

**IHC seeks report from IGP**  
**F.P. Report**

ISLAMABAD: The Islamabad High Court (IHC) on Monday sought report from Inspector General of Police (IGP) regarding alleged illegal arrest of a citizen by the capital police. IHC's Justice Mohsin Akhtar Kayani heard the case regarding alleged kidnapping of a citizen Ali Muhammad. Petitioner's lawyer Sher Afazal Murawat appeared before the court.

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**Bushra Bibi's bail extended**  
**F.P. Report**

ISLAMABAD: A local court on Monday extended the interim bail of Bushra Bibi till February 25, in a case pertaining to protest of November 26, at D-Chowk. Duty Judge Additional District and Session Judge Afzal Majoka heard the case due to the leave of Judge Aamer Zia. Shams Kiani Advocate appeared before the court on behalf of Bushra Bibi.

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ISLAMABAD: A delegation of World Bank Executive Directors called on Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif.

## Kurrum situation reviewed

### KP cabinet approves Rs359m for N Waziristan TDPs

**F.P. Report**

PESHAWAR: A provincial cabinet meeting, chaired by Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur on Monday underscored the government's commitment to restoring peace and stability in Kurrum district through comprehensive security and development measures.

The 24th meeting of the Provincial Cabinet of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa was held wherein various key matters were discussed. The cabinet was briefed in detail about the implementation of government decisions aimed at ensuring sustainable peace in District Kurrum. It was informed that since October last year, 189 people had lost their lives in various incidents of unrest in Kurrum. However, due to the continuous efforts of the Provincial government, a peace agreement was reached to restore peace and normalcy in the region. To ensure uninterrupted supply of essential goods to the people of the restive district, nine convoys comprising 718 vehicles have so far been sent to Kurrum leaving no space for the shortage of essential commodities in the area. It was further told that the Provincial Government has launched helicopter service to and from Kurrum on the direction of the Chief Minister. So far, 153 flights have been carried out using two helicopters that provided air transport facilities

to approximately 4,000 people. Besides this, 19,000 kilograms of essential medicines have been supplied to Kurrum to cater to the medical needs of the patients.

It was further revealed that in line with the Cabinet's decision and the peace agreement, the demolishing of illegal bunkers in Kurrum is going on and 151 bunkers have been dismantled till date. The deadline for complete removal of all bunkers and deweaponisation has been set for March 23. The Cabinet accorded approval for Rs.98.3 million to procure explosives for dismantling the remaining illegal bunkers.

To enhance security on Kurrum Road, the cabinet had already approved the establishment of a special security force, with work in progress to set up both temporary and permanent security posts. A total of 120 security posts will be established along the road, and approval has been granted for the recruitment of 407 personnel.

These security posts will be equipped with essential supplies worth Rs. 764 million. The cabinet approved the designs of this security post and the release of funds for the whole scheme. On this occasion, the Chief Minister also directed to establish such security posts at the spots from where attacks from long distances can be effectively monitored and countered to secure the life and property of the people on permanent

basis.

The Cabinet also reviewed plans for the restoration of the damaged infrastructure in Kurrum. The briefing indicated that the rehabilitation of the destroyed Bagan Bazaar is estimated to cost Rs. 480 million, and work on the project will commence soon. The Chief Minister said that the government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is committed to ensure lasting peace, development, and stability in the region, with all necessary measures being taken for the welfare of the people. The Cabinet also approved the release of 1645 MT PASSCO imported wheat lying in Kurrum to the general public in the area.

The Cabinet approved one time 5 years relaxation of age and four attempts for PMS candidates due to the fact that the competitive examination has not been conducted for the last so many years. It was also directed that in future such competitive examination should be conducted on annual basis regularly like the CSS.

The Cabinet approved the creation of various posts for the effective utilization/running of the already installed tubewells of the D.I.Khan Irrigation circle. The Cabinet further approved the release of Rs. 359 million for monthly ration and sustenance allowance to those people of North Waziristan registered as TDPs since June 2014.

(Continued on Back Page)

## Remittances increases by 32% this year. Tarar

**F.P. Report**

ISLAMABAD: Minister for Information, Broadcasting, National Heritage, and Culture, Attaullah Tarar, lauded the contributions of overseas Pakistanis, revealing that remittances have increased by 32% this year.

During the question hour in the National Assembly, he explained the government's stance on blocking passports and national identity cards, emphasizing that the primary objective is to deter individuals from using illegal routes to leave the country. The minister further said that violations of national laws harm those who are lawfully residing in the country.

He said that individuals who remain abroad after their work (overstayed) and residency permits expire create challenges for legal residents. The minister assured that the government has implemented strict legal measures to prevent such practices.

Federal Minister for Information, Broadcasting, also informed the National Assembly that a total of 416 human smugglers had been arrested, including 17 proclaimed offenders involved in the Greece boat incident of 2023 and six of the most wanted human smugglers listed in the Red Book.

Responding to a question during the Question Hour, the minister explained that the crackdown resulted in the seizure of properties worth Rs. 661.63 million, recoveries amounting to Rs.10,455 million, and the freezing of bank accounts totaling Rs. 73.51 million. Furthermore, he said that 34 FIA officials involved in the human trafficking have been dismissed and their appeals were rejected, adding, the investigations in that regard are completed in few days to fix these facilitators.

## Rubio arrives in S Arabia ahead of Ukraine talks

RIYADH: Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman received US Secretary of State Marco Rubio in Riyadh on Monday. Rubio was received by the Kingdom's Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan, Saudi Press Agency reported. During the meeting, the diplomats reviewed Saudi-US relations and ways to enhance them to serve the interests of both friendly countries.

They also discussed regional and international developments and efforts made in this regard. Rubio arrived in the Kingdom after a visit to Israel, the first leg of his first Middle East tour in his current position. Next up on his tour will be the United Arab Emirates. US National Security Advisor Mike Waltz and Special Envoy to the Middle East Steve Witkoff have also arrived in Riyadh. Al-Ekhbariya reported.

The United States and Russia have confirmed that their top delegates will meet in Saudi Arabia this week to discuss ending the war in Ukraine, in a move that has sparked concern among European leaders left out of the US-led effort.

Senior US and Russian officials will hold talks in Riyadh on Tuesday in an effort to lay the groundwork for peace talks, the US Department of State and the Kremlin confirmed on Monday. Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and Yuri Ushakov, a foreign policy adviser to President Vladimir Putin, were due to travel to the Saudi capital, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said.

They will meet US Secretary of State Marco Rubio, National Security Advisor Mike Waltz, and Special Envoy to the Middle East Steve Witkoff, the State Department said. The confirmation comes just days after US President

Donald Trump said he and Putin had agreed in a phone call to begin negotiations to end the war, which will hit the three-year mark later this month.

Trump's push for bilateral talks with Moscow has raised alarm about what place Ukraine and its European allies would have at the negotiating table. It also has spurred concerns that the US president could hand concessions to Russia, and that Europe's security architecture and its defence partnership with the US could be weakened.

Peskov said this week's meeting in Saudi Arabia "will be dedicated to possible negotiations on a Ukrainian resolution and organising a meeting between the two presidents". Following reports that Trump could meet Putin in Saudi Arabia, the Republican leader said at the weekend that such a meeting could happen "very soon". — Agencies

## India opposition slams Trump's F-35 offer

NEW DELHI (Reuters): India's opposition parties have criticised US President Donald Trump's offer to sell F-35 fighters to the country, citing their high costs, even as Russia has discussed producing its most advanced jets locally in line with Prime Minister Narendra Modi's goals.

The offer from both US and India's long-time defence partner Russia comes at a time when the Indian Air Force's squadrons have fallen to 31 from an approved strength of 42 and it is seeking to acquire more jets to counter China, which is rapidly building its military.

After meeting Modi in Washington last week, Trump said the US will

increase military sales to India starting in 2025 and will eventually provide the fifth-generation F-35 fighters made by Lockheed Martin LMT.N. India's main opposition Congress party has used Trump ally and billionaire Elon Musk's past criticism of the fighter to target Modi's government.

"The F-35, which Elon Musk has described as 'junk', why is Narendra Modi hell-bent on buying it?" asked a post on Congress's official X account this weekend, saying that the aircraft was expensive and had high operational costs. The US government estimates that an F-35 costs around \$80 million.

The Indian government has not said it intends to buy the plane and India's foreign secretary told reporters last week that the US offer was at a "proposal stage", adding that the acquisition process had not started. India's defence ministry did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

The Congress post cited a November 2024 post by Musk on X in which he shared a video of a drone swarm and captioned it: "Meanwhile, some idiots are still building manned fighter jets like the F-35". Musk later said in another X post: "Manned fighter jets are obsolete in the age of drones anyway".

## Aid convoy attacked in Kurram

**F.P. Report**

PARACHINAR: Unidentified armed men on Monday attacked a convoy of relief goods in Kurram district and robbed trucks after resorting to firing.

According to police sources, the convoy of 100 trucks came under attack in the Uchet area of the district. Police quoted eyewitnesses as saying that the attackers opened fire on the convoy from a number of places and started robbing the vehicles. However, the security forces responded immediately and fired on the robbers through a gunship helicopter.

Sources said due to the tense situation in Lower Kurram, the convoy has been stopped at Tal. The armed men have been continuing firing on the convoy. Meanwhile, dismantling of bunkers set up by warring tribes continued under the Kohat Peace Agreement in Kurram district on Monday.

## PTI demands hearing of 26th amend case

**F.P. Report**

ISLAMABAD: The Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) has urged the judiciary to expedite the hearing of its cases against the 26th constitutional amendment.

Speaking at a press conference alongside party leaders, PTI Chairman Barrister Gohar stated that the amendment was passed by a government with a 'fake mandate'. He emphasised that all judges should hear the case and deliver a decision.

Gohar reiterated that protecting PTI's mandate was the Election Commission's constitutional duty, stressing that the party reserved the right to reclaim it. He also revealed that the PTI founder wrote a letter to the army chief, urging harmony between the military and public.

Meanwhile, Opposition Leader Omar Ayub criticised the judiciary for failing to uphold constitutional supremacy and accused the government of suppressing PTI leaders in jails. PTI's Shibli Fraz added that Pakistan could not achieve political stability without fair and transparent election.

Ayub, addressing the press conference, the PTI leader also demanded the judiciary to stand up for the rule of law and release all political prisoners, including party founder Imran Khan — who has been behind bars since August 2023. "Judges of the anti-terrorism courts will have to take a stand," urged the opposition leader in the National Assembly, adding that the judiciary should have stood on its feet and told everyone that "enough is enough".

He added that the former premier Khan, ex-first lady Bushra, PTI leaders Shah Mahmood Qureshi, Yasmin Rashid, Mian Mehmood-ur-Rasheed, Hassan Niazi, and others were political prisoners who should be released.

Ayub claimed that jail amenities have been taken back from Khan which he deserved as the former premier of the country. He also alleged that the PTI founder was kept in isolation by restricting access to him at the [Adiala] jail.

PTI Secretary General Raja also addressed the press conference and reiterated his demand to appoint more judges to the election tribunals. He criticised that only two jurists were appointed to the tribunals hearing election-related petitions in Punjab. The senior lawyer said that the current parliament has no legal grounds as facts of the stolen mandate could not be hidden.

Leader of Opposition in the Senate Shibli Faraz said that the country could not see political stability until free and fair elections were held. He also stressed legislation aimed at providing relief to the nation. The major opposition party has expedited efforts to form a grand opposition alliance, as incarcerated Khan proposed to start anti-government protests after Eid.

# PM appreciates WB's role in development

**F.P. Report**

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif on Monday said that with the cooperation of the World Bank (WB), several key development projects were completed in Pakistan, which had been playing a vital role in the country's progress.

The prime minister expressed these views during a meeting with the delegation of World Bank Executive Directors, PM Office Media Wing said in a press release. The prime minister welcomed the delegation on their visit to Pakistan and said the partnership between the WB and Pakistan spanned over seven decades.

"Pakistan has greatly benefited from its partnership with the World Bank," he said, adding the WB provided substantial assistance to the people affected by the 2022 floods in Pakistan. The meeting was attended by Ministers Ahsan Iqbal, Ahad Khan Cheema, Sardar Owais Khan Leghari, Dr. Musadik Malik, Ministers of State Ali Pervaiz Malik and Shaza Fatima Khawaja, Prime Minister's Coordinator Romina Khurshid Alam, Senator Sherry Rehman, Member of the National Assembly Nafisa Shah, Prime Minister's Representative for the Polio Program Ayesha Raza Farooq, and other senior officials.

The prime minister observed that recent Country Partnership Framework of the World Bank included an investment of \$40 billion in Pakistan which was highly encouraging. With \$20 billion allocated for various projects in health, education, youth development, and other social sectors, a new chapter of progress would begin in Pakistan, he added. The prime minister said that an additional \$20 billion investment in Pakistan private sector under the International Finance Corporation (IFC) would accelerate the country's economic growth.

Appreciating the WB trust in the government's policies, he said Pakistan's institutional and economic reform pro-

gramme was moving rapidly. "The country's economy is on the right path and moving towards growth," the press release quoted the prime minister as saying. He also stressed that the sustainable economic development required further efforts. He said the credit for economic turn around went to the hard work of the government's economic team.

The prime minister observed that Pakistan's exports and remittances were increasing, adding reduction in interest rates was boosting investment in the production sector. He further said that the government was introducing transparency in the system to control corruption. Digitization remained a priority in the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) reforms, he reiterated.

He said the power sector reforms aimed to ensure uninterrupted electricity supply and reduce losses. "The Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC) has created an attractive environment for investment in Pakistan, functioning under a unique system involving all stakeholders," he added. The prime minister maintained rather than relying on loans, they prioritized investment and partnerships. The delegation members praised Pakistan's ongoing reform programme and its effective implementation.

The positive outcomes of the government's ongoing reform initiatives were being felt which was a promising development, the delegation noted. They said under the leadership of Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, Pakistan's journey of economic reforms was progressing fastly.

The delegation also appreciated the government's reform measures in the energy, industrial and export sectors, privatization, revenue generation, and other key areas. A nine-member World Bank Executive Directors delegation is currently visiting Pakistan, overseeing portfolios of various countries within the World Bank. The delegation will discuss economic development projects and investment opportunities in Pakistan.

## Senate approves Anti-Rape Amend Bill — declares DNA testing mandatory

**F.P. Report**

ISLAMABAD: The Senate approved the Anti-Rape (Investigation and Trial) (Amendment) Bill on Monday, declaring DNA testing of rape victims mandatory. The bill now also includes jail time and a fine on the police officer, responsible for the investigation, over failure to comply with the new changes.

The bill was presented by Senator Humayun Mohmand, stating that police officials would arrange DNA tests of the rape victims from the laboratories recognised by the federal government preferably within 72 hours after the crime. Over failure to comply with the law, the concerned police official will face up to three years in jail and a fine.

The approval for fresh tweaks was given in today's session conducted by Senate Deputy Chairman Syedaal Khan Nasar. Earlier, the Senate's Standing Committee on Interior gave the nod to amendments to the Anti-Rape (Investigation and Trial) Act, 2021, proposing mandatory DNA testing of rape victims and imposition

of penalty if police fail to comply with the new order.

The amendments were presented to the upper house by Senator Mohmand via a private member bill, the Anti-Rape (Investigation and Trial) (Amendment) Bill, 2023, seeking modifications in the prevailing law's section 2, insertion of new sections 13A, 13B, and 13C and amendment of section 21. Under the new sections, the Senate body proposed making it "compulsory for every police officer to get the rape victim tested through the laboratories recognised by the federal government or the provincial government, as the case may be".

"Provided that in case, the concerned police officer has been unable to collect the sample within the prescribed time period, then the sample must be collected within seven days from the day of the crime, and if delay has been more than a week, then within the shortest possible time, for the purpose of the investigation of the crime," it stated.

The legislation also prescribed sources of collecting samples for DNA test-

ing in rape cases. It also stated maintaining privacy while preserving the DNA results in the hospital or the forensic lab.

Subsequently, section 13C of the law will also restrict police stations across the country to maintain records of all DNA sampling and testing results "in confidentiality and under the control of an officer not below the rank of BPS-19". "Provided that if such police officer fails to fulfil his obligation," another amendment to section 21 stated, "[...] he shall be guilty of an offence punishable with imprisonment of either description which may extend to three years and with fine."

Senator Mohmand, who presented these amendments to the Senate on July 24, 2023, stated that the new sections had been inserted into the anti-rape law by the Sindh Assembly in 2017 which helped its police force in arresting offenders involved in committing rape against women and children. He termed it an "exemplary law" and proposed implementing it throughout the country by passing certain amendments.

## CJP reconstitutes SC's administrative bodies

**F.P. Report**

ISLAMABAD: Chief Justice of Pakistan (CJP) Justice Yahya Afridi on Monday reconstituted different administrative committees of the Supreme Court (SC), says in media reports.

Justice Musarrat Hilali was made the in-charge judge of anti-terrorism courts (ATCs) in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) while Justice Malik Shahzad and Justice Hashim Kakar were made the in-charge judges of ATCs of Punjab and Balochistan, respectively. Similarly, Justice Salahuddin Panhwar was made the in-charge judge of ATCs of Sindh, Justice Aamer Farooq of ATCs in Islamabad, while Justice Jamal Mandokhel

was made the head of the Supreme Court's (SC) Building Committee.

Justice Shafi Siddiqui and Justice Aamer Farooq will be the members of the committee. The CJP will head the IT committee himself, while other members are Justice Muhammad Ali Mazhar and Justice Miangul Hassan Aurangzeb.

Justice Shahid Bilal Hassan was made the in-charge of the Research Center Committee, while Justice Shafi Siddiqui and Justice Aamer Farooq will be its members. Justice Muhammad Ali Mazhar will head the Law Clerk Programme Committee, while Justice Miangul Hassan Aurangzeb will be its member.

Likewise, five judges

were nominated to hear chamber appeals of different nature. CJP Afridi, Justice Hassan Azhar Rizvi and Justice Hashim Kakar, Justice Salahuddin Panhwar and Justice Shakil Ahmad will hear these appeals.

Justice Hassan Azhar Rizvi will head the Supreme Court's Archive and Museum Committee, while Justice Salahuddin Panhwar and Justice Miangul Hassan Aurangzeb will be its members. Justice Malik Shehzad was made the in-charge of the model courts. Others on the committee are Justice Hashim Kakar, Justice Salahuddin Panhwar and Justice Ishiaq Ibrahim. Justice Ibrahim was also appointed as a security judge.



## CM message on World Tourism Day

LAHORE (APP): Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif has emphasized the importance of promoting tourism in Punjab, highlighting the province's natural beauty and cultural richness.

In her message on the World Tourism Day, she said: "Pakistan is a country blessed with extraordinary natural beauty," she said, adding that Punjab's diverse landscapes—ranging from deserts and mountain ranges to lakes and rivers—hold immense tourism potential. She reaffirmed the government's commitment to showcasing Punjab's scenic beauty on a global stage.

The CM highlighted that sustainable measures are being implemented to boost tourism across the province. She stressed that tourism was essential for economic growth, the preservation of local culture, and strengthening international relations. CM Maryam Nawaz described the Islamabad-Murree Glass Train Project as a game-changer for tourism development.

## Lanjar chairs meeting on land grabbing issues

KARACHI (APP): Sindh Home Minister, Zia Ul Hassan Lanjar on Monday chaired the maiden meeting of the Committee constituted by the Government of Sindh to address the grievances of business community and general public related to encroachment/land grabbing.

During the meeting, further necessary instructions were issued regarding the prevention of land grabbing and encroachment issues.

He stated that a high-level desk will be established to address land grabbing and encroachment issues, which will operate under the leadership of the Commissioner of Karachi, with the involvement of all relevant members. The complaints, along with full evidence, will be presented by the business community, builders, and public representatives at this desk.

It is important to note that members of the desk established to address complaints regarding land grabbing and encroachments include the Additional IGP Karachi, representatives from KDA, Board of Revenue, KCCI, KATI, and ABAD. The Minister further emphasized that ensuring public access to all information regarding the desk's establishment and its objectives is crucial.

He mentioned that the desk will prepare a report on the resolution of complaints or other actions to be submitted to the government committee every fifteen days. He also instructed that 22 complaints presented by the business community today should be resolved as soon as possible. He acknowledged that new and different challenges would arise, and to address them,

collective tough decisions would need to be made.

The IGP Sindh informed the meeting that an SOP related to land grabbing and encroachment has been prepared, which will be presented in the next meeting.

He added that they are in continuous contact with the business community and builders, addressing their issues based on merit. On this occasion, the business community welcomed the committee's decisions and assured their full cooperation and support.

The meeting was attended by the Additional Chief Secretary (Home), Iqbal Memon, IGP Sindh, Ghulam Nabi Memon, Senior Member Board of Revenue Sindh, Chairman Anti-Corruption Sindh, Additional IGP Karachi, President KCCI, Chairman KATI, and Chairman ABAD.

## Provincial leaders gather as CM Murad hosts key delegation at Sindh house

E.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: On reaching Sindh House, Chief Minister Murad Ali Shah gave a warm welcome to the delegation along with provincial ministers.

The delegation met the Chief Minister and the Provincial Cabinet. Senior Minister Sindh Sharjeel Memon, Energy Minister Sindh Nasir Shah, Education Minister Syed Sardar Ali, Agriculture Minister Sardar Muhammad Baksh, Livestock Minister Muhammad Ali Malkani and Chief Secretary Sindh and secretaries and senior officials of all ministries also participated in the meeting.

The Chief Minister of Sindh told the delegation that two-thirds of the province was severely affected during the flood. After the flood, the government of Pakistan, Sindh and the World Bank worked together. The bank has immediately approved 1.6 billion dollars for the rehabilitation of the flood victims. Chairman Bilawal Bhutto gave immediate



instructions to build houses for the victims, after which we built houses for the flood victims with a fast pace. We look forward to a stronger partnership with the World Bank.

The high-level delegation was briefed on the ongoing projects in Sindh with the support of the World Bank. Chairman Planning and Development Department Dr. Najam Ahmad Shah told the delegation that 13 projects are currently underway in Sindh with the support of the World Bank. Among

them are Solid Waste Emergency and Efficiency Project, Karachi Water and Sewerage Services Improvement Project, Sindh Solar Energy Project, Karachi Mobility Project, Sindh Early Learning Enhancement Through Classroom Transformation, Sindh Water and Agriculture Transformation Project, Sindh Barrages Improvement Project, Sindh Livestock and Aquaculture Sector Transformation Project and National Health Support Program are included.

Work on these projects is going on rapidly. 5 projects are also in the pipeline in Sindh with the support of World Bank.

The delegation was told that Sindh is the first province which has adopted Public Private Partnership method and this is going very successful. The delegation expressed satisfaction and happiness over the progress of the Sindh government on the projects and also assured of further cooperation in the future.



LAHORE: Speaker Punjab Assembly Malik Ahmad Khan congratulated Dr Fatmeen Athar, the granddaughter of Jameel Athar Qazi and daughter of Irfan Athar Qazi, on her wedding with Dr Muhammad Naeem Tariq.

## Dr Fowzia calls for reduction in medicine prices

KARACHI (PPI): Epilepsy Foundation Pakistan President Dr Fowzia Siddiqui today raised alarms about the exorbitant costs of epilepsy medications, urging for both price regulation and subsidies to make these lifesaving drugs more accessible.

According to a statement by the Epilepsy Foundation Pakistan, Dr Siddiqui highlighted at the 2nd 360° Neuro Summit in Malaysia that neurological medicine costs rank just after cancer drugs in terms of sales. She emphasized the World Health Organization's classification of epilepsy treatments as lifesaving, calling for urgent measures to make them affordable.

Siddiqui also addressed the issue of neuropathic pain, noting its nerve-damaging effects and the high prevalence of diabetes in South Asia, with Pakistan leading globally. She advised the use of vitamins for nerve health while warning against their excessive use.

Additionally, she discussed treatments for emergency epilepsy and neuropathic pain, including the use of specific medications like Levetiracetam and Pregabalin.

## Governor shows concern over recklessness driving

KARACHI (PPI): Sindh Governor Kamran Khan Tessori has written a letter to the Sindh Chief Minister, expressing concern over the reckless driving of dumpers, trucks, and water tankers in Karachi.

According to a statement by the Governor House today, in the letter, the governor stated that there has been an increase in traffic

law violations and accidents over the past few months.

The governor has proposed forming a high-level commission headed by the Chief Secretary to address this issue. The commission will be tasked with identifying the causes of the accidents and determining those responsible so that the offenders can be punished according to the law.

