbal, SAPM Syed Tariq Fatemi, PM's Coordinator for Climate change Ms Romina Khurshed Alam and senior government officials also attended the meeting.

**President Erdogan gifts Turkish electric vehicles Togg to PM, President:** President of Türkiye Recep Tayyip Erdogan has gifted Turkish electric vehicles Togg to Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif and President Asif Ali Zardari.

While thanking the president for the thoughtful gesture, the prime minister lauded the strides made by the Turkish automotive industry and looked forward to collabora-

tion amongst Pakistani and Turkish automotive companies in future. Later, the Prime Minister and First Lady Aseefa Bhutto Zardari also drove their respective electric cars along with President Erdogan.

**IFC's role lauded:** Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif met with Makhtar Diop, Managing Director and Executive Vice President of the International Finance Corporation (IFC), the private sector investment arm of the World Bank Group (WBG), to discuss IFC's ongoing and pipeline portfolio in Pakistan.

Muhammad Ishaq Dar, Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister, Muhammad Aurangzeb, Finance Minister; Ahad Khan Cheema, Minister of Economic Affairs, and senior officers of the Ministry of Finance and Economic Affairs attended the meeting.

The prime minister appreciated the WBG's recently launched new decade-long Country Partnership Framework (CPF) (2026-2035) with its unprecedented commitment of US\$40 billion. It would include sovereign lending of US\$ 20 billion by the International Development Association (IDA) and International Bank for Reconstruction & Development (IBRD).

# The Frontier Post

Five killed in road mishap  
F.P. Report

JAMSHORO: At least five people were dead and six others were injured in a tragic road accident on Indus Highway near Jamshoro. As per details, two cars collided on Indus Highway near Jamshoro resulting in multiple casualties. Five individuals lost their lives on the spot, while six others sustained injuries. The accident was caused by one of the car drivers attempting to overtake from the wrong side.



ISLAMABAD: President Asif Ali Zardari administering oath of office to Justice Sardar Muhammad Sarfraz Dogar as Acting Chief Justice of Islamabad High Court, at Aiwan-e-Sadr.

## SBP injects over Rs 1.9tr in market

F.P. Report

KARACHI: The State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) injected Rs 1,901.7 billion in the market through reverse repo purchase and Shariah Compliant Mudarabah based Open Market Operations (OMO) on Friday.

The SBP, during the Open Market Operation, Reverse Repo Purchase (Injection) for 7-day and 28-day tenors on February 14, 2025 and accepted an amount of Rs 1,508.2 billion offered through 22 bids.

The central bank received 14 bids for 7-day tenor cumulatively offering an amount of Rs 1,198.7 billion at the rate of return ranging between 12.03 to 12.08% while 10 bids were received for the 28-day tenor amounting to Rs 508.7 billion at the rate of return ranging between 12.03 to 12.10%.

The SBP accepted 13 quotes for 7-day tenor cumulatively amounting to Rs 1,000 billion at 12.05% rate of return. Total amount offered at 12.05% was Rs 417.5 billion, out of which SBP accepted Rs 219.3 billion on a pro-rata basis. The SBP also accepted 9 bids for 28-day tenor amounting to Rs 508.2 billion at 12.05% rate of return.

Meanwhile, the central bank also conducted Shariah Compliant Mudarabah based Open Market Operation for the 7-day and 28-day tenors and further injected around Rs 393.5 billion into the market.

The central bank received 6 bids for 7-day tenor quoting an amount of Rs 338.5 billion at the rate of return ranging between 12.09 to 12.11 % while 2 bids were received for 28-day tenor offering an amount of Rs 55 billion at the rate of return ranging between 12.08 to 12.10%.

The SBP accepted the entire amount of Rs 338.5 billion offered through all the six quotes for 7-day tenor at 12.09% rate of return while an amount of Rs 55 billion offered through 2 quotes for 28-day tenor was accepted at 12.08% rate of return.

## ATC indicts 31 PTI workers in May 9 riots

F.P. Report

LAHORE: An anti-terrorism court (ATC) on Friday indicted 31 Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) leaders and workers in two cases related to the torching of a Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) office during the May 9 riots.

ATC Judge Arshad Javed conducted the trial proceedings, during which incarcerated PTI leaders Dr. Yasmin Rashid, Mian Mahmoodur Rasheed, Omar Sarfraz Cheema, and Senator Ijaz Chaudhry were produced before the court. PTI social media activist Sanam Javed and other accused, who were out on bail, also appeared and marked their attendance.

## 11 killed, many hurt in Harnai blast

F.P. Report

QUETTA: At least 11 labourers were killed and four others were injured when a bomb planted on the road exploded in the Shahrag area of Harnai. Initially, nine labourers were reportedly killed and six injured in the deadly blast took place near a vehicle carrying coal miners.

Later, two of the injured miners succumbed to their wounds. Harnai Deputy Commissioner Hazrat Wali Kakar confirmed the casualties.

The local levies said that the explosives, potentially an Improvised Explosive Device, were planted on the road. The security officials cordoned off the area after shifting the bodies and the injured to medical facilities. The condition of some of the injured labourers is reportedly critical. Arrangements are being made to shift the injured to Quetta.

It may be noted that multiple bomb blasts have been reported lately in the

Shahrag area, which is home to coal mines. However, the loss incurred in the latest is reportedly quite bigger than the previous explosions. The mines department officials said that most of the miners affected in the incident belonged to Swat and Shangla.

Balochistan government spokesperson expressed grief over the tragic incident. He said that investigations had been ordered into the blast. According to Harnai Deputy Commissioner Hazrat Wali Kakar, those in the pickup truck worked in coal mines. The explosion occurred in Coal Mines Area PMDC 94 in the Shahrag district. The bodies of the deceased and the injured were being shifted to the Shahrag Basic Health Unit, Kakar said.

This is a developing story that is being updated as the situation evolves. Initial reports in the media can sometimes be inaccurate. We will strive to ensure timeliness and accuracy by relying on credible

sources such as concerned, qualified authorities and our staff reporters.

President Asif Ali Zardari and Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif today condemned the tragic blast in Harnai, Balochistan, which claimed the lives of several coal miners. Both leaders expressed their profound grief and sorrow over the incident.

According to a statement by Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, President Zardari and Prime Minister Sharif, in separate communications, reiterated their unwavering commitment to eradicate the threat of terrorism. They emphasized the necessity of bringing those responsible for the attack to justice.

Sharif directed the authorities to ensure that the injured receive comprehensive medical care. He warned that those who jeopardize the lives and property of innocent individuals will face severe consequences for their actions.

## Newly-appointed SC, HCs judges take oath

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Six newly-appointed judges of the Supreme Court took oath of office at a ceremony held here on Friday. Chief Justice of Pakistan Justice Yahya Afridi administered the oath to the judges. The ceremony was attended by judges of the apex court and lawyers.

The newly sworn-in judges were: Justice Muhammad Hashim Khan Kakar, Justice Muhammad Shafi Siddiqui, Justice Salahuddin Panhwar, Justice Shakeel Ahmad, Justice Aamer Farooq and Justice Ishtiaq Ibrahim. Justice Mianqul Hassan Aurangzeb of Islamabad High Court (ICH) took oath as acting judge of the Supreme Court.

The oath-taking ceremony was originally scheduled for Thursday, Feb 13. However, it was postponed till Friday due to a delay in the issuance of the notification of the new judges as it was issued by the Ministry of Law and Justice late at night. The Judicial Commission of Pakistan had approved the appointment of new judges to apex court amid boycott by the

## CJP convenes JCP meeting

F.P. Report

LAHORE: Chief Justice of Pakistan (CJP) Yahya Afridi has convened a Judicial Commission meeting on February 28 to finalise appointments for Lahore High Court (LHC) judges. Out of eight nominated sessions court judges, four will be appointed as additional judges of the LHC. The proposed names included Session Judge Raja Nazir Ghazanfar Ali Khan, Qaiser Nazir Butt, Muhammad Akmal Khan, and Tajveer Ahmed Sheikh. Additionally, Session Judges Jazeela Aslam, Tariq Mehmood Bajwa, Shahid Saeed, and Abhar Gul Khan are also under consideration. The commission will review these nominations before finalising the appointments.

Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) and two senior judges. Meanwhile, acting chief justices of Sindh and Peshawar high courts took oath in Karachi and Peshawar.

Sindh: Governor Kamran Tessori administered the oath to acting Chief Justice Muhammad Junaid Ghaffar at Governor's House in Karachi.

Justice Zafar Rajput, Justice Zafar Iqbal, Justice Yousuf Syed, Justice Amjad Sahato, head of the Constitutional Bench Justice Agha Faisal, and Justice Sana Akram Minhas also attended the ceremony. Justice Junaid Ghaffar was born on Sept 14, 1963,

obtained his law degree in 1990, and was appointed as an additional judge of the Sindh High Court in 2013. He became the most senior judge in the Sindh High Court after the elevation of Justice Shafi Siddiqui and Justice Salahuddin Panhwar to the Supreme Court.

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa: Governor Faisal Karim Kundi administered the oath to Justice S.M Atiq Shah as acting chief justice of Peshawar High Court. The swearing-in ceremony, held at Governor's House in Peshawar, was attended by Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur. Judges of the Peshawar High Court, lawyers and officials also attended the ceremony.

## Justice Mansoor stripped off Federal Judicial Academy's advisory role

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Supreme Court's senior puisne judge Justice Mansoor Ali Shah has been removed from adviser's role in the Federal Judicial Academy. Justice Shah had been performing advisory role in the academy for the last one year.

Earlier, speaking to journalists after the oath-taking ceremony of newly-appointed

SC judges, Justice Shah said he held no malice or grudge against anyone. Asked about rumours that a reference may be filed against him, the senior judge said he wasn't afraid of any such move against him as he didn't commit any wrongdoing.

He, however, averred people couldn't see the elephant in the room. Answering another question about criticism of backlog of cases, he

said: "You can check the ratio of hearing of the cases by the judges by visiting the SC website. You will see whose cases have made it to the law books mostly."

A few days earlier, Justice Shah and Justice Muneeb Akhtar had boycotted the meeting of the Supreme Judicial Council (SJC) meant for the elevation of newly-appointed judges in the Supreme Court.







# Meeting reviews projects for inclusion in ADP 2025-26

### F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: A review meeting was held in Peshawar under the chairmanship of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Minister for Livestock, Fisheries and Cooperatives Fazal Hakeem Khan Yousafzai regarding the development projects to be included in the annual development program for the financial year 2025-26.

In meeting Director General Livestock Extension Dr. Asal Khan, Director Livestock Extension Merged Districts Dr. Waheedullah Wazir, Director Livestock Research Dr. Khuro Kaleem and other relevant

officers were also present. On this occasion, the provincial minister Fazal Hakeem directed to establish a livestock call center for better and prompt treatment of livestock and other matters in remote areas of the province. Under which the remote livestock farmers of the province will be able to get benefit from the emergency centers established in the department. During the meeting, fifteen development projects worth billions of rupees to be launched under the Livestock Department Extension in the province were discussed. The projects under consideration also include a

plan to establish a poultry hatchery to increase chicken production so that the province can become self-sufficient in the poultry sector. Similarly, a plan for the Katta Bachao Program is also being planned. Under this project, young cattle will be raised in government farms at the government level. This will increase meat production to the maximum. The meeting also discussed in detail the plan to provide interest-free loans to livestock farmers. So that livestock farmers can not only solve their problems but also increase employment opportunities. While briefing the

Provincial Minister for Livestock on this occasion, it was informed that due to the excessive use of antibiotics in the last few decades, the spread of germs in humans and livestock has increased rapidly. Which poses a huge threat to human and animal health at the domestic and international levels. The meeting expressed concern over the excessive use of antibiotics and considered including a project for surveillance and control of antibiotic resistance in the annual development plan along with other projects to ensure effective and appropriate use of antibiotics.



PESHAWAR: Commissioner Peshawar Division Riaz Khan Mehsud chairing a meeting to take steps to stop expected artificial price hike in Ramadan.

## Tax exemption for FATA/PATA Industrialists demand action against unlawful beneficiaries

### F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The President of Hayatabad Industrial Association, Bakhtiar Afridi, and former President of Sarhad Chamber of Commerce, Muhammad Ishaq, have called for strict action against individuals who obtained billions of rupees in relief under the name of tribal districts and the poor but illegally supplied goods to settled areas. They stated that this malpractice has inflicted severe damage on the national treasury, local industries, and the economy. In a joint statement, they demanded that the federal government, the

Finance Minister, the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR), and the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) take immediate action against those who fraudulently secured relief funds meant for industries and the tribal population of former FATA and PATA. They emphasized that this misuse of funds has caused irreparable financial losses to the national treasury while forcing the closure of 70% of industries in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. They further stated that a handful of so-called industrialists have manipulated the system for years, depriving the tribal people of their rightful benefits. These individuals have been falsely claiming to

operate industries in former FATA and PATA while selling raw materials and finished goods in settled areas. As a result, the local people remain deprived, while the national treasury continues to suffer losses of billions annually. The industrial leaders pointed out that even when FBR officials have caught shipments of raw materials being illegally sold in Sindh, Punjab, and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, they were released after bribes were taken. They urged the federal government, the Prime Minister, the Finance Minister, the Chairman of the FBR, and FIA authorities to take immediate action against these cor-

rupt elements by registering cases against them and holding government officials involved in these illegal activities accountable. They warned that if these black sheep are not stopped, the country's industrial sector-especially in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa-will continue to decline, unemployment will rise, and the economy will suffer further setbacks. The federal government must take urgent steps to address this crisis, recover stolen funds, and ensure that relief funds genuinely benefit the tribal population. They stressed that the future of the country's industries depends on decisive action against corruption and exploitation.

## GIZ, CISNR sign agreement

### F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: A significant milestone in Pakistan's journey toward the just transition of power distribution networks was marked with the signing of a grant agreement at the Center for Intelligence Systems and Network Research (CISNR), UET Peshawar. The agreement is part of the GIZ-commissioned project "Digitalization and Decarbonization of Power Distribution Networks", funded by the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), Germany. The initiative aims to enhance the quality of electricity supply, reduce system losses, and optimize overall operations

through the integration of advanced technologies and information systems. This will help in making the Grid more efficient and climate friendly. The signing ceremony was attended by key representatives from GIZ and CISNR, including Wolfgang Hesse, Cluster Coordinator, Jens Brinkmann, Head of Project Energy, Climate Change & Just Transition GIZ Pakistan, Kim Ursina Brinkmann, Consultant GIZ Pakistan, Ms. Khadija Bano, Mr. Kashif Zahoor Climate Change Advisors/Provincial Coordinators as well as Prof. Dr. Gul Muhammad Khan, Director CISNR and his team. The event highlighted the significance of international collaboration in driving inno-

vation and achieving energy efficiency. Following the formal signing, the GIZ delegation received a comprehensive briefing on CISNR's pioneering work in AI and IoT applications. The delegation was given a guided tour of the center's state-of-the-art facilities, where they observed innovative projects focused on smart grid technologies, disaster management, precision agriculture, water quality, and climate change products. These advancements are expected to play a crucial role in modernizing and climatizing the country's power distribution systems. The agreement, set to conclude by the end of next year, 2026, marks a pivotal step toward inte-

grating cutting-edge technologies into Pakistan's power infrastructure. It also reflects a broader commitment to fostering international cooperation for sustainable development. The delegation also explored opportunities for future collaboration with CISNR on Green Skills and engaging in academia for long-term, sustainable changes among youth. He lauded the role of CISNR in developing green skills through innovative solutions and emphasized the need to create awareness in students and academic institutions towards climate issues and energy challenges from an early stage. Later, Prof. Dr. Gul Muhammad Khan presented traditional souvenirs and university shield to the delegation.

## Consistent efforts to make Pakistan polio-free country



PESHAWAR (APP): The pain of Abid Khan's father continued unabated as he daily pushes his son on wheelchair to visit playground to watch children playing different games to get him amused as he fell prey to poliovirus in his childhood and paralyzed for life. When football or cricket balls come closer to the wheelchair of disabled Abid at sports ground at village Dheri Ishaq in Nowshera district, he unintentionally tries to catch it but sometimes falls from in this effort, and his father Jamshed Khan supports him to settle down again in his wheelchair in relatively cold evenings. Extremely saddened for his younger son, Jamshed Khan said that he feels so sorry for his 31-year-old son for being unable to play like a normal child and always looks for others' support. "Poliovirus has badly affected my son at the age of three-year, when he took him to the doctor at Government Hospital Nowshera due to high fever, vomiting and constant pain in neck and limbs where he was diagnosed with polio," he recalled. "It was like a lightning fall on me when doctor told that Abid will not walk for entire life as both of his legs were paralyzed by the poliovirus," the saddened father said, adding falling to misconception and propaganda against anti-polio vaccines have deprived him of healthy son for life. The old father had been practicing to bring his son to the playground for the last 27 years on his request by leaving work in agriculture fields ahead of time. Like Abid, the polio virus continued attacking the under five-year old children

in the country where 73 kids were paralyzed last year. According to Emergency Operation Centre (EOC) KP, one polio case was reported on January 22 this year from the country and 73 in 2024, six in 2023, 20 in 2022 and one in 2021. The lone positive polio case (WPV-1) was reported from DI Khan Khyber Pakhtunkhwa on January 22, 2025. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan are most vulnerable to polio cases with 22 and 27 positive cases reported last year apparently due to mass migration, security challenges, limiting supervision and oversights in the past, resulting restricting access to vulnerable population especially in high risk remote areas and exposing security personnel to attacks. Once in the spotlight in the world for polio virus following reports of about 20,000 cases per year in early 1990, there was a great hope that Pakistan was going to be declared a polio free country after a report of one case from Balochistan on January 27, 2021. However, the report of 73 cases last year from Pakistan showed that wild polio virus (WPV-1) was still circulating in the country mostly in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan and its eradication was still a big challenge. Dr Samiullah Khan, head of children department, Government hospital Mardan said that polio was a highly contagious disease that mostly invades the nervous system of malnutrition children under five-year of age and spreads quickly through feco-oral route. "The dangerous virus leads to permanent paralysis

and its victim can't even move parts of his body and even causes death." He said that over 100 million children are immunized every year before their first birthday in world and about 24 million under one-year age i.e. 20 percent were deprived of vaccines due to various reasons including refusal. Termining the anti-polio vaccine a safe option, he said the vaccines prevent two to three million deaths every year in world including Pakistan and can save an additional two million children due to improvement of global coverage. "The oral polio vaccine (OPV) and inactivated polio vaccine (IPV) contributes in weakening and killing of poliovirus as the former saved over five million children from permanent paralysis," he said. Following a report of 350,000 polio cases from 125 endemic countries in 1998, the World Health Assembly had expressed strong resolve to eradicate polio from the globe and today the entire world except Pakistan and Afghanistan were declared polio-free. "The main reason behind the report of high polio cases in vulnerable districts of KP were mostly refusal of vaccination by parents, misconception against the vaccine and high rate of illiteracy," he said. Ziaur Rehman, Spokesperson of Pakistan Polio Eradication Program said that despite resurgence of polio cases in 2024, Pakistan has achieved significant progress in reversing the epidemiological trends of the crippling virus by reducing its genetic diversity. He said the number of circulating poliovirus variants have been successfully

reduced from 12 in 2020 to just two, marking a major milestone in the country's fight against polio. "In 2020, we had found 12 genetic clusters of poliovirus against which 10 were completely eradicated while solid efforts are on to wipe out remaining two circulating variants i.e YB3A4A and YB3A4B, belonging to the Wild Poliovirus Type 1 (WPV1) soon." YB3C, an indigenous poliovirus of the region, was eradicated in 2023 from the country, he said, confirming that this variant had not been detected in environmental samples collected from 88 districts over the past 15 months. Among the six WPV1-infected cases and 126 W P V 1 - p o s i t i v e Environmental Sampling reported in 2023, nine belonged to groups of viruses derived from the YB3C cluster which has now been completely eradicated. "This is a commendable success of Government ongoing battle against polio, indicating that the disease is on its last legs in Pakistan," Zia remarked. Pakistan's progress has received acknowledgment by the Technical Advisory Group (TAG) during its recent meeting held in Islamabad on January 26, 2025. The federal government launched a nationwide campaign on Monday last to immunize over 45 million children under five-year of age across Pakistan. Ayesha Farooq, Prime Minister's Focal Person for Polio Eradication has recently visited Peshawar where she discussed with Chief Secretary KP about the arrangements made for the success of ongoing polio campaign in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. As part of government's efforts, more than 33 million children under five-year of age were vaccinated during September 2024 campaign in 116 districts of Pakistan including KP with the help of nearly 400,000 trained workers. She sought cooperation of religious scholars, media, politicians, LG representatives and tribal elders in nullifying misconceptions against anti-polio vaccine for the safe future of children.

## Alleged murderer obtained bail

### F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: A two-member bench of the Supreme Court of Pakistan, comprising Justice Sardar Tariq Masood and Justice Mazhar Alam Miankhal, has ordered the release of an accused on bail in a murder case. The counsel Amin Khattak Lachi advocate argued that on December 17, 2023, a person was killed during a wedding ceremony, and a case was registered at Sabirabad Police Station. The accused, Shafiullah Khan, was also nominated in the case and arrested. The lawyer further argued that the applicant had no role in the murder and was only accused of giving a signal that led to the firing. He added that it was not clear what signal the accused had given, and this would be clarified during the trial. The two-member bench, after hearing the arguments, accepted the accused's appeal and ordered his release on bail.

## Governor flays blast in Harnai district

PESHAWAR (APP): Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Faisal Karim Kundi, on Friday condemned the deadly blast near a laborers' vehicle in Balochistan's Harnai district. The tragic incident, which claimed the lives of 11 workers from Swat, has deeply shocked the nation. Expressing profound sorrow over the loss of precious lives, Governor Faisal Karim Kundi extended his heartfelt condolences to the families of the victims. He also conveyed his best wishes for the speedy recovery of those injured in the explosion. Governor Kundi emphasized, "In this moment of grief, I stand with the bereaved families of the innocent workers. We share in their pain and suffering." The Governor also condemned the perpetrators of the attack, calling them enemies of peace and humanity. "Those who spill the blood of innocent individuals are enemies of peace and humanity," he said, underscoring his firm stance against such acts of violence.

