

**Six more militants killed**  
**F.P. Report**  
RAWALPINDI: Security Forces conducted an intelligence based operation in Karak, on reported presence of Khwarij. Own troops effectively engaged the khwarij location, resultantly, six khwarij were sent to hell. Sanitization operation is being conducted to eliminate any other Kharji found in the area as the security forces of Pakistan are determined to wipe out menace of terrorism from the country.



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RAWALPINDI: General Syed Asim Munir, NI (M), Chief of Army Staff on the invitation of General Roland Walker, CGS UK Army had a field visit to Warminster and Larkhill Garrisons. COAS was briefed on the modernisation plan of British Army and Deep Recce Strike Brigade. Niche technologies including AI and uncrewed systems were also showcased by the British Army during the visit.

## Peaceful protest right of every citizen, Senate told

**F.P. Report**

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Law, Justice, and Parliamentary Affairs, Senator Azam Nazeer Tarar, on Friday said peaceful protest was a fundamental right of every citizen but it must take place within the parameters set by the law.

In response to concerns raised by Senator Sherry Rehman, the minister reaffirmed that peaceful protest was a core right but must adhere to the legal frameworks that clearly define acceptable guidelines and limitations.

Tarar expressed his concerns about the disruptions caused by protesters at the Pakistan Secretariat, a crucial institution that serves citizens from all regions of the country, including the remote areas of Balochistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Sindh, and Punjab. He stressed that such disturbances impede the delivery of public services and stated that the Secretariat should not be held hostage by these actions.

The minister also mentioned that the prime minister had instructed that proper engagement be undertaken with the protesters to address their concerns and find resolutions. The finance minister was actively involved in negotiations with the protesting employees, and the government was committed to meeting their legitimate demands.

Tarar further noted that the Prime Minister has assured that any employees offered early retirement or placed in the surplus pool will have their rights fully protected. The government remains steadfast in its commitment to safeguarding employees' rights, while simultaneously working towards reducing non-developmental expenditures, such as salaries and pensions. This strategy aims to free up

resources that will foster industrial and economic growth, ultimately generating private-sector job opportunities. He concluded by stating that this approach aligns with global economic strategies for sustainable progress.

The Senate was informed that Ramadan Package worth twenty billion rupees has been prepared by the federal government this year which will be provided in cash directly to about four million deserving people.

Responding to the points raised by PPP leaders Shahdat Awan and Sherry Rehman, Minister for Industries and Production Rana Tanveer Hussain told the House that the provincial governments are also following the same cash transfer model for the Ramadan package.

Rana Tanveer Hussain said Utility Stores Corporation will be restructured to enhance its performance and efficiency. He made it clear that the Utility Stores Corporation would not be closed down. Law Minister Azam Nazeer Tarar said the Finance Minister, on the direction of the Prime Minister, is engaged with the protesting government employees to address their genuine demands.

As regards the rightsizing in public sector departments, Azam Nazeer Tarar assured that rights of the employees would be protected. He said it is our effort to reduce non development expenditures to use these resources for economic activity which in turn will create job opportunities in the private sector. Law Minister Azam Nazeer Tarar laid before the house the Societies Registration Amendment Ordinance 2024. At the outset, the House offered fateha for those martyred in recent acts of terrorism in the country.

## Ties with Bahrain based on common faith: Tarar

RIYADH (APP): Federal Minister for Information, Broadcasting, National Heritage and Culture Attaullah Tarar said on Friday that brotherly relations between Pakistan and Bahrain were very strong and based on common faith, history and culture.

During a meeting with Bahraini Minister for Information Ramzan bin Abdullah Al Noaimi in Saudi Capital Riyadh he said exchanges of media delegations were very important to further strengthen ties in the media sector. The meeting expressed the determination to expand media cooperation, exchange

skills and promote joint projects between the two countries.

The federal minister for information stressed the need to promote cooperation between the state media institutions of Bahrain and Pakistan. He suggested sharing of news between Bahraini News Agency BNA and Pakistan's state news agency Associated Press of Pakistan.

Both sides welcomed regular exchanges of high-level delegations in recent years. Tarar said a parliamentary delegation from Bahrain currently visiting Pakistan today had an important meeting with

Prime Minister of Pakistan Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif. He said national economy was in the right direction and moving forward and Pakistan was a great investment opportunity for global investors.

Bahrain Minister said that they valued relations with Pakistan. Bahrain-Pakistan relations are continuously developing in various fields under the wise guidance of the leadership, he remarked. Bahrain Information Minister reiterated Bahrain's commitment to further strengthen cooperation in the media sector and promote joint achievements.

## Israel says it has struck Lebanon-Syria border crossings

BEIRUT (AFP): Israel said Friday it struck crossings on the Lebanon-Syria border used by Hezbollah to smuggle weapons, with a Syria war monitor reporting an unspecified number of people wounded in the attack.

The Israeli military said its air forces "struck crossing points in the area of the Lebanon-Syria border" used by the Iran-backed Hezbollah militant group "in attempts to smuggle weapons into Lebanese territory." "These activities constitute a blatant violation of the ceasefire understandings between Israel and Lebanon," the statement added.

A fragile ceasefire between Israel and Hezbollah has been in place since

November 27, after more than a year of hostilities including two months of all-out war. Both sides have accused the other of violating the deal. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights war monitor said the overnight strikes put an "illegal crossing" near Lebanon's frontier town of Wadi Khaled, which borders Syria's Homs province, "out of service" and wounded a number of people.

The raids came "after a convoy of smugglers' vehicles was observed headed from Syria toward Lebanon," added the Britain-based Observatory, which has a network of sources inside Syria. Observatory chief Rami Abdel Rahman reported

"heavy material damage to buildings and vehicles."

Lebanon's official National News Agency reported "enemy aircraft flying at low altitude over the city of Hermel" and villages in the Bekaa Valley in the country's northeast near the Syrian border. Under the Israel-Hezbollah ceasefire, Lebanon's military was to deploy in south Lebanon alongside UN peacekeepers as the Israeli army withdrew over a 60-day period that was later extended to February 18.

Hezbollah was to pull back north of the Litani River, about 30 kilometers (20 miles) from the border, and dismantle remaining military infrastructure in the south.

## Imran will never be part of any deal like Nawaz: Saif

**F.P. Report**

PESHAWAR: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Information Adviser Barrister Muhammad Ali Saif said on Friday that incarcerated Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) founder Imran Khan would never become part of any deal with the establishment like Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) president Muhammad Nawaz Sharif.

In a statement, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Information Adviser Barrister Muhammad Ali Saif said the government was afraid of the PTI founder, adding that the government had banned meetings with the PTI founder due to this very reason.

"The government is pressurising Imran Khan into brokering a deal but he stands resolute unlike Nawaz Sharif. The government isn't only violating basic human rights but also committing contempt of court," he reiterated. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Information Adviser Barrister Muhammad Ali Saif also demanded lifting of ban from meetings between Khan and party leaders.

## SBP injects Rs 1,754b in market

**F.P. Report**

KARACHI: The State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) injected Rs 1,754 billion in the market through reverse repo purchase and Shariah Compliant Mudarabah based Open Market Operations (OMO) on Friday.

The SBP conducted the Open Market Operation, Reverse Repo Purchase (Injection) for 7-day and 28-day tenors on February 21, 2025 and accepted 15 bids amounting to Rs 1,449 billion. The central bank received 20 bids for 7-day tenor cumulatively offering an amount of Rs 1,621.6 billion at the rate of return ranging between 12.05 to 12.08 percent while no bid was received for the 28-day tenor.

The SBP accepted the total amount of Rs 1,449 billion offered through 15 quotes for 7-day tenor at 12.07% rate of return. Total amount offered at 12.07% was 754 billion, out of which SBP accepted 647.1 billion on pro-rata basis.

Meanwhile, the central bank also conducted Shariah Compliant Mudarabah based Open Market Operation for the 7-day and 28-day tenors and further injected Rs 305 billion into the market. The central bank received 7 bids for 7-day tenor quoting an amount of Rs 305 billion at the rate of return ranging between 12.09 to 12.11 % while no bid was received for 28-day tenor. The SBP accepted the entire amount offered through all the 7 quotes for 7-day tenor at 12.09% rate of return.

# The Frontier Post

**22 Indian fishermen freed**  
**F.P. Report**

KARACHI: A total of 22 Indian fishermen have been released from Malir Jail in Karachi. They were sent to Wagah Border by bus for repatriation to India. According to the Edhi Foundation spokesperson, the organization will cover all travel expenses for the fishermen from the jail to the border. Most violations occur due to the absence of a physical boundary and lack of navigational tools for small fishermen.

## Ensuring transparent, speedy justice PM launches Case Assignments and Management System

**Saqib Mushtaq**

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Friday inaugurated the Case Assignments and Management System (CAMS), a transformative initiative designed to provide transparent, efficient, and speedy justice for litigants.

During the launching ceremony, the prime minister highlighted the long-standing demand from applicants and litigants for a more transparent and timely justice system, which CAMS is set to address. "Case Assignments and Management System was long overdue because litigants and applicants from all over the country wanted transparent and speedy justice and this initiative will go a long way to address their grievances and provide justice in a reasonable time frame," the prime minister said while addressing the inauguration ceremony held here.

He also thanked the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crimes (UNODC) and Canadian High Commission for providing funds for the project. The prime minister mentioned that although, in the past, a track and trace system was introduced in the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR), it did not yield the desired results and ultimately failed. However, he emphasized that due to his personal involvement, the current government had successfully launched an effective and efficient system that was now benefiting the people of Pakistan.

"FBR is now having a trial run of faceless interaction at Karachi port, and once it is fully operational, it will then be replicated at various sea ports, dry ports and other places all over the country," he added. He regretted that trillions of rupees had delayed for decades due to corruption

and lack of modern technology techniques.

"I have been personally following this," he said adding that a couple of days, he also met Chief Justice of Pakistan (CJP) to request him ensuring speedy decisions on merit because trillions of rupees worth cases were pending at the tribunal level, at higher forums, high court, and supreme court. The prime minister pointed out that Pakistan was meant to lead many nations due to its tremendous natural and human resources.

"What has been lacking is 'will to do', had we utilized these factors earlier, Pakistan would have been transformed long ago." The prime minister expressed his resolve to recover each and every penny that was due for the betterment of the people of Pakistan. He mentioned that after making mechanism functional, an amount of Rs 24 billion was adjudicated by the Sindh High Court on merit and this money will now be deposited in the national exchequer.

Minister for Law and Justice Azam Nazeer Tarar, on the occasion informed that 98.5% of the federal government's official work was now conducted through technology via the e-business portal. He said the prime minister had always expressed concern over delays in the judicial system, and now the federal laws had been put on a mobile app, ensuring amendments were updated swiftly. "Our response time for amendments is now just 48 hours," he added.

Country Representative of UNODC Troels Vester highlighted that the Office was committed to improving the justice system by making it faster, more efficient, and fairer for all through effective oversight mechanisms. He extended appreciation to Prime Minister Shehbaz



Sharif's leadership in driving government reforms, particularly in modernizing Pakistan's justice sector.

He said this launch aligned directly with the Prime Minister's e-office initiative, and the UNODC was grateful for the support from the Ministry of Law and Justice and its team, whose hard work had turned this vision into reality. High Commissioner of Canada to Pakistan Leslie Scanlon said this milestone was significant for the Ministry of Law and Justice and showcased how Pakistan's government was embracing automation, promoting digitalization, and fostering transparency. Additionally, she said it also highlighted the government's commitment to environmental conservation by reducing paper waste. The prime minister also presented certificates of appreciation to the team members for their hard work.

**Premier assures to resolve issues faced by retail businesses:** Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif directed the formation of a committee to resolve the issues faced by retail businesses and assured his government's all-out support for their hard work.

(Continued on Back Page)

## KP cabinet approve Ramazan package for poor

**F.P. Report**

### Govt finalizes its one-year performance report

**F.P. Report**

PESHAWAR: The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) government has finalized its one-year performance report, highlighting significant achievements under the leadership of Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur. The report emphasizes initiatives in social welfare and public service, in line with the vision of the party's founding chairman, Imran Khan.

Over the past year, the KP government has implemented several groundbreaking measures, including financial aid of PKR 10,000 each for 37,000 differently-abled individuals, the distribution of electric wheelchairs to 2,000 university and college students, and the rehabilitation of 1,240 drug addicts. Additionally, 570 hearing-impaired individuals were provided with hearing aids. The report also outlines key transport and education initiatives, such as the allocation of PKR 316 million for 11 HiAce vans and 12 minibuses to facilitate the transportation of special needs students. Furthermore, PKR 274 million was allocated to the Special Education Complex in Hayatabad, Peshawar.

Secondary Education Foundation for uninterrupted education of 181,233 students studying in 2325 Girls Community Schools across the Province. Talking on the occasion, the Chief Minister stressed for the provision of quality education and said that the number of beneficiaries of such schools should be increased in a way that no girl is left without education. He assured that the Government will make every effort to provide as many funds as required for the purpose.

The Cabinet also approved the creation of 458 nursing internship slots for one year with a total financial implication of Rs.170.376 million @ Rs.31000/- per month for the passed out students of 1st batch of BS Nursing program 2020. On this occasion, the cabinet stressed for enhancing such nursing education facilities and encouragement of the private sector in nursing education.

The Cabinet approved Rs. 400 mil-

lion as Grant-in-Aid for the Auqaf Organization, for the Financial Year 2024-25, so that it could pay the outstanding salaries/pensions and other operational expenses. The Cabinet approved utilization of the savings and interest earned on deposit of Rs. 332.563 million for salaries and routine operations of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Board of Investment and Trade (KP-BOIT) subject to regularization by the Finance Department.

