

Govt employees hold sit-in
F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Government employees' announced grand sit-in has started in front of Parliament House Islamabad. Government employees start gathering at Pak Secretariat Chowk and they closed the main iron gate of Pak Secretariat Chowk. The employees are raising slogans in favor of their demands. A march will be held to Parliament House after the arrival of more government employees.



@thefrontierpost

First national English daily published from Peshawar, Islamabad, Lahore, Quetta, Karachi and Washington D.C

www.thefrontierpost.com

Vol. XXXIXII

No. 25

Regd. No. 241

SHABAAN 22 1446 -- FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 21 2025

PESHAWAR EDITION

12 PAGES

PRICE. 30

Hamas hands over bodies of 5 Israelis held captive in Gaza

GAZA: Hamas has handed over the bodies of an Israeli woman, her two young children and an elderly man who were taken captive during the October 2023 attack on southern Israel. Hamas staged a public hand-over ceremony in Khan Younis, southern Gaza on Thursday, displaying four coffins on a stage in front of a poster depicting the likeness of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu with fangs and blood on his face. Masked Hamas fighters then carried the coffins from the stage and handed them over to the Red Cross.

United Nations rights chief Volker Turk slammed the spectacle as cruel and contrary to international law. "Under international law, any hand-over of the remains of deceased must comply with the prohibition of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment, ensuring respect for the dignity of the deceased and their families," he said.

Red Cross staff held up white screens in an attempt to conceal the coffins from the gaze of the large crowds as they were loaded into their vehicles. "These operations should be done privately out of the utmost respect for the deceased and for those left grieving," the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) said in a statement. The bodies that were handed over included Israeli infant Kfir Bibas, his four-year-old brother Ariel, their mother Shiri Bibas, and a fourth captive, 83-year-old Oded Lifschitz.

The Bibas brothers, the youngest captives taken on October 7, have become symbols of national anguish for many Israelis. Hamas has maintained that they were killed in an Israeli air strike during the war, during which Israeli forces were responsible for the deaths of numerous captives held by Palestinian armed groups. "Agony. Pain. There are no words. Our hearts — the hearts of an

Israeli army kills three Palestinians in West Bank refugee camp assault

WEST BANK: Israeli forces have killed at least three Palestinians in an attack on a house in the Far'a refugee camp in the occupied West Bank. The Palestinian Wafa news agency reported that the killings took place on Wednesday night after the Israeli military surrounded their homes near Tubas and opened fire. The report added that Israeli forces have withheld all three bodies. "Ambulance crews entered the house after the occupation forces withdrew from it and found body parts and traces of blood inside," Wafa reported.

The Israeli military claimed that the three Palestinians were "wanted terrorists who sold weapons for terror purposes". Israeli forces also arrested two Palestinians — Ahmed Nabil Sobh and Hakam Muhammad al-Khatib — during a raid in the camp near the besieged house. The killings come as the Israeli military continues its weeks-long, large-scale offensive on several areas of the northern West Bank, including Jenin and its refugee camp, as well as Tulkarem and its Nur Shams refugee camp, forcing thousands to flee their homes. The army has also deployed hundreds of soldiers and bulldozers that demolished houses and tore up vital infrastructure in the camps, cutting off water and power. Israel launched its crackdown on refugee camps in the West Bank in January. The camps have long been a hotbed of Palestinian resistance against Israeli occupation. The army has since killed dozens of Palestinians and forced at least 40,000 to flee as they have demolished homes and torn up vital infrastructure in refugee camps across the West Bank, the United Nations agency for Palestinian refugees (UNRWA) reports. Elsewhere in the West Bank, Israeli forces continued with their raids and arrests. Soldiers detained two brothers after storming their family home near Tubas on Thursday. — Aljazeera

entire nation — lie in tatters," said Israeli President Isaac Herzog.

A Hamas spokesman said all four were alive before the "Zionist occupation aircraft deliberately bombed the locations where they were being held". Hamas said in a statement it "preserved the lives of the occupation prisoners", provided them with what it could, and "treated them humanely, but their [Israel's] army killed them along with their captors". "Criminal Netanyahu is crying today over the bodies of his prisoners who returned to him in coffins, in a blatant attempt to evade responsibility for their killing in front of his audience," Hamas said.

While addressing the families of the killed Israeli captives, it said: "We would have preferred your sons to return to you alive, but your army

and government leaders chose to kill them instead of bringing them back." Throughout the war, Israeli press reports stated that Netanyahu had worked to scuttle ceasefire efforts that would have included the release of captives held in Gaza.

The handover marks the first return of the bodies of captives under the ceasefire agreement between Hamas and Israel that took effect last month and will also see hundreds of Palestinians released from Israeli jails, where allegations of abuse and torture are widespread and where many have been kept in detention without any charge or trial. A Palestinian group said Israel is withholding the remains of at least 665 Palestinians, including several killed in the 1960s and 1970s. — Aljazeera

PTI perturbed by tribute & honor to Army Chief in UK: Tarar

ISLAMABAD (APP): Federal Minister for Information, Broadcasting, National Heritage and Culture Attaullah Tarar said the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) is virtually perturbed by the tribute and honor given to Chief of Army Staff (COAS) General Asim Munir at the esteemed Royal Military Academy Sandhurst during his visit to the United Kingdom.

A guard of honour was awarded to the Army Chief, and Pakistan's national anthem was played by the Royal Band at the esteemed Royal Military Academy Sandhurst that indeed enhanced the prestige of the country, said the minister while speaking to the media. He condemned a social media campaign peddled by what he said "a handful miscreants of Tehreek-e-Intehsar" to make the visit of the Army Chief controversial. Tarar said the entire world recognizes the professional capabilities of the Pakistan Army including officers and cadets, but it seemed that the tribute and honor given to the Pakistan's Army Chief is perturbing the "Tehreek-e-Intehsar". "It is as same as they are stunned by the Pakistan's progress under the leadership of Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif," he added.

He said the law shall take its course and action would be taken against those who are resorting to harm the national interest of Pakistan. Tarar said the people of Pakistan had reiterated their commitment to the respect and integrity of their country and Army by rejecting their social media campaign in this regard. "This same lot of miscreants

also ran a campaign on social media to disrupt the flow of remittances but the overseas Pakistanis being responsible citizens continue to play their due role expressing their association and love for the country".

He said the PTI founder is the mastermind of every anti-Pakistan move, hell bent on pursuing the agenda of the country's enemies. There is a group of miscreants who targeted military installations and burnt Jinnah House Lahore and even did not spare the memorials of martyrs who sacrificed their lives for the security of their country, he said, adding the video evidence is existed that shows their involvement in the May 9 incidents. "When they tried to attack the Pakistan's defense, they actually tried to fulfill the dream of enemy who never even by today dared to resort to attack Pakistan this way," he remarked. While pursuing agenda of the country's enemy, they brought back terrorists in Pakistan, he said, pointing out to the speeches of the PTI founder who "completely support terrorists".

"At international media, his speeches are there in which he is saying that they (terrorists) are good people and he will bring them back to resettle in Pakistan," the minister noted. "Will it not be correct to say that these terrorism issues are just due to the PTI founder who resettled them in Pakistan by changing the policy of state," Tarar questioned.

Meanwhile, Attaullah Tarar said that there was a need for further improvement in collaborations in the field of media as local media needed more

growth and capacity enhancement.

Expressing his views in a discussion organized by the Saudi Media Forum 2025 here, he opined that that hand holding from global partners would bring a paradigm change in local media organizations. He said that the government would promote such collaborations further so that human resource could benefit from it.

He said it was a great pleasure to witness the historic changes taking place in Saudi Arabia under Vision 2030 which was no more a dream, rather it has become a reality. "A great revolution has taken place under the leadership of Saudi Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman", Attaullah Tarar remarked. Tarar said that as Minister for Information, Broadcasting and Culture his role was important.

Our focus is on a vibrant media, a media which is in line with modern trends, a media which has all its aspects covered as far as digital domain is concerned. He said Pakistan's Ministry of Information dealt with electronic, print and digital media. He said he was also minister for culture and dealt with cultural aspect.

"Out of Pakistan's 240 million population, 180 million people use the internet and we have a vibrant young population as more than 60 percent of population is under the age of 30", Attaullah Tarar informed the audience. "We are the people of Indus Valley civilization and guardians of an ancient civilization that lives on the banks of the Indus River," he said.



ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif chairing a meeting on health and pharmaceutical sector reforms.

5 judges move SC against seniority list F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: A legal battle over the seniority of judges erupted in the Islamabad High Court, as five judges moved the Supreme Court against the seniority list.

The petition has been filed by Justices Mohsin Akhtar Kayani, Tariq Mahmood Jahangiri, Babar Sattar, Sardar Ejaz Ishaq Khan, and Saman Rafat Imtiaz, challenging the seniority. Spanning 49 pages, the petition has been submitted under Article 184(3) through senior legal counsel Munir A. Malik and Barrister Salahuddin.

Also read: Six IHC judges write to SJC against 'interference' in judicial matters. The petition urges the Supreme Court to declare that the president does not hold unlimited authority under Article 200(1) to transfer judges between high courts without justifiable public interest. It asserts that such transfers should not be executed arbitrarily.

Further, the petition calls for suspending three transferred judges from their duties and requests that Justice Sarfraz Dogar be restrained from serving as the acting chief justice. Earlier, the five judges had engaged the legal expertise of Munir A. Malik and Barrister Salahuddin to challenge the seniority decision.

Salman Akram hints at movement F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf Secretary General Salman Akram Raja said on Thursday they would remain undeterred and launch a countrywide movement for restoration of supremacy of law.

Speaking to media, he reiterated that the PTI was fighting for restoration of democracy in the country. He said he had come to Peshawar to meet notables and the PTI would continue activities in Ramadan. "We will continue to voice concern against wrongs and ensure supremacy of constitution. We will unify people for rule of law," he averred. The PTI leader said he would meet Shahid Khaqan Abbasi and also visit Karachi to engage with parties of Sindh.

PM reviews reforms in health sector

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif Thursday chaired a meeting to review reforms in the health and pharmaceutical sectors.

He directed that a drug testing laboratory of good standard should be established in Islamabad to ensure quality of medicines according to international level. He instructed that mobile hospitals should be launched to provide health facilities in the outskirts of Islamabad, Gilgit Baltistan, Kashmir and Balochistan.

He ordered an operation in collaboration and consultation with the provincial governments against counterfeit drugs. Fraudsters could not be allowed to play with the lives of the people, he asserted. He said a comprehensive plan should be made for better regulation and development of the pharmaceutical sector in cooperation with the provincial governments.

He said the officers of Drug Regulatory Authority of Pakistan (DRAP) involved in the facilitation of fraud in the pharmaceutical sector should be identified and action against them should be ensured. The prime minister said research in the medicine field should be undertaken for increase of exports of the pharmaceutical sector. Implementation of reforms in Drug Regulatory Authority should be speeded up, he continued. He said experienced experts of good reputation should be appointed on merit in the policy board of DRAP, adding steps should be taken on a priority basis for making the Drug Pricing Committee effective and strong.

Federal ministers Nazir Tarar, Ahad Khan Cheema, Prime Minister's Coordinator for Health Dr Mukhtar Ahmed Bharath and high level officers attended the meeting. The prime minister

was informed about the progress in reforms of the health and pharmaceutical sectors. The meeting was told that the method of registration of locally manufactured drugs in a digital system was in final phases of its completion. It was told that consultation was continuing on the National Drugs Policy and would be soon presented for approval.

A review was given on the posting of 94 new drug inspectors for inspecting drugs and about the performance of the present 25 drug inspectors. The prime minister stressed that transparency should be ensured in the process of appointment of new drug inspectors. The meeting was further told that the present export volume of medicines of Pakistan was \$ 500 million and Ministry of Health was taking steps to enhance exports by carrying reforms including provision of research facilities. Establishment of Export Directorate in DRAP was in the final stages with the aim to expand exports of the pharmaceutical sector in the country. The Health Ministry also gave a briefing on measures to enhance the capacity of the surgical sector to further boost its exports and bring it to the international standard.

Prime Minister also chaired a meeting to review measures for increasing exports of the country. He directed formulation of a comprehensive and effective strategy to take the exports to \$ 60 billion in the next five years.

He instructed his economic team to introduce sustainable reforms for the system of tariff to achieve economic progress and enhance exports. He said the tariffs should be brought down and the system should be made easy and simple. The prime minister said a strategy should be adopted to increase the production capacity of the industries by bringing reforms in the tariff structure.

IMF mission due on 24th

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Finance Senator Muhammad Aurangzeb has said that the another International Monetary Fund (IMF) delegation will reach Pakistan on February 24 to hold negotiations on the Climate Fund, under which Pakistan can over \$1 billion funds.

Addressing a ceremony organized by Pakistan Retail Business Council in Islamabad on Thursday, Senator Aurangzeb said the country was expected to receive over \$1 billion under the Fund, while Fund's second delegation would arrive in Pakistan in March. The minister said that everything regarding the IMF loan programme was on track.

He said that the country's economy should grow in a calculated manner so that it

does not enter the boom-and-bust cycles again and move towards sustainable and inclusive growth.

Aurangzeb said that faults would be removed from economy's DNA through structural reforms. The minister said that the government had finalized the plan for the rightsizing of the departments. He said the government was mindful of the economic targets it had set. "The country's economy is moving in the right direction," he said, adding, "The government is trying to make the privatization process more transparent."

The minister added that the introduction of reforms had resulted in an increase in tax collection. "We simply cannot afford that people continue to avoid paying taxes," he added.

Besides that, he went on to say, the government was

also taking steps to cut down its expenditures. "The interest rate is continuously on a decline benefiting industrialists and traders."

Aurangzeb said it was heartening to see that the provincial governments were working on the introduction of agriculture tax.

He said these structural reforms are already underway in areas such as taxation, energy, State-Owned Enterprises (SOEs), and public finance. He expressed satisfaction that the country is heading in the right economic direction with macroeconomic stability achieved.

On the taxation side, the minister mentioned that a real transformation is underway with a focus on utilizing latest technology to bring transparency and check leakages. He emphasized that it is also important to restore trust in the tax authority.

KP CM reviews flagship projects in province

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: A high-level meeting held here on Thursday with Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Ali Amin Khan Gandapur, has conducted a detailed review of the progress made so far on the flagship projects of the current provincial government.

These projects include provision of solar systems to 130,000 deserving households, construction of a 120-kilometer power transmission line, construction of the Peshawar-D.I. Khan Motorway, establishment of the Provincial Islamic Takaful Insurance Company, Home-Stay Tourism initiative, Traffic Corridor Hub, Establishment of the Debt Management Fund, and Construction of the CRBC (Chashma Right Bank Canal) Lift Canal.

The meeting was attended by Advisor to the Chief Minister on Finance, Muzammil Aslam, Chief Secretary Shahab Ali Shah, Additional Chief Secretary for Planning and Development Ikramullah Khan, as well as adminis-

trative secretaries of the relevant departments.

The Chief Minister directed the concerned authorities to ensure progress on these flagship projects according to the set timelines, emphasizing that these are game-changing initiatives for the province. He instructed that daily progress on these projects should be ensured, as the government is committed to their speedy completion and will provide the necessary resources on a priority basis.

He further stated that these projects have the potential to economically strengthen the province, offering not only essential facilities to the public but also creating opportunities for investment and employment. The Chief Minister also instructed officials to propose amendments to relevant laws to reduce the standard time frame for implementing development projects, ensuring that the benefits of these initiatives reach the public without delay.

During the briefing, it was informed that an e-ballooting process



will be conducted this month for the provision of free solar systems to deserving households. The contract for the construction of Lot 1 of the provincial transmission line has been awarded, with a completion timeline of 18 months. Lot 1 of the transmission line spans 40 kilometers, running from the Matiltan Powerhouse to Bahrain. Lot 2 of the transmission line will cover 80 kilometers, extending from Bahrain to the Chakdara Grid Station.

Regarding other projects, the meeting was informed that physical work on two packages of the CRBC Lift Canal project will commence by May this year. Additionally, letters have been sent to Deputy Commissioners regarding land acqui-

sition for the Peshawar-D.I. Khan Motorway.

The Chief Minister directed that land acquisition for the CRBC project should begin simultaneously from both the head and tail ends. He stressed that this project is of critical importance for ensuring the province's food security.

Meanwhile, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has set the stage for another historic sports event as Chief Minister Ali Amin Khan Gandapur officially inaugurated the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Games 2025 here on Thursday. The grand opening ceremony took place on Thursday at Qayyum Stadium, Peshawar, featuring vibrant performances and a spectacular fireworks display. The event was attended by

Provincial Minister for Sports and Youth Affairs Syed Fakhar Jehan, members of the provincial assembly, government officials, journalists, athletes, and a large number of students. Traditional dances added a cultural touch to the colorful ceremony.

With a total of 2,380 athletes competing, including 1,043 female participants, this year's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Games marks the largest sporting event in the province's history. Athletes from seven regional zones are participating, with 16 sports categories for men and 12 for women. The competitions include athletics, football, hockey, volleyball, basketball, karate, taekwondo, boxing, squash, table tennis, badminton, gymnastics, throwball, judo, wushu, and handball.

Sports venues hosting these competitions include Peshawar Sports Complex, Abdul Wali Khan Sports Complex Charsadda, Peshawar Board Sports Ground, Hayatabad Sports Complex, Pakistan Sports Board Coaching Centre, PSB Hall, Peshawar University, and Kohat

Sports Complex.

During his address, Chief Minister Gandapur congratulated the Sports Department and the athletes for organizing the event. He also announced that gold medalists in these games will receive a monthly stipend of PKR 25,000 for one year. Encouraging the participants, he emphasized the importance of perseverance, stating, "An athlete who learns to compete can never truly lose." He also expressed his satisfaction over the inclusion of female athletes, reinforcing the idea that "Victory and defeat are part of the game, but even a loss can turn into a win. To compete in life, we must follow Islamic teachings, as a person who adheres to them always succeeds."

In a political note, the Chief Minister remarked, "Our leader has been unjustly imprisoned, yet he has already won even behind bars. Imran Khan is an ideology—an ideology that neither dies nor fades away; it only grows stronger. He will be free soon and will once again become the Prime Minister of this country."



LAHORE: A motorcyclist wears rain suit to protect him from rain and cold on his way during the first rain of the season in the provincial capital. —APP Photo

Karachi-Hyderabad Motorway project back on track: Ahsan

ISLAMABAD (APP): Federal Minister for Planning, Development & Special Initiatives Ahsan Iqbal announced on Thursday that the long-delayed Karachi-Hyderabad six-lane motorway project is progressing rapidly and is expected to be completed within the current year (2025).

In an exclusive interview, Federal Minister Ahsan Iqbal assured that the long-delayed Karachi-Hyderabad six-lane motorway project is back on track, revealing that it is progressing rapidly and is expected to be completed within the current year (2025).

He further explained the detail that the Karachi-Hyderabad motorway project has faced significant delays due to changes in government.

During their tenure, the project was in the bidding phase, but it was scrapped by the PTI government, he mentioned, adding, however, that in their 16-month government, the project was handed over to a private-public partnership and work on it has once again resumed. Ahsan Iqbal expressed optimism that the project will be completed soon.

The Karachi-Hyderabad motorway is a crucial infrastructure project that aims to improve connectivity and facilitate trade in the region. Its completion is expected to have a positive impact on Pakistan's economy.

In addition to the updates on the Karachi-Hyderabad motorway project, Ahsan Iqbal revealed that the government has been in talks with Chinese officials regarding the project.

He stated that once the Chinese complete their feasibility study, the project will be put on the fast track, ensuring its swift completion. This collaboration with China is expected to bring significant expertise and investment to the project, further solidifying the country's infrastructure development, he added.

Govt taking steps to restore rural health centers

LAHORE (APP): Punjab Assembly (PA) Speaker Malik Muhammad Ahmad Khan on Thursday said that becoming a doctor was not just about obtaining a degree but fulfilling a noble duty of human service.

He said this while addressing the convocation of Akhtar Saeed Medical & Dental College here. He said, "A successful doctor is one who does not consider the profession merely a mean of livelihood but prioritizes the welfare and well-being of humanity." He expressed hope that the dedication and hard work of parents would be rewarded with their children's professional success.

He further said that with increasing population in the country, private institutions had played a crucial role in supporting the health and education sectors and the government appreciated their contributions.

Discussing the current state of healthcare facilities in rural areas, the speaker said, "I belong to a rural area and the Punjab government is taking steps to restore rural health centers." He stressed that private institutions must also play their role in ensuring the provision of quality healthcare facilities to the rural population.

At the conclusion of the ceremony, Speaker Malik Muhammad Ahmad Khan congratulated the graduating doctors and remarked that there was no greater joy for parents and teachers than witnessing their children achieve academic and professional milestones.

UMT launches Shri Guru Nanak Scholarship

LAHORE (APP): A historic Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed between the University of Management and Technology (UMT) and the Government of Punjab.

The ceremony was attended by the Provincial Minister for Minority Religious Affairs, Ramesh Singh Arora, as the chief guest.

Parliamentary Secretary Sonia Asher, other Sikh leaders, and members of the Pakistan Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee were also present.

The Director General of UMT briefed the Provincial Minister on the university's educational initiatives, sharing that over 100 religious minority students are currently enrolled at UMT, with 35 students receiving various scholarships for higher education. Ahmed Abdullah further mentioned that 121 religious minority students have graduated from UMT so far, and the university has awarded more than 37 million rupees in scholarships to these students.

REQUEST FOR SHORT TERM CONSULTANCY SERVICES

Office of the Assistant Director (Sr), LG&RDD Bajaur intends to engage individual consultant for the project "Uplift & Beautification of Urban Centers/Bazars in the newly Merged Districts, ADP NO. 2098/210624, Sub Work: Installation of Solar Street Lights in Sub Division Khar, District Bajaur" under Rule 28 of the KPRA Rules 2014. The interested consultant shall at least meet but not limited to, the requirements mentions below.

Contract Type	Qty	Qualification / Eligibility	Responsibilities
Individual Consultant	1	1. The intending consultant shall have B.Sc Electrical / Electronic Engineering Degree from an HEC recognized university. 2. The Engineer shall be registered with PEC as a Professional Engineer in Electrical Power sector. 3. The Engineer shall have Master Degree in Project Management, Engineering Management, Supply Chain Management or MBA from an HEC recognized university. 4. The Engineer shall have at least 10 years of professional experience in which at least 7 years' experience shall be in Design, Implementation and Commissioning of Solar Energy Projects in public sector. 5. The Engineer shall have proven experience of Design, Testing, Installation and troubleshooting of Solar Street Lighting systems and allied components.	1. Design Review and vetting of BoQ. 2. Inspection, Testing and product approval of each component of the solar street lighting system. 3. Quantity and quality assurance of works. 4. Verification & Recommendation of Contractor IPCs. 5. Preparation of project completion report.

- TERMS AND CONDITIONS:**
- The Expression of Interest (EOI) of each individual consultant shall reach office of the undersigned at or before 1400 hours on 11-03-2025.
 - The intending consultant shall be registered with the FBR and KPRA.
 - Age of the intending individual consultant shall not be more than 45 years on the last date for submission of documents.
 - The EOI form along with the draft contract documents can be obtained from office of the Assistant Director (Sr), LG&RDD Bajaur at Civil Colony Khar, Bajaur upon submission of written request.
 - The EOI shall be submitted on the form obtained from office of the undersigned. All the information mentioned in the EOI form shall be supported by documentary evidences.
 - The consultant shall have experience of design, implementation, supervision, monitoring and commissioning of Solar Street Light projects equivalent to at least PKR. 100 million. The work orders supported by the experience certificates issued by the employers shall be called provided along with the EOI.
 - Among all intending consultants, the one having the maximum score in accordance to the criteria set forth in the EOI form shall be for interview. Grounds for rejection of proposal of any other intending consultant will be communicated upon written request.
 - In case of any further information / clarification, the intending consultant may visit the office of the undersigned on any working day before closing EOI submission deadline or contact on email (adlgbajaur@gmail.com) of the Assistant Director (Sr), LG&RDD Bajaur or Phone No. 0942-220818
 - The procuring entity may reject all proposals at any time prior to the acceptance of proposals in light of KPRA Rule-47.

Assistant Engineer
LG & RDD Bajaur

Assistant Director
LG & RDD Bajaur

INF(P) 740/25

Sindh launches crackdown on unfit commercial vehicles

KARACHI (APP): In response to an alarming rise in traffic accidents, the Sindh government has launched a province-wide crackdown on unfit commercial vehicles.

The initiative, spearheaded by Sindh Senior Minister Sharjeel Inam Memon, aims to curb the operation of vehicles with questionable fitness certifications. The Transport Department, acting on the minister's directives, has ordered swift and effective action against unfit commercial vehicles.

Concerns have been raised over vehicles using fitness certificates from other provinces, which were not inspected by Sindh's Motor Vehicle Inspection System (MVIS) or issued following the proper procedure.

Sharjeel Memon highlighted that many commercial vehicles registered in other provinces continue to operate in Sindh under potentially unauthentic fitness certificates. He stressed that the lack of proper inspection raises serious safety concerns, contributing to a spike in fatal accidents caused by mechanical faults.

In a bid to address the issue, Sharjeel Memon announced that all commercial vehicles in Sindh will now be required to obtain fitness certificates through the Sindh MVIS. These certificates will feature enhanced security, including QR codes. Vehicles from other provinces operating permanently in Sindh will also need to acquire a fitness certificate from the Sindh government.

Furthermore, commercial vehicle drivers must now possess valid driving licenses, and route permits will only be issued or renewed if vehicles present fitness certificates with the new QR code system. The measures are designed to ensure thorough inspection and certification of all commercial vehicles and reduce the risk posed by unfit vehicles on the roads.

The Sindh government's initiative marks a significant step toward improving road safety in the province and preventing further loss of life due to unfit vehicles.

