

Pakistan flays attack

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan strongly condemned the attack on a United Nations Interim Force In Lebanon convoy in Beirut that injured several peacekeepers. According to Foreign Office, "Such attacks on blue helmets are flagrant violations of international law for which there must be accountability. Pakistan stands in solidarity with UNIFIL and affirms its unwavering support for UN peacekeeping operations."



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JEDDAH: Finance Minister Senator Muhammad Aurangzeb joined the head table luncheon with His Excellency Minister ALJadaan, Minister of Finance, Saudi Arabia; MD IMF, Kristalina Georgieva; the Finance and National Economy Minister of Bahrain, Shaikh Salman bin Khalifa Al Khalifa and the Vice Minister of Finance, Saudi Arabia, Abdulmuhsen Alkhalaf at the Emerging Markets Conference 2025.

CM launches Spring 2025 Tree Plantation Drive

# 2.6m trees to be planted in KP

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Ali Amin Gandapur formally launched the Spring 2025 Tree Plantation Campaign by planting a sapling on the lawn of the CM House. The event was attended by Provincial Minister for Local Government Arshad Ayub, Special Assistant to CM for Environment and Forests Musawir Khan, as well as senior officials from the Environment and Forest Department and Peshawar Development Authority (PDA).

During a briefing on the campaign, officials informed the Chief Minister that the province has set a target of 2.6 million trees to be planted across Khyber Pakhtunkhwa during the campaign adding that the initiative includes both regular and fruit-bearing trees.

It was further informed that 892,000 saplings would be planted in

Central-Southern Forest Region, 1,057,000 saplings in Northern Forest Region and 864,000 saplings in Malakand Forest Region.

To achieve this target, 2 million saplings will be distributed among the public for plantation while the Forest Department itself will plant 560,000 saplings.

On this occasion, the Chief Minister also launched a special tree plantation drive under the Peshawar Development Authority (PDA). Officials briefed him that under this initiative, 82,544 trees will be planted in the provincial capital this year, along with 480,000 seasonal plants, which will be planted twice a year.

These plantations will be carried out in Hayatabad, Regi Model Town, GT Road, Jamrud Road, Ring Road, Motorway, and Northern Bypass. Additionally, 1,300 climbers will be planted on BRT flyovers and pillars.

Officials further told that in the last three years, 191,202 trees have been planted under the PDA.

Talking on this occasion, the Chief Minister directed the officials to prioritize environment-friendly and fruit-bearing trees in the plantation drive.

He also emphasized the need to plant trees within educational institutions and to ensure the proper maintenance and care of the saplings.

He termed tree plantation as a national duty, and urged the public to actively participate in the campaign to achieve its objectives. He reaffirmed his government's commitment to transforming Khyber Pakhtunkhwa into a green province, in line with the vision of the founding chairman.

He stressed that tree plantation is the most effective way to combat the negative impacts of climate change and urged citizens to play their role in this crucial initiative.

## DPM to take part in UNSC meeting on multilateralism

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of Pakistan, Senator Mohammad Ishaq Dar, will travel to New York to participate in the high-level meeting of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) on "Practicing Multilateralism: Reforming and Improving Global Governance", scheduled for 18th February 2025.

The meeting has been convened by China under its rotating presidency of the Security Council for the month of February 2025. It will be chaired by the Foreign Minister of China, Wang Yi.

Pakistan welcomes this timely initiative by China, which underscores the critical importance of multilateralism in addressing today's complex global challenges.

In his remarks, the Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister will reaffirm Pakistan's strong commitment to the principles of multilateralism and the central role of the United Nations in promoting international peace, security, and sustainable development. He will also highlight Pakistan's priorities as a non-permanent member of the Security Council for the term 2025-2026, emphasizing the importance of dialogue, cooperation, and inclusive global governance.

On the sidelines of the UNSC meeting, DPM/FM is also expected to hold bilateral meetings with his counterparts, as well as senior UN officials.

## AIUla Conference kicks off

F.P. Report

ALULA, SAUDI ARABIA: The inaugural AIUla Conference for Emerging Market Economies commenced today in AlUla, Saudi Arabia, bringing together finance ministers, central bank governors, policy-makers, and economic experts from around the world. Pakistan's Federal Minister for Finance and Revenue, Senator Muhammad Aurangzeb, is attending the two-day high-level event on the special invitation of his Saudi counterpart, Mohammed Al-Jadaan. The conference, jointly organized by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the Saudi Ministry of Finance, aims to foster discussions on building resilience and sustainable economic growth amid global economic uncertainties. A total of nine sessions will take place, featuring 200 participants and 36 speakers, with representatives from 48 countries in attendance. During the conference, Senator Aurangzeb will take part in a high-level panel discussion on 'Navigating the Path for Resilient Emerging Markets', moderated by IMF Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva, alongside finance ministers from Egypt, Brazil, and Türkiye.

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Sunday strongly condemned a terrorist attack on Levies check post in Kalat, Balochistan. The prime minister prayed for the high ranks of shaheed personnel and for the bereaved family to bear the loss with fortitude, PM Office Media Wing said in a press release.

The prime minister also paid tribute to martyred personnel Ali Nawaz and prayed for the early recovery of the injured.

He said the terrorists were the enemies of the development and progress of Balochistan province and reiterated that terrorists' nefarious designs would not be allowed to succeed.

The Levies personnel had laid down his life for the defence of the country, he said and saluted the martyred personnel for sacrificing his life for the sake of peace in the country.

## Bilawal: No one to be allowed to challenge writ of state

MUNICH (INP): Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf founder remains in jail or not, it has nothing to do with Pakistan's progress, Bilawal Bhutto Zardari said in an informal chat on the sidelines of the Munich security conference.

"The PTI's founder has a role if today's young generation is frustrated," Chairman People's Party Bilawal Bhutto said.

He said that the military, parliament and judiciary all belong to Pakistan. "We will not allow anyone to challenge the writ of the state," PPP leader added.

He said the democracy required generations to be strengthened and flourish, he said. "PTI's founder has destroyed everything for his personal interest," Bilawal alleged.

"Now, he has pinned hopes with Sharifs and other political parties," PPP chairman said. "We are tackling various challenges," he said.

He said the people from the whole world have gathered at the artificial intelligence moot ongoing in France. "We are not ready for the digital age, nor are we equipping our children

and youth for this transformation," he said. "We have to prepare our children, youth and the economy for the modern age."

"We have faced challenges before, and we have successfully tackled terrorism in the past. We will not allow anyone to challenge the authority of the state," he asserted.

Bilawal also emphasised the need for technological advancement and digital transformation, expressing concern that Pakistan is not adequately preparing its youth for the IT and digital era.

## Levies checkpoint attacked in Kalat, officer martyred

F.P. Report

KALAT: A terrorist attack on a Levies check post in Kalat resulted in the martyrdom of one officer, while two others sustained injuries.

According to Balochistan government spokesperson Shahid Rind, the Levies personnel responded swiftly, forcing the attackers to retreat and flee.

He added that a search operation is underway to apprehend the perpetrators, and the injured officers have been shifted to Quetta for medical treatment. "The sacrifices of security forces for peace and stability will not go in vain," he stated.

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif strongly condemned the attack on a Levies post in Kalat, paying tribute to the martyred officer, Ali Nawaz.

Expressing his deep sorrow, the prime minister prayed for the elevation of the martyr's ranks and

patience for the bereaved family. He also wished a swift recovery for the injured personnel.

PM Shehbaz reaffirmed that terrorists are enemies of Balochistan's progress and development, vowing that their nefarious plans will not succeed.

"The Levies officer sacrificed his life for the protection of the homeland, and we salute all martyrs who lay down their lives for the peace of the nation," the prime minister stated.

Federal Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi strongly condemned the attack and paid tribute to the martyred officer, Ali Nawaz.

Praising his bravery, Naqvi said, "Ali Nawaz courageously confronted the terrorists and attained martyrdom in the line of duty. He sacrificed his precious life for the peace of the nation."

PM strongly condemns terrorist attack on Kalat Levies check post

# The Frontier Post

PIA to resume US flights

LAHORE (INP): Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) is gearing up for the revival of the direct flights to the United States (US). As per details, hopes for direct flights revival to the US by PIA as a delegation from the US Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) is scheduled to visit Pakistan in mid-March for a final clearance inspection, sources said.

## Tarar for imparting religious education on modern lines

LAHORE (APP): Federal Minister for Information and Broadcasting Attaullah Tarar has said that it is a need of the hour to impart religious education on modern lines.

Speaking at the annual convocation of Al-Hikmah International education centre on Sunday, he highlighted the importance of integrating research, digital media, and contemporary communication tools into religious education to make it more relevant to today's world. He also commended Al-Hikmah International for producing an exceptional documentary about the institute, praising it as being of international standard.

Atta Tarar congratulated students for completing their degrees and getting shields. He said that Pakistan came into being on 27th of Ramazan,

adding that Allah Almighty chose blessed night of 'Laylatul Qadr' for giving the Muslims of Subcontinent a separate homeland. He said that there was one vision behind the Two Nation Theory that Islam was not being promoted in an efficient manner. He further said that the incumbent government had always advocated for the Kashmir issue in most effective way and highlighted sacrifices of all unarmed people of Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir including Burhan Wani.

The minister said that Muslims living in Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir were facing brutal human rights violations because they raise slogan 'Pakistan Say Rishta Kya, La Illaha Illal-Allah'.

He said Pakistan was created in the name of Islam, adding that migration was also a Sunnat of Holy Prophet Hazrat Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him). He noted that during the Partition, hundreds of thousands of Muslims migrated, an event with few parallels in history. He emphasised that it was "only through the immense sacrifices of our forefathers that we are able to live in an independent country today". He said, "You are serving religion and government will extend all possible support to you."

Attaullah Tarar said that working for integrity and prosperity of the country was among top priorities of the government.

He said with the grace of Allah Almighty and sincere efforts of the incumbent government during

the last one year, things had improved in the country. He said that world was acknowledging that Pakistan was moving towards stability and its economy was improving.

He said that recently Turkiye President Recep Tayyip Erdogan visited Pakistan and "whenever we visit Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates or China, leadership of these countries appreciate efforts made by Pakistani government to stabilise its economy".

He said, "My grandfather Muhammad Rafiq Tarar served this country a lot and made great services for 'Khatm-i-Nabuwat'." He said, "Our elders have taught us to give more respect to a person who has a knowledge of religion." Hafiz Qari Shafiqur-Rehman and others were also present.

## 37,000 exam papers go missing from KP medical faculty

Syed Adnan

PESHAWAR: A major scandal has rocked the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Medical Faculty as it has been revealed that over 37,000 exam papers from two separate examinations held in March and September last year have gone missing. The secrecy department of the faculty reportedly has no record of these papers, raising serious concerns about transparency and accountability within the institution.

Adding to the controversy, several official vehicles have also disappeared from the faculty's possession. In response to these alarming revelations, the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the faculty has issued three urgent directives, demanding the retrieval of all missing records and assets within 24 hours. However, no significant

action has been taken yet, leaving the future of thousands of students in jeopardy.

The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Medical Faculty is responsible for issuing degrees and handling the affiliation and registration of paramedical staff in the province. Reports indicate that complaints regarding administrative mismanagement have been surfacing for a long time, but this latest scandal has sent shockwaves through the provincial health department.

A senior official from the health department disclosed that the issue came to light when the current Director General of Health Services was replaced as the faculty's CEO, and the charge was handed over to the Additional Director General Monitoring and Evaluation. During the record inspection, it was

discovered that over 37,000 candidates who sat for exams in March and September 2024 had no official records, their answer sheets were missing, and even crucial IT systems were not fully accessible.

In a formal communication, the CEO instructed the in-charge of the conduct system, the secrecy section, the admin and finance section, and the IT section to provide all missing exam papers, answer sheets, and superintendent files related to the March and September 2024 paramedics' exams within 24 hours.

Additionally, another directive was sent to the former CEO, highlighting the unauthorized retention of three faculty-owned vehicles, including a 2024 Toyota Corolla Grande, a 2006 Suzuki Van, and a 2013 Toyota Corolla. The

former CEO was urged to return the vehicles immediately to avoid operational disruptions.

A third notice addressed the issue of critical IT system credentials, including the Management Information System (MIS), Institute Web Portal, and software for paper generation and marks entry, which are reportedly still under the former CEO's control. Despite verbal requests, these digital assets have not been handed over, leading to severe operational challenges, delays in question paper preparation, and disruptions in student services.

The public and stakeholders are now demanding immediate intervention from the provincial government to investigate the matter and take swift action against those responsible for this alarming mismanagement.

## Rubio says coming days will show if Putin serious about Ukraine peace

WASHINGTON (Reuters): U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio said on Sunday the next few days will determine how serious Russian President Vladimir Putin is about peace in Ukraine, as U.S. officials travel to Saudi Arabia for meetings with Russian officials.

America's top diplomat also played down European concerns about being cut out of the opening talks between Russia and the United States, saying in an interview with CBS that a negotiation process had not yet begun in earnest.

Earlier on Sunday, Reuters reported that U.S. officials had handed European officials a questionnaire asking, among other things, how many troops they could contribute to enforcing a peace agreement. But no European allies were invited to Saudi Arabia, where Russian and American officials are expected to kick off talks early in the week about ending the Ukraine war.

"President Trump spoke to Vladimir Putin last week, and in it, Vladimir Putin expressed his interest in peace, and the president expressed his desire to see an end to this conflict in a way that was enduring and that protected Ukrainian sovereignty," Rubio said on CBS' "Meet the Press."

"Now, obviously it has to be followed up by action, so the next few weeks and days will determine whether it's serious or not. Ultimately, one phone call does not make peace."

U.S. Middle East Envoy Steve Witkoff and National

Security Adviser Mike Waltz were due to leave for Saudi Arabia on Sunday evening, Witkoff said in a Fox News interview earlier in the day. Rubio noted he was due to be in Saudi Arabia anyway due to previously arranged official travel. The composition of the Russian delegation had not yet been finalized, Rubio said.

Rubio and Witkoff rejected concerns that Ukraine and other European leaders would have no place at peace negotiations, despite Trump's Ukraine envoy Keith Kellogg suggesting precisely that at this week-end's Munich Security Conference.

Witkoff noted in an interview on Fox News' "Sunday Morning Futures" that Ukrainian officials had met several U.S. officials in recent days at the conference, while Trump had talked with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy last week.

Chief among their fears

Rubio said that Ukrainians and other Europeans would be included in any meaningful negotiations.

"Ultimately, it will reach a point - if it's real negotiations, and we're not there yet - but if that were to happen, Ukraine will have to be involved because they're the ones that were invaded (by Russia), and the Europeans will have to be involved because they have sanctions on Putin and Russia as well," Rubio said. "We're just not there yet."

French President Emmanuel Macron will host European leaders on Monday for an emergency summit on the Ukraine war, Macron's office said, in the wake of Kellogg's remarks.

European officials have been left shocked and flat-footed by the Trump administration's moves on Ukraine, Russia and European defence in recent days.

Chief among their fears

is that they can no longer count on U.S. military protection and that Trump will do a Ukraine peace deal with Putin that undermines Kyiv and broader European continental security.

Asked if he had discussed lifting sanctions on Russia during a Saturday phone call with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, Rubio declined to confirm this, saying only that they "did not go into any details".

After that call, Moscow said that the two had discussed the removal of "unilateral barriers" set by the previous U.S. administration in relations with Russia.

Rubio said he did address the "difficult" operating conditions of the U.S. embassy in Moscow with Lavrov. If there was to be progress in Ukraine peace-making, both Russia and the U.S. would need properly functioning embassies in the other country, he added.







LAHORE: Women viewing Painting and Calligraphy Exhibition organized in collaboration with Walled City at Masjid Wazir khan Square inside the Knowledge of Art Academy at Delhi Gate. —APP Photo

## Sindh Govt refutes Sattar’s blames

KARACHI (PPI): Sindh government spokesperson Samita Afzal Syed on Sunday refuted MQM leader Farooq Sattar’s statement, alleging that MQM is attempting to gain public sympathy by blaming the Sindh government for its political decline.

She remarked that those who once promoted linguistic politics in Karachi are now presenting themselves as victims of conspiracy.

According to a statement by Sindh Information Department, Samita asserted that MQM was originally formed on a linguistic basis and has consistently propagated unrest. She pointed out that Karachi’s residents are fully aware of who was responsible for disrupting the city’s peace and who contributed to restoring stability.

She urged MQM to stop misleading the people of Karachi and refrain from spreading division. She emphasized that the Sindh government is taking all necessary measures to ensure the protection of citizens’ lives and property. Concluding her remarks, she stated that Karachi’s residents no longer support development linked to linguistic politics.

## 11 in-charge investigations changed

LAHORE (APP): DIG Investigation Syed Zeeshan Raza has changed 11 in-charge investigations on the basis of their performance, posted at various police stations in the provincial metropolis.

Official sources said that Sub-Inspector Gohar Iqbal was posted as In-charge Investigation Sabzazar from Sunder, Inspector Imran Pasha was posted as In-charge Investigation Sunder from Headquarters, Sub-Inspector Asif Ali Shafiq was posted as In-charge Anarkali from Shafiqabad.

Likewise, Inspector Irfan Saeed was posted as In-charge Anarkali from Headquarters, Sub-Inspector Ali Raza was posted as In-charge Investigation Badami Bagh from Investigation Headquarters, while Sub-Inspector Rizwan Atta was posted as In-charge Investigation Badami Bagh from Investigation Headquarters.

Similarly, Inspector Javed Hussain was posted as In-charge Liaquatabad from Headquarters, Sub-Inspector Khadim Ali was posted as Investigation Headquarters from Liaquatabad, Inspector Muhammad Anwar was posted as in-charge Sabzazar from Investigation Headquarters, Sub-Inspector Shahid Mahmood was posted as In-charge Gulshan-e-Ravi from Headquarters, while Inspector Nazir Ahmed was posted as Investigation Headquarters from Gulshan-e-Ravi.

## Dog show held

LAHORE (APP): As part of the Horse and Cattle Show 2025, the Parks and Horticulture Authority (PHA) Lahore organized the All Breed International Dog Show at Jilani Park, here on Sunday. The show showcased 280 dogs from 35 different breeds. The event featured a diverse range of breeds, including German Shepherds, Australian Shepherds, American Bulldogs, Boxers, Alaskan Malamutes, Borzois, and many others.

# CM expresses satisfaction over use of super seeders

LAHORE (APP): Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif has expressed satisfaction over the use of super seeders in wheat cultivation, calling it a major step toward agricultural innovation and farmer prosperity.

She was addressing the distribution ceremony of super seeders to farmers under CM’s smog control programme on Sunday. She emphasized that mechanization in agriculture is just the beginning, and more revolutionary measures will be introduced to further enhance productivity and ease farming practices.

CM Maryam Nawaz

noted that super seeders have significantly reduced labor costs, fuel consumption, and time, making wheat sowing more efficient. She was briefed that in just a few months, farmers using super seeders have earned millions, saved tons of seeds, and cut down on fuel expenses. The advanced sowing technique has also led to better soil fertility and increased yields, with the majority of farmers declaring it more effective than traditional methods.

Authorities informed the chief minister that wheat cultivation through super seeders has not only saved resources but has also proven to be a cost-

effective and environmentally friendly solution. Farmers reported that sowing with this method takes significantly less time, allowing them to maximize productivity while minimizing input costs.

Expressing her satisfaction, CM Maryam Nawaz reiterated that the Punjab government is committed to introducing more modern technologies in agriculture to ensure the prosperity of farmers. She praised the positive impact of super seeders and assured that the government will continue supporting initiatives that promote sustainable and efficient farming practices.

# Kundi urges govt to focus on youth sports

PESHAWAR (APP): Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Faisal Karim Kundi on Sunday emphasized that the Provincial government should focus on creating sports opportunities for the youth to highlight the name of country.

The Governor attended the final match of the Chitral Cricket Championship 2025 at the University of Peshawar as the chief guest. The final match was played between Chitral Hunters and Upper Chitral Titans. After the match, the Governor presented the winning team with the trophy and congratulated the players.

In his speech during the event, Governor Faisal Karim Kundi expressed concern over the lack of cricket grounds in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa especially in Chitral district.

He also pointed out that the Arbab Niaz Cricket Stadium in the province remains incomplete, while

the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) has successfully completed the renovation of stadiums in Karachi and Lahore in a short period.

The Governor highlighted that the development of sports grounds in the province would help enhance the country’s reputation, and the government would take practical steps in this direction.

Faisal Karim Kundi further expressed his commitment to promoting sports in Chitral and assured that sports facilities would be developed there.

He also congratulated the administration of Chitral Hunter Club, especially Shahid Khan Shinwari, for their efforts.

Meanwhile, Governor Faisal Karim Kundi, has expressed deep regret over an incident in which a lecturer at University of Malakand allegedly harassed female students.

The Governor said that the police, district adminis-

tration, and university authorities must ensure a transparent investigation into the matter.

He expressed his shock and sorrow upon hearing about the inappropriate behavior from a teacher, emphasizing that such shameful incidents are equivalent to pushing women backward in both education and society.

Governor Kundi further said that the traditions and values of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa do not permit such disgraceful actions in any circumstance. He called for strict action against individuals who harm the future of young people, particularly in higher educational institutions.

Such incidents, he said, raise serious concerns about the reputation and academic standards of universities. Unfortunately, the provincial government, he added, has shown little interest in matters beyond hiring in universities.

# AMI meters’ installation hailed

ISLAMABAD (APP): Islamabad Electric Supply Company (IESCO) has issued a notification determining the prices for Advanced Metering Infrastructure (AMI) meters required for new electricity connections in Rawalpindi City and Rawalpindi Cantt Circles.

During a briefing, Project Director AMI, Syed Mohsin Raza Gillani, stated that all old electricity meters under all tariffs in Rawalpindi City and Rawalpindi Cantt Circles are being replaced with AMI meters at no cost to the consumers, said a press release issued here Sunday. Approximately 600,000 old meters in the project area have already been replaced with new, advanced-technology AMI meters without any charges. The Project Director AMI further explained that IESCO has issued a notification determining the prices for AMI meters required for new electricity connections. The implementation has already begun.

According to the notification cost of Single-phase AMI meters, with 20-meter cable is Rs 35,000, with 30-meter cable Rs 36,500 and with 40-meter cable Rs 38,000.

The cost of three-phase AMI meters with 20-meter cable is Rs 65,000, with 30-meter cable is Rs 72,000 and with 40-meter cable Rs. 79,000.

The security amount will be determined based on the load. Additionally, consumers in areas where three-phase AMI meters have already been installed will not need to install green meters or make additional payments to avail net metering facilities, as three-phase AMI meters has already come with net metering capabilities.

Syed Mohsin Raza Gillani emphasized that the installation of AMI meters is a revolutionary step in the power sector, which will not only bring innovation but also empower consumers.

He said that automated and timely meter readings

will ensure 100 percent accurate billing and timely delivery of electricity bills, adding that consumers will be able to monitor their electricity usage and potential bills 24/7.

He further said the balance distribution system will protect against system overload and tripping, significantly reducing the rate of transformer and meter burnouts.

Electricity theft will be effectively controlled, and timely collection of bills from defaulters will be ensured, he said and adding that consumers will also be able to automatically register complaints regarding power outages.

The Project Director AMI clarified that the rates for AMI meters mentioned in the notification are for new electricity connections, while the replacement of old meters with AMI meters is being done free of charge. He advised the consumers to contact the relevant IESCO offices for further information.

# 185 canal lining schemes have been completed in Sindh: Nasir Hussain

E.P. Report

SUKKUR: Provincial Minister for Planning, Development, and Energy, Syed Nasir Hussain Shah, visited the Nara Canal. After the completion of 2 kilometers of lining work on the Nara Canal, he reviewed the project. During the briefing, Xen Nara Canal, Khurram Pervez, informed that the initial estimated cost of the project was RS. 2.8 billion r, but after design modifications, the cost increased to Rs. 5.4 billion.

The capacity of the Nara Canal will increase from 13,649 cusecs to 18,000 cusecs, and the lining will reduce water seepage by 10 to 12 percent and the project will ensure water availability for tail-end farmers. Speaking to the media on the occasion, Provincial Minister Syed Nasir Hussain Shah said that the economy of Sindh depends on the Nara Canal.

The canal was not receiving proper intake from the river, and the Sukkur Barrage was also under severe pressure. He mentioned that this important project will improve the flow of the canal and was completed within a record one month time.

He added that the project



will save 10 to 12 percent of water. He further added that 185 canal lining schemes have been completed in Sindh, costing Rs. 82 billion , while 99 schemes are still ongoing. A total of 1,710 kilometers of canal lining is being carried out across Sindh, for which Rs. 52 billion have been allocated in the budget. He emphasized that this work is not visible in many places.

The Provincial Minister further stated that this is the vision of President Asif Ali Zardari, under whose special directives work on the 25 kilometers of Rohri Canal will also begin soon. He mentioned that the pressure at the initial points of the canals will be reduced , and the Sukkur Barrage will remain safe.

In response to a question, he said that the leadership of the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) has always been vocal on water issues. Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah has written a letter to the Prime Minister, and a meeting of the Council of Common Interests (CCI) is expected soon, for which they have prepared thoroughly.

He reiterated that the PPP’s stance is clear: no canal on the Indus River is acceptable to them. Their position on the Kalabagh Dam has always been clear, and the Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto herself led protests against the construction of Kala Bagh Dam on Kamo Shaheed.

He emphasized that their stance is aimed at strength-

ening not only Sindh but also Pakistan. Any escalation on this issue could harm the country. He added that Pakistan is finally moving in the right direction, and many foreign companies are coming to invest, which will create job opportunities and reduce prices.

In response to another question, Syed Nasir Hussain Shah said that the National Highway Authority (NHA) should be renamed the Punjab Highway Authority (PHA), as the NHA has not done any work in Sindh, while it has built provincial roads in other provinces. He mentioned that globally, motorways start from port cities.

He added that during their recent visit to China, Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah raised the issue of the M-6 Motorway, and progress is expected on this front. He further stated that the federal government has a large development budget, and there is a misconception that after the 18th Amendment, the federal government has nothing left. He pointed out that since 2013, all federal governments have neglected Sindh, allocating only 3 to 4 percent of the federal development budget for Sindh, which is a great injustice.

## 1,275 arrested for kite flying

LAHORE (APP): On the directives of Inspector General Police Punjab, Dr. Usman Anwar, Punjab Police is actively enforcing the Kite Flying Prohibition Amendment Bill and the Anti-Kite Flying Act with full vigor.

Providing details, the Punjab Police spokesperson said that this year, across the province, including Lahore, 1,275 accused have been arrested, and 1,257 cases have been registered for violating the Anti-Kite Flying Act.

Additionally, 386,890 kites and over 12,850 spools of kite string (dor charkhiyan) have been confiscated, while challans for more than 975 cases have been submitted.

In Lahore alone, 374 accused were arrested, 376 cases were registered and 17,752 kites along with 564 spools of kite string were seized. Comparatively, last year, 12,525 accused were arrested, and 11,866 cases were registered across the province.

The IG Punjab has directed strict enforcement of the Kite Flying Prohibition Amendment Bill and instructed RPOs, CPOs, and DPOs to intensify the crackdown against kite flyers, sellers, and manufacturers. He emphasized that this life-threatening activity will not be tolerated, and those involved in this dangerous trade must face zero tolerance.

Furthermore, he ordered legal action against individuals engaged in the online sale of metal kite strings and kites. He urged parents to keep their children away from this deadly game and appealed to citizens to report any instances of kite flying to emergency helpline 15 to fulfill their civic responsibility.

## CTO to initiate awareness about use of helmet

E.P Report

PESHAWAR: Chief Traffic Officer Haroon Rashid Khan distributed awareness pamphlets about the use of helmets, motorcycle side mirrors, (glasses) and helmets among motorcyclists.

In order to distribute helmets and inform the citizens, an awareness zone was created on the Gulbahar bridge. A news release issued by spokesman of City Traffic Police says that Chief Traffic Officer Haroon Rashid Khan had started a series of awareness about the use of helmets by motorcyclists so that they are safe in case of any untoward incidents occur.

He said that there will be a regular crackdown against those who do not use helmets next week. He stated the purpose of awareness is to control traffic accidents including ensuring the flow of traffic in the city. CTO further added various measures have been taken to provide travel facilities to the citizens.

Awareness campaign about traffic rules will ensure traffic flow and reduce fatal accidents, he said and adding citizens can make their journey safer by ensuring the use of helmets. He said that there is a risk of losing precious lives by driving without using a helmet.

## Minister for security during Urs of Lal Shahbaz Qalandar

KARACHI (APP):The Sindh Home Minister Ziaul Hasan Lanjar on Sunday directed the Sindh Police for extraordinary security measures on the occasion of a three-day Lal Shahbaz Qalandar’s 773rd Urs.

He said that all police officers and policemen should be briefed about security duties assigned to them.

The Home Minister Lanjar said that a large number of followers and devotees from all over the country were expected to participate in the three-day Urs.

He said that continuous coordination must be ensured with the relevant institutions for providing facilities to the devotees. He directed that police patrolling, picketing, blockade and strict surveillance should be ensured on all the entry and exit routes of the Sindh province.

Lanjar said that security should be provided to convoys coming from other provinces and Sindh at the district level.

He also directed for special focus on security, medical facilities, traffic management and public services during the Urs. He directed that all possible support and cooperation should be ensured.

## PDP demands action against traffic violations

KARACHI (PPI): Pasban Democratic Party (PDP) General Secretary Iqbal Hashmi today urged authorities to refrain from politicizing traffic accidents and instead address the issue as a serious public concern. According to a statement by PDP, Hashmi held the traffic police and administration responsible for the rising number of traffic accidents in Karachi.

He alleged that police and traffic officials were openly collecting bribes on roads and intersections while failing to enforce traffic laws. He pointed out that an increasing number of non-local traffic police officers are more interested in extracting money from citizens rather than ensuring compliance with traffic regulations.

He stressed that strict measures should be taken against corrupt officials and that traffic laws must be enforced without compromise. He called for a complete ban on heavy vehicles entering the city during daytime hours and strict action against violators.

Hashmi further stated that truck, trailer, and dumper drivers frequently disregard traffic rules, putting passengers’ lives at risk. He accused the traffic police of accepting bribes from heavy vehicle drivers and letting them go despite serious violations, while ordinary citizens face strict penalties.

PDP leader demanded that the dumper mafia be controlled and that Karachi’s residents not be pushed to a point of frustration. He concluded that enforcing traffic laws with discipline is the only way to ensure public safety and protect lives.

# Abaseen Foundation marks 15th anniversary

E.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Abaseen Foundation on Sunday marked its 15th anniversary with an event titled ‘From Dream to Reality 2009-2025’. The celebration brought together former and current Board of Governors (BOG) members, pioneer contributors, school principals, teachers, administrative staff, and well-wishers to reflect on the foundation’s achievements and its impact on education.

What began as a small primary school in 2009 has grown into a thriving educational organization, providing quality education to underserved communities, particularly girls. Over the years, the foundation has become a symbol of hope, demonstrating that with dedication and teamwork, ambitious dreams can be achieved.

The event featured inspiring stories from key figures who played pivotal roles in the foundation’s growth. Mr. Said Man Sher, the first Director of Rahim Education Complex, recalled the early chal-

lenges and achievements. Mr. Muhammad Zahir Shah, a founding BOG member, spoke about the importance of teacher training in maintaining educational standards. Mr. Tahir Khattak, who oversaw the foundation’s infrastructure, shared how every brick laid was a step toward a brighter future. Dr. Rukhsana Farooqi, a founding member, highlighted the generosity of donors, while Mr. Ahmad Zaman, Director of Procurement & Infrastructure, emphasized the importance of resource management.

The chief guest, Brig (R) Gulman Sher Afridi (Sitara-e-Imtiaz), founder of Abaseen Foundation, reflected on the foundation’s humble beginnings and its evolution into a degree college. “When we started, we dreamed of educating girls in this region. Today, seeing how far we have come fills me with pride,” he said. He credited the foundation’s success to the hard work and dedication of everyone involved.

Prof. Dr. Mukhtar Zaman,

Visionary Founder and CEO of Abaseen Foundation Pakistan, concluded the event with a vote of thanks. He expressed gratitude to Abaseen Foundation UK and its supporters, Mr. William Bingley and Ms. Helen Bingley, for their contributions. He also thanked the BOG, pioneer members, and staff for their relentless efforts. “This is not just my achievement; it’s ours. Together, we have built something special,” he said.

The celebration included a shield-giving ceremony, where BOG and pioneer members were honored for their contributions. Staff members were also recognized for their dedication. Abaseen Foundation has come a long way, but its mission continues. With a strong legacy and a clear vision, the foundation remains committed to empowering communities and transforming lives through education. For everyone present, it was a reminder that when people come together with a shared dream, even the impossible becomes possible.



# Five killed in firing incident over old enmity

## F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: A tragic shooting incident took place in the jurisdiction of Budhbher police station in Rashta Ronda, Mashokhel, Mohalla Fatah Khan Khel, where five people were killed due to an ongoing enmity on Sunday.

According to initial

reports, the suspects- Imtiaz and Ali Gohar, sons of Sattar; Sarfraz, son of Imtiaz; and shoaib, son of Ali Gohar-residents of Mashokhel, Mohalla Anezi, opened fire on their rivals.

As a result, five individuals, including Malik Aman, son of Qasim Khan; Naheed, son of Hastam;

Maqsood, son of Nasir; Imdad; and Razam Khan, son of Murad Khan, lost their lives.

All the deceased were residents of Mashokhel, Mohalla Anezi.

Upon receiving the report, local police immediately arrived at the scene and shifted the bodies for post-mortem examination.

A case has been registered on the complaint of Malik Arshad, son of Qasim Khan, a resident of Mashokhel, Mohalla Anezi.

Police have launched a search operation and are conducting raids at possible hideouts to arrest the suspects involved in the incident.

# ICRC Country Manager Ahmed Hassan Al-Mousa visits PCP



## F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Ahmed Hassan Al-Mousa, Country Manager of the Physical Rehabilitation Program at the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), visited the Paraplegic Center Peshawar along with his team and called on Centre's CEO Dr.

Syed Muhammad Ilyas. The Director Rehabilitation Dr. Amir Zaib, and Senior Physical Therapist Dr. Gohar Rehman, were also present on the occasion.

During the visit, the del-

egation was briefed on various departments of the center, the rehabilitation process of admitted patients, the challenges faced, and the overall medical and rehabilitation services provided at the facility. Discussions were held on enhancing cooperation between the two institutions and providing modern and high-quality rehabilitation facilities for people with disabilities.

Ahmed Hassan Al-Mousa appreciated the efforts of the Paraplegic Center, acknowledging its

significant role in rehabilitating persons with disabilities (PWDs) and enabling them to lead independent lives. He assured the center of ICRC's continued support to further improve the quality of life PWDs.

Chief Executive Dr. Syed Muhammad Ilyas expressed his gratitude for ICRC's support and acknowledged its previous financial and technical assistance in strengthening the center. He hoped that both institutions would continue working together on joint initiatives to fur-

ther enhance rehabilitation services for persons with disabilities.

He highlighted that the modern assistive devices produced in the center's workshop for PWDs are made possible due to the costly materials provided by the ICRC.

Thousands of PWDs and as such their poor families benefit from these assistive devices, and for this generous financial and technical support, the center remains deeply grateful to the global organization, he concluded.



PESHAWAR: Commissioner Peshawar Division, Riaz Khan Mehsum chairing a meeting regarding tree plantation campaign.

# KP Health Advisor releases Rs. 440m for delayed salaries

## F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: On the directives of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Health Advisor, Ihtesham Ali, funds amounting to Rs. 440 million have been released to clear three months' pending salaries of over 4,500 employees of the Integrated Health Program (IHP).

In his statement, the

Health Advisor assured that all employees would receive their salaries before Ramadan.

He instructed the relevant authorities to ensure that payments are transferred to employees' accounts without delay. He emphasized that no employee's salary would be withheld, but necessary reforms are essential to

streamline project operations.

"There is no place in my team for those who cannot deliver," he asserted. Expressing concern over frequent salary delays and protests for project extensions, Ihtesham Ali directed officials to start preparing for the upcoming budget now.

He urged consultations

with stakeholders to ensure efficient financial planning, preventing such disruptions in the future.

The advisor further stated that the next Annual Development Program (ADP) would include only those schemes that enhance service delivery and benefit the public at large, rather than launching unnecessary new projects.

# Project to improve water management in KP Delegation of IWMI meets with Secretary Irrigation

## F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: A technical delegation of international water management institute (IWMI) led by Dr. Mohsin Hafeez held a meeting with secretary irrigation ayaz khan in his office to brief him on the updated progress of its ongoing UK Aid funded water resource accountability in Pakistan (WRAP) project.

All the chief engineers and other senior officers of the department attended the meeting.

It was informed during

the meeting that IWMI is helping the province in implementation of KP WATER ACT 2020 where necessary rules and regulations are being framed by the patron of Punjab.

It was also informed that IWMI will extend help in the development of proper ground water management information system (GWMIS) in the province.

The special focus during the meeting was given on the proposed Water Resource Management Information system (WRMIS) for KP in which the data base of the entire

irrigation system of the province will be computerized.

The system will be reflecting all relevant information of the KP Irrigation system on the website of the department. This system will not only facilitate the KP Irrigation department with real time monitoring of their canal system but will also ensure the proper running of the canals with their design discharges till their tail ends.

The system will also contain a robust complaint redressal mechanism which will ease out the irri-

gators in quick resolve of their problems at field level.

This system has already been established in the world largest irrigation system of Punjab and its replication at KP level will improve the overall water sector governance in the province.

Secretary Irrigation appreciated the system and requested IWMI for its early implementation in the province. He also directed the field formation of his department to help IWMI with necessary data for early completion of the system.

# Stage play highlights challenges for youth in performing arts

## F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Culture and Tourism Authority and the Centre for Learning Law and Business (CLLB) jointly staged a theater drama in order to promote culture and encourage youth to face the challenges in the field of performing arts.

The play staged at the Nishtar Hall, Peshawar, shed light on various

issues prevalent in the society and beautifully presented the way for their redressal.

Students from different institutions, including the University of Peshawar, University of Engineering and Technology, IMSciences, National University of Modern Languages (NUML), Air University, and Pak-Turk School, participated in the drama.

The purpose of the the-

ater drama was to highlight the difficulties faced by the younger generation from their homes to society and their surroundings.

On this occasion, the author and director of the drama, Mujtaba Hilal, said that performing arts and creative abilities were essential for building a progressive society and training students to tackle 21st-century challenges.

He said that CLLB had

fostered a culture where creativity could flourish, and there was a need for more efforts to educate and train the next generations in performing arts.

With the initiative of presenting theater dramas at Nishtar Hall by the KPCTA, artistes would have a platform to showcase quality performances, and the people of Peshawar would have the opportunity to witness high-standard shows. The provincial government has taken steps to promote culture and encourage young artistes to engage in cultural activities.

This was the third theater play staged at Nishtar Hall this month, following a well-received performance on Kashmir Solidarity Day. Students demonstrated their talents through auditions, live performances, scriptwriting, and stage acting.

The KPCTA organizes various cultural events at Nishtar Hall, including stage dramas and other activities, to promote cultural activities.

# Commissioner Peshawar chairs meeting on tree plantation drive

## F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: A meeting regarding the tree plantation campaign was held under the chairmanship of Commissioner Peshawar Division, Riaz Khan Mehsum. The meeting was attended by Deputy Commissioners of all five districts of Peshawar Division-Peshawar, Nowshera, Charsadda, the tribal district of Mohmand, and Khyber-

along with District Forest Officers and other administrative officials from relevant departments.

During the meeting, it was decided that fruit-bearing trees would be planted across all five districts in the ongoing plantation season. This initiative aims to provide long-term benefits of fruit production while also ensuring the arrival of migratory birds. Targets were assigned to all Deputy

Commissioners to implement the campaign effectively.

Addressing the meeting, Commissioner Riaz Khan Mehsum emphasized the importance of involving the public in the tree plantation campaign to ensure its success. He instructed that, along with planting trees, local communities should be engaged in protecting them. Welfare organizations and social workers

should also be included in the campaign.

Furthermore, events should be organized in all districts to promote the campaign, and individuals who demonstrated outstanding performance in the previous plantation drive should be rewarded with certificates and prizes. The commissioner also announced that he would visit all districts next week to review the progress of the campaign.

# MHO holds hybrid seminar on Protracted Communities

## F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The Maraka Humanitarian Observatory (MHO) held a hybrid seminar at the Department of Political Science, University of Peshawar. Chaired by Prof. Dr. Shahida Aman and Assoc. Prof. Dr. Ayub Jan, the seminar featured insightful presentations on "Protracted Communities,"

highlighting three years of research in collaboration with Sussex University. The discussions covered displacement, the cultural institution of malikship, and the anthropological significance of Gham Khadi among Afghan refugees and host communities in Pakistan. Notable attendees included Dr. Saba Gul Khattak, Sadia Yousafzai, and Khalid Usman Khattak,



among others. The seminar concluded with a robust Q&A session addressing key issues faced by Afghan

refugees in Pakistan, lack of literature on the subject and the need to decolonize the concept of solidarity

# Gender disparity affecting women's full participation in workforce

PESHAWAR (APP): The issue of gender disparity in government jobs continues to be a major challenge, where women face significant barriers to equal opportunities in employment, pay, and career progression.

Despite a series of reforms and policies aimed at promoting gender equality, the representation of women in the public sector departments remains strikingly low, especially in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

This persistent imbalance is not only a reflection of systemic inequalities but also a manifestation of broader societal issues such as illiteracy, population growth, and cultural norms that continue to restrict women's full participation in the workforce.

Government jobs, which offer stable and prestigious career opportunities in Pakistan, span a wide range of sectors,

from administration to public health, law enforcement, education, and the social sector. However, despite making up almost half of the country's population, women account for only 5% of the federal government's civilian workforce — a figure that falls far below international standards.

According to a report by the Pakistan Public Administration Research Centre (PPARC) from the Establishment Division, out of over 1.2 million employees in the federal government, only 49,508 are women, including those in autonomous bodies and corporations.

This figure represents a modest 6.09% increase from the previous year, indicating slow progress in narrowing the gender gap. Moreover, a 10% employment quota for women in federal government jobs, including the Civil Superior Services (CSS), has yet to yield substantial

improvements.

While some provinces, notably Punjab and Sindh, have made incremental gains, the gender gap persists, particularly in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan, where societal and cultural barriers are deeply entrenched.

The distribution of female employees across Pakistan shows a clear regional disparity, with Punjab contributing the largest share of female government employees. These statistics highlighted the uneven progress made in different parts, where traditional gender roles, especially in regions like KP and former FATA, continue to discourage women from pursuing professional careers especially in police, forests, irrigation, mines and minerals, excise and taxation.

Professor Dr. Muhammad Naeem Khattak, a former economics department chairman at

the University of Peshawar, emphasized that social, cultural, and institutional factors continue to drive gender disparity in government jobs in KP. He pointed out that in areas like KP's former FATA, societal norms dictate that women prioritize family over professional aspirations.

These expectations have not only limited educational opportunities for women but also restricted their career choices, including those that could lead to government employment.

In addition, he said the lack of market-oriented education and limited technical training for women further compounds the challenge in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Despite policies aimed at increasing female participation in government, such as the employment quota, women often find themselves hard to get promotions or career advancement

ment due to red-tapism. Furthermore, unfavorable treatment at workplace, lack of mentorship and support networks discourage long-term female participation in government jobs, especially in tribal and conservative areas of KP.

"Efforts to address gender inequality in government jobs must begin with promotion of girls' education especially in tribal societies of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa," said Ikhtair Wali Khan, the PML-N spokesman while talking to APP.

He argued that the root cause of the gender gap in government employment lied in the lack of access to higher education for girls, particularly in rural and tribal areas that needed to be countered through online education.

Despite the government efforts to improve education, he claimed that millions of students in KP remain out of school, and

educational institutions are often understaffed, particularly in terms of female teachers in the province.

Senior lawyer Malik Ashfaq Khan stressed that the 1973 constitution guaranteed the right of every citizen to pursue any profession, including those traditionally dominated by men, such as defense, law enforcement, police and politics.

He said reserved seats for women in national and provincial assemblies are a step toward ensuring female representation, but more needs to be done to ensure equal opportunities for women in government jobs.

Dr. Riffat Sardar, Chairperson of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Commission on the Status of Women, acknowledged the pace of progress to remove general disparity in government jobs in the country, highlighting ongoing efforts to improve women's partici-

pation in both the public and private sectors as government reforms has brought fruits.

She referred to various policies introduced by the government to address gender inequality, including the National Gender Policy (2002) and Women's Empowerment Package (2017), increase women quota in Federal government jobs including CSS and Parliament besides increasing BISP stipend to Rs13500 this year to facilitate nearly one million BISP beneficiaries to educate their loved ones.

She said these initiatives aim to increase female representation in government jobs through quotas and leadership development programs besides ensuring gradual increase in female participation in the judiciary, police, and other administrative roles.

She underlined the need for promotion of online

education to encourage girls to pursue higher studies imperative to create jobs for the educated women.

Khalique Rehman, KP Minister noted that the government is actively encouraging women to compete with men through various competitive exams like KPSPSC and ETEA. He said family-friendly policies such as flexible working hours, paid parental leave, and child care facilities are ensured to facilitate working women in KP.

Despite significant progress, the experts said a multifaceted approach was required to achieve gender equality in government employment after tackling systemic barriers, changing societal attitudes toward women's work, and implementing policies that ensure women not only have equal access to government jobs but also opportunities to thrive in leadership positions.