It also approved the enhanced cost of land for Establishment of Cadet College Project Phase-III from Rs. 298.481 million to Rs. 468.013 million with total difference of Rs. 169.532 million in order to comply with judgment of the Supreme Court. The cabinet approved amendments in Motor Vehicles Rules (MVR), 1969 authorizing the Secretary Regional Transport Authority for inspection of Bus/Truck Stands.

## PTI team highlights grievances in rare meeting with CJ

**F.P. Report**

ISLAMABAD: In a rare occasion, a delegation of five opposition members met Chief Justice of Pakistan Yahya Afridi, where PTI leaders voiced their grievances regarding legal and political challenges the party has been facing.

Sources revealed that the meeting took place at the chief justice's residence and lasted an hour. The PTI leaders shared their grievances including cases the party leaders had been facing.

Later, PTI Chairman Barrister Gohar told a press conference that they informed the chief justice about the government's failure to comply with court orders and the restrictions on PTI founder's meetings with his wife. The

CJP also shared a 10-point agenda on judicial reforms.

Opposition Leader Omar Ayub mentioned that their delegation included top lawyers and discussed issues such as FIRs against PTI workers and alleged state repression. PTI Secretary General Salman Akram Raja highlighted human rights violations and misuse of the judicial system. He warned that if these concerns were not addressed, public protests would be inevitable.

Earlier, the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) urged the judiciary to expedite the hearing of its cases against the 26th constitutional amendment. Speaking at a press conference alongside party leaders, PTI Chairman Barrister Gohar stated that the amendment was passed

by a government with a 'fake mandate'. He emphasised that all judges should hear the case and deliver a decision. Gohar reiterated that protecting PTI's mandate was the Election Commission's constitutional duty, stressing that the party reserved the right to reclaim it.

He also revealed that the PTI founder wrote a letter to the army chief, urging harmony between the military and public. Meanwhile, Opposition Leader Omar Ayub criticised the judiciary for failing to uphold constitutional supremacy and accused the government of suppressing PTI leaders in jails. PTI's Shibli Fraz added that Pakistan could not achieve political stability without fair and transparent election.









PESHAWAR: Chairperson Benazir Income Support Program Rubina Khalid meeting with Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Faisal Karim Kundi at Governor's House.

## Sherpao stresses need for promoting mother languages

### F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The Qaumi Watan Party (QWP) Chairman Aftab Ahmad Khan Sherpao on Friday underscored the need for promoting mother languages and demanded the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government to take tangible steps to promote Pashto and other native languages spoken in the province.

He was speaking at a seminar at Watan Kor in connection with the International Mother Language Day.

Former senator Afrasiab Khattak, Afzal Shah

## Provincial ministers discusses MDA and TMA affairs

### F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Minister for Food Zahir Shah Toru, met with the Minister for Local Government, Elections, and Rural Development, Arshad Ayub, in Peshawar, on Friday.

The meeting focused on key issues related to the Mardan Development Authority and Tehsil Municipal Administration (TMA) Mardan.

Secretary Local Government Dr. Anber Ali, along with other officials, was also participated. Various matters concerning the development of Mardan, municipal challenges, and the improvement of urban facilities were discussed in detail.

During the meeting, Minister Zahir Shah Toru emphasized the need for expediting development projects at the district level to ensure the timely provision of essential civic amenities to the people of Mardan.

Minister Arshad Ayub provided insights into the ongoing development projects under the Mardan Development Authority and TMA Mardan. The minister directed the concerned authorities to accelerate and ensure the completion of these projects soon. Toru further stated that the provincial government is taking concrete steps to enhance urban development and improve the efficiency of local government institutions.

At the conclusion of the meeting, both ministers reiterated the commitment of the provincial government to utilizing all available resources to ensure the timely completion of public welfare projects across the province.

Khamosh of Mazdoor Kissan Party, former IGP Akhtar Ali Shah, QWP's Hashim Babar, a large number of literati and intellectuals were present on the occasion.

Aftab Sherpao said national progress was closely linked to imparting education in mother languages. He added that most languages were on the verge of dying owing to negligence of the government.

Highlighting the importance of mother tongue, Aftab Sherpao said that developed countries imparted education to children in their own language to make them understand the concepts in a better way.

He said the government should make concerted efforts for the promotion and preservation of regional languages. He also urged the literary organizations to join hands to play their due role in this regard. "A language links people to their culture," he maintained, adding that ignoring one's

language was harmful for a nation.

Aftab Sherpao said Pakistan being a multilingual and multicultural society was home to around different 70 languages.

Demanding the promotion of the Pashto language and its teaching in schools, he maintained the Constitution of Pakistan also called for promotion of regional languages.

He expressed concern over the extinction of some regional languages in the country including Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. He said that a language was the source of communication and education therefore its extinction discontinued the transfer of social values to the coming generation.

Commenting on the prevailing political situation in the country, Aftab Sherpao said that media was under siege to curb dissenting voices. He said the constitution guaranteed the freedom of expression, but the government was hell-bent on depriving people of their due rights.

He said that Pashto, Punjabi, Saraiki, Sindhi and Baluchi should be given national language status with increased emphasis on Pashto language, literature and arts, adding that this would strengthen national identity and foster unity. He also demanded the establishment of Pashto language centres and said that organizing literary festivals and digital content creation in Pashto would ensure cultural preservation.

He also demanded the creation of one united province for Pakhtuns by giving due representation to all ethnic groups in national decision making bodies and ensuring fair distribution of resources to address political marginalization.

The QWP leader said that promises made at the time of merger of ex-Fata should be honoured. "The integration of Fata into Khyber Pakhtunkhwa was a step towards mainstreaming the region, but the government must fulfill its promises to ensure lasting benefits," he added.



PESHAWAR: Chairman Qaumi Watan Part Aftab Ahmad Khan Sherpao addressing on "Mother Languages Day" ceremony at Watan Kor.

## FIA arrests two agents for sending Afghans to Italy

PESHAWAR (APP): The Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) has arrested two travel agents involved in sending Afghan citizens to Italy on fake Pakistani passports.

The suspects were apprehended from Waziristan Plaza, Saddar, Peshawar. Earlier, the FIA had conducted raids in Thal and Hangu to capture the accused.

The Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) Kohat Zone carried out an operation leading to the arrest of two human smugglers facilitating Afghan citizens' illegal travel to Italy.

The arrested accused have been identified as Shafiullah and Khurshid. FIA sources confirmed on Friday that the suspects were arrested using advanced resources and human intelligence.

The crackdown was initiated following a report from the FIA Immigration Liaison Office in Italy. Investigations further revealed that the suspects were also involved in smuggling Afghan citizens from Kabul to Saudi Arabia using fake Pakistani passports.

During the raid, authorities seized 15 Pakistani passports and mobile

phones, which contained crucial evidence, including information related to Pakistani and Afghan passports.

Records indicate that the arrested suspects were also wanted by FIA Peshawar Zone in human trafficking cases, as they had defrauded multiple individuals by falsely promising visas and extorting large sums of money.

The FIA spokesperson said, the arrested individuals are now under investigation, and further raids are being conducted to apprehend other members of the network.

## Kundi, Rubina join hands to combat poverty

PESHAWAR (APP): The Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Faisal Karim Kundi, and Chairperson of the Benazir Income Support Program (BISP), Rubina Khalid, in a collaborative effort to enhance support for the underprivileged, have pledged to work together to strengthen initiatives aimed at poverty alleviation.

During a meeting held at Governor House on Friday, both leaders discussed the importance of BISP in providing financial assistance to poor and deserving families, emphasizing its role in empowering women, promoting education, and improving health outcomes.

The Governor expressed his commitment to expanding the program's reach and ensuring transparency, so that more people benefit from this critical social

welfare initiative.

By joining hands, the Governor and BISP Chairperson aim to create a more inclusive environment where vulnerable communities can access the support they need, thereby contributing to the broader goal of reducing poverty in the province.

They underscored their shared dedication to uplifting the lives of the less fortunate through sustained, impactful efforts.

During the meeting, Chairperson Rubina Khalid provided an overview of the ongoing programs under BISP and highlighted its key role in providing financial support to poor and deserving families.

She emphasized that BISP is not only offering financial assistance but is also empowering women, promoting children's education, and having a posi-

tive impact on the health sector.

Governor Faisal Karim Kundi praised the role of BISP, acknowledging it as a vital initiative in reducing poverty and promoting social welfare in the country. He added that the program reflects the vision of the late Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto, and steps are being taken to improve its scope and transparency so that more deserving individuals can benefit from it.

He also suggested establishing BISP model offices across the country.

The meeting also discussed the acquisition of land for the BISP office in Peshawar, with the Governor assuring the Chairperson of his full support in this regard.

Meanwhile, the Head of Polio for Rotary International Club, Tayeba Gul, met with the Governor

Faisal Karim Kundi, to discuss the rising number of polio cases in the province, particularly in the southern districts.

Tayeba Gul informed the Governor about Rotary's ongoing efforts to eliminate polio and emphasized the need for stronger local awareness campaigns and more effective vaccination processes.

Governor Faisal Karim Kundi praised the Rotary Club's efforts and reaffirmed Pakistan's commitment to eradicating the disease, mentioning First Lady Asifa Bhutto Zardari's role as a polio ambassador.

He stressed that polio is a societal issue affecting entire families and communities, and called for a unified effort from welfare organizations, health professionals, and government bodies to make Khyber Pakhtunkhwa polio-free.

## High Court approached against law & order in Swabi

### Humayun Khan

PESHAWAR: A writ petition has been filed in the Peshawar High Court regarding the deteriorating law and order situation in Swabi and the failure of law enforcement agencies to control the situation.

The petition was filed by Muhammad Aftab Qaiser through Advocate Muhammad Hamdan. The respondents in the petition include the Ministry of Interior, Chief Secretary Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Inspector General of Police, Commissioner Mardan, and Regional Police Officer.

In the petition, it is argued that the law and order situation in Swabi has been extremely poor for the past several months, with a surge in targeted killings of innocent civilians. The petition further states that the entire district is plagued by heinous crimes such as murder, kidnapping, extortion, and robbery.

Despite protests by local residents against the deteriorating law and order situation, no action has been taken. The police, law enforcement agencies, and administration have failed to provide protection to the people.

Therefore, to prevent the situation from deteriorating further, the petition requests the court to order the deployment of Frontier Corps (FC) in the area. The petition also requests the court to direct the respondents to take concrete measures to ensure the protection of citizens.

The petition seeks the court's intervention to address the grave concerns of the people of Swabi and to ensure that the government and law enforcement agencies take effective measures to restore law and order in the area.

## Age limit for PMS exams raised to 35

PESHAWAR (APP): KP Public Service Commission has announced an increase in the age limit for Provincial Management Services (PMS) exams.

According to the official notification on Friday, the age limit has been raised from 30 to 35 years for PMS exam candidates. Additionally, the number of PMS test attempts has been increased from three to four for the next two years.



PESHAWAR: Chief Minister KP Ali Amin Khan Gandapur addressing convocation of University of Engineering & Technology Peshawar.

## MoU signed between KP Assembly, ASPIRE-KP

### F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: A significant Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed between the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly and ASPIRE-KP to collaboratively work towards securing the financial and economic rights of the province.

The MoU signing ceremony was held in the Speaker's Chamber of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly, under the leadership of Speaker Babar Saleem Swati, while ASPIRE-KP was represented by former Chief Secretary Shehzad Arbab. The MoU was signed by Syed Waqar Shah, Special Secretary of the KP Assembly, and Arbab Muhammad Arif, a member of ASPIRE-KP. Chief Whip

of the KP Assembly, MPA Akbar Ayub Khan, was also present on the occasion.

Speaker Babar Saleem Swati termed the agreement a historic milestone and emphasized that this partnership would play a crucial role in securing the province's financial rights and ensuring sustainable economic growth. He stated that all political parties and institutions must work together on a unified economic agenda to guarantee the development of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

The primary objectives of this MoU include formulating a joint strategy to safeguard the financial and economic rights of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, developing policy recommendations for the province's economic growth and financial stability, facilitating investment in key sectors such as hydropower, oil and gas,

minerals, and tourism, and bringing political stakeholders together to establish a consensus on the province's fiscal rights. Additionally, the agreement aims to address the legal, political, and technical aspects of securing pending financial dues from the federal government.

Under this collaboration, the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly will provide a platform for stakeholder consultations, while ASPIRE-KP will offer research and technical assistance to formulate effective strategies for securing the province's financial rights. Speaker Babar Saleem Swati, Shehzad Arbab, and other dignitaries expressed confidence that this partnership would contribute significantly to the economic development of the province and the well-being of its people.



PESHAWAR: MoU between Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly and ASPIRE-KP signing in presence of Speaker KP Assembly Babar Saleem Swati and former Chief Secretary Shehzad Arbab.

## Minister distribute certificates and toolkits

### F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Minister for Labour, Fazal Shakur Khan, distributed certificates and toolkits to men and women flood affectees of district Charsadda who completed various development skills training under the Sarhad Rural Support Program (SRSP). A grand ceremony in this regard held at the SRSP Peshawar, where the provincial minister, along with representatives from CESVI, Concern Worldwide, and FCDO, participated.

Earlier, the provincial minister visited various

stalls displaying with handmade items prepared by men and women trainees of the course.

The provincial minister highly appreciated this significant initiative by SRSP.

Addressing the ceremony, the provincial minister emphasized the importance of acquiring technical education and said that in the current era, technical education is essential, especially for women, so women can run their businesses with dignity within their homes.