JI leader assails govt over cases against opposition leaders

KARACHI (PPI): Senior leader of Jamaat-e-Islami and former MNA Asadullah Bhutto today accused the Sindh government of retaliatory actions against political opponents. He alleged that the PPP government is surpassing even authoritarianism by filing false cases and arresting opposition leaders.

He expressed these views while speaking to the media in Jacobabad. Other party leaders were also present on the occasion.

According to a JI statement, Mr Bhutto mentioned that the Sindh government is on a ventilator and cannot sustain for long. He claimed that contrary to Bhutto's manifesto, the PPP has become a party of oppressive feudal lords and chieftains.

He further alleged that the unrest and bandit rule in Sindh have the support of PPP leaders. He feared: "There is a risk of chaos and disorder spreading due to retaliatory actions against political opponents."

The JI leader remarked that by using the police for political purposes and registering false cases against Jamaat-e-Islami Sindh chief Kashif Saeed Sheikh and other leaders, the PPP government has even outdone the era of dictatorship.

He added that Jamaat-e-Islami believed in peaceful and constitutional struggle and would continue its efforts for the restoration of peace.

Nasir Shah announces to lighten remote areas with solar power

KARACHI (APP): The Sindh Minister for Energy and Planning and Development, Syed Nasir Hussain Shah, Thursday, said that efforts were underway to provide basic facilities to people in all the areas of the province while solar panels will be provided to off-grid areas.

The minister while addressing the inauguration ceremony of electricity supply in Abdullah Rind Goth of Manghopir Town said that Bilawal Bhutto Zardari's vision is to provide electricity to everyone.

Nasir Shah said that Abdullah Rind village is a pre-Pakistan settlement and currently comprises more than 450 houses which are being provided with electricity for the first time through K-Electric. He said that a project for provision of solar power systems to 200,000 households has already been started while the scheme to provide 500,000 solar systems will start this year.

Solar systems will be provided in areas where electricity has not reached so far while efforts will be made for establishing the solar park and provision of technical training to the local people for making employment opportunities available to them. PPP MNA Shahida Rehmani, the chairman Manghopir Town Nawaz Ali Brohi and other PPP leaders were present on the occasion.

Minister orders strict security arrangements for Ramazan

LAHORE (APP): Punjab Minister for Health and Chairman Cabinet Committee on Law and Order Khawaja Salman Rafique has directed the law-enforcement agencies to ensure strict security measures during the holy month of Ramazan.

Chairing the 23rd meeting of the Special Cabinet Committee on Law and Order at the Home Department on Thursday, he lauded CM Maryam Nawaz Sharif's leadership, stating that the successful organisation of the international cricket series and the Horse and Cattle Show was a testament to her efforts for the people of Punjab.

During the meeting, Secretary Punjab Home Department Noor-ul-Amin Mengal briefed the committee on the province's latest law and order situation. The committee reviewed security arrangements for Ramazan, as well as the ongoing ICC Champions Trophy.

The meeting was attended by senior officials, including Additional IG Punjab Chaudhry Sultan, Additional IG CTD and Special Branch, Special Secretary Home Fazlur Rehman, Commissioner Lahore, and other relevant officers. CCPO Lahore Bilal Siddique Kamiana, Chief Operating Officer PCB Sameer Ahmed Syed, Commissioner Rawalpindi Division, and RPO Rawalpindi participated via video link.

Strict action taken against encroachment in Lora Lai



F.P. Report

LORA LAI: In a decisive move to curb illegal encroachment, action has been taken against unlawful encroachment within the jurisdiction of the Lora Lai Cantonment. The initiative came on the direct instructions of the Director General of Military Lands and Cantonment.

Under the leadership of CEO Cantonment, Mr. Javed Ali, the Cantonment authorities have removed all illegal encroachments, both temporary and permanent, from the region. CEO Javed Ali emphasized that the Cantonment will not tolerate any illegal encroachment within its boundaries, reinforcing that no such encroachment will be allowed in the future.

"This operation was conducted with the full support of the civil administration, ensuring the removal of illegal proposals in accordance with military regulations," said Javed Ali. He added that strict actions will continue to be enforced against any future illegal encroachment in the area.

The collaborative efforts between the Cantonment authorities and civil administration underscore the commitment to upholding the rule of law and ensuring the proper development of the region.

The crackdown on illegal proposals marks a significant step towards maintaining order and enforcing regulations in Lora Lai Cantonment.

Sindh decides to install large screens across province

KARACHI (APP): The Sindh government had decided to install large screens across the province, for the Pakistan-India match in the ICC Champions Trophy on February 23. According to the press release, Provincial Sports Minister Muhammad Baksh Mahar stated that screens will be set up in Karachi, Hyderabad, and Larkana for the Pakistan-India match, and arrangements have also been made to broadcast the match live in 30 districts, including Ghotki.

He mentioned that the Pakistan-India match will be shown live at the beach in Karachi, while a large screen will be set up at the Sindh Youth Club Gulistan-e-Jauhar to broadcast the match live. Muhammad Baksh Mahar added that the match will also be shown live at Hyderabad's Niaz Stadium, Khairpur's Mumtaz Cricket Ground, and Tando Muhammad Khan.

According to a spokesperson, Sports Minister Sardar Muhammad Baksh Mahar will watch the Pakistan-India match with the people of his constituency in Ghotki on February 23.

Special Polio vaccination campaign from Feb 22

KARACHI (APP): Sindh Government, in collaboration with its partners, is launching a targeted polio vaccination campaign, the first phase of which is in 27 high-risk union councils of Karachi from February 22nd, to strengthen children's immunity and curb the transmission of the polio virus.

This first phase of the campaign aims to vaccinate 562,163 children under the age of five with Oral Polio Vaccine (OPV) and administer Fractional Inactivated Polio Vaccine (fIPV) to 521,953 children aged 4 months to under 5 years using painless jet injector technology.

As Pakistan's largest and most densely populated city, Karachi remains a crucial battleground in the fight against polio.

The city's frequent population movement contributes to the persistent presence of polio-virus in environmental samples. Despite repeated vaccination efforts, transmission risks remain high, making targeted campaigns essential to closing immunity gaps and protecting children from lifelong paralysis.

The use of painless jet injector technology for fIPV administration ensures a needle-free, stress-free experience for children. The combination of OPV and fIPV further strengthens immunity, offering additional protection in areas where the virus continues to circulate. Recently, in August 2024, an f-IPV campaign was successfully conducted in Karachi.

Speaking about the urgency of this campaign, Irshad Ali Sodhar, Provincial Coordinator of the Emergency Operations Centre (EOC) Sindh, stated: "Karachi remains one of the most critical areas for polio eradication due to continuous virus detection in environmental samples. This campaign is a crucial step in boosting children's immunity and ensuring no child is left vulnerable. We urge all parents to cooperate with vaccinators and ensure their children receive both OPV and fIPV doses. Every vaccination brings us closer to a polio-free future."



CS reviews province-wide preparation for Ramazan

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The Chief Secretary Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Shahab Ali Shah, chaired a high-level meeting to review the province-wide preparations for the holy month of Ramazan. The meeting was attended by Additional Chief Secretary Home & Tribal Affairs, AbidMajeed, Secretaries of the Food, Social Welfare, Industries, and Local Government Departments, and staff of the Performance Management and Reforms Unit.

Key aspects discussed included price fixation, establishment of monitoring mechanisms, quality assurance of essential commodities, prevention of hoarding, market assessment, waste management, crowd control, and a robust complaint resolution mechanism.

The meeting decided on the active involvement of traders, market associations, and consumer representatives to ensure fair pricing. The finalized prices will be widely publicized through social media, FM radio, print, and elec-

tronic media. Additionally, the fixed prices will be uploaded on the Price Control System in the Integrated Performance Management System (IPMS) managed by the PMRU.

It was also decided that the Deputy Commissioners will establish at least one Price Monitoring Camp/Desk per district, with the number of camps to be determined based on local requirements. Dedicated teams will ensure compliance with price lists displayed at shops, conduct surprise inspections, and address public complaints.

A comprehensive mechanism will be framed to check the quality of milk and food items. Halal Food Authority teams will be deployed to inspect the quality of Sehri and Iftari items, while checkpoints will be set up to test milk for adulteration.

Additionally, coordination with the Weights & Measures Inspectorate will ensure compliance with standard measures. Frequent surprise inspections of warehouses and storage facilities will be

conducted to detect and penalize hoarding.

Weekly assessments of market inventories and supply chains will be conducted to identify potential shortages. Coordination with wholesalers, traders, and suppliers will be strengthened to ensure adequate stock levels.

Dedicated teams will be constituted for waste collection and removal, starting a week prior to Ramazan. Sanitation teams will be deployed in crowded markets to manage waste, particularly during peak hours.

Special traffic management teams will be formed to regulate congestion in market areas, particularly before Iftar. Temporary parking arrangements will be created to reduce bottlenecks, and additional personnel will be deployed to manage crowds and ensure public safety.

The Chief Secretary directed all departments to ensure the timely implementation of these measures and maintain a high level of vigilance throughout Ramazan. He emphasized the need for coordi-

nated efforts among all stakeholders to facilitate the public and maintain market discipline during the holy month.

He directed the concerned authorities to issue a special duty roster for Ramazan, specifying personnel from relevant departments.

The Chief Secretary stated that the active presence of Price Control Magistrates, Food, Agriculture, Local Government, Industry departments, and the Food Authority is crucial for effective governance measures for Ramazan.

Chief Secretary Shahab Ali Shah directed the PMRU to activate a robust reporting and complaint mechanism, including mobile apps, to address public grievances. Additionally, instructions were issued for the activation of District Control Rooms with dedicated PTCL and WhatsApp numbers and complaint registration facilities at Price Monitoring Camps/Desks, as well as through the monitoring teams operating in the field.



PESHAWAR: Chief Secretary Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Shahab Ali Shah chairing a high level meeting on Ramazan preparations.



Amin to contest PHCBA polls

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: An alliance has been formed between the Malgari Lawyers and the Insaf Lawyers Forum for the Peshawar High Court Bar Association elections, and Amin ur Rehman Yousafzai Advocate has been nominated as the joint candidate.

This decision was made during a meeting between the leaders of the Malgari Lawyers and Insaf Lawyers Forum.

Amin ur Rehman Advocate, the nominated candidate, spoke to journalists and shared his agenda, which includes: activating the Law University in KP, introducing a scholarship program for young lawyers and upgrading the High Court library.

Advisor visit IMScience

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Advisor to Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa on Finance and Inter-Provincial Coordination Muzammil Aslam, emphasized the need to strengthen ties and cooperation between students and industries in Pakistan. Aslam stressed that entrepreneurs and startup founders must have knowledge of the capital market and consider opening an account at the stock exchange of Pakistan.

Advisor on finance expressed these views during his visit to the Institute of Management Sciences (IMScience) in Peshawar, where faculty members, students, and alumni presented successful startup businesses and ideas. The event was also attended by Director of the Institute of Management Sciences, Dr. Usman Ghani, and Director General of the Higher Education Commission, Nasser Shah.

Advisor Finance praised the alumni and students for their innovative ideas and startups, and commended the Institute of Management Sciences for maintaining its W-category ranking.

Chairperson NCRC discuss child health, welfare issues with Advisor

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Chairperson of the National Commission on the Rights of Child (NCRC), Ayesha Raza Farooq, along with her team, met with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Health Advisor, Ihtesham Ali, at his office. The meeting was attended by Special Secretary Health (Polio) Abdul Basit, Additional Secretary Health Manzoor Afridi, Director EPI Dr. Asghar Khan, Director MCH Dr. Khizar Hayat, NCRC KP Member Nadia Bibi, and Program Officer Maham Afridi.

During the meeting, discussions were held on key

child health concerns, including birth registration, the availability of medicines in Kurram, vaccination efforts in the southern districts, and enhancing outreach campaigns under the Big Catch-Up initiative.

The Health Advisor briefed the Chairperson on the healthcare situation in Kurram and the ongoing efforts to ensure the availability of essential medicines. He also shared insights on the achievements of the Big Catch-Up campaign and the progress made in vaccination programs.

Chairperson Ayesha Raza Farooq presented recommendations for improv-

ing birth registration, including the formal approval of birth registration rules. She proposed the validation of a health-integrated and data-interoperable model to streamline the registration process.

Addressing concerns regarding medicine shortages in Kurram, the Health Advisor clarified misinformation circulating on social media and highlighted the government's initiatives to ensure medical supplies.

Discussing polio vaccination, the Health Advisor emphasized the need for strategic changes in vaccination efforts, particularly in the southern districts. He

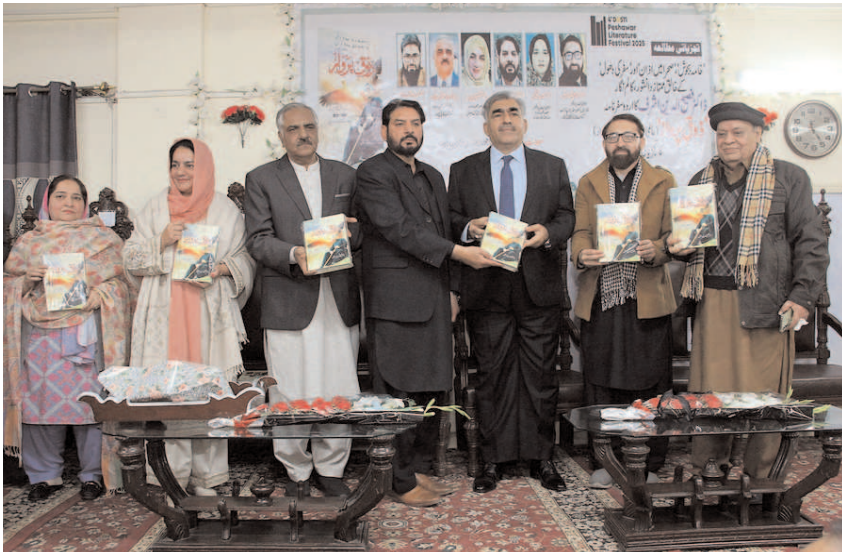
stated that donors should provide funds rather than dictate strategies, allowing local authorities to decide the best course of action.

He stressed the necessity of a strategic overhaul in the polio program to enhance its effectiveness.

The Health Advisor expressed gratitude to Chairperson Ayesha Raza Farooq and her team for their commitment to child welfare in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

He assured full cooperation from his office in strengthening departmental collaboration with the NCRC to safeguard and promote children's rights in the province.

Scholars and critics praise Dr Fasihuddin for his vital role



F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Scholars and critics from different universities and academic disciplines praised a senior police officer Dr Fasihuddin Ashraf, DIG and Commandant Police Training College for his exemplary contributions to literature, research and indigenous scholarship.

They spoke on the eve of launching ceremony of his recent book, Zooq-e-Perwaaz (the delight of journey), a travelogue which has been published by Progressive Books, Lahore.

Well known writers, authors and academics, Prof Nasar Ali Sayid, Prof. Khalid Sohail Malak, Prof. Sadia Khalil, Prof. Tehseen

Bibi, Prof. Hussain Sherazi, Prof. Ishaque Wardag, Prof. Ejazul Hasan and Dr. Imran Ahmad Sajid critically evaluated the book, its style, diction and contents. Prof. Dr. Tajjuddin Tajwar presided over the meeting.

The scholars regarded the book as a trend setter in the series of books on travelling and journey and a great addition to Urdu liter-

ature on national and international issues, affecting Pakistan and its citizens.

The ceremony was held at the Social Work Department and attended by teachers, students and research scholars of M.Phil and PhD.

The author Dr Fasihuddin Ashraf narrated a brief account of his presentations in more than 40 international conferences across globally which he attended from 2005 to 2019, the basic stories and discussions now compiled in his travelogue, Zooq-e-Perwaaz.

The book has now been selected by the University of Peshawar and Women University of Mardan for M.Phil research, it was announced.

Certificate distribution ceremony organized

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Secretary Establishment Zulfiqar Ali Shah has said that all officers should make public service their motto and serve the public without discrimination. It is an important milestone for your service that your training has been completed and you have joined the Provincial Management Services Group.

He expressed these views on Thursday while addressing the participants at the civil officer mess after the completion of program.

Director Staff Training Institute Dildar Muhammad, Private Secretary for Special Assistant to CM on Population Syed Shah Bacha, Deputy Secretary Chief Minister Secretariat Hashim Khan, Tehsildar Ajmal Khan, Sikandar Khan, Arbab Shahi Room, Tehsildar Sikandar Zaman and other concerned officers were also present on the occasion.

Waqar assign acting charge of DG NAB

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Mian Muhammad Waqar, a Grade 20 Director of NAB Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, will assume charge as the Acting Director General of NAB Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The Acting Chairman of NAB has assigned the additional responsibility of Acting Director General NAB Khyber Pakhtunkhwa to Mian Muhammad Waqar in the absence of Waqar Ahmed Chauhan, the Director General of NAB Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, who is on an overseas visit. Mian Muhammad Waqar will perform his duties as the Acting Director General NAB Khyber Pakhtunkhwa from February 21. A formal notification of his appointment has been issued by the Acting Chairman of NAB.

One-day climate conference held

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: A one-day Climate Conference was organized by the Progressive Climate Foundation (PCF) in collaboration with the Directorate of Youth Affairs Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and ATC at the Jawan Markaz Hayatabad. The conference aimed to provide an effective platform for youth to share their ideas and solutions regarding environmental and climate change issues. It also encouraged young people to collaborate with policymakers in promoting impactful environmental initiatives.

The event primarily focused on climate action, policymaking, and environmental education, led by young people. Discussions were held on incorporating environmental topics into the academic curriculum, exploring sustainable economic models, and promoting eco-friendly business strategies. The conference featured panel discussions with environmental experts, bridging the gap between policy formulation and practical implementation. Young participants presented innovative and feasible environmental solutions and projects.

To make the conference more engaging, activities such as a climate quiz, games, and awareness-raising interactive sessions were conducted. The Chief Guest of the conference was Barrister Muhammad Ali Saif, Advisor for Information, while Syed Qasim Ali Shah, Advisor for Social Welfare, also participated in the event.

Tauseef Khan, Founder and President of the Progressive Climate Foundation, emphasized the growing threats of climate change and stressed the crucial role of youth in combating environmental challenges. He stated that the conference aimed to bridge the gap between environmental policy and actionable solutions. The PCF Climate Conference 2025



reflected Pakistan's commitment to environmental initiatives and youth empowerment. He also invited youth, policymakers, environmental experts, and business leaders to collaborate in addressing Pakistan's climate challenges.

Project Director of PCF and EV Scholar, Mian Shahid Hamid, spoke about the challenges of climate change and the vital role of youth. The expert panel included Nida Gul, Dr. Taza Gul, Mian Shahid, and Muhammad Shayan Hamid, while the youth panel featured Azmat, Zahra Kamal, Faizyab, and Muhammad Aizaz.

At the end of the conference, Hamza Saleem, Vice President of the Progressive Climate Foundation, expressed gratitude to the guests, ATC, and the PCF Khyber Pakhtunkhwa team. To recognize outstanding contributions to environmental protection, certificates and awards were distributed among participants.

PHC dismisses writ against defamation suit hearing

Humayun Khan

PESHAWAR: Peshawar High Court Justice Fazal Subhan dismissed a petition seeking damages against former caretaker provincial minister Khushdil Khan for allegedly making false statements and damaging his reputation, on Thursday. The petition was filed in response to statements made by Khushdil Khan, which were published in various newspapers and channels. The statements allegedly damaged the reputation of Justice Fazal Subhan.

Khushdil Khan's lawyer argued that his client is a respectable citizen who was unfairly removed from the

caretaker cabinet due to false accusations. He stated that Khushdil Khan was removed from the cabinet on the basis of a letter sent by the Secretary of Defense, which alleged that Khan was working as the principal of a school while serving as a minister.

The lawyer claimed that this accusation was false and damaged Khushdil Khan's reputation. He demanded that the relevant authorities pay damages to his client.

However, the court upheld the decision of the lower court, stating that the case should be heard in the relevant courts in Peshawar, Rawalpindi, and

Islamabad, where the defendants reside. The court also cited Supreme Court rulings in support of its decision.

The petition was dismissed, and the court rejected the request to hear the case in Nowshera. Additional Attorney General Thanauallah and the provincial government's lawyer argued that the lower court's decision was correct and in accordance with the law and the Constitution.

They stated that the Supreme Court has already ruled on similar cases, and that the case should be heard in the relevant courts where the defendants reside.

Central Ruet-e-Hilal Committee to hold meeting

PESHAWAR (INP): In a significant move aimed at achieving uniformity in the start of Ramadan across Pakistan, the federal government has convened a meeting of Central Ruet-e-Hilal Committee in Peshawar.

The moon-sighting event for Ramadan 1446 AH will take place on February 28, 2025, in the provincial capital of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The meeting will be chaired by Maulana Abdul Khabir Azad, Chairman of the Central Ruet-e-Hilal Committee.

The meeting will see Zonal Ruet-e-Hilal Committees holding separate sessions at their respective locations, with the final

announcement regarding the sighting or non-sighting of the Ramadan moon to be made by the central committee based on evidence gathered from all regions.

Efforts are underway to finalize the arrangements for the event, and consultations are ongoing with religious scholars and relevant institutions to ensure harmony in the beginning of Ramadan throughout the country.

In a related development, the government is also preparing to roll out the largest-ever Ramadan Relief Package in the country's history. The Prime Minister has directed that the summary of the pack-

age be presented to the federal cabinet for approval.

Under consideration is a proposal to provide cash assistance to 3.9 million deserving families across the nation.

A one-time cash assistance of Rs. 5,000 per family is being discussed, with the total budget for the Ramadan package estimated at Rs. 20.5 billion. Funding for the package is being sourced from multiple government departments, with Rs. 10 billion from the Ministry of Industries and Production, Rs. 2 billion from the Benazir Income Support Program, and Rs. 8.5 billion from the Ministry of Finance.



PESHAWAR: Chairman All Pakistan Commercial Exporters Association Iftikhar Ahmad in a group photo with DG Exhibition Trade Development Authority of Pakistan Karachi Azhar Ali and others.

‘Basic Life Support and Emergency Care’ held

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Young Pharmacists Community, University of Peshawar, under the leadership of President Saqib Hussain and Mariam Shahab, organized a workshop on “Basic Life Support and Emergency Care” in collaboration with Rescue 1122.

The workshop was held at the Sahebzada Abdul Qayyum Hall, University of Peshawar.

The primary objective of the workshop was to educate participants about first aid and basic medical skills in emergency situations, enabling them to provide effective assistance in case of an unexpected emergency.

The workshop covered

essential topics such as CPR, choking, cardiac arrest, bleeding control, AED/Defibrillation, and Chain of Survival. Participants received comprehensive training on these critical subjects.

District Emergency Officer Rescue 1122 Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Mr. Ghayyur Khan, attended the workshop as a guest of honor.

The District Emergency Officer Rescue 1122 appreciated the organizers' efforts and emphasized the importance of basic life support skills for every individual, enabling them to save precious lives during emergency situations.

Additionally, Senior Procurement Officer from Khyber Teaching Hospital,

Ms. Seema Samin, and Supply Chain Officer Pharmacy, Mr. Inamullah Khalil, also attended the workshop and shared their thoughts.

Certificates were distributed among participants at the end of the workshop to formally acknowledge their training.

Participants expressed their satisfaction and gratitude after receiving the training, and congratulated the organizers on conducting such an informative and essential session.

Young Pharmacists Community expressed its commitment to continuing such awareness programs in the future to raise awareness about first aid and emergency services in the community.



In brief

Crackdown on profiteers
F.P. Report

BUNER: Deputy Commissioner cautioned traders and markets that looting of fasting locals will not be tolerated rather the profiteers and hoarders will spend Ramadan in Prison. ADC General Waseem, ADC, ACs, TMOs, Inspector Food, President Traders Federation Fazal Rabi and presidents of different bazaars and items participated in the meeting. The DC has shared that the provincial government has issued clear orders to provide relief to the people during the holly month of Ramadan and the district administration will make it sure at all. He added in the holly month of Ramadan, the business community and shopkeepers should play their role in providing relief to the fasting people so that they can earn reward in this blessed month of holly Ramadan by Almighty Allah.

Action against illegal colonies
F.P. Report

FAISALABAD: At the behest of Director General FDA Muhammad Asif Chaudhry, operation against illegal housing colonies has been expanded to additional populations as some developers are in violation of illegal housing schemes under the guise of additional populations. In this connection, the FDA's Enforcement Team destroyed the construction structures of four additional populations on Jhumra Road, while the office of an illegal housing scheme was overturned in the same area. According to the details, the Enforcement Inspector Aslam Ansari, Aslam Gujjar and other staff, under the supervision of State Officer Mian Qamar Shahzad, under the supervision of Director Town Planning Asma Mohsin, inspected Jhumra Road (Dry Port Road), Chak No. 202 RB and Chak No. 197 RB. The land was being set up additional populations. In action against whom there was a demolition of sewerage, roads and other illegal construction structures, and developers have been asked to refrain from setting up illegal schemes under the guise of additional populations, avoiding violating the law. In case of violations against the guilty Criminal cases can be filed. The FDA administration has notified the public to beware of illegal housing schemes and must investigate their legal status and record before buying or investing plots in any housing scheme so that they do not face any difficulty or trouble.

Khokhar flays conspiracies
F.P. Report

MUZAFFARABAD: Former Minister of Tourism and Transport, Muhammad Tahir Khokhar, said today that elements conspiring against Pakistan would never succeed. In a statement, he said that we stand with our army for the protection and stability of Pakistan. Khokhar mentioned that enemy forces were trying to weaken Pakistan by attempting to create terrorism and instability in the country. He said: "Pakistan's security and stability are being threatened by the forces of terrorism and military are vigorously confronting these challenges, and all citizen stands with their armed forces." He stated that India is supporting terrorists in Pakistan to create unrest in the country, but all these conspiracies of the enemy will fail because the Pakistani people and military are determined to defend the nation.