## NSPP, NIPs playing vital role in national uplift

### F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: "NSPP and NIPAs are playing a vital role in national development by preparing future leaders. Public servants have to enhance their professional skills to effectively tackle administrative challenges. These views were expressed by Dr. Safdar Sohail, former Additional Secretary and Dean NSPP while addressing the graduating officers of 42nd Mid-Career Management Course at NIPA Peshawar as chief guest. He further said that Mid-Career Management Course (MCMC) holds a unique and indispensable position in the professional training of the public ser-

vants. It is not merely a training program but a transformative experience that enhances leadership capabilities of mid-career public servants. He urged the graduating officers to maintain highest standards of integrity and friendly attitude with the masses while performing their responsibilities. Director General N I P A / P A R D / P P S A Peshawar Capt.(Retd) Usman Gul also addressed the ceremony. He said that trainings at NSPP are professionally designed and are consistently reviewed according to the emerging challenges. He said that public servants have to translate the theoretical concepts of

management into actions to ensure effective public service delivery. He extended his gratitude to Rector NSPP Dr. Ijaz Munir whose guidance and support has been instrumental in the successful culmination of the training courses. He appreciated the untiring efforts and dedication of the faculty and staff of the three training institutes for putting their best efforts in providing quality trainings to the public servants. Dr. Safdar Sohail later awarded course completion certificates to the graduating officers. Director General NIPA/PARD/PPSA Capt.(Retd.) Usman Gul presented shield to Dr. Safdar Sohail for gracing the occasion.

## Protesters demand release of 1122 worker

### F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Family members, relatives, and officials of the Aman Jirga staged a protest in front of the Peshawar Press Club, demanding the release of Rescue 1122 worker Safer Ullah, who is currently imprisoned in Attock Jail. The protesters urged the Prime Minister and the Army Chief to ensure his immediate release, claiming that he is innocent. They warned that if their demand is not met, they will be forced to stage a sit-in outside the Chief Minister's House. The demonstration was led by Safer Ullah's brother, children, relatives, and

representatives of the Aman Jirga. The protesters held banners and placards displaying their demands, along with pictures of Safer Ullah's son, who had reportedly passed away due to the trauma of being separated from his father. They also chanted slogans against the Chief Minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and the Director General of Rescue 1122. Speaking at the protest, Aman Jirga district president Zaka Ullah Zahid stated that Safer Ullah had taken an ambulance to a Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) rally on official orders, leaving him with no choice but to comply.

General Secretary Noor Khan added that one of Safer Ullah's sons had already died due to the grief of his father's imprisonment and urged authorities to show mercy on the remaining children. Safer Ullah's brother, Kiramat Ullah, also spoke at the protest, saying that his family, including his wife and children, waits for him every day. He appealed to the Prime Minister and other authorities to intervene and secure his release. The protesters reiterated their demand for Safer Ullah's release, warning that they would escalate their protest by surrounding the Chief Minister's House if their plea was not heard.







## In brief

### Two abducted in S Waziristan F.P. Report

WANA: Unknown kidnappers abducted three high profile persons including Lower Waziristan Chamber of Commerce and Industries (LWCCI) president Saif-ur-Rehman Wazir, along with Superintendent Pakistan Customs Nisar Khan and Customs Inspector Khushal Khan from the Raghzai area of the Birmal tehsil, Lower Waziristan. The Wana Trade Union has expressed strong outrage over the incident and has called on the local district administration and other senior officials to take immediate action. The union has warned that if Saif-ur-Rehman Wazir and his companions are not safely released, the local population will take to the streets in protest. The district administration has not yet issued an official statement regarding the incident till filing of the news, but local sources have indicated that efforts are underway to locate the kidnappers and secure the release of the hostages. Meanwhile, the local brigade commander held an important meeting with tribal elders in the Shakai area. The meeting focused on key issues such as development, prosperity, and maintaining law and order in the region. During the discussion, the brigade commander attentively listened to the concerns of the local community and assured them of full cooperation in resolving their problems. He emphasized that the army remains committed to supporting developmental projects and initiatives aimed at public welfare. The tribal elders, in response, pledged their full support for peace, stability, and progress in the region. They appreciated the commander's efforts and reaffirmed their commitment to working closely with security forces for the betterment of Shakai.

### JUI-F leader flays KP govt F.P. Report

BUNER: Jamiat-e-Ulema Islam Fazl (JUI-F) district Emir Mufti Fazal Ghafoor claimed that the provincial government, district administration, police, law enforcement agencies and lawmakers failed to address public grievances through good governance, on Thursday. This he said while addressing a press conference along with party activists and said that the problems and difficulties faced by the people are brought to them through the media so that they take immediate steps to solve these problems and difficulties, otherwise the people will be right to understand that the current government elected members, district administration, district police and security institutions have left them helpless. JUI-F District Ameer Mufti Fazal Ghafoor has described the law and order situation as very bad and looting of crores of rupees from a person in Tortworsak, theft from shops in Daggar, incidents of motorcycle theft in parts of Buner, threat to peace in Tehsil Mandanar and Tehsil Chagharzi and threats to life and property of ordinary citizens in Buner.

### Woman killed F.P. Report

MINGORA: A woman lost her life, and 10 others were injured in a collision between two cars in the Matta Durshkhela area of Swat district. The accident occurred late at night, adding that six injured including women, were transported to Matta Hospital for medical treatment.

# Overseas Pakistanis demand establishment of medical center

F.P. Report

LOWER DIR: The overseas Pakistanis hailing from the Lower Dir district have demanded the government to establish a medical center and an office for verification of fingerprints anywhere in Malakand division so that they can easily verify their documents and get vaccination certificates.

Speaking at a news conference at Timergara, the overseas Pakistanis president Haji Ameer Zaman, general secretary engineer Kifayatullah, former MPA Saeed Gul, Haji Imtiaz Khan and others complained that the 2.5 million overseas Pakistanis belonging to Malakand division had no facility of medical center and offices for verification of fingerprints in the region.

They said the number of overseas Pakistanis was higher than any other region but despite this fact they suffered hard to visit Peshawar for petty issues. They said the overseas Pakistanis were sending remittances to the country for feeding their families. The overseas representatives said that they had to travel to Peshawar and stay there for a night to visit the medical center and verify their fingerprints.

The speakers said that the overseas Pakistanis' organization was an apolitical body that represented the entire overseas community without any discrimination. They said the organization had brought bodies of 16 overseas Pakistanis with the help of the Overseas Pakistanis Foundation who died in Saudi Arabia.

They said the deceased Families were also provided with Rs 500,000 each. They demanded the government to increase the staff of the Timergara passport office and issue urgent and routine passports as soon as possible. They said the government should also permit them to bring a mobile phone to Pakistan without any tax.

**JUI-F multiparty conference:** The

Jamiat Ulema Islam Fazl Khall chapter arranged a multiparty conference at Khall. The event was addressed by the JUI-F district chief Sirajud Din, village council chairman Umar Hayat, PTI tehsil chairman Ashfaq ur Rahim, PML-N divisional president and former provincial minister Malik Jehan Zeb Khan, JI's Akhunnzada Kalimullah, PPP's Mubarak Zeb, Anjuman Tajiran Khall president Hameed ur Rehman, Azhar Taqveem and others.

The MPC agreed to form a grand jirga for maintenance of peace, curbing drug abuse and collective struggle for completion of development projects. They complained about the excessive power outages and lack of funds for development projects. They said that due to government apathy, the residents of Rabat and Khall had collected donations to rebuild a flood damaged bridge over the Panjkora River on their own and they had started work on the Rs 150 million project. The MPC demanded a separate grid station in Khall, construction of a sports' complex, provision of natural gas and functionalization of all water supply schemes in Khall.

Meanwhile the JUI-F central deputy general secretary Maulana Amjad Khan, during a conference at the Timergara Rest house, announced that the party would soon launch a massive campaign against the government on the call of Maulana Fazl ur Rehman. The conference arranged for the graduated seminaries students was also addressed by former provincial minister Muzafar Said advocate, senator Maulana Atta ur Rehman, senator Mufti Abdur Rashid, JUI-F provincial deputy chief Mufti Fazal Ghafoor, provincial coordinator Qazi Ayaz ud Din, tehsil chairman Mufti Irfan ud Din and others.

A total of 570 seminary students and 15 MPhil and PhD scholars were awarded with certificates, shields and prizes. The speakers asked the graduated students to utilize their knowledge for leading the nation in every sector of life.

## MCCI flays kidnapping of WCCI's president

F.P. Report

MARDAN: The President of the Mardan Chamber of Small Traders and Small Industries, Mr. Taj Muhammad strongly condemned the kidnapping of the President of the Waziristan Chamber of Commerce, Saifur Rehman Wazir, along with two customs officers. He expressed deep anger and grief over the broad daylight abduction and demanded immediate action from the local district administration and higher authorities.

Taj Muhammad emphasized that the security agencies, District Police Officer (DPO), and civil administration must ensure the safe and swift recovery of all abducted individuals and bring the kidnappers to justice. He stated that this incident has further heightened the concerns and apprehensions of the business community across the province.

He criticized the provincial government for its complete failure to provide security to the presidents, cabinet members, and business community of the Chambers of Commerce. Taj Muhammad specifically called on the Inspector General (IG) of Khyber

Pakhtunkhwa to take immediate action for the recovery of the abductees and provide security to all chamber presidents and officials across the districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

**Mayor announces support for farmers:** City Mayor Mardan Himayat Ullah Mayor has said that the new tax imposed by the provincial government on the agriculture and tobacco sector is an injustice to the landlords and an anti-farmer policy, which should be withdrawn immediately, on Friday.

This he condemned while addressing a press conference at Mardan press club along with the representatives of Anjuman Ittehad Kashtakaran. He said that the landlords are already suffering from severe financial difficulties and they cannot afford to pay this additional tax.

The enactment of the Act 2025, which will increase taxes on farmers from 6% to 45%, will further push agriculture into crisis if the provincial government does not take this issue seriously, it will become difficult for farmers to maintain their lands and they will be forced to sell them for township projects, which

will significantly reduce agricultural production.

Speaking at the press conference, Anjuman Ittehad Kashtakaran spokesperson Liaquat Khan said that interest-free loans and modern agricultural facilities are being provided to farmers in other provinces, especially in Punjab, but unfortunately, the government in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is not focused on this. He said that many mills have been closed in Mardan, Charsadda and other areas, due to which the local economy is having serious negative effects.

The new tax is being implemented under the pressure of the IMF, which will prove disastrous for the country's economy and agriculture.

He pointed out that there is no concept of agricultural tax in the neighboring countries while its implementation here is taking away the jobs of the farmers. He warned that if the Farmers Act 2025 is not withdrawn, there will be protests across the province in the first phase and later they will surround the provincial assembly and raise their voices for their rights.



**DIR: Deputy Commissioner Muhammad Arif Khan presenting an appreciation certificate to District Health Officer Dr. Muhammad Shakir in recognition of his excellent performance.**

## Govt High School No. 1 achievement hailed

F.P. Report

HAFIZABAD: Deputy Commissioner Abdul Razzaq visited government high school No.1, Hafizabad meet the students of the school who won 'JASHAN STEAM' Punjab Competition and grabbed 1st position in the competition.

DC lauded performance of students Ehtisham Ali and Fiazan Shafqat, their teachers Nusrullah Sajid, Shahzad

Kazam and principal Mian Inayat Ullah to bring credit the name of the school, education department Hafizabad, his teachers and principal of the school. He congratulated the students, teachers and principal to grabbed 1st position at province level in science, Technology, Engineering, Arts competition 'JASHAN STEAM' Punjab.

Later, DC invited the students, teachers and principal

of the school at his office and treated with sweets and tea and congratulated on this great success. He gave away ten thousand rupees cash prize to student each who won the 'JASHAN STEAM' Punjab Competition. He welcomed creative, mental and technical abilities of the students and said that our students are enrich with all abilities to compete the students of other countries.



**PESHAWAR: Adviser to KP CM, Tariq Sadozai visiting Hydropower Project site.**

## Institutional collaboration key to fight gender-based violence Shafi Ullah

MINGORA: A two-day workshop, "Capacity Building of EVAWG Alliance Swat," was held in Swat under the auspices of Aurat Foundation, bringing together legal experts, law enforcement officials, government representatives, and journalists.

The workshop, attended by stakeholders from various sectors, focused on enhancing collaborative efforts to address gender-based violence and strengthen the EVAWG (Elimination of Violence Against Women and Girls) alliance.

Through interactive sessions, case studies, and group discussions, participants explored advocacy strategies, legal frameworks, and support mechanisms for women victims of violence. Experts emphasized the importance of collective action in addressing societal abuses against women and girls.

Aurat Foundation representatives, including Shabna Ayaz, Provincial Manager Saima Munir, and EVAWG Alliance Swat Focal Person Samrin Hakim Advocate, highlighted the need for empowering the EVAWG Alliance through capacity-building measures.

The workshop also delved into policy implementation, grassroots mobilization, and creating a safe environment for women and girls. Participants gained valuable insights into gender-sensitive policies and intervention strategies. This initiative is a crucial step towards eliminating violence against women and promoting a safer, more equitable society in Swat.

## 3 coal miners from Shangla killed in Harnai blast F.P. Report

SHANGLA: Almost three coal miners killed in Balochistan's Harnai district, explosion occurred at the Shahrig coal mine operated by PMDC with lease number 94 belonging to district Shangla. This tragic incident resulted in the death of 10 workers and injured 7 others, on Friday.

The explosion happened when the coal miners were traveling from the mine to their residences in the market area. The powerful blast near their vehicle led to the instant death of 10 workers.

According to initial information, the three workers from Shangla who lost their lives are identified as Rehmat, son of Muhammad Tayyab (resident of Galli Bat Kharora), Daulat Mand, son of Qadar Mand (resident of Lilownai), and Iqbal Hussain, son of Gul Rashad (resident of Lelunai). The others hailed from Swat and Dir.

The bodies and the injured were transferred to hospitals in Quetta, where the injured are reported to be in critical condition. In a related incident, another coal mine accident occurred twenty days ago in Darra Adam Khel due to an electrical short circuit. This incident claimed the life of Bakht Wali, son of Gul Zameen, a young man from Pir Abad Shalmano.

## SIAL enhances passenger experience with new buses

F.P. Report

SIALKOT: Sialkot International Airport is Pakistan's first privately owned international airport. Renowned for its efficiency and passenger-centric approach, SIAL continues to expand its services and infrastructure to accommodate the growing needs of travelers and airlines. Sialkot International Airport (SIAL) continues to set new standards in passenger convenience and operational efficiency with the induction of new state-of-the-art ramp buses.

This latest addition reinforces SIAL's commitment to providing world-class facilities and ensuring seamless connectivity between the terminal and aircraft. The newly introduced ramp buses are equipped with advanced features, including spacious interiors, comfortable seating, air-conditioning, and accessibility options for passengers with reduced



mobility. These buses are designed to enhance the overall travel experience, ensuring a smooth and efficient transition for travelers boarding and disembarking flights. The buses are capable to take more than 100 passengers at a time. Chairman & Vice Chairman SIAL, stated, that "The induction of these modern ramp buses marks another milestone in our ongoing efforts to elevate passenger services at Sialkot International Airport. We are dedicated

to enhancing the comfort, safety, and efficiency of airport operations, and these buses will significantly contribute to that goal." This investment in infrastructure is part of SIAL's broader vision to continuously upgrade facilities and meet the evolving needs of passengers. As one of Pakistan's leading international airports, SIAL remains committed to adopting innovative solutions that ensure a seamless and world-class travel experience.

## AARI launches journal of agricultural research

F.P. Report

FAISALABAD: The Directorate of Agricultural Information, Faisalabad, is playing a pivotal role in disseminating the new crop varieties and advanced production technologies introduced by the agricultural scientists to farmers, through the effective use of print, electronic, and social media.

It is a significant development that free services have been launched for the online publication of research papers by agricultural scientists in the Journal of Agricultural Research. Dr. Asif Ali, Director Agricultural Information, announced this initiative during a consultative meeting with stakeholders at the Ayub Agricultural Research Institute, Faisalabad, on February 13, 2025.

The meeting was convened to discuss the various aspects for facilitating of the Journal of Agricultural Research (JAR), a quarterly scientific publication under the Punjab Agriculture Department. The journal, approved by the Higher Education Commission (HEC) in the Y-category,

has been in continuous publication since 1963. The primary objective of the consultative meeting was to formulate a comprehensive strategy for the citation, indexing, upgrading, and category improvement of the Journal of Agricultural Research.

During the meeting, the Director Agricultural Information, Faisalabad, provided detailed insights to eminent researchers from various departments of AARI regarding the online processing and publication of the journal. The session was chaired by Principal Scientist Dr. Abid Niaz and attended by Chief Librarian Choudhry Muhammad Nadeem, Principal Scientists Dr. Hafiz Muhammad Bashir and Dr. Faisal Hafeez, Senior Scientists Dr. Abdul Majeed, Dr. Hafiz Naveed Ramzan, Muhammad Sajjad, Dr. Umar Farooq, Muhammad Noman, and Deputy Director of Agricultural Information Muhammad Ishaq.

Dr. Asif Ali emphasized that the Directorate of Agricultural Information, Faisalabad, is committed to providing timely, reliable, and useful information to

all stakeholders of the Agriculture Department, tailored to their needs. He further highlighted that the department not only promotes the services and activities of various agricultural sectors but also disseminates government projects and initiatives through print, electronic, and digital media.

During the meeting, Assistant Editor of JAR, Ms. Bushra Talat, briefed participants on the importance and operational procedures of the Open Journal System (OJS). Principal Scientist Dr. Abid Niaz and other agricultural scientists commended the JAR team for their consistent efforts in ensuring timely publication despite limited resources and staff. They stressed the need for a more efficient strategy to expedite the processing of research papers by agricultural scientists and proposed constructive suggestions for the journal. The meeting ended with the vote of thanks to all participants vowing to underscore the importance of collaborative efforts to further enhance the quality of the journal.

## Spring art festival held

F.P. Report

HYDERABAD: A one-day Spring Art Festival, organized by the Sindh Cultural Department and MURK society, brought together experts and enthusiasts to discuss the impact of climate change on South Asia, particularly Pakistan. The event featured a panel discussion, cultural performances, and interactive sessions, highlighting the need for collective action to mitigate the effects of climate change.

Environmental activist Javed Soz Halai emphasized the importance of creating mass awareness about the significance of a green and clean environment in remote areas of Sindh. He noted that cities in Northern Sindh, such as Jacobabad, are becoming increasingly warmer, making them uninhabitable in the future.

Climate expert and author Zulfikar Ali Halepoto

stressed the need to include environmental education in school curricula and promote environmental advocacy. He highlighted how climate change is altering the traditional perception of spring as a season of love and romance.

Dr. Sorath Sindhu, a health expert and researcher, discussed the devastating effects of climate change on women's menstrual health, leading to frequent miscarriages and mental health issues. She also criticized the authorities for not taking concrete measures to prevent air pollution in Thar.

The event proposed several solutions, including the prevention of carbon emissions, reduced usage of plastic materials, and proper planting methods. The experts also noted that climate change would create opportunities for people in remote areas of Sindh.

Co-organizers Dr. Asif

Memon and Dr. Kazbano Asif thanked the Sindh Culture Department for providing them with an opportunity to welcome spring. They emphasized the importance of reviving lost cultural traditions and organizing seasonal events.

The festival featured cultural performances, including music, dance, and theater. The famous Murk theater group performed a stage drama and puppet shows. Dr. Govind Sharma, Harish Kumar, Sufi Aijaz Zulqarnain, and Manzoor Sindh Afshien Memon gave musical and dance performances to enliven the audience.

Politician Ayaz Latif Palijo, cultural activist Annu Solangi, Naz Saheto, and others addressed the audience on several contemporary issues facing Sindh. Book, embroidery, and food stalls were set up to attract the audience.





# Zelenskyy rejects Trump, Putin talks sans Ukraine present

KYIV (AP): Russian officials and state media took a triumphant tone after President Donald Trump jettisoned three years of US policy and announced he would likely meet soon with Russian President Vladimir Putin to negotiate a peace deal in the almost three-year war in Ukraine.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, meanwhile, said he would not accept any negotiations about Ukraine that do not include his country in the talks. European governments also demanded a seat at the table. Trump's change of tack seemed to identify Putin as the only player that matters in ending the fighting and looked set to sideline Zelenskyy, as well as European governments, in any peace talks. The Ukrainian leader recently described that prospect as "very dangerous."

Putin has been ostracized by the West since Russia's February 2022 invasion of its neighbor, and in 2023 the International Criminal Court issued an arrest warrant for the Russian leader alleging war crimes. Trump's announcement created a major diplomatic upheaval that could herald a watershed moment for Ukraine and Europe. Russia rejoices at Putin's spotlight role

Russian officials and state-backed media sounded triumphant after Wednesday's call between Trump and Putin that lasted more than an hour. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said that the "position of the current (US) administration is much more appealing." The deputy chair of Russia's National Security Council, Dmitry Medvedev, said in an online statement: "The presidents of Russia and the US have talked at last. This is very important in and of itself." Senior lawmaker Alexei Pushkov said the call "will go down in the history of world politics and diplomacy."

"I am sure that in Kyiv, Brussels, Paris and London they are now reading Trump's lengthy statement on his conversation with Putin with horror and cannot believe their eyes," Pushkov wrote on his messaging app. Russian state news agency RIA Novosti said in an opinion column: "The US finally hurt Zelenskyy for real," adding that Trump had found "common ground" with Putin. "This means that the formula 'nothing about Ukraine without Ukraine' - a sacred cow for Zelenskyy, the European Union and the previous US administration - no longer exists. Moreover, the opinion of Kyiv and Brussels (the European Union) is of no interest to Trump at all," it added. The pro-Kremlin Russian tabloid Komsomolskaya Pravda went even further

and published a column stating in the headline that "Trump signed Zelenskyy's death sentence." "The myth of Russia as a 'pariah' in global politics, carefully inflated by Western propaganda, has burst with a bang," the column said. In his first comments to journalists since Trump held individual calls first with Putin and then Zelenskyy, the Ukrainian leader conceded that it was "not very pleasant" that the American president spoke first to Putin. But he said the main issue was to "not allow everything to go according to Putin's plan." "We cannot accept it, as an independent country, any agreements (made) without us," Zelenskyy said as he visited a nuclear power plant in western Ukraine. While Trump was noncommittal on Wednesday, he offered some reassurances when asked by reporters whether Ukrainians would have a seat at the table in US negotiations with Russia. "Of course they would," Trump said. "I mean, they're part of it. We would have Ukraine, we have Russia, and we'll have other people involved too." During the conversation with Trump on Wednesday, Zelenskyy said, the US president told him he wanted to speak to both the Russian and Ukrainian leaders at the same time.