He appreciated the handmade items by the trainees and said that these items would be highly appreciated

in the market.

He added that steps need to be taken to introduce these handmade items to the market.

He further said that the flood-affected trainees, who completed various courses under the SRSP, would play an essential role in supporting their families through these skills.

A total of 720 men and women successfully completed training in various courses, including leather bag making, Ada work, mobile repairing, and solar installation. Women trainees from Charsadda district were also present at the ceremony.

## 4-year-old thalassemia patient's fight for life

### F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Ayman, A 4-year-old girl from Kohat Road, Peshawar, is battling Thalassemia Major, a genetic blood disorder that requires regular blood transfusions. Registered at Hamza Foundation Welfare Thalassemia Hospital (Registration No. TP-1099), Ayman relies on the hospital for healthy blood components every 15-20 days. Born with this condition, Ayman has been receiving blood donations since birth. Despite her illness, she

dreams of a bright future, longing to live a happy life like other children. Her family appeals for continuous blood and financial support to save her life.

You can help save Ayman's life and the lives of 1,505 patients registered at Hamza Foundation by donating your Zakat, Sadaqat, and contributions. Contact Hamza Foundation at 091-5845553 or donate through their bank account: Account Name: Hamza Foundation Peshawar, account No. 2040-4, MCB, University Town 0957,



PK28MUCB0095701010020404. Support can bring hope and a brighter future for Ayman and many others like her.

## Metamorphosis of words - The abiding wisdom

"In a world of deliberation, the passion within us forgets its intuition. Words sail on the shore, piercing the truth in revelation.

Ambition seizes hold while desire flings hope. The lantern of life lights at night, indulging the epilogue of existence.

Definition remains intended, while the flame of illiteracy seems undaunted.

The cognition stays alight, where the theater of poetry unravels. "Abundancy outspreads, and flare in persuasion strikes.

Words clash in the formation of a rhythm, so poisonous yet hard to get a hold.

The writing intoxicates, the paper makes a promise. Maybe the fragility heeds alone-no scar, no story, yet abode."

— Maryam Khan Mahsud  
(The writer is student of Grade 9, The City School, D.I.Khan Campus)





## In brief

### Almost 87 cops suspended F.P. Report

LARKANA: Senior Superintendent of Police Larkana has suspended 87 policemen on public complaints and directed departmental inquiry, on Friday. Those affected by the departmental actions include inspectors, sub-inspectors, assistant sub-inspectors, head constables, and constables. SSP Larkana has terminated Head Constable Abdul Rahman and Constable Abdul Ghafoor from their jobs. Orders have also been issued to suspend Inspector Fida Hussain and Inspector Ahmed Ali along with 55 police constables, including Sepoy Muzaffar Hussain, Abdul Hamid, Junaid Ahmed, and others. Meanwhile, Inspector Shabbir Ahmed, Sub-Inspector Azhar Ali, and ASI Dedar Ali, along with (11) police officers, have been issued show-cause notices; other departmental actions such as forfeiture, stop increment, and fines have been taken against others. Meanwhile, an armed men opened fire over an old dispute in Qubo Saeed Khan, killing one person and injuring two others, on Friday. The deceased identified as Abdul Razak Magasi, resident of Zareenabad, near Lundi Shakh, in the premises of Qubo Saeed Khan police station. The deceased's wife, Zarina Magasi, Abdul Latif were injured in the firing. On the other hand, an investigation is being conducted regarding the incident, and the involved suspects will soon be arrested and brought to justice.

### Mother Language Day marked F.P. Report

LANDI KOTAL: To underscore the role and importance of languages, Mother Language Day was commemorated here in tehsil Landi Kotal on Friday. The 21 February was declared as International Mother Language Day by The United Nations Education, Science and Culture Organization (UNESCO) on 17 November 1999 to pay tribute to the language movement done by the Bengali youth in 1952. To mark the day, under the auspices of Khyber Ullas, a gathering was organized at Bacha Khan Chawki that was attended by scores of people from different walks of life. Addressing on the occasion Aftab Shinwari, Qasim Khan and others called for the usage of mother language in educational, parliamentary and judiciary. Pakistan is a culturally diverse country and every culture needs to be protected and promoted at the state level. The purpose of commemorating the day was to promote linguistic and cultural diversity and to protest and promote mother language, they remarked. It is to be stated here that presently approximately 8324 languages are spoken across the World.

### Minority Card hailed F.P. Report

HAFAZABAD: Provincial Parliamentary Secretary, Punjab, Mian Shahid Hussain Bhatti, Deputy Commissioner Hafizabad Abdul Razaq and local leader of PML-N Mian Tahawwur Hussain Tarar said that issuance of Minority Cards is ideal and historic steps of Chief Minister Punjab for welfare of minorities. The expressed these views while addressing Minority Cards distribution ceremony held at district complex. They said that 50 thousand minorities cards were being distributed would be distributed across the Punjab including district Hafizabad and each family would be received Rs. 10500/= quarterly as financial assistant.



LANDI KOTAL: Tribesmen holding a banner during a rally to mark International Mother Language Day. — F.P. photo

## FC jawan martyred in Balochistan laid to rest

F.P. Report

SHANGLA: The funeral prayers of martyred FC jawan, Zahoor Ahmed, offered at Lilownai, Shangla, and laid to rest with full military honors, on Friday.

The terrorist incident occurred in Turbat, Balochistan, where Zahoor Ahmed, a young FC personnel from Shangla, was martyred while performing his duty. Zahoor Ahmed's funeral was attended by a large number of people, including military and civil officials, politicians, social leaders, and local residents. The martyred Zahoor

son of Sher Malik, resident of Jamra Dherai, Lilownai, Shangla, had recently joined the FC and completed his training. He was martyred in a terrorist attack in Turbat, Balochistan, during his duty.

**BISP to provide assistance for education:** Eligible families urged to submit school enrollment forms. The Benazir Income Support Program (BISP) has urged eligible families to submit school enrollment forms for their children to receive scholarships under the program.

To avail of the scholarship, students whose moth-



ers are receiving stipends under the BISP should obtain the scholarship form from their school's headmaster, get it verified, and submit it to the relevant BISP office. This facility is available to all BISP beneficiaries across the country.

## Crackdowns against wall chalking

F.P. Report

BANNU: On the orders of the Chief Minister, the Tehsil Municipal Administration authorities have launched a crackdown against illegal Pina Flexes throughout the district. Wall chalking has been removed in the inner city. The operation against illegal and environmentally polluting wall chalking and Pina Flexes will continue wherever it occurs.

Under the public agenda of the Chief Minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, a crackdown was carried out against illegal Pina Flexes and wall chalking on the walls in the inner city and adjacent areas under the leadership of Tehsil Municipal Administration Officer Muhammad Yousuf Khan, along with Chief Land Inspector Malik Tariq Khan, Assistant Land Inspector Waseem Khan Sikandri, Land Inspector Hafiz Karim Dad Khan and other staff. During this, Pina Flexes were removed and taken into possession by different teams, while wall chalking done on government and private walls.

Meanwhile, the strike call given again in Bannu has failed. The announcements made for the evacuation of millions of people also proved to be a wall of sand. The protest sit-in organized by the sit-in organizers was shifted to the Central Jail Bannu.

Due to the division of traders into two factions, no strike was held in the city, while life remained completely restored, while the other faction held a protest march from Police Line Chowki to Central Jail. According to details, the leaders of the Bannu Traders Association, Nasir Khan Ghulam Qibaz Khan and former police officer Jamsheed Khan, had called for a protest sit-in and Friday prayers at Police Line Chowki on Friday in a press conference.

## UoB join hands with Hashu Foundation

F.P. Report

BUNER: University of Buner and Hashu Foundation was signed memorandum of understanding (MOU) for development and cooperation, on Friday.

Vice-Chancellor Dr. Saif Ul Islam and Haris Qayum Khan signed this agreement. Under this partnership, Hashu Foundation will provide technical support while UoB will implement the project provided by the European Union and the United Nations Offices on Drugs and Crime and Nectar. UoB will establish a social lab which will provide training and financial assistance to students and local youth.

Various creative business ideas will be worked on through this platform, which will pave the way for positive change in the students but in the entire society.

# JUI-F to convene jirga on UoM issue

F.P. Report

LOWER DIR: The Jamiat Ulema-i-Islam-Fazl (JUI-F) Lower Dir has announced plans to convene a grand jirga comprising all stakeholders to address the prevailing situation at the University of Malakand and other regional issues.

The decision was taken during a meeting of the party's General Council in Timergara here the other day. The JUI-F Lower Dir chief Siraj ud Din chaired the meeting which was attended by General Secretary Maulana Muhammad Huzaifa, former provincial minister Muzaffar Said Advocate, Maulana Muhammad Rahim Haqqani, Maulana Muhammad Nabi Shah, and other key figures.

Council members expressed satisfaction with the performance of the dis-

trict leadership and its cabinet. The leadership was also praised for successfully organizing religious scholars' conferences and multiparty meetings on local issues under the party's banner in various tehsils.

Addressing the meeting, Siraj ud Din criticized the PTI-led provincial government, claiming it had failed to resolve the region's pressing issues. "To effectively highlight regional concerns, a grand jirga with all stakeholders will be convened soon," he announced.

The meeting also decided to mobilize Jamiat Tulaba Islam (JTI), the party's student wing, across various sectors and to organize media workshops for tehsil-level representatives.

**Madrasas in Dir to be registered under Societies Act:** The Local

Government and Rural Development Department (LG&RDD) has completed the first phase of madrasa registration in Lower Dir under the Societies Act, with 1,300 more institutions for boys and girls set to undergo profiling and final registration in the second and third phases.

Assistant Director LG&RDD, Aamir Nizam Durrani shared this update with local journalists, stating that the department had completed preparations for the registration process in accordance with government policy. This initiative will apply to all boys' and girls' madrasas across 198 village councils.

Mr. Durrani further stated that efforts were being made to enhance the capacity of village secretaries to streamline the issuance of birth, death, marriage, and divorce certificates in their respective councils.

## Donors raise Rs 51.35m donation at AKF moot

F.P. Report

LOWER DIR: Local philanthropists, influential and workers of the Jamaat-i-Islami contributed generously Rs 51.35 million to the Al-Khidmat Foundation (AKF) for supporting orphan children during a donors' conference held at a wedding hall in Timergara here on Friday.

The AKF central Secretary-General Fazal Mahmood, Jamaat-e-Islami Lower Dir chief Maulana Asadullah Khan, AKF district president Hafeezullah Khaksar, JI Khyber Pakhtunkhwa North deputy chief Arshad Zaman, Information Secretary Yaqoob-ur-Rehman, and others addressed the event.

The speakers emphasized that it was the state

responsibility to take care, provide education and health facilities to about 4.6 million orphaned children in Pakistan but due to government's failure the AKF stepped forward, sponsoring 450 orphaned children only in the Lower Dir and ensuring their education and well-being.

The donors contributed Rs. 51.35 million on the spot, reaffirming their commitment to supporting vulnerable children. The speakers highlighted the reality that over 4.6 million orphaned children in Pakistan faced uncertainty and despair, with 5 million children in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa alone deprived of education.

"The AKF provides monthly scholarships, education, and training to

30,000 orphaned children nationwide". Fazal Mahmood pointed out, adding that in the last year alone, the AKF spent Rs. 23.22 billion on relief efforts for Palestinian victims in Gaza and was now investing Rs. 15 billion in Gaza's reconstruction.

He further emphasized that public trust in the Foundation continued to grow, as the organization remained committed to transparency and accountability in managing donations. "The foundation is dedicated to serving humanity beyond religious, racial, or political affiliations, extending its humanitarian efforts not only in Pakistan but also in several other countries", Mahmood added.

## Commissioner, DIG visits Kurram TDPs camp

F.P. Report

HANGU: Commissioner

along with deputy Inspector general Kohat Region paid a detailed visit to the Kurram TDPs Camp established in Thal Degree College. They assured the affectees that the government and the district administration are always ready to help them in all possible ways and they will not be left alone, on Friday.

Commissioner Kohat issued instructions to ensure immediate supply of food, clean water, health facilities and other basic needs to the affectees living in the camp.

He urged the authorities concerned authorities to mitigate that the difficulties in the camp and all the facilities should be provided in time. DPO Hangu briefed on the security

arrangements of the camp in detail and deployment of the police personnel.

The victims expressed satisfaction and happiness on the arrival of the higher authorities and listening to their problems. They appreciated the steps taken by the government and the district administration.

Earlier, under the Program "Awami Agenda", Commissioner Kohat along with the concerned officials made surprise visits to government hospitals, offices and schools in Kurram, Hangu and Kohat. He participated in the morning assembly with the children in the schools.

Commissioner Kohat appreciated the excellent performance of the children and teachers and congratulated them as well as gave directions and useful sug-

gestions for further improvement. He also appraised himself about the school cleanliness, curricular and extracurricular activities.

He had a detailed discussion with the school administration on the new admission campaign and school problems. Similarly, during the visit, he reviewed the management and public services issues of hospitals and offices in detail and directed the concerned authorities to further improve the cleanliness of the hospitals and the provision of public services.

The concerned Deputy Commissioners and District Police Officers along with their respective staffs were also present on the occasion. Necessary instructions were given to the concerned authorities on the spot.

## Indiscipline in police wouldn't be tolerated: RPO

F.P. Report

MARDAN: Regional Police Officer (RPO) Mardan ordered to tighten security arrangements and stressed on crime prevention, police discipline, and protection of lives and property of citizens, on Friday.