PML-N provides relief to masses, says Muqam

F.P. Report

SWABI: Federal Minister for States and Frontier Regions, Gilgit Baltistan and Kashmir Affairs, Engr Amir Muqam here Thursday said the Pakistan Muslim League (PML-N) has fulfilled the promise of development and provided relief to masses besides saved the country from an imminent economic default.

Addressing a big public gathering at Chota Lohor here, he said that PML-N Govt despite challenges has brought stability to the country besides put Pakistan on road to prosperity. He said the price hike has been slashed to four percent from 40 percent due to Govt goal oriented policies and its credit went to Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif and PML-N Quaid Muhammad Nawaz Sharif.

"The PML-N top leadership did not take care of political cost and took bold decisions by saving the country from an imminent economic collapse after the PTI founder put the national economy on the brink of collapse. Engr Amir

Muqam said that PTI founder was convicted in £190 million corruption case and has used expensive gifts worth millions of rupees for personal gains.

Engr Amir Muqam said that Muhammad Nawaz Sharif has eliminated terrorism and load shedding from the country in 2013 and price hike was record low during 2013-2018 while development was skyhigh. He accused the PTI for bringing terrorism, pricehike and load shedding back besides putting the national economy at the verge of collapsed.

The Federal Minister accused PTI founder for bringing tsunami of corruption in Pakistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and despite his party 11 years rule, no change has been witnessed in people lives in KP. Engr Amir Muqam said that only PTI loyalists were facilitated during change of their three Chief Ministers in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa while people were deprived of all facilities.

He questioned that had the Government of PML-N existed in KP then the youth of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa would defi-

nately have laptops, motorcycles, quality education, Kisan Card, modern agriculture, tractors, roads interchanges, free medicines and housing facilities like that of the Punjab province.

Engr Amir Muqam said that Chief Minister Punjab Maryam Nawaz Sharif was working tirelessly to provide relief to people while the KP Govt revolves around the Adyala jail. He said that people of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa have rejected the PTI negative politicking.

He questioned that how elements involved in May 9 attack could bring peace to the restive Kurram district. Engr Amir Muqam said the negative elements neither could fight terrorism nor bring peace and failed in all sectors. The Federal Minister said that Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif Govt was providing jobs, laptops and employment to youth while PTI has given them lathis, petrol bombs and jails. He claimed that PTI has made rigging with Maulana Fazlur Rehman and no body will accept his viewpoint if he sit with elements involved in rigging.

Wafaqi Mohtasib office inaugurated at Mirpur

F.P. Report

MIRPUR KHAS: The Wafaqi Mohtasib, Ejaz Ahmad Qureshi has formally inaugurated its Regional Office in Mirpur Khas (Sindh), on Thursday.

Addressing the inaugural ceremony, he urged the government officials to redouble their efforts for providing speedy relief to the public. He said that the institution of Wafaqi Mohtasib was receiving an increasing number of complaints as its outreach expanded and new offices have been established in Muzaffarabad (AJ&K) and Gilgit-Baltistan. "Now this office is providing services in 24 cities of the country and we plan to setup some more offices in the far-

flung areas during the current year", he added.

The inaugural ceremony was attended by the local heads of the Federal Government agencies there, apart from civil society members and the media. Speaking on the occasion, the Wafaqi Mohtasib said that the outgoing year 2024 was eventful in the sense that the office received a large number of complaints totaling 226,373, out of which 223,198 have been disposed of satisfactorily, marking an increase of 17 % and 16% in the receipt and disposal over the figures of 2023. He said that more than 93% of the decision have been implemented. He further added that our Investigating Officers

held Khuli Katcheries in far-flung and remote areas to provide administrative relief to the people.

Later, the Wafaqi Mohtasib, Qureshi also held a meeting with the heads of Federal Government agencies. He called upon the government officials to intensify efforts for prompt redressal of public complaints. Following the meeting, he informally spoke to the journalists and media representatives and highlighted the key initiatives of his office like the Informal Resolution of Disputes (IRD), Inspection Visits, Khuli Katcheries etc. which have been instrumental in providing effective redressal to public complaints.



HYDERABAD: A deserted view of Session Court after lawyers' boycott.

Shangla turns into darkness due to power outage

F.P. Report

SHANGLA: The residents of Shangla were left without electricity for 12 hours as the power supply was suspended due to rain. The power outage started on Wednesday night and continued till Thursday afternoon.

The power supply was suspended in the entire district, including the district headquarters Alpuri, Lilownai, and other surrounding areas. The residents were left to face severe cold weather without electricity. The power outage has become a routine matter in Shangla whenever it rains. The residents have expressed severe resentment over the suspension of power supply and have emended that the WAPDA authorities take immediate steps to resolve the issue.

The business community has also suffered heavily due to the power outage, which has resulted in huge financial losses. The traders have demanded that the

government take immediate action to resolve the issue and provide uninterrupted power supply to the district.

The WAPDA authorities have claimed that the power supply was suspended due to technical faults, but the residents have rejected this claim, saying that the power supply is suspended whenever it rains. The residents have demanded that the government take immediate action to resolve the issue and provide uninterrupted power supply to the district.

Meanwhile, the Shangla valley has received its first snowfall of the season, bringing an end to the dry spell in the region. The snowfall, which started on Wednesday evening, continued till Thursday afternoon, covering the entire valley in a thick layer of snow.

The snowfall was heaviest in the upper reaches of the valley, with some areas receiving up to 6 inches of snow. The lower-lying areas, includ-

ing the district headquarters Alpuri, received lighter snowfall. The snowfall has brought relief to the farmers and residents of the valle.

2 children injured in dog attack

MUZAFFARGARH (INP): Two children sustained injuries after being bitten by a neighbor's pet dog near Mondka city, Shah Jamal Road.

Rescue-1122 said here on Thursday that Muhammad Haseeb (7) along with his sister Anam Shabbir (5), both residents of Basti Bara, Mondka, was going to madrasa when the dog attacked them, left them severely injured. Upon getting information, rescue team reached the spot and shifted them to the District Headquarters (DHQ) Hospital (DHQ) for necessary vaccinations.



SHANGLA: Administan staff with the help of tractors removing ice from Khwaza Khela, Alpuri main highway after snowfall. — F.P. photo

Bar Association to observe strike
F.P. Report

BANNU: Bannu Bar Association has announced a strike in the courts while announcing its full support for the Bannu Aman National Jirga to be held today.

It has also announced to fight a legal battle against the transfer of the university's examination section to the township along with the Bannu Judicial Complex. The incompetent administration of the university should refrain from sending millions of students, otherwise the lawyers will take suo motu action against the transfer of national rights.

Bannu Bar President Shah Qiyaz Bacha Advocate and General Secretary Shoaib Khan Sadozai Advocate briefed the media after the cabinet meeting and said that after the approval of the Bannu Bar from the cabinet, the lawyers will participate in the protest sit-in at Police Line Chowk today on Friday on the call of the Bannu National Jirga in favor of the demands and the arrest of Bannu Bar member Haji Abdul Samad Khan, establishment of law and order and other issues.

Plantation drive launched
F.P. Report

MARDAN: Commissioner and Deputy Commissioner Mardan launched the Billion Tree Plus plantation campaign 2025, on Thursday. This initiative is part of government's Green Pakistan program.

The initiative aims to promote environmental conservation and tree plantation among the public. Pakistan Tobacco Company has pledged to provide 60,000 plants to the district administration, supporting long-term environmental goals. The campaign's objective is to raise awareness about the importance of tree plantation and environmental protection.

Commissioner Mardan Division Nisar Ahmed emphasized that tree plantation is crucial for mitigating the effects of climate change and promoting environmental improvement. The campaign will continue throughout the district in 2025, encouraging public participation and awareness.

Dead animal meat found
F.P. Report

TOBA TEK SINGH: A supplier of dead animal meat was caught red handed with 445 kg and FIR has been registered him, on Thursday.

During the DG Food Authority's direction, the food safety teams on 298 road while checking the vehicle The meat of the dead animal was to be prepared. On the occasion, the Veterinary Specialist declared the meat hazard after detailed examination. The supplier was without covered the meat.

The dead animals meat were hidden in the truck. An investigation has been launched to file a case against forgery. The Food Authority said that the dead health meat was to be supplied in the city and the surrounding areas. Preparing the dead animals meat is a serious crime. Therefore, citizens report all such fraudulent elements around them to the Punjab Food Authority's helpline 1223.

JI says tax-free status of Malakand to be retained

F.P. Report

LOWER DIR: Jamaat-e-Islami Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (North) chief Inayatullah Khan has urged the government to maintain Malakand Division's tax-free status for at least the next ten years. Chairing a meeting of the party's provincial office-bearers in Chakdara here the other day, he reaffirmed JI's commitment to protecting the region's rights.

He stated that he would engage with the Chamber of Commerce, traders, lawyers, political and social figures, and all segments of society to address the Malakand tax issue.

The meeting was attended by JI provincial general secretary Muhammad Haleem Bacha, deputy chief Bakhtiar Ma'ani, Arshad Zaman, former MPA Muhammad Amin, Hanifullah, Maulana Jama-luddin, secretary information Engineer Hafiz Yaqub ur Rehman, and former provincial minister Shah Raz Khan. Discussions centered on taxation issues and other political matters, with an emphasis on protecting Malakand Division's tax-exempt status.

Participants highlighted that despite contributing billions of rupees through

overseas remittances, electricity revenue, and forestry resources, the people of Malakand Division continued to face economic hardships. They unanimously resolved to resist any tax imposition in the region and warned the government against encroaching upon the rights of the local population. The meeting also stressed the urgent need to improve infrastructure and communication facilities in the area.

Meanwhile, JI Lower Dir staged a protest rally in Timergara against unannounced and prolonged power outages. The demonstration, led by former tehsil chief Malik Sher Bahadar, condemned the excessive load-shedding imposed by the Peshawar Electric Supply Company (PESCO).

Speaking at the protest, Malik Sher Bahadar criticized PESCO, calling it a "white elephant" for enforcing power cuts without justification. He stated that prolonged outages had disrupted water supply tube wells, leading to a severe drinking water crisis for residents and traders. He warned that if unannounced power cuts were not halted, citizens and traders would be compelled to withhold electricity bill payments.

Resolution for Dir Division Passed in Assembly: In another significant development, Chairman of the District Development Advisory Committee (DDAC) Lower Dir, MPA Ubaid ur Rehman, announced that the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly had unanimously passed his resolution for the establishment of Dir Division.

Speaking to journalists in Munda on Wednesday, the lawmaker stated that he had tabled the resolution to address administrative challenges posed by Malakand Division's vast and mountainous terrain. He proposed creating a separate Dir Division comprising Upper Chitral, Lower Chitral, Upper Dir, Lower Dir, and Bajaur districts, with Timergara as its headquarters. The resolution was put to a vote by the Provincial Assembly Speaker and was unanimously approved.

MPA Ubaid ur Rehman reiterated his commitment to serving the people and ensuring the progress and prosperity of the region. He emphasized that he was elected to highlight public concerns and vowed to work tirelessly for the district's development without discrimination.

Admn holds Kuli Katchery in Kohat

F.P. Report

KOHAT: District Administration Kohat has held a Kuli Katchery under the Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Program "Awami Agenda" chaired by the Deputy Commissioner Kohat Abdul Akram, in Chorlaki area of Tehsil Gumbat on Thursday.

Former Federal Interior Minister and senior leader of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf Shahryar Afridi MNA and Mayor Tehsil Gumbat Sajid Iqbal specially participated in the Katchery. The officers of district administration, heads of line departments, elders of the area and common people from the surrounding suburbs also participated in it.

On this occasion, elected representatives, social

workers and local elders presented in detail the problems and difficulties faced by the people at the local level. Most of the problems and grievances of the people were related to the electricity overbilling, load-shedding, shortage of teachers in schools, upgradation of schools, shortage of staff in hospitals, communication, irrigation and drinking water sectors.

Referring to the problems and difficulties presented by the people in the Katchery, Shahryar Afridi MNA and Deputy Commissioner Kohat said that the Kuli Katchery is an important and useful forum of the current government for solving public problems at the local level. Therefore, in order to make it effective, all the officers should give priority to the

implementation of the instructions received in this regard so that the people who are suffering from problems can get relief.

Expressing their anger at the absence of some important and responsible officers in the Katchery, they warned that this attitude of the officers is totally intolerable, so they should mend their way otherwise strict measures will be taken. They assured that concerted efforts will be made to solve the problems.

They further assured that none of the problems presented here will remain unsolved. Every department and institution is bound to solve the problems within the fixed deadline. Strict action will be taken in case of violation of the order. they concluded.

Civil society protests against incompetence policing

F.P. Report

LARKANA: The last social alliance protested in front of the press club against the increasing lawlessness, social vices, drug trafficking, and unresolved issues of citizens in Larkana district under the title "Long Live Peace."

On this occasion, the protesters held placards and banners that had writings such as "Slogans of Long Live Peace" and "End Lawlessness." The protesters also chanted slogans against the police. During this event, leaders of various organizations, including Hafiz Bashir Ahmad Sheikh, Liaquat Ali Umrani, Haji Ghulam Hussain Jatoli, and others, expressed strong protest, stating that in Larkana city and throughout the district's villages and urban areas, there have been robberies, thefts, murders, lawlessness, and especially illegal police actions, making life difficult for ordinary people. Recently, a Hindu trader, Sanjeev Kumar, was

murdered after being injured during a robbery, and the police have yet to arrest the responsible individuals.

Meanwhile, within the entire district, under the patronage of the Larkana police, obscenity, drug trafficking, gambling, and other social evils are openly taking place, which has pushed the younger generation to the brink of destruction instead of studying. However, the police have limited their actions to police stations. No appropriate measures have been taken by the administration regarding cleanliness in the city, resulting in heaps of garbage everywhere. Despite having an annual budget of billions of rupees, Larkana has been neglected, leading to corruption in the budget, allowing even small employees to live in lavish bungalows worth millions. They demanded that steps be taken against lawlessness, social vices, drug trafficking, and corruption, and to improve sanitation in the

city to ensure protection and basic facilities for the citizens.

Table Tennis tournament: The table tennis tournament was held, and the SSB team won the award. Under the special instructions issued by the Provincial Minister for Sports and Youth Affairs, Muhammad Bakhsh Mahar, a table tennis program was organized by the Sports and Youth Affairs Department, supervised by Sports Officer Larkana, Mahfooz Makani, at the M.A. Khuhro Complex in Larkana, where students from various educational institutions participated.

After tough and exciting competitions, the final match of the tournament was held between the SSP Table Tennis team and the Zabis Table Tennis Club team, in which the SSP team defeated the Zabis team by a score of 2-1, claiming the championship title, while the Sachal Table Tennis team secured the third position.



Zelensky meets Erdogan amid US shift on Ukraine

ISTANBUL (AFP): Turkey's Recep Tayyip Erdogan met with Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky in Ankara, as Kyiv seeks to shore up its position in response to US-Russia talks. Zelensky flew into the Turkish capital from the United Arab Emirates (UAE), saying on Telegram he would discuss prisoner exchanges and other issues with Erdogan.

The talks at Erdogan's presidential palace, which began around 1115 GMT, came several hours after top US and Russian diplomats met in Saudi for their first high-level talks since Moscow invaded Ukraine nearly three years ago. Zelensky, who last visited Turkey in March 2024, is himself due in Riyadh for a visit.

Top Erdogan aide Fahrettin Altun said the pair would discuss how to "further strengthen cooperation" between their two nations. NATO member Turkey has sought to maintain good relations with its warring Black Sea neighbours, with Erdogan pitching himself as a key go-between and possible peacemaker between the two. Ankara has provided drones for Ukraine but

shied away from Western-led sanctions on Moscow.

Alongside Saudi and the UAE, Turkey has played a role in brokering several prisoner swap deals between Russia and Ukraine which have seen hundreds of prisoners returning home despite the ongoing conflict. Earlier, Russia's Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov met in Riyadh with US Secretary of State Marco Rubio as part of what the Kremlin says is a bid to re-open ties with Washington. US and Russian officials are eyeing a summit between their two leaders, with Europe and Kyiv worried they will try to end the war in Ukraine without them.

Earlier, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said he had discussed bringing back Ukrainians from Russian captivity with UAE President Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan at a meeting in Abu Dhabi. "The UAE's mediation has saved many lives," Zelenskyy wrote on X. "We are grateful for this crucial cooperation and today we discussed how to continue it." The United Arab Emirates has played a key role in overseeing the return of Ukrainians deported to Russia during

the nearly three-year-old war, many of them children.

Zelenskyy had said earlier that the top priority for his visit was to ensure "that still more of our people are able to return home from captivity". He also announced the signing of an economic agreement between two countries that liberalizes access to the UAE market for nearly all Ukrainian goods. The comprehensive economic partnership covers goods, services, investments and digital trade among other sectors, Ukraine's Economy Minister Yulia Svyrydenko said on X.

"In the medium to long term, this partnership alone is expected to contribute around 0.10% to Ukraine's GDP growth trajectory," she said. The highest growth rates are expected in transportation, metallurgy and the food industry, Svyrydenko added. During the meeting, Sheikh Mohammed reaffirmed UAE's commitment to support a peaceful resolution to the Ukraine conflict and initiatives to ease its humanitarian impact. US and Russian officials will meet in Saudi Arabia in the coming days to start talks aimed at ending the war.

Russian attack injures civilians in Ukraine

KYIV (Reuters): An large-scale overnight Russian drone attack hit a residential building in the city of Dolynska in central Ukraine, injuring a mother and her two children and forcing evacuations from 38 apartments, a regional official said.

"A difficult night for the Kirovohrad region," Andriy Raikovich, the region's governor, said in a post on the Telegram messaging app. "An enemy drone hit a high-rise building in Dolynska." The mother and one of the children were taken to hospital, said Raikovich, who posted photos of flames bursting out of windows of a high-storey apartment building.

The Ukrainian military said that Russia launched 176 drones in a large-scale attack. Ukraine's air force shot down 103 of the drones and 67 did not reach their targets, probably due to electronic countermeasures, the military said. It did not specify what happened to the remaining six drones, but said that Kirovohrad, Kharkiv, Kyiv and Cherkasy regions were impacted.

Kyiv mayor Vitali Klitschko said that drone debris fell in one of the districts of the capital, causing a fire at an industrial enterprise. Reuters could not independently verify the report. There was no immediate comment from Russia. Both Moscow and Kyiv deny targeting civilians in the war, which Russia started with its full-scale invasion on Ukraine nearly three years ago. But thousands of civilians have died in the conflict, the vast majority of them Ukrainian. The attack took place as top Russian and US officials are meeting in Saudi Arabia for talks - without the participation of Kyiv or its European allies - on how to end the war in Ukraine.

US to cut size of diplomatic mission in China

WASHINGTON/BEIJING (Reuters): The United States is set to cut the size of its diplomatic mission in China by up to 10%, the South China Morning Post (SCMP) reported, citing people familiar with the situation.

American diplomats working in mainland China and Hong Kong as well as local employees might be given notice in a round of downsizing that the media outlet described as unprecedented. The cuts would affect the embassy in Beijing and the consulates in Guangzhou, Shanghai, Shenyang and Wuhan, as well as the consulate in Hong Kong, the SCMP said.

It was not clear whether any of those affected would be reassigned elsewhere in the diplomatic service, but layoffs are expected, it added. Two sources familiar with the situation told Reuters the leadership of the mission to China had sent out a message to embassy staff "refuting" the report. Embassy spokespeople did not immediately respond to a request for comment and the US State Department had no immediate comment.

President Donald Trump's administration has asked US embassies worldwide to prepare for staff cuts, sources told Reuters last week, as part of the Republican president's effort to overhaul the US diplomatic corps. Trump and his billionaire ally Elon Musk have been making efforts since Trump took office on January 20 to cut US government spending they consider wasteful. The United States has a large diplomatic workforce in China and those in Beijing are located in a 10-acre site consisting of six buildings, including an annex completed in 2016.

According to the website of the US Embassy and Consulates in China, the Beijing embassy complex houses more than 1,300 American and locally hired staff representing almost 50 different US federal agencies.

Martin Romualdez assassinated if she herself were fatally attacked amid an escalating political rivalry between the two highest leaders of one of Asia's most unwieldy democracies. The vice president has denied that her remarks in an online news conference in November amounted to a threat to kill Marcos although that was what she literally said.

The International Criminal Court has been investigating the large number of killings that happened under the former president's crackdowns against illegal drugs, which left thousands of mostly poor suspect dead, as a possible crime against humanity. Duterte has denied he authorized extrajudicial killings under his anti-drugs crackdowns while he was in office, but he has openly and repeatedly threatened to kill suspected drug dealers while in power.



BEIRUT: A returning resident walking near a damaged site amid destroyed buildings, as Israeli troops withdrew from most of south Lebanon.

British Army 'absolutely ready' if ordered to deploy to Ukraine

LONDON (BBC): The British Army has said it is ready to deploy to Ukraine if requested by the government. This week, 2,500 UK troops from the Army's high readiness force, the First Division, have been taking part in a large Nato exercise in Romania - on a training area just 16 miles (25km) from the border with Ukraine.

Although mobile phones have been banned on the exercise, most soldiers are aware that there are now initial discussions to send troops to Ukraine itself. Brigadier Andy Watson, who is commanding the British contribution to the Nato exercise, says his brigade "is absolutely ready" should they receive orders to deploy to Ukraine. Earlier this week Keir Starmer said that he was ready and willing to send British troops to Ukraine to help guarantee its security, should there be a ceasefire.

But so far he too is unclear as to what they might be asked to do. In terms of numbers of troops that might be needed, Brigadier Watson said "clearly what the force package would look like would be dependent on what the prime minister and the Ministry of Defence would like". But he said "it's absolutely not" something the UK could do on its own. "I think the prime minister has been very clear that the UK would contribute to efforts, but absolutely not doing it on our own," says Brigadier Watson.

Exercise Steadfast Dart is Nato's largest exercise this year and meant to demonstrate how quickly allies can come to the defence of an ally under attack. But while it's meant to demonstrate Nato's readiness, it also highlights its limitations too. The UK has

shown it can move large numbers of troops and equipment, including more than 700 military vehicles, 1,400 miles (2,253 km) across Europe at relatively short notice as part of Nato's new Allied Reaction Force. And that it can operate alongside allies. More than 10,000 military personnel are taking part in the exercise from eight European nations. But that is just 10% of the number that most military experts believe might be required for any peacekeeping operation inside Ukraine which might require a force of more than 100,000.

Some of the nations taking part, like Spain and Italy, have not even met Nato's own spending target for defence of 2% of GDP, set more than a decade ago. Many, including the UK, have experienced recent cuts in the size of their armed forces. When British forces were sent to Helmand in 2009, the British Army had more than 100,000 regular troops. Now it is at its smallest since the Napoleonic wars, at just over 70,000. Even before the cuts, the British Army was stretched sending a force of 9,000 troops. It required additional defence spending for urgent operational equipment, as well as a rolling deployment of fresh troops every six months. A regular Army of around 73,000 would now struggle to do something on a similar scale.

Steadfast Dart is meant to show that Nato's European allies can respond to a crisis. Unusually, for a large Nato military exercise, US forces are not directly involved. But America remains Nato's most powerful and largest military member and its absence from any plan to guarantee Ukraine's security would leave a gaping hole. That's why Keir Starmer

and his Defence Secretary John Healey are calling for the US to be involved, despite the Trump administration's insistence that there will be no US boots on the ground.

Healey said that European nations would have to play a leading role but he added that "it is only the US that can provide the deterrence to Putin that will prevent him attacking again". Nato's intervention in Libya in 2011 illustrated how European nations struggled without their biggest partner. The US was supposed to take a back seat in the bombing campaign but was still heavily relied on for logistics - air-to-air refuelling - and providing intelligence and surveillance. Back at Exercise Steadfast Dart, Colonel Gordon Muir, who commands 4 Scots troops and previously fought alongside the US in Afghanistan, said "there's a famous Highland saying - that friends are good on the day of battle". He said there are few circumstances when you want to go it alone.

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine should have been the wake-up call that European nations needed. Most of its members are now spending 2% of their GDP on defence. But Nato Secretary General Mark Rutte now says that is not enough and is pushing for more than 3%. The Trump administration says it should be more like 5% of GDP. The UK government has still not set a date for its new spending target of 2.5%. Europe has also been slow to ramp up defence production. But Exercise Steadfast Dart shows that some lessons are being learned from the war in Ukraine. There is an emphasis on trench and urban warfare as well as combatting drones.

Vietnam's strict new social media regulations strangle free speech

BANGKOK (AP): New government regulations on social media in Vietnam give authorities increased powers to prevent dissent and control the news, along with the tools to more easily track down critics and silence them, according to an analysis released.

Vietnam's authorities implemented "Decree 147" in December, tightening regulations on social media companies like Facebook, X, YouTube and TikTok in a bid to further stifle criticism, said Ben Swanton, one of the authors of the report by The 88 Project, a group focused on human rights and free speech issues in Vietnam. "Any challenge to the government and the Communist Party, any significant challenge to their official narrative of events, is perceived by them as a situation that is getting out of control," he said in an interview from Thailand.

Among other things, the decree requires users to verify their accounts with phone numbers or national ID cards that must be provided to the government upon request, and for the

social media companies to store their data in Vietnam. It also prevents social media users from engaging in citizen journalism or posting information about suspected government wrongdoing, and requires companies to remove posts deemed illegal within 24 hours. The decree requires companies to allow authorities access to their internal search engines so that it can identify offending content.

Social media companies have until late March to be in compliance, and it is not yet clear whether they will try to push back. TikTok and Facebook refused to comment on their plans, while X and Google, which owns YouTube, did not return emails. Already, however, researchers have noticed a decline in political posts, Swanton said. "In the last several years Hanoi has imprisoned or forced into exile the country's most prominent independent journalists, reformers, human rights activists, and dissidents. This has had a chilling effect that encourages people to engage in self-censorship," he said. "Decree 147 is designed to

turn this chilling effect into an icy stranglehold on free speech."