## In brief

### Shakur for more sports activities F.P. Report

CHARSADDA: The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Minister for Labor Fazal Shakur Khan, has said that young people should actively participate in both educational and sports activities, adding participation in sports activities helps individuals maintain good health and fitness, and it can protect them from many diseases. He said that KP has much talent in every field and in sports the KP players always have brought honor to Pakistan and the province at both national and international levels. The provincial minister expressed these views during his speech as the chief guest at the closing ceremony of a local cricket tournament held at Abid Khan cricket ground, district Charsadda. The provincial minister awarded the trophy to the captain of the winning team and presented medals to players who performed outstanding in the tournament. Addressing the participants of the closing ceremony, the provincial minister said that sports develop the ability to face all kinds of challenges. "By participating in sports, young people can protect themselves from many negative activities," Mr. Fazal Shakur added.

### Protest in Larkana Allah Dad Chandio

LARKANA : Last day, Pakistan Sunni Tehreek (PST) organized a protest rally in Larkana against the growing unrest in the district, at Jamia Masjid Gulstan Madina Meinhlabad in which PST Sindh Provincial Leader Maulana Ali Nawaz Qasmi, Larkana Division General Secretary Shamsuddin Sarohi, District President Madad Hafiz Ali Qadri, Hafiz Riaz Hussain Chandio and other workers participated in large numbers. Addressing the meeting on that occasion, Maulana Ali Nawaz Qasmi and others said that unrest has increased in Larkana city and other surrounding areas, while the incidents of robberies, robberies, thefts and other social evils are increasing day by day, due to which ordinary citizens are becoming insecure but it is sad to say that the management is nowhere to be seen, they demanded to immediately control the increasing criminal activities in Larkana city including the surrounding areas and bring the accused persons to justice and ensure the safety of the lives and property of the citizens, otherwise a strong movement will be started from the platform of PST.

### Two butchers fined

TANK (INP): Assistant Commissioner of Tank Shaukat Iqbal paid a surprise visit to the bazaar and inspected butcher shops here Sunday. According to the district administration, the inspection was made following directives of the Deputy Commissioner to provide quality meat to the citizens. The AC also took stock of cleanliness and carried out verification of licenses of various shops. During the inspection, he found that substandard meat was being sold at certain shops. As a result, action was taken against the butchers, and fines were imposed on two of them in accordance with the law. Assistant Commissioner Shaukat Iqbal emphasized that it was the priority of the district administration to provide the public with quality and safe food. In this regard, he said no compromise would be made and that such inspections would be continued to ensure the provision of food in accordance with health and hygiene standards.

# Barkwal vows to remain united for peace in Karak

## F.P. Report

K A R A K : K h y b e r Pakhtunkhwa Minister for Agriculture Major? Muhammad Sajjad Barkwal has said that Karak district is the most peaceful district of the province in terms of peace and its people are also the most peace-loving. Therefore, no one will be allowed to spoil the peaceful environment of District Karak, he added.

This he said while addressing the national-level "Aman Paswan" in Karak district on Sunday. Shahid Khan Khattak MNA, former Senator Mushtaq Ahmed, Chairman DDAC Karak Khurshed Khattak MPA, former members of the

Assembly and noted national leaders also addressed the Aman Paswan.

Demands of the Aman Pasoon were included giving powers to the CTD, early recovery of the abductees and protecting the peaceful environment of Karak from deterioration.

Agriculture Minister said that peace is the need of all of us and we will remain united beyond personal and party politics for the cause of peace and deal with the enemies of peace together.

The minister said that the land of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and its people cannot afford any more unrest. He while referring to the peace of Karak, said

that the Khattak tribe has always supported the state in every matter, so it is the responsibility of the state to protect the its people from unrest. The Minister supported the decisions of the management committee of the Aman Pasoon and said that we are all one for peace and no one can separate us from each other for this important cause.

Addressing the people of Karak, Barakwal said that we all should not be oblivious to the current situation, otherwise destruction will be our destiny. Today, we have to send a message to the anti-peace forces that we are not a heedless nation but are ready to go to any extent for the peace.

# PHP conduct one-day road safety workshop

MULTAN (APP): A one-day road safety workshop was organized at Basti Malook Patrolling Post with active participation of traders, community groups, respected social figures, motivational speakers, and the staff of patrolling post.

SSP Patrolling, Muhammad Saleem Khan Niazi, attended the event as the chief guest. He briefed the distinguished guests

about community policing and road safety measures.

Addressing the workshop, SSP Patrolling Muhammad Saleem Khan Niazi emphasized: "Life is given only once; wear a helmet for the sake of your children."

During the workshop, certificates of appreciation were distributed among PHP volunteers, road safety ambassadors, and law-abid-

ing citizens. Additionally, helmets were distributed to highlight the importance of road safety.

The event was also attended by DSP Amjad Hussain Khan, In-charge Patrolling Post Sub-Inspector Muhammad Hamza Shakoor, Licensing Branch In-charge Shahzad Sarwar, PRO, and other staff members of Punjab Highway Patrol.

# DC Hafizabad reviews cleanliness

## Hafiz Aziz Ur Rehman

HAFIZABAD: Deputy Commissioner Abdul Razzaq visited different areas of city Hafizabad and reviewed standard of cleanliness under 'Suthra Punjab Programme' of the Chief Minister Punjab Maryman Nawaz Sharif.

He directed the officers of Municipal Committee and Solid Waste Management Company to expedite lifting of garbage from Bajli Mohallah, Railway Line, Sheer Pura and other areas of the city to ensure provision of clean and neat atmosphere to people.

He also checked construction work to lay green belts and tree plantation on Gujranwala Road to make the road attractive and beautiful.

While visiting general bus stand, DC inspected construction of shed, benches for passengers and directed the officers concerned to complete this work at the earliest.

He also surprisingly inspected DRQ hospital and Trauma Centre and reviewed provision of medicines and other treatment facilities to patients. He enquired after health of patients and took feedback

from patients regarding availability of medicines and other treatment facilities.

Meanwhile, district administration has been laid first walking track at district complex for providing morning walk facility to people.

DC Abdul Razzaq inspected newly established walking track and said that a large number of people are coming for morning and evening walk in beautiful and attractive environment.

Meanwhile, Deputy Superintendent Punjab Highway Patrolling Police Hafizabad Ghazi Arif Mehmood Khan said that under the community policing concept of Inspector General Polie Punjab, the patrolling police is taking all possible measures to create awareness among people about implementation on traffic rules for saving precious lives of people and to ensure smooth flow of traffic on the roads.

While addressing a awareness workshop held at PHP Post Paraneki near Sukhaki Mandi, he said that PHP was arranging seminars, walks and workshops to invite social workers, trades, students and parents for persuading the people to act upon traffic rules.



HYDERABAD: A doctor examining a patient during free eye camp organized by host lions club at Police ground.

MULTAN (APP): Out of total six historic Sarai (Inns) at Multan City Railway Station which was once a bustling hub for passengers, Khuda Bakhsh Sarai is still operational and offering residential facility to scores of its permanent weary travelers on daily basis from across the country.

In past, outside the station, the streets were alive with tea stalls, local eateries, tandoors, and the famous Sohan Halwa stalls. Six Sarai (inns) provided shelter to weary travelers.

However, one Sarai Khuda Bakhsh stood as a significant landmark, a place where travelers from across regions, especially Sindh, stay before heading to the historic shrines of Multan.

A 75-year-old Abdul Ghafoor, a resident who

witnessed the golden era of these Sarai, recalled how his father used to call out to passengers, inviting them for a stay.

Talking to APP, he mentioned that there were two Hindu Sarai, while four belonged to Muslims, including Dilawar Shah, Khuda Baksh, Sharif Kashmiri, Malkoon Wali Sarai. These inns were once filled with travelers, traders, and devotees, contributing to the city's vibrant cultural and economic life.

Popular Waseeb Explorer Amir Bashir informed, Sarai culture in sub-continent appeared during Sher Shah Suri era. However, with passage of time, it started working on commercial basis.

However about Khuda Bakhsh Sarai, he shared "upon visiting Khuda Bakhsh Sarai, the first



sight that struck was its majestic entrance, which still stands strong. Just inside, an old Masjid, still in use, tells the tale of time. Moving further, an archway with name of Khuda Bakhsh, his birth and death years inscribed on it, marks the way to the main courtyard. Amir Bashir further added, "the



BUNER: KP Minister for Sports and Youth Affairs Syed Fakhar Jahan and Chairman PTI MNA Barrister Gohar Ali Khan offering dua after inaugurating tree plantation campaign.

## Commissioner shows anger F.P. Report

LAKKI MARWAT: Bannu division commissioner Muhammad Ali Shah has expressed his anguish and displeasure over poor hygiene and cleanliness conditions in public parks and asked the concerned authorities to improve the situation within three weeks. While paying a surprise inspection visit to the Fazal Qadir Shaheed Park in Bannu city, the divisional commissioner said that renovation and beautification of parks and ensuring provision of facilities in them for visitors was a key indicator under the Chief Minister's public service agenda. WSSC chief executive officer Muhammad Imran Khan, TMO Muhammad Yousaf Khan and other officials accompanied him. The provincial government has established the park on 40 kanal in the heart of the city to provide local residents with a healthy environment and recreation facilities.

## Commissioner Kohat suspends to TMA officers

### F.P. Report

KOHAT: Commissioner Kohat Division Syed Motasim Billah Shah has under the Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Program "Awami Agenda" visited various public places along-with the administration officers the other day.

During the visit, he made a detailed inspection of the bus stand, fruit and vegetable market, under-construction overhead water reservoir and Government Primary School, PAF Bazar Kohat.

During his visit to the bus stand, Commissioner Kohat Division found the cleanliness pathetic in pathetic condition, the toilets were closed and unusable while there was no clean drinking water facility. Commissioner Kohat expressed his deep anger on it and ordered the authori-

ties concerned to ensure cleanliness and restoration of basic facilities within 18 hours, otherwise strict action will be taken.

Later, the fruit and vegetable market was also inspected, where strict instructions were issued to TMA Kohat due to poor sanitation and non-availability of water. He suspended the Chief Sanitary Inspector Muhammad Waqas and Incharge Bus Stand Jhang Khan for poor performance. He directed the Deputy Commissioner Kohat to complete the inquiry against the said 2 officers of TMA Kohat for negligence and poor performance as per the law and submit the report within a week.

Commissioner Kohat also inspected the under construction overhead water reservoir of WSSC Kohat where the concerned engineer briefed him on the

financial and physical status of the project. He directed the completion of the project within stipulated time and the Divisional Monitoring Authority should also be made active for effective monitoring of the developmental works.

Motasim Billah Shah, during the visit to Government Primary School PAF Bazar found the cleanliness condition and attendance of teachers and students satisfactory. However, he directed the District Education Officer Kohat to immediately ensure the appointment of teachers on vacant posts as only 3 teachers were available for 220 students.

The Commissioner Kohat visit was part of his commitment to prompt resolution of public issues and transparent monitoring of the government projects to provide the best facilities to the people.

# Sexual harassment scandal surfaces in University of Malakand

## Haleem Asad

LOWER DIR: A students' harassment scandal in the University of Malakand (UoM) Chakdara, went viral on social media throughout the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province here on Sunday, in which the UoM lecturer of the political Science department identified as Abdul Haseeb, a resident of Peshawar, regularly asked female students to send him their nude pictures to his mobile phone in various ways. The varsity teacher, Abdul Haseeb son of Abdul Hameed, resident of Peshawar, currently living at Shahgram Chakdara, was accused by several female students of the university that they were sexually harassed, but the university administration remained completely silent despite the complaints due to fear of defamation.

The matter surfaced when a female student (H), a student of the 6th semester of the Urdu department and a resident of Hibatgram, Malakand district approached the Jehan Bakht Shaheed police station Pul Chowki and registered the first information report (FIR) against the lecturer Abdul Haseeb on Feb 4. According to the FIR registered under sections 365B, 511, 452, 354

and 506 crpc the complainant was present at her home when the accused forcefully entered her house with the intent to commit a sexual crime with her. The accused also attempted to abduct her against her will and used force and threats to intimidate her.

The FIR said that the complainant resisted, upon which the accused misbehaved, harassed, and physically assaulted her. The complainant further stated that upon hearing the noise, some neighbors gathered at the scene, causing the accused to flee while issuing serious threats against her life and well-being. The complainant immediately reported the matter to the police, seeking legal action against the accused.

The Malakand district deputy commissioner Hamid ur Rehman, who is also the Commandant of Malakand Levies, said that the accused had been arrested and the matter was being investigated through a joint investigation team.

According to the varsity's media cell, the University of Malakand administration, in this regard, has taken immediate and strict steps. The accused tried to marry a student by going to her house on which the accused was immediately suspended. A

meeting of the Anti-Harassment Committee was held, in which the complainant was given the opportunity of a personal hearing. Now the committee is finalizing its recommendations, which will be sent to the Syndicate for disciplinary action against the accused, it adds.

The UoM public relation officer Miraj Hameed Nasari said the varsity was committed to ensuring an impartial investigation and the case would be taken to its logical conclusion in the light of all available evidence. Talking to this reporter, he said the university had always given top priority to providing a safe and equitable educational environment and designated officers had been appointed for this purpose, who provided timely assistance to the students.

The PRO said the university administration had adopted a zero-tolerance policy against harassment and was taking all possible steps to ensure a safe, fair, and transparent educational environment.

The UoM students requesting not to be named, told this reporter that the case should be seriously taken up as there had been reports that teachers blackmailed female students studying in the university in

various ways. They said that complaints were coming about the accused lecturer for several months, but the university authorities hid this kind of incident.

According to sources, numerous complaints had been raised against the accused for inappropriate behavior, but the university administration did not take any concrete steps due to concerns about reputational damage. They said that several female students had previously complained about harassment, but the university administration failed to act. Meanwhile, according to media reports, the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Ali Amin Khan Gandapur has taken prompt notice of the incident and has formed a two-member inquiry committee to oversee the investigation.

This case follows similar incidents in Pakistani universities, highlighting a wider problem of harassment in academic institutions, i.e. a senior professor was found involved in harassing female students in the Gomal University. Earlier the Ghazi University Harassment Case was surfaced in which reports of faculty members blackmailing female students surfaced, leading to protests and legal actions.

# Decline of ancient Sarai Culture

MULTAN (APP): Out of total six historic Sarai (Inns) at Multan City Railway Station which was once a bustling hub for passengers, Khuda Bakhsh Sarai is still operational and offering residential facility to scores of its permanent weary travelers on daily basis from across the country.

In past, outside the station, the streets were alive with tea stalls, local eateries, tandoors, and the famous Sohan Halwa stalls. Six Sarai (inns) provided shelter to weary travelers.

However, one Sarai Khuda Bakhsh stood as a significant landmark, a place where travelers from across regions, especially Sindh, stay before heading to the historic shrines of Multan.

A 75-year-old Abdul Ghafoor, a resident who

witnessed the golden era of these Sarai, recalled how his father used to call out to passengers, inviting them for a stay.

Talking to APP, he mentioned that there were two Hindu Sarai, while four belonged to Muslims, including Dilawar Shah, Khuda Baksh, Sharif Kashmiri, Malkoon Wali Sarai. These inns were once filled with travelers, traders, and devotees, contributing to the city's vibrant cultural and economic life.

Popular Waseeb Explorer Amir Bashir informed, Sarai culture in sub-continent appeared during Sher Shah Suri era. However, with passage of time, it started working on commercial basis.

However about Khuda Bakhsh Sarai, he shared "upon visiting Khuda Bakhsh Sarai, the first

massive wooden doors, once welcoming countless visitors, remain unchanged. Behind them were offices where managers and workers of the Sarai once kept track of arrivals and departures. Beyond the offices lay a spacious courtyard, surrounded by veranda-lined rooms,

where travelers used to stay, he added.

The architectural beauty of the Sarai, with its open and airy design, still reflects its grandeur, though time has left its mark.

About declining Sarai culture, he remarked that modern guest houses replaced the Sarai culture

but guest houses were too much expensive and lower middle class families could not afford expenses at guest houses.

Muhammad Asghar, the manager of Khuda Bakhsh Sarai informed that about 250 people used to stay here till 1990. However, now it could accommodate only 20 persons. About charges, he stated that Rs 10,000 was charged for one month stay.

He further informed that popular singers Mehdi Hassan, Ghulam Ali, Raishma and many others also used to stay here. However, suspension of City Railway Station, the Sarai facing decline in terms of customers. He hinted that Sarai offer residential facilities to families also.

Muhammad Razaq, 65, another citizen, who once sold "Flooda and Sohan

Halwa" at the railway station, remembered the bustling businesses outside the Sarai. He spoke of Ghani Mal-Pooriwalla, a famous vendor, and Chacha Rahimo's grocery shop, where the guests of the Sarai would buy essentials. Travelers from Sindh, especially devotees visiting shrines, were called "Pir Bhai" by the locals. These pilgrims brought life to the Sarai, making it an essential part of Multan's history.

But time has not been kind to Khuda Bakhsh Sarai. Where once travelers rested. The descendants of Khuda Bakhsh still reside in the Sarai, but the vibrant days are long gone. As City Railways Station itself fell into disuse, so did everything around it. He however lamented the Sarai Culture turning into a forgotten relic of the past.





# DR Congo’s M23 rebels enter centre of strategic city Bukavu: Report

RWANDA (Aljazeera): Rwandan-backed M23 rebels have entered Bukavu, the second-largest city in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), after advancing rapidly in the country.

A local official, a security source, and five witnesses reported seeing the rebels there on Sunday, while a spokesperson for the militia told the Reuters news agency: “We are there.”

The armed group had been advancing on the capital of South Kivu province since seizing the city of Goma in late January. The fall of Bukavu, if confirmed, would represent the most significant expansion of territory under the M23’s control since the latest armed rebellion started in 2022.

M23 spokesperson Willy Ngoma said in a telephone message that the group was in the city. The Congolese army did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

“I’m at home, and I can see with my own eyes the M23 entering our town,” a local official said, speaking on condition of anonymity for security reasons.

Claude Bisimwa, a Bukavu resident, was transporting the bodies of two slain men who were hit by bullets “inside ... their house.”

“They were in their room. We are taking their bodies to the morgue. These were not stray bullets – the soldier did this out of his own will,” Bisimwa told Al Jazeera.

As panic swept through the city, there were reports of widespread looting, including at a World Food Programme depot, while thousands of civilians fled. A day earlier, the rebels took control of Kavumu airport serving Bukavu. They reportedly faced minimal resistance as they advanced through the town.

The airport was the last significant military barrier for the rebel forces before reaching Bukavu, a city of more than one million people.

The development comes as the African Union (AU) summit continues in Ethiopia. The conflict in the DRC has been a key topic of discussion at the annual two-day meeting.

Addressing the summit, United Nations chief Antonio Guterres said a “regional escalation must be avoided at all costs” and the DRC’s “territorial integrity” must be preserved.

The AU has been criticised for its timid approach, and observers have demanded more decisive action towards the conflict.

Rwanda denies giving military support to M23 but has accused hardline Hutu groups in DRC of threatening its security. A report by UN experts said last year Kigali maintained about 4,000 soldiers in the DRC and had de facto control of the rebel group.

# Finnish leader urges Europe to firm up Ukraine’s hand for US-sought talks with Russia

MUNICH (AP): Finland’s president on Sunday urged the rearming of Ukraine and putting “maximum pressure on Russia” through sanctions and asset freezes in the run-up to possible negotiations sought by the U.S. on ending the war. France was set to host a meeting to help firm up Europe’s answer to assertive American diplomacy.

Alexander Stubb and other European leaders at the final day of the Munich Security Conference on Sunday sought to firm up how the European Union can move from talk to more action and stay relevant as Washington pushes to stop the fighting. He laid out three phases: “pre-negotiation,” ceasefire and long-term peace negotiation.

“The first phase is the pre-negotiation, and this is a moment when we need to rearm Ukraine and put maximum pressure on Russia, which means sanctions, which means frozen assets, so that Ukraine begins these negotiations from a position of strength,” he said.

There were early signs of efforts for a quick reaction from EU leaders.

French Foreign Minister Jean-Noel Barrot confirmed Sunday that French President Emmanuel Macron will convene leading European countries for an emergency “working meeting” on Monday in Paris to discuss next steps for Ukraine after the U.S. announcements last week.

Barrot spoke on public broadcaster France-Info.

“The president of the Republic will bring together the main European nations tomorrow for discussions on European security,” Barrot said, adding, “These meetings are very frequent.” He emphasized that European leaders remain in “constant contact.”

News reports said Prime Ministers Keir Starmer of Britain, Mette Frederiksen of Denmark, and Donald Tusk of Poland were among those set to attend.

“A wind of unity is blowing over Europe, as we perhaps have not felt since the COVID period,” Barrot added, underscoring the growing sense of cohesion among European allies.

U.S. President Donald Trump’s push for a quick way out of the Ukraine war has stirred concern and uncertainty in Munich.

After a phone call with Russian President Vladimir Putin last week, Trump said he and Putin would likely meet soon to negotiate a peace deal over Ukraine. Trump later assured Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy he also would have a seat at the table. U.S. officials have indicated that European nations, however, would not be involved.

“Don’t underestimate Trump as a negotiator, I genuinely believe that Putin is baffled and afraid what might be coming from there,” Stubb said.

“Right now, the ball is in our court here in Europe. We need to convince the Americans where’s the value added, and then get back into the table.”

“I think in Europe we need to talk less and do more,” he added later.

President Edgars Rinkevics of Latvia, which like Finland borders Russia, agreed that “if we are strong, if we have something to offer ... then we are going to be interesting to the United States. If you are just continue having those nice conferences, talking and whining, then we are not going to be interesting to our own publics very soon.”

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told Russian state TV on Sunday that the Putin-Trump call was a sign that Washington and Moscow “will now try to solve problems through dialogue and talk about peace, not war.”

Zelenskyy, in a Telegram post on Sunday, said Russia “confirms its desire to continue fighting by striking Ukraine daily,” adding that this week, “almost 1,200 aerial bombs, over 850 strike drones, and more than 40 missiles of various types were launched by the Russians against our people.”

The three-day Munich conference was a hub of crisscrossing diplomacy on issues of politics, economics, and defense and security, with top envoys on hand from places as diverse as Syria and Saudi Arabia, and Japan and South Korea, as well as many European leaders.

On Saturday, Zelenskyy called for the creation of an “armed forces of Europe” to better stand up to an expansionist Russia that could threaten the European Union, too.

He also said he directed his ministers not to sign off on a proposed agreement to give the United States access to Ukraine’s rare earth minerals because the document was too focused on U.S. interests. The proposal was a key part of his talks with U.S. Vice President JD Vance on the sidelines of the Munich event, according to one current and one former senior Ukrainian official familiar with the talks.

Zelenskyy’s decision not to sign a deal, at least for now, was described as “short-sighted” by a senior White House official.

Also Saturday, Japanese Foreign Minister Takeshi Iwaya told reporters in Munich that he has asked U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio to exclude Japan from steel and aluminum tariffs as well as from reciprocal tariff measures.

Iwaya, who had a brief chat with the top U.S. diplomat on the sidelines of the conference, said he also “raised the issue” of auto tariffs, though he gave no further details. If imposed, the impact of auto tariffs on the Japanese auto industry would be huge, experts say.



OTTAWA, CANADA: Anaida Poilievre, the spouse of Canada's Conservative Party Leader Pierre Poilievre speaks before introducing Pierre Poilievre at the "Canada First" rally at the Rogers Center in Ottawa, Canada. Poilievre spoke of his plans if he is elected prime minister of Canada.

# 18 dead in India stampede to catch trains to Hindu mega-festival

NEW DELHI (AFP): At least 18 people died during a stampede at a railway station in India’s capital late Saturday when surging crowds scrambled to catch trains to the world’s largest religious gathering, officials and reports said.

The Kumbh Mela attracts tens of millions of Hindu faithful every 12 years to the northern city of Prayagraj, and has a history of crowd-related disasters — including one last month, when at least 30 people died in another stampede at the holy confluence of the Ganges, Yamuna and the mythical Saraswati rivers.

The rush at the train station in New Delhi appeared to break out Saturday as crowds struggled to board trains for the ongoing event, which will end on February 26.

“I can confirm 15 deaths at the hospital. They don’t have any open injury. Most (likely died from) hypoxia or maybe some blunt injury but that would only be confirmed after an autopsy,” Dr Ritu Saxena, deputy medical superintendent of Lok Nayak Hospital in New Delhi told AFP.

“There are also 11 others who are injured. Most of them are stable and have orthopaedic injuries,” she said.

Broadcaster NDTV reported three more dead from the stampede quoting an official of another hospital in the city.

Those dead were mostly women and children.

“I have been working as a coolie since 1981, but I never saw a crowd like this before,” the Times of India newspaper quoted a porter at the railway station as saying.

“People started colliding and fell on the escalator and stairs” when platform for a special train departing for Prayagraj was suddenly shifted, the porter said.

Railways minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said a “high-level inquiry” had been ordered into the causes of the accident.

“Doing our best” Vaishnaw said additional special trains were being run from New Delhi to clear the rush of devotees.

Undeterred by the accident crowds of devotees continued to throng the railway station on Sunday with more police and railway protection forces deployed to control the flow of passengers.

“We are operating an unprecedented and record number of special trains for the ease of passengers,” railways official Himanshu Shekhar Upadhyay told reporters. “We are doing our best.”

Opposition parties, however, criticised travel arrangements for the mega-festival and blamed the government for attempting a coverup, after they denied for hours that a stampede had occurred.

“They are worried about their image at the cost of the faith of crores of people who are visiting Maha Kumbh... There is no arrangement,” opposition Congress party leader Pawan Khera told ANI news agency.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi said he was “distressed” by the stampede.

“My thoughts are with all those who have lost their loved ones. I pray that the injured have a speedy recovery,” Modi wrote on X.

The governor of the capital territory Delhi, Vinai Kumar Saxena said disaster management personnel had been told to deploy and “all hospitals are in readiness to address related exigencies.”

The six-week Kumbh Mela is the single biggest milestone on the Hindu religious calendar, and officials said around 500 million devotees have already visited the festival since it began last month.

More than 400 people died after they were trampled or drowned on a single day of the festival in 1954, one of the largest tolls in a crowd-related disaster globally.

Another 36 people were crushed to death in 2013, the last time the full festival was staged in Prayagraj.

# Taiwan detects 24 Chinese aircraft as Canadian ship transits waters

TAIPEI (AFP): Taiwan said it detected 24 Chinese military aircraft near the island on Sunday as a Canadian warship passed through the sensitive Taiwan Strait.

It was the first Canadian naval vessel to transit the waterway this year, Taiwan’s foreign ministry said, and came days after two US ships made the passage.

The United States and its allies regularly pass through the 180-kilometer (112-mile) Taiwan Strait to reinforce its status as an international waterway, angering China.

Beijing has never ruled Taiwan, but it claims the democratic island as part of its territory and has threatened to bring it under its control by force.

“The Royal Canadian Navy’s Halifax-class frigate HMCS Ottawa sailed through the Taiwan Strait on February 16,” Taiwan’s foreign ministry said in a statement.

“Canada has once again taken concrete action to uphold the Taiwan Strait’s freedom, peace and openness, demonstrating its firm stance that the strait is international waters,” it added.

Taiwan’s defense ministry said on Sunday that 24 Chinese aircraft, including fighter jets and drones, were detected carrying “joint combat readiness patrols” with military vessels around the island.

During the Canadian warship’s passage, China’s military radioed the ship and warned it to change course, Taiwanese media reported.

A US destroyer and an ocean survey ship traveled through the strait starting on February 10, drawing criticism from China’s military, which said it sent the “wrong signal and increased security risks.”

Data published by the Taiwan defense ministry showed 62 Chinese military aircraft were detected near the island in the 48 hours to 6:00 am local time on Wednesday, coinciding with the US ships’ transit.

Washington’s latest passage through the Taiwan Strait was the first time since US President Donald Trump took office in January.

It came after Trump and Japanese Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba said they “opposed any attempts to unilaterally change the status quo (in the Taiwan Strait) by force or coercion.”

# Argentines flock to budget-friendly beaches

VIÑA DEL MAR, Chile (AP): On a recent hot summer day in Chile, the beaches of Viña del Mar, Concón and Reñaca are packed with holidaymakers sharing yerba mate teas and playing ball. Others mill about in the shopping centers on the coast and in the capital, some wearing shirts with Lionel Messi’s name on them, carrying bags full of clothes, video games and mobile phones.

They are part of a wave of Argentines who have found Chile to be a budget-friendly paradise this southern summer.

“Everything here is so cheap for us,” said Cristian Vázquez, who was enjoying the sea in Reñaca, on Chile’s central coast.

In December 2024, the start of the Southern Hemisphere’s summer, more Argentines went on vacation abroad than in the previous year, with Chile, Brazil, and Uruguay as the top destinations.

Despite a year of economic crisis, Argentines are flocking to beaches, mountains and shopping centers abroad, encouraged by a favorable economic outlook — and a strong peso.

Between December 2023 and the same month in 2024 the Argentine peso appreciated by around 41% against the official U.S. dollar, thanks in part of a strong adjustment plan implemented by President Javier Milei, an ultra-liberal who came to power at the end of 2023 on vows to “blow up” the central bank, take an axe to the bloated government and kill sky-high inflation.

The stampede of Argentines traveling abroad for their summer vacations is driven by several factors, including the recent devaluation of various foreign currencies, the convenience of nearby destinations accessible by car and the prohibitively high cost of domestic vacations, especially along the Argentine Atlantic coast.

Argentine tourism abroad surged in December, with departures up 76.4% year-over-year to 1.3 million travelers compared to the same month the previous year, according to official figures. Of those, 80.7% visited neighboring countries, primarily Chile (28%), Brazil (22.6%) and Uruguay (15.6%).

Chile has become a popular destination for Argentines, who made up 40% of the 5.2 million visitors to the country in 2024 and early 2025. Chile’s strong economic position relative to Argentina has resulted in competitive prices, a major draw for Argentine tourists.

Chile’s tourism undersecretary, Verónica Pardo, noted that visitors are also spending more than in previous years, averaging about \$63.3 per person per day.

Argentine visitors aren’t confined to the sun-drenched beaches of the Chilean coast. Messi jerseys and mate gourds are also a common sight in other neighboring countries.

Nicolás Lentini, 37, recently arrived in Brazil, drawn by the devalued real and lower prices. “A week’s rent for four people in Argentina costs \$700,” he said, noting that he paid the same amount for 14 days in Búzios, a Brazilian resort east of Rio de Janeiro.

“Besides, the beaches here are incomparable to ours, where it’s cold. Here, you can wear a T-shirt all day.”

Brazil experienced a surge in tourism after the real depreciated by around 27% in 2024, when it reached a record of 6.6 million foreign arrivals, with Argentines being the main visitors (1.9 million).

Andrés Deyá, from Argentina’s federation of travel and tourism business associations, highlighted the challenges of competing with neighboring countries like Brazil.

“We can provide good services, financing tools, tourism quality and everything else,” he said, but ultimately “macroeconomic issues define where Argentines decide to travel.”

After a four-year hiatus marked by the COVID-19 pandemic and a subsequent economic crisis, Luis Sánchez returned to the exclusive resort of Punta del Este, Uruguay.

“We like it a lot... this year the prices aren’t as high as they’ve been,” said Sánchez, one of 309,570 Argentines who visited Uruguay between December 20, 2024, and January 13, 2025, representing nearly half of all visitors to the country, where the U.S. dollar appreciated almost 13% against the Uruguayan peso in 2024 compared to 2023.

Tourism operators in Argentina note that the Argentine exodus was also fueled by recovering purchasing power due to falling inflation and the recent elimination of a tax on foreign credit card purchases.



HONG KONG, CHINA: Local residents and visitors wait to see Hong Kong's first locally-born giant panda cubs "Jia Jie" and "Xi Lao" at Ocean Park on Sunday in Hong Kong, China. The pair of giant panda cubs was born last August and their parents are Ying Ying and Le Le, the giant pandas gifted by the central government to the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region.



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## Trump cuts could clash with Kennedy's goals

**ROBERT F. Kennedy Jr, the new US health secretary, has promised to address an epidemic of chronic illness with President Donald Trump's backing, but his broad agenda from making food healthier to studying vaccines may clash with government spending cuts.**

Trump on Thursday ordered the creation of a 'Make America Healthy Again' Commission made up of Kennedy and other secretaries to look at everything from the high rates of autism and asthma in children to how much medicine is being prescribed to them for ADHD or other conditions. Kennedy, a 71-year-old environmental lawyer, has said the government should open up its data, conduct new scientific studies on vaccines and tackle gaps in rural healthcare with artificial intelligence and telemedicine. He has plans to go after food additives, an area regulated by the US Food and Drug Administration, one of about a dozen agencies within the \$3 trillion US Department of Health and Human Services, according to a Reuters report.

At the same time, Republicans are looking to offset extensive tax cuts by slashing the federal workforce. One HHS agency – the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention – plans to cut its probationary staff, about one-tenth of its employees, according to the Associated Press, says the report.

To make a lasting change, as Kennedy has said he wants to do, it takes years and requires technical experts who can change regulations, said Dan Troy, managing director at consulting firm BRG and former FDA Chief Counsel under President George W. Bush. "If you walk in and you fire the people who are best able to help you get regulations done, then not a lot's going to get done," Troy said. "They're going to have to decide, do they want to actually attack the issue of food additives... or do they want to get rid of the people in the food additive division? You can't really do both."

The administration is also targeting Medicaid spending through specific cuts by the agency, two sources with direct knowledge of the government's plans told Reuters. Medicaid health programmes are jointly paid by states and the federal government and cover low-income individuals and families. Reform of Medicaid, Medicare and the Affordable Care Act could free up resources for Kennedy to spend on promoting nutrition, physical activity and social engagement, said Brian Blasé, president of think tank Paragon Health Institute, which is closely aligned with the Trump administration. "It's time to stop wasting so much money on low value government health programmes," Blasé said.

Ameet Sarpatwari, a professor at Harvard Medical School, said there could be tensions between Kennedy and the president's staff on some of these issues, but that he and Trump would be aligned on most policy matters.

Joseph Antos, senior fellow emeritus at conservative think tank the American Enterprise Institute, agreed. "If there's going to be a problem, it's going to be more about (Kennedy's) personal interests butting up against the heads of somebody in the White House."

Some of Kennedy's allies who supported him throughout his presidential campaign, abandoned last August, said they want him to prioritise transparency of government data, removing ultra-processed food from school lunches and ensuring government health decisions are independent from corporate agendas, the Reuters report adds. Trump's health order for his new secretary's first day does not mention one of the items Kennedy raised during Congressional testimony – that he would ask for a review of the safety of abortion drug mifepristone.

Project 2025, a series of detailed policy proposals put together by hundreds of high-profile conservatives, some of whom Trump has named to his administration, calls for a series of detailed anti-abortion measures like banning abortion pills and withdrawing Medicaid funds from pro-abortion states.

### Important Notice

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## The West has been in denial about censorship for far too long

Khalid Albaih

On February 14, US Vice President JD Vance caused a stir at the Munich Security Conference when he decided to accuse America's European allies of practising censorship. Outraged Europeans hit back, pointing at the track record of Vance's boss, President Donald Trump, in attacking and eroding democracy in the United States.

To many of us, proponents of freedom of expression outside the West, this exchange was rather amusing. For so long, the West has lectured us on freedoms and criticised us for being unable to achieve them.

Last month, we marked 10 years since the brutal attack on the office of French satirical magazine, Charlie Hebdo and the subsequent march by Western political and economic leaders in Paris in support of cartoonists, journalism, and "the right to offend", urging the world to be able to "take a joke and laugh at itself". Freedom of expression is the highest value of Western civilisation, we were told.

It is quite ironic to see a decade later, the political and economic elites of these same Western countries trade accusations of censorship, while in the background actively working to suppress or distort freedom of expression.

Meanwhile, a majority in Western societies remain stubbornly in denial that this is happening at a systemic level and are convinced that only this party or that party is an exception to the democratic rule. They still seem to believe that censorship and repression are, and have always been, Global South problems.

Living in the West for nearly a decade, I have grown used to the wide-eyed reactions when I mention my profession. "A Sudanese political cartoonist? That must be dangerous," they say, as if freedom of expression is an exclusively Western ideal. And yes, being a cartoonist in some parts of the Global South can be dangerous, and the consequences of crossing red lines can be brutal. Western media like to point that out and show concern.

For example, in 2015, when cartoonist Atena Farghadani was sentenced to years in prison in Iran for depicting parliamentarians as animals, her story immediately made headlines. Tehran was widely condemned for not being able to "take a joke".

There was also much Western solidarity with Ali Farzat, a prominent Syrian cartoonist, who was kidnapped and his hands broken in 2011 for drawing a cartoon of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. A few years later, news of the death of cartoonist Akram Raslan under torture in al-Assad's jails also sparked an outpouring of empathy.

But the Western voices of support and condemnation are quieter when it comes to "friendlier regimes". Egyptian cartoonist Ashraf Omar has

been under arrest for six months now, with hardly anyone in the West paying attention. And of course, when it comes to Palestinian artists, there tends to be total silence. In October, an Israeli bomb killed Mahassen al-Khateeb in Jabalia camp in Gaza; her last illustration was of Shaban Al-Dalou burning alive in the courtyard of Al-Aqsa Hospital. There was no Western condemnation of her death, or of Israel's killing of more than 200 Palestinian journalists in

mingling of peoples that gave the Western nations their present mixed identities?," he wrote in his famous book Orientalism.

Indeed, censorship in the West is no less real than in the Global South; it's simply more palatable. It is true that cartoonists in the Global South have to navigate clear red lines – lines we know and learn to work around or leave behind.

But what I struggle to get my Western peers to understand is that the West also has red lines. They

**As the prominent Palestinian American intellectual Edward Said reminds us, the West likes to imagine the East (and other places of the world) in ways that satisfy its own civilisational ego. "How can one today speak of 'Western civilization' except as in large measure an ideological fiction, implying a sort of detached superiority for a handful of values and ideas, none of which has much meaning outside the history of conquest, immigration, travel, and the mingling of peoples that gave the Western nations their present mixed identities?," he wrote in his famous book Orientalism. Indeed, censorship in the West is no less real than in the Global South; it's simply more palatable. It is true that cartoonists in the Global South have to navigate clear red lines – lines we know and learn to work around or leave behind. But what I struggle to get my Western peers to understand is that the West also has red lines. They just find them hard to see. As a Sudanese proverb goes: "The camel can't see the curve of its neck". Still, there are some red lines in the West that are quite clear cut; they are just not called that. For example, in 2019, a syndicated cartoon published by The New York Times depicting Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu as a dog leading a blind Trump was swiftly taken down after it was slammed as anti-Semitic. In the following months, the newspaper decided to stop publishing political cartoons altogether. In 2023, veteran cartoonist Steve Bell was dismissed from The Guardian also for drawing a cartoon of Netanyahu that was alleged to be anti-Semitic; the newspaper did not reverse its decision even after the Israeli Cartoon Association condemned his firing.**

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There are other red lines finely disguised as "corporate interests", "editorial standards", or "public sentiment".

In 2018, Israeli cartoonist Avi Katz was informed by the Jerusalem Report, for which he had been freelancing since 1990, that he would be no longer be published because of a cartoon he posted on social media of far-right members of the Knesset depicted as pigs. The official statement by the magazine attributed the decision to "editorial considerations".

More recently, on January 4, Ann Telnæs, a long-term cartoonist for The Washington Post, announced her decision to quit her job after one of her cartoons, which criticised the Post's owner, Jeff Bezos, and his fellow Tech Bros, for their sur-render to Trump, was rejected. She wrote in a short article published on Substack that this was the first time a cartoon of hers was not accepted "because of the point of view inherent in the cartoon's commentary".

These are just a few examples illustrating the red lines of Western societies. True, the consequences for daring to cross a red line with your pen is not prison or death, as can be in other places, but ultimately, the result is the same: cartoonists are silenced.

What we are seeing today will likely only grow worse as billionaires buy up more media outlets and publishing platforms where they get to decide who gets published based on their economic interests and political expediency. The freedom to express, to dissent, and to hold power accountable is no longer celebrated by Western elites; it's being managed.

Currently, the brunt of censorship and violent repression in the West is being borne by Palestinians and their allies. Pro-Palestinian protesters have been brutally beaten up, arrested and charged with criminal or even terror offences across Western countries. One would be naive to believe that such vicious oppression and violation of the extolled "Western values" of freedom of assembly and freedom of speech, would stop at the pro-Palestinian movement.

For cartoonists like me from the Global South, freedom of expression isn't just a lofty ideal – it's a daily struggle that we have sacrificed a lot for. My hope is that my peers in the West and their audiences will stop taking that freedom for granted and become aware of the violent suppression beginning to rear its head in their societies as well.

It is time to end delusion and denial, and take action.

## Why 'peak pessimism' about Europe is overdone

Andrew Hammond

Ursula von der Leyen had been anticipating a fast and furious first 100 days back in power in her second term as European Commission president. However, the "Trump storm" from Washington in January and February may have exceeded even her wildest expectations about what might emanate from the new US presidency.

Not only has US President Donald Trump talked up a cascade of new tariffs on Europe, including reciprocal measures and sectoral ones on steel and aluminum, he has also potentially laid claim to begin one-to-one negotiations with Russian President Vladimir Putin, apparently cutting not only Ukraine, but also wider Europe, out of negotiations to try to settle the three-year-long war.

The perceived power imbalance between the US Building from

**At present, there is sometimes unmitigated gloom about Europe's prospects, despite the region's ongoing fundamental economic and political strengths. However, one of the many ironies about the reelection of Trump as US president is that it might strengthen rather than weaken Europe by being a driver for reform to boost economic competitiveness and strengthen security and defense. Already, Trump's presidential victory has been one of the key drivers of the EU's major trade deal with the Mercosur bloc in South America in December. This agreement, which was more than 20 years in the making, may not have happened without the "Trump effect."**

and Europe shown in these episodes in Trump's first three weeks back in power has fueled sentiment that the EU, in particular, faces a bleak four years ahead, economically and politically. However, this "peak pessimism" about Europe may be significantly overdone.

History highlights how sentiment about powers can change, sometimes significantly. An alternative "Resilient Europe" scenario could unfold in coming years if the region surprises on the upside, with stronger political resolve. This follows multiple key elections in 2024 and forthcoming ones in 2025, including Germany on Feb. 23, which may provide a much-needed political "window of opportunity" for reform.

What makes Europe's future economic and political pathway hard to forecast is that the regional landscape is characterized by intense VUCA (volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity). It is full of both risk and opportunity, with the balance between the two waxing and waning.

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There are multiple other potential factors that could realign perceptions about Europe's future economic and political prospects. For one, potentially faster than anticipated interest rate cuts in 2025 by the European Central Bank and other national authorities in the region, including the Bank of England, could have a larger than expected economic impact.

There is also a possibility of faster paced progress on former ECB chief Mario Draghi's competitiveness agenda than is commonly perceived. This is a major

political priority for von der Leyen amid a blizzard of new economic initiatives, including a new EU Clean Industrial Deal scheduled to be launched on Feb. 26, which may become the signature issue of her second term.

Meanwhile, in Germany, Europe's largest economy, the next chancellor is likely to be pro-business Friedrich Merz. His Christian Democrat Union is likely to be the largest party post-election and form a pro-growth coalition centered around his Germany 2030 reform agenda. With the current Bundesbank President Joachim Nagel supporting reform of the nation's balanced budget amendment (or "debt brake"), looser fiscal policy may well be on the horizon. Moreover, supply side reforms could lift the economy markedly in the next four years.

Building from

December's Mercosur agreement, the EU is also negotiating further trade deals with key Global South powers, including the Gulf Cooperation Council.

Any number of such factors, collectively, may help significantly boost economic growth. In turn, this could then start reversing lost competitiveness against other world powers, and boost security and defense spending to boot, thus tackling one of the Trump administration's key gripes about the region, as voiced at the recent Munich Security Conference.

Perhaps the central challenge with enhancing EU competitiveness centers around the EU's three largest economies: Germany, France, and Italy. All three are stagnating, economically, while Southern European powers like Spain, Greece and Portugal, as well as much of Eastern Europe have outperformed the EU average in recent years, a trend likely to continue in the medium term.

However, we should not get carried away with positivity. While there is more potential than commonly perceived for Europe to surprise, with the region at a significant economic and political pivot point, there are less-rosy scenarios.

Failure to reform, economically, will intensify the political challenges facing Europe. Right-wing populism is gaining followers, which may yet help create an existential crisis for the EU — something Draghi highlighted the possibility of in his European competitiveness report in September.

The geopolitical context facing Europe is also likely to continue to be very difficult in the second half of the 2020s, even if Trump can deliver a sustainable deal to end the Ukraine war. Primarily, this is because of the continuing security problems posed by Russia. Beyond Moscow there are wider challenges, including the possibility of significant migration flows from the region's southern border, plus ongoing tensions in the Middle East, especially if the current ceasefire between Israel and Hamas breaks down.

While the 1920s became known as the prosperous "Roaring Twenties," a century later there is a significant risk that the 2020s will be seen as the "Warring Twenties," sending Europe's future in a negative direction.



# Redrawing borders across Libya would resolve nothing

The unraveling of Libya since 2011 has become a woeful parable of post-intervention state collapse. What began as a movement fueled by democratic aspirations has devolved into a fragmented contest for power, with rival governments propped up by foreign patrons and an array of militias, smugglers, and political elites.

A decade of failed peace talks, broken ceasefires, rampant corruption, and splintered institutions has left the plight of ordinary Libyans drowned out by competing authorities, each extracting loyalty through coercion or patronage. Exhausted by perpetual instability, some now whisper of partition — a formal division of the country into eastern and western zones, maybe even a southern region, too — as the only remedy for this crisis.

Yet, even when framed as pragmatism, such a “national divorce” risks cementing the dysfunction rather than resolving it.

The roots of the appeal of partition lie in the intense rivalry between the UN-recognized government in Tripoli, and Khalifa Haftar’s forces in the east of the country. Backed by an array of external powers, these factions have become less national entities and more proxies in a regional power struggle.

Meanwhile, hybrid networks — militias-turned-municipal authorities, smuggling rings-turned-economic pillars — exploit the vacuum to consolidate localized control and launder ill-gotten gains. Given that national elections are often proposed but perpetually delayed, these new “elites” have entrenched themselves, rendering traditional disarmament and governance reforms highly implausible.

Partition advocates argue that accepting this reality could halt open conflict and allow parallel governance. But Libya’s history, social cohesion, and economic anatomy defy such simplistic perspectives.

Unlike, say, Sudan or Cyprus, Libya lacks the sort of deep-rooted ethnic or sectarian divisions that

could justify a “neat” bifurcation. Tribal affiliations cross over geographic lines; economic life depends on interconnected networks, including oil flows from eastern fields to western ports; and financial institutions in Tripoli underpin national transactions.

Partition would rupture these ties, sparking heated disputes over citizenship and control of resources that could escalate into violence. It would empower warlords and external forces while alienating communities dependent on interconnected trade and kinship. Far from ending Libya’s crisis, partition would codify its

**No longer confined to operating in the shadows or within exclusive family dynasties, these groups would gain sovereign authority to negotiate oil deals, sign military pacts, and suppress dissent within their domains. It would mirror the post-1991 fragmentation of Somalia, where clan leaders-turned-presidents exploited newly granted recognition to entrench networks of patronage, fueling cycles of corruption and insurgency. In addition, the absence of unified governance would invite external actors motivated by self-interest to deepen their interference. Regional powers, no longer constrained by the pretense of backing a single Libyan state, would be further emboldened to carve out exclusive spheres of influence, endorsed by a new ruling elite that would seek to safeguard its own grip on newfound power.**

divisions, trading a fragile status quo for a future of smaller, weaker, and more volatile statelets.

Furthermore, redrawing borders across Libya would do nothing to resolve the crisis and instead institutionalize the forces perpetuating it. Formalizing boundaries between eastern and western territories would grant highly sought-after legitimacy to warlords and militias, transforming them from rogue actors into de facto heads of state.

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Whether it was to secure a buffer zone against per-

Iraqis after the 2003 invasion — could face a future in which “stability” is synonymous with repression, and national identity fractures along the lines of foreign allegiances.

The most immediate appeal of partition — a quick end to fighting — also overlooks the tenacity of Libya’s hybrid actors. Militias in Misrata, Zintan and Benghazi have survived demobilization efforts not through brute force alone but by embedding themselves in local governance. Formal disarmament and security sector reform programs, which would already be challeng-

ing even in a unified Libya, would face near-impossible hurdles in partitioned territories where militias would function as de facto state agencies.

Meanwhile, the recycled efforts by the UN to broker elections reflect an institutional paralysis that only values national polls as the more, and perhaps only, viable path toward unification. However, repeated delays and derailments of similar previous initiatives have allowed parallel institutions to calcify, with the eastern-based House of Representatives and Tripoli’s High Council of State now operating as rival legislatures, each resistant to the idea of ceding power. The latest UN-sponsored initiative echoes familiar patterns of diplomatic theater that will not compel rival powers to change course, nor does it possess the mechanisms to disarm

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# Unity, stability the key goals of Syria’s post-Baathist transition

The Baath Party, once a dominant force in the Arab world, has been reduced to a dwindling memory of its former rule, running down its legacy in Syria in the face of the Assad regime’s demise. Its collapse, following decades of repression and sociopolitical upheaval, marks the expiration of an ideology that shaped the region, but left a legacy of division and authoritarianism.

As Syria begins to navigate its post-Baathist transition, the lessons learned from Iraq’s de-Baathification offer a cautionary tale. The dissolution of Saddam Hussein’s Baath Party in 2003 led to serious consequences, including institutional collapse, widespread instability and sectarian violence. If Syria is to avoid repeating these mistakes, it must chart a different course: one that emphasizes unity, justice and the integrity of its national statehood.

The de-Baathification process in Iraq was swift and indiscriminate. More than 35,000 government employees lost their jobs overnight and thousands of military personnel were dismissed as the Iraqi army

was dissolved. This dismantling of state institutions created a power vacuum that fueled anarchy and sectarian divisions and allowed the rise of extremist groups like Daesh.

Rather than addressing past grievances, Iraq’s de-Baathification actually deepened societal rifts. The campaign disproportionately targeted Sunni communities, perpetuating cycles of violence and mistrust. This experience underscores the importance of pursuing accountability in a manner that promotes reconciliation rather than retribution.

Syria’s path forward must prioritize inclusivity, justice and a vision for shared prosperity. Central to this vision will be the reform of state institutions, ensuring that they serve all citizens equitably, regardless of sect or ethnicity. This requires rebuilding governance structures on the principles of merit and fairness, fostering a system that includes voices that have been previously marginalized by decades of authoritarian rule.

The scale of the challenge is immense. According to the UN High Commissioner for

Dr. Gyorgy Busztin

Refugees, as at the end of 2023, 16.7 million people in Syria required humanitarian assistance, the highest number since the onset of the crisis. Additionally, there are 7.2 million internally displaced persons as per the Joint Data Center on Forced Displacement, reflecting the devastating toll of conflict on the population. These figures underscore the urgency of comprehensive governance reforms and inclusive recovery plans to address the needs of the most vulnerable.

Accountability will also play a critical role in healing societal wounds. Establishing a transitional justice framework, rooted in international norms, is essential to address past grievances without resorting to collective punishment. By holding perpetrators of war crimes and human rights abuses accountable, Syria can begin to rebuild trust among its people.

Economic reconstruction stands as an equally urgent priority. Over the last decade, Syria’s economy has suffered a catastrophic

decline, with its real gross domestic product contracting by about 84 percent between 2010 and 2023, according to the Middle East Council on Global Affairs. Estimates of the cost of rebuilding the nation’s infrastructure range between \$400 billion and \$600 billion, highlighting the monumental financial resources required for recovery, according to Arabian Gulf Business Insight.

This task will demand robust international support, particularly from the Gulf states, which have demonstrated their commitment to regional stability. Through partnerships and targeted investments, Syria can pave the way for sustainable development, job creation and the reintegration of displaced communities.

Moreover, regional and international cooperation is vital. Syria’s stability (or lack thereof) will have an effect that extends beyond its borders, impacting the broader Middle East. Collaborative efforts with neighboring countries and global institutions must be prioritized to ensure security and foster a peaceful transition. The UAE’s diplomatic leadership, with

its emphasis on dialogue and humanitarian initiatives, offers a model for constructive engagement in Syria’s recovery process.

At the heart of this vision for the future lies the principle of unity. Preserving Syria’s territorial integrity is nonnegotiable and fragmentation along sectarian or ethnic lines risks further destabilization, potentially perpetuating cycles of violence. The international community must recognize the critical importance of safeguarding Syria’s sovereignty while promoting reconciliation and inclusivity.

The end of Baathist rule in Syria offers a historic opportunity to redefine the country’s future. By learning from its own past mistakes, along with others in the region, and prioritizing inclusivity, justice and unity, Syria can emerge as a stable and prosperous state.

The global community, particularly key regional actors, must rally around this vision. Through collaboration and shared commitment, Syria can transition from a fractured past to a cohesive future that serves as a beacon of hope for the region.

# Netanyahu loves presents and he got one while visiting Washington

Yossi Mekeberg

The Netanyahus, that is to say Prime Minister Benjamin and his wife Sara, love the high life and they crave presents, preferably expensive ones. But on the occasion of his recent visit to Washington, the Israeli prime minister received a special present from US President Donald Trump, one that cannot be purchased in designer shops: a political rope, thrown out to save his drowning coalition.

Like many presents, it came with a price, but in this case the price will be paid by the Palestinians of Gaza, who will, if Trump and Netanyahu get their way, be ethnically cleansed from Gaza. And it will also be paid by Egypt and Jordan, who are being pressured into absorbing more than 2 million refugees.

Netanyahu is accustomed to receiving freebies, but on this occasion the gift is one that constitutes a war crime, probably several of them, and while he might think it sums up a successful visit to Washington, this is a minority opinion.

If you are wondering just how repulsive this plan is for the so-called “relocation” of most of the population of Gaza to neighboring countries, the very fact that it was greeted with unabated delight and enthusiasm by Bezalel Smotrich, the ultra-right Israeli finance minister and leader of the Zionist Religion party, provides a clue. One cannot remember the last time he showed any trace of humanity, either to Palestinians or even to his own fellow citizens who are still languishing as hostages of Hamas.

Netanyahu returned from Washington satisfied, even complacent, not because he thinks Trump’s plan is implementable — he probably knows these ideas might even signal the end of any chance of normalization with Saudi Arabia, and undermine Israel’s peace agreements with Egypt and Jordan — but because for him these are secondary considerations compared with the opportunity the Trump plan provides for him to keep his coalition government together.

Smotrich and his party remained in the coalition despite opposing the ceasefire deal, mainly to prevent its second phase, which entails ending the war. If Washington continues to come bearing such gifts, Netanyahu might also be celebrating the return to the coalition of Itamar Ben Gvir and his bunch of Khanists, which might improve the chances of this government surviving until next year’s election.

There were some other, lethal, gifts for Netanyahu during his visit to the US. Trump, for instance, instructed the Pentagon to release the hold imposed by the Biden administration on the supply of 2,000-pound bombs to Israel. The State Department also approved the sale of weapons worth more than \$7.4 billion, and is considering sending to Israel 24,000 assault rifles that were held up on the orders of Antony Blinken, the former secretary of state, for fear that many of them would end up in the hands of violent settlers.

No prime minister should be as smug as Netanyahu was during his trip to Washington and upon his return home, not when he is responsible for so much suffering, among both Israelis and Palestinians. After the last round of exchanges of Israeli

hostages for Palestinian prisoners, we all learned of the disturbing conditions endured by at least the three hostages most recently returned by Hamas. We can only imagine the state of the few remaining captives who are still alive, probably only barely so.

That is not to say that Hamas does not bear responsibility for the poor condition of the hostages, and for the way they were most cruelly and grotesquely paraded moments before their release. However, Netanyahu and his government were warned about the starvation and torture the captives have been enduring, and yet for many months the Israeli leadership remained opposed to the idea of negotiating any

even seasoned Trump-watchers, when he delivered the bombshell suggestion that the future of Gaza should unfold without the people of Gaza, a call for ethnic cleansing that continues to send shock waves across the world.

Declaring publicly that the US solution for Gaza entails a massive war crime — and doing so while Netanyahu, the first leader to visit the White House since Trump’s inauguration, was standing next to him in the White House — means his plan must be taken seriously, not simply shrugged off as just another one of his bombastic statements that could never happen. After all, this man holds the most powerful position in the world.

And we should also bear in mind that he made his

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deal that could free them, despite several opportunities to do so.

They preferred to continue the war, not because this was the recommendation of their military chiefs, but to appease ultra-right members of the coalition; this took precedence over the lives and health of those who were kidnapped on the prime minister’s watch.

If Netanyahu does not care for his own people, how could anyone expect him to show any sympathy for the Palestinian people and the enormity of their suffering? Sadly, in this he has found a kindred spirit in the White House — probably several of them.

One of the reasons Netanyahu resorted to delaying tactics in the ceasefire negotiations with Hamas was his hope that Trump would return to the presidency. In this sense, his gamble seems to have paid off, at least for him if not for anyone else.

The early signs in the weeks leading up to Trump’s inauguration were encouraging, as it appeared he was prepared to put pressure on Netanyahu to agree to a ceasefire agreement and eventually end the war, including the withdrawal of the Israeli forces from the Gaza Strip. But something flipped along the way, confirming his reputation for being “unpredictable,” and surprising

unexpected announcement while standing next to an Israeli prime minister who, despite his obvious surprise, was quick to embrace the idea, calling this plan, which falls short even of the description half-baked, “revolutionary” and “creative.”

If Trump wants to receive the Nobel Peace Prize, and he desperately does, forcing 2 million people from their homes and handing their territory to the US is not likely to convince the award committee that he is the most suitable candidate.

Netanyahu knows very well that even if he plays along with Trump’s terrifying fantasies, it might buy his coalition a temporary reprieve but it will damage Israel’s reputation for generations to come, along with any prospect of acceptance in the region, and would end any remaining perceptions of Israel as a progressive democracy.

For that reason, and so many others, he should have warned the new White House administration not to even toy with such a revolting idea, but instead to support the reconstruction of Gaza for, and with, its Palestinian people. But this would have required a principled and courageous leader, not one whose only concern is to escape justice by derailing his own corruption trial.

# Erdogan on tour as Turkiye pivots to Asia

Dr. Sinem Cengiz

Turkiye’s engagement with Southeast Asia is often seen as part of a broader strategic pivot that has been evolving in line with its broader foreign policy. Last week President Recep Tayyip Erdogan conducted a tour of Malaysia, Indonesia, and Pakistan, which was significant in many respects and deserves a closer look.

In 2019, Turkiye introduced the Asia Anew Initiative with three main goals: to bolster Turkiye’s defense cooperation by building stronger defense ties with Asian countries; to address the growing demand for defense procurement by increasing Turkiye’s access to Asian markets; and to foster closer economic relations with individual countries and

regional organizations of which they are members. The initiative covers various projects from 2024 to 2026. Malaysia and Indonesia play important roles, as both are members of influential organizations such as the ASEAN, BRICS, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, and the Developing-8.

Erdogan’s first stop on his tour was Malaysia, which he last visited in 2019. Malaysia is especially important in the context of Asia Anew for several reasons. Malaysia is the 2025 chair of ASEAN, in whose summits Turkiye has participated since 2013. Turkiye is currently a sectoral dialogue partner of the organization, with aspirations to gain full dialogue partner status. Malaysia’s

support, as one of ASEAN’s founding members, is crucial for Turkiye to achieve this goal.

Malaysia is also a member of the D-8, an international organization founded in 1997 in Istanbul, along with Turkiye, Iran, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Egypt, and Nigeria. It is also an active member of the OIC, and along with Turkiye has been instrumental in diplomatic efforts to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

One of the key issues discussed during Erdogan’s visit to Malaysia was the reconstruction of Gaza: Malaysia pledged to support the creation of a fund for this purpose and co-chair the East Asia Reconstruction Plan for Gaza and Palestine.

Erdogan emphasized the importance of platforms like the OIC and D-8 to address global humanitarian issues, including Gaza. Malaysia also was the first ASEAN member country to sign a free trade agreement with Turkiye in 2014.

There is a burgeoning relationship between Turkiye and Southeast Asian states in the area of defense. Malaysia’s Ministry of Defense has identified Turkiye as a key player in the development of its defense capabilities. In particular, Malaysia has shown interest in Turkish maritime defense products. Turkish defense giant STM signed an agreement with Malaysia in 2024for the purchase of three corvette warships.

The strong momentum of Turkish-Malaysian relations was evident in the 11 agreements signed during Erdogan’s visit.

The president’s second stop was Indonesia, the world’s most populous Muslim-majority nation and Southeast Asia’s largest economy. The two countries have significantly strengthened their ties in recent years. In 2022, they signed five agreements on defense, technology, forestry, and environmental cooperation. In 2023, they agreed to carry out joint military exercises and enhance their defense industry cooperation. During Erdogan’s visit, an agreement was signed between Indonesian defense compa-

ny Republikorp and Turkiye’s Baykar to establish a drone production facility in Indonesia. President Prabowo Subianto spoke highly of this growing cooperation, noting successful joint ventures with Turkish defense firms such as Roketsan, Aselsan, Havelsan, and Baykar. This visit also marked the first meeting of the High-Level Strategic Cooperation Council of two states, which was established in 2022.

The final leg of Erdogan’s tour took him to Pakistan, which he visited five years ago. Turkiye has a special bond with Pakistan, a middle-sized defense partner where Turkiye has long played a crucial role in strengthening military capabilities. During this visit, Pakistan signed a

deal to acquire electronic warfare aircraft — another outcome of the already growing defense cooperation, particularly in areas such as technology transfer, joint production agreements, and arms sales. Turkish defense companies such as Aselsan and Roketsan have worked with Pakistani partners to develop advanced weaponry, enhancing Pakistan’s indigenous defense production and reducing its reliance on Western suppliers. This growing military collaboration has deepened Turkiye-Pakistan relations and solidified Turkiye’s position as an important partner.

The global shift of power from the West to the East, the “pivot to Asia” trend, changing dynamics in the Middle East, and

Turkiye’s pragmatic foreign policy have shaped Ankara’s own turn toward Asia. Turkiye is now working to expand its influence in Southeast Asia, a region that has warmly welcomed this involvement. But it is important to consider how Turkiye can further align its strategic objectives with the evolving dynamics of this region and increasing competition among several actors. The personal diplomacy at leadership level with each nation, defense capabilities, and economic potential are Turkiye’s key assets that can support its pivot to Asia. But its Southeast Asia policy needs sustained focus and efforts, moving beyond economic and defense collaboration, and building more on people-to-people relations.





# Pakistani entrepreneurs urged to tap Oman’s trade potential

LAHORE (APP): Pakistan Furniture Council (PFC) Chief Executive Officer Mian Kashif Ashfaq called upon Pakistani entrepreneurs to capitalize Oman’s potential as a strategic gateway to the Middle East to enhance export capabilities.

According to a message received here on Sunday from Oman, speaking at a grand reception hosted by Pakistani Ambassador to Oman Naveed Safdar Bokhari in honour of visiting exhibitors and entrepreneurs attending expo, Kashif Ashfaq emphasized that Oman’s geographical location, coupled with its

business-friendly policies, presents a golden opportunity for Pakistani exporters to expand their footprint in the region.

He highlighted that Oman’s ports and logistics infrastructure can serve as a vital hub for Pakistani furniture and other goods to access markets in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries and beyond.

By tapping into Oman’s strategic position, Pakistani entrepreneurs could not only boost exports but also strengthen economic ties with the Middle East, contributing to the overall

growth of Pakistan’s economy. Ashfaq’s call to action underscores the need for proactive measures to explore and exploit emerging trade opportunities.

He urged Pakistani businesses to focus on innovation, quality, and competitive pricing to meet the demands of the Middle Eastern markets.

He also stressed the importance of establishing strong trade ties with Omani counterparts and leveraging bilateral agreements to facilitate smoother trade operations.

Earlier, in his welcome address, Pakistani Amba-

sador Naveed Safdar Bokhari disclosed that the furniture industry, in particular, has immense potential to grow in the region, given the increasing demand for high-quality, affordable furniture.

He said entire staff of embassy was one call or email away to facilitate all intending Pak entrepreneurs and exporters for promotion of trade. He said Oman was also extending secure homely ambience with excellent basket of incentives and unprecedented packages to all foreign companies especially to Pakistan.



MULTAN: Laborers unloading tomatoes from delivery truck in Vegetable Market.

## Malik for modernizing agriculture

LAHORE (APP): SAARC Chamber of Commerce and Industry’s former President Iftikhar Ali Malik emphasized on Sunday that Pakistan’s future depends on the adoption of modern technologies in agriculture to achieve sustainable economic growth and development.

In a statement, he urged the government to prioritize this crucial sector, as agriculture remains the backbone of Pakistan’s economy, contributing significantly to GDP, employment, and food security.

He pointed out that despite its importance, the agricultural sector has not yet reached its full potential due to outdated practices, poor infrastructure, and insufficient investment. He advocated for policies promoting technological advancements, improved irrigation systems, and access to high-quality seeds and fertilizers. He also called for increased financial support to farmers, particularly smallholders, to mitigate challenges like rising input costs and climate change.

He highlighted the need for better market access and value addition to agricultural products to boost exports and revenues. He stressed the importance of public-private partnerships in transforming the sector, noting that collaboration with the private sector and international organizations could drive innovation and productivity.

Ifitikhar Ali Malik also underlined the vital role of education and training for farmers, equipping them with the necessary skills to adapt to modern agricultural practices. He said that prioritizing agriculture was not only an economic necessity but also a social imperative, as it impacts millions of livelihoods. By investing in agriculture, Pakistan can secure food, reduce poverty, and pave the way for sustainable development.

# 28 new fodder varieties introduced to boost milk, meat production

FAISALABAD (APP): The agriculture scientists have introduced 28 fodder varieties to boost milk and meat production, said Dr Qamar Shakeel, recently appointed Chief Scientist at the Biotechnology Department of the Ayub Agricultural Research Institute (AARI) Faisalabad.

Addressing a meeting at AARI, he said that supply of nutritious fodder round the year was imperative for increasing milk and meat production.

In this connection, the agri scientists were striving day and night to develop new fodder varieties, he said and added that Fodder Research Department had so far introduced 28 new fodder varieties, including Berseem, Alfalfa, Sorghum,

Bajra and Maize, etc. which were playing a pivotal role to enhance livestock nutrition and productivity.

He highlighted the importance of high-yielding fodder varieties and said that limited awareness among farmers about advanced fodder varieties and modern farming techniques was a major challenge in ensuring sufficient green fodder availability.

He urged the officials of Punjab Agriculture Extension Department to actively promote the new fodder varieties such as Lucerne, Maize, Sorghum, Bajra, Guar, Mott Grass, Road Grass, Napier Grass and Jantar, etc.

These varieties can significantly boost per-acre fodder yield if the farmers

would ensure proper soil selection and fertilization according to expert recommendations, he added.

Dr. Shakeel said the Punjab government provided subsidies for mechanical cutters and modern agricultural machinery. This initiative would help Pakistan increase its milk and meat production to compete with developed countries, he added.

He advised the farmers to adopt modern production technology if they wanted to increase their crop production and mitigate their financial constraints.

The abundant supply of nutrient-rich fodder would not only meet domestic dairy and meat demands but also enhance exports and contribute to Pakistan’s economic growth, he added.

# Power sector afflicted by gross inefficiencies, huge losses: PIAF

E.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Pakistan Industrial and Traders Associations Front (PIAF) on Sunday observed that power sector has long been afflicted by gross inefficiency, huge losses, and unstable finances, stressing the need for its restructuring of its debt, long-term reforms and privatization, as the experts have revised economic growth projection downward to 3% for

## ‘Pakistan must leverage Turkey’s food market’

LAHORE (APP): Convener Federation of Pakistan Chamber of Commerce & Industry regional committee on Food Shahid Imran has said that Pakistan, an agrarian economy with vast agricultural resources, must fully exploit the untapped food import potential of Turkey to bolster Pak export leading to economic growth and strengthen bilateral trade ties.

Talking to a delegation of food producers led by Abdul Rehman, here on Sunday, he said Turkey, strategically located at the crossroads of Europe and Asia, offers a lucrative market for Pakistani food products due to its growing demand for diverse and high-quality agricultural goods. By leveraging its strengths in producing staples such as rice, wheat, fruits, and seafood, Pakistan can position itself as a key supplier in the Turkish market. To achieve this goal, Pakistan needs to address several challenges, including improving food quality standards, enhancing packaging, and ensuring compliance with international certifications.

He said the government and private sector must collaborate to establish robust trade channels, streamline export procedures, and invest in marketing campaigns to promote Pakistani products in Turkey. By tapping into this untapped potential, Pakistan can not only increase its export revenue but also foster stronger economic and diplomatic relations with Turkey, creating a win-win scenario for both countries, he added.

fiscal year 2025, reducing its earlier estimate of 3.2%.

PIAF Chairman Faheemur Rehman Saigol, in a joint statement along with senior vice chairman Nasrullah Mughal and vice chairman Tahir Manzoor Chaudhary said that long-term reforms of the power sector was crucial for improving operational effectiveness, and lessening the financial strain on the government.

Faheem Saigol said that DISCOs and GECOs in the country’s energy sector have historically experienced problems with bad management, corruption and inefficiency. He pointed out that privatization would introduce new resources, know-how, and creative approaches that are frequently absent in government-run entities. Private businesses would enhance customer service, streamline processes, and use better technology, which could result in a more reliable power supply and lower energy losses.

Nasrullah Mughal said that investors would provide funds to the sector, which can be utilized to expand the grid, enhance service quality, and upgrade infrastructure. In a country where infrastructure is aging and in dire need of up-gradation, this infusion of capital is essential. Furthermore, private organizations are good at controlling operating expenses and meeting consumer needs, which can lead to more effective and efficient services.”

Tahir Manzoor Chaudhary highlighted that privatization was not with-

out its challenges, as the equity and access are issues, particularly in rural or underdeveloped areas, where private companies might be less likely to make investments. It is vital to ensure that privatisation does not result in higher energy bills for end users.

He suggested that strong regulatory frameworks were necessary to stop monopolistic behavior and safeguard the interests of the broader public. The need to ensure that all residents have access to reasonably priced power must be balanced with the government’s pursuit of efficiency.

The PIAF leaders said that owing to years of operational inefficiencies, poor management, and financial losses, the power sector was heavily indebted. Due to financial limitations, this debt creates a vicious cycle that exacerbates existing inefficiencies and strains finances further by preventing investment in up-gradation.

They explained that structural changes were necessary in the long run to ensure that the sector becomes financially viable. This entails enhancing revenue collection, cutting down on losses, and implementing effective operational procedures. They pointed out that the effective execution of these methods was contingent upon robust governance and open procedures. The issues facing the power sector are not only financial but also managerial. Mismanagement and corruption have been major roadblocks to progress.

Faheem Saigol suggested that to ensure accountability and stop financial mismanagement, any plan for privatisation or debt restructuring needs to be supported by stringent oversight procedures. “Gaining the public’s trust and support requires openness in the decision-making process and clear communication with stakeholders.”

The PIAF Chief said that financial institutions and development partners could offer best practices, financial support, and technical help to steer the privatisation and debt restructuring processes. Their participation would help the reforms gain more traction and draw in more funding. The government must, however, make sure that this support advances sustainable development objectives and is in line with national interests.”

It is to be noted that the reports have forecast a 4% growth rate for Pakistan in fiscal year 2026. The State Bank of Pakistan has projected real GDP growth in the range of 2.5% to 3.5% for the ongoing fiscal year.

The report anticipates global headline inflation to decline to 4.2% in 2025 and further to 3.5% in 2026. However, inflation is expected to return to target levels sooner in advanced economies compared to emerging markets and developing countries.

The report underscores the need for policies that balance inflation control and real economic activity, rebuild economic buffers, and boost long-term growth through structural reforms and enhanced multilateral cooperation.



SHREWSBURY, Massachusetts (US): Former member provincial assembly participating in wedding ceremony of Dr. Iftikhar’s sons Haroon Khan and Arbaaz Khan.

# Central Chinese city emerges as key NEV hub

ZHENGZHOU (APP): Chinese automaker BYD’s Zhengzhou branch in central China’s Henan Province plans to recruit 20,000 employees in the first quarter of this year, attracting a surge of applicants following the Spring Festival holiday.

The recruitment drive spans multiple fields, including technological R&D and manufacturing, and aims to expand the company’s talent pool, according to Ren Yongbin, personnel manager at the Zhengzhou branch.

To accommodate job seekers, a fixed recruitment site features a luggage storage area, and candidates who pass their interviews and medical checks sign contracts, complete onboarding procedures and move into staff dormitories promptly.

Many applicants expressed their optimism about BYD’s growth prospects and employee benefits, which include social insurance and access to a housing fund for front-line workers, as well as free dormitory accommodation and a subsidized canteen.

expressed their optimism about BYD’s growth prospects and employee benefits, which include social insurance and access to a housing fund for front-line workers, as well as free dormitory accommodation and a subsidized canteen.

# Pak, Turkiye need to revamp PTA to unlock business potential: BMP

E.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce & Industry’s Businessmen Panel (BMP) on Sunday suggested that that Pakistan and Turkiye need to revamp their preferential trade agreement with a view to addressing existing challenges and unlocking the business potential between the two countries.

The BMP Chairman and FPCCI former president Mian Anjum Nisar said the two countries should explore the possibility of reviving and strengthening the D8 Preferential Agreement to boost trade among member countries. He revealed that during the visit, 21 agreements were signed in key sectors such as services, tourism, education, IT, defence and infrastructure but the real task is

implementation.

It is good that Pakistan shown commitment to facilitating foreign investment, highlighting efforts to streamline business operations and improve the ease of doing business. He said the role of the Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC) is vital in ensuring a smooth investment process for Turkish companies.

Anjum Nisar appreciated the confidence shown by Turkish companies in Pakistan’s economy, citing their investments in infrastructure, manufacturing, energy, transport, and municipal services as examples of growing economic cooperation.

He proposed that a Made in Pakistan single-country exhibition be held in Turkiye, aiming to bring Pakistani companies across various industries to show-

case their products. He recalled recent successful trade exhibitions in Saudi Arabia, Uzbekistan and Ethiopia, noting that Turkiye’s strategic location makes it an ideal trade hub for Pakistan.

Recognizing the potential for collaboration, Anjum Nisar invited Turkiye to participate in Pakistan’s healthcare and industrial expo from April 17-19, stressing that joint ventures in medical technology and hospital infrastructure could benefit both nations.

According to reports, Turkiye and Pakistan have agreed to expand the scope of their goods trade agreement, marking a significant step towards achieving a \$5 billion bilateral trade target, and laid the groundwork for Turkish firms to develop a special economic zone in Pakistan.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan visited Islamabad, where he co-chaired the seventh session of the Pakistan-Turkiye High Level Strategic Cooperation Council (HLSCC) with Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif.

Established in 2009, HLSCC is the highest decision-making forum between the two countries, guiding bilateral relations through joint standing committees covering trade, investment, defence, energy, agriculture, health and education.

During the visit, the two countries signed 24 agreements and memoranda of understanding (MoUs) to enhance cooperation in defence, energy, agriculture, information technology, health and other sectors. The signing ceremony was overseen by President Erdogan and PM Shehbaz

after the HLSCC’s meeting.

Bilateral trade between Turkiye and Pakistan reached a record high of \$1.4bn in 2024, rising nearly 30 per cent from the previous year.

Both leaders expressed optimism about building on this momentum, with Erdogan urging Turkish investors to engage more actively in Pakistan’s growing market.

“We are encouraging our investors, who are the driving engines of economic cooperation, to engage more in Pakistan and develop flagship projects,” Erdogan said after the ceremony held for signing MoUs and agreements.

PM Shehbaz, while speaking at the Pakistan-Turkiye Business Forum, assured Turkish businesses of Pakistan’s full support, emphasising his administration’s commitment to

facilitating investment opportunities.

“We are determined to further promote our deep friendship and mutual relations,” he said. “I want to assure my very dear brother, President Erdogan, that our teams will work closely to convert these agreements into action.”

A key highlight of Mr Erdogan’s visit was the announcement of a special economic zone to be developed by Turkish firms to boost industrial production and economic growth in Pakistan.

The initiative is another major step towards deeper bilateral economic collaboration.

The announcement of the special economic zone to be built by Turkish firms for industrial production is going to materialize through our joint cooperation, the PM said. The 24

agreements signed during the visit covered a wide range of areas, including defence cooperation, power, energy, mining, trade, industrial development, water resources, seed production, scientific education and training, banking, religious services, halal food, media, legal cooperation, health, aerospace, and cultural exchanges.

Ministers from both sides presented progress reports from nine joint standing committees.

Two newly formed committees on health and information technology also delivered their first reports.

Both leaders reaffirmed their commitment to strengthening strategic cooperation and economic growth.

President Erdogan and PM Shehbaz also held in-depth discussions on

regional and global issues, including security and counterterrorism. The premier emphasized the importance of regional stability and cooperation in combating terrorism.

“The menace of terrorism is a common factor for Pakistan and Turkiye, and together, we will fight this menace until we defeat it once and for all,” the premier said.

Erdogan added, “We reaffirmed our determination to advance our strategic cooperation, including in defence industries, and to continue our military dialogue.”

President Erdogan arrived in Islamabad, accompanied by First Lady Emine Erdogan and a high-level delegation.

Pakistan was the final stop on his three-nation tour, which also included Malaysia and Indonesia.





## In brief

**Pak team bags bronze medal**

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan team bagged a bronze medal in the 22nd Asian Junior Squash Team Championships 2025 at Hong Kong, China. According to details received here Sunday, Korea grabbed a gold medal in the mega event while Malaysia got silver. Pakistan and India won bronze medals. The closing ceremony of the 22nd Asian Junior Squash Team Championships 2025 was held and Pakistan achieved a bronze medal in the championship. Now, Pakistan has set sights on the next challenge for even greater success. Pakistani players are back to their rigorous training regimen.

**Shahid, Asif win matches**

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistani cueists Shahid Aftab and Muhammad Asif earned victories in the ACBS Asian Men Snooker Championship 2025 matches at Doha, Qatar. According to details received here Sunday, on Day 2nd match results, Shahid Aftab beat Seyang Heo of South Korea 4-2 (14-86(73), 47-58, 56-26, 85-33, 63-54, 72(65)-06) while Asif outplayed Mhanna Alobaidli of Qatar 4-0 (80-38, 61-43, 63-59, 130(130)-0). The highlight of the championship was Asif's break of 130.

**Table tennis coaching camp**

KHANEWAL (APP): A 15-days table tennis coaching and training camp is underway at Sports Gymnasium Khanewal under the Khelata Punjab and Talent Hunt policy of the Punjab government. According to the details, the table tennis training camp is being organized by the District Sports and Youth Affairs Department and the District Table Tennis Association under the Khelata Punjab and Talent Hunt policy of Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz in which, in addition to coaching, training will be given to girls and boys of various table tennis clubs. According to President District Table Tennis Association, Haji Amber Bashir Ahmed, the first phase of the coaching camp would be completed before Ramadan and the second phase would start after it. Players from across the district could contact the District Sports and Youth Affairs department and District Table Tennis Association to participate in the camp. In this training camp, Asad Jawad Rana, a qualified Coach of the International Table Tennis Federation and provincial table tennis coach of the Punjab Sports Board, will provide modern training to the players.

**Pegula on anti-doping**

DUBAI (AFP): World number five Jessica Pegula believes the handling of high-profile doping cases involving Jannick Sinner and Iga Swiatek has shown that the "process is completely broken". And top-ranked Aryna Sabalenka admits she cannot trust the tennis anti-doping system and has become "too scared" of it. Sinner's long doping saga came to an end on Saturday after he agreed to a three-month ban from tennis, the world number one admitting "partial responsibility" for team mistakes which led to him twice testing positive for traces of clostebol in March last year. Sinner was facing a potential ban of two years after the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) appealed to the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) against his initial exoneration by the International Tennis Integrity Agency (ITIA), announced in August.

# Spectacular opening ceremony of ICC Champions Trophy 2025 held at Lahore

LAHORE (Monitoring Desk): A grand opening ceremony for the ICC Champions Trophy 2025 was held at the historic Diwan-e-Aam of the Lahore Fort on Sunday night.

Addressing the event, Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) Chairman Mohsin Naqvi said that the global cricket community was closely watching Pakistan's readiness for the cricket tournament. He described hosting the tournament as a "great honor" for the country. Naqvi further emphasised that Gaddafi and National stadiums were revamped in record time to ensure a successful event.

The chairman reiterated PCB's commitment to showcasing Pakistan's rich culture and hospitality to the world, adding that the tournament will reflect the warmth and love of the Pakistani people.

Set against the majestic backdrop of Pakistan's rich heritage, the event promised a dazzling mix of cricketing glory and cultural splendor. With esteemed cricket personalities, top officials from the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB), and die-hard fans in attendance, the night promises to be a memorable one.

Punjab Assembly

Speaker Muhammad Ahmed Khan, provincial Minister for Sports and Youth Affairs Faisal Ayub Khokhar, Champions Trophy 2017 winner team, brand ambassador for the tournament Tim Southee, former South African batsman JP Duminy and others were among the attendees of the event. Besides Lahore, the cricket festival is ready to light up the stadiums of Karachi, Rawalpindi, and Dubai.

The tournament will kick off on February 19 (Wednesday) with the opening match in the port city between Pakistan and New Zealand, which will be played after a small ceremony at the National Bank Cricket Stadium.

Meanwhile, Indian team has arrived in Dubai, where Bangladesh are already practicing for the mega event. The two sides will face each other in the tournament on February 20.

Before that, the Tigers will compete against Pakistan's Shaheens in a practice match on February 17. Meanwhile, the Afghanistan team will play their second practice match against New Zealand in Karachi today.

However, the most anticipated clash, as

always, will be the high-stakes showdown between arch-rivals Pakistan and India, set to take place on February 23 in Dubai.

All the Champions Trophy matches will be telecast live on Geo Super. Here is the complete schedule of the tournament.

**Champions Trophy schedule**

February 19, Pakistan vs New Zealand, Karachi  
February 20, Bangladesh vs India, Dubai, UAE  
February 21, Afghanistan vs South Africa, Karachi

February 22, Australia vs England, Lahore  
February 23, Pakistan vs India, Dubai  
February 24, Bangladesh vs New Zealand, Rawalpindi

February 25, Australia vs South Africa, Rawalpindi  
February 26, Afghanistan vs England, Lahore  
February 27, Pakistan vs Bangladesh, Rawalpindi

February 28, Afghanistan vs Australia, Lahore  
March 1, South Africa vs England, Karachi  
March 2, New Zealand vs India, Dubai, UAE  
March 4, Semi-final 1, Dubai, UAE

March 5, Semi-final 2, Lahore  
March 9, Final, Lahore (unless India qualify, when it will be played in Dubai)  
March 10, Reserve day.

## HN Polo claim Deepal 96 Punjab Cup trophy

LAHORE (Monitoring Desk): HN Polo emerged title winner in the Deepal 96 Punjab Cup final, after defeating DS Polo with an impressive 10-6 victory at the Lahore Polo Club.

The thrilling final saw an intense battle, with HN Polo showcasing dominance from the very first chukker to secure the prestigious title. A large crowd gathered at the Lahore Polo Club to witness the high-stakes encounter. The event was graced by Speaker of the Punjab Assembly, Malik Muhammad Ahmad Khan, alongside distinguished guests, including Changan CEO Daniyal Malik, Director Changan Samir Malik, former Interior Minister Aitzaz Ahsan, film star Shan, YouTuber Junaid Akram, and renowned designer HSY.

Before the final, Olympia/AZB won the subsidiary final, while spectators enjoyed an exciting display of barrel racing and cavalcade performances by riding school students. The event also featured tent pegging competitions between men and women and an all-girls polo exhibition match.

In the final showdown, HN Polo delivered an aggressive performance, led by Pelayo Berazadi,



who was named player of the match after scoring four spectacular goals. Hamza Mawaz Khan further strengthened the team's lead with six goals. For DS Polo, Estanislao Abelenda netted three goals, Max Charlton added two, and Ahmed Ali Tiwana contributed one.

During the closing ceremony, Speaker Punjab Assembly Malik Muhammad Ahmad Khan, along with Changan Master Group CEO Daniyal Malik and Director Samir Malik, distributed prizes among the winners. Haider Naseem's mare, Empedia, was awarded the best pony of the match for its outstanding performance.

DS Polo started the main final on a strong note, opening the scoring with a well-executed field goal. However, HN Polo responded emphatically, launching a

stunning comeback with three consecutive goals to seize a solid 3-1 lead by the end of the first chukker.

HN Polo continued their dominance in the second chukker, adding four more goals to their tally, while DS Polo fought back with three of their own. Despite DS Polo's efforts, HN Polo maintained their advantage, heading into halftime with a 7-4 lead.

The third chukker saw complete control from HN Polo, as they extended their lead to a commanding 10-4, leaving DS Polo struggling to close the gap. In the fourth and final chukker, DS Polo showcased their resilience, scoring two back-to-back goals in an attempt to stage a comeback. However, their late surge proved insufficient, as HN Polo secured a convincing 10-6 victory to claim the championship title.

## Diaz ends goal drought as Liverpool move seven points clear

LIVERPOOL (AFP): Liverpool moved seven points clear at the top of the Premier League as Luis Diaz ended his goal drought to spark a tense 2-1 win against struggling Wolves on Sunday.

Arne Slot's side got back on track after an unexpectedly poor week thanks to Diaz's first goal in 2025 and yet another Mohamed Salah strike. Diaz opened the scoring early in the first half at Anfield as the Colombian forward finally scored for the 13th time this term after 10 games without a goal.

While Diaz has struggled to find the net, Salah is in red-hot form and his penalty before the interval took the Egypt star to 28 goals in all competitions this season. Mathew Cunha netted in the second half for fourth-bottom Wolves, but although Liverpool looked tired in a disjointed, nervous, climax, they held on for a valuable victory.

Liverpool had gone two games without a win: an embarrassing FA Cup fourth round loss at second



tier Plymouth last weekend and the stormy 2-2 draw at Everton on Wednesday.

Arsenal's 2-0 win at Leicester on Saturday had applied a little more pressure on Liverpool. The Reds responded to Arsenal's challenge as they moved a step closer to a record-equalling 20th English title.

Liverpool, who last won the Premier League in 2020, will be within touching distance of the crown if they take maximum points from trips to Aston Villa and Manchester City before hosting Newcastle over the course of the next 10 days.

Liverpool boss Slot was

in the dug-out despite being charged with abusive behaviour after angrily approaching referee Michael Oliver on the pitch following the Merseyside derby. Slot was furious that James Tarkowski's stoppage-time equaliser was not disallowed because of a possible push by Toffees striker Beto on Reds defender Ibrahima Konate.

Slot had urged Liverpool to use their "anger" from the painful end to the Everton game as fuel to get back on track against Wolves. They didn't have to wait long to light the fuse as Diaz bagged his first league goal at Anfield since



LAHORE: The Alamghiri Gate is lit up in the lead-up to the Champions Trophy.

## Stirling & Campher help Ireland win over Zimbabwe

HARARE (Agencies): A 144-run partnership between captain Paul Stirling and Curtis Campher steered Ireland to a six-wicket victory over Zimbabwe as they levelled the ODI series in Harare.

The hosts were dismissed for 245 with Wesley Madhevere (61) and Sikandar Raza (58) putting on 74 for the fourth wicket.

Stirling (89) and Campher (63), who also took 3-13, set the Irish on course for victory and they reached 249-4 with eight balls to spare. Zimbabwe secured a 49-run win in Friday's opener and the sides will meet again at the Harare Sports Club on Tuesday for the decider.

Ireland won the toss on Sunday and elected to field with the Chevrons moving to 73-3 before Madhevere and Sikandar Raza put them in a good position.

Campher trapped Madhevere and followed it up with two wickets in two balls to swing the momentum in Ireland's favour.

Sikandar Raza steadied Zimbabwe's innings and from 157-6 they were bowled out for 245 with an over remaining with Mark Adair claiming 4-54.

Andrew Balbirnie fell for 11 before fellow opener Stirling and Campher took Ireland to 171-1.

Lorcan Tucker (30\*) and George Dockrell (20\*) were at the crease as victory was sealed.

"I think we were better [than the first ODI] - there's no lull in that middle period, Sikandar and Wesley battled really well and that's when we were under the most pressure," said Stirling.

"I chucked the ball to Curtis and he really turned the game on it's head. I think 250 was about right for us to chase and we got there."

## Pakistan continues dominance in Asian Taekwondo C'ships

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Combaxx 7th Asian Taekwondo Open Championships witnessed thrilling action on Sunday, as athletes from across Asia competed in various weight categories. Pakistan continued to demonstrate its dominance, securing 2 gold, 4 silver, and 8 bronze medals in both male and female divisions, further strengthening its standing in the championship.

In the Male -48kg category, Ahmed Muzamil earned a silver medal for Pakistan, while Qureshi Muhammad Suleman and Ansari secured bronze medals, showcasing Pakistan's strong presence on the podium. Tamim Rahmani

of Afghanistan took the gold in this category.

The Male -55kg division saw another intense battle, with Akeed Hukmuddin of Afghanistan claiming the gold medal. Pakistan's Yasir Muhammad secured silver, while Sameer Muhammad and Akbar Sh Muhammad Muaz took home bronze medals, adding to Pakistan's tally.

In the Female -44kg category, Pakistan's Anwar Ayesha achieved a remarkable feat by winning gold, while Habiba Umme secured silver. Sarwary Manahil and Aslam Safia earned bronze medals, ensuring a complete Pakistani podium finish.

Pakistan continued its winning streak in the Female -49kg category, where Khan Aiman clinched gold, and Fatima Ghouse secured silver. Khawakani Fatima Tuz Zahra and Khan Khadija took home bronze medals, further solidifying Pakistan's dominance in women's taekwondo.

The outstanding performances on Day three have strengthened Pakistan's medal count, demonstrating the country's growing strength in Asian taekwondo. With several weight categories still to be contested, Pakistan's athletes are determined to continue their remarkable run and bring more glory to the nation.

## Zain wins Cholistan jeep rally

BAHAWALPUR (APP): Last year's champion Zain Mahmood, who belongs to Bahawalpur, has once again clinched first position in the final round of the prepared category of the 20th International Cholistan Desert Jeep Rally 2025.

Zain Mahmood covered a distance of a 216 kilometers long track within two hours and fifty-six minutes while Meer Nadir Magasi covered the distance of the track within two hours and fifty-eight minutes. Therefore, Zain once gain has become the champion of the internationally known motor race event while Meer Nadir Magasi won the Cholistan Desert Jeep Rally 2025. He also won the

title in 2024. Another racer, Meer Jaffar Magasi, got third position as he covered the 216 kilometers long track over three hours. Sahibzada Sultan got fourth position.

The prepared category race was held in two phases in Cholistan desert. The first phase was held on Friday, in which Zain Mahmood clinched first position while Meer Nadir Magasi, who has won the International Cholistan Desert Jeep Rally for several times, won second position. The final phase of the internationally known motor race event was held in the Cholistan desert on Sunday.

Thirty-two vehicles participated in the final phase of the rally. Two female drivers also took part in the final phase. Earlier, the administration of the jeep rally told media persons that the second phase would be kicked off from Dilwash Stadium, Derawar Fort but later, the starting point was changed and the second phase was started from Shikarwala Toba.

The center of the motor race event was Dilwash Stadium, Derawar Fort, while sports vehicles which participated in the race passed through several historical areas of Cholistan desert.

## Kiplimo smashes world half-marathon record



PARIS (AFP/APP): Uganda's Jacob Kiplimo became the first person to break the 57-minute barrier for the half-marathon as he set a stunning new world record of 56 minutes 42 seconds in Barcelona on Sunday.

The 24-year-old two-time world cross-country champion, who held the half-marathon record between 2021 and 2024, reclaimed the record by slashing 48sec off the previous record of 57:30, set by Ethiopia's Yomif Kejelcha in Valencia in October.

It is the greatest single improvement on the men's world half marathon record.

Racing in ideal weather conditions of 13 degrees Celsius (55 degrees Fahrenheit) with no wind, Kiplimo also set a world best of 39:47 for 15km en route to the half marathon record.

"I am very excited about what I did today," said Kiplimo, who made his Olympic debut in the 5,000m in Rio when he was just 15.

"I started strong, I wanted to have a great race, but I didn't expect to break the world record."

"As the kilometres passed and I saw that I was going at record pace, I told myself that I had to maintain that pace no matter what it took."

## Army wins National Boxing C'ship

KARACHI (Monitoring Desk): The National Boxing Championship concluded at KPT Sports Complex, Karachi, with Pakistan Army securing first position. The event, organised by the Pakistan Army and the Pakistan Boxing Federation, saw participation from over 300 male and female boxers and officials.

Corps Commander Karachi, Lt. Gen. Muhammad Awais Dastgir, attended the final matches as the chief guest and distributed prizes among the winners. He lauded the championship as a great opportunity for Pakistani boxers to showcase and refine their talent.

The 41st National Elite Men's and 5th National Elite Women's Boxing Championships ran from February 10 to 15. Competitions were held across various weight categories, culminating in intense final matches.

A total of 14 teams participated, including Pakistan Army, Navy, PAF, WAPDA, Railways, KPT, Balochistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Punjab, Sindh, Islamabad, AJK, HEC, and Pakistan Police.

In the men's category, Pakistan Army claimed first place, followed by Pakistan Navy as runners-up and WAPDA securing third position. In the women's category, Pakistan Army also secured first place, while Punjab and WAPDA took second and third positions, respectively.





## In brief

### Police net arm smuggler

RAWALPINDI (APP): Naseerabad police here on Sunday arrested an arm smuggler and recovered weapons from their possession, said a police spokesman. He informed that police recovered a Kalashnikov, a repeater gun, 10 pistols and hundreds of bullets from the possession of the arrested accused namely Haider Khan. Police also impounded the vehicle being used by the accused for arms smuggling. Naseerabad police in snap checking stopped a suspicious vehicle and during search of the vehicle recovered weapons. The accused revealed that he brought weapons from KPK to supply in Rawalpindi. Superintendent of Police, Potohar appreciated SHO Naseerabad and his team for netting the smuggler and recovering weapons. He said that crackdown against criminals, arms and drug smugglers would continue.

### Police arrest two bike lifters

RAWALPINDI (APP): Police have arrested two bike lifters and street criminals, recovered three stolen motorcycles and other items from their possession, said a Police spokesman on Saturday. He informed that a team under the supervision of SHO Saddar Baroni Police Station, managed to net two bike lifters, and street criminals namely Waqas and Naqash and recovered three stolen motorcycles, Rs 93,300 cash, weapons and other items from their possession. The accused had snatched two motorcycles on gun point while a bike was stolen. The arrested accused are record holders in street crime cases. A case has been registered against the accused while further investigation is underway. Superintendent of Police, Potohar said the accomplices and facilitators of the accused would also be sent behind bars.

### AIOU to hold 'Education Expo'

ISLAMABAD (APP): Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU) is always striving for the promotion of education, providing students with information about admissions to various universities while also organizing events to showcase their talents. Continuing this tradition, the University's Vice-Chancellor, Professor Dr. Nasir Mahmood on Sunday approved the organization of Education Expo 2025, which will be held on February 26 at the University's main campus in Islamabad under the auspices of the Office of Research, Innovation and Commercialization. The expo will feature stalls from various universities and industrial institutions, providing information about admissions and highlighting revolutionary advancements in modern research, sustainable development, and technology. In addition to educational and industrial stalls, food stalls will also be set up. A poster competition will be held among students from different educational institutions as part of the expo. The most exciting feature of this grand event will be a surprise lucky draw, where fortunate winners will receive a cash prize of Rs. 50,000/- along with other valuable prizes. Students who wish to participate in the lucky draw should immediately contact the Office of Research, Innovation, and Commercialization at the university to seize this opportunity. Entry to the expo will be free. Students from schools, colleges, and universities along with their parents are welcome to attend. Families from the twin cities are also invited to participate in the event.



ISLAMABAD: A vendor arranging and displaying different flower pots and decoration items to attract the customers at local nursery in Federal Capital. —APP Photo

## Kardar urges PTI to play constructive role

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) leader Uzma Kardar on Sunday criticized Pakistan Tehrike-Insaf (PTI) for prioritising its own agenda over the nation's welfare, urging the party to adopt a constructive approach as a parliamentary opposition.

In an exclusive conversation with PTV news channel, Uzma Kardar strongly criticized PTI, calling it a "self-serving group" that should focus on resolving issues through dialogue in parliament, rather than pursuing its own interests.

Uzma Kardar further alleged that PTI has split into two factions and its

leaders have become notorious for their U-turns.

She claimed that the party has lost its credibility and now relies solely on its allied partners to further its interests. Kardar criticized PTI's leadership for its lack of vision and principles, saying that they prioritize short-term gains over long-term benefits for the country.

Responding to a query, Kardar criticized PTI's opposition alliance as deceitful and is rooted in the party's history of using and then discarding its allied parties.

Uzma Kardar expressed her party's respect for JUI-F leader Maulana Fazlur Rehman, acknowledging his signif-

icant role in the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM).

She expressed optimism that Maulana Fazlur Rehman would make decisions that align with the country's best interests, rather than being swayed by PTT's opportunistic tactics.

To another question, Uzma Kardar also commended the current government for its efforts in stabilizing the economy, acknowledging the challenges posed by the previous government's mismanagement. She credited the government's prudent policies and decisions for improving economic indicators and restoring investor confidence.

## Citizens urged not to allow children to fly kites

RAWALPINDI (APP): City Police Officer (CPO) Rawalpindi has urged the citizens to ensure that the children do not violate the ban on kite flying imposed by the provincial government otherwise strict action would be taken against the violators in accordance with the law.

A police spokesman told on Sunday that the Rawalpindi district police were conducting raids to net the kite sellers and flyers. He informed that on the special directives of City Police Officer, Rawalpindi Syed Khalid Hamdani, police were taking strict action in accordance with the law.

The CPO had requested the parents to stop their children from getting involved in such activities as a crackdown against kite flyers had already been accelerated in the city, he added. Police in a crackdown against kite flyers and sellers arrested 60 accused for kite flying and aerial firing. The spokesman informed that Police had launched a crackdown on kite flying and aerial firing and arrested 56 kite dealers and involved in kite flying and recovered thousands 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, Dhamial, Waris Khan, Westridge and Saddar Baroni Police Stations. In a joint operation conducted by CIA and City Police Station, a kite supplier was arrested with over 10,000 kites and kite flying string rolls. Police arrested a kite dealer namely Zakir Khan, supplying kites online from Peshawar to Rawalpindi. A bus driver namely Jahanzeb Khan, involved in kite delivery was also arrested and the bus being used for supplying kites was also impounded. The accused had created a page on Facebook for selling kites. He said, Rawalpindi district police had finalized effective arrangements to control kite flying and aerial firing.

## Pakistan's education system to be aligned with global standards

ISLAMABAD (APP): Minister for Planning, Development & special Initiatives Ahsan Iqbal has reaffirmed his government's commitment to providing quality modern education for Pakistan's youth, emphasizing the need to bring the country's education system up to par with international standards, allowing students to compete globally.

"We are committed to providing quality education to our youth, enabling them to compete globally and address contemporary challenges," said Ahsan Iqbal while talking to a private news channel.

Pakistan is indeed shifting its focus towards STEM education to equip

its youth with skills necessary for the 21st century, he said, adding, this initiative aims to promote hands-on learning, critical thinking and problem-solving skills among students.

Ahsan Iqbal has reaffirmed that modern education is the key to unlocking Pakistan's global competitiveness and has committed to revamping the country's education system to ensure inclusive and sustainable national development.

He emphasized the importance of skill-based education for the youth, saying it is crucial for them to acquire skills that are in demand in the modern job market, enabling them to compete effectively

ly and secure better employment opportunities.

"Youth are the greatest assets of the nation and investing in their education and skills development is essential for Pakistan's progress and prosperity," Ahsan Iqbal said.

Ahsan Iqbal highlighted the government's initiatives for youth empowerment, including the Youth Loan Scheme, Skill Development Programs and the Laptop Scheme, aimed at providing financial support, skills training and digital access to young Pakistanis, enabling them to unlock their potential and contribute to the country's growth.

## Female students visits CTD HQ

ISLAMABAD (APP): A delegation of female students from F-7/4 College, volunteering with the Islamabad Traffic Police under the Friends of Police Program, visited the Counter Terrorism Department (CTD) Headquarters for an educational and awareness tour.

A public relation officer told APP on Sunday that the delegation was given a detailed tour of various departments of the Counter Terrorism Department and was given a detailed briefing regarding the working of the

institution.

The delegation was told how the CTD uses modern technology and professional skills to suppress terrorist elements and ensure the safety of citizens. CTD experts also informed the delegation about the modern equipment and techniques used to deal with terrorism.

The delegation was further told that the CTD was always ready to maintain national security. The delegation of female students appreciated the role and sacrifices of the police in the anti-terrorism efforts

and paid tribute to the services of the department.

On this occasion, senior police officers said that the aim of the Friends of Police program was to create social awareness among the youth and make them aware of the performance of law enforcement departments and their role in national security.

They further said that the aim of this educational and awareness tour was to make the young generation aware of the measures taken against terrorism and the security measures taken by the police.

## WASA urges residents to use water carefully

RAWALPINDI (APP): Managing Director (MD), Water and Sanitation Agency (WASA), Rawalpindi, Muhammad Saleem Ashraf has urged the citizens to use water carefully.

The MD said that WASA was making every possible effort to provide clean drinking water to the citizens, but, it is also the responsibility of the citizens to use water carefully. He urged the citizens to cooperate with WASA and pay their water and sewerage bills on time, said a news released issued by the WASA on Sunday.

The MD further said that WASA Rawalpindi was making all out efforts to provide clean drinking water to the citizens and all possible efforts were being made in this regard while it is also duty of the citizens to use water carefully.

WASA is committed to providing essential water

and sewerage facilities in line with the Punjab government's vision. However, a severe drought, a rapidly growing population, increased commercial activities, and limited resources have posed significant challenges. In response, a drought emergency has been declared across Rawalpindi, he added.

He highlighted that the lack of rainfall over the past three months has led to a sharp decline in both dam water levels and underground reserves, making it difficult to balance water supply and demand. The city requires 68 million gallons of water daily, but only 51 million gallons are available from existing sources. To address this shortfall, a public awareness campaign has been launched, urging the citizens to use water responsibly.

As part of these efforts,

strict measures are being enforced to prevent water wastage, including fines and disconnection of illegal or wasteful connections.

He informed that the households and businesses urged to use sewer lines strictly for wastewater drainage, avoid dumping garbage, dispose of used cooking oil and grease in containers instead of pouring them down drains.

WASA spokesman informed that MD WASA also conducted inspections across the city, reviewing actions taken against the violators of water conservation policies. The citizens are strongly advised to adhere to WASA's guidelines, as non-compliance may result in warnings, fines, and disconnections. Given the ongoing drought, responsible water usage is more critical than ever to ensure sustainable supply for all.

## A legacy on wheels: Pakistan's iconic truck art tradition continues



ISLAMABAD (APP): In a nation where art and culture were inextricably linked, Pakistan's legendary truck art had emerged as a vibrant and captivating embodiment of the country's rich creative heritage, reflecting the country's rich history, traditions, and values.

For decades, Pakistan's trucks have been transformed into moving canvases. Trucks, lorries, and rickshaws were being reborn as dazzling works of art, adorned with intricate designs, colorful patterns, and poetic calligraphy.

Pakistan's truck art had become a cultural ambassador of sorts, captivating the hearts of art lovers and tourists worldwide.

This dazzling display of color and craftsmanship was a testament to Pakistan's rich cultural heritage, and a source of pride for the nation.

A truck artist Sohail Khan said, 'I pour my heart and soul into every design, every brushstroke, and every detail. For me, truck art is not just about decorating vehicles, it's about creating moving pieces of art that bring joy and beauty to people's lives.'

He said that he like to write about social issues like education, healthcare, and women's rights on trucks. It's a way to raise awareness and inspire change. He emphasized that the painters spend

countless hours decorating the truck with their professional artwork.

He continued that Truck drivers develop a deep emotional connection with their vehicle, which transforms into a home away from home during their extended journeys.

This bond inspires them to lavishly decorate their trucks, making each vehicle a unique reflection of their personality, culture, and travels.

We want to show the world that truck art is not just a form of decoration, but a reflection of our country's rich cultural heritage, he stated.

According to an official at Lok Virsa, for decades, the Lok Virsa Museum has been tirelessly promoting Pakistan's centuries-old truck art tradition, recognizing its significance as an integral part of the country's rich cultural heritage.

He said that Truck art is not just a form of art but it's way of life and It's also a reflection of our values, our traditions, and our culture. He further said that as long as we continue to create and appreciate this art form, it will remain an integral part of Pakistani identity.

## ICT admin bans boating in Rawal Dam for public safety

ISLAMABAD (APP): The district administration of Islamabad on Sunday has imposed ban on all boating activities in Rawal Dam, citing public safety concerns. In a recent crackdown, the Islamabad district administration took strict action against boating activities in Rawal Dam. The operation led to the confiscation of one engine float and three boats. Four individuals were arrested and transferred to the Bani Gala police station for further legal proceedings.

The ban on boating was imposed under Section 144, which prohibits such activities to ensure public safety.

In this regard, Deputy Commissioner Islamabad, Irfan Memon, emphasized that the restriction is necessary to protect citizens from potential risks associated with unauthorized boating.

The district administration has urged the residents to comply with the ban and

avoid engaging in any boating activities in the area. The enforcement of this regulation aims to prevent accidents and ensure the safety of all visitors to Rawal Dam. This move follows concerns over the increasing number of unauthorized boating incidents, which have raised alarms about the potential dangers to public safety.

The administration has reiterated its commitment to maintaining order and protecting the well-being of the community. Residents are encouraged to adhere to the guidelines and report any violations to the authorities. The district administration has assured that strict measures would be taken against those who fail to comply with the ban.

**ICT admin starts preparations for vibrant spring festival:** The district administration is all set to host a colorful spring festival, with preparations in

full swing in the Federal Capital. The district administration, led by Deputy Commissioner (DC) Islamabad Irfan Nawaz Memon, is ensuring that the event will be a memorable experience for all attendees, said the spokesman of ICT administration here.

The festival, scheduled for February 25, 26, and 27, aims to showcase Pakistan's rich culture and provide entertainment for citizens and visitors alike. In a recent review meeting chaired by DC Irfan Memon, the district administration discussed the final preparations for the Spring Festival.

The meeting saw participation from representatives of all relevant departments, including Additional Deputy Commissioners and Assistant Commissioners. The agenda focused on ensuring that every aspect of the event is meticulously planned and executed.

One of the key high-

lights of the meeting was the briefing on the arrangements for the main event. The officials confirmed that all details regarding food stalls have been finalized, ensuring a variety of culinary delights for attendees.

Additionally, the festival will feature participation from CEOs of international companies and members of the diplomatic community, adding a global touch to the celebrations. DC Irfan Memon emphasized that the primary goal of the festival is to provide entertainment and recreational opportunities for the citizens.

He stated that the three-day event will be packed with activities designed to engage and delight attendees of all ages. The festival will also serve as a platform to highlight Pakistan's cultural heritage, with various performances and exhibitions planned to showcase the country's traditions and arts.



17 Afghan nationals released

KABUL (Amu TV): Seventeen Afghan nationals have been released from prisons in Egypt and several African countries, including Morocco, Libya, Sudan, and Mauritania, over the past three months, the Taliban-controlled Ministry of Foreign Affairs said. In a statement, the ministry said the individuals were freed through efforts coordinated by the Taliban-led Afghan embassy in Cairo and have since returned to Afghanistan on Ariana Airlines flights.

Taliban flog man in Bamiyan

BAMIYAN (Amu TV): Taliban flogged a man in Bamiyan province's Yakawlang district on charges of "running away from home," as public corporal punishments under their rule persist. The Taliban-controlled Supreme Court did not specify whether the individual was a man or a woman but said in a statement that the person was lashed 39 times and sentenced to one year and six months in prison. District governor and police chief were present during the punishment.

Afghanistan's exports drop by \$28 million

KABUL (TOLOnews): Statistics from the National Statistics and Information Authority indicate that Afghanistan's exports in Jadi (solar calendar) decreased by \$28 million compared to Qaus of the current solar year. According to the provided figures, Afghanistan's exports in Jadi amounted to over \$162 million, whereas in Qaus, the country's exports reached more than \$190 million. Mohammad Halim Rafi, spokesperson for the authority, noted that the highest exports in Jadi were to India, Pakistan, and the United Arab Emirates, while most imports came from Iran, Pakistan, and China. According to Rafi, Afghanistan imported goods worth \$1.097 billion during this month. The spokesperson said: "Our figures show that the total value of exports in January amounts to \$162.2 million, while imports reached \$1.097 billion." Meanwhile, the Chamber of Agriculture and Livestock attributed the decline in exports to trade challenges between Afghanistan and Pakistan and emphasized the need to establish alternative trade routes. Mirwais Haji Zada, first deputy of the Chamber of Agriculture and Livestock, said: "There is supply and demand, but demand is lower while supply is higher, especially in Afghanistan's agricultural sector. We need to boost exports and create alternative routes to Chabahar and Torkham in Pakistan." Some experts believe that if efforts are made to mechanize the agricultural sector, provide more facilities for traders, and support farmers, Afghanistan's exports will increase. Abdul Nasir Reshtia, an economic expert, said: "Fundamental work should be done on the quality and quantity of agricultural products for export, including packaging, establishing cold storage facilities, marketing inside and outside the country, promoting the use of agricultural products in national and international ceremonies, and prioritizing contracts signed within Afghanistan." Afghanistan is an agricultural country where 80% of its citizens are engaged in the agriculture sector, and most of the country's exports consist of agricultural products.

12 embassies, 2 consulates still operated by ex-govt diplomats

KABUL (Amu TV): Three senior diplomatic sources told Amu TV that despite Taliban pressure, 12 embassies and two consulates of Afghanistan remain under the control of diplomats from the former government. According to the sources, with the exception of Afghanistan's embassy in Tajikistan, these diplomatic missions currently function under the Coordination Council of Diplomatic and Consular Missions of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan. Additionally, Afghanistan's permanent seats at the UN in New York and Geneva remain under the control of diplomats from the former republic. More than three years after the Taliban took power, no country has formally recognized their government. The United Nations continues to recognize Afghanistan under the tricolor flag of the former republic, and the country's seats at the U.N. headquarters in New York and Geneva remain occupied by diplomats from the previous administration. Taliban push for diplomatic control Since returning to power in 2021, Taliban have sought to take control of Afghanistan's embassies abroad in an effort to accelerate their quest for international recognition. While they have gained control of some diplomatic posts, others remain under the former government's envoys. The embassies still operating outside Taliban control include those in Canada (along with two consulates), Australia, Switzerland, France, Belgium, Austria, Poland, Greece, South Korea, Sweden, and Italy. Meanwhile, a diplomatic source noted that before the fall of the previous government, Afghanistan had 71 embassies and consulates worldwide. Over the past three and a half years, at least seven embassies and consulates, including those in India, Norway, the United Kingdom, and the United States, have shut down due to political and financial constraints. Some embassies cooperate with Taliban Sources also indicated that some embassies, while still operated by diplomats from the former government, have begun coordinating with the Taliban. In August 2024, the Taliban's Foreign Ministry stated that the consular services of five embassies and consulates in Europe were being processed with their approval. According to a statement issued on August 5, 2024, the Taliban recognized the consular documents issued by: Afghanistan's Consulate General in Munich, Germany Afghanistan's Embassy in the Netherlands Afghanistan's Embassy in Spain Afghanistan's Embassy in Bulgaria Afghanistan's Embassy in the Czech Republic On February 5, 2025, Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid claimed that their administration was engaging with 40 countries on diplomatic affairs. "Our embassies, consulates, and diplomatic institutions are interacting with 40 countries, and those countries also have embassies in Afghanistan," he said. While Taliban have taken control of some diplomatic missions, former Afghan diplomats argue that this does not equate to official recognition. "With new tactics, the Taliban are aggressively seeking control over diplomatic missions, believing that this will help them establish formal ties," said Shukria Barakzai, Afghanistan's former ambassador to Norway. "But gaining control of an embassy does not automatically translate into official diplomatic recognition by the host country." Afghanistan's Embassy in Tajikistan also remains under the control of former government diplomats, bringing the total number of embassies resisting Taliban control to 14.

ARCS, ICRC strengthen cooperation for services



KABUL (BNA): Shaha-buddin Delawar, the acting head of the Afghan Red Crescent Society (ARCS), and his deputy, Hafiz Azizur-Rahman, engaged with Pierre Krähenbühl, President of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), alongside senior ICRC officials, including Ms. Katrina Ritzzo and Rabiha Faqih. During the meeting, Delawar expressed his gratitude for the ICRC's ongoing support and vital assistance in humanitarian initiatives. He presented a comprehensive overview of the current economic climate in Afghanistan, detailing the Afghan Red Crescent's development projects, achievements, and humanitarian services. Delawar highlighted the resilience of the Afghan people, who have recently emerged from a period of hardship and insecurity. He emphasized that this is a crucial time for international humanitarian organizations to increase their support for those in need. In response, Krähenbühl commended the efforts of the Afghan Red Crescent, underlining the historical challenges faced by the Afghan population. He reaffirmed the ICRC's commitment to bolstering its cooperation with the Afghan Red Crescent, ensuring the continuation and expansion of joint activities.

Retirees hold protest over non-payment of pensions



KABUL (TOLOnews): A number of retirees once again gathered in front of the pension office in Kabul to protest the non-payment of their pensions. These retirees say they have been grappling with severe economic hardships for the past four years and are calling on the Islamic Emirate to pay their pensions as soon as possible. However, the Islamic Emirate has yet to make any new statements regarding the timing of pension payments. Mirwais, one of the retirees, said: "We endured a very bitter winter, and now the holy month of Ramadan is approaching, yet no one pays attention to us. Who should we turn to?" Habibullah, another retiree, said: "It's been five years since we received our pensions. Are we not part of this society? Do we not have families to support? Did we not serve this country?" The retirees stressed that after years of service in government institutions, they now expect the government to address their situation and pay their pensions without further delay. Gol Mullah Bakhtiar, another retiree, said: "All our money is spent on transportation fares. No one has the courage to tell us when we will receive our pensions. A promise is a promise, and a commitment is a commitment." Sayed Sahib Shah, another retiree, emphasized: "We ask the leaders, Ramadan is near—pay our pensions." Although the leader of the Islamic Emirate has issued a decree for the payment of retirees' pensions, the relevant authorities have not yet announced a specific time for the payments.

90% of Pul-e-Kheshti market completed

KABUL (TOLOnews): Kabul Municipality has announced that the construction of the underground market in the Pul-e-Kheshti area of Kabul city is over 90% complete. Nematullah Barakzai, a representative of the municipality, stated that the purpose of constructing this underground facility is to reduce urban congestion and establish commercial centers. Pul-e-Kheshti is one of the historic and busy areas of Kabul city, known for its constant hustle and bustle in all conditions and times. Speaking to TOLOnews, the Kabul Municipality representative said: "An underground facility is being constructed in the Pul-e-Kheshti Mosque area, which is more than 90% complete. The main objective is to establish commercial centers and eliminate street vendors in the area." This underground market has six access points for customers and is comprised of 360 shops. Ajmal, one of the employees of the underground project, told TOLOnews: "This is a national and valuable project with 360 shops and six entrances." Kabul residents also believe that the establishment of this commercial market will effectively reduce urban congestion and have called for the construction of more such underground facilities in various parts of the capital. Abdul Hamid, a Kabul resident, said: "Building this underground market is a great initiative. It will relieve people from the challenges of congestion, and our fellow citizens can make good use of this convenient facility." Since the return of the Islamic Emirate to power, construction efforts have been launched in various sectors, including roads, canals, green spaces, and commercial centers.

UN grants travel exemptions to Minister

UNITED NATIONS (Amu TV): The United Nations Security Council has approved travel ban exemptions for several senior Taliban officials, including Abdul Ghani Baradar, the Taliban's deputy chief minister, allowing them to travel for diplomatic, medical, and religious purposes. On February 7, 2025, the Security Council Committee established under resolution 1888 (2011) granted an exemption for Abdul Ghani Baradar, permitting him to visit Doha, Qatar, from February 9 to March 3 for medical treatment, according to a UNSC press release. Subsequently, on February 14, the committee approved a travel exemption for Ahmad Zia Agha, the Taliban's deputy governor for the central bank, allowing him to attend the Urals Forum "Cybersecurity and Finance" in Yekaterinburg, Russia, from February 19 to 21. Taliban said on Thursday, Feb. 13, that Baradar met with Qatar's Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani during his visit to Doha. Earlier in the year, on January 22, the committee granted an exemption for Sirajuddin Haqqani, the Taliban's interior minister, enabling him to travel to Saudi Arabia from January 23 to February 3 to perform Umrah, a religious pilgrimage. Additionally, on January 10, an exemption was approved for Noor Mohammad Saqib, permitting him to attend the Hajj Conference and Exhibition in Mecca from January 13 to 16. In late December, the committee authorized a travel exemption for Amir Khan Muttaqi, the Taliban's foreign minister, allowing him to participate in regional security and reconciliation meetings in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, from December 28, 2024, to January 7, 2025. These exemptions come as the UN continues to enforce sanctions against Taliban leaders while allowing limited travel for specific purposes.

New document verification procedure for consular services

KABUL (BNA): The Directorate of Consular Affairs at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has announced a new initiative aimed at improving efficiency and reducing unnecessary visits for applicants seeking consular services. All foreign-issued and verified documents, along with various forms of criminal liability clearance, will be collected and returned through designated branches of the Emirati Afghan Post company in Kabul province. This change is designed to streamline the verification process and minimize time spent by clients. Submission and collection process Clients are requested to submit their foreign documents for verification to the Central Post Office located at the Ministry of Communications. The same post office will serve as the collection point for completed documents. Additional Document Locations, For documents concerning non-criminal liability, processing will also take place at the following post offices: 1. Central Post Office at the Ministry of Telecommunications and Information Technology 2. Makrorayan Post Office – Right entrance of the Supreme Court 3. Arya Township Post Office – Phase 1, left side of the first market 4. Qala-e-Fathullah Post Office – Located on Ninth Street 5. Qasaba Post Office – Right entrance of the National Development Company 6. Khair Khana Post Office – Next to the 11th Police District headquarters Applicants are advised not to visit the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for the submission or processing of foreign documents and criminal liability clearances after the mentioned date. All related services will be handled exclusively through the designated post offices. This new system is expected to enhance the service experience for all clients by reducing wait times and improving accessibility to consular services.

Taliban team led by Minister for Economy travels to Japan



KABUL (Amu TV): A Taliban delegation, led by Abdul Latif Nazari, their deputy minister of economy, traveled to Japan on Sunday. Nazari announced that "We seek respectful engagement with the world for a strong, united, advanced, prosperous, and developed Afghanistan that is an active member of the international community." However, he did not provide further details on the purpose or agenda of the trip. The visit comes more than three years after the Taliban regained control of Afghanistan, yet no country has formally recognized their government. The international community has maintained that recognition is contingent on the formation of an inclusive government, respect for human rights—particularly women's rights and girls' access to education—counterterrorism commitments, and assurances that Afghan territory will not be used for attacks against other nations.

Female FMs urge Taliban to repeal restrictions on women

KABUL (Amu TV): Foreign ministers from 17 countries, including Canada and Germany, in a statement called on the Taliban to repeal restrictive laws and decrees issued by their Ministry for the Propagation of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice, expressing deep concern over "systematic human rights violations" in Afghanistan. The joint statement, followed a meeting hosted by Canadian Foreign Minister Mélanie Joly, where women foreign ministers from around the world discussed the worsening conditions for Afghan women and girls. The statement condemned the Taliban's December 2024 decree banning women from medical education, calling it a direct threat to the country's already fragile healthcare system. "If not reversed, Afghanistan will lose a generation of women health professionals in a society where cultural norms often require women to be treated exclusively by other women," it read. "This severely jeopardizes the health and well-being of Afghan women and children in a country already facing one of the highest maternal mortality rates globally." The ministers also denounced the Taliban's ongoing ban on secondary and higher education for girls, calling Afghanistan "the only country in the world where women and girls cannot attend secondary school or obtain higher education." The statement described this policy as "a personal tragedy for each Afghan girl and a collective blow to Afghanistan's long-term development, economic growth, and stability." The statement also demanded the repeal of the Taliban's so-called morality laws, which have further restricted women's rights. "These decrees aim literally to silence Afghan women and girls and confine them to their homes," the ministers wrote. "There is no viable future—no long-term peace, prosperity, or legitimacy—for any state that seeks to effectively erase women from public life." The foreign ministers reaffirmed their support for international mechanisms to hold the Taliban accountable, including the United Nations Human Rights Council's ongoing discussions on Afghanistan and efforts by Canada, Australia, Germany, and the Netherlands to take formal steps under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). The initiative is now backed by 25 other countries. The Taliban's Ministry for the Propagation of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice dismissed the statement as "baseless." Ministry spokesman Saifur-Rahman Khyber told Amu TV that "women and girls in Afghanistan have rights and freedoms in accordance with Sharia law" and rejected claims that Afghanistan is the most oppressive country for women. The meeting in Ottawa was attended by foreign ministers from Andorra, Australia, Colombia, Ecuador, Finland, Georgia, Germany, Iceland, Jamaica, Kosovo, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Monaco, Mongolia, Slovenia, and Sweden, as well as the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. The statement also emphasized the need for Afghan women to be included in any discussions about the country's future, including the UN-facilitated Doha process. "Afghan women have demonstrated time and time again that they will not give up the fight in claiming their rights, despite violent repression by the Taliban," the ministers wrote. "They've shown incredible courage, and we must not give up on them."



# No action taken against registered Afghan refugees: Muqam

Says we take pride in capabilities of security forces

**F.P. Report**

KARACHI: Federal Minister for Kashmir Affairs, Gilgit-Baltistan & SAFRON, and President of PML-N Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Engineer Amir Muqam, stated that Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif in the federation and Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif in Punjab are delivering exceptional governance.

Addressing PML-N workers and leadership in Sindh, Engineer Amir Muqam emphasized that Nawaz Sharif and Shehbaz Sharif have proven their patriotism by prioritizing Pakistan over politics. He praised their courage and commitment to sacrificing for the nation's welfare.

He further asserted that PML-N saved Pakistan from economic default and thwarted conspiracies aimed at plunging the country into civil unrest. He noted that Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif's dedication and performance have led people in other provinces to wish for a similar leader.

Engineer Amir Muqam expressed great pride in the capabilities of Pakistan's security forces, highlighting that the officers and soldiers of the armed forces work tirelessly, without concern for

their own lives, to safeguard the nation. The Pakistani nation salutes their unwavering commitment to national security.

He criticized the individuals who attempted to have Pakistan's financial aid suspended through written appeals, stating that such a person is now imprisoned in Adiala Jail. He further mocked internal conflicts within PTI, stating that those who orchestrated attacks on others' homes are now attacking each other with punches and slaps. According to him, PTI's letter-writing politics has failed, just like their protests.

Engineer Amir Muqam alleged that in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, "Pinky Peerni" and "Farah Gogi" want to install their preferred chief minister, and positions in PTI are being auctioned to the highest bidder. He predicted that after Eid, PTI's protest call would meet the same fate as their previous failed attempts. He also accused the so-called "honest and truthful" figures in PTI of looting the national treasury and filling their own pockets.

He pointed out that even the people of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa did not attend PTI's rally in Swabi on February 8. In contrast, he praised Shehbaz Sharif

for not drawing any salary and for depositing valuable foreign gifts and vehicles into the Toshakhana.

**Address to Afghan Refugees in Karachi**

Earlier, while addressing Afghan refugees and the Pakistani community at the Commissionerate for Afghan Refugees in Sindh, Karachi, Engineer Amir Muqam clarified that no action is being taken against registered Afghan refugees.

He noted that refugee policies are evolving worldwide, and in recent days, Pakistan has been running a campaign against undocumented individuals purely due to security concerns, not as part of any discriminatory action.

The minister assured that the government would provide all possible assistance and protection to refugees within the legal framework. Despite various challenges, Pakistan continues to stand with Afghan refugees, but the international community must also fulfill its responsibilities.

Engineer Amir Muqam emphasized the need for the resettlement of Afghan refugees in third countries and called for serious measures to ensure sustainable peace in Afghanistan. He urged

global organizations to assist host communities that have provided refuge to Afghan migrants for decades, stressing that supporting refugees is a shared international responsibility, not just Pakistan's burden.

He reaffirmed that Pakistan stands firmly with Afghan refugees and will continue to do so. He also appealed to the international community to acknowledge Pakistan's sacrifices and find long-term solutions for refugees.

"We must work together for peace, stability, and a dignified future," said the minister, adding that Pakistan has upheld the traditions of brotherhood, hospitality, and compassion. He further remarked that Afghan refugees are not just guests but brothers, and Pakistan has shared its land, resources, and employment opportunities with them for over four decades.

Engineer Amir Muqam assured that the Ministry of SAFRON is committed to ensuring the protection and welfare of refugees, whether they reside in camps or urban areas. He reiterated that Afghan refugees have access to education, healthcare, and other essential services in Pakistan.



**PESHAWAR:** Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Ali Amin Khan Gandapur planting a sapling to launch the tree plantation drive in the province.

## Sharjeel, Chinese investors discusses investment in EVs

**F.P. Report**

KARACHI: A delegation of Chinese investors met with Sindh's Senior Minister, Sharjeel Inam Memon, at his office in Karachi. The meeting focused on discussions regarding investment in electric vehicles (EVs) in Sindh. Senior Minister Sharjeel Inam Memon invited the delegation to establish an EV manufacturing plant in Sindh.

Secretary of Transport Asad Zaman and Managing Director of Sindh Mass Transit Authority Kamal Dayo also attended the meeting.

Speaking to the Chinese delegation, Senior Minister and Provincial Minister for Information, Transport, and Mass Transit, Sharjeel Inam Memon, assured that the Sindh government would provide necessary incentives and a business-friendly environment for foreign investors.

He emphasized that Pakistan, particularly Sindh, holds strategic importance in terms of investment, with its ports, expanding road network, and a large workforce.

Senior Minister Sharjeel Inam Memon stated that the future belongs to electric vehicles, and Sindh is ready to play a leading role in this transition. He invited international investors to establish EV manufacturing plants in the province, highlighting that such ini-



tiatives would boost the economy and create thousands of job opportunities.

During the meeting, the Chinese delegation expressed interest in investing in Sindh's EV sector and appreciated the Sindh government's commitment to industrial development. Discussions also covered potential partnerships in renewable energy, infrastructure development, and technology transfer.

Meanwhile, Sindh's Senior Minister, Sharjeel Inam Memon, has stated that the Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM) has always used others' dead bodies for political purposes. He emphasized that Farooq Sattar and other MQM leaders should understand that making accusations will

not elevate their stature.

Reacting to the press conference by MQM leader Farooq Sattar, Senior Minister and Provincial Minister for Information, Transport, and Mass Transit, Sharjeel Inam Memon, said that for decades, the people of Karachi were at the mercy of MQM's violent and coercive politics. Now that MQM's intimidation tactics are failing, they are trying to incite the public and fuel riots based on tragic incidents.

He stated that Farooq Sattar's remarks are baseless, false, and hypocritical. Before blaming the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) and the Sindh government, Sattar should reflect on MQM's dark history.

Sharjeel Inam Memon

further added that those accusing the Sindh government were themselves responsible for destroying the city's peace and progress in the past. He alleged that ethnic riots, violence, extortion, and target killings were MQM's trademarks.

He clarified that Afaq Ahmed's arrest was conducted according to the law and that no one is above it. He urged MQM to stop shedding crocodile tears.

Sharjeel Inam Memon also stated that while the Sindh government is focused on solving public issues, MQM is busy spreading chaos, MQM is deliberately creating discord between Pashtuns and Urdu-speaking communities, the public knows who the real troublemakers are.

## Govt open to talks, says Rana Tanveer

SHARAPUR (APP): Federal Minister for Industry and Production Rana Tanveer Hussain has said that the government is open to negotiations, but the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) founder has a history of making U-turns on every issue and engaging in politics based on lies and incitement.

Speaking to the media in his constituency of Sharqpur on Sunday, Rana Tanveer dismissed claims of any correspondence between the PTI founder and the country's leadership, stating that neither the army chief nor the prime minister had received any

letter from him.

He also highlighted Pakistan's deep-rooted relations with Turkiye, stressing the significance of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's visit, during which several crucial economic agreements were signed.

Commenting on the political landscape, the minister asserted that Pakistan is now on the right economic track, whereas the PTI members are engaged in internal disputes, forming small factions within the party. "A party founded on hostility toward the nation will always experience such divisions," he added.

Rana Tanveer also addressed concerns regarding the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA), clarifying that the law is not intended to target newspapers or TV channels but rather those who spread abusive content on social media. He further pointed out that PECA was originally drafted during the tenure of PTI's founder.

The minister reiterated the government's willingness to engage in dialogue but criticised the PTI founder's inconsistent stance on political matters, accusing him of fueling unrest through misinformation and divisive tactics.

## Pakistan's 24th relief consignment to Gaza arrives at El-Arish airport

CAIRO (APP): On the directions of the Prime Minister, Pakistan's National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) in collaboration with Al-Khidmat Foundation continues to provide much needed humanitarian and relief assistance to the brotherly people of Gaza Strip.

A special aircraft from Pakistan carrying 55 tons of relief supplies landed at El-Arish International Airport, Egypt on Sunday.

The relief consignment includes bell and winterized tents as well as tarpaulin sheets.

Officers from embassy of Pakistan, Cairo received the relief consignment, and handed over to Egyptian Red Crescent Society for onward dispatch to Palestinian Red Crescent Society inside Gaza.

An official of embassy of Pakistan in Cairo, Egypt said, "Pakistan will continue to stand with the Palestinian brothers and sisters and provide much needed humanitarian assistance."

We are thankful to Egypt for their crucial support. More consignments from the Government and people of Pakistan are on their way and will be delivered soon to the Palestinians inside Gaza. "

## Finmin says Pakistan has 'big potential' in skilled labor export

ISLAMABAD (Arab News): Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb has said that Pakistan has a "big potential" in terms of skilled labor export to Saudi Arabia to support the Kingdom's Vision 2030 framework.

The statement came on the sidelines of a two-day Emerging Market Economies Conference in Saudi Arabia's AlUla city, where he will be taking part in discussions around sustainable economic growth amid global uncertainties.

Saudi Arabia is consolidating its economy on modern lines under the Vision 2030, which is a strategic development framework that intends to cut the Kingdom's reliance on oil.

The program is aimed at developing public service sectors such as health, education, infrastructure, recreation and tourism, and the Kingdom has initiated several groundbreaking projects that are expected to significantly impact the Pakistani labor market.

"We do think there is big potential in terms of exports from Pakistan, especially with respect to skilled labor,

in terms of everything that Saudi Arabia requires in terms of executing Vision 2030," Aurangzeb told Arab News on the sidelines of the AlUla summit.

"So, there are a number of opportunities for the two countries to work together."

Pakistanis constitute one of the largest migrant communities in Saudi Arabia, with more than 2 million working in the Kingdom and making it the largest source of remittances to Pakistan. While a significant majority of these Pakistanis comprises blue-

collar workers, there is still a growing demand for skilled labor in the Kingdom as it seeks to modernize its economy.

Rana Mujtaba, a spokesperson of the Pakistani Education and Professional Training Ministry, told Arab News in April last year that Islamabad was working on a new education policy to impart different technical skills to at least a million youth per annum to export trained human resource to Gulf countries, including Saudi Arabia.

insisted Hamas must have no future role.

The October 7, 2023 attack on Israel resulted in the deaths of 1,211 people, mostly civilians, according to an AFP tally of Israeli official figures.

Israel's retaliatory campaign has killed at least 48,264 people in Gaza, the majority of them civilians, according to figures from the health ministry in the territory that the United Nations considers reliable.

On Sunday morning, Hamas said an Israeli air strike killed two police officers and wounded another near south Gaza's Rafah. Israel said it struck "several armed individuals" in south Gaza.

And overnight, Israel said it received a shipment of "heavy" US-made bombs. The Biden administration had blocked a shipment of 2,000-pound bombs during the Gaza war.

## Israel receives shipment of heavy bombs cleared by Trump

O C C U P I E D JERUSALEM (Reuters): Israel has received a shipment of heavy MK-84 bombs from the United States, after US President Donald Trump lifted a block imposed on the export of the munitions by the administration of predecessor Joe Biden, the defence ministry said on Sunday.

The MK-84 is an unguided 2,000 pound bomb, which can rip through thick concrete and metal, creating a wide blast radius.

The Biden administration declined to clear them for export to Israel out of concern about the impact on densely populated areas of the Gaza Strip.

The Biden administration sent thousands of 2,000-pound bombs to Israel after the Oct. 7, 2023 attack by Palestinian Hamas from Gaza but later held up one of the shipments.

The hold was lifted by Trump last month.

"The munitions shipment that arrived in Israel tonight, released by the Trump Administration, represents a significant asset for the Air Force and the IDF and serves as further evidence of the strong alliance between Israel and the United States," Defence Minister Israel Katz said late on Saturday.

The shipment arrived after days of concern about whether a fragile ceasefire in Gaza agreed last month would hold, after both sides accused each other of violating the terms of the deal to halt fighting to allow the exchange of hostages held in Gaza for Palestinian prisoners and detainees in Israeli jails.

Washington has announced assistance for Israel worth billions of dollars since the war began.

Rubio discusses Gaza

truce with Israel's Netanyahu on first leg of Mideast tour

AFP: US Secretary of State Marco Rubio met with Israel's prime minister in Jerusalem on Sunday for talks on the Gaza ceasefire, launching a Middle East tour a day after the latest hostage-prisoner exchange.

On his first visit to the region as Washington's top diplomat, Rubio is expected to push US President Donald Trump's widely condemned proposal to take control of Gaza and relocate its more than two million residents.

The plan envisions redeveloping the coastal territory into the "Riviera of the Middle East" after it was devastated by more than 15 months of war.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu welcomed the idea during his recent White House visit, but foreign leaders have largely rejected it.

Rubio arrived hours after Hamas freed three Israeli hostages in Gaza in exchange for 369 Palestinian prisoners — the sixth swap under the fragile ceasefire.

Negotiations on a second phase of the truce, aimed at securing a more lasting end to the war, are expected to begin next week in Doha.

The United States, Israel's top ally and weapons supplier, has said it is open to alternative proposals from Arab governments but insists that, for now, "the only plan is Trump's."

Rubio is also due to visit Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, with tough talks expected on Monday in Riyadh, a key player in Trump's regional strategy.

**Brink of collapse** Hamas and Israel are implementing the first, 42-day phase of the ceasefire that nearly collapsed last week.

Israel had warned Hamas it must free three living hostages by the weekend or face a renewed offensive.

Netanyahu credited "President Trump's firm stance" with ensuring Saturday's releases went ahead.

The freed hostages — Israeli-American Sagui Dekel-Chen, 36, Israeli-Russian Sasha Trupanov, 29, and Israeli-Argentine Yair Horn, 46 — returned to emotional family reunions.

Flanked by Hamas fighters, they carried gift bags from their captors and urged further exchanges.

In an Israeli government video, Dekel-Chen's wife, Avital, told him the name of their daughter who had been born two months after his abduction in October 2023.

"That's perfect," the 36-year-old replied. Israel freed 369

Palestinian prisoners, mostly Gazans detained during the war, but also some were serving life sentences for attacks on Israelis.

Footage aired by Israeli media showed Palestinian prisoners in sweatshirts bearing a Star of David and the slogan: "We will not forget and we will not forgive."

They tore them off upon reaching Gaza and burned them in a bonfire at the reception point in Khan Younis, Ibrahim, 61, a freed prisoner who declined to give his full name, said he was shocked by Gaza's devastation.

Arrested in northern Gaza's Jabalia refugee camp, he said he still did not know why he had been jailed for nine months.

Since the truce began last month, 19 Israeli hostages have been released in exchange for more than 1,000