He was addressing the crime meeting chaired by him at DPO office On Friday. The meeting was attended by DPO Mardan Zahoor Babar Afridi, SP Investigation Nisar Ahmed and SPs, DPOs and SHO's of the entire district. RPO Najeeb ur Rehman directed to adopt zero tolerance policy against drugs and to maintain close contact with Anti-Narcotics Force and Excise Department. He ordered to tighten security, take special measures in mosques and bazaars and increase bank security in view of the arrival of Ramadan.

The Regional Police Officer issued instructions to the SDPOs to improve the

accuracy of police station records, regular inspections, prompt action against serious crimes, and improve the efficiency of office staff. Strong action against ad-hoc criminals, preparation of history sheets, and improvement in PSRMS record management were also emphasized. The RPO laid special emphasis on the security of police personnel, saying that every soldier's life is the most precious, and directed them to make mandatory use of bullet-proof jackets and helmets. He made it clear that there will be no compromise on police discipline, and any kind of touts will not be tolerated.

**Price control meeting:** A meeting regarding preparation for Ramzan to control prices and provide relief to the public held between traders and administration. The business community is the backbone of the country's economy. He said that two places have been fixed for the table in Ramadan, one in College Chowki and the other

in DHQ Hospital. Meanwhile, Member Provincial Assembly (MPA) Ifikhar Ali Mashwani visited Abdul Wali Khan University Mardan and met Vice Chancellor Professor Dr Zahir Shah.

## Police to ensure public safety: DPO

F.P. Report

TOBA TEK SINGH: District Police Officer (DPO) Toba Tek Singh, emphasized his commitment to serving the people, stating that providing security is his top priority, on Friday. "As a servant of the people, it's my duty to listen to and address their issues," he remarked. Since assuming his role, DPO has initiated action against criminal elements and directed all SHO's of the Police Station to treat citizens with respect.

## Tribesman assassinated in front of press club

F.P. Report

WANA: Presidential award-winning tribal leader Malik Abdul Khaliq was martyred in an assassination attempt in front of the Wana Press Club, located in the cantonment area. The public and even the press club itself are feeling increasingly insecure, on Friday.

Unknown assailants launched an armed attack on Malik Abdul Khaliq Wazir in front of the Wana Press Club, which is situated near the Wana FC Camp and Police Lines. The attackers targeted him with a pistol, leaving him critically injured. He was immediately transported to the District Headquarters Hospital, from where he

was referred to Dera Ismail Khan. However, before reaching Tanai Chowki, he succumbed to his injuries and was martyred.

This incident occurred in Wana's sensitive cantonment area, where, in addition to the police lines and Wana Press Club, offices such as NADRA and other government institutions are also located. Previously, violent incidents were primarily reported in remote areas, but recently, even the most sensitive locations have come under attack.

Just a few days ago, three people were shot near the NADRA center, resulting in two deaths and one injury. In all these attacks, the perpetrators managed to escape without being apprehended.

This situation has sparked fear and panic among the public and political circles. Citizens are questioning how safe other areas can be if even supposedly secure locations like Wana Cantonment and Police Lines are no longer safe. Criticizing the local administration, they claim that law and order have completely spiraled out of control.

Journalists associated with the Wana Press Club have also declared themselves unsafe and have demanded immediate security measures. The public warns that if the government does not take decisive action soon, the wave of lawlessness in Wana could escalate further.

## Mother Language Day observed

Sahibzada Afridi

KOHAT: On the eve of the World Mother Languages Day, a grand function was organized in Government Degree College Gumbat, Kohat, on Friday.

The function beside the intellectuals, literary figures and other important personalities of Pashto, Hindko

and Urdu languages was also attended by the faculty members and students. On this occasion, Regional Officer Information and Public Relations Kohat Irshad Afridi and Dr. Shakir Orakzai participated as special guests.

Prof. Dr. Wazir Shadan, Sultan Aziz, Dr. Shakir Orakzai, Masoom Shah Masoom and others also

addressed the event and spoke in detail on the importance of mother tongues.

The speakers said that the mother tongue is the identity of any nation and if a nation does not have a mother tongue, it will not take long to disappear. They said that the secret of the development of nations lies in their mother tongues.





## Drone attacks leave many in Odesa without power, heat

ODESA (Reuters): Russia unleashed a mass drone attack on Ukraine's southern city of Odesa for the second night running, knocking out power for thousands of residents and plunging parts of the city into darkness, the regional governor said.

Governor Oleh Kiper, writing on the Telegram messaging app, said the latest night-time strikes had triggered a blackout for some 5,000 residents. Kiper said nearly 90,000 people had been left in the dark in Odesa district in and around the city from the successive nights of attacks. President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said a similar number was without heating.

Kiper also said the strikes had triggered a fire at a restaurant and a storage facility and damaged an administrative building. One person was injured. Photos on social media showed areas of the city in darkness. Four people, including a child, were injured in the initial attack. Heating was interrupted to about 500 apartment buildings, 13 schools, a kindergarten, and several hospitals, officials said.

The temperature in the Black Sea port was about minus 6 degrees Celsius (21 F). "Rescue operations are underway in Odesa after another Russian attack on the energy infrastructure," Zelenskyy wrote after the first attack. "It is civilian energy facilities against which the Russian army has not spared neither missiles nor



attack drones for almost three years," he said.

The Ukrainian military said Russia launched 167 drones overnight in the region and elsewhere in the country. Air defence units and mobile drone hunting groups shot down 106 of them, and 56 drones were 'lost' in reference to the military using electronic warfare to counter unmanned aircraft, it said. Russia has stepped up attacks on Ukrainian power infrastructure since March 2024, knocking out about half of the available generating capacity and causing widespread blackouts.

Schools and kindergartens in the district were closed. "Everybody ran to the building hall. All the windows were blown out. The next hits scattered all the debris around. The furniture fell, the door was blown out as well," Tetiana, an Odesa resident who declined to share her last name, told Reuters. "Even the ventilation in the bathroom was knocked down - and they say that a bathroom is a safe place. No, it is not." Russia says it does not target civilians, though thousands have been killed since it launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.

## 'Why Trump blames Ukraine for war'

PARIS (Reuters): France does not understand why US President Donald Trump has suggested Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy was to blame for Russia's invasion of his country and the resulting war, a French government spokesperson said.

"We don't understand the logic very well," spokesperson Sophie Primas told reporters, describing "the diverse, varied and often incomprehensible comments by President Trump". She said Trump had made a number of comments on Ukraine over the past few days without consulting his European allies.

Trump, in comments to reporters, said: "You've been there for three years," referring to concerns that Ukraine had been excluded from talks between Russia and the United States. "You should've never started it. You could have made a deal." Europe's bloodiest conflict since World War Two began in 2022, when Russian President Vladimir Putin ordered a "special military operation" in Ukraine. Ukraine and its allies in Europe were stunned by the decision by Washington and Moscow to hold peace talks in Saudi Arabia this week. Ukraine has said it will not accept a deal imposed on it without its consent, which European leaders have echoed, while Russia has ruled out conceding land it has won.

French President Emmanuel Macron is set to have an informal meeting on Ukraine with some European leaders and NATO ally Canada at 4 p.m. (1500 GMT), following a similar meeting with Britain, Italy, Germany, Spain, the EU, Denmark and the Netherlands. Ahead of talks, Swedish Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson said that, while there was not complete agreement in the European Union on how to move forward, countries had nevertheless managed to accomplish a lot within the EU framework. He said it was important for backers of Ukraine to do everything possible to put Kyiv in a strong position. Sounding a note of caution, he added: "Everyone seems to believe that Russia wants to negotiate peace. I don't feel sure at all on that point. So we need to keep a cool head and continue to support Ukraine."

Putin hails Russia's huge number of 'convictions'

MOSCOW (AFP): Russian military courts sentenced more than 1,000 people on terrorist charges last year, President Vladimir Putin said, referring to a massive wave of prosecutions during the Ukraine offensive.

Russia's secretive military courts prosecute captured Ukrainian soldiers, Russians accused of working with Kyiv or sabotaging Moscow's army, domestic opponents of the Kremlin, and alleged radicals and terrorist groups. "Military courts have a key role in deciding on criminal cases with a terrorist direction," Putin said in a speech to Russia's top judges.

"Last year, around 950 such cases were looked at, 1,075 people were sentenced," Russia regularly sentences people over opposition to the Ukraine offensive, while convicting captured Ukrainian soldiers on treason and terrorist charges. The Geneva Conventions prohibit the prosecution of prisoners of war (POW) for taking part in armed hostilities.

Moscow has also intensified its targeting of alleged jihadist cells since the March 2024 massacre at a Moscow concert hall that killed 145 people — an attack claimed by the Islamic State. The crackdown at home is of a scale not seen since the Soviet era.

The OVD-Info rights group says 1,184 people have been prosecuted in Russia for their opposition to the Ukraine conflict — including 258 for justifying "terrorism" and 58 for "acts of terrorism." The Memorial rights group says Russia has 868 political prisoners, though its co-founder Oleg Orlov told AFP last year.

## US-Russia trust key to peace deal: Putin

MOSCOW (Reuters): Russian President Vladimir Putin said that Ukraine would not be excluded from negotiations to end the war, but success would depend on raising the level of trust between Moscow and Washington.

Putin, speaking a day after Russia and the United States held their first talks on how to end the three-year conflict, also said it would take time to set up a summit with US President Donald Trump, which both men have said they want, and there was no point in meeting just to drink tea. He praised the outcome of meeting in Saudi Arabia, where Russia and the US agreed to appoint negotiating teams on Ukraine and discussed ways to reset their bilateral relations, which the Kremlin described as "below zero" under Trump's predecessor Joe Biden.

"In my opinion, we have taken a first step to resume work in a variety of areas that are of mutual interest," Putin said in televised comments. These included issues relating to the

Middle East, global energy markets and cooperation in space, he said. "Without increasing the level of trust between Russia and the United States, it is impossible to resolve many issues, including the Ukrainian crisis," Ukraine and European governments were not invited to the talks in the Saudi capital, which heightened their concern that Russia and the United States might cut a deal that ignores their vital security interests. But Putin said Russia had never rejected talks with the Europeans or with Kyiv, and it was they who had refused to talk to Moscow.

"If they want, please, let these negotiations take place. And we will be ready to return to the table for negotiations," he said. "No one is excluding Ukraine," he added, saying that there was therefore no need for a "hysterical" reaction to the US-Russia talks. Putin, who since Trump's November election victory has made a series of flattering comments towards him, praised the American's

"restraint" in the face of what he called "boorish" behaviour by US allies. He said he would be "happy to meet with Donald". "But we are in such a situation that it is not enough to meet to have tea, coffee, sit and talk about the future. We need to ensure that our teams prepare issues that are extremely important for both the United States and Russia, including - but not only - on the Ukrainian track, in order to reach solutions acceptable to both sides." Putin said this would be no easy task. He said that Trump himself, who during the US election campaign repeatedly promised to end the Ukraine war in 24 hours, was now talking about a period of six months. He said this was "natural" because Trump had simply begun to receive fresh information that changed his approach. On energy prices, Putin said that he, Trump and the Saudi king had held a three-way conversation in the past, and there was a need to hold a new discussion in that format.

## NATO holds large-scale combat drills

SMARDAN, Romania (AP): NATO members continued their largest combat exercises of 2025, testing their ability to rapidly deploy large-scale forces on the 32-nation alliance's eastern border as worries grow over its most powerful member, the United States.

The drills in Romania, which borders Ukraine, come as a shaken Europe grapples with a new US course under President Donald Trump. Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth has demanded that allies dramatically ramp up military spending and said US security priorities lie elsewhere - casting doubts on Washington's longstanding security guarantees provided to Europe.

Days before the third anniversary of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the Steadfast Dart 2025 drills comprise about 10,000 military personnel from nine nations as part of NATO's new Allied Reaction Force. They are taking place over six weeks in Romania, Bulgaria and Greece. Although the Trump administration has not announced plans to pull US forces from the region, Hegseth's remark that "European allies must lead from the front" left NATO partners contemplating a potential new reality in which the US is no longer the powerful, nuclear-

armed backstop for the continent's security.

Radu Tudor, a defense analyst in Bucharest, said a US rollback of its military presence in Romania would be "a gift" to Russian President Vladimir Putin. "The whole eastern flank of NATO (would) become weaker in front of Russia's aggressive behavior," he said, adding that it would push Romania to ask NATO allies to contribute troops and weapons to plug the gap left by several thousand American troops.

Adm. Stuart B. Munsch, commander of the Allied Joint Force Command, said threats to NATO "have become increasingly complex and unpredictable" over the past decade. "To address this complex security environment, NATO has undergone a significant war-fighting transformation. We have taken our defensive plans from concept to reality," Munsch told reporters at the training base. "This exercise ... represents the culmination of our efforts and the beginning of our new force that will defend every inch of alliance territory." European allies have also expressed concern over being sidelined from talks between Washington and Moscow's top diplomats in Saudi Arabia on working towards ending the war in Ukraine.

The fast-moving developments prompted France's president to convene select EU countries and the U.K. for talks this week in Paris. Combat exercises in Romania saw live-fire training and trench warfare drills. Greek and Spanish marines led exercises last week in Greece, including a mock amphibious assault. NATO's new Allied Reaction Force, established last July, is designed to deploy at scale within 10 days and combines conventional forces with cyber and space-based technologies. Britain leads the operation with 2,600 military personnel and 730 vehicles.

The drills also include Romania, Bulgaria, France, Greece, Italy, Slovenia, Spain and Turkey and involve 1,500 military vehicles, more than 20 aircraft and more than a dozen naval assets. After Russia launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine on Feb. 24, 2022, NATO bolstered its presence on Europe's eastern flank by sending additional multinational battle-groups to Romania, Hungary, Bulgaria and Slovakia. Since then, Romania has played an increasingly prominent role in the alliance. It has donated a Patriot missile system to Ukraine and opened an international training hub for F-16 jet pilots from allied countries, including Ukraine.