Vietnamese authorities did not respond to a request for comment on the Project 88 analysis or the intent behind the new decree. About 65 million Vietnamese have Facebook accounts, roughly two-thirds of the population, and some 35 million have YouTube accounts. About half of Vietnam's people say they get most of their news from social media. Already, the government frequently insists critical posts from outside the country be geo-blocked so they cannot be accessed inside Vietnam and it has moved quickly to censor posts it deems unacceptable, like a video of a top minister eating a gold-encrusted steak in London in 2021 while Vietnam was on COVID-19 lockdown.

In October, a prominent Vietnamese blogger was sentenced to 12 years in prison for articles and videos exposing the corruption of government officials, and in January, a prominent Vietnamese lawyer was sentenced to

India anger as judge frees man accused of raping wife who then died

NEW DELHI (BBC): An Indian court's ruling that a man's forced "unnatural sex" with his wife is not an offence has led to huge outrage and sparked renewed calls for better protections for married women.

The controversial order has also brought back into the spotlight the issue of marital rape in a country which has stubbornly refused to criminalise it. Earlier this week, a high court judge in the central Indian state of Chhattisgarh set free a 40-year-old man who was convicted by a trial court in 2019 of rape

and unnatural sex with his wife, who died within hours of the alleged assault.

The lower court had also found the man guilty of "culpable homicide not amounting to murder". He was sentenced to "rigorous imprisonment for 10 years" on each count, with all the sentences to run concurrently. But, the High Court's Justice Narendra Kumar Vyas acquitted the man of all charges, saying that since India did not recognise marital rape, the husband could not be considered guilty of non-consensual sex or any non-con-

sensual unnatural sexual act.

The judgement has been met with anger, as activists, lawyers and campaigners renew their calls to criminalise marital rape in India. "To watch this man walk away is unacceptable. This judgement may be correct legally, but it is ethically and morally abhorrent," said lawyer and gender rights activist Sukriti Chauhan.

"An order that absolves a man of such a crime, to say it's not a crime, is the darkest hour in our legal system," she told the BBC. "It

Can Europe match words with actions post Munich?

BRUSSELS (AFP): Lofty rhetoric and frank acknowledgements of a new world order have not been in short supply from European leaders since the new American administration of Donald Trump took office, but it will take an immense leap to translate such sentiments into reality, analysts and observers say.

Trump spoke over the heads of not only Europe but also Ukraine by declaring he was ready to negotiate with Russia to end the three-year war, while his Vice President JD Vance left seasoned policymakers dazed with a withering attack on the European Union at the Munich Security Forum. "It's really a 'make or break' moment," said a European source, asking to be named, adding: "while the war continues, (...) things bigger than Ukraine are at stake in Ukraine, starting with our security."

The shock switch in policy from the United States prompted European leaders to vow to ramp up defence capacities through higher spending and even to consider sending troops to Ukraine to enforce an eventual ceasefire. Emergency talks of key European leaders called by French President Emmanuel Macron were aimed at showing a united front, but immediately exposed tensions with German Chancellor Olaf Scholz saying he was "a little irritated" by suggestions, from the likes of British Prime Minister Keir Starmer, that troops should be deployed.

In the most concrete sign

that the United States has brought Russia back from the cold, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov held talks with American counterpart Marco Rubio in Saudi Arabia later. Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk told reporters in Paris: "Everyone at this meeting is aware that transatlantic relations, the NATO alliance and our friendship with the United States have entered a new phase."

NATO chief Mark Rutte said the Europeans were "ready and willing" to step up, while EU commission chief Ursula von der Leyen called for a "surge" in defence.

The chairman of the Munich Security Forum Christoph Heusgen, after the annual conference was shocked by Vance's speech, went as far as to say: "We have to fear that our common-value base is not that common anymore". As if to emphasise his point, some accounts on social media edited his speech to show him weeping when he said this, although in fact his emotion came after he thanked his team over his last year in charge. "This unfortunately shows again how the mechanisms of disinformation work," Heusgen later said on social media.

Phillips O'Brien, professor of strategic studies at the University of St Andrews, said that while the west is "perilously close to the worst-case scenario on Trump and Ukraine", Europe should have seen the trouble coming. "The European reaction seemed stunned -- which is just as

worrying," he said.

For Alberto Alemanno, professor of EU law at the HEC Paris business school, the Paris meeting showed "major differences" among European countries over committing peacekeeping troops to Ukraine and funding a massive defence investment push. "At least the debate is now in full swing across capitals and beyond but the clock is ticking," he said.

The potential challenge of finding unity within the EU were underlined by the stance at the Elysee Palace meeting of Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni who arrived conspicuously late and echoed concerns about troop deployments. Sending troops was "the most complex and the least effective" way of securing peace in Ukraine, she said according to reports confirmed by an Italian government source to AFP.

Meloni, who revels in her cordial ties with Trump and his advisor the X and Tesla owner Elon Musk, also said the meeting should not be an "anti-Trump" initiative, the source added. Latvian President Edgars Rinkevics, whose country shares a border with Russia, said that since the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, there had been much talk in Europe about increasing defence spending, but "our capabilities are not enough". "I'm afraid that, after a couple of days, after strong statements, we will somehow relax, will relax again, and we will go back to business as usual," he said after the Munich meeting.

Philippine ex-President faces criminal complaint

MANILA (AP): Former Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte is facing a criminal complaint over comments he made during a campaign rally when he said 15 senators should be killed in a bombing to allow more vacant seats for his own party's candidates to fill. The alleged illegal utterances and inciting to sedition were contained in a complaint filed by police Maj. Gen. Nicolas Torre III to the Department of Justice. They are the latest legal trouble to face the former president and his family under President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. Campaigning is underway for half of the 24 Senate seats for the May 12 mid-term elections in the Philippines. The former president's camp said his remarks were just a joke uttered to liven up a political rally for the nine senatorial candidates of his PDP-Laban party.

"Let's kill senators now

so there will be vacancies," Duterte said at the proclamation rally of his party's senatorial candidates. "If we can kill about 15 senators, we're in...the only way to do it is, let's just stage an explosion." Torre said the tumultuous era during Duterte's six-year presidency, when he could just publicly threaten to kill anybody, was over.

"Our country went through a lot of troubles in those past six years," Torre told reporters. "Do we want those troubles to continue, the constant threats of killings that they will dismiss later by just saying that these were just a joke?" The danger with such remarks, Torre added, was that followers may take Duterte's remarks seriously and carry them out.

Duterte's daughter, Vice President Sara Duterte, is facing an impeachment trial partly for publicly threatening to have Marcos, his wife and House Speaker

so there will be vacancies," Duterte said at the proclamation rally of his party's senatorial candidates. "If we can kill about 15 senators, we're in...the only way to do it is, let's just stage an explosion." Torre said the tumultuous era during Duterte's six-year presidency, when he could just publicly threaten to kill anybody, was over.

"Our country went through a lot of troubles in those past six years," Torre told reporters. "Do we want those troubles to continue, the constant threats of killings that they will dismiss later by just saying that these were just a joke?" The danger with such remarks, Torre added, was that followers may take Duterte's remarks seriously and carry them out.

Duterte's daughter, Vice President Sara Duterte, is facing an impeachment trial partly for publicly threatening to have Marcos, his wife and House Speaker

has shaken us to the core. This needs to change and change quickly," Priyanka Shukla, a lawyer in Chhattisgarh, said a judgement like this "sends out the message that because you're the husband, you have rights. And you can do anything, you can even get away with murder".

She added that this is not the first time a court has given such a judgement, and there is always anger. "This time, the outrage is more because it is so gruesome and the woman died." The court documents make for grim reading.

The Frontier Post

Rehmat Shah Afridi (Late)

Founder

Bilal Shah Afridi

Chief Executive

Jalil Afridi

Managing Editor

Printed and published by Mahmood Afridi at Moraka's

Printers, 27 Abdara Road, University Town, Peshawar.

Peshawar Office: 0300- 9009001

Peshawar Fax: 091-5703687, Post Box No. 573

E-mail: fppeshawar@thefrontierpost.com

Lahore Office: 0335-4026284

Email: fplahore@thefrontierpost.com

Islamabad Office: 0321-5066253

Email: mahmoodafridi@thefrontierpost.com

Karachi Office: 021-32213411, 0300-8340907

Email: fpkarachi@thefrontierpost.com

*USA and Canada Toll Free Number 1-800-5905747

Türkiye's Asia anew initiative

TURKISH President Erdogan's visit to Malaysia, Indonesia, and Pakistan was primarily aimed at strengthening cooperation and aligning shared strategic interests. Since August 2019, Türkiye has been redefining its priorities in Asia through its Asia Anew initiative, seeking to reassert its multidimensional foreign policy in an increasingly complex and multipolar world. The timing of Erdogan's Asia tour is particularly significant, as global humanitarian concerns like the Palestine issue remain unresolved, and the world order faces new challenges, especially the return of Trump to power in the US.

In recent decades, modern Türkiye-especially under the "Asia Anew" initiative-has primarily viewed Asia through a trade and economic lens. However, President Erdogan's recent tour highlighted that Türkiye's engagement with the region extends beyond commerce, encompassing strategic, defense, and cultural dimensions that offer far greater significance than trade alone.

It is obvious that President Erdogan's visits to three major Asian nations-Malaysia, Indonesia, and Pakistan-highlight his widespread popularity in the region. While Türkiye has strong economic and strategic ties with these countries, Erdogan's appeal goes beyond material interests. His leadership is seen as a symbol of emotional ownership and commitment to global issues. Many Muslim-majority and humanitarian-oriented nations view Erdogan as their representative, especially due to his vocal stance on conflicts in Syria, Iraq, Palestine, Arakan's Rohingya people, Libya, Qatar, or even in Azerbaijan, Somalia, or Ukraine. In contrast to many global leaders, Erdogan's consistent advocacy for peace and sustainable solutions has strengthened his influence and reputation in Asia.

Moreover, Türkiye's public diplomacy and soft power have significantly contributed to President Erdogan's popularity, both in these Asian nations and globally. State and non-state institutions such as TİKA, YTB, Maarif Foundation, Yunus Emre Institute, TRT, Anadolu Agency, Religious Affairs Directorate, Türk Red Crescent, AFAD, and civil society institutes have played active and key roles in strengthening Türkiye's presence in Asia. Additionally, Türkiye's historical TV series have further enhanced its cultural influence, solidifying Erdogan's image as a prominent and respected leader in this region.

While many Muslim countries and leaders exist worldwide, Erdogan stands out as one of the few who has consistently advocated for Muslim communities and their causes over the past two decades. Nations such as Malaysia, Indonesia, and Pakistan perceive Türkiye as a reliable ally, believing that if they were to face external challenges, Türkiye would be among the first or possibly the only country to offer support. Historical instances further reinforce this perception, showcasing Türkiye's unwavering commitment to standing with these nations in times of need.

In recent times, global politics has been shifting significantly, largely due to China's rise and its strategic influence, particularly in Asia. The USA's response to China's expansion further underscores the region's growing geopolitical importance. Additionally, initiatives such as China's Belt and Road Initiative, Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, or BRICS, alongside the US Indo-Pacific Strategy, Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad), or AUKUS, highlight why Asia remains a focal point for international politics, especially for nations aspiring to attain great power status.

Given this perspective, it is obvious that Türkiye, following its crucial role, advocacy, and support, if needed for Syria, Azerbaijan, Somalia, or Qatar, is on the path to becoming an emerging great power. However, to achieve this goal, Türkiye needs more reliable partners and strong allies. In this context, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Pakistan stand out as strategic choices, offering Türkiye the necessary support and opportunities to establish a stronger presence in the region.

Strategically, the geopolitical significance of these three countries explains why Türkiye has chosen to strengthen its cooperation with them. Türkiye is positioning itself in three crucial geographical, geopolitical, geoeconomic, and geostrategic hubs, where these countries act as "key allies" in the Southeast and South Asia region. The entire partnership is founded on a mutually beneficial 'win-win' cooperation.

Türkiye aims to prioritize expanding trade and economic ties, followed by enhancing defense cooperation through this partnership. Malaysia and Indonesia are particularly strategic choices for Türkiye due to their significant geoeconomic and geostrategic positions, as both hold strong economic influence globally and regionally. While the partnership initially focused on economic collaboration, both Malaysia and Indonesia have shown a keen interest in deepening defense relations. Türkiye already has a strong defense presence in these countries, with ASELSAN operating a branch in Malaysia and BAYKAR recently signing a major defense partnership with Indonesia during the latest visit. This demonstrates a shared commitment to expanding collaboration beyond trade to include cultural, educational, and broader economic cooperation.

Pakistan's inclusion is also crucial due to its significant geopolitical role for Türkiye, particularly in shaping its future role in international politics. As highlighted by President Erdogan's recent visit, Türkiye is seeking not only to expand trade with Pakistan but also to establish a stronger geostrategic and geo-security presence in Central and West Asia. Looking ahead, Türkiye's growing engagement in Central Asia will be more effective with a solid foothold in Pakistan. To achieve this, Türkiye should prioritize forging a robust defense pact with Pakistan, which could later be expanded to include countries like Bangladesh, Malaysia, and Indonesia. Such a strategic alliance would bolster Türkiye's regional leadership while allowing it to maintain an independent stance without being drawn into the power struggle between the USA and China. Notably, President Erdogan's visit to these three Asian countries was driven not solely by Türkiye's national interests. Instead, his tour also emphasized global humanitarian concerns, particularly advocating for a unified stance in support of the Palestinian people. By aligning with Malaysia, Indonesia, and Pakistan on this issue, President Erdogan aimed to mobilize international solidarity and gather broader backing to assist the Palestinian cause against oppression.

Important Notice

The Frontier Post will not be responsible for the comments in the articles and letters. The Frontier Post requests the writers of articles and letters to please make sure that they write their email addresses and mention the names of the cities, towns, districts or tehsil of their residences at the bottom of their articles and letters.



History will judge Europe if it doesn't stand up to Putin

Sophie in't Veld

THIS year's Munich Security Conference takes place under the darkest clouds in decades. The foundations of the post-war world order are shaking, and we are entering the great unknown. Donald Trump has made the US an unpredictable and unreliable member of NATO, displaying open contempt for Europe. For decades, Europe comfortably and lazily bobbed along with the US, developing its internal market while the Americans ensured our security.

The past three years have been a rude awakening - yet many European leaders still prefer to pull the pillow over their heads and pretend business as usual will suffice. But Europe's security is directly tied to Ukraine's survival. If Ukraine falls, Putin will be emboldened to aim for new targets. Even if the war ends with a deal in which Ukraine's sovereignty is preserved, Putin will undoubtedly use the time to regroup and prepare for the next attack. Analyses by various intelligence services in Europe have warned that he is already eyeing targets within the EU. These warnings must be taken very seriously. We should learn the lessons of 2014 and 2022 and act accordingly. Three weeks into Trump's second presidency, Europe must urgently determine its response to his whirlwind tactics and blustering. It has tried appeasing Trump by bringing him myrrh and incense. It tried mild threats of retaliation. It tried moral arguments. But Trump only understands one language: the language of power. Unfortunately, Europe has little hard power of its own. So it has to be bold, smart and find strong friends - and keep in mind that ultimately, despite the rough language, the US still needs Europe.

The fact that Trump spoke with Putin before speaking with Zelensky is very disturbing. Giving in to Putin before talks have even started is even worse. The EU's foreign policy chief Kaja Kallas was right to immediately make clear that it stands firmly by Ukraine and will reject any backroom deals over its future. We don't need a new Yalta conference. However, Europe does not have enough power to back up

its position on its own. It must urgently build a solid alliance with like-minded countries like the U.K. and Canada and present a unified front within NATO.

Europe must keep its cool in the face of Trump's bravado and claim its seat at the negotiating table. NATO membership for Ukraine must remain part of the discussion. Sovereign nations - not Putin or his friends in the US - decide their own alliances.

Ukraine's security must be backed by rock-solid guarantees. Putin cannot be trusted to honor agree-

enforcing EU sanctions in full. There can be zero tolerance for circumvention or violation of sanctions and for non-implementation by member states. Putin must feel the full force of these measures.

The EU must also reform its enlargement policy, and fast. The slow, technocratic accession procedure was designed for a different era. Enlargement is, and always has been, a political and strategic instrument, but leaders preferred to sell their voters the myth that it was an administrative procedure, a tick-box exercise based on

tant to bring it into the EU.

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

Europeans should also start to understand that there is no cheap, painless solution. This is not someone else's war - this war concerns us directly, even if we are utterly unprepared for this kind of situation.

For decades, Europe ignored calls to strengthen its defense and geopolitical power. They clung to illusory notions of national sovereignty and treated the EU as mere intergovernmental cooperation. Is it a coincidence that Putin's lapdogs are among the strongest opponents of a strong federal Europe? For years they aimed for European disintegration, campaigning for Brexit, Frexit and Nexit. Now they have adapted their strategy, seeking to dismantle the EU from within. Mainstream parties must understand that a weak EU is a key part of pro-Putin parties' agendas - even if the rhetoric of intergovernmental Europe also aligns with national politicians' ambitions.

Today, we are all paying a high price for not having built up a strong Europe in more tranquil times, and the cost of our collective denial is going up by the day.

Europe can still change the dynamic, but the window of opportunity is closing fast. The EU rose from the ashes of two world wars and united the continents after years of division and dictatorship. The Union is now entering a new phase. European leaders will have to follow in the footsteps of the EU's founding fathers. They must demonstrate the courage and vision needed to build a bigger, stronger Europe that protects its citizens. History will judge us.

Europe has to make it crystal clear who belongs in the European family. In the face of US threats to block Ukraine's NATO membership, it is even more important to bring it into the EU. The Baltic states' disconnection from the Russian energy grid last week was a small but significant step showing the way for the rest of Europe. The EU has been discussing energy independence for many years. The time for debates, white papers and task forces is over. Europe now needs to put its money where its mouth is and act. The same goes for raw materials.

ments, and Kyiv has certainly not forgotten how previous deals meant to guarantee its security were simply ignored and promises were broken - resulting in today's situation.

Europe and its allies should also push for US involvement in enforcing any future security guarantees for Ukraine. Of course, Europe itself will have to provide large numbers of troops, even if national leaders still dismiss the possibility.

At the same time, the EU should ensure that Russia enters talks in the weakest position possible. This means drastically and rapidly ramping up support to Ukraine as well as finally

purely technical criteria. They used the procedure to keep countries out rather than integrating them efficiently.

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

Risk of sidelining Ukraine

Maksym Skrypchenko

DIPLOMATIC efforts to end the Russia-Ukraine War are once again in the spotlight, as US and Russian officials meet in Saudi Arabia on Tuesday. In a sharp contrast to the previous administration's strictly defined red-line policy, representatives from the newly formed US President Donald Trump-aligned diplomatic team-Secretary of State Marco Rubio, National Security Advisor Mike Waltz, and Middle East envoy Steve Witkoff-are set to engage with their Russian counterparts in discussions that many fear may sideline Ukraine's own interests.

The stakes in this conflict extend far beyond territorial disputes. For Ukraine, the war is an existential struggle against an enemy with centuries of imperial ambition. Every defensive maneuver is a stand for sovereignty and self-determination. Yet recent diplomatic moves suggest that Ukraine's central role in negotiations may be diminished. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's absence from the Saudi meeting underscores the deep-seated concern in Kyiv that their security concerns might be marginalized in a process dominated by transactional interests.

Under the previous administration, Washington's policy was driven by a clear set of red lines designed to deter any actions that could provoke a nuclear-armed adversary. That approach was predicated on a belief that excessive support for Ukraine might lead to a dangerous escalation. However, the new strategy, as signaled by Trump's team, appears less encumbered by these constraints. Instead, the focus seems to have shifted toward a pragmatic resolution-a process that prioritizes ending the war at the expense of Ukraine's moral imperatives underpinning their fight for survival. This shift represents not only a departure in tone but also in substance. While the previous policy imposed strict limitations to avoid provoking Moscow, the current approach appears more willing to concede Ukraine's positions if it serves the broader goal of ending the fighting.

The decision to hold talks in Saudi Arabia is far from arbitrary. The Saudi Kingdom provides a neutral venue and a longstanding trusted mediator especially for figures like Steve Witkoff and Donald Trump, whose longstanding business and diplomatic ties in the region are well known. This credibility is further reinforced by Saudi Arabia's recent announcement of a \$600 billion package with the US, comprising investments and procurement agreements from both public and private sectors.

Moreover, Saudi Arabia's position outside NATO shields it from the obligations that compel Western allies to enforce international legal mandates, including the ICC arrest warrants issued against top Russian officials, notably Putin. In such an environment, Saudi Arabia offers a secure venue for direct negotiations with Moscow, free from the pressures of external legal mandates.

Meanwhile, high-ranking European officials

express growing concern over their exclusion from the process. UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer has even suggested the possibility of deploying British troops to enforce any resulting peace deal, a move that underscores the importance European leaders give to Ukraine's future. The concerns are not merely about the cessation of hostilities, but about the long-term security guarantees that Ukraine desperately needs. European officials argue that a peace process that excludes Kyiv from the initial stages could lead to an agreement lacking the robust assurances necessary to prevent future Russian aggression.

Russia, for its part, is approaching the negotiations with its signature long-game strategy. Recent reports suggest that Kremlin officials are assembling a team of seasoned negotiators well-versed in securing maximum advantage. Their method is well known-ask for a shopping mall when all they need is a cup of coffee. Just one day before the talks, Russian diplomats are already staging a narrative of victory, asserting that the EU and the UK are entirely non-negotiable parties to any future agreements on Ukraine. According to the Russian representative at the UN, Ukraine has irretrievably lost key territories, and any new arrangement should force Kyiv into accepting a demilitarized, neutral state determined by future elections. This approach is designed to create the illusion of strength while ultimately settling for concessions that heavily favor Russian interests.

Meanwhile, for Ukraine, the principle that "nothing about Ukraine without Ukraine" is more than just a slogan-it is a critical security principle. Ukrainian leaders are rightfully wary of any agreement negotiated without their active participation. With the current US strategy favoring swift and transactional outcomes rather than comprehensive negotiations, there is a real danger that Kyiv's position could be compromised. The absence of Ukraine from these early discussions may result in a peace agreement that fails to address the existential risks the nation faces. Without strong security guarantees built into any deal, Ukraine remains vulnerable to renewed incursions and a potential destabilization of the entire region.

In this evolving diplomatic landscape, the contrast between the old and new approaches is stark. The previous risk-averse strategy sought to maintain clear boundaries to prevent escalation, whereas the current approach appears more willing to blur those lines in the hope of bringing an end to the bloodshed. Yet by doing so, there is an inherent risk: the very nation fighting for its survival might be reduced to a bargaining chip in a broader geopolitical deal.

It is imperative that Ukraine's interests remain at the forefront of any negotiations. The war in Ukraine is not just a regional conflict-it is a struggle that speaks to the fundamental principles of sovereignty and self-determination. Any peace settlement that fails to incorporate Ukraine's security concerns is likely to be unstable at best, and catastrophic at worst.

AA

Munich security conference and future of transatlantic relations

Giuseppe Spatafora

IN 2007, Russia's President Putin gave a now-infamous speech at the Munich Security Conference (MSC), announcing Russia's new posture of hostility towards the US and Europe. In 2022, when Russia invaded Ukraine, many looked back at Putin's 2007 Munich speech as a revealing moment of his intentions [1].

This year's MSC could be a similar watershed. This time, the warning bells ring from across the Atlantic, US Vice President JD Vance delivered one of the most hostile speeches by a US official to Europe in decades. Rather than addressing the Russian or Chinese threats, Vance argued that Europe faced a "threat from within," accusing the EU and national governments of censorship and ignoring popular demands on issues like illegal migration [2].

Meanwhile, away from Munich, US President Donald Trump held a phone

call with Putin, setting the stage for negotiations between the US and Russia for a peace agreement in Ukraine - without involving European counterparts in the discussions. The day before, Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth announced some of the US expectations from this deal: Ukraine should drop its NATO membership bid, European countries would need to provide the forces to enforce the agreement, and these forces would not be covered by NATO's Article 5 guarantees [3].

The transatlantic picture in which the MSC took place was even bleaker. Since Trump's inauguration one month ago, the new president had promised (and now imposed) tariffs against countries across the world, including Europe. He has threatened to annex the territory of allies like Canada and Denmark.

Normally, the MSC is an opportunity for the United States to reaffirm its commitment to Europe and the

Atlantic alliance. This year, it could be remembered as the time when the US started the process of abandoning Europe - or even going aggressively after it.

Vance's speech and the reactions to it have dominated the discussions at the MSC. Although the conference theme was "multilateralization", the real topic on everyone's mind was: how would Trump's second administration approach Europe?

As the pre-conference report argued: "Donald Trump's presidential victory has buried the US post-Cold War foreign policy consensus that a grand strategy of liberal internationalism would best serve US interests." [4] That this consensus was gone was clearly visible in the conference. Despite perfunctory references to shared values, Vance's speech did not talk about the alliance between Europe and North America, nor about the common

threats and how to face them.

And he has voiced support for anti-EU parties. Vance pronounced his speech in Germany, just weeks before federal elections, and argued that there should not be "firewalls" in government - a clear reference to the far-right Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) which has so far been kept out of governing coalitions. After the speech, Vance met with the AfD leader.

Additionally, Vance criticized Romania for canceling its 2024 elections and accused the EU of censoring free speech. But Vance failed to acknowledge that the very election that brought Trump and him to power in November was the subject of major foreign interference by Russia, China, and Iran. Rather than sitting idly by, US agencies took active measures to counter these malign actions and prevent disruptions - like raising awareness, coordinating with the media, and keeping poli-

tics out of the fight [5]. With his speech, Vance seems to be arguing for the exact opposite approach.