"He never mentioned in a conversation that Putin and Russia was a priority. We, today, trust these words. For us it is very important to preserve the support of the United States of America," Zelenskyy said. Trump also effectively dashed Ukraine's hopes of becoming part of NATO, which the alliance said less than a year ago was an "irreversible" step, or getting back the parts of its territory captured so far by the Russian army. Russia currently occupies close to 20% of the country. Trump has blamed Ukraine's desire to join the US-led mutual defense pact for sparking Russia's invasion. "That's the way it is," Trump said of Russia's long-standing opposition to Ukraine joining NATO, "and I think that's the way it's going to have to be." The US administration's approach to a potential settlement is notably close to Moscow's vision of how the war should end. That has caused alarm and tension within the 32-nation NATO alliance and 27-nation European Union. Some European governments that fear their countries could also be in the Kremlin's crosshairs were alarmed by Washington's new course, saying they must be part of negotiations. "Ukraine, Europe and the United States should work on this together. TOGETHER," Poland's Prime Minister Donald Tusk wrote Wednesday on social media.

## Putin holds phone call with Syria's Sharaa

MOSCOW (Reuters): Russia's President Vladimir Putin held a phone call with Syria's interim leader Ahmed al-Sharaa, the Kremlin said on Wednesday, the first direct communication between the two since Sharaa's forces overthrew Moscow's ally Bashar al-Assad in December.

Russia is hoping to retain the use of naval and air bases in Syria under the leadership that took power after Assad fled to Moscow following 13 years of civil war in which Russian troops had intervened on his behalf. The Kremlin described the phone call as constructive and said Putin had emphasized Moscow's support for the unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Syrian state.

It made no mention of discussions over the fate of the Russian military bases in northwest Syria. Losing the Tartous naval base and Hmeimim air base would deal a serious blow to Russia's ability to project power in the Mediterranean and Middle East. The Syrian presidency said Putin had invited Syrian Foreign Minister Asaad Hassan al-Shibani to visit Moscow. It said Putin told Sharaa that Moscow was ready to reconsider agreements signed between Russia and Syria under Assad. Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Mikhail Bogdanov visited Damascus in late January. A Syrian source familiar with the discussions told Reuters at the time that Sharaa had requested that Moscow hand over Assad.

## Boy, 16, acted in self-defence, murder trial hears

LONDON (BBC): A teenage boy accused of killing a man in a revenge attack over the theft of drugs was acting in self-defence, a court has been told. David Hunt, 45, was "repeatedly stabbed" on the upstairs landing of a house in Arundel Close, Hull, on 19 June last year and later died in hospital. Hull Crown Court was told Mr Hunt had "a propensity for violence" and had been wielding a hammer at the time.

The 16-year-old boy, who cannot be named because of his age, and Dean Dawkins, 20, of Cherry Nook Road, Huddersfield, deny murder but have admitted two drug offences. The court previously heard the defendants were handling a drugs line from the property, being operated by two dealers in London. The prosecution told the jury that the teenager and Mr Dawkins were "in it together" and "lying in wait" for Mr Hunt at the house.

On the night of the incident, Mr Hunt gained access to the property by climbing through the bathroom window after his knocks at the door went unanswered, the court heard. Defence barrister Richard Wright KC said: "If this was about revenge, why not just let him in [through the door] and attack him there?"

Mr Wright told the court that the prosecution's case was that the attack was "determined and brutal". However, he told the jury that the teenager had believed Mr Hunt was there to steal drugs and was in an "absolute panic" while trying to get him to drop the hammer. "There is a debt to pay if you don't deliver the profits - and David Hunt does have a hammer," Mr Wright said. "That is the true context in which you need to judge the question on whether it was revenge or self-defence against a man who was intent on getting drugs come what may."

Mr Dawkins' barrister, Alistair MacDonald KC, also dismissed claims that it was a revenge attack and said his client did not know Mr Hunt, who had turned up unannounced at the address. The court also heard that Mr Dawkins, who was friends with the teenager, had travelled from his home in Huddersfield to help out as things were very busy. He said the prosecution had not addressed how anyone would know that Mr Hunt would climb up on to the roof like "Spiderman" to gain entry to the property.



WASHINGTON: US Marines wait to be deployed along US-Mexico border near the San Ysidro Port of Entry.

# Egypt and Qatar working to salvage Gaza ceasefire deal

CAIRO (AP): Egyptian and Qatari mediators were working to salvage the ceasefire deal between Israel and Hamas on Wednesday, according to Egypt's state-run Al-Qahera News TV, which is close to the country's security agencies.

The fragile ceasefire is facing a significant test after Hamas said it would delay the next release of hostages scheduled for Saturday, alleging Israel has violated the truce by firing on people in Gaza and not allowing the agreed-upon number of tents, shelters and other vital aid to enter the territory. Since the truce started on Jan. 19, Israeli fire has killed at least 92 Palestinians and wounded more than 800 others, said Munir al-Bursh, director general of the Health Ministry, on Tuesday. The Israeli military says it has fired on people who approach its forces or enter certain areas in violation of the truce.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, with the support of President Donald Trump, has warned that Israel would resume fighting if hostages are not freed on Saturday. Trump has threatened that "all hell" will break out if the militant group does not release the remaining Israeli hostages held in Gaza. The United Nations said that since the start of the ceasefire in Gaza, its agencies and partners have fed 1.2 million people, provided shelter aid to more than 600,000 people and provided water and waste disposal services to nearly half a million. In a briefing, the UN said it opened 37 shelters for Palestinians returning to the war-battered north, where they were providing tents, blankets and warm clothing. At least 644,000 people across the territory had received tents, tarps or sealing-off materials to improve

their shelter conditions.

The ceasefire, which came into effect on Jan. 19, has paused the war in Gaza and sent aid flowing more freely to Palestinians in need. The war sparked a humanitarian crisis in the territory. Al-Azhar, the Sunni Muslim world's foremost seat of religious learning, on Wednesday threw its support behind Egypt's rejection of President Donald Trump's plan to depopulate the Gaza Strip. "No one has the right to force the Palestinian people to accept unworkable proposals," the Cairo-based institution said in a statement. "The whole world must respect the right of the Palestinians to live on their land and establish their independent state with Jerusalem as its capital."

It called for Arab and Muslim leaders as well as "the world's wise people" to reject "transfer plans that aim at destroying the Palestinian cause." Al-Azhar also called on religious institutions around the world to use their influence and defend "the vulnerable in Palestine." Israel's military kept up its protracted raid in the northern occupied West Bank on Wednesday, where soldiers and armored vehicles remained deployed in the urban refugee camp of Nur Shams. Many residents were still stuck in their homes without running water on the fourth day of the raid, as military bulldozers had torn up roads and gunfire blasted in the alleys, said Nihad Al-Shawish, head of the Popular Committee that runs the camp.

As troops fired sound bombs and explosions shook houses, an Israeli military call in Arabic went out over mosque loudspeakers in the camp of some 7,000 people, imploring residents to immediately evacuate. Hundreds of people continued to flee the camp outside the city of Tulkarem

on Wednesday, said the mayors of the nearby villages of Anabta and Kufr al-Labad, which have scrambled to open new shelters. In response to reports of the evacuations, the Israeli military said it "does not evacuate the population" in the West Bank. It said its forces secure crossings to allow residents who want to flee combat zones do so. The Israeli military put out a statement Wednesday saying its forces were confiscating weapons and dismantling militant infrastructure in Nur Shams. It said soldiers killed a Palestinian militant who shot and moderately wounded one of them. Israel has intensified its operations against Palestinian militants in the northern occupied West Bank since the ceasefire in Gaza took effect last month.

Israel's defense minister said Wednesday that "all hell would break loose" on Hamas if the militant group fails to free hostages on Saturday, as it has threatened to do. Israel Katz said that if Hamas stops freeing hostages "then there is no deal and there is war." Katz said his threat echoed US President Donald Trump, who has warned there would be "hell to pay" if the hostages aren't freed.

Hamas has threatened to delay the next hostage release scheduled for Saturday, saying that Israel was not meeting its commitments under the ceasefire deal, including over humanitarian aid. Israel has said it would resume the war if the hostages aren't released as planned. Hamas says it will only release hostages if Israel sticks to the ceasefire agreement. Hamas reiterated Wednesday that the only way to free the remaining hostages was for Israel to follow through with the ceasefire deal, brushing off warnings from Israel and the Trump administration.

# 'Russia-Iran ties to Assad are an open wound after war'

DUBAI (AP): Syria's relations with Iran and Russia remain an open wound for its people after those nations backed autocratic President Bashar Assad during the long civil war, the country's new, interim foreign minister said.

Speaking at the World Governments Summit in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, Asaad al-Shibani acknowledged some "positive" signs from both Moscow and Tehran but did not elaborate. However, he underlined the desire of the new government in Damascus to improve relations with the West and get sanctions on Syria lifted so the country could start rebuilding after the ruinous 14-year war.

"Syria has recovered its freedom and dignity" after decades of despotism, al-Shibani said. "It's a new period of peace and peace building." Al-Shibani's very attendance and address at the Dubai summit were remarkable, reflecting the efforts by the former rebels who ousted Assad in December to gain new friends on the international stage. Qatar and Turkey, one-time rivals of the UAE over their support of Islamists in the region, had far closer ties to the rebels who ultimately took

over Damascus. The UAE, a federation of seven sheikhdoms, had reopened its embassy in Syria in late 2018 as part of a thaw in relations. Assad then visited the UAE in 2022 as Abu Dhabi argued he should be brought back in from the cold among Arab nations, despite the bloodshed by his forces and allies in Syria. In the immediate hours following Assad's ouster in December, a top UAE diplomat pointedly refused to discuss whether he was in the federation. Assad was later confirmed to have fled and been given sanctuary in Russia, where Vladimir Putin has long been one of his closest allies. Among key concerns for al-Shibani are the sanctions imposed by the US and the European Union. Estimates suggest it will cost at least \$250 billion to rebuild Syria, which has a poverty rate of 90% and a gross domestic product of less than half of what it was before the war, according to the EU.

The sanctions were imposed on "the Syrian regime as result of its oppressions," al-Shibani said. "It's only natural to lift" them now. Al-Shibani, from Syria's northeastern al-Hasakah governorate, is relatively new to the international

scene though he attended the World Economic Forum in Davos in January. He had taken part in the 2011 protests against Assad that were part of the Arab Spring uprising, according to a biography published by the Foreign Ministry. During the war, he used several different noms de guerre and as a member of the former militant group Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, once allied with al-Qaida, he was active in Idlib province. He was named Syria's interim foreign minister in December after the rebels' lightning offensive ended the Assad family's 54-year rule.

A new government is set to take over March 1. The interim government's former ties to al-Qaida are among the West's concerns with the former rebels and interim President Ahmad al-Sharaa. Al-Shibani also claimed Wednesday that the interim government had "ended all security and Captagon-related challenges" that strained ties with neighboring Jordan. Captagon, an amphetamine-like stimulant, had been a main source of revenue for Assad. But tensions remain with Russia and Iran. That's even with al-Sharaa holding his first call Wednesday with Russian President Vladimir Putin.

# Macron says only Zelenskiy can negotiate peace for his country

PARIS (Reuters): French President Emmanuel Macron said only Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy could negotiate on behalf of his country with Russia to end the war, warning a "peace that is a capitulation" would be "bad news for everyone", including the US, the Financial Times reported.

"The only question at this stage is whether President Putin is genuinely, sustainably, and credibly willing to agree to a ceasefire on this basis. After that, it's up to the Ukrainians to negotiate with Russia," Macron said in an interview with the newspaper at the Elysee Palace. US President Donald Trump on Wednesday separately dis-

cussed the war with Russian President Vladimir Putin and Zelenskyy and told US officials to begin talks on ending the nearly three-year-long conflict.

The phone calls came shortly after US Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth told Ukraine's military allies in Brussels that a return to Ukraine's pre-2014 borders - before Russia annexed Crimea - was unrealistic and that the US does not see NATO membership for Kyiv as part of a solution. Ukrainians worried that Trump was preparing to sell out their country following his phone call with Putin. Trump, speaking to reporters at the White House, said Ukraine would have a seat at the table during any peace negotiations

with Russia over ending the war.

Macron told the Financial Times that Trump had created a "window of opportunity" for a negotiated solution, where "everyone has to play their role", adding that it is now up to Zelenskyy to discuss territorial and sovereignty issues. He said "...it is up to the international community, with a specific role for the Europeans, to discuss security guarantees and, more broadly, the security framework for the entire region. That is where we have a role to play." Macron described Trump's return as an "electroshock" that should force Europe to secure its own future as well as Ukraine's, the Financial Times report added.

# NATO is in disarray after the US announces that its security priorities lie elsewhere

BRUSSELS (AP): In just one speech by US Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth this week, the most powerful member of NATO has thrown the world's biggest military alliance into disarray, raising troubling questions about America's commitment to European security. Hegseth told almost 50 of Ukraine's Western backers on Wednesday that he had joined their meeting "to directly and unambiguously express that stark strategic realities prevent the United States of America from being primarily focused on the security of Europe." "The United States faces

consequential threats to our homeland. We must - and we are - focusing on security of our own borders," he said.

Reading the riot act to US allies, Hegseth said that Ukraine will not get all its territory back from Russia and will not be allowed to join NATO, which would provide the ultimate security guarantee to ensure that Russian President Vladimir Putin never attacks it again. He insisted NATO will not be involved in any future force that might be required to police the peace in Ukraine. European and other nations will, but the

Europeans will have to pay for it. No American troops would take part in such an operation, he warned.

Beyond that, Hegseth said that NATO will not come to the rescue of any European nation involved in that force if it is attacked by Russia. It's unclear what role the US would play, if any, although Russia is sure to test the force's resolve if America does not provide backup. French Defense Minister Sébastien Lecornu said that NATO faces "a real moment of truth." "To say that it's the biggest and most robust alliance in history is true, historically

speaking. But the real question is will that still be the case in 10 or 15 years," he said. Founded in 1949, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization was formed by 12 nations to counter the threat to European security posed by the Soviet Union during the Cold War. Dealing with Moscow is in its DNA. Keeping the peace outside the Euro-Atlantic area is not.

NATO's ranks have grown since the Washington Treaty was signed 75 years ago - to 32 countries after Sweden joined last year, worried by an increasingly aggressive Russia.



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# What if US were to stop supporting Ukraine?

MANY Americans are understandably concerned about the cost of aid to Ukraine. But they are thinking about the issue the wrong way - we should be considering the cost of Ukraine losing. Analysis conducted at the American Enterprise Institute has determined that Russia defeating Ukraine would cost American taxpayers an additional \$808 billion over what the US has planned to spend on defense in the next five years. This is about seven times more than all the aid appropriated to the Pentagon to help Ukraine since Russia's 2022 invasion.

This estimate is based on a scenario in which the US stops providing aid and the resulting Russian victory requires us to adapt our military capabilities, capacity and posture in order to maintain our security. The study then uses the Defense Futures Simulator to estimate the spending required to deter and, if necessary, defeat Russia in Europe, while also preventing further conflict by emboldened adversaries in the Pacific and the Middle East. Without US support, Russia would advance in 2025 as Kyiv runs out of weapons. By 2026, Ukraine would lose effective air defense, allowing Russia to conduct continuous large-scale bombings. Ukraine's conventional forces would continue to courageously fight but would likely collapse by the end of that year, allowing Russia to seize Kyiv and then drive to the NATO border.

An emboldened Russia would reconstitute its combat units, use Ukraine's resources to bolster its capabilities, station its forces along the NATO frontier, and be ready to attack beyond Ukraine by 2030. The notion that America should disengage from Europe and save its forces and money misses the global nature of conflict. While Europe should certainly invest more in its own defense, history has violently shown us the dangers of thinking we can ignore our interests in any given region. Such regional conflict is a thing of the past. Nothing has made that more clear than China, North Korea and Iran's support of Russia's war effort.

In order to protect itself - nationally, militarily, economically - the US must remain a global power and invest in the capabilities it needs to protect its partners and itself. A failure of American resolve in Europe will only motivate aggression and threaten our prosperity across the globe. If Ukraine is allowed to fall, Washington will need a military that is larger, more capable, more responsive, and positioned in more locations. To deter or, if necessary, defeat Russia, the US armed forces would need 14 new brigade combat teams, 18 more battle force ships, eight additional Marine Corps infantry battalions, 555 more Air Force aircraft, and 266,000 more uniform personnel for the increased force structure.

The US would need to fortify its presence in Europe, including repositioning air defenses, supplies and munitions. Efforts to diversify and expand the industrial base that supports our military would also need to move much more quickly than it does now to fulfill the high demands of modern warfare. Although a conflict on the European continent would be primarily led by land forces under the cover of air forces, Washington would need to invest in naval capabilities as well. The US Navy would have to discard its plans to shrink its overall number of ships, stabilize its carrier fleet at 12 and buy additional craft - submarines, destroyers, frigates, and logistics and support ships to keep the fleet at sea longer.

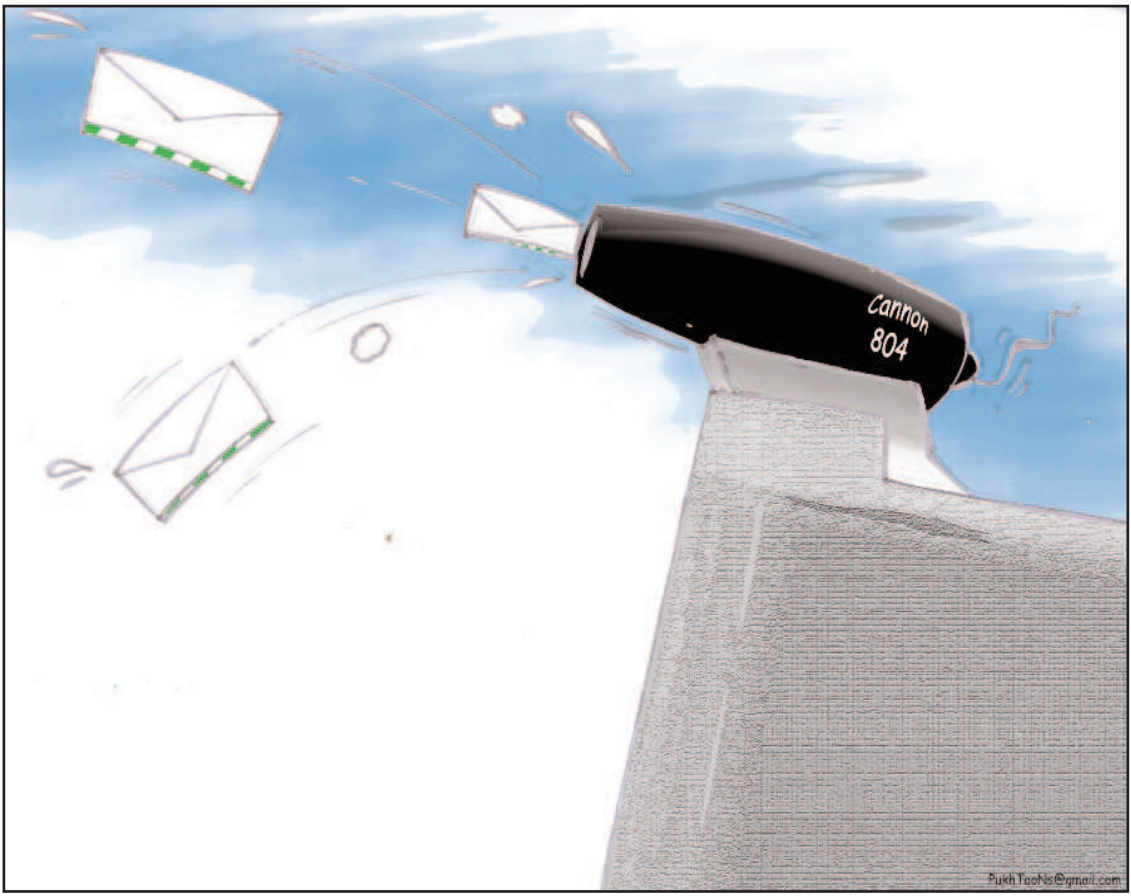
The US will also have to maintain a higher state of readiness for home-stationed and deployed forces, which means additional training, improvements to facilities and stockpiles of spare parts. It will need more and better special operations forces, which are essential to intelligence gathering, shaping the battlefield and disrupting the enemy. Given that Russia is an experienced space and cyber power, the US will also need better architecture and command systems for both domains.

Instead, if America and its allies accelerate assistance, a victorious Ukraine would see Russia retreat behind its own borders with a defeated and diminished military, a struggling economy, weakened partnerships, and a healthy dose of domestic challenges. Ukraine, in contrast, would be vibrant and free, with a thriving industrial base and a modern military. Washington would be able to scale down its deployments and capabilities in Europe. It would still maintain a presence there, but it would be able to dedicate more resources and attention to the Pacific.

Not only is the US safer when it is engaged, but it also saves money. The US is faced with numerous national challenges. Illegal immigration, financing the national debt and an increasingly unpredictable global security environment all compete for attention and resources. But the stakes are especially high in Ukraine. Even putting aside the security and moral reasons for supporting a free Kyiv, which are immense, backing Ukraine is a financially sound decision for the United States.

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# Dynamic developers

CHINA-AFRICA cooperation is the largest and most dynamic form of South-South cooperation. It is comprehensive, cooperative and strategic. It is based on mutual respect and the principle of win-win cooperation. China and Africa share common aspirations for development and prosperity. Both are committed to developing a fair global governance system and represent the solidarity spirit of the Global South.

It is the 25th anniversary of the founding of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation in 2025. Significant achievements in trade, investment, infrastructure development and people-to-people relations have been recorded over the 25 years. However, we also need to recognize that the potential for China and Africa is still to be fully tapped, and we should scale up our joint efforts to release that potential. For instance, bilateral trade has increased from over \$10 billion in 2000 to \$282 billion in 2023. Research indicates that the trade volume between Africa and China has more potential for further growth over the next decade. During the past 25 years, China's foreign direct investment flow to Africa reached around \$50 billion. However, given Africa's demographic and economic transformation, there are vast opportunity and necessity for massive productive investment to create jobs, exports and productive capacity. Significant infrastructure development - energy, transport, communications - was achieved during this period. China and Africa have substantial opportunities for green transformation and building of a carbon-neutral economy through a joint effort. In his speech at the FOCAC Beijing summit in September 2024, Chinese President Xi Jinping stated that the founding of the forum was a milestone in the history of China-Africa relations. He proposed that bilateral relations between China and all African countries having diplomatic ties with China will be elevated to the level of strategic relations, and that the overall characterization of China-Africa relations will be elevated to an all-weather China-Africa community with a shared future for the new era.