## Why have Rwanda-backed rebels seized two cities?

ABUJA (AP): Rwanda-backed rebels have captured two key cities in Congo's mineral-rich east in less than a month after a major escalation in their yearslong fighting against overstretched and weakened Congolese forces.

With the support of thousands of troops from neighboring Rwanda, the M23 rebels first took Goma last month before marching to Bukavu this weekend in an unprecedented advance since they took up arms more than a decade ago, further raising fears of regional warfare.

M23 is one of about 100 armed factions vying for control in eastern Congo. But unlike the others, they are mainly made up of ethnic Tutsis who failed to integrate into the Congolese army. The group says it is defending ethnic Tutsis and Congolese of Rwandan origin from discrimination, although critics say their Rwanda-backed campaign is a pretext for economic and political influence over eastern Congo. M23 is being supported with troops and weapons from neighboring Rwanda, according to US and UN experts. Rwanda's longtime President Paul Kagame accuses Congolese President Felix Tshisekedi

of overlooking the concerns of Congo's ethnic Tutsis and ignoring previous peace agreements.

The M23's takeover of Goma in North Kivu province witnessed intense fighting with government and allied troops that left bodies lying in the streets and thousands of Congolese soldiers surrendering their arms. But the rebels apparently had it much easier in Bukavu, 100 kilometers (62 miles) south of Goma, where residents reported Congolese forces fleeing as M23 fighters marched into the city with little resistance.

The reasons for the timing of M23's "all-out assault" could be the realization that they faced only limited resistance and were pushing against an open door, the International Crisis Group think tank said. The international community has used mostly the same rhetoric since the latest M23 advance started on Jan. 26, with countries emphatic on dialogue and the rebels' withdrawal but stopping short of financial and diplomatic pressure on Kigali, as was the case in 2012, when M23 took Goma before pulling out. A summit of leaders from eastern and southern Africa called for

an immediate ceasefire but notably didn't call for the rebels to withdraw from Goma.

Observers have said the muted international pressure on Rwanda is partly because of the guilt over the failure to intervene to stop the 1994 genocide in Rwanda as well as the country's evolving stature under Kagame both in Africa and the West. Murithi Mutiga, Africa director at the ICG, said it's African countries largely to blame for ignoring the warning signs of the conflict. He said the latest fighting was "a failure of African mediation." Unlike in 2012, when they withdrew from Goma in less than a week, the M23 has become more emboldened by Rwanda's support with troops and weapons, Mutiga added.

The conflict has regional complications with the involvement of Congo's southern and eastern neighbors, whose armies were invited by Tshisekedi when M23 resurfaced at the end of 2021. Some of Congo's allies have suffered losses, including South Africa with 14 peacekeepers killed in the fighting for Goma. Authorities in Burundi also say their troops have been attacked by the rebels.

## Australian and NZ militaries monitoring 3 Chinese warships

MELBOURNE (AP): The Australian and New Zealand militaries were monitoring three Chinese warships moving unusually far south along Australia's east coast on an unknown mission, officials said.

The Australian government revealed a week ago that the warships had traveled through Southeast Asia and the Coral Sea and were approaching northeast Australia. Defense Minister Richard Marles said that the Chinese ships - the naval frigate Hengyang, cruiser Zunyi and replenishment vessel Weishanhu - were "off the east coast of Australia."

Defense officials did not respond to a request for comment on a Financial Times report that the task group from China's military, the People's Liberation Army, was 150 nautical miles (278 kilometers) east of Sydney. "There is no doubt that this is, not unprecedented, but an unusual event," Marles told Sky News television. Marles said Australian navy ships and air force planes were monitoring the Chinese ships' movements through international waters that are in Australia's exclusive economic zone, the area beyond its territorial waters where a nation has exclu-

sive economic rights.

"They're entitled to be where they are; Australia is also entitled to be prudent and we are monitoring very closely what the activities of the task group are," Marles told reporters. "What we will do whenever this mission is over on the part of the Chinese task group is engage in a full assessment of what the Chinese were seeking to achieve in respect of this mission," he added. In Beijing, China's foreign ministry spokesperson Guo Jiakun was asked at a media briefing about the Chinese warships' location and replied he was not aware of the situation. The Chinese Embassy in Australia did not immediately respond to a request for comment. Marles said Australia had engaged with its nearest neighbor Papua New Guinea over its response because the Chinese had traveled around the South Pacific island nation's coast on their way to Australia's exclusive economic zone. Australia was also "working very closely" with New Zealand, which is separated from the Australian east coast by the Tasman Sea, he said.

New Zealand's military was also monitoring the Chinese ships by sea and

air "in coordination with Australia," New Zealand Defense Minister Judith Collins said in a statement. "We have not been informed by the Chinese government why this task group has been deployed into our region, and we have not been informed what its future plans are," she added. "We will continue to monitor these vessels." Jennifer Parker, an expert associate of Australia's National Security College and a former Australian naval officer, said Chinese warships rarely traveled so far south along the nation's east coast.

"This is part of a broader power projection from the PLA-Navy and we should expect to see more of this in the Pacific and in the Indian Ocean," Parker said. The Chinese deployment comes as the head of US Indo-Pacific Command Adm. Samuel Paparo visits Australia this week. Parker said the timing was likely coincidental given the Chinese deployment would have been planned well in advance and the United States doesn't release information about their senior officers' travel until close to the visit.

"Without knowing exactly where the ships are going, the point of this

deployment, I think, is to demonstrate to Australia that they have the capability to come down and operate in our maritime domain," Parker said. Prime Minister Anthony Albanese told a news conference he was not worried by reports of Chinese warships off Sydney. "The Chinese naval ships are complying with international law, but as we do, we are monitoring the situation and observing what is going on, as you would expect," Albanese said. Three Chinese warships visited Sydney Harbor in 2019. But their voyage had been approved by the Australian government.

Australia's diplomatic and trade relations with China have improved in recent years, but relations between the two militaries are dangerous. Australia protested what it described as an unsafe interaction last week over the South China Sea where a Chinese fighter is accused of releasing flares that endangered an Australian military surveillance plane. Guo, the Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson, accused the Australian aircraft of "deliberately" intruding into airspace over the disputed Paracel Islands, which China claims.

## Trump's freeze on foreign aid could give China an opening on the world stage

WASHINGTON (AP): President Donald Trump's restrictions on foreign aid and targeting of a key agency funding programs around the world may be offering an opening to America's biggest adversary - China.

From the dismantling of the US Agency for International Development to quitting international groups, Trump's drastic "America First" moves have raised concerns among some lawmakers and experts about whether the US is ceding global influence to its rivals, especially at a time when Washington is fretting over Beijing's growing clout at the cost to American interests.

Foreign assistance offered the US a source of "soft power" - allowing it to cultivate goodwill, build alliances and counter adversaries in a bid to shore up national security without having to dispatch troops, weapons or other more coercive measures. In Cambodia, the contrast could not be sharper than China sending \$4.4 million to support demining operations, as Trump halted a \$6.3 million grant from the State Department's Office of Weapons Removal and Abatement partly meant to clear "US-origin unexploded ordnances as the remnants of war."

Administration officials say it's past time to review how America spends money abroad. Asked if the US was giving China and Russia an opening for greater global influence, national security adviser Mike Waltz denied

that, telling NBC's "Meet the Press" recently that "all too often, these missions and these programs ... are not in line with strategic US interests like pushing back on China."

In Panama, the Trump administration got the government to quit the Belt and Road Initiative, Beijing's flagship overseas development program, prompting condemnation from China. Experts and lawmakers disagree on the impact of the US taking a step back from foreign aid. Lawsuits are challenging the administration's freeze on foreign assistance and moves against USAID, with temporary holds on some of those efforts.

"The second Trump administration will deliver the goal for China" of wielding greater global influence, Feng Zhang, a visiting scholar at Yale Law School's Paul Tsai China Center, said at a recent debate in Washington. Sen. Andy Kim, a Democrat from New Jersey, was worried for the same reason. "China doesn't even need to fight for their influence around the world now because of our own effort," Kim said recently on "Meet the Press."

Rep. John Moolenaar, a Republican from Michigan who chairs the House Select Committee on the Chinese Communist Party, said it could be time for change on foreign assistance. "I think as we dig into this, we're going to find out what's been working and what hasn't been working," he said. "And then how do we inno-

vate to a new way of promoting American interests, American values and being clear on what those values are."

Dennis Wilder, a senior fellow at the Initiative for US-China Dialogue on Global Issues at Georgetown University, said global influence goes beyond foreign aid, with the US commanding the world's most powerful military and its dollar dominating the financial system. Let's not "accept at face value that China is ready or able to step in where the US may be leaving a vacuum," Wilder said. The Chinese embassy in Washington said Beijing is "willing to work with all countries and parties, including the US, to strengthen exchanges and cooperation in the field of development, so as to promote common development and prosperity among all countries."

The two countries - the primary players in global development - are spending foreign assistance differently. Most Chinese money is issued as debt and typically spent on energy and infrastructure projects. Most US funds were disbursed as grants or loans with low or no interest rates in areas like public health and humanitarian aid, said AidData, an international development research lab at William & Mary University's Global Research Institute. In Peru, Chinese money helped build the \$1.3 billion megaproject in Chancay, which opened in November during a visit by Chinese President Xi Jinping. US foreign aid

in Peru, by contrast, was used to finance coffee and cacao as alternatives to cocaine production.

Elsewhere, American dollars helped fight HIV/AIDS in Africa, treated malnourished children in South Sudan and provided medical services at an immigrant shelter in Mexico. Acknowledging that the US should fund tangible foreign projects like ports and factories, Congress in 2018 established an institution to combine government funding with private investments for projects such as the trans-Africa rail project in Angola.

Overall, China spent \$1.34 trillion on nearly 18,000 overseas development projects between 2000 and 2021, averaging about \$61 billion a year, AidData said. The US disbursed \$1.24 trillion in foreign aid, including military assistance, between 2001 and 2023, the research lab said. USAID, created during the Cold War to counter Soviet influence, is the single largest US government player in foreign aid. It paid out \$43.8 billion in 2023, AidData said. That is equivalent to less than 1% of total annual government spending.

Because of the differences in the types of projects funded, China is unlikely to step in as the US retreats, but Beijing still wins because foreign aid is about building relationships and goodwill, said Samantha Custer, director of policy analysis at AidData.



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# Nations race for AI dominance

ARTIFICIAL intelligence is no longer just a technological breakthrough; it is quickly becoming a linchpin of global power. While countries once focused on military alliances, industrial capacity, or energy resources, many now see AI as a crucial part of their national security and economic strategy. This notion of "AI sovereignty" recognizes that whoever masters key components of the AI stack - ranging from high-performance computing to regulatory policy - will profoundly influence the world stage. Far from an abstract concern, governments across the globe are already putting billions of dollars into AI labs, ordering top-tier chips, and positioning themselves to attract or develop frontier technologies.

In the next few years, national leaders face a fundamental choice about how they will obtain the compute, data, energy, and regulatory frameworks that power advanced AI models. Some may opt to "build," pouring resources into domestic research labs, data centers, and homegrown talent. Others may decide to "buy," forming alliances with hypercenter nations or corporations that can supply cutting-edge hardware and knowledge. This "build vs. buy" decision is not new in the history of technology. Countries grappled with similar questions when electricity, railroads, and telecommunication networks first arose. However, AI's speed of evolution and its capacity to encode cultural values and worldviews in digital form make today's decisions especially urgent.

One way to evaluate a nation's AI potential is through four interlocking pillars: compute, data, energy, and policy. Compute refers to access to high-performance hardware capable of training and running large AI models, often requiring specialized chips like graphics processing units. Data encompasses the quantity and quality of datasets that train AI systems necessary for advanced model capabilities.

Energy is the cost and availability of electricity - an increasingly critical factor because running large-scale AI workloads consumes enormous power. Finally, policy determines how governments regulate AI development, protect intellectual property, and set ethical boundaries on model usage. Countries that have excelled in any of these pillars have a head start. The US has long been a leader in compute, hosting major chip manufacturers and cloud infrastructure giants. China is similarly advanced, although unique legal frameworks allow it to mobilize private-sector resources at scale.

Nations in the Middle East hold a comparative advantage in energy - ample reserves and low-cost power that could transform their economies into AI super-hubs if strategically paired with strong data-center construction and top research talent. Meanwhile, regions like Europe are pushing forward on policy, trying to articulate a coherent approach to regulating AI models while safeguarding innovation.

For most nations, it is impractical to dominate all four pillars single handedly. At least in the near term, sovereignty does not require building everything in-house. Instead, the goal is to avoid dependence on unreliable or misaligned partners for any critical element of AI infrastructure. Where a country lacks robust data center facilities, it might ally with a corporate cloud provider or a friendly state that can host compute capacity. Where local energy costs are high, a government might incentivize green power initiatives or forge international agreements to secure long-term energy contracts, thus creating an environment to attract AI labs and startups. The critical question is whether a nation can trust these alliances to remain stable and beneficial over time, particularly if geopolitical winds shift.

Leaders making these calculations should pay attention to several key indicators. First, watch where high-end computing hardware is flowing. Early chip orders and multi-year contracts for GPUs, tensor processing units, or specialized accelerators often signal a commitment to becoming an AI "hypercenter."