The governor further mentioned that it is essential to devise an effective strategy to prevent such incidents in the future. Public anxiety and concerns are escalating, and there is an urgent appeal for immediate and effective measures from the government to ensure the safety of citizens' lives, Tessori concluded.

## JI files petition on deaths by heavy traffic in Karachi

KARACHI (INP): Jamaat-e-Islami has filed petition in Sindh High Court (SHC) seeking court order about monitoring of heavy traffic in Karachi.

JI Karachi's Ameer Munam Zafar, opposition leader in KMC Saifuddin advocate and Muhammad Farooq MPA in their petition pleaded to the high court to bound the Sindh government, police department and the KMC to monitor heavy traffic in the metropolis.

Chief Secretary Sindh, Secretary Transport and Mass Transit, and IG Police Sindh have been made

respondents in the petition.

Usman Farooq Advocate pleaded that the negligence of authorities resulting in large number of deaths of citizens by heavy vehicles.

Petitioners have requested for strict implementation on the notification about entry of the heavy traffic in city from 10:00 in night to 6:00 in the morning.

"A permanent system should be devised for monitoring and management of the heavy traffic in city," petition suggested.

The KMC should be ordered to take steps for

improvement and maintenance of the city's roads.

Petitioners requested that details of the use of funds allocated for carpeting of roads should be summoned and an audit of the funds spent on roads should be conducted.

The petitioners also sought the court to fix compensation for the citizens died or injured in accidents.

Petitioners pleaded for the court's order to enforce the Amal Umer Act adding that last year 773 citizens lost their lives and over 2000 injured in road accidents in Karachi.

## Suthra Punjab Programme reviewed

LAHORE (APP): A meeting was held at the Civil Secretariat under the chairmanship of Minister for Local Government Zeeshan Rafiq to review the Suthra Punjab Programme tehsil-wise.

Work done so far in four districts of Lahore division came under consideration. Secretary Local Government Shakeel Ahmed Mian, Special Secretary Asia Gul and concerned contractors participated in the meeting.

CEO of Lahore Waste Management Company (LWMC) Babar Sahib Din briefed the provincial minister about the performance in 12 tehsils, while contractors of Lahore, Nankana Sahib, Sheikhupura and Kasur informed about targets and challenges.

Addressing the meeting, Minister Zeeshan Rafiq said a phase review of all waste management companies was being conducted. "The people's full trust in the Suthra Punjab Programme is an honour for us", he observed.

The provincial minister took notice of non-fulfillment of targets in some areas of Nankana Sahib and directed to reach all rural areas within a week. "Equal sanitation facilities should be provided in cities and villages", he vowed. He said that action should be taken on complaints within the stipulated time and pictorial evidence should be sent to control room.

## Khalid Mir's poetry collection unveiled

KARACHI (PPI): The Arts Council of Pakistan Karachi, in collaboration with Halqa-e-Arbaab-e-Takhleeq, launched the latest poetry collection by renowned poet Khalid Mir, titled "Jise Tum Pyaar Karte Ho," at an event hosted in Haseena Moin Hall.

Presided over by the eminent literary figure Professor Shehar Ansari, the ceremony was graced by Tajdar Adil as the guest of honor.

According to Arts Council of Pakistan Karachi information, the event featured speeches from prominent personalities such as Tariq Jameel, Naseem Sheikh, Akhtar Saeedi, and Dr. Fahim Shinas Kazmi, with Hamid Islam Khan moderating.

## LHC summons attorney general over Anti-Rape Act implementation

LAHORE (APP): The Lahore High Court (LHC) on Monday summoned the Attorney General for Pakistan in connection with the implementation of the Anti-Rape Act.

A three-member bench, headed by LHC Chief Justice Aalia Neelum, issued the orders while hearing a bail application as well as matters related to the implementation of the Anti-Rape Act.

At the start of proceedings, Acting Advocate General Punjab Balighur Rehman and Inspector General of Police (IGP) Punjab appeared before the bench. The acting advocate general presented a report on the implementation of

the law, highlighting gaps in the legislation.

However, the full bench questioned the absence of the Attorney General. To which, a deputy attorney general informed the bench that he was unable to appear due to commitments in Islamabad. The bench expressed dissatisfaction, stating that this was a critical issue requiring his presence. It noted that although the law was enacted in 2021, it still contains several flaws.

At this stage, the IGP revealed statistics, reporting 5,000 cases of abduction and 7,000 cases of honor killings, among other crimes. He stated that investigators compile

reports from crime scenes and that personnel are being recruited and trained to improve investigations. However, he mentioned that certain measures still require cabinet approval.

Chief Justice Aalia Neelum expressed disappointment over the lack of efforts to protect victims' confidentiality, stressing that safeguarding affected women should be a top priority. The court also underscored the importance of preserving video and audio evidence under legal standards.

The full bench adjourned the hearing indefinitely, ruling that the Attorney General's presence in the next session is mandatory.

## Speaker highlights significance of parliamentary committees

LAHORE (APP): Punjab Assembly (PA) Speaker Malik Muhammad Ahmad Khan on Monday highlighted the significance of parliamentary committees and said that they played crucial role in parliamentary system.

He presided over an important meeting of the Council of Chairpersons, held in the Punjab Assembly, said a press release issued here.

The meeting focused on amendments to the Rules of Procedure, pending business of standing committees and the scheduling of committee meetings.

He emphasized that the strength of the committee was the strength of the Assembly, adding that across the world, people looked towards the Parliament for guidance.

Expressing regret, the speaker said that despite existing laws, this was the first-ever meeting of the

Council of Chairpersons in the history of the Assembly.

He further explained that previously, committees could only deliberate on referred matters, whereas now they had the authority to review all rules comprehensively.

The Speaker apprised the attendees that the number of standing committees in the Punjab Assembly had increased from 37 to 48, ensuring that each department under the Assembly's jurisdiction now had a dedicated committee.

He further said that this Assembly could not be compared to the previous 17 assemblies, as the current standing committees were more active and empowered than ever before.

The meeting was attended by standing committee chairpersons and several members of the Assembly,

including Asma Insham, Mansab Ali Dogar, Waqar Ahmad Cheema, Junaid Afzal Sahi, Ahmad Ahsan Iqbal, Samiullah Khan, Haider Ali Gillani, Pir Ashraf Rasool, Owais Work, Shazia Abid, Habibur Rehman, Hassan Riaz, Philbos, Ahmar Bhatti, Hassan Butter, Amjad Ali Javed, Agha Ali Haider, Adnan Dogar, Mohsin Ayub, Khan Bahadur, and Arif Gul. Additionally, Zulfiqar Ali Shah and several other members participated via video link.

The meeting deliberated on amendments to the Assembly's rules and procedures, discussed pending matters of the committees and reviewed the scheduling of standing committee meetings. This session is seen as a significant step towards strengthening the role and autonomy of Punjab Assembly's standing committees.

## Punjab Home dept amends 125-year-old prison rules

LAHORE (APP): Punjab Home Department has taken a commendable step by amending the 125-year-old prison rules under the vision of Punjab's chief minister for comprehensive jail reforms.

According to the

spokesperson here on Monday, in the first phase, 138 jail rules were revised to meet modern standards.

These amendments aimed to ensure the protection of human rights and adherence to international laws.

## PLF defeats Keio University to secure spot in Okinawan Open Finals

E.P. Report

OKINAWA: In an exhilarating match at the Okinawan Open Lacrosse Championship, the PLF Performance Development Team emerged victorious against the host team, Keio University, with a nail-biting score of 14-11. This thrilling victory has secured their place in the finals, where they will compete for a Gold medal tomorrow.

The match was a showcase of skill and determination, with Sara from the PLF team standing out as the star player, scoring an impressive 5 goals and earning the title of Player of the Match. Jasmine Akiba,



Muqaddas, and Momina, Pari, also made significant contributions, each scoring 1 goal, demonstrating the team's depth and versatility.

Head Coach Mr. Nisar Ahmad expressed his opti-

mism about the team's chances of winning the championship, stating, "The team has shown great resilience and teamwork. We are confident that we can bring home gold

medal." The team is also benefiting from the expertise of Mr. Muhammad Irfan, the team coach, and Manager Syed Ul Mulk, who are currently attending an official course but are fully committed to supporting the team.

The PLF Performance Development Team has been in excellent form, recently receiving training from FOGO Japan and the Japan Lacrosse Association (JLA), which has evidently paid off in their performance. As they advance to the next stage, all eyes will be on this dynamic team as they aim to clinch gold medal in the championship.

**Court Notice**

In the Court of Syed Zamarrud Shah Judge Banking Court-II Federal Judicial Complex Phase-7 Hayatabad Peshawar

Case No: 25/1/1 Next Date: 18-03-025 Suit for recovery of Rs.1159108/47 HBL Mingora Branch Swat Vs. Jamal Zeb Shamsheer. Notice Versus: Jamal Zeb Shamsheer s/o Shamsheer Ali R/o Mekan Bagh Mohallah Haji Muhammad Ghany laar Tehsil Babozai Distt Swat. Where is the plaintiff Bank has instituted a suit for the recovery of Rs.1159108/47 against you under section 10(2) of the Financial institious (Recovery of Finances) Ordinance 2001. You are hereby summoned to obtain leave of the court to appear and defend the suit within 30 days after receipt/ publication of the notice in the newspaper filling which an experte decree shall be passed in favour of the plaintiff Bank with costs. Issue today on 8-2-2025 under my signature & Seal of the Court.

**Judge | Banking Court-II Peshawar**

**تصحیح (CORRIGENDUM)**

بجوال اشتہار، بھرتی اساتذہ ضلع نوشہرہ شائع شدہ اخبارات فرنیئر پوسٹ اینڈ مشرق تاریخ 15، 13 فروری 2025 میں مندرجہ ذیل وضاحت کی جاتی ہے۔

1- ایٹا ویب سائٹ پر درخواست جمع کرنے کی آخری تاریخ 17-02-2025 کے بجائے 17-03-2025 پر دئی جاتی ہے۔

2- پی ایس ٹی کیلئے ٹرانس میڈر کی خالی آسانی پر بھرتی تحصیل ہی کے بجائے ضلع نوشہرہ کی سطح پر کی جائے گی۔

(شاہ جہان)

ڈسٹرکٹ ایجوکیشن آفیسر (مردانہ) ضلع نوشہرہ

INF(P) 661/25



# KP Games: 1,043 female athletes to compete in 12 events: Rasheeda

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: A total of 1,043 female athletes will participate in 12 different sports events in the upcoming Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Games organized by the Directorate General of Sports Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The mega event is set to commence on February 20 and will feature competitions in badminton, table tennis, squash, athletics, volleyball, karate, basketball, taekwondo, cricket, judo, hockey and netball.



Courts, while table tennis, hockey, volleyball, judo, and karate events will be held at Abdul Wali Khan Sports Complex in Charsadda. Athletics and cricket competitions will be played at the Peshawar Education Board grounds. The events will officially begin at 11:00 AM on February 20.

Rasheeda Ghaznavi expressed confidence in the performance of female athletes stating that they had excelled in previous editions of the games and were well-prepared to showcase their talent once again. The participation breakdown for female athletes includes 42 in badminton, 42 in table tennis, 42 in squash, 126 in athletics, 98 in volleyball, 91 in karate, 98 in basketball, 98 in taekwondo, 126 in cricket, 56 in judo, 126 in hockey and 98 in netball. The games will be officially inaugurated by Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur. Teams from Dera Ismail Khan, Bannu, Kohat, Mardan, Swat, Abbottabad and Peshawar

regions will compete in the event. All participating athletes will be provided with daily and travel allowances, along with accommodation, sports equipment, shoes and kits. The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Games are being organized under the vision of Chief Minister Sardar Ali Amin Khan Gandapur for the promotion of sports. Under the leadership of Provincial Minister for Sports and Youth Affairs, Syed Fakhar Jahan, this initiative marks a significant step in fostering sports development in the province. The event aims to discover new talent and prepare a strong contingent for the National Games scheduled for May.



PESHAWAR: Employees of Utility Stores holding protest outside Peshawar Press Club. — INP photo

## PHC orders UOP to keep a vacant seat in LLM for special persons

Humayun Khan

PESHAWAR: A two-member bench of the Peshawar High Court (PHC), comprising Justice Syed Arshad Ali and Justice Mudassir Emir directed the University of Peshawar (UOP) to keep one seat vacant in the LLM program. The court also sought a response from the provincial government, Higher Education Commission

(HEC), and the university administration. The writ petition filed by Mustaqim Khan, against UOP's denial for admission to the LLM program under the quota for special persons, he was denied admission. The university claimed that there was no quota for special persons in the LLM program. The lawyers further argued that the HEC had already announced that a quota would be reserved for special persons in all educational programs.

The University of Peshawar had advertised the LLM program, but when the petitioner applied under the quota for special persons, he was denied admission. The university claimed that there was no quota for special persons in the LLM program. The lawyers further argued that the HEC had already announced that a quota would be reserved for special persons in all educational programs.

They also pointed out that the petitioner had already completed his LLM under the quota for special persons and had obtained good grades. PHC directed the UOP to keep one seat vacant in the LLM program and also sought a response from the provincial government, HEC, and the university administration after hearing the arguments.

## Fuel price cut branded ‘a cruel joke’, says Wasi

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: A minor reduction in fuel prices has been dismissed as a token gesture by Abdul Wasi, the Ameer Jamaat-e-Islami, (JI) Khyber Pakhtunkhwa central, who likened the price cut to 'scattering crumbs to the starving.'

Speaking at an event in Mardan, Wasi criticized the government's pricing policy, arguing that relief for the public appears to be a low priority. He noted that while global oil prices have dropped significantly, the government continues to raise fuel prices every fortnight, only offering slight reductions after months of increases. "This is nothing but a cruel joke," he said. He accused the government of relying on foreign loans instead of tackling financial mismanagement, saying these loans come with

harsh conditions imposed by international lenders such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. "They dictate policies that result in higher taxes and regular hikes in the prices of electricity, gas, and fuel," Wasi said. "Despite lower global oil prices, the government is failing to pass on the benefits to the people."

He also criticized Pakistan's prime minister for seeking a reduction in electricity prices from the IMF, calling it "an embarrassing display of economic dependence." Wasi urged the government to adjust fuel prices in line with the international market to provide meaningful relief to the public. Ghulam Rasool, Ameer JI Mardan, also spoke at the event, condemning what he described as rampant government corruption.

## PCP's Sports Gala concludes with thrilling cricket final

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The Sports Gala organized by Paraplegic Center Peshawar concluded on Monday with an exciting cricket tournament final. The College of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation (CPMR) team secured victory by eight wickets against Attendants XI, claiming the tournament trophy. Held at Hayatabad Phase 5 Ground, the event featured 18 teams, with two matches played daily.

Chief Executive of Paraplegic Center Peshawar, Dr. Syed Muhammad Ilyas, attended the final match as special guest and congratulated the winning team and players. He emphasized that although Paraplegic Center is primarily a medical institution, however providing sports opportunities for staff, patients, and caregivers is essential, as they are engaged in round-the-clock care for disabled individuals. Speaking about the significance of attendants' participation, Dr. Ilyas Syed highlighted that most patients at the center are young individuals who, after various accidents, undergo prolonged treat-

ments and become confined to wheelchairs. Their caregivers, often their young family members, remain by their side at all times, making recreational and physical activities equally important for them. Dr. Ilyas Syed announced that the Sports Gala will be held annually, with continuous improvements and added facilities. He expressed satisfaction over the active participation of female athletes, emphasizing that women often lack access to sports facilities and opportunities at home. He added that such events not only contribute to their physical well-being but also enhance their creative potential.

The Sports Gala also featured competitions in tug-of-war, table tennis, Ludo, carrom board, volleyball, basketball, and archery, all of which concluded successfully. The closing ceremony witnessed enthusiastic participation from players, spectators, and organizers, reflecting the event's resounding success while the formal closing ceremony of the Sports Gala will soon be held at the premises of Paraplegic Center Peshawar.



## Raising awareness on Right to Public Services in KP

Khosh Bakht Hussain

PAKISTAN is a "youth bulge" country where 64% of the population is under the age of 30, and 29% falls between 15 to 29 years. It is very timely and crucial that the youth become more informed about their rights and duties as citizens. Unfortunately, many young people today are more likely to follow social media influencers and famous politicians and believing their narratives rather than taking the time and learning about legal systems and institutions that protect their civil rights. With technology at our fingertips, we should be more aware of our civic rights and duties. However, we often lack basic awareness about public services, leaving us uninformed when we face real-life problems.

One such statutory body was formed in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in January 2014, to oversee and ensure the implementation of the Right to Public Services Act, 2014. The aim of RTPSC aims to monitor the effective and timely delivery of public services in KP. Under this commission, if government officials fail to provide timely services to citizens within the specified time, they are held accountable and fined. Surprisingly, 70% of the fine is given to the applicant as compensation for the inconvenience of waiting and repeated visits to the offices. On the other hand, citizens who file frivolous complaints also face penalties. This is an essential step for the prompt delivery of public services. With the help of RTPSC, citizens can easily avail themselves of public services without any personal connections or references.

There are 14 government departments in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa that provide public services to citizens under the Right to "Public Services Act, 2014". The time period for each service is allocated based on the scope of the work that needs to be done and time it might take, ranging from one day to 6 months. These services range from basic documents such as domicile certificates and marriage certificates to more complex services like vehicle registration and factory registration. Other rights include access to drug license, changes in inheritance and educational certificates.

The Right to Public Service Commission has made a real difference in the lives of KP citizens making it easier for them to access all the required services from the comfort of their homes. It is now very significant that the youth and all citizens must be aware of these services so that they can avail themselves of them. All thanks to (RTPSC) citizens no longer have to go through bureaucratic hurdles. Hence, it is of great importance and urgency, for the youth of Pakistan to understand the significant impact of this commission and how it protect their rights.

Being responsible citizens we should not only claim our rights rather we must also fulfill our duties and responsibilities. In today's world, where information is readily accessible, there is no excuse for being unaware of our rights, which are designed to protect and serve us. The Right to Public Service Commission is working for making Pakistan's governance more accountable, transparent and citizen- friendly. The youth must prioritize such awareness and play an active role in making our democracy stronger by understanding and utilizing essential services.

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## Recovery of Waziristan Chamber President demanded

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The Regional Coordinator of the Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FPCCI), Akbar Khan, has strongly condemned the abduction of Waziristan Chamber of Commerce President Saifur Rehman Wazir and two customs officials. He has urged the relevant authorities to ensure their safe recovery without delay.

In a statement issued yesterday, Akbar Khan expressed grave concern over the broad daylight abduction, calling it an unacceptable and deplorable security lapse. He emphasized that such incidents highlight the deteriorating law and order situation, which poses increasing security risks to the business community and fosters an atmosphere of distrust. He further stated that an insecure environment for traders and industrialists is detrimental not only to the economy but also to national development.

"The business community is the backbone of the country's progress, and if they are unsafe, it means the future of the nation is also at risk," he remarked. Akbar Khan urged both federal and provincial governments to take the matter seriously and ensure the safe recovery of the abductees. Additionally, he called for long-term security measures for traders and the business community to eliminate the prevailing uncertainty.

He also warned that if the abductees were not recovered immediately, the business community across the country would be forced to launch a strong protest.

## Unity of Ummah and Stability of Pakistan Efforts made to improve KP's law, order situation

PESHAWAR (APP): A conference on the "Unity of Ummah and Stability of Pakistan" was held on Monday here at the Governor House, bringing together prominent religious scholars, leaders, and political figures.

The Conference hosted by Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Faisal Karim Kundi, focused on the crucial role of religious leaders in promoting peace, unity, and stability within the province and across the country.

Governor Faisal Karim Kundi welcomed all the scholars and religious leaders in attendance, emphasizing their vital role in maintaining peace and stability in the province.

Governor Kundi remarked that significant efforts had already been made to improve the province's law and order situation, and the involvement of religious leaders was crucial for further progress. He stressed that the conference was a platform to discuss issues related to the province's betterment and growth.

The conference addressed several key issues, including the contribution of religious scholars and representatives from all sects towards maintaining peace, addressing regional conflicts, and finding potential solutions to ongoing disputes. The participants unanimously pledged their commitment to eradicating terrorism and expressed their resolve to implement the "Message of Pakistan" initiative.

The speakers called on the government to collaborate with religious, political, and social leaders to create a comprehensive and inclusive policy to promote tolerance, peace, and brotherhood across all sects. It was stressed that laws upholding the dignity and sanctity of Islamic values and personalities should be fully enforced. The conference also highlighted the need for decisive action against those propagating extremism, sectarianism, and hatred on social media.

A special committee was proposed, under the leadership of Governor Faisal Karim Kundi, to work alongside the government to resolve disputes, including conflicts in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The participants of the conference strongly advocated for unity based on shared beliefs, particularly the oneness of God, the finality of the Prophethood, and the Quran and Sunnah.



PESHAWAR: ANP local leaders interacting during Bacha Khan death anniversary gathering at Chamkani. — F.P. photo





## In brief

### Anti-polio drive launched in GB F.P. Report

ASTORE: A special anti-polio campaign was launched in Astore district, Gilgit-Baltistan (GB), with Deputy Commissioner Muhammad Tariq inaugurating the drive by administering polio drops to a child. On this occasion, Tariq emphasized the importance of protecting children from the debilitating disease, stressing that parents must ensure their children receive anti-polio drops to prevent lifelong disability. The campaign aims to immunize children who were born during the COVID-19 pandemic or missed previous vaccination opportunities. District Health Officer Dr Nawab Khan while exclusively talking to APP, explained that the special drive will target these vulnerable children to ensure no one is left behind in the fight against polio. The Astore district administration has pledged to utilize all resources to make the campaign a success, aligning with the national effort to eradicate polio from Pakistan. Similar anti-polio drives have been conducted in other districts of GB, demonstrating the government's commitment to protecting its citizens from this crippling disease.

### Tribesmen to hold protest today F.P. Report

WANA: In response to the rising incidents of kidnapping, political leaders, religious scholars, the business community, local representatives, and the general public of Lower South Waziristan have called for a complete shutdown and protest on February 18. The protest, scheduled for Tuesday, February 18, aims to strongly condemn the increasing abductions in Wana. During the demonstration, Wana Bazaar will remain completely closed, and people from all walks of life have been urged to participate actively. The organizers stress that peace and stability in the region require collective efforts, and it is crucial to raise voices for a prosperous Waziristan. Recently, multiple cases of kidnapping for ransom have surfaced, including the abduction of a doctor, the president of the South Waziristan Lower Chamber of Commerce and Industry, and two customs officials, all of whom remain missing. These incidents have caused widespread fear and insecurity among the local population, leaving people feeling unsafe in their own communities. The organizers of the protest state that this demonstration has become necessary to pressure the government and law enforcement agencies into taking immediate action. They demand urgent steps to restore public confidence and break the growing sense of insecurity in the region.

### Agri experts introduce varieties F.P. Report

FAISALABAD: 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 is imperative for increasing milk and meat production. In this connection, the agri scientists are striving day and night to develop new fodder varieties, he said and added that Fodder Research Department has so far introduced 28 new fodder varieties, including Berseem, Alfalfa, Sorghum, Bajra and Maize, etc. which are playing pivotal role to enhance livestock nutrition and productivity.



SEHWAN: A police official searching devotees before entering shrine to attend Urs celebrations of Harat Lal Shahbaz Qalandar.

## 42% land settlement completes in Landi Kotal

F.P. Report

LANDI KOTAL: Approximately 42.85% land settlement has been completed in ongoing process in tehsil Landi Kotal, Geographical Information System (GIS) and Revenue staff informed.

It is worth mentioning that after abolishment of century old Frontier Crime Regulation in 2018, like extension of other laws, land settlement process has been also extend to merged tribal region and for the purpose 15 members of GIS and 21 staff of revenue team has been assigned the duty of land settlement in tehsil Landi Kotal who are executing their duties for the last three years in the area.

Sharing details officials of GIS and Revenue teams said that the total measurement of tehsil Landi Kotal is 1480740 kanal and the area has been divided into four patwar circles i.e. Neiki Khel, Khuga Khel,

Shiekmal Khel, and Zakha Khel circles.

Land settlement has been completed in Shiekwal and Chengi Khel areas of Neiki Khel while the process is in progress in Wali Khel, Sadu Khel and Sultan Khel (except Mazrina locality due to security threats). The process has not been begun in Neiki Khel locality due to non-cooperation of residents.

They further added that in the circle, land settlement of Mukhtar Khel and Karigar has been completed and verification of Alam Khani and Ghani Khel is in progress. In the same way, the practice has been initiated in Mirdad Khel and Pased Khel.