All these issues did not touch on security and defense, the core of the MSC's discussions. But they did lure in the background of Vance's speech. A few months ago, Vance argued that the EU should not regulate tech companies owned by Elon Musk. If the Europeans did so, he argued, the US should reduce its security commitments to NATO [6]. Hence, American assurances could become bargaining chips to resolve other issues.

Vance's Munich speech marks a new era in US relations with Europe. While the themes are not new - Trump has never been a fan of NATO, and enjoys courting Europe's far-right - the extent of the rhetorical change cannot be understated. Ukraine's President Zelensky, speaking in Munich the day after Vance, spelled out the challenge in clear terms: "We

can't rule out the possibility that America might say 'no' to Europe on issues that threaten it." [7]

The reaction from European leaders has been strong so far. EU Commission President von der Leyen called for an emergency clause in the EU treaties to allow member states to boost defense spending [8]. French President Macron called for a summit of European leaders in Paris on Monday, February 17 - to sketch out a common position on the upcoming negotiations over Ukraine, and on making up for US security guarantees from Europe. The greatest challenge, however, will be transforming outrage into meaningful action. Europeans have long ignored calls to take charge of their own security. Domestic constraints over spending, divisions and the continued belief that Uncle Sam will have their back have stood in the way of ambitious choices. Will this time be different?

F-35 fighter jet’s troubles: The price of complexity?

Alfredo Nocera

ON Jan. 28, 2025, an F-35A fighter jet crashed at the Eielson US Air Force Base in Alaska during a training session. This incident has once again drawn attention to the issues of the safety, reliability, and operational readiness of this debated aircraft. Fortunately, in this case, the pilot ejected safely after experiencing an in-flight malfunction and was in stable condition after the crash.

The F-35 Lightning II is a fifth-generation fighter jet developed by US aerospace giant Lockheed Martin, with its first flight in December 2006. It represents a major advancement in military aviation, featuring cutting-edge stealth capabilities, advanced avionics, and modern weaponry. However, it is a relatively heavy platform with a distinctive small-wing design. Over 1,000 aircraft have been delivered so far to the US military and to the global partners. However, at least 12 accidents since 2018, along with ongoing concerns about reliability, maintenance, project delays, and cost overruns, continue to raise questions about the viability of the F-35 program and the future of manned fighter aircraft in general.

Just last November, US entrepreneur Elon Musk commented on a video posted on X, showing hundreds of small drones in formation. He stated verbatim: "Meanwhile, some idiots are still building manned fighter jets like the F-35." He elaborated: "Manned fighter jets are obsolete in the age of drones anyway. Will just get pilots killed ... Crewed fighter jets are an inefficient way to extend the range of missiles or drop bombs. A reusable drone can do so without all the overhead of a human pilot."

Musk, known for his bold statements, raised a valid point. Drones

are rapidly transforming the landscape of defense operations. For example allowing nations with limited budgets to acquire reconnaissance and air defence systems that are not too expensive and are quite effective.

The January crash is the latest in a series of incidents involving the F-35. Due to the classified nature of military investigations, detailed information on the causes is not always readily available. Available reports suggest that most issues stem from the aircraft's complexity. The F-35 processes vast amounts of data, which can be overwhelming for pilots, or experiences failures in critical systems. Here are a few significant examples: In May 2020, an F-35A from the 58th Fighter Squadron crashed while landing at Eglin Air Force Base. The accident was attributed to a combination of pilot error induced by fatigue, a design issue with the oxygen system, the aircraft's complex nature, a malfunctioning head-mounted display, and an unresponsive flight control system. In January 2022, a South Korean Air Force F-35A made a belly landing after all systems failed except the flight controls and the engine. In both cases (and in most incidents involving the F-35), the pilot survived.

Beyond these incidents, the F-35 fleet has struggled with reliability, maintenance issues, and delays in deliveries. The Annual Report for Fiscal Year 2024, published in January 2025 by the Pentagon's test director states that "the F-35 program has shown no improvement in meeting schedule and performance timelines for developing and testing software designed to address deficiencies and add new capabilities."

Earlier in April 2024, the

Government Accountability Office (GAO) of the US published a report titled "F-35 Sustainment: Costs Continue to Rise While Planned Use and Availability Have Decreased." It emerges that "projected costs for sustaining the F-35 continue to increase while planned use of the aircraft declines" and that the F-35 fleet's "overall availability has trended downward considerably over the past five years, and none of the variants of the aircraft are meeting availability goals." The F-35 fleet's mission-capable rate was significantly below program goals. The report attributed this shortfall to maintenance and repair issues, noting that the aircraft takes long repair time due to the failure rate of critical parts.

Meeting delivery deadlines also appears to be a weak point of the F-35 program. Recently, it has been hit hard by delays with its Tech Refresh 3 (TR-3) upgrade, which provides features such as improved processing power to facilitate a suite of new capabilities known as Block 4. The first F-35s that were supposed to feature the TR-3 upgrade began rolling off Lockheed Martin's assembly line in Fort Worth, Texas, in July 2023. But the US Department of Defense has refused to accept their deliveries. What are the main factors that most likely contribute to the F-35's challenges?

The F-35's advanced systems and capabilities make it one of the most complex fighter jets ever built. The aircraft is often referred to as a "flying computer": it is equipped with numerous sensors, processing systems, and integration capabilities that handle a vast array of signals. This complexity can lead to unforeseen technical issues and compli-

cate maintenance procedures. Additionally, as highlighted in the GAO report mentioned above, the F-35 program has faced challenges with the reliability and maintainability of parts, leading to longer repair times and reduced aircraft availability. Furthermore, critics argue that the F-35 program moved too quickly from development to production, leading to the discovery of deficiencies during operational use.

On Jan. 8, Lockheed Martin summarized the progress of its F-35 Lightning II program, highlighting significant achievements despite recent challenges. The manufacturer has delivered 110 F-35s in 2024 and nearly 1,100 worldwide across all variants. The program's fleet has accumulated nearly a million flight hours. "Lockheed Martin is fully committed to advancing and delivering unmatched air dominance solutions to the United States and our allies, helping to ensure America continues to own the skies," the company has said in a statement.

While the F-35 represents a leap forward in fighter jet technology, its safety record and maintenance challenges cannot be overlooked. The series of accidents since 2018 underscores the need for thorough investigations and prompt corrective actions. Addressing the root causes of these incidents, learning from pilots' operating experience, improving parts reliability, and enhancing maintenance procedures are essential steps to ensure the F-35 fleet's smooth operations. As the program progresses, it is imperative for the Department of Defense and industry partners to prioritize these issues to fulfill the aircraft's promise as a cornerstone of modern air combat (along with unmanned aircraft?).

Is Trump’s Napoleon quote just idle trolling?

Jonah Goldberg

THE president of the United States posted a possibly apocryphal quote often attributed to Napoleon Bonaparte on social media Saturday: "He who saves his Country does not violate any Law." This is an indefensibly stupid thing for a president to say - at least absent the sort of situation in which a lawyer has told him, "Mr. President, you can't fire a nuke on that planet-destroying asteroid without first getting an environmental impact statement and allowing for the legally required 90-day public comment period."

I don't mean to be unduly glib. An American president implying he's above the law because he's "saving" his country is a serious thing. It's even more serious when the notion that we face an existential crisis requiring a hero on a white horse to save us has been manufactured by the president and his allies.

The best defense of President Trump's cerebral flatulence is that he was the one being glib. Reince Priebus, who served as White House chief of staff during Trump's first term, said as much on ABC News' "This Week": "It's entertainment for Trump. It's a distraction."

"I've lived through this," Priebus added. "In good times, in bad times, the president enjoys taking a grenade out on a Saturday afternoon, throwing it on the floor and watching everybody react. ... There's no downside." I said it was the best defense; I did not say it was a good defense. I honestly don't know what Priebus means in saying "there's no downside" to Trump's trolling. Giving millions of Americans - friends and foes alike - the impression that the president is megalomaniacally

contemptuous of the law is not good for anybody.

Presidents - all presidents - rely on a certain amount of trust and goodwill, not just from their allies but from their opponents as well. In a real crisis, the public and the opposition party need to believe that presidential authority is being exercised for unselfish reasons. Insinuating that you crave crises to maximize your power makes people less likely to trust you with the power to deal with an actual crisis. Still, because Priebus may be right that Trump was motivated chiefly by boredom, it's impossible to be confident of the intent of his Napoleonic statement. But it coincided with a far more serious controversy: Trump's decision to suspend a public corruption prosecution against the mayor of New York City, Eric Adams.

Danielle Sassoon, until recently Manhattan's top federal prosecutor, alleged that Trump ordered the suspension of the case because Adams' lawyers floated a political quid pro quo: If the Justice Department would drop the case, the Adams administration would vigorously support the White House's mass deportation plans. Indeed, Trump's political henchman at Justice, acting Deputy Atty. Gen. Emil Bove, argued that continuing the prosecution "would interfere with the defendant's ability to govern in New York City" and restrict Adams' ability to deal with "illegal immigration and violent crime" - a top priority in the president's efforts to, as he would put it, save America. Adams and Trump's Justice Department deny the alleged quid pro quo. Bove has even purported that the

Biden Justice Department had corrupt reasons for launching the federal investigation of Adams, who has pleaded not guilty to charges that he accepted bribes from Turkish nationals. The implication is that the Biden Justice Department was rankly political and Trump is correcting an illegitimate prosecution.

If that were true, one wonders why Trump didn't object to having such will-ding hacks continuing to work as federal prosecutors. The answer, of course, is that they aren't hacks. Sassoon, whom Trump had promoted to interim US attorney just weeks earlier, resigned rather than comply with the department's orders, and she was joined by six other federal prosecutors, all of whom were privy to the facts and relevant internal negotiations. As the rising conservative star laid out in her magisterial eight-page resignation letter, leveraging the threat of criminal prosecution to force cooperation with the president's political agenda is an intolerable assault on the administration of justice. The Trump administration wants the case against Adams merely suspended so that it can still be dangled over the mayor as a sword of Damocles to ensure his obedience, which is the very definition of weaponization of the criminal justice system. So is Bove's threat to investigate the resigning prosecutors for their refusal to comply.

This is the crucial context of Trump's claim that the president cannot break the law if he is "saving" the country. He may well have thought it was just an entertaining quote, as Priebus suggests. But given what we know, it looks less like trolling and more like a confession.

The Los Angeles Times

Who will stop Trump and Elon Musk from dismantling the US government?

James D. Zirin

TO paraphrase Ernest Hemingway, there are two ways to descend into autocracy: gradually and then suddenly. Right now, we are on the bullet train. With President Trump in office only a month, many say his "shock and awe" campaign-issuing executive orders to abolish birthright citizenship, defund national health, invade sensitive Treasury payment systems, shutter USAID, impound funds allocated by Congress, fire civil servants and the like - puts us well on the road to autocracy. And the presence of his satrap, billionaire Elon Musk, makes even Republicans nervous and underscores the anxiety over where we are headed.

The Democrats are stunned, wringing their hands. They have no agenda except to say they say they don't like what Trump is doing. And a few may believe that what he is doing is not so bad. True, there are some 40 lawsuits filed nationwide - some sound, and others untenable - seeking to block this junking of American government. But sorting it all out will take time, while Trump argues in the courts that he is a unitary executive with extraordinary powers to ignore acts of Congress and trash the Constitution by executive fiat. His vice president suggests he can defy court orders anyway - a sure passport to tyranny.

There was a 12-day transit strike in New York in 1966, and the courts enjoined the walkout as contrary to the public interest. Michael J. Quill, president of the Transit Workers Union, defied the court order and said, "The judge can drop

dead in his black robes." Quill went to jail for contempt, but his name is on the facade of Transit Workers Union headquarters to this day. The contempt power is enforced by the executive branch, which at the federal level is the US Marshal Service. The Marshals are under the Justice Department, and Trump knows that Attorney General Pam Bondi is not about to send them to the White House to enforce a contempt citation.

The stark contrast is astonishing between the speed with which Trump has moved and the snail's pace with which former President Joe Biden and Attorney General Merrick Garland moved to prosecute Trump for his misdeeds on Jan. 6 and his obstruction of justice with the Mar-a-Lago documents. Biden could have appointed an attorney general like Bondi - ready, willing and able to work his political will. Bondi has already moved swiftly to sue Trump's nemesis, New York Attorney General Letitia James, for blocking the immigration crackdown. Bondi vows more cases of this nature will follow.

The basis for such suits is solely political, but there is nary a peep from the Democrats in Congress who are supposed to exercise oversight. Where the rule of law ends, tyranny begins. Horrifically, Trump's Justice Department last week ordered the US Attorney for the Southern District of New York to drop the very strong corruption charges against New York City Mayor Eric Adams, who has helpfully changed positions to enforce

Trump's immigration crackdown. The order was so out of line that the Trump-appointed acting US Attorney and the senior prosecutor on the case resigned in protest, along with six other lawyers from the Justice Department's Public Integrity section.

The switch was such a political sellout that four of Adams's deputy mayors are resigning as well, and there is said to be tension with the New York Police Department, which wants to stay clear of the immigration crackdown unless the migrants commit crimes.

The Justice Department order is not necessarily the last word. District Judge Dale Ho, who has the case, may hold a hearing to delve into the whole mess. What comes out might destroy Adams politically and even end the career of acting Associate Attorney General Emil Bove, who ordered the US attorney to dismiss the case.

The Justice Department said it had not considered the merits of the Adams case, but rested its decision on the premise that no official like Adams running for office should be prosecuted before an election. Baloney! There is no law, decision or policy that has ever said that. Quite the opposite. Chief Justice John Roberts just reaffirmed that no one is above the law.

Trump and Musk are playing fast and loose with presidential and constitutional norms. As every child learns (or should learn) in high school civics we have three co-equal branches of government serving as a system of checks and

balances against each other. Since the Marbury v. Madison case of 1803, it has been the province of the judiciary to decide whether one branch is asserting more power than it constitutionally possesses.

The courts have no army to enforce their decisions, but their stature is such that even presidents have - almost always - respected their decisions. When President Harry Truman illegally seized the steel mills in 1952, the Supreme Court said he couldn't do it, and he backed off. When the high court ordered President Richard Nixon to turn over the White House tapes in 1974, he eventually complied, even though he knew the tapes would incriminate him.

Most of the plaintiffs in the current lawsuits have won temporary orders to stop Trump from proceeding with his plans. But these are just interim orders to freeze the status quo. We will have to see what unfolds as these cases wind their way through the courts.

Democrats are on the receiving end of a bum rush. They need to think outside the box and get tough. Maybe a quiet pledge to make significant contributions to the reelection campaign of any Republican member of Congress who is primaried for voting against Trump? That might get some attention. Asked what the American people want from Democrats, a shell-shocked Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-N.Y.) could only sputter, "They want us to beat Trump and stop this s-." Some answer, as the unelected Musk rubbishes the republic.

The Hill

Can Trump abolish Education Department?

Diyar Guldoan

SINCE his return to power Jan. 20, US President Donald Trump has signed executive orders to overturn the policies of his Democratic predecessors. Trump's quick actions targeted immigration, climate change, oil exploration, health, gender and many more, as he promised during his campaign.

The Education Department is on the list Trump has an eye on, and now he is reportedly finalizing an executive order that would attempt to dismantle the agency, which was established by Congress in 1979. The agency's purpose is to strengthen the federal commitment to ensuring access to equal educational opportunities for every individual, and supplement and complement efforts by states. Having more than 4,000 employees, the department is responsible for the \$1.6 trillion federal student loan program and a range of grants for K-12 schools, according to federal data. Its allocation was \$238 billion in fiscal year 2024, less than 2% of the federal budget.

The idea of dismantling the department is not specific to Trump. Republican President Ronald Reagan pushed for its elimination during his 1980 presidential campaign.

Being a decades-long goal for some Republicans, Trump has accused the agency of "indoctrinating young people with inappropriate racial, sexual, and political material." "One other thing I'll be doing very early in the

administration is closing up the Department of Education in Washington, DC, and sending all education and education work and needs back to the states," Trump said in a 2023 campaign video.

In his vision for education, Trump backs universal school choice which would allow parents to use public funding to send their children to K-12 schools other than their assigned neighborhood school -- including public, private or religious schools. "Oh, I'd like it to be closed immediately. Look, the Department of Education is a big con job," Trump told reporters Wednesday.

Recently, five Democratic lawmakers, including senators Bernie Sanders and Tammy Baldwin, sent a letter to Acting Secretary of Education Denise Carter, outlining concerns about Trump's plans to unilaterally dismantle the department. "We will not stand by and allow this to happen to the nation's students, parents, borrowers, educators, and communities. Congress created the Department to ensure all students in America have equal access to a high-quality education and that their civil rights are protected no matter their zip code," they said.

They urged Carter to provide information on steps the department is taking to ensure the continuity of programs that Americans depend on and the ability of the department to effec-

tively administer programs for their intended purposes without "waste, fraud and abuse." The lawmakers noted that Trump and tech billionaire Elon Musk have not shared any plans for changes to the department with congressional committees responsible for oversight and funding. They requested information about access to sensitive data and steps taken to safeguard it, communications and details regarding department employees who have been placed on leave and confirmation that no awards have been blocked or terminated.

Last week, a group of Democratic lawmakers was blocked from entering the agency's building in Washington, DC amid a row over potential spending cuts. Among those blocked were Reps. Maxwell Alejandro Frost and Maxine Waters, who were stopped by security at the entrance.

The answer is: On his own, no. He needs congressional approval. Although he cannot dismantle the department with an executive order, he can undermine its functions and redistribute duties. But congressional approval seems unlikely since the legislation would require a supermajority of 60 votes to pass in the Senate. Republicans have a 53-47 majority in the Senate. So, it means that at least seven Democrats would need to vote to support the legislation.

Linda McMahon, Trump's nominee for education secretary,

appeared Thursday before the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee and thanked Trump for his confidence in her. "He pledged to make American education the best in the world, return education to the states where it belongs, and free American students from the education bureaucracy through school choice," she said.

McMahon told the committee if confirmed, she would work with Congress to reorient the agency toward helping educators, not controlling them.

She also confirmed that the department could not be shut down without congressional action. "President Trump understands that we'll be working with Congress," said McMahon. "We'd like to make sure that we are presenting a plan that I think our senators could get on board with, and our Congress could get on board with, that would have a better functioning Department of Education." When questioned by Sen. Sanders, she said the department was set up by the Congress. "And we work with Congress. It clearly cannot be shut down without it," she said.

"I do believe that we want to make sure that every child in our country has the opportunity to have equal access to a quality education. And the Department of Education really is not setting economic policy in the country. We should focus on educating our children, and we should focus on it at the local level," she said. Her hearing was interrupted several times by protesters.

Fall of house of Navalny?

Morvan Lallouet

IN the year since Alexei Navalny's death, his most important legacy, the Anti-Corruption Foundation (FBK), has been rocked by scandal and criticism. It was once the most influential and powerful organization in the Russian opposition, which the regime started to destroy in the wake of Navalny's return to Russia in 2021 - possibly aiming to bring the homefront to heel in preparation for the full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Most of its leaders have relocated abroad, from where the FBK continues to investigate corruption and agitate Russians on social media.

Besides his ever-debated forays into nationalism, Navalny and his team always managed to evade major scandals. Those put forward by the Kremlin to persecute and discredit him always appeared shallow, if not completely bogus. But that all changed last fall when Maxim Katz released a devastating investigation. A former professional poker player turned successful political organizer, Katz shares a long history with Navalny's team. He had a prominent role in Navalny's 2013 run for Moscow mayor until he was fired. Katz claims that was because Navalny's right-hand man, Leonid Volkov, harassed his then-girlfriend, while Navalny called him a "dishonest con man." Since then, reciprocal acrimony has not abated. Rather, it has increased.

Now the FBK finds itself engulfed in the biggest scandal since its founding. The substance of Katz's investigation is that the American branch of the FBK, the Anti-Corruption Foundation (ACF), had been registered by a former banker, Alexander Zheleznyak, who also served as its treasurer.

At the same time, the ACF was funded by his former business associate, Sergey Leontiev. When the bankers fled Russia after they were charged with embezzling their customers' money in wide-scale financial fraud, Katz said they used the FBK to launder their reputation abroad.

The defense offered by the FBK appears rather unconvincing. They claim that working with Zheleznyak was expedient in times of trouble - as if the FBK could not find better sponsors in the US. They question Katz's political motives and also attempt to claim that the bankers did not steal any money. Katz's attack is certainly motivated by his long-standing competition with the FBK. But appeals to the letter of the law certainly do not fit well with what

Navalny stood for. His fight for justice and truth was not limited to the strict enforcement of the law. He actually criticized Katz for claiming that using legal loopholes for tax optimization was just fine.

On the face of it, Leontiev and Zheleznyak's business appears to be both illegal and immoral. It would probably be deemed so in the West too. Even if there was no quid pro quo exchanging reputation for money, the optics are terrible: Zheleznyak and Leontiev are precisely the kind of people that the FBK investigates. While it is likely that they were prosecuted because they supported Navalny, this does not mean they did not commit actual crimes in a financial system that the Central Bank has been trying hard to clean up. That the bankers are crooked and that their prosecution is politically motivated can be both true at the same time.

The scandal is all the more damning since the FBK had been warned. In 2023, it was revealed that Volkov had endorsed the removal of oligarch Mikhail Fridman from EU sanctions lists, reopening old speculations that Navalny was backed by Fridman's Alfa group for which Vladimir Ashurkov, one of Navalny's most prominent allies, used to work. The whole scandal was blamed on Volkov as he acted on his own and took a short leave from the Anti-Corruption Foundation.

This time, the whole organization is involved in the scandal which has been significant enough to alienate some of the FBK's oldest and most reliable sponsors. Among them is the entrepreneur and philanthropist Boris Zimin, who had bankrolled the Foundation since its inception.

Back then, Navalny, the FBK and the liberal press belonged to the same world, that of the tusovka, the Moscow-based "clique" that shared a common liberal outlook. But that was not all they shared. Even though Navalny was a lawyer and surrounded himself with lawyers, his work was that of an investigative journalist. He even claimed that he started his investigations on his blog because he found the Russian press lacking. In a word, Navalny and journalists were colleagues, as Oleg Kashin pointed out.

Manifestations of this closeness - or coziness - were many. But it has always been striking how little interest the Russian press showed in the most obscure pages of Navalny's biography, like his business career in his youth. This is not to imply that it

was outright criminal or even shady. But that no one really dug into what Navalny's business actually was during the "wild 1990s" is intriguing.

With him gone, his organization has become just one group among others. His successors do not and will not enjoy the same tolerance from the opposition media. After a lengthy investigation on Zheleznyak and Leontiev by The Insider, an outlet that entertained close links with the Navalny team, the Sota website has now claimed that due to errors in the FBK's donation systems, Russian law enforcement has access to the personal information of thousands of Russians who gave money to the FBK - an extremely serious crime, given the FBK's designation as an "extremist" organization. Sota's message - "The work of the leading force of the opposition must be closely analyzed" - could not be clearer: the FBK is now fair game.

Navalny and his team had always been fair game for the rest of the liberal opposition, as they never enjoyed unanimous support. Far from it. But with the clique scattered across the world and Navalny gone, divisions and criticisms have turned even more vicious. Relentless and unrelenting, with daily skirmishes on X, the war between Katz and the FBK appears nowhere near a truce and has turned to attrition. In their latest counterattack, the FBK released an investigation into Katz's wife and her alleged business dealings with Kremlin-connected structures.

Does this matter? Division is probably the default mode of the zero-sum game of politics. Only pressure from the base or the promise of victory can force unity upon power-hungry, self-interested politicians. When there are no elections and there is a scant chance to win, politics will turn evermore solipsistic. Exile can only reinforce this trend, as politics in exile is by definition politics without voters. Social media and the competition for scarce resources certainly do not help either. Despite appalled questions from Russians about whether such bickering is really worth it while Ukraine is being devastated, they are yet to be heard. In the meantime, there are indications that ordinary Russians are tired of the infighting. And on the ground, the rank and file of the Russian opposition is overwhelmed by depression and despondency - after all they had to go through, the death of Navalny has left them lonesome. Unity is the holy grail of Russian liberalism. But is anybody at the top really searching for it?



MoU signed between SCCI and RCCI

— to strengthen collaboration in multiple sectors thru JVs

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: A memorandum of understanding (MoU) was signed between Sarhad Chamber of Commerce and Industry and Rawalpindi Chamber of Commerce and Industry (RCCI) to strengthen collaboration in multiple sectors, inter-provincial coordination, conduct joint research and attract investment in potentials through joint ventures (JVs).

SCCI president Fazal Moqem Khan and RCCI president Usman Shaukat signed the agreement during a visit of the Rawalpindi Chamber delegation at the chamber house here on Thursday.

On the occasion, the chamber's senior vice president Abdul Jalil Jan, vice president Shehryar Khan, Businessman Forum leader, former president FPCCI Ghazanfar Bilour, former president Haji Muhammad Afzal, Malik Niaz Ahmad, Fuad Ishaq, member of the chamber executive com-

mittee Aftab Iqbal, Ashfaq Ahmad, Sabir Ahmad Bangash, Saifullah, Abbas Fuad Azeem, Junaid Altaf, Gul Zaman, and Ishtiaq Ahmad, Saddam Gul, Fazal e Wahid, Secretary General SCCI Muqtasid Ahsan, traders and industrialist were present.

RCCI vice president Fahad Barlas, former presidents of the chamber Ch. A Arif, Saboor Malik, Saqib Rafiq, M.Nasir Mirza, M. Naveed Khan, Fayyaz Ahmad Qureshi, and Imran and Sadar Sadiq were amongst the RCCI delegation.

Fazal Moqem while speaking on the occasion said vast avenues are available to make investment through joint ventures in marble, gemstone, honey, handmade carpet, furniture, industrial mineral, and mines and natural resources like oil, gas and hydropower generation and other important sectors of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

He asked the RCCI members to take advantage of investment opportunities

in the province.

The SCCI chief informed the meeting that the incumbent provincial government is working on a special incentive package for industrialization in K-P.

Moqem Khan welcomed the signing of agreement with RCCI, stating that the move would help to strengthen collaboration between the two chambers, especially flourish economic activities through joint ventures and promote investment potentials of the both sides.

Ghazanfar Bilour also addressed the meeting, stressing sustainable and long-term collaboration between SCCI and RCCI. He remarked that the business community generally, particularly in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has faced various challenges and issues and emphasized a joint roadmap/strategy between the two chambers to address issues with the business community.

Former FPCCI president talked about cross border

trade, stating that mutual trade between Pakistan and Afghanistan is very low, which needs to be enhanced by revisiting policies and initiatives and concrete steps should be taken to remove the difficulties of the business community.

Later, addressing the event, RCCI president Usman Shaukat, former presidents and senior members spoke on the occasion and called for cementing mutual collaboration and ties with SCCI and taking advantages from each other experts, investment opportunities, establishment close-liaison and enhancing mutual collaboration and coordination.

On the occasion, SCCI former president Haji Muhammad Afzal, Fuad Ishaq and others also addressed the meeting and welcomed the MoU with RCCI and called for strengthening mutual collaboration.

On the occasion, the participants also offered a prayer for the departed soul of the late senator Ilyas Ahmad Bilour.



PESHAWAR: President Sarhad Chamber of Commerce and Industry Fazal Moqem Khan and president Rawalpindi Chamber of Commerce and Industry Usman Shaukat signing an agreement.

Mobile phone imports decreased

ISLAMABAD (APP): The import of mobile phones into the country has witnessed a decrease of 12.04 percent during the first seven months of the current fiscal year (2024-25) as compared to the corresponding months of last year.

Pakistan imported mobile phones worth US \$ 868.551 million during July-January (2024-25) as compared to the imports of US \$ 987.447 million during July-January (2023-24), according to the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS).

Meanwhile, on a year-to-year basis, the import of mobile phones also dipped by 30.66 percent during the month of January 2025 when compared to the same month of last year.

The import of mobiles into the country during January 2025 was recorded at \$ 135.127 million against the exports of \$194.866 million in January 2024.

On a month-on-month basis, the imports of mobile phones also decreased by 17.23 percent during January 2025, as compared to the imports of US \$163.257 million during December 2024, according to the data.

It is pertinent to mention here that the overall merchandise exports from the country increased by 10.16 percent.

PSX stays bullish, gains 396 points

ISLAMABAD (APP): The 100-Index of the Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX) continued with bullish trend on Thursday, gaining 396.72 points, a positive change of 0.35 percent, closing at 113,739.16 points as compared to 113,342.44 points on the last trading day.

A total of 787,438,742 shares were traded during the day as compared to 667,719,653 shares the previous trading day, whereas the price of shares stood at Rs33.097 billion against Rs25.734 billion on the last trading day.

As many as 453 companies transacted their shares in the stock market, 223 of them recorded gains and 176 sustained losses, whereas the share price of 54 companies remained unchanged.

The three top trading companies were Pak International Bulk with 91,476,864 shares at Rs8.69 per share, Fauji Cement with 73,707,472 shares at Rs43.41 per share and K-Electric Limited with 58,967,212 shares at Rs4.71 per share.

Hoechst Pakistan Limited witnessed a maximum increase of Rs125.03 per share closing at Rs2,968.05 whereas run-

ner-up was Lucky Core Industries Limited with Rs58.24 rise in its share price to close at Rs1,248.04.

Unilever Pakistan Foods Limited witnessed a maximum decrease of Rs272.51 per share price, closing at Rs23.115.00, whereas the runner-up was Abbott Laboratories (Pakistan) Limited with Rs124.62 decline in its per share price to Rs1,121.61.

Rupee remains unchanged against dollar

The Rupee on Thursday remained unchanged against the US Dollar in the interbank trading and closed at Rs279.46.

However, according to the Forex Association of Pakistan (FAP), the buying and selling rates of the dollar in the open market stood at Rs279.85 and Rs281.35, respectively.

The price of the Euro decreased by 55 paise to close at Rs291.53 against the last day's closing of Rs292.08, according to the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP).

The Japanese yen gained 02 paise and closed at Rs1.86, whereas an increase of 68 paise was witnessed in the exchange rate of the British Pound, which was traded at

Rs351.99 as compared to the last day's closing of Rs352.67.

The exchange rates of the Emirates Dirham and the Saudi Riyal remained stagnant and closed at Rs76.08 and Rs74.51, respectively.

Gold up by Rs1,000 per tola to Rs309,000

The price of 24 karat per tola gold increased by Rs1,000 and was sold all time high at Rs309,000 on Thursday against its sale at Rs308,000 on previous trading day. All Pakistan Safa GEMS and Jewelers Association reported.

The price of 10 grams of 24 karat gold also increased by Rs857 to Rs264,917 from Rs264,060 whereas that of 10 gram 22 karat went up by Rs786 to Rs242,849 from Rs242,063.

The prices of per tola silver increased by Rs28 to Rs3,468 whereas that of ten gram silver went up by Rs24 to Rs2,973.

The price of gold in the international market increased by \$9 to \$2,953 from \$2,944 whereas the prices of silver in international market increased by \$0.19 to \$33.15, the Association reported on Thursday.

Al Baraka hosts Grand Road Show & launches NexGen Banking



F.P. Report

KARACHI: Al Baraka Bank (Pakistan) Limited hosted a Grand Road Show "Shaheen Paharon Par" and launched NexGen Banking at a ceremony held at PC, Karachi. Some of the invitees included Mr. Yaseen

Anwar - Former Governor State Bank of Pakistan, Cemal Sangu - Consul General of Turkiye, Engineer Sami Abdullah Salim Al Khanjari - Consul General of the Sultanate of Oman, Ms Andaleeb Abbas - Senior Consultant at Franklin Covey Pakistan,

Dr. Amanullah Kassim, Director - Kassim Textiles Private Limited along with many more distinguished guests.

The Event started with a Grand Road Show for "Shaheen Paharon Par", where 9 students from 7 leading Universities of Karachi, each with a diverse skill set showcased documentaries, artwork & photos from a Study Tour to Gilgit, Hunza & Skardu, sponsored by Al Baraka Pakistan and Organized by Ms. Tara Uzra Dawood - CEO Dawood Global Foundation.

This was followed by the Launch of Pakistan's first academia co-brand debit card powered by ILink's domestic card scheme, PayPak. With 4 unique card variations that

personify the digital native, tech savvy youth of Pakistan, the NexGen program creates incredible value via digital financial literacy programs.

Muhammad Atif Hanif CEO Al Baraka Bank (Pakistan) Limited, during his keynote address said, "Al Baraka Bank Pakistan continues to creatively position itself with new market segments by aligning to particular banking needs and lifestyle. NexGen is an all-round banking business model for Universities and their students. Al Baraka Bank Pakistan also associates itself with youth in exploring the beauty and diversity of Pakistan and continuous engagement in the form of roadshows by the Shaheens in their respective Universities."

FMCG leader EBM expands global reach

F.P. Report

KARACHI: The English Biscuit Manufacturers (EBM), Pakistan's largest biscuit and cake manufacturer, is strengthening its global presence with participation in Gulfood 2025, held from February 17-21 in Dubai, UAE.

Gulfood, the world's leading food and hospitality exhibition, brings together industry professionals to explore the latest products, analyze global market trends, and connect with suppliers. The 30th edition of Gulfood features over 5,500 exhibitors from 129+ countries.

As Pakistan's largest biscuit and cake manufacturer, producing over 30 billion biscuits and cakes annually, EBM recognizes the vital role of exports in economic growth. The company continues to expand into new markets across the Middle East, Africa, and beyond, positioning Pakistan as a key exporter of value-added FMCG products.

With operations in 30+ countries across five continents, EBM is committed to strengthening its global supply chain, ensuring that Made-in-Pakistan brands reach a wider consumer base.

As the leading biscuit exporter from Pakistan, EBM plays a pivotal role in the country's FMCG trade, delivering high-quality baked goods to international buyers.

Managing Director and CEO of EBM, Dr. Zeelaf Munir, stated: "With rising

global demand for baked goods, EBM is scaling up its international expansion to enhance Pakistan's standing in the global FMCG market. Prioritizing exports is essential for economic sustainability, and our participation at Gulfood 2025 reflects our commitment to bringing world-class Pakistani products to a global audience."

Shahzain Munir, Executive Director at EBM, added: "Strong interest from international buyers highlights EBM's reputation for quality, innovation, and trust. We have made significant investments in supply chains, research, and infrastructure to meet evolving global tastes. Pakistan's export potential is vast, and EBM is proud to drive this growth."

At Gulfood 2025, EBM is unveiling new product innovations tailored for global markets while reinforcing its commitment to sustainability and responsible manufacturing.

By investing in cutting-edge production technology, expanding global distribution, and refining its export strategy, EBM continues to set industry benchmarks while contributing to Pakistan's economic resilience.

With a strong commitment to expanding Pakistan's footprint in global trade, EBM remains dedicated to long-term export growth and positioning Pakistani FMCG brands competitively on the world stage.

'Netherlands significant trading partner of Pakistan'

FAISALABAD (APP): Hajo Provo Kluit, Deputy Ambassador of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, said on Thursday that his country is a significant trading partner of Pakistan.

Addressing the business community at Faisalabad Chamber of Commerce & Industry (FCCI), he said: "Pakistan has tremendously benefited from the GSP plus facility so far", and added that out of \$8 billion exports to the EU every year, \$7bn were facilitated under the GSP plus regime.

The deputy ambassador discussed the Paris Agreement and emphasised the importance of investing in climate change mitigation, adaptation, and reducing carbon footprints in business operations.

Regarding the dairy sector, he shared that cows in the Netherlands produce an average of 40 litres of milk per day, which is collected by small cooperatives and consolidated into major multinational organisations.

He highlighted that Pakistan could benefit from Dutch technology in this field.

The deputy ambassador also assured that efforts would be made to connect small IT exporters from Pakistan with relevant companies in the Netherlands.

Earlier, Faisalabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (FCCI) President Rehan Naseem Bharrara warmly welcomed the guest and noted the long-standing diplomatic and economic ties between the two nations.

Mobilink Bank joins forces with NymCard and Dellson Associates

— to revolutionize digital financial services

F.P. Report

KARACHI: Mobilink Bank, Pakistan's leading digital microfinance institution, has entered into a strategic partnership with leading fintech innovator NymCard and technology consultancy, Dellson Associates to accelerate digital financial services and cross-border enablement. The collaboration marks a significant step toward reshaping the future of financial inclusion in Pakistan.

Under this alliance, NymCard will integrate its cutting-edge technology platform to facilitate seamless digital lending solutions, including Buy Now, Pay Later (BNPL), Send Now, Pay Later (SNPL), and Instant Card Issuance. Meanwhile, Dellson Associates will spearhead the bank's technology enablement and digital transformation initiatives, reinforcing Mobilink Bank's mission to provide scalable, innovative, and future-

ready financial solutions.

This strategic partnership aims to empower consumers with dynamic financial tools that enhance accessibility, flexibility, and user experience. BNPL enables customers to make purchases and defer payments over time, while SNPL revolutionizes remittances by allowing users to send money instantly and settle payments in structured installments—easing financial burdens and fostering greater financial control.

As a core pillar of its long-term growth strategy, Mobilink Bank continues to forge high-impact alliances that transcend industry boundaries, driving financial, technological, and operational excellence. This MoU underscores the bank's unwavering commitment to innovation, digital agility, and financial inclusion, ensuring its customer-first ecosystem remains at the forefront of the evolving digital banking landscape.



Mobilink Microfinance Bank Ltd. is Pakistan's foremost digital microfinance institution, dedicated to advancing financial inclusion through cutting-edge digital solutions. The bank was recently honoured as 'Best Microfinance Bank' at the Pakistan Banking Awards 2024 in recognition of its transformative contributions to the financial sector.

NymCard is a next-generation fintech platform that empowers financial institutions with state-of-the-art solutions, including digital lending, instant card issuance, and seamless money movement. Focused on scalability and adaptability, NymCard provides agile payment infrastructure designed to meet the demands of a rapidly evolving financial ecosystem.

Dellson Associates is a leading consultancy firm specializing in technology-driven financial solutions. With deep expertise in digital transformation and financial innovation, Dellson enables financial institutions to enhance operational efficiency, optimize digital strategies, and future-proof their business models.

ICCI, TDAP host seminar

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ICCI), in collaboration with the Trade Development Authority of Pakistan (TDAP) organized a high-profile seminar on 'Export Finance, Market Research, and TDAP's Annual Plan of Activities.'

The event brought together key figures from the Ministry of Commerce, the State Bank of Pakistan, TDAP, and leading business executives to explore strategic opportunities for enhancing Pakistan's global trade presence, according to a press release issued here on Thursday. The seminar provided a vital platform for discussions on financial support, market insights, and proactive trade development strategies to unlock new export potentials and drive sustainable economic growth.

L.D. Khan, Director at TDAP, emphasized the Authority's pivotal role as the government's marketing and facilitation arm, advocating for the business community.

Trends in postmodernism

Waleed Khan

The journey of historical era and literary era has been transformed to postmodern era. Every era represents its own importance and specification. Although every age, period and movement emerges as a reaction to one another which gave birth to new ideas, perspectives, cultural transmission, technological advancement, discoveries and innovations that altered human life style and way of thinking. The age of reason and emotions has been gone. We are living in postmodern era which also raises questions on modern era. The major reason of deep influence were world war two and technological advancement in postmodern world.

Moreover, ancient literature, classical literature and modern literature were in a linear form but postmodern literature is non-

linear more political and ideological in nature. Even writing style and form is completely different in post-modern world of literature which carries different approaches and supports multiple perspectives. In postmodernism different concepts came into being such as fragmentation, intertextuality, multiple perspective, meta narrative, self-reflexivity, identity crisis, pastiche, paranoia, temporal distortion, three dimensional writing, intercultural transmission and the voice of marginalized people.

However, architecture in post-modern era has revolutionized the world because unexpected modern designs have been originated. The concepts of hyper reality and consumerism have been introduced. The trend of writing fictional novels has influenced authors and readers. Postmodern era is also famous for different concepts like Magical realism and

stream of consciousness.

Furthermore, Identity crisis, existential crisis and challenging the authorities are also prominent trends in postmodernism for example deconstructionism. Generational shift has described that there is no absolute truth only my truth and there is no past and future but only present (now).

In addition to that the contemporary period is marked by global interconnectedness, the rise of digital culture, and shifting geopolitical dynamics, such as the aftermath of 9/11 and the rise of social media. The trend of social media is more powerful because it can alter the truth, create propaganda and it can viral things in seconds. Defamation of someone can easily cause by social media because social media is controlled by the Elite and powerful people. Someone can hardly find facts through social media. It is blessing and curse at the same time.

Pakistan's liquid foreign reserves position

F.P. Report

KARACHI: The total liquid foreign reserves held by the country stood at US\$ 15,947.9 million as of 14-Feb-2025. The break-up of the foreign reserves position is as under:

Foreign reserves held by the State Bank of Pakistan: US\$ 11,201.5 million

Net foreign reserves held by commercial banks: US\$ 4,746.4 million

Total liquid foreign reserves: US\$ 15,947.9 million

During the week ended on 14-Feb-2025, SBP reserves increased by US\$ 35 million to US\$ 11,201.5 million.



In brief

Pakistani cueists victorious

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistani cueists Hasnain Akhtar and Ahsan Ramzan earned victories in the ACBS Asian U21 Snooker Championship 2025 at Doha, Qatar. According to details received here, in the last 18 round, Hasnain beat Mohammed Zahim of Sri Lanka by 3-0 (73-8, 80(72)-12, 72(72)-0). In the pre quarters, Liu Yu Sang Shaun of Hong Kong defeated Hasnain Akhtar of Pakistan by 4-3 (61-43, 31-77, 68-75(56), 68-43, 67(55)-24, 1-83(76), 57-38) while Ahsan outplayed his country mate Hamza Ilyas by 4-0 (93-6, 80-36, 64-1, 70-23).

Athletics c'ship on Feb 23

ISLAMABAD (APP): The seven nation athletics cross country championship is scheduled to be held here at the Fatima Jinnah Park (F-9) on February 23. Bhutan, Bangladesh, Maldives, Nepal, India, Sri Lanka and Pakistan are members of South Asian Athletics Federation, said a press release. A press briefing will be held at on February 22 here at the Jinnah Sports Complex in this regard. Two events of senior and junior cross-country athletics championship will be held at Fatima Jinnah Park (F-9) on Sunday. It is first ever Athletics Championship in Pakistan during last 77 years. It is an excellent opportunity to attract youth to sports grounds.

Tenpin Bowling C'ship kicks off

ISLAMABAD (APP): The 17th National Tenpin Bowling Championship kicked off on Thursday here at the Leisure City Bowling Club, Safa Gold, F-7 Markaz. The event was inaugurated by Chairman Pakhtun Action Committee, Javed Bangash. Meanwhile Pakistan Tenpin Bowling Federation, Chairman Dr Israr Hussain, President Ijaz ur Rehman, and Secretary General Muhammad Hussain Chatha, attended the inauguration ceremony. Former national football team manager and gold medalist Muhammad Irfan Khan Niazi was also present. The championship has attracted male and female players from across the country, who will compete in seven categories, including Men's Singles, Men's Doubles, Team Event, Media Event, Ladies Singles, Amateur and Deaf Men's Singles. The final matches of the championship are scheduled to take place on February 25, marking the culmination of the exciting tournament.

Milan edges UAE Tour 4th stage

ABU DHABI (AFP): Italy's Jonathan Milan prevailed in a tight sprint to claim Thursday's wind-battered UAE Tour fourth stage with Tadej Pogacar retaining the leader's red jersey. Milan added to his opening day success, edging out Belgian duo Tim Merlier and Jasper Philipsen at the line. Pogacar, who won Wednesday's third stage, remained in command of the general classification after the 181km ride from Fujairah Qidfa Beach to Umm al Quwain. Lidl-Trek rider Milan will be hoping to add another win in Friday's sprinter-friendly 160km fifth stage. The 24-year-old has established himself as one of the top sprinters around and will be one to watch in next month's Milan-SanRemo one-day classic. "It's true that this type of race is very important for the classics," Milan noted. "It was windy today so in terms of position and managing the nerves it will help to gain experience," he added.



DUBAI: Shubman Gill and KL Rahul forged a steady partnership.

Afghanistan cricket team can ignore boycott calls, says Shahidi

KARACHI (AFP): Afghanistan skipper Hashmatullah Shahidi on Thursday said calls from other nations for a boycott of their matches because of the treatment of women by the ruling Taliban did not effect his team.

Afghanistan open their Group B campaign in the Champions Trophy against South Africa in Karachi on Friday. Last month South Africa Sports Minister Gayton McKenzie backed demands from British politicians for a playing boycott of Afghanistan.

The England and Wales Cricket Board resisted the demand to boycott their Champions Trophy group game, but said they would not host Afghanistan in a bilateral series.

Australia, also in Group B, have canceled a Twenty20 international series and a Test against Afghanistan in the last two years, but plan to play their trophy game. Shahidi said his team was unperturbed.

"We only control things

inside the ground, that's our job," Shahidi said in a press conference in Karachi on Thursday. "The other things cannot put us under pressure." Afghanistan face England in Lahore on February 26 and Australia at the same venue two days later.

"The whole world knows that we are playing well, especially in the last three years so we are focused on our play and here also we do the control things," Shahidi said.

Having learnt most of their cricket in the refugee camps in Pakistan during the Soviet invasion of their country in 1970s, the Afghanistan team have risen by leaps and bounds.

They shocked three former champions — England, Pakistan and Sri Lanka — at the 2023 one-day World Cup in India. They were the losing semi-finalists in the Twenty20 World Cup last year, held in the United States and the West Indies. Shahidi said his team was not overawed by South Africa.

"We have recently beaten South Africa in Sharjah so we have that confidence with us and we are not under any pressure," said Shahidi of his team's 2-1 win last year. Afghanistan skipper vowed his team wants to win the Trophy.

"We are doing very good so we are here to win the final and not just to participate. We are definitely hundred percent looking to win this event." Afghanistan boast quality spinners with Rashid Khan, ranked second in the world in one-day internationals, leading the attack. They also have hard hitting batters in Rahmanullah Gurbaz, Ibrahim Zadran and Mohammad Nabi.

The Champions Trophy — the first global event hosted by Pakistan in three decades — opened on Wednesday with New Zealand beating the host country by 60 runs in Group A. India and Bangladesh are the other two teams in the Group. Two teams from each Group will qualify for the semifinals.

Imam approved as replacement for Fakhar

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Event Technical Committee of the ICC Men's Champions Trophy 2025 has approved Imam-ul-Haq as a replacement for Fakhar Zaman in the Pakistan squad.

Twenty-nine-year-old Imam, who has played 72 ODIs, was named as a replacement after Fakhar was ruled out due to an oblique injury, said a press release. The replacement of a player requires the approval of the Event Technical Committee before the player can be officially added to the squad.

The Event Technical Committee of the ICC Men's Champions Trophy 2025 consists of Wasim Khan (ICC General Manager – Cricket), Sarah Edgar (ICC Senior Manager – Events), Usman Wahla (PCB Director – International Cricket Operations), Shaun Pollock (Independent Representative).

Pakistan fined for slow over-rate

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan have been fined 5 per cent of their match fee for maintaining a slow over-rate against New Zealand in the opening match of the ICC Men's Champions Trophy 2025 on Wednesday.

Andy Pycroft of the Emirates ICC Elite Panel of Match Referees imposed the sanction after Mohammad Rizwan's side was ruled to be 1 over short of the target after time allowances were taken into consideration, said a press release. In accordance with Article 2.22 of the ICC Code of Conduct for Players and Player Support Personnel, which relates to minimum over-rate offenses.

Gill hits ton as India cruise to victory over Bangladesh

DUBAI (Agencies): Shubman Gill scored a superb unbeaten century after Mohammed Shami took 5-53 as India began their Champions Trophy campaign with a six-wicket win over Bangladesh.

Set a modest target of 229 to win, Gill batted through and finished on 101 from 129 balls as India cruised to victory with 3.3 overs to spare. India made a brilliant start in Dubai as they reduced Bangladesh to 35-5 halfway through the ninth over.

Shami took two wickets and spinner Axar Patel had two in two balls before captain Rohit Sharma dropped a regulation catch at slip to deny him a hat-trick.

Bangladesh avoided further humiliation thanks to a superb stand of 154 between Tawhid Hridoy and Jaker Ali. It was slow going for large parts but the pair, who stayed together for 34 overs, kicked on after each passed 50.

Shami eventually broke the stand when he removed Jaker for 68, becoming the quickest man to 200 ODI wickets in terms of balls bowled in the process, and went on to complete his sixth five-wicket haul in one-day internationals.

Hridoy brought up his maiden ODI century from 114 balls before he was the last man out with two balls of the innings remaining.

The India chase got off to a swift start with Rohit making a quickfire 41 and Gill soon into his work to put the 2013 winners in command. Bangladesh fought hard through the middle overs and will rue a dropped catch by Jaker to give KL Rahul a life - had it been taken India would have been five down with 64 runs still needed.

But Gill batted with great poise in a chanceless knock, mixing stylish shots with the requisite resolve to ensure India were never truly concerned.

The 25-year-old eased his way to an eighth ODI century from 129 balls and it was left to Rahul to seal the win with a six hoisted over deep backward square.

Stunning start sets up India victory

India came into the Champions Trophy as strong favourites and nothing that occurred in Dubai suggested that judgement will need reassessing any time soon. After all, India are a team capable of essentially wrapping up a 100-over match inside nine

overs as they did in Dubai.

They let Bangladesh off the hook somewhat from 35-5 but for all Hridoy and Jaker's valiant efforts, the situation never got away from India. The chase did not go entirely according to plan either but, again, a fast start had put them in control and, despite the odd misstep, there was no sense that Bangladesh were ever really going to wrestle that from them.

With both bat and ball, India's quality - and the depth of that quality - is such that it only needs one or two to really perform for them to become incredibly tough to beat.

On this occasion, it was Gill and Shami - the former coolly steering the chase after the latter's fine efforts with ball in hand. Shami not only reached 200 ODI wickets, he also overtook to Zaheer Khan to become India's leading wicket-taker in men's ICC tournaments.

Even after the best part of a year out through injury, the 34-year-old seamer remains a man India can rely on when the big events come around. That the same could be said of the majority in India's squad is what makes them such a formidable team.

Andreeva stuns Swiatek to reach Dubai semi-finals with landmark win



DUBAI (AFP): Teenager Mirra Andreeva stunned second seed Iga Swiatek to become the youngest woman to reach the semi-finals of the Dubai Championships on Thursday, attributing victory to working on her "anger inside".

The 17-year-old Russian came from a break down in the second set to win 6-3, 6-3 in one hour and 36 minutes and continue the cull of the leading seeds in Dubai.

The 14th-ranked Andreeva, who reached the semi-finals at the French Open last year, is the youngest player to record five Top 10 wins since Nicole Pietrangeli in 2007.

In their previous meeting in Cincinnati last year, Swiatek fought back from a set down to win 7-5 in the third set. "Last time we played was a close match and it was tough, it was intense," said Andreeva.

"This time I just tried to tell myself to go for my shots, to be aggressive, to not hesitate. I think that helped me to win in a way." Andreeva said she had been consulting a psychologist on "how to work with my anger inside, what to do when I don't feel great, how to maintain my level when I feel great, how to keep being me."

Swiatek, a five-time Grand Slam winner, failed to convert seven break points before finally taking her opponent's serve for a 3-1 lead in the second set but Andreeva responded by taking the next five games.

The Pole made 33 unforced errors in the contest. "I wasn't really sure where my ball is going to go," the 23-year-old said.

"Some things missing" "Mirra is a good player. I already could see that before when we practised and when we played in Cincinnati. It's

not like I can win against her when I play worse." Swiatek had reached the semi-finals at last week's Qatar Open, where she was swept off court by Jelena Ostapenko.