Second, look for data-center investments and energy infrastructure expansions; both strong predictors of a nation's ambition to host large-scale AI projects. Third, monitor research ecosystems: Are universities expanding AI curricula, are local tech firms partnering with global AI players, and is there a surge in AI talent visas or exchange programs? Finally, observe the regulatory front. A patchwork of conflicting rules deters AI innovators and pushes them elsewhere, so any coherent federal-level framework is a sign a government wants to compete effectively.

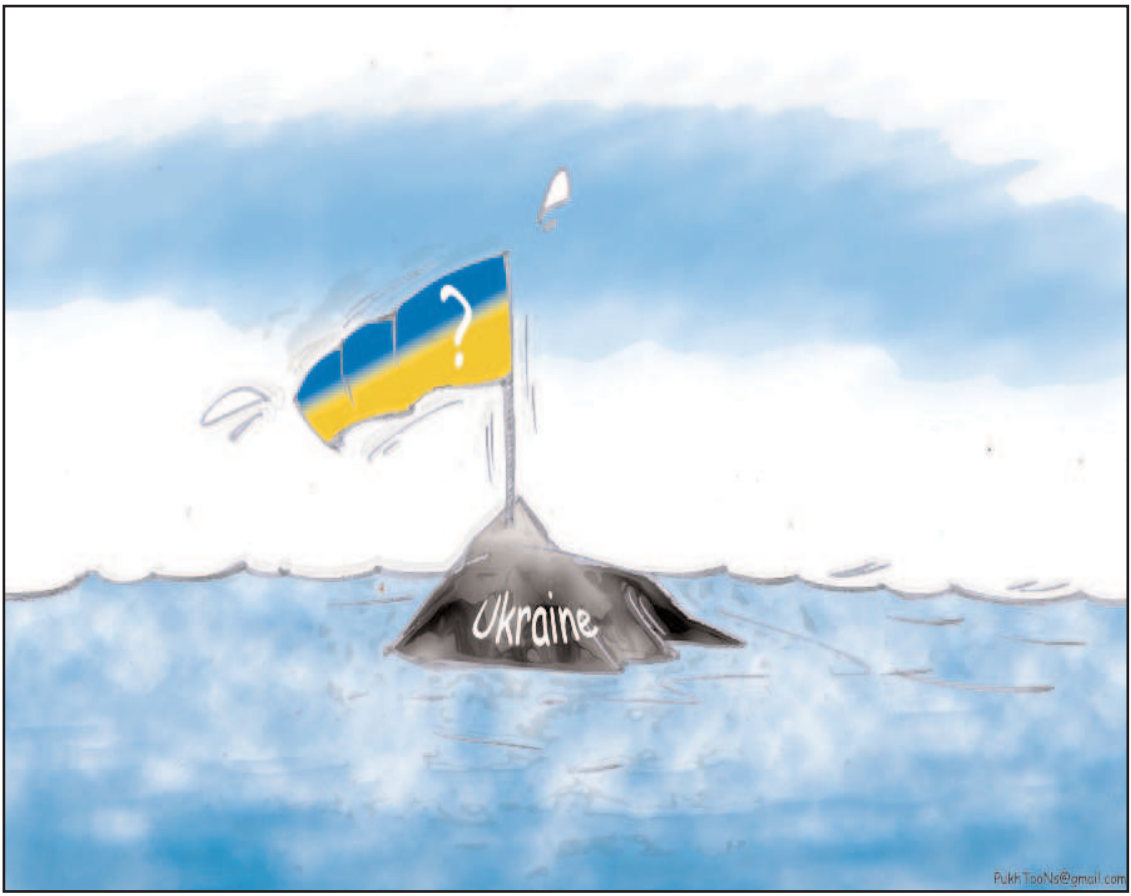
Practically, policymakers can prepare in a few ways. They can provide clarity on data usage, ensuring local researchers have access to large, high-quality datasets while respecting privacy and ethical considerations. They can incentivize the private sector to build and operate advanced data centers domestically, particularly if cheap energy is abundant. They might form strategic alliances, bilateral or regional treaties to pool resources and share the burden of significant infrastructure costs. And crucially, they can invest heavily in AI education and training, cultivating a workforce capable of building and maintaining sophisticated systems. These efforts foster self-sufficiency and signal to international partners that a nation is a credible, capable ally in collaborative ventures.

Those who underestimate AI's geopolitical significance may be left scrambling for relevance as alliances solidify around the countries and corporations that control the fundamentals. For instance, missing the chance to secure a pipeline of GPUs can mean lagging years behind in frontier AI research. Failing to craft a coherent data policy could deter innovators, while moral and cultural values are shaped elsewhere. And overlooking the crucial role of energy means watching from the sidelines as other regions with the right mix of power, computing, and policy surge ahead. This may sound daunting, but it also represents an unprecedented opportunity. AI truly is a new dimension of geopolitics; therefore, each country can align its strengths - abundant energy, a tradition of technical expertise, or a highly skilled workforce - toward building a robust AI ecosystem.

The path need not be isolationist; international partnerships and private-sector collaboration can fill gaps in a nation's strategy, provided mutual trust and a well-defined division of responsibilities exist. What matters is that leaders recognize the shift now, weigh their options, and act before the global map of AI power becomes locked in place. In the near term, sovereignty is about ensuring you have choices rather than being at the mercy of those who took the AI revolution seriously first.

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# The party of Reagan is selling out Ukraine

Jonathan Lemire

A year ago this week, Senator John Thune and 21 of his Republican colleagues defied Donald Trump and voted to send \$60 billion in US aid to Ukraine as it tried to ward off Russia's invasion. "America cannot retreat from the world stage," the South Dakota senator later said, explaining his vote. "American leadership is desperately needed now more than I think any time in recent history, and we need to make sure that Ukraine has the weaponry and the resources that it needs to defeat the Russians."

The vote was gutsy: It drew a rebuke from Trump, who was then heavily favored to capture the GOP presidential nomination. And it was taken even though the bipartisan bill faced uncertain odds in the House, until Speaker Mike Johnson backed it two months later. The measure passed, and assistance continued to flow to Kyiv.

Twelve months later, Ukraine's future is even more imperiled. Over the past week, the Trump administration has made clear that the United States will no longer be Kyiv's largest and most crucial supporter, and that it might sideline Ukrainians from negotiations meant to bring an end to the war. But the response from Republicans has been noticeably different. Thune, now Senate majority leader, has remained silent, as have many of his GOP colleagues. He did not respond to interview requests this week.

Republican capitulation to Trump is a familiar story line, but the moment is nonetheless worth marking. With a few, mostly timid, exceptions, the party that once prided itself on standing up to Moscow-the party of Cold Warriors Ronald Reagan and George H. W. Bush-has bowed to a president who himself is bowing to an adversary. And as Trump officials yesterday embarked on negotiations with their Russian counterparts that could reward Vladimir Putin's gamble on seizing territory from a sovereign neighbor, Republicans faced a new, extraordinarily high-profile test: whether to prioritize their long-held national-security beliefs or their loyalty to the president.

"The Founders intended

Congress to be first among equals of the three branches of government; you'd be hard-pressed to know it, though, looking at today's Republican-controlled Congress," Richard Haass, the former president of the Council on Foreign Relations, told me. Haass, who worked in three previous Republican administrations, said that Republicans have been "not just subservient but invisible," "not holding hearings or otherwise challenging the Trump administration's unconditional embrace of Putin's Russia, the dismissal of Europe's interests and Ukraine's demands."

No representatives from Ukraine or other European nations were present at a hurriedly arranged meeting between US and Russian officials yesterday in Saudi Arabia. Secretary of State Marco Rubio told reporters afterward that Russia and the United States had agreed to work on a Ukraine peace deal and to explore "the incredible opportunities that exist to partner with the Russians" both geopolitically and economically. The message amounted to a dizzying change from President Joe Biden's isolation of Moscow after the Ukraine invasion, which many Senate Republicans broadly supported.

Last week, Trump's White House signaled a fundamental shift in relations with both Europe and Russia by stridently dismissing longtime democratic allies while looking to reestablish ties with the nuclear-armed autocracy to the east. The president prioritized a call with Putin over one with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky and invited the Russian leader, and not the Ukrainian one, for multiple summit meetings. Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth ruled out Ukraine joining NATO or receiving substantial future American security guarantees as part of the negotiations to end the war. Vice President J. D. Vance upbraided European leaders for freezing the far right out of government in their nations. And then yesterday, at a Mar-a-Lago news conference, Trump chided Ukraine for the conflict, snapping, "You should never have been there," and ignoring that it was Russia

that had invaded.

Some Republicans in the Senate offered outright support for Trump's Putin-friendly view of American security. "I don't think anybody really believes Ukraine should be in NATO now," Senator Eric Schmitt told reporters last week. "Unless you want World War III."

Others took a more measured approach, expressing the wish that the US would still support Ukraine-or at least not yield to Putin-while still avoiding outright criticism of Trump. Senator John Cornyn, who voted for the aid package last year, told reporters after Trump's call with Putin, "Ukraine ought to be the one to negotiate its own peace deal. I don't think it should be imposed upon it by any other country, including ours. I'm hopeful." But he added: "I can't imagine President Trump giving up leverage. I don't know what his strategy is for negotiating, but he's pretty good at it. I think it surprises people, including me, sometimes what he's able to pull off."

Few represent the Republican Party's evolution more than Senator Lindsey Graham, who spent years as the late Senator John McCain's wingman, earning a reputation as a globe-trotting national-security hawk. But he has since become one of Trump's most obsequious supporters, often offering over-the-top praise of the president in a way that McCain would not have recognized. Over the weekend, Graham highlighted Trump's plan to seize half of Ukraine's rare earth minerals as payment for the United States' support of Kyiv in the war, praising the scheme as "a game-changer."

Zelensky immediately declined the proposal. But only a few Republican senators-including Mitch McConnell and Susan Collins-publicly opposed Trump's concessions to Russia. "This was an unwelcome, unjustified invasion," Collins told reporters. "I appreciate that the president is trying to achieve peace, but we have to make sure that Ukraine does not get the short end of a deal." Senator Roger Wicker criticized Hegseth's declaration last week that Ukraine would not recover its terri-

tory, deeming the statement a "rookie mistake" on the world stage. But the White House believes that those voices of GOP dissent will stay in the minority, a senior administration official told me under the condition of anonymity to discuss internal strategy.

Trump has been eager to strengthen ties with Putin and asked aides to schedule a summit with the Russian leader in the weeks ahead, the official said. The president has told aides that he believes resetting relations with Russia reduces the chances of a nuclear war and will offer the US new economic opportunities. American officials who spoke with reporters after the Riyadh meeting suggested that Biden-era sanctions on Russia could be lifted, and they did not spend much time in their briefing with reporters discussing Moscow's violation of international law in invading Ukraine or the war-crimes allegations against Putin for the attacks.

Instead, Rubio, whose own views have seemingly evolved since his time in the Senate as a Russia hawk who supported NATO, made a point to repeatedly praise Trump's approach to Russia. "For three years," Rubio said, "no one else has been able to bring something together like what we saw today, because Donald Trump is the only leader in the world that can."

Thom Tillis, another Republican senator who strongly supported the funding bill a year ago, has continued to support Kyiv even though he cast the deciding vote to confirm Hegseth. Tillis, in fact, made a trip to Kyiv on Monday with two other senators, pledging support for the war effort even as the Trump team was landing in Riyadh to begin negotiations without Ukraine.

"I believe, first, we should understand that this is just the beginning of a dialogue. There is no specific framework that's been mapped out yet," Tillis said. "We expect that that will come to pass very quickly, we hope, and that Ukraine has to be front and center as a part of the negotiations to make sure that it's something sustainable." Tillis then turned to his colleagues for validation. Both assented. But both were Democrats.

The Atlantic

# Will Europe look to China to replace US?

Dr. Amal Mudallali

THE question of who will lead in Europe was asked openly at last weekend's Munich Security Conference in light of the rising tensions between the US and its transatlantic allies. Some called on Germany to lead, while others regretted that the UK had left the EU. But the bigger question on everybody's mind was: Will China replace the US as Europe's main partner and world leader?

As transatlantic relations enter a new stage, with Europe questioning whether the historic partnership is still on the same page and whether Europe and the US still share the same values, especially those related to the global order, China looks to be positioning itself as not only the beneficiary but also the better and more stable partner, or "the anti-Trump."

As the US speaks of America First and withdraws from international institutions, China is presenting itself as the guardian of the international order - but not the unipolar world of yesterday, rather the new multipolar world that Beijing says must be fair and devoid of rivalry.

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi told the Munich Security Conference that "a multipolar world is not only a historical inevitability, it is also becoming a reality."

The new American administration prides itself on the "disruption" it is causing to the international system, to fix what it says is a system that has gone astray. China, on the other hand, is presenting itself as a power that is working for an "equal and orderly multipolar world" and "a factor of certainty in this multipolar system," as Wang said.

China is presenting itself as the rational actor in a chaotic world, while "some countries believe that might makes right and have opened the Pandora's box marked the law of the jungle."

But this is not mere political talk, the Chinese claim. Wang pointed out that Beijing "contributed nearly 30 percent of the world's economic growth" and "served as an important engine for global economic growth."

While US Vice President J.D. Vance lectured and chided the Europeans on their supposed abandoning of democratic values, he also intervened in their domestic affairs, especially those of Germany. He met the leader of the far-right Alternative for Germany party but not Chancellor Olaf Scholz. The Chinese were very direct in offering themselves as an alternative, with their officials expressing China's willingness to "deepen strategic communication and mutually beneficial cooperation" with Europe.

Wang was very specific, saying China is "willing to synergize high-quality Belt and Road cooperation with the European Union's Global Gateway Strategy so as to empower each other and empower the entire world." He added that China and Europe are partners, not rivals.