Re-settlement has not been started in the Khuga Khel area because of the unavailability of actual records, compiled in 1918. The GIS officials informed that to conduct new settlement, a number of steps

have to be carried out including roughly village boundary, family tree, measurement date compilation, katuni tehrer, masavi preparation, field book, verification etc.

Counting advantages of the land settlement Tehsildar Riazul Haq and his colleagues said that through the process, a proper computerized record of land will be formulated, one can get avail ownership documents of his, her property, local land dispute will be resolved, property will be safe, value of property in the area will be increased, one can produce his property as bond in Court or for loan etc., convenience in hereditary sharing etc. It is to be stated that like other parts of merged tribal districts, tehsil Landi Kotal lacked land revenue record that multiplied problems of the locals and the administrators to resolve it, official said.

### Agri Dept unable to provide plants to framers F.P. Report

BUNER: Deputy Director Agriculture Extension stated that due to the lack of funds from the provincial government, there is no program to provide free fruit plants to the people and small landowners, on Monday.

Talking media, he repeated this year, among individual, small number of plants will not be distributed. According to Saeed ul Haq, among the landowners who for planting gardens, the plants have been given through the respective tehsil offices, purely on the basis of feasibility survey and report.

In response to a question regarding the interest of landowners in olive cultivation, he said that barrister Gohar Khan inaugurated olive cultivation and this year olives are being cultivated on five acres in the mountainous areas of Chaghorzai and Amazi, while this area will be increased from next year and grafting and transplanting will also be done in the already existing wild olive trees by next year, he concluded.

### Goods transporters role hailed Syed Waliullah Shah

NOWSHERA: Afghan Consulate Peshawar's Transport Attaché, Maulvi Syed Muhammad, said that the goods transporters of Pakistan and Afghanistan play a crucial role in not only improving trade but also diplomatic relations between the two countries, on Monday.

Pakistan and Afghanistan have maintained friendly relations since the beginning, and the Pakistani people and government have always served the Afghan refugee people with open hearts, for which the Afghan government and people are deeply grateful. The Afghan government and the Afghan Consulate in Peshawar are working to resolve the issues faced by the goods transporters of Pakistan and Afghanistan.

These views were expressed by Maulvi Syed Muhammad while addressing the inaugural ceremony of the Afghan Joint Goods Transport General Council's central office after the completion of the election process for the office-bearers of the Afghan Joint Goods Transport General Council in Nowshera's Azakhel area.

### Quetta braces for cold snap F.P. Report

QUETTA: The Meteorological Department Quetta Regional Center today predicted a shift in the weather, forecasting partly cloudy and cold conditions for central, northern, and upper parts of the region.

According to a statement by the Pakistan Meteorological Department, the lowland areas are expected to experience hot days, while light rain or drizzle is anticipated in district Chaghai, Panjgur, Surab, and Kech during the daytime.

# Fake, govt drugs recovered from private clinic

F.P. Report

MARDAN: The drug control team raided a clinic established for a long time in New Pohan Colony, an urban area of Mardan, recovered a huge cap of government medicines with fake and short expiry and tamper stamp, several packets of medicines were taken into custody by the government, action will be taken against the owner of the clinic according to the law District Drug Inspector.

According to the details, on the instructions of Deputy Commissioner Mardan Dr. Azmatullah Wazir and DG Drug Control and Pharmacy Services Dr. Abbas Khan, the drug control team of Mardan District Drug Inspectors Amirzeb and Haroon Rasheed raided the anonymous clinic inside the street in New Pohan Colony of Baghdada with police force. During this time, the drug team recovered a large amount of short-expiry and fake drugs, including drugs that were sealed by breaking the seal of government hospitals and samples of some suspected drugs and injections were sent to the laboratory.

Meanwhile, Islamabad D Chowk during protests Pakistan Tehreek -e -Insaf (PTI) workers belonging to PK -55 Mardan were succumbed, Shah Nawaz Son Of Abdul Shakoor, who belongs to Mardan Rustam Palodheri, was critically injured during a protest in Islamabad D Chowk on November 26 for release of Pakistan Tehreek -e -Insaf (PTI) founder Imran Khan, he succumbed to his injuries.

Meanwhile, inflation, underweight selling, and hoarding have reached their peak, leaving the public distressed. The severity of these issues has intensified, yet the administration's criminal silence has further aggravated the situation.

The prices of essential commodities, including food items, have skyrocketed. Butchers and milk sellers have created havoc; chemically contaminated and toxic milk is being sold openly, while fraudulent weighing has become a norm. On the other hand, the hoarding mafia has artificially created a shortage of essential goods, driving prices to sky-high levels, making life increasingly difficult for the common citizen.

According to reports, butchers in Takhtbhai Bazaar have completely disregarded government price lists and are charging exorbitant prices, causing severe distress to ordinary citizens. The prices of broiler chicken and mutton have surged to unaffordable levels. The local administration remains a silent spectator, seemingly engaged only in official photo sessions rather than taking real action.

Public compliant suggest that butchers are neither displaying the government price list at their shops nor adhering to it. The official rate for beef is PKR 750 per kg, yet butchers are selling it for PKR 1000 per kg. Similarly, mutton is being sold for PKR 1400-1500 per kg, while kebabs are priced as high as PKR 1100 per kg. Adulterated milk mixed with harmful chemicals is being sold at PKR 220-240 per liter. Citizens claim that due to the district administration's negligence, butchers are charging arbitrary prices without any fear. Already burdened by rising food prices, inflation-hit citizens now find meat beyond their reach. Public circles have urged the district administration and relevant authorities to take immediate steps to control prices, impose heavy fines on profiteers violating government rates, and ensure strict action against hoarders.

## Public services delivery to be ensured at doorsteps

Sahibzada Afridi

KOHAH: Member National Assembly and former federal minister Shahryar Afridi and MPA Daud Shah Afridi under the Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Program "Awami Agenda", along with the Deputy Commissioner Kohat Abdul Akram held Kuli Katchery in Khairatoo, on Monday.

People openly presented their problems and grievances of the area including load shedding of electricity and gas, upgradation of schools, lack of

staff in schools, non-availability of water, cleaning of streets, illegal occupation of lands, construction of roads and construction of bridge or underpass at Dhoda Chowk were on top.

Addressing the Kuli Katchery, MNA, MPA Afridi and Deputy Commissioner said, in the light of the special directions of the provincial government, Kuli Katcheries are being held in remote areas of the district to solve the problems of the people at the local level. They assured that the problems

and complaints presented here, will be solved and the concerned persons will be kept informed about the progress on it.

Meanwhile, the Zarghun Khel Cricket League, started under the Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Program "Awami Agenda" Provincial Sports Minister and Fakhar Jahan, Minister Law Aftab Alam Afridi, Director General Sports Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Abdul Nasir and Deputy Commissioner Abdul Akram Chitrali in Dara Adam Khel concluded after 70 days.

## Commissioner annoys over cleanliness condition

F.P. Report

BANNU: Commissioner Bannu has expressed his deep 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 Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister's public service agenda.

WSSC chief executive officer Muhammad Imran, 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.

The commissioner said that poor maintenance of parks was intolerable and those responsible for it would face legal action. He directed the relevant officials to repair and redecorate the park by developing green belts, gardens, flower beds and other facilities. He also ordered installation of new dustbins and construction of a latrine block at the park.

He asked the officials of the water and sanitation services company and the communication and works department to cooperate with municipal authorities in the renovation of the park. Ali also inspected the green belt at Allah Chowk

and directed the WSSC CEO Imran to ensure cleaning the facility on a daily basis. He also directed him to sow evergreen and ornamental plants in the green belt. In the day, he also chaired a meeting regarding cleanliness drive at his office attended by the heads of line departments and civic bodies.

The commissioner asked the bigwigs of civic bodies to clean public places, bazaars and markets, public parks and roads so as to [provide the local people with a healthy and dust-free environment. He also asked the authorities to ensure cleanliness of sports facilities, government offices, sewage drains and footpaths and motivate citizens to take enthusiastic part in the drive to make it a success.

## Insaf Teachers Association Dir president lauded

F.P. Report

LOWER DIR: District Education Officer male Lower Dir Inayatullah Khan has said that as long as he holds this position, there will be no injustice with any teacher, clerk or class four employee in the education department.

He expressed these views while addressing a function organized by Insaf Teachers Association (ITA) Lower Dir as the chief guest at a farewell function held at Shamsi Khan Talaash here on Monday. The farewell party was organized in the honor of the recently retired former district president of Insaf Teachers Association and renowned poet Tahir Altaf Sarhadi. The ITA office bearers, educationists, relatives and friends of Tahir Altaf attended the function.

MPA and former special

assistant to chief minister on prisons Malik Shafiullah Khan, District Education Officer Inayatullah Khan, Deputy District Education Officer Fayyazuddin Khan, retired Principal Aftab Alam Khan, ITA officials Walayat Khan, Sirajuddin, Zakirullah, Muhammad Ali and others also addressed the function.

On this occasion, ITA colleagues presented gifts to Tahir Altaf Sarhadi and paid tribute to his services for the teaching community. The speakers said that Tahir Altaf won the hearts of the teachers by serving the entire teaching community selflessly with honesty.

MPA Malik Shafiullah Khan in his address highlighted the provincial government's initiatives for education and said that teachers are being recruited on the basis of merit. He

said that the provincial government is spending a considerable amount of money on education so that poor parents can educate their children with ease.

DEO Inayatullah said that the problems of teachers were being resolved immediately and he was trying to rectify all the past wrongdoings in his office. He asked the representatives of Insaf Teachers Association not to force him to do any wrongdoing during his tenure as DEO because according to the mission of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf and its founder Imran Khan, justice should be upheld.

Tahir Altaf thanked the ITA for its love and sincerity with him and said that he would not leave his past colleagues alone and would continue to serve the teacher's community despite his retirement.

## Spain's ambassador visits Mohanjo Daro

F.P. Report

LARKANA: Spain's ambassador Jozi along with a tourist delegation arrived at Mohanjo Daro, a historical site of Larakna district, along with his staff. The ambassador visited the Stupa, Great Bath, Museum and cultural relics of the ancient civilization of Mohanjo Daro.

On this occasion Zaheer Ahmed Jokhio, the appointed official of Mohanjo Daro, gave him a warm welcome and presented him with cultural caps and Sindhji Ajraks. After that, the Spanish tourist delegation was given a detailed briefing about the ancient civilization of the site and the excavations done by Sindhji experts, guider appointed by the side, further told the foreign ambassador that even after 100 years.

BTM protesting for 6 years to turn Badeh into taluka: Badha Taluka Movement (BTM) has been continuing its struggle for 6 years against not getting the status of Badeh as taluka in Larkana district. BTM and other political persons

Seengar Noonari, Aziz Brohi and others addressing and said that the rulers make various promises to get votes, but they find it difficult to implement them.

Sunni Tehreek hold against growing unrest: 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 man-

agement is nowhere to be seen.

The protesters 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.

### Shops sealed F.P. Report

SARGODHA: On the directives of Deputy Commissioner Sargodha Capt (ret) Muhammad Waseem, a grand anti-encroachment operation was underway across the district.

According to a press release issued by the district administration, under the supervision of Assistant Commissioner (AC) Sargodha, Syed Asad Abbas Shirazi, a clearance drive was conducted from Qainchi Mor to 47 Pull, removing all types of encroachments.

(Revenue) Syed Jameel Haider Shah, Assistant Commissioners Ali Sameer and Kamran Ashraf, Chief Officer District Council Mahar Anwar Baig Sial, along with heads of all departments.

The ceremony began with the recitation of the Holy Quran, a Naat, the national flag hoisting, and the national anthem. The audience was treated to a spectacular parade by the Police, Jail Police, Rescue 1122, Elite Force, and Cadet College students.

Traditional performances, including Jhoomar, Luddi, tableau shows, horse dances, a cattle show, and exhibitions of birds and flowers, drew significant attention. Students from DPS School beautifully represented the cultures of all provinces, while the departmental exhibitions and food street attracted large crowds.





## 9 dead in US floods and heavy rain



VIRGINIA (BBC): At least nine people have died over the weekend, as torrential downpours drenched parts of the south-eastern US, submerging roads and houses. Kentucky Governor Andy Beshear said eight people had died in his state and suggested at a news conference that the total could go up.

Hundreds of people stranded in flood waters, many stuck in their cars, had been rescued, and Beshear warned residents to "stay off the roads right now and stay alive". In Georgia, the ninth death was recorded after a man lying in his bed was struck by an uprooted tree that crashed into his home. Kentucky, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, Tennessee, Virginia, West Virginia and North Carolina were under some type of storm-related alert this weekend. Almost all of those states suffered catastrophic damage in September from Hurricane Helene.

Between the eight states, more than half a million households were without power, according to poweroutage.us. A bulk of the death and destruction appears to have occurred in Kentucky, where a mother and her seven-year-old child and a 73-year-old man were among the dead. Some parts of Kentucky received up to 6in (15cm) of rain, National Weather Service (NWS) figures show, resulting in widespread flooding issues. The rapid influx of rain caused river levels to rise quickly and trapped vehicles in feet of water, images posted online show.

Governor Beshear wrote on X that there were over 300 road closures. He also said that he had written to the White House requesting an emergency disaster declaration and federal funds for affected areas, according to the BBC's partner CBS News. President Donald Trump approved the declaration, authorising the Federal Emergency Management Agency (Fema), which he has suggested abolishing, to co-ordinate disaster relief efforts. Officials have cautioned that the worst of the flooding is not over yet. "The rivers are still going to rise," Eric Gibson, director of the

Kentucky Division of Emergency Management, said.

Bob Oravec, a senior forecaster with the NWS, said: "The effects will continue for a while, a lot of swollen streams and a lot of flooding going on." In Obion County, Tennessee, heavy rains there caused a levee to break, "resulting in rapid onset flooding", a local NWS account said on X. "If you are in the area, GET TO HIGH GROUND NOW! This is a LIFE THREATENING situation," the post said. The town of Rives along the Obion River was deluged from the breached flood barrier. Footage shows brown water rushing over rocks and past trees, as rescue workers in red boats pass flooded homes.

Steve Carr, the Obion County mayor, declared a state of emergency on Facebook and said there would be mandatory evacuations in Rives because of "the rising water, no electricity, and freezing temperature creating a life-threatening situation". Located north-east of Memphis, Rives has a population of roughly 300. West Virginia Governor Patrick Morrisey issued a state of emergency in 10 counties and added another three counties to the list. "Please continue to be cautious," Morrisey said on X. Kristi Noem, head of the Department of Homeland Security, which oversees Fema, said she had been in contact with both Governors Beshear and Morrisey, and left voicemails with Governors Bill Lee of Tennessee and Kay Ivey of Alabama.

"While emergency management is best led by local authorities, we reinforced that DHS stands ready to take immediate action to offer resources and support," Noem said. Meteorologists have also warned that a polar vortex is making its way early this week towards the northern Rocky Mountains and northern Plains in the middle of the country. In Colorado, temperatures could drop to as low as 14F (-10C), with the city of Denver reportedly opening shelters for its homeless population this weekend.

## White South Africans gather in support of Trump

PRETORIA (AP): Some white South Africans showed support for President Donald Trump and gathered at the US Embassy in Pretoria to claim they are victims of racism by their own government.

Hundreds of protesters held placards that read "Thank God for President Trump" and displayed other messages criticizing what they see as racist laws instituted by the South African government that discriminate against the white minority. Many were from the Afrikaner community that Trump focused on in an executive order a week ago that cut aid and assistance to the Black-led South African government. In the order, Trump said South Africa's Afrikaners, who are descendants of mainly Dutch colonial settlers, were being targeted by a new law that allows the government to expropriate private land.

The South African government has denied its new law is tied to race and says Trump's claims over the country and the law have been full of misinformation and distortions.

Trump said land was being expropriated from Afrikaners - which the order referred to as "racially disfavored landowners" - when no land has been taken under the law, Trump also announced a plan to offer Afrikaners refugee status in the US. They are only one part of South Africa's white minority.

In a speech to Parliament this week, South African President Cyril Ramaphosa said the forced removal of any people from their land will never be allowed in South Africa again after millions of Blacks were dispossessed of property under the apartheid system of white minority rule and hundreds of years of colonialism before that. "The people of this country know the pain of forced removals," Ramaphosa said. He said the land law does not allow any arbitrary taking of land and only refers to land that can be redistributed for the public good. The Trump administration's criticism and punishment of South Africa has elevated a long-standing dilemma in the country over moves to address the wrongs of centuries of white minority rule that oppressed the Black majority.

According to the government, the land law aims to fairly address the inequality that the majority of farmland in South Africa is owned by whites, even though they make up just 7% of the country's population. White protesters held banners referencing the expropriation law but also other affirmative action policies put in place by the government since the end of apartheid in 1994 to advance opportunities for Blacks.

Those laws, known as Black Economic Empowerment, have been a source of frustration for some white people. Influential Trump adviser Elon Musk - who was raised in South Africa - has also criticized South Africa's government and claimed it is anti-white for years, although some have questioned his motivations. He has recently failed to get a license for his Starlink satellite internet service in South Africa because it doesn't meet the country's affirmative action criteria.

## Council urged to drop flood defence project funding

LONDON (BBC): A campaign group is calling on councillors to drop funding for a town's flood protection project in order to prioritise spending elsewhere.

Save Our Sands (SOS) fears the Whitesands plans in Dumfries will rise in cost well above the latest estimate of £37m. Spokesman John Dowson called on all of the main political groups to leave it out of their budget plans due to be finalised this month.

However, none of them would commit to doing so ahead of a full Dumfries and Galloway Council meeting to agree their spending plans. Some sort of flood protection for the area - which regularly floods - has been discussed for decades. A target start date for the prevention scheme has been set in the summer of next year.

However, Mr Dowson said it was time to drop the proposals - which also include work on the nearby Greensands area. "My message to the political groups is this really, you should pull the plug on this whole project," he said. "It's gone up from £10m to the latest estimates of £40m to £50m - the council simply can't afford it."

"So what I've put to the group leaders, Labour, SNP and Conservative is will they consider taking any further works on the Whitesands and Greensands project out of their budgets." The council budget-setting meeting is on 27 February when Mr Dowson, who also sits on Lornburn Community Council, said he hoped they would set different priorities. "I would like them to take the money out and basically just stop the whole thing in its tracks," he said. "As a community council member, I can tell you, what we are getting from local people is that there's a desperate need to spend money in our High Street. It's a terrible mess, it's just dirty - not clean - there's empty shops, we need to tackle antisocial behaviour."

He said one of the biggest concerns about the project was that car parking spaces being lost in one area would be "dumped" on another. "They're going to destroy really a quite a beautiful green space as part of this project, it doesn't make sense - there is no logic to it," he said. Mr Dowson insisted that flooding was not, in reality, a major issue for businesses and homes in the area. "It doesn't flood that often, we occasionally get a large flood - every five to 10 years or whatever," he said. "But I can tell you that even in a large flood, these properties will be up and running again within 24 to 48 hours. They clean it out, they're used to it, and in the meantime, they have the benefit of very low rates and very low property values."

Labour councillor Linda Dorward said the area had suffered "chronic flooding issues" and it could not be allowed to continue. She also highlighted that Dumfries was in line for £20m from the UK government over 10 years to improve the town centre, alongside the 80% Scottish government support for the flood scheme. Ms Dorward added that the Labour group was "ambitious for our region" and believed the investment in the Whitesands should progress. "We believe our region needs brave, bold and responsible decision-making," she said.

## British couple held in Iran named as family urge safe return

TEHRAN (BBC): The family of a British couple in custody in Iran say they are united in their determination to secure their safe return. Craig and Lindsay Foreman were arrested in January, but news of their detention emerged when state-run Iranian media reported they were being held on unspecified security charges.

The couple, in their early 50s, had been on a motorbike trip across the world, and had only planned on being in Iran for five days. A statement issued by the Foreign Office on their family's behalf said: "This unexpected turn of events has caused significant concern for our entire family, and we are deeply focused on ensuring their safety and wellbeing during this trying time." The family called it a "distressing situation", adding: "We are actively engaging with the British government and relevant authorities, working diligently to navigate the complexities of this matter." They said the "emotional burden of this situation weighs heavily on us", and that "the outpouring of support from friends, family, and the community" had "provided us with strength and encouragement as we face this ordeal".

Mr and Mrs Foreman were heading for Australia on their journey across the globe. They had crossed into Iran from Armenia on 30 December and had planned to be in Pakistan by 4 January. After staying in the cities of Tabriz, Tehran and

Isfahan, accompanied by a tour guide, they travelled on to Kerman, in east-central Iran, but never checked into their hotel there. In a series of social media posts before they were detained, the couple described their joy at being in Iran. Lindsay Foreman, a life coach with a doctorate in psychology, said she was "having an amazing time". Her husband, Craig, who is a carpenter, spoke of the "lovely people" of a "lovely country".

Mrs Foreman posted a picture of herself on 3 January meeting a cleric in the town of Isfahan. Writing on Instagram, she said: "Travel continues to teach me that humanity's core is shared: kindness, humility, and respect for one another." On Facebook that day she wrote: "Despite differences in culture, language, and traditions, we've seen something beautifully universal: kindness, humour, hospitality - and a shared love of good food!" The Iranian authorities have not said what the couple are accused of. They had moved from East Sussex to start a new life in Andalucia, Spain, in 2019. The couple appeared on an episode of Channel 4's A New Life in the Sun in 2022 to showcase their lives as expats. Mrs Foreman is reported to have been carrying out a research project on their journey to Australia, asking people what it means to be human and what constitutes a good life.

She was due to present her find-

ings at a conference on positive psychology in Brisbane in July. Posting on Instagram, she acknowledged that travelling to the Iran, against Foreign Office advice, and to Pakistan was risky and "slightly scary". "Yes, we're aware of the risks," she wrote. "But we also know the rewards of meeting incredible people, hearing their stories, and seeing the breathtaking landscapes of these regions could far outweigh the fear." She added: "From the vast deserts of Iran to the towering peaks of Pakistan, we hope to share the beauty, hospitality, and humanity that often go unnoticed."

The Foreign Office says it is in contact with the local authorities in Iran, and is providing the couple with consular assistance. A photograph of the couple, with their faces blurred, meeting the British ambassador Hugo Shorter at the public prosecutor's office in Kerman was published. The Foreign Office currently advises British nationals to avoid all travel to Iran. "British and British-Iranian dual nationals are at significant risk of arrest, questioning or detention," advice says. "Having a British passport or connections to the UK can be reason enough for the Iranian authorities to detain you." Over the past few years, dozens of foreign and dual nationals have been arrested in Iran on vague security-related charges. Human rights groups say they are often used by the Iranian authorities for political leverage.

## Second DR Congo city falls to Rwanda-backed rebels

DR CONGO (BBC): Rwandan-backed M23 rebels have entered Bukavu, the second-largest city in the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, seizing the regional governor's office. Some people lined the streets to clap and cheer the fighters as they marched and drove into the city centre without resistance. It is the second city after Goma to fall to the rebels in the mineral-rich region in the past few weeks.

The Congolese government has acknowledged its fall and urged residents to stay at home "to avoid being targeted by the occupying forces". The UN and European countries have warned that the latest offensive, which has seen hundreds of thousands of people forced from their homes, could spark a wider regional war. A resident in Bukavu, who asked to remain anonymous because of concerns for her safety, told the BBC that most people were still afraid to leave their homes.

"Since yesterday the children and the youth took the weapons. They are shooting everywhere in all directions, they are looting," she said. "This morning the M23 entered and they were acclaimed by the people, very happy to see them. We don't know if it's because they are afraid or because they found that there were no authorities in the city. The place where I live the crackling [gunfire] can still be heard." The M23 captured

Bukavu's main airport, which is about 30km (18 miles) north of the city - and then began advancing slowly towards the city, which is the capital of South-Kivu province. The provincial governor, Jean-Jacques Purusi Sadiki, confirmed to the Reuters news agency the fighters were in Bukavu city centre, adding that Congolese troops had withdrawn to avoid urban fighting. This left a security vacuum in the city with chaotic scenes playing out, including a reported prison break from the central prison. The UN World Food Programme (WFP) said a warehouse with nearly 7,000 tonnes of food was looted. The city of around two million people on the southern tip of Lake Kivu borders Rwanda and is an important transit point for the local mineral trade. Its fall represents an unprecedented expansion of territory for the M23 since their latest insurgency started in late 2021 - and is a blow to the government of President Félix Tshisekedi. Government spokesman Patrick Muyaya said Rwanda was violating DR Congo's territorial integrity through expansionist ambitions and human rights abuses.

The Congolese government accuses Rwanda of sowing chaos in the region - as well as having troops on the ground - so it can benefit from its natural resources, something Kigali denies. President Tshisekedi wants

his Rwandan counterpart Paul Kagame to face sanctions over the latest unrest. But President Kagame has dismissed such threats - and has repeatedly pointed out that Rwanda's main priority is its security. He has long been angered by what he sees as the failure of the Congolese authorities to deal with the DR Congo-based FLDR rebel group, which he sees as a danger to Rwanda.

The group is made up of some members of the ethnic Hutu militia accused of involvement in the 1994 genocide in Rwanda when over 100 days around 800,000 people, mainly from the Tutsi ethnic group, were killed. Troops from the Tutsi-led M23 gathered at the Place de l'Indépendance in central Bukavu, where one of its commanders, Bernard Byamungu, was filmed chatting to locals and answering their questions in Swahili. He urged government forces "hiding in houses" to surrender - and accused the withdrawing military of spreading terror by arming local youths who had gone on a looting rampage. The African Union (AU) - which has been holding a heads of state summit in Ethiopia this weekend - again urged the M23 to disarm. "We are all very, very concerned about an open regional war," Reuters quotes the AU's peace and security commissioner Bankole Adeo as saying.

## Uganda military chief threatens to attack eastern Congo town of Bunia

NAIROBI (Reuters): Uganda will attack the town of Bunia in neighbouring eastern Congo unless "all forces" there surrender their arms within 24 hours, the chief of Ugandan defence forces, General Muhoozi Kainerugaba, said in a post on X.

Kainerugaba, who has a history of posting provocative comments on foreign policy, said he had the authority of President Yoweri Museveni, who is also his father. A spokesman for Uganda's military said he could not comment on the matter. Earlier, Kainerugaba had said, without providing evidence, that people from the Bahima ethnic group were being killed in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

"My people, the Bahima are being attacked. That's a very dangerous situation for those attacking my people. No one on this earth can kill my people and think he will not suffer for it!" he said. "Bunia will soon be in UPDF hands," he said in a separate post, referring to the Uganda People's Defence Force. Congo's Prime Minister Judith Suminwa told Reuters on the sidelines of an African Union summit that her government had "no comment to make" on Kainerugaba's remarks. The threat from Uganda's top military officer, who is widely believed to be Museveni's heir apparent, has stoked fears that a conflict between Congolese forces and Rwandan-backed M23 rebels could flare into a wider regional war.

An M23 leader said the rebels had entered Bukavu, the second-largest city in the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, following the capture of Goma, the largest city, at the end of last month. Citing UN sources, Reuters reported earlier in

February that Uganda had deployed more than 1,000 extra soldiers in eastern Congo under the auspices of an operation to help Congo fight Islamist militants. But UN experts say Uganda has also backed the ethnic Tutsi-led M23. Kainerugaba has been publicly supportive of Rwanda's President Paul Kagame, who has denied accusations that Rwandan troops are fighting alongside M23. In 2022, Kainerugaba referred to M23 as "brothers of ours" fighting for the rights of Tutsis in Congo.

Observers said the posts were aimed at sending a message about Uganda's economic and geopolitical interests in Congo's Ituri province, of which Bunia is the capital. "Uganda seems to be sending a message that it's claiming 'its territory'," Kristof Titeca, a professor at the University of Antwerp, told Reuters.

That makes it less complicated to untangle, now that Trump is in the White House, demanding that Europe take care of itself. The US has sent a document to European allies consisting of six points and questions, such as which countries would be willing to deploy troops to Ukraine as part of a peace settlement, and which governments would be prepared to increase sanctions on Russia, including more strictly enforcing existing ones. But Julianne Smith, until recently the US ambassador to Nato, says this kind of complicated diplomatic work normally takes weeks of meetings and can't be organised by filled-in forms.

She adds that whatever Europe's leaders achieve in Paris, if they use that to demand a seat at the negotiating table over Ukraine, their hand is weak. "If Trump blinks and says no, does Europe refuse to help altogether? They can't cut off their nose to spite their face." Essentially, if the US plans to turn away from Ukraine and from Europe more broadly in terms of security, they will have to significantly up their defence game anyway. If Donald Trump isn't watching, Vladimir Putin certainly is.

## Can Europe conjure a united front on Ukraine's future?

BRUSSELS (BBC): Europe's leaders are scrambling. Their hastily convened security summit in Paris is proof of that. They are still reeling from not being invited by the US to talks with Russia over the future of Ukraine. US President Donald Trump said he could be meeting Russian President Vladimir Putin "very soon".

Can Europe, under pressure, put political differences and domestic economic concerns aside, and come up with a united front on security spending and on Ukraine's future, including potentially sending troops there - to force themselves a spot at the negotiating table? They are going to try. The Trump administration is clearly not 100% sure what it wants to do about Ukraine. There were a number of mixed messages over the weekend. This allows Europe a tiny window of opportunity to try to persuade the American president it's an invaluable partner.

It hopes to do that via this Paris meeting, getting the ball rolling on two major issues demanded by Donald Trump: That Europe spend and do more for its own defence, and that Europe send troops to Ukraine after a ceasefire. Europe's leaders insist Kyiv be directly involved in

ceasefire talks too. They've long maintained the view that "there can be no decisions about Ukraine, without Ukraine". But it's about even more than that for Europe. It is the cold realisation - much dreaded, but not entirely unexpected - that the Trump administration does not prioritise relations either with European partners, or their defence. Europe has relied on a security umbrella provided by the US since World War Two. Depending on the parameters of the Russia-US talks over Ukraine, and how emboldened Putin feels by them, there is also a European fear this could end up changing their continent's security architecture. Putin historically resents the spread of Nato eastwards. Russian neighbours - the tiny, former Soviet Baltic States and also Poland - now feel particularly exposed.

Not all European countries will be at summit. Just those with military heft: the UK, France, Germany, Italy, Poland, Spain and Denmark - which is expected to represent the Baltic and Nordic nations, plus the EU Council president and the secretary general of the defence alliance, Nato. Other countries will reportedly have later, follow-up meetings. Even at the small Paris gathering, it will be hard, if not

impossible, to agree concrete defence spending increases. Poland plans to spend 4.47% of its GDP on defence in 2025. The UK is struggling towards, and hasn't yet reached, 2.5% of its GDP. But leaders can pledge to coordinate better, spend more inside Nato and shoulder most of Ukraine's post-war reconstruction. The EU is expected to bolster its defence effort too. A large part of the Paris meeting will also focus on the question of sending troops to Ukraine after a ceasefire. The idea being discussed is not for peacekeeping troops but rather a "reassurance force", stationed behind, rather than on, any eventual ceasefire line.

The aim of a European troop presence would be three-fold. To send a message to Ukrainians: that they are not alone. Another message to the US, to show that Europe is "doing its bit" for defence of its own continent, and the last message to Moscow, to warn that if it breaks the terms of an eventual ceasefire, it won't be dealing with Kyiv alone. But it's a controversial concept and may not be popular with voters. In Italy for example, 50% of people asked don't want to send any more weapons to Ukraine, never mind sending sons and daughters, sisters

and brothers there.

There are so many as yet unanswered questions: How many troops would each European country have to send, for how long, and under whose command? What would their mission statement be - for example if Russia broke the terms of an agreed ceasefire, would that mean European soldiers would be directly at war with Russia? Would the US have their back if so? Europe would want a US security guarantee before deploying soldiers to Ukraine. It may not get one. It's far too much to be decided.

And leaders, including UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer, come to Paris with their own domestic concerns - can they afford extra defence spending, do they have the troops to send to Ukraine? Germany is nervous about making concrete commitments just before a heated general election. But this summit is more broad brush-strokes than fine print. The conversation can at least get started publicly.

Will Donald Trump be paying attention? Hard to know. There's talk of sending an envoy to Washington after the Paris meeting to make Europe's case. Italy's Prime Minister, Giorgia Meloni, is close to the Trump administration, for example. Sir Keir



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## Zelensky wants Europe to have its own army

**UKRAINIAN** President Volodymyr Zelensky had sensed that United States President Donald Trump is likely to do business with Russia and its President Vladimir Putin, and that he will be willing to sacrifice Ukrainian interests to do so. Donald Trump had a telephonic conversation with Putin, and also with Zelensky.

Ever since the war broke out with Russia in February 2022, Zelensky had support from the United States and the European Union. With Donald Trump taking over as president, Zelensky is quick enough to grasp the point that Ukraine cannot depend on US support. So, Zelensky, speaking at the Munich Security Conference this week, pointed out the need for a European army. It can be said that while arguing for an army of Europe, he is doing it to protect Ukraine more than Europe. Ukraine has to argue that if Russia can threaten Ukraine, then it will threaten Europe as well. This is the only argument that will bring Europe to the side of Ukraine.

Zelensky has argued persuasively that the US will respect Europe only if it is strong on its own, and it is not dependent on the US. It is a good point on any day. It is also interesting that Zelensky is talking of an army of Europe and he does not refer to NATO. He understands that there is no NATO without the US, and that it is better to leave it out altogether.

He is also aware of the reluctance of the European members of the NATO to admit Ukraine to the military alliance because then it would drag the whole alliance into war with Russia. But he is making the same case when he talks of the army of Europe and includes Ukraine as part of this armed Europe. What the Ukrainian president is effectively arguing for is a kind of a NATO-like alliance without the US in it.

Of course, it remains to be seen whether the other European powers like Germany, France, Poland and the Scandinavian countries are convinced that they should stand with Ukraine against Russia. At the political level, the stand is clear.

Europe does not want Russia to extend its boundary to Ukraine. If Russia wanted a buffer zone like Ukraine with NATO, then the Europeans would prefer Ukraine to be that territory which stands between Russia and Europe. Given his blinkered view of Making America Great Again (MAGA), Trump does not seem to care much for the historical significance of the US-Europe relations. Zelensky, who faces a tough situation in Ukraine, has grasped this change in American attitude towards Europe during the Trump presidency.

He is making demands of his own for Ukraine-Russia peace negotiations. He is saying that no agreement is possible without Ukraine being present at the negotiating table. He is trying to preempt Trump's possible ploy of clinching a deal with Russia directly, over the heads of Ukraine as well as Europe. And he rightly raising the alarm.

It is clear however that Zelensky will not be able to demand for American aid the way he did during Joe Biden's presidency. So, Ukraine and Zelensky are in trouble because they will have to cope with the Russian challenge without American help.

Ukraine is not as important for America as Israel is. While Europe is quite resentful of Trump and his administration, there does not appear to be an alternative plan in place where the American backing is minimal.

Ever since the end of the Second World War 80 years ago, Europe has been willy-nilly leaning on the American crutches. The time has come for Europe to stand on its own legs. Zelensky hopes that Ukraine could be the trigger for Europe's throwing off its American crutches.

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## It is not Trump that betrayed Ukraine

Leonid Ragozin

**UNITED** States President Donald Trump did not stop the war in Ukraine within 24 hours of his inauguration, as he promised during the election campaign last year. But three weeks into his presidency, things got moving in that direction at a breakneck speed.

On February 12, Trump called Russian President Vladimir Putin and then posted on Truth Social that they agreed to work together in order to stop "millions of deaths taking place" in the Ukraine-Russia war. This was followed by the announcement of a possible summit between the two in Saudi Arabia. On February 13, Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth laid out some of the specifics of the US proposal to end the war during a speech at the NATO headquarters in Brussels. In an abrupt departure from the key talking points of the previous US administration, he said Ukraine cannot hope to restore sovereignty over its entire territory and that its NATO membership should be off the table to get the talks going.

With these statements, the Trump administration effectively struck down the US-Ukraine Charter on Strategic Partnership which laid out mutual commitment to territorial integrity and inviolability of borders and identified Ukraine's integration into Euro-Atlantic institutions (NATO and the European Union) as a priority policy goal.

Some Western media outlets were quick to declare "Ukraine's betrayal" following the statements of Trump and Hegseth. Washington is indeed abandoning Kyiv, but this is not a surprise development. The abandonment has always been a likely outcome of the US approach to relations with Ukraine.

And Trump is not to blame for setting it up. Kyiv

was betrayed by those who promised it NATO and EU membership so it fights Russia and rejects any compromise in a war it cannot win.

In the past three years, the West reached the upper limit of what it could feasibly do in terms of supplying weapons and imposing economic sanctions without triggering World War III or badly damaging the world economy. Continuing this costly backing longer would not have changed the reality that Russia is bigger and richer than Ukraine and is able to sustain an army that has adapted to modern warfare and cannot be defeated by large quantities of state-of-the-art Western military technology. Above all, Russia would always have the final word in any regional war as a major nuclear power – a factor that restricts Western involvement in the conflict. Sooner or later a US administration was going to cut support for Ukraine because it was unsustainable. It just so happened that the decision was made by a Republican administration. The Democrats are lucky that they did not have to do it and now get to use it in their domestic battle against the GOP.

Meanwhile, despite a few angry escapades in recent days, Ukraine's European partners may begin to fall in line with the US on Ukrainian membership. On February 14, NATO Secretary-General Mark Rutte said there was never a guarantee that Ukraine would join the alliance as part of a peace deal with Russia.

This statement contradicted some of his earlier pledges. In December 2024, the newly appointed Rutte said at a joint news conference with Ukrainian President Volodymyr

Zelenskyy that Ukraine's "path to membership is irreversible" and that it was "closer to NATO than ever".

While NATO membership now seems completely off the table for Ukraine, the Trump administration does not appear to be completely ignoring Ukraine. In a nod to Ukrainian demands for Western security guarantees, Hegseth mentioned the possibility of deploying European and non-European peacekeepers to observe and enforce a ceasefire. He did rule out the deployment of American troops and said peacekeepers from NATO countries should not be covered by NATO's Article 5 which allows for a joint response against an attack on any alliance member.

This proposition will hardly reassure Ukrainians. Zelenskyy has repeatedly said that Western security guarantees are of little value without US involvement. At the same time, the Kremlin will likely see any NATO troops on Ukrainian territory as a Trojan horse, so the idea is unlikely to take off when the talks begin in earnest. Non-NATO European troops should not be an issue for Moscow, but non-NATO European states like Austria and Serbia can likely supply just a few thousand troops. The main contingents will, therefore, have to come from the Global South.

That said, the whole peacekeeper issue is overblown. The only way to guarantee stable peace is to establish Ukraine's genuine non-alignment and advance rapprochement between Russia and the West.

Does this mean a win for the Kremlin? Yes, it does, but this has been the only realistic outcome since Ukraine got thrown under Putin's bulldozer by

Western hawks.

Contrary to various Western predictions that the Russian economy will collapse and the regime will crumble under war pressure, Russia has managed to fare relatively well throughout this conflict. Its economy has been booming thanks to lavish defence spending and – unlike Ukrainians – the Russian population has been effectively shielded from the war becoming a major factor in their lives.

Putin clearly cannot be defeated on the battlefield. He can only be brought down if the Russian people are on board. But the West and Ukraine have done everything to alienate even the most staunchly pro-Ukrainian anti-Putin Russians through xenophobic rhetoric and discriminatory policies. It seemed that the hawkish crowd always wanted war, not a better Ukraine and Russia.

The choices Ukraine is left with are all grim. This was apparent in Zelenskyy's speech at the Munich Security Conference, which was meant to show defiance but smacked of desperation.

He turned to the EU proposing that the Ukrainian army become the core of a new European military force. This is also unlikely to work because it brings the EU into direct confrontation with Russia. The Ukrainian president also tried to interest Trump in Ukraine's mineral riches only to receive an ultimatum from his administration tantamount to an imperialist confiscation of Ukrainian resources.

But all of this is intended for his domestic audience. Zelenskyy needs to show that he has tried every avenue, even the most improbable ones, and that the West still betrayed him. With that, he can then succumb to the inevitable.

## Arabs know their history and won't let it be repeated

Dr. Ramzy Baroud

**JARED** Kushner, US President Donald Trump's son-in-law, said in a 2020 interview that he had "read 25 books" on the Middle East. Such intellectual bravado would not matter if it were not for the fact that Kushner served as the president's Middle East adviser during his first term and was essentially the main architect of Trump's policies in the region.

Trump's successor did not fare any better, as the Biden administration largely adhered to Trump's major mistakes and ultimately sustained the Israeli genocide, which killed – as per the latest estimates – more than 55,000.

Joe Biden, too, proved to be a reader; although, unlike Kushner, he did not publicly brag about his intellectual prowess. On Nov. 29, a photo emerged of him holding a book by Palestinian historian Rashid Khalidi entitled "The Hundred Years' War on Palestine: A History of Settler Colonialism and Resistance, 1917-2017."

Though American leaders and officials claim to base their decisions on a thorough understanding of the complexity of the Middle East, they are repeating the same mistakes over and over again.

Trump has repeatedly insisted that the US will take ownership of Gaza, displace its population and turn their destroyed homeland into a real estate opportunity, while threatening them with "hell" should they not follow his

diktats. Trump is using such language based on the misguided idea that these threats will allow him to restore the political leverage that Washington lost over the course of its 15 months of blind support for the Israeli genocide in Gaza.

No rational thinker, in the Middle East or beyond, would actually imagine a scenario in which Palestinians leave en masse due to Trump's threats. They refused to do so after more than 85,000 tonnes of mostly US-supplied explosives were dropped on Gaza, destroying nearly all of the Strip. Empty threats will certainly not change that.

Even though Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his extremist government have taken advantage of Trump's words to repair, however temporarily, their struggling coalition, turning Trump's supposed new doctrine on Gaza into a reality is impossible.

Israel has, in fact, tried to create the circumstances that will lead, in the words of Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich, to the "voluntary emigration" of Palestinians out of Gaza. Instead, on Jan. 27, nearly 1 million displaced Palestinians who had been driven to southern Gaza began their awe-inspiring march back to the north.

It behooves the US administration to stop discounting history, as any wrong move or policy could lead to disastrous

outcomes.

Historically, the ethnic cleansing of Palestinians has been the main objective of all Israeli policies, even before the establishment of the Israeli state on the ruins of historic Palestine in 1948. Aside from the immorality of that act, the pain of which continues to be felt by generations of Palestinian refugees, the event was catastrophic to the Middle East region as well.

Aside from millions of refugees displaced in Palestine itself, millions more live in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, other parts of the Middle East and around the world. Currently, there are nearly 6 million registered Palestinian refugees, according to UNRWA, though a large number remain unaccounted for.

That political earthquake of 77 years ago remains one of the most decisive events that shaped, and continues to shape, the Middle East to this day. Its reversal will remain elusive unless justice finally prevails in Palestine – justice that is dictated by international and humanitarian laws, not impulsive statements from American officials.

Jordan, Lebanon and Syria were the Arab countries that hosted most Palestinian refugees and whose political dynamics, as well as conflicts, were shaped by the mass displacement of Palestinians.

Palestinian groups became part of the political

fabric of these societies, sometimes becoming involved in internal struggles and sometimes being used to balance out existing demographic conflicts. Hardly a major event in the Middle East did not involve Palestinians, or the price of which was not disproportionately shouldered by them. Anyone who knows the fundamentals of modern Middle Eastern politics ought to know this.

One can only imagine what would happen if 2.2 million more Palestinian refugees were pushed into Jordan, Egypt and other Arab countries, as per Trump's proposal. It would arguably be the most earth-shattering event in the region since the Nakba. No Arab government can possibly entertain such a scenario under any circumstances.

While the prospects of another Gaza Nakba were born dead, the real worry is the fact that nearly 50,000 Palestinians have already been internally displaced in the West Bank. This ongoing ethnic cleansing is no less dangerous than the US-Israeli designs in Gaza.

The uninformed US policy on Palestine, which continues to be led by the extremely dangerous policies of the politically bankrupt government of Netanyahu, is once again unifying the Arabs around a common cause.

The Arabs know their history very well. It is time for them to prove to Israel that the lessons of history have been learned and will never be repeated.

## Musk-tering power

Michael Jansen

**SOUTH** African multi-billionaire Elon Musk is the most influential civilian in the entourage of Donald Trump who seems unable to say no to his interventions in US foreign and domestic affairs. Musk has even escaped Trump's ire by dismissing his Gaza plan. By contrast, Trump vented fury on Time magazine for printing covers placing Musk behind the presidential desk in the White House's Oval Office. The covers suggest that Musk's \$288 million campaign donation has made him the Rasputin of today.

Grigory Rasputin was an Orthodox priest who exerted immense power over Alexandra, the last Tsarina of Russia, and her husband Tsar Nicholas who disastrously mismanaged his country's military during World War I. The couple and their children were arrested in 1917 and executed in 1918.

In mid-January, Musk demonstrated he could avoid being destructive like Rasputin by taking a surprisingly positive line on Gaza. While saying there was "no choice but to eliminate those who wish to eliminate ...Israel," naming Hamas, Musk said there must be a Marshall Plan for Gaza. This would rebuild and "make the Palestinian areas prosperous." Musk's proposition contrasted with Trump's cockeyed declaration that Israel would transfer Gaza to him. The strip's 2.3 million Palestinians would be ethnically cleansed so Gaza could be developed as a Mediterranean tourist resort accessed by anyone but Gazans.

As co-director of Trump's Department of Government Efficiency (Doge), Musk and his partner Vivek Ramaswami serve as "outside volunteers not federal officials or employees." This means both can interfere in external and internal affairs without answering to Congress or the judiciary.

To prove his intention to mount a Marshall Plan,

Once the plan is finalised, Musk's first task will be to ensure that the ceasefire ends Israel's campaign to obliterate Gaza while insisting that Hamas must stand aside and allow a Palestinian technocratic administration to take charge. Second, Musk must ensure that Israel will not oppose, obstruct, and meddle in implementation of the plan. Since Hamas' take-over of Gaza in 2007, Israel has waged war on the strip in 2008-2009, 2012, 2014, and 2021 and has done its utmost to interfere in and limit reconstruction. As Israel controls land, air and sea access to Gaza, Israel has imposed limitations and controls on the importation of building materials and machinery, claiming that Hamas would use these goods for military purposes. Consequently, after these repeated military assaults Gazans could only partially rebuild homes, businesses, and infrastructure. This led Gazans to construct tunnels beneath the Egyptian border to smuggle construction materials and consumer goods banned by Israel. By 2011 there were more than a thousand tunnels and trade was brisk. Gazans who wanted to repair or build homes could obtain cement and other essential materials while foodstuffs, medical supplies and equipment, clothing, livestock, and vehicles were freely imported through the tunnels which were closed down by the Egyptians in 2013. Third, since about 70 per cent of Gaza's structures have been destroyed or damaged, a survey will be needed to decide on what can be repaired and what must be levelled.

Musk must end the suspension of \$400 million slated for humanitarian and food aid in the Gaza Strip. More will be needed. Since Gazans need shelter while the Marshall Plan is drafted, temporary mobile homes must be imported and accommodation for hundreds of doctors and nurses are currently treating patients in tents and schools. Gazans will need treatment for injuries and trauma. Several thousand may have to go abroad for operations and psychiatric help. Many may need long-term or lifelong care.

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Third, since about 70 per cent of Gaza's structures have been destroyed or damaged, a survey will be needed to decide on what can be repaired and what must be levelled. Gaza's water and sanitation systems and electricity plants and networks will have to have priority. The UN Development Programme has said rebuilding homes could cost as much as \$40 billion and take until 2040 to complete. Gazans do not the luxury of rebuilding over such a long period. They need homes now.

Fourth, Gaza must be cleared of 42 million tonnes of rubble at a cost of \$500 million to \$600 million. Before tackling this task, Gaza must import deminers and equipment to eliminate unexploded ordnance in the rubble created by Israel's demolition of Gaza. Once an area is cleared of explosives, experts will have to recover human remains and eliminate toxic materials. Machinery will be needed to remove rubble and lorries to transport it to dumps. Some rubble can be crushed for reuse in buildings of one and two stories (not more) and for roadbeds. Before the war, Gaza had facilities for crushing rubble. I visited one.

Fifth, farmland must be cleared of explosives and toxic waste and restored. Greenhouses must be rebuilt, fields for grazing

replanted, and barns and sheds reconstructed and cattle, sheep, goats, horses, and chickens restocked. Before the war, half the food consumed in Gaza was home grown. The other half of farm produce was exported. At one time, Gaza sold cut flowers and early strawberries to Europe.

Who would finance Marshall Plan II? The countries which funded Israel's war on Gaza. The US has provided Israel with \$32.9 billion to turn Gaza into a wasteland and should be responsible for largest proportion of the funding for the Marshall Plan. Germany supplied \$453.7 million. France, Britain, India, Canada, Italy, Serbia, and Holland should contribute sums equal to the value of their arms exports to Israel. It should be compelled to pay reparations to Gazans for their human and physical losses.

The objective of the new Marshall Plan – like the original – would be to make Gaza liveable and provide young men with decent careers and living wages so they do not take up arms against Israel. As young women enter the workforce they must be given equal treatment in employment. As a tech-multi billionaire, Musk could invest and encourage investment in Gaza as a hub for regional high-tech development. Gazan youths began to prepare for such a future two decades ago, but war and more war intervened.



# Trump offers key concessions to Putin ahead of Ukraine peace talks in Saudi Arabia

**V**LADIMIR Putin is riding high ahead of critical US-Russia talks Tuesday in Saudi Arabia on ending the Ukraine war.

Donald Trump’s administration has ended the Russian president’s international isolation, shattered Western unity on the conflict and cast doubt on how far the US would go to defend Europe, signalling a stunning shift toward Putin and away from America’s traditional allies.

With a flurry of conflicting statements in their first forays into Europe, Trump aides also fueled concerns that the US president will embrace just about any deal with Putin — even if it’s a bad one for Ukraine and a continent whose borders are again threatened by Russian expansionism.

Suggestions that the US will exclude its European friends from peace talks on Ukraine — despite demanding they provide security guarantees and troops as part of any deal to end the war — also triggered alarm in capitals on the continent, with France calling key leaders to an emergency meeting in Paris on Monday.

Trump has also sparked fears that Ukraine itself would not be part of talks that are critical to its survival as a nation after its sovereign territory was invaded by a totalitarian neighbor bringing war crimes, civilian carnage and destruction on its people.

The president on Sunday raised the prospect of a meeting with Putin “very soon.” He told reporters in Florida: “We’re moving along. We’re trying to get a peace with Russia, Ukraine, and we’re working very hard on it.”

After Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky warned on NBC’s “Meet the Press” that he would “never accept any decisions between the United States and Russia about Ukraine,” Trump gave a vague assurance that he would be “involved.”

Secretary of State Marco Rubio, national security adviser Mike Waltz and Middle East envoy Steve Witkoff will head the US delegation for talks hosted by the Saudis, who are friendly with both Moscow and the Trump team.

Rubio styled the meeting as a follow-up to Trump’s phone call last week with Putin. “The next few weeks and days will determine whether it’s

serious or not,” he said on CBS’ “Face the Nation” on Sunday. “Ultimately, one phone call does not make peace. One phone call does not solve a war as complex as this one.”

Rubio also contradicted comments by Trump’s Ukraine envoy, Keith Kellogg, who said Saturday that while Kyiv would be involved in peace talks, European nations wouldn’t. “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 one that were invaded, and the Europeans will have to be involved because they have sanctions on Putin and Russia as well, and they’ve con-

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tributed to this effort,” Rubio said.

The evolving US line on the proposed peace deal shows that it’s often unwise to overreact to the early rhetoric of Trump and his subordinates before the substance of their positions is locked in. Without the new US president’s determination to forge ties with Putin, there’d be little hope of ending a vicious war in the coming months. And there still appears to be substantial room for Ukraine and European states to shape negotiations that can be fully successful only with their buy-in.

Polish Foreign Minister Radek Sikorski said in Munich over the weekend that he thought Trump’s call with Putin was a mistake since it “vindicated” the Russian leader and lowered morale in Ukraine. But he added: “When President Trump says as part of a deal there will have to be European troops, we will have to be asked to supply them, so sooner or later we will have to be involved.”

Still, mixed messages from the administration will fuel concerns that Trump will agree to a deal with Putin that validates the illegal invasion and will then impose it on Ukraine. While most foreign policy realists accept that Ukraine will not get back all the land seized by Russia, Trump was criticized for throwing away leverage with his call with

**Stephen Collinson**

the Russian leader. As was Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth, who said that a peace deal would not include a path to NATO membership for Ukraine and that no US peacekeeping troops would be involved. Some of those statements were later watered down by Hegseth and other administration officials.

Concerns were exacerbated by Trump’s war-speed attempt last week to fully rehabilitate Putin, an accused war criminal, when he promoted Russia’s foreign policy positions rather than the West’s. The president, for instance, seemed to sympathize with Putin’s ratio-

All of this is music to Putin’s ears, since it suggests that his status as an international pariah is over, and that he has a deal within reach over Ukraine that would cement his territorial gains. The divisions Trump has opened inside NATO is delivering on one of Russia’s most important foreign policy goals.

“It’s indeed like Easter, Hanukkah, Christmas, (the) birthday of Vladimir Putin and everything is happening in one day,” Alexander Gabuev, director of the Carnegie Russia Eurasia Center, told CNN’s Bianna Golodryga on Sunday. “Whatever Champagne is not chilled is brought to the fridge and other bottles are

uncorked.”  
The crisis in transatlantic relations prompted French President Emmanuel Macron to call an informal meeting Monday with the leaders of Germany, Britain, Italy, Poland, Spain, the Netherlands and Denmark, as well as the heads of the European Council, the European Commission and NATO’s secretary general.

While Trump’s hostility to 80 years of post-World War II security policy is a stunning shift in US policy and a sign of his antipathy to internationalist goals, Europe has left itself vulnerable to more isolationist currents in US policy that have long been part of America’s DNA.

Years of strangled defense budgets have left most non-US NATO members poorly prepared for the task of defending Europe and the dominant role the Trump administration is now demanding. Swift increases in defense spending will mean painful choices for leaders who are already struggling to finance welfare states and are hampered by low-growth economies.

But there are already some indications that the Trump administration’s headline position is concentrating minds as leaders seek to impress the president. British Prime Minister Keir Starmer, who plans to meet with Trump in the coming days, said he’s willing to send British troops to Ukraine

as part of any peace deal. Writing in Monday’s Daily Telegraph, Starmer also said European nations “must increase our defense spending and take on a greater role in NATO” — but added that US support would remain critical for guaranteeing peace.

The talks in Saudi Arabia will also highlight another evolving theme in international relations — the growing clout of the kingdom — evidenced by both its growing role under Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman in Middle East affairs but also by its soft-power initiatives like investments in European sports leagues and its hosting of the 2034 FIFA World Cup.

Trump has made no secret of his admiration for strongmen leaders, and the prince and Putin have a tight relationship. A source close to the Saudi court told CNN’s Alex Marquardt that hosting the talks would enhance the Saudis’ image and prestige and show them to be players on one of the top issues of the day.

Saudi Arabia will be vital to another of Trump’s foreign policy goals — ending the war in Gaza. The administration is trying to coax the Saudis and the Israelis toward a diplomatic normalization agreement that could reshape the geopolitics of the Middle East and solidify an Arab front against Iran. But such a deal would be politically impossible for the Saudis without a path to a state for the Palestinians. And Arab states have pushed back hard against Trump’s extraordinary plan to relocate Palestinians en masse out of Gaza in what would amount to a form of ethnic cleansing.

Trump’s fantastical plan for the US to “own” and redevelop Gaza, as well as his apparent desire to enter talks with Putin on Ukraine, underscore the risks of his unorthodox approach to foreign relations. But the president is back in the White House at a unique moment that offers opportunities to pursue agreements that could make America and the world safer — that is, unless he inks deals that ignore grave security implications.

Sikorski warned in Munich that the president was playing for huge stakes.

“The credibility of the United States depends on how this war (in Ukraine) ends — not just the Trump administration, but the United States itself.”

— CNN

# Is China’s military really built for war? New report questions Beijing’s arms buildup

**Brad Lendon**

**C**HINA is not ready for war, according to a contentious report from a US think tank, which claims the main motivation for the ruling Communist Party’s expansive push for military modernization is to retain its grip on power — not fight an overseas foe.

Beijing has pursued a head-turning military buildup under Chinese leader Xi Jinping, during which the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) — previously not even one of the strongest in Asia — has started to rival, or in some categories surpass, the US military in analysts’ estimations.

Simulations by US defense experts have repeatedly shown the US — widely regarded as the world’s strongest military — having a tough time matching the PLA in a fight close to China’s shores, especially over the democratic island of Taiwan, which is claimed by Beijing.

But a report released last month by the Washington-based RAND Corp. said that despite the impressive buildup, political considerations — importantly the Communist Party’s desire for control over both military personnel and Chinese society — could hamper the PLA in battle, especially against a peer adversary such as the US.

“The PLA remains fundamentally focused on upholding Chinese Communist Party (CCP) rule rather than preparing for war,” wrote Timothy Heath, a longtime China expert with RAND, in the report, titled “The

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**Few doubt that the PLA has made great strides in both the number and quality of weapons it can field. Take for example its warships, led by the Type 055 destroyer, classified by many analysts as the most powerful surface combatant in the world. The PLA Navy launched its 10th Type 055 last year, with as many as six more expected in the coming years. Each requires a crew of about 300 sailors. Collin Koh, research fellow at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies in Singapore, said building the high-tech warships may be easier than crewing them — because modern warships need young sailors to take on complex tasks, and that requires extensive training. “The army could likely assimilate someone from the countryside ... who might not get a lot of education ... and train him up to be an infantryman. But if you want to train somebody who is able to man the controls in the combat information center in the warship, fire a missile and to maintain a missile, that requires a bit more,” Koh said. Meanwhile, the PLA continues to struggle another personnel problem — corruption. A Pentagon report from December said a widespread anticorruption campaign within the senior levels of the Chinese military and government is impeding Xi’s defense buildup. “I think they’ve identified it as something that really has posed great risks to the political reliability and ultimately the operational capability of the PLA,” a senior US defense official said in December.**  
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Chinese military’s doubtful combat readiness,” said Erickson of the US Naval War College.

He noted that China is building both numbers — the Pentagon estimates Beijing is growing its nuclear warhead arsenal by about 100 a year — and technology, “pushing global frontiers with ambitious hypersonic weapons megaprojects.”

**The human factor**  
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for East Asia, also cast doubt on the report.

“War isn’t Plan A, but it is Plan B if events require and the material capacity of the PLA and China for such an event is strong and getting stronger,” he wrote on X. China has achieved rapid and indisputable military progress since Xi introduced sweeping reforms a decade ago.

Beijing’s intense ship-building program of recent years has yielded the world’s largest navy/maritime fighting force, which can operate farther than ever from China’s shores — including from the country’s first overseas military base in Djibouti.

Meanwhile, China has made advances in stealth aircraft and hypersonic weapons — and turned vast areas of its inland deserts into fields of missile silos.

But Heath questioned whether Beijing’s new arsenal would be effective in war.

“History has shown repeatedly that militaries sometimes fail to effectively use their advanced armaments in battle,” his report read, citing the war in Ukraine as the latest conflict where a better-armed military has failed to prevail.

Critics of Heath’s report said it’s folly to see the same weaknesses in the PLA.

“Xi repeatedly engages in difficult military restructuring efforts that prioritize improvements in realistic warfighting capabilities and impose some of the most demanding requirements conceivable on

“I think they’ve identified it as something that really has posed great risks to the political reliability and ultimately the operational capability of the PLA,” a senior US defense official said in December.

**Defining Chinese military readiness**

When analysts talk about Chinese military readiness, focus quickly zooms in on Taiwan. US intelligence estimates say Xi has ordered the PLA to be ready to invade the island by 2027, if necessary.

But Heath argues that while the Chinese leader set that goal, he and other top party officials have not engaged in any concerted push to prepare the Chinese public for combat.

“Chinese leaders have made no speeches that glorify war, advocate for war, or otherwise characterize war as inevitable or desirable,” Heath wrote, noting that “China’s military has not even published a study on how it might occupy and control Taiwan.”

Others caution against judging Beijing’s intentions based on Western thinking. It’s unknown what Xi would consider a win in Taiwan, they say.

The amount of pain the PLA — and Chinese society as a whole — could sustain to take the island is known only in Beijing, they say.

“We have to consider the use of force by Beijing at a level that could be potentially calibrated to suit its political needs,” Koh said.

That force could be a blockade to strangle the island without shots being fired.

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John Culver, a former US intelligence officer

— Aljazeera

# To avoid another conflict in the Horn of Africa, now is the time to act

**T**HE Horn of Africa is a turbulent region whose history and contemporary realities are intertwined with those of the Middle East. Just like the Middle East, it straddles strategic waters that sustain millions of people and connect continents and thus is a theatre of fierce geopolitical rivalry. Great powers and regional players perpetually circle its vast strategic resources, leading to conflicts that ravage the region and its peoples.

Eritrea has long been an eager participant in this theatre of discord. For nearly half a century, Eritrea has been involved to differing degrees in almost every conflict in the region. Sudan, South Sudan, Somalia and Ethiopia have all been affected by its machinations. The ambitions of Isaias Afwerki, the first and only president of Eritrea since 1993, have seen his country get involved in many conflicts miles away from its borders, including those in the Great Lakes region. It seems Isaias is not just drawn to conflict but he seeks it out and thrives in it, like a pyromaniac who can’t resist setting fires.

Isaias’s 32-year reign in Eritrea is a cautionary tale. Since independence, the country has lacked all the traditional tools of governance that most nations take for granted.

No constitution. No parliament. No civil service. In Eritrea, there is only one executive, legislative and legal authority — President Isaias.

In Isaias’s Eritrea, military service is also mandatory and indefinite. Young Eritreans often risk everything to try to escape a lifetime in the president’s military. As such, the major export of the Eritrean state, apart from illicit gold, is the large number of young men and women who risk their lives to illegally migrate to neighbouring countries and Europe. Eritreans flee from their country in droves to escape forced conscription into military service and other dystopian realities created by the regime.

War is the main business and preoccupation of the Eritrean state. Stirring conflict here and there, supporting rebels, insurgents or governments seeking war and division throughout the region seems to be the raison d’etre of the Eritrean state.

Today, Isaias is once again engaged in manoeuvres that are as destructive as they are predictable.

After years of strong animosity towards and direct clashes with the Tigray People’s Liberation Front (TPLF) — the party that ruled Ethiopia’s Tigray region since 1975 and waged

**Mulatu Teshome Wirtu**

war against the federal government from 2020 to 2022 — Isaias is now trying to exploit divisions within the group’s ranks.

The history here is long and bitter. In the late 1990s, a falling-out between Eritrea and Ethiopia erupted into a bloody war. After years of bloodshed, Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed managed to secure a peace agreement between the two countries in 2018 and was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for his efforts.

Regrettably, reconciliation with Eritrea did not deliver long-term peace dividends. Because, for Isaias, building trade and infrastructure connections between Ethiopia and Eritrea was of no interest. He had no appetite for economic cooperation despite it being beneficial to both countries.

When the TPLF launched its ill-fated bid to reclaim power in Ethiopia by unseating Prime Minister Abiy in 2020, Isaias saw his chance. Eritrean forces surged into Tigray, leaving devastation in their wake.

The 2022 Pretoria Peace Agreement, which ended the conflict between the TPLF and the Ethiopian government, was a diplomatic triumph for Ethiopia and the African Union. But it was a personal setback

for Isaias, who thrives in conflict and sees peace as an obstacle to his efforts to expand his influence.

It soon became clear that Isaias wanted the conflict in the Tigray region to continue indefinitely and Ethiopia to bleed into oblivion. To invalidate the Pretoria Peace Agreement, he engineered a militia in Ethiopia’s Amhara state. More recently, he has also found common cause and joined forces with elements within the TPLF who were unhappy with the peace agreement.

His cynical and dangerous machinations are now threatening to undo the Pretoria Peace Agreement.

A faction of the TPLF and its armed supporters are openly expressing their intent to dismantle the interim administration set up as per the peace agreement and tear up the whole peace deal. The implications of such a development would be catastrophic, both for Ethiopia and the wider region.

The stakes couldn’t be higher. To Ethiopia’s west, Sudan is consumed by civil war. To the east, Somalia is struggling to rebuild after decades of gradual collapse. Across the Sahel, extremist groups are gaining ground. A possible return of conflict to the Tigray region must be assessed in this context.

A belt of chaos stretch-





# BOP achieves its highest profitability

— announces record cash dividend and highest-ever since its inception in 1989

## F.P. Report

LAHORE: A meeting of the Board of Directors of The Bank of Punjab (BOP) was held on Monday to review and approve the Annual Audited Financial Statements for the year ended December 31, 2024.

Despite facing challenges on both the revenue and expenditure sides, including the implementation of IFRS-9, the debt restructuring of a large state-owned entity, a difficult interest rate environment, the MDR anomaly, and significant investments in technology and infrastructure, the Bank posted a pre-tax profit of Rs. 24.56 billion for the year 2024. The Board also declared a cash dividend of Rs. 1.8 per share, marking a historic milestone with the highest-ever profit and the largest cash dividend payout in the bank's 35-year history.

Total deposits grew to PKR 1,710 billion from PKR 1,521 billion in 2023. A significant contributor to this growth was the 24% increase in current account deposits, which rose to

PKR 354 billion and now constitute 20.7% of total deposits. These deposits have more than doubled over the past three years.

The balance sheet expanded to PKR 2,380 billion, further strengthening the bank's financial and capital position. Revenue growth remained strong across all segments, particularly in fee income and capital gains etc., which grew by 51% during the year.

The Board acknowledged that the cost-to-income ratio improved to 60.76% (adjusted) in 2024. Based on September 2024 results, the Bank maintained the lowest cost per employee at PKR 2.4 million against a peer average of PKR 3.6 million, the second-lowest cost per branch at PKR 45.5 million against a peer average of PKR 56.3 million, and a total administrative cost-to-gross revenue ratio of 12.2% compared to the industry average of 15.0%, demonstrating strong cost discipline and operational efficiency. With a continued focus on improving the composition

of current accounts within total deposits and the removal of minimum deposit rate conditions on public sector deposits, the cost-to-income ratio is expected to improve further in the coming years.

The Board also approved BOP's inaugural dividend policy, which explores the possibility of interim/quarterly dividends, moving beyond the conventional annual model, with a preference for cash dividends over bonus shares. This shift aims to strengthen investor confidence and attract long-term institutional investments, backed by projected stability in BOP's earnings.

Looking ahead, the Board approved the strategic roadmap for 2025-27, focusing on growth, capital build-up, digital innovation, and cost efficiency. A key priority is the acceleration of the transition to a fully Shariah-compliant banking model, in line with SBP guidelines.

Additionally, the Bank will continue expanding its digital services with enhanced cybersecurity

measures and will introduce AI-powered financial solutions to improve customer experience and operational efficiency.

The Board commended BOP's management for its pivotal role in executing key initiatives under the Chief Minister of Punjab's programs, including the Kissan Card, Livestock Card, Student Bike Scheme, Dhee Rani Card, Minority Card, and Aasaan Karobar Finance & Card Schemes, all of which have been facilitated through BOP's robust digital banking infrastructure.

Furthermore, the Bank has played a key role in the successful execution of the CM Punjab Apni Chat Apna Ghar scheme, which facilitates home financing for low- and middle-income families.

The Board recognized that, with a clear vision, strong leadership, and a robust financial position, BOP is well-positioned to continue its growth trajectory, delivering greater value to its customers, investors, and the broader economy.



ISLAMABAD: Pakistan-Australia Business Council delegation meeting with Commerce Minister Jam Kamal Khan.

## Textile exports up by 10.60%

ISLAMABAD (APP): Textile exports witnessed an increase of 10.60 percent during the first seven months of the current financial year (2024-25) as compared to the corresponding period of last year, Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS) reported Tuesday.

The textile exports from the country were recorded at US \$10,770.472 million during July-January (2024-25) against the exports of US \$ 9,738.542 million during July-January (2023-24).

The textile commodities that contributed in trade growth included cotton cloth the export of which increased by 3.99 percent to \$ 1,129.728 million from \$ 1,086.396 million while the export of knitwear surged by 18.16 percent to \$ 3,033.951 million from \$ 2,567.576 million.

The other commodities that witnessed growth in trade included bed wear, the export of which rose by 14.71 percent to \$ 1,868.894 million from \$ 1,629.185 million, towels by 6 percent to \$ 631.973 million from \$ 596.203 million, tents, canvas,

## EPC launches hydrogen peroxide business with Rs12 billion investment

### F.P. Report

KARACHI: Engro Polymer & Chemicals (EPCL), a subsidiary of Engro Corporation, has successfully commissioned its Rs11.7 billion hydrogen peroxide plant, marking a major milestone in its journey of undertaking investments that drive Pakistan's economic growth. This project has been developed with investment from the International Finance Corporation (IFC) to support EPCL's expansion in the hydrogen peroxide market.

With an installed annual capacity of 28,000 tons, the hydrogen peroxide plant features state-of-the-art Chematur technology. By ensuring sufficient local production, EPCL will enable import substitution of around USD 11 million, reducing reliance on foreign suppliers and strengthening Pakistan's industrial base. The company will manufacture and market its high-quality hydrogen peroxide solution, PureOxide, under its wholly owned subsidiary, Engro Peroxide (Private) Limited.

As the only hydrogen peroxide manufacturer in southern Pakistan, the company aims to be a responsible supplier offering high quality, reliable delivery and safe packaging with its PureOxide brand.

Customers will benefit from lower lead time and costs through just-in-time deliveries in a safety-compliant fleet. PureOxide will be transported in 100% virgin HDPE jerry cans, featuring pressure-release technology to prevent explosions and a vapor-blocking membrane to mitigate fire risks.

Additionally, PureOxide has a lower carbon footprint and higher energy efficiency as EPCL derives hydrogen as part of its caustic manufacturing process.

Commenting on the milestone, Abdul Qayoom Shaikh - CEO of EPCL, said that, "Our HPO business will strengthen local industries, especially export-oriented textiles players, who will be able to source a high-quality product locally. With unmatched quality, safety and sustainability, we are confident that PureOxide will become the preferred choice for customers in Pakistan and beyond."

Ahsan Zafar Syed, President & CEO - Engro Corporation, added that, "Our Rs12 billion investment in the hydrogen peroxide plant reflects Engro's commitment to growth and continued belief in Pakistan's potential. I would like to thank the EPCL leadership, IFC, project team, partners, and other stakeholders for their support in the successful completion of this project."

## HBL MfB, IFC sign a landmark US\$ 80m Risk Sharing Agreement

### F.P. Report

KARACHI: The HBL Microfinance Bank (HBL MfB) has signed a US\$ 80 million Risk Sharing Agreement (RSA or the facility) with the International Finance Corporation (IFC), a member of the World Bank Group. This facility, which is supported by the Private Sector Window of the Global Agriculture and Food Security Program (GAFSP), will allow HBL MfB to share 50% of the risk on its microfinance loan portfolio of up to US\$ 80 million (in PKR equivalent) with IFC, on an unfunded basis.

The collaboration between HBL MfB and IFC will significantly enhance access to finance for smallholder farmers and microenterprises across the country, with a strong focus on women entrepreneurs. The signing of the agreement took place in Karachi in the presence of HBL

MfB's and IFC's senior leadership including Maya Inayat Ismail, Chairperson of HBL MfB; Amir Khan, President and CEO of HBL MfB; and Makhtar Diop, Managing Director of IFC.

As the pioneer and leader of microfinance in Pakistan, HBL Microfinance Bank has continuously led the industry in transforming financial inclusion. This RSA is another milestone, reinforcing the Bank's legacy of innovation and leadership in addressing the evolving financial needs of underserved communities. By being the first microfinance bank to establish an agreement on such a scale, HBL MfB is not only pushing boundaries but also redefining industry standards, ensuring that microfinance remains a catalyst for empowerment and economic growth.

This agreement also underscores the Bank's resilience in navigating the challenges of the microfi-

nance sector. Amidst an evolving economic landscape, HBL MfB remains committed to developing forward-thinking solutions that enhance financial accessibility while mitigating risks. The RSA exemplifies this approach - leveraging strategic partnerships to strengthen financial resilience, expand lending capabilities, and maintain sustainable growth.

Amir Khan, President & CEO, HBL Microfinance Bank, while sharing his views on the RSA, said, "This partnership with IFC is a testament to our commitment to financial inclusion. The facility serves as a replicable model for strategic partnerships that mitigate market challenges while driving sustainable development. By pioneering this Risk Sharing Facility in the microfinance sector, we are ensuring that underserved segments of the society - especially small business owners and farmers, particularly

women, have access to the capital they need to thrive. We are thankful to IFC for their trust in us and look forward to the growth and progress it will bring for underserved Pakistanis".

Momina Aijazuddin, Regional Head of Financial Institutions Group (FIG) at IFC, said: "Boosting access to finance, especially for smallholder farmers, small businesses, and women, can be a gamechanger in Pakistan. With this in mind, IFC is excited to support this pioneering risk sharing facility which aims to de-risk HBL MfB's on-lending activity to its microfinance clients and support critical growth opportunities in agriculture, entrepreneurship, and women's empowerment."

This agreement will accelerate financial inclusion, and further HBL Microfinance Bank's mission of creating a more inclusive and resilient financial ecosystem in Pakistan.

## PSX witnesses bearish, loses 341 points

ISLAMABAD (APP): The 100-Index of the Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX) witnessed bearish trend on Monday, losing, 341.76 more points, a negative change of 0.30 percent, closing at 111,743.53 points as compared to 112,085.30 points on the last trading day.

A total of 511,194,686 shares were traded during the day as compared to 457,049,928 shares the previous trading day, whereas the price of shares stood at Rs19.635 billion against Rs23.215 billion on the last trading day.

As many as 435 companies transacted their shares in the stock market, 130 of them recorded gains and 235 sustained losses, whereas the share price of 70 companies remained unchanged. The three top trading companies were B.O. Punjab with 184,433,032 shares at Rs.12.17 per share, Power Cement with 38,642,821 shares at Rs10.76 per share and WorldCall Telecom with 33,028,658 shares at Rs1.47 per share.

Service Industries Limited witnessed a maximum increase of Rs48.94 per share closing at Rs1,400.00 whereas runner-up was Sapphire Textile Mills Limited with Rs43.00 rise in its share price to close at Rs1,243.00.

Nestle Pakistan Limited witnessed a maximum decrease of Rs123.09 per share price, closing at Rs7,250.30, whereas the runner-up was Rafhan Maize Products Company Limited with Rs106.53 decline in its per share price to Rs9,389.33.

Rupree sheds 06 paisa against dollar

Pakistani rupee on Monday depreciated by 06 paisa against the US dollar in the interbank trading and closed at Rs279.26 against the previous day's closing of Rs279.20.

However, according to the Forex Association of Pakistan (FAP), the buying and selling rates of the dollar in the open market stood at Rs279.75 and Rs281.25, respectively. The price of the Euro increased by 45 paisa to close at Rs292.71 against the last day's closing of Rs292.26, according to the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP).

The Japanese yen went up by 01 paisa and closed at Rs1.83, whereas an increase of 71 paisa was witnessed in the exchange rate of the British Pound, which was traded at Rs351.74 as compared to the last day's closing of Rs351.03.

The exchange rates of the Emirates Dirham and the Saudi Riyal went up by 02 paisa each to close at Rs76.03 and Rs74.46, respectively.

**Gold dip by Rs1,700 per tola to Rs303,200**

The price of 24 karat per tola gold increased by Rs1,700 and was sold at Rs303,700 on Monday against its sale at Rs301,500 on previous trading day. All Pakistan Sarafa Gems and Jewelers Association reported.

The price of 10 grams of 24 karat gold also increased by Rs1,458 to Rs259,945 from Rs258,487 whereas that of 10 gram 22 karat went up to Rs238,283 from Rs236,955.

The prices of per tola and ten gram silver were traded at Rs3,350 and Rs2,872 respectively.

The price of gold in the international market increased by \$17 to \$2,900 from \$2,883 whereas the prices of silver in international market was recorded at \$32.45, the Association reported.

### Court Notice

In the Court of Jawad Bin Dawood Civil Judge II, Alaga Qazi Buner at Daggar, Suit No. 21/1, Institution 28/1/ 2025. Date of hearing : 19/2/2025. Jalal Husain VS Saeed ur Rehman etc. Notice to No.1 Saeed ur Rehman, 3. Muhib ur Rehman sons of Said Kamal Shah resident of Daggar Kalay tahsil Daggar district Buner. Whereas in the above mentioned case the mentioned defendants can not be served in the ordinary way, it is, therefore, proclaimed that if the said defendants will/shall not appear personally or through duly authorized agent or pleader in the court at 8:30 am dated 19/2/2025 the proceeding will be taken ex- parte. Given under my hand and seal of this Court.

### Court Notice

In the court of Sana shah civil judge IV/ Illaqa Qazi Swat.1) Case #45/1, year 2024. Hearing 08/03/2025. Noor Jehan vs Muhammad sadid khan etc.2) 57/1, Year 2024. Hearing 08/03/2025. Razia sultana vs Muhammad sadid etc. Notice to:- 158/16, Muhammad Saleem s/o Muhammad Ajmal khan r/o changlai tahsil matta district Swat.168/17 khog bacha s/o Muhammad Ajmal khan changlai matta swat. Presently Abroad. Whereas the above named cannot be served in ordinary manner it is therefore proclaimed or through duly authorized agent or pleader in the court on 08/03/2025, at 8.00 am. Ex-parte proceeding will be initiated against you. seal of the court.

## CEO Murree Brewery hosts luncheon celebrating Pak's religious diversity



### F.P. Report

RAWALPINDI: The Federal Par-

liamentary Secretary and CEO of Murree Brewery, Isphanyar Bhandara, hosted a luncheon at his

residence in honor of religious minority communities. A large number of people from various faiths attended the gathering.

Speaking on the occasion, Isphanyar Bhandara welcomed the attendees and extended his best wishes to them.

He emphasized the significant role religious minorities have played in Pakistan's progress and development. Since the country's inception, they have contributed alongside their fellow citizens in various fields and will continue to do so in the future.

Bhandara reaffirmed his commitment to fostering interfaith harmony and ensuring that all communities feel valued and included in Pakistan's social and economic fabric.

## PayPak, Golootlo and Imtiaz Stores join forces for exciting 'Spend & Win' campaign this Ramzan

### F.P. Report

KARACHI: In an exciting and innovative collaboration, PayPak, Golootlo and Imtiaz Stores have joined forces to launch the "Spend & Win" campaign, offering shoppers incredible rewards while promoting cashless transactions. Timed perfectly with the high-traffic Pre-Ramzan and Ramzan season, this campaign will run from February 21, 2025, till Chaand Raat, giving customers across 30 Imtiaz outlets nationwide the opportunity to win exciting prizes, thereby enhancing the shopping experience when customers are already in buying mode.

Customers who make a

transaction of Rs.5000 or more with their PayPak Debit Card at any Imtiaz Store nationwide will be eligible to enter the Lucky Draw; the more the value of transaction, the more the entries in the Lucky Draw. The grand prizes of the Lucky Draw include 3 cars and 13 bikes alongside thousands of high-value electronic items. And that's not all, multiple surprise gifts will be distributed to customers on the spot, making the campaign exciting for everyone.

ILINK, the operator of Pakistan's first domestic payment scheme, PayPak, aims to promote the adoption of digital payments across the country. In partnership with Golootlo,

which offers exclusive discounts and deals through its extensive network, PayPak cardholders will now have access to a unique shopping and rewarding experience at Imtiaz stores.

This strategic alliance was signed off at the Imtiaz Head Office by Mr. Amin Razzaq, CFO of Imtiaz, Mr. Syed Ahsan Aslam, Managing Director of Golootlo, and Ms. Shaista Abdullah, Chief Merchants & Schemes at ILINK (Private) Limited.

This collaboration marks a significant milestone in promoting digital payments and creating value-driven experiences for customers across Pakistan. With over 30 branches in 13 cities, Imtiaz provides a powerful

platform for nationwide participation.

Amin Razzaq, CFO of Imtiaz, said: "At Imtiaz, we are always looking for ways to bring more value to our customers. This partnership with PayPak and Golootlo reflects our commitment to creating unique shopping experiences that exceed expectations. We're excited to offer customers a chance to win grand prizes while promoting digital payment solutions in Pakistan."

Ms. Shaista Abdullah, Chief Merchants & Schemes at ILINK, commented: "The growing adoption of PayPak cards is a positive sign for the future of digital payments in Pakistan. This campaign

will not only reward loyal PayPak customers but also encourage more people to experience the convenience of cashless shopping."

Syed Ahsan Aslam, MD Golootlo, remarked: "Golootlo is dedicated to making everyday transactions more rewarding. This collaboration brings together three industry leaders to drive digital payment adoption while giving customers an opportunity to win big. By integrating rewards into their daily shopping, we are redefining how customers engage with digital payments in Pakistan."

This partnership highlights the shared vision of PayPak, Golootlo and Imtiaz to innovate and



deliver unmatched value-driven experiences for their customers. With Imtiaz's wide customer base, PayPak's secure and accessible card network, and Golootlo's expertise in consumer engagement, 'Spend

& Win' is set to make shopping at Imtiaz more rewarding than ever.

Shoppers are encouraged to visit their nearest Imtiaz Store, make purchases using their PayPak Debit Card powered by Golootlo,

and stand a chance to win exciting prizes! Don't miss out on the opportunity to shop, save, and celebrate the holy month of Ramadan with PayPak and Golootlo through the 'Spend & Win' campaign.





In brief

Sajjad, Asif move in knockout round

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistani cueists Muhammad Sajjad, Muhammad Asif and Muhammad Sajjad have qualified for the knockout round of the ACBS Asian Men Snooker Championship 2025 at Doha, Qatar. According to details received here, on day 3rd matches, Sajjad beat Ayman Alamri of Saudi Arabia 4-1 (67-57, 68-33, 73(56)-7, 70-83, 73-46) while Asif outplayed Siyavosh Mozayani of Iran 4-1 (70(57)-31, 12-55(53), 76(75)-39, 85-36, 76(76)-0) and Sajjad defeated Fung Kwok Wai of Hong Kong 4-2 (101(65)-25, 75(58)-0, 79(63)-30, 50-75, 48-77(71), 63-52). Meanwhile Mohamed Shehab of United Arab Emirates downed Pakistan's Shahid Aftab 4-2 (124(102)-6, 57-8, 43-67(56), 35-84, 67(51)-36, 80-18).

Throw Ball C'ship kicks off in Sukkur

SUKKUR (APP): The Shaheed Rani Benazir Bhutto National Men and Women Throw Ball Championship 2025 kicked off in Sukkur here on Monday. The event, held at the Sindh Sports Board Futsal Ground, will conclude on Tuesday night (February 18) with the final matches. The Divisional Commissioner Sukkur, Fayaz Hussain, was the guest of honor at the opening ceremony, where he welcomed teams from all participating provinces and departments. The championship features teams from Punjab, Sindh Green, Balochistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Islamabad, Azad Kashmir, Gilgit-Baltistan, HEC, Pakistan Railways, and Sindh White. The closing ceremony will feature prominent personalities, including Pakistan Throw Ball Federation General Secretary Maqbool Arain, Secretary Shahid Khan, and others. This championship aims to promote throw ball in Pakistan and play a vital role in its development.

Liverpool can cope with title nerves

LONDON (AFP): Liverpool captain Virgil van Dijk insists the Premier League leaders can cope with the mounting pressure of the title race. Arne Slot's side moved seven points clear of second-placed Arsenal after surviving a sloppy second half display to beat struggling Wolves 2-1 on Sunday. After conceding a stoppage-time equaliser at Merseyside rivals Everton on Wednesday, there was a palpable air of anxiety around Anfield as Liverpool laboured to protect their lead in the closing stages against Wolves. Van Dijk understood why there were nerves in the stands and the Dutch centre-back expects more drama as Liverpool edge closer to a record-equalling 20th English crown. "We are all human beings and I totally understand anxiety or nervousness can kick in," he said. "I said it weeks ago, we just have to buckle up, enjoy the ride. There will be a lot of twists and turns. "If you're not ready for it, it will be a difficult couple of months for you but I feel like we as a team are ready for it. "We will give it everything we've got and we will see in 13 games if that is enough." Liverpool can extend their lead at the top to 10 points if they win at Aston Villa on Wednesday. But Van Dijk has experience of having a 10-point lead, albeit at an earlier stage of the season, and blowing the chance to win the league. In January 2019, Liverpool had a similar-sized cushion over Manchester City when they lost at the Etihad Stadium as Pep Guardiola's side won 18 of their last 19 matches, with the Reds finishing second by one point.

# Pakistan wins 6 medals at Asian Road Cycling C'ship

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan's cycling team stunned competitors at the 44th Asian Road Cycling Championship, securing a remarkable sixth place in the overall medal standings and achieving the country's best-ever performance in continental cycling.

According to press released issued by Pakistan Cycling Federation (PCF), the national team brought home a record-breaking six medals: two gold, two silver and two bronze, marking a significant breakthrough for Pakistan

in international cycling. Key performers included Ali Ilyas Jawaaid who won gold in Individual Time Trial (ITT) and silver in Road Race and Rabia Garib, who claimed gold in Road Race and silver in ITT. Zainab completed the team's success with two bronze medals in both ITT and Road Race categories. "This is a historic moment for Pakistani cycling," said a spokesperson for the Pakistan Cycling Federation (PCF). "We've proven that our athletes can compete at the highest

international levels." The success is attributed to robust training programs by the SSGC Sports Board and the Bekistan Cycling Academy Karachi which have been crucial in developing cycling talent. The achievement not only highlights individual excellence but also signals Pakistan's emerging potential in continental cycling competitions. Sports officials are now calling for increased investment and sponsorship to build on this momentum.

## Haris available for selection for Champions Trophy opener

LAHORE (APP): Ace fast bowler Haris Rauf has said that he felt comfortable during the fielding and bowling practice on Monday and was available for selection for Pakistan's opening match against New Zealand in the ICC Men's Champions Trophy 2025 at the National Stadium, Karachi on February 19 (Wednesday).

Haris Rauf had left the field early after bowling 6.3 overs against New Zealand in the first match of the tri-nation series at the Gaddafi Stadium after he felt discomfort in his ribs. He did not take part in the remainder of the series and rested as per advice of the PCB medical panel.

Pakistan team spent good time in bowling and batting practice at the Oval Ground of the PCB's Hanif Muhammad High Performance Center, Karachi on Monday afternoon. The cricketers also participated in exercise drills.

Haris Rauf bowled at full throttle during the nets and looked confident to spearhead Pakistan bowling attack against New Zealand in the opening match of the ICC Men's Champions Trophy 2025 at the National Stadium Karachi. When asked about Virat Kohli by the journalists, the speed merchant said, "We have

played quite good cricket against Indian batter Virat Kohli and enjoy good bonding with one of the modern day batting greats. I enjoy bowling against him and learn from his as well." To a question, Haris Rauf said the current team had a burning desire to win an ICC events, adding that they had made to the finals and semi-final of ICC events as well as the Asia Cup in the recent past but there was nothing like recording a trophy against your name. "We have together as a group for quite good time and wish to be remembered as the ones who won an ICC event for the country," he responded.

Pakistan's total medal tally now stands at 21, demonstrating the team's exceptional talent and commitment. As the championship continues, the national squad remains focused on further victories. CEO of Pakistan Taekwondo Federation (PTF), Omar Saeed, and President PTF, Col (R) Raja Waseem Ahmed, expressed their pride in the team's achievements. "Seeing our athletes rise to the occasion and earn these medals fills us with immense pride. Their hard work and dedication have truly paid off, and we look forward to building on this success in future competitions."

## Pakistan team dominates Asian Taekwondo C'ships

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan's taekwondo team continued stellar performance in the Combaxx 7th Asian Taekwondo Open Championships, securing an impressive 21 medals, as the competition enters its fourth day. Pakistan bagged 5 gold, 6 silver, and 10 bronze medals with consistent victories across multiple weight categories and remains a dominant force in the championship.

Najiam Wania won gold in the Female -55kg category, while Zahid Zainab took silver, and Maqsood Hamna and Gul Umama secured bronze. Abdullah Syed clinched gold in the Male -63kg division, with Rahman

Fawad earning silver, and Ejaz Muhammad Hadi & Ahmed Rana Tanveer winning bronze. Raza Mahar Muhammad Ahmad secured gold in the Male +73kg, with Aslam Zain winning silver, and Khan Umair grabbing bronze. Butt Maiza Imtiaz dominated the Female -63kg category with gold, while Hussain Abdar earned silver, and Sharipova Bibishota from Tajikistan & Alam Myrish took bronze. Naseer Mamoona clinched gold in the Female +63kg, while Munaf Bareera claimed silver, and Rashid Eman & Zulfiqar Warisha secured bronze.

## Mohammad Nabi undecided to hang up boots

LAHORE (APP): Afghanistan all-rounder Mohammad Nabi said that he was fit to play and had not decided on retirement from the international cricket after the ICC Men's Champions Trophy 2025 in Pakistan.

Speaking at the ICC Media Zone during the ICC Champions Trophy 2025 practice matches in Karachi, he said, "I'm still thinking (about the future). These might not be my last ODIs, I will probably play less ODIs and give chances to the youngsters to build experience." He told the journalists that he had discussed with the senior players and in the high-level meetings, adding that the retirement would depend on his fitness. Being part of the Afghanistan team in the ICC Champions Trophy, the elite all-rounder, 40, recently helped Fortune Barishal win the Bangladesh Premier League (BPL). He further said, "Winning the BPL gave me more confidence, from a tough position in the final. In the whole tournament, we did really well and my performances were good as well, bowling and also batting, I helped finish the job in four or five matches. I feel really good, it's building confidence." Mohammad Nabi is the only player left who was part of the first-ever Afghanistan One-Day



have 1000 wickets soon! He's still young, still energetic and still has hunger for more wickets. "On the pitch, he's aggressive and will fight every ball, he brings extra energy. Off the pitch, he's a very normal person who enjoys every moment away from cricket. "That is the plus point and he has really helped with the youngsters. He comforts them and talks to them to help their development. He is very good at making them feel comfortable in the changing room."

The Afghans find themselves in a group with Australia, South Africa and England, in their maiden appearance in the tournament. They will hope to kick on from reaching the semi-finals of the ICC Men's T20 World Cup 2024, while Mohammad Nabi also has longer-term ambitions. On his son Hassan Eisakhil, 18, Mohammad Nabi said, "It's my dream (to play for Afghanistan together), expressing the hope they may do it. "He is doing very well. In the last two games he scored a hundred and 95. He is a hard worker and I'm also pushing him to do work. "I want him to make his own goals, if you want to get to be a high-level cricketer, you have to work hard. It's not enough to make 50 or 60, you have to score 100+."



KARACHI: Temba Bavuma fields during a warm-up game, Pakistan Shaheens vs South Africa, Warm-up, match Champions Trophy

## Australian team reach Pakistan for ICC Champions Trophy

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Australian cricket team has arrived in Pakistan to feature in the ICC Champions Trophy 2025 beginning February 19. As per details received here, the Australian cricket team has arrived in two groups. The first group, which included team captain Steve Smith, coaches, and support staff, arrived from Colombo via Dubai.

The second group, comprising 15 players and two additional members of the support staff, followed the same route and reached Lahore later the same day. The Australian players who arrived in Lahore in

the second group included Marnus Labuschagne, Glenn Maxwell, Travis Head, Matthew Short and Adam Zampa. Australia will play their first match in the ICC Champions Trophy against arch-rivals England on February 22 at the Gaddafi Stadium, Lahore.

Australia's second match in the ICC Champions Trophy will be against South Africa on February 25 at the Rawalpindi Cricket Stadium. Australia will play their last group match against Afghanistan on February 28 at the Gaddafi Stadium in Lahore.

## Three matches to watch at the Champions Trophy

LAHORE (Monitoring Desk): The Champions Trophy begins on Wednesday with the world's top eight teams competing in Pakistan and Dubai for the prestigious title. AFP Sport looks at three highly anticipated matches in the group phase of the 50-over tournament: - **Australia v England** - The Ashes rivals clash in Lahore on Saturday. World Cup holders Australia have had the upper hand against their old foes in recent 50-over matches and won their previous series 3-2 last year. But both come into the Champions Trophy with question marks hanging over them.

Australia are without their "Big Three" pacemen -- Pat Cummins (ankle), Josh Hazlewood (hip) and Mitchell Starc, who has opted out for personal reasons. Add in the absences of all-rounders Mitchell Marsh (back) and Marcus Stoinis (retired), and half of their regular team is missing. The depleted side suffered a heavy 2-0 series defeat in Sri Lanka on the eve of the tournament. England, with Test coach Brendon McCullum now in charge, did no better and were whitewashed 3-0 in India. Since winning the 2019 World Cup and 2022 T20 World Cup, England have struggled in white-ball cricket.

- **Pakistan v India** - TV ratings rocket with millions tuning in to watch the arch-rivals any time they battle it out, owing to the deep rivalry between the nuclear-armed neighbours. The two teams meet on Sunday in Dubai. Tickets for the clash were sold out minutes after going on sale as more than 150,000 fans queued online to grab a seat in the 25,000-capacity stadium.

India refused to visit Pakistan for the Champions Trophy, forcing the latter to agree to partially relinquish hosting rights to Dubai after a long stand-off. On the pitch, India are favourites to win the tournament for a third time, in what is expected to be the international swansong for Rohit Sharma. Pakistan are the holders and unpredictable. - **Afghanistan v England** - More than 160 British politicians called for England to boycott the match in Lahore on February 26 over the erosion of women's rights by Taliban authorities in Afghanistan.

Skipper Jos Buttler rejected the idea, saying: "I don't think a boycott is the way to go about it." Barring a shock last-minute about-face, the game will go ahead. After being well beaten in India last week, Buttler insisted that England can be "dangerous" at the Champions Trophy, even if recent evidence suggests otherwise. Afghanistan have become a rising force in white-ball cricket in recent years, rising to eighth in the ODI world rankings, one place below England. The Afghans beat Australia on the way to a historic semi-final place at last year's T20 World Cup, before losing to South Africa.

## Djokovic calls for overhaul of 'unfair' anti-doping system

DOHA (AFP): Novak Djokovic on Monday urged tennis authorities to overhaul the sport's anti-doping system, pointing to "inconsistencies" in cases involving top stars Jannik Sinner and Iga Swiatek and those of lower-ranked players. World number one Sinner agreed to a three-month ban on Saturday, admitting "partial responsibility" for mistakes by his team 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.

In a surprising move, WADA withdrew its appeal and came to an agreement with Sinner to accept a three-month ban. In another high-profile case last year, five-time Grand Slam champion Swiatek accepted a one-month ban after testing positive for the banned heart drug trimetazidine. "There's a majority of the players that I've talked to in the locker room, not just in the last few days, but also last few months, that are not happy with the way this whole process has been handled," said Djokovic. "A majority of the players don't feel that it's fair. A majority of the players feel like there is favouritism happening. It seems like, it appears that you can almost affect the outcome if you are a top player, if you have access to the top lawyers." In contrast, the recently

retired Simona Halep, a former world number one, was handed a four-year ban by the ITIA in 2022 after testing positive for the blood-boosting drug roxadustat. She argued it was the result of a tainted supplement and successfully appealed to the Court of Arbitration for Sport, which reduced her suspension to nine months. "Simona Halep and (Britain's) Tara Moore and some other players that are maybe less known that have been struggling to resolve their cases for years, or have gotten the ban for years," said Djokovic. "There is so much inconsistencies between the cases." Djokovic, who is returning to action this week at the Qatar Open for the first time since retiring injured from last month's Australian Open semi-finals, believes a change is needed. "Right now it's a ripe time for us to really address the system, because the system and the structure obviously doesn't work (for) anti-doping, it's obvious," he said. "I hope that in the next period of the near future that the governing bodies are going to come together, of our tours and the tennis ecosystem, and try to find a more effective way to deal with these processes.

"It's inconsistent, and it appears to be very unfair." "If you are going to treat every case individually or independently, which is what's happening, then there's no consistency, then there is no transparency, and some cases are transparent, some are not," he continued.

## Italy's Milan upstages Pogacar in UAE Tour first stage

ABU DHABI (AFP): Italian rider Jonathan Milan prevailed in a chaotic scramble for the line to claim first stage honours in the UAE Tour on Monday.

Tour de France champion and hot favourite Tadej Pogacar was in contention on his season debut. The Slovenian, resplendent in his world champion's rainbow jersey, launched the sprint 350 metres from the finish only to run out of steam close to home. He had to settle for 10th. "It was supposed to be a lead out for our sprinter but he crashed out, so I was kind of stuck in the lead out idea," Pogacar explained later. Milan was followed home by Jasper Philipsen, however the Belgian was demoted to 52nd for hampering Finn Fisher-Black. The New Zealander inherited second while was enjoying his moment in the sunshine after a tough day in the saddle. Pogacar proved he embarks



on the 2025 season in good shape, displaying plenty of verve throughout the 138km ride from Madinat Zayed to Liwa to suggest he will be the man to beat come Sunday's time-trial conclusion. Pogacar is aiming for a third win in the race after 2021 and 2022. Milan meanwhile was enjoying his moment in the sunshine after a tough day in the saddle.

"I feel brutally tired after this sprint. The warmth and the last 700 metres of the race have made it really tough, more than I was thinking. It was a pretty intense day," said Milan. "I must thank my guys. They controlled, supported me and led me to the final stretch. I'm super happy with this victory, it was so hard!" added the 24-year-old who

is with the Lidl-Trek team. Pogacar was looking forward to testing his fitness on Tuesday's second stage, a 12km race against the clock on the Al Hudayriyat Island. "It's going to be the first real effort of the season. There was a lot of work done this winter and I hope it pays off tomorrow," said Pogacar.





## In brief

### Wissen Dan hockey club visits national assembly

ISLAMABAD (APP): The players and officials of the German Hockey Club, Wissen Dan, participating in the Prime Minister's Youth International Hockey Series, visited the National Assembly of Pakistan on Monday. The Speaker of the National Assembly, Ayaz Sadiq, welcomed all the players, guests, and organizers. The visiting club declared their visit an honor to witness the proceedings of the parliament and extended gratitude to the organizers for arranging the tour.

### Drug supplier sentenced to 9 years in prison

RAWALPINDI (APP): A court has sentenced a drug supplier, convict Farooq Khan to 09 years imprisonment and a fine of Rs. 80,000.0. According to the details, Westridge Police arrested the convict in September 2023 after 3.300Kg of hashish was recovered from him. In view of solid evidence and effective prosecution, a court on Monday sentenced the criminal to 09 years imprisonment along with a fine of Rs. 80,000.0. Appreciating the investigating and legal teams, CPO Syed Khalid Hamdani said that full-fledged actions are being taken against drug suppliers to eradicate the scourge of drugs from the society.

### 3 Fake cops arrested

RAWALPINDI (APP): The police has arrested three fake cops during a random searching at a checkpoint. According to the details, the personnel of Police Station Dhamyal Camp stopped the accused considering them suspicious on Monday. Instead of showing their identity, the accused started arguing with the police and pretended to be police officials. Police arrested all three accused who were identified as Nafees, Abdul Shakoor and Kashif. During the searching, fake uniforms, weapons, visiting cards and other items were recovered from the accused. A police spokesman said that a case has been registered against the accused and an investigation has been initiated. SP Saddar Muhammad Nadir Khokhar said that the accused would be challaned in court with solid evidence and will be punished.

### Police busts illegal kite flying network

ISLAMABAD (APP): Islamabad Capital Police has launched a large-scale crackdown on kite flyers and sellers, arresting 24 individuals involved in the illegal activity over the last 24 hours. A public relations officer told APP on Monday that the Capital police have also seized 3,279 kites and 240 rolls of string during the operation. He said that the crackdown against kite sellers is being carried out across the district, with action taken without discrimination. Following the arrests, cases have been filed against the offenders. SSP Operations Muhammad Shoaib Khan, emphasized that kite flying, a dangerous pastime, leads to the loss of innocent lives, and such activities will not be tolerated. SSP Shoaib urged parents to educate their children about the dangers and legal consequences of kite flying. "Citizens must fulfill their social and legal responsibilities by contributing to the prevention of kite flying," said Shoaib. "Announcements have been made in the mosques of all police stations regarding the hazards of kite flying and its ban." SSP Shoaib further stated that kite flying with metal-coated string poses a serious threat to human life, leading to potential injury or even death.

# Pak & Bahrain vast opportunities to explore in investment, trade, IT, tourism sectors: Ayaz Sadiq

ISLAMABAD (APP): Speaker of the National Assembly Sardar Ayaz Sadiq on Monday said that Pakistan and Bahrain have vast opportunities to explore in investment, trade, IT and Tourism sectors.

On the special invitation of Speaker of the National Assembly, the high-level Bahraini parliamentary delegation led by the President of the Council of Representatives, Ahmed Bin Salman Al Musallam, called on him at Parliament House, Islamabad.

During the meeting, Ayaz Sadiq highlighted the deep-rooted, longstanding relationship between Pakistan and Bahrain, based on shared religious, cultural, and historical values. He said, "These commonalities have fostered mutual respect and understanding, paving the way for enhanced bilateral cooperation in multiple sectors. Both nations have consistently worked together to promote regional stability, economic growth, and cultural exchange, making our partnership stronger with time."

The Speaker said that Pakistanis enjoys great respect in Bahrain, with several roads named in their honor, reflecting Bahrain's appreciation of their contributions. He expressed gratitude for the strong ties

between the two nations, stating that Pakistanis consider Bahrain as their second home. He also extended an invitation to President Ahmed Bin Salman Al Musallam to visit Pakistan again next year.

While appreciating the services Pakistani expatriates in Bahrain, the Speaker acknowledged the special privileges, including dual nationality, granted to them and expressed hope for continued support in resolving any outstanding issues. While deliberating on opportunities for deeper cooperation, Ayaz Sadiq stressed the need for proactive measures to enhance collaboration in investment, trade, business, tourism and IT sectors.

He underlined the importance of inter-parliamentary cooperation, stating that parliaments play a crucial role in bringing nations closer together.

He said that Saudi Arabia and Bahrain's Parliament has made significant advancements in IT and technology, urging Pakistan to adopt similar innovations. He said that bilateral agreements should lead to tangible outcomes, particularly in economic and trade sectors. The Speaker also highlighted Pakistan's rich diversity, mentioning: Punjab's strong agricultural sector, Sindh's

vast desert landscapes, Balochistan's abundant natural resources, The breathtaking Himalayan peaks, The strategic importance of Gwadar's deep-sea port.

He further mentioned that this was the first time that provincial speakers from Pakistan had been invited for inter-parliamentary discussions, reflecting a new era of strengthened collaboration among legislative bodies. He provided an overview of key parliamentary initiatives in Pakistan, including: Women's Parliamentary Caucus (WPC) – Focused on empowering women in legislation, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Forum – Overseeing progress on the UN's SDGs, Young Parliamentary Forum – Engaging youth in legislative processes.

He also briefed that Pakistan has reserved 60 seats for women in Parliament, emphasizing the country's commitment to gender inclusivity and empowerment. President of the Council of Representatives, Ahmed Bin Salman Al Musallam, expressed his gratitude for the warm welcome and hospitality. He remarked that he never felt like he was outside Bahrain, emphasizing the strong bond between the two



nations that has flourished over the last five decades.

He encouraged the younger generation to continue this legacy of friendship and cooperation. He assured full support in digitizing Pakistan's parliamentary system, suggesting that trade between Pakistan and Bahrain, currently valued at \$800 million, should be doubled. He also stressed the importance of enhancing IT infrastructure to keep pace with global advancements. Deputy Speaker of the Bahraini Council of Representatives, Ahmed Abdulwahed Qarata, reaffirmed the close ties between Pakistan and Bahrain.

He recognized Pakistan's central role in the Muslim world, particularly in the Arab region, and highlighted key areas for future collaboration, including tourism, energy, and trade. A Bahraini Member of Parliament also praised Pakistan's progress in women's empowerment, noting that Pakistani women have access to extensive educational and professional opportunities. She attributed these advancements to strong leadership and progressive policies.

The Bahraini parliamentary

delegation comprised the following dignitaries: Mr. Ahmed Bin Salman Al Musallam – Speaker of the Council of Representatives, Mr. Ahmed Abdulwahed Qarata – Second Deputy Speaker of the Council of Representatives, Mrs. Jalila Alawi Sayed – Member of Parliament / Chairperson of the Committee on Services, Mr. Mohamed Moosa Albalooshi – Member of Parliament / Chairman of the Public Utilities and Environment Committee, Mr. Bader Saleh Al Tamimi – Member of Parliament / Deputy

Chairman of the Public Utilities and Environment Committee, Mrs. Lulwa Ali Al Romani – Member of Parliament, Mr. Jaleel Kadhim Hasan – Member of Parliament, Mr. Jameel Dad Mohamed Mulla Hasan – Member of Parliament, Mr. Abdulla Khalifa Al Romaihi – Member of Parliament, Mr. Hamad Farooq Al Doy – Member of Parliament. Ambassador of Bahrain to Pakistan Mohamed Abdul Qadar and Acting Convener Pak-Bahrain PFG Ch. Muhammad Shahbaz Babar.

## Capital preparations for colorful Jashn-e-Baharan festival

ISLAMABAD (APP): The capital city was gearing up for a vibrant celebration of Jashn-e-Baharan with district administration officials finalizing preparations for a three-day cultural extravaganza.

According to DC office, Deputy Commissioner (DC) Islamabad Irfan Memon led a comprehensive preparation to review meeting, bringing together representatives from various departments to ensure a seamless festival experience. The meeting covered critical aspects of the upcoming event including entertainment programs, food stalls and cultural showcases.

"Providing entertainment opportunities to the public is our top priority," DC Memon emphasized during the meeting. The festival was scheduled for February 25, 26, and 27, promising three days of cultural celebration and enjoyment. Key highlights of the Jashn Baharan include: participation of foreign company CEOs, Silver circle involvement, Comprehensive cultural representation of Pakistan.

Local and international companies are set to participate, showcasing the festival's diverse and inclusive nature. The event aims to celebrate Pakistan's rich cultural heritage and provide residents with a memorable entertainment experience.

The meeting addressed all logistical details, from food stall arrangements to major program preparations, ensuring a smooth and enjoyable festival for all attendees. "We will celebrate Pakistan's culture through Jashn Baharan," DC Memon stated, highlighting the event's cultural significance.

## National Police Academy to be upgraded on modern lines: Interior Minister

ISLAMABAD (APP): The government has announced a comprehensive plan to upgrade the National Police Academy (NPA) on modern lines, bringing it in line with the standards of Military Academy Kakul.

The decision aims to enhance police training facilities and improve law enforcement capabilities. During his visit to the National Police Academy, Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi presided over a high-level meeting where he was briefed on the NPA's upgradation plan. The minister emphasized the need for state-of-the-art training facilities to ensure that officers receive the highest level

of professional training.

As part of the plan, an Elite Force Training School will be established at the academy. Additionally, Technical Training Centers, Indoor and Outdoor Firing Ranges, and a modernized Parade Ground will be developed to meet the evolving needs of law enforcement.

Naqvi directed officials to prioritize the construction of residential blocks for under-training officers, ensuring they have proper living arrangements. He also instructed that the Master Plan be revised and resubmitted after necessary modifications.

"The goal is to transform

the National Police Academy into an internationally recognized institution, where officers from abroad can also come for training," Naqvi stated.

The restructuring of the NPA will be implemented in phases, with a focus on enhancing infrastructure and training modules. The meeting was attended by senior officials, including Commandant NPA Muhammad Idrees Ahmed, Chairman CDA, IG Islamabad, and DC Islamabad. This initiative marks a significant step towards modernizing Pakistan's police force and aligning it with global policing standards.



ISLAMABAD: Labourers along with tools sitting on the roadside waiting to be hired for daily work at Khanna Pul. —APP Photo

## Tarar emphasis importance of ADR in tax system

ISLAMABAD (APP): Minister for Law and Justice Azam Nazeer Tarar on Monday emphasized the importance of Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) in ensuring expeditious tax dispute resolution and reducing litigation burdens.

The International Mediation & Arbitration Centre (IMAC), Ministry of Law & Justice successfully conducted a One-Day Executive Training on Tax Dispute Resolution through ADR at COMSTECH Islamabad. Law Minister Azam Nazeer Tarar graced the event as chief guest.

The training aimed to enhance the understanding and application of the ADR mechanism in tax governance, fostering a constructive dialogue on the institutionalization of ADR in resolving tax disputes efficiently. It brought together retired judges of the high

courts, government officers, legal experts, business leaders, and tax professionals.

Speaking on the occasion, the law minister said that the ADR system already present in our culture has been refined by the legal framework. It can be helpful to unlocking revenue of trillions of rupees stuck up before various courts in litigation, he stated.

Secretary Law & Justice Raja Naeem Akbar emphasized continuity of such capacity building programs for the stakeholders throughout the Pakistan.

The Chairman, Federal Board of Revenue (FBR), acknowledged the need for alternative mechanisms in tax dispute resolution. "FBR is committed to integrating ADR within its processes to ensure fair and transparent tax administration. Such ADR sessions may also be extended to big

business hubs like Karachi and Lahore," he remarked.

Key speakers, Dr. Umar A. Oseni, Secretary General of OIC-Arbitration Centre, Mr. Mir Badshah Khan Wazir, Member Legal, FBR, and Mian Sheraz Javaid, Barrister & Arbitrator, highlighted international best practices in tax dispute resolution and the benefits of ADR in reducing tax litigation.

They elaborated the operationalization of ADR within the FBR tax administration system.

IMAC, the recently established under the umbrella of Ministry of law & Justice, has successfully conducted a series of capacity building workshops to institutionalize the ADR mechanism amongst various legal fraternity, business chambers, government officers and serving and retired judges.

## WB delegation visits Benazir One Window Center in Islamabad

ISLAMABAD (APP): A high-profile delegation of 19 Executive Directors from the World Bank visited the Benazir One Window Center in Islamabad on Monday to assess the overall efficacy of the center.

Chairperson Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP), Senator Rubina Khalid, and Secretary Amer Ali Ahmad extended a warm welcome to the esteemed delegation.

The purpose of the visit was to scrutinize the facilities provided to deserving women and assess the overall efficacy of the One Window operations. The delegation was briefed by DG NSER, Dr. Asim Ijaz, on the intricacies of BISP One Window Operations.

The delegation, comprising Executive Directors, including Abdelhak BEDJAOUI, Zainab AHMED, Beatrice MASER, Robert Bruce NICHOLL, Teresa SOLBES, Paul BONMARTIN, Lonkhululeko MAGAGULA, Marlene Suzie

NZENGOU, Tauqir SHAH, Mercy TEMBON, Shadiya ADAM, Karl BACH, and other key personalities, exhibited keen interest in the multifaceted initiatives of the BISP One Window Center.

The delegation, accompanied by Senator Rubina Khalid and Secretary Amer Ali Ahmad, conducted a thorough inspection of the registry of deserving women at the NSER survey desk, enrollment of children in Taleemi Wazaif, Nashonuma awareness sessions for women, and the payment system. Senator Rubina Khalid informed the delegation that financial assistance is currently being provided to 9.3 million beneficiaries under BISP, with the number soon reaching 10 million.

She credited President Asif Ali Zardari for making housewives eligible for BISP financial assistance, emphasizing that BISP is a revolutionary program that has empowered poor women in Pakistan with eco-

nomie independence and recognition.

Earlier, a World Bank delegation led by Amjad Zafar Khan visited BISP headquarters. The delegation is on a visit to BISP from February 17 to February 25 to review progress on the Crisis Resilient Social Protection (CRISP) Framework, Program Action Plan, and agreements between BISP and the World Bank.

Chairperson Senator Rubina Khalid informed the delegation that, in collaboration with the State Bank of Pakistan, BISP will soon open bank accounts for deserving women, allowing them to receive relief funds directly and withdraw money from a bank of their choice for greater convenience.

She also highlighted efforts under the Benazir Hunarmand Program to provide skill training and overseas employment opportunities for deserving individuals, in collaboration with NAVTTC and the Ministry of Overseas Pakistanis.

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Capital Development Authority (CDA) is gearing up for a massive Spring Tree Plantation Drive 2025, aimed at enhancing the green cover of the federal capital.

The initiative was discussed in a high-level meeting chaired by CDA Chairman Muhammad Ali Randhawa at the CDA headquarters on Monday.

The meeting was attended by Member Environment, DG Environment, and other senior officials, alongside representatives from the corporate sector, including Nestle, Centaurus Mall, Garana, Imarat Group of Companies, and Agency 21.

Representatives from various NGOs and other organizations also participated in the discussions.

During the briefing, Chairman Randhawa was informed that the Spring

Plantation Drive 2025 will officially commence on February 19 at IMCB F-8.

The campaign will focus on large-scale tree plantation in key areas such as F-9 Park, Shakarparian, along nullahs, and in both urban and rural regions of Islamabad. In a unique approach, the campaign will utilize helicopters and drones to drop seed balls in the Margalla Hills National Park, ensuring plantation in hard-to-reach areas.

Chairman Randhawa emphasized the importance of involving civil society, private organizations, and the corporate sector in the drive. He directed that specific areas be allocated to companies and brands for tree plantation, urging them to contribute to environmental welfare.

To ensure widespread participation, the Chairman also called for the inclusion of students from educational institutions and the gen-

eral public in the campaign.

He instructed that stalls be set up in major parks and commercial areas across Islamabad to distribute plants and raise awareness about the initiative.

In a move to modernize the campaign, Chairman Randhawa directed the introduction of a digitized monitoring system to track the growth and survival of the planted trees. An online plant tracking system will also be established to ensure transparency and accountability.

Furthermore, the CDA website will feature a list of indigenous plants suitable for the local climate, with a focus on fruit-bearing and flowering trees. Chairman Randhawa stressed the importance of collective efforts to make the Spring Plantation Drive 2025 a success, urging all stakeholders to play their part in creating a greener and more sustainable Islamabad.



26 Afghan migrants deported

KABUL(BNA): 26 Afghan migrants has released by neighbor country who were detained for lacking legal documents. The Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation stated that the detainees had spent two to three months in custody before being repatriated. Upon arrival in Afghanistan, they received humanitarian aid before being transported to their home. The ministry reaffirmed its efforts to support undocumented Afghan migrants abroad, where many remain at risk of detention.

Avalanche in Ghor kills three

GHOR (Am TV): An avalanche in Ghor province has killed three men along the Ghor-Helmand highway in Pasaband district. Abdul Rahman Badri, Taliban police spokesperson in Ghor, said the avalanche struck in the Anqarchaq area of Pasaband district, burying the victims as they traveled toward Helmand province. According to Badri, residents of the area helped recover the bodies from beneath the snow before they were returned to their families.

Afghans struggle with costly visa extensions

KABUL (TOLOnews): With the continued forced expulsion of Afghan refugees from neighbor country, several Afghan refugees in the country have complained about the high cost of visa extensions and its time limitations. They say that currently neighbor country's visa is only extended monthly, which has created significant economic challenges for the refugees. "We must extend our visa every month, and this monthly extension has caused major economic difficulties for Afghan refugees. A family cannot afford to extend the visas of five members," said Haseena Sarwari, an Afghan refugee in neighbor country. Mohammad Reza Sazish, another Afghan refugee in neighbor country, said: "At present, all visas have been converted to one-month durations, and we cannot extend our visas for more than one month. We hope this system changes and returns to its previous state because the high cost of visa extension is beyond the means of any Afghan refugee in neighbor country." Meanwhile, several refugee rights activists have called for serious attention to the problems of Afghan refugees in neighbor country. "The current Afghan government must take action through diplomatic channels with the neighbor country government to issue long-term visas based on the laws of both countries," said Mohammad Khan Mohammadzai, a refugee rights activist. "In the past, visas were extended for six months or three months, but now they are only extended for one month at a cost of \$100. A solution must be found for this problem," Ehsan Khan Ahmadzai, another refugee rights activist, added. This comes as officials of the Islamic Emirate and various organizations have repeatedly called for more facilities for Afghan refugees. The International Organization for Migration and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees have also repeatedly urged to treat Afghan refugees appropriately in accordance with international law. Despite repeated attempts, TOLOnews was unable to obtain comments from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation on this matter. However, previously, officials of the Islamic Emirate have called on neighboring countries to provide all necessary facilities for Afghan refugees and to refrain from forcibly expelling them.

Prison access limits obstruct Afghan detainee efforts



KABUL (BNA): The acting Foreign Minister of Afghanistan, Mawlawi Amir Khan Muttaqi, met with the President of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), Peter Maurer, in his office on Monday. In a press release, the Foreign Ministry stated that during the meeting, the ICRC President highlighted the organization's ongoing activities in Afghanistan, particularly in the fields of healthcare, prosthetic limb production, and other humanitarian efforts. Maurer expressed satisfaction with the improved security and stability in the country. Sources added that Muttaqi commended the ICRC for its decades-long support to Afghanistan's most vulnerable populations, including the sick and disabled, describing their work as a source of pride and gratitude for the Afghan people. He also urged the ICRC to assist in determining the fate of Afghan detainees held in other countries. During the meeting, Maurer acknowledged that restrictions imposed by some nations on the ICRC's access to prisons have hindered its humanitarian efforts to locate detained Afghans and relay information to their families. However, he affirmed that the organization would intensify its efforts in this area. Maurer emphasized that the ICRC's decisions remain independent of external influences and reiterated the organization's commitment to continuing its operations in Afghanistan as before. The meeting underscored the critical role of international humanitarian organizations in addressing the ongoing challenges faced by Afghanistan, mainly in the wake of recent political changes and the evolving humanitarian landscape.

Herat silk weavers struggle against low-quality imports

HERAT CITY (Pajhwok): The rhythmic sounds of weaving machines can still be heard in the historic alleys of western Herat province. Once a thriving industry, silk weaving is now on the verge of extinction, with only a handful of artisans striving to keep this ancient craft alive. Silk weavers in the province express deep concern over the declining state of their industry. Speaking to Pajhwok Afghan News, they cite a decrease in demand for handmade products and the influx of cheap, low-quality silk fabrics from China and Pakistan as the primary reasons for the industry's downfall. Aminullah, a silk weaver with over 60 years of experience, recalls a time when nearly every household had at least one or two silk weavers. However, he laments that today the number of silk weavers in all of Herat is barely countable on one hand. He explained that hand-woven silk scarves and shawls no longer attract buyers in the domestic market, with only a few individuals purchasing them as gifts for export. "A locally hand-woven silk scarf costs about 1,000 afghanis, while a machine-made, low-quality version from China or Pakistan is sold for just 20 afghanis," he said. This significant price gap has led many people to opt for the cheaper, imported alternatives. Ghulam Hazrat, another seasoned silk weaver who entered in the industry at the age of seven and has been involved in the business for over 45 years, also complains about the lack of customers and the declining demand. He noted that he now weaves "Patu Walangi" (silk blankets) only for a limited number of clients who travel from northern provinces to Herat. He shared similar concerns, highlighting that a Pakistani or foreign-made "Patu Walangi" is available for 200 afghanis, whereas a locally handmade silk blanket sells for up to 4,000 afghanis. "Many people prefer low-cost foreign products without considering their quality or durability," he added. Meanwhile, silk product sellers in Herat are urging the government and relevant institutions to provide serious support and implement effective programs to revive this valuable industry. Ali Reza, a silk goods vendor at Lelami Market in Herat, has been striving to support the industry by offering a variety of hand-woven blankets, shawls, and scarves. However, he believes that the only way to save this industry is through export opportunities. "If the government facilitates exports, we might be able to revive this industry. But under the current conditions, silk weaving is rapidly disappearing," he warned. He urged the government to support silk weavers by providing export opportunities and establishing international markets for their products. In response, officials at the Information and Culture Department say they are working to create new markets for local products. Maulvi Hamidullah Ghayasi, an official at the Information and Culture Department, acknowledged the challenges facing the silk industry. He admitted that low-cost imported products have severely impacted the sector but promised to discuss potential solutions with officials in Kabul. Amid fading hopes, Herat's silk weavers insist that without substantial government support, this centuries-old industry will soon disappear. With some optimism remains, they warn that if immediate action is not taken, future generations may never again hear the sound of silk weaving machines in the old alleys of Herat.

Explosion reported near Kabul Airport

KABUL (Amu TV): An explosion occurred near Kabul's airport on Monday afternoon, according to local sources. Footage sent to Amu TV shows the blast took place on the road leading to the airport. Breaking — An explosion occurred near Kabul's airport on Monday afternoon, according to local sources. Footage sent to Amu TV shows the blast took place on the road leading to the airport. Details about the cause of the explosion or possible casualties remain unclear.

Six check dams to be built in Khost

KHOST (BNA): Construction has officially begun on six check dams in Khost province, with a total investment of \$120,000. The dams will be built across three districts, aiming to address key environmental and water management challenges in the region. Mustaghfar Gharibzai, the spokesperson for Khost province, told Bakhtar News Agency that the project, which falls under the Natural Resources Management initiative, is being funded by the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). The provincial agriculture, irrigation, and livestock department is overseeing the project. The dams are being constructed in the Sabari, Bak, and Zazi Maidan districts of Khost. Gharibzai explained that the primary goals of the project are to improve water management, prevent soil erosion, and enhance groundwater levels in the region. The check dams, each ranging from 15 to 20 meters in length, 5 to 6 meters in height, and 4 to 5 meters in width, are expected to provide long-term and short-term benefits to local communities. Additionally, the construction phase is set to generate employment opportunities for area residents. This project is part of a broader initiative to tackle water scarcity and environmental challenges in the region, while also promoting sustainable development and supporting local livelihoods.

