

Eight more reach home
F.P. Report
MANDI BAGA UDDIN: Eight more Pakistanis, who survived the boat tragedy off the shores of Morocco, landed at Islamabad airport onboard flight number QR614 on Saturday. Of these eight persons namely Muhammad Afzal, Muhammad Adeel, Irfan Ahmad, Arsalan, Ghulam Mustafa, Badar Mohaiyuddin, Mujahid Ali and Tasweer Ahmad

23 terrorists killed, 18 soldiers martyred in operations

F.P. Report
RAWALPINDI: The Security Forces killed 23 terrorists in different operations in Balochistan during the last 24 hours, demonstrating great determination to purge the country of the menace of terrorism.
“In the backdrop of the heinous act of terrorism in Kalat District, multiple sanitization operations are being conducted by the security forces throughout the province,” an ISPR news release said. On Saturday, in one of such operations conducted in Harnai District, own troops effectively engaged the terrorists as a result of which eleven terrorists were sent to hell, busting multiple terrorist hide-outs.
While successfully thwarting terrorists’ attempt to establish a road-block in the general area Mangochar, Kalat District, twelve terrorists were sent to hell. “Thus a total of 23 terrorists have been sent to hell in different operations in Balochistan in last 24 hours,” it added.
On the behest of inimical and hostile forces, this cowardly act of terrorism was aimed at disrupting the peaceful environment of Balochistan by targeting mainly innocent civilians.
During the conduct of operations, eighteen brave sons of the soil, having fought gallantly, made the ultimate sacrifice and embraced shahadat. The ISPR vowed that the sanitization operations would continue until perpetrators and facilitators of the heinous and cowardly act are brought to justice. Security forces of Pakistan, in step with the nation, are determined to wipe out the menace of terrorism from Balochistan and Pakistan.
President Asif Ali Zardari and Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif have commended security forces for neutralizing terrorists during multiple operations in Balochistan.
In their separate messages, they said terrorists are enemies of Balochistan’s peace and development reaffirming that the fight against terrorism will continue until it is completely eradicated from the country. Condemning the terrorist attack, they said these terrorist elements want to disrupt peace in Balochistan. However, our brave security forces will continue such operations to suppress anti-state elements. In his message, President Asif Ali Zardari commended the security forces for killing 23 terrorists in various operations in Balochistan, including Kalat and Harnai.
The Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, in his remarks, affirmed that the entire nation, including him, stands with its security forces in the war against terrorism. The two leaders also prayed for the elevation of the martyrs’ ranks and for patience for their families.
Federal Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi on Saturday paid a glowing tribute to the 18 soldiers of FC (Frontier Corps) Balochistan, who embraced martyrdom while courageously confronting terrorists in Kalat District of Balochistan.
In a statement, he said the brave sons of FC Balochistan sacrificed their lives for the peace of the country, and the nation takes pride in the bravery of the martyred soldiers.
The Interior Minister said martyrs are the heroes of the nation. He said the 18 brave sons of the nation have achieved eternal glory by sacrificing their lives for the homeland and have attained the exalted status of martyrdom. He said the nation salutes their immense sacrifice. He made it clear that the nation stands with the families of the martyrs. Mohsin Naqvi emphasized that the nation deeply values the sacrifices of the security forces in the war against terrorism.
He expressed heartfelt condolences and sympathy to the families of the martyrs. The Interior Minister also praised the security forces for eliminating 23 terrorists in Mangochar. He commended the security forces for bringing the 23 terrorists to a humiliating end. He said the security forces have thwarted the nefarious designs of the terrorists. He added that the nation stands shoulder-to-shoulder with the security forces.

JC approves 10 additional judges for PHC

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Judicial Commission of Pakistan (JCP) on Saturday approved the appointment of 10 additional judges to the Peshawar High Court (PHC).
During a meeting chaired by Chief Justice of Pakistan (CJP) Yahya Afridi, the commission deliberated on appointing additional judges in the PHC, with 40 names initially under consideration for nine vacant positions. However, after detailed discussions, the JCP approved 10 candidates for the positions.
During the meeting, Chief Justice of Peshawar High Court Justice Ishaq Ibrahim reportedly advocated for the appointment of a tenth judge. Despite objections raised by Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) members, including Barrister Gohar, Ali Zafar, and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa’s Law Minister, the commission approved the appointments by majority vote. The decision comes amid a broader judicial debate over the appointment of judges in high courts.

Cop injured in Kurram firing dies

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: A police official injured in a firing incident in Kurram along with Assistant Commissioner Revenue the other day succumbed to his wounds at the hospital on Saturday Police said, the cop, Syed Ashiq Hussain, who was wounded in an attack on the Assistant Commissioner in Boshetra, Kurram, could not survive his injuries and was martyred. Hospital sources also confirmed his martyrdom.
Police said the slain official had been stationed in Boshetra after a ceasefire and was targeted by unknown assailants in the evening. Police reports indicate that the situation in the area remains tense, and security has been further tightened.
The Assistant Commissioner was present in Boshetra with the police after a ceasefire agreement when the firing incident occurred. The injured Assistant Commissioner was immediately taken to the hospital for medical treatment. Investigations into the firing incident are ongoing.

COAS lauds troops role against terrorism

F.P. Report

RAWALPINDI: General Syed Asim Munir, NI(M), Chief of Army Staff (COAS), visited Balochistan where he was given a comprehensive brief on the prevailing security situation in Balochistan which was also attended by senior security and intelligence officials.
COAS, Governor and CM Balochistan offered funeral prayers of the Shaheeds and also visited the injured soldiers in the Combined Military Hospital Quetta and appreciated their unwavering commitment to defending the country at all costs.
COAS highlighted that those who are acting as terrorist proxies of their foreign masters who have mastered the art of manifesting double standards of hunting with the hound and running with the hare are well known to us. No matter what these so called “frenemies” may do, you will surely be defeated by the resilience of our proud nation and its Armed Forces Inshallah. For the defence of our motherland and its people, we will definitely retaliate and ‘hunt you down’, whenever required and wherever you may be.
COAS also appreciated the efforts of the valiant officers and soldiers of Army, Frontier Corps and Law Enforcement Agencies for their courage and determination towards fighting terrorism. He reassured Army’s resolve to ensuring the security and well-being of the people of Balochistan, while also reaffirming commitment to supporting the provincial government in its efforts to promote peace, stability, and development in the region.

PM urges religious scholars to promote brotherhood

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Saturday urged the religious scholars, community leaders and citizens to play role in promoting brotherhood as extremism and divisive rhetoric are threat to social peace and harmony.
The Prime Minister shared these views in his message on World Interfaith Harmony Week. Sharif said this week serves as a powerful reminder of the importance of dialogue, understanding, and cooperation among diverse religious communities.
He said Pakistan, envisioned by our founding father Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah as a sanctuary for all faiths, remains steadfast in its constitutional oath to protect every citizen’s right to belief, dignity, and equality. The Prime Minister said the government is committed to fostering an environment of acceptance, tolerance, and mutual respect.
World Interfaith Harmony Week is starting from today (Saturday). It is celebrated every year during the first week of February. This week was conceived to promote a culture peace and nonviolence, World Interfaith Harmony Week is an annual event being observed since 2010.
Meanwhile, the Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif also made a phone call to President Aleksandr Lukashenko of Belarus and congratulated him on his re-election as President.
During the conversation, the Prime Minister reaffirmed Pakistan’s commitment to further strengthening long-standing, friendly relations between the two countries. He emphasized the importance of transforming these ties into a mutually beneficial economic partnership.
Recalling President Lukashenko’s visit to Islamabad last November, the Premier said that he looked forward to his official visit to Minsk later this year. President Lukashenko thanked the Prime Minister for the telephone call and conveyed his best wishes for the progress and prosperity of the people of Pakistan. Both leaders expressed their desire to further enhance bilateral cooperation across all areas of mutual interest, building on the existing foundation of friendship and collaboration.

Govt, PTI talks committees still not denotified

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Despite an announcement by the PTI that talks with the government were over, National Assembly (NA) Speaker Sardar Ayaz Sadiq still desires the dialogue between the two sides to continue and has not formally dissolved the committees formed for the purpose.
Speaker’s orders, the National Secretariat had not de-notified the committees as yet. It is pertinent to mention here that both the government and the PTI have dissolved their committees formed to find a way out of the current situation through dialogue.
On Friday, PML-N Parliamentary Leader in the Senate Senator Irfanul Haq Siddiqui, confirmed that the government has ended the negotiation process with PTI after the party withdrew and rejected the prime minister’s offer for another round of talks. Siddiqui, also the spokesman for the government’s negotiation committee involved in talks with the PTI, said that PTI leaders hurried into negotiations and exited just as quickly as they had arrived. Their primary and genuine demand was the immediate release of Imran Khan and other leaders.
In an interview, Irfan Siddiqui further emphasized that negotiations have ended, with no deadlock or breakdown.



PESHAWAR: Members of Khyber Union of Journalists holding protest against PECA Act 2025.

Zardari visits native village of Maj Hamza Shaheed

F.P. Report

RAWALPINDI: President Asif Ali Zardari Saturday visited native village of Major Hamza Israr Shaheed. He offered fateha at the grave of Major Hamza Israr who embraced martyrdom during operation against terrorists in Mir Ali, North Waziristan.
He laid wreath at the grave of the martyred officer and paid him tribute. He also met with the heirs of Major Hamza and expressed condolences. The President prayed for elevation of the ranks of Shaheed and for grant of fortitude to the bereaved family. He lauded Major Hamza for his services for the country and for offering the ultimate sacrifice. He appreciated patriotism of the Shaheed and his bereaved family.

PTI to observe ‘Black Day’ on 8th

F.P. Report

SWABI: Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) leader Asad Qaiser has announced that the party will observe February 8 as a Black Day, marking a significant protest against what they call the rigging of the 2018 elections.
In a media statement, Qaiser said that on this day, PTI supporters from across the country would gather for a major rally in Swabi, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The rally, he said, would serve as a demonstration of the people’s desire to make decisions for Pakistan, emphasizing that the “real mandate” of PTI had been forcibly taken from them.
Qaiser condemned the election results, reiterating that despite the majority of people voting in favor of PTI and its leadership, the party’s rights were “robbed overnight.” He accused the government of suppressing the will of the people, calling it a dark day in Pakistan’s history. PTI chairman Imran Khan has previously announced the Swabi rally and called for protests in other cities as well, emphasizing that the demonstration would highlight the widespread dissatisfaction with the election process and the perceived injustice that took place.
Qaiser highlighted that the election was conducted in the name of Imran Khan, with the party leader being immensely popular among the people. He reiterated that PTI workers would protest in solidarity, voicing their opposition to what they believe was election rigging.
Barrister Gohar, the chairman of PTI, also spoke out about the failed negotiations between the government and PTI. In an interview in Abbottabad, Gohar criticized the government for its lack of seriousness in the negotiations, claiming that it was the government that had closed the door to talks, not PTI. He explained that PTI’s demands were clear: the release of political prisoners and the formation of a commission to investigate election rigging.

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KP govt committed zero-tolerance policy

Anti-Corruption Establishment to be replaced with Anti-Corruption Authority

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: In a major move to curb corruption, the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) government has decided to restructure the Anti-Corruption Establishment and introduce a new law to enhance its effectiveness. The decision was taken during a high-level meeting chaired by Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur here the other day. The meeting was attended by Adviser on Anti-Corruption Brigadier (Retd.) Musaddiq Abbasi, key cabinet members, the chief secretary, and other senior officials.
Under the proposed law, the Anti-Corruption Establishment will be replaced with an independent and more powerful Anti-Corruption Authority. The chief minister directed officials to finalize the draft of the Anti-Corruption Force Act and present it for approval at the earliest. Briefing the meeting about the proposed structure and new legislation, concerned authorities informed that the proposed law aims to effectively tackle white-collar crimes. A dedicated anti-corruption force will be established under this law, with professionals recruited on merit through the Public Service Commission. The new organizational structure will include six regional and two sub-regional offices, staffed by specialists in relevant fields who will build strong legal cases against corruption.
It was further told that the restructuring is expected to significantly improve conviction rates, increasing them from the current 1-2% to 80%. The new system will also enhance recovery mechanisms, raising direct recoveries from PKR 100 million to PKR 500 million annually and indirect recoveries from PKR 2 billion to PKR 5 billion per year.
Additionally, the handling of registered complaints and ongoing investigations will be expedited. It was told that the draft law has been developed in line with national and international anti-corruption strategies, focusing on awareness, prevention, and enforcement. Measures will also be introduced to penalize false complaints and ensure witness protection. Furthermore, the new force will have a robust internal accountability system. Speaking at the meeting, Chief Minister Gandapur emphasized that strengthening the anti-corruption system aligns with the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) manifesto adding that the objective of this initiative is not only to eliminate corruption but also to prevent undue harassment of individuals. The government, he added, remains committed to a zero-tolerance policy against corruption, following the vision of PTI’s founding chairman.
Meanwhile, the Chief Minister has reaffirmed that maintaining peace in the province remains a top priority for his government. Speaking at the 11th Talent Award Ceremony organized by the Mehsud Welfare Association at the Chief Minister’s House in Peshawar the other day, he acknowledged the sacrifices made by the people of the merged areas, stating that the people of these regions have endured immense hardships and that the government must fulfill its promises to them.

Protests across KP against PECA Act amendments

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Like the rest of the country, protests were held across Khyber Pakhtunkhwa on Saturday at the call of the Khyber Union of Journalists (KhUJ) against the PECA Act, which has been imposed to stifle press freedom. The protesters rejected the federal government’s amended PECA Act, calling it an attack on press freedom.
Demonstrations took place in various districts, including Peshawar, Dir, Timergara, Dera, Wana, Jamrud, and Upper Dir. The Khyber Union of Journalists organized a major protest outside the Peshawar Press Club, where a large number of journalists, political leaders, and civil society members participated.
Prominent figures in attendance included Awami National Party’s provincial president Mian Iftikhar Hussain, General Secretary Arsalan Khan, PTI senior leader Sher Ali Arbab, Irfan Saleem, and businessman Mujeeb-ur-Rehman. The protest was led by KUJ President Kashifuddin Syed and General Secretary Irshad Ali, while Peshawar Press Club Secretary Irshad Ali, Peshawar Press Club President M. Riaz, senior journalist Shamim Shahid, and other speakers condemned the amendments, calling them an attempt to silence journalists.
They alleged that the government is using “fake news” as a pretext to suppress dissenting voices and vowed to continue their protests at every level. The speakers criticized the government for hastily passing the PECA amendments, claiming it reflects the federal government’s anti-media stance.
They demanded an immediate withdrawal of the amendments, stating that such laws are meant to curb freedom of expression and silence journalists. The speakers accused the ruling PML-N of attempting to impose black laws to muzzle the media. They also highlighted that the amended PECA Act not only targets social media but also aims to control digital platforms of electronic and print media.
During the protest, journalist leaders warned the government that if the controversial PECA amendments were not withdrawn, they would escalate their demonstrations. KUJ leaders also condemned the provincial law minister for filing a privilege motion against Peshawar Press Club Vice President Irfan Khan and demanded its withdrawal.
They urged the provincial government not to follow in the footsteps of the federal government’s oppressive policies. The protesters called on the government to immediately review the law and ensure press freedom. They vowed to continue their struggle until their demands are met.

SC to hear KP Universities’ VCs appointment case on Feb 6

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: A three-member bench of the Supreme Court of Pakistan will hear the case regarding the appointment of vice chancellors in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) universities on February 6. The bench will be headed by Justice Amin-ud-Din Khan. The vice chancellor positions in 19 universities of KP have remained vacant for over one and a half years. The Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) government, led by KP Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur, has refrained from acting on the recommendations made by the caretaker government in February 2024.
The vice chancellor positions were advertised in 2022 during the previous PTI government, but interviews for potential candidates were not conducted, leading to the matter being transferred to the caretaker government.

Snowfall in Naran, Kaghan
F.P. Report
KAGHAN: Snowfall continues in the popular tourist destinations of Naran, Kaghan, and Shogran. Kaghan Development Authority (KDA) spokesperson informed media that continuous snow has been recorded in various areas of Mansehra. Shogran has seen six inches of snow, Naran has received over one foot, and Kaghan has accumulated four inches of snow so far.



Major reforms planned in NADRA, FIA: Mohsin Naqvi

LAHORE (APP): Federal Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi has announced major reforms in NADRA, passport offices, and the FIA to improve public services and tackle illegal immigration. He stated that Pakistan enjoys good relations with the United States and that a passport authority will be established soon.

He made these remarks while addressing the inauguration ceremony of new passport counters at the NADRA Mega Center on Peco Road here on Saturday.

Speaking to the media, Naqvi emphasized that the government is implementing large-scale reforms to address public grievances. Naqvi said that passport demand in Pakistan is high, and the introduction of new counters at NADRA centers will speed up processing times, ensuring no delays in passport issuance.

He announced that 14 major cities across the country will have similar

centers to facilitate citizens and prevent long queues. He stressed that strict action is being taken against those attempting to travel abroad illegally using fake documents, as well as against agents involved in human smuggling. He warned that these agents will soon be brought to justice.

Referring to the Champions Trophy match scheduled in Lahore on February 8, Naqvi criticized a political party's decision to hold protests on the same day. He accused the party of damaging Pakistan's international image by organizing demonstrations whenever foreign dignitaries visit the country. "Their politics promote chaos rather than constructive development," he remarked.

Dismissing negative reports on social media about Pakistan-US relations, Naqvi assured that the ties between the two countries are strong and improving. He highlighted that Pakistan's recent delegation visit to the

US has yielded significant benefits and that better days are ahead for Pakistan.

In response to a question, he revealed that major reforms are planned for the FIA, particularly in Faisalabad and Gujrat, as a large number of youth from these areas attempt to go abroad illegally. While legal migration is encouraged, he warned that illegal routes tarnish Pakistan's reputation and harm its global standing.

Naqvi assured that action against human smugglers is a priority and that the public will soon receive good news regarding their crackdown.

Regarding passport delivery issues, he emphasized that the establishment of a Passport Authority is the only solution. He said he has already discussed this with the Prime Minister, acknowledging that there are some challenges, but work on the authority's formation will begin soon.



LAHORE: A view of thick fog that engulfs the whole city during the morning time in the Provincial Capital. —APP Photo

Khorasan Razavi Governor General meets Punjab Governor

LAHORE (APP): Governor General of Iran's Khorasan Razavi province Gholam Hossein Mozaffari on Saturday met with Punjab Governor Sardar Saleem Haider Khan here at Governor's House.

Matters pertaining to both sides especially on promoting trade between both countries came under discussion. Discussion was also held on

promoting mining and petroleum and exchange of women chamber delegations.

The Punjab Governor said, "It is a matter of pride that you accepted my invitation and arrived in Lahore."

He welcomed the assurance of Khorasan Razavi Governor General Gholam Hossein Mozaffari for reducing the visa fee for Pakistani visitors.

He said that relations between Pakistan and Iran would reach a new height and exchange of trade delegations would be promoted. The Punjab Governor said that matters pertaining to celebrate the cultural week of Lahore in Mashhad and

Mashhad in Lahore would be finalized soon.

Khorasan Razavi Governor General Gholam

Hossein Mozaffari said that exhibitions would be organized to promote ties between Punjab and Khorasan Razavi.

Flights between Lahore and Mashhad and Karachi to Mashhad would be increased, he said.

He also invited the Punjab Governor and chamber delegations to attend an exhibition in Khorasan Razavi.

Sindh vs. Punjab: Debate over Pakistan's first electric bus initiative

E.P. Report

LAHORE: A debate has sparked between the Sindh and Punjab governments over which province first introduced electric buses for public transport.

The controversy began after Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif

tweeted that Punjab is set to become the first province to transition its mass transit system to electric vehicles.

She announced the arrival of the first fleet of 27 e-buses, emphasizing features like WiFi, female sections, wheelchair ramps,

CCTV, and special seating for disabled persons.

However, Sindh's Information Minister Sharjeel Inam Memon responded to correct the record, stating that Sindh was the first province to launch electric buses under the PPP-led govern-

ment in January 2023. He pointed out that Punjab is the second province, following Sindh's initiative.

The exchange highlights the growing competition between provinces in Pakistan's shift towards sustainable and eco-friendly public transport.

IG reviews facilities for police

LAHORE (APP): Inspector General Police Punjab Dr. Usman Anwar chaired a video link meeting at the Central Police Office here on Saturday. DPO Rahim Yar Khan Rizwan Omar Gondal and DPO Rajanpur Farooq Amjad participated via video link. Additional IG South Punjab Muhammad Kamran Khan briefed about the challenges and performance in the Kacha area of Rahim Yar Khan and Rajanpur.

A Punjab police spokesperson shared that the IG Punjab reviewed the food and other facilities provided to the police officers and personnel deputed at the police stations and posts in the Kacha area. The IG Punjab said that the brave personnel of Punjab police are ensuring the safety of the Kacha area from dacoits and miscreants under challenging circumstances. The infrastructure development of police stations, camps, and posts in the Kacha area, provision of transport and logistics, modern weapons, and technology has been ensured.

The welfare and provision of facilities to the personnel at the police stations and check posts in the Kacha area are a top priority. Kacha area check-posts play a vital role in protecting citizens from honey traps and curbing smuggling. He said that Punjab police, through a vigorous awareness campaign and strict checking, has saved more than 500 citizens from falling prey to honey traps.

The IG Punjab directed the personnel stationed at the kacha area check-posts to remain highly alert and adopt safety measures such as wearing bulletproof jackets, helmets, and other protective gear. RPOs and DPOs should regularly inspect the police stations and check posts in the kacha area and ensure the provision of additional facilities. A total of 943 personnel at the police stations and posts in the kacha area are benefiting from the hard area allowance.

The spokesperson said that ASIs to inspectors were being provided Rs25,000, Head Constables and Constables are receiving Rs20,000, while Grade-IV employees are being provided with Rs18,000 per month as hard area allowance.

PTI announces protest drive against 'stolen mandate'

KARACHI (PPI): Haleem Adil Sheikh, President of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Sindh, addressed a press conference at Insaf House Karachi, announcing a province-wide protest campaign against what he termed the "stolen mandate" from February 1 to February 8.

According to a statement issued from PTI, he also declared February 8 as a

"Black Day" to mark the alleged electoral fraud in the 2024 general elections.

Speaking to the media, heikh criticized the government for imposing restrictions on media and suppressing freedom of expression. He stated, "After the PECA Act, the nation is suffering. First, we were oppressed, and now the media is being silenced. We stand in solidarity with the

media's protest and strongly oppose any conspiracy to stifle the voice of freedom."

He recalled February 8 of the previous year as a "dark day" when the future of the country was allegedly compromised through electoral manipulation. He claimed that PTI's mandate was stolen through Form 47, despite the public's overwhelming support for the party.



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PESHAWAR: Members of Khyber Union of Journalists (KhuJ) and Peshawar Press Club (PPC) protesting against PECA Act imposed by the federal government. — F.P. photo

Toru hits back at Muqam, vows legal action

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Minister for Food, Zahir Shah Toru, has strongly criticized Federal Minister Amir Muqam, of spreading false allegations against provincial government. Speaking at a press conference at the Civil Secretariat on Saturday, Zahir Shah Toru dismissed allegations leveled against the Chief Minister and himself as baseless, claiming that Amir Muqam was attempting to cover up his own wrongdoings by shifting blame.

The provincial minister went a step further, branding Amir Muqam the "uncrowned king of corruption" and alleging that he had amassed wealth through dishonest means. "Everyone knows who the

real liar and thief is," he remarked.

While voicing strong opposition to the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA), Zahir Shah Toru described it as a "black law" that suppresses free speech. However, he argued that if the law were to be enforced, it should first be applied to Amir Muqam for allegedly spreading false accusations. He announced that provincial government would initiate legal proceedings against the federal minister under PECA.

Providing an update on the province's wheat supply, Zahir Shah Toru assured that the KP government had started releasing 77,000 metric tons of imported wheat to flour mills, with 40,000 metric tons already released.

The remaining wheat, he said, would be distributed according to laboratory reports before March 30 to ensure quality.

He clarified that the wheat being distributed was part of the stock purchased by the previous caretaker government from the federal government in 2023. Highlighting the province's wheat shortage, Zahir Shah Toru noted that KP produces 1.4 million metric tons annually, while its total demand stands at 5 million metric tons.

To meet this shortfall, he explained, the province imports 3.6 million metric tons from Punjab, other provinces, and international sources through the Pakistan Agricultural Storage and Services Corporation (PASSCO).

He further disclosed that the KP government has procured 208,000 metric tons of high-quality wheat from local farmers this year.

He urged anyone with doubts about transparency in the procurement process to present evidence, emphasizing the government's commitment to fair governance. If my party no longer requires my services, I am willing to step down," he said. "I stand by my record and am ready for accountability at any time. If anyone has evidence against me, they should come forward. Responding to a query about the Provincial Accountability Committee, Zahir Shah Toru reaffirmed his stance on transparency and accountability, aligning his approach with Imran Khan's vision.

KP announces Rs10,000 Ramazan Package for deserving families

PESHAWAR (APP): The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government has announced a special Ramadan relief package for deserving families, official sources said on Saturday. Under this initiative, the provincial government will provide Rs. 10,000 to each selected family during the holy month of Ramadan.

As per details, 5,000 families will be chosen from each of the 115 constituencies across the province. The selected families will receive a Rs. 10,000 cheque in the first ten days of Ramadan.

To ensure fair distribution, the government has assigned different departments to oversee the selection process.

Sources said a total of Rs. 8 billion will be allocated for the Ramadan package. The entire distribution process will be monitored directly from the Chief Minister's House.



PESHAWAR: Vendors sitting by the fire to save themselves from cold as provincial capital witnessed a breezy day on Saturday. — INP photo

New tourism project to generate job opportunities in KP

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: A senior official on Saturday said that the homestay tourism project would promote sustainable tourism in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and create employment opportunities for the local populace at the tourists sites.

"Exploration of new tourist destinations and the installation of camping pods in new locations will further increase the number of tourists," said Dr Muhammad Bakhtiar Khan, secretary Tourism, Culture, Archaeology and Museums Department of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, at a panel discussion at the Pakistan Travel Mart held at the Expo Centre, Karachi.

The session was attended by key figures from tourism departments of all provinces along with a large number of participants.

The session focused on Sustainable Destinations Forum to promote sustainable tourism during travel and explore further improvements in the tourism sector.

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Culture and Tourism Authority (IKPCTA) Umar Arshad Khan, General Manager Tourism Sajjad Hameed and other key personalities were also present.

Dr Bakhtiar said that the Billion Tree Tsunami Project in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa would support eco-friendly tourism and help create a clean and green environment for tourism.

He also talked about the Integrated Tourism Zones (ITZs) and said that project was ready for promotion and would soon be presented for investment.

To reduce congestion at existing tourist spots, the province is actively searching for new destinations and taking steps to develop them.

Moreover, he said the camping pods project was being expanded, and eco-tourism projects were being introduced in new tourist locations.

The Homestay Tourism Programme in KP would not only provide employment opportunities to youth in the tourism sector but also offer tourists a home-like environment where they could enjoy local culture and traditional home-cooked meals.

At the Pakistan Travel Mart, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's tourism and culture have been showcased impressively. The three-day event features exhibitions on various tourism projects, including the camping pods project, Swat Expressway, Naran chairlift project, information desks, and rest areas. Additionally, multiple conferences and sessions related to tourism are being held.

The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Pavilion spotlighted traditional handicrafts such as Charsadda Chappal, Mughal Art from Dera Ismail Khan, traditional rubab music, Khattak dance, and much more.

The Pakistan Travel Mart is a travel and tourism expo held annually to connect all partners of mobility in Pakistan with key stakeholders from the travel, tourism and hospitality industries taking the lead to promote inbound, outbound and domestic travel in Pakistan. The KPCTA has taken a number of steps for the revival of tourism to attract foreign and domestic tourists to the province.

Within the midst of breathtaking river valleys and overlooked by towering mountain peaks, visitors have the opportunity to enjoy nature and visit sites of global significance for Buddhists, Sikhs and Muslims in KP.

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is blessed with abundant natural resources, which make the province a preferred destination for both the domestic and international tourists.

The Spirit of Ramazan and the harsh realities of inflation in Pakistan

Muhammad Mohsin Iqbal

RAMADAN Mubarak is not far from us, and as the blessed month approaches, Muslims in Pakistan and around the world prepare to observe the fast with devotion and respect. Considered the month of mercy and forgiveness, this holy month is eagerly awaited by over two billion Muslims around the world. It provides believers with an opportunity to purify their souls, seek Allah's mercy, and strengthen their faith through prayer, charity, and self-control. The importance of Ramazan is deeply rooted in Islamic teachings, as stated in the Quran: "O you who have believed! Fasting has been prescribed for you as it was prescribed for those before you, that you may become righteous." (Surah Al-Baqarah 2:183). The Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) also emphasized the importance of fasting, saying: "Whoever fasts the month of Ramazan out of faith and in the hope of reward from Allah, all his previous sins will be forgiven." (Sahih Bukhari).

In many Islamic nations, as well as in non-Muslim countries with considerable Muslim populations, special provisions are made to ensure the ease of fasting for all. Governments and charitable organizations work in unison to offer essential commodities at reduced prices, allowing individuals from all social classes to partake in this sacred observance without undue hardship. Markets extend significant concessions on food and beverages, and alms are distributed among the impoverished. However, the reality in Pakistan stands in stark contrast to this ideal. Though special Ramazan bazaars are established in every city, ensuring affordability and quality remains an elusive goal.

It has long been observed that, as Ramazan approaches, the prices of fundamental necessities experience an unjustified surge. Certain merchants, driven by avarice, engage in the unscrupulous practice of hoarding goods—particularly fresh fruits and beverages—only to release them at exorbitant rates once the holy month commences. Dates, bananas, apples, and other such essentials, indispensable for the Iftar meal, become almost unattainable for the common man. This merciless price inflation leaves the consumer helpless. The distress is heightened when parents, compelled by their children's innocent desires for a wholesome Iftar, find themselves struggling to procure even the most basic sustenance.

The grievous irony is that a month devoted to piety and self-restraint is tarnished by economic exploitation. Where fasting is intended to cultivate patience, gratitude, and compassion for the less fortunate, the unethical pursuit of profit in Pakistan runs counter to these very tenets. Elsewhere in the Muslim world, governments undertake rigorous measures to ensure that traders do not take undue advantage of the heightened demand. In the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, stringent price regulations are enforced, with heavy penalties imposed upon those found guilty of hoarding or price manipulation. Similarly, in Turkey and Malaysia, Ramazan is a period of extensive welfare programs, wherein food aid is dispensed generously, and essential commodities are made available at significantly reduced prices. Even in certain non-Muslim countries, particularly in Western lands where Muslims reside in great numbers, supermarkets launch special Ramazan campaigns to make foodstuffs more affordable.

Despite repeated declarations by the Pakistani authorities to curb inflation during Ramadan, the situation remains unchanged year after year. Market committees and consumer protection bodies prove ineffective, while merchants continue to exploit the absence of stringent oversight. At times, frustrated citizens have endeavored to launch fruit boycotts as a means of protest, yet such efforts have borne little fruit. It is imperative that the state enforces robust price control mechanisms, meting out exemplary punishments to hoarders and profiteers. If other nations, both Muslim and non-Muslim, can successfully regulate their markets during Ramadan, there is no plausible reason why Pakistan should be unable to do the same.

In addition to price regulation, ensuring the provision of wholesome food is of paramount importance. It is all too common that substandard or adulterated goods infiltrate the markets during this sacred month, endangering public health. Authorities must take uncompromising action against those who peddle inferior merchandise. Yet Ramazan should not be reduced to a mere matter of economic management; it must, above all, be a period of spiritual and social refinement. The government, private sector, and civil society must collectively endeavor to restore the true spirit of Ramadan—one of honesty, generosity, and communal welfare.

A peculiar trend is also witnessed in Pakistan wherein numerous businessmen, particularly those engaged in trade and commerce, capitalize on the month's soaring prices, only to embark upon a journey to the Holy Hijaz for the final ten days of Ramadan. While there is great virtue in spending the last nights of the month in the sacred precincts, one cannot help but question whether such individuals, who have contributed to the economic burden of the masses, truly fulfill the spirit of this hallowed period. If those who hold dominion over the supply chains of essential commodities devoted themselves to ensuring the welfare of the people rather than amassing wealth, the observance of Ramazan in Pakistan would be far more dignified and rewarding for all.

Ramazan in Pakistan ought to be a time of solemn reflection and moral rectitude, not one marred by avarice and exploitation. While the citizens of this land continue to exhibit extraordinary generosity through almsgiving and communal Iftars, it remains the duty of the state and the mercantile class to uphold their responsibilities. If economic policies are aligned with the true essence of Ramadan, and the principles of fairness, compassion, and justice are upheld, then this sacred month shall truly become a period of both material relief and spiritual elevation for all Pakistanis.

Kundi opposes proposed tax on landowners

PESHAWAR (APP): Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Faisal Karim Kundi, on Saturday stepped forward to represent the province's farmers in the face of a proposed tax on landowners by the provincial government.

In a meeting with Muhammad Ali Shah Bacha, Provincial President of the Pakistan Peoples Party, and other political leaders including Parliamentary Leader Ahmad Karim Kundi, the proposed tax was criticized as being unjust and anti-farmer.

During the meeting, Governor Faisal Karim Kundi highlighted that the bill passed by the provincial government clearly demonstrates an unequal tax system, which would further burden farmers already struggling with inflation.

According to the bill, landowners with an annual income of Rs150 million would be taxed Rs66 million, while those earning more than 150 million would face only a 1% tax (around 1.5 to 2 million rupees).

This disparity, Kundi argued, would pave the way for whitewashing black money, while the common farmer would be crushed under additional financial pressure.

Kundi firmly said that the farmer community, which is the backbone of the country's agriculture, will not tolerate such exploitative measures.

He emphasized that this issue is tied to the future of thousands of farmers in the province and vowed to collaborate with the farming community to decide on further actions.

He warned that if the government did not reconsider its decision, protests would be organized across all forums, and every possible step would be taken to safeguard farmers' rights.

The meeting concluded with the decision to organize a farmer's convention at the Governor's House. This convention will invite farmers from all over the province to present their concerns and issues to the authorities.

Meanwhile, Shafiq Bettani, General Manager North of Wapda's Water Wing, met with Governor Faisal Karim Kundi to provide an update on the Chashma Lift Canal project.





In brief

Patwari among three arrested F.P. Report

SWABI: The Anti-Corruption Department has arrested a patwari and two others for their involvement in fraudulent land transfers in Swabi district. According to the Spokesman on Saturday, the KP Anti-Corruption Department took swift action after receiving complaints about fake transfers of inherited land in the Razar area of Swabi. Upon investigation, it was revealed that revenue staff were involved in the illegal transfers. Following a detailed inquiry, the fraudulent transactions were confirmed, leading to the registration of an FIR. A patwari named in the case has been arrested, while further investigations are underway.

Admn imposes on ban arms display F.P. Report

LAKKI MARWAT: The district administrations of Lakki Marwat and Bannu have banned display of weapons, use of tinted glasses in vehicles and pillion riding ahead of the five-day anti-polio drive commencing from Feb 3. Officials said that Lakki Marwat DC Zeeshan Abdullah and Bannu DC Abdul Hameed Khan imposed restrictions through separate notification issued under section 144 of CR.P.C. "In Bannu, the district police officer proposed imposition of restrictions keeping in view previous attacks on polio teams and their police escorts and recent threats", maintained an official, adding that patwaris (revenue officials) engaged in polio eradication duty will be exempted from the ban on display of weapons. Another official said that the administration had also banned plying of unregistered bikes and vehicles on roads and gatherings of five or more people at public places in Lakki Marwat district. Officials said that the ban would remain intact for five days (Feb 3 to Feb 7) in Lakki Marwat district and for seven days (Feb 2 to Feb 8) in Bannu district. "The violators will be dealt with sternly under the law", they added.

Anti-polio drive reviewed F.P. Report

M A R D A N : Commissioner Mardan has directed the relevant quarters to make sure that all children up to five years of age are given polio vaccine drops during the five-day anti-polio campaign starting from February 3, in Mardan and Swabi. He further directed law enforcing agencies to take all necessary steps for the protection of polio teams. He was addressing a meeting of the Divisional Polio Task Force in the conference room of the Commissioner's office here. Deputy Commissioner Swabi Nasrullah Khan, DPO Mardan Zahoor Babar Afridi, DPO Swabi Muhammad Azhar Khan, ADC Saeedullah Jan, DHO Mardan Dr. Javed Iqbal and DHO Swabi Dr. Abdul Latif besides officers Education Department, WHO N-Staff Officer, representatives of national security agencies and other concerned officials of the Health Department attended. Meanwhile, a crime meeting was held at RPO Office Mardan under the chairmanship of Regional Police Officer in which District Police Officers of all districts of Mardan Region, SPs Investigation and SP CTD Mardan participated. In the meeting, the overall situation of crimes in Mardan region, their counter-measures, and progress in crime detection were reviewed.

Journalists' hold protest against amends in Act

F.P. Report

ATTOCK: Following the protest call of Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists, the journalistic community of inter provincial district of Attock on Saturday while chanting slogans against the arbitrary legislation of the alliance rulers have also strongly rejected the most controversial Law of Prevention of electronic Crime Act, 2025 with the demand to repel its recent draconian amendments.

The journalistic community under the aegis of Attock Press Club (regd) led by their chief patron senior journalist Syed Raza Naqvi, along with social media journalists Mian Zia, Mumtaz Hussain, prominent journalists include Sheikh Javed Iqbal, Dr. Suhail Ahmed, Tahir Naqash and others have also addressed the protest rally leading from Fowara Chowk Attock City which concluded near Katchery Chowk in a peace manner.

On this occasion, MPA of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf, Syed Ijaz Hussain Bukhari, also joined the protest to show solidarity with the journalist community. He criticized the government, stating that there is no oppression left that the current regime has not committed. "There is chaos everywhere, and no institution is safe from their violent actions. The government does not want to hear the truth," he said. Speaking at the protest, Patron-in-Chief Syed Raza Naqvi emphasized that journalism is the fourth pillar of the state, and by enforcing the PECA Act, the government is attempting to dismantle this pillar, which will not be tolerated.

Addressing the participants, Chairman of the Press Club, Sheikh Faisal Javed, stated that truth is a powerful force, and anyone who stands against it will be shattered. He asserted that the PECA Act is not only against press freedom but also a violation of human rights. He demanded that the government immediately revoke this act. Sheikh Faisal Javed also criticized the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) and Pakistan Muslim League-N (PML-N), stating that while they claim to uphold democracy and human rights, their support for this act contradicts their principles. "In reality, both parties have buried the essence of democracy," he remarked.

The protest highlighted the journalist community's unity and their unwavering stance against any attempts to curb press freedom. They protestants have also opposed the undemocratic attempts of the present rulers involved in making illegal and unlawful amendments without the due participation of the stake holders who are

fighting their constitutional guaranteed rights of expression since long.

The disputed amendments in PECA were assented the President Asif Zadari without taking the stake holders into confidence as discussed with JUI chief Moulana Fazale Rehman which is an open malafide of the rulers. They stressed upon the opposition parties, lawyers, civil society and apex courts to join hand for protection of their fundamental rights of speech and power of pen.

The present rulers are adamant to legislate all kinds of bills just to cover their corrupt practices from the eyes of people but they would not be able to succeed in their plans. The journalistic community in their fiery speeches have also committed to protect their freedom of expression as envisaged in the Article 19 of the Constitution of Islamic Republic of Pakistan, 1973 which was made possible with their continuous sacrifices.

Police arrests two killers: Police arrested two alleged killers of a young passenger over a minor dispute on Rickshaw Fare. According to First Information Report, Irfan Ali reported to City police station that he works as an electrician. On January 21, 2025, he was present at Gul Electric Store near Fawara Chowk when his uncle, Munir Hussain, called him and informed that Umar Saeed and Abdul Sattar Shah, alias Sono Shah, son of Syed Binyamin, were arguing with him over the payment of a rickshaw fare.

Upon receiving this call, Irfan Ali rushed to Sheikhon Wali Gali, Mohalla Mehrpura Sharqi, where he found his brother, Liaqat Ali, his uncle, Munir Hussain, and his cousin, Kashif Hussain, standing in the street. Umar Saeed and Abdul Sattar Shah were also present and were engaged in a heated exchange of words. Upon inquiry, his uncle explained that on January 20, he had traveled to People's Colony, Attock City, using Abdul Sattar Shah's rickshaw. The agreed fare for the round trip was 400 rupees, which he had already paid. However, Sono Shah was now demanding an additional 200 rupees, leading to a verbal altercation.

During this argument, Sono Shah restrained Kashif Hussain while Umar Saeed attacked him with a knife, stabbing him in the chest, causing him to collapse. When Irfan Ali's uncle stepped forward to protect his son, Umar Saeed stabbed him in the abdomen as well. The attackers fled the scene after the assault. Irfan Ali and his brother rushed the injured to the hospital, but unfortunately, Kashif Hussain succumbed to his injuries on the way.

Journalist's union holds protest in Wana

F.P. Report

WANA: The Journalists' Union staged a protest in Wana, South Waziristan, against the recent amendments to the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA). The protesters criticized the government for passing these amendments through Parliament, calling it an attempt to undermine press freedom and curtail independent journalism.

Speakers at the protest expressed concerns that the amendments would pave the way for authoritarian-

ism by restricting freedom of expression. They argued that the legislation was designed to suppress the media, which plays a crucial role in upholding democracy.

President of the Wana Press Club, Shahzada Wazir, and senior journalist Nek Muhammad Wazir, while addressing the media, stated that the amendment to the 2016 PECA Act sends a concerning message to the world. They claimed that after imposing restrictions on judicial independence, the government is now targeting press

freedom.

They further stated that these amendments place severe limitations on journalism, undermining democratic principles and creating an environment that stifles dissent. The journalists condemned the move, stating that it effectively places the media under the control of powerful elites.

The protestors reaffirmed their support for the ongoing demonstrations against the amendments and vowed to continue their struggle until the changes to the PECA Act are reversed.

Govt must abolish extra perks of elite class: JI

F.P. Report

LOWER DIR: Jamaat-i-Islami leader and former senator Mushtaq Ahmad Khan has said the country can not make progress unless perks and privileges of judges, generals and bureaucrats are not abolished. He was addressing a students' welcome party hosted by a private college at a local wedding hall in Timergara here on Saturday. The college principal Malik Shahid Khan, renowned Pushto poet Prof Bakht Zada Danish and others also spoke on the occasion.

Mushtaq said that Pakistan was still not a free country but in reality it was being run on foreign dictation. The JI leader said that the Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif had admitted that his government could not reduce power tariffs because of the IMF that spoke of our helplessness. He asked youths to break the chains of slavery and be prepared for a revolution.

Mushtaq said the Lower Dir youths had great talents. He said that 70 per cent of the total population in Pakistan was occupied by youths but instead of utilizing their strength, they were leaving the country in distress to seek better jobs abroad. He said that several youths had sacrificed their lives while crossing the borders to Europe. The JI former lawmaker alleged

the members of national assembly had increased their salaries by 1000 percent while the Punjab lawmakers had increased their salaries by 300 percent. He said that judges, Generals, bureaucrats and politicians got heavy perks and privileges till their end. He said that 9 million vehicles and their fuel were used by the elite class. He demanded the government to increase the budget for education as compared to other fields as education would lead this nation toward development and prosperity.

Mushtaq Ahmad paid rich tributes to the Hamas leaders and said that its sacrifices would bear fruits soon. The JI leader said that Ismail Hannia, Yehya Sunwar and Abu Ubaid had repeated the history of Salahud Din Ayubi. He said the JI rejected the US president Donald Trump's announcement that Palestinians should be dwelled in Egypt, Jordan and Indonesia. He emphasized that Palestinians should be given their due right to live freely. He said the two-state solution was not suitable for lasting peace in Palestine and Gaza.

Power outage: The Pakistan People Party local chapter on Saturday criticized the federal government and the authorities of Pesco for their failure to overcome unscheduled power outage. The PPP dis-

trict secretary information Alam Zeb advocate told local journalists at Timergara that prolonged and excessive power outages had forced the business community to give up their job. He said the power supply remained suspended from morning till evening for the last one month. He demanded the government to take notice of the problem. Otherwise, he threatened the PPP would bring consumers onto the roads if the duration of electricity load shedding was not reduced.

Urs begins F.P. Report

CHINIOT: The three-day celebrations of the 147th annual Urs of the country's renowned Hazrat Khwaja Ziauddin Chinioti have begun.

According to the details, Pir Khwaja Nazir Ali Chinioti, the resident of his shrine located in the Takliran area of the city, started the Urs celebrations by covering the shrine with a chadar (veil) along with his disciples. After the chadar, a special prayer will be offered. A night gathering was also held on the occasion of the Urs. A large number of disciples from all over the country participated in the Urs celebrations.

ANP to hold power show on 10th F.P. Report

SHANGLA: Awami National Party (ANP) Shangla chapter leaders held a consultative meeting at the Shangla Press Club in Alpuri to discuss the upcoming visit of the party's provincial president, Mian Iftikhar Hussain, on February 10. The meeting was chaired by Muhammad Azam Khan, the district president of ANP Shangla. The meeting was attended by various party leaders and members, including former provincial deputy general secretary Mutawakkil Khan Advocate, former provincial assembly member Faisal Zeb and former district council member Attaullah Khan Malik Khel.

During the meeting, it was decided that the party would showcase its full political strength in Shangla on February 10, and that most of the party's local leaders would participate in the event. The party leaders also emphasized the importance of preparing for the visit and making necessary arrangements.

The party leaders reiterated their commitment to the party's core values and principles, emphasizing the importance of promoting peace, democracy, and development in the region. They also highlighted the party's efforts to address the issues faced by the people of Shangla and to work towards the betterment of the area.

The meeting was also attended by other senior party leaders, including former provincial assembly candidate Haji Shah Farooq Khan, renowned lawyer Haq Nawaz Khan Advocate, Shah Fawad Khan Advocate, former general secretary Altaf Hussain Khan Advocate, Muhammad Jameel Salar, Karim Khan, Muhammad Dawood Khan Tirmizi, Mian Waheed Murad, Sultan Sikandar Khan Advocate, and Shah Wali Khan Advocate.

RPO visits Safe City project F.P. Report

MULTAN: Regional Police Officer (RPO) Captain (R) Sohail Chaudhry visited the under-construction Safe City Project site on Saturday.

During the visit, officials from the Buildings Department and the contractor briefed him on progress of the project. The RPO stressed that no compromise would be made on the quality of materials used in the project. "The project is vital to ensure the safety and security of citizens. We are committed to working round the clock to complete it on time," he added.

The RPO also visited the Police Public School & College Multan, where he inspected under-construction classrooms. He instructed that the construction work should be completed at the earliest.

Meanwhile, the Commissioner Amir Karim Khan visited the under-construction PET-Scan installation bunker site at Nishtar Hospital and reviewed the progress of the project. He said providing modern healthcare facilities to citizens is a top priority of the Punjab government.

He stated that Nishtar Hospital would be the first healthcare facility in South Punjab to have a PET-Scan machine, significantly improving diagnostic services for serious diseases. The installation of PET-Scan and Cyclotron technology will enhance the hospital's ability to detect cancer, heart diseases, brain disorders, and other medical conditions at an early stage.

A PET-Scan is an advanced imaging technique that provides detailed insights into organ function by using radioactive tracers. It helps doctors identify abnormalities more accurately than traditional imaging methods. The Cyclotron will produce isotopes essential for PET-Scans, allowing better diagnosis and treatment planning. These isotopes can also be supplied to other hospitals, benefiting a larger population.

KUST hosts farewell party for ex Pro-VC Dr. Tasleem Hussain



Sahibzada Afridi

KOHAT: A farewell party has been arranged in the honor of former Pro-Vice Chancellor Dr. Tasleem Hussain at Kohat University of Science and Technology (KUST) under the auspices Academic Staff Association.

The ceremony aimed to pay tribute to former Pro-Vice Chancellor Professor Dr. Tasleem Hussain on his retirement. The event was attended by deans, directors, heads of departments, faculty members, and administrative staff, who came together to bid farewell to their esteemed colleague with respect and admiration.

During the gathering, university-related issues, particularly contract faculty salaries and administrative matters, were discussed. Faculty members also expressed confidence in the

leadership of Vice Chancellor Professor Dr. Muhammad Naseeruddin and acknowledged his efforts toward institutional progress.

Expressing his sentiments, Dr. Tasleem Hussain spoke about his long-standing association with the university. He remarked that KUST had always felt like family to him, and the warmth and affection of his colleagues had been a source of immense happiness. He emphasized that strong bonds and collaboration between faculty and staff are crucial for the institution's progress.

Vice Chancellor Professor Dr. Muhammad Naseeruddin, in his address, highlighted the steps being taken to resolve university challenges. He assured faculty members of positive developments regarding salary increments for contract faculty, infra-

structure improvements, and academic growth. He reaffirmed that the administration is committed to making KUST a better educational institution, with faculty welfare as a top priority.

Dr. Farman Khan lauded the Vice Chancellor's efforts, stating that Professor Dr. Naseeruddin had shown a positive approach toward addressing faculty concerns and advancing the university. He expressed optimism about KUST's future under his leadership and stressed the importance of faculty unity and collaboration for the success of any academic institution.

The ceremony concluded with faculty members paying rich tribute to Professor Dr. Tasleem Hussain for his invaluable contributions and extending their best wishes for his future endeavors.

Students hold ceremony in solidarity with Kashmiris

F.P. Report

HAFIZABAD: In District Public School and College Hafizabad, the students of Girls Wing organized an assembly regarding Solidarity Day in Central Assembly. After the recitation of Quran and Naat, the children expressed their solidarity with the Kashmiri people.

Principal Muhammad Zaman Cheema while addressing the children informed about the value and importance of freedom that freedom is a great blessing and we should thank God that we are citizens of an independent country. If you want to know the price of freedom, look at any slave country who have been fighting for years for the right to live as they wish.

Govt employees hold protest: Public servants, teachers and educators from across the district came to the streets to protest and protest against the change in pension rules

and abolition of leave encashment. The rally was led by Divisional General Secretary PIPLA Gujrat Prof. Jawad Asif and Chairman Muttahida Mahaz Asatiza District Hafizabad Riaz Ahmad Tarar.

Addressing the rally, the leaders and civil servants demanded that measures hostile to education and students like transfer of government educational institutions to private NGOs should be avoided, amendment of pension rules and leave encashment notification should be immediately withdrawn Rule 17A. SSEs and AOs should be restored and made unconditionally permanent, they demanded.

The participants also demanded that House Rent, Medical and Conveyance Allowance should be increased immediately as per prevailing pay scale. Madam Shazia Lady Health Workers, Qamar Zaman Kamboh Forest Department, Faisal Abbas

APCA represented in the rally, while Hasnain Ali Waqas from Young Teachers Association, PMA Patron Dr. Abid Hussain Bhatti, President Dr. Farooq Mughal, General Secretary Dr. Shoaib Akbar, Mudassar Ashraf, General Secretary of Paramedics, Malik Asrar from TMA, Imran Mustafa from PIPLA, Madam Samira Bano, Muazzama Nawaz and Muhammad Nageeb Nishat from Education, Aslam Rashid, Fayyaz Waraich, Ihsanullah Bawara, Naseeruddin, Abubakar Alvi, Chaudhry Asghar Hanjara, Khalid Parvez, Rana Waqar Ahmed Khan, Shabbir Ahmed Gujjar, Mian Suleiman, State Ali Rawan, Ameer Hamza, Iftikhar Shaheen, Chaudhry Mohammad Rafiq, Iftikhar Bhatti, Sajid Nazir Bhatti, Tariq Langah, Madam Hijab Zahar, Madam Sughra and Madam Shagufta Shahzai, government employees of various departments participated.

UAJK to observe Kashmir solidarity day

F.P. Report

MUZAFFARABAD: The University of Azad Jammu and Kashmir (UAJK) has begun preparations to observe Kashmir Solidarity Day on February 5, 2025, with a series of impactful programs aimed at expressing unwavering support for the oppressed people of Indian-occupied Jammu & Kashmir.

A meeting, chaired by Vice-Chancellor Prof. Dr. Muhammad Kaleem Abbasi, was held at City Campus to finalize the arrangements. The meeting was attended by Registrar Meritorious Prof. Dr. Ghulam Murtaza, Controller of Examinations Prof. Dr. Wajid Aziz Lone, Chairperson Department of Sociology Prof. Dr. Nazneen Habib, Director Student Affairs Dr. Sharjil Saeed, Director Jehlum Valley Campus Dr. Imtiaz Awan, Director Institute of Kashmir Studies Dr. Sumaira Shafique, Chairperson Department of Mass Communication Dr. Shahida Khalique, and Additional Registrar Sardar Zaffar Iqbal.

The meeting resolved that Kashmir Solidarity Day will be commemorated with great zeal through multiple events organized by various university departments. These include a grand solidarity rally to demonstrate support for the Kashmiri people and a central seminar titled

"Freedom of Kashmir: Our Role & Commitment", where distinguished speakers will shed light on various aspects of the Kashmir liberation movement.

Addressing the meeting, Vice-Chancellor Prof. Dr. Muhammad Kaleem Abbasi emphasized that observing Kashmir Solidarity Day serves as a dual purpose: to reaffirm UAJK's unwavering commitment to the just cause of Kashmir and to draw global attention to the atrocities, human rights violations, and demographic engineering being carried out by Indian authorities in occupied Jammu & Kashmir. He stated that the events organized by UAJK will highlight the plight of Kashmiris, the suppression of their fundamental rights, and the urgent need for the international community to implement UN Security Council resolutions on Kashmir.

The Vice-Chancellor further stressed that academic institutions have a critical role to play in shaping discourse and advocating for the Kashmiri people's right to self-determination. He called upon faculty members, department heads, officers, staff, and students to actively participate in the planned activities.

Other members in the meeting echoed the Vice-Chancellor's views, asserting that after India's unilateral and illegal revocation

of Jammu & Kashmir's special status, the importance of expressing solidarity with Kashmiris has increased manifold. The participants reiterated their firm support for the ongoing struggle of the Kashmiri people and vowed to continue raising their voices for justice and human rights.

3 alleged drug peddlers arrested F.P. Report

SHAHDADKOT: Police has arrested three alleged drug peddlers in the different areas of Qambar city, on Saturday.

The alleged culprits identified as Afzal Sheikh, recovered 700 grams of hashish from his possession in the premises of police station Qambar. In the second operation, Naseerabad police arrested drug peddler accused Qamar u Din Phulpoti from Chanjani Branch Naseerabad Bada Road and recovered 1030 grams of hashish.

In the third operation, police arrested the wanted accused Babar Ali Buledi and recovered a pistol and a large quantity of bullets used in the crime from his possession. A case was registered against him. Wanted in FIR#31/2025 u/s 324,114, 504, 337Hii,34 PPC of PP Saddar PS Kambhar City and FIR.



Ukraine aid groups cut services

KYIV (Reuters): Some 150 Ukrainian teenagers from northeastern areas near the frontlines of the war with Russia had already packed their bags to travel west for an educational retreat far from the shelling and fighting. Their plans were abruptly cancelled.

Tetiana Kovryga, head of a Ukrainian NGO called GoGlobal, said she had to suspend the trip for the youths from the Sumy and Kharkiv regions after President Donald Trump paused development assistance from the US Agency for International Development. "It was difficult. Not only for the children. I had a meeting with the team this morning, and I was very emotional; I carefully chose every word," Kovryga told Reuters.

Sitting in a small room lined with boxes full of goods that had been prepared for the cancelled trip, Kovryga added that she had to pause two other projects and was considering downsizing her team of 50 people. GoGlobal, an educational foundation that focuses on supporting the young in frontline areas where frequent air raid alerts and Russian bombardments disrupt classes, is one of many in Ukraine affected by the review and 90-day freeze on US foreign aid. After nearly three years of war against Russian forces, cash-strapped Ukraine channels the bulk of state revenues to fund its armed forces and produce and purchase weapons.

Kyiv relies on foreign aid to pay pensions and public sector wages as well as to finance social and humanitarian projects. Since the start of Russia's full-scale invasion in February 2022, the United States has been a major supplier of both

military assistance and development aid. USAID has provided Ukraine with \$2.6 billion in humanitarian aid, \$5 billion in development assistance and more than \$30 billion in direct budget support, according to the agency.

Many local communities rely on aid and donor support to fund initiatives in education, health, energy, agriculture and infrastructure. President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has said military assistance was not affected by Trump's foreign aid freeze, but he voiced concern over the funding pause for what he described as "critically important projects" to support the economy, energy, infrastructure, health and veterans. "I have already given instructions to do some key things with our internal funds and also to talk to Europeans," Zelenskyy said in his daily address to the nation, adding the government would prioritise economic stability and veterans' programmes.

Ukrainian government data shows the United States was a development partner in more than 100 projects ranging from investment and exports to sponsoring media, enhancing energy supplies and supporting veterans, young people and scientists.

With Ukraine's budget deficit running at about \$38 billion this year, the number of projects the government can support from its own coffers was likely to be limited, according to economic analysts and NGOs. Reuters spoke to 10 NGO leaders and representatives from across affected projects. They said the abrupt pause in US funding came as a shock to communities exhausted

by wartime challenges, and they were scrambling for new sources of funding.

"We have not been able to pay salaries or any expenses since January 24. It was a big shock for our team because it was very unexpected," Ivona Kostina, co-founder of a group called Veteran Hub that supports war veterans and their families. Veteran Hub briefly suspended its support hotline serving more than 1,300 people every month, and also shut down one of its two centres in the central town of Vinnytsia where 700 people visited monthly for support and advice, Kostina said. However, the hub's centre in Kyiv and three mobile support groups operating in six regions were still working and the team was pressing on with research and other projects, she added.

The Veteran Hub, along with some other aid groups and independent media outlets Reuters spoke to, has appealed for private and corporate donations to maintain operations. Kostina said that the response so far had been "overwhelming", allowing the charity to resume its hotline for now. But community activists worried about the future of groups serving the public if the US aid freeze becomes permanent.

Ukrainian businesses are struggling with rising costs and lower profits, the population is getting poorer amid double-digit inflation and higher taxes. Many people already donate regularly to support the army. Even if US aid resumes, several NGOs said it would be a challenge to keep their teams at a time of severe staff shortages in Ukraine as the war drains the labour force.

Hamas confirms death of military chief Deif

GAZA (BBC): Hamas has confirmed that its military chief, Mohammed Deif, has been killed.

Israel's military said it had killed Deif in July last year, but Hamas had not confirmed this until now. Israel says Deif was one of the figures responsible for planning the 7 October attacks in southern Israel in which 1,200 people were killed and 251 taken hostage.

Deif was widely seen as the second-ranking Hamas official in Gaza, behind Yahya Sinwar, the group's leader in the territory, who was also killed by Israeli forces last year. Judges at the International Criminal Court (ICC) last year issued an arrest warrant for Deif, alongside Israel's PM Benjamin Netanyahu and former defence minister Yoav Gallant.

Deif was known to have helped engineer the construction of tunnels that have allowed Hamas fighters to enter Israel from Gaza. He was also credited with designing Hamas's signature weapon, the Qassam rocket. In its statement, Hamas also announced the death of deputy military commander Marwan Issa. The US announced Issa's death in March last year. Issa was the deputy commander of Hamas's military wing and was considered one of Israel's most-wanted men. The European Union, which placed the Hamas leader on its terrorist blacklist, linked him directly to the 7 October attack.

The latest war was triggered when Hamas attacked Israel on 7 October 2023. Israel's 15-month military offensive killed more than 47,300 Palestinians in the territory, according to Gaza's Hamas-run health ministry. A ceasefire between Hamas and Israel came into effect on 19 January. A total of 15 Israeli hostages have been freed since then. So far, 400 Palestinian prisoners - ranging from those serving long sentences for bombings and other attacks to teenagers held without charge - have been released. Most have returned to the occupied West Bank, East Jerusalem and Gaza, while about 70 of the most serious offenders have been deported.

Philippines to remove US missile system

MANILA (AFP): President Ferdinand Marcos said his government will remove a US missile system from the Philippines if Beijing ends its "aggressive and coercive behaviour" in the contested South China Sea and ceases claiming Filipino territory.

The US military deployed the Typhon missile system in the northern Philippines last year as part of an annual joint exercise, and Filipino troops have been training with it, with plans to acquire the system as a means to protect Manila's maritime interests.

Beijing's forces have engaged in several confrontations with Philippine vessels in recent months over disputed reefs and waters in the strategically located South China Sea. The US mid-range weapon system's presence on Philippine soil has angered China, which has warned Manila was "inciting geopolitical confrontation and an arms race" in the region.

"I don't understand the comments on the Typhon missiles. We don't make any comments on their missile systems, and their missile systems are a thousand times more powerful than what we have," Marcos told reporters during a visit to the central city of Cebu. "Let's make a deal with China: Stop claiming our territory, stop harassing our fishermen and let them have a living, stop ramming our boats, stop water-cannoning our people, stop firing lasers at us, and stop your aggressive and coercive behaviour," Marcos said. "If they stop doing all these things, I will return" the Typhon system to the United States, he added.

Manila and Washington are bound by a mutual defence pact, and the recent South China Sea clashes have sparked fears the US military could be drawn into a war with China.



KYIV: Rescuers working at an apartment building damaged during a Russian drone strike in Sumy, Ukraine.

Syria's new leader pledges 'national dialogue conference'

DAMASCUS (AFP): Syria's interim president, Ahmed al-Sharaa, promised to hold a "national dialogue conference" in his first address to the nation since the fall of ousted leader Bashar al-Assad. Sharaa, who was appointed interim president a day earlier for an unspecified transitional period, vowed to preserve "civil peace" and Syria's territorial unity.

"We will announce in the coming days a committee charged with preparing the national dialogue conference, a direct platform for discussions, to listen to different points of view on our future political programme," Sharaa said in the pre-recorded televised address. Sharaa also committed to issuing a "constitutional declaration" to serve as a "legal reference" during the country's transition, following the suspension of the old constitution.

And he vowed to "pursue the criminals who shed Syrian blood and committed massacres and crimes", whether they were in Syria or abroad, and to establish "real transitional justice" after Assad's fall. The speech followed a visit by Qatari Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani, who emphasised the "urgent need" to form an inclusive government during a meeting with Sharaa, according to the Qatari royal court.

The emir's trip to Damascus was the first by a head of state since Islamist-led rebels seized power less than two months ago. It also follows a visit by Qatar's prime minister this month. The emir "stressed the urgent need to form a government representing all spectrums" of Syrian society in order "to consolidate stability and move forward with reconstruction, development and prosperity projects", the royal court statement said, congratulating Sharaa on his appointment.

Syria's new authorities said Sharaa had also been tasked with forming a transitional legislature. They announced the dissolution of all armed groups involved in Assad's overthrow, as well as the former government's army. A transitional government had previously been appointed to steer the multi-ethnic, multi-confessional country until March 1.

Syrian Foreign Minister Asaad al-Shaibani said discussions with the Qatari delegation touched on reconstruction in the country devastated by nearly 14 years of civil war. Unlike other Arab countries, Qatar did not restore diplomatic ties with Syria under Assad and was one of the first to back the armed rebellion that erupted after his government crushed a peaceful uprising in 2011.

Several visiting foreign officials have urged an inclusive transition after Sharaa's Islamist group led the offensive that ousted Assad on December 8. Qatari foreign ministry official Mohammed al-Khulaifi welcomed announcement by Syria's authorities "on the end of the revolutionary phase and the transition to the phase of establishing the state".

Doha would continue "to provide the required support on all humanitarian and service levels, and also regarding infrastructure and electricity", he said. Qatar was the second country, after Turkey, to reopen its embassy in Damascus following Assad's overthrow. It has urged the lifting of sanctions.

During a visit earlier this month, Qatari Prime Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Merz took over the CDU after Merkel, a former rival, stepped down as chancellor in 2021. A more conservative figure, he has taken a more restrictive stance on migration. He said last week that Germany has had a "misguided asylum and immigration policy" for a decade - since Merkel allowed large numbers of migrants into the country. Merkel has largely kept a low profile since leaving office, doesn't usually comment on day-to-day politics and is no longer actively influential in her party. However, her intervention could be problematic for Merz.

Merz appears to hope that he will gain support by making the Union look decisive in forcing a tougher approach to migration, blunting the appeal of the anti-immigration AfD, while making center-left Scholz and the Greens look weak. It's uncertain whether that will succeed. AfD lawmakers celebrated after vote while others sat stony-faced. Merz said he had sought a majority in the "democratic center" and he regretted that didn't happen. But he also insisted that "a

correct", the royal court statement said, congratulating Sharaa on his appointment.

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During a visit earlier this month, Qatari Prime Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin

Jassim Al-Thani pledged to support the rehabilitation of Syria's infrastructure. A diplomatic source has also said Qatar was weighing plans to assist Syria with public sector salaries. Saudi Arabia's king and crown prince congratulated Sharaa on assuming Syria's interim presidency.

Riyadh was key to returning Assad's Syria to the Arab League in 2023, after openly championing his overthrow following Damascus's 2011 crackdown on pro-democracy protests, which sparked war. "We are pleased to express our congratulations on the occasion of your assumption of the presidency of the Syrian Arab Republic in the transitional phase," King Salman said in a cable, according to the foreign ministry. Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, the Saudi prime minister and de facto ruler under his ageing father, sent a separate cable also offering his congratulations, the statement said.

Last week, Saudi Arabia's foreign minister visited Damascus, promising help to secure the lifting of international sanctions imposed during Assad's rule. Shaibani travelled to Riyadh early in January for his first official trip abroad, and also visited Qatar during a regional tour. Jordan's King Abdullah II also congratulated Sharaa, wishing him "success in leading Syria and serving its people". Amid a flurry of diplomatic activity, a delegation from Russia, a close ally of ousted leader Assad, visited this week, while foreign ministers or senior officials from countries including France, Germany and Turkey have also been to Damascus. Syria's defence ministry said that a high-level Turkish military delegation also visited the country.

Merkel criticizes German front-runner Merz over migration vote

BERLIN (AP): Former German Chancellor Angela Merkel issued rare public criticism of her successor as the country's center-right leader, the front-runner in Germany's election next month, for putting to parliament proposals for tough new migration rules that only passed with the help of a far-right party.

Germany's center-left governing parties have cast doubt on whether conservative leader Friedrich Merz can still be trusted not to bring the far-right Alternative for Germany, or AfD, into government after events. He insists that he didn't and won't work with it, and that he didn't break a political consensus, often called a "firewall," to shun the party. But Chancellor Olaf Scholz said Merz made "an inexcusable mistake." Merz, determined to show his center-right Union bloc's commitment to cutting irregular migration after a deadly knife attack last week by a rejected asylum-seeker, put a nonbinding motion to parliament calling for Germany to turn back many more migrants at its borders, although it might need AfD's backing

to pass. The measure squeaked through thanks to the far-right party's support. Polls show Merz's Union leading ahead of the Feb. 23 election with around 30% support, while AfD is second with about 20%, and Scholz's center-left Social Democrats and their remaining coalition partners, the Greens, are further back. Merkel, a former leader of Merz's Christian Democratic Union, noted in a rare statement that Merz had said in November that no measures should be passed with AfD's support before the Feb. 23 election. She said she supported that position but "I think it was wrong no longer to feel committed to this proposal and, on Jan. 29, to enable with open eyes for the first time a majority with votes from AfD in a vote in the German parliament." Merkel added that "all democratic parties" must work together - "not as a tactical maneuver," and while respecting European Union law - to do everything to prevent attacks such as last week's and others in recent months in which the suspects were immigrants.

UN chief demands evacuation of 2,500 Gaza children at 'imminent risk' of death

UNITED NATIONS (Reuters): United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres demanded that 2,500 children be immediately evacuated from Gaza for medical treatment after meeting with US doctors who said the children were at imminent risk of death in the coming weeks.

The four doctors had all volunteered in Gaza during the 15-month-long war between Israel and Palestinian militants

Hamas that has devastated the enclave of more than 2 million people and its healthcare system. Just days before a ceasefire began on Jan. 19, the World Health Organization said more than 12,000 patients were waiting for medical evacuations and it had hoped they could be ramped up during the truce. Among those patients are 2,500 children, said Feroze Sidhwa, a

California trauma surgeon who worked in Gaza from March 25 to April 8 last year. "There's about 2,500 children who are at imminent risk of death in the next few weeks. Some are dying right now. Some will die tomorrow. Some will die the next day," Sidhwa told reporters after meeting with Guterres.

"Of those 2,500 kids, the vast majority need very simple things done," he said, citing the case of

a 3-year-old boy who suffered burns to his arm. The burns had healed, but the scar tissue was slowly cutting off blood flow, leaving him at risk of amputation, said Sidhwa. Ayesha Khan, an emergency doctor at Stanford University Hospital, worked in Gaza from the end of November until Jan. 1. She spoke about many children with amputations, who had no prosthetics or rehabilitation.

Daughter of Jacob Zuma arrested

JOHANNESBURG (AP): A daughter of former South African President Jacob Zuma was arrested and appeared in a court on terrorism charges for allegedly inciting violence through social media posts before and during riots that shook the country four years ago and left more than 350 people dead.

Duduzile Zuma-Sambudla, who is a member of parliament, was released on warning - which is similar to bail without money needing to be put down - while her case was moved to a higher court to continue in March. Her lawyer said she did make social media posts on what was then known as Twitter related to the riots in July 2021 but denied they incited violence.

The riots, which were sparked by Jacob Zuma being sent to prison for contempt of court for refusing to testify at an inquiry into widespread government corruption during the time he was president from 2009-2018, were some of the worst civil unrest South Africa has seen since the end of the apartheid system of white minority rule in

1994. For more than a week, angry mobs engaged in widespread looting of shops and warehouses, arson and destruction of property and more than 5,000 people were arrested. Authorities estimated the riots caused more than \$2 billion in damage. The disorder and violence caught authorities unprepared and left South Africa uneasy after three largely peaceful decades since apartheid ended.

More than 60 other people have previously been arrested for allegedly inciting violence during the unrest, which authorities say was stoked by Jacob Zuma supporters in an "insurrection" against current President Cyril Ramaphosa, the man who replaced Zuma as leader of the country and the ruling African National Congress party. Zuma-Sambudla, 42, was accused of urging protesters to cause more damage during the riots as a sign of support for her father. Police said she handed herself in at a police station in the eastern city of Durban.

The investigation into her involvement in the riots was conducted by a special

police unit that deals with serious and organized crime, known as the Hawks. The unit had taken so long to gather evidence because of the complexities of the case and the need for social media specialists, prosecutors said. "The arrest is as a result of a meticulous investigation ... following the unrest that brought the country to a standstill in 2021," Hawks spokesperson Brig. Thandi Mbambo said.

Prosecutors said Zuma-Sambudla faces charges of incitement to commit terrorism and incitement to commit public violence under a law that deals with threats to the state. They said she made social media posts and speeches in June and July 2021 and the "natural and probable consequence" of her statements "would be the commission of public violence." While Jacob Zuma's arrest was believed to be the only catalyst for the riots, a later investigation found that they were also partly spurred by frustration and poverty at a time South Africa was under harsh lockdowns because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Criminal proceedings against Trump co-defendants drops

WASHINGTON (AP): The Justice Department abandoned all criminal proceedings against the two co-defendants of President Donald Trump in the Florida classified documents case, wiping out any legal peril the pair could have faced.

Trump valet Walt Nauta and Mar-a-Lago property manager Carlos De Oliveira were charged with conspiring with Trump to obstruct an FBI investigation into the hoarding of classified documents that the Republican took with him when he left the White House after his first term. US District Judge Aileen Cannon dismissed the case, in July, saying that the prosecutor who brought it, special counsel Jack Smith, had been illegally appointed by the Justice

Department. Smith's team ended its case against Trump after his November election win, citing longstanding department policy that says sitting presidents cannot be indicted.

But its appeal of the dismissal of charges against Nauta and De Oliveira remained pending. That's when prosecutors informed the Atlanta-based 11th US Circuit Court of Appeals that it had withdrawn the appeal, formally ending the case.

"The United States of America moves to voluntarily dismiss its appeal with prejudice," prosecutors wrote. "The government has conferred with counsel for Appellees Waltine Nauta and Carlos De Oliveira, who do not object to the voluntary dismissal."

The Justice Department had previously committed to not making public Smith's report on the classified documents investigation as long as proceedings remained ongoing against Nauta and De Oliveira. But with the appeal now dismissed, Democrats on the Senate Judiciary Committee asked acting Attorney General James McHenry to make the report available to them, saying they needed access to evaluate the document as they prepare to take up the nomination of Kash Patel to be FBI director. Patel testified before the grand jury in that investigation in 2022 after being granted immunity. Trump's Justice Department is widely expected to keep the report permanently under wraps.

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Peace in Ukraine will require more than sanctions

PRESIDENT Trump issued a stern ultimatum to Russian President Vladimir Putin, threatening to impose significant taxes, tariffs and sanctions if a peace agreement is not reached promptly in Ukraine. Trump emphasized that Russia's economy is under strain and urged Putin to negotiate, stating that failure to do so would compel the US to enact severe economic penalties. "I'm going to do Russia, whose Economy is failing, and President Putin, a very big FAVOR," Trump posted to Truth Social, liberally using capital letters. "Settle now, and STOP this ridiculous War! IT'S ONLY GOING TO GET WORSE. If we don't make a 'deal,' and soon, I have no other choice but to put high levels of Taxes, Tariffs, and Sanctions on anything being sold by Russia to the United States." The Kremlin quickly downplayed these threats as nothing new, with spokesman Dmitry Peskov noting that Trump employed similar tactics during his first term. Despite facing even harsher sanctions since the February 2022 invasion of Ukraine, Russia's economy has demonstrated surprising resilience. Former President Joe Biden's boast that international sanctions had reduced the ruble to "rubble" turned out to be bluster. Russia simply fled into the arms of China and appears perfectly capable of sustaining its own war machine for the foreseeable future.

In this case, Trump is brandishing the wrong big stick. At the very least, more than tariffs and sanctions will be needed. An effective policy must bring to bear all relevant elements of national power. During his campaign, Trump bragged that he could end the war in 24 hours. Unfortunately, it won't be that simple. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky (and the Ukrainian people) are more willing than ever to accept a negotiated settlement. But although they no longer entertain delusions of reclaiming every inch of Russian-occupied soil, Ukrainian negotiators might still bristle at Russian demands.

Putin has repeatedly stated that any peace deal must give his country full control of the provinces of Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson and Zaporizhzhia, large swaths of which remain under Ukrainian control. He also insists that Ukraine reject the possibility of NATO membership. The two nations might come to loggerheads over either point. From an American perspective, the best solution would be to establish a ceasefire along current battlelines (with Ukraine perhaps pulling its forces out of Kursk in exchange for a similar-sized chunk of the Russian-occupied Donbass). This would allow energy and food (two important commodities) to stabilize across European and world markets.

But what happens if either party objects to that solution? Russia, after all, has been gradually gaining ground for months, giving Putin every incentive to stonewall negotiations until his winning streak runs out. Bullying Ukraine into a deal by threatening to cut off all aid might also be harder than it seems. Both Trump and Vice President JD Vance criticized Zelensky on the campaign trail for siphoning off hundreds of billions of taxpayer dollars that could be better spent at home. The current total amount of aid authorized for Ukraine is about \$175 billion. Much of that money is spent in US factories producing the weapons that are either shipped to Ukraine or used to backfill US defense stocks.

It is estimated that approximately 70 US cities are benefiting from these contracts. Termination of that aid would require cooperation from congressional Republicans, many of whom are more pro-Ukraine than Trump and have constituents who benefit from the aid. Further complicating the situation is the prominence of Elon Musk, who has his own government department, contracts for most US government launches, and Trump's ear. When it comes to Ukraine, Musk is difficult to pin down. He allowed Ukraine free use of his Starlink satellite constellation in the early stages of the war, but he refused to allow its use for a proposed strike against Crimea.

He also drew condemnation from Ukraine and its allies for proposing his own "peace plan" in October 2022, which included UN-supervised referenda in Russian-occupied regions and a neutrality pledge from Ukraine. And if that weren't enough, he's also been in close contact with Putin, which worried Air Force Secretary Frank Kendall, instigated ongoing federal reviews, and even caused some senators to suggest that he should have his security clearance revoked. From a Ukrainian perspective, even the perception that Musk is influencing negotiations could poison the well. In light of all these challenges, America's best weapon in the struggle for peace remains what it always was: support for Ukraine in the form of money and matériel.

Trump can use this support to exert pressure on both parties to reach a compromise. If Ukraine objects to proposed territorial concessions, he can offer generous reconstruction aid and help in rebuilding the country's war-ravaged military. Such assistance would also help prepare Ukraine for eventual inclusion into NATO and the EU. If Russia gets too greedy, Trump can remind them that he's perfectly willing to continue (or even ramp up) support for Ukrainian forces, leaving all options on the table. At this point in the war, it would be unwise to back another large-scale counteroffensive or authorize further strikes on Russian soil, but strategic ambiguity is valuable. We can make Russian forces pay even more dearly for every inch they gain or (better yet) stop them in their tracks. This credible threat is the best way to convince Putin that it's better to "declare victory and take what's on offer" than to "keep slogging away until the Russian flag flies over Kyiv." Sanctions have only hardened Putin's resolve. If we want to break it, we'll need to speak the only language he understands: force.

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Tense Moldovan election puts a spotlight on pro-Russian region of Gagauzia

Madeleine Cuckson

MOLDOVA'S recent EU referendum and presidential election have drawn attention to Gagauzia, a semi-autonomous region in southern Moldova where opposition to European Union integration and President Maia Sandu's re-election was the strongest in the country. The country's Oct. 20 referendum on pursuing EU membership passed by a narrow margin of 0.35%. In Gagauzia, a predominantly Russian-speaking, ethnic Turkic region, only 5.16% of voters backed EU integration.

The region also heavily favored Sandu's Russian-aligned opponent, Alexandr Stoianoglo of the Party of Socialists, who received 97% of Gagauzia's votes in the Nov. 3 presidential runoff. Stoianoglo, a former prosecutor with ties to Russia, was labeled by Sandu as "Moscow's man." Irina Vlah, who served as Gagauzia's Bashkan (governor) from 2015-2023, has been a central figure in shaping the region's recent trajectory. "My team and I were able to transform the region," Vlah told The Moscow Times. "We created opportunities for young people, built infrastructure, and advanced the region's economic development. I am proud of what we achieved." After incorporation into the Moldavian SSR, Gagauzia experienced significant Russification that cemented its cultural and linguistic ties to Russia. Following Moldova's 1991 independence the region sought autonomy, which was granted in 1994. Since then, local leaders have frequently clashed with federal authorities over cultural policies, economic development and Moldova's foreign policy.

During her tenure, Vlah partnered with international organizations like the UNDP on initiatives such as the EU-funded Support for Agriculture and Rural Development project as well as advanced campaigns to address domestic violence, making Gagauzia a leader in prevention efforts. Her tenure was also marked by deepening ties with Russia, including

facilitating access for Gagauzian agricultural products to Russian markets and signing cooperation agreements with nine Russian regions. Vlah's dual approach of working with the East and West underscored the balancing act of her leadership. "I never chose to work with the West against the East, or vice versa," she said in an interview with

interests of the people." Gagauzia's current Bashkan, Evghenia Gutul, is affiliated with the pro-Russian ?or Party, whose exiled leader Ilon Shor's destabilization campaigns in Moldova were allegedly financed by Russian oligarch Roman Abramovich. Gutul's June 2023 election remains unvalidated by Moldova's Central Election Commission due to alleged

Shevel also pointed to the region's struggles with language barriers, noting that only 12% of Gagauzians speak Romanian proficiently. "Our lack of Romanian language skills has hindered our ability to work in Chisinau and in government structures," he said. The language question is emblematic of broader cultural challenges in Gagauzia. Russian remains the dominant language in the region, and some residents feel excluded from national life due to Moldova's increasing prioritization of Romanian as the state language.

Moldovan podcast Bandstage in 2024. "I have always implemented projects with both," Vlah is critical of the country's current pro-European leadership, telling Russia's state-run RIA Novosti news agency this year that "Sandu mistakenly believes that if you have good relations with the West, you must necessarily have poor relations with Russia." Still, she backed Moldova's EU candidacy in 2022, saying that "the people of Gagauzia welcome Moldova's status as a candidate for EU membership."

However, the recent referendum results highlight a growing divide between Gagauzia's population and Moldova's European aspirations. Shortly after the presidential election in November, Vlah announced her new political party, Heart of Moldova. She told The Moscow Times of Gagauzians' right to "responsible politicians who make decisions in the

campaign finance violations and foreign interference. She has also been barred from Cabinet meetings and was targeted by recent US sanctions. While the diaspora rallied behind Sandu to secure her victory in November - with 82.82% of the diaspora's 327,851 votes backing her - she lost the internal vote with 48.69%. Reports of Russian interference, including alleged voter bribery, are under investigation. Gagauz activist Andrei Shevel, 28, feels strongly about Gagauzia's underrepresentation in government decisionmaking.

"There isn't a single representative from Gagauzia in the ruling party or parliament, which I believe is a problem," he told The Moscow Times. Shevel also pointed to the region's struggles with language barriers, noting that only 12% of Gagauzians speak Romanian proficiently. "Our lack of Romanian language skills has hindered

our ability to work in Chisinau and in government structures," he said. The language question is emblematic of broader cultural challenges in Gagauzia. Russian remains the dominant language in the region, and some residents feel excluded from national life due to Moldova's increasing prioritization of Romanian as the state language. Shevel criticized the region's nostalgia for the Soviet Union. His family suffered during the Soviet famine of 1946-47, as did many others in Gagauzia. It is estimated that 20-30% of Gagauzia's population perished during the famine.

"People ignore the reality of those times," he said. Economic challenges have driven 20-25% of Gagauzians to seek work abroad. Lyuba, a 29-year-old Gagauz native from Comrat, expressed concerns about the future of her community. "Overall, Gagauz culture is fading," said Lyuba, who is learning Romanian to adapt to Moldova's linguistic reality and voted against EU membership in the referendum.

"Joining the EU may deepen the division between pro-European and pro-Russian forces in the country," she told The Moscow Times. Some Moldovans fear that EU membership could lead to NATO accession, a move that would clash with Moldova's constitutional neutrality. "People claim to support neutrality while simultaneously favoring cooperation with Russia," Shevel said. "This contradicts the principle of neutrality, especially when there are Russian troops stationed in Moldova." Today, 1,500 Russian troops remain in Transnistria, a separatist region on the Ukrainian border that has been disputed since the dissolution of the USSR. Despite these challenges, Shevel remains optimistic about the region's future, supporting Gagauzia's cause in Moldova's political landscape. "I see that they don't fully understand or address the local mindset, needs and regional agenda here," he said of the current government. "My goal is to represent Gagauzia in parliament."

Social media sans fact-checking will destabilize Global South

Ashfaq Zaman

FOR Big Tech companies, the Global South has long been little more than an afterthought. The rollback of any form of robust or credible fact-checking on both X and Meta demonstrates this all too clearly. While the majority of X and Meta's users remain outside of the US and Europe, their content moderation policies simply shift with America's ever-changing cultural and political tides.

Social media companies seem perfectly happy to profit off the masses of data they accumulate from users across the world. They are far less interested in investing in the systems and processes that ensure some semblance of accuracy or protection across their platforms. Meta's decision to replace independent fact-checkers with an X-style "community notes" feature may be a somewhat cynical attempt to appease the new Trump administration. Yet despite America's current zeitgeist, tech executives must remember that their platforms still have global reach with global implications. While masquerading as a protection of "free speech," this move will have calamitous effects on places that lie beyond America's borders.

Of course, even before the removal of third-party fact-checkers, misinformation and disinformation on X and on Meta's various platforms have caused untold damage. This results in social division and, all too frequently, violence. That's because, all too often, that is what it's designed to do. I have experienced this first hand. In my home country of Bangladesh, in the wake of our country's revolution, we have been the victim of a concerted disinformation campaign designed to stir racial division and discredit the reputation of our country.

As documented in a BBC investigation, false reports of violence perpetrated by "Islamic radicals" have been spread by far-right, state-affiliated accounts from neighboring India. Various instances of false or misleading social media posts have been identified and debunked by the AI intelligence service Blackbird.AI. These include fake images of arson attacks at Hindu temples, shops and even houses, along with mistitled and misattributed videos of racially-driven mob beatings and killings. In fact, this campaign has been so successful that even President Trump referenced "barbaric violence" against Hindus, Muslims and other minorities in Bangladesh (in a post he has since deleted) based on misinformation he had seen online.

This is part of a long-standing tradition in India. Indeed, the "Indian Chronicles" campaign was designed to discredit rival countries in the region and amplify pro-Indian interests. Yet Bangladesh is not the only victim of lax content moderation protocols. Social media has been politically manipulated during political campaigns in both Brazil and Kenya. Health misinformation was allowed to run rampant

across Nigeria, Indonesia and South Africa.

Economic disinformation has led to panic buying in Zimbabwe, while disinformation on Meta in Sri Lanka has led directly to violence against the Muslim community there. Indeed, one of the main motivating forces behind whistleblower Frances Haugen's release of the "Facebook papers" was her concerns around how the company handled misinformation in the Ethiopian election. Both misinformation and disinformation pose unique threats to the Global South. Lower levels of digital literacy, combined with rapid mobile phone adoption, can leave falsehoods harder to distinguish from information gained from credible sources.

Similarly, many Big Tech platforms simply fail to decipher misinformation through cultural and linguistic nuance. Social media fills an information vacuum left when no credible, fact-checked sources of journalism are available.

Social media is no longer simply a tool for individuals to communicate. It is being used at the state level to launch weaponized information warfare campaigns. That's why the rollback of content moderation is a step in the wrong direction, taken at the wrong time. We should call this what it is - digital colonialism. These companies use predatory algorithms to keep users engaged for as long as possible so that their data can be sold to the highest bidder. Despite their eye-watering profits, companies like Meta and X show little interest in protecting the users from which they profit so handsomely.

As technology advances, the stakes only get higher. The rise of both AI and deepfakes makes false information even harder to identify. In fact, researchers have already identified a "detection gap," whereby the tools or systems used to identify fake content in the Global South often work poorly, or not at all. Of course, AI can be a useful tool for detecting deepfakes. However, as stated by Sabhanaz Rashid Diya, founder of the Tech Global Institute, "There's a lot more easily accessible tools and tech available that actually allows someone to create synthetic media than the ones that are available to actually detect it."

AI has made the internet both a more productive and more dangerous place to be. Removing content moderation and fact-checking on social media platforms is the opposite of what the global online community needs. Social media executives have ignored their civic duty in favor of a set of sycophantic policy changes signaling subservience to the new administration. The early promise of a democratized, gatekeeper-free internet has been broken by a Tech Bro class that cares only about money and power. Sadly, it will be countries like mine in the Global South that will continue to drown in the flow of unregulated social media slop. Will the Western world listen?

The Hill

Europe needs to stand up for Greenland. It is failing

Nathalie Tocci

DONALD Trump's antics over the past week have put paid to the refrain, often heard in Europe, that the president should be taken "seriously but not literally". It turns out that Trump literally wants Greenland. He doubled down on his aggressive rhetoric in a raging 45-minute call with the Danish prime minister, Mette Frederiksen, a few days ago, threatening crippling tariffs unless she agreed to sell the autonomous territory to the US.

In response to Denmark's sharp increase in military spending for the Arctic, including ships and drones, he derided Copenhagen's "dog-sled" defences for Greenland, the world's largest non-continental island, which pale in comparison with the strength of the US military base there.

The threat to take over the territory of a European country by force is some-

thing that Europeans now know all too well. Russia has repeatedly threatened east European countries, making good on those threats by invading Georgia in 2008 and Ukraine since 2014. Yet many Europeans are gobsmacked that such a threat is now coming from its greatest ally.

That said, the reaction has been muted. The European Commission president, Ursula von der Leyen, and the European Council president, António Costa, have said nothing, while the French president, Emmanuel Macron, and the German chancellor, Olaf Scholz, while speaking out initially, have joined in the collective silence. What's going on?

There are several rational explanations. Against the backdrop of great power rivalry and the climate crisis, which is opening seaways in the melting Arctic, Washington's appetite for resource-rich Greenland is growing. At the same time,

the relationship between Copenhagen and Nuuk (Greenland's capital) is complex, with the latter now pushing for independence. Although results from a recent survey published in the Greenlandic newspaper Sermitsiaq and the Danish Berlingske reveal that 85% of Greenlanders do not want to join the US, Denmark fears that if its reactions to Trump's territorial designs are too vocal, it could alienate Greenlanders and push the island further into the US orbit. Tread carefully are the watchwords coming from Copenhagen to its European partners.

And European leaders are heeding the call. Both the public silence and behind-the-scenes work appear to be coordinated, with Frederiksen meeting with the leaders of Norway, Sweden and Finland, as well as Germany, France and Nato's secretary general,

Mark Rutte, in recent days. Cooperation between the EU and Greenland is also intensifying on issues such as energy and critical raw materials. The upfront explanation for Europe's silence on Greenland is, therefore, that it is a deliberate, coordinated tactic not to feed the beast of transatlantic escalation, giving space for officials to quietly mitigate and defuse the threat.

An equally rational, though less edifying, explanation is that Europeans have bigger fish to fry with Washington. They need to make sure Trump remains engaged on the question of European military security, starting with Ukraine, and they want to dissuade the US president from unleashing a trade war. European silence on Greenland is, therefore, also a question of priorities; the last thing Europeans want is to antagonise the

man such that he pulls the plug on Nato. Countries in northern and eastern Europe that would be hurt most by US disengagement from Ukraine, as well as western and southern European countries that would be most exposed to a transatlantic trade war, will be thinking that it's not worth making too much of a fuss about Greenland.

But these rational explanations only go so far, and don't take into account the potentially high costs of inaction - such as undermining the notion of European political solidarity. Instead of reason, it might be worth thinking about emotions. Two contrasting ones are mutually reinforcing. Europeans are scared. They fear Trump and their fear is paralysing. It freezes their actions and quiets their rhetoric. The more Trump confirms their fears through his repeated threats, the less they are inclined to react. Trump presumably smells

the fear, and like all bullies revels in it, upping the ante.

Yet Europeans also paradoxically feel insufficiently anxious. They cling to the conviction that the storm will pass. Waiting translates into silence, a complacent wish that Trump's threat to Europe will wither away or that his attention will inevitably turn elsewhere. Insufficient anxiety means that Europe lacks the adrenaline to act.

In other words, faced with yet another serious crisis, Europe - through a combination of reason and fear - is deciding to just muddle through. But convincing ourselves that everything will be all right is precisely what prevents the radical renewal that the continent badly needs. And a mere week into Trump's presidency, a vital question looms: if a US president threatening an EU member state doesn't jolt Europe out of its complacent slumber, then what will?

With Russia gone, Syrians begin a long, painful process of rebuilding

Joseph Roche & Iryna Matviyihsyn

DAMASCUS Governorate, SYRIA - The central alley souk in Arbin, a neighborhood in the Damascus suburb of Eastern Ghouta, is bustling with people. Among the ruined buildings, vendors have set up their stalls and shout out the day's prices at the top of their lungs.

One month ago, HTS, a movement formed from the merger of rebel and jihadist groups based in the northwestern Idlib governorate, overthrew Bashar al-Assad's regime following a lightning offensive, ending five decades of dictatorship in less than two weeks. Assad's ally Russia, which had propped up the regime with military force, was forced to retreat to its bases at Tartus and Khmeimim. Since then, long-suppressed civilian voices have come to the forefront.

"The Russians destroyed my house during the siege," cries an old man at the market, his cane raised to the sky. "My son and daughter also died because of the Russians," adds another. "They killed everyone and destroyed everything." Located just a few kilometers from Damascus, Eastern Ghouta was the site of one of the most violent and deadly battles of the Syrian Civil War. As the epicenter of anti-Assad protests in 2011, it was besieged by the regime starting in 2012 and relentlessly bombed by Russian aviation. It wasn't until 2018, after five and a half years of siege, chemical attacks and famine, that Eastern Ghouta's rebel fighters agreed to lay down their arms and exile themselves to the Idlib pocket as part of a Russia-brokered evacuation deal.

Seven years later, the neighborhood is little more than a field of ruins, sparsely populated by survivors who, until the regime's collapse, had lived under the control and repression of the Russian forces operating there. Mandouh Abdul Latif, 32, an egg vendor in Arbin's souk, recalls those days bitterly. His round face, framed by a blond beard, glistens in the sunlight. "The Russians based nearby often raided our neighborhood," he says. "We were terrified of them, especially the Chechen fighters. We avoided interacting with them, but it wasn't a peaceful relationship. They were

monstrous. They would often come to our market and just take whatever they wanted. But what could we do?" Abu Salmun, an elderly man standing nearby whose face is scarred by an explosion during the siege, interrupts Latif. "Under the 2018 agreement, Assad's forces couldn't enter Ghouta. So it was the Russians who handled security," he explains. "Assad had the Iranians behind him, and the Iranians had the Russians behind them. In the end, it was the Russians who called all the shots."

Abu Salmun recounts how Russian troops once arrested his own son. "They took him for no reason. I sold my house and paid a bribe to get him out," he says. "Yesterday, I saw photos of Saydnaya [a prison in Damascus governorate notorious for its atrocities]. God knows what would have happened to him if he'd stayed there. The prisoners were crammed together like sheep in those jails." Pausing for a moment, Abu Salmun leans on a nearby vegetable stall. He smiles, a grimace lost in the scars on his face. "In the end, it's thanks to the Ukrainians that we're free," he says. "If they hadn't destroyed the Russian army, God knows how long Assad would have stayed in power." In Arbin, the time for celebrating Assad's overthrow is gradually coming to an end, giving way to a phase of uncertainty about Syria's future. In Damascus, al-Julani, the leader of HTS and Syria's new head of state, has shed his jihadist identity, adopting his civilian name, Ahmed al-Sharaa. He has traded his khaki uniform for a European-style suit and now welcomes diplomats and ministers from around the world to his office. But despite this symbolic transformation, al-Sharaa and his "Salvation Government" face the immense challenge of rebuilding a country devastated by over a decade of war. Large parts of Syria, including regions under Kurdish or Turkish militia control, remain beyond his reach. In areas liberated from the Assad regime, tensions between Alawites (the sect Assad's family originates from and the backbone of his regime), Sunnis and Christians

risk further escalation.

Meanwhile, in territories previously held by Assad, the situation is equally bleak: the economy is nearly non-existent, electricity is available only a few hours a day, and rampant inflation continues to cripple daily life. The government also has to deal with tens of thousands of Syrians who are finally returning home after years as refugees. Abu Rami, an HTS soldier, is one of them. A knife and ammunition magazines strapped to his uniform, he is a child of Eastern Ghouta. "I first served in Bashar's army. Then I deserted to join the opposition and defend my neighborhood," he explains. "I can barely remember those years. Everything is blurred in my memory." From 2012 to 2018, he and his comrades from Faql Al Rahman, a moderate Islamist group, lived under daily bombardments, famine and sarin gas attacks. Their return is tinged with melancholy. "The first hours after the liberation were so overwhelming that I could barely breathe," says Abdul Rahman, one of his comrades. "Everyone welcomed us as heroes. People fired into the air, played drums, and hosted feasts. But after that, it was hard to come back home. Everything about our life here was destroyed by Assad and the Russians." Walking through the maze of streets, Abu Rami stops in front of a mosque under construction.

"This was an 11th-century mosque. The Russians destroyed it. Further down, that's the church they bombed. Assad claimed he was protecting Christians, but he killed them too," he says. Further along the streets, he adds: "No one was waiting for me at home. My parents died during the siege, and other members of my family too. All my memories are gone. The house where I got married was destroyed." A hundred meters away, his eyes well up. "My father and mother died on this street, killed by a Russian Iskander missile." On what remains of a central square, Abdul Rahman points to a building. "That was my house. The Russians destroyed it." One by one, he climbs the stairs. At one point, he stops, and after a few seconds of silence, push-

es aside a stone with one of his boots. "This is the room where my sister and my mother died." In a room of his house, damaged by a Russian airstrike, Nasser, a young HTS soldier who recently returned from exile, feeds a central stove with sunflower seeds to heat one of the few renovated rooms in the family home. Part of his family stayed behind after 2018, while he fled into exile in Idlib. "I hadn't seen him since 2012," says his uncle Ayman, who fled to the north of the country before the siege of Ghouta began.

Nasser is still trying to readjust to being back. Several times, he attempts to describe the emotions he is feeling upon his return. "I can't believe it. My body is here, but my heart can't grasp what's happening. I think no one expected the regime to fall so easily or that we'd be back home so quickly," he says. Between cigarettes, he admits: "I had resigned myself to the idea that I'd never see my family or my city again." "I met my nephew for the first time last month," Nasser says, pointing to the young man. "Look how tall he is. He has a beard. He's a man now." Wissam, Nasser's nephew, barely knew he had an uncle in Idlib. "Because of Bashar, we didn't call each other. We were too scared to talk. We knew they were there, but we never hoped we could speak. Seeing each other now is like living a dream," says Wissam. Still, Ayman, his round face worn by years of hardship, acknowledges the difficulties exiles face when returning to their neighborhoods.

"There are two big problems: housing and jobs," he says. "Over 90% of the buildings have been destroyed, and there aren't enough jobs for everyone." Abu Rami, Nasser and their comrades are stationed in Ghouta, but they don't know for how long. As soldiers, they could be sent to another city or neighborhood at any moment. So they take things day by day, savoring the chance to be home. "I dream of bringing my children here," sighs Abu Rami. "I have three. They're with my wife in Idlib. Inshallah, they'll come here soon. The only thing I long for is to live in peace in my neighborhood and never leave it again."

Young people say they'd elect a 'strong leader'. I say give more of them vote

Polly Toinbee

FOR God's sake don't give them the vote! Many people said that after a shocking poll published this week appeared to show young people rejecting democracy. But that's utterly wrong. On the contrary, this should prompt Labour to accelerate its manifesto pledge to give 16- and 17-year-olds the vote. They need more democracy, not less, and soon.

The Channel 4 poll found that 52% of 13- to 27-year-olds think "the UK would be a better place if a strong leader" were in charge "who does not have to bother with parliament and elections", and 33% thought the country would be better run "if the army was in charge", among other dark impulses. I have doubts about the value of springing kneejerk, contextless questions on people. (Does anyone want a "weak" leader? Was there a follow-up question: "Do you want the right to get rid of a leader you hate?") Psephologist Peter Kellner reckons "it's more a top-of-the-head response indicating a general sense of pessimism, disillusionment and disengagement than a thought-out view of how society should be organised". It's a spasm, much like Peter Finch in the film Network leaning out of the TV studio window and shouting: "I'm mad as hell and I'm not gonna take this any more!"

But some working knowledge of politics matters. Citizenship education flowered briefly when David Blunkett as education secretary made it compulsory in England, with specialist teachers. But it was killed off by Michael Gove dropping it from his Ebacc, along with bursaries for teachers training in it. Officially, it's still compulsory for state-maintained schools - academies are not curriculum-bound - but it's often

absent, left to form tutors, untimetabled. Ofsted barely checks, and what's not inspected gets ignored. Five times fewer pupils take the GCSE than 15 years ago, according to Liz Moore, chief executive of the Association for Citizenship Teaching. This latest poll should spur the national curriculum review to restore it, when it reports in March. Forget memories of grim "civics" lessons, citizenship is nothing like that. At Priory school in Southsea, Hampshire, headteacher Stewart Vaughan and his specialist citizenship teacher Helen Blatchford promote it enthusiastically, not just to study but as democratic practice running right through the school, with a school council, consultations on the curriculum and priorities for spending capital. Students there "know they are heard", says the head, even if they don't get the final say. Blatchford has submitted her evidence to the curriculum review about the good effect of citizenship education on the whole school.

Critical thinking is its core, which means learning about problem-solving, weighing evidence, making arguments and learning how to agree and disagree. Students run mock elections and take practical collective action with local councillors and voluntary groups. Teaching media literacy, debunking myths and identifying reliable online sources is not easy, says Vaughan. "They are overwhelmed 24 hours a day by a volume of online material: we can't keep up. We only hope to equip them to filter unreliable sources, but schools can't do this alone. It needs families, and government regulation of these sites." Difficult subjects are not ducked. Gaza

arouses strong passions, so they discuss Middle Eastern history, conflict and identity. Vaughan says, "with impartiality, listening to students' stories. They are opinionated, but respectful of arguments." Where better to debate Andrew Tate's misogyny? Forty of the school's year 10s choose citizenship for GCSE. Plentiful studies show good effects rippling through schools that teach it seriously.

Voting at 16 and 17 would affect schools and teenagers profoundly. Politicians eagerly pressing the flesh in care homes would turn to schools and colleges with equal solicitude for the young. In Scotland and other countries where 16-year-olds vote, Dr Christine Huebner of Sheffield University finds, they vote more than the 18-24s - perhaps because they live at home and are encouraged by their schools. But once 18-year-olds leave for colleges and universities elsewhere, registration plummets - their lives are disrupted and they move frequently, "with crucial NI numbers often left at home". Huebner wonders if that's exactly what David Cameron intended when he banned colleges and universities from registering all students: young votes "fell off a cliff" with his individual voter registration from the 2015 election, she says. Voter ID rules passed by the Tories in 2022, another anti-youth gerrymander, allowed pensioners' travel passes for identity but not young people's travel cards.

The ability of schools, universities and colleges to register students needs to be restored, alongside automatic voter registration, to stem falling turnout. Here's why voting at 16 is crucial: if someone votes once, it's likely to become a lifelong habit. Many of the never-

voted secretly fear getting it wrong at the polling station because their literacy or English is poor, covering it with a bluff: "They're all the same!" But if every pupil were taken to the school's local polling station by a teacher and everything explained (including the option to spoil their ballot), that habit would start right there. I would make the quid pro quo for votes at 16 a compulsory to vote that first time, but good citizenship education might make that unnecessary. Electronic voting is essential - and again, barred by the Tories to deter the young.

There are too few 16- and 17-year-olds in any constituency to significantly shift the dial, even if they all voted for the same candidate (and they are as diverse as other age groups, says Huebner). But would George Osborne's austerity have targeted their educational maintenance allowances and their housing benefits, or closed youth centres, if MPs were soliciting their votes?

Generation Z has grown up since the 2008 crash and knows only stagnation, dwindling life chances and vanishing home ownership, so no wonder 47% of them told the Channel 4 poll that "the entire way our society is organised must be radically changed through revolution". Citizenship education makes them more tolerant and more supportive of democracy and increases their intentions to vote, but it won't assuage that indignation. It should channel justified anger into political action to force Westminster's attention. The government says votes at 16 will definitely be law "in good time ahead of the next general election": speed it up. If anyone thinks young people are too stupid, just spend a day out canvassing.

The Guardian

Russians claiming US asylum face prolonged detention and uncertain

Anastasia Tenisheva & Leyla Latypova

WHEN Galina Kaplunova, a 26-year-old opposition activist from St. Petersburg, fled Russia with her four-year-old child and mother last summer, she hoped to find safety and a fresh start in the United States. Instead, she found herself caught in the harsh realities of the US immigration system.

In Russia, Kaplunova worked for the late Kremlin foe Alexei Navalny's Anti-Corruption Foundation, which was blacklisted as "extremist" in 2021, as well as with pro-peace presidential hopefuls Boris Nadezhdin and Yekaterina Duntsova. She had also been detained at opposition rallies. After arriving in Mexico, Kaplunova and her mother registered with CBP One, the US government's official app for asylum seekers at the southern border. They waited 36 days in the Mexican border city of Tijuana for their appointment - a very short time compared to many other applicants.

"We were incredibly lucky," she recalled in a conversation with The Moscow Times. Just hours after crossing the border, Kaplunova was summoned for an interview with a border security officer where - after answering a few "generic biographical questions" - she was told she would be sent to a detention facility. "It was nearing midnight and my child was sleeping in my arms when an officer handed me a piece of paper stating that I was to be sent to a detention center. I looked at the officer and said: 'I can't go right now. I have a child'," she recalled. "But he just told me through an interpreter that my child would remain under the custody of ICE [US Immigration and Customs Enforcement]." "It is one of those moments when you really don't have a choice - you can't go back and can only agree with whatever they tell you," she said.

Kaplunova spent nearly two months in detention. It took her another 19 days after being released to reunite with her son, who had been placed in a foster family. Her mother, a 45-year-old sales manager from St. Petersburg, remains in detention. Since the Kremlin's invasion of Ukraine, a growing number of Russians have turned to the CBP One program with hopes of seeking refuge in the US. According to official data, 118,000 Russian citizens have registered with CBP One since 2022. However, once across the border, many Russian applicants are held in immigration centers for months as they await decisions on their asylum cases - a trend that appears to have become more common in recent months. Their experiences have led some immigration lawyers and Russian opposition politicians to decry what they see as "discrimination" toward the Russian passport. Yet others note that it is merely an example of how the often-criticized US immigration system functions for people of all nationalities.

At least 900 Russian citizens who have used CBP One are currently in detention, American immigration lawyer Julia Nikolaev told The Moscow Times, citing her own calculations. The real number, she said, is likely much higher. The Moscow Times spoke to five Russian citizens who were placed in detention after using the CBP One program to cross the US border and apply for asylum. Four of them described facing harsh conditions including being held in detention for several months, moved between facilities in different states and - like Kaplunova - separated from their spouses or minor children. Until recently, most Russian asylum seekers using the CBP One program had undergone the same process, immigration lawyers say: after submitting their applications, they would receive an invitation from US border authorities to enter the country.

While some were briefly held in detention centers, the majority were allowed to remain free while awaiting a decision on their asylum claims. But "something happened within the system in May 2024 and Russians began to be sent to detention centers en masse," said

Yelena Kuzmina, who leads the Detentions project at Russian America for Democracy in Russia (RADR), a US-based NGO working with the Russian diaspora. Inside these detention centers, detainees often face overcrowded cells, poor sanitary conditions and limited access to legal assistance. Danila Dolotov, a 30-year-old doctor, fled Russia with his wife and crossed the US-Mexican border through CBP One in September 2023.

In a phone interview, he described the conditions in the detention center where he spent six months as "horrific." "The air was filled with an unbearable odor, as dozens of men were confined in a single space. Sanitation conditions were extremely poor," said Dolotov, whose asylum bid is due to be reviewed by a US court in 2026. Cells housed

asylum seekers using the official CBP One program to enter the country were still being detained. "They entered through the established legal procedure. They have a temporary status that allows them to stay in the US and apply for political asylum. They didn't crawl through tunnels or climb over fences - they came and entered through an official border checkpoint with permission from border officials," Nikolaev told The Moscow Times. However, according to lawyer Liya Djamilova and immigration expert Marina Sokolovskaya, it is standard practice in accordance with US law to hold asylum seekers in detention facilities regardless of nationality.

"What is happening now with Russian speakers in immigration prisons has been happening to everyone else for many years," Djamilova told The

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between 100 to 120 people with open toilets and poor sanitation, he said. Activist Kaplunova recalled the "difficult" experience of being transferred from a California detention center to a facility in Arizona, with no water provided during the 12-hour minivan ride in the summer heat. "When we arrived in Arizona, we were tormented further," said Kaplunova. "After taking a shower...we were sent to a freezing room with no warm clothes...and denied water again."

Prolonged detentions of four to six months or more can take a toll on asylum seekers' health, lawyers warn, as these facilities are ill-equipped to provide adequate medical treatment. While living conditions vary between detention centers, navigating immigration court may pose the greatest challenge to refugees stranded in these facilities. Many struggle to find or pay for a qualified lawyer and can lose access to vital evidence for their asylum claims when border officers confiscate their devices, said RADR President Dmitry Valuev. The rise in detentions of Russian passport holders who used the CBP One program has led to a debate over whether the practice is discriminatory - or merely how the system works for asylum seekers of all nationalities.

Since invading Ukraine in 2022, the Kremlin has intensified its crackdown on Russian civil society, forcing thousands of opposition figures, journalists and activists to flee abroad. Russian opposition politician Ilya Yashin, himself a former political prisoner in Russia who was released in last year's historic exchange between Moscow and the West, argued that people running from "war, repression and [President Vladimir] Putin's prisons" need to be protected. He recently met with officials from the Senate, the State Department and the Biden administration in Washington, where he urged officials to expedite the processing of Russian asylum applications. "According to lawyers and asylum seekers, no matter what kind of [politically motivated criminal] cases individuals have, how many times they have been detained or even if they have won a case against the Russian authorities in the European Court of Human Rights - none of it matters [to the US authorities]," Yashin told The Moscow Times. "They still end up in detention."

Lawyer Nikolaev said the main problem was that

Moscow Times. "It's just that the US has never seen such a large influx of people from post-Soviet countries before." National security concerns could also play a role given the increasingly adversarial relations between the Kremlin and the West as well as the risk of terrorist activity spilling over from Russia, the Caucasus and Central Asia. Just this month, US authorities arrested former Wagner mercenary Timur Praliev, who holds both Russian and Kazakh passports, after he illegally crossed the border.

According to the Department of Homeland Security, all individuals who use CBP One are "thoroughly screened and vetted, and individuals who pose a national security or public safety concern are detained." A leaked memo circulated by the media last year revealed that asylum seekers from Georgia, Moldova, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan were allegedly being singled out for expedited removal. According to this memo, the individual would not necessarily be deported - the asylum application would simply be reviewed through an expedited process, Sokolovskaya said. The Moscow Times could not independently verify the memo's authenticity. "These six countries were likely targeted because obtaining political asylum in the US has become a commercial enterprise for them, and the number of dangerous individuals exceeded certain thresholds. For this reason, people started being sent to detention [en masse]," Sokolovskaya told The Moscow Times.

ICE did not respond to The Moscow Times' requests for comment. The Trump administration this month shut down the CBP One program. Those who registered with the program before the shutdown now face an uncertain future as they continue to wait in detention. Among them is Kaplunova's mother, whose immigration case was separated from her activist daughter's and transferred to Louisiana.

Her mother's health, she said, has deteriorated since being placed in an immigration facility. "My mom started to suffer from high blood pressure. She was diagnosed with hypertension and the doctors told her that she needed to get out of the facility as soon as possible," Kaplunova said. "But [it seems that] no one has any intention of letting her go."

The Moscow Times

Labour can't understand why Trump hates snivelling Mandy

Tim Stanley

HEAVEN rejoices at repentant sinners, but it laughs in the face of Peter Mandelson. The would-be ambassador to the United States appeared on Fox News to denounce his past comments on Donald Trump - "reckless... a bully" - as if someone else had made them. "I consider my remarks... ill-judged and wrong," he said in the tone of a scandalised vicar, adding "attitudes toward the president have changed since then". Since when? Since Trump won the election and Peter lost the Oxford chancellor job, and decided he'd like an ambassadorship instead. Shades of "what first attracted you to the millionaire Paul Daniels?"

Mandy's story is Labour's geopolitical crisis in a nutshell. I guess from their perspective it makes sense sending him to Washington, being an experienced trade negotiator and - certainly to

the neo-Blairites running No10 - an elder statesman. But the yanks are oblivious to his role in New Labour or Northern Ireland. They think he's pally with the Chinese (a dossier on his links to Beijing was reportedly submitted to the FBI) and connected to Jeffrey Epstein, the paedophile financier who accidentally, brutally hanged himself in his cell.

Trump's co-campaign manager called our forthcoming ambassador an "absolute moron" who should "stay home". To any Maga fanatic googling him for the first time, he'll sound like globalism incarnate. Of course, Trump knew Epstein, too, and has rescued China's TikTok from the Biden ban: he'll be able to work with Mandelson because he always puts business before politics. Now he can operate that partnership entirely on his own terms.

Trump's modus operandi is to establish dominance; Mandy has

given it to him. Labour, the party whose activists volunteered for Kamala Harris, cannot escape the fact that it was once very rude about the most powerful man in the world - or, given that the UK is teetering on recession, that it needs Trump far more than Trump needs Britain. Thus Mandy, like David Lammy, has rolled over to show Trump his soft, vulnerable belly, launching this new "golden age" of the special relationship in a position of humiliating subservience. Laugh all you want at Peter's Fox News recantation. You are only laughing at yourself, because this poodle now speaks for our country.

The Left used to dismiss Trump as an "isolationist", yet it's Britain under Labour that looks isolated. Trump disagrees with us on Ukraine and the climate; we plan to become world-leading in both renewables and AI, even though one undermines the other (AI

needs cheap energy to work). From Washington's point of view, the stakes of the Mandelson saga are laughably low, for the UK has so little to offer the Atlantic partnership beyond expanded sales of Paddington Bear. Trump cares only about two things, namely unfettered access to the Royal family and addressing Parliament. Nigel Farage says the latter has already been offered; the PM hasn't conformed or denied it.

It was a notional Tory, John Bercow, who vetoed such an address in 2017. That Labour will almost certainly roll out the red carpet is the biggest indicator of how far things have changed in world politics. Labour, which fancies itself as a party of socialist saints, showers praise on the capitalist devil - and Mandelson, as if figuring out that his own nation is dying, has wisely decided to relaunch his career overseas. Well, it worked for James Corden.

The Telegraph



SCCI calls increase in PoL prices detrimental for business and industries

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Sarhad Chamber of Commerce and Industry president Fazal Moqem Khan termed recent increase in prices of petroleum commodities detrimental for business, industries and economic growth and asked the government to revise its decision forthwith.

Fazal Moqem in a statement here on Saturday stated production of oil and gas is surplus in Khyber

Pakhtunkhwa despite the fact burden of additional prices put on this province, which is completely unjust and unacceptable.

SCCI chief criticized business and industries were reeling owing to government unfriendly policies that has accelerated unemployment and compounded miseries of business community and general public.

Moqem went on to say that KP is far away from the port city, while increase

of oil, gas and electricity prices were tantamount to usurping constitutional rights of the province.

He continued that abundant natural resources including oil, gas and hydel power generation exist in KP which should be tapped efficiently for economic stability and growth and shifted its benefits to business and industries so that people won't go to other provinces for jobs and get employment opportunities in their own province.

The chamber president said petrol, electricity and gas are used raw material in industries and increase in their prices, not only push up cost of production but also surge the transport fares and prices of essential food items that is directly affecting ordinary citizens and business community as well.

Therefore, he urged the government to review its decision in the best interest of business and industries and flourish the economy.

Company incorporation SECP achieves highest number in a single month

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Securities and Exchange Commission of Pakistan (SECP) has achieved a historic milestone by incorporating the highest-ever number of companies i.e. 3,442 in a single month, reflecting a 39% increase compared to the monthly average of the previous year.

This unprecedented achievement reflects SECP's commitment to fostering a business-friendly environment and promoting ease of doing business in Pakistan, said a press release issued here on Saturday.

During the month of January, 2025, SECP registered companies across diverse sectors, with a significant concentration in key industries.

The Information Technology (IT) and e-commerce sectors saw the largest growth, adding 652

new companies. The trading sector followed with 463 new companies, services with 411 new companies, Real Estate Development & Construction recorded 311 new companies.

Tourism and Transport with 242, Food and Beverages with 158, Healthcare & Pharmaceutical with 233, Fuel & Energy with 81, Education with 124, Mining and Quarrying with 119, Marketing and Advertisement with 86, Textile with 79, Corporate Agricultural Farming with 73 new registrations.

Other sectors contributing to this growth included Auto and Allied, Power Generation, Sports and Allied, Tobacco etc. with 650 new companies.

Additionally, the incorporation trend highlights the growing preference for different types of business

structures. Private companies accounted for 58% of the total new registrations, while single member companies represented 38%. The remaining 4% included unlisted companies, non-profit organizations, trade organizations and LLPs.

SECP's continued digital transformation, simplified registration processes, and facilitative regulatory framework have played a crucial role in achieving this milestone.

The surge in company registrations is a testament to Pakistan's growing entrepreneurial ecosystem and the increasing confidence of investors in the country's regulatory framework.

The SECP remains committed to supporting business growth through ongoing reforms and digitization initiatives, ensuring seamless company incorporation and compliance processes.

Texas Stock Exchange files to operate nationally

TEXAS (Reuters): The Texas Stock Exchange (TXSE) is eyeing a 2026 launch after submitting paperwork to operate as a national securities exchange, its parent company said. The company hopes the U.S. Securities & Exchange Commission will approve the application before the end of the year as it attempts to disrupt the New York-dominated industry. The proposed exchange said it wants to reverse the shrinking number of publicly traded companies, tackling what it described as the high cost of going public and remaining on exchanges. "This is a very big step forward," said Anne Peetz, an attorney specializing in capital markets at Reed Smith LP in Houston. Since the exchange's backers announced their plans in the summer, few details have been disclosed.



LONDON: Federal Minister for Planning, Development and Special Initiatives Ahsan Iqbal visited Keele University's Denis Coates Foundation Building and Business School in London.

FBR successfully foils an attempt to game faceless customs assessment system

Suspends licences of dozens of agents; arrests three

F.P. Report

KARACHI: Pakistan Customs has successfully foiled an attempt to game the Faceless Customs Assessment System (FCAS), a newly launched system for speedy and quality assessments.

Such an attempt was quite expected and the Karachi Customs team, tasked with its operations, was directed by FBR to

exercise constant vigilance in this regard.

Those who attempted to game FCAS have been taken to task. Customs licences of 45 agents found involved in the gaming attempt have been suspended by Karachi Customs and show cause notices have been issued in the light of Customs Agents Rules.

An Appraising officer found to connive in this attempt was placed under

suspension by FBR yesterday and formal inquiry has been initiated against him under the Efficiency and Discipline Rules.

A criminal case has also been lodged against the culprits including agents, appraising officer, and some private persons who were found involved in the attempt of gaming the FCAS.

A team of investigators has been constituted. Three persons have

already been arrested. Raids are being conducted to arrest the remaining culprits and bring them to justice.

FCAS is working smoothly with no backlog of Customs clearances.

The system is being hailed as a game changer in the Customs clearances by the stakeholders and was inaugurated by the Prime Minister of Pakistan about two weeks ago.

SECP Clarifies its role in merger process of telecom companies

ISLAMABAD (APP): A digital media outlet has reported that the merger of two large telecom companies in Pakistan is pending because of procedural delays by SECP. The news item is factually incorrect.

Till date, no such transaction has been reported to SECP for approval. It should be noted that SECP only sanctions schemes of arrangements in respect of small sized companies and public sector companies to

the extent of the Federal Government, which is not relevant in the mentioned transaction, said a press release issued here on Friday.

It also provides feedback on petitions filed for

sanction by the relevant courts, in a timely manner.

Accordingly, the reports of delay in approving the transaction by SECP is incorrect, and no such feedback is pending at our end.

Federal minister chairs performance review meeting

F.P. Report

KARACHI: Federal Minister for Maritime Affairs, Mr. Qaiser Ahmed Sheikh, recently chaired a Performance Review Meeting to evaluate the progress of key maritime organizations. The meeting was attended by top officials, including the Federal Secretary and Additional Secretary of the Ministry of Maritime Affairs (MoMA), Mian Muhammad Mansha Chairman MCB Bank / CEO Nishat Group, as well as board members and trustees of the respective

organizations.

The meeting focused on assessing the performance of major maritime organizations: Port Qasim Authority (PQA), Karachi Port Trust (KPT). The discussions centered around enhancing efficiency, productivity, and service delivery in the maritime sector, with the aim of driving growth and development.

The meeting offered a thorough examination of the monthly performance indicators, identifying areas of challenge and opportunity for growth. Key discussions focused on develop-

ing strategies to boost operational efficiency, enhance productivity, and elevate the overall quality of services within the maritime sector, ultimately driving improvement and progress.

Minister for Maritime Affairs, Mr. Qaiser Ahmed Sheikh, took a significant step towards fostering transparency and collaboration in the maritime sector by chairing a Khuli Kachehri session immediately after the Performance Review meeting. This open forum provided a unique opportunity for employees of maritime organizations

and industry stakeholders to openly discuss their concerns, share suggestions, and exchange ideas directly with the Minister. By doing so, Honorable Minister encouraged a culture of open dialogue, empowering stakeholders to contribute to the growth and development of the maritime sector. This interactive approach has paved the way for addressing grievances, leveraging collective expertise, and driving progress in the industry.

The Khuli Kachehri, an open forum, was attended by representatives from various organizations under the Ministry of Maritime Affairs. Notable attendees included the Chairman of Port Qasim Authority (PQA), the Chairman of Karachi Port Trust (KPT), Chairman Korangi Fisheries Harbour Authority (KoFHA), DG (P&S), DG (MFD) and Executive Directors of the Pakistan National Shipping Corporation (PNSC), along with team members from their respective maritime organizations were also present in Khuli kachehri.

Directives were issued to resolve the issues on a priority basis.

Flyadeal begins flight operations

F.P. Report

KARACHI: Saudi Arabia's new airline, Flyadeal, has launched its flight operations to Pakistan. The first Flyadeal flight, F3-661, arrived from Saudi Arabia at Karachi's Jinnah International Airport at 8:04 AM.

The airline will operate two weekly flights to Karachi—one from Jeddah and the other from Riyadh. Upon arrival, the Flyadeal aircraft was given a water salute at Karachi Airport.



Trump tariffs to stoke US food inflation

CHICAGO (Reuters): U.S. consumers grappling with soaring prices for beef and eggs will face even higher costs for meat, vegetables and fruit if President Donald Trump imposes tariffs on Canadian and Mexican imports, economists and food industry executives said.

Consumers have struggled with high inflation since the COVID-19 pandemic and voted for Trump in part due to discontent with higher prices. Trump pledged to bring down costs for ordinary Americans.

The White House said on Friday that the new tariffs on Canada and Mexico will take effect on Feb. 1, denying a Reuters report that they would be delayed until March 1.

Tariff-related price increases would hit consumers' wallets at a time when beef prices are near record highs and costs for eggs have climbed after bird flu eliminated millions of egg-laying hens. Bird flu cases in dairy cows have also reduced milk output in top-producer California.

Shortly after taking office last week, Trump set the Feb. 1 deadline for imposing 25% tariffs on imports from Mexico and Canada unless the countries move to halt flows of illegal immigrants and the deadly opioid fentanyl into the U.S. He also said he would impose a 10% tariff on Chinese goods over that country's role in the fentanyl trade.

"Any increase in expenses in the form of a tariff subsequently serves as a 'food tax' on consumers for imported products and is not a workable solution," National Grocers Association spokesman David Cutler said.

Tariffs are paid by importers, not exporters, who either pass on the costs to consumers or face lower profits.

The Trump administration says its planned tariffs will not cause higher prices in the U.S. Vice President JD Vance said

on Sunday that consumer prices will start coming down, but it might not happen immediately.

Supply disruptions due to tariffs would highlight how reliant the nation has become on its neighbors for feeding its population.

The United States imported \$195.9 billion of agricultural goods from suppliers around the world in 2023, according to U.S. Department of Agriculture and U.S. Customs data. That included nearly \$86 billion from Mexico and Canada, the top two suppliers representing 44% of the total.

Up to 40% of fresh produce sold in U.S. food stores is imported, according to the National Grocers Association.

"We import most of our fresh fruit and vegetables from Mexico and Canada so you will definitely see inflation on those products," said Rob Fox, an economist and director of CoBank's Knowledge Exchange. "These are products that are not easily replaced," he said. "I can't go out and plant tomatoes in Illinois in January and hope to replace them."

About two-thirds of U.S. vegetable imports and half of its fruit and nut imports come from Mexico, according to the USDA. That includes nearly 90% of its avocados, as much as 35% of its orange juice, and 20% of its strawberries.

Avocados from Mexico, a marketing arm of Mexico's avocado industry, was shipping 52 to 53 million pounds of avocados each week to the U.S. in December, CEO Alvaro Luque said. That climbs to more than 70 million pounds ahead of the U.S. Super Bowl football game which this year is on Feb. 9, he said, highlighting America's demand.

The threat of tariffs alone can be inflationary, said David Ortega, an economist at Michigan State University. "Food companies are

scrambling to come up with contingency plans in terms of where they might source these products should these tariffs come into place, and that adds cost to their operations," he said.

HIGHER BEEF PRICES

The U.S. normally imports more than 1 million cattle from Mexico annually, though Washington has blocked shipments since late November due to the discovery of a pest in Mexico.

Canadian cattle also are shipped into the U.S. to be fattened and slaughtered.

PUBLIC NOTICE

In the Court of Sana Shah Civil Judge IV Swat, Case No. 5/12/2. Instituted 5/10/23 next date Of Hearing 8/2/2025 case title Fayyaz Ahmed etc versus Dost Muhammad etc Publication against Defendants no. (44)Kamaluddin son of Primoz Khan resident of Parrai Kabal Swat presently abroad In the case cited above the service of defendants are not possible in easy way , therefore , they are hereby informed through this publication to ensure his attendance personally or through their counsel or attorney on date fixed mentioned above.

PUBLIC NOTICE

It is Published Through This Notice That I Muhammad Imran Khan Son of Amir Muhammad Khan R/o p.o Khas Nusrat Khel District Kohat persently R/o Dubai UAE is the owner of Plot no. 93. Sector B-5 Size 5 Marla Phase. 2.KDA Kohat Has Appointed Mr. Alam Zeb Son of Nadir Khan R/o Near Gate no. 1 KDA H.no. 66. St. no. 2.Sector. 10.Kohat through (Special) Deed no. 54 Bahi no.04 Volume no. 295 Dated 31/01/2025 which is Registered in The office Kohat of Tehsildar/Sub Registrar The Attorney Holder now wants to Transfer The Above Said Plot If Any Bank/ Institution/ Firm/ Person has any objection About The Transfer He should contact the housing officer UADA Within 15 Days in Writing with Proofs otherwise Plot will be Transfer and no objection will Be Accepted (Director Urban Area KDA Kohat)

India axes import tax on some smartphone parts in boost to Apple, Xiaomi

NEW DELHI (Reuters): India has removed import duties on some components key to producing mobile phones, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced in the annual budget on Saturday, in a boost for local production efforts and benefiting firms such as Apple (AAPL.O), opens new tab and Xiaomi (1810.HK), opens new tab.

India's electronics production has more than doubled in the last six years to \$115 billion in 2024, with the country now becoming the world's second-largest mobile phone manufacturer.

Apple led the India smartphone market with a 23% share in total revenue during 2024, followed by Samsung at 22%, according to research firm Counterpoint.

The list included components for mobile phone assembly such as printed circuit board assembly, parts of camera modules, and USB cables, which were taxed at 2.5% earlier.

The cuts will help India better cope with a potentially disruptive year of global trade due to U.S.

President Donald Trump's tariff threats.

As Trump hopes for his "America First" policies to lure more manufacturing units back into the U.S., India is seeking to take advantage of U.S.-China trade tensions to increase its own share of global supply chains.

Internally, India's IT ministry had warned it risks losing out to China and Vietnam in the smartphone exports race if it were to not lower tariffs to lure global companies, Reuters reported last year.

Sitharaman, in her budget last year, had announced a review of the nation's customs duty rate structure to rationalise and simplify tariffs for ease of trade.

The duty review also aimed at removing the so-called inverted duty structures or instances where tariffs on raw materials or intermediate goods are higher than the final products they are used to produce.

India's complicated tariff structure is often cited as a deterrent for efficient local production and a cause of disputes.





In brief

Women's training camp

LAHORE (PPD): Pakistan Women's 27-day training camp for the preparations of the ICC Women's World Cup Qualifiers 2025 has been shifted to Faisalabad from Multan. According to a statement by Pakistan Cricket Board today, the players and player support personnel have assembled today in Faisalabad. A total of 31 players will attend the camp, which will be held from 2-28 February at the PCB High-Performance Academy in Faisalabad. The camp involves 50-over practice matches and regular training sessions to improve the skills and fitness of the players. List of players invited to the camp: Batters – Aliya Riaz, Ayesha Zafar, Eyma Fatima, Gull Feroza, Gull Rukh, Hafsa Khalid, Iram Javed, Natalia Parvaiz, Sadaf Shamas, Saira Jabeen, Shawaal Zulfiqar, and Sidra Amin. Wicketkeepers – Muneeba Ali, Najia Alvi and Sidra Nawaz. All-rounders – Fatima Sana, Omaira Sohail, Rameen Shamim, Syeda Aroob Shah, and Tuba Hassan Spinners – Ghulam Fatima, Mahmood Aftab, Nashra Sundhu, Sadia Iqbal, Tania Saeed, and Umm-e-Hani Pacers – Diana Baig, Fatima Khan, Tasma Rubab, Waheeda Akhtar and Zaib-un-Nisa Niaz.

FDA to host Kabaddi Cup

FAISALABAD (APP): The Faisalabad Development Authority (FDA) in collaboration with Divisional Kabaddi Association (DKA) would organize the "Kashmir Kabaddi Cup" tournament at Sports Ground FDA City Sargodha Road here on February 5, to mark Kashmir Solidarity Day. An FDA spokesman said here on Saturday that four Kabaddi teams comprising players of national and international level would participate in the tournament. In this connection, draws were also arranged for the participating teams and according to results, the first match would be played between Sanjha Punjab Kabaddi Club and House of Tyre Sher Punjab whereas Nankana Sahib Kabaddi Club and Azad Kabaddi Club 409 UK would fight against each other in the second match. Director General (DG) FDA Muhammad Asif Chaudhary witnessed the draws as the chief guest and said that position holder teams would be awarded cash prizes. He said that kabaddi was a popular traditional sport in the region and attracted significant interest from the spectators. He said that the Kabaddi tournament on Kashmir Solidarity Day would help highlight the Kashmir issue through the cultural sport. He hoped that the Kashmir Kabaddi Cup would captivate the audiences and attract large crowds. All necessary arrangements are being finalized to ensure a successful event, he said and directed the management of the sports complex to make a comprehensive planning for smooth organization of the tournament in addition to paying special focus on facilitating the spectators. On the occasion, Secretary General DKA Tayyab Gilani introduced the players, captains, coaches, and management committee members and briefed the Kabaddi teams about the rules and regulations set for the tournament. He announced that the first match of the Kashmir Kabaddi Cup would commence at 12:30 p.m. while the final match was scheduled for 4 p.m. During match intervals, an exhibition match will be held between Kashmir Kabaddi Club and Randhawa Kabaddi Club, he added.

Sri Lanka crash to worst Test defeat in Australia thrashing



GALLE (AFP): Sri Lanka suffered their heaviest defeat in Test cricket history on Saturday as Australia flexed their muscles to take a 1-0 lead in the two-match series with a crushing victory by an innings and 242 runs.

The contest was wrapped up before tea on day four, with rookie left-arm spinner Matthew Kuhnemann's match-winning spell delivering him career-best figures of 9-149 over both innings.

"We were put under pressure," Sri Lanka skipper Dhananjaya de Silva said afterwards. "The batters should have put up a better show." Kuhnemann underwent surgery only two weeks ago on a broken right thumb sustained during the Big Bash League and battled through the match in pain, requiring constant medical attention.

He was well-supported by the ever-dependable

Nathan Lyon, who spun a web around the Sri Lankan batters to finish with seven match wickets. Sri Lanka's heaviest defeat before Saturday was in Nagpur in 2017, when India hammered them by an innings and 239.

Sri Lanka resumed on 136 for five overnight but their first innings folded for 165, losing their last five wickets for a mere nine runs.

Put straight back in to bat chasing 489, they lost three wickets before lunch and then capitulated in the second session -- a humiliating finish for a team once renowned for its prowess on turning tracks.

Dinesh Chandimal had waged a lonely battle in the first innings to top-score with 72 and, with Angelo Mathews, stitched together one of only two 50-plus partnerships in the second.

However, he was sent back for 31 on the last ball before lunch when he

gloved Lyon to Travis Head at short leg. Oshada Fernando failed to make an impact in his return to the side, undone by a sharp inswinger from Mitchell Starc that trapped him plumb in front for six to go with his first innings seven.

Former skipper Dimuth Karunaratne's horror run with the bat continued after an avoidable dismissal for nought by Todd Murphy.

"Tough place to play" Rain forced an early lunch on day three before washing out the final two sessions. Australia declared on 654-6 late on the second day after opener Usman Khawaja's career-best 232.

"Galle is a tough place to play cricket and we are very happy with this win," Khawaja said. "I've played a lot of cricket in Sri Lanka, this being my fifth tour. I've made lot of mistakes before. I guess all that experience came in handy in this game."

Stand-in skipper Steve Smith also had a game to remember, becoming only the fourth Australian to breach the 10,000-run mark in Test cricket on the first ball he faced. He finished his innings with a masterful 141, while wicket-keeper Josh Inglis hit a century on debut.

Galle will host the second and final match of the series next week before a two-match ODI series in Colombo.

Boon, Gough, Illingworth to officiate tri-nation series

LAHORE (APP): The International Cricket Council (ICC) on Saturday appointed David Boon, Michael Gough and Richard Illingworth to officiate the tri-nations ODI series fixtures featuring Pakistan, New Zealand and South Africa in Lahore and Karachi between February 8 and 14.

As per the PCB media release, Australia's David Boon, a member of ICC Elite Panel of Match Referees, will lead the playing control team for the tri-nation ODI series involving hosts Pakistan, New Zealand and South Africa.

The single league tri-series is set to be played from 8-14 February in Lahore and Karachi as the newly upgraded Gaddafi Stadium and National Bank Stadium are set to welcome back international cricket.

As Pakistan will take on New Zealand in the much-anticipated opening match on Saturday, February 8, at the Gaddafi Stadium, Lahore, England's Michael Gough, member of the ICC Elite Panel of Umpires, and Pakistan's Faisal Khan Aafreedi, an ICC International Panel Umpire, will be the on-field umpires. ICC Elite Panel Umpire, Richard Illingworth will be the third umpire and Rashid Riaz, member of the ICC International Panel of Umpires, will be the



fourth umpire.

The Gaddafi Stadium will also play host to the New Zealand vs South Africa contest on February 10, where Richard Illingworth and Rashid Riaz will serve as the on-field umpires, while Michael Gough will be the third umpire. ICC's International Panel of Umpires' member Asif Yaqoob will be the fourth umpire for the fixture which is set to be played as a day game.

The action will move to Karachi's National Bank Stadium for the last league

match and the final of the tri-series. Asif Yaqoob and Michael Gough will form the on-field umpires' duo, while Richard Illingworth and Faisal Khan Aafreedi will be the third and fourth umpires, respectively for the Pakistan vs South Africa fixture in Karachi.

In the final on Friday, February 14, ICC Elite Panel Umpire, Ahsan Raza will officiate as an on-field umpire along with Richard Illingworth, while Michael Gough will be third umpire. Asif Yaqoob will perform duties as the fourth umpire in the final.

NBP National Snooker C'ship Punjab's Shahid Aftab Becomes the New Champion



F.P. Report

KARACHI: Punjab's Shahid Aftab won the NBP 49th National

Snooker Championship, defeating National Bank's Muhammad Sajjad 7-5 in an exciting final. NBP's Senior Vice President

Mudassar Inamullah was the guest of honor, and he, alongside PBSA Chairman Alamgir Shaikh, presented trophies and awards to

the winning and runner-up cueists and other players.

According to Tournament Director Naveed Kapadia, the final,

held at the NBP Sports Complex Snooker Arena on Saturday, was a thrilling contest between NBP's Muhammad Sajjad and Punjab's Shahid Aftab. At one point, Sajjad was trailing 5-2, but he fought back to level the score at 5-5.

However, Shahid Aftab clinched the next two frames to win the final and claim the title. The frame scores were 69-9, 92-28, 48-70, 73-19, 49-70, 74-38, 79-24, 62-66, 22-63, 25-69, 81-36, and 71-61. Shahid Aftab played remarkable breaks of 82 in the second frame, 52 in the sixth, 79 in the seventh, and 81 in the eleventh. Muhammad Sajjad also made a 52 break in the third and ninth frames.

Shahid Aftab, the champion, received a cash prize of Rs. 200,000, while Muhammad Sajjad, the runner-up, was awarded Rs. 100,000. A special cash prize of Rs. 50,000 was presented to Muhammad Asif for his 147 break in the championship.

The closing ceremony was attended by NBP's Senior Vice President Mudassar Inamullah, PBSA Chairman Alamgir Shaikh, PBSA President Javed Karim, Hon. Secretary Zulfiqar Ali Ramzi, NBP Sports Head Shar Muhammad, Tournament Director Naveed Kapadia, and other distinguished guests including Adil Murtaza and Farhan Rafique.

Wood hits hat-trick as flying Forest thrash Brighton 7-0

NOTTINGHAM (AFP): Chris Wood netted a hat-trick as Nottingham Forest thrashed Brighton 7-0 to reignite their charge towards next season's Champions League at the City Ground on Saturday.

Morgan Gibbs-White, Neco Williams and Jota Silva were also on target after Lewis Dunk's own goal opened the scoring in an astonishing performance from Nuno Espirito Santo's men as they bounced back from a 5-0 defeat at Bournemouth last weekend.

Victory takes Forest level on points with second-placed Arsenal and opens up a seven-point cushion on sixth-placed Chelsea. Fifth place in the Premier League this season is almost certain to be enough for Champions League qualification due to a strong start by English

clubs in European competitions. Two-time European Cup winners in 1979 and 1980 during the club's heyday under Brian Clough, Forest last played in Europe back in 1996.

But a run of 10 wins from their last 12 games has put them well on course to end that two-decade wait for continental competition.

Brighton boss Fabian Hurler set out with a bold selection that included five forwards in his starting 11.

However, that backfired massively as the Seagulls were wide open and punished by Forest's frightening pace and precision going forward. Dunk gave the hosts a helping hand they did not need after just 12 minutes as he turned Gibbs-White's dangerous low cross into his own net.

On his 100th Forest appear-

ance, Gibbs-White then rose highest to power in a header from Anthony Elanga's corner.

Manchester United will wonder about what they let go in Elanga as the Swedish international cut Brighton open at will down Forest's right side.

His pinpoint cross on the half hour mark left Wood with the simple task to head in his 15th Premier League goal of the season to set his own personal best ever tally for a season in the English top flight.

Two more were to come for the New Zealander, who is enjoying the best spell of his career at 33, after the break.

Elanga was again the creator for the fourth as he dashed towards the by-line and squared for Wood to tap in from point-blank range. Gibbs-White was then man-handled to the floor by



Tariq Lamptey from a corner, allowing Wood the chance to complete his hat-trick from the penalty spot.

Wood is now closing in on Stan Collymore's record of 24 goals as Forest's top scorer for a single season in the Premier League era. Brighton remain in ninth after a damaging day for their own European ambitions.

After a bright start to Hurler's reign, the 31-year-old

has won just two of his last 11 league games.

It went from bad to worse for the visitors in the closing stages as Williams smashed in from close range.

Brighton goalkeeper Bart Verbruggen compounded a miserable day for his side in stoppage time as his pass was intercepted by Jota Silva, who surged forward and fired past the Dutch international.

Ponting predicts Pakistan to play ICC CT final

LAHORE (APP): Australian Great Ricky Ponting has said that hosts Pakistan are strong contenders to make to the final of the ICC Men's Champions trophy 2025.

Speaking to Sanjana Ganesan alongside Ravi Shastri in a bumper episode of The ICC Review, the two cricket greats predicted that India and Australia were the two firm contenders for this year's Champions Trophy but Ponting believed 'there was another contender in the mix.'

The former Australia skipper, as quoted by the ICC website, the other team that is playing some really good cricket at the moment is Pakistan.

"Their one-day cricket over the last little bit has been absolutely outstanding," said Ponting.

"We know they're not always the most predictable team in those big tournaments, but they seem like they've sorted things out a little bit."

The ICC adds, Led by Mohammad Rizwan, Pakistan are coming into 2025 on the back of ODI series wins in Australia and South Africa.

In the previous edition of the Champions Trophy, a young Pakistan side, led by the experienced Sarfaraz Ahmed and a sizzling hundred in the final from Fakhar Zaman, combined with a blistering bowling show, pulled off the job at the Oval, and the hosts will be looking to repeat their heroics.

The element of defending champions will also provide some extra energy to the home side, who beat India to their maiden crown in the 2017 edition. The two sides will tussle it out yet again in a group fixture in Dubai on February 23.

However, Ricky Ponting and Ravi Shastri named India and Australia will fight out the final and the firm contenders for this year's ICC Champions Trophy Final.

'Based on their recent success in big tournaments and star-studded lineups, they will play the final,' the duo predicted.

While Shastri named England and South Africa as the other semi-finals prospects, the former India head coach tipped the 2023 Cricket World Cup finalists to go all the way in the eight-team tournament.

Ponting agreed. "It's hard to go past India and Australia again," Ponting told The ICC Review.

"Just think about the quality of players in both countries right now, and you look back in recent history when these big finals and big ICC events have come around and inevitably Australia and India are there somewhere."

India and Australia, the two most successful sides in the tournament, having won it twice each in 2002, 2013 and 2006, 2009 respectively, will be looking to add another ICC honour to their ever-growing list of accolades.

The two gigantic cricketing nations also played out the ICC World Test Championship and the ICC Men's Cricket World Cup in 2023, where the side from Down Under emerged victorious on both occasions.

Australia crush England in one-off women's Test for Ashes whitewash

MELBOURNE (AFP): Australia crushed a lamentable England by an

innings and 122 runs in a one-off pink ball Test on Saturday to complete a his-

toric women's Ashes whitewash. In the first women's Test

at the Melbourne Cricket Ground since 1949, the hosts wrapped up victory within three days to culminate a horror tour by the visitors. Australia were in a class of their own all series, reinforcing the chasm between the two sides.

They won all three ODIs, three T20s and the sole Test that comprised the multi-format Ashes, which has been points-based since 2013 -- two for a white-ball win and four for a Test.

It was the first time either side has scored a whitewash, ensuring the Ashes stay firmly in the hands of Australia, which regained them on English soil in 2015 and has retained a tight grip ever since.

"It's amazing. I couldn't

be more proud of the group that's standing there," said Australia skipper Alyssa Healy.

"I think at every opportunity, when we thought England may be clawing their way back, somebody came out and shut the door on them. "So I think full credit to the group of people standing there."

"Remarkable cricket" England arrived in high spirits after winning six of seven matches on their all-format tour of South Africa last month. But they were methodically worn down by an Australian side with far greater strength in depth.

After being dismissed for 170 in their first innings, England dropped eight catches and missed a

stumping on a shambolic day two.

It allowed the hosts to compile 440 on the back of Annabel Sutherland's majestic 163 and Beth Mooney's gritty 106.

Australia then bowled England out for 148 in the final session of day three to complete the rout in a game celebrating the 90th anniversary of the first women's Test, played between Australia and England in Brisbane in 1934.

Australian spinner Alana King, who took 5-53, was named player of the series. "I just want to say congratulations to Australia," said England captain Heather Knight.

"They made it really tough for us out here. They've really pressed

home their advantage when they've been on top.

"Look, I think it's been a tough month, hasn't it," she said. "Australia have played some remarkable cricket, and we've competed at times, I think, but haven't been able to do it for long enough."

Former England men's captain Alastair Cook said the series had "shown the reality of where the two sides are". "The best thing about when you go down to 5-0 or a clean sweep, is that you're at the bottom and the only way is up," he told reporters ahead of the Test.

"Ultimately, England are about 20 percent behind Australia in everything -- batting, bowling, fielding, athleticism, the lot."





In brief

CDA, SGP to enhance cooperation for 3D mapping

ISLAMABAD (APP): Capital Development Authority (CDA) and the Survey General of Pakistan (SGP) have agreed to strengthen mutual cooperation, particularly in acquiring advanced 3D maps and high-resolution imagery for Islamabad. In a meeting held on Saturday, CDA Chairman Muhammad Ali Randhawa and SGP Head Major General Rafiq Ur Rehman discussed leveraging SGP's technical capabilities for urban planning and development in the capital. SGP officials assured their readiness to provide cutting-edge digital mapping and real-time imagery with centimeter-level accuracy. Chairman Randhawa emphasized that these 3D maps and images would significantly enhance urban planning, improve layout preparations, and help address various city challenges. He also highlighted their role in the early detection of land encroachments. Both organizations agreed to form technical teams to facilitate collaboration and ensure effective implementation. Chairman Randhawa reaffirmed that CDA would greatly benefit from SGP's technical expertise and experience in geospatial mapping.

ANF recovers 27 kg drugs

RAWALPINDI (APP): Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF) while conducting 4 operations across the country managed to recover over 27 kg drugs worth more than Rs 10 million and arrested two accused, said an ANF Headquarters spokesman here on Saturday. He informed that in an operation, 2 kg hashish was recovered from the possession of an accused arrested near a university in Peshawar. The arrested accused confessed to selling drugs to the students of educational institutions. In 2nd operation, 2,970 kg ice drug was recovered from a leather jacket in a parcel booked for Australia through a courier office in Lahore. In 3rd operation, 19 kg ice was recovered from a motorcycle checked in Turbat area of Balochistan. 5 kg ice was recovered from the possession of an accused going in a passenger bus near the M-2 Motorway Toll Plaza Islamabad. Separate cases have been registered against the arrested accused under the Narcotics Control Act and further investigations are under process.

CDA partners with KPMG

ISLAMABAD (APP): Capital Development Authority (CDA) has engaged KPMG a global professional services firm, to provide consultancy aimed at ensuring the financial feasibility and sustainability of various development projects in Islamabad. A KPMG delegation met with CDA Chairman Muhammad Ali Randhawa on Saturday, with CDA Board members and senior officials also in attendance. The meeting focused on devising the best financial strategies to make CDA projects viable and investment-friendly. Several proposals were discussed to enhance their long-term sustainability. Chairman Randhawa emphasized that the goal is to attract investment and drive Islamabad's development while ensuring that revenue generated from these projects is reinvested for the city's welfare. The discussion also covered plans to organize conferences and seminars to engage potential investors. KPMG will offer expert consultancy, technical assistance, and business models to optimize financial planning for CDA projects. Chairman Randhawa expressed confidence that KPMG's expertise will play a crucial role in making these initiatives financially robust and sustainable.

Pakistan, Azerbaijan vow to strengthen bilateral relations

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan and Azerbaijan have reiterated their resolve to further enhance bilateral relations by extending cooperation in diverse sectors, including energy, investment, and tourism, as well as other areas of mutual interest between the two countries.

The understanding was reached during a meeting between the Federal Minister for Board of Investment, Privatization, and Communications, Abdul Aleem Khan, and the Prime Minister of Azerbaijan, Ali Asadov, who called on him on Saturday in Baku.

Welcoming the Federal Minister Abdul Aleem

Khan and Pakistani delegation, the Prime Minister of Azerbaijan H.E. Ali Asadov said that both the two countries are connected with each other through a strong bond of brotherhood which will further be strengthened in the coming days.

He appreciated recent developments in various sectors of Pakistan and assured his support for increasing investment and mutual cooperation by Azerbaijan for Pakistani people.

During the meeting, Aleem Khan shed light on the investment opportunities in Pakistan including in the privatization of State Owned Entities (SOEs).

It was emphasized that

following the state visit of the President of Azerbaijan to Pakistan last year, interstate relations have entered a qualitatively new stage. Both sides also discussed the development prospects of Azerbaijan-Pakistan strategic partnership relations in economy, trade, investments and other areas of mutual interest.

Abdul Aleem Khan also held meetings with Azerbaijan's Energy Minister Pervez Shahbazov, Transport Minister Rashad Nabiye, Deputy Minister of Economy Samad Bashiri and President of the State Oil Company of the Republic of Azerbaijan Rovshan Najaf.

Govt's economic stability key achievement: Uzma

ISLAMABAD (APP): A senior leader of PML-N Uzma Kardar Saturday praised her party's government for stabilizing Pakistan's economy, likening their efforts to rescuing a patient from a ventilator and effectively acting as a firefighter to curb economic instability and inflation.

In an exclusive conversation with PTV News Channel, Uzma Kardar highlighted her party's significant economic achievements and that the stable stock exchange, which has witnessed a remarkable surge in recent times, is a testament to the PMLN government's prudent economic policies.

She further noted that the positive indicators in the economy, including a notable decrease in inflation have not only boosted investors' trust but also created a conducive environment for businesses to thrive.

Kardar credited the PMLN government's visionary leadership and effective economic strategies for these achievements, which have put Pakistan's economy on a stable growth trajectory.

She also emphasized that it is now the opposition's turn to demonstrate seriousness in addressing the

country's challenges. Uzma Kardar strongly criticized PTI, holding them responsible for perpetuating chaos, hate and abusive politics in the country.

She stressed that PML-N is deeply committed to democratic values and seeks to address pressing issues through constructive dialogue and negotiation.

By advocating for a democratic approach, PML-N aims to foster a more inclusive and respectful political environment, where differences are resolved through peaceful means rather than resorting to hate and abuse, she added.

WWF-Pakistan calls for urgent action to protect wetlands

ISLAMABAD (APP): WWF-Pakistan, on the occasion of World Wetlands Day 2025, underscored the urgent need to protect and restore the country's wetlands, which serve as crucial ecosystems for biodiversity, local communities, and sustainable development.

In a press release issued on the occasion, WWF-Pakistan highlighted that Pakistan is home to more than 240 significant wetlands, covering approximately 10% of the country's land area.

These wetlands provide essential ecosystem services such as water filtration, carbon storage, flood control, and habitat for migratory birds and commercially important fish.

However, these fragile ecosystems are under severe threat due to water scarcity, pollution, encroachment, unregulated development, climate change, and unsustainable resource extraction.

"The health of wetlands has been severely impacted by water stress, untreated industrial waste, land reclamation, and agricultural runoff. These factors continue to shrink wetland areas, diminishing their ecological value," the organization stated.

The degradation of wetlands has placed several species at risk, including

the Indus River dolphin, freshwater turtles, and migratory birds.

The Ramsar-listed wetlands in Pakistan such as Keenjhar Lake, Haleji Lake, Chashma Barrage, and Jiwan Coastal Wetlands are critical breeding and feeding grounds for species like white-headed ducks, flamingos, cranes, and the critically endangered Siberian crane.

Muhammad Jamshed Iqbal Chaudhry, Senior Manager of Research and Conservation at WWF-Pakistan, emphasized that wetlands are a lifeline for millions of Pakistanis, particularly those dependent on fisheries, agriculture, and tourism.

He also highlighted wetlands' role in mitigating climate change by absorbing excess flood waters and reducing the impact of extreme weather events.

"Conserving wetlands is not just an environmental imperative but also a social and economic necessity," Chaudhry stated.

WWF-Pakistan is actively working on conservation and restoration efforts through various initiatives, including the Water Resource Accountability in Pakistan (WRAP) and Recharge Pakistan (RP) programs.

These initiatives employ nature-based solu-

tions (NbS) to address challenges facing wetlands, particularly in the Indus Delta, Punjab's wetlands, and Balochistan's coastal ecosystems.

The organization has also engaged policymakers to strengthen wetland protection laws and promote sustainable water management practices. Training programs for local communities in sustainable fishing, eco-tourism, and alternative livelihoods aim to reduce pressure on wetland resources, integrating biodiversity conservation with community resilience.

This year's World Wetlands Day theme, "Protecting Wetlands for Our Common Future," underscores the vital role wetlands play in supporting livelihoods, food security, water regulation, and climate resilience.

WWF-Pakistan has urged government agencies, civil society, businesses, and local communities to take collective action for wetland conservation. The organization encouraged simple but impactful actions such as reducing water wastage, preventing plastic pollution, promoting sustainable agriculture, and participating in wetland clean-up activities to help preserve these invaluable ecosystems.



ISLAMABAD: A view of banners displayed on a bridge along the Expressway in connection with Kashmir Solidarity Day. —APP Photo

Modern aesthetic skin clinic inaugurated in Islamabad

ISLAMABAD (APP): The first modern aesthetic skin clinic of Pakistan, named 'On Aesthetics Skin Clinic' was officially inaugurated in Islamabad on Saturday, featuring state-of-the-art machinery and high-quality equipment imported from Europe.

The inauguration ceremony was attended by skin experts, political and social figures, including Muhammad Afzal Butt, President of the Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists, who served as the guest of honor.

Butt congratulated Mehnaz Saeed, former Punjab Assembly member and founder of the clinic, on the establishment of this pioneering facility.

He highlighted the significance of the clinic in providing high-quality treatments at affordable rates, making European-standard services accessible in Pakistan and saving foreign exchange.

Mehnaz Saeed, who is also an aesthetic expert and key figure behind the clinic, shared her vision for the future, including plans to transform the clinic into a training center for emerging dermatologists.

She emphasized the vital role that quality equipment, modern machinery, and skilled staff play in achieving healthy and radiant skin.

Dermatologist Dr. Anzla also spoke at the event, stressing the importance of maintaining high standards in skin disease treatment.

She praised the clinic for introducing European-style technology to Pakistan, marking a significant step toward improving the quality of dermatological care in the country and providing valuable resources for both patients and professionals in the field.

It may be mentioned that the clinic will offer all skincare services, including HydraFacial, laser hair removal, PRP for skin and hair, mesotherapy for pigmentation, exosomes for hair and skin, laser treatment for uneven skin tone, fat-dissolving injections, and Botox for wrinkles.

Ayaz strongly condemns terrorist attack in Kalat

ISLAMABAD (APP): Speaker National Assembly Sardar Ayaz Sadiq has strongly condemned the terrorist attack on security forces in Kalat, Balochistan.

Ayaz Sadiq paid rich tribute to the martyrs of Frontier Corps (FC). While Expressing deep sorrow over the loss of lives, the Speaker extended heartfelt condolences to the families of the martyrs, stating that the entire nation stands in

solidarity with them in this hour of grief.

He lauded the bravery and timely response of the security forces, which eliminated 12 terrorists.

Paying rich tribute to the martyrs of nation, he said that those who lay down their lives for the defense of the country are the true national heroes. Ayaz Sadiq said that terrorist elements have been attempting to disrupt peace in

Balochistan, but they will never succeed in their malicious intentions.

He said that operations against anti-state elements would continue with full force. He further stated that the people of Pakistan firmly stand against all attempts to destabilize the country and stand united with their security forces in the fight against terrorism. The Speaker prayed for the martyrs and their bereaved families.

OPGF urge resolution for overseas Pakistanis' issues

ISLAMABAD (APP): Chairman of the Overseas Pakistani Global Foundation (OPGF), Zahir Akhtar Meher, on Saturday urged resolving the issues faced by overseas Pakistanis on a priority basis.

He also demanded to restore the green channel for overseas Pakistanis, grant them foreign investor status and create a favourable environment for investments, said a press release, adding the protection for expatriates' properties from illegal occupation, permission to allowed

the duty-free import of second-hand mobile phones, and the establishment of a charter for the economy same as the charter for democracy. He also said the OPGF is going to organise a three-day convention from February 3-5, 2025.

While talking about the activities during the convention, he added that the convention's first day was planned as briefings and sessions with government ministries and departments.

The second day would include a meeting and lunch with the Prime Minister at

the PM House, while on the final day the participants would pay tribute to martyrs at their grave. He also hailed the sacrifices of the country in the war against terrorism and reiterated that OPGF focused on a state-first policy over politics.

Meher called for training and ethical conduct for airport staff for interaction with expatriates. NPC President Azhar Jatoti welcomed the delegation, praising overseas Pakistanis as national assets whose remittances bolster the economy.

Police warn of higher toll rates for vehicles without M-Tag

ISLAMABAD (INP): Motorways Police warned of higher toll rates for vehicles without M-Tag, saying they would face a 25% surcharge effective from February.

According to an official statement, the National Highways and Motorways Police (NH&MP) have increased toll rates for vehicles operating without the mandatory M-Tag, effective February 1, 2025.

Commuters have been urged to obtain the M-Tag

free of charge by January 31 to avoid additional charges.

Authorities have warned that from February 1, vehicles without the tag or with insufficient balance will be subject to a 25% surcharge on the standard toll fee, with a minimum charge of Rs50.

The official notification issued by the NHA Directorate of Revenue (Finance Wing) read as, "In exercise of powers conferred under Section 10(2)

vii of NHA Act 1991 as amended in 2001, National Highways Authority hereby notifies for the information of the General Public that in order to implement 100% M-Tag Regime on all Motorways in the country".

"The vehicles without M-Tag or low balance/cash vehicles shall pay additional toll of 25% over and above the original toll rate with minimum capping of Rs.50 w.e.f 1st February 2025," the notification added.

IBCC & AKU-EB conclude 3-day capacity building workshop

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Inter Boards Coordination Commission (IBCC), in collaboration with Aga Khan University Examination Board (AKU-EB), successfully concluded a three-day capacity-building workshop in Lahore.

The workshop aimed to enhance the expertise of master trainers from Punjab Examination Boards in advanced assessment methodologies aligned with modern technologies.

The workshop, conducted at MAO College Lahore and hosted by BISE Lahore, brought together subject specialists from nine examination boards across Punjab including BISE Lahore, BISE Rawalpindi, BISE Gujranwala, BISE Faisalabad, BISE Multan, BISE Sargodha, BISE Bahawalpur, BISE DG Khan and BISE Sahiwal. Participants included subject specialists in English, Physics, Chemistry,

Mathematics, and Biology, as well as IT specialists and focal persons from the examination wings of all Punjab Boards.

Dr. Ghulam Ali Mallah, Executive Director IBCC, participated as the Chief Guest, while Prof. Zahid Mian, Controller Lahore Board, and Mr. Ali Raza, Chairman Punjab Chamber of Education, attended as Guests of Honour. Ms. Sadia Naz, Deputy Director IBCC, served as the Focal Person for the workshop, ensuring seamless coordination and execution of the training sessions.

Experts from AKU-EB conducted sessions on modern assessment techniques, digital integration in examination systems, and data-driven evaluation strategies. The workshop focused on equipping examination board officials with the latest methodologies to enhance transparency, efficiency, and fairness in student assessments.

Speaking at the closing ceremony, Dr. Ghulam Ali Mallah emphasized the need for continuous professional development to modernize Pakistan's examination system in line with global best practices.

Prof. Zahid Mian highlighted the importance of such initiatives in strengthening the credibility and effectiveness of examination boards. Dr. Ghulam Ali Mallah also expressed his gratitude to PBCC and BISE Lahore for their support in organizing this successful workshop.

He acknowledged the significant role of Punjab Boards as key stakeholders in the country's education system, emphasizing that they are equally important as other provincial boards in shaping Pakistan's academic future. This workshop is part of a nationwide effort by IBCC and AKU-EB to introduce advanced assessment methodologies across Pakistan.



ISLAMABAD: Experienced aesthetic specialist and former member of Punjab Assembly, Ms. Mehnaz Saeed, along with expert dermatologist Dr. Anzla and PFUJ President Afzal Butt, inaugurating the new aesthetic clinic at F-11. —APP Photo

Meeting approves plans for private sector

KABUL(BNA): A special meeting of the Technical Committee of the Economic Commission convened recently to discuss and approve plans for the establishment of tollgates by the private sector. The meeting, held under the auspices of the Deputy Prime Minister of Economic Affairs's Office, focused on tollgates proposed for land owned by the Ministry of Transport and Aviation at the Arghandi cross-roads and Chamtala area in Kabul province.

15-year feud between two families resolved

KABUL (BNB): A longstanding feud between two families in Chora district has finally been resolved after 15 years, local authorities in Uruzgan have confirmed. The conflict, which resulted in significant loss of life and property for both sides, was mediated by local officials, Ulama (Islamic scholars), and tribal elders. After extensive efforts, the dispute was peacefully settled.

Republican Senator: Democrats stopped efforts to end financial aid to Taliban



KABUL (Khaama Press): Rand Paul, the Republican senator from Kentucky, has stated that Democratic members of the U.S. Senate have consistently opposed halting aid to Afghanistan. Since the withdrawal of U.S. troops from the country, approximately \$3.3 billion in assistance has been sent to Afghanistan.

On Friday, January 31, Paul posted a message on X, previously Twitter, expressing that he had attempted several times to stop financial aid to Afghanistan but faced resistance from Democrats. According to the senator, a portion of this aid has ended up in the hands of the Taliban.

Paul mentioned that he is now pushing for a bill that would entirely halt all financial aid to Afghanistan. He has previously criticized the Democratic Party's policy regarding the current Afghan government over the past year.

He has published an analytical article by John Sopko, the U.S. Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction. The article, titled "The U.S., Afghanistan, and the Price of Self-Deception," argues that the fall of the previous Afghanistan government was a result of systematic self-deception in policy-making and reporting by

senior U.S. officials.

In the article, Sopko explains how this self-deception led to the mismanagement of resources and failed strategies in Afghanistan. He claims that U.S. officials ignored the realities on the ground, resulting in flawed policies that ultimately contributed to the collapse of the Afghanistan government.

The President Donald Trump, shortly after his inauguration, signed an executive order suspending all U.S. foreign assistance for 90 days. However, concerns have been growing that halting U.S. aid could worsen the already dire situation for the people of Afghanistan, exacerbating their needs.

The debate over U.S. assistance to Afghanistan continues, highlighting the stark divide in U.S. politics over how best to handle relations with the country since the Taliban's return to power. The ongoing challenges faced by the Afghanistan's population are a key factor in the discussions surrounding foreign aid.

Union Formation for Pine Nut sector in country



KABUL (BNA): In a move to strengthen the pine nut production, processing, and export sector, Nooruddin Azizi, the Acting Minister of Industry and Commerce, convened a meeting with local pine nut traders.

During the meeting, traders shared their concerns, highlighting the need for enhanced support and the establishment of dedicated pine nut processing factories. Minister Azizi emphasized the importance of creating a

unified front in the industry, announcing plans for the formation of a single union that will represent all traders.

Key topics discussed included boosting pine nut exports, fostering support for the sector, and creating a centralized market for pine nuts in Afghanistan. The Acting Minister assured traders of the government's commitment to ending unhealthy competition and fostering a collaborative environment among producers and exporters.

Currently, Afghan pine nuts are exported to several international markets, including China, India, and various European countries.

Residents urge faster completion of electricity project



KHOST (TOLONews): Some residents of Tani district in Khost province said that the electricity supply project in this district began nearly a year ago, but its progress has been slow.

They urged the authorities of the interim government to complete this project as soon as possible.

"Some time ago, electricity work started here, and even electricity poles were installed, but now the work has stopped. We request the government

complete this project as soon as possible so that we can also benefit from electricity," stated Nisar, a resident of Tani.

"Our demand is that electricity should arrive as soon as possible because it will facilitate both shopkeepers and ordinary people," said Bilal, another resident.

Other residents also say that once electricity reaches this district, many conveniences will be provided.

"The initial electricity work has started here,

and people are very happy. If electricity comes, many facilities will be available for us," said Ahmad Mena Nak, a resident of Tani district.

"We have a serious need for electricity. If electricity is connected, opportunities for work and development will also be created," Mohammad Sakan, another resident of Khost.

Meanwhile, local Khost officials pledged that the electricity connection process in Tani district will be accelerated and completed soon.

"The Khost local administration, along with the electricity department, is working to complete this electricity project as soon as possible and bring it into operation," said Mustaghfir Gurbaz, the spokesperson for the Khost governor.

According to local officials, once this project is completed, about 1,400 families in Tani district will benefit from electricity.

Taliban call for release of frozen assets

KABUL (Amu tv): The Taliban-run Ministry of Economy on Saturday called for the release of Afghanistan's frozen assets following a recent report from a U.S. watchdog.

In a statement, the ministry claimed that of the \$3.71 billion spent in Afghanistan over the past three years, a significant portion was allocated to international organizations, with much of it used for operational expenses rather than direct humanitarian aid.

The Taliban maintain

that the continued freezing of more than \$9 billion in Afghanistan's foreign reserves—funds they describe as belonging to the "Afghan nation"—has negatively impacted the country's economy. They also rejected any U.S. decision regarding the allocation, transfer, or use of these assets, calling such actions "unacceptable."

The Taliban-controlled Ministry of Economy has urged the international community to transfer these financial resources directly to Afghanistan's central

bank under their control.

Breakdown of U.S. Assistance to Afghanistan Since 2021

Since the Taliban's return to power in 2021, the United States has provided more than \$3.7 billion in assistance to Afghanistan, with nearly 65 percent of the funds channeled through the United Nations and the World Bank.

- Humanitarian aid: \$2.6 billion
- Development assistance: \$557 million
- Operational support for organizations: \$342 million

- Security-related assistance: \$100 million

The United Nations has warned that cutting aid could further deteriorate Afghanistan's humanitarian situation.

However, SIGAR's report noted that despite the billions of dollars in humanitarian and development assistance provided since 2021, the funding has neither prevented violations of women's and girls' rights nor stopped Afghanistan from becoming a safe haven for terrorist groups.

Ghazni's fur craft on the brink of extinction

GHAZNI (TOLONews): Some traditional fur coat producers in Ghazni province say that this ancient craft has significantly declined and is on the verge of dying out.

There used to be 120 fur tailoring workshops in the province, they say, but now only one remains. Abdul Wadood, a 56-year-old artisan, has been engaged in fur tailoring in Ghazni for over four decades. He says that declining demand and a stagnant market have put the industry in crisis.

"In the past, there were more than 120 fur tailoring shops in Ghazni because the market was good, we had foreign customers, and security was stable. But now, out of those 120 shops, only I remain, and even I am on the verge of collapse," said Abdul Wadood told TOLONews, fur tailoring is considered one of Ghazni's traditional handicrafts, which was renowned not only in Afghanistan but also internationally. Some residents of Ghazni say that in the past, both men and women were engaged in fur tailoring, and this craft was an essential part of the province's winter clothing culture.

"During our youth, fur tailoring was very common. In the surrounding areas, it was called 'Jafari.' Families would usually make 10 to 15 fur coats for themselves," said Abdul Rasheed, a resident of Ghazni. "In the past, fur tailoring was booming, and many shops were active in this field. The market was thriving, and even foreigners would come to Ghazni to buy fur coats because they were very warm and of high quality." While this industry is on the brink of extinction, local officials say they will make serious efforts to promote handicrafts, especially fur tailoring, in the province.

"The Department of Information and Culture is striving to support handicrafts, especially the fur tailoring industry. We are working to encourage people to use more handmade products through exhibitions and public awareness programs," said Hamidullah Nisar, head of Ghazni's Department of Information and Culture.

Fur coats, jackets, vests, hats, and other winter garments made from animal hides used to have a thriving market in Ghazni, and the people of this province would wear them during the cold season.

UNICEF warns of rising food insecurity in Afghanistan



KABUL (TOLONews): The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) has warned of a possible rise in food insecurity in Afghanistan.

Despite a slight improvement in food security in 2024, the organization has stated that 32% of Afghanistan's population still requires urgent humanitarian assistance.

According to UNICEF's report: "In 2024, 14.8 million people (32 percent of the population) are projected to be food insecure (IPC Phase 3/Crisis or above) during the winter months

and are in urgent need of humanitarian food assistance from November 2024 to March 2025. The risk of food insecurity is likely to increase as borderline La Niña conditions have been projected for the period December 2024 - February 2025."

UNICEF has identified prolonged conflicts, the return of migrants from Pakistan, climate change, and economic stagnation as the primary causes of food insecurity in Afghanistan.

Economic experts emphasize the need for both short-term and long-

term plans to reduce poverty in the country.

"To eradicate poverty, we need two programs: a short-term one, which includes increasing people's purchasing power through liquidity injection and humanitarian aid, and a long-term one, which involves infrastructure development and the implementation of national and international projects in Afghanistan," stated Abdul Zahoar Madbar, an economic expert.

As poverty and unemployment continue to rise in the country, some Kabul

Facing global pressure, Hanafi urges patience among ranks



KABUL (Amu tv): As global pressure mounts on the Taliban and their senior leaders, Khalid Hanafi, the Taliban's minister for the promotion of virtue and prevention of vice, has called on their members to remain steadfast in the face of foreign scrutiny.

In an audio message broadcast by Taliban-controlled National Television, Hanafi urged followers to practice "patience, perseverance, and piety" in response to external pressures.

"In the face of any enemy plots and pressures, we must rely on perseverance, patience, and piety," he said, adding that the Taliban had endured "the most difficult" challenges over the past two decades.

Meanwhile, U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio warned that Washington is prepared to

impose further measures against the Taliban, including placing a larger bounty on their leaders than the one previously offered for Osama bin Laden, the former Al Qaeda chief.

In a post on X, Rubio said he had learned that the Taliban were holding more American citizens hostage than previously reported.

"If this news is true, we must immediately set a much bigger bounty on their leaders—bigger than Bin Laden's," he wrote.

His remarks come amid reports that the Taliban have detained several U.S. citizens in Afghanistan, though the exact number remains unclear.

Separately, the prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC), Karim Khan, has requested arrest warrants for Hibatullah Akhundzada,

the Taliban's supreme leader, and Abdul Hakim Haqqani, the group's chief justice, on charges of crimes against humanity and gender-based persecution, particularly targeting Afghan women and girls.

In response, Taliban Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi condemned the move as "unjust." Following his return to the White House, President Donald J. Trump signed executive orders suspending most U.S. aid to Afghanistan.

Rubio later clarified that humanitarian assistance would be exempt from the suspension, but the shift in policy has already affected Afghanistan's economy. The value of the Afghan currency has fallen against the U.S. dollar, further straining the country's financial markets.

Taliban shut down fuel stations in Faryab: Sources

FARYAB (Amu tv): Taliban have shut down several fuel stations in Maimana, the capital of Faryab province, citing violations of price regulations, according to local sources.

Officials from the Taliban's Commission for the Prevention of Hoarding and Price Control confirmed the closures, saying the businesses failed to comply with mandated price limits. Fuel station owners were accused of overpricing, a charge that Taliban authorities said could lead to further punitive measures.

The commission has warned businesses across Maimana that any violations of set price regulations—including overcharging—will result in "serious actions." Last month, Taliban issued price controls for essential goods, including fuel, flour, rice, oil, meat, dry bread, and animal fodder, with specific expiration dates for the regulations.

Meanwhile, residents have complained about soaring prices for fuel and food, saying that widespread poverty and economic hardship have made it increasingly difficult to afford basic necessities.

Some investors argue that restrictions on cross-border trade under Taliban rule, coupled with what they describe as high customs tariffs, have forced them to raise prices on imported goods.

Arab FMs reject Trump call for transfer of Palestinians

CAIRO (Reuters): Arab foreign ministers on Saturday rejected the transfer of Palestinians from their land under any circumstances, presenting a unified stance against US President Donald Trump's call for Egypt and Jordan to take in residents of the Gaza Strip.

In a joint statement following a meeting in Cairo, the foreign ministers and officials from Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, the Palestinian Authority and the Arab League said such a move would threaten stability in the region, spread conflict and undermine prospects for peace.

"We affirm our rejection of [any attempts] to compromise Palestinians' unalienable rights, whether through settlement activities, or evictions or annex of land or through vacating the land from its owners...in any form or under any circumstances or justifications," the joint statement read. They were looking forward to working with Trump's administration to achieve a just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East based on a two-state solution, they added.

The meeting comes after Trump said last week that Egypt and Jordan should take in Palestinians from Gaza, which he called a "demolition site" following 15 months of Israeli bombardment that rendered most of its 2.3 million people homeless. Critics have called his suggestion tantamount to ethnic cleansing.

Egyptian President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi on Wednesday rejected the idea that Egypt would facilitate the displacement of Gazans and said Egyptians would take to the streets to express their disapproval. However, on Thursday, Trump reiterated the idea, saying: "We do a lot for them, and they are going to do it," in apparent reference to abundant US aid, including military assistance, to both Egypt and Jordan.

Any suggestion that Palestinians leave Gaza, territory they want to form part of an independent state, has been anathema to the Palestinian leadership for generations and repeatedly rejected by neighboring Arab states since the Gaza war began in October 2023. Jordan is already home to several million Palestinians, while tens of thousands live in Egypt. The foreign ministries of Egypt and Jordan have both rejected Trump's suggestion in recent days.

The Arab ministers also welcomed Egypt's plans to hold an international conference with the United Nations that would be focused on rebuilding Gaza, which has been mostly flattened during the 15 months war between Israel and Hamas. No date has been set yet for the conference.

Earlier, an idea floated by US President Donald Trump to move Gazans to Egypt or Jordan faced a renewed backlash as hundreds of thousands of Gazans

displaced by the Israel-Hamas war returned to their devastated neighborhoods.

A fragile ceasefire and hostage release deal took effect earlier this month, intended to end more than 15 months of war that began with Hamas's October 7, 2023 attack on Israel. After the ceasefire came into force, Trump touted a plan to "clean out" the Gaza Strip, reiterating the idea on Monday as he called for Palestinians to move to "safer" locations such as Egypt or Jordan.

The US president, who has repeatedly claimed credit for sealing the truce deal after months of fruitless negotiations, also said he would meet Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in Washington "very soon." Jordan, which has a tumultuous history with Palestinian movements, on Tuesday renewed its rejection of Trump's proposal.

"We emphasize that Jordan's national security dictates that the Palestinians must remain on their land and that the Palestinian people must not be subjected to any kind of forced displacement whatsoever," Jordanian government spokesman Mohammad Momani said. Qatar, which played a leading role in the truce mediation, on Tuesday said that it often did not see "eye to eye" with its allies, including the United States.

"Our position has always been clear to the necessity of the Palestinian people receiving their rights, and that the two-state solution is the only path forward," Qatar's foreign ministry spokesman Majed Al-Ansari said. Following reports that Trump had spoken with Egyptian President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi at the weekend, Cairo said there had been no such phone call.

"A senior official source denied what some media outlets reported about a phone call between the Egyptian and American presidents," Egypt's state information service said. On Monday, Trump reportedly said the pair had spoken, saying of El-Sisi: "I wish he would take some (Palestinians)."

After Trump first floated the idea, Egypt rejected the forced displacement of Gazans, expressing its "continued support for the steadfastness of the Palestinian people on their land." France, another US ally, on Tuesday said any forced displacement of Gazans would be "unacceptable." It would also be a "destabilization factor (for) our close allies Egypt and Jordan," a French foreign ministry spokesman said.

Moving Gaza's 2.4 million people could be done "temporarily or could be long term," Trump said on Saturday. Israel's far-right Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich said he was working with the prime minister "to prepare an operational plan to ensure that President Trump's vision is realized."

6 dead after small plane crashes in US

PHILADELPHIA (Reuters): A medevac plane crashed in Philadelphia with a child and five others on board, the air ambulance company that operated it said, adding that it had not confirmed any survivors. Jet Rescue Air Ambulance said its aircraft crashed with four crew members, one pediatric medical patient and the patient's escort on board.

"At this time we cannot confirm any survivors," the company said in a statement. State and local officials said late on Friday they could not yet confirm how many people may have died on the ground after the plane slammed into a heavily populated portion of the city.

Pennsylvania Governor Josh Shapiro told a press conference at the crash scene that "we know there will be loss in this region." "We want to offer our thoughts and our serious prayers for those that are grieving at this moment," Shapiro said. President Donald Trump wrote on social media that it was "so sad to see the plane go down in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. More innocent souls lost. Our people are totally engaged. First Responders are already being given credit for doing a great job."

The crash follows this week's collision of an American Airlines jet and a US Army Black Hawk helicopter over Washington, DC, which killed 67 in the deadliest airplane crash in the US since 2009. The Federal Aviation Administration said six people were on the Learjet 55 that crashed around 6:30pm (0030 GMT) on Friday. Local media reported it was near the Roosevelt Mall in northeast Philadelphia and that there were multiple injuries on the ground.

Video aired on local TV stations showed the plane in a sharp dive before hitting the ground and exploding in a massive fireball. Philadelphia Mayor Cherelle Parker told a press conference at the scene that several houses and cars had been engulfed in flames. She said the situation is "all hands on deck, that's where we are right now."

Officials said it was not clear what led to the crash. The weather was cold and rainy and with low visibility when the plane went down. The air ambulance had left Northeast Philadelphia Airport and was headed to Springfield-Branson National Airport in Missouri, about 1,100 miles (1,800 km) to the southwest, the FAA said in a statement.

A large fire and several fire trucks were visible at the crash scene in images broadcast by the Philadelphia CBS affiliate. About two hours after the crash the fires were mostly out, according to TV images. Neither the Philadelphia police department nor the fire department immediately responded to requests for comment.

Gunmen kill 10 in Syria village massacre

DAMASCUS (AFP): Gunmen in Syria have shot dead 10 people in a "massacre" in a village home to members of ousted president Bashar al-Assad's Alawite minority, a war monitor said on Saturday.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said Friday's attack killed "10 citizens in Arzakh village in the northern Hama countryside, which is inhabited by citizens of the Alawite sect". The Britain-based monitor, which has a large network of sources on the ground in Syria, said gunmen "rapped on the doors of houses in the village and shot at people using handguns equipped with silencers" before fleeing.

Observatory chief Rami Abdel Rahman said a child and an elderly woman were among the victims. He said the gunmen "were Sunni Muslims, and the attacks bear all the hallmarks of sectarian killings". Syrian newspaper Al-Watan, quoting a security source in Hama, said security forces "are surrounding the Arzakh area to hunt the criminals" behind the killings. It said "former officers and soldiers" were among those who died in the attack. A resident told AFP that two vehicles carrying seven gunmen entered the village and targeted homes under the pretext of conducting weapons inspections.



RAWALPINDI: President Asif Ali Zardari laying a floral wreath at the grave of Major Hamza Israr Shaheed, who embraced martyrdom in North Waziristan.

Israeli hostages, Palestinian prisoners released in exchange

GAZA/CAIRO (Reuters): Palestinian militant group Hamas handed over three Israeli hostages on Saturday, and dozens of Palestinian prisoners and detainees were released in exchange, in the latest stage of a truce aimed at ending the 15-month war in Gaza.

Ofir Kalderon, a French-Israeli dual national, and Yarden Bibas were handed over to Red Cross officials in the southern Gaza city of Khan Younis before being transferred to Israel. Israeli-American Keith Siegel was separately handed over at the Gaza City seaport. Hours later, 183 Palestinian prisoners and detainees were released in the exchange. Among them, 150 arrived in Gaza while 32 got off a bus in Ramallah in the occupied West Bank, where they were greeted by large crowds. One freed prisoner will be exiled to Egypt, according to the Hamas prisoners' media office.

"I feel joy despite the journey of pain and hardship that we lived," said Al Al-Barghouti, who was serving two life sentences in an Israeli jail. "The life sentence was broken and the occupation will one day be broken," added Barghouti, as the crowd around him in Ramallah chanted "Allah Akbar (God is the most great)."

At the newly reopened Rafah crossing on the southern border, [alestinian patients to be allowed to leave Gaza for medical treatment in Egypt. Mohammad Zaout, a senior official in Gaza's health ministry, however, criticized the limited number of patients allowed to travel for treatment, saying that around 18,000 people needed better health care. In Israel, crowds gathered at the location

in Tel Aviv known as Hostage Square to watch the release in the morning of the Israeli hostages on giant outdoor screens, mixing cheers and applause with tears as the three men appeared.

Kalderon, whose two children Erez and Sahar were released in the first hostage exchange in November 2023, and Bibas both briefly mounted a stage in Khan Younis, in front of a poster of Hamas figures including Mohammad Deif, the former military commander whose death was confirmed by Hamas this week, before being handed over to the Red Cross officials. "Ofir Kalderon is free! We share the immense relief and joy of his loved ones after 483 days of unimaginable hell," French President Emmanuel Macron said in a statement.

Saturday's handover saw none of the chaotic scenes that overshadowed an earlier transfer on Thursday, when Hamas guards struggled to shield hostages from a surging crowd in Gaza. But it was once again an occasion for a show of force by uniformed Hamas fighters who paraded in the area where the handovers took place in a sign of their re-established dominance in Gaza despite the heavy losses suffered in the war.

The total number of hostages freed so far is 18, including five Thais who were part of an unscheduled release on Thursday. After Saturday's exchange, Israel will have released 583 Palestinian prisoners and detainees, including militants serving life sentences for deadly attacks as well as some detained during the war but not charged.

As the fighting has abated, diplomatic efforts to build a wider settlement have stepped up. Prime Minister

Benjamin Netanyahu is expected to meet US President Donald Trump on Tuesday with the ceasefire in Gaza, and a possible normalization of relations with Saudi Arabia as part of a postwar deal likely to be a focus.

During the first phase of the ceasefire, 33 children, women and older male hostages as well as sick and injured, were due to be released, with more than 60 men of military age left for a second phase which must still be worked out. Negotiations are due to start by Tuesday on agreements for the release of the remaining hostages and the withdrawal of Israeli troops from Gaza in a second phase of the deal, which is intended to lead to a final end of the war in Gaza.

The initial six-week truce, agreed with Egyptian and Qatari mediators and backed by the United States, has mostly remained intact despite incidents that have led both sides to accuse the other of violating the deal. Netanyahu's government, which has hard-liners who opposed the ceasefire deal, and Hamas say they are committed to reaching an agreement in the second phase.

But prospects for a durable settlement remain unclear. The war started with a Hamas-led attack on Israel that killed 1,200 people, and saw more than 250 taken as hostages. The Israeli military campaign has killed more than 47,000 Palestinians. Gaza is in ruins and a deep legacy of bitterness and mistrust remains. Israeli leaders continue to insist that Hamas cannot remain in Gaza, but the movement has taken every opportunity to demonstrate the control it continues to exert despite the loss of much of its former leadership and thousands of fighters during the war.

Russian drone and missile attacks kill 6 in Ukraine

KYIV (AP): At least six people died overnight as Russian drone and missile strikes pounded Ukraine's towns and cities, local officials said Saturday. Meanwhile, Moscow's troops continued their grinding advance through the country's east.

A Russian missile strike on an apartment block in the Ukrainian city of Poltava killed at least five people and injured 13 more, including three children, Ukraine's emergency services reported. Some 22 people were rescued from the five-story building, which partially collapsed following the attack, said the Poltava region's acting governor, Volodymyr Kohut. He also announced that the region would observe three days of mourning for the victims of the attack. Rescue teams remain at the site.

Elsewhere, a 60-year-old woman was killed by falling debris from a downed drone in the Kharkiv region, local Gov. Oleh Syniehubov wrote on social media. The bombardment comes as Russian forces

continue their monthslong campaign to capture the key Donetsk strongholds of Pokrovsk and nearby Chasiv Yar, fighting their way across farm fields and woodland and engulfing small rural settlements.

Russia's Ministry of Defense said Saturday that its troops had taken control of Krymske, a suburb to the north of the contested front-line town of Toretsk in Ukraine's Donetsk region. Russian troops have been fighting for the settlement in a grinding assault throughout the winter of 2024. The Institute for the Study of War, a Washington-based think tank, said last week that it expected the Russians to take full control of Toretsk "within days." "Last night, Russia launched an attack on our cities using various types of weapons: missiles, attack drones, and aerial bombs," Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky wrote on social media Saturday.

"Every such act of terror proves that we need greater support in defending against Russian terror.

Every air defense system, every interceptor missile, means a life saved." The full-scale war between Russia and Ukraine, which began nearly three years ago and shows no signs of ending, has killed more than 10,000 Ukrainian civilians, according to the United Nations.

Many have been evacuated from areas along the roughly 1,000-kilometer (600-mile) front line where Ukrainian defenses are straining to hold the bigger Russian army at bay. Civilians have endured hardship caused by Russian attacks on the power grid that have denied them heating and running water. Saturday's missile attack prompted emergency power grid shutdowns in seven Ukrainian regions, including Poltava, state energy company Ukrenergo said. Ukrainian strikes also hit Russia, with air defenses intercepting nine drones across the country's Bryansk, Belgorod and Saratov regions, Russia's Defense Ministry said in a statement Saturday morning.

Senate Chairman, Austrian FM discuss strengthening ties

VIENNA: Senate Chairman Syed Yousaf Raza Gilani, who is leading a high-level parliamentary delegation, held a constructive meeting with the Federal Finance Minister (FM) of Austria, Gunter Mayr.

The discussions focused on strengthening economic ties, enhancing trade and investment cooperation, and exploring new avenues for collaboration between the two countries. Chairman Senate reaffirmed Pakistan's commitment to further building upon the traditionally strong relations between Pakistan and Austria, according to a statement

issued on Saturday.

He highlighted that several Austrian companies, including Andritz and Voith in hydropower generation, Toppelmeyr in tourism, Plasser and Theurer in railways, and OMV in oil and gas exploration, have already contributed to Pakistan's development. The Senate Chairman invited Austrian companies to take advantage of the recent incentives announced by Pakistan for foreign investors, particularly in priority sectors such as mining and minerals, energy, IT, the defense industry, and agriculture.

During the meeting, the Senate Chairman acknowledged Austria's keen interest in the mining sector and expressed Pakistan's readiness to explore collaborative opportunities, particularly leveraging Austrian expertise in mining within used mines. He also emphasized Pakistan's potential in Alpine tourism and invited Austrian firms to invest in tourism development on a Build-Operate-Transfer (BOT) basis. Additionally, he highlighted Pakistan's plans to upgrade its railway infrastructure, an area where Austria has significant expertise. — Agencies



KAGHAN VALLEY: Working clearing main Shogran Road due to heavy snowfall in the area.

PNS Yamama arrives in Karachi

F.P. Report

KARACHI: Fourth Offshore Patrol Vessel (OPV) PNS YAMAMA arrived in Karachi. Upon arrival, an impressive reception ceremony was held at PN Dockyard. Commander Pakistan Fleet, Rear Admiral Abdul Munib, was Chief Guest on the occasion.

While addressing the ceremony, Commander Pakistan Fleet highlighted that addition of PNS YAMAMA in PN fleet will significantly enhance Pakistan Navy's capability of safeguarding Maritime frontiers of Pakistan. He also emphasized that induction of such multipurpose state-of-the-art platforms will provide vital support to ongoing PN Maritime security patrol in Indian Ocean.



PNS YAMAMA is a multipurpose and highly agile medium sized Offshore Patrol Vessel equipped with self protection and terminal defence system, state-of-the-art electronic warfare, anti-ship and anti-air warfare capabilities.

Additionally, it is capable of embarking a multiple helicopter and can operate independently or as

part of a task force for extended durations to execute a variety of missions. PNS YAMAMA is the fourth vessel of OPV Batch II constructed and commissioned at DAMEN Shipyards, Galati, Romania. Reception ceremony of PNS YAMAMA was attended by large number of PN Officers and CPOs/Sailors.

Trump readies order for steep tariffs on goods

WASHINGTON (Reuters): US President Donald Trump is expected to sign an order on Saturday imposing hefty new tariffs of 25% on goods from Mexico and Canada and 10% on imports from China, potentially disrupting more than \$2.1 trillion worth of annual trade.

Trump, who is working from his Mar-a-Lago estate in Florida this weekend, said on Friday that there was little that the top three US trading

partners could do to forestall the tariffs. He also said that revenue was a factor and the tariffs may be increased, adding: "But it's a lot of money coming to the United States." Trump did, however, reference a potential carve out for oil from Canada, saying that tariff rate would be 10% versus the 25% planned for other Canadian imports. But he indicated wider tariffs on oil and natural gas would be coming in mid-February,

remarks that sent oil prices higher.

Crude oil is the top US import from Canada, reaching nearly \$100 billion in 2023, according to US Census Bureau data. Trump acknowledged that the steep duties could result in higher costs being passed on to consumers and that his actions may cause disruptions in the short term, but said he was not concerned about their impact on financial markets.