"For sure I'm not happy with the results," she said. "There were some things missing that should have been there." Swiatek joined third seed Coco Gauff, who exited in her opening match, world No.1 Aryna Sabalenka, fourth-seeded defending champion Jasmine Paolini and fifth seed Jessica Pegula to be knocked out.

Andreeva will next face sixth seed Elena Rybakina after the former Wimbledon champion claimed a 6-2, 7-6 (7/4) victory over Sofia Kenin of the United States.

Rybakina, the highest-ranked player still standing, is in the semi-finals in Dubai for the first time since 2020. Clara Tauson, the 38th-ranked Dane who knocked out Sabalenka in the last 16, also advanced to the semi-finals by beating Czech Linda Noskova, Pegula's conqueror, 7-6 (7/4), 6-4.

"I was texting one of my best friends, I had a great match today, I'm for sure going to play (bad) tomorrow," Tauson said. "But I didn't. I'm really happy about that. Otherwise I would have lost for sure." Tauson will be playing in her first WTA 1000 semi-final where she will face either Karolina Muchova or Sorana Cirstea.

Mbappe hat-trick as Real Madrid knock Man City out of Champions League

MADRID (AFP/APP): Kylian Mbappe struck a brilliant hat-trick for Champions League holders Real Madrid in a 3-1 win over Manchester City on Wednesday, helping Los Blancos reach the last 16 with a 6-3 aggregate victory.

Pep Guardiola's side, shorn of key striker Erling Haaland, suffered a painful early exit without laying a glove on the completely dominant 15-time record winners in the Spanish capital, until Nico Gonzalez tapped home in stoppage time.

French superstar Mbappe broke the deadlock with a lob in the fourth minute and netted a fine second after combining with his attacking partners as the English side were sliced open.

The striker, in sensational form after a slow start to life at Madrid, completed his treble in the second half with a low strike from the edge of the box to reach seven goals in the competitive season in 10 appearances. "We wanted to win and go through because for us it was logical that Real Madrid would be in the last 16 of the Champions League," Mbappe told Movistar. "We know that at home we are very strong, and we played as a team in the best way, and we made Madrid fans very happy."

Mbappe has scored 28 goals this season, with 18 in his last 18 games across all competitions. "I said it (before), I didn't come to Real Madrid to play badly," continued Mbappe. "Making my dream come

true is one thing, but I want to play well here, mark an era and make history at Real Madrid." City, who won the competition in 2023, were a far cry from their best as has been the case for much of their campaign.

Guardiola was dealt bad news before the game with Haaland, who netted twice in the first leg, named on the bench after a suffering a knock at the weekend against Newcastle. By contrast Real Madrid welcomed back Antonio Rudiger from injury and he slotted seamlessly into defence, with Aurelien Tchouameni restored to his preferred midfield slot. Carlo Ancelotti's side performed almost flawlessly from the off and took the lead in the opening stages. Mbappe shrugged off Ruben Dias and lofted the ball over City goalkeeper Ederson after young centre-back Raul Asencio played him in with a long pass. John Stones limped off for the visitors a few minutes later in another blow for the Premier League champions.

- 'Fantastic four'

Mbappe netted his second in the 33rd minute after Madrid's "fantastic four" star players combined. Jude Bellingham fed Vinicius who rolled the ball across for Rodrygo, who nudged it to Mbappe.

The former Paris Saint-Germain forward slipped inside to leave the flailing Josko Gvardiol sliding in the wrong direction and drilled home at the near post. Guardiola had claimed City only had "one percent chance" of

beating Madrid and his team played like they believed him.

Madrid's only blot on their copy-book was a booking for Bellingham for fouling England team-mate Phil Foden, leaving him suspended for the last 16 first leg. Bellingham, who caused a stir after being sent off for dissent last weekend in La Liga, was assured in midfield but the night belonged to Mbappe.

The 26-year-old completed his hat-trick with a superb individual goal just after the hour mark, opening up some space on the edge of the box and firing beyond Ederson as City's defence stood off. Mbappe departed to a standing ovation and Madrid fans marvelled at the ease of their team's victory, against an opponent with whom they have shared many close battles in the past decade.

The visitors pulled a goal back in stoppage time when Omar Marmoush crashed a free-kick against the crossbar and Gonzalez rolled home the rebound, but it offered scant consolation. City have now lost 13 games in their last 26 across all competitions, and face Premier League leaders Liverpool next on Sunday, with a battle to finish in the top four on their hands.

Madrid, by contrast, are still in the running for three major competitions and with Mbappe in such sensational form, believe they can win all of them. Next up in the last 16 is a clash with either city rivals Atletico or German champions Bayer Leverkusen.



In brief

ANF seizes 493 kg drugs

RAWALPINDI (APP): Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF) conducting nine operations across the country seized over 493 kg drugs worth Rs 80 million and arrested six accused, said an ANF Headquarters spokesman here on Thursday. He informed that 10.6 kg ice was recovered from a parcel sent to Australia from a cargo office in Karachi. 1.210 kg heroin hidden in cushion covers and hats was recovered from a parcel booked for France through a courier office in Faisalabad. 1.660 kg ice hidden in ladies' clothes was recovered from a parcel sent to Hong Kong through a courier office in Lahore. 455 kg hashish was recovered in two separate operations conducted in a remote area of Pishin in Balochistan. 20 kg heroin hidden in a car was recovered near Sher Shah Toll Plaza Multan and three suspects were arrested during the operation. One kg ice and two kg heroin were recovered from the possession of two suspects near a mall in Islamabad. In another operation near Sher Shah Toll Plaza, Multan, two kg hashish was recovered from the secret cavities of a car and a suspect was arrested. Cases have been registered against the arrested suspects under the Narcotics Control Act and further investigations are under process.

Mother Language Day on Feb 21

ISLAMABAD (APP): Like other parts of the world, the "International Mother Language Day (Maan Boli ka Alimi Din)" will be observed on February 21 (tomorrow) with the theme "Silver Jubilee Celebration of International Mother Language Day". On this occasion, different events and seminars would be held to commemorate this day. In this regard, the Indus Culture Forum also schedules an event from 21-23 February in the Pakistan National Council of Arts' auditorium with the title "Pakistan Mother Languages Literature Festival 2025". An inaugural ceremony of the festival will be held at 6:00 p.m. at the PNCA. The event will be featured with keynote speeches by eminent scholars and writers, etc. ICF member, Munawar Memon, said that the diversity of languages in Pakistan is something we all cherish and take pride in. We are passionate about speaking these languages and promoting them further. In this spirit, the Indus Cultural Forum organizes an annual literary festival celebrating the richness of these native languages. This day recognizes the importance of our native languages in shaping our identity, connecting us to our culture, and expressing ourselves freely. Speaking our mother tongue helps us feel comfortable and confident.

Police nab two wanted dacoits

ISLAMABAD (APP): Islamabad Capital Police's Sabzi Mandi police team successfully arrested two wanted dacoits involved in multiple armed robberies, officials said on Thursday. A police spokesperson told APP that the arrested suspects, identified as Yaseen and Yasir Hussain, were found in possession of a snatched motorbike and weapons used in their criminal activities. He said the Sabzi Mandi police team used technical and human resources and succeeded in apprehending two wanted members of a snatcher gang. The accused were identified as Yaseen and Yasir Hussain.

France, Pakistan strengthen ties with resumed direct flights: French Ambassador

ISLAMABAD (APP): French Ambassador to Pakistan Nicolas Galey has said that the resumption of Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) direct flights between Islamabad and Paris on January 10, this year marks a major step forward in strengthening ties between France and Pakistan.

The ambassador said resump-

tion of flights is a testament to the strong relationship between the two countries, reflecting their commitment to enhancing connectivity and cooperation. He said the PIA's decision to choose Paris as its first European destination for resumed operations underscores the importance of this partnership.

Nicolas said the flights will

operate twice a week, offering convenient travel options for passengers. PIA has also partnered with Air France-KLM, providing connections to 21 European destinations with streamlined check-in and baggage handling.

He highlighted this new route is expected to boost economic and cultural exchange between

Pakistan, Europe, and beyond. With reduced travel times and competitive pricing, passengers will benefit from increased convenience and affordability.

He further stated the resumption of direct flights follows a sustained effort by PIA, the Pakistani government, and the civil aviation sector to meet European Union Aviation

Safety Agency (EASA) standards. This achievement demonstrates Pakistan's commitment to ensuring the highest safety standards in its aviation industry.

The ambassador said that as PIA expands its European operations, it is likely to require additional aircraft. European manufacturers, such as Airbus and

ATR, are well-represented in PIA's fleet and are poised to support the airline's future growth.

In concluding remarks he said the resumed direct flights between Islamabad and Paris mark a significant milestone in the strengthening of France-Pakistan ties, fostering greater cooperation and exchange in the years to come.



ISLAMABAD: Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi in a meeting with Ambassador of Qatar Ali Mubarak Ali Essa Al-Khater. —APP Photo

Mohsin Naqvi meets Ambassador of Qatar

ISLAMABAD (APP): Federal Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi met with Qatar's Ambassador Ali Mubarak Ali Essa Al-Khater here on Thursday.

During the meeting, matters of mutual interest, bilateral relations, and enhancing cooperation in various fields were discussed in detail. Both sides also discussed the release of Pakistani citizens imprisoned in Qatar. Both

sides also agreed to increase cooperation in combating narcotics.

The Qatari Ambassador invited Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi to visit Qatar. Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi said that Pakistan has very close relations with Qatar, adding that he will visit Qatar soon and meet his counterpart.

He highlighted that a conference of Gulf countries on Narcotics control is

being held in Islamabad in April, and the head of Qatar's drug control department has been invited to participate in this conference. He emphasized the importance of close cooperation with friendly countries in combating narcotics.

The Qatari ambassador said that Pakistan is a brotherly Islamic country and Qatar attaches great importance to the bilateral relations.

NAB signs MoUs for welfare of its employees

ISLAMABAD (PPI): The National Accountability Bureau (NAB) on Thursday signed six Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) with various private sector educational and medical institutions here at the NAB Headquarters in Islamabad.

The NAB is collaborating with various institutions to provide better facilities and ease to its employees, aiming at enhancing their performance and service delivery.

The acting Chairman NAB, Sohail Nasir, Prosecutor General Accountability, Syed Ihtesham Qadir Shah, Director General NAB Headquarters, Farman Ullah and the Chairman's Advisor, Zafar Iqbal witnessed the signing of MoUs.

NAB Headquarters Director, Muhammad Imran Butt, CEOs of renowned

institutions: Shoaib Ahmed Khan (CEO of International Hospital), Dr Bilal Arshad Butt (CEO of Ali Medical Center), Zubair Nasir (CEO of Qamar Jahan Diagnostics), Dr Amir Q. Khawaja (Chief Dental Surgeon, Aamir Nair Dental), Dr Anum Javed Cheema (CEO of SJ Dental and Skin), and Zafar Bakhtawari (CEO of De Watson Chemists), signed the MoUs on behalf of their respective institutions. Other senior NAB officials were also present at the event.

The acting Chairman NAB expressed his gratitude to the heads of all the institutions, stating that, under these agreements, these institutions would provide their services at discounted rates to NAB employees and their families.

This initiative will help employees access educa-

tional, medical, and other essential life services, ensuring that they can perform their duties with peace of mind and dedication, thereby contributing effectively to the country's development.

Retired NAB employees and their families will also benefit from these facilities. Sohail Nasir emphasized that under these recent agreements, NAB employees would benefit from discounted healthcare packages provided by these institutions, and further additional agreements are also under consideration.

The acting Chairman underscored that, under the visionary guidance of the Chairman NAB, the Bureau is working alongside various institutions to combat corruption and promptly address the public's concerns in this regard.

Tributes paid to martyred policemen, ghazis

RAWALPINDI (APP): Regional Police Office Rawalpindi Region here on Thursday organized a grand ceremony to pay tributes to the eternal sacrifices of the police martyrs and ghazis of Rawalpindi Region.

The ceremony was organized in accordance with the orders of Inspector General of Police, Punjab Dr. Usman Anwar and attended by Regional Police Officer (RPO) Rawalpindi Region, Babar Sarfraz Alpa, ADIG, families of the martyrs and ghazis. In recognition of the eternal sacrifices of the martyrs, their heirs were given gold medals and the ghazis were given silver medals.

The purpose of the ceremony was to acknowledge the sacrifices of the brave sons who ensured the safety of the public by sacrificing their lives and demonstrating bravery. The RPO, while addressing the participants, said, "The police martyrs and ghazis are our pride, their sacrifices are a beacon of light for us, we consider the heirs of our martyrs and ghazis as part of our family and we are taking all possible steps for their welfare. If the heirs of the martyrs or ghazis face any kind of problems, our doors are always open for them."

He further said that the Punjab Police will never forget the sacrifices of its brave soldiers and will continue to provide all possible help to their families. At the end of the ceremony, prayers were offered for the elevation of the ranks of the martyrs, and the resolve was reiterated that the police force will always remember the sacrifices of the martyrs and ghazis and give top priority to the welfare and well-being of their families.

AIOU launches online bookstore

ISLAMABAD (APP): Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU) has launched an online bookstore, allowing teachers, researchers, and students nationwide to purchase books from the comfort of their homes. The bookstore offers textbooks for programs ranging from matriculation to PhD. Vice Chancellor, Prof. Dr. Nasir Mahmood, officially inaugurated the store on Thursday in a ceremony attended by the University Principal Officers, Deans, and Professors. Addressing the event, the Vice Chancellor directed that the book selection, purchasing process, and payment methods be made as simple as possible. Emphasizing the importance of customer service, the Vice-Chancellor instructed that search options be provided by book name, codes, and program categories.

Gilani meets Azerbaijani President, discusses bilateral ties

ISLAMABAD (APP): Senate Chairman Syed Yousuf Raza Gilani met with the President of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev, in Baku and discussed bilateral relations, regional dynamics, peace, development, and other key matters.

Gilani is leading a Pakistani parliamentary delegation to participate in the Asian Parliamentary Assembly (APA), which is being held in Baku. Expressing gratitude to the Azerbaijani leadership, Gilani said, "It has been a pleasure to visit Azerbaijan."

He highlighted the opportunity to engage with

leaders of various regional parliaments during the APA.

He reaffirmed Pakistan's strong ties with Azerbaijan, emphasizing that both nations share deep-rooted religious, cultural, and historical bonds.

He also underscored the importance of political and parliamentary exchanges, reaffirming Pakistan's commitment to strengthening these fraternal relations.

Gilani said that both countries had signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to enhance institutional cooperation at the parliamentary level and that friendship groups had already been

established within both parliaments.

He stressed that high-level exchanges would further promote people-to-people connections.

During the meeting, he briefed the President on Pakistan's Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC), highlighting vast investment opportunities in agriculture, energy, mining, and other sectors.

The Senate Chairman also lauded Azerbaijan's government and parliamentary leadership for successfully hosting the Asian Parliamentary Assembly, extending his congratulations on the achievement.



ISLAMABAD: A beautiful view of clouds hovering in the sky after rainfall in the Federal Capital. —APP Photo

Syedaal visits Parliament House cafeteria, stresses cleanliness

ISLAMABAD (APP): Acting Chairman Senate, Syedaal Khan, Thursday the Parliament House cafeteria to inspect the ongoing renovation work and assess the quality of food being served.

During his visit, he emphasized the need to ensure high-quality and hygienic food for visiting dignitaries and employees.

He made it clear that no compromise on food quality would be acceptable and directed the administration to maintain the highest standards of cleanliness.

Syedaal Khan highlighted that a clean and healthy environment positively impacts employee performance, adding that it is the responsibility of institutions to provide the best facilities for both employees and visitors. Expressing satisfaction

over the renovation work, he instructed the administration to take all necessary steps to further enhance the cafeteria's food quality.

He also issued special directives regarding cleanliness, stating that the focus on hygiene should extend beyond the cafeteria to all public spaces across the country. He stressed that access to healthy food contributes not only to individual well-being but also to national development.

The Acting Chairman Senate underscored the government's commitment to improving public spaces, maintaining cleanliness, and ensuring compliance with health and hygiene standards. He directed officials to present the Parliament House cafeteria as a model facility to inspire other insti-

tutions to enhance their management and service quality.

Later, Syedaal Khan met with journalists at the Parliament House cafeteria. Acknowledging the significance of journalism, he described it as a strong pillar of democracy that plays a vital role in national development and stability.

He praised journalists for their contribution in highlighting social issues and effectively shaping public opinion.

He said that journalistic insights and analyses help improve governance and parliamentary affairs. To strengthen transparency and address public concerns, the government is working closely with journalists to establish a more efficient and accountable system.

Traffic plan devised for Champions Trophy matches

RAWALPINDI (APP): Rawalpindi City Traffic Police (CTP) have devised a special plan for maintaining smooth traffic flow on the city roads during the Champions Trophy matches scheduled to begin at the Rawalpindi Cricket Stadium on Feb 23.

Some 367 traffic police personnel, including DSPs/Circle in-charges, inspectors/sector in-charges and wardens would be on roads to maintain traffic flow during the matches to be played from Feb 23 to Feb 27, Chief Traffic Officer (CTO) Beenish Fatima said in a statement issued on Thursday.

The CTO said additional personnel would be deployed to keep the traffic flowing on alternate routes during the movement of cricket teams.

The Murree Road, she said, would be completely closed from Faizabad to Double Road at the time of arrival and departure of the cricket teams from the stadium. During the time,

the traffic coming from Islamabad to Rawalpindi would be diverted from Faizabad to Expressway, while the traffic from Rawalpindi would be able to enter Islamabad via Saidpur Road using 6th Road.

Similarly, the traffic from Ghousia Chowk would be diverted to the Kurry Road via Farooq Azam Road. She said during the match, the Stadium Road, from 9th Avenue Chowk to Double Road Turn, would remain fully closed for traffic.

The traffic coming from Islamabad via 9th Avenue would be able to enter Rawalpindi through Expressway via Faizabad, and IIP Road from Pindora Chungi, Katarian, Carriage Factory and Pirwadhai Mor Chowk, while those going to 9th Avenue from Murree Road via Double Road would enter Islamabad from Faizabad.

The CTO said five spaces had been specified for parking of vehi-

cles, from where the shuttle service arranged by the district administration would carry spectators to the stadium. She said the CTP would display banners at different places for the awareness of people about alternate routes during the cricket match.

The public could also get guidance in that regard from the CTP's social media pages and FM radio station, she added. Beenish urged the citizens to cooperate with the traffic police for smooth flow of traffic on city roads during the cricket match.

Special arrangements have been made to ensure smooth flow of traffic on alternative routes during the matches and movement of the players. The citizens would also be provided with all information about diversion points and traffic situation through the official social media pages of Traffic Police @ctrpwp and FM radio stations, Beenish Fatima added.

EU calls social justice key

KABUL (Amu TV): Marking World Day of Social Justice, the EU's mission in Afghanistan reaffirmed that social justice is essential for lasting peace and stability in the country. The EU expressed its firm support for all Afghans in their pursuit of justice and fairness, particularly emphasizing women's equal rights to education and employment. The EU also urged the international community to work toward justice in Afghanistan, calling it a critical step toward long-term stability.

Taliban publicly flog woman

KABUL (Amu TV): Taliban publicly flogged a woman and three men in Shakardara district of Kabul, accusing them of adultery, unlawful relationships, and fleeing home, according to a statement from the Taliban's Supreme Court. Each of the four individuals received between 38 and 39 lashes and was sentenced to six months to 18 months in prison, the statement said. The punishment was carried out in public after being approved by the Taliban's highest court.

Afghanistan's membership at ICC no longer valid: IEA

KABUL (Ariana News): The Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (IEA) declared Thursday that it does not recognize any legal obligation under the Rome Statute and deems the former government's accession to this statute to be devoid of legal validity. In a statement, IEA said that rather than adhering to the principles of justice and impartiality, the International Criminal Court has consistently operated in accordance with political considerations. "In numerous countries, including Afghanistan, mil-

lions of innocent civilians—predominantly women and children—have suffered oppression and been subjected to acts of violence. However, this "court" has conspicuously failed to address these egregious injustices," the statement said. "This institution has undertaken no substantive measures against the war crimes perpetrated in Afghanistan by occupying forces and their allies. These transgressions include the wholesale destruction of villages, educational institutions, mosques, hos-

pitals, and wedding ceremonies. Thousands of women, children, elderly individuals, and even prisoners in captivity have been martyred, yet this "court" has neither initiated investigations nor sought to prevent these acts of oppression," the statement added. IEA noted that many of the world's major powers are not signatories to ICC, and "it is unwarranted for a nation such as Afghanistan which has historically endured foreign occupation and colonial subjugation to be bound by its jurisdiction."

Interior Ministry rejects drug trafficking concerns



KABUL (TOLNews): Abdul Mateen Qani, spokesperson for the Ministry of Interior, dismissed concerns from some countries regarding the trafficking of synthetic drugs from Afghanistan, calling them unfounded. He stated that synthetic drugs are smuggled into Afghanistan from neighboring and some European countries. The spokesperson urged neighboring and regional countries to cooperate in preventing drug trafficking into Afghanistan. Speaking to TOLNews, Qani said: "We request regional and especially

neighboring countries to collaborate with us in combating drug trafficking so that it no longer occurs. We suffer due to security and drug-related issues from these countries." The Ministry of Interior added that poppy cultivation and drug production have been banned in Afghanistan and efforts to eradicate them continue. The criticism from the Ministry of Interior towards neighboring countries comes as some United Nations agencies and neighboring states had previously expressed concerns about the increase in drug trafficking from

Afghanistan to the region. Meanwhile, some economic experts emphasize the importance of international organizations and the interim government supporting farmers in promoting legal crops. "Border checkpoints should be kept active, intelligence information should be shared, and cooperation with the Ministry of Interior should be strengthened," Hadi Quraishi, a military affairs analyst, told TOLNews. "International organizations and the UN must assist Afghanistan and its farmers in various areas, including technology, seed distribution, and pest control medications, to encourage them to pursue lawful agriculture," Abdul Nasir Rashtia, an economic affairs expert, told TOLNews. Previously, the deputy minister for counter-narcotics of the Ministry of Interior also stated that the international community has not taken practical steps to collaborate in the fight against drugs in Afghanistan.

DABS invests over 4b in power supply projects

KABUL (TOLNews): Da Afghanistan Breshna Shehkat (DABS) announced that more than four billion Afghanis from the national budget have been spent on power supply projects. Abdul Bari Omar, the CEO of DABS, emphasized at the inauguration ceremony of the 110-kilovolt Jarqaduq substation extension and the 20-kilovolt Pul-e-Khurasan Sheberghan grid that Afghanistan needs both foreign engineers and domestic knowledge and expertise to achieve self-sufficiency. He stated: "More than four billion Afghanis have been invested in develop-

ment projects. This money did not come from the World Bank, the European Union, the United States, or any other source. This proves the commitment and vision of this system, and, Alhamdulillah, transparency exists here." Jowzjan Governor Gul Haidar Shafaq said: "We have gas, roads, security, and electricity here. There are no more excuses. We must work to increase our production." According to the CEO of DABS, an additional 570 million Afghanis have been spent in the past six months to improve power networks across the country.

Meanwhile, local officials and tribal elders have called on traders and industrialists to return to Afghanistan and invest in the energy sector, particularly in electricity and gas. Sayyed Hamed Agha, a tribal elder from Jowzjan, stated: "If our basic needs are met and electricity is supplied, there will no longer be a need for our children to leave the country just to earn a livelihood." Two power projects in Sheberghan have been completed and put into operation at a cost of over 125 million Afghanis from DABS' development budget.

Ex-minister calls for UN-backed talks



KABUL (Amu TV): Masouda Jalal, Afghanistan's former minister of women's affairs, has called for a United Nations-backed international conference similar to the 2001 Bonn Agreement as a pathway to resolving Afghanistan's crisis. In an interview with AFP, Jalal said the

ing that despite their initial assurances of moderation, they have imposed harsh interpretations of Islamic law, including public floggings and executions. "The political regime in Kabul does not have public support, and the world refuses to recognize it, yet still engages with it," she said. "That makes no sense. Why continue this? Millions of people are suffering." Jalal, who served as minister of women's affairs from 2004 to 2006, argued that with sufficient international will, the Taliban and their backers could be pressured into meaningful engagement to ensure inclusive governance. Emphasizing the global community's responsibility to end Afghanistan's humanitarian crisis, she urged world leaders to take decisive action. "The world cannot stand by and watch this suffering continue," she said.

ing that despite their initial assurances of moderation, they have imposed harsh interpretations of Islamic law, including public floggings and executions. "The political regime in Kabul does not have public support, and the world refuses to recognize it, yet still engages with it," she said. "That makes no sense. Why continue this? Millions of people are suffering." Jalal, who served as minister of women's affairs from 2004 to 2006, argued that with sufficient international will, the Taliban and their backers could be pressured into meaningful engagement to ensure inclusive governance. Emphasizing the global community's responsibility to end Afghanistan's humanitarian crisis, she urged world leaders to take decisive action. "The world cannot stand by and watch this suffering continue," she said.

Japan tells IEA team to respect human rights

KABUL (Ariana News): A senior Foreign Ministry official of Japan has called on visiting representatives of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (IEA) to respect human rights and promote an "inclusive" political process. Toshihide Ando, director-general of the Middle Eastern and African Affairs Bureau, met with IEA's senior officials in Tokyo, according to Toshihiro Kitamura, Japan Foreign Ministry's press secretary. Ando, who serves as the ministry's special representative for Afghanistan, asked the officials to address "urgent priorities," such as respect of human rights and promotion of an "inclusive" political process, Kitamura told a news conference. IEA officials arrived in Japan on Feb. 16 at the invitation of the Sasakawa Peace Foundation. IEA officials are staying in Japan for about a week during their first visit to the country since their return to power in August 2021.