Ministry supports students

KABUL (BNA): The Ministry of Martyrs and Disabled Affairs announced the distribution of essential aid to 153 students enrolled in technical and vocational programs at the Support Center for the Heirs of Martyrs and Disabled. The support package included food essentials such as rice, beans, sugar, and other vital items to help meet the students' immediate needs. Each student also received cash assistance amounting to 7,160 Afghani, providing them with further financial support during these challenging times. In addition to aiding students, the ministry has also focused on supporting disabled individuals in the region. In a separate effort, 101 deserving disabled people in Balkh province received wheelchairs, enhancing their mobility and independence. Each of these individuals was also granted 1,000 Afghani to cover transportation expenses. The Ministry of Martyrs and Disabled Affairs continues to prioritize the welfare of marginalized groups, ensuring that they receive the necessary support to lead dignified lives and pursue their education and rehabilitation goals.

Taliban arrest poet



KABUL (Amu TV): The Taliban's intelligence forces have detained Alam Hashimi, a poet and cultural activist, in Kabul, sources told Amu TV. According to his relatives, Hashimi was arrested in the Arya Township area of Kabul and taken to an unknown location. His family said they have received no information about his whereabouts since his detention. Sources said Hashimi was born in Panjshir province and is known for his latest collection of poetry, Masoodnama, which chronicles Afghanistan's history of resistance against oppression and foreign invasions. Taliban have not commented on his arrest.

DABS implements 126 electricity projects

KABUL (TOLOnews): Da Afghanistan Breshna Sherkat (DABS) says that in the solar year 1403, it has nearly 126 electricity supply projects underway, some of which have been contracted, while others are currently being implemented. Safiullah Ahmadzai, the chief operations officer of Breshna, stated during the company's six-month achievements presentation that currently 21% of electricity is supplied from domestic sources and 79% is imported from abroad. "In the year 1403, we have close to 126 projects, most of which have been contracted, and many are in the process of implementation," said the chief operations officer of Breshna. During this program, Breshna officials provided information on the expansion of the electricity network, reforms, electricity supply, operational affairs, and electricity import plans from neighboring countries. Abdul Bari Omar, the head of Da Afghanistan Breshna Sherkat (DABS), stated that special attention has been given to providing electricity to industrial parks this year, with projects such as the Kajaki Dam, Mahipar Dam, the 500-kilovolt Arghandi transmission line, and the Chak Wardak project currently under implementation. "Some people think there is a shortage of electricity or that Breshna is not distributing electricity properly, but part of this issue is due to load shedding, and another part is due to overloading of power lines, which leads to automatic power cuts and connections," Abdul Bari Omar added. He said that out of 56,000 analog meters, 37,000 have so far been converted to digital meters, and the process of standardizing the electricity system is ongoing. He also pledged that efforts are being made to provide electricity to remote areas of the country, adding: "In the past five months, out of 650,000 installed meters, we have managed to digitize 37,000." "Most politicians who have not yet paid their electricity debts have had their cases referred to the courts as per the directives of relevant authorities," stated Maiwand Atace, the Commercial Deputy of DABS. According to statistics from the Government Media Center, Breshna Company has collected 31.531 billion Afghani from electricity bills from its customers since the beginning of the current solar year.



Calligraphers in Herat struggle to preserve a vanishing art

HERAT (Amu TV): For centuries, Herat's calligraphers have etched the words of history onto stone, preserving the cultural identity of Afghanistan. But decades of war have devastated this delicate art, leaving many inscriptions damaged or destroyed. Among those fighting to keep the tradition alive is Ahmad Sabri, a master calligrapher who has handwritten several Qurans. Now an aging artist, he continues to inscribe his generation's cultural legacy for the next, ensuring the echoes of history are not lost. A legacy scarred by war "Many of Herat's historical calligraphic works have been lost due to war," Sabri said. "From the time of British occupation to the present, some of our most treasured inscriptions have been erased. Only fragments remain." Among the most significant surviving examples of Herat's calligraphy are the Great Mosque of Herat and the shrine of Khwaja Abdullah Ansari, revered for their intricate inscriptions. Calligraphers typically work on durable surfaces, hoping their scripts will endure for generations. However, war has been merciless, with bullets and bombs damaging even the most resilient stone inscriptions. A forgotten art in modern Afghanistan Once highly regarded, calligraphers now struggle to make a living, facing economic hardship and fading recognition. "Herat's historical sites have two designated calligrapher positions," said Raqibullah Rizwani, the Taliban-appointed head of historical monuments in Herat. "These artists repair inscriptions when they are at risk of collapse." The city's monuments feature various calligraphic styles, from Naskh and Thuluth to Kufic. "We have many historical sites decorated with Islamic calligraphy, particularly in the Thuluth and Kufic scripts," said Jalil Ahmad Tawanah, head of Herat's Calligraphers Association. Despite the challenges, Herat's calligraphers continue their work, carving history into stone, determined that no hardship will erase the cultural heritage they have dedicated their lives to preserving.

Afghan women turn to entrepreneurship in Herat



work from home," she said. Almost all employees of this workshop are girls deprived of education who, alongside learning art, also earn an income. "My family encouraged me to come to this job. I am very happy to leave the house, work here, and earn an income," said Asra, one of the employees. "Schools are closed, and in these circumstances, it is good that we work and have our own income," Sadaf, another employee of the workshop, added. Many of the women and girls engaged in commercial activities in Herat also support their families financially. "It has been two months since we started working in person, and during this time, we have employed three women in tailoring and marketing," said Mahtab Nazari, the manager of a clothing store. "We ask women to support us so that we can expand our work and provide job opportunities for other women as well," said Lida Ahmadzadah, an employee of a clothing store. According to statistics from the Women's Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Herat, in addition to nearly one thousand officially registered women's businesses, more than five thousand other women are also engaged in informal business activities in the province. According to officials of this chamber, there are no restrictions on women's business activities in Herat.

Taliban flog nine people

GHAZNI (Amu TV): The Taliban's Supreme Court announced that on Monday, nine people—including three women—were publicly flogged in the provinces of Ghazni and Takhar. Taliban said the punishments were carried out on Monday, with sentences ranging from one to five years in prison and 30 to 39 lashes. In a separate statement, the Taliban said they also flogged two women and three individuals, including two men convicted of sodomy and theft, and man and a woman sentenced for running away from home and kidnapping. According to a Taliban statement, the individuals were convicted on charges of sodomy, theft, running away from home, kidnapping, and adultery. In Jaghori district of Ghazni, the Taliban flogged two men in Takhar's Farkhar district on adultery charges. The punishment was carried out in the district's public square. Three of the accused received one year and six months in prison and 39 lashes, while the fourth was sentenced to five years in prison and 39 lashes. This latest round of public punishments follows the flogging of 12 people in Bamiyan and Nimroz the previous day. According to figures compiled by Amu TV, the Taliban have publicly flogged at least 71 people—including 10 women—across multiple provinces in the past three weeks. Despite international outcry, the Taliban continue to enforce harsh corporal punishments in public, drawing sharp criticism from human rights organizations.





ISLAMABAD: Chief Justice, Justice Yahya Afridi presenting souvenir to Marilina Armellini, Ambassador of Italy to Pakistan.

## Israel will leave troops in five locations in Lebanon

BEIRUT/JERUSALEM (Reuters, AFP): Israel will keep troops in several posts in southern Lebanon past a February 18 deadline for them to withdraw, a military spokesperson said on Monday, as Israeli leaders sought to reassure northern residents that they can return home safely.

Under a truce deal brokered by Washington in November, Israeli troops were granted 60 days to withdraw from southern Lebanon where they had waged a ground offensive against fighters from Lebanon's armed group Hezbollah since early October. That deadline was extended to February 18, but Israeli and Lebanese officials as well as foreign diplomats had anticipated that the military would retain some troops on parts of the Lebanese side of the border.

"We need to remain at those points at the moment to defend Israeli citizens, to make sure this process is complete and eventually hand it over to the Lebanese armed forces," military spokesperson Lt. Col. Nadav Shoshani told a briefing with reporters, adding that the move was in accordance with the mechanism of the ceasefire agreement. He said the locations were close to Israeli communities or occupying strategic vantage points overlooking Israeli towns like Metula, at the northernmost point of Israel.

"Basically the security situation is very, very complex," he said. A Lebanese official and two foreign diplomats said Israeli troops would likely leave villages in south Lebanon but stay in overlook points to reassure residents of northern Israel who are set to return home on March 1.

Tens of thousands of people were displaced from northern Israel by Hezbollah rocket fire and more than a million people in Lebanon fled Israeli air strikes in the year-long war conflict playing out in parallel with

the Gaza war. The fighting ended in late November with a truce ordering Israeli troops to withdraw from south Lebanon, Hezbollah fighters and arms to leave and Lebanese troops to deploy. The ceasefire deal stipulates that only "official military and security forces" in Lebanon can carry arms and that the Lebanese government must prevent any transfers of arms or related material to non-state armed groups.

Its language — sharper than previous United Nations Security Council Resolutions — appears to spells out ways that the Lebanese state will be expected to constrain Hezbollah, diplomats and analysts said. The deal's implementation is being overseen by a committee chaired by the US and France. Lebanon's President Joseph Aoun, who has said Israeli troops should leave by the February 18 deadline, said on Monday he was "afraid that the complete (Israeli) withdrawal will not be achieved tomorrow."

The two diplomats said talks were still underway on alternatives to Israeli troops staying, including possibly deploying more UN peacekeepers to the border. France has proposed that UN forces including French troops replace Israeli forces at key border points.

Hezbollah said on Sunday that Israeli forces still in Lebanon after Tuesday would be considered an occupying force. Israel occupied southern Lebanon for 22 years, withdrawing in 2000 after continued attacks on its positions in occupied Lebanese territory by Hezbollah, founded in 1982 to counter Israel's invasions. In the latest war, Israel and Hezbollah exchanged fire for nearly a year, mostly around the border. Israel significantly escalated in September, eliminating much of Hezbollah's top leadership in air strikes and sending ground troops into south Lebanon.

## Iran will not hesitate to defend its N-programme

DUBAI (Reuters): Iran has defended its nuclear programme and will not be hesitant to continue doing so, Iran's foreign ministry spokesperson Esmail Baghaei said on Monday, a day after Israel and the US vowed to counter Iran's nuclear ambitions.

"Iran's peaceful nuclear programme is ongoing, and has been for the last three decades, based on Iran's rights as a member in the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons... definitely we will not show any weakness in this regard," he said.

Israel and the United States are determined to thwart Iran's nuclear ambitions and its influence in the Middle East, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said on Sunday after meeting US Secretary of State Marco Rubio in Jerusalem. Rubio said: "Behind every terrorist group, behind every act of violence, behind every destabilising activity, behind everything that threatens peace and stability for the millions of people that call this region home, is Iran."

## Cop shot dead by terrorists in DI Khan

F.P. Report

D I KHAN: A police constable embraced martyrdom on Monday when unidentified terrorists opened fire on him near Kotli Imam Husain area of Dera Ismail Khan.

After receiving the report of the incident, heavy contingent of police reached the area and shifted the dead body of Constable Fazal Shah to District Headquarters Hospital (DHQ) in Dera Ismail Khan.

Earlier in December 2024, a cousin of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur was shot dead by unidentified gunmen in Dera Ismail Khan. According to police, Sardar Saqlain Khan Gandapur was killed on the spot in Kalachi area of DI Khan.

The deceased was the son of Sardar Ismail Khan Gandapur and brother of former provincial assembly candidate Sardar Faridun Khan Gandapur.

## Court orders exhumation of Amir's body

F.P. Report

KARACHI: A local court of Karachi on Monday ordered the exhumation of Mustafa Amir's body. The young boy was brutally killed allegedly by his friend Armaghan in Karachi.

The judicial magistrate of Karachi on Monday accepted the plea of investigation officer seeking the exhumation of body. The court directed to constitute the medical board for exhumation of body seeking report within seven days. The health secretary has been directed to constitute the medical board.

Meanwhile, the court directed the authorities to present the suspect in the court at 9am on Tuesday with proper security arrangements. Earlier, police said that the murder was an outcome of a dispute between two friends.

Sheraz, one of the suspects police earlier apprehended, claimed that Armaghan killed the young man to settle personal score. There are also reports that a girl was involved in the gruesome murder of 24-year-old Mustafa. Armaghan called Mustafa to his home on some pretext on Jan 6 and thrashed him with an iron rod for three hours. He later put him in his car trunk and drove towards Hub, Balochistan, police quoted Sheraz as having said.

On Friday, CIA DIG Muqaddas Haider said in a presser that police had found Mustafa's dead body from Hub Chowki as he was taken there by his vehicle on Jan 6. Suspect Armaghan set the vehicle on fire after locking Mustafa in the trunk. Haider said the boy's charred body was found in the vehicle trunk.

Earlier, a police team conducted an operation at the house of Armaghan in Defence Phase 5 and found bullet marks in a room and blood stains on the carpet. He said sample of kidnapped Mustafa's mother was sent to laboratory for DNA matching with the blood found at the house of Armaghan.

# Sharjeel urges KP CM to focus his efforts on combating terrorism

F.P. Report

KARACHI: Sindh Senior Minister Sharjeel Inam Memon stated that the bills on which the Sindh Governor had raised objections will be re-passed in Monday's session. Once the assembly passes these bills, they will be sent to the Governor again but will be considered approved.

Speaking to the media at the Sindh Assembly Media Corner, Sindh Senior Minister and Provincial Minister for Information, Transport, and Mass Transit, Sharjeel Inam Memon, stated that job restrictions had been in place for the past few years, with some individuals taking the matter to court. The Sindh government has now relaxed the age limit for jobs; however, this relaxation will not apply to CSS and police recruitment.

He stated that the Punjab Information Minister attempted to politicize the accident in Sehwan, and her statement suggested a lack of awareness of the facts. He added that both the Punjab Chief Minister and the Information Minister make statements without proper research. The Punjab Chief Minister claimed that they launched the EV bus service and established the first autism center, but it is well known that the Sindh government was the first to introduce the EV bus service and also built modern autism centers.

He stated that Sehwan Road and Sukkur-Hyderabad Road fall under the jurisdiction of the National Highway Authority. Human lives are lost daily on Sehwan Road, and despite the Sindh government providing seven billion rupees, the road has yet to be constructed. He blamed the PML-N federal government's incompetence for accidents on national highways, emphasizing that PML-N has held power in the federation the most, yet the incomplete roads reflect its failure.

Senior Minister Sharjeel Inam Memon stated that when the Punjab Information Minister makes fiery statements, she should understand that if we respond, we will not lie—we will only speak the truth. He added that the PPP holds a genuine mandate in Sindh, and the people have recognized and appreciated its work. He further remarked that everyone is aware of their mandate and the level of their service.

He stated that PIT's Barrister Saif also made a statement on Monday regarding President Asif Ali Zardari and Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari.



He described PTI as a party of opportunists, where individuals from various parties kept joining. He claimed that if the PTI leader is in jail, it is due to the actions of their own second-tier leaders. He further accused PTI of misleading the people of Pakistan and alleged that Imran Khan attempted to damage the country's reputation internationally.

He said that PTI's politics revolves around chaos and harming the country's progress. According to him, not just Imran Khan but the entire PTI was involved in these actions. He also accused PTI members of writing to the IMF to block loans for Pakistan and of consistently criticizing the country and its institutions on social media. He claimed that PTI made every possible attempt to harm Pakistan both locally and internationally. He advised PTI spokespersons to reflect on their own party's politics before criticizing others, stating that no greater test could be placed upon them than this.

He stated that in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), police stations are locked after 5 PM, and the police are unable to operate freely. He pointed out that the APS tragedy occurred during PTI's 15-year rule, and the Bannu jail was demolished under their watch. He accused the PTI government in KP and the party as a whole of being more focused on attempting to invade the federal capital rather than addressing governance issues. He added that if the people of KP are coming to other provinces for employment, it is a clear indication of the KP government's failure to provide relief and opportunities for its own people.

In response to a question, Senior Minister Sharjeel Inam Memon stated that the PPP has never engaged in blackmail politics. He clarified that the party did not support the PML-N out of

enthusiasm but did so unconditionally to ensure the formation of assemblies and uphold democracy. Even now, he asserted, the PPP is not blackmailing anyone but is simply demanding the legitimate rights of its province.

He emphasized that Karachi is the gateway to Pakistan and that disrupting its operations affects the entire country. He questioned why funds could be allocated for other projects but not for the crucial Hyderabad-Sukkur Road. He pointed out that despite the Sindh government providing funds for Sehwan Road, the federal government's incompetence has prevented its construction.

He stressed that these are legitimate concerns, not political point-scoring, as the goal is to provide relief not just to Sindh but to all of Pakistan. He also highlighted the closure of Sindh's airports, including Mohenjo Daro and Shaheed Benazirabad, while Hyderabad airport had already been shut down. He reiterated that PPP is merely demanding its rights, and where the federal government needs assistance, the party is willing to support it wholeheartedly. Lastly, he criticized federal government spokespersons for making baseless statements, advising them to study the facts before speaking.

In response to another question, Senior Minister Sharjeel Inam Memon stated that any movements or actions by PTI should not be directed against the federation or institutions but against the terrorists who are killing innocent civilians in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. He urged the Chief Minister of KP to focus his efforts on combating terrorism rather than engaging in political confrontations.

In response to another question, Senior Minister Sharjeel Inam Memon stated that heavy traffic is a major issue in Karachi, as it is a port city that receives heavy transport from across Pakistan. He lamented that Rs. 180 billion from two years of cess was transferred to the Supreme Court. Despite writing a letter regarding the matter, the tax money remains with the court. He appealed to the Chief Justice to allocate these funds for Sindh's infrastructure development. Senior Minister Sharjeel Inam Memon announced that charged parking has been abolished starting today. He stated that any operation of charged parking would be considered illegal. He also assured that the Sindh government would provide complete security for the Champions Trophy.

## PHC seeks response against misuse of govt vehicles by officials

Humayun Khan

PESHAWAR: A divisional bench of Peshawar High Court (PHC), comprising of Justice Waqar Ahmad and Justice Qazi Ishaan Ullah has issued notice to the federal and provincial governments, seeking a response regarding the misuse of official vehicles, on Monday.

The writ petition filed by Mufti Noor-ul-Basir advocate. The petition argued that government officers are using official vehicles for personal purposes, including attending private events and programs. The petitioner's counsel, Malak Salman Khan advocate argued that government officers are using official vehicles for personal purposes, which is not only a misuse of public funds but also a violation of the law. He claimed that the officers are using the vehicles for personal gain, which is not allowed under the law.

The court has directed the federal and provincial governments to respond to the petition and explain using official vehicles for personal purposes. The court has also sought a response regarding the measures taken by the governments to prevent the misuse of official vehicles.

**Court rejects alleged murderers bail plea:** PHC has rejected the bail application of two accused named Fahad Afridi and Yousaf Afridi, in a case involving the murder of a person over a property dispute.

The defense lawyer argued that the accused were innocent and had been falsely implicated in the case. However, the prosecution countered that the accused had a history of enmity with the victim and that the murder was premeditated. The counsel for complainant, Umar Farooq advocate argued that the accused had allegedly killed Nader Zaman on September 7, 2024, in the premises of Bily Tangi police station in Kohat. He claimed that the victim had predicted his own murder in a social media post, stating that a powerful family with political influence would kill him over a property dispute.

The defense lawyer argued that the case was a result of a property dispute and that the accused were being falsely implicated. He claimed that a cross-FIR had been registered at the Lady Reading Hospital in Peshawar, which proved that the accused were innocent.

The court, after hearing the arguments from both sides, rejected the bail

application of the two accused. The court cited the severity of the crime and the evidence presented by the prosecution as the reasons for rejecting the bail application.

**Court orders appointment of another focal person for enforced disappearance cases:** The Chief Justice of Peshawar High Court (PHC) Justice SM Attique Shah has sought a report from the government regarding the enforced disappearance of three citizens, including two brothers, from Charsadda and Dera Ismail Khan, on Monday.

The court was surprised on appointment of only one focal person for the entire country to deal with enforced disappeared persons/ missing persons cases. The brother of the missing persons informed the court that his two brothers have been missing since 2023. He stated that they are six brothers, and none of them are involved in politics. The Chief Justice asked why only these two brothers were picked up, to which the brother replied that one of the brothers is only 16 years old. The father of the missing brothers informed the court that his sons are innocent and have no connection with any illegal activity.

## Kurrum situation reviewed

(Continued from Page 1)

Since April 2021, provision of dry food/ ration to the TDPs of North Waziristan has been discontinued by World Food Program (WFP) while the funds already provided by the Federal Government too have been exhausted. The Cabinet therefore decided to approach the Federal Government for the provision of more funds and also stressed for a plan to rehabilitate the TDPs.

The cabinet also approved forwarding the Provincial Assembly resolution No. 123 to the Federal Government asking for the establishment of Regional offices of Foreign Office at all the Divisional Headquarters of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa particularly Abbottabad and Swat to address the matter of documents' attestation needs of the students. The Cabinet also approved the reconstitution of Provincial Transport Authority and the nomination of its three non-official Members. It also approved the hiring of private legal counsels for defending the CNSA (Control of Narcotics Substances Act) and imposing of Provincial Excise duty in the Supreme Court of Pakistan and Peshawar High Court respectively. It approved grant-in-aid for District bar Association Khyber.

The Cabinet approved the construction/Rehabilitation/Improvement of 20 KM road from Bada Mir Abbas to Sari Norang via Bahrat,

Kakki and MirdilNar Shakoorullah and 15 KM road from Kacha BachakMiakhel to Shagi Machan Khel at District Bannu. It also approved implementation of Axle Load Control over the Provincial Highways.

The Cabinet approved a non-ADP Scheme titled 'Integrated Development Package for D.I.Khan' with initial allocation of Rs. 2000 million during the current financial year. In District D.I.Khan, as per SDGs report indicators such as Poverty is 66%, non availability of sanitation facilities 55%, and non-availability of social protection coverage is 48.2%, which require substantial improvement. Moreover, the prevalence of stunting among children under five years remains in the District is alarmingly high at 45.8% and malnutrition 10.8%. Addressing these issues demand a holistic approach, targeting sectors such as health, education, infrastructure, and social protection.

It also approved the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Local Governments Property Lease Rules 2025" for the fair market price of properties of local government. The Cabinet was informed about the enhanced cost of the revised PC-I of the project 'Design and Construction of Residential/Non Residential Building in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa District Peshawar-Phase-I' from original cost of Rs. 651 Million to Rs. 888.609 million.

Speaking about the residential issues of the government employees, the Chief Minister directed the concerned authorities to prepare proper plan for the construction of high rise buildings in the provincial metropolis to address the housing needs of the employees, to be included in the next ADP.

The Advisor to Chief Minister Musaddiq Abbassi briefed the Cabinet on the salient features of the proposed awareness plan on anti-corruption. The Chief Minister, in this regard stressed initiating Honesty awards and enactment of rules to curb the menace of corruption. He further directed the Elementary & Secondary Education Department to introduce offering Durood Sharif immediately after recitation from the Holy Quran during morning assemblies in the schools.

Earlier in his opening remarks, the Chief Minister welcomed the newly appointed Chief Secretary Shahab Ali Shah expressing the hope that having served the Province in various capacities in the past; he will contribute a lot to good governance endeavors. He also appreciated the service of outgoing Chief Secretary Nadeem Aslam Chaudhary for the Province. Cabinet members, Chief Secretary Shahab Ali Shah, Additional Chief Secretaries, Senior Member Board of Revenue, Administrative Secretaries and Advocate General Khyber Pakhtunkhwa attended the meeting.

## NFC award formula to include new factors: Sindh CM

F.P. Report

KARACHI: In a pivotal move, Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah, during a meeting with a United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA) delegation on Monday, said that the National Finance Commission (NFC) Award formula should incorporate factors such as income disparity, demographic performance, human development, tax efforts, and forest cover.

According to Sindh Chief Minister House information, the meeting took place at the CM House and was attended by Health and Population Minister Dr Azra Fazal and other key officials. The UNFPA delegation, led by Dr Luay

Shabaneh, discussed equitable financial resource distribution and sustainable economic growth strategies with the chief minister, focusing on the NFC Award.

CM Shah highlighted the historical evolution of the NFC, stating that since 2008, the Pakistan People's Party has pushed for provincial control over sales tax collection to boost revenue. With provinces closer to consumers, Shah argued, they could collect taxes more efficiently, reducing dependence on federal allocations and ensuring effective resource distribution.

Dr Ashfaq Khan, Director General of NUST, provided an extensive overview of Pakistan's fis-

cal framework, which emphasized the need for a reformed revenue-sharing approach. He noted that historically, Pakistan has relied heavily on population size for resource allocation, a practice that was adjusted with the 7th NFC Award to include multifactor criteria.

The discussions also drew comparisons with international models, particularly India's financial management system, and underscored the necessity for a depoliticized, data-driven NFC formula. An equitable distribution mechanism, Dr. Khan suggested, would involve parameters such as income gap, population, demographic performance, and others, each with specific weight.