Arkeb Oqubay

Furthermore, he also stressed the vital features and urgency of modernization in support of the African Union's Agenda 2063, the continent's development blueprint over a 50-year period.

In his speech, President Xi stressed that over the next three years, China will work with Africa to take partnership actions for modernization in the following respects, including deepening China-Africa cooperation and spearheading the modernization of the Global South; mutual

opment; and common security.

At the Beijing summit, significant attention was given to accelerating Africa's industrialization and developing industrial chain cooperation, modernizing agriculture and food security, energy cooperation, the digital economy and financial cooperation. China has removed all import tariffs on goods from 33 African countries and has taken the initiative to apply alternative payment systems for cross-border trade. Both sides should

***He proposed that bilateral relations between China and all African countries having diplomatic ties with China will be elevated to the level of strategic relations, and that the overall characterization of China-Africa relations will be elevated to an all-weather China-Africa community with a shared future for the new era. Furthermore, he also stressed the vital features and urgency of modernization in support of the African Union's Agenda 2063, the continent's development blueprint over a 50-year period. In his speech, President Xi stressed that over the next three years, China will work with Africa to take partnership actions for modernization in the following respects, including deepening China-Africa cooperation and spearheading the modernization of the Global South; mutual learning among civilizations; trade prosperity; industrial chain cooperation; connectivity; development cooperation; health; agriculture and people's livelihoods; people-to-people exchanges; green development; and common security.***

learning among civilizations; trade prosperity; industrial chain cooperation; connectivity; development cooperation; health; agriculture and people's livelihoods; people-to-people exchanges; green devel-

opment; and common security.

More importantly, China has remained a source of inspiration and development experiences for

African countries in poverty reduction, industrialization, infrastructure development, urban development, human development, economic catch-up, and economic governance. Policy learning is a vital dimension of China-Africa cooperation. I have been involved in Ethiopia's continuous endeavor to learn from China's reform and opening-up journey over the past more than four decades.

China is at the forefront of the global fight for sustainability and a carbon-neutral economy. China is the leader in renewable energy, accounting for over 80 percent of solar power production and contributing to massive cost reduction and accessibility. China is also the world's leading manufacturer of electric vehicles and battery storage. In the past decade, China has emerged as one of the innovation and technological leaders, in many fields such as renewable energy and electrification - solar, wind, green hydrogen, automotive and digital technologies. In comparison, Africa has a massive demand for clean and renewable energy. It accounts for over 60 percent of the potential for global solar energy. Africa must also create millions of jobs, generate exports and develop its industrial capacity.

I genuinely believe in the potential and impact of what I describe as a new green pact for Africa as one of the drivers of Africa's green transition and economic transformation. This pact will bring together China's capability and African requirements for a better future. It will also manifest the vision of a shared future for the Global South. This cooperation should be comprehensive and include green financing, investment, industrial capacity, knowhow transfer and a common position on climate justice.

The vision for China-Africa cooperation should be more resilient in meeting people's expectations. It should also aim to promote multilateralism and a multipolar world, reform the international financial architecture, and reform the United Nations system and Bretton Woods institutions. New institutions should be established to accelerate economic growth, sustainable development and build a prosperous future.

# Spiralling inequality won't fix itself

Winnie Byanyima

AS dozens of billionaires sip champagne and zip down the ski slopes at this year's World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, millions in Zambia endure the harsh realities of extreme poverty, with two-thirds of the country living on less than \$2.15 a day - a fraction of the cost of a cappuccino in Davos.

These contrasting scenes underscore a grim reality: The world's wealth is grotesquely concentrated in the hands of a few. According to a new Oxfam report out this week, the wealth of the world's billionaires has risen three times faster in 2024 than the year prior; five are projected to become trillionaires within a decade. The imbalance of wealth and power is particularly glaring in international spaces. One example is the recent UN climate change talks (COP29), where more than 1,700 lobbyists for the fos-

Seven of the 10 largest companies on Earth are controlled by billionaires, their combined value surpassing the economies of Africa, Latin America, and the Caribbean. At the same time, the wages of nearly 800 million workers failed to keep up with inflation, resulting in an average annual loss equivalent to 25 days of income. The most important step in any solution is to increase the taxes the super-rich must pay, an idea that gained significant traction at the G20 meetings in Brazil last year. Not all countries have billionaires, but every country has a rich elite. The richest 1 percent should be taxed the most everywhere, and taxes on the poorest should be reduced.

The revenue generated by these taxes should fund an increased investment in public services and climate action that benefits society: in education, healthcare, housing, and environmental protection, and in ensuring

***Ninety-four out of 100 countries with current World Bank and IMF loans have cut investments in public education, health and social protection over the past two years. Around the world, 3.3 billion people now live in countries that spend more on debt repayments than on education or health. The IMF and World Bank now acknowledge that inequality is a grave threat to economic stability, social cohesion, and democracy. Yet their actions fuel further imbalance, despite statements about tackling economic and gender inequality.***

sil fuel industry outnumbered almost every national delegation attending. Wealthy nations prioritized their own agendas. Unsurprisingly, the final commitments towards the climate made at COP29 fell \$1 trillion short of what will be needed every year.

The international spaces of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) are equally emblematic of the power imbalances that are driving inequality to new heights. Rich countries dominate both of these institutions, setting the rules of the international financial system in ways that serve their own banks and balance sheets. Ninety-four out of 100 countries with current World Bank and IMF loans have cut investments in public education, health and social protection over the past two years. Around the world, 3.3 billion people now live in countries that spend more on debt repayments than on education or health.

The IMF and World Bank now acknowledge that inequality is a grave threat to economic stability, social cohesion, and democracy. Yet their actions fuel further imbalance, despite statements about tackling economic and gender inequality. Not much has changed: The powerful make decisions; the marginalised pay the price. Money is flowing out of poor economies, in debt servicing, when it should be flowing in.

Meanwhile, corporate wealth continues to swell.

that the cost of living can become more reasonable. One of the many social service initiatives that could benefit from the new tax revenue is cash transfer programs, which provide money directly to impoverished households. Research has found that these programs can help successfully mitigate the harshest effects of poverty, including the burdens of HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis, two diseases that hit the less wealthy parts of society the hardest.

We also need to make sure people can afford the medicines they need. New breakthroughs can prevent HIV transmission with shots just twice a year. But when used for treatment in the United States, they cost \$40,000, when we know they could be just \$40 if produced at scale. We need low-cost, effective generics in every low and middle-income country to curb new infections. People across the world are pushing for alternatives to the current world order. If we fail to act, the consequences will be catastrophic: An entrenched billionaire class will continue to undercut democratic systems around the world; social unrest will continue to rise as millions lose hope for a fair future; and the climate crisis will spiral even further out of control. This is not a distant threat. It is happening now, and it will affect everyone on the planet. It is enough to take the fizz out of any glass of champagne - even those served in Davos.

# US-Türkiye role in resolving Russia-Ukraine war

Prof. Dr. Aylin Ünver Noi

IN 2023, the number of conflicts worldwide increased to 59, the highest recorded since data collection began in 1946. US President-elect Donald Trump's victory in the November presidential election raised the possibility of ending at least some of these conflicts.

Ending wars was a central commitment of Trump's election campaign. Americans cast their votes for Trump because they do not want to spend their taxes in these endless wars anymore. While cutting financial aid to war-torn countries could help, the new US administration may need a more comprehensive approach. As Trump pursues his policy to end wars, he may need partners and facilitators to share the burden.

Türkiye, as a country that seeks stability and peace in its region, can play a pivotal role in ending the Russia-Ukraine war. Türkiye's readiness, willingness, and capability as a unique player in

the international system, with its complex interrelations, make its role in preventing and resolving crises invaluable. Since the onset of the Russia-Ukraine war, Türkiye has worked to keep dialogue open through regular meetings and calls at the leadership level, while facilitating mediations. These diplomatic efforts of Türkiye included both initiatives and deals for the opening of humanitarian corridors and the prisoner swaps between Moscow and Kyiv. As a part of this proactive diplomacy, the prisoner exchange between the US and Russia was facilitated by Türkiye in August 2024 during the war in Ukraine. Moreover, active diplomacy and mediation efforts of Türkiye bore the fruit when the grain deal was signed. Türkiye thus made a significant contribution in providing food security by engaging in talks with Russia and Ukraine and convincing them to establish a safe shipping corridor for the trans-

portation of Ukrainian grains to world markets.

Furthermore, Türkiye demonstrated its ability to act as both a security provider and mediator for the Euro-Atlantic alliance in the Balkans. Russia's war on Ukraine is not the only example of Moscow's effort to thwart NATO expansion. Russia tried to prevent some Balkan countries from joining NATO. Some Balkan countries, especially non-NATO Balkan countries, are more vulnerable to Russian meddling. There are significant risks, particularly for states embroiled in ethno-national disputes. Türkiye is an important player in the Balkans due to its ability to talk all sides in disagreement. Türkiye played an important role in preventing such crises that broke out in the past before they turned into a regional conflict in the Balkans.

No doubt that Washington

needs to end the war in Ukraine and they might need a facilitator in this process, as the conflict's escalation poses a nuclear threat. Russia announced that the Kremlin had updated its nuclear doctrine by lowering the threshold for a nuclear strike in response to a broader range of conventional attacks to Russian territory. This announcement came after the Biden administration's decision to allow Ukraine to use US missiles on targets in Russian territory. When Moscow and Kyiv signed Budapest Memorandum in 1994, Russia committed to respecting the independence, sovereignty, and existing borders of Ukraine in exchange for Kyiv giving up its nuclear arsenal. Actually, the Budapest Memorandum was first breached by Russia in 2014 with the annexation of Crimea. This came to another level since 2022, when Russia invaded the eastern

part of Ukraine. Now, we are facing a nuclear threat explicitly stated by Russia. The Biden administration's policy allowing Ukraine to use US missiles in Russia, coupled with the Kremlin's subsequent decision to revise its nuclear doctrine, complicates Trump's goal of ending this war. It is evident that new commitments and assurances are needed for Ukraine's security. Also, there is an urgent need for de-escalation and a renewed peace process.

In this complicated and difficult process, the new US administration needs allies that can facilitate the peace process by convincing the sides by providing an honorable peace and sustainable security. The guiding philosophy of Turkish foreign policy is "peace at home, peace in the world" which was proclaimed by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder of the Republic of Türkiye. Ankara has already played a pioneering role in raising awareness and creating capacity for

mediation in its neighborhood and beyond. Türkiye, along with Finland, has also spearheaded the "Mediation for Peace" initiative at the UN since 2010 and the "Group of Friends Mediation" at the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) since 2014. To this end, the country has actively worked in recent years for the resolution of many conflicts in the world. The most recent example is the agreement reached in Ankara-mediated peace talks between Somalia and Ethiopia to resolve the conflict between two nations.

Türkiye's efforts in facilitating the Istanbul Agreement in 2022 demonstrated its willingness, capability, and effectiveness in peace negotiations to end the war in Ukraine. This underscores the need to consider US-Türkiye cooperation in ending the war in Ukraine and achieving an honorable peace and sustainable security in the Black Sea region.



# As America throws stones at LA’s rubble

Brit Barron

As fires rage on in Los Angeles - the city that I love, the city that brought me into this world, the city that has both broken me and made me - I've noticed two very distinct responses. As I write this, the fires are still burning. My wife and I left and drove an hour south to my brother's house for a reprieve from the smoke, and as I sit in a coffee shop processing the last 72 hours, I can't help but feel that these responses to what's happening in our city seem to mirror what's happening across the country.

As people around us are losing everything - truly losing the foundation beneath them, as landmarks and community staples are being erased - one of the most unsettling responses I've noticed is from folks, both online and in real life, who seem desperate to politicize this. To make it another round of "us vs. them."

Statements like, "If the right would only..." or "This is the result of the Dems' lack of..." have flooded social media. The rhetoric became instantly divisive. And although I'm not surprised, I am horrified that we can't even make our way through a tragic natural disaster without throwing a few more hammers on

the wedge that so deeply divides us. It feels as though it's easier for some to blame someone than to sit with the painful reality of what this will mean for thousands of Angelenos. And yet, at the exact same time, the opposite is also happening.

You know who isn't tweeting political one-liners or playing blame like a game of hot potato? The people on the ground. The ones sitting with neighbors and friends still reeling from their losses. The ones opening their homes, volunteering to clean up, or standing in real-time watching as places they once took their grandkids for breakfast now sit in piles of ash. In the grocery stores and group chats, the conversations aren't about division - they're about connection.

I'm not here to pretend there aren't real political implications in how a nation responds to natural disasters. And yes, we are facing a climate crisis that has contributed to more than a few unprecedented disasters in my lifetime. But we need to make room for more than one truth to exist at the same time. Yes, we are all feeling the weight of policies made without us in mind. And yes, we are grieving. But perhaps

a pile of rubble is not the best place to throw stones.

It's not lost on me that the closer you get, the more nuance you find. On the ground, you see more compassion, more humanity, across all lines. Neighbors fill trash cans with water to help in any way they can. Firefighters take moments to preserve photo albums and family heirlooms. On Tuesday evening, on our street, a group of neighbors worked to bring down trees threatening to blow onto homes. The closer you are, the closer you get. I can't imagine watching as my neighbor ran down the street with ratchet straps to secure a tree blown over by 50+ mph winds and shouting from the safety of my doorway, "Who did you vote for so I know if I can feel bad for you or not!"

When you're that close, connection transcends disagreement. But when you're far - disconnected - that connection dissipates. In the last few days online, I've seen debates about whether or not we should feel bad for wealthy people who lost their homes and unhelpful platitudes about how this could have all been prevented. It feels painfully detached.

This isn't just about what's happening in LA. It's part of a

larger pattern in our cultural climate: a constant battle of throwing stones at a pile of rubble we've never actually seen, smelled or touched. A pile of rubble that doesn't hold our childhood home or our favorite coffee shop. On the other side of that coin is connection - the real place, in our actual lives, where we hold the nuance of grief and gratitude, anger and resilience.

In my experience, the only thing stronger than disagreement is connection. Connection might be our only way forward, yet we seem addicted to commenting, posting and arguing about places and issues where we have the least connection. Sometimes, it feels easier to tweet about a politician's incompetence than to call your mom and have that long-overdue conversation. If this past week in LA has taught me anything, it's that connection blows opinions out of the water. I don't want to be the person who can endlessly dissect a tragedy happening across the country but can't help my neighbor charge their phone when the power goes out. Moments like this remind me we need to get closer, stay closer, get smaller, and start from where we are connected. Political opinions don't go nearly as far as showing up for a neighbor. If you're able today, let's choose the latter.

# Trump’s tariffs could undo his ‘America First’ agenda

Paul Mueller

ON Inauguration Day, President Trump reiterated his intention to raise tariffs across the board - including 25 percent for goods from Canada and Mexico. When announcing the "External Revenue Service" to collect tariff revenue, Trump said, "We will begin charging those that make money off of us with trade." This is a mistake, and it will work against other parts of his agenda such as deregulation, lower taxes and cheaper energy.

When it comes to Trump's "America First" and "Make America Great Again" agenda of economic dynamism, tariffs are the odd policy out. They restrict Americans' freedom to conduct their business as they see fit. Even though the US may be in a position of strength when negotiating trade policy with any individual country, it cannot out-compete the rest of the world put together. And should most countries choose to retaliate, Trump's tariffs might also cause more problems for the economy than most people realize.

From steel and aluminum to solar panels to washing machines, and in countries ranging from

China to Canada, Trump's first administration had no qualms about using tariffs. And, contrary to those who think tariffs are simply a negotiating tool, it appears that his second administration won't hesitate to raise tariffs either. But tariffs reduce economic growth. They don't stimulate it. Tariffs are taxes and taxes everywhere and always make things more expensive. Home builders will see the cost of building materials rise when we tax lumber from Canada or tools from China. The cost of vehicles will rise as we tax auto parts and electronics from Mexico.

And, ironically, the price of oil in the US will face upward pressure since we import more than \$100 billion of crude oil from Canada. It would be impossible to list all the items that will become more expensive with tariffs since we import over \$3 trillion worth of goods consisting of tens of thousands of different items. Besides reducing America's purchasing power, tariffs will also cut into many US companies' profitability. They will slow economic expansion.

And they will push companies to make costly changes to their production processes and supply chains.

But won't the resultant onshoring or reshoring be good for the US economy? Surprisingly, no. Some American companies will benefit, as will some US workers. But those limited benefits will be dwarfed by the overall social costs. Economists have estimated that, historically, every job "saved" or "added" due to protectionist tariffs has cost nearly \$1 million.

Nonetheless, Trump loves tariffs. He said, "To me, the most beautiful word in the dictionary is tariffs," and "The higher the tariff, the more likely it is that the company will come into the United States." Yet tariffs don't fit his agenda of reducing government inefficiency. Instead, they promote more government overreach and corruption by requiring a veritable army of bureaucrats and lawyers to decide what rates to put on products - and to collect the taxes.

Every industry, and even individual companies, will clamor for exemptions. This additional

bureaucracy and favor-generating machine around tariffs is not what the American economy needs to succeed. And it does not support the America First agenda. Targeted tariffs on China to protect national geopolitical interests is one thing. But draconian across-the-board tariffs (especially on our largest trading partners) are absurd and will push them to trade with China more and raise their tariffs on US goods. Domestically, tariffs will reward a few special business and labor interests at the sizable expense of ordinary Americans and economic growth.

Tariffs fly in the face of the rest of Trump's economic agenda. They will reduce purchasing power. They will divert US resources from high-value opportunities in AI, engineering and construction into industries producing goods that we used to import cheaply but will now have to produce ourselves. The US has the largest and most dynamic economy in the world. Trump's agenda of cheaper energy, deregulation and low taxes will accelerate that economic vigor. Don't slam the brakes with tariffs.

likely require years to implement. In contrast, the ICC could act more swiftly, targeting a select number of high-profile perpetrators responsible for the gravest crimes. The court's focus would likely be on individuals such as Assad, senior military leaders, top politicians, and heads of the security and prison systems.

Although the ICC cannot prosecute all offenders, it could issue arrest warrants for key figures, for instance, the top 100 suspects, who would face extradition to The Hague and remain fugitives wherever they travel. This would send a strong message that impunity for atrocities will not be tolerated and that non-accession to the ICC does not preclude accountability. While the path to prosecuting the Assad regime at the ICC is complex, it is not insurmountable. A declaration by the transitional Syrian government under Article 12(3) of the Rome Statute could serve as a vital first step, ensuring justice for the victims of the devastating conflict in Syria.

# How can the Assad regime be prosecuted by the ICC?

Dr. Mutaz M. Qafisheh

AT first glance, the prospect of prosecuting the Assad regime at the International Criminal Court (ICC) might appear impossible. Syria is not a party to the Rome Statute, the treaty establishing the ICC. This limitation restricts the court's jurisdiction to crimes committed by citizens of state parties or within their territories.

Additionally, some may assume that the prosecution of Syria's Bashar Assad and his associates would require a UN Security Council referral, as seen in the cases of Sudan and Libya. However, such a scenario is unlikely, as Russia would almost certainly veto any resolution referring Assad to the court. Assad has sought refuge under Moscow's protection, shielded by Russian President Vladimir Putin, who is himself wanted by the ICC.

Yet, there is still a pathway for the ICC to act against Assad and other leaders of his regime who stand accused of grave crimes

against humanity, widespread war crimes, and potentially genocide. Under Article 12(3) of the Rome Statute, any state, even one that is not an ICC member, may grant the court jurisdiction by referring the situation to the ICC. This referral can apply retroactively to crimes committed on or after July 1, 2002, or another specified date thereafter. The transitional Syrian government could, therefore, accept ICC jurisdiction, at a time it deems appropriate.

Precedents for such declarations already exist. Ukraine, despite not being a state party to the Rome Statute, accepted ICC jurisdiction retroactively as of Nov. 21, 2013. Similarly, Palestine acceded to the statute in 2015 and granted the ICC power to prosecute crimes committed since June 13, 2014, the start of Israel's war on Gaza that year. In both cases, the ICC acted on these declarations, issuing arrest warrants against prominent figures, including Putin and Israeli Prime

Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. There is no reason why Assad's case would not be handled similarly.

The process for a Syrian declaration would be straightforward. The current transitional authorities in Damascus could submit a brief letter to the ICC Registrar, specifying the date from which the court's authority for Syria would begin. This step allows the ICC to investigate and prosecute individuals responsible for atrocities committed during Syria's long conflict.

While ICC prosecution could be an essential step, it would not preclude other avenues of justice. National courts or even a dedicated special tribunal could address the crimes committed by Assad's regime. Syria could also establish truth and reconciliation commissions to uncover abuses, deliver justice to victims, and hold key perpetrators accountable through transitional justice mechanisms. Such measures, however, would

# US-Israel joint defeat

Mohsen Pakaein

ON January 15, 2025, parallel to the end of Biden's presidency and 5 days before the inauguration of Trump, the US president-elect, the Zionist regime surrendered to the conditions of Hamas and agreed to establish a ceasefire. Netanyahu had promised to identify and destroy Hamas tunnels, defeat Hamas movement, take Gaza as his own and free all Israeli prisoners with the support of America until the end of Biden's presidency.

But now this regime has surrendered to the demands of Hamas without achieving its goals and in a situation where it is hated by the people of the world as a war criminal, while the resistant Palestinian upright people are standing like a mountain. The cease-fire by Israel at the end of Biden's presidency indicates the failure of the joint US-Israel plan to create a new Middle East.

The effects of this failure can be seen in the last speech of US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken at the Atlantic Council meeting, when he points out that the Gaza war isolated Israel in the world, and admits that the Hamas movement cannot be defeated by a military solution because As much power has been lost, it has gained new power.

Blinken addressed an important fact in these historic but late confessions and admitted that our goal was to create a new reality in the Middle East and says: "It was supposed to be on October 10, 2023 (three days after the Al-Aqsa storm operation) to examine the last remaining problems for I will visit Saudi Arabia to normalize the relations between Riyadh and Tel Aviv. But Hamas attacked Israel."

In fact, with this confession, Blinken declares Hamas the winner at the very beginning of the Al-Aqsa storm operation, because it thwarted Ibrahim's plan at the beginning of this operation. Blinken continues: "The continuation of the war situation harms the Israeli economy, the Gaza war isolated Israel in the international arena and caused instability."

He admits that "the timing of the Hamas attack was not a coincidence. Israel was expanding its

the Israeli economy." Although Blinken's statement was made very late, it is an admission of Tel Aviv's failure to achieve the alleged goals and shows that not only the Muslims of the world and especially the Palestinian people consider the acceptance of the ceasefire as a sign of the

***As long as the suffering in Gaza continues, Arab countries will further distance themselves from Israel and Israel's peace agreement with Jordan and Egypt will collapse. The continuation of the war in Gaza will crush the Israeli economy." Although Blinken's statement was made very late, it is an admission of Tel Aviv's failure to achieve the alleged goals and shows that not only the Muslims of the world and especially the Palestinian people consider the acceptance of the ceasefire as a sign of the victory of the resistance, but the Secretary of State Biden also admits this.***

Today, after fifteen months of resistance, Israel's military superiority has not resulted in this regime, but has introduced Israel as an agent of genocide, a center of insecurity, a violator of human rights and hated by the world.

Israel. Blinken also confirms the US's participation in the Zionist regime's invasion of Gaza and the genocide of the people of this strip and says: "Last year, we helped Israel with 25 billion dollars." Regarding the need for a ceasefire, he says: "We believe that if the Palestinian demand is ignored, even if Hamas is destroyed, a more dangerous movement will be formed. We have seen this issue in Gaza. Hamas will quickly regain its power because there is no other alternative for the Palestinians. As long as the suffering in Gaza continues, Arab countries will further distance themselves from Israel and Israel's peace agreement with Jordan and Egypt will collapse. The continuation of the war in Gaza will crush

victory of the resistance, but the Secretary of State Biden also admits this.

Today, after fifteen months of resistance, Israel's military superiority has not resulted in this regime, but has introduced Israel as an agent of genocide, a center of insecurity, a violator of human rights and hated by the world. He is legally prosecuted and does not dare to leave the occupied territories, and the deep internal differences will not be resolved except with Netanyahu's resignation and political death.

On the other hand, the popularity of Hamas has increased throughout Palestine, and the people of this land did not hesitate to support the resistance despite the great expenses, and the members of this movement are increasing every day.

# Royal Navy is in a truly pitiable condition

Tom Sharpe

THE new year is almost upon us. For the Royal Navy it will be, first and foremost, the year of Carrier Strike Group deployment 2025 (CSG25). This will be the second Indo-Pacific deployment by one of our new carriers, and the first in which a combat-worthy British air group will be aboard the ship.

This will offer a series of foreign policy opportunities for the new Government. The first active combat theatre will be the eastern Mediterranean. Depending on the situation at the time, there may be opportunities to affect matters ashore in Syria, or to offer some useful assistance to our Israeli allies. Next will come the Red Sea, where it is absolutely crucial that our ships should not scuttle through hoping to avoid a fight. Instead, the chance should be taken to mount effective strikes on the Houthis - and to take action against the resurgent pirates of the Horn of Africa. Those who believe that Houthi missiles can deny the sea to carriers must be shown that this isn't so, and quickly arriving jets from just off the coast - as opposed to ones which have to fly in all the way from Cyprus - can show how useful a carrier is.

If we take these opportunities, we will show that Britain is still a force to be reckoned with: if we pass them by, we will project weakness. It's that simple. If we aren't willing to use our ships, we shouldn't send them. We must be willing to accept risk. Indeed, just sending the CSG25 force off around the world involves risk in itself.

Frigate and destroyer numbers are painfully low just now. This erosion has been going on since the dawn of time and has been papered over by a Navy that is expert at "making do" and

politicians happy to look the other way (or slap Service chiefs down for mentioning problems). But if you keep reducing numbers, paying off ships to make way for the new ones that are fewer in number and often late, you end up with no ships. We are nearly there. Unfortunately, a carrier that is to deploy anywhere near an active threat needs two destroyers, two frigates and a nuclear attack submarine to accompany her. All too often in recent times, this has been everything we have had available.

CSG25 will achieve this and leave at least some working ships behind through careful planning and working with allies, which is great if you do it because you can - less so if you do it because you must. There are other problems, too. The Royal Fleet Auxiliary (RFA), the civilian-manned fleet of tankers and supply ships which supports our warships at sea, is on the verge of collapse.

Without major surgery, starting with a pay rise, the RFA will cease to exist in its current form before long. Personnel shortages mean that it can now only keep three or maybe four of its 13 ships at sea. A vessel that it cannot get to sea is our one and only solid support ship, RFA Fort Victoria - an essential part of a Carrier Strike Group. The Norwegians are filling this gap, but allowing a single point of failure is not a good look. Then there's the matter of F-35B jets to go on the carrier. The ship is designed to carry 36 planes. Back in 2021 we could find just eight. It is not clear how many will go this time, though the figure of 24 has been stated as an aspiration. If that happens, there will be some unhappiness among those responsible for other

air missions. The F-35B is our only modern, fifth-generation fighter, and more than half of ours will be away on the far side of the world.

Apart from fighter jets, it is absolutely critical to have airborne early warning (AEW) radar aircraft. This was the bloody lesson of the Falklands, but it has not been learnt. It's now public knowledge that the Crownstest AEW radar system, which can be carried by Merlin helicopters, wasn't in a working condition for the 2021 deployment. Crownstest has now hopefully been sorted out, but we don't have enough radars or helicopters. Even if we did, the altitude, radar horizon and endurance of the Merlin all compare unfavourably with a fixed-wing alternative such as the US Hawkeye. The sooner an uncrewed alternative with decent height and endurance is available the better. However the deployment goes, it will take place as the current Strategic Defence Review is being completed. Previous defence reviews have failed because ambition has not been matched to resources.

Will this one be any different? Will "resource" even be clearly articulated? We know that the review team is working to a figure of 2.5 per cent of GDP to be spent on defence. Will the new Government commit to this? If not, this review will be like the Integrated Reviews of 2021 and 2023 - fascinating, beautifully written and completely pointless. I very much fear that we can only send out a proper carrier group by stripping our home defences to a dangerous degree - a pathetic position for one of the world's major naval powers to be in. And I very much fear that the Defence Review will do very little to rectify matters.

# Migrant exploitation is a progressive issue

David Lammy

IN January 1946, the foreign secretary, Ernest Bevin, stared into the geopolitical fog. The second world war had only just ended. The cold war, which would last more than four decades, was only just beginning. It was hard to see six months, let alone six years ahead.

But Bevin did not sit waiting for the fog to clear. He was a minister of action, who saw that what matters is not just what Britain says, but what it does. What matters is not just what Britain wants, but what it builds. What matters is having a strategy. This is why Clement Attlee's 1945 general election manifesto was called Let Us Face the Future.

We are at a moment of great uncertainty once again. Our foundation will always be Britain's security, facing down geopolitical threats at a time of war in Europe, but we must do so recognising this is a time that the line between foreign and domestic policy has blurred more than ever. Keeping the British people safe means standing up to the Kremlin. Working with our friends and allies to deter Vladimir Putin's mafia state. Fighting dirty money laundered in

financial centres such as London.

Getting the British economy growing means seizing economic opportunities abroad in areas such as clean energy. It means telling foreign companies and investors of our considerable strengths in education, tech and professional and business services. And nowhere is this blurred line more evident than in tackling irregular migration. It's completely unrealistic to solve this issue and deliver our Plan for Change to secure Britain's borders without a role for the Foreign Office. A realistic strategy involves transactional, hard-headed diplomacy with partners all along the international people-smuggling pathway.

This government, from the prime minister down, sees this challenge for what it really is. There are some who argue migration is not a progressive issue. They are, quite simply, wrong. There is nothing progressive about leaving the most vulnerable exploited. Nothing progressive about letting criminal gangs get rich and drive more crime on to the streets of Britain. That's why today I am announcing that the UK is develop-

ing legislation for a new sanctions regime that specifically targets irregular migration and organised immigration crime. This will help to prevent, deter and disrupt irregular migration and the smuggling of migrants into the UK. We are set to be the first country in the world to introduce a sanctions regime of this sort. It will significantly strengthen our arsenal for combating those who profit from putting other people's lives at risk. And I am working closely with the home secretary, Yvette Cooper, and our departments' new joint irregular migration unit to deploy every tool at our disposal to restore control of our borders.

We need smart interventions in source and transit countries just as much as on the shores of the UK. It's only by working with others that we can strengthen borders, smash the gangs and get those with no right to be in our country returned. Projects we now have in places such as Vietnam and Iraq are a good example of that. And, crucially, we must use our sharpest diplomatic weapons. This is one of a number of changes





# Pakistan's largest health check drive State Life ignites a nationwide crusade against diabetes



## STATE LIFE INSURANCE CORPORATION OF PAKISTAN

F.P. Report

LAHORE: State Life Insurance Corporation of Pakistan (SLIC) is set to launch an ambitious national diabetes health

check drive and awareness campaign on February 15, 2025 between 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. Offering free diabetes health checks, expert consultations, and essential resources on prevention,

nutrition, and disease management, this initiative marks a significant step in addressing one of the nation's most pressing health challenges.

In collaboration with over 370 hospitals across KP, Balochistan Sindh and Punjab, SLIC's free diabetes health check drive is the largest public health initiative of its kind, targeting diabetes-a silent epidemic affecting more than 30% of the population.

Beyond diagnosis, the campaign empowers individuals with the knowledge and tools needed to adopt a preventive and proactive approach to their health.

The event stands out not

only for its scale but also for the quality of care provided to those who need it most, demonstrating the ability of our healthcare professionals to meet the needs of the population while working towards the best advantage of our communities.

Visit StateLife.com.pk for the full list of participating hospitals and to find your nearest free diabetes health check facility.

About State Life Insurance Corporation of Pakistan (SLIC): State Life Insurance Corporation of Pakistan, established in 1972, is the largest life and health insurer in the country and stands as a pillar of reliability and excellence.

## We are ready to fight cancer! SKMT launches Zakat campaign 2025



Shaukat Khanum Memorial Trust

شوکت خانم میموریل ٹرسٹ

F.P. Report

LAHORE: The Shaukat Khanum Memorial Trust (SKMT) has launched its Zakat collection campaign for 2025 with the theme "We are ready to fight cancer!" On this occasion, Dr Faisal Sultan, CEO of SKMT said that cancer management in a low- and middle-income country like Pakistan comes with a host of challenges, including access to medicines, equipment, trained healthcare staff and ultimately, managing financial costs associated with treatment.

He explained, "At our hospitals in Lahore and Peshawar, we provide multi-modality cancer care to our patients. For three decades, support of generous donors has enabled SKMT to provide quality treatment to deserving cancer patients, irrespective of their ability to pay.

Dr Faisal also added, "In 2024, we were able to provide financially supported treatment worth over Rs. 17 billion to over 75 percent of our cancer patients.

The proportion of Zakat in this was over fifty percent, which shows that

Zakat plays a crucial role in funding treatment of needy cancer patients. Shaukat Khanum Memorial Trust is also independently certified for Shariah compliance, confirming that the framework we follow for collection, utilisation, and management of Zakat funds is in line with Islamic principles.

This Ramzan, please consider Shaukat Khanum Memorial Trust for your Zakat and donations. Remember that cancer does not rest or relent and every contribution matters. Every day, thousands of Pakistanis wake up to face the harsh reality of cancer. Every day, they fight for their lives and for this reason, we need your unwavering support, every day, to help save lives. We are ready to fight cancer, but we cannot win this fight without your Zakat and donations."

## Holding of Vape Expo in Lahore flayed F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The Provincial Alliance for Sustainable Tobacco Control Khyber Pakhtunkhwa expresses its deep concern regarding the recently held Vape Expo Pakistan 2025 in Lahore, which took place from February 7th to 9th, 2025. The event, billed as a platform to promote international vaping brands and create collaboration among industry pioneers, retailers, and enthusiasts, represents a dangerous shift in public health priorities in Pakistan.

This expo, far from being a harmless celebration of technological innovation, serves as a catalyst for the promotion of e-cigarettes and vaping devices that have been associated with a host of health risks. While organizers claim that vaping is a form of harm reduction compared to traditional tobacco smoking, mounting scientific research indicates that these devices expose users to toxic chemicals, potentially leading to serious respiratory and cardiovascular issues. The long-term health impacts of vaping remain largely uncertain, but preliminary evidence suggests that these products are far from benign.

The event's high-profile nature has only amplified its impact, especially among the youth. By glamorizing vaping and presenting it as a trendy alternative to conventional smoking, such gatherings risk enticing non-smokers and young people, who may be more vulnerable to the allure of nicotine addiction. This is particularly alarming given the current global trends that show a significant rise in youth uptake of e-cigarettes, which could reverse decades of progress made in tobacco control and public health awareness.

Critically, the narrative of harm reduction promoted at the expo is nothing more than a strategic diversion. It is a carefully constructed narrative pushed by the tobacco industry and its affiliated front groups to mitigate the public's awareness of the inherent dangers of nicotine consumption. These groups exploit the lack of stringent regulatory oversight in Pakistan to market products that continue to pose significant risks, despite claims to the contrary.

Civil society activist Qamar Naseem, a prominent advocate for public health, stated, "The Vape Expo Pakistan 2025 is a harmful misstep that misleads our communities into thinking that vaping is a harmless alternative. This event not only endangers public health but also undermines the integrity of tobacco control policies designed to protect our youth and vulnerable populations."

Adding to the call for decisive action, Mr. Usman Afridi, Chairman of the Grow Up Youth Lead Organization, stated, "We must not allow the commercialization of vaping to take root in our society. The promotion of these products, especially under the guise of harm reduction, is a thinly veiled attempt to bypass effective regulations.



PESHAWAR: President Sarhad Chamber of Commerce and Industry Fazal Moqem Khan presenting shield to Assistant Commissioner Headquarter Peshawar Amir Shehzad.

## Traffic management plan in city SCCI seeks representation in committee

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Sarhad Chamber of Commerce and Industry demanded the chamber's representation in a provincial government-formed committee for the proposed traffic management plan, removal of encroachment and waste management to remove grievances and apprehensions of traders' community.

The demand was made by SCCI president Fazal Moqem Khan during a consultative session on proposed traffic management plan, removal of encroachment and waste management in the city, which was jointly organized by the chamber, DC Office and WSSCP, held at the chamber house.

SCCI senior vice president Abdul Jalil Jan, vice president Shehyar Khan, Chairman, the chamber standing committee on Law and Order Shaukat Ali Khan, former presidents Magsood Anwar Pervez, Zulfiqar Ali Khan, former SVP Sanaullah Khan, former

vice president Javed Akhtar, members of the executive committee Nadeem Rauf, Aftab Iqbal, Ashfaq Ahmad, Saifullah Khan, Mujeeb Rehman, Gul Zaman, Sultan Muhammad, President, SIE Association Kohat Road Peshawar Wahid Arif Awan and Iqbal Sikandar, Faiz Rasool, Saddar Gul, Fazal e Wahid, Insanullah, Habibullah Zahid, Asghar Khan, Feroz Shah, Secretary General Muqtasid Ahsan and traders, shopkeepers and industrialists.

AC Headquarters Peshawar Aamir Shahzad through his multimedia presentation briefed the business community regarding the proposed traffic management plan and sought suggestions from traders to further improve the plan.

Senior official apprised that the proposed plan will be put before the chief minister very shortly, before that consultation with the business community is being carried out to furnish the plan

by removing all reservations of relevant stakeholders and today's session is part of this effort.

Moqem assured that they will fully cooperate to dismantle illegal structures in the city.

He, however, made it clear that demolition of legal/private owned properties, markets, shops and plazas on the pretext of removing encroachment won't be acceptable.

The SCCI chief asserted that the government should further modify the proposed traffic management plan by taking further input from traders and incorporate the traders' proposals in this regard.

Shaukat Ali Khan appreciated the government's decision to introduce a comprehensive traffic management plan and assured the traders' community fully cooperate in implementation of the plan.

He vociferously said that they will strongly resist any move to snatch morsel from the mouth of

traders and dismantle their legally owned properties, shops, markets and plazas on pretext of removing encroachment.

Senior leader said traders are already being faced with hardships under the prevailing circumstances.

Therefore, he urged the provincial government and authorities concerned to avoid taking such initiatives that will further compound miseries of the business community and cause gulf and collision between the authorities and traders as well.

Earlier, the former presidents Zulfiqar Ali Khan, Engr Maqsood Anwar Pervez, Wahid Arif Awan and executive members also spoke on the occasion and gave a number of proposals for further improvement and modification into the proposed traffic management plan.

Meanwhile, a senior official of WSSCP also briefed the traders regarding cleanliness and waste management plan in the city.

## ICCI commends CDA for launching digitized 'One Window Facility'

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Capital Development Authority (CDA) has taken a significant step toward improving public service delivery by introducing a fully digitized "One Window Facility" to streamline processes and offer a more efficient, accessible, and high-quality service experience for citizens and businesses in the capital city.

The presentation, held at the Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ICCI), was attended by a large group of ICCI executives, members, and local business leaders, according to a press release issued here on Friday.

The event provided valuable insights into the facility's features and benefits, marking a major milestone in the CDA's ongoing efforts to modernize and enhance its services.

Nasir Mansoor Qureshi, President of ICCI, praised the CDA's leadership for its commitment to modernizing public services, calling the digitization of the One Window Facility a "pioneering move" to better serve the public.

President Qureshi also highlighted the importance of digitizing the ICCI itself, sharing that the Chamber is already implementing an Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) system, with plans to unveil a new mobile application in April. This app will allow members to complete all their Chamber-related tasks from the convenience of their homes.

The ICCI President emphasized the need for continued collaboration between the ICCI and CDA, underlining that stronger coordination between the two organizations will help address the challenges faced by the business community and facilitate a more conducive environment for business growth in Islamabad.

Abdul Rauf Khan, Director of One Window

Operations at CDA, spoke about the Authority's commitment to serving the public and improving Islamabad's overall infrastructure, calling for collective efforts to "enhance the face of the city." Rashid Minhas, Deputy Director of IT, outlined the key features of the new facility, which will allow users to track their applications at each stage and make payments online.

The event also included remarks from ICCI Executive Member Sardar Tahir Mahmood, who commended CDA's initiative and expressed hope that such efforts would continue to benefit Islamabad's business community. Senior Vice President of ICCI, Abdul Rehman Siddiqui said that the event provided valuable insights into the facility's features and benefits, marking a major milestone in the CDA's ongoing efforts to modernize and enhance its services. He said that increased collaboration between CDA and ICCI

would help resolve key business challenges and accelerate economic growth in the capital.

### Public Notice

I Ghulam Kibria S/o Ghulam Ahmad CNIC # 17301-1532840-5 has submit an application for PDA Duplicate allotment letter of my Plot # F/8-420, 7 Marla situated at Phase-6, Hayatabad Peshawar. If any person/firm or institution have any objection please contact the undersigned within 15 days after publication of this notice. Otherwise no objection will be accepted and duplicate allotment letter will be issued. Director Estate Management (PDA) Peshawar

### Court Notice

In the court of sidra jalal civil judge-III/judicial Magistrate II. Matta swat. Case # 143/1. Institution 02/10/024. Next Hearing date 28/02/2025. Mst-Kharo bibi VS Afreen khan. Notice to defendant. 4/1) Nisar s/o sher jan khan r/o khareni. 4/4) Nizam s/o Nisar r/o khareni presently Saudi Arabia. Whereas the above named cannot be served in ordinary manner it is therefore pro-claimed or through dually authorized agent or pleader in the court on 28/02/2025. at 8.00 am. Ex-parte proceeding will be initiated against you. Issued today on 11/02/2025 under my signature and seal of the court.

### Court Notice

In the court of sidra jalal civil judge-III/judicial Magistrate II. Matta swat. Case # 115/1. Institution 05/09/024. Next Hearing date 28/02/2025. Mst-Kharo bibi VS Afreen khan. Notice to defendant. 5/1) Nisar s/o sher jan khan r/o khareni. 5/3) Nizam s/o Nisar r/o khareni presently Saudi Arabia. Whereas the above named cannot be served in ordinary manner it is therefore pro-claimed or through dually authorized agent or pleader in the court on 28/02/2025. at 8.00 am. Ex-parte proceeding will be initiated against you. Issued today on 11/02/2025 under my signature and seal of the court.

## Kitchen Items' prices decrease by 0.04pc

ISLAMABAD (APP):The weekly inflation, measured by the Sensitive Price Indicator (SPI), went down by 0.04 percent for the combined consumption groups during the week ended on February 13 and decelerated to 0.98 percent on a year-on-year (YoY) basis, the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS) reported on Friday. According to the PBS data, the SPI for the week under review in the above-mentioned group was recorded at 318.26 points as compared to 318.38 points during the past week. As compared to the corresponding week of last year, the SPI for the combined consumption group in the week under review witnessed an increase of 0.98 per cent. The weekly SPI with the base year 2015-16=100 covers 17 urban centres and 51 essential items for all expenditure groups. The SPI for the lowest consumption group of up to Rs 17,732 witnessed decrease of 0.23 per cent and went down to 308.24 points from last week's 308.96 points. The SPI for consumption groups of Rs 17,732 to 22,888; Rs 22,889-29,517; Rs 29,518-44,175 and above Rs 44,175, declined by 0.17 percent, 0.11 percent, 0.05 percent and 0.02 percent respectively. During the week, out of 51 items, prices of 13 (25.49%) items increased, 15 (29.41%) items decreased and 23 (45.10%) items remained stable. The items, which recorded major decrease in their average prices on a week-on-week basis included tomatoes (8.80%), tea Packet (4.46%), onions (3.97%), pulse gram (1.91%), potatoes (1.54%), pulse moong (1.47%), LPG (0.86%), wheat flour bag & gur (0.67%) each, rice irri-6/9 (0.48%), rice basmati broken (0.47%) and vegetable ghee 1kg (0.42%).





## In brief

## Hockey cup to kick off from Feb 19

PESHAWAR (APP): The Directorate General of Sports Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has announced on Friday that the Inter-Regional Hockey Cup will commence on February 19, featuring players from all seven regions of the province. The tournament will run until February 23 and will be hosted at Qayyum Sports Complex, Peshawar. Teams from Peshawar, Mardan, Malakand, Hazara, Kohat, Bannu, and Dera Ismail Khan will compete in the event, which is being organized in collaboration with the Provincial Hockey Association. The tournament is part of a broader initiative under the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Games 2025, aimed at preparing athletes for the upcoming National Games. Held under the directives of the Provincial Minister for Sports, the Secretary of Sports, and the Director General of Sports, this event is expected to enhance the skills of local players and improve their chances of excelling at the national level. The closing ceremony on February 23 will be graced by Syed Fakhar Jehan, the Provincial Minister for Sports and Youth Affairs, as the chief guest.

## Pak team bag 24 medals

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan team made a dominant start in the Poomsae category at the Combaxx 7th Asian Taekwondo Open Championship 2025, securing 24 medals on the opening day here at the Liaquat Gymnasium of Pakistan Sports Complex. Pakistani athletes excelled in the technical discipline of Taekwondo, bagging 8 gold, 7 silver, and 9 bronze medals across various individual and pair categories, setting the tone for an action-packed tournament. Key Medalists from Day 1 (Poomsae Category): Gold Winners include Hussain Adil (Individual Under 30 Male), Hussain Mudassar (Individual Under 40 Male), Khan Muhammad (Individual Under 50 Male), Nisa Mehr Un (Individual Under 30 Female), Sabir Sana (Individual Under 50 Female), Hussain/Naila (Pair Over 30), Mumtaz/Bashir (Pair Over 30), Hashemi Sayed Zarif (AFG) (Individual Under 60 Male), Silver & Bronze Medalists include Latif Kainat, Shafaqat Aqsa, Ahmed Shahbaz, Anas Muhammad, Ali Irshad, Usmani Rafia, and others contributed to Pakistan's impressive medal tally in the Poomsae division. The championship, organized by the Pakistan Taekwondo Federation (PTF) in collaboration with Combaxx, has brought together elite Taekwondo practitioners. This event is focused on promoting Taekwondo in Pakistan, while providing local athletes an opportunity to compete at an international level. PTF President Col. (R) Wasem Ahmed Janjua praised the remarkable performance of Pakistani athletes. "Winning 24 medals on the opening day in Poomsae is an extraordinary achievement. It reflects the dedication and skill of our athletes and coaches. We anticipate even greater success as the championship progresses." The tournament will continue till of February 20.

# New Zealand win tri-nation ODI series

KARACHI (Monitoring Desk): New Zealand romped to a five-wicket win over hosts Pakistan in the final of the tri-nation ODI series as they chased the 243-run target with 28 balls to spare here at the National Bank Stadium in Karachi on Friday.

Daryl Mitchell and Tom Latham anchored the chase with an 87-run fourth-wicket stand as the duo also struck half-centuries. Mitchell, who walked in at 76-2, gathered 57 runs off 58 balls striking six boundaries. Latham faced 64 balls for 56 runs inclusive of five fours.

Latham also partnered with Glenn Phillips (20 not out, 17b, 2x4s) for a 31-ball 37-run stand for fifth wicket before New Zealand chased the target in 45.2 overs.

At the start of the innings, Naseem Shah drew the first blood for Pakistan when he pinned Will Young in front of the stumps in the second over. Kane Williamson (34, 49b, 3x4s, 1x6) joined forces with Devon Conway (48, 74b, 5x4s) to stitch a solid 71-

run stand for the second wicket. For Pakistan Naseem picked up two wickets, while Salman Ali Agha, Abrar Ahmed and Shaheen Shah Afridi dismissed one batter each.

Earlier, Pakistan opted to bat first and lost Fakhar Zaman in the fourth over to player of the match Will O'Rourke. Pakistan slipped to 54-3 in 11.5 overs before middle order batters Mohammad Rizwan (46, 76b, 4x4s, 1x6) and Salman Ali Agha (45, 65b, 1x4, 1x6) dug deep for an 88-run stand off 120 balls.

Rizwan was castled by O'Rourke in the 32nd over, while Salman fell to Michael Bracewell in 37th over with scorecard reading 161-5. No.6 batter Tayyab Tahir hit four boundaries and a solitary six in his 33-ball stay on the crease scoring 38 runs before Jacob Duffy removed him in 42nd over. The last four wickets could add 47 runs to the total with Faheem Ashraf and Naseem Shah contributing 22 and 19 runs, respectively.

O'Rourke was the pick of New Zealand bowlers with figures of 9.3-0-43-4, while Mitchell Santner and Michael Bracewell picked up two wickets each.

Pakistan and New Zealand will now face each other in the opening match of the ICC Champions Trophy 2025 at the same venue on Wednesday, 19 February.

Scores in brief :

Final – New Zealand beat Pakistan by five wickets at the National Bank Stadium, Karachi

Pakistan 242 all out, 49.3 overs (Mohammad Rizwan 46, Salman Ali Agha 45, Tayyab Tahir 38, Babar Azam 29, Faheem Ashraf 22; Will O'Rourke 4-43, Mitchell Santner 2-20, Michael Bracewell 2-38)

New Zealand 243-5, 45.2 overs (Daryl Mitchell 57, Tom Latham 56, Devon Conway 48, Kane Williamson 34, Glenn Phillips 20 not out; Naseem Shah 2-43)

Player of the match – Will O'Rourke (New Zealand)

Player of the series – Salman Ali Agha (Pakistan).



KARACHI: A group photo of New Zealand's Cricket team after winning the Tri-Nation series trophy-2025 beating Pakistan in final match at the National Stadium. —APP Photo

## Pakistan reach Asian Jr Squash C'ships semis

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan reach semifinals of 22nd Asian Junior Squash Team Championships 2025 in Hong Kong, China.

Pakistan team beat Japan by 2-1 in the quarterfinals.

Match Results: Anas Ali Shah (Pak) beat Renshi Makino (Jpn) (3-1) 11-4 11-6 7-11 11-8 (53m) while Shu Takahashi (Jpn) beat Sakhi Ullah Khan Tareen (Pak) 3-2 11-9 11-6 2-11 7-11 11-8 (57m) & Abdullah Nawaz (Pak) beat Shunsaku Kariyazono (Jpn) 3-0 (11-7 11-5 12-10) (30m).

Next up, Pakistan will face Korea in the semifinals on Saturday.

## Alcohol to be banned at 2034 WC in Saudi Arabia

RIYADH (AA) : Saudi Arabia has confirmed that alcohol will not be sold at the 2034 FIFA World Cup, which it will be hosting across five cities.

"Rather like our weather, it's a dry country. At the moment, we don't allow alcohol, but plenty of fun can be had without it. It's not 100% necessary," the Saudi ambassador to the UK, Prince Khalid bin Bandar bin Sultan Al Saud, told British digital radio station LBC News on Thursday.

"If you want to drink after you leave, you're welcome to, but at the moment, we don't have alcohol," he added.

Emphasizing cultural differences, Al Saud said Saudi Arabia is happy to accommodate people within their boundaries. He added, however, that his country is not willing to change its culture for others.

In December 2024, FIFA officially announced Saudi Arabia as the host for the 2034 men's FIFA World Cup. This decision makes Saudi Arabia the second Middle Eastern country to host the prestigious international football tournament, following Qatar in 2022.

The tournament is set to take place across a total of 15 stadiums in Jeddah, Khobar, Abha, the capital Riyadh, and the planned city of Neom.

Notably, the 2034 World Cup will mark a historic milestone as the first edition to feature 48 teams, expanding the competition's format.

# ICC boosts prize money for Champions Trophy by 53 percent

KARACHI (AFP): Prize money for the eight-nation Champions Trophy starting in Pakistan next week has been increased by 53 percent, the International Cricket Council (ICC) said Friday.

Besides an impressive trophy, the winning side will earn a whopping \$2.24 million, an ICC statement said, while the runners-up will receive \$1.12 million.

"The total prize pool has

increased by an impressive 53 percent from the 2017 edition, reaching \$6.9 million," the ICC said.

"The substantial prize pot underscores the ICC's ongoing commitment to investing in the sport and maintaining the global prestige of our events."

Each losing semi-finalist will take home \$560,000, teams finishing in fifth or sixth place will receive \$350,000, and the seventh

and eighth-placed sides take home \$140,000.

Last place is worth \$125,000 -- and a win in the group stages is worth around \$34,000.

The February 19 to March 9 tournament marks the first time Pakistan hosts an ICC event in three decades, although some matches will be played in the United Arab Emirates as India is refusing to play on its neighbour's soil.

# Babar becomes joint-fastest batter to 6,000 ODI runs

LAHORE (INP): Star Pakistan batter Babar Azam has joined legendary batter Hashim Amla to become the joint-fastest to 6,000 ODI runs.

The former Pakistan captain achieved the milestone in the PAK vs NZ tri-nation series final in Karachi. Babar Azam completed his 6,000 ODI runs in 123 innings, the same number of innings Hashim Amla took to reach the milestone.

Star India batter Virat Kohli sits at the second spot on the list, having completed his 6,000 ODI runs in 138 innings. While Babar Azam etched his name in history, his stay at the crease

during the PAK vs NZ game proved to be a short one and he was dismissed after scoring 29 off 34 balls.

The former Pakistan captain has been promoted up the order in the tri-nation series after opening batter Saim Ayub was ruled out of the series and the upcoming Champions Trophy 2025. Babar Azam opened the inning for Pakistan in the PAK vs NZ tri-series opener on February 8.

However, he managed to score just 10 off 23 balls. In the South Africa game, the former Pakistan captain was dismissed on 23 off 19 deliveries. It is to be noted here that the right-handed

batter retained his position as the number one batter in the latest ICC Men's ODI Player Rankings, with 786 rating points.

Babar Azam holds a narrow lead over India's Shubman Gill (781) and Rohit Sharma (773) following a dip in his rating from his career-best 898 in 2022.

The former Pakistan captain had also been included in ICC Men's T20I Team of the Year for 2024 as the only Pakistani player. Led by Rohit Sharma, who captained the Indian side which lifted the T20I World Cup 2024 trophy, the team has as many as four Indian cricketers.

# Sri Lanka hammer Australia in record 174-run rout

COLOMBO (AFP): Sri Lanka spinner Dunith Wellalage took four wickets to give a hapless Australia their lowest ever total in Asia with a 174-run loss in Friday's second and final ODI.

Chasing a target of 282 in Colombo, a much-changed Australia testing their lineup for next week's Champions Trophy were bundled out for a meager 107. The spectacular collapse saw them lose their last seven wickets for just 28 runs.

"Not the best result we wanted. We used lot of players and everyone got a game," Australia skipper Steve Smith said. "Credit to Sri Lanka. They deserved the series win. We struggled a bit in Colombo... Their bowlers were superb." Asitha Fernando set the tone with a fiery opening spell of 3-23 in four overs before the spin-

ners tightened the screws.

Wellalage triggered the collapse, bamboozling Josh Inglis with a skiddy arm ball that crashed into the stumps. In his next over, he delivered another peach, rattling the dangerous Glenn Maxwell's timber to finish 4-35.

Wanindu Hasaranga joined the party from the other end to take three more including Smith, who was trapped plumb in front. This emphatic victory sealed a 2-0 series win for Sri Lanka against the defending world champions and propelled them to fifth in the ODI rankings.

It also told the cricketing world that Sri Lanka's absence from the upcoming Champions Trophy, after finishing ninth in the 2023 World Cup, will be felt. "Not often you beat Australia," Sri Lanka captain Charith

Asalanka said.

"Today was our day and the spinners did a superb job," he added. "We are disappointed that we are not in the Champions Trophy... the important thing is that we don't get into a similar situation again." Sri Lanka's batting had been under the microscope in recent weeks, but the top order silenced critics with a commanding display.

Kusal Mendis was the star of the show, crafting a superb 101 — his fifth ton in ODIs and first against Australia. He found ample support from half-centuries by Nishan Madushka (51) and Asalanka. Fresh from a match-winning hundred in the opener, Asalanka bludgeoned an unbeaten 78 off just 66 balls, peppering the boundary with six fours and three towering sixes.

# Swiatek's Doha reign ended by Ostapenko in semis

DOHA (AFP): Three-time defending Qatar Open champion Iga Swiatek suffered a crushing 6-3, 6-1 defeat by Jelena Ostapenko in the semi-finals on Friday, her fifth loss in as many meetings with the mercurial Latvian.

Swiatek entered the semi-finals carrying a 15-match winning streak in Doha, having clinched the title in each of the last three editions.

The five-time Grand Slam champion was looking to become the first player since 2011 — and just second this century — to win the same WTA tournament four years in a row but Ostapenko had other ideas.

Ostapenko, the 2017 Roland Garros champion, became the first player to defeat Swiatek on five occasions.

The world number 37 fired 24 winners against just 15 unforced errors, brushing aside the second-ranked Pole after just 70 minutes of play.

Ostapenko is through to the third WTA 1000 final of her career and is searching for her first title at that level, having lost on her two previous

attempts in Doha 2016 and Miami 2018.

She will face Amanda Anisimova in Saturday's championship match after the American defeated Ekaterina Alexandrova 6-3, 6-3 to reach her second WTA 1000 final.

"I feel like this court has a special energy and it was always helping me. Everything started for me on this court (when I reached the final in 2016)," said Ostapenko.

"Today when I went on the court I was pretty confident that I could beat her because we played a lot of matches and I kind of know how to play against her. I was just focusing on myself and knew what I had to do. I'm really happy with the way I'm handling my emotions this week and I'm so happy to be in the final."

A blistering start from Ostapenko saw the Latvian unleash a forehand winner to break Swiatek in the opening game of the contest and she surrendered just one point on her way to a 2-0 lead.

Ostapenko got her hands on three set points on the Swiatek serve at 5-

3 and converted her third opportunity to scoop the first set in 35 minutes.

The start of the second set followed a similar pattern to the first, with Ostapenko punishing Swiatek's serve, and attacking any short ball that came her way.

As the match clock hit one hour, Ostapenko was already up a set and 4-0 and cruising. Swiatek halted the momentum by getting one of the breaks back but her comeback attempt was short-lived as she dropped serve again the following game en route to a hefty defeat.

"Knew what to expect" Ostapenko limited Swiatek to under 50 percent in points won behind the first or second serve and logged seven return winners against the Pole.

"Obviously I was preparing for the match, and I pretty much knew what to expect from her," said Ostapenko of her success on return against Swiatek.

"I don't know, sometimes I know where the ball's coming, but sometimes I'm just going with my feelings and my instincts, so that helps me."

# Int'l Hockey League 2025 held under PM Youth Program

LAHORE (APP): Under the Prime Minister Youth Program, the International Hockey League 2025 was held, featuring teams from Pakistan Police, Khawaja Junaid Hockey Club, Netherlands Hockey Club and Germany Hockey Club.

In the series, a match between Pakistan Police and Netherlands Hockey Club teams was held at the National Hockey Stadium. Inspector General of Police Punjab, Dr. Usman Anwar, participated as the chief guest. The event was attended by the ambassadors of the Netherlands and Germany, Commandant Police

Training College Chohung DIG Mahboob Aslam, Force Commander ANF Punjab Brigadier Sikandar Hayat Chaudhry, President Lahore Press Club Arshad Ansari, former hockey players, senior journalist Raees Ansari, Olympians Khawaja Junaid, Shabbir Senior, Tahir Zaman, Qamar Ibrahim, Kamran Ashraf, M Irfan, Mujahid Rana, President Pakistan Hockey Federation Mir Tariq Hussain Bugti, and other officials.

The IG Punjab met with the players of the Netherlands Hockey Club and Pakistan Police teams, as well as other dignitaries.

He also interacted with the fans, children, and students in various enclosures. Fans cheered and chanted "Punjab Police Zindabad" after seeing the IG Punjab among them. The match at the National Hockey Stadium was dedicated to police martyrs.

The IG Punjab said that Punjab Police is committed not only to protecting the lives and properties of the public but also promoting positive activities among the youth. He highlighted that the visit of international hockey teams to Pakistan reflects the country's peaceful and positive image. Punjab Police has a long-

standing association with sports, with several internationally renowned players, including Fazal Mahmood and Munir Dar, having been part of the police force. Two members of Punjab Police were selected for the Lahore Qalandars team in the PSL.

The IG Punjab further emphasized that matches between Pakistan Police teams and foreign sports teams, including the Netherlands Club, will continue in the future. Police athletes have won numerous medals and awards in both national and international sports competitions, he added.





## In brief

### AIOU exams to begin from March 3

ISLAMABAD (APP): Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU) will hold annual exams (Autumn 2024) of its Matric, FA and I.Com programs simultaneously across all four provinces, including Gilgit-Baltistan and Azad Jammu & Kashmir from March 3. The date sheet has been made available on the university's website [www.aiou.edu.pk](http://www.aiou.edu.pk), while roll number slips are being uploaded to students' CMS portals, said a press release on Friday. According to date sheet, the exams will continue uninterrupted from March 3 to March 28. There will be Eid-ul-Fitr holidays from March 29 to April 2. After Eid, the first exam will be held on April 3, and the examinations will conclude on April 11.

### DC reviews 'Suthra Punjab' campaign

RAWALPINDI (APP): DC Murree, Agha Zaheer Abbas Shirazi visited Karor Bazaar on Friday morning and reviewed the cleanliness of the area, under the ongoing 'Suthra Punjab' Campaign. He appreciated the performance of sanitation staff and directed for further improve the cleanliness. Talking on the occasion, Agha Zaheer said that the Clean Punjab sanitation program was ongoing throughout the district. "According to the vision of CM Punjab Maryam Nawaz Sharif, the Clean Punjab sanitation program is successfully underway in Murree", he said. He further said that the campaign was proving helpful in improving the environment.

### Police arrest 10 criminals

RAWALPINDI (APP): The Rawalpindi Police on Friday continued operations against law breakers across the district and arrested 10 accused including drug peddlers, liquor suppliers and illegal arms owners. According to a police spokesman, four drug peddlers were captured with more than 4 kilograms charas. The Race Course Police netted accused Owais with 1.26 kg charas while the Mandra Police nabbed accused Nafees Akhtar with 1.467 kg of the contraband item. Similarly, the Wah Sadder and Civil Lines Police recovered 800 grams and 600 grams charas from accused Naseer and Zulfiqar respectively. Likewise, the Ratta Amral and Wah Cantt Police arrested accused Farooq and Bilal Iqbal respectively on the recovery a 30-bore pistol from them. Meanwhile, the Ganjmandi Police recovered 10 litres of liquor from accused Fazlur Rehman and 10 litres of liquor from accused Saddam. The Taxila Police held accused Haq Nawaz with seven bottles of local liquor while the Kahuta Police recovered 20 litres of liquor from accused Zaffar.

### 3 thieves held

RAWALPINDI (APP): The Waris Khan Police on Friday arrested an accused who along with his two accomplices had committed theft at the house of his cousin decamping with 7.5 tolas gold ornaments and Rs 50,000 in cash. According to a Rawalpindi Police spokesman, the accused Mubeen along with his friends Hassan Raza and Hamad stole the jewellery and money from the house of his cousin in the absence of the family a few days ago. The Waris Khan Police registered a case of the incident on the complaint of the victim, and conducted an operation on Friday to nab the accused with the booty.

# PTI hatching conspiracies to destabilize national economy: Kayani

ISLAMABAD (APP): Convener of the National Parliamentary Taskforce for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Bilal Azhar Kayani on Friday said that Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) was hatching conspiracies against national interest and submission of dossier to International Monetary Fund (IMF) was another conspiracy to destabilize the country's economy.

Talking to media, he said that PTI did not want to resolve public issues through dialogue rather than creating noise in parliament, adding that the Parliament was best forum to tackle the matter amicably.

He informed that the Speaker National Assembly

had given ample opportunity to PTI's members to speak in the assembly to discuss public issues instead of politicking on non-issues.

This political party was doing reprehensible and dirty politics for political motives and had no interest to resolve the issues to promote healthy politics in the country, he added.

Kayani urged PTI to discuss only public interest issues in the Parliament, adding that today's PTI leadership's news conference was based on lies as its leaders only talk about the prisoners in Adiala Jail.

He stressed that PTI had criticized and attacked the National Assembly in the past and now they were receiving salaries from

same institution. "PTI had attacked institutions for its political gain and advantages."

He said that the PTI founder deliberately tried to bankrupt the country and incited the workers and supporters for violence.

He said that due to the present government's prudent policies, the country was moving on the path of right direction.

Kayani reiterated that submission of PTI dossier to IMF was another attempt to damage the national economy.

Responding to a question, he emphasized that PTI members had even shown non-serious attitude during the negotiations with the Government parliamentary committee.

## Naqvi oversees arrangements for Jashn-e-Baharan festival

ISLAMABAD (APP): Federal Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi has overseen the arrangements for Jashn-e-Baharan, a vibrant festival celebrating Pakistan's culture and heritage, scheduled to take place on February 25-27 in Islamabad.

The festival will feature traditional food stalls offering Pakistani cuisine from across the country. Cultural performances will include Khattak, Kalash, and Kathak dance shows, as well as performances by

the Rangers' camel squadron and archery teams. Pakistan Army bands will also perform, adding to the festive atmosphere. A spectacular fireworks show will light up the night sky.

The Interior Minister highlighted that for the first time, innovative programs will be introduced, breaking away from traditional events.

He stated that the festival aims to showcase Pakistan's rich culture and heritage. The diplomatic

community, CEOs of foreign companies in Pakistan, and the general public are invited to attend.

Mohsin Naqvi inspected the rehearsal of the candlelight parade at Police Lines. He also chaired a meeting to review the festival's preparations.

Federal Secretary Interior, Chief Commissioner Islamabad, IG Islamabad Police, and Deputy Commissioner Islamabad were also present on the occasion.

## AGPR updates employees' records on SAP system: Saad

ISLAMABAD (APP): Parliamentary Secretary for Finance and Revenue, Saad Waseem Sheikh, informed the National Assembly that the Accountant General Pakistan Revenues (AGPR), Islamabad, has updated all records of Federal Government employees on the SAP (System Application Product) system with unique personnel numbers.

Responding to a question during the question hour, he said that all key events, including appointments, promotions, upgradations, transfers, retirements, revisions of pay and allowances, and service verifications, are recorded in the SAP system as well as in employees' personal files in the pre-audit sections.

He highlighted that the AGPR currently manages records for 79,380

employees, with nearly all employee data updated in the system.

The responsibility for providing accurate employee details lies with the respective administrative ministries, divisions, and departments. In case of any discrepancies, the updated information provided by the concerned departments is continuously incorporated into the SAP system.

He further said that the AGPR ensures the timely sharing of General Provident (GP) Fund statements with Federal Government employees through their designated Gmail accounts. Additionally, monthly salary slips are regularly sent to employees.

He said that AGPR has recently initiated payments via the RAAST/MPG (Micro Payment Gateway) system, for which employees

are required to provide their 13-digit CNIC or IBAN number. The relevant departments have been asked to submit updated information to facilitate this process.

The AGPR offices maintain timely communication with concerned departments regarding employees and retirees to ensure swift resolution of cases.

Furthermore, pension cases submitted through the Pension Facilitation Centre (PFC) or online can be tracked via a designated tracking system available at various ministries, divisions, and departments.

He assured that the entire process of pay and pension payments is conducted in accordance with the Finance Division's instructions, which are regularly updated to enhance transparency and efficiency.

## CDA Chairman chairs meeting to address water situation

ISLAMABAD (APP): In response to the growing concerns over water availability in the federal capital, Chairman Capital Development Authority (CDA), Muhammad Ali Randhawa, chaired a high-level meeting here on Friday.

The meeting was attended by board members, Director General (DG) of Islamabad Water, and other senior officials to discuss the current water situation and devise strategies to ensure uninterrupted water supply to the residents of Islamabad.

During the meeting, DG Islamabad Water Management provided a detailed briefing on the current water reserves and supply mechanisms.

It was highlighted that water is being supplied to the city through major sources, including Simly Dam, Khanpur Dam, and tube wells. The meeting was informed that water reserves are being utilized according to the city's requirements, but the situation remains challenging due to a 40% decrease in rainfall across the country, as reported by the

Meteorological Department. This has led to drought-like conditions in several regions, including Islamabad.

Chairman CDA Muhammad Ali Randhawa directed the officials to formulate a comprehensive strategy to address the water crisis. He emphasized the need for efficient management of water resources and instructed the relevant authorities to ensure the cleanliness of water sources.

Randhawa who also holds the charge of Chief Commissioner Islamabad directed all Assistant Commissioners and Islamabad Rescue officials to submit detailed reports on the cleanliness of water sources. To enhance transparency and monitoring, the CDA Chairman ordered the installation of live cameras at tube wells to monitor water supply in real-time.

He further directed that data related to water supply and other operational matters be made available to the public through a dedicated website.

Randhawa instructed the concerned departments to ensure that all water

tankers are operational and any shortages are addressed immediately.

He also directed the Member T&D to install a tracker system in all water tankers to improve efficiency and accountability.

The Chairman emphasized the importance of digitizing all billing and payment processes to streamline operations.

He directed that all cash transactions be phased out as soon as possible and encouraged the promotion of online banking and mobile apps for water bill payments and other transactions to facilitate citizens.

To address staffing shortages, Randhawa ordered the immediate recruitment of additional human resources, including drivers, for Islamabad Water. He also directed the Member Finance to ensure the availability of funds for water-related initiatives.

The meeting concluded with a resolve to tackle the water crisis head-on and ensure that the residents of Islamabad receive an uninterrupted and clean water supply.



ISLAMABAD: President of Malaysia Consultative Council of Islamic Organization (MAPIM) Hajji Mohd Azmi Abd Hamid called on Chairman Parliamentary Committee on Kashmir Rana Muhammad Qasim Noon. —APP Photo

## 1,000 Pakistani agricultural graduates to get advanced training

ISLAMABAD (INP): Federal Minister for National Food Security & Research, Rana Tanveer Hussain chaired a high-level meeting to review progress on Prime Minister's Initiative for

Short-Term Training of 1,000 Agricultural Graduates in China.

The initiative aims to enhance the skills of young professionals in nine priority areas of modern agriculture through three- and six-month training programs at leading Chinese institutions.

According to Gwadar Pro, the first batch of 300 students is set to depart for China in March, 2025, followed by a second batch, while the selection process for the final 300 students is underway.

The training will be conducted at Northwest

Agriculture & Forestry University and Yangling Vocational & Technical College, Shaanxi Province, China. During the meeting, Minister Rana Tanveer Hussain emphasized the need to speed up the dispatch process and ensure maximum facilitation for students.

The ministry is actively coordinating with Chinese authorities, stakeholders, and financial institutions to streamline logistical arrangements. The Pakistani government has ensured merit-based selection, with 10%

additional quota for students from Balochistan.

The meeting also discussed the Joint Working Group meeting with China, scheduled for next month, where further discussions on Pakistan-China collaboration in agricultural education and training will take place.

This initiative will equip young agricultural professionals with modern knowledge in mechanization, biotechnology, AI, irrigation systems, and value chain development, strengthening Pakistan's agriculture sector for future growth.

## 30 Sri Lankan students arrive in Pakistan for higher studies

ISLAMABAD (APP): Another 30 Sri Lankan students have reached Pakistan to pursue MBBS degree in Pakistani medical universities under Allama Iqbal Scholarships for Sri Lankan Students.

The students arrived at Jinnah International Airport, Karachi, said a press release on Friday. These scholarships are a portion of the comprehensive educational programme entitled Pakistan-Sri Lanka Higher Education Cooperation Programme (HEC).

The Sri Lankan students will pursue their medical education in top-notch medical institutions of Pakistan like DOW University of Health Sciences, Karachi and Liaquat University of Medical Sciences, Karachi. Both of these institutions are accredited by Sri Lankan Medical Council (SLMC).

There are another 456 Sri Lankan students enrolled in Pakistani universities, under this scholarship programme, in all major disciplines, including Medicine, Engineering, Business Studies, Natural Sciences, Social Sciences, etc.

The students were selected through a competitive selection process keeping in view their basic eligibility criteria for enrolment in Pakistani universities. The incoming Sri Lankan scholars were given a warm welcome at the airport.

ISLAMABAD (APP): Parliamentary Secretary for Federal Education and Professional Training, National Heritage, and Culture, Farah Naz Akbar, informed the National Assembly that the government has undertaken several initiatives to bridge the skills gap and align the Pakistani workforce with the demands of the Middle Eastern labor market.

Responding to a question during the session, she highlighted key measures, including the establishment of the Pakistan Skill Company and the Pakistan Skill Development Fund to unify technical and vocational education across the country and create better employment opportunities for Pakistani workers abroad.

She further said that the National Vocational Qualification Framework (NVQF) Regulations have been revised to align Pakistan's qualifications with the standards of destination countries, including those in the European

Union (EU) and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). This step aims to enhance the global competitiveness of Pakistani manpower and boost skilled labor exports.

The government is integrating life skills and soft skills—such as communication, problem-solving, teamwork, interpersonal skills, and work ethics—into technical and vocational training programs. These skills are highly valued by Middle Eastern employers and are crucial for workplace success.

The curriculum is also being updated to reflect the latest industry trends and technologies, ensuring that Pakistani workers are equipped with relevant knowledge and skills to meet evolving job market demands in the Middle East.

She said that the government is shifting towards competency-based training programs that prioritize practical skills and hands-on experience. This approach will ensure that Pakistani

workers are not only knowledgeable but also proficient in the skills required by Middle Eastern employers.

To improve the quality of technical training, the government is implementing reforms in certification standards to align with international benchmarks, making Pakistani workers more competitive in the global market.

She also mentioned that efforts are underway to gather information on employment opportunities and required skills from foreign countries, ensuring that workforce training aligns with market demands. She said that the students are being certified through internationally recognized assessment centers to maintain high vocational and technical training standards.

These comprehensive reforms, she added, will help Pakistan strengthen its labor force and increase employment opportunities for skilled workers in the Middle East.

## ‘Beautiful Japan’ Photo Exhibition opens at PNCA



ISLAMABAD (INP): A mesmerizing photo exhibition titled 'Beautiful Japan' — Through the Eyes of an Ambassador' opened on Friday at the Pakistan National Council of the Arts (PNCA), offering a stunning visual journey through the many facets of Japanese life.

The exhibition, capturing the essence of Japan's culture, landscapes, people, and technological marvels, is the work of former Ambassador of Pakistan to Japan, Farukh Amil.

The diplomat-turned-photographer meticulous-

ly documented his time in Japan, forging deep connections between the two nations through his lens.

His work has also been recognized internationally, earning him the prestigious Grand Prix in Japan's Ambassador's Photo Exhibition competition.

The exhibition was inaugurated by Hassan Nasir Jamy, Secretary of the National Heritage & Culture Division, alongside Japan's Ambassador to Pakistan, Akamatsu Shuichi. Also in attendance were PNCA

Director General Ayoub Jamali and other distinguished guests.

The exhibition, a collaborative initiative between the Embassy of Japan, the MEXT Alumni Association of Pakistan (MAAP), and PNCA, will run until February 19.

Featuring around 40 selected photographs, the exhibition not only highlights the breathtaking beauty of Japan but also serves to strengthen cultural ties between Japan and Pakistan. The collection offers Pakistani audiences a unique perspective

on Japan's rich heritage and contemporary society.

Speaking at the inaugural ceremony, Ambassador Akamatsu lauded Amil's keen eye and deep appreciation for Japanese culture. "Each photograph is a testament to his understanding of our society. As Japan's Ambassador to Pakistan, I am delighted to see my country through the lens of someone who knows it so well," he remarked.

He further emphasized the exhibition's role in fostering cultural diplomacy. "This exhibition powerfully connects our two nations, allowing us to share Japan's beauty and complexity with the people of Pakistan."

It reminds us that despite geographical distance, we share common values, respect for traditions, and a deep appreciation for beauty and the human experience."

Ambassador Akamatsu also extended his gratitude to PNCA and MAAP for their invaluable support in organizing the exhibition, underscoring the significance of cultural collaborations in strengthening bilateral relations between Pakistan and Japan.



### Grenade attack injures 4 in Samangan

SAMANGAN (Ariana News): The press office of the Samangan Police Command said in a statement on Friday that four worshippers were injured when a hand grenade was thrown by two individuals inside a mosque in the center of Aybak city, the capital of the province. The statement stated the incident took place during Friday prayers at the Joe Zhondan Mosque in Aybak city, and the injured were transferred to the provincial hospital in Mazar-i-Sharif.

### Traffic accident on highway kills four

KABUL (Amu tv): A collision on the Kabul-Kandahar highway left four people dead and 10 others injured, Taliban officials said Friday. The crash occurred in the Zarny Dasht-e-Top area of Sayedabad district when a bus collided with a minivan, according to Yousuf Israr, a spokesman for the Taliban's police command in Maidan Wardak Province. Among the dead was one woman, while three women were among the injured, Taliban said.

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

## Mujahid calls UN report on Al-Qaeda presence in Afghanistan incorrect

KABUL (TOLONews): The Islamic Emirate considers the United Nations Security Council's sanctions monitoring committee report on the presence of al-Qaeda in Afghanistan to be inaccurate and contrary to the current realities of the country.

Zabiullah Mujahid, the spokesperson for the Islamic Emirate, told TOLONews that the interim government will never allow any group to use Afghan soil to act against other countries. According to Mujahid, some countries and intelligence circles within the United Nations are using this narrative to conduct propaganda against Afghanistan.

Mujahid said: "The Islamic Emirate does not allow any foreign, rogue group to operate in Afghanistan, and such groups are not present here. Unfortunately, some countries and intelligence circles, through organizations like the United Nations and the Security Council, are tarnishing public

opinion and waging propaganda and campaigns against Afghanistan." The United Nations Security Council's sanctions monitoring committee reported that the Islamic Emirate has provided favorable conditions for al-Qaeda's presence, offering safe houses and training camps across Afghanistan.

The report states: "Low-profile members resided with their families under the protection of the Taliban intelligence service (General Directorate of Intelligence) in Kabul neighbourhoods, while senior leaders were placed in rural areas outside Kabul. Some Member States noted that Hamza al Ghamdi (not listed) was in the highly secured Shashdarak area in Kabul with his family."

"The unconfirmed killing of al-Zawahiri should not reflect Afghanistan's decision or the will of the Afghan people, and the fate of Afghanistan should not be determined based on that. It must be addressed

according to Afghanistan's situation, logic, and evidence, not through malicious policies or blind speculations for self-interest," said Abdul Sadiq Hamidzoi, a political analyst.

Meanwhile, Sergey Lavrov, the Russian Foreign Minister, has stated that the situation in Afghanistan poses a serious threat to neighboring countries. In a press conference, Lavrov emphasized the need for regional cooperation to counter security threats in Central Asia, particularly Afghanistan. He said: "The situation in Afghanistan remains difficult and has a significant impact on neighboring countries, including Tajikistan."

Although the international community has repeatedly expressed concerns about potential terrorism threats from Afghan soil, the Islamic Emirate has stated that, just as Afghan soil has not been used against other countries so far, it will not be used for such purposes in the future.

## Lavrov: Situation in Afghanistan poses serious threat to neighboring countries



KABUL (Ariana News): Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov has expressed concern over the situation in Afghanistan, saying it

poses a serious threat to neighboring countries.

During a meeting with Tajikistan's Foreign Minister, Lavrov emphasized the need for coopera-

tion to address security threats in the Central Asian region, particularly in Afghanistan.

He specifically mentioned Russia and

Tajikistan as countries that could be affected by the instability in Afghanistan.

He added that cooperation within multilateral frameworks, such as the Moscow Format on Afghanistan, the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), is essential to counter these threats.

Meanwhile, Russia and Tajikistan have agreed to strengthen their cooperation in combating terrorism and drug trafficking.

However, the Islamic Emirate has repeatedly called these concerns unfounded and consistently emphasized that it will never allow Afghan soil to be used against other countries.

Earlier, the IEA stated that regional joint efforts are necessary to eradicate terrorism.

## 36th anniversary of soviet forces' withdrawal marked

KABUL (Pajhwok): On the 36th anniversary of the Soviet forces' withdrawal from Afghanistan, the caretaker government states that invading forces should take heed and never again take steps against the freedom and independence of the Afghan people.

Today, February 14, marks the 36th anniversary of the withdrawal of Soviet forces from Afghanistan.

A statement from the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (IEA), published by chief spokesman

Zabihullah Mujahid, called this day one of the proudest moments in the country's history and extended congratulations to its "Muslim and Mujahid brothers" on the occasion.

The statement, while referring to the withdrawal of American forces from Afghanistan and the re-establishment of the IEA, emphasized that the desire for independence among Afghans remains strong, and they are firmly committed to protecting their religion.

Without naming any specific party, Mujahid stressed

that lessons should be learned from the past century of invasions and the successful jihad in response.

The statement urges all Afghans to remain vigilant against any future conspiracies or plots and to follow the path of their ancestors by maintaining strong resolve and Islamic unity to protect their faith, beliefs, and sovereignty.

Thirty-six years ago, Soviet forces, after nearly a decade of war, were defeated in Afghanistan and left the country through the Hairatan port in the north in 1989.

## Harsh winter deepens hardship for families

GHAZNI (Amu tv): As winter grips Afghanistan, families in Ghazni say they are struggling with worsening economic hardship, facing both freezing temperatures and empty dinner tables.

With little food and no reliable source of heat, Zahra and her family are among those enduring the brunt of the crisis. "We have nothing to eat," she said. "My whole body aches. We have no food, no warm clothes. Our life is in ruins. If we manage to find some flour one day, we have nothing for the next."

Her husband, Qurban Ali, echoed her concerns, describing the lack of work opportunities in the province. "No matter how much I try, I can't make a living," he said. "I work as a laborer, but I barely earn anything. I go to the mountains to collect firewood to keep my family warm, but even that is beyond my strength. I've been working for ten years and still can't afford to fix my teeth."

Across Afghanistan, from the capital to remote provinces, people are voicing frustration over the scarcity of jobs. Some have told Amu TV that as temperatures drop, they are forced to choose between heating their homes and putting food on the table, or between buying medicine and buying a meal. Economic analysts warn that these struggles are signs of a deepening crisis in the country, with no immediate relief in sight.

## Afghanistan stands firm on Saffron export quality

KABUL (BNA): The Ministry of Industry and Commerce of Afghanistan has refuted claims made by Iranian officials regarding the quality and origin of the saffron exported from Afghanistan.

The Iranian officials alleged that much of the saffron being sold in international markets as Afghan is, in fact, produced in Iran.

Responding to these accusations, Afghanistan's Ministry of Commerce emphasized that the country only exports its own domestically produced saffron, known for its exceptional quality. According to the ministry, all export shipments are thoroughly vetted and approved by international customer laboratories, ensuring that only the highest quality saffron reaches the global market.

A statement from the ministry, reported by Bakhtar News Agency, asserted, "Without a doubt, Afghanistan's exported saffron is entirely a domestic product. We see no reason to harm the reputation of Afghan saffron by exporting low-quality saffron from other countries."

The ministry also highlighted its commitment to supporting local saffron producers, describing them as a positive example of quality production.

## WB: Nearly 3M people in Afghanistan on verge of famine

KABUL (TOLONews): The World Bank has once again stated that Afghanistan is facing a severe food security crisis. According to the bank's latest report, 12.6 million people in Afghanistan are struggling with food insecurity, and nearly three million people are on the brink of famine.

The report states: "Afghanistan is facing a severe food security crisis. Nearly one-third of the population – 12.6 million people – are experiencing food insecurity, with 2.9 million on the brink of starvation. Economic instability, climate shocks, and disrupted agricultural productivity have left the nation struggling to meet basic needs."

The World Bank also said that climate change is one of the main drivers of food insecurity in

Afghanistan, significantly impacting the agricultural economy, which is already affected by the ongoing war.

"Every year, our crops are destroyed, and even our homes are damaged. We ask institutions and the government to help and cooperate with us," said Enayatullah, a farmer. Poverty and unemployment are among the main factors contributing to food insecurity in Afghanistan, which have arisen due to economic challenges, climate change, and years of conflict.

"There are six members in my family. I go out daily and work 30, 40, or 50 jobs until evening. The household expenses are covered, but because of the problems, there isn't a day that passes easily," said Daoud, a resident of Kabul.

However, the Ministry of Economy,

emphasizing the continuation of humanitarian aid in Afghanistan, states that the Islamic Emirate has several programs aimed at reducing food insecurity in the country.

Abdul Latif Nazari, deputy minister of economy, said: "The Islamic Emirate has large-scale economic projects in hand to reduce food insecurity and create employment. At the same time, we urge the international community and aid organizations to assist the people of Afghanistan in reducing poverty and food insecurity."

Concerns about food security in Afghanistan have increased as, following the US president's order to suspend foreign aid, around 50 international organizations, mainly working in humanitarian sectors in Afghanistan, have halted their operations.

## Fetrat urges aggressors to learn from Afghanistan's struggles

KABUL (TOLONews): The Islamic Emirate said the 26th of Dalwa – the day the Soviet Union forces withdrew from Afghanistan – is a proud day in the history of the country.

Hamdullah Fetrat, the Deputy Spokesperson of the Islamic Emirate, stated that aggressors should learn from the continuous struggles of the Afghan people. He urged the citizens of the country to remain vigilant against conspiracies, just as they have in the past.

The Deputy Spokesperson further said: "The Muslim and courageous people of Afghanistan should remain alert to any kind of conspiracy and plot in the future, just as they have in the past. With steadfast resolve and Islamic unity, they should follow the path of their ancestors."

On the other hand, during a program marking the 36th anniversary of the



Soviet Red Army's withdrawal from Afghanistan, the acting Minister of Energy and Water referred to the remaining equipment in Afghanistan as war spoils.

Abdul Latif Mansoor, acting Minister of Energy and Water, stated: "We should have done this with Russia as well; because the Russians have destroyed our country and must pay for all the damages, and you should tell Trump this too. The weapons we have seized are spoils, just like we took tanks from the Russians, and they are still

here. This is our right."

Khairullah Khairkhwā, acting Minister of Information and Culture, said: "Today, after 45 years, we have a central government. Nowhere in the world could this happen – a country with 50 million or more people, after 45 years, having a central government without any rifts or problems. This is impossible anywhere else."

The Soviet Union's army was present in Afghanistan for nearly nine years and was forced to leave the country due to the struggles of the Afghan people.

## Exports of Afghanistan's dried fruit decline: Ministry

KABUL (TOLONews): The Ministry of Industry and Commerce said that the country's dried fruit exports decreased in the first ten months of this solar year compared to the same period last year.

According to the ministry's statistics, over 350 million dollars' worth of dried fruit has been exported in the first ten months of this solar year, while this figure exceeded 388 million dollars last year.

Akhundzada Abdul Salam Jawad, the spokesperson for the Ministry of Industry and Commerce, regarding the decrease in dried fruit exports, said: "In the first ten months of 1403, approximately 115 thousand tons of dried fruit, valued at more than 350 million dollars, were exported to countries including India, Pakistan, the United Arab Emirates, Russia, China, the United Kingdom, Germany, Canada, Uzbekistan, the United States, and others."

Afghanistan has abundant agricultural and horti-



cultural products and primarily exports dried figs, pistachios, almonds, pine nuts, raisins, dried apricots, and walnuts to global markets.

The Kabul Dried Fruit Exporters Union identifies banking challenges, difficulties in obtaining business visas, and Pakistan's imposition of tariffs on Afghan goods as major obstacles to dried fruit exports.

The spokesperson for the Kabul Dried Fruit Exporters Union said: "The lack of visas is a significant issue. Unfortunately, over the past three years, India, which receives 70% of Afghanistan's dried fruit

exports, has not issued visas to our traders. This is one of the major problems, along with Pakistan's 2% tax."

Omid Haidari, a businessman, said: "We call on the Islamic Emirate to prioritize economic policies so that we can advance these policies. We expect our ambassadors in neighboring countries and our trade attachés to work towards finding good markets for Afghanistan's agricultural products."

Dried fruit exports, known for their high quality, remain one of Afghanistan's key sources of foreign currency income.

## Karzai condemns Munich attack

BERLIN (Amu tv): Former President Hamid Karzai condemned an attack in Munich, Germany, in which a 24-year-old Afghan asylum seeker drove his car into a crowd of protesters, injuring at least 28 people, according to reports.

In a statement on X on Friday, Karzai expressed sympathy for the victims and gratitude for Germany's support of Afghanistan. "My condolences go to the families of the victims," he wrote. "I wish the people of Germany lasting happiness and good health and appreciate their steadfast support for Afghanistan."

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz denounced the attack, saying the suspect should not expect leniency and would face prosecution and deportation. The attack, which took place just ahead of the Munich Security Conference, has heightened concerns over migration policies in Germany.

## Economic struggles compel Paktia's children to work

PAKTIA (TOLONews): Child laborers in Paktia province said they are forced to work due to economic challenges, leaving them deprived of education.

Zahedullah, a 14-year-old resident of the Ibrahim Khil area in Gardez city, is one of these children who, because of financial difficulties, was unable to complete his education in the sixth grade.

Now working as an apprentice mechanic, he says: "I studied until the sixth grade, but due to economic problems, I had to stop. Now I'm busy learning trade. If given the opportunity, I would love to return to school."

Other child laborers in Gardez, who are engaged in hard labor due to economic hardships, call on officials and aid organizations to support them and provide educational opportunities.

"I want to go to school,

but I have to work here out of necessity. I ask the government to create educational opportunities for us," said Hasibullah, a child laborer in Paktia.

"Out of necessity, I do very hard work here and lift heavy metal pieces. I need to learn a skill," Zabihullah, another child laborer in Paktia.

"There are many children like me here who are doing difficult jobs. We have a future, and we must study. We ask the government to help provide educational opportunities for us," said Sayed Abdul Fazl, another child laborer in Paktia.

Meanwhile, local officials in Paktia say they have provided free education for some orphaned and needy children and are working to expand educational programs.

"We don't have exact statistics from the past to determine whether the

number of child laborers has increased or decreased. However, many children are engaged in hard labor. As the department responsible, we are trying to implement programs that not only provide educational opportunities but also ensure the work they do is not beyond their capacity," said Mohammad Rahim Nasrat, the head of Paktia's Labor and Social Affairs Department.

These appeals come as four months ago, the Global Poverty Index reported that the number of impoverished children in Afghanistan is five million more than the adult population.

The child laborers in Paktia hope that with the support of the government and international organizations, they can leave behind hard labor and return to classrooms to build a brighter future for themselves.

## Sheberghan marks birth anniversaries of historic figures

KABUL (TOLONews): A ceremony was held in Sheberghan, the capital of Jowzjan province, to commemorate the 584th birth anniversary of Amir Ali-Shir Nava'i, and the 542nd birth anniversary of Zahiruddin Muhammad Babur Babur, with the participation of several writers, poets, and cultural figures.

Participants at the event emphasized the importance of passing on the ideas and scientific and cultural achievements of these two historical figures to the younger generation. Zahiruddin Muhammad Babur, the founder of the Mughal Empire in India, and Amir Alisher Nava'i, the learned minister of Sultan Husayn Bayqara in the 9th century Hijri, are recognized as prominent figures in Timurid civilization and Afghan history.

Attendees of the gathering described the legacies



and governance approaches of these two historical personalities as suitable models for Afghanistan and the region. "Holding such events helps us become aware of our ancestors and their cultural growth. These programs can encourage future generations to support cultural activities," said Alisher Entezar Jowzjani, a poet and writer.

"Learning from these personalities is essential for everyone. We must encourage our youth to draw inspiration from their lives and works and study their poetry and history," said Najibullah, a poet and writer.

"Organizing such programs is crucial for today's generation to become familiar with their historical figures and use their works to

advance the cultural, social, and economic growth of society," stated Sayed Ahmad Haidari, a poet and writer from Sar-e-Pol.

The event organizers also emphasized the importance of raising awareness among young people about the scientific, cultural, and literary contributions of these two historical figures.

"Young people should study these brilliant figures of the East and other poets and writers and preserve their works in their libraries so that their cultural heritage is passed down to future generations," said Faizullah Habibi, one of the organizers.

According to the organizers, Amir Ali-Shir Nava'i, and Zahiruddin Muhammad Babur left lasting contributions not only in governance but also in the fields of science, culture, and literature.



# Afghan Taliban providing funds to TTP terrorists: UN

UNITED NATIONS (APP): The Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), a United Nations designated terrorist group, continued to receive from Afghanistan's de facto authorities logistical and operational space as well as financial support in conducting cross-border attacks in Pakistan, according to a new UN report.

The UN sanctions monitoring team released its annual assessment late Thursday amid a surge in TTP terror attacks against Pakistani security forces and civilians, killing a number of them in recent weeks. "The ambition and scale of TTP's attacks on Pakistan, though, had significantly increased, with over six hundred attacks during the reporting period, including from Afghan territory," the United Nations Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team reported.

TTP, it said, established new training centers in Afghanistan's Kunar, Nangarhar, Khost, and Paktika (Barmal) provinces while enhancing recruitment within the group's cadres, including from the Afghan Taliban. Also reported was an increase in collaboration between TTP, Afghan Taliban, and al-Qaeda in the Sub-continent, conducting attacks under the banner of Tehrik-e-Jihad-e-Pakistan.

"Greater facilitation among these groups and TTP in terms of provision of suicide bombers and fighters and ideological guidance might transform the latter into an extra-regional threat and an umbrella organization for other terrorist groups operating in the region," the report said. "With over two dozen terrorist groups operating in Afghanistan, the security threat emanating from the country is a continuing driver of instability in the region and beyond," it said.

"The presence of terrorist organizations in Afghanistan posed a serious challenge to the stability of the

country, as well as to the security of neighbouring states." According to the report, ISIL-Khorasan suffered a significant setback in the summer, when Pakistani security forces foiled an attempt by its external operation branch to establish itself inside Pakistan, resulting in the arrest of high-profile operatives. These included Adil Panjsheri (Afghan), Abu Munzir (Tajik) and Kaka Younis (Uzbek), who, it said, were central figures in the recruitment, travel and funding of fighters and suicide bombers.

"To avoid detection and minimize arrests, ISIL-K leadership replaced electronic and internet-based communications in favour of old-fashioned methods through a network of couriers to deliver instructions and conduct in-person meetings." The Majeed Brigade, a dedicated death squad of the Baluchistan Liberation Army claimed carrying out several high-casualty attacks in the reporting period.

The brigade included females in its ranks and operated across the southern region of Pakistan, including Awaran, Panjgur and Dalbandin, it was pointed out. The Majeed Brigade, according to the report, maintained connections with TTP, ISIL-K and other terrorist groups, including ETIM/TI.

It also said that ISIL-K represented the most serious threat to the de facto authorities, ethnic and religious minorities, the UN, foreign nationals and international representatives in Afghanistan. The killing of acting Minister of Refugees & Repatriation, Khalil Ahmed Haqqani in a suicide bombing on 11 December, claimed by ISIL-K, marked the highest-profile casualty within the de facto Cabinet since the Taliban takeover, the report said, pointing out that the move was aimed at undermining

Taliban's credibility in providing security.

"ISIL-K benefited from the Taliban's inability to protect itself against infiltration and corruption among its own ranks, despite raids conducted to arrest disloyal officials." The group continued building its capabilities to threaten Central Asian countries from northern Afghanistan. The group, it said, consolidated its support base while seeking to capitalize on the growing dissatisfaction among ethnic Tajiks against Taliban rule in northern provinces.

"Despite Taliban pressure against ISIL-K, particularly in Helmand and Kandahar Provinces, farmers affected by the poppy cultivation ban reportedly provided shelter for the group's fighters in retaliation." ISIL-K maintained a presence across the region, while Afghanistan remained the main hub for ISIL-K's recruitment and facilitation, the report said adding that the group prioritized the movement of fighters into the country. "Central Asians, mostly Tajik nationals, were recruited and used in this process."

As regards al-Qaeda, the report said it sought to strengthen cooperation with regional terrorist organizations of non-Afghan origin that operate in the country (TTP, Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, ETIM/TIP, Jamaat Ansarullah) to expand their presence in neighbouring countries. "Member States judged Sayf al-Adl's strategy to reorganize Al-Qaeda's presence in Afghanistan and reactivate sleeper cells in Iraq, Syria, Libya, and Europe indicative of the group's longer-term intent to carry out external operations." "The Taliban maintained a permissive environment allowing Al-Qaeda to consolidate, with the presence of safe houses and training camps scattered across Afghanistan," the report added.



ISLAMABAD: Chief Justice of Pakistan, Justice Yahya Afridi administering oath of offices to new Supreme Court judges.

## PTI reiterates demand for judicial commission

E.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) has reiterated its demand for an empowered judicial commission to investigate the electoral fraud of February 8, 2024 and punish those responsible for stealing the public mandate.

PTI Central Information Secretary Sheikh Waqas Akram said that PATTAN in its report, released on the first anniversary of the worst rigged general election, made a startling revelation regarding 2024 Election and unmasked the dirty roles of all those who conspired to manipulate the general elections, denying PTI's electoral victory and fraudulently imposing rejected political figures on the nation.

He said that the report also revealed that all the king's horses and all the king's men are still busy to save the stolen people's mandate by enacting the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act and the 26th Constitutional Amendments, which is lamentable because the biggest poll robbery in history was carried out to impose the rejected and most corrupt clique on the nation.

PTI CIS said that in the aftermath of PATTAN's detailed postmortem report on Feb 8 electoral mega theft, the power grabbers bereft of public mandate did not have any moral and ethical justification to say in power for a single day.

Waqas alarmed that the report identified 64 new methods of electoral manipulation, coercion, and fraud used before, during, and after polling aimed at achieving "positive" results. He said that PATTAN summed up the entire fraud of electoral cycle of GE 2024 in four words: Delay, Deny, Detain, Destroy as portrayed on the title cover of the report.

PTI CIS stated that democracy can only run if the government has moral strength, as all the key pillars of democracy, including an independent judiciary, freedom of expression, a free media, and human rights, have been dismantled under the nefarious plot to crush the PTI and cover up election fraud. Waqas emphasized that the report was a chargesheet against the ECP, which miserably failed in conducting its constitutional and legal duty justly and fairly, as the institution was busy in changing the election result forms on its website till September 2024.

## Pakistan withdraws key powers from FBR

E.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Pakistan government has fulfilled another International Monetary Fund (IMF) condition by withdrawing key powers from the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) and establishing a Tax Policy Office under the Ministry of Finance, as per a newly issued notification.

As per details, the government has separated tax policy formulation from tax collection to enhance transparency and efficiency. Under the new law, FBR will now focus solely on tax collection and implementation rather than policymaking.

The new Tax Policy Office will report directly to the Finance and Revenue Minister and will be responsible for developing reform agendas and analyzing tax policies and proposals. The office will provide policy reports on income tax, sales tax, and federal excise duty, focusing on reducing fraud and strengthening tax enforcement mechanisms.

# Pakistan, Romania strengthen bilateral ties

E.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: A pivotal meeting between the Pakistan Romania Parliamentary Friendship Group (PFG) and H.E. Mr. Dan Stoescu, Ambassador of Romania to Pakistan, was held today at the Parliament House in Islamabad. The gathering aimed to enhance bilateral cooperation across various sectors, including the economy, culture, education, technology, tourism, health, and sports.

The meeting was attended by distinguished Members of the National Assembly of Pakistan, including Ms. Zahra Wadood Fatemi, Mr. Aqeel Malik, & Mr. Sadiq Ali Memon. The proceedings were chaired by Mr. Danyal Chaudhary, Convener of the Pakistan-Romania PFG and Federal Parliamentary Secretary for Information and Broadcasting.

The Romanian side was represented by H.E. Mr. Dan Stoescu, Ambassador of Romania to Pakistan, Mr. Cristian Stelin Corom?, Head of the Consular Section, and Mr. Eduard-Robert Preda, Chargé d'Affaires/Minister Plenipotentiary.

During the meeting, Mr. Danyal Chaudhary acknowledged the strong economic partnership between Pakistan and Romania during the 1960s, 70s, and 80s, a period marked by Romania's significant technological contributions to Pakistan's industrialization, particularly in the oil, fertilizer, and cement sectors. He emphasized that today's meeting provided a crucial opportunity to explore new areas of collaboration, tap into untapped potential, and reaffirm the shared commitment to strengthening bilateral relations.

Mr. Chaudhary underscored the importance of enhancing technological cooperation, particularly in areas such as drone technology, cybersecurity intelligence sharing, and NATO-compatible peacekeeping training. He also highlighted the focus on economic cooperation, discussing opportunities in agri-tech, renewable energy, and the automotive industry.

The members of the Pakistan-Romania PFG acknowledged the existing challenges and barriers to

closer collaboration between the two countries and called for practical solutions to address these issues. They emphasized the role of parliamentary exchanges and people-to-people interactions in fostering mutual understanding and dispelling misconceptions about Pakistan.

The Romanian Ambassador reaffirmed his commitment to supporting Pakistan within the European Union, particularly regarding the Generalized Scheme of Preferences (GSP+) and at international fora. He expressed optimism that through continued collective efforts, the bilateral relationship between Pakistan and Romania would continue to strengthen.

The meeting concluded on a positive note, with both sides reaffirming their determination to deepen bilateral ties and explore new avenues for cooperation in the years to come. This significant development represents a milestone in the relationship between Pakistan and Romania, setting the stage for enhanced collaboration and mutual understanding.

# Erdogan: US making 'wrong calculations' in ME

ANKARA (Reuters): Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan said the administration of US President Donald Trump was making "wrong calculations" regarding the Middle East, adding that heeding "Zionist lies" would only exacerbate conflicts.

Turkiye has rejected Trump's plan to remove the more than 2 million Palestinians from the Gaza Strip, claim US control of it and turn it into the "Riviera of the Middle East." It has also said Israel's assault on Gaza amounted to a genocide, while calling for international measures against its government. "Unfortunately, the United States is making a wrong calculation about our region. One should not be engaged in an approach that disregards the region's history, values, and accumulation," he said, according to a transcript of comments to journalists on a return flight

from Malaysia, Indonesia and Pakistan.

Erdogan said he expected Trump to realize his election campaign promises of taking steps for peace, rather than create new conflicts. He said he saw real signs of a ceasefire in Gaza despite a truce agreement between Israel and Palestinian militant group Hamas, and added the Muslim world had still not been able to take a collective step on the issue.

Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia on Friday welcomed a recent phone call between US President Donald Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin, as well as the possibility of hosting a summit between the two leaders in the Kingdom, according to a statement issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. "The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia commends the phone call that took place between His Excellency

President Donald J. Trump, President of the United States of America, and His Excellency President Vladimir Putin, President of the Russian Federation, on February 12, 2025," the statement read.

It further expressed Saudi Arabia's readiness to host any potential summit and reaffirmed its commitment to mediating a resolution to the ongoing war in Ukraine. Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman has reiterated the Kingdom's support for mediation since the beginning of the war, and during separate calls with both Putin and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky on March 3, 2022.

"The Kingdom affirms its continued efforts to achieve lasting peace between Russia and Ukraine," the statement added, underscoring Riyadh's ongoing diplomatic initiatives over the past three years.

# Drone strikes Chornobyl nuclear plant in Ukraine

KYIV: A Russian drone with a high-explosive warhead has hit the Chornobyl nuclear power plant in the Kyiv region, Ukraine said, amid warnings by the military that Russia launched 133 unmanned vehicles against the country.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said on Friday that the drone strike significantly damaged the protective containment shelter and started a fire, which has been put out. The Kremlin responded saying Russia does not hit nuclear sites. Radiation levels at the site have not increased, according to Zelenskyy and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

The IAEA did not attribute blame but said the drone strike occurred at 01:50am local time (23:50 GMT) and that there was "no indication of a breach in the ... inner containment" shell, a protective cover built around the fourth reactor of the plant. The Ukrainian air force said it shot down 73 drones and 58 others did not reach their targets, likely due to electronic countermeasures. It did not specify what happened to the two remaining drones it said Russia had launched.

The attacks took place as world leaders and diplomats gathered for the start of the Munich Security Conference in the southern German city, which features the war in Ukraine as one of the main

items on the agenda. United States Vice President JD Vance is expected to meet Zelenskyy for talks that many hope will shed some light on planned US-led negotiations with Russia that appeared to sideline Ukraine and its European allies.

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio was supposed to join Vance and Zelenskyy but his air force plane had to return to Washington after developing a mechanical problem en route to Munich. It was unclear whether he would arrive in time for the meeting. Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov dismissed as a "provocation" accusations by Ukraine that a Russian drone hit Chornobyl.

"There is no talk about striking on nuclear infrastructure, nuclear energy facilities, any such claim isn't true, our military doesn't do that," he told reporters on Friday. He suggested Ukrainian officials made the claim because they wanted to thwart efforts to end the war through negotiations, after US President Donald Trump spoke to Russian President Vladimir Putin about reaching a peace deal.

Meanwhile, Russia's defence ministry claimed multiple attacks from Ukraine overnight, saying it had shot down 50 drones in various regions. It said Kyiv conducted an artillery attack on a thermal power plant it controls in southern Ukraine,

which is located near the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power station, causing "critical damage" to energy infrastructure. Moscow annexed the region in September 2022 but does not fully control it.

Russian-installed local officials said the attack on the power plant in the city of Enerhodar occurred late on Thursday and left more than 50,000 people without electricity. Urgent work was under way to try to restore supplies. Russian news agencies cited a nuclear plant official as saying that the Zaporizhzhia nuclear facility itself had not been damaged in the attack and was operating as usual.

IAEA chief Rafael Rossi said on X that the strike on the Chornobyl plant and a recent increase in military activity near the Zaporizhzhia plant "underline persistent nuclear safety risks," adding that the agency remains "on high alert". The Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant is Europe's biggest and one of the 10 largest in the world. Chornobyl was the site of one of the worst nuclear accidents in nuclear history when its reactor exploded in 1986.

Russia and Ukraine have accused each other of blocking the rotation of staff from the IAEA at the Zaporizhzhia facility and of risking a potentially devastating nuclear disaster by attacking the site. — Aljazeera

## Hariri returns to politics

BEIRUT: Former Lebanese Prime Minister Saad Hariri announced on Friday, the 20th anniversary of the assassination of his father Rafic Hariri, also a former PM, the "return of the Future Movement to political activity in all upcoming milestones and events." This comes after a three-year suspension of his political engagement and that of his party.

Hariri affirmed that the party, founded by his late father, "will continue, rooted in adherence to the Taif Constitution, state-building, reconstruction, and institutional development. We ask for nothing but a normal state where no weapons exist outside the authority of the state." Speaking before crowds that had gathered since the morning from Beirut, Bekaa, and the north, waving Lebanese flags in Martyrs' Square in downtown Beirut and chanting his name, Hariri stated: "The supporters of Rafic Hariri remain here, and your voices will be heard in every upcoming national milestone. Everything comes in its own time."

In what politicians have described as a "responsible, non-provocative, and unifying speech," Hariri emphasized: "We now have a president, a government, and new hope, which was expressed in the inaugural speech and the statement of Prime Minister Nawaf Salam. This is a golden opportunity, and our decision is to support it and reject any attempt to circumvent it." Addressing the residents of the south, Bekaa, and Beirut's southern suburbs — who suffered the brunt of the Israeli war against Hezbollah — Hariri said: "You are partners in this opportunity, and without you, it cannot be realized. You must break the previous impression that you are a force of obstruction, domination, and arms. You are partners in building bridges with Arab brothers and in reconstruction. You are key partners in restoring the legitimacy of the state, which alone — through its army, security forces, and institutions — can protect all Lebanese citizens."

Hariri added: "Demanding a normal state means a state where weapons are exclusively in the hands of the national army and legitimate security forces, where the economy is free, productive, and provides jobs and a dignified life for all Lebanese. It means a state where the judiciary is independent, laws are upheld, freedoms are protected, and justice is served for the martyrs, the wounded, and those affected by the Beirut port explosion." He praised citizens who opened their homes to those forced to flee their communities. — Arab News

# Measures taken to promote sports in KP: CM

E.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Ali Amin Khan Gandapur, has inaugurated the Inter-College Sports Gala 2025 organized by the Higher Education Department. A ceremony in this regard was held on Friday in Peshawar, where the Chief Minister participated as the chief guest. Provincial Minister for Higher Education, Meena Khan Afridi, along with other officials from the Higher Education Department, teachers, students, and athletes, attended the event in large numbers.

The Chief Minister unveiled the trophy is to formally launch the Sports Gala, while teams of athletes participated in a march past. A spectacular fireworks display was also presented on the occasion. The Sports Gala features 2,000 students from 320 colleges across eight zones of the province.

Competitions will be held in 13 different sports, including cricket, football, hockey, basketball, volleyball, throwball, handball,

table tennis, badminton, squash, kabaddi, chuckball, and netball. These competitions will take place in sports complexes in three districts — Peshawar, Charsadda, and Nowshera. Earlier, inter-collegiate competitions were held at the zonal level, and the winning teams from those contests are now participating in this event.

Addressing the ceremony, the Chief Minister stated that solid measures are being taken to promote sports in the province in line with the vision of the founding chairman, and he takes pride in fulfilling the dream envisioned for Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. He highlighted that, for the first time in the province's history, an Inter-College Sports Gala is being organized, which will now be held annually.

He encouraged students to work hard and make a name for themselves in both academics and sports, urging them to strive for excellence and bring pride to the province and the country. He emphasized that sports teach individuals how to compete, and those

who learn to face challenges are the ones who succeed. "The greater the competition, the bigger the victory and recognition," he added.

The Chief Minister stated that Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has carved out a unique identity in the field of sports. Addressing the students, he remarked that jealousy and insecurity are diseases they must avoid. He encouraged them to move forward with a positive mindset, prioritizing national interests over personal gains.

On this occasion, the Chief Minister announced a total prize of 5 million rupees for the participating teams, in addition to regular awards, and pledged to provide further funds for purchasing sports kits for schools and colleges.

In his speech, he also highlighted that the province has increased its revenue by 55%, with a surplus of 176 billion rupees in the treasury, which will be invested in the people, especially the youth. Provincial Minister Meena Khan Afridi also addressed the ceremony.



QUETTA: People shifting an injured person to civil hospital after bomb blast in Harnai.

# SCBA, IMF discuss strategies to combat corruption

E.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Representatives of the Governance and Corruption Diagnostic Assessment (GCDA) team of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) met with members of the Supreme Court Bar Association of Pakistan (SCBAP) on Friday and discussed shortcomings of the judicial system and combating corruption in the governmental departments.

The SCBAP team was led by the president of the association, Mian Muhammad Rauf Atta. A delegation of the IMF is currently in Pakistan to review the judicial framework as part of the ongoing \$7 billion Extended Fund Facility (EFF). During Friday's meeting, the chairman of the bar association

addressed the shortcomings of the judicial system of the country such as the lack of judges, inefficiencies within departments and potential measures like Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) to lessen the burden on the courts. The SCBAP and the team from the IMF discussed various strategies to tackle corruption in governmental departments, to promote and work for good governance and implementation of legal reforms which in turn would benefit the judicial hierarchy, the statement added.

In the meeting, Rauf Atta was accompanied by Member Pakistan Bar Council Hassan Raza Pasha, Additional Secretary SCBAP Muhammad Aurangzeb Khan and President High

Court Bar Association Balochistan, Mir Attaullah Langove. The president emphasised and put forward the need for measures to eradicate financial crimes to boost the economy and noted that a system of accountability and rewarding is already in place within the judicial system where the Supreme Judicial Council oversees complaints against judges of the higher judiciary.

The statement from the SCBAP also conveyed that the chairman of the council described the rule of law as a "cornerstone of a democratic society and reaffirmed his commitment to uphold it, along with the SCBAP's dedication to the Constitution, the supremacy of institutions, and the independence of the judiciary".