And to contrast China's approach to that of the US regarding its participation in the negotiations over Ukraine, the Chinese foreign minister said Beijing backs Europe to play a significant role in the peace process.

But can China really replace the US for Europe, which has enjoyed more than three-quarters of a century of close political, security, economic and strategic ties with Washington?

As the US is going its own way on ending the war in

Ukraine and as the threat of a trade war becomes serious, Europe is struggling to find a way to preserve its historic and indispensable relationship with the US, while at the same time asserting itself as an equal partner to Washington that cannot be bullied.

China's close relationship with Russia is the main obstacle to a closer and deeper relationship with Beijing. The Europeans believe that China's critical support of Russia is giving it a lifeline, as it is buying its energy, which helps Moscow continue its war in Ukraine. The chair of the Munich Security Conference told Wang, "today, Russia has become ... China's gas station," and asked him about the possibility of China cutting off the gas supply from Russia to pressure it to end the war. Wang repeated China's position that sanctions cannot solve the issue and that the negotiating table is the place to end any conflict. But this is not the answer that Europe needs if it is going to change strategic partners.

Economically, Europe and the US have enjoyed strong economic cooperation in all fields, especially in trade. While there are many voices in Europe calling on it to look after its own interests and allow economic ties with China a larger role in its trade relations, despite caution over technology transfer, the figures and facts paint a different picture.

While the EU describes its approach to China as "multi-faceted," it also describes Beijing as simultaneously "a partner for cooperation, an economic competitor, and a systemic rival." The US enjoys a different relationship. The EU and the US have "the world's largest bilateral trade and investment relationship and enjoy the most integrated economic relationship in the world," according to Brussels.

"EU-US trade in goods and services reached an impressive 1.6 trillion in 2023," the official EU policy and trade site notes. Trade in goods alone was worth \$975.9 billion in 2024. China is the EU's second-largest trading partner for goods after the US, worth 739 billion (\$772 billion) in 2023, a decline of 14 percent from 2022. There is a sustained trade imbalance in favor of China.

The EU-China trade and economic relationship is modest in comparison to the defense, security and strategic relationship enshrined in NATO and other security organizations that make the Europe-US relationship the most enduring and robust in the post-Second World War order.

However, Europe has depended on the US for its defense for too long and, as Vance told the Europeans last week, today there is a "new sheriff in town" who wants different rules so has decided to stop playing by the old rules. It seems Vance's message has been received by Europe loud and clear. The result is multiple voices around the continent talking about scaling up its defense, making new defense commitments and pledging higher defense budget promises.

This is hardly a continent that is replacing its old partner - it is one that is being forced to shape up and pay up. China can be "strong and untiring," as in the Chinese proverb Wang cited in Munich, but it will find out that there is more than ties the US and Europe than the sum of their transatlantic alliance and the latter's shortcomings in defense.

# Trump and GOP Senators have different ideas

Charles Hilu

SEN. Lindsey Graham and John Cornyn sat on a Munich stage alongside Ukraine's president last weekend and reiterated their long-standing support for the war his country has waged against invading Russian forces. "I want to tell you and your people," Graham said to Volodymyr Zelensky, "you're the ally I've been hoping for all my life. Not one American has died defending Ukraine. You've taken our weapons, and you've kicked their ass. And I'm very proud to have you as our ally."

Later, Cornyn argued that America and Ukraine need to halt Vladimir Putin's territorial ambitions before he progresses further into Europe. "We need to recognize that Putin is driven by a vision of restoring the Russian Empire, and that's why I believe that he won't stop at Ukraine," he said. "And that's why it's so

important that we must stop him together in Ukraine."

But just days after the Munich Security Conference, Graham, Cornyn, and other Republican senators who have long backed Ukraine in its nearly three-year war, are finding themselves in a bind on the opposite side of President Donald Trump's increasingly harsh rhetoric against Ukraine and its president. On Tuesday, he said Ukraine "never should have started" the war, and, on Wednesday, he called Zelensky a dictator.

Although Republican senators who have a record of supporting aid to Ukraine would not criticize Trump directly for his rhetoric, they found it easier to condemn Vladimir Putin.

"Vladimir Putin is a murderous dictator," Sen. Thom Tillis of North Carolina told reporters. "He started this war, ordered the occupation, and now the souls of tens of thousands of Ukrainians are

lost on his watch."

But even as he noted there is "no moral equivalency between Vladimir Putin and President Zelensky," Tillis attempted to explain away Trump's comments, putting them in the context of previous Ukraine leaders who did not take measures to liberalize their government after the Cold War, which would have facilitated a potential admission to NATO.

"President Trump, to his credit, does not like seeing our military men and women going into harm's way. I think he is trying to avoid conflicts that put American lives at risk," said Tillis, who on Monday visited Kyiv with two Democratic senators. "He may be voicing some frustrations over some of these democratic norms, independent judiciary-all those things could be conflated into frustration with Zelensky."

Whatever the source of

his frustration, Trump aired it by using harsher language toward Ukraine than Russia. After his administration began meetings with Russian officials without Ukraine Tuesday in Saudi Arabia, Trump made comments at a press conference that falsely asserted the Ukrainians had initiated the war with Russia. "Today I heard, 'Oh well we weren't invited.' Well, you've been there for three years. You should have ended it three years-you should have never started it. You could have made a deal," Trump said. The next day, he doubled down, hitting Zelensky for not holding elections that were scheduled for last year, something that's both legally and logistically difficult while the country is at war. "He refuses to have Elections, is very low in Ukrainian Polls, and the only thing he was good at was playing Biden like a fiddle." A Dictator without Elections,

Zelensky better move fast or he is not going to have a Country left," Trump posted on social media.

That's a very different tone from a Republican Senate caucus that has long been supportive of Ukraine. For nearly three years, Senate Republicans have castigated Putin for the invasion, and 31 Senate Republicans voted for America's latest aid package for Ukraine last year. At the same time, they have an incentive not to criticize Trump too much, lest they draw his ire and that of his base.

Cornyn likewise endeavored to sound optimistic about Trump's early efforts to bring about a ceasefire in the war. "I was a little surprised at one of the president's comments, but I think what's more important is what the actions are," he told The Dispatch of the "should have never started it" comment. "And I don't think there's anything inherently bad about talking to Russia,

but ultimately, I think this is going to be something that Ukraine is going to have to participate in." Asked about the "dictator" comment, he told reporters, "I wouldn't use the same word." Sen. John Kennedy of Louisiana said he had not heard about Trump's "dictator" comment but gave a severe condemnation of Putin.

"I heard [Trump's] comments about Ukraine starting the war, which I disagree with, and I've made my feelings known about Mr. Putin, I think, pretty clearly," he told reporters. "I think he's a gangster. I mentioned he's got a black heart. I think he's got Stalin's taste for blood. I hate to have to even breathe the same air that he does. I think he's an evil person. And I think he makes Jeffrey Dahmer look like Mother Teresa." Kennedy declined to answer a question about why he believed Trump didn't seem to share his opinion. "You'll have to ask him," he said.



# Gaza urgently needs a more effective humanitarian approach

THE ceasefire agreement in Gaza has now held for a month. There have been critical moments and violations, but the mediators have so far managed to keep the deal alive. This has allowed many of the 1.9 million displaced people to move back to areas they had fled from, easing the strain on southern and central Gaza which had hosted large makeshift camps without the necessary infrastructure.

The ceasefire has certainly brought a sense of relief to the Gaza Strip, which has endured unimaginable suffering for 15 months. But for the families who have survived the relentless bombing and destruction, the battle is far from over.

They face a new war - one against poverty, hunger, homelessness, and despair. Homes lie in ruins, hospitals are overwhelmed, and schools are either destroyed or still shelter the displaced and homeless.?Gaza has been set back by decades.

Over the past weeks, we have seen aid access ramp up significantly into the Strip, particularly the north, which was besieged for months. But significant challenges remain. On the ground, colleagues and friends report continued difficulties in accessing food, water, medicine and supplies. Distribution remains a key challenge due to damaged infrastructure, but it is not the only problem.

There are also still barriers to the entry of various essential items. The blocking of trucks carrying tents, mobile homes and heavy machinery for clearing rubble brought the ceasefire deal to near-collapse last week. Due to the absence of proper shelter, many Palestinian families continue to suffer harsh weather conditions across the Gaza Strip, but especially in the north, where the rate of destruction of civilian buildings is the highest.

Many of our colleagues are saying they have yet to see any sign of blankets or tents. They're still exposed to the elements, unable to properly carry out their life-saving work. Some of our beneficiaries share that they have stopped bathing their children because of the harsh cold. Sara\*, a mother of

three living in Deir el-Balah, told our team earlier this month that she used to bathe her children in the sea, but she can no longer do that because she fears they may fall ill. With the continuing lack of medicine, this could be a death sentence for a little child. Although a large amount of food has entered the Strip - especially compared with a few months ago - there are still considerable challenges in meeting Palestinians' nutritional needs. Aid packages are filled exclu-

They have been starved and made ill. Even though aid is increasing into the region, she still can't find the food and nutrients they need to survive. Gaza requires 600 trucks of food daily for at least four consecutive months to address acute malnutrition. Hundreds more will be needed every day to return to a humane living standard, and for years to come. Many of the food items like eggs, chicken, fresh fruit and vegetables are now available in some

farmland has been destroyed and parts of it covered in rubble or toxic residue - remnants of a violent bombing campaign on a civilian population. Nothing will grow for years to come.

The economy of the Strip is all but destroyed. The vast majority of working-age people are unemployed and have no hope of securing employment in the near future. Palestinian families simply cannot survive on packages of flour, rice and canned fish.

With aid distribution faltering and dignity being stripped away, the urgency for a new approach has never been clearer. People in Gaza need a more dignified way to receive support that can help them recover in the long run. Seeing the inadequacies of the current humanitarian response, our organisation decided to launch its "Extend Your Table" initiative, which is rooted in solidarity, compassion, and shared humanity. Rather than relying on the often inconsistent and inadequate aid that reaches Gaza, we are empowering people around the world to make a tangible difference by twinning with families in Gaza.

Through monthly donations, people can directly support a Palestinian family, providing not just food but also dignity and hope for a better tomorrow. Beneficiaries will receive cash vouchers enabling them to decide how to meet their own needs - a choice which hasn't been provided to them since the start of the horrors in Gaza. Providing families the dignity of choice in how to care for themselves does not even begin to address the issues, but it will be a start. We hope this initiative will help restore agency, foster connections, and ensure that basic needs are met for Palestinian men, women and children, who have experienced unimaginable suffering and devastation.

Such a holistic approach can not only provide immediate relief, but support economic recovery, education, and health. We very much hope other organisations will also adopt different, more efficient strategies in Gaza that offer more dignified and humane support for Palestinians. The road to recovery will be long, but we can be part of the solution.

Othman Moqbel

*Her children, however, have no energy to cry any more. They have been starved and made ill. Even though aid is increasing into the region, she still can't find the food and nutrients they need to survive. Gaza requires 600 trucks of food daily for at least four consecutive months to address acute malnutrition. Hundreds more will be needed every day to return to a humane living standard, and for years to come. Many of the food items like eggs, chicken, fresh fruit and vegetables are now available in some parts of Gaza, but they are for sale.*

sively with pantry items. Oil, flour, ghee, rice, tinned beans and tomatoes, and tuna. There are no fresh fruits, vegetables, meat or eggs. The long-term health effects of 15 months without fresh food will surely only be understood in the coming years. Worse still, these aid packages are still not enough and do not reach all people who are in need. In fact, for most of the population in Gaza, access to aid hasn't seen any notable improvement since the tentative ceasefire came into effect.

Fatima\*, a 21-year-old mother of two, says she is still suffering under the same conditions she faced months ago. Her tent leaks in the rain and topples in the wind. She hasn't had a tearless night in 16 months. Her children, however, have no energy to cry any more.

That is because a significant portion of the trucks that have entered Gaza are not aid. They carry commercial goods, including food, that are then sold to the few Palestinians who can afford them at exorbitant prices. Humanitarian agencies have largely sworn off purchasing resale goods for fear of pushing the already soaring prices even further out of reach of civilians. But even still, there are reports of eggs costing \$40, \$50, even \$60 for a carton of 12. In the south, where supplies are supposedly easier to reach, bags of flour can go for as much as \$100.

It is clear the current humanitarian response cannot provide what the Palestinians of Gaza need to begin to rebuild their lives. Gaza has been scorched. Most of its

Alexander Clackson

## Integrating Russia into Western security framework is key to long-term stability

INTEGRATING Russia into a Western security framework may sound almost treacherous as the war in Ukraine rages on. After three years of brutal conflict, the notion of engaging with Moscow, let alone incorporating it into a broader European security structure, is anathema to many in the West.

But security is built on pragmatism, not emotions. If the goal is to prevent future wars and ensure long-term stability, then difficult, even unpalatable, discussions must take place. The best time to negotiate with Russia was three years ago. The next best time is today.

The planned US-Russia negotiations in Saudi Arabia, initiated by President Trump, are likely to deliver an outcome that could have been reached before February 2022: a neutral Ukraine and an implicit understanding that it will not join NATO. Any deal now will likely involve Ukraine conceding territories that Russia has seized. When it comes to Russia's role in the broader Western security order, the longer the West delays a dialogue with Russia, the higher the chances of another conflict.

Of course, Russia's actions - especially its full-scale invasion of Ukraine - have severely undermined trust. The annexation of Crimea in 2014 and Moscow's open contempt for Ukraine's sovereignty mean that any reintegration into a Western security framework must come with strict conditions.

However, an exclusively adversarial approach - endless sanctions,

military deterrence and strategic containment - increases the likelihood of future conflicts. The challenge is finding a middle ground between deterrence and engagement. Rather than leaving Russia indefinitely outside the Western security order, a new framework should be designed that prevents future conflicts while upholding international norms.

For instance, a structured NATO-Russia Council could serve as a forum for military transparency, crisis prevention and conflict resolution. Under strict conditions, Russia and NATO could resume dialogue on military doctrines and risk reduction. Additional measures could include military hotlines, force reductions near borders and transparency agreements on troop movements. None of this would grant Russia veto power over NATO's decisions, but it would help manage tensions and avoid unnecessary escalation.

Additionally, discussions can explore neutral security zones, including the possibility of Ukraine adopting a permanently neutral status. This would need to be accompanied by demilitarized zones with strict international monitoring and verification mechanisms to prevent violations. Similar agreements could be considered for other flashpoints, including Georgia, where Russia has historically exerted influence. A gradual economic reopening could also be on the table - under

strict conditions. If Russia ends its aggressive policies and abides by international norms, limited reintegration into European energy markets could help stabilize global energy supplies. Conditional agreements on oil and gas exports could ensure that energy remains a tool for economic cooperation rather than a weapon of coercion.

A post-war Western security architecture should involve Russia under a new paradigm. This framework must ensure that the Kremlin cannot dictate terms. Instead, a structured approach - reminiscent of Cold War-era security agreements - should be pursued, balancing deterrence with engagement. Skepticism toward such an approach is understandable, especially from Eastern European states, which bear the brunt of Russian hostility. Ukraine, in particular, will vehemently oppose any Western-led security arrangement that gives Russia even the slightest perception of influence over European security matters.

Yet, the failure to engage Russia diplomatically before 2022 contributed to the Ukraine war. It was avoidable. Now, the war will likely end within the next year, but unless a broader dialogue takes place about Russia's role in European security, future conflicts may erupt elsewhere. Even if full-scale war is avoided, hybrid warfare, including cyberattacks and economic coercion, will continue. Another reason to explore this integration is its

potential to weaken Russia-China ties. The growing strategic alignment between Moscow and Beijing has increasingly posed challenges for the West. By isolating Russia entirely, the West inadvertently pushes it deeper into China's orbit, strengthening a bloc that is harder to confront.

Engaging Russia within a Western security framework, even under stringent conditions, could drive a wedge between Moscow and Beijing. Dealing with Russia and China separately is far more manageable than facing them as a united front. The Cold War offers a valuable precedent. Even at the height of US-Soviet tensions, diplomatic channels remained open, and arms control agreements - such as the Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty, the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty and the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty - helped manage competition. A similar approach can be explored today. The goal is not to embrace Russia as an ally but to ensure that its place in the security order prevents further destabilization.

A comprehensive security architecture - built on deterrence, conditional engagement and strict compliance with international norms - offers a pathway toward stability. The alternative is endless confrontation, with future crises waiting to erupt. The West must make a difficult but necessary choice: to work towards a security order that includes, rather than isolates, Russia.

JP Lindsley

## Ukraine is stronger than Trump realizes

THE Trump White House is missing the obvious: Ukraine is not losing its war against Russia. In fact, it is winning in five tremendous ways that US officials, the European elite and the media alike are failing to see. A retired American general recently told me in Kyiv, "Ukraine is just going to have to give up a lot - it's so sad." He said this with resignation, as if it were inevitable. But, as is so often the case, the simple and clear is often overlooked amid the swirl of events, executive briefings and Elon tweets.

Here are five true and simple narratives, the knowledge of which could change the dynamic for Washington during talks with Russia this week. In May 2024, Kharkiv, 30 miles from the Russian border, was under relentless bombardment. The goal? Force citizens to flee so the city could be captured. Suddenly, by June, the attacks had nearly stopped. Why? After months of hesitation, the Biden administration finally answered a clear global plea and allowed Ukraine to use HIMARS to strike Russian missile launch points across the border.

The result? Immediate relief. Kharkiv became safer overnight. But Washington failed to take

note. As officials dozed, Russia adapted, shifting launch points further back. By the end of June, the bombing had resumed, but less intensely. In fact, today, Kharkiv remains a clean, prosperous and low-crime city. It even has traffic jams! The "Kharkiv state of mind" is so powerful that people I know from much safer Lviv are moving there now. Isn't this proof that standing up to Russia works?

Russia's Black Sea Fleet once blockaded Ukraine's exports while attacking cities from the sea. A 2022 United Nations-backed grain deal allowed shipments but prevented Ukraine from striking back. When that deal collapsed in 2023, Ukraine took matters into its own hands. Within a year, using domestically produced sea drones, Ukraine destroyed one-third of Russia's Black Sea fleet. The remaining ships have fled from Sevastopol's port in Crimea to Russian shores. Today, Ukraine is exporting more grain - over 40 million tons in 2024 - than it did under the UN deal. Ukraine, without a conventional navy, put Russia's mighty fleet on the run. This was a clear strategic win. And if Ukraine were to agree to give up Crimea, why would the Russian

navy be allowed to toddle back to Sevastopol?

For three winters, Moscow has tried - and failed - to break Ukraine by crippling its power grid. Experts predicted a dire situation without power and water, yet as I write from snowy Kyiv, the lights are on, and they have been on for months. Ukraine didn't just endure; it adapted and outmaneuvered Russia's strategy. I suspect this is the real key: Russians learned that Ukrainians can live by candlelight if needed, making these attacks not worth it. That's not just survival - it's a victory.

The experts were wrong again. Last August, analysts predicted that Pokrovsk would fall to Russian forces within two weeks. The next target would be the major city of Dnipro. Six months later, that still hasn't happened. Thanks to Ukrainian incursions into Russia's Kursk region, precision drone strikes and, yes, a lot of bloodshed in Donbas, fortress Pokrovsk still stands. Once again, Ukraine has defied predictions and kept Russian forces at bay. The game-changer. In 2022, Russian forces were taking cities at a terrifying pace. On June 24, Severodonetsk fell. But the next

day, Ukraine started using US-supplied HIMARS. Another so-called "red line" was crossed. Everything changed - and no one got nuked.

Precision HIMARS strikes halted Russia's advance, allowing Ukraine to hold Bakhmut for 10 more months. This wasn't just a delay; it was a shift in the balance of power, proving that it works to cross Vladimir Putin's red lines. A well-armed freedom stops tyranny. That lesson is just as true today. Even senior Pentagon officials likely don't fully grasp these five truths, which expose Russia's weaknesses. Unaware of these realities, Team Trump speaks about Ukraine in a helpless way. How can the US negotiate effectively and from strength if it doesn't understand Ukraine's strengths?

This might seem hard to believe, but not if you have spent time in Washington's corridors. So, let's cut through the noise. First, when Ukraine fights back, its cities become safer and global commerce more stable. Second, when the US removes restrictions on its use of weapons, Ukraine gains ground. And finally, when Ukraine gets the weapons it needs and crosses Putin's red lines, Russia retreats.

# Britain can't afford to support Ukraine

Sam Ashworth-Hayes

IF the war in Ukraine isn't over quite yet, the end certainly seems to be in sight. Donald Trump is determined to get a deal, and will clearly place pressure on a country reliant on US military aid into signing up to whatever he agrees to with his Russian counterpart. Kyiv is likely to accede to his terms.

Attention in Ukraine will then turn from the battlefield to rebuilding, and from this war to the next one. In other European capitals, this shift has already taken place. Sir Keir Starmer is musing about putting British troops "on the ground" to guarantee Ukraine's security after the war is over, making sure that any deal is not "merely" a temporary pause before Putin attacks again.

To paraphrase another Russian leader, the response in Moscow is likely to run along the lines of "Keir Starmer? How many divisions has he?". The answer to that is "not clear, but possibly none". While Brigadier Andy Watson might insist that his brigade is totally ready "to conduct the whole range of military operations", and that "the Ministry of Defence would not send us into theatre without having the correct force package", the prospect of Britain projecting force at scale seems slim.

Our Armed Forces are "too small and inadequately set up for large, prolonged conflicts", "hollowed out", "below critical mass", and possibly unable "to field a heavy war-fighting division within reasonable time", lacking "equipment and the logistics required to support it". It is, in other words, far from clear that we would be able to sustain a large deployment at the scale required to deflect a Russian attack.

This might come as a surprise to some. Adjusted for inflation, British defence spending in 2024 is a little higher than it was in 2003-2004, when we were sustaining a deployment tens of thousands strong in Iraq. But in 2003, even though spending had been cut in recent years, we still had the legacy of a decade of spending 2.6 to 4pc of GDP each year between 1984 and 1996.

That's emphatically not the case today. From 2011-2012, defence spending dropped significantly in real terms, only recovering in 2021. If we'd kept spending flat, we'd have invested an additional £44bn over the last decade.

That's a big shortfall to make up, and thanks to the mechanics of defence

spending - scrapping a capability saves small amounts in maintenance, rebuilding it requires large up-front sums - it's not coming back soon. It will take time to build back from 72,510 full-time, fully trained soldiers back up to the 102,000 we had in 2010.

And if we want to present a credible deterrence in a Ukrainian theatre marked by brutal levels of attrition, we'll want rather more than that. An army fit for counterinsurgency operations against non-peer adversaries is not necessarily one that will stand up to a near-peer meat-grinder.

This brings us to the second point: that the cost of backing Ukraine over the last two years has already taken a bigger bite out of our budget than many suspect.

The general analysis is that in exchange for £12.8bn in aid and equipment - about a third of a year's defence spending - Britain was able to give Putin a bloody nose, and stabilise Ukraine's forces until US aid arrived.

The problem with this analysis is that it's massively understating the costs involved. Perhaps the most important economic consequence of the war in Ukraine was the decision to cut supplies of Russian gas to Europe, taken in part by Vladimir Putin attempting to put pressure on his neighbours, and in part by those countries moving to switch away from reliance on Moscow, and the cascading effects through energy markets.

The direct costs to the Government of this cut can be easily summed up. Between the various schemes targeted at relieving the pressure of energy bills on households and businesses, the Treasury paid out £44bn between 2022 and 2024. Remember that £44bn gap in our defence budget? It turns out that Britain's already found that money, and spent it on supporting Ukraine.

Rather than spending it on armaments, it spent it on maintaining domestic support. While some of the £44bn was offset by taxes on energy producers, it is not a negligible sum, particularly when put next to the economic consequences of higher energy prices. We can try to work out some of those consequences by going through the data.

Prior to the pandemic, the UK burned roughly £10-16bn worth of natural gas, the equivalent of somewhere between 73m and 75m tons of oil. In 2022, it spent around £47bn for 67m tons equiv-

alent, and in 2023, £46bn for 60m tons equivalent. Some of this spend accrued to domestic producers and exporters, but around £44bn appears to have ended up in net imports. Had prices stayed where they were in the three years before the pandemic, I calculate we would have spent £36bn less in 2022, and saved around the same in 2023. And this, recall, is with a drop in the quantity of gas burned, likely a reduction in cost of around £22bn.

This reduction won't show up on the cost sheet, but it does show up in real GDP in consumption of heating services and in industrial use. The Office for Budget Responsibility suggests that the elasticity of UK output with respect to fossil fuel prices is around -0.013. In English, this means that if prices rise 10pc, GDP will likely fall 0.13 per cent. If they rise 100pc, GDP drops 1.3pc. And gas prices over the last few years have generally been multiples of their previous levels, with a roughly 360pc premium in 2022, and a 100pc premium in 2023.

Gas is not the only fossil fuel input into the UK economy, other benchmark prices - for instance, Brent crude - rose less sharply. And there were other reasons for prices to rise as the economy reopened after the pandemic. Nevertheless, whether you take OBR elasticities or lean on the mathematical properties of homogeneous production functions, if you attribute half the gas price spike to Putin's war then estimates in the region of 0.88pc of GDP seem reasonable in year one of the conflict - £22bn or so of lost output.

Adding these costs up would be unwise, as we'd be double-counting higher spending on gas, and higher government support for the same. None the less, a back-of-the-envelope approach suggests that £22bn in lost output in the first year of the war, £44bn in imports, and £13bn in aid might be a useful first-order approximation of the UK's contribution to the defence of Ukraine over 2022-2023. Or £79bn in total. That's a lot to have lost on a conflict a long way from these shores. It's likely that the burst of inflation it fuelled cost the Conservative Party whatever slim chance they had of retaining office last year. Sir Keir Starmer and Rachel Reeves have made themselves unpopular enough already. Are they really going to push through further tax rises for a mass permanent deployment to Eastern Europe?

## Zelensky deserves credit

Owen Matthews

IS Donald Trump preparing a sordid betrayal of Ukraine that hands the Kremlin victory and rewards Putin's aggression? If you count victory as getting away with stealing another country's land, then yes - Putin is set to retain control of the 22 per cent of Ukraine that he has already occupied, expanding the territory of the Russian Federation by less than half a percent. But in every other sense, Putin's war on Ukraine has turned out to be a humiliating defeat.

Putin invaded to bring Ukraine under his heel and prevent Kyiv's inexorable Westward drift. In this, he has totally failed. Ukrainians - including Russian-speaking Ukrainians like Zelensky - hate Putin with a passion and are strongly committed to becoming a prosperous European democracy. Putin has won Donbas and Crimea, but lost Ukraine at vast cost in blood and treasure. Compared to that strategic defeat the land is unimportant, however unobnoxiously Putin will grow over it. The Soviet-style victory march that he will inevitably stage will be a sickening sight. But the pomp of the Kremlin's bