

PTI leaders indicted
F.P. Report
LAHORE: A report by Lahore police has found seven individuals, including PTI leader Salman Akram Raja, guilty in three separate cases of arson and violence, according to the Anti-Terrorism Court in Lahore. The court heard the interim bails of several PTI leaders, including Salman Akram Raja, Zameer Jhando, and Ali Imtaz Warraich, in relation to the ongoing investigations.

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LAHORE: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and others offering dua during the funeral prayer of Lieutenant Muhammad Hassan Ashraf Shaheed, who embraced martyrdom in North Waziristan.

President for greater cooperation with China

ISLAMABAD (APP): President Asif Ali Zardari desired that Pakistan, due to its closer geographical proximity with China, would like to take advantage from the Chinese advancements in different fields including agriculture, communication space, technology and industry.

In an interview with CCTV during his recent visit to China and broadcast by the national TV channels on Saturday, the president said Pakistan accorded high priority to all-weather friendship with China as the latter had always been a steadfast friend and stood by Pakistan in difficult times.

He also reaffirmed Pakistan's unwavering support to China, its leadership and the nation, saying that they firmly believed in their strongest friendly bonds. He said Pakistan, due to its geographical location and owing to mutual extensive cooperation and partnership, wanted maximum benefits from the Chinese advancements and experiences in different fields.

He also termed the Chinese achievements in realms of science and technology as the 'good thing' for the entire world and the region. The president said agriculture was a sector where China could help as Pakistan's per acre yield was less when compared with China.

Responding to a query to China-Pakistan cooperation in space technology, he said Pakistan wanted to take advantage from the Chinese technology, adding Pakistan was growing its capacity in this regard by forging partnership with China, 'which



is a good thing'. He said Pakistan could use the Chinese technology for its advancement, in every field, whether it was utility of water or it was climate change. Pakistan wanted to take advantage from the Chinese lessons.

The president expressed his satisfaction over the pace of connectivity and development under the umbrella of CPEC which was fast transforming the economic landscape of Pakistan. The president said, during his recent visit to China, the two sides had discussed the industrial parks would be only for China; and worked upon by the Pakistani labourers while the chief executive of a company could be running a business online while sitting in China.

The president said that China and Pakistan were known as all-weather friends. "If I cannot develop myself to China's standards, I can bask in China's glory," he said, underscoring to take advantage from the Chinese technology for their coming generations. Responding to a query, he said Pakistan wanted to take advantage of its position and its ties with the Chinese people that spanned over

centuries.

Expressing his affection for the Chinese people, he said that he loved them and would always stand with China. "Goodwill, goodwill and goodwill", it is always the trust and goodwill and in-depth relationship," the president said while summoning up his recent visit.

The president also lauded President Xi as a 'very strong and very steadfast' who understood a lot of things, adding that he wanted to convey to the world that they were all-weather friends. Further admiring President Xi's political philosophy and his governance, he observed that China had made strides in different fields, showing 'a very vast difference' under the Chinese president's leadership.

To another question, President Zardari said that relationship between Pakistan and China was centuries old as people from the two countries had been travelling and interacting with each other. This relationship was based upon humanity and trust, he said, adding the Chinese people had never been inhuman and never gone to another country to massacre people. China had never been an occupier.

Two more IMF team to visit Pakistan

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Two more IMF delegations will visit Pakistan this month, with separate negotiations to be held for a total loan of \$2.5 billion.

An IMF delegation will visit Pakistan from February 24, with negotiations between Pakistan and IMF to focus on a new concessional loan of \$1.5 billion. The new loan program will be for addressing losses from climate change. Discussions were held during the Prime Minister's meeting with IMF Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva. The IMF delegation will negotiate the new climate change loan program. Pakistan's economy suffered \$30 billion in losses from climate change two years ago. The IMF will help reduce climate change losses in the new loan program.

The IMF will review climate change measures and targets in the new loan program. Discussions about the new climate change loan program are expected to continue until the first week of March. In early March, an IMF economic review mission will also visit Pakistan. Negotiations will be held for the next tranche of \$1 billion from the \$7 billion loan program. The IMF will be briefed on economic performance from July to December.

16 dead as multiple buses crash in Sindh

F.P. Report

NAWAB SHAH: At least 16 people were killed and dozens injured in separate accidents involving two buses carrying pilgrims in Nawabshah and Khairpur.

In Nawabshah, at least six people lost their lives and 10 were injured in a collision between a van and a trailer carrying pilgrims near Fatuhal Zardari village on Amri Road. In Khairpur, on the other hand, a coach carrying pilgrims overturned near Ranipur on the National Highway resulting in the deaths of at least 10 people and injuring 30 others.

According to the police, those injured in the accidents were shifted to the hospital. Pilgrims, who travelled in the vehicles, were visiting Sehwan Sharif to attend the urs — the death anniversary of a sufi saint — of Usman Marwandi, popularly known as Hazrat Lal Shahbaz Qalandar.

Moreover, according to the rescue sources, the condition of the seven people injured in the accident remains critical. The rescue sources also added that the passenger coach was travelling from Punjab to Sehwan. Additionally, it is important to note that the Sindh government has declared a public holiday on February 19 on the occasion of Lal Shahbaz Qalandar's urs.

Khairpur Deputy Commissioner Ahmed Fawad Shah said a local bus was coming from Burewala when it collided with a rickshaw that was crossing the National Highway near Ranipur.

3 Israeli hostages freed, 369 Palestinians released

KHAN YOUNIS (Reuters): Hamas released Israeli hostages Iair Horn, Sagui Dekel Chen and Sasha (Alexander) Troufanov in Gaza on Saturday and Israel freed some 369 Palestinian prisoners and detainees in exchange, after mediators helped avert a collapse of the fragile ceasefire.

The three Israelis were led onto a stage with Palestinian Hamas militants armed with automatic rifles standing on each side of them at the site in Khan Younis, live footage showed, before they were taken back into Israel by Israeli forces. Shortly afterwards, buses carrying freed Palestinian prisoners and detainees departed Israel's Ofer jail in the Israeli-occupied West Bank. The first bus arrived in Ramallah to a cheering crowd, some waving Palestinian flags.

"We didn't expect to be freed, but God is great. God set us free," said Musa Nawarwa, 70, from the West Bank town of Bethlehem, who was serving two life terms for killings of Israeli soldiers in the West Bank. Buses carrying some of the hundreds of Palestinian freed prisoners and detainees, some flashing victory signs as they hung from the windows, arrived later at the

European Hospital in Khan Younis in the southern Gaza Strip.

A few were returning to an enclave they have not seen for years, before it was blasted into rubble by Israeli airstrikes and shelling in 15 months of war. But most were rounded up after the Hamas-led October 7, 2023 attack on Israel. The ceasefire's second phase would usher in negotiations to return the remaining living hostages among the 251 seized that day, and complete an Israeli military withdrawal before a final end to the war and the reconstruction of Gaza.

Argentina-born Iair Horn, 46, was taken captive together with his younger brother Eitan. Horn appeared to have lost considerable weight in captivity. "Now, we can breathe a little. Our Iair is home after surviving hell in Gaza. Now, we need to bring Eitan back so our family can truly breathe," Horn's family said in a statement.

The swap of the three Israelis for the 369 Palestinians allayed growing alarm that the ceasefire agreement could unravel before the end of the 42-day first stage of the truce pact in effect since January 19. In what has become known as Hostage Square

in Tel Aviv, people broke into cheers and tears after hearing the Red Cross was on its way to deliver the three to Israeli military forces.

Dekel Chen, a US-Israeli, Troufanov, a Russian Israeli, and Horn along with his brother Eitan were seized in Kibbutz Nir Oz, one of the communities near Gaza's border that were overrun by Hamas gunmen on October 7, 2023. Some of the dozens of masked Islamist Hamas fighters deployed at the handover site carried rifles seized from the Israeli military during the October attack, Hamas sources said. On the handover stage in Khan Younis, the hostages were made to give short statements in Hebrew and militants presented Horn with an hourglass and photo of another Israeli hostage still in Gaza and his mother, reading "time is running out (for the hostages still in Gaza)."

Troufanov was abducted with his mother, grandmother and girlfriend — all of whom were released during a brief November 2023 pause in hostilities. His father was killed in the attack on Nir Oz, one of the worst-hit communities, where one in four people either died or were taken hostage.

The Frontier Post

Dar departs for S Arabia
F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Finance Minister Mohammad Aurangzeb has left for Saudi Arabia to participate in the first high-level AIUla Conference for Emerging Market Economies, which begins tomorrow in the historic city of AIUla. The conference is being organized in collaboration with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the Saudi Ministry of Finance.

Four army personnel martyred, 15 terrorists killed in KP operations

F.P. Report

RAWALPINDI: The security forces have killed fifteen Khwarij in two separate engagements in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) province. On reported presence of Khwarij, an intelligence based operation was conducted by the security forces in general area Hathala, Dera Ismail Khan District, an Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) news release said on Saturday.

During the operation, own troops effectively engaged the khwarij's location and as result, nine khwarij including their ring leaders HVT Farman Saqib, Kharji Amanullah Toori, Khwarij Saeed Liaqat and Khwarij Bilal were sent to hell. The killed khwarij were involved in numerous terrorist activities in the area and were highly wanted by the Law Enforcement Agencies.

In another operation conducted in general area Miran Shah, North Waziristan District, six khwarij were effectively neutralized by the security forces.

However, during intense fire exchange, Lieutenant Muhammad Hassaan Arshaf (age: 21 years, resident of District Lahore) leading his troops from front, fought gallantly and embraced Shahadat along with his three men. The three soldiers who paid the ultimate sacrifice include Naib Subedar Muhammad Bilal (age: 39 years, resident of District Dera Ismail Khan), Sepoy Farhat Ullah (age: 27 years, resident of District Lakki Marwat) and Sepoy Himat Khan (age: 29 years, resident of District Mohmand).

"Sanitization operations are being conducted to eliminate any other Kharji found in the area as the security forces of Pakistan are determined to wipe out the menace of terrorism and such sacrifices of our brave men further strengthen our resolve," it added.

President Asif Ali Zardari and Prime

Funeral prayer of Lt Hassan offered

F.P. Report

LAHORE: The funeral prayer of Lieutenant Muhammad Hassan Ashraf Shaheed (age 21, resident of District Lahore), who embraced martyrdom while valiantly defending the motherland in Miran Shah, North Waziristan District, was solemnly offered at Lahore Garrison.

The Honourable Prime Minister of Pakistan, Mian Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif, along with the Defence Minister, Information Minister, senior serving military and civil officials, and relatives of the Shaheed, attended the funeral to pay their respects. In his statement, the Prime Minister remarked that "this noble sacrifice serves as yet another resplendent example of the unwavering dedication and bravery of our valiant sons, who willingly lay down their lives for the sovereignty and defence of our beloved homeland. The entire nation stands united in unwavering solidarity with our Armed Forces." Lieutenant Muhammad Hassan Ashraf Shaheed will be laid to rest with full military honours, in recognition of his supreme sacrifice for the nation.

Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif on Saturday praised the security forces officers and personnel for their successful operation against Fitna al-Khwarij terrorists in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. The president and the prime minister appreciated the security forces for their professional capabilities and by sending 15 Khwarij to hell in two different operations in Dera Ismail Khan and North Waziristan districts.

They paid tribute to four martyred security personnel including Lt. Muhammad Hassaan Arshaf Shaheed who laid down their lives during the operation. The president and prime minister prayed for the high ranks of the shaheed security personnel and expressed condolences with the bereaved families.

The president said the nation would always remember the sacrifices of its valiant shuhada, and praised their passion of patriotism and bravery, President Secretariat Press Wing said in a press release. The president also reiterated the unflinching national resolve to continue operations till complete elimination of Khwarij terrorists.

The prime minister paid tribute to

shaheed Lt. Muhammad Hassaan Arshaf, Naib Subedar Muhammad Bilal, Sepoy Farhatullah and Sepoy Himat Khan who laid down their lives while fighting bravery during the operation, PM Office Media Wing said in a press release.

The prime minister said he along with the entire nation were proud of their shuhada and their families. Expressing resolve, the prime minister said that they would not let terrorists to succeed in their nefarious designs and to disrupt peace in the country. He commended that the officers and jawans of Pakistan armed forces were defending and protecting the country round the clock without caring for their lives.

Chairman Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) Bilawal Bhutto Zardari has commended the security forces for successfully eliminating 15 terrorists in two separate intelligence-based operations in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

According to a press release issued by the Media Cell Bilawal House, Chairman PPP said that the security forces' operations against terrorists are a testament to the unwavering resolve of the Pakistani nation.

CM links KP's peace with Afghanistan

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Ali Amin Khan Gandapur, hosted the second consultative session titled "National Unity Against Terrorism" at the Chief Minister's House Peshawar on Saturday. The meeting, convened under the directive of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) founder Imran Khan, aimed to foster national unity against terrorism, seek sustainable solutions to national issues, and deliberate on establishing peace.

Leaders from various political and religious parties across the country attended the session. Participants emphasized that peace in Pakistan is contingent upon stability in Afghanistan; therefore, government-level negotiations with Afghanistan should commence promptly to address terrorism effectively.

It resolved that political and religious parties would collaborate to promote sectarian harmony, recognizing that establishing peace is paramount and urgently needed. While acknowledging that the Kurram district issue is regional, attendees



warned it could escalate into a national concern, necessitating serious measures for a lasting resolution. The provincial government's efforts, particularly those of the Chief Minister, in addressing the Kurram issue were commended.

Participants called on the government to ensure the supremacy of the constitution and the rule of law, and to prevent human rights violations nationwide. The meeting concluded that national reconciliation and political stability are essential for peace, prosperity, and economic develop-

ment. To this end, a committee will be formed to engage all political parties.

The Chief Minister and the Information Advisor were praised for organizing the consultative session on critical national matters. Such meetings are expected to lay a strong foundation for sustainable peace, the eradication of terrorism, and the promotion of national reconciliation. There is a need to conduct similar activities at the district level nationwide, with the Milli Yakejhti Council pledging full support to the provincial government in this endeavor.

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Sindh cabinet approves upper age relaxation for govt jobs

KARACHI (APP): Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah, presiding over a cabinet meeting, approved the Relaxation of Upper Age Limit Rules, and passed two bills, Sindh Civil Courts (Amendment) Bill 2025 and Sindh Universities and Institutes Laws (Amendment) Bill returned by the Governor with his observations.

Provincial ministers, advisors, special assistants, acting Chief Secretary Musadik Khan, and concerned secretaries attended the meeting, held here at CM House on Saturday.

After thorough deliberations and discussions, the Sindh Cabinet approved the Sindh Civil Servants, Relaxation of Upper Age Limit, Rules and directed the Services, General Administration, and Coordination Department (SGA&CD) to notify the new rules, which grant significant upper age relaxations for candidates applying for government jobs.

According to the cabinet decision, the general upper age relaxation applies to various categories of candidates. Government Servants with two years of Continuous Service will be eligible for up to five years of relaxation, to be granted by the respective

Administrative Department.

General Candidates will be entitled to up to two years of relaxation by the Administrative Department and up to five years by the SGA&CD.

Widows or Children of Deceased Civil Servants means those whose parents died during service will also be eligible for up to five years of relaxation, granted by the Administrative Department.

Persons with Disabilities, Divorced Women, and Widows will also be entitled to up to five years of relaxation, granted by the Administrative Department.

Additionally, widows and divorced women must present relevant certificates, such as a death certificate (for widows) or a divorce certificate (for divorced women), at the time of applying for age relaxation.

Under Rule-5, upper age relaxation for general candidates will be granted based on compelling reasons and sound justifications. These reasons may include medical issues, the death of parents or a spouse, natural calamities, delays in appointments, recruitment bans, and other significant circumstances. To assess these cases, special committees will be constituted.

Recognizing prolonged delays in recruitment and the overwhelming number of applications, the Sindh government has approved a blanket relaxation of up to five years beyond the maximum age limit prescribed in the appointment or recruitment rules. This relaxation applies across all departments, except for the Police and posts filled through the Combined Competitive Examination (CCE) conducted by the Sindh Public Service Commission (SPSC). This relaxation will remain in effect for an initial period of two years, starting from January 1, 2025, to December 31, 2026.

Sindh Civil Courts (Amendment) Bill 2025: The cabinet was told that a recent amendment bill passed by the assembly has been returned by the Sindh Governor with observation regarding the jurisdiction of the Sindh High Court.

The Governor expressed reservations, citing Article 175(2) of the Constitution of Pakistan, which states that courts can only exercise jurisdiction conferred by law. He emphasised that the SHC's original jurisdiction, derived from Clause 9 of the Letters Patent of 1866, allows it to hear civil cases exceeding a specified pecuniary

value within Karachi. The Sindh Civil Courts Ordinance, 1962, grants original jurisdiction to District Courts but does not override the SHC's jurisdiction.

After thorough discussion, the cabinet passed the bill, asserting that the proposed Bill of 2025 does not violate Article 175 of the Constitution. The Bill aligns with the Sindh Civil Courts Ordinance, 1962, which has been amended multiple times without prior objections.

The Cabinet further argued that the backlog of cases at the SHC is overwhelming, with only a few benches hearing civil suits. In contrast, district courts have a larger pool of judges, which could facilitate quicker resolutions. The judgment in C.P. No. 5913 of 2018 (Ghulam Asghar Pathan case) also highlighted the excessive burden on the SHC and recommended redistributing caseloads.

Regarding judicial expertise, the Cabinet pointed out that maritime matters remain under the SHC's jurisdiction, while intellectual property cases are handled by specialized tribunals and banking matters are dealt with by dedicated banking courts. The provincial legislature enacted the amendment as a remedial measure to provide swift

and cost-effective justice.

The cabinet was told that the provincial assembly has passed the Sindh Universities and Institutes Laws (Amendment) Bill, which expands the eligibility criteria for Vice Chancellor appointments in public sector universities. This bill was initially proposed by the Universities and Boards Department through the Search Committee and underwent extensive deliberation before receiving Provincial Cabinet approval on December 4, 2024. After further review and modifications by the Standing Committee, the Provincial Assembly passed the bill on January 31, 2025.

Upon submission for assent, the Sindh Governor raised objections, particularly concerning the removal of the PhD requirement for Vice Chancellor candidates. The Governor also referenced the guidelines of the Federal Higher Education Commission (HEC), which stipulate that Vice Chancellors should be distinguished academicians, preferably with a PhD.

It was pointed out during the discussion that the original bill proposed by the U&B Department, candidates

must hold a Master's degree, preferably a PhD, in the relevant field, along with 15 years of experience in academia, civil society, research, or leadership roles, as well as a distinguished record in research and publication. The Standing Committee proposed amendments to clarify these experience requirements while retaining the same basic criteria which the assembly has passed.

The cabinet was informed that in the original bill, it was stated that a cadre officer selected as Vice Chancellor must resign from civil service. The Standing Committee amended this to specify that the officer must either resign or seek retirement from service, depending on the individual case which the assembly also passed.

It was also pointed out that the original bill did not specify an age limit. However, the Standing Committee amendment established that general candidates must be under 62 years of age, retired High Court judges must be under 63, and retired Supreme Court judges must be under 67, which the assembly passed.

The cabinet approved the bill and referred it to the assembly for necessary action.

JI Leader Assails Rising Crimes in Sindh

KARACHI (PPI): Jamaat-e-Islami Sindh General Secretary Muhammad Yousuf said on Saturday that kidnapping for ransom has turned into an organized business in the upper districts of Sindh, making both citizens and traders unsafe.

According to the party statement, Mr Yousuf noted that bandits from the riverine areas have become a source of income for urban criminals. The rising incidents of daylight abductions and robberies indicate a complete breakdown of law and order in the province.

He said that the advanced weapons in possession of those bandits were far much to those available to the police and Rangers, raising concerns about how such arms reach criminal elements. He remarked that in civilized societies, states ensure the security of their citizens.

However, in Pakistan,

despite people paying heavy taxes, they neither receive security nor see any improvement in the public treasury.

Yousuf pointed out that Sindh's culture once upheld respect for women, but in the current situation, women have become the most vulnerable segment of society. He criticized elected representatives who move around in government-provided luxury vehicles with police protocol while leaving the public at the mercy of ruthless criminals.

He further noted that due to the government's failure to control lawlessness, the wave of insecurity has reached Larkana, the hometown of the founder of the Pakistan Peoples Party. He cited a recent robbery incident in which two Hindu youths were shot and critically injured, warning that if the Sindh government does not take immediate action, this

wave of lawlessness could spread across the province.

Yousuf announced that Jamaat-e-Islami will stage a historic sit-in against organized crime on February 16 at the Shikarpur Kundan Bypass on the Indus Highway.

Addressing media restrictions, he accused the government of suppressing journalists' voices by misusing the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA). He reaffirmed Jamaat-e-Islami's support for press freedom and journalistic organizations opposing the law. He urged journalists to continue using their pens to fight against social injustices.

On this occasion, Jamaat-e-Islami's Provincial Deputy General Secretary Aftab Ahmed Malik, Badin district Ameer Engineer Syed Ali Mardan Shah Gilani, General Secretary Abdul Karim Muleedi, and Ali Gul Mansoori were also present.

KP, Sindh are now following Punjab CM's policies: Azma

LAHORE (APP): Punjab Information Minister Azma Bokhari has said that it is a welcome development that Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Sindh are following the progressive policies introduced by Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz in Punjab.

In a statement, she emphasized that the relief reaching people beyond Punjab is a testament to the effectiveness of her governance. Instead of targeting Maryam Nawaz with baseless criticism, opponents should direct their efforts toward addressing the issues faced by their own provinces, she added.

She highlighted that Punjab is witnessing an unprecedented transformation in the fields of agriculture, industry, and infrastructure, with Maryam Nawaz leading historic and groundbreaking reforms. The government is working diligently to establish Punjab as the country's true food basket by strengthening the agricultural sector.

Azma Bokhari also announced that, for the first time in Punjab's history, a historic Rs. 400 billion "Kisan Card Program" has been launched to support farmers. The initiative includes the distribution of Green Tractors, Super Seeders, and agricultural machinery on a rental basis, ensuring better access to modern farming tools.

Furthermore, she noted that Maryam Nawaz is committed to providing equal relief across all districts of Punjab. Under the "Ramazan Nigehban Program", essential food supplies will be delivered directly to the homes of deserving families, ensuring dignified support during the holy month.

The minister reaffirmed that Maryam Nawaz's vision and policies are entirely focused on the welfare and uplift of the common people.



KARACHI: Governor Sindh Kamran Khan Tessori meeting with High Commissioner of Bangladesh, Iqbal Hussain Khan at Governor House.

GPI to serve as milestone in development of agriculture: Kirmani

LAHORE (APP): Punjab Agriculture Minister Syed Ashiq Hussain Kirmani has said that under the Green Pakistan Initiative (GPI) farmers will have access to all agricultural facilities, including seeds, pesticides, fertilizers and modern agricultural machinery, all under one roof.

He said this while addressing a press conference here on Saturday. He said that the Cholistan region, once a desert, would now be transformed into fertile land, where farmers would be provided with agricultural inputs at government-regulated prices, along with high-tech machinery on rent.

He further said that Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif and Chief of Army Staff (COAS) General Asim Munir inaugurated the Green Pakistan Initiative (GPI) in Punjab (Cholistan). Under this initiative, Green Mall & Services Company, Smart

Agriculture Farms and agricultural research facilities have been established, fulfilling the vision of the Prime Minister and the Punjab Chief Minister.

A rental service for agricultural machinery would also be launched in every tehsil of Punjab, he added.

He said, "This mega program is a reflection of Punjab CM Maryam Nawaz Sharif's vision and will serve as a major milestone in the development of the agricultural sector."

On behalf of the Punjab Chief Minister, Provincial Minister for Agriculture & Livestock, Syed Ashiq Hussain Kirmani said, "In less than a year, the Punjab government has been implementing 80 projects across various departments, most of which are nearing completion." He credited the success of these initiatives to Maryam Nawaz Sharif's dynamic leadership.

Key agricultural projects include the Kisan Card, the Green Tractor Programme,

the solarization of agricultural tube wells and the provision of super seeders to combat smog.

These projects aim to bring revolutionary reforms in the agricultural sector and introduce modern technology to boost the national economy, yielding positive results, he said.

The provincial minister emphasized the importance of ensuring genetically resilient and climate-adaptive seeds, efficient irrigation systems and the use of modern agricultural machinery and said that these measures would increase per-acre crop yield and reduce losses.

He further said that to tackle food security challenges, there was an urgent need to introduce cooperative farming. For the first time in history, provincial, federal, and army institutions related to the agriculture sector are working together in a collaborative effort to achieve this goal, he maintained.

Encroachments to be removed across Karachi: Mayor

KARACHI (PPI): Karachi Mayor Barrister Murtaza Wahab has announced that encroachments will be removed from the city to improve traffic flow and facilitate pedestrians. During a visit to various areas, he directed officials to take immediate action against encroachments and ensure they do not re-emerge.

According to a statement by Mayor Karachi's office today, Wahab issued instructions to remove a temporary market near the Matric Board and stalls selling fruits and second-hand clothes on both sides of the Teen Hatti Bridge. He underscored that encroachments create hurdles for the public and affect the city's infrastructure.

He clarified that while the Pakistan Peoples Party does not support unemployment, businesses must adhere to regulations. Street vendors and stalls should operate only in designated areas. Emphasizing the importance of urban development, he reiterated that Karachi, as an international city, should have better roads, organized streets, parks, and playgrounds. Encroachments on roads within the jurisdiction of the Karachi Metropolitan Corporation (KMC) will be cleared.

The Mayor also shared that KMC is ready to offer business opportunities under public-private partnerships and will encourage individuals contributing to both business growth and urban development. On sports, Wahab expressed support for the Champions Trophy matches in Karachi, stating that such events uplift the morale of young people and provide them with opportunities to excel.

Six-day training course by PJA concludes

LAHORE (INP): The Punjab Judicial Academy (PJA) successfully concluded a six-day training course on "Understanding the Concepts of Medico-Legal & Autopsy and Arms & Ammunition" for judges of the district judiciary on Saturday.

The closing session was presided over by the Director General of Punjab Judicial Academy, Justice (Retd.) Sardar Ahmad Naehm. Notable attendees included Advisor and Director Admin Hafeez Ullah Khan, Director Program Mansoor Ahmad Khan, Director Research Bushra Zaman, Director Training Irum Ayaz, and Senior Instructors Mahmood Azam, Ayesha Khalid, and Muhammad Khalid Khan.

Addressing the participants, Justice (Retd.) Sardar Ahmad Naehm emphasized the judiciary's crucial role in upholding justice and interpreting the law impartially.

He stated, "Judges are the most responsible segment of society. They must uphold, interpret, and apply the law consistently and without bias. Only by fulfilling these responsibilities can they play a crucial role in protecting individual rights and restoring public trust in the legal system."

Scholar unveils groundbreaking research on AI security risks

F.P. Report

MALAKAND: Malik Zubair, an MPhil scholar at the University of Malakand's Department of Computer Science & IT, has successfully defended his research on the cybersecurity threats posed by Artificial Super Intelligence (ASI), proposing innovative solutions to counter these emerging risks.

Under the supervision of Dr. Siffat Ullah Khan, Malik Zubair's research explores the unprecedented challenges ASI presents, including existential risks, next-generation cyberattacks, regulatory voids, loss of human control, and ethical concerns. His work sheds light on the pressing need for stringent governance models to prevent unintended consequences arising from unchecked AI advancements.

During his defense, the scholar emphasized that existing cybersecurity frameworks are ill-equipped to handle ASI-driven threats, which could surpass human capabilities and operate beyond traditional control mechanisms. He argued that



without proactive countermeasures, the world could face an era of unpredictable digital security crises.

To address these vulnerabilities, Zubair proposed a series of strategic solutions. His recommendations include constrained optimization techniques to ensure AI systems function within ethical parameters, a Human-AI Empowerment (HAIE) model to reinforce human oversight, and Multi-Agent Reinforcement Learning (MARL) to develop self-regulating AI envi-

ronments. Additionally, he advocated for the implementation of kill switches, AI sandboxing techniques, and a comprehensive ethical and regulatory framework to safeguard against ASI-related risks.

The external examiner, Professor Dr. Muhammad Nawaz of IM Sciences, Peshawar, commended the research, describing it as a crucial contribution to the ongoing global discourse on AI security. He noted that as artificial intelligence rapidly evolves, research like

Zubair's is essential to shaping regulatory frameworks and ensuring AI development remains aligned with human interests.

With AI safety becoming an increasingly critical concern worldwide, Malik Zubair's work stands as a testament to the role academia can play in preempting technological risks. His research serves as a guiding framework for policymakers and cybersecurity experts striving to regulate AI before it surpasses human control.

DC reviews Ramazan bazaar preparations

LAHORE (APP): Deputy Commissioner (DC) Syed Musa Raza, chairing a meeting at his office on Saturday, reviewed the arrangements for setting up Ramazan bazaars across provincial capital.

The meeting was attended by Additional Deputy Commissioner General Muhammad Shojain Vistro, Director of Industries, Secretary of the Market Committee, and GM of Model Bazaar.

During the briefing, it was informed that ten model bazaars will be set up across Lahore during the holy month of Ramzan, with each tehsil hosting one model bazaar featuring 10 shops. Seven of these shops will offer essential goods such as fruits, vegetables, lentils, spices, and other items, while the remaining three will be dedicated to selling meat. The vendors will receive goods at wholesale prices, ensuring affordable rates for consumers.

The DC emphasized that the goods sold will be of high quality and that all items would adhere to the prices set by the Market Committee. Separate counters will be arranged for women, senior citizens, and general customers to ensure ease of shopping for all. Furthermore, the bazaars will be maintained with high standards of cleanliness, and adequate parking will be provided.

DC Syed Musa Raza instructed that all arrangements be completed by February 24th, ensuring the bazaars are ready before Ramadan begins.

Meanwhile, the DC conducted a visit to various locations in Tehsil Allama Iqbal Town to review the cleanliness and encroachment measures in Thokar Niaz Baig, Khanpur, and the surrounding areas of Sabzar.

MCL CO Shahid Abbas Kathia, Assistant Commissioner Allama Iqbal Town Muhammad Khawaja Umair, and other officials were present. The DC expressed frustration over the poor

cleanliness arrangements in Thokar Niaz Baig Service Lane and green belts. He instructed LWMC and WASA officials to immediately address the cleanliness issues. He emphasized that poor cleanliness would not be tolerated at any point.

The DC warned administrative officers that an effective monitoring system is essential for improving cleanliness operations. He urged shopkeepers to dispose of waste in designated bins and avoid throwing it on roads or green belts. Special cleanliness operations will be launched on main roads, streets, and neighborhoods, he said.

He also called for awareness walks and door-to-door campaigns to educate the public about cleanliness. He directed that goods will be seized, and fines imposed if encroachments persist despite warnings and notices. Model carts will soon be provided to street vendors free of charge to boost the local economy.

Chief Justice visits SOS village in Peshawar

PESHAWAR (INP): The Chief Justice of Pakistan (CJP), Justice Yahya Afridi, visited SOS village in Hayatabad Peshawar, an institution which his late father Umer Khan Afridi patronized all his life. The Chief Justice was accompanied by his wife.

The CJP was briefed by the Director of the Village Ms. Kokab Batool Qureshi. The SOS Peshawar is a Charity Organization funded through private donations. It currently houses around 121 children from various age groups up to 25-26 years.

The SOS Peshawar provides boarding facilities to orphans and abandoned children. In addition to providing quality education as well as technical skills, it also arranges marriages of children.

The Chief Justice and the madam interacted with the kids and took a keen interest in their routine activities.

They both shared lunch with the kids and encouraged them in their curricular and extra-curricular activities.

He mentored them to excel in their studies to become useful for themselves as well as for society.

He also lauded the role of the Director of the SOS and appreciated her keen interest in maintaining discipline on the campus as well as high standards of education and upkeep of the institution.

The Chief Justice assured the children and management of SOS Village that he would be available for them whenever needed.



PESHAWAR: Chief Justice of Pakistan Justice Yahya Afridi in a group photo with children and management of SOS Village in Hayatabad.

UBG demands safe, early recovery of abducted president of WC



F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: United Business Group, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa expressed concern over the abduction of president of the Waziristan Chamber Saifur Rehman

and customs officer.

UBG provincial leadership urged government and law enforcement agencies to take concrete steps for safe and early recovery of the kidnapped president of the Waziristan Chamber and customs official.

Ghazanfar Bilour, provincial chairman of the UBG and businessman forum leader, and Haji Muhammad Afzal, provincial general secretary of the UBG in a joint statement issued here on Saturday, said government and security institutions must utilize all resources to ensure protection and provision of a peaceful environment to the business community.

They went on to say that business community has played a pivotal role in economic stability and progress, if the state couldn't provide conducive and safe atmosphere so the flight of capital is already being rampant from the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and rest of businessmen will force to pack up business and industries from K-P and shift them other provinces.

UBG provincial leaders maintained that the incident of kidnapping of the Waziristan chamber president had created great unrest among the business community, essentially, this unfortunate act also an attempt and heinous conspiracy to sabotage peace-building efforts, initiated by government and law enforcement institutions.

Therefore, they urged government and law enforcement agencies to ensure safe and early recovery of the abducted president of the Waziristan Chamber and custom officer.



PESHAWAR: A delegation led by Mayor Mardan Himayat Ullah Khan meeting with Provincial Minister for Local Government Arshad Ayub Khan.

First-ever Endoscopic Ultrasound Symposium concluded

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The first-ever Endoscopic Ultrasound (EUS) Symposium in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa successfully concluded at Prime Teaching Hospital, Peshawar. Organized by the Gastroenterology Department of Peshawar Medical College, the symposium brought together national and international experts to discuss the latest advancements in EUS technology and its applications in modern medical practice.

The event featured distinguished gastroenterologists, including Dr. Maaz Bin Badshah (Shifa International Hospital), Dr. Christopher Ball (United Kingdom), Dr. Muslim Atiq (Shifa International Hospital), Dr. (R) Amjad Salamat, Dr. Muhammad Imran (Pakistan Kidney and Liver Institute, PKLI), Dr. Adeel ur Rehman (Aga Khan University Hospital), Dr. Bakht Biland, Dr. Nouman Khan and Dr. Shehzad Amir (UK).

Additionally, Dr. Arbab Muhammad Kashif Khan, Dr. Mian Shah Yousaf, and Dr. Noman Khan from the Department of Gastroenterology at Prime Teaching Hospital played a crucial role in organizing the symposium.

The symposium aimed to enhance healthcare professionals' expertise through expert lectures, live demonstrations, and hands-on training sessions. Renowned specialists emphasized the importance of incorporating advanced

endoscopic techniques into routine clinical practice to improve patient outcomes. Interactive sessions provided attendees with practical exposure to EUS, enhancing diagnostic accuracy and promoting minimally invasive procedures.

Speakers stressed the need for the optimal utilization of available endoultrasonic services in the country and called for increased training opportunities to enhance the diagnostic and therapeutic capabilities of healthcare professionals.

Chief Guest Dr. Mohammad Saleh emphasized the importance of knowledge sharing and the ethical responsibility of healthcare professionals to treat patients with compassion and professionalism.

The symposium concluded with the distribution of shields to the esteemed speakers in recognition of their valuable contributions to the field of gastroenterology.

The event marked a significant step forward in advancing endoscopic ultrasound services in KP, paving the way for improved patient care and professional development in the region.



PESHAWAR: A group photo of teachers with chief guest of 2-day training workshop.

Training workshop concluded

PESHAWAR (APP): A 2-day training titled "Equipping teachers to foster learning skills in students" was conducted by Post Secondary Education Reform Unit (PERU) under Higher Education Development Project (HEDP) of Higher Education Commission at HEC Regional Centre Peshawar in collaboration with QAC HED Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Training was attended by 42 college teachers from 11 colleges in KP.

The main objective of the training was to train teachers in information management skills, communication skills and problem solving skills.

Contents of the workshop had been prepared in the light of a national study conducted with undergraduate students which revealed serious learning gaps in students' skills' repertoire in the aforementioned areas.

Resource persons for the 2-day workshop were Prof. Dr. Kashif Suhail Malik, consultant IIUI Islamabad and Dr. Karim Ullah from IMSciences Peshawar.

The opening ceremony was graced by Dr. Imran Ullah Marwat (Director Quality Assurance HED KP), Nasir Shah DG HEC regional center Peshawar while the closing ceremony was graced by Prof. Dr. Shafiq ur Rehman, Advisor Quality Assurance HED KP Peshawar.

Teachers were equipped on three important learning skills through various activities. These teachers were directed to prepare students of their respective colleges in the mentioned skills.

Police arrest 13 suspects

PESHAWAR (APP): The City Police on Saturday claimed to have arrested a total of 13 suspects from different areas of provincial metropolises.

Faqirabad police arrested seven suspects Hamza, Qaiser, Afsar, Maqbool, Zakir, Waseem and Allah Dad. All confessed to their involvement in various crimes during initial investigation. Police recovered one Kalashnikov, one rifle, 1.5Kg of ice-drug, 1.2Kg of heroin, 1.4Kg of hashish, and pistol from their possession.

Similarly, Regi, Kotwali and Pishitakara police each arrested two suspects for theft and narcotics sales. Narcotics and stolen goods were recovered from the arrested suspects. Cases have been registered in respective police stations, while further investigation was underway.

KP CM launches motor vehicle automation system

PESHAWAR (APP): The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government has launched the Motor Vehicle Automation System under its online service platform, "Dastak." The inauguration ceremony took place at the Chief Minister's House in Peshawar, with Chief Minister Ali Amin Khan Gandapur as the chief guest.

The event was attended by the Speaker of the Provincial Assembly, cabinet members, and officials from the Excise Department.

Chief Minister Gandapur officially launched the Motor Vehicle Automation System, which digitizes processes such as vehicle registration, fee payments, ownership transfers, tax payments, and the issuance of universal number plates.

Initially piloted in September of the previous year, the system has already facilitated the registration of 13,229 vehicles, issuance of 71,654 vouchers, and completion of 6,437 ownership transfers, generating over 280 million rupees in revenue for the provincial government.

Additionally, 13,738 vehicles have been issued universal number plates through the system. The comprehensive rollout now extends these services province-wide.

This secure and efficient system aims to streamline motor vehicle services, reducing the need for citizens to visit offices for tasks like registration and fee payments.

By enabling online access to these services, the system enhances transparency, curbs corruption, and is expected to significantly boost provincial revenue. Moreover, it serves as a deterrent against vehicle theft and misuse.

During the ceremony, Chief Minister Gandapur also launched the Motor Vehicle Registration Smart Card. In his address, he commended the Excise Department for their efforts in implementing the digitization vision, emphasizing that such initiatives lead to greater transparency, improved departmental performance, and the elimination of corruption.

He highlighted that upon

assuming office, the government prioritized digitization across all departments, resulting in substantial progress in many areas.

The Chief Minister underscored the importance of maintaining organized and comprehensive databases, noting that the absence of data poses challenges for governance.

He stressed the need for prudent resource utilization to enhance revenue and expressed pride in the province's strides toward complete transparency.

He encouraged departments to work diligently and promote transparency, assuring that performance-based incentives would be provided.

Highlighting the government's achievements, Chief Minister Gandapur mentioned a 55% increase in revenue through transparency and better management, which facilitated the reinstatement of public welfare projects like the Sehat Card.

Effective monitoring has also resulted in annual savings of 11 billion rupees in the Sehat Card program.

NSPP and NIPAs playing a vital role: Safdar Sohail



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 said that Mid-Career Management Course (MCMC) holds a unique and indispensable position in the professional training of the public

servants. 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.

The 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.

Turkish President's visit to Pakistan: A milestone in bilateral relations widely hailed in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

PESHAWAR (APP): Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's historic two-day visit to Pakistan has been widely hailed as a momentous occasion in the strengthening of ties between the two nations, with significant praise from political, economic, and international experts, particularly in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

The visit is seen as a significant step in advancing the strategic partnership and fostering deeper economic cooperation between Pakistan and Türkiye, two brotherly Muslim countries that have shared strong historical ties.

The visit has been marked by high-level discussions and the signing of

several key agreements aimed at enhancing cooperation across various sectors.

According to Manzoorul Haq, former Pakistani Ambassador, Pakistan-Türkiye relations have always been deep-rooted, but President Erdogan's visit has elevated these ties to new heights.

"The historic visit was characterized by extensive dialogues at the highest government levels and the signing of multiple agreements which solidify the commitment of both nations to broaden their economic horizons," he said.

The Turkish President received a grand welcome upon his arrival at

Islamabad's Nur Khan Airbase, where he was greeted by Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari, Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif, cabinet members, and other senior officials.

Manzoor noted that the welcome ceremony was nothing short of impressive, including a 21-gun salute, a fighter jet flyby, and traditional performances, highlighting the strength of the bond between the two countries.

At the heart of this historic visit was the 7th session of the Pakistan-Türkiye High-Level Strategic Cooperation Council (HLSCC), which was co-chaired by Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif

and President Erdogan.

Established in 2009, the HLSCC serves as the most elevated mechanism for institutionalizing cooperation between Pakistan and Türkiye.

He underscored that the visit resulted in the signing of 24 agreements and memoranda of understanding (MoUs) across a range of sectors, including trade, agriculture, energy, defence, education, healthcare, and more.

One of the key outcomes of the visit was the mutual commitment to significantly increase the trade volume between the two nations.

Manzoor expressed optimism, noting that both leaders set a target of reaching

\$5 billion in annual trade, up from the current \$1.5 billion. This expanded trade cooperation is expected to benefit both nations economically, with Pakistan poised to gain from Turkish investment in sectors like industrial production through the establishment of a special economic zone in Pakistan.

Professor Dr. Adnan Sarwar Khan, former Chairman of the International Relations Department at the University of Peshawar, highlighted the shared regional perspectives between Pakistan and Türkiye, particularly concerning issues such as Kashmir and terrorism.

He emphasized that

President Erdogan praised Pakistan's sacrifices in the war on terror, reaffirming Türkiye unwavering support for Pakistan in its fight against terrorism in all its forms.

"Turkey has consistently supported Pakistan's stance on Kashmir and vice versa on Cyprus, making the bond between the two countries even more stronger," Dr. Sarwar Khan said.

Dr. Naem Khattak, former Chairman of the Economics Department at the University of Peshawar, expressed optimism about the bilateral trade prospects after this historic visit of Turkish President.

He noted that the upgraded trade agreement

will likely bolster Pakistan's economy and open new avenues for business at Middle East.

The establishment of a special economic zone in Pakistan, alongside increased Turkish investment, is poised to have a positive impact on the country's industrial and economic landscape.

Experts further opined that the visit would significantly enhance Türkiye's influence in South Asia, contributing to regional stability, and providing Pakistan with new opportunities to expand its trade network in the Middle East.

The strengthened bilateral relations are expected to attract considerable invest-

ment from both sides and offer a new dimension of economic growth for both nations.

This visit, considered a great success by all stakeholders, is seen as a new chapter in the long-standing partnership between Pakistan and Türkiye.

The agreements, MoUs and initiatives launched during this historic visit are set to deepen the cooperation between the two countries and contribute to the overall peace and prosperity of the region.

The hope is that this milestone will continue to shape a bright future for Pakistan-Türkiye relations and enhance the role both countries play on the global stage.



In brief

Three killed in road accidents F.P. Report

MUZAFARGARH: At least three persons lost their lives and one sustained injuries in separate road accidents in Layyah. According to Rescue officials, a motorcycle collided with a tractor-trolley in Jaman Shah on Ladhana road. As a result, 50-year-old Allah Wasaya and 45-year-old Tahir, both residents of Chak No. 160 TDA, died on the spot. A young man, Muhammad Umar, was injured in the incident. Eyewitnesses said that the accident occurred as motorcycle slipped on the road. Rescue 1122 handed over the bodies to the families after completing legal action. In another tragic incident near Chak No. 230/TDA in Fatehpur, a speeding trailer ran over a motorcycle rider, killing 17-year-old Adil Raza on the spot. Rescue 1122 shifted the body to the Tehsil Headquarters Hospital. The trailer driver fled while police took the vehicle into custody and initiated legal proceedings.

10 power pilferers held F.P. Report

SARGODHA: The Faisalabad Electric Supply Company (FESCO) on Saturday apprehended 10 power pilferers. According to a spokesperson, Sub-Divisional Officers (SDOs) along with other staff conducted operations against power theft in Tariq Abad, Noori gate area, Lahore road, Queen chowk and Muhammadi colony and arrested 10 power thieves including Ghulam Rasool, Shah Saleem, Mujtaba Shah, Ahmed Shair, Noor Ullah, Amir Khan, Asmatullah, Ghulam Baqir, Shafique and Waqar in electricity theft. Further investigation was underway. Meanwhile, police unearthed a kite making unit in Tariq Abad and seized a huge quantity of kites here on Saturday. A police team raided the unit and arrested two people, identified as Shehzad and Aslam. Police recovered four machines, four bags of raw material, two bags of plastic 'dana' and three bags of plastic roll, etc. A case has been registered against the accused. Meanwhile, District police on Saturday arrested 13 criminals during a crackdown across the district. A spokesman said that police teams from different police stations raided and arrested Nadeem, Naseer, Nouman, Naveed, Nasrullah, Muhammad Ashfaq, Muhammad Aslam, Tariq, Waqas, Walced and others. Police recovered 2kg hashish, 2kg opium, 231 litres of liquor, nine pistols, nine guns and 222 bullets. Further investigation was underway.

Operation against electricity theft

NAWABSHAH (INP): A joint team of WAPDA officials, Police and Rangers conducted massive action against electricity theft, illegal connections and recovery of electricity dues in different areas of city including Jamshed Colony, Ghulam Hyder Shah Colony, Rao Hanif colony and Mumtaz colony. During the joint operation illegal connections were disconnected and huge amount was recovered in arrears. Team officials said that the action was initiated with the objective of taking strict measures against electricity theft and preventing national loss. Officials said that operations would remain in process till objective is achieved. Officials said that during operation Rs 625000 were recovered from defaulters while 17 connections were disconnected and 4 persons were arrested for recovery of pending dues.



LANDI KOTAL: Labourers and daily wagers holding a protest in favour of their demands at Torkham border.

Panama needs more Torrijos

Rehman Yar

DONALD Trump is getting lost in the lust to dominate the world within a year. He proclaimed taking back the Panama Canal which was handed over to Panamanians after a treaty was signed between the United States and Omar Torrijos in 1977. In his inaugural speech, President Trump claimed that Panama had broken a promise to remain neutral, alleging that China is operating the Panama Canal. He said that we didn't give it to China, we gave it to Panama, and we're taking it back.

How can you take it back when it wasn't even yours? If Panama had the broken promise then what about the promise that the US has made in the treaty of not intervening in the Panama Canal anymore? But why is the Panamanian Canal important? Why does America want it back and feel threatened about China's operating in the canal?

Panama Canal is one of the world's most important shipping trade routes. It serves as a vital link between the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, enabling ships to avoid the lengthy and hazardous voyage around Cape Horn at the southern tip of South America. The canal's strategic significance extends beyond economic benefits and encompasses national security, defense capabilities, diplomatic relations, and logistical resilience. Panama was overall under the influence of the US and other foreign corporations. They were depriving the people of Panama of their rights and were utilizing the resources for their benefit until Omar Torrijos took power in 1968 as a dictator and changed the history of Panama.

Panamanian families were well rewarded for their support to the US. A dozen

times US intervened in Panamanian independence. But 1968 was the year that changed the history of Panama. Torrijos was highly regarded by the Panamanian middle and lower classes.

He earned a reputation for listening to the dispossessed who were deprived of homes, lands, and property. He did many reforms in his tenure from 1968 to 1981 and one of his most popular and remarkable achievements was his 'Panama Canal Treaty'. He signed a treaty with Jimmy Carter in 1977 in which the stipulation was that Panama Canal would be handed over to the Panama by the year 2000. It was signed and the control was transferred from the US to Panama.

It was a big achievement in terms of sovereignty, national security, and economic control. For the first time in history, Panama was not a puppet of Washington. He was determined to win freedom from the US without forging alliances with the United States' enemies. He was simply saying that Panama has its rights to sovereignty over its people, its land, and the waterway and these rights were valid. He's still remembered as 'Hero of Panama'. He was later assassinated in a suspicious plane crash.

However, Panama's current President has rejected the plan of Donald Trump and said Panama "is and will remain" in the country's hands. It was and is sovereign and no country is allowed to intervene. Trump should remember that the treaty was signed by the US president himself. Breaking the treaty would be inadequate. Panamanians have the privilege to utilize their resources. To face the conspiracies of Trump, Panama needs more Torrijos to secure the Canal's sovereignty.

The writer is student of Public Policy at Government College University, Lahore.

Terrorism to be eliminated at any cost: Mir Ali

F.P. Report

HUB: Provincial Minister for Agriculture and Co-operative Mir Ali Hassan Zehri, grieve over the incident of terrorists in Harnai to crush the innocent miners' vehicle. In his condemnation, he said that the incident is the operation of the cowardly enemies and that it is highly condemnable by terrorists to target innocent coal miners.

The minister strongly condemned the testimony of more than 10 miners and injuries to several miners in the incident, saying that the incident was the operation of the cowardly enemies, which aims to destroy the law and order situation and the peace of the province and the country to destabilize. He said that the incidents of terrorism in Pakistan are aimed at spreading chaos in the country.

In his statement, Mir Ali Hassan Zehri expressed his

condolences to the relatives of the innocent martyr miners and said that the entire Pakistani nation is equally involved in the suffering of the martyrs and the cowardly terrorist elements involved in the incident will be brought to the role of disbelievers soon.

Mir Ali Hassan Zehri said that the terrorists will be chased to the last and they will be completely cleansed. Very soon the miscreants involved in the incident will be brought to the disbelievers. He said that the cowardly incidents of terrorism are aimed at spreading chaos in the public and weakening Pakistan towards political and economic stability which will not be allowed to succeed.

On the other hand, they are fighting the terrorists with determination and will soon bring these cowardly terrorists to their end. In his statement, he said that the cowardly enemies cannot shake our determination

with such actions. Every drop of blood of the martyrs will be calculated. Mir Ali Hassan Zehri said that till the end of the last terrorist, the resolve of the security forces and the nation will not be diminished. Pak forces and other security forces stand day and night in the protection of the homeland and stand like a lead wall in front of the terrorists.

Mir Ali Hassan Zehri said that the whole nation is with its security agencies till the end of terrorists from the country and will not hesitate to achieve this goal. He reiterated that every attempt by the enemy elements to sabotage the peace and development of Pakistan would be thwarted. He prayed that May ALLAH gives martyrs the high place in Jannat-ul-Firdos and be able to endure this great tragedy with determination and fastest recovery of injured.

Sports festival for inmates organized in Kohat

F.P. Report

KOHAT: The district administration Kohat has under the Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Program 'Awami Agenda' organized a one-day Sports Festival in District Jail Kohat. Commissioner Kohat, Division Syed Motasim Billah Shah was the chief guest while Deputy Commissioner Kohat Abdul Akram Chitrali was the guest of honour.

The festival beside others was also attended by the District Sports Officer Kohat, Commissioner Kohat Division on this occasion

also inaugurated the newly constructed Chakra Office which includes Barber Shop, Library and IT Office. He appreciated the establishment of the library and promised to provide more books in it so that the prisoners can benefit from the light of knowledge.

Competitions of Volleyball, Tug-of-War, Musical Chairs and other exciting games were the part of the said Sports Festival. The inmates participated in these competitions with enthusiasm and excelled. The winning players were encouraged by giving trophies and prizes.

Commissioner Kohat Division and Deputy

Commissioner Kohat appreciated the positive activities in the Jail and said that the prisoners will be provided with all the basic rights as per the law. They further said that the prisoners should use their time positively so that they can play their role in the society as a useful citizen after release.

Commissioner Kohat also promised to installation of water filtration plant in the Jail which will ensure the supply of clean and quality drinking water to the prisoners. Superintendent District Jail Kohat thanked all the guests and presented them shields.

Catch up vaccination from 17th planned F.P. Report

LOWER DIR: A meeting chaired by Deputy Commissioner Dir Lower Muhammad Arif Khan, marked the beginning of the Bag Catch-up Vaccination Campaign, set to take place from February 17 to 28.

The campaign aims at vaccinating approximately 500,000 children under the age of 5 who have not received vaccinations for various reasons. These children will be protected against 12 dangerous diseases through the efforts of 130 EPI Health Technicians and 40 District Supervisors. Health department teams will visit villages and set up specific vaccination points to facilitate the process.

Arif Khan emphasized the importance of deploying expert health staff, particularly in remote areas, to ensure the campaign's success. He also stressed the need for social mobilization and awareness campaigns through various media channels. The DC took the opportunity to recognize the outstanding performance of District Health Officer Dr. Muhammad Nisar, Polio Incharge, DS. Viz, Polio Field Workers, and Line Officer Zahid Hussain, presenting them with certificates of appreciation.

Anti-Canal Action Committee hold protest F.P. Report

LARKANA: Under the management of the anti-canal action committee of the joint platform of settler organizations against the extraction of 6 canals, a protest march was held in Larkana from Sheikh Zayed Chowk in Larkana to the press club.

On this occasion President Sindh United Party (SUP) Syed Zain shah has addressed to rally that we have gathered on the call of various forums including the Board, Chamber of Agriculture, Sindh United Party, while on the call of all these forums, we have come together to clarify that the Sindh enemy forces have taken approval to illegally draw a canal from the Indus River on July 8, 2024, and the rulers have made a deal with Sindh.

Sports gala 2025 started: The first sports gala 2025 was started by the University of Larkana in Larkana which was inaugurated by the chief guest and the political secretary of the People's Party MP Jamil Soomro, the vice-chancellor of the university Professor Muhammad Usman Careo, the special assistant to the Chief Minister of Sindh Khair Muhammad Sheikh, the mayor of Larkana Anwar Ali Lahar, the chairman of the district council Ijaz Ali Laghari and others.

PP Amir promoted F.P. Report

KARAK: District Public Prosecutor Karak Amir Mahmood has been promoted to Grade 19. The Law Department has issued a notification. The provincial government has promoted District Attorney Karak Advocate Amir Mahmood to Grade 19.

Laborers reject restriction at Torkham border

F.P. Report

LANDI KOTAL: Laborers and daily wagers condemned what they said was an unnecessary restraint policy imposed by the custom at their trade on Torkham border, in a protest demo held in Torkham Bazaar on Saturday.

Scores of local laborers carrying black flags and chanted slogans in favor of their demands marched till immigration office. Speaking on the occasion their leaders including Hazrat Salam Shinwari, Farman Shinwari and others said that because of short of source of income, thousands of local tribesmen crossed the border to Afghanistan for business purpose to earn for their livelihood; however the custom officials seized the trading commodities, they brought it from across the border.

Due to constrained policy of the custom at the crossing thousands of families have been compelled to starve, they added. The protestors demanded of the custom high to have mercy on them and ease restrictions and permit them to cross the border. They threatened that if their problem was not addressed then they would initiate indefinite agitation against it.

DC inaugurates trees plantation drive: Deputy Commissioner (DC), Khyber planted a sibling in tehsil compound, Landi Kotal last day by formally

inaugurated the billion plus tree plantation campaign in Khyber.

In this connection a simple gathering was held in the compound that was attended by DC, Khyber Capt(Retd) Bilal Shahid as a chief guest besides Additional DC Ihsanullah, Additional DC (Finance) Gul Nawaz Afridi, Division Forest Officer Zahid Mehsud, Assistant Commissioners Landi Kotal and Jamrud Adnan Mumtaz and Dr Amir Zeb respectively, Station House Officer (SHO) Adnan Afridi, officials of forest, civil Defense and other line departments.

Under the banner of billion plus tree plantation drive, the district administration with support of the Forest Department will plant siblings across the Khyber and all line departments including Local Government, Education, Police, Agriculture will participate in the campaign.

According to the Forest Department various kinds of plants have been supplied to tehsil Landi Kotal that will be distributed among the representatives of Local Government and youths to plant it. DC, Khyber in his public message urged the tribesmen to actively participate in the plantation campaign, assist the Administration and Khyber Forest Division in the welfare activity to plant as much as siblings in the area and make the drive successful.

Vacant teachers' posts to be filled by ETEA in Dir

F.P. Report

LOWER DIR: The elementary and secondary education department Lower Dir has issued its schedule of teachers' recruitments through educational testing and evaluation agency (ETEA) in the district.

Talking to media on Saturday, the district education officer male Inayatullah Khan said the department had to fill a total of 217 vacant posts of primary school teachers (PSTs), 15 of theology teachers (TTs), 18 of Arabic teachers (ATs), 14 of physical education teachers (PETs), 13 of drawing masters (DM), 70 of certified teachers (CT), 16 of Qari and 15 posts of CT information technology (CTIT) through ETEA. The DEO said that 50 posts of PST were to be filled in the Balambat Tehsil, 50 in Adenzai, 25 in Khall, 50 in Lal Qila, 19 in Munda, 32 in Samarbagh.

Meanwhile, the E&SE department Lower Dir promoted a total of 72 teachers of various cadres to the post of secondary school teachers (SSTs) in pay scale 16.

The promoted teachers including Senior Certified Teachers (SCT), Senior Drawing Masters (SDM), Senior Qari, senior theology teachers (STT), senior Arabic teachers (SAT) and senior primary school teachers (SPST) were directed to take over the charge of their duties at government high and higher secondary schools mentioned in the orders. The district education officer male Inayatullah Khan told local journalists at his office that the vacant posts in schools would soon be filled.

Killer arrested: The Khall police has arrested a killer identified as Hazrat Shah here the other day for killing his stepmother brutally. Talking to local journalists, the SHO Khall said the accused had killed his stepmother and was wanted by police for a long time. He said that a police team led by him traced the case and arrested the accused who confessed to the crime.

The Lower Dir district police officer Saleem

Abbas Kulachi appreciated the Khall police for arresting the killer. The DPO asked the local public to extend their cooperation to the police for making the society peaceful.

Meanwhile, the DPO Salim Abbas Kulachi presided over a police 'darbar' at the Balambat police lines on Friday, which was attended by police officials from different parts of the district. The DPO Lower Dir Saleem Abbas Kulachi and SP Investigation Rashid Ahmad Khan listened to the problems and complaints of the police personnel and issued necessary orders for their immediate resolution.

Addressing the darbar, DPO Saleem Abbas Kulachi said that the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Police were fighting on the frontline against terrorism and many personnel had sacrificed their lives in this struggle. He said that the police force was like a family and all possible resources were being utilized to solve the problems of the personnel and keep their morale high.

Mentally retarded woman reunites with family

F.P. Report

LOWER DIR: A missing woman from Karachi reunited with her family after 18 months. The woman identified as Ajmina 52, a mentally retarded, went missing from Karachi 18 months ago. She reached the Samarbagh area after travelling from Karachi and staying at different places for the last 18 months.

One Ibrar Nawaz, a citizen of Samarbagh found the woman who did not tell anything about her identity and relatives. Ibrar contacted a local journalist Liaquat Seemab Durrani who made the matter viral on his social media page.

Syed Zameen, a resident of Badwan in Lower Dir, confirmed that the woman belonged to his family. Later, the woman was handed over to her relatives thus she reunited with her loved ones.

Teachers' promotion: The elementary and secondary

education department Lower Dir issued the orders of promotion of 72 teachers of various cadres to the post of secondary school teachers (SSTs) in pay scale 16. The promoted teachers including Senior Certified Teachers, Senior Drawing Masters, Senior Qari, senior theology teachers, senior Arabic teachers and senior primary school teachers were directed to take over the charge of their duties at government high and higher secondary schools mentioned in the orders. The district education officer male Inayatullah Khan told local journalists at his office that the vacant posts in schools would soon be filled.

Meanwhile, the E&SE department Lower Dir also issued the schedule of teachers' recruitments in the district. According to official data, the department had 217 posts vacant in primary schools, 15 of theology teachers, 18 of Arabic teachers, 14 of physical education teachers, 13 of drawing masters, 70 of certified teachers, 16 of Qari and 15 of CT information technology, would be filled through the educational testing and evaluation agency (ETEA). Sources said that 50 posts of PST were to be filled in the Balambat Tehsil, 50 in Adenzai, 25 in Khall, 50 in Lal Qila, 19 in Munda, 32 in Samarbagh.

Killer arrested: The Khall police claimed to have arrested a killer identified as Hazrat Shah for killing his stepmother brutally. Talking to local journalists, the SHO Khall said the accused had killed his stepmother and was wanted by police for a long time. He said that a police team led by him traced the case and arrested the accused who confessed to the crime. The Lower Dir district police officer Saleem Abbas Kulachi appreciated the Khall police for arresting the killer.

Former tehsel nazim supports Salarziwal

F.P. Report

BUNER: District Naib Amir of JUI former Nazim Tehsil Council Daggar Maulana Saeedur Rehman Mufakir along with Salarziwal elders Hafiz Sadique and Maulana Ali Rehman have held a press conference on the problems and difficulties faced by Salarziwal.

Maulana Mufakir has said that the link roads to Salarziwal are in dilapidated condition, especially the road from Gerari to Jowar and Kohay are in bad conditions while the RHC

buildings were yet to reconstructed which demolished in the previous government. He lamented that people are deprived of health facilities on the name of reconstruction. He demanded 1122 center at Jowar which is very important in Salarziwal, where marble mining is going on a lot and incidents happen all the time. He claimed that section 4 for marble zone was imposed over agriculture land in 2014 and occupation started in 2024 which is unlawful and also against the

supreme court verdict as marble zone can not be built over agri land. He claimed this pice of land also unsuitable for marble zone because of lack of water in Salarziwal. So the government should not harass the people of Salarziwal by force, he demanded.

He further said the issue of Chor Banda, land should be decided as per courts verdicts in favour of land owners in a safe manner so that the risk of possible conflict between the illegal occupants and real owners avoided.



KYIV: Paramedics treating a wounded man in his home after Russian shelling as the Russia-Ukraine war continues in Kostiantynivka, Ukraine.

Russia is able to fight on in Ukraine for another year

LONDON (Reuters): Russia has what it needs to fight on in Ukraine for at least another year and retains the battlefield initiative, but is struggling to replace its destroyed tanks, experts at a leading security research organisation said on Wednesday.

In what has become a war of attrition now nearing its three-year mark, both sides are sustaining heavy casualties as Moscow's forces slowly but steadily advance at a time when the scale and nature of any future US military aid to Kyiv remains unclear under US President Donald Trump. For now at least, Russia is in a stronger position than Ukraine on the battlefield despite Kyiv seriously reducing the once formidable Russian Black Sea Fleet's room for manoeuvre, experts at the London-based International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) said.

"(With) attrition being such an important factor on land Russia has the initiative and Ukraine is fighting a defensive land battle," said IISS senior land warfare analyst Ben Barry. "Without any ceasefire the most likely contour of the war over the next few months is more of the same. More bloody attrition on land with very heavy casualties on both sides. If Russia wishes to prolong the war I judge it has the potential human, equipment and logistical resources to continue to do so through the rest of

this year." Trump has said he wants to end the war as fast as possible though it's not yet clear how he intends to do that. Ukraine says it needs both European and US help to ensure its security. Russia says it wants full control of four Ukrainian regions it has claimed as its own, something Kyiv rejects, and for Ukraine to be kept out of NATO. Russia and Ukraine accuse each other of not being serious about peace negotiations.

In its annual assessment of military capabilities, the IISS said that Moscow's total defence spending was higher than total European defence spending in purchasing-power-parity terms. It said Russia also appeared better able to maintain the size of its military than Ukraine. "While Russia appears to be able to sustain the manning of its forces, evidence suggests that Ukraine, which generally kept its casualty figures secret, has suffered a serious drain on its personnel - with many ground units under-strength," the report said. Ukraine's Defence Ministry this week launched a recruitment drive to attract 18-to-24-year-olds to military service for a year in an attempt to address its manpower problem. Russia, the report said, had a serious tank and armoured vehicle problem which meant it was taking heavier personnel losses on the battlefield. Moscow lost 1,400 tanks

in 2024 and is struggling to make new tanks at a fast enough rate to replace the old ones despite increasing production of advanced models like the T-90M tank.

"Russia is increasingly trading quality for quantity to support its war effort," the report said. "The scale of its equipment losses fighting against Ukraine has meant that, to keep units equipped, it has had to draw down from its stocks of Soviet-era armour." That has seen Moscow fall back on small numbers of vintage armoured personnel carriers built in the 1950s and tanks built in the 1960s, said the IISS, which estimates Russia has lost a total of 4,400 main battle tanks in the war so far. "The remaining equipment in store could allow Russia to sustain the current rate of loss in the short term, but a significant number of these platforms would require deep and costly refurbishment," the report said. Henry Boyd, the institute's senior fellow for military capability, said Russia would need to significantly expand its production of new armoured vehicles or look to imports.

Another problem for Russia, said Nigel Gould-Davies, a Russia specialist at the same research centre, was that the current course of the Russian economy - which he said was suffering from "fundamental monetary imbalances" after being put on a war footing - was unsustainable "in the longer term."

Emergency declared on a second Greek Island

ATHENS, Greece (AP): Authorities declared a state of emergency on a second Greek island Wednesday as a series of earthquakes continued to rattle the south-eastern Aegean Sea region. The emergency measure announced on the island of Amorgos follows a similar decision for nearby Santorini on Feb. 7 after thousands of unusual tremors were registered in an undersea area near the two islands, as well as the islands of Ios and Anafi - all popular tourist destinations.

Scientists had expressed hope the seismic swarm could be easing up, but a string of earthquakes around magnitude 5 has renewed concern. Seismologists have also noted that the epicenter of the earthquakes is steadily drifting northward in the direction of Amorgos. The emergency declaration will facilitate rapid deployment of resources and emergency services. The region has already seen a significant mobilization of fire departments, police, coast guard, and armed forces mostly on Santorini where thousands of residents and seasonal workers have left the island.

Overall, about 12,000 earthquakes with magnitudes greater than 1 have been registered since Jan. 26, the University of Athens' crisis management committee said earlier. Although Greece lies in a highly seismically active part of the world and earthquakes are frequent, it is very rare for any part of the country to experience such an intense barrage of earthquakes for such an extended period.

US tells UN: We cannot pay forever for Syria camps

UNITED NATIONS (Reuters): US assistance for managing and securing camps in northeastern Syria with Islamic State-linked prisoners "cannot last forever," the acting US Ambassador to the United Nations, Dorothy Shea, told the Security Council on Wednesday.

"The United States has shouldered too much of this burden for too long. Ultimately, the camps cannot remain a direct US financial responsibility," she told the 15-member council, referencing the al-Hol and Roj displaced persons camps. "We accordingly continue to urge countries to expeditiously repatriate their displaced and detained nationals who remain in the region," she said.

Packed with families linked to Islamic State after the extremist Sunni Muslim group's defeat in Syria in 2019, the al-Hol camp has a population of around 40,000. It is widely viewed as a breeding ground for extremism and a security concern for regional states, particularly neighbouring Iraq, where Islamic State at one point controlled about a third of the country. Camp authorities - led by the US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces, a Kurdish-led force that controls northeast Syria - have long called on countries to repatriate citizens in the camp, which hosts thousands of foreigners. Iraq has repatriated more than 10,000, according to Iraqi officials, but few Western states have shown interest in following suit. Of those currently in the camp, nearly 16,000 are Syrians, camp authorities say.

"US assistance has played a vital role in managing and securing al-Hol and Roj displaced persons camps in northeast Syria, and, critically, Syrian Democratic Forces-managed facilities detaining thousands of ISIS fighters, but this assistance cannot last forever," Shea said.

Her remarks come after Syria's Bashar al-Assad was ousted in December after insurgent forces led by the Islamist Hayat Tahrir al-Sham swept through Syria in a lightning offensive, ending more than 50 years of iron-fisted rule by Assad's family. Talks facilitated by the US and France are under way to determine the SDF's future. The new Syrian ruling authorities have said it would seek to assert control over the entire country.

Europe warns Trump against Ukraine deal 'behind our backs'

BRUSSELS (AFP): Blindsided Europeans warned that a "dirty deal" between US President Donald Trump and Moscow on ending the Ukraine war was doomed to fail -- insisting they and Kyiv must have a seat at the negotiating table.

Meeting NATO partners the day after Trump revealed he had agreed to start peace talks with Russia's Vladimir Putin, Pentagon chief Pete Hegseth denied it meant a betrayal of Kyiv's three-year war effort. But Trump's move stunned European allies -- several of whom openly called his strategy into question.

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz rejected any "dictated peace" and his defence minister called it "regrettable" that Washington was already making "concessions" to the Kremlin. In a blunt address to reporters at NATO talks in Brussels, EU top diplomat Kaja Kallas insisted that no deal "behind our backs" could work, as she accused Washington of "appeasement" towards Russia. "We shouldn't take anything off the table before the negotiations have even started because it plays to Russia's court and it is what they want," she said.

"Any quick fix is a dirty deal," she said. "It will just simply not work." After a 90-minute phone call with Putin, his first since returning to power, Trump said he expected to meet the Russian leader in Saudi Arabia for Ukraine peace talks -- sparking fears Kyiv would be frozen out. That came after his administration poured cold water on Ukraine's goals of reclaim-

ing all its territory and pushing to join NATO's protective umbrella. "There is no betrayal there. There is a recognition that the whole world and the United States is invested and interested in peace," Hegseth said at NATO. "That will require both sides recognising things they don't want to," added the US Defense Secretary. Trump, who has been pushing for a quick end to the war, denied that Ukraine was being excluded from direct negotiations between the two nuclear-armed superpowers. The Kremlin said both leaders had agreed the "time has come to work together," insisting it wanted to organise a face-to-face meeting promptly and that broader European security should be on the agenda. After speaking to Putin, the US president called Ukraine's Volodymyr Zelensky and shared details of his talks with the Kremlin leader.

Ukraine's defence minister Rustem Umerov told Kyiv's NATO backers "we're continuing, we're strong, we're capable, we're able, we will deliver". Zelensky is set to meet US Vice President JD Vance at a security conference in Munich on Friday to kick off negotiations. It will be the latest in a flurry of high-level meetings after US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent held talks in Kyiv on Wednesday on granting Washington access to Ukraine's rare earth deposits in return for security support. Trump's outreach to Putin had been broadly expected, but the quick pace of his peace push has left heads spinning after three years of staunch Western support

for Kyiv. Kyiv's European backers are terrified that Trump could force Ukraine into a bad peace deal that will leave them facing an emboldened Putin -- while fronting the lion's share of costs for post-war security. Hegseth Wednesday laid out a string of US expectations to halt the conflict, saying it was not realistic for Ukraine to regain all its land or become a NATO member. He also said Europe must now start providing the "overwhelming share" of aid to Ukraine and that the United States would not deploy troops as a security guarantee under any deal. In a statement on Wednesday, the foreign ministers of key European powers including Germany, France, Poland and Britain said "Ukraine and Europe must be part of any negotiations."

Throughout Russia's war on Ukraine since 2022 it has been a mantra for Western powers that there should be no decisions taken on Ukraine's future without Kyiv. NATO chief Mark Rutte said it was crucial that Kyiv was "closely involved" in any talks about what happens in Ukraine. Britain's defence minister John Healey echoed that message. "There can be no negotiation about Ukraine without Ukraine, and Ukraine's voice must be at the heart of any talks," he said. Rutte insisted that any potential peace deal had to be "enduring", pointing to similar comments made earlier by Hegseth. Russia's ally China meanwhile said it was "happy" to see the United States and Russia "strengthen communication".

US considers pulling its troops from Syria

WASHINGTON (Agencies): Syria has been one of the world's most complex proxy fights since its civil war broke out in 2011, but who holds power and where is now shifting rapidly. The biggest change came from the dramatic toppling of Bashar al-Assad's regime in December. It was driven out by the Islamist group Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, who are no friends of Russia or Iran.

HTS holds territory from Aleppo in the northwest to Damascus, the seat of the Assad regime. But Syria remains fractured by competing armies. Turkish forces and militants it backs hold pockets near its northern border. The US-partnered Syrian Democratic Forces occupy the large triangle of northeastern Syria, an area that has oilfields and prison camps holding ISIS fighters. Russia is reducing its military footprint as Israel seizes new positions near the Golan Heights. But the newest question mark is the US. The US has 2,000 troops in Syria backing the Kurdish-led SDF to contain ISIS. It also controls the strategically located al-Tanf base in southern Syria. But the longevity of those deployments is unclear. The Department of Defense is reportedly drafting contingency plans to withdraw all

troops should President Donald Trump order it. "Presently, the HTS-led government is seeking to create the conditions for a US withdrawal from the country that would undermine the SDF coalition, which represents an impediment to the emerging regime's ability to control all of the country," Nicholas Heras, senior director of strategy and innovation at the New Lines Institute, told Business Insider.

US forces in Syria safeguard oilfields and assist the SDF in strikes to defeat remnants of ISIS. These forces are potential leverage that Trump risks losing if he withdraws them before talks with the new government under interim president Ahmed al-Sharaa. "It seems likely that the Trump administration will keep troops in Syria over the short term and speak about a step-by-step policy of loosening sanctions based on President Sharaa's willingness to develop a constitution and move toward a representative government that does not threaten its neighbors," Joshua Landis, Director of the Centre of Middle East Studies and the Farzanah Family Center for Iranian and Persian Gulf Studies at the University of Oklahoma, told BI. The easier chip in bargaining

could be the US base at al-Tanf in Syria's southern desert. Controlled by the US-allied, anti-ISIS Syrian Free Army group, the base is situated near the Jordanian border and the important Baghdad-Damascus highway. The US enforced a 34-mile de-confliction zone around al-Tanf which Iranian-backed forces and Assad's regime weren't allowed to access.

"The US presence at al-Tanf was pretty dubious before Assad fell and it serves no discernible purpose now, except possibly as a point of leverage vis-à-vis the new Damascus government," Aron Lund, Middle East analyst with the Swedish Defence Research Agency and fellow with Century International, told BI. "So, al-Tanf could be a place they'll withdraw from first, perhaps after getting some little thing in return from Sharaa's government." The SDF-controlled regions present a "thornier issue" with much higher stakes. The Kurds guard prisons with thousands of ISIS fighters, but they'd be hard-pressed to maintain these faced with a major offensive by a rival. While HTS has not attacked the SDF, the Turkish-backed militias have done so repeatedly since late 2024.

NATO tests new deployment model without US

NEA ANCHIALOS, Greece (AP): NATO is testing its ability to rapidly deploy across eastern Europe - without direct US assistance - as Washington shifts its approach toward European defense and the war in Ukraine. The six-week Steadfast Dart 2025 exercises across Bulgaria, Romania and Greece are taking place as Russia's invasion of Ukraine approaches the three-year mark. They involve some 10,000 troops from nine nations and represent the largest NATO operation planned this year.

The US absence from the exercises comes as European nations scramble to build greater military self-sufficiency over their concerns about the Trump administration's commitment to common defense and demands for increased European military spending. President Donald Trump on

Wednesday announced his intention to negotiate with Russia directly. And US Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth said at his first meeting with NATO colleagues in Brussels on Wednesday that European nations should dramatically increase their defense spending and shoulder the "overwhelming share" of funding for Ukraine. Greek and Spanish marines led military demonstration, an amphibious assault near the central Greek city of Volos, in the first full-scale operational deployment of NATO's new Allied Reaction Force.

Established last July, the force represents NATO's latest strategic evolution, designed to deploy at scale within 10 days and combining conventional forces with cyber and space-based technologies. "This is what we've been training for," the

ARF's commander, Italian Lt. Gen. Lorenzo D'Addario, told The Associated Press after the 90-minute demonstration. "The thinking is that NATO wanted to have a force that is ready, that is flexible, that can operate across the five domains - air, sea, land, but indeed cyber and space - in a way that ensures it answers the (needs) of defending the alliance, but also deterring (conflict)," he said. Western military officials - anticipating lasting tension with Russia and President Vladimir Putin, possibly beyond the Ukraine conflict - argue that NATO's new capability is becoming increasingly important to reinforce its eastern flank. "As we soon approach the anniversary of Russia's brutal invasion of Ukraine, we see today a revitalized and refocused NATO," said Canadian Lt.

With doors closed to the US, asylum-seekers turn to their Plan B

MEXICO CITY (AP): When Angelica Delgado took a one-way flight to Mexico as she fled Cuba in December, she was set on seeking asylum in the United States. But after President Donald Trump effectively slammed the door on asylum-seekers crossing the US border when he took office last month, the 23-year-old recalibrated her plans.

She decided she would seek protection in Mexico. "Like almost all Cubans, our objective was to go to the United States," she said. "It wasn't in our plans to stay, but now we have to face reality." Amid a clampdown on asylum under Trump and tightening restrictions in recent years under the Biden administration, Delgado is among a growing number of migrants from across the world to ditch - or at least pause - their ambitions of reaching the US, and focus instead on building a life in Mexico. Migrants trying to apply for asylum in Mexico in January more than tripled compared to the monthly average from the previous year, according to an international official with knowledge of the

numbers who was not authorized to discuss them publicly. Mexico's refugee agency has not yet published figures for January. "All of these policies Trump is pushing are leading more people to seek international protection in Mexico," said Andrés Ramírez, former director of the Mexican Commission for Refugee Aid, which processes asylum cases.

Delgado was among hundreds of migrants from Cuba, Venezuela, Haiti, Afghanistan and other countries gathering outside the refugee agency in Mexico City after Trump unleashed executive orders last month meant to slash access to asylum and militarize the border. The Associated Press spoke to around a half-dozen people who had asylum appointments in the US through the Biden-era app, CBP One, that Trump canceled on Inauguration Day. They were left stranded on the Mexican side of the border, their dreams of a legal pathway into the US snuffed. Many more said they now intended to seek asylum in Mexico, citing increasingly harsh restrictions in recent years in the US or what

they said was anti-immigrant sentiment there. "Now, it's the Mexican dream," said a Mexican man helping Haitian friends try to get an appointment this month to apply for asylum in Mexico following the Trump executive orders.

Delgado, her partner and many others had put their hopes on pathways opened by the Biden administration to legally seek asylum in the US. They said they had no intention of hiring a smuggler to enter the US illegally. They said the risks of returning to Cuba were too great following a government clampdown on protests in recent years. "Crossing illegally isn't an option for us. We'd rather stay here" in Mexico, Delgado said, adding that if they crossed illegally into the US and were caught "they'll deport us and they'll send us back to Cuba."

Delgado, who is an architect, and her partner, a doctor, aren't able to work in their fields in Mexico because their training in Cuba is not recognized there, she said. So for now she's washing dishes in a market. Mexico has long opened its doors to refugees

and exiles, but asylum applications have soared in recent years, growing from 1,295 in 2013 to a record 140,982 in 2023. That number dipped to 78,975 in 2024, as the CBP One app allowed migrants in southern Mexico to apply for appointments for entry into the US before heading to the northern border.

The rise in petitions for asylum in Mexico may not result in an immediate uptick in refugees there as only a couple hundred applications can be processed each day, fueling criticism about Mexico's capacity to take on the burgeoning asylum demand. Amid criticisms over the backlog, President Claudia Sheinbaum has sharply boosted funding for Mexican agencies handling migration and asylum. Venezuelan asylum-seeker Harry Luzardo, 37, said life in Mexico is an improvement after scrambling for years to scrape by in Ecuador and Chile. Ecuador, Chile, Peru and Colombia were once the epicenter of the exodus of 8 million people from Venezuela, fleeing spiraling economic and political crises.

UN rights office estimates up to 1,400 killed in crackdown on protests in BD

GENEVA (AP): The UN human rights office on Wednesday estimated that up to 1,400 people may have been killed in Bangladesh over three weeks last summer in a crackdown on student-led protests against the now-ousted former prime minister. In a new report, the Geneva-based office says security and intelligence services "systematically engaged" in rights violations that could amount to crimes against humanity and require further investigation.

Citing "various credible sources," the rights office said it estimated that as many as 1,400 people may have been killed in the protests between July 15 and Aug. 5 - the day long-

time Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina fled to India amid the uprising. Thousands more were injured in the weeks leading up to and after the protests, and the vast majority of those killed and injured "were shot by Bangladesh's security forces," the report said. Over 11,700 people were detained, the report said, citing information from security services. It said that about 12 to 13% of people estimated to have been killed -- or as many as about 180 people - were children. In some cases, "security forces engaged in summary executions by deliberately shooting unarmed protesters at point blank range," it said.

UN human rights chief Volker Türk cited signs that

"extrajudicial killings, extensive arbitrary arrests and detentions, and torture" were conducted with the knowledge and coordination of the political leadership and top security officials as a way to suppress the protests. The UN fact-finding team was deployed to Bangladesh at the invitation of the country's interim leader, the Nobel Peace laureate Muhammad Yunus, to look into the uprising and violent crackdown. The team of investigators said the interim government has reportedly made 100 arrests in connection with attacks on religious and indigenous groups. The report said "many perpetrators of acts of revenge, violence and attacks on distinct groups apparently continue to

enjoy impunity." The human rights situation in Bangladesh continues to raise concerns, the UN office said. While the government has changed, "the system has not necessarily changed," Rory Mungoven, head of the rights office's Asia-Pacific region, told reporters. "Many officials and people who had served or been appointed under the previous regime continue to function," he said.

Such a situation creates "a potential conflict of interest" and could impede reforms and accountability, Mungoven added. The investigators issued dozens of recommendations to the government, such as steps to improve the justice system and setting up a witness protection program.

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‘America first’ means in practice

WRAPPED in a flag and clutching a beer, Marc Fogel looked understandably overwhelmed. The 63-year-old teacher from Pennsylvania was safe at last, freed via prisoner exchange from the Russian jail where he served three and a half years for possessing the marijuana his family says he took for back pain. His homecoming this week was just the kind of heartwarming scene Donald Trump needs to show ordinary Americans that cosy-ing up to Vladimir Putin’s murderous regime could pay off, and the president himself said he hoped it marked “the beginning of a relationship where we can end that war” in Ukraine.

Or to put it another way, hours later his new defence secretary, Pete Hegseth, was in Brussels dictating the effective terms of Ukraine’s surrender, over Ukrainian heads and on terms that a former head of MI6 has called a “golden opportunity” for Putin to walk away. An American family reunited; a country that to most of their compatriots must seem far away, seemingly sold down the river. Small victories for those back home tired of shouldering the world’s burdens; anger and disbelief among allies. “It’s appeasement. It has never worked,” said the Estonian EU foreign policy chief Kaja Kallas, choosing words ominously freighted with history. We are starting to see what “America first” looks like in practice, as a superpower that once prevailed by building alliances across the west dramatically reorients itself.

The US is too preoccupied with China and with patrolling its own borders to be “primarily focused” on Europe, Hegseth explained: put bluntly, the war will have to end, and what happens next is mostly Europe’s problem. All pretence that it’s for Ukraine as a sovereign nation to negotiate its own future disappeared with the news that Trump had already telephoned Putin, and apparently conceded most of what he wants before even opening talks.

The self-styled greatest dealmaker believes Russia should keep some of the territory it forcibly seized – they had, he reasoned, lost “a lot of soldiers”, as countries do when invading a neighbour unprovoked – and Ukraine shouldn’t join Nato. Already Putin’s aggression seems amply rewarded, but there’s more: American troops won’t be deployed to keep the peace, and any European force can’t operate under Nato’s umbrella – meaning the US wouldn’t be obliged to come to its aid if attacked. And if Trump is reluctant to defend Ukraine, he seems keen on a deal to extract rare earth minerals needed by hi-tech US industries from whatever is ultimately left of it. Welcome to a new age of empire, except this time with Britain at the sharp end. It’s the new imperial powers of US, China and Russia that now display the telltale ambition to expand territorially and Hoover up raw materials needed for the next industrial revolution, plus the military strength to redraw borders at will. And while this week has clearly been most devastating for Ukraine, a country that sacrificed its children to this brutal war and deserved so much better, it shatters some comforting British illusions, too.

This country has punched above its weight in foreign policy because we never punched alone. With US firepower behind us, we could bluff our enemies but also perhaps lie to ourselves. We didn’t have to face what we had become, namely a small island with grandiose ideas about itself whose regular army would – as the defence minister Alistair Carns recently warned – be wiped out within six months of fighting something like the Ukraine conflict. Working on the assumption that we would never again fight anything but a small, localised war without the US alongside us, we built our defences around inter-operable kit and the quiet assumption that American troops could fill the gaps we no longer could. Preparing for a world in which the US may no longer be a dependable ally doesn’t just mean spending more – though Hegseth argued European governments should now earmark 5% of GDP for defence, double the 2.65% Rachel Reeves is reportedly telling British chiefs of staff we can’t afford – but something more like unscrambling an omelette into its component eggs.

There was always going to come a time, 80 years on from the last world war and with new threats emerging, when the US, not unreasonably, concluded that Europe should stand on its own two feet. But what could have been a gradual transition has become a panicky scramble, with consequences for which the public is woefully ill-prepared. You may well be tired of the trade-offs made for US protection, of being dragged into dubious US wars. But all those who have cordially loathed the US acting as world policeman might consider what happens to neighbourhoods from which policing suddenly retreats.

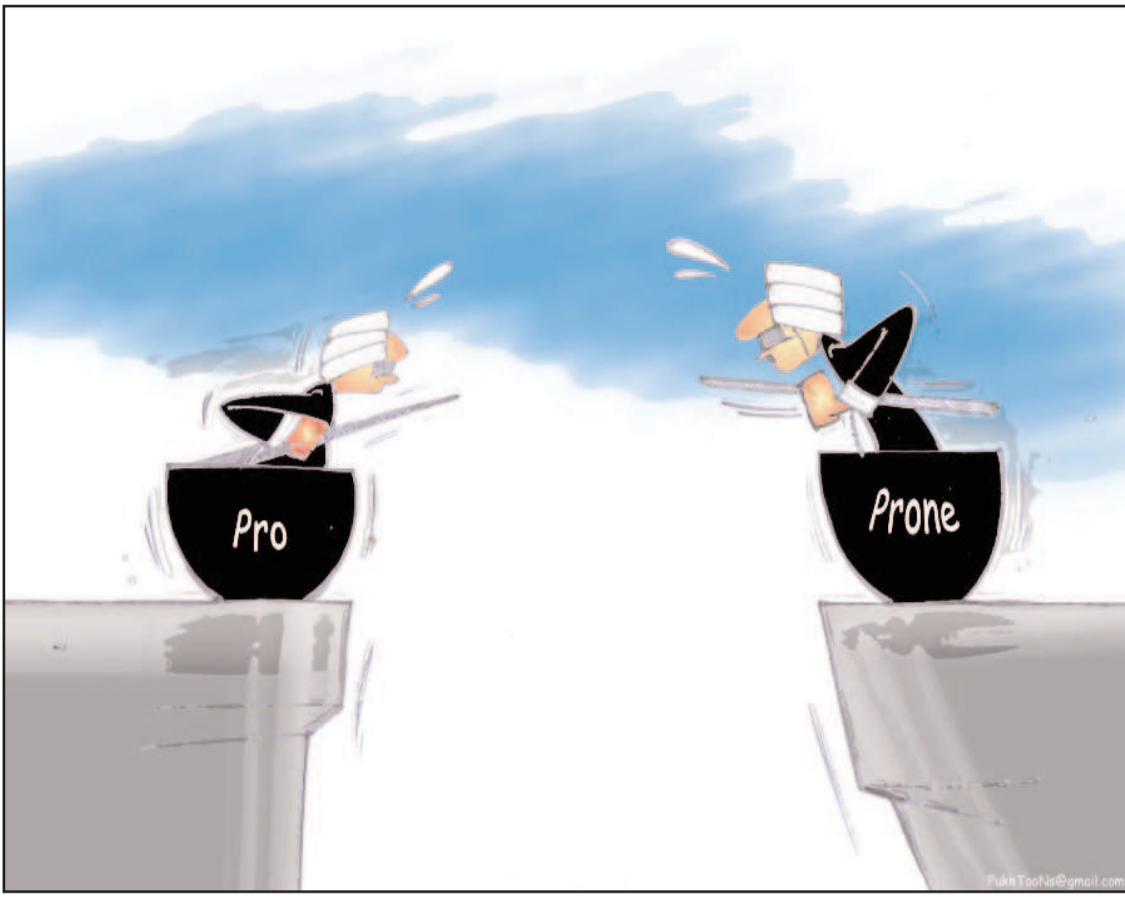
Some will argue that Britain can simply ride this turbulent time out by abandoning its delusions of grandeur, keeping its head down, and spending the defence budget on hospitals instead. But trouble still finds even those who don’t go looking for it, as Ukraine sadly discovered. The danger is of becoming Russia’s or China’s poodle instead of America’s; or at the very least feeling powerless to help our friends.

We had a taste of how that felt in Afghanistan in 2021, where a sudden US withdrawal in the face of a Taliban surge forced allied troops (who could not have sustained the mission without them) into a chaotic exodus. The shame and the betrayal of having to abandon Afghan interpreters and fixers to their fate has stayed with serving and former soldiers. Something similar may now be happening in Ukraine, where EU leaders who vowed sincerely to stand always with Zelenskyy are now struggling with the harsh reality that it is effectively over once the US pulls the plug.

That Trump has done so should surprise nobody. Washington’s focus was shifting to China long before he reached the Oval Office, and he has never wavered either from his belief that Uncle Sam is getting taken for a sucker on defence, or from his closeness to Putin. We can’t say we weren’t warned, and there has at least been some time to prepare. But as with the tariff war Trump kept threatening to start, somehow when it happens it’s still a shock. On trade, Trump has tended to make dramatic threats before backing off when sufficiently mollified, and perhaps something similar may happen over defence. But on both counts, uncertainty alone is corrosive. It forces us to invest time and money we don’t have on contingency planning, and emboldens those who wish us harm. We look, and feel, more vulnerable because, in truth, we are. This is a different world, and Britain will emerge a different country from it.

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The damage done when journalists get the story wrong

Andrew Mitrovica

PATIENCE is a virtue ill-used by most columnists. Too often, writers are consumed by the urgent here and now. As a result, they fail to look back and devote time and space to important topics that once caught their critical eye.

The other, broader, and much more important failing of journalists and the news organisations – big and small – that they work for is the stubborn refusal to make honest and tangible amends for the damage they have caused to people – known and unknown – by their reporting that turns out to be defective and wrong.

Almost two years ago, I penned a number of columns warning that a racist-tinged hysteria was gripping Canada. The McCarthyism-drenched frenzy impugned the loyalty of dedicated police officers, a past governor general of Canada, as well as Chinese-Canadian citizens, including sitting parliamentarians. That deeply corrosive, “yellow-peril”-like furor was ginned up largely by a handful of scoop-thirsty reporters working hand-in-too-comfortable glove with, I suspect, a few so-called “intelligence officers” – still serving or retired.

The gaggle of scheming spies, who supplied snippets of cropped “intelligence” to gullible scribes, made scurrilous accusations about whole ethnic communities and several prominent figures who were obliged, of course, to plead their innocence publicly at draining emotional and financial cost while their Cheshire-cat-like accusers remained in the agreeable shadows – handsome salaries and pensions intact. For two years, the hyperbolic handiwork of this nexus of cocky spies and credulous reporters dominated Canada’s political and media landscape.

The spigot of stories alleged, among other nefarious escapades, that parliament harboured a nest of “traitors” who plotted with foreign powers to undermine Canadian democracy; a Liberal member of parliament [MP] of Chinese descent thwarted diplomatic attempts to release two Canadians jailed in China on suspicion of spying; and Beijing ran a vast political “interference” campaign to alter the outcome of at least two federal elections. The breathless tales of subterfuge and treason were

picked up by other media eager not to be left behind and given extended life and legitimacy by a host of braying columnists who know little to nothing about the subterranean world of espionage, the pedestrian types who populate it nor how “intelligence” is gathered and can be moulded to create the illusion of credibility.

In late January, Commissioner Marie-Josée Hogue – who headed an inquiry triggered by the sensational reports – released her findings after hearing from scores of witnesses and reviewing thousands of classified documents over 15 months. The commissioner’s conclusions constitute a damning indictment of the reporters and major domestic news outlets who ought to have treated their coveted sources with a lot more caution and scepticism, rather than accepting, almost verbatim, their self-aggrandising interpretation and use of selective secrets to pursue personal agendas at the expense of the reputations of honourable Canadians and the public interest.

Hogue delivered a categorical refutation of every major allegation served up by The Globe and Mail – Canada’s self-anointed “national” newspaper of record – and a second-tier national broadcaster, Global News. The commissioner “found no evidence” of any “traitors” lurking in parliament nor that Canada’s democratic institutions were swayed or “seriously affected” by any “interference.”

“I have found no evidence that any election has been swung by a foreign actor,” she wrote. Hogue added that there may have been “attempts to curry favour with Parliamentarians...[but] the phenomenon remains marginal and largely ineffective.”

“There is no cause,” she declared, “for widespread alarm.” That “alarm” was raised by front-page and top-of-the-newscast-attention-addicted politicians and reporters who, together, persuaded many Canadians that China, in particular, posed what amounted to an existential threat to the nation’s sovereignty and integrity of its “sacrosanct” elections.

Hogue wrote, in effect,

that the supposed threat had been “overblown”. To her credit, the commissioner erased a disfiguring stain that Liberal MP Han Dong has endured with grace and contested with an uncompromising determination to clear his good name.

She dismissed dubious, thinly sourced stories charging that Dong had contacted Chinese diplomats with the intent to stall the release of two Canadians – Michael Kovrig and Michael Spavor – accused of spying by the People’s Republic of China (PRC) – as unequivocally false. “The classified information corroborates Mr. Dong’s denial,” she wrote, “of the allegation that he suggested the PRC should hold off releasing Mr. Kovrig and Mr. Spavor.” And that “[Mr. Dong] did not suggest that the PRC extend their detention.”

The commissioner condemned the grievous, lasting harm that can be caused by spies trafficking in “untested intelligence” with easily convinced reporters. “Examples like these demonstrate why it would be entirely unfair to rely on untested intelligence to publicly label an individual parliamentarian a traitor,” Hogue wrote. “This would have a profound impact on the individual, one that cannot be justified in light of the frailties of intelligence.”

In a press release, Dong demanded – quite rightly – that “Global News ... retract their false stories about me and apologize for the harm they have caused”. To date, to my knowledge, Global News has not retracted the stories nor apologised. That is shameful.

Hogue confirmed the thrust of my testimony before a variety of House of Commons committees in spring 2023 where I cautioned parliamentarians to treat the “revelations” cautiously since “intelligence” is far from proof. In that critical regard, the commissioner warned of the “inherent limitations,” incompleteness, and insufficiency of “intelligence.”

“Just because intelligence says something does not make it true, accurate, or complete,” Hogue wrote. “The credibility of sources can also be a concern. Sources may, for example, intentionally mislead their

audiences.”

The Quebec Court of Appeal justice’s voluminous report mirrored to the syllable the verdict of David Johnston, Canada’s one-time governor general who was appointed “special rapporteur” by Prime Minister Justin Trudeau to investigate the claims of Chinese interference. Her study was just longer than his.

But, incredibly, Johnston’s impeccable character, allegiance to Canada, and independence came under sustained and egregious assault by frothing opposition politicians and media personalities more interested in “scandal” than the truth. The Globe and Mail led the charge on this outrageous score. I was appalled when a Conservative MP asked another witness during a committee hearing whether the Queen’s former representative was a closet Chinese “asset”.

The baseless insinuations and smears culminated in Johnston’s resignation as “special rapporteur”. Now, Hogue’s report stands as a marquee-sized vindication of Johnston’s intelligent, sober, and deliberate work. Johnston is owed an apology, too. Still, an unimpressed Globe editorial writer insisted that Hogue had committed a “disservice” to the “courageous people inside Canada’s intelligence community” who “were concerned that the Trudeau government was ignoring a threat to the federal electoral system”.

An old Globe hand told me that the paper’s editors were disappointed by Hogue’s exhaustive rebuttal of its reportage and that the consensus among journalists inside and outside its insular orbit was that they had been “played” by those “courageous” spooks who have, like the agitated band of China-bashing columnists, gone suddenly mute.

Meanwhile, the president of the United States – Canada’s dearest and closest neighbour – has been busy hatching plans to annex and convert the great white, mostly uninhabited north into America’s 51st state, through punitive economic force. Apparently, Canada’s “courageous” spies were too preoccupied with pointing an accusatory finger at Beijing to notice the real and present danger nearby.

Aljazeera

History will Judge Europe if it doesn’t stand up to Putin

Sophie in’t Veld

THIS year’s Munich Security Conference takes place under the darkest clouds in decades. The foundations of the post-war world order are shaking, and we are entering the great unknown.

Donald Trump has made the US an unpredictable and unreliable member of NATO, displaying open contempt for Europe. For decades, Europe comfortably and lazily bobbed along with the US, developing its internal market while the Americans ensured our security. The past three years have been a rude awakening – yet many European leaders still prefer to pull the pillow over their heads and pretend business as usual will suffice.

But Europe’s security is directly tied to Ukraine’s survival. If Ukraine falls, Putin will be emboldened to aim for new targets. Even if the war ends with a deal in which Ukraine’s sovereignty is preserved, Putin will undoubtedly use the time to regroup and prepare for the next attack. Analyses by various intelligence services in Europe have warned that he is already eyeing targets within the EU. These warnings must be taken very seriously. We should learn the lessons of 2014 and 2022 and act accordingly.

Three weeks into Trump’s second presidency, Europe must urgently determine its response to his whirlwind tactics and blustering. It has tried appeasing Trump by bringing him myrrh and incense. It tried mild threats of retaliation. It tried moral arguments. But Trump only understands one language: the language of power. Unfortunately, Europe has little hard power of its own. So it has to be bold, smart and find strong friends – and keep in mind that ultimately, despite the rough language, the US still needs Europe.

The fact that Trump spoke with Putin before speaking with Zelenskyy is very disturbing. Giving in to Putin before talks have even started is even worse. The EU’s foreign policy chief Kaja Kallas was right to immediately make clear that it stands firmly by Ukraine and will reject any backroom deals over its future. We don’t need a new Yalta conference. However, Europe does not have enough power to back up its position on its own. It must urgently build a solid alliance with like-minded countries like the U.K. and Canada and present a unified front within NATO.

Ukraine’s security must be backed by rock-solid guarantees. Putin cannot be trusted to honor agreements, and Kyiv has certainly not forgotten how previous deals meant to guarantee its security were simply ignored and promises were broken – resulting in today’s situation. Europe and its allies should also push for US involvement in enforcing any future security guarantees for Ukraine. Of course, Europe itself will have to provide large numbers of troops, even if national leaders still dismiss the possibility.

At the same time, the EU should ensure that Russia enters talks in the weakest position possible. This means drastically and rapidly ramping up support to Ukraine as well as finally enforcing EU sanctions in full. There can be zero tolerance for circumvention or violation of sanctions and for non-implementation by member states. Putin must

feel the full force of these measures.

The EU must also reform its enlargement policy, and fast. The slow, technocratic accession procedure was designed for a different era. Enlargement is, and always has been, a political and strategic instrument, but leaders preferred to sell their voters the myth that it was an administrative procedure, a tick-box exercise based on purely technical criteria. They used the procedure to keep countries out rather than integrating them efficiently.

Unsurprisingly, frustration and disappointment are mounting in several candidate countries about the many years they’ve spent in the waiting room. If the EU doesn’t change tack, some of these countries may turn to Russia or China. The EU must adopt a new process that allows for rapid accession, granting voting rights progressively as criteria are met. Europe has to make it crystal clear who belongs in the European family. In the face of US threats to block Ukraine’s NATO membership, it is even more important to bring it into the EU.

The Baltic states’ disconnection from the Russian energy grid last week was a small but significant step showing the way for the rest of Europe. The EU has been discussing energy independence for many years. The time for debates, white papers and task forces is over. Europe now needs to put its money where its mouth is and act. The same goes for raw materials. A quick transition is tough, but over the past three years, we have shown it can be done. It is essential for Europe as a geopolitical force to secure its energy and resource independence.

Europeans should also start to understand that there is no cheap, painless solution. This is not someone else’s war – this war concerns us directly, even if we are utterly unprepared for this kind of situation. For decades, Europe ignored calls to strengthen its defense and geopolitical power. They clung to illusory notions of national sovereignty and treated the EU as mere inter-governmental cooperation. Is it a coincidence that Putin’s lapdogs are among the strongest opponents of a strong federal Europe? For years they aimed for European disintegration, campaigning for Brexit, Frexit and Nexit. Now they have adapted their strategy, seeking to dismantle the EU from within. Mainstream parties must understand that a weak EU is a key part of pro-Putin parties’ agendas – even if the rhetoric of inter-governmental Europe also aligns with national politicians’ ambitions.

Today, we are all paying a high price for not having built up a strong Europe in more tranquil times, and the cost of our collective denial is going up by the day. Europe can still change the dynamic, but the window of opportunity is closing fast. The EU rose from the ashes of two world wars and united the continent after years of division and dictatorship. The Union is now entering a new phase. European leaders will have to follow in the footsteps of the EU’s founding fathers. They must demonstrate the courage and vision needed to build a bigger, stronger Europe that protects its citizens. History will judge us.

The Moscow Times

Ah, here’s Trump’s peace plan for Ukraine

Marina Hyde

IN the wake of Donald Trump’s decision to instigate his Ukraine “peace plan”, it’s great to hear from US defence secretary, Pete Hegseth, that “everything is on the table”. Also: would President Putin like to keep the table? I get the feeling that Hegseth would be very willing to throw in the table, which is likely to be hewn by Saudi craftsmen.

That’s not a bone-saw euphemism: Trump says the putative peace talks could be hosted by the crown prince Mohammed bin Salman. For now, the world had to settle for Hegseth popping into a Nato defence ministers meeting in Brussels to announce: “Make no mistake, President Trump will not allow anyone to turn Uncle Sam into Uncle Sucker.” So this week offered an opportunity to watch Eisenhower quotes get Disneyfied by a defence secretary with a Crusades tattoo. Good times!

Anyway: the peace plan. I expect this lesson is con-

tained in Trump’s seminal business text, The Art of the Deal, but one fairly reliable principle of negotiation is that if you say a number first, you end up negotiating down from it. If you get the other side to say a number first, you can negotiate up from that. For whatever reason, and supposedly before formal negotiations have even begun, Hegseth has already effectively surrendered most or all of the land taken by Russia since 2014, the possibility of Ukraine joining Nato, and the threat of any future European security being guaranteed by the US. I image Vladimir Putin will simply accept the terms by pointing at him and saying, “You’re hired!”

This wasn’t the exact way Hegseth billed it in his scene-stealing turn on the eve of the Munich security summit, going instead with the assertion that Trump will be “the perfect dealmaker at the table”. As mentioned, the president’s going to lose the

table, but so what? Like he cares. Ever since he got much of a country to kayfabe that he won an election which he definitely lost, he must have known it will be a piece of piss to get them to agree he pulled off the most elegant peace treaty of all time. That, really, is the art of his deal. Also, he has bone spurs.

Other interested parties should be engaged in far deeper self-laceration. I kept reading and hearing yesterday about how European leaders were left “in shock”, “reeling” and “blindsided” by the US gambit, but ... how? What did they think was going to happen? The signs have been spelled out for more than a year by Trump, who said he was going to end the Ukraine war on day one of his presidency – so if anything he has been slow in pulling the rip cord. Furthermore, I wouldn’t say Hegseth was hard to read. In fact, as indicated, you can

quite literally read him. He has a US flag enmeshed with an assault rifle on his bicep, and a number of handy clues to his strategic thinking emblazoned, in writing, down both his forearms.

As far as mealy-mouthed statements you’d struggle to fit on a forearm go, hats off to the German foreign minister for responding to Trump’s move on Thursday by declaring: “It is now crucial for us Europeans to make it clear what is important for our own peace.” Now? Hate to be the bazillionth person to point it out, but “now” feels a bit late for Europe to finally get its multiple-cheeked backside in gear on this front. Europe has spent years – diplomatic technicalse ahoy – dicking around and not acting to prepare for the possibility of the US withdrawing support.

Shortly after Putin invaded Ukraine three years ago, EU leaders met at Versailles. You would think that this particu-

lar location would be sufficient to crystallise the minds of those present in a spirit of “let’s not cock this one up”. And yet. No one could have accused what emerged from Versailles that time round of going too far. Despite the French president, Emmanuel Macron, announcing that while Versailles 1919 divided Europe, Versailles 2022 was bringing it together, that couldn’t meaningfully have been said to be the case. Instead, and unsurprisingly, the declaration that emerged from that meeting found Europe retreating into its happy place of fine words and forever consultations.

And here we all are. Nobody but the US administration and Putin is in their happy place, with Ukraine in the unhappiest place of all. Asked whether it was equal partners with Russia in these high-handed negotiations over its own future, Trump replied: “Hmm, that’s an interesting question.” Which I guess is your answer. Not

only is Ukraine not in the driving seat, as various people keep mildly observing, but it may well not even be in the car, condemned at best to run along after it, and at worst to be run over by it.

In terms of where the UK stands in all of this, the answer increasingly feels like “nowhere particularly”. This morning, Keir Starmer was assuring Ukraine’s president by phone that his country was on “an irreversible path” to Nato membership. Hmm. Meanwhile, Hegseth was on the ground in big-spending Poland saluting it as “the model ally”. The UK’s ego has long been writing cheques its body can’t cash – and certainly its chancellor refuses to cash. Starmer looks about as likely to make a modern-day Yalta photo with Trump and Putin as he is to be revealed as Dressed Crab on the Masked Singer. As for Trump, he’s never going to get a tattoo. But if he did, it should read APRES MOI LE DEALUGE.

The Guardian

Ukraine can improve its campaign against Russia’s infrastructure

THE focal point of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine has often been the front line. But Ukraine’s ability to attack infrastructure deep within Russian territory has thrown some of Russia’s infrastructure vulnerabilities into sharp relief.

Ukraine’s ability to target Russia’s critical national infrastructure — from transport to oil refineries and depots — may not have been able to shift the dial on the war. However, they do highlight Russia’s dependence on the production and export of hydrocarbons.

Attacks on national infrastructure have been a feature of this war since the start. In a US policy shift, Ukraine was in November 2024 permitted by the Biden administration to use its longer-range Storm Shadow missiles against targets within Russia. The US had argued against their use in Russian territory, but Russia’s deployment of North Korean troops to shore up its vulnerable southern border region in Kursk to push back Ukraine’s incursion there, as well as the incoming Trump administration which has sought a negotiated end to the conflict, likely prompted the change in US policy. The most significant attacks within Russia took place in January 2025, with an uptick in targeted strikes using a barrage of precision drones to hit high-value oil fields and manufacturing plants. The attacks have continued into February, most recently with a barrage on 10 February intended for the Afipsky oil refinery in the Krasnodar region.

In the absence of information, it has been assumed that these attacks are impacting on Russia’s supply chain and its ability to produce and export hydrocarbons, as fires at the depots have taken days to be extinguished. This assumption is also largely because Russia’s statistics agency Rosstat by August 2024

entirely stopped publishing data on oil production, and the Kremlin has remained tight-lipped on the extent of the damage. But Russia is evidently experiencing a host of other issues which may be accounting for its numerous infrastructure problems.

First, the damage to refineries in Russia appears mostly contained for now. While it might temporarily affect production, there is no sign yet that these attacks have had a measurable impact on Russia’s export volumes. For example, the oil refineries that came under attack in 2024 were able to come back online after a couple of weeks of repairs.

Second, the attacks appear to be walking a careful line between disrupting Russia’s supply and actually impacting global supply chains, of which Russia remains an important part. While the sheer number of targets that Ukraine has managed to hit across Russia has been hailed as a success of Ukraine’s reach into the country — and the ability of the ATACMS missiles — it also suggests that the tactic is to go for geographical expanse, rather than sustained damage to particular refineries. A more concentrated tactic would likely have a more discernible impact on international supply chains. Whether these attacks can sufficiently disrupt supplies is unlikely. But Russian infrastructure remains highly vulnerable across the board — and not necessarily to attack from the air.

While the focus has shifted to oil refineries, Ukraine has also sought to probe and expose weaknesses in Russia’s railroad system, a vital part of not only Russia’s exports but also its military movement across the country and into the war theatre in eastern Ukraine. Often described as the backbone of the country, Russia’s railway systems, ports and roads are

the key to advancing its foreign policy through trade links with international partners such as China and Iran; its domestic connectivity, and its military maneuvering from parts of eastern Russia to the front in Ukraine. These linkages allow Russia to resupply the front relatively seamlessly, as well as maintain a high export volume of hydrocarbons to fund the war. For this reason, the targeted destruction of key nodes of the rail network by the Ukrainian armed forces has always loomed large as a way of frustrating Russia’s war goals.

In the early days of the war, recognizing the importance of railways to the advancing Russian army, Ukraine sabotaged some of its own rail crossings so that Russia could not use the connections to advance more deeply into the country. There were several attempts by pro-Ukrainian groups throughout 2023 to disrupt Russia’s internal rail network, with small-scale attacks that disabled electrical equipment and temporarily slowed down shipments of materiel.

One of the most serious incidents was barely reported in Russia in November 2023, in which Ukraine’s SBU claimed that it had blown up part of the Baikal Amur Mainline (BAM) in Buryatia, which runs into China, claiming that it was carrying military equipment. These attacks have been few and far between and have largely rumbled on in the background of the war, but highlighted the fact that Russia has a plethora of pre-existing and new infrastructure issues to contend with. A close reading of its internal discussions reveals that this has not gone unnoticed at the top.

In a Jan. 30 meeting with his own Transport Minister, Roman Starovoit, President Vladimir Putin ignored platitudes about how well the sector is performing, interrupting and zero-

ing in instead on the fact that cargo loading is down by 4% overall. Starovoit failed to adequately account for this, aside from noting that this was a widespread issue. But there are several explanations for this.

Russia’s overloaded railway system is in the throes of a full upgrade — the BAM line in the east and the Trans-Siberian, both of which are the key routes for export to China, are under expansion and so it is not functioning at capacity. This means that high-value goods such as oil and precious metals need to be prioritized over coal. Western sanctions have been most effective at targeting Russia’s coal sector: bankruptcies are reported across the industry, with declining domestic and external demand, a labor shortage, high railway tariffs to use Russia’s own network and meager investment plans.

Other transport issues that Starovoit failed to mention abound: reports of rail cars idling with an excess of wagons, and spare parts shortages due to the war all mean freight services are significantly slowed down and are operating inefficiently. Although numbers are difficult to verify, sanctions appear to be fairly effective at prompting a locomotive shortage in Russia. Although locomotive plants such as TMH in Novocherkassk were tasked with upping their output in 2024, the industry is under pressure and approaching capacity.

For now, it is unlikely that Ukraine’s piecemeal attacks on oil and rail do much more than cause delays in the operation of the machine. However, they are another spanner in the works that those who oversee Russia’s infrastructure capabilities must contend with. If Russia is to continue the war to the West and expand its export partnerships to the East, it will have to confront some of these systemic vulnerabilities.

Peace in Ukraine would crush energy prices

DONALD Trump’s Ambrose Evans-Pritchard Economic and strategic vision is riddled with contradictions. None is greater than the clash between his plan to flood the world with American oil and gas, and his other plan of bringing Russia in from the cold.

The only reason Europe is importing so much US shale gas today, and why liquefied natural gas (LNG) is trading at a nose-bleed prices of 15 MMBtu (£12.50), is because Russian flows to Europe have slowed to a trickle. The world market has lost 120 billion cubic meters (BCM) of supply trapped in Western Siberia. “There is a fundamental conflict between US gas coming into Europe from one side, and Russian gas coming in from the other,” said professor Alan Riley, an expert on European energy at the Atlantic Council.

We do not yet know the contours of Trump’s plan to partition Ukraine. Some think this looks like “peace in our time”, a Munich 2.0 akin to the dismemberment of Czechoslovakia in 1938. Others see a Yalta 2.0, akin to the Roosevelt-Stalin carve up of Eastern Europe in 1945, with Putin restored to global respectability, gaining what he wants along with superpower parity for the Kremlin as if the clock had turned back half a century.

In my view it is too early to conclude whether these talks ratify aggression, or betray Kyiv. Donald Trump hates to be thought of as Putin’s poodle, and does not want to be the loser who fumbled Ukraine. Kremlin apologists whisper into one of his ears, pro-Ukrainian hawks speak into the other, fully aware that the contest against China is being fought in the Donbas. “It is like a medieval court. What the Ukrainians tell me is that Boris Johnson is exercising a lot of positive influence over this,” said Prof Riley.

“There is a feeling in the UK and Nato right now that Putin is playing Trump along and will string this out, but I think people are jumping to conclusions,” he said. There may be a Trumpian sting in the tail for Putin if he spurns the deal, and that deal may not include all of the four annexed oblasts, or the city of Zaporizhia, or the full coastal strip to Crimea. The offer may chiefly be the fringe of obliterated wasteland conquered at such murderous cost, with the British Army of Dnieper on

incoherence. On the one hand he exhorts the world to buy his LNG and oil, and therefore to lock in an energy dependency on the US; on the other he turns trade on and off coercively in pursuit of manias, or to compel genuflections, and in doing so shatters US credibility as a reliable supplier.

He has another problem. Shipped LNG is expensive. It cannot compete with new solar and batteries in sunny regions containing most of humanity. The International Energy Agency (IEA) was already forecasting an “unprecedented” global glut of LNG in the late 2020s even without the return of Russian gas. The world cannot absorb the extra 250 BCM in the project pipeline over the next five years. “The result is an overhang of capacity which is set to depress international gas prices and set the stage for fierce competition,” it said.

The IEA said the breakeven cost for new LNG is at least \$8 MMBtu, but India will not buy imported LNG above a price band of \$3-\$5. It will soak up some LNG, when the price is right, but it will not save the golden age for US gas. India has just announced 100 gigawatts (GW) of nuclear power in its new budget, on top of its 500 GW roll-out of renewables.

China has made a strategic decision not to rely on gas as a “bridge fuel”, fearing that the US Navy could blockade LNG passing through Malacca Strait. China will draw on its Shaanxi coal mines instead. Global Energy Monitor says the country added 95 GW of coal-fired plants last year. Chinese officials say these are being deployed in conjunction with four times as much new wind and solar. The plants will run at low capacity as a back-up to cover intermittency.

Whether or not you believe that, one thing is clear: Xi Jinping does not need or want Trump’s gas. The oil and gas industry has embraced the hope of a fossil fuel supercycle over the last three years, the span of Putin’s war. The majors have torn up their strategies, shuffled off green bunting, and bet their corporate futures on business as usual. Donald Trump has been their champion. The partition of Ukraine and the rehabilitation of Russia will test whether this supercycle is real, or whether they are all living in a fool’s paradise.

Putin won’t settle for less than a US betrayal of Ukraine

“I just had a lengthy and highly productive phone call with President Vladimir Putin of Russia,” President Donald Trump wrote in a post on his social media platform Truth Social, recounting how they had spoken of exchanging visits and bringing the war in Ukraine to an end. “We have also agreed to have our respective teams start negotiations immediately,” he added.

The Russian readout claimed that Putin “supported” Trump’s view that “the time has come for our two countries to work together.” Europe reacted with barely concealed dismay. The EU’s top diplomat Kaja Kallas reaffirmed her support for Ukraine, noting that the Europeans were “looking forward to discussing the way ahead together with our American allies.”

President Volodymyr Zelensky of Ukraine was plainly humiliated, with Trump promising to “inform” him of his talks with Putin. He had long insisted that the only way to bring this war to an end was to speak to Putin from a position of strength. But there was little strength in Trump’s rambling announcement — only hubris. Putin would relish a summit with Trump, preferably in Moscow, perhaps around the time of the 80th anniversary of Russia’s Victory Day celebrations in early May. He has long sought a direct engagement with Washington that would effectively sideline Europe and, crucially, Ukraine. A summit would allow him to reassert Russia’s place as a global power on par with the US. It would be, in Putin’s mind, a return to the kind of recognition Russia enjoyed in 1945, when Josef Stalin parleyed with Franklin D. Roosevelt in Yalta about the fate of nations and the shape of Europe.

But there would have to be an agreement on ending the war in Ukraine, or else the summit would fail. What would such an agreement

look like? Putin’s demands are clear, and they would require significant concessions from the United States — concessions that, if granted, would leave Ukraine adrift and at Russia’s mercy.

The first item on Putin’s wish list would be the recognition (including by Ukraine) of Russia’s territorial gains. He would insist on keeping all the territories Russia currently occupies, as well as those he has formally annexed but not yet fully controls. This is a prospect Zelensky has repeatedly rejected. It goes without saying that Ukraine would be asked to withdraw from Kursk, which it invaded, to dubious benefit, some months ago.

Equally important would be Ukraine’s formal, permanent neutrality. This was a major sticking point during the Istanbul negotiations in the spring of 2022. At the time, Ukraine sought real security guarantees to prevent future Russian aggression. Russia, however, insisted on a mechanism that would allow it to be consulted — and potentially veto — any Ukrainian request for external assistance.

Putin would likely agree only to meaningless guarantees — ones that could not be effectively invoked if Russia were to launch another attack. As in Istanbul, he would want to leave Russia and its potential partners (like China and Belarus) in a position to veto any Ukrainian request for external assistance. For that reason, it is very doubtful that Putin would ever agree to a European peacekeeping contingent to enforce the agreement.

Would Trump agree to such a framework? If he did, it would amount to a betrayal of Ukraine and would leave the country defenseless against future aggression. The second point would be Putin’s insistence on Ukraine’s demilitarization. What this

means can be gleaned from Russia’s proposals in Istanbul, which called for Ukraine’s army to be cut back to 85,000 troops (i.e. a fraction of its current strength), with severe limits put in place on the types and the quantities of arms a neutral Ukraine would be permitted. Would Trump agree? There is no reason why he should, but nor is there any indication that Putin would back down.

None of this is likely to sell in Kyiv, which is how we come to the third point. Any such agreement between the US and Russia would almost certainly require the removal of Zelensky from power. Putin sees Zelensky as a personal adversary, someone who has repeatedly defied and humiliated him. The Russian leader would want a more pliable government in Kyiv — one that could be easily manipulated from Moscow. This was his original plan for what he still calls a “special military operation,” before it was bravely thwarted by the Ukrainians. He has since repeatedly alluded to Zelensky’s supposed lack of electoral legitimacy. Is it altogether inconceivable that Trump would betray Zelensky? It is difficult to say, but our times hold a record for inconceivable things coming to pass. Needless to say, any such deal behind Kyiv’s back would fracture US relations with Ukraine and Europe.

Fourth: One often-overlooked but deeply significant issue for Putin is the control of Ukraine’s language policies and historical memory laws. During the Istanbul talks, Russian negotiators pushed hard for changes to specific legislation — something that, if agreed to, would further erode Ukraine’s sovereignty and enforce a narrative that aligns with Russian imperial ambitions. This aspect of negotiations should not be underestimated, as it reveals the depth of

Putin’s desire not just to conquer but to control Ukraine.

Fifth: Putin will seek relief from sanctions. Although the Russian economy proved to be more resilient than many have expected, it is still under serious strain. Putin would welcome reprieve. This is one where Trump has some real negotiating advantages, which the American president referred to in his aforesaid post when he claimed he and Putin discussed “the power of the dollar.” The real question is whether Russia’s economic difficulties are severe enough to force serious concessions from Putin who has already shown a willingness to sacrifice his people’s economic well-being for the sake of national glory.

Given what we know about Trump’s haphazard diplomacy, it is all too probable that he did not deign to consult with, or even inform, America’s European allies of his talks with Putin. That unpleasant task will probably fall to Vice President JD Vance who is currently in Europe, presumably in part to communicate his boss’s strategic vision to the weary Europeans, who seem to know less about Trump’s plans than Putin does.

This is no mean achievement for the Russian ruler. He aims to negotiate with the US over the heads of Europe and Ukraine, reinforcing the notion that Russia and America are equals and can work jointly to solve pressing issues. In my recent book, “To Run the World,” I show how this notion of a Moscow-Washington condominium, with a special role for Moscow in what was then called its “sphere of influence,” was never far from the minds of the Soviet leaders. Putin has followed in the footsteps of his predecessors. During the Cold War, US policymakers were far too clever to give in to such schemes. But today, who can tell?

UK shouldn’t take a single Gazan refugee

THE news that a family of six Gazans who applied to enter the UK through a route intended for Ukrainians were granted permission on human rights grounds has produced a horrified response on both the Left and the Right.

The Right is horrified that they were allowed to come. The Left is horrified that Sir Keir Starmer has indicated his desire to close this loophole, and that people are unwilling to extend to Gaza the welcome extended to Kyiv. Perhaps unsurprisingly, my sympathies lie very much with the Right. Anyone calling for Gazans to come to the UK should be extremely careful what they wish for. It is notable, for instance, that Arab countries vocal in their support for a Palestinian state are similarly vocal about their desire to avoid admitting any additional Palestinian refugees.

Egypt doesn’t want more. Jordan doesn’t want more. This is true now of Donald Trump’s mooted plan for permanent displacement, and it was true just 12 days after the October 7 terror attack, when King Abdullah II stated “no refugees in Jordan, no refugees in Egypt”. This attitude is based in part on the risk that any such transfer could prove permanent, but also in Egypt’s case concern that militants could carry out attacks against Israel from the Sinai.

It should give Britain pause, too. Do we really trust that we will

be able to flawlessly identify potential radicals amid those seeking to come here? Our vetting can barely pick out obvious frauds, with one immigration expert remarking last year that while the Home Office is quite good at cross-checking spelling errors on paperwork provided by claimants, such as hospital forms, it was less good at checking the hospital actually existed. Given that one notable challenge with taking people from war zones controlled by proscribed terrorist organisations is verifying the legitimacy of paperwork and stories, this shouldn’t fill us with confidence.

As Jake Wallis Simons has noted in these pages, some Palestinian schoolbooks in the relatively moderate West Bank glorify terrorists who took part in the murder of Israeli civilians. Those raised under the watchful eye of Hamas — a proscribed terrorist organisation here — seem unlikely to have been given lessons on loving their Jewish neighbours. If surveys are to be believed, some 57 per cent of the Gazan population still supported the October 7 attacks last summer, even after months of Israeli military response. Almost all Palestinians denied that Hamas had committed any crimes against Israeli civilians. A comparable percentage wanted Hamas to retain control of the Strip.

By September, support had dipped slightly. Only 39 per cent thought the attack had been a good idea, and 36 per cent wanted armed “resistance”. But the point holds: there is no need for Britain to risk airlifting radical supporters of Palestinian terror groups into cities where some seem to already exist.

And it’s this point, incidentally, which utterly destroys any attempts to draw parallels with Ukraine. Ukraine was a peaceful country invaded by an aggressive neighbour. Some Gazans celebrated in the streets as hostages were dragged through crowds. The civilians of Gaza may not be responsible for Hamas atrocities. But it would be foolish to pretend that such levels of support would not have implications for British social cohesion.

Experience tells us that we could expect fiscal costs, too. In 2017, migrants who came to the UK for asylum had an employment rate of 51 per cent, well below the 73 per cent for the UK born. Those in employment earned 55 per cent less per week, working fewer hours for lower wages.

As the Office for Budget Responsibility has noted, low-skilled migrants present a net fiscal cost of £151,000 by the time they claim the state pension at 66. By 80, this rises to around £500,000. As asylum migrants are

more likely to have health conditions, these costs may well be understated. And as our courts have helpfully illustrated, a limited flow today gives rise to chain migration tomorrow.

For an example of just how badly wrong kind-hearted schemes can go, we can turn to Denmark. In 1991, Copenhagen rejected the asylum applications of 321 Palestinians. Some claimed sanctuary in local churches, and a political storm erupted. Could a modern European state not find it in its heart to offer these people shelter?

Eventually, in 1992, a special law was passed. The 321 Palestinians — and only the 321 — would be given residence permits. How well were they integrated? By 2019, 71 members of the group had been handed a prison sentence (some suspended). Another 133 had been fined. By 2011, 200 working-age members of the cohort were claiming public benefits. And their children performed only slightly better. By 2019, of the 999 residing in Denmark, 132 had been given a prison sentence, some suspended, and 372 were claiming public funds. As the then-acting integration minister sadly noted, Denmark had been careless with who it admitted. All it could do was learn for the future. Britain has made plenty of migration mistakes already. This is one we should avoid adding to the list.

The Telegraph

Munich attack

THE tragic scenes in Munich today are all too familiar. The lead suspect is, yet again, an asylum seeker — this time with a police history of drug crime and petty theft. Where once a shocking event like this provoked wall to wall coverage, now many shrug their shoulders, so desensitised are we to this extreme violence that comes with life in Europe.

In Bavaria this terror attack comes following an attack last month by another Afghan asylum seeker who killed a small boy at nursery. It wasn’t always this way, and it doesn’t have to be this way if Western leaders wake up. A generation of German politicians have operated an open-doors immigration policy, which, coupled with the EU’s Schengen Zone, has been nothing short of disastrous. If the German leadership took border security seriously, this man would not have been in the country.

In most respects, the Munich attack is a parable for everything that is wrong with European migration policy. The suspect arrived illegally and managed to avoid deportation for almost a decade despite a history of crime and alleged extremism. He lived with the impunity we’ve come to expect. But at least in the frankness of the authorities in levelling with the public after his most heinous act, they acknowledged how bankrupt their system has become.

Today was a rare instance where the German authorities did something the British Government should learn from. Within just a few hours of the attack the Bavarian state leader made public the nationality and police history of the suspect. The German press were briefed that his application for asylum had been rejected and that he had posted Islamist

Robert Jenrick

content on a social media site before carrying out the crime.

An hour later the German Chancellor told the public the attacker must be punished and deported. If you commit crimes, you should be sent home, even if that is a place which is “very difficult to live in”, as Olaf Scholz put it. Nobody should be made to live next to these dangerous people. For some reason, Germany remains the only country in Europe deporting migrants back to Afghanistan. For reasons I cannot understand, our courts continue to prevent removals.

The leadership on display in Munich is as night and day to the scenes in the aftermath of Southport, where a news blackout from the British Government — caught in an excess of legalistic caution — allowed a void for conspiracy theory and fuelled deep suspicion. German political leaders appear to have learnt their lessons and taken a different approach to past attacks, bringing basic facts into the public domain quickly, no matter how uncomfortable they were. In contrast our Prime Minister went to great lengths to deny a terror-related motive, and then refused to correct the public record even after being informed privately.

Where German political leaders expressed sympathy for the public anger, we were treated to the sight of our Deputy Prime Minister, Angela Rayner, smearing Brits who asked whether the attacker was known to the security services — who could smell something was up — as “conspiracy theorists”.

The German Interior Minister wasted no time getting to the nub of the issue, stressing the importance of deporting violent criminals. Yet in the aftermath of Southport our

political class largely dodged important questions about the risk of violence from migrants emigrating from conflict areas, and distracted ourselves with absurd debates about changing the shape of knives. Don’t worry, banning pointed knives — turning every kitchen into a Fisher Price toy-set — will solve the problem, we were told.

It felt as through the Labour Government did not trust the British public with information on migration that challenged the prevailing elite orthodoxy. The public are sick of being infantilised, fobbed off or lied to about the reality of immigration. Nor is this approach likely to work in an age when most of us consume our news online, not in the controlled media of old.

This is a timely reminder for the British Government. With trust in the authorities on crime and immigration ebbing away, we need an altogether more transparent approach. Jonathan Hall KC, the independent reviewer of terrorism laws, has come forward with sensible proposals to ensure information is provided in a way that does not collapse a trial, but prizes openness and transparency with the public. They have not been implemented.

But to bridge the gulf in trust we need more than just that. If the Government is to be given the benefit of the doubt by a deeply sceptical public it needs to take a far more open approach to the facts on Islamist extremism, migration and crime by nationality. Some data they could publish instantly if they ended the obstructionism, other statistics they need to begin to collect. Until then deep discontent will continue to bubble below the surface — above it on occasion — and more importantly, our immigration system will continue to fail the public.



APBF urges central bank to review policies to facilitate private sector

F.P. Report

KARACHI: The All Pakistan Business Forum (APBF) has stated that the government has been using taxpayers' money to pay unprecedented returns to the banks, urging the central bank to review its policies to facilitate the private sector, as the massive investment in government papers leave little room for lending to the private sector.

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

He said that the banks' investments in government papers reached Rs26 trillion by December 2024, contributing 57.6 percent to the central government's domestic debt.

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

Moreover, the government borrowing from the SBP also increased by record highs during the period, increasing inflationary pressures on the economy.

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

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

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

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

fiscal year citing rising inflationary pressures.

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

Syed Maaz Mahmood said this massive investment in government papers left little room for lending to the private sector. However, in the second quarter of the current fiscal year, the banks had to increase lending to meet the advance-to-deposit ratio limit to avoid the 15 incremental tax imposed by the federal government. The banks suddenly increased their lending to the private sector, which reached around Rs1.3tr; now, this lending size is shrinking. To avoid tax on lower ADR, the banks lent Rs1.3tr to the non-banking financial institutions as short-term lending.



PESHAWAR: Workers busy in making traditional warm shawl on his workplace at Charsada Road.

Counterfeit medicine trade condemned

SUKKUR (APP): Sukkur Chamber of Commerce and Industry (SCCI) on Saturday has condemned the manufacturing and sale of counterfeit medicines, stating that those involved in such activities are playing with human lives for financial gain.

The Chamber's President Muhammad Khalid Kakizai, Senior Vice President Ameet Kumar and other senior members have expressed their support for joint actions against counterfeit medicine manufacturers and sellers.

In a press release, the SCCI stated that it has always opposed individuals and businesses that prioritize profits over human lives.

The Chamber demands strict action against those responsible and calls for full implementation of the Drug Regulatory Authority of Pakistan's laws. The SCCI appreciates the efforts of law enforcement agencies, including the Deputy Commissioner Sukkur, SSP Sukkur, Assistant Commissioner Sukkur, and Drug Inspector, in taking action against counterfeit medicine manufacturers and sellers. The Chamber offers its full cooperation in this regard and urges the authorities to take stern measures to discourage such activities, the statement said.

Call to promote agro-finance

BAHAWALPUR (APP): Experts emphasized the need to promote agro-finance in the banking sector to boost the agriculture economy in the country at a seminar jointly organized by National Institute of Banking and Finance and Faculty of Agriculture and Environment, Islamia University Bahawalpur here.

The seminar was also supported by the State Bank of Pakistan. Addressing the seminar, finance expert and business head of a bank, Yahya H. Walah said that modern technology had brought about a great revolution in the field of agriculture.

"We will have to take new initiatives and introduce modern technology and devices to boost the agriculture economy," he viewed. He urged students of the Faculty of Agriculture to play their due role in the agriculture field to strengthen efforts being made to put the agriculture economy on track of development.

Joint Director, National Institute of Banking and Finance, State Bank of Pakistan, Mubashar Tayyab, opined that the State Bank would extend its full cooperation to youths and graduates who wanted to play their role in boosting the agriculture economy. He urged the youth to benefit from the offers of the State Bank of Pakistan in this regard.

Dean, Faculty of Agriculture and Environment, Prof-Dr. Tanveer Hussain Turabi told the participants that agriculture scientists, who completed their degrees at the Islamia University Bahawalpur, had been playing an important role in research in agriculture.

FRIA wants better regulatory system — to achieve high EDB level

F.P. Report

LAHORE: The Ferozepur Raod Industrial Association (FRIA) has asked the authorities to undertake economic reforms and improve the regulatory environment for better Ease of Doing Business (EDB) level to boost foreign investment so that financial stability can be achieved in the long-run.

The FRIA Chairman Shahbaz Aslam stressed the need for reducing cost of doing business, besides evolving a new price control mechanism, as huge taxation, rising oil prices and constant jump in electricity and gas tariffs have lifted the inflation to decades high level in 2024.

Shahbaz Aslam said that according to the World Bank's Ease of Doing Business report, Pakistan's ranking has fluctuated, reflecting persistent obstacles such as bureaucratic red tape, complex tax regulations, and insufficient infrastructure.

In the Doing Business report, Pakistan ranked 108th out of 190 economies, showing some improvement from previous years but still indicating significant room for enhancement.

Previously the country was even worse off, standing at 136 in 2019.

He said that not the extensive borrowing but improving the Ease of Doing Business Index of the country was vital to put the country's economy back on track.

He alleged all previous governments for extensive borrowing of forex during last five years to meet local expenditure, which had increased the burden of foreign debt of Pakistan substantially, instead of making serious efforts to enhance the ranking of Ease of Doing Business Index of Pakistan, as it is must to attract foreign as well as local investment and high economic growth.

The FRIA chief warned the authorities that inflation can hurt economic growth and a careful policy is required to keep it in control.

He said that the pace of inflation is skyrocketing at a time when the economic activity is slowing down.

As the oil prices have been increased and power tariff has gone up further, the chairman stated that the government has dropped a fuel bomb on the businessmen after it suffered an electric shock to meet the

conditions of IMF for the revival of the stalled loan program- a recipe to shake the trade and industry.

He said that the decision would prove detrimental to the industries due to high cost of doing business and will also open the flood-gates of inflation.

In addition to making the electricity bills costlier and unaffordable for the consumers, the hike in base tariff would escalate prices of all household goods being widely used in every household, he added.

He said that Pakistan's industry had been harmed by the high cost of doing business, which discouraged investment in capacity and capability and called for easing the burden of heavy taxes on the power sector.

He stated that the constant increase in power tariffs on the pretext of fuel adjustment had increased electricity prices and added to the already high cost of trade and industry.

The FRIA chief urged the power ministry to identify system constraints and communicate targets to all concerned departments in order to launch a wartime effort to upgrade the transmission system.

SIPCO acquires Premium Paints in Saudi Arabia — enhances local production capabilities

F.P. Report

KARACHI: The Saudi Industrial Paint Company (SIPCO) a subsidiary of Kaizen Paint Middle East (KPME) has acquired Premium Paints Company (PPC) in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. PPC was a joint venture between Red Sea Building Materials & Equipment Trading Co. and Sherwin Williams Company. With full ownership of PPC, SIPCO can now locally manufacture high-quality decorative coatings, further expanding its portfolio and strengthening its market presence in Saudi Arabia.

Commenting on the acquisition, Ameer Hamza

Hassan, GCEO of KPME, stated "SIPCO has a strong legacy in industrial coatings. With Premium Paints in the SIPCO family, we are now extending this expertise into the decorative segment, bringing the same commitment to excellence to homes, spaces and businesses across Saudi Arabia".

Mamoon Ali, Country Manager of SIPCO, further added "With this acquisition, we're not just expanding, we're investing in localization, ensuring superior quality and greater accessibility for our customers".

Under KPME's leadership, SIPCO continues to expand in the region, focus-

ing on innovation, quality, and customer satisfaction.

SIPCO, a subsidiary of Kaizen Paint Middle East (KPME), is a leading manufacturer of high-performance coatings and industrial paints, delivering innovative solutions for infrastructure projects, oil and gas, power generation, water and wastewater, and various other sectors.

Premium Paints Company is a Saudi Arabia based coatings manufacturer, specializing in high-quality decorative paints. The company offers a diverse range of interior and exterior coatings tailored to residential, commercial and industrial applications.

No need for one country to control chip industry

TAIPEI (Reuters): There is no need for one country to control the semiconductor industry, which is complex and needs a division of labour, Taiwan's top technology official said on Saturday after US President Donald Trump criticised the island's chip dominance.

Trump repeated claims on Thursday that Taiwan had taken the industry and he wanted back in the United States, saying he aimed to restore US chip manufacturing.

Wu Cheng-wen, head of Taiwan's National Science and Technology Council, did not name Trump in a Facebook post but referred to Taiwan President Lai Ching-te's comments on Friday that the island would be a reliable partner in the

democratic supply chain of the global semiconductor industry.

Wu wrote that Taiwan has in recent years often been asked how its semiconductor industry had become an internationally acclaimed benchmark.

"How did we achieve this? Obviously, we did not gain this for no reason from other countries," he said, recounting how the government developed the sector from the 1970s, including helping found TSMC (2330.TW), opens new tab, now the world's largest contract chipmaker, in 1987.

"This shows that Taiwan has invested half a century of hard work to achieve today's success, and it certainly wasn't something taken easily from other countries."

Each country has its own speciality for chips, from Japan making chemicals and equipment to the United States, which is "second to none" on the design and application of innovative systems, Wu said.

"The semiconductor industry is highly complex and requires precise specialisation and division of labour. Given that each country has its own unique industrial strengths, there is no need for a single nation to fully control or monopolise all technologies globally."

Taiwan is willing to be used as a base to assist "friendly democratic countries" in playing their appropriate roles in the semiconductor supply chain, Wu said.

Fund managers boost exposure to bitcoin ETFs, US filings show

NEW YORK (Reuters): Asset managers, ranging from wealth management companies to hedge funds and pension funds, boosted allocations to US exchange-traded funds tied to the price of bitcoin in the

fourth quarter of 2024, as the price of the world's largest cryptocurrency soared 47%, according to recent regulatory filings.

The State of Wisconsin Investment Board disclosed in its quarterly 13-F filings with the Securities and Exchange Commission that its bitcoin ETF holdings more than doubled in the final three months of last year, to 6 million shares of the iShares Bitcoin Trust ETF (IBIT.O), opens new tab by December 31. The fund, which was the first fund of its kind to report investing in crypto following the debut of bitcoin ETFs, couldn't immediately be reached for comment.

Other large investment funds also boosted their holdings in the ETFs, which launched in January 2024.

Tudor Investment Corp, a systematic hedge fund manager, reported its holdings of the iShares ETF -- now the largest of the pack, with more than \$55 billion in assets -- climbed to 8 million shares, from 4.4 million shares. The value of those holdings also soared, reflecting bitcoin's jump in value, hitting \$426.9 million, up from \$159.9 million at the end of September. Tudor didn't immediately respond to a request for comment.

An Abu Dhabi sovereign wealth fund, Mubadala Investment Co, reported its first foray into bitcoin ETFs in the fourth quarter, taking a 8.2 million share stake in the iShares ETF that was worth \$436.9 million.

Hedge fund Hunting Hill Capital had no exposure to these ETFs as of the

end of the third quarter, but by December 31 had re-emerged as a significant investor, with positions valued at about \$131 million by the end of the year.

"We've been actively trading within the broader crypto ETF complex, and the timing of the third-quarter filing may not have aligned with when we bought and sold various ETFs," said Adam Guren, founder and chief investment officer of the firm.

The ranks of those adding to positions included financial advisory firms whose clients have been eager buyers of bitcoin ETFs. Cetera Advisors and NewEdge Advisers were among firms that boosted holdings in several of the ETFs, including products offered by Fidelity, ARK Investments and Invesco (IVZ.N), opens new tab.

IFC plans \$2B annual investment in Pakistan's infrastructure

ISLAMABAD (APP): International Finance Corporation's Chief Makhtar Diop said that IFC is increasing equity investments and eyeing large-scale infrastructure financing in Pakistan, in an investment plan that could unlock \$2 billion annually over a decade.

"Between now and maybe October, we will be able to progress enough on a couple of transactions that will signal that this is a country ready to receive large-scale financing for critical and important infrastructure," said Makhtar

Diop, the corporation's managing director told Reuters during his visit to Pakistan.

International Finance Corporation chief Makhtar Diop's maiden visit to Pakistan follows the World Bank's plans to allocate up to \$20 billion for Pakistan under a Country Partnership Framework announced in January, with the IFC (the World Bank's private investment arm) also slotted to invest the same amount.

Diop said a \$2 billion annual investment "is not a large number" for Pakistan,

which needs infrastructure development in international airports, energy, water and ports.

According to Reuters, the IFC had an exposure of \$2.1 billion in Pakistan during the fiscal year 2024, ending in June, marking its record investment in the South Asian country's \$350 billion economy.

Diop said the IFC is looking into agriculture, infrastructure, the "very important" financial sector, and the digital sector.

Diop said equity-based transactions were to be expected in Pakistan too.

Global stocks buffeted by tariff threats and data

NEW YORK (AFP/APP): Stock markets diverged and the dollar dipped as traders tracked US President Donald

Trump's latest tariff announcement, economic data and earnings.

Wall Street indices were mixed at the end of the session with the S&P 500 near flat.

That came despite data showing that US retail sales fell by a more-than-expected 0.9 percent in January from December.

Analysts pointed out that was due in part to the December figure being revised higher.

The drop was due partly to bad weather that depressed demand, but the result could also show "a little consumer fatigue," said Briefing.com analyst Patrick O'Hare.

Investors largely shrugged at data earlier this week showing an increase in consumer price inflation and higher-than-expected wholesale price inflation.

"The stock market continues to maintain this resilient disposition," said O'Hare, who pointed to strong corporate earnings as an offset to concerns about tariffs and an

uptick in inflation.

But a rebound in inflation, or persistent inflation at a high level, would make it difficult for the Federal Reserve to cut rates further.

Markets also continued to follow the latest trade developments.

The European Union on Friday vowed to respond "firmly and immediately" to trade barriers after Trump unveiled tariffs that could hit US allies and competitors.

Trump on Thursday said he had decided to impose reciprocal duties, in a dramatic escalation of an international trade war he has unleashed since taking office in January, but the measures will not go into effect until a study is completed.

Despite rising trade tensions, investor sentiment has largely held up in the hope that many of the tariffs can be rowed back with negotiations, while Trump's announcement of plans to hold Ukraine peace talks with Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin has added some optimism.

Lost & Found

I have lost my passport # WV 4155151 somewhere in Pabbi Bazar. If anyone finds it please return it to Asim Zaib Khan S/o Jamshed Khan Mohalla Mulyan, Village Chowki Drab Tehsil Pabbi District Nowshera. Contact: 03139354027

COURT NOTICE

In the Court of Ms Fayyal Ayaz Judge Family Court/CJ-VIII Kohat, Suit no. 219/FC Date of hearing:18-02-2025, Titled:- Mst Salma Bibi Vs Muzammil Shahzad (etc) Notice against:- (1)Muzammil Shahzad (2)Amir Shahzad (3)Tajammul Shahzad Sons of Ghulam Razzaq R/o Ashraf Kamal Street Mohallah Tehsil Pindi Ghab District Attock and (Defendant no. (1)Muzammil Shahzad now in Abroad) (Defendants) Whereas the above plaintiff has instituted a suit for Dower against you Defendants in which date of hearing 18-02-2025 is fixed for your appearance Since your intimation/service is not possible through ordinary means/mode therefore you Defendants is intimated through this publication to appear before this court by person or by pleader on date fixed 18-02-2025 otherwise court shall be proceeded in accordance with law. Order Issued on. 30-01-2025 (Court of J.F.C.Kohat)

COURT NOTICE

In the Court of Jawad Bin Dawood, Civil Judge II, Alaga Qazi Buner at Daggar. Suit No. 111/1. Institution 2024. Date of hearing. 18/2/2025. Abdul Jamal VS Bakht Zari Notice to No. 2. Fared Jamal. 6.Jihan Zeb. 7.Anwar Zeb sons of Sahib Jamal resident of Bajkatta tehsel Gagra district Buner. Whereas in the above mentioned case the mentioned defendants can not be served in the ordinary way, it is, therefore, proclaimed that if the said defendants will/shall not appear personally or through dually authorized agent or pleader in the court at 8.30 am dated 18/2/2025 the proceeding will be taken ex- parte. Given under my hand and seal of this Court.

COURT NOTICE

In the Court of Jauhar Ali Safi Civil Judge I. Alaga Qazi Buner at Daggar. Suit No. 402/1. Institution 2024. Date of hearing. 21/3/2025. Basmen Ullhuda VS Bakht Nazer. Notice to No. 2.Gul Nazer Khan.S.Sardar Ali Khan sons of Masal Khan resident of Sura tehsel Mandarn district Buner. Whereas in the above mentioned case the mentioned defendants can not be served in the ordinary way, it is, therefore, proclaimed that if the said defendants will/shall not appear personally or through dually authorized agent or pleader in the court at 8.00 am dated 21/3/2025 the proceeding will be taken ex- parte. Given under my hand and seal of this Court.

CORRECTION OF FATHER'S NAME

I, Isfandiyar Ali Khan S/o Sardar Ali have passed SSC/Metric exams held in April, 1993 (as regular student at Edwardes College School, Peshawar) and HSSC/Intermediate Exams (FSc/Pre-Medical) held in May/June, 1995 (as regular student of Edwardes College Peshawar) from Board of Intermediate and Secondary Education, Peshawar bearing Roll No. 11453 and 151860 respectively. My father's name has been recorded/written incorrectly in the said academic certificates, etc. as Sardar Ali Khan instead of Sardar Ali and due to which the relevant record of the Board of Intermediate and Secondary Education, Peshawar needs to be corrected. In this respect I intend to correct the record and if any person, agency, organization has any objection, the same may be intimated in writing to Secretary, BISE, Peshawar within 15 days.



In brief

Karachi stadium handed over to ICC

KARACHI (Monitoring Desk): The revamped Karachi was handed over to the International Cricket Council (ICC) as the highly-anticipated Champions Trophy was around the corner. According to details, the tournament will be kick-start in Pakistan from February 19, when the hosts will take on New Zealand in the opening match. The opening ceremony will be held at the Karachi stadium, for which the preparations had been sped up. The Karachi stadium had been handed over to the ICC for branding. The broadcasters had started making arrangements in line with the ICC's requirements. Moreover, according to the report, the baggy cam, spider cam and hawkeye system will be installed at the Karachi stadium. The ICC officials, match officials, anti-corruption and anti-doping units will render the services at the stadium's new building. For the Champions Trophy, the cameras of the match referee and other organisers have also been arranged at the new building. The officials had also taken a review of the command and control. Pakistan will look to defend their Champions Trophy title, which they clinched back in 2017. It is pertinent to note that the Indian cricket team had refused to travel to Pakistan by making excuses about the security issues, due to which their matches will be held in line with the hybrid model at the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

Duckett fit for Champions Trophy

LONDON (Agencies): England opener Ben Duckett has been passed fit to take part in the 50-over Champions Trophy, which starts next week in Pakistan. Duckett had an issue with the left side of his groin during the heavy defeat by India in the third one-day international in Ahmedabad on Wednesday. But scans have given the 30-year-old the all-clear from injury. England travel from the United Arab Emirates to Pakistan on Tuesday and play Australia in their opening group game in Lahore on Saturday, 22 February. England will also play South Africa and Afghanistan in their group games. Brendon McCullum's side go into the tournament on the back of a 3-0 ODI series defeat by India and four losses from five T20s against the same opponents. They have already lost Jacob Bethell to a hamstring injury with the 21-year-old replaced by Tom Banton. Wicketkeeper Jamie Smith has not played since the third T20 on 28 January because of a calf injury while there are also concerns over Brydon Carse's toe issue, a cut to Jofra Archer's hand and a hamstring niggle affecting Jamie Overton.

Medvedev into Marseille semi-finals

MARSEILLE (AFP/APP): Daniil Medvedev reached his first semi-final of the year at the Marseille Open on Friday by defeating Germany's Jan-Lennard Struff in straight sets. The former world number one from Russia came through 6-3, 6-2 in 78 minutes, saving five break points. "I didn't start the match well, he had a lot of break points," said Medvedev, the 2021 champion in Marseille. "I served good a couple of times. He made some mistakes. It's part of tennis. Then I managed to take control of the match and I feel like I was a little bit of a better player."

Super-sub Merino strikes late as Arsenal sink Leicester

LEICESTER (AFP): Arsenal ignored their injury woes to close the gap on Premier League leaders Liverpool to four points as Mikel Merino came off the bench to clinch a 2-0 win against Leicester on Saturday. Mikel Arteta's side were in danger of wasting a chance to put pressure on Liverpool in the title race as they laboured to make the breakthrough at the King Power Stadium. But, with his attacking options limited by a host of injuries, Arteta sent on Spain midfielder Merino to act as a makeshift striker in the closing stages. It proved an inspired move as Merino netted twice in the last nine minutes to extend Arsenal's unbeaten run in the league to 15 games. "We knew it was going to be tough. The first 20 minutes, we were too sloppy. We didn't have a real threat and we weren't playing with enough urgency," Arteta said. "We were much sharper in the second half. Mikel could give us something. He has a sense of danger and great timing in the box. "We were on the verge of a different level of anxiety. But we were composed, scored two brilliant goals and could have scored one or two more."

Having lost 2-0 at Newcastle in the League Cup semi-final second leg before an extended break due to their early FA Cup exit, the Gunners returned to action with a vital victory that keeps them hot on the heels of Liverpool. Liverpool, who stumbled with a draw at Everton in their game in hand on Wednesday, can increase their lead back to seven points if they beat lowly Wolves at Anfield on Sunday. "Let's go day by day and take a lot of positives from the second half, but also know the first half wasn't good enough to win games," Arteta said. With Kai Havertz ruled out for the season after suffering a hamstring injury while blocking a shot during Arsenal's recent training trip to Dubai, Arteta was left with a threadbare attack. Havertz's injury blow came just weeks after Arsenal failed to sign Aston Villa striker Ollie Watkins during the January transfer window. Gabriel Jesus, Bukayo Saka and Gabriel Martinelli were already sidelined, so Arteta was forced to use Belgian winger Leandro Trossard as his central striker. Underling the paucity of Arteta's forward options, 17-year-old Ethan Nwaneri and the out-of-

form Raheem Sterling filled in on the flanks either side of Trossard. Protest songs Fortunately for Arteta, third-bottom Leicester were ideal opponents for his weakened team. Underlying the gloom around Leicester's relegation battle, fans staging a vocal protest against the club's Thai owners and Foxes director of football Jon Rudkin after 14 minutes. With the protest songs still ringing around the King Power Stadium, Declan Rice headed wastefully wide when Nwaneri's cross teed up Arsenal's first sight of goal. Wilfred Ndidi was close to breaking the deadlock on the stroke of half-time when his header skidded off the rain-soaked surface and flashed just wide of the far post. Nwaneri was one of Arsenal's few bright sparks on a murky day in the East Midlands. The teenager surged onto Martin Odegaard's pass and curled just wide from 20 yards in a rare Arsenal threat. Nwaneri was a constant menace, unloading a stinging strike that Leicester keeper Mads Hermansen tipped onto the post. Leicester couldn't stem the tide as Arteta's gamble paid off in the 81st minute.



LEICESTER: Mikel Merino of Arsenal celebrates scoring his team's first goal during the Premier League match between Leicester City FC and Arsenal FC at The King Power Stadium.

ICC Champions Trophy 2025: Key players ruled out due to injuries

LAHORE (Web Desk): The ICC Champions Trophy 2025 is set to kick off on February 19, with eight teams finalising their preparations.

However, several teams will be missing key players due to injuries and other reasons. Many teams had to make last-minute squad changes due to injuries, forcing them to adopt new strategies.

Here are the top players who will miss the tournament:

Pakistan
Saim Ayub: The 22-year-old talented batter suffered an ankle injury during the Test series against South Africa, ruling him out. His absence is a significant blow for Pakistan, as he had already scored three ODI centuries in just nine matches.

India
Jasprit Bumrah: The star pacer suffered a back injury during the Border-Gavaskar Trophy against Australia and failed to recover in time. He will be replaced by Harshit Rana in the squad.

Australia
Pat Cummins: The Australian captain is out due to an ankle injury, with Steve Smith taking over the captaincy.
Mitchell Starc: The legendary pacer withdrew due to personal reasons, weakening Australia's pace attack.

Josh Hazlewood: Another key fast bowler, ruled out due to injury.
Marcus Stoinis: The all-rounder retired from ODI cricket to focus on T20s.
Mitchell Marsh: Sidelined due to fitness issues.

South Africa
Anrich Nortje: Ruled out due to a back injury.
Gerald Coetzee: Suffered a thigh strain during training and will also miss the tournament.

Afghanistan
M.A. Ghaznafar: The young spinner suffered a fracture and is out for four months.

England
Jacob Bethell: The all-rounder sustained a hamstring injury during the India series. Tom Banton has replaced him.

New Zealand
Ben Sears: Suffered a hamstring injury during training in Karachi and will be replaced by Jacob Duffy.

Pakistan athletes shines in Asian Taekwondo Open

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan's taekwondo athletes delivered an outstanding performance in the Poomsae event of the c, concluding the category with a total of 16 gold medals.

Pakistani athletes bagged eight medals on the opening day, as many on the second day of the mega event. The national contingent also secured seven silver and 14 bronze medals on day two, further solidifying Pakistan's dominance in the competition. With five days of action remaining, the focus now shifts to the highly anticipated Kyorugi (sparring) events, where Pakistan aims to continue its impressive run. The championship, featuring top athletes from across Asia, will

conclude on 20th February. Pakistan's athletes displayed exceptional skill and synchronization, clinching gold in various team and individual events.

In Free Style Mixed Team Over 17 – Naqvi, Sial, Abbas, Iqbal, Maryam; Free Style Pair Over 17 – Nailah, Hamza; Free Style Individual Over 17 (Male) – Hamza Ameer; Free Style Individual Over 17 (Female) – Naqvi Zymal; Team Under 30 Male – Qadeer, Waheed, Deedar; Team Over 30 Male – Ahmed, Hussain, Mumtaz; Team Over 30 Female – Nisa, Sabir, Bashir; Team Under 30 Female – Sheraz, Batool, Maryam.

Silver Medalists (7 Silvers): Pakistan's athletes continued to shine with seven silver medals, showcasing strong performances across multiple categories.

letes continued to shine with seven silver medals, showcasing strong performances across multiple categories.

Bronze Medalists (14 Bronzes): The depth of Pakistan's taekwondo talent was further highlighted with 14 bronze medals, proving the country's rising status in the sport.

Focus Now on Kyorugi (Sparring) Events: With the Poomsae events concluded, all eyes are now on the Kyorugi (sparring) competitions, where Pakistan will compete for more podium finishes. The national taekwondo team, buoyed by its strong start, is determined to build on this momentum and further strengthen its position on the international stage.

PTF hires American coach to train national

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan Tennis Federation (PTF) has hired renowned American coach Robert Davis to train national players, President of the PTF Aisam-ul-Haq Qureshi said on Saturday. Speaking at a press conference alongside Robert Davis, Aisam said that Robert was one of the top-tier tennis coaches in the world.

"This is a momentous occasion for Pakistan tennis. It is for the first time that we have brought in a foreign coach of such a caliber to work with our players. This demonstrates our dedication to providing them with the best possible training and resources," Aisam said. He said the federation was committed to elevating Pakistan's tennis standard on the international stage.

"Robert is a highly respected figure in the tennis world. He brings a wealth of experience, having coached players in numerous countries, including China, Korea, Saudi Arabia and Vietnam."

According to Aisam, the federation has also invested in sending players for training in Kazakhstan. "Robert has produced 10 to 15 top-ranked players in the world.

He also helped our team significantly during the Davis Cup in Myanmar and provided a 10-day training session for our coaches.

"Now, here in Islamabad, he has already conducted a week-long training sessions for our coaches and players," he added. He said a state-of-the-art gym at PTF Complex was nearing its completion. "Hopefully, it will be ready by February 20", he said.

Aisam said the PTF was focusing on increasing tournaments and rewards for young players. "A foreign fitness trainer is also arriving in Islamabad on Sunday to support the athletes' physical conditioning," he added.

The PTF President mentioned a series of international events taking place during the ongoing year where Pakistan's tennis teams would showcase their skills.

The national team will travel to Malaysia for the Asian Qualifying Round, while the junior team will compete in the South Asian Qualifiers. Additionally, the Under-14 team is also set to participate in an international event. Calling 2025 "a golden year" for Pakistan tennis, Aisam expressed confidence that Pakistan

players would claim medals in the Islamic Games and the South Asian Games. He said that Pakistan's performance in the recently held Davis Cup tie against Kazakhstan was good, but they could not get over the line. He said that preparations for the September Davis Cup tie had already begun.

He said Pakistan's seasoned coaches Mehboob Khan and Asim Khan were actively training junior players, with over 100 children in Peshawar and 150 in Faisalabad already receiving coaching.

Robert, on occasion, said: "The first impression, which I got here is that everyone - the players, coaches and the PTF management are very much enthusiastic. They love tennis and want to improve."

"I am also incredibly impressed by the talent I see in Pakistan," He said Pakistan's junior players had immense potential while the senior players were already performing well. "They [budding players] just need more exposure to international competition, and I am confident they can achieve great things," he reckoned.

Former cricketers react to Babar Azam opening in ODIs

KARACHI (Monitoring Desk): Pakistan batter Babar Azam's recent underwhelming performances have fuelled discussions about his role as an opener for the upcoming International Cricket Council (ICC) Men's Champions Trophy 2025, set to run from February 19 to March 9. Interim head coach Aqib Javed voiced support for Babar's promotion to the opening position during a post-match press conference following Pakistan's five-wicket defeat to New Zealand in the tri-nation ODI series final on Friday. Javed defended the management's decision to elevate the star batter, expressing optimism that Babar would thrive in this crucial role during key matches ahead. Javed said: "Our rationale behind the change was that if you look at the away series against South Africa, the right-hand batter had to bat in the first over in all games. Then Saim got injured and he had to open in Tests too. These pitches are not troubling the batters at the start, we wanted our best batter to make good use of the powerplay, that suits us more. "So, I think, in these conditions, Babar should open and I am hopeful that he will play big innings in

important matches."

Despite managing only one victory from three matches of the recently-concluded tri-nation ODI series, Javed remained confident in the squad's ability to "do great" in the upcoming tournament, suggesting that it has all the basis covered.

In contrast, other former cricketers have criticised and opposed this decision in light of Babar's persistent poor performances in recent months. During the tri-nation ODI series final against New Zealand, Babar struggled to make an impact, recording scores of 10 (23), 23 (19) and 29 (34) in three matches, including the final in Karachi.

As a result, former Pakistan pacer Mohammad Amir voiced discontent over Babar's role as an opener in ODIs, asserting that the star batter is better suited on the No. 3 position. During a recent interview, Amir highlighted Babar's strength in building an innings from No. 3, where he can effectively anchor the batting lineup.

He stressed the importance of defined batting roles in longer formats, emphasising that an opener's approach in ODIs and Tests differs from that in T20 cricket.

"As I have said before, if I don't get to bowl with the new ball, I won't be able to utilise my strength. Similarly, Babar's strength is at No. 3, where he knows how to construct an innings. The role of an opener in T20s is different from that in ODIs and Tests," Amir stated.

"He has to do it in phases. In 10 overs, I have to take a chance. In the next 10 overs, I have to build a partnership. The role is different. Babar, yes, he's a big player. But I think he should have played at number 3. This is his strength. Yes, when you're stuck, you try different things. Maybe I should take runs from here or there," he added.

Additionally, ex-Pakistan captain Mohammad Hafeez suggested that the team management should opt for Abdullah Shafique, Imam-ul-Haq or Shan Masood to partner Fakhar Zaman at the top, allowing Babar to return to his preferred position.

"Shan Masood, Imam-ul-Haq or Abdullah Shafique, take any one as opener & let Babar Azam play at no 3 in Champions trophy. Make things easier for everyone," Hafeez wrote on X.

Furthermore, former South African cricketer Herschelle

Gibbs, who previously worked with Babar as the head coach of Karachi Kings in the Pakistan Super League (PSL), took a dig at the former Pakistan captain's English proficiency while responding to a fan on social media.

He also claimed that Babar is reluctant to adapt his game despite receiving suggestions that could enhance his performance. On Thursday, a fan urged Gibbs to offer Babar advice to help him overcome his recent struggles with the bat. The 50-year-old responded on X, stating that communicating with Babar is challenging due to the language barrier. "Language is an issue with Babar... as you know, his English isn't great, so it's difficult to get points across to him," Gibbs wrote.

The former opening batter further opined that Babar's batting style and tempo have remained unchanged since his stint with Karachi Kings, despite his evolving role in international cricket. "It was the first time I worked with him, so for me, it was more of an observation than anything else. But what I've seen since then is that he hasn't changed his approach — he still plays with the same tempo and the same shots," he said.

Cholistan Jeep Rally Khalid Hameed, Lalain Khanzada win race

BAHAWALPUR (APP): Khalid Hameed has bagged first position in the male category while Lalain Khanzada won first position in the female category in the stock category race of the 20th International Cholistan Desert Jeep Rally 2025.

The stock category race competition of the 20th International Cholistan Desert Jeep Rally 2025 was held in the Cholistan desert here on Saturday. Around 78 racers including five female racers were given the task to cover a distance of around a 216 kilometers long race track. It was the second phase of the 20th International Cholistan Desert Jeep Rally 2025. According to the results, Khalid Hameed Khan clinched first position in the male category, Masood Hoot won second position and Asif Imam got third position. According to the results of the female category, Ms. Lalain Khanzad clinched the first position and Ms. Zanaira Mahmood won second position. The race track started from Star Point near Derawar Fort and it culminated at Bajnot Fort. The both forts are located in Cholistan desert.

The final race competition of the prepared category of the 20th International Cholistan Desert Jeep Rally 2025 will be held in Cholistan desert on Sunday, 16th February 2025. In the prepared category, Zain Mahmood will defend his title as the major competition race would be held between Zain Mahmood and Meer Nadir Magis. The final results of the race competitions of the 20th International Cholistan Desert Jeep Rally 2025 would be announced on 16th February.



In brief

RCB completes 70pc desilting of Khanpur Dam

RAWALPINDI (APP): The Rawalpindi Cantonment Board (RCB) on Saturday has completed 70 percent of the desilting of its portion of Khanpur Dam's canal. The annual cleaning process which was started on 10th February will be completed by 20th of this month. RCB shares 5Km of the canal which is 18Km long from the dam to Sangjani. The section plays an arterial water supply role to the twin cities. Naseem Bishnu, Assistant Cantt Engineer RCB informed APP that as much as 60 people have been deployed by the RCB, along with the heavy machinery at the location near HIT Taxila. He further informed that the human and technical resources deployed at the site were doing their best to finish the project by the given deadline. It is worth mentioning here that the irrigation departments from KPK and Punjab, WASA, CDA, PMO and HIT are partnering the project. On the other side, the water supply management which was hampered due the cleaning process is also getting improved. "We are managing the water supply with continuity, however in any emergency if arises or demand by the residents, RCB is providing water tankers", said Naseem while highlighting the water shortage redressal system of the board.

RDA seals 20 properties

RAWALPINDI (APP): Rawalpindi Development Authority (RDA) here on Saturday conducted an operation against unauthorized commercial properties and sealed 20 on Raja Sultan Road. According to a RDA spokesman, RDA Enforcement Squad on the directives of Director General, Kinza Murtaza, conducted a targeted operation and took action in accordance with the law against the violators. During this operation, 20 properties including shops and plazas were sealed for illegal land use, violations of approved building plans, and regulations. The owners of the properties violated the approved building plans. Despite notices issued by the RDA, the owners continued to disregard regulations, violating the Punjab Development of Cities Act 1976 and the RDA Building and Zoning Regulations 2020. The properties had been converted into illegal commercial establishments without the required approvals or No Objection Certificates. Earlier, notices were also issued to the owners of the properties regarding the illegal construction. The DG RDA had directed the Land Use and Building Control (LU&BC) Wing to take strict measures against encroachments, unauthorized constructions, and illegal commercial activities in residential areas. The RDA is committed to upholding the city's planning and zoning laws to ensure orderly urban development.

WASA declares drought emergency

RAWALPINDI (APP): The Water and Sanitation Agency (WASA) Rawalpindi has declared a drought emergency in Rawalpindi and water restrictions have been imposed. According to Managing Director (MD) WASA Rawalpindi Muhammad Saleem Ashraf, the WASA Rawalpindi always strives to provide water, sewerage and drainage facilities to the citizens as per the vision of the Punjab government. However, due to the recent drought, rapidly growing population, various commercial activities and limited resources, the agency is facing severe difficulties in fulfilling its responsibilities, he told here Saturday.



ISLAMABAD: Federal Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi in a meeting with Acting US Ambassador Natalie Baker. —APP Photo

Senator Rubina, Dar explore collaborative strategies to tackle poverty

ISLAMABAD (APP): In a bid to enhance the impact of the Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP) and uplift marginalized communities, Chairperson BISP Senator Rubina Khalid met with Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Senator Ishaq Dar.

The discussion focused on strengthening partnerships, advancing BISP's new banking model for transparent fund disbursement, and expanding the Benazir Hunarmand Programme to equip women with employable skills.

During the meeting, Senator Rubina Khalid apprised Ishaq Dar of the newly introduced banking model, aimed at ensuring a more efficient, dignified,

and transparent distribution of financial assistance to beneficiaries.

The initiative is expected to significantly improve the effectiveness of BISP's cash transfer programs, minimizing challenges faced by recipients.

A key highlight of the discussion was the Benazir Hunarmand Programme, BISP's flagship poverty graduation initiative, designed to provide vulnerable women and families with essential skills training. This program focuses on equipping beneficiaries with market-relevant skills, enhancing their employability both locally and internationally, and ultimately fostering financial independence.

Senator Ishaq Dar expressed his full support for BISP's initiatives, emphasizing the pivotal role the Ministry of Foreign Affairs can play in strengthening these programs through international collaboration. He reaffirmed the government's commitment to poverty alleviation and economic empowerment.

The meeting underscored the need for strategic partnerships between government institutions, international organizations, and civil society to create a lasting and sustainable impact. By leveraging these collaborations, BISP aims to further its mission of economic inclusion, empowerment, and poverty reduction across Pakistan.

Qaiser Ahmed Sheikh calls for political harmony

ISLAMABAD (APP): Federal Maritime Minister Qaiser Ahmed Sheikh Saturday urged the opposition to engage in dialogue for the country's betterment, stressing that political stability is crucial for attracting investments and achieving progress, as the government takes historic steps towards development.

In an exclusive conversation with PTV news channel, Qaiser Ahmed Sheikh called for political harmony, emphasizing the need for unity and economic growth to tackle regional challenges.

He reiterated the gov-

ernment's commitment to fostering dialogue, political stability and economic growth, urging all political stakeholders to prioritize national interest and work together for the country's prosperity.

Responding to a query, he acknowledged the opposition's potential concerns, he emphasized the need for a collective effort to move forward.

He further added that the International Finance Corporation (IFC) and International Monetary Fund (IMF) have expressed admiration for Pakistan's economic progress, with the IFC

seeking to increase its annual investment in the country as trust is being rebuilt in Pakistan under the PML-N policies.

He highlighted that Pakistan has achieved a notable 25% increase in remittances, while also maintaining stability in foreign currency reserves, demonstrating the country's economic resilience and growth.

The nation eagerly awaits a positive attitude from all politicians, as unity and collective effort are the need of the hour to drive the country towards further development and growth, he added.

ANF recovers over 63 kg drugs in eight operations

RAWALPINDI (APP): Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF) while conducting eight operations across the country, managed to recover over 63 kg drugs worth over Rs 7.9 million and arrested nine accused, said an ANF Headquarters spokesman here on Saturday.

He informed that 200 grams ice and 172 grams heroin were recovered from two suspects netted near two different universities in Rawalpindi.

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

In another operation,

230 grams weed hidden in household goods was recovered from a parcel booked for Thailand at the cargo office in Lahore.

33.6 kg hashish and 4.8 kg opium were recovered from a motorcycle checked near Daska in Sialkot and two suspects were arrested during the operation.

15.6 kg hashish was recovered from the possession of two women going in a passenger bus near M-1 Motorway Islamabad.

2.4 kg opium and 3 kg hashish were recovered from three parcels booked for Faisalabad and

Islamabad through a courier office located on Ring Road, Peshawar.

2.4 kg ice hidden in a car was recovered near Khanna Rohi Nullah Road in Lahore and an accused was arrested.

In 8th operation, 1 kg ice hidden in secret cavity of a car was recovered near a bus stop in Lahore and two accused were rounded up during the operation.

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

Mohsin Naqvi meets acting US Ambassador Natalie Baker

ISLAMABAD (APP): Federal Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi held a meeting with Acting US Ambassador Natalie Baker in Islamabad. During the meeting, detailed discussions were held on Pakistan-US relations, matters of mutual interest and enhancing bilateral cooperation.

The interior minister's

recent visit to the US was also discussed during the meeting, where he had positive interactions with members of the US Congress. In these meetings, detailed talks were held on formulating a joint strategy against terrorism and further strengthening of bilateral relations.

On this occasion, Mohsin Naqvi stated that

terrorism is an international issue and the global community must work together to fight this menace. He further emphasized that Pakistan and the United States have longstanding and excellent relations that span over several decades.

The interior minister said that US cooperation in enhancing the capacity of

Pakistan's law enforcement agencies is highly significant. He expressed hope that Pakistan-US relations would be further strengthened during President Donald Trump's tenure.

During the meeting, Mohsin Naqvi invited Acting US Ambassador Natalie Baker to attend the Jashn-e-Baharan (Spring Festival) in Islamabad.

Police arrest 58 for kite flying

RAWALPINDI (APP): Rawalpindi district police in a crackdown against kite flyers and sellers on Saturday, arrested 58 accused for kite flying and aerial firing. According to a police spokesman, the police on the directives of City Police Officer, (CPO) Rawalpindi, Syed Khalid Hamdani, launched a crackdown on kite flying and aerial firing and arrested 54 involved in kite flying and recovered hundreds of kites and string rolls from their possession while four accused were rounded up for aerial firing in the Race Course and R.A.Bazar areas.

He informed that action against kite flyers were taken in the areas of Race Course, RA Bazar, Naseerabad, Dharmial, Waris Khan, Westridge and Saddar Baroni Police Stations. The R.A.Bazar Police arrested 22 kite flyers while Race Course police netted 19 accused. Similarly, Dharmial police netted eight, Waris Khan nabbed two while Westridge, Naseerabad and Saddar Baroni police arrested one each.

He said, Rawalpindi district police had finalized effective arrangements to control kite flying and aerial firing. Police officers continuously monitored the crackdown by staying in the field, he added. An awareness campaign was also launched and awareness walks were organized in different city areas to spread awareness against kite flying and aerial firing. Due to effective measures of the Rawalpindi Police, no untoward incident was reported.

The crackdown against kite flying and kite selling would continue, he said adding, those found involved in the deadly game could not escape the grip of the law. The Police officers including Superintendent of Police, (SP) Saddar, SDPO Cantt and SHOs remained present in the field to monitor the crackdown. Announcements were being made from the mosques and pamphlets against kite flying and aerial firing were distributed among the citizens in door-to-door campaign.

Strict monitoring was being done from high-rise buildings to prevent kite flying and aerial firing, he informed. He said that kite flying is a non-bailable offense and the accused would be punished with imprisonment of 3 to 7 years in prison and fine amounting to Rs 500,000.

Immediate legal action would be taken in case of aerial firing and kite flying, he said and informed that cases would also be registered against the owners of the buildings from where the kite flying or aerial firing would be done. He urged the citizens particularly parents to stop their children from the deadly game No one would be allowed to endanger the lives of others for their temporary pleasure, he added.

Aqeel emphasizes 26th amendment's role in fortifying judicial independence

ISLAMABAD (APP): Adviser to the Prime Minister on Law and Justice Barrister Aqeel Malik said on Saturday that the objective behind the 26th Amendment was to strengthen judicial independence through transparent appointments.

"The removal of suo motu power is intended to prevent judicial overreach and regulate the same while increased parliamentary oversight ensures a balanced approach to such appointments, as is the case in democracies the world over", he said in a statement in reaction to an article of PTI leader Raouf Hasan carried by a section of media.

The adviser to the PM said that the amendment also introduced the fundamental right to a clean environment and promoting economic justice. These reforms, he maintained, were designed to bolster democratic institutions and benefit citizens, reflecting the Government's commitment to transparency, inclusivity, and justice.

Rebutting Raouf Hasan's remarks he said the claims of judicial compromise and political entanglement were unfounded as the amendment's goal was to foster institutional harmony and uphold democratic principles. Moreover, the Government has strength-

ened Pakistan's international relationships evidenced by deeper engagement with Gulf countries and further demonstrated by Turkish PM visit earlier this week, Barrister Aqeel said.

The IMF has satisfactory observations on the program as inflation has reduced to a record level and highest level of remittances witnessed in the one year. Overall, he said large-scale federal and provincial level programs were being designed, financed and implemented in health, education, infrastructure, climate change and beyond which was proof that citizens have reposed trust in the Government.

Bar Elections in full swing in Rawalpindi

RAWALPINDI (APP): The Election Board has released the final list of candidates for the High Court Bar Association elections for the year 2025-26, according to which candidates have been elected unopposed on one seat each of the executive body reserved for Attock, Jhelum and Mianwali, except the seat for joint secretary.

According to the details, polling for other seats, including the President, General Secretary, and two seats of the executive body, will be held on February 22 in which more than 5,500 male and female lawyers from across the division will choose their leadership for the coming year.

According to the final list of candidates released on Saturday by the Election Board's Chairman, Tanveer Iqbal Khan, there will be a one-on-one contest between Ahsan Hameedullah and Khurram Masood Kayani for the post of President, female candidates Saima Shujee and Khawar Riaz Qadri for the post of Senior Vice President, Malik Shahid Iqbal and Shahid Jahangir Khan for the post of Vice President, Khalil Ahmed Malik and Raja Amir Mahmood for the post of Secretary General, female candidates Shazia Ambrain Awan and Nargis Shabbir Alvi for the post of Additional Secretary.

Hassan Ali was elected unopposed for the post of Joint Secretary.

Sheikh Muhammad Ali was elected unopposed on the Attock seat, Raja Muhammad Zia Ashraf on the Jhelum seat, and Sohail Imran on the Mianwali seat in the executive body.

Following the unopposed election, there will be a contest between 5 candidates on the 2 Rawalpindi seats, including Rahat Saleem, Tahira Bano Malik, Uzma Mubarak, Azmat Ali Mubarak, and Talib Shahzad. The projection meeting of the candidates will be held on February 20, while polling will be held on February 22 from 8:00am to 4:00 pm.

IGP chairs meeting on crime control, security measures

ISLAMABAD (APP): Inspector General (IGP) Syed Ali Nasir Rizvi chaired high-level meetings to review crime control and security arrangements in the federal capital on Saturday.

An official told APP that Senior police officials, including DIG Headquarters/Security Syed Ali Raza, DIG Islamabad Muhammad Jawad Tariq, SSPs, SPs, and other officers, attended the meetings.

He said during the meeting, IGP Rizvi reviewed the overall arrangements to ensure complete security in the federal capital and prevent crime. IGP Rizvi issued orders to senior police officers to ensure effective security measures for the transportation of important institutions, ambassadors,

embassies, other domestic and foreign dignitaries, state guests, and important delegations located in the high-security zone.

On this occasion, IGP Rizvi emphasized that the entrances and exits of important buildings and embassies located in the high-security zone should be monitored by the Safe City Islamabad cameras. The security of foreign ambassadors and delegations in the federal capital is a top priority for Islamabad Police.

IGP Rizvi also reviewed the steps taken to combat crime in the federal capital. IGP instructed all officers to intensify efforts to combat crime, ensure public safety and improve the law-and-order situation. All officers should implement prompt

and effective measures to prevent theft, robbery, drug trafficking, and other serious crimes by utilizing modern technology and sharing intelligence.

Furthermore, IGP Rizvi ordered officers to handle cases under investigation based on merit, submit challans with solid evidence to the competent courts, and ensure that criminals are punished in as many courts as possible. The arrests of apprehended members of criminal gangs should be prioritized.

IGP Rizvi further stated that maximum arrests of declared suspects should be made. The protection of citizens' lives and property is our top priority, and no negligence will be tolerated in this regard.



RAWALPINDI: PHA workers carefully trim trees interfering with electricity pylons and cables to prevent hazards near Pindi Cricket Stadium. —APP Photo

DHA achieves 100% success in LQAS survey in anti polio campaign

RAWALPINDI (APP): The District Health Authority (DHA) Rawalpindi has achieved a milestone of successful completion of the year's first National Immunization Drive by reaching out to the target population.

Officials from the World Health Organization (WHO) and other international partners have verified the vaccination campaign in randomly picked 30 UCs of the district.

The immunization drive, which was started on February 3 in 212 Union Councils of the district, was followed by international partnering organizations.

As many as 30 UCs were randomly checked by the WHO and other partnering organizations who declared 'all 30 UCs passed' by the

health authority during the campaign.

In a brief interaction with APP here on Saturday, Dr Asif Arbab Niazi, CEO of DHA, informed that the Lot Quality Assurance Survey (LQAS) was conducted by the WHO and other organizations in 30 UCs of their choice.

"This is done to ensure that no child is left unaddressed during the immunization drive", he said, adding that his team has achieved a milestone of a hundred per cent execution of the campaign.

The CEO lauded the commendable work done by the health workers and also highlighted that attaining the high target remained possible only because of the tremendous response from the parents.

He further appreciated the role and coordination of allied departments of the local administration in this regard.

He reiterated that the District Health Authority would continue its efforts by following the vision of CM Maryam Nawaz Sharif for reshaping the society free of diseases.

The health authority set a target to vaccinate over 10 million children of the age group equal to or less than 5 years for which 3717 field teams were deployed and 330 fixed points were set up in the health centers.

Moreover, 870 area incharges and 163 transit teams were facilitating the population at various bus stops, railway stations etc.

AFC coaches arrive in Kabul

KABUL (BNA): Hossein Shams, a prominent teacher, and Reza Kurdi, an Iranian deputy teacher from the Asian Football Confederation (AFC), have arrived in Kabul to conduct a specialized training course in Asian Futsal Level 2 coaching. The Afghanistan Football Federation (AFF) has announced that this course, aimed at enhancing the skills of local coaches, will commence today and is set to benefit 24 qualified coaches from across the country.

Iran detains Afghan migrants

TEHRAN (Amu TV): Iranian authorities have detained 100 Afghan migrants in the northern part of Sistan and Baluchestan province, a local police official said, as part of an ongoing crackdown on undocumented foreigners. Mohammad Sheibak, the police commander of Hirmand, said the arrests were carried out under what Iranian authorities call a “social security enhancement plan,” according to the state-run IRNA news agency.

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

Khost exports \$11m worth of dried fruits this year

KHOST (TOLONews): Officials from the Khost Chamber of Commerce and Investment have announced that \$11 million worth of dried fruits has been exported from the province this solar year. According to officials, in addition to pine nuts, pistachios, and almonds, 17 other types of dried fruits were included in these exports. Nawab Amirzai, head of the Khost Chamber of Commerce and Investment, said: “Total exports have reached 4,500 tons, showing a significant increase compared to previous years. However, we are still

striving to make Afghanistan a major exporting country.” Meanwhile, traders have called on officials to address their challenges. “Tariffs should have a fixed schedule so that traders are informed of any changes in a timely manner,” said Shahbaz Gurbaz, one of the traders. “Our trade transactions with Pakistan should be based on the principle of reciprocity,” another trader, Awal Khan Zadran, added. Trader Nurgul Mangal also stated: “We urge the government to organize international exhibitions for us, especially in Arab

countries, and to provide greater support to traders.” Local officials in Khost say they are working to provide necessary facilities for traders. “Exports have increased compared to previous years, and we are working to provide more facilities for traders to expand their businesses,” said Mustaghfir Gurbaz, spokesperson for the Khost governor. This comes as the Ministry of Industry and Commerce of Afghanistan recently announced that in the past 10 months of this solar year, the country’s dried fruit exports have reached \$350 million.

‘Scholars to serve all sections of society’

KABUL (Ariana News): Acting Minister of Foreign Affairs Amir Khan Muttaqi has said that religious scholars should serve all sections of society, both in the religious and worldly spheres, and their actions should be such that people are encouraged towards religion. Addressing students at the Jaamia Riaz-ul-Uloom in Kabul, Muttaqi also stressed the need for unity. “You should gather everyone around you. No one should be disappointed in you. No one should be offended by you. No one should run away from you. Why should they run away? You should befriend one who runs away. Why should your friend leave you? You have knowledge. You have a system. You have seen the world. You have experience in dealing with matters. Why should he leave you?” Muttaqi said. He also said that no one should look at another person as if he is less pious. Muttaqi also warned that “unwarranted criticism leads to destruction.” “If a sheep, cow or goat leaves the flock, it is eaten by wolf,” he said.

Support for women and children highlighted

KABUL (Khaama Press): Tajudeen Oyewale, the UNICEF representative in Afghanistan, emphasized support for women and children during a meeting with officials from the Asian Development Bank (ADB). Oyewale stated on his X account regarding the meeting with ADB officials, discussing how they can support women and children in Afghanistan. He described the meeting as a “strong partnership for a brighter future for women and children in Afghanistan” and stressed that they are working together to expand essential services and create more opportunities to help those in greatest need. He emphasized that during the discussion, both parties agreed to expand essential services and provide more opportunities for those in need. No further details have been released about the meeting’s discussions. This comes at a time when several international humanitarian organizations have expressed concern over the worsening humanitarian situation in Afghanistan, especially for women, after the suspension of US aid. Afghanistan’s economic and social crises have intensified, leaving millions of women and children reliant on humanitarian aid to meet their basic needs. Recently, the World Bank reported that Afghanistan is facing a severe food security crisis, with at least 2.9 million people currently on the brink of hunger.

Political talk shows: CPJ urges Taliban to reverse ban

KABUL (Amu TV): The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) has called on the Taliban to reverse a newly imposed ban on domestic media broadcasting political and economic talk shows, warning that the restriction further erodes press freedom in Afghanistan. The Taliban’s Ministry of Information and Culture issued the directive verbally to media executives in Kabul, stating that outlets may only discuss political and economic matters through the group’s official spokespersons, according to Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ). “The Taliban must allow Afghan media to operate independently,” said Beh Lih Yi, CPJ’s Asia program coordinator. Yi described the latest restriction as part of an ongoing effort by the Taliban to suppress independent journalism in the country. “This latest move to censor discussion, reporting, and debate of political and economic issues is yet another repressive measure that indicates the extreme steps the Taliban are taking to totally dismantle Afghanistan’s independent media,” she said. The ban follows a series

of measures aimed at curbing press freedom. In September, the Taliban prohibited live political broadcasts and required journalists to seek approval before airing pre-recorded programs, limiting coverage to pre-approved topics and participants. CPJ also reported that journalists seeking to interview experts outside the Taliban’s list of 68 approved speakers must obtain permission from the Ministry of Information and Culture. CPJ said its requests for comment from Taliban spokesperson Zabihullah Mujahid went unanswered.

Ministry signs MoU to support orphans

KABUL (BNA): The Ministry of Martyrs and Disabled has officially signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the International Islamic Welfare Organization, valued at \$168,890, to enhance the economic self-sufficiency of orphans in Afghanistan. The agreement was signed by Mullah Sadokhan Haqshenas, Head of Foreign Relations and Planning at the Ministry, and Mohammad Zolqarnain Abbas, Head of the International Islamic Welfare Organization. Under this initiative, services will be provided to 80 orphans in Kabul and Balkh provinces, focusing on job creation and promoting economic independence for their families. During the signing ceremony, Mullah Sadokhan Haqshenas emphasized the need for improved services for the many orphans, wid-

ows, and individuals with disabilities who have been affected by decades of conflict and instability in the region. He stated, “The ongoing challenges necessitate targeted support in various aspects of life for these vulnerable groups.” Mohammad Zolqarnain Abbas also committed to collaborating closely with the Ministry to ensure comprehensive assistance for the orphans and their families.

2 arrested for attacking worshippers in Mosque

KABUL (Khaama Press): Local authorities in Samangan province said two individuals have been arrested in connection with injuring four worshippers in Samangan. The incident occurred during Friday prayers on February 14 at a Mosque in the city of Aybak. According to a statement from Hashmatullah Rahmani, spokesperson for the Samangan Police, the two individuals, residents of Samangan, threw a hand grenade inside the mosque, resulting in injuries to four worshippers. The attack was reportedly motivated by personal grievances with the mosque’s community. Rahmani confirmed that after being informed of the incident, the Deputy Security Commander and personnel from the third security district of the Samangan Police responded quickly. They apprehended the suspects, who were attempting to flee, along with a firearm. They are now under investigation. The wounded victims were immediately transferred to the provincial hospital in Mazar-e-Sharif for medical treatment. The authorities have stated that the situation is under control. In a separate incident, Kabul witnessed a suicide bombing on Thursday, February 13, which resulted in two deaths, including the attacker, and three others being injured. This attack follows a similar suicide bombing in

Kunduz on Tuesday, February 11, where an attacker detonated explosives outside a Kabul Bank branch, targeting civilians and Taliban members waiting to collect their pay. The Islamic State (ISIS) claimed responsibility for the attack.

Mass wedding ceremony celebrated in Ghazni

GHAZNI (BNA): A joyful mass wedding ceremony took place in Ghazni, uniting 11 young couples from diverse cultural backgrounds. The event was organized by Sheikh Sayed Gul Ahmad Motamedi, who emphasized the significance of simplicity in marriage according to Islamic teachings. Motamedi highlighted that the primary message of the mass wedding is one of unity and solidarity among the Afghan people. The couples, hailing from both the city and surrounding districts, represented various cultures and languages, showcasing the rich diversity of the region.

Herat’s medical advancements reduce need for treatment abroad

HERAT (TOLONews): The Herat Public Health Directorate states that with the improvement of healthcare services and the implementation of advanced surgeries in the province, the need for patients to travel abroad for treatment has significantly decreased. According to health officials, in recent months, complex surgeries such as advanced brain surgeries, tumor removal, cancerous gland surgeries, open-heart surgeries, kidney transplants, and other sensitive and complex procedures have become possible in Herat. Recently, doctors successfully removed a tumor from the brain of Noor Ahmad, a patient from Kandahar, at a private hospital in Herat. “For the first time, we were able to remove the tumor through the nose using an endoscopic method. Fortunately, the patient’s vision has returned to normal after the surgery,” said Mohammad Younus Iqbal, a neurosurgeon. Noor Ahmad also expressed his happiness

ment within the country. “Traveling abroad was difficult for me due to visa issues and high costs,” he said. Basir Ahmad Tawakkoli, a neurosurgeon, said about Mohsen’s surgery, “In this operation, we removed the patient’s third cervical vertebra, which was completely damaged, and replaced it with a cage.” The Herat Public Health Directorate emphasizes that in recent years, treatments for certain diseases that were previously not possible in the country are now

being performed in the province. “In the past, patients with brain tumors had to travel abroad for treatment, but now these surgeries are performed in both the public and private sectors in Herat. Additionally, kidney transplants and open-heart surgeries are performed in the province, which has reduced people’s difficulties,” said Ghulam Mohammad Hanafi, deputy director of the Herat Public Health Directorate. Farid Ahmad Ijaz, director of a private hospital in

Herat, also stated: “We provide advanced medical services in areas such as kidney transplants, cancer surgeries, spinal surgeries, neurosurgeries, and open-heart surgeries.” According to statistics from Afghanistan’s Ministry of Public Health, Afghan patients spend more than \$500 million annually on treatment in neighboring countries. The development of advanced medical services within the country can play an important role in reducing these costs and prevent-

ing patients from traveling abroad. “For the first time, we are providing cancer treatment services such as chemotherapy and radiotherapy within the country,” said Somaia Hamidzai a doctor. “We have started performing laser knee surgeries, which were previously not done in Afghanistan, forcing patients to seek treatment abroad,” said Ahmad Tariq Azizi, a specialist. “We have managed to establish open-heart surger-

ies, and so far, nearly 50 successful heart surgeries have been performed,” said Fawad Salehi, a doctor. In addition to public hospitals, healthcare services in private medical centers in Herat have also improved. Health officials say that in recent years, several hospitals with advanced equipment have started operating in the province, providing, for the first time in the country, the possibility of treating certain sensitive and complex diseases.

Afghanistan, Iranian officials discuss trade and border bhallenges



FARAH (BNA): Senior Afghanistan and Iranian officials met at the Sheikh Abu Nasr Farahi border crossing to tackle trade disruptions and stalled infrastructure projects, underscoring a push for stronger economic ties. Joint effort to improve trade routes The high-level meeting brought together Iranian Ambassador to Afghanistan Alireza Beigddeli, Herat Consul General Alireza Marhamati, South Khorasan Deputy Governor Jafari, and Farah Governor Mawlawi Ghousuddin Rahbar. Talks focused on expediting road repairs and easing trade flows. Rahbar announced a joint Afghanistan-Iranian committee to oversee reconstruction efforts at the key border crossing. “Trade is the backbone of regional stability, and we are committed to ensuring smooth cross-border movement,” Rahbar said. Infrastructure delays due

to material shortages Project Engr. Mohammad Mohammadi noted that while labor and machinery are ready, shortages of asphalt, fuel, and funding have stalled progress. “We have the workforce and equipment, but without key materials, work remains slow,” he told officials. Iranian officials reaffirmed their commitment to trade facilitation, with Jafari stressing Iran’s readiness to support infrastructure projects. Expanding economic and cultural ties Ambassador Beigddeli highlighted Afghanistan’s annual exports of over \$50 million to Iran, saying there is room for growth.

“Beyond trade, we seek deeper cultural and educational partnerships for long-term cooperation,” he said. The meeting concluded with both sides pledging to accelerate infrastructure development and expand economic collaboration, though officials acknowledged that funding constraints remain a key challenge.

Earthquake victims in Herat receive new homes

HERAT (TOLONews): More than 70 houses built by an international organization in three earthquake-affected villages of Zindajan district in Herat have been handed over to the victims. According to the officials of this organization, the houses have been constructed in a standard manner and are equipped with toilets and water tanks for the affected families. Mir Ahmad, one of the earthquake victims whose house was destroyed, has found a new shelter after about one and a half years. He, along with his seven family members, lived under a tent for months. “We went through very difficult days. We had only one tent that would collapse with the wind and fall on

my children. On cold and rainy nights, I had to set up the tent repeatedly. There were nights when I didn’t even sleep for 20 minutes because I had to take care of my children,” said Mir Ahmad. “We have built and handed over houses with facilities such as toilets and water tanks for the earthquake victims in the villages of Chah Sawal, Shorabak, and Molana. Previously, we also built 73 houses in the village of Gharמושک and handed them over to the victims. The goal is to save the afflicted people from the scorching sun and severe cold and provide them with shelter in these houses,” said Nooruddin Haqyar, the head of Islamic Welfare in Herat. “Resilient and standard

houses have been built for the earthquake victims. The Islamic Emirate continues its efforts to build more durable homes for the affected people,” said Enayatullah Saber, the deputy head of the Herat Natural Disaster Management Authority. Despite the construction of new houses, the challenges for earthquake victims remain. The lack of clean drinking water, schools, and medical centers has created serious challenges for the people. “We do not have a medical center in our area, and many women lose their lives during childbirth. Also, there are no schools, and our children remain illiterate. The roads are in poor condition, and we have to fetch drinking water from

a well far away using animals,” said Darwish Ahmad, one of the victims. “We don’t have a school, and our children are illiterate. Another problem is the lack of drinking water; we don’t have enough water to drink,” said Abdul Latif, another earthquake victim. According to available information, last year’s earthquake destroyed more than 50,000 houses in the districts of Zindajan, Injil, Keshk Rabat Sangi, and Gulran in Herat province. Local officials in Herat say that with the cooperation of international organizations, a large number of houses have been built for the earthquake victims of this province. However, improving basic infrastructure is still necessary for the full return to normal life.

Kabul residents complain about increasing noise pollution

KABUL (Pajhwok): A number of the residents of Kabul complain about what they call it increasing noise pollution, especially in central parts of the city and ask the government for a solution. Kabul municipality officials insist no one should cause noise pollution or harm other residents and they assure such violators would face legal consequences. Noise pollution is considered one of the major problems of the environment. The sounds of various vehicles, loudspeakers used by shopkeepers and vendors and the sound of generators are major factors behind noise pollution in the cities. A number of residents of Kabul complained about such awkward sounds in the city and ask the government to prevent the phenomenon. Mohammad Qaseem, a resident of Kabul said: “Unfortunately, a number of vendors use loudspeakers for attraction of customers which harm other passersby. Cities are places

where different people such as elders, children and sick people live, such loud noise leaves a negative impact on their lives.” He urged civilians to follow the culture of the city life and Islamic ethics and they must not cause any sort of harassment to others. Tamim, another resident, said such noise irritates him a lot and he cannot walk in the city conveniently. Referring to noise created by vehicles, Tamim said the sound of loudspeakers and generators cause inconvenience to people. He asked the government to prevent such noise pollution in the city. What are psychological impacts of noise pollution? Psychologists believe that prolonged exposure to noisy places can cause serious damage to people’s mental health. A psychologist Sharafuddin Azimi said: “Anxiety, anger, aggression, boredom, sleep disturbances and interaction problems are usually caused by noise pollution.”

Referring to the impact of noise pollution on children and elders, he said the impacts of noise are more serious on such people. If experienced for long time, such people may suffer psychological disorders and their nervous system may be weakened. Another psychologist, Mohammad Safa Farzaee, said noise pollution harms the human body as microbes

and it leaves negative impacts on human health. Nematullah Barakzai, spokesman for the mayor, told Pajhwok Afghan News: “The use of loudspeakers is a false culture in the business of Afghanistan, officials of the municipality would address this problem through its permanent patrols and confiscate loudspeakers of the sellers.”

449 Afghan families deported

KABUL (Amu TV): Iran and Pakistan expelled 449 Afghan migrant families last week, according to data compiled by Amu TV from Taliban statements. The data shows that from Feb. 8 to Feb. 15, Iran deported 335 families, while Pakistan expelled 114. Some families reportedly returned voluntarily. The figures account for only five days of the week, as the Taliban-controlled Bakhtar News Agency did not publish data on Tuesday or Thursday. Among those returning, 52 families crossed into Afghanistan via the Torkham border, while 62 entered through Spin Boldak. Another 153 families returned through the Pul-e-Abrisham border in Nimroz, and 182 families arrived via the Islam Qala border. The latest deportations follow a similar trend from the previous week, when Iran and Pakistan expelled 648 Afghan migrant families between Feb. 2 and Feb. 8. Afghan migrants in both countries have reported intensified crackdowns by local security forces, saying they have faced arrests and mistreatment.



WEST BANK: A freed Palestinian prisoner reacting in Ramallah after being released from an Israeli jail.

Zelensky seeks ‘guarantees’ as US presses end to Ukraine war

KYIV (AFP): Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said he sought “security guarantees” as he met with the US vice president on Friday to discuss the Trump administration’s efforts to broker a truce deal with Moscow.

Zelensky’s sitdown with JD Vance at the Munich Security Conference comes as Kyiv scrambles to ensure it is not sidelined in Washington’s push to wrap up the three-year war. President Donald Trump stunned allies and upended the status quo of US support for Ukraine this week when he announced he would likely soon meet Russian leader Vladimir Putin to start truce talks.

Speaking with reporters in Munich, Zelensky stressed the need to “speak more” with the White House before any endgame to the war is formulated. “We want peace very much but we need real security guarantees,” he said after his first meeting with Vance. Zelensky’s anxiety was also on display in a preview of his interview with US media outlet NBC, saying Ukraine “will have low, low chance to survive without support of the United States”.

Vance meanwhile described “good conversations” with Zelensky, and acknowledged the administration’s goal of bringing the war to a close. “We want to achieve a durable, lasting peace, not the kind of peace that’s going to have Eastern Europe in conflict just a couple years down the road,” Vance said as the meeting wrapped up. Zelensky later wrote on X that an envoy from Washington would visit Kyiv. “We are ready to move as quickly as possible towards a real and guaranteed peace,” he wrote.

The Ukrainian leader has acknowledged that it was “not very pleasant” that his own phone call with Trump this week came after Putin’s 90-minute call. US officials have insisted

that Ukraine will be not be left in the cold after three years of battling Russia’s invasion. Vance said ahead of the Munich meeting that the United States was prepared to pressure Russia, adding that Europe should “of course” be at the table.

But he also told Europe to “step up” bolstering its own defence to allow Washington to focus on threats elsewhere in the world. US officials have sent mixed messages over Washington’s strategy after Pentagon chief Pete Hegseth appeared to rule out Ukraine joining Nato or retaking all of its territory. That has sparked major worries in Kyiv and Europe that Ukraine could be forced into a bad deal that leaves the continent facing an emboldened Putin.

But Vance told the Wall Street Journal that Trump would put everything “on the table” in potential talks, and that Washington could even use “military leverage” against Russia to force a deal. He did not give more away in a keenly awaited keynote speech, which mostly focused on scolding Europe over immigration and free speech.

Saudi Arabia, after being named by Trump as a likely venue for a meeting with Putin, said it would welcome holding any talks between the two leaders. Zelensky appeared to address fears that Trump was cutting out Kyiv by saying the US president had given him his personal number when they spoke.

European allies, who along with Washington are Ukraine’s strongest backers, demanded they also be included in negotiations that will impact their continent’s security. French President Emmanuel Macron said he assured Zelensky that it is “Ukrainians alone who can drive the discussions for a solid and lasting peace” with Russia. Zelensky said he had discussed with Macron “many important issues, including security

guarantees and specific proposals from France”.

In a bid to keep Washington close, Kyiv has held talks over granting access to its rare mineral deposits in return for future US security support. EU chief Ursula von der Leyen warned that forcing Ukraine into a bad deal would harm US interests. “I believe that by working together, we can deliver that just and lasting peace,” she said.

While Europe nervously monitors the US stance on Ukraine, there is little ambiguity on Trump’s determination to get Europe to spend more on its defence. Fears that Vance could announce a major US troop reduction in Europe did not materialise, but he repeated warnings that Washington needed to focus more on other parts of the globe. On the sidelines of the conference, Vance also met with the leader of the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD), Alice Weidel, according to German press.

It comes as Vance criticised Germany for blocking the far right from possibly sharing power in upcoming elections. The conservative candidate and poll favourite Friedrich Merz insists he would not govern with the AfD or actively seek its support. Amid the diplomatic flurry in Munich, Zelensky said that back on the ground in Ukraine a Russian drone had struck a cover built to contain radiation at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant, though he added that radiation levels were normal.

The Ukrainian air force said Russia had launched 133 drones across the country overnight, including attack drones, targeting northern regions of the country where the Chernobyl plant lies. Zelensky said the attack was evidence that “Putin is definitely not preparing for negotiations — he is preparing to continue deceiving the world”.

Educational emergency fails to address KP teacher shortage

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Despite the declaration of an educational emergency in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the condition of schools remains unchanged. Several schools in the provincial capital, Peshawar, are operating with only one teacher, raising concerns about the quality of education.

According to sources, when the teacher is absent, junior staff members, including Class-IV employees, take over the class. Official documents from the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Education Department reveal that six schools in Town-4 are being run with just a single teacher.

Additionally, a school in the Hassan Khel subdivision is also operating under the supervision of only one female teacher. These schools collectively accommodate over 600 female students, highlighting the severe shortage of teaching staff.

Despite the provincial government’s emphasis on girls’ education, the lack of adequate teaching staff remains a major obstacle to ensuring quality education for female students.

Poet Akash Ansari burnt to death

F.P. Report

HYDERABAD: Renowned Sindhi poet and writer Dr Akash Ansari burnt to death while his son was critically injured when he tried to save him after a massive fire erupted in their home due to electricity short-circuit in Hyderabad on Saturday.

Soon after receiving the report of the incident, a rescue team reached the residence of the poet which is located in Citizen Colony and brought the fire under control. The late poet was living in his house along with his son. Later the Rescue team shifted the dead body of late poet to mortuary of a local hospital while his son is still under treatment.

Sindh Minister for Culture and Tourism Syed Zulfiqar Ali Shah expressed his heartfelt sorrow over the sad demise of Dr. Akash Ansari. In his condolence message, Syed Zulfiqar Ali Shah lauded valuable services rendered by Dr. Aakash Ansari for promotion of poetry and literature in the province.

He also directed police officials to thoroughly keeping in view all angles investigation about the death of Dr. Aakash Ansari. He prayed to Almighty Allah to rest the departed soul in eternal peace and grant courage to deceased’s family to bear this irreparable loss with courage.

CJCSC meets Saudi mly leadership

F.P. Report

RAWALPINDI: General Sahir Shamshad Mirza, NI (M), Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee, while on an official visit to Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) for 8th round of Pakistan-KSA Joint Military Cooperation Committee (JMCC) meeting, called on H.E. Major General Talal Bin Abdullah Al-Otaibi, Assistant Minister of Defence and General Fayyadh bin Hamed Al-Ruwaili, Chief of General Staff, Saudi Arabia. During the meetings, strategic and security issues, evolving regional environment and bilateral defence cooperation were discussed.

The CJCSC and General Fayyadh bin Hamed Al-Ruwaili, Chief of General Staff, Saudi Arabia co-chaired JMCC meeting. Both sides reviewed the ongoing cooperation between Armed Forces of Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, focusing on mutual exchange programs, training initiatives and other defence-related activities. The military leadership reaffirmed their commitment for further strengthening existing defence and security cooperation between the two brotherly countries.

The Saudi military leadership lauded professionalism of Pakistan Armed Forces and acknowledged their sacrifices in fight against terrorism. Earlier upon arrival at Armed Forces Headquarters smartly turned out military contingent presented “Guard of Honour” to Chairman JCSC.

Pakistan, Saudi Navies conclude maritime exercise

F.P. Report

KARACHI: Pakistan Navy (PN) and Royal Saudi Naval Forces (RSNF) successfully concluded bilateral maritime exercise NASEEM AL BAHR-XV, with a display of live weapon firing in North Arabian Sea. Commander Royal Saudi Naval Forces graced the event as the Chief Guest, while Chief of the Naval Staff, Admiral Naveed Ashraf, was also present on the occasion.

PNS ZULFIQAR along with RSNF Ships HMS JAZAN, HMS YARMOOK and HMS HAIL fired variety of Surface to Surface and Surface to Air missiles. All PN and RSNF Ships successfully engaged their respective targets demonstrating their combat readiness and war fighting potential.

Exercise NASEEM AL BAHR-XV featured



advance maritime operations, and the participating assets of both navies executed diverse range of complex scenarios including joint maneuvers, Anti-Surface Warfare, Anti-Submarine Warfare and integrated Maritime Security Operations. The exercise provided an opportunity to strengthen bilateral cooperation, enhance interoperability and demonstrate a shared commitment to ensure maritime security. While recently

concluded AMAN 25 demonstrated the soft power, Live Weapon Firing during NASEEM AL BAHR-XV testified Pakistan Navy’s combat fire power.

Exercise NASEEM AL BAHR is a biennial operational exercise that reinforces the strategic partnership between Pakistan Navy and Royal Saudi Naval Forces, reflecting their unwavering resolve to safeguard mutual maritime interests.

KP govt spends Rs40.6b surplus in NMDs

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa spends Rs 40.6 billion extra to fill Federal Funding Gap in newly merged districts of erstwhile Fata. This was confirmed by Advisor to the KP Chief Minister on Finance and Interprovincial Coordination Muzzamil Aslam, also written to the Federal Minister of Finance, detailing the withheld funds and expenditures for the merged districts. Aslam stated that the KP government has spent an additional Rs. 40.6 billion beyond the funds allocated by the federal government to maintain services in the newly merged districts.

This amount includes expenditures from the fiscal year 2019-20 to 2024-25.

Furthermore, under the Accelerated Implementation Program (AIP), the KP government has incurred extra expenses of Rs. 19.9 billion, which have been borne by the province over the past seven years.

In the fiscal year 2023-24, the federal government allocated Rs. 66 billion for the merged districts, while the KP government spent Rs. 88.1 billion, with an additional Rs. 22.1 billion spent from its own resources, Mr. Muzzamil Aslam added. He said that similarly, in the fiscal year 2024-25, the federal government has released Rs. 44 billion so far, while the KP government’s expenditures have reached Rs. 54.4 billion, with an additional Rs. 10.4 billion spent.

KP Advisor on Finance,

has reiterated concerns regarding the withheld funds for the merged districts, stating that the provincial government has been filling the gap using its own resources. Despite repeated reminders to the Ministry of Finance, Aslam claims that the funds are being withheld on the Prime Minister’s instructions.

Aslam emphasized that the merged districts have been facing significant challenges, including backwardness and law and order issues, which necessitate increased funding rather than a halt. He pointed out that the KP government has been shouldering the burden of expenditures for the past two years, despite the federal government’s allocations being insufficient.



CHOLISTAN: Chief of Army Staff, General Azim Munir inspecting agriculture machinery at the launching ceremony of Green Pakistan Initiative.

China will ‘play along to end’ with US: Diplomat

BEIJING (Reuters): Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi said that China will “play along to the end” if the United States is bent on suppressing the country even though Beijing does not wish to be in conflict with Washington.

Wang, speaking at the Munich Security Conference, said China would respond resolutely to unilateral “bullying” practices, but hopes the US can work together with it in the same direction. Earlier this month, US President Donald Trump slapped an additional 10% tariff on all Chinese goods despite having what he had described as a “good” telephone call with Chinese leader Xi Jinping weeks earlier.

The levies spurred China to hit back with up to 15% in duties on some US imports, reigniting fears of a full-blown trade war between the world’s largest economies. In the weeks before Trump was sworn in, the Biden administration declared more curbs on advanced technology that can be sold to China, in further efforts to stop Chinese firms from developing high-tech chips that can be used by Chinese military applications.

Beijing said the curbs had been part of a long-running plan to contain the technological progress of China. China has developed and grown by overcoming difficulties and obstacles, and will not be afraid, Wang said at the

Munich conference, whose attendees included US Vice President JD Vance.

Wang then cited several Chinese sayings, including one from the first chapter of the Chinese classic, the Book of Changes, as the I Ching is known: “The movement of Heaven is full of vigour. Thus the gentleman (follows suit and) makes himself strong and untiring.” “These lines are hard to translate, you can get DeepSeek to help,” Wang said with a smile. DeepSeek is an artificial intelligence app developed by China despite U.S. chip curbs, an app that is threatening to challenge the dominance of U.S. generative AI chatbots including ChatGPT.

Despite ceasefire, Israel still destroying homes in Gaza

GAZA: Israel has destroyed dozens of homes in Rafah, southern Gaza, despite the ceasefire between Israel and Hamas, satellite imagery analysis conducted by Al Jazeera’s fact-checking agency, Sanad, has revealed.

The crossing between Egypt and Gaza at Rafah, which has served as a critical lifeline into the enclave for decades, was closed by Israel in May 2024. Since seizing control of the border area, in breach of its 1979 peace agreement with Egypt, Israel has been digging in in the Philadelphi Corridor, a 14-km (8.7-mile) strip of land along the boundary between Egypt and Gaza.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has emphasised the importance of remaining in the corridor, despite the illegality. According to Sanad, the images, taken between January 19 and 21, show the Israeli army to have built sand fortifications across the Rafah crossing. Additionally, the agency said, a new military outpost has been established just to the north of the crossing.

The army has also constructed a 1.7 km (1.1-mile) road surrounding the crossing, running parallel to the

sand fortifications. Israeli forces have also kept thousands of Rafah residents from their homes, Israeli military vehicles shooting at dozens of people trying to go home, injuring and killing them.

Israel, in essence, is constructing “a buffer zone that allows you to push any kind of fighters or, in technical terms, any hostile within an otherwise friendly environment away from you”, Palestinian defence analyst Hamze Attar said. As part of the ceasefire, which began on January 19, Israel agreed to reduce its forces in the area before completely withdrawing its troops by the 50th day of the agreement.

However, analysis carried out on satellite images taken between January 19 and February 1 shows the Israeli army has continued construction in the area, demolishing and bulldozing 64 buildings within the city of Rafah, specifically in the as-Salam, Idari, and Tel Zaarab neighbourhoods. The demolitions occurred only 700 metres (766 yards) from the Egyptian border. At the same time, Sanad also identified at least six homes razed in Tal as-Sultan, west of

Rafah, a little more than 750 metres (820 yards) from the Egyptian border.

“This is a war crime because they are destroying residential houses,” Attar said, referring to the fourth Geneva Convention, which prohibits the destruction of private property. Meanwhile, Munir al-Bursh, director-general of the Ministry of Health in Gaza, said on Tuesday that Israeli attacks, unexploded ordnance, or fatal injuries sustained earlier have killed 118 people since the ceasefire agreement took effect.

In addition to military breaches of the ceasefire, Israel has not allowed in sufficient amounts of essential humanitarian aid, such as food, fuel, tents, and emergency shelters. Rafah Mayor Ahmed al-Sufi said most of the city’s residents remain displaced, with an estimated 200,000 people sheltering in the al-Mawasi Khan Younis area and other locations across Gaza, unable to come home. According to him, initial estimates indicate that 90 percent of Rafah’s homes have been damaged, with approximately 52,000 units suffering various degrees of destruction. — Aljazeera

UN chief warns against regional war over DR Congo at Africa summit

ADDIS ABABA (AFP): UN chief Antonio Guterres on Saturday demanded that the Democratic Republic of Congo’s “territorial integrity” be respected and a regional war avoided, at an African summit the day after Rwandan-backed fighters seized a second DRC provincial capital.

With international pressure mounting on Rwanda to curb the fighting in eastern DR Congo (DRC), the conflict was set to dominate the African Union summit as it opened in Addis Ababa. Rwanda’s President Paul Kagame was seen attending meetings at the gathering, but DR Congo’s president Felix Tshisekedi was absent from the summit as the M23 advanced through his country’s territory.

Having routed the Congolese army to capture the key provincial capital of Goma in North Kivu last month, the Rwandan-backed armed group pushed into neighboring South Kivu. It took a vital airport there before

marching virtually unchecked into another key city, Bukavu, on Friday, security and humanitarian sources said.

“The fighting that is raging in South Kivu — as a result of the continuation of the M23 offensive — threatens to push the entire region over the precipice,” Guterres told leaders in an address to the summit, without mentioning Rwanda. “Regional escalation must be avoided at all costs. There is no military solution,” he added.

“The dialogue must begin. And the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the DRC must be respected.” With the spectre of a regional conflagration rising in eastern DRC, the AU has been criticized for its timid approach and observers have demanded more decisive action. The European Union on Saturday said that it was “urgently” considering all options following the news from Bukavu.

“The ongoing violation of the

DRC’s territorial integrity will not go unanswered,” it warned. East and southern African leaders on February 8 called for an “immediate and unconditional” ceasefire within five days, but fresh fighting erupted on Tuesday. Outgoing AU commission chairman Moussa Faki Mahamat told AFP on Friday that there was a “general mobilization” among African nations to stop the clashes.

Summit host Abiy Ahmed, Ethiopia’s prime minister, insisted on Saturday that “conflict resolution, diplomacy and peace building must remain at the heart of our efforts.” A meeting of the AU’s Peace and Security Council dedicated to the conflict ran late into the evening on Friday, with neither Kagame nor Tshisekedi attending. A government source told AFP that Tshisekedi would not attend the summit over the weekend either as he had to “closely follow the situation on the ground in DRC.”