MoRRD emphasizes community needs

KABUL (BNA): Mullah Mohammad Yunus Akhundzada, the Acting Minister of Rural Rehabilitation and Development, underscored the necessity of aligning development projects with the needs of the local population. The Ministry's Press Office reported that Minister Akhundzada highlighted the gathering's significance, stating, "Our responsibility is to implement projects in areas where the pain of our oppressed and suffering people can be alleviated." He reaffirmed the Ministry's commitment to ensuring that essential services and projects reach those who most require them. Minister Akhundzada stressed the importance of addressing the pressing issues faced by rural residents, insisting that development initiatives must be tailored to meet their specific needs. He stated, "We strive to deliver our projects and public services to the deserving people," emphasizing the Ministry's dedication to timely responses to rural challenges.

Projects inaugurated

JAWZJIAN (BNA): Islamic Emirate Authorities have inaugurated two major electricity projects in Jawzjan Province, valued at 125 million Afghanis, in the presence of Dr. Abdul Bari Omar, executive director of Da Afghan Breshna Shehkat (DABS), and local officials. During the ceremony, Dr. Omar highlighted that the projects include the installation of a 110-kilovolt transmission line from the Jarqaduq substation to Bayat Power Station, as well as the expansion of a 20-kilovolt distribution network in the Khurasan Bridge area of Shibirghan City. According to Dr. Omar, these initiatives will increase electricity capacity from 40 megawatts to 90 megawatts, significantly reducing power shortages in Jawzjan, Faryab, and Sar-e-Pul provinces. He added that efforts are ongoing to ensure a stable and sustainable energy supply across the country. Local officials described the projects as crucial for boosting industrial and commercial activity, paving the way for new factories and job creation. Residents of Jawzjan welcomed the initiative and urged authorities to extend electricity access to all districts, ensuring that communities across the province benefit from the development. Afghanistan's national power company stated that several large-scale energy projects are currently underway.

ANDMA urges aid groups to prioritize preventive measures



KABUL (BNA): In a meeting, Mullah Nooruddin Turabi, The head of Afghanistan National Disaster Management Authority (ANDMA), called on aid organizations to enhance their focus on preventive measures in disaster management projects. The meeting included Shehzad Jameel, the coun-

try director of Concern Worldwide, who acknowledged the partnership between the organization and the authority. According to a statement from the authority's press office, Mullah Turabi highlighted Afghanistan's vulnerability to natural disasters due to its geographical location, which results in

significant human and financial losses annually. He urged all organizations involved in disaster management to prioritize projects aimed at prevention. He also reassured aid organizations that necessary facilities would be provided to support their efforts. He emphasized the importance of transparency

and efficiency in the implementation of projects. In response, Shehzad Jameel expressed gratitude for the ongoing cooperation with the National Disaster Preparedness Authority. He presented a report detailing Concern Worldwide's previous initiatives and reaffirmed the commitment to continue future collaborations.

Haneef Atmar expresses strong support for 'Vienna Process'

KABUL (Amu TV): Haneef Atmar, Afghanistan's former foreign minister, welcomed the fifth Vienna Process conference, praising its success in drafting a roadmap and key political documents in consultation with various opposition groups. In a post on X on Thursday, Atmar expressed his ideological alignment with the Vienna Process, emphasizing the need for a return to national sovereignty and a political system based on the will of the Afghan people. "We share a strong vision for Afghanistan's present and future," he wrote. "We are united in our call for restoring national sovereignty to the Afghan people and establishing a political system that reflects their free will while upholding fundamental rights and freedoms for all citizens—women, men, and children alike." Atmar pledged sincere cooperation with the Vienna Process and put forward two proposals. He urged opposition groups to set aside past

divisions that contributed to the collapse of the republic and work toward greater unity. He called for national cooperation based on shared goals, emphasizing that the real challenge lies not in defining objectives, but in the methods and leadership dynamics required to achieve them. The two-day Vienna Process conference in Austria, which began on Wednesday, February 19, brought together key opposition figures, including Ahmad Massoud, leader of

the National Resistance Front; Yasin Zia, leader of the Afghanistan Freedom Front, and various political figures and activists. According to Mohammad Afzali, the conference's media coordinator, participants focused on developing a unified political vision for Afghanistan's future. On its second day, the conference issued a six-point resolution, emphasizing the importance of drafting key political documents to guide the country's path forward.

Kabul Municipality reclaims seized land in District 11

KABUL (BNA): Kabul Municipality officials reclaimed 5.5 jeribs of land in the Labjar area of District 11. The announcement was made by Mawlawi Zabiullah Nabi Khail, the head of District 11, who emphasized that this land had been illegally seized by usurpers who constructed unauthorized structures over the years. Speaking to the media, Nabi Khail highlighted the municipality's commitment to addressing land misuse. "These structures were identified and removed, ensuring that the land is now under the control of Kabul Municipality," he stated. The reclaimed area is set to be utilized for upcoming development plans aimed at benefiting the community. The municipality's efforts do not stop here; Nabi Khail



revealed plans to reclaim additional seized lands across various locations in District 11 in the near future. "We are determined to eliminate opportunistic and law-

less activities that exploit government properties," he added, assuring the public that the municipality will not tolerate further illegal encroachments.

Kabul Municipality is actively working to safeguard public land and implement development initiatives that will enhance the quality of life for residents.

Heavy snow and storms shut down key highways

KABUL (Amu TV): Heavy snowfall and storms have forced the closure of major highways in the country, including the Salang Pass north of Kabul and the Khost-Kabul Highway in the east, disrupting travel across Afghanistan, Taliban officials said on Thursday. The Taliban-run Ministry of Public Works announced that the Salang Pass was closed to all traffic at 11 p.m. Wednesday, Feb. 19, due to heavy snowfall, storms, and poor visibility. The ministry described the closure as temporary and urged travelers to avoid the route until further notice. Meanwhile, the Khost-Kabul Highway has also been blocked since late Wednesday night, particularly in the Kotal Teri area



of Paktia province, where thick snow has covered nearly three kilometers of road. Local Taliban officials said efforts were underway to clear the highway by the

end of Thursday. Ministry has advised citizens to refrain from traveling on these routes until conditions improve. The Khost-Kabul Highway, a crucial

national roadway, frequently faces closures during winter as much of its route passes through mountainous terrain, making it highly susceptible to heavy snowfall.

S Korea's President Yoon in court for hearing

SEOUL: South Korean President Yoon Suk-yeol has appeared in court for a preliminary hearing on allegations he was attempting to orchestrate a rebellion when he briefly imposed martial law in December.

The hearing – held at the Seoul Central District Court on Thursday, where security was heightened as dozens of his supporters rallied nearby – involved discussions around witnesses and other preparations in advance of his criminal trial. The court will also review a request by Yoon's lawyers to cancel his arrest and release him from custody.

Police arrested Yoon on January 15 after a weeklong standoff at his residential compound, in the first such action taken against a sitting president in South Korea. Yoon declared martial law in a television address on December 3, claiming the shock move was to "safeguard a liberal South Korea from the threats posed by North Korea's communist forces and to eliminate antistate elements".

Yoon's decree brought thousands of angry protesters opposing the move to the streets, before lawmakers

in the National Assembly voted it down and lifted the martial law within about six hours of it being declared. Authorities indicted Yoon on January 26 on charges of staging a rebellion, alleging that his decree was an unlawful attempt to shut down the National Assembly and arrest politicians and election authorities.

While presidents in South Korea enjoy immunity from most criminal prosecutions, an exception is made for charges of rebellion or treason. If convicted, Yoon faces a potential punishment of death or life in prison. Yoon's defence minister, Kim Yong-hyun, as well as the national police chief Cho Ji-ho and several military commanders have also been arrested and indicted on rebellion, abuse of power and other charges related to the decree.

While short-lived, Yoon's martial law declaration has plunged the country into political turmoil. On December 14, the National Assembly overwhelmingly voted to suspend Yoon's presidential powers and impeach him. In a parallel impeachment trial to Yoon's criminal case,

South Korea's Constitutional Court is now nearing a decision on whether to formally remove him from office or dismiss the motion and reinstate him.

Al Jazeera correspondent in Seoul, Rob McBride, said that should the court uphold Yoon's impeachment, South Korea will hold elections within 60 days. "This drama continues, and of course, the country remains in a kind of diplomatic limbo," McBride said outside the Seoul court where Yoon's trial is taking place.

"The country's acting president, Choi Sang-mok, has not even spoken on the phone with [United States President] Donald Trump, the leader of South Korea's most important ally," he added. Yoon's vocal supporters, hundreds of whom rioted at the Seoul Western District Court after it authorised his arrest last month, have protested against the legal action being taken against him. Yoon has also maintained a defiant stance, continuing to express contempt for his liberal rivals and endorsing baseless conspiracy theories about election fraud. — Aljazeera



BAKU: Chairman Senate, Syed Yousuf Raza Gillani in a group photo with President of Azerbaijan, Ilham Heydar Oghlu Aliyev.

ATC rejects Police Lines bombing facilitators

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Anti-Terrorism Court (ATC) Peshawar has rejected the bail applications of suspects arrested for facilitating the 2023 Peshawar Police Lines Masjid bombing, on Thursday.

According to the prosecution, the arrested suspects, including Hilal, Inayat Rahman, Usman, Fazal Khaliq, and Abdul Rahman, are accused of providing support and facilitation to the perpetrators of the bombing.

The bombing, which occurred on January 30, 2023, targeted a mosque in the Peshawar Police Lines area, killing over 80 police personnel and injuring hundreds more. The Counter-Terrorism Department (CTD) of the Peshawar Police had arrested the suspects during the investigation.

The suspects had filed bail applications in the ATC, challenging their arrest. However, after completing the hearing, the court rejected their bail applications, ordering them to remain in jail.

Pak-Turkish joint exercise concludes

F.P. Report

RAWALPINDI: The closing ceremony of Pakistan-Turkiye Joint Exercise Ataturk-XIII in counter-terrorism domain was conducted between the armies of Pakistan and Republic of Türkiye at Cherat, Pakistan.

Two-week-long exercise commenced on 10 February 2025. Two combat teams from Special Services Group, Pakistan Army and 36 officers and soldiers from all ranks from Special Forces, Republic of Türkiye participated in the exercise.

Commander 11 Corps, attended the Closing Ceremony as Chief Guest. Brigadier General Ahmet ASIK from Republic of Türkiye also witnessed the Closing Ceremony. The troops displayed highest standards of professional excellence during the conduct.

Removal of employees

PHC approached against KP govt

Humayun Khan

PESHAWAR: The decision of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government to terminate employees recruited during the caretaker government's tenure has been challenged in the Peshawar High Court. The petition seeks to declare the termination as illegal and to suspend the implementation of the law under which the employees are being terminated.

The petition was filed by Syed Muhammad Ali Shah Bacha, Provincial President of the Pakistan Peoples Party, through Advocate Gohar Rahman. The respondents in the petition include the Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Chief Secretary, Secretary Establishment, Secretary Law, Secretary Provincial Assembly, and Advocate General Khyber

Pakhtunkhwa.

In the petition, it is argued that thousands of individuals were recruited in various government departments during the caretaker government's tenure, following all legal requirements and formal advertisements in newspapers. However, the current PTI-led government has initiated a campaign to terminate these employees, and has even passed legislation, known as the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Employees Act 2025, to facilitate their removal.

The petition contends that the employees were recruited through a proper process and that the legislation aimed at terminating them is unconstitutional and violates their fundamental rights. It is also alleged that the employees are being targeted for political revenge, simply

because they were recruited during the caretaker government's tenure.

The petition requests the court to declare the termination of employees as illegal and unconstitutional. Suspend the implementation of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Employees Act 2025. Restrain the respondents from taking any action against the employees under the Act until a final decision is made.

The petition argues that the termination of employees is a clear violation of their fundamental rights, including the right to equality, the right to life, and the right to livelihood. It is also argued that the legislation passed by the provincial assembly is ultra vires and unconstitutional, as it violates the principles of natural justice and the rule of law.

US refusing to co-sponsor UN motion backing Ukraine

LONDON/GENEVA/BERLIN (Reuters): The US is refusing to co-sponsor a draft U.N. resolution marking three years since Moscow's invasion of Ukraine that backs Kyiv's territorial integrity and again demands Russia withdraw its troops, three diplomatic sources told Reuters, in a potential stark shift by Ukraine's most powerful Western ally.

Countries can decide to co-sponsor a resolution up until a vote. The 193-member General Assembly is due to vote on Monday, said diplomats. General Assembly resolutions are not binding but carry political weight, reflecting a global view on the war. "In previous years, the United States has consistently co-sponsored such resolutions in support of a just peace in Ukraine," one of the sources, who like the others requested anonymity to discuss sensitive matters, said on Thursday.

The first diplomatic source told Reuters that the

resolution was being sponsored by more than 50 countries, declining to identify them. A second diplomatic source who also requested anonymity said: "For now, the situation is they (the US) won't sign it." Efforts are ongoing to seek support from other countries instead, including the Global South, the source added.

A spokesperson for the US diplomatic mission to the United Nations in Geneva did not immediately respond to a request for comment. The U.N. vote comes amid a widening rift between Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and US President Donald Trump, who is trying to rapidly end the war in Ukraine and whose team has held talks with Russia without the involvement of Kyiv.

The row is a major political crisis for Ukraine, which has used tens of billions of dollars of US military aid agreed under the previous US administration to weather Russia's

invasion and also benefited from diplomatic support. The draft U.N. resolution, seen by Reuters, "calls for a de-escalation, an early cessation of hostilities and a peaceful resolution of the war against Ukraine ... in line with the U.N. Charter and international law".

It also "recalls the need for full implementation of its relevant resolutions adopted in response to the aggression against Ukraine, in particular its demand that the Russian Federation immediately, completely and unconditionally withdraw all of its military forces from the territory of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders". Russia has seized some 20% of Ukraine and is slowly but steadily gaining territory in the east. Moscow said its "special military operation" responded to an existential threat posed by Kyiv's pursuit of NATO membership. Ukraine and the West call Russia's action an imperialist land grab.

SC upholds judgement of LHC

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Giving a significant support to working women and expressing Pakistan commitment to eliminating workplace harassment, the Supreme Court has maintained the judgement of the Lahore High Court dismissing a convict of sexual harassment from service.

A two member bench of the Supreme Court of Pakistan, headed by Justice Syed Mansoor Ali Shah and comprising Justice Aqeel Ahmad Abbasi, was hearing an appeal against a judgement of the Lahore High Court in sexual harassment case.

The Petitioner, Muhammad Din, was dismissed from service by the Ombudsman Punjab office for sexual harassment of a lady physician Dr. Sidra Zafar.

In her petition under the Protection against Harassment of Women at Workplace Act 2010, she alleged harassment and misconduct of her driver Muhammad Din before the Ombudsman, Punjab. The Ombudsman issued a show-cause notice to the accused but he denied the allegations. However, the Ombudsman found the allegations true after thorough investigation and sent the accused on compulsory retirement.

The Petitioner preferred representation before the Governor Punjab that was dismissed. Subsequently, the petitioner invoked the constitutional jurisdiction of the Lahore High Court by filing a writ petition that was dismissed too.

The Supreme Court, in its order, says that it is imperative to recognize that workplace harassment remains a pressing global issue, affecting millions of workers across various sectors. More than one in five workers (22.8% or 743 million people) worldwide have experienced some form of workplace violence.

Trump says he could give 20% of DOGE savings back to Americans

WASHINGTON: United States President Donald Trump has proposed using some of the savings from tech billionaire Elon Musk's cost-cutting drive to give Americans cash and pay down government debt.

Speaking at an investment summit hosted by Saudi Arabia's sovereign wealth fund in Miami Beach, Florida, Trump said he was considering using 20 percent of the savings for payouts to the public and 20 percent to pay down the federal government's \$36 trillion debt. "The numbers are incredible, Elon. So many billions of dollars ... hundreds of billions," Trump told the Future Investment Initiative (FII) Priority Summit, referring to savings identified by Musk's Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE).

"We're thinking about giving 20 percent back to the American citizens, and 20 percent down to pay back debt," Trump's suggestion came a day after DOGE adviser James Fishback, the CEO of investment firm Azoria, proposed a "DOGE dividend" funded by the cost-cutting initiative. In a four-page memo posted on X on Tuesday, Fishback said every tax-paying household could be sent a \$5,000 cheque assuming Musk's task force saves \$2 trillion by the time it finishes up its work in July 2026.

In response to Fishback's memo, Musk, the CEO of Tesla and SpaceX, said on X that he would "check with the President". Guo Xu, an associate professor at UC Berkeley Haas who studies the efficiency of government bureaucracies, expressed scepticism about the proposal. "This seems like a populist measure designed to make the crippling of our federal government

capacity more appealing," Xu told Al Jazeera.

"Instead of cutting the government to cut cheques, we should be investing to strengthen the nation's infrastructure, science and national security," During Trump's election campaign, Musk, the world's richest person, predicted he could find \$2 trillion in savings but later backtracked on that estimate, suggesting in an interview in January that he had a good chance of saving half that much. DOGE, which is not an official government department, has claimed to have achieved savings of \$55bn so far, but has not released detailed documentation to support that figure.

DOGE published a list of contracts it said it had cancelled to achieve \$16bn in savings. The list, however, misstated the value of a \$8m contract with Immigration and Customs Enforcement as \$8bn. Canice Prendergast, a professor at the University of Chicago Booth School of Business and the author of The Limits of Bureaucratic Efficiency, expressed doubt that DOGE would make much of an impact on waste in the federal bureaucracy.

"My guess is that at least 100 percent of the 'savings' will be used to pay the severance payments to the workers that they let go," Prendergast told Al Jazeera. "There is no question that there is a lot of inefficiency in the government. Finding it is either pretty hard to do without screwing up services or something no politician is willing to touch. For instance, most of the US federal budget goes to Social Security, Medicaid or Medicare that no one is touching." — Aljazeera



ISLAMABAD: Government employees holding a protest for acceptance of their demands.

In Russia, dozens of dissenters are held as psychiatric patients

LONDON (Reuters): Dozens of Russians are being subjected to compulsory psychiatric treatment because of their political views, according to lawyers and human rights groups - a trend they say has gathered pace since the start of the war in Ukraine.

The practice carries echoes of a method of control used widely in the Soviet Union and known as "punitive psychiatry", even if the current scale falls far short of that seen from the late 1960s until the early 1980s. For this story, Reuters analysed data from an international expert and two Russian human rights groups, interviewed three lawyers and reviewed case materials of two female activists sent by court order to undergo psychiatric assessments at a Siberian hospital.

The women, whose accounts are reported here in detail for the first time, were released after a few weeks but described the experience as a scarring ordeal. Yekaterina Fatyanova, 37, was interned on April 28 last year at the KKPND No.1 psychiatric hospital in her home city of Krasnoyarsk after being accused of discrediting the Russian armed forces by publishing an article in a small opposition newspaper she ran in her spare time. She was not the author of the piece, which argued the war in Ukraine was driven by imperialist motives.

While in hospital she was subjected to painful, degrading and unnecessary procedures including a gynaecological examination, she wrote in letters of complaint to authorities, reviewed by Reuters. Fatyanova was discharged from the hospital on May 27 after doctors determined, in a document seen by Reuters, that she had no mental disorders or diseases.

"I believe that the real purpose of placing me there was moral suppression

and isolation from society, possibly as a punishment for my active civic position," she said. Robert van Voren, a Dutch professor and human rights campaigner who has spent decades studying what he describes as the political abuse of psychiatry in Russia, said he had documented around 23 such cases a year since 2022, when the full-scale invasion of Ukraine began, up from an annual average of around 5 between 2015 and 2021. Russia's justice ministry, human rights commissioner and the Kremlin did not reply to requests for comment about the alleged use of psychiatry for political purposes. The Kremlin says it does not discuss individual cases that pass through the criminal justice system, as these are a matter for the courts.

Hospital KKPND No.1 did not respond to a request for comment. In the Soviet era, thousands of dissenters, opens new tab were hospitalised for political reasons, based on the premise that only someone mentally ill would oppose the Communist state. Among the best known cases were those of dissident Vladimir Bukovsky and Nobel prize-winning poet Joseph Brodsky. While far below that scale, the current trend is nonetheless "disturbing," van Voren said in an interview. Reuters has previously reported a revival of other Soviet-era practices during the Ukraine war, including citizen denunciations of suspected dissenters.

In many other parts of the world, the use of compulsory psychiatric treatment has been in decline and generally confined to violent criminal cases, said Dainius Puras, a Lithuanian psychiatrist who served as the U.N. Special Rapporteur on the right to health. Puras said an erosion of democratic reforms in Russia had a "detrimental impact on Russian psychiatry," cautioning that

Russia's use of state-appointed psychiatrists in court cases likely leads to decisions that serve the interests of national authorities.

In Russia, compulsory treatment "is now again used for political purposes, like it was in the time of the Soviet Union," he said. Russian rights group Memorial has identified 48 people it says are currently undergoing such treatment in politically motivated cases. Of those, 46 are psychiatric inpatients and two are receiving out-patient treatment while in prison.

The most common charges against them related to criticism of the war. Thirteen of the people had been prosecuted under censorship laws passed shortly after Russia's invasion, the rights group said. According to Memorial, the youngest person subjected to compulsory psychiatric treatment for war protests turned 20 in hospital last week. He was investigated as a teenager in 2023 for seeking permission to organise an anti-war rally, and a court ordered his hospitalisation in February last year. Anastasia Pilipenko, a lawyer who has represented people placed under compulsory psychiatric treatment, told Reuters she did not consider "risky behaviour in the form of public anti-war statements to be a sign of mental disorder."

Pilipenko does not represent any of the people in this story. Hospitalisations represent a small fraction of overall arrests and jailings for political crimes, including speaking out against the war. Just over 20,000 people have been arrested for expressing an anti-war position since the full-scale invasion began, according to Russian rights group OVD-Info. Some 1,155 people have been criminally charged. For those admitted as psychiatric patients, additional trauma stems from the open-

ended nature of their detention and the fact that their sanity is being called into question, van Voren said.

"It challenges the value of what you think because it is dubbed mental illness. And that has a very debilitating effect." Memorial said the person hospitalised the longest in a politically motivated case is Albert Gurdjian, interned since 2017 after allegedly posting online that justice officials were an organised crime group and that it would be good to "blast the yacht" of a businessman close to President Vladimir Putin. Reuters was unable to reach Gurdjian for comment. Fatyanova, the Krasnoyarsk journalist, said in her complaints that she was taken to the KKPND No.1 hospital by officers of the FSB security service, and that she was pressured to sign admission forms authorising treatment and procedures without her informed and voluntary consent. While there, she said she had to resign from her main job at a management company because it declined to give her leave. She had also been fired from a previous job at a transport company in December 2023 after the FSB started investigating her, she said in her complaints. She said patients were sometimes denied daily walks, given mouldy bread and frequently disturbed by female screams from another floor of the building.

The health ministry wrote back, dismissing Fatyanova's complaints. However, the regional health inspectorate said in a letter dated October 1 that it had warned the hospital to obtain informed consent from patients. In December, Fatyanova was sentenced for the newspaper article to two years' forced labour, a form of punishment where convicts have to live in a hostel and perform mostly unskilled tasks such as picking up trash or clearing snow. It

has yet to come into force, pending appeals, she said.

While in hospital, she met Olga Suvorova, 56, a prolific campaigner on social and environmental issues who told Reuters she too had been subjected to invasive and unnecessary tests there even though, unlike Fatyanova, she refused to sign a consent form. "This is punitive psychiatry," Suvorova said in a telephone interview. "The aim of this whole thing is to defame me, belittle my contribution ... and to slander me and make people no longer trust me."

The case documents show Suvorova's internment stemmed from a criminal investigation alleging she falsely accused a police officer of assault in October 2023. Suvorova says the officer manhandled her. She supported her complaint with a medical report showing bruising that required her to wear a sling for two weeks. In December 2023, Suvorova was arrested in the false accusation case at Krasnoyarsk airport after returning from a meeting in Moscow with Yekaterina Duntsova, an opposition politician who was seeking to run against Putin in an election.

Refusing to admit wrongdoing, Suvorova was sent by order of an investigator for two out-patient psychiatric assessments. In a report, a doctor said she showed signs of "mixed personality disorder" including impulsive behaviour and a "fixation on the desire to help other people". For further investigation, a court in May sent Suvorova to KKPND No.1 as an inpatient, the documents reviewed by Reuters showed.

Suvorova said it was only after complaining about her treatment that she was discharged after three weeks, with a medical document stating she had not been found to be suffering any psychiatric disorder. Suvorova acknowledged

that during two court appearances, in 2021 and 2024, she publicly cut her arm, drawing blood. She said she did not seriously injure herself on either occasion, and had acted in order to highlight injustices.

"I choose methods that can draw attention," she said. "If there were real grounds to suspect that I had a psychiatric illness, I would definitely not have got out of hospital." Ingar Gorlanov, a 26-year-old from Siberia whose parents died when he was a child, was first sent to a psychiatric institution in 2019 when he staged a one-man picket outside the presidential administration in Moscow, demanding a meeting with Putin about the rights of orphans, according to his lawyer, Alexei Pryanishnikov. Police detained Gorlanov and took him to a hospital. A few days later, a court ruled in favour of compulsory treatment.

Since then, Gorlanov has been sent to two other psychiatric hospitals after repeated arrests, Pryanishnikov told Reuters. He is on a federal list of "terrorists and extremists," charged with offences including inciting hatred and insulting a police officer. Pryanishnikov said his client was a normal person with a "heightened sense of justice" who presents no danger to himself or others and should be receiving therapy rather than in-patient treatment and anti-psychotic drugs.

Reuters has communicated sporadically via text with Gorlanov, interned at a psychiatric facility in his hometown, Novokuznetsk, since July 15. He said he was allowed access to his phone for 10 minutes at weekends. As of early February, Gorlanov said he was still a patient there. Asked what motivated him to keep protesting, Gorlanov replied: "The opportunity to contribute to changing policy in the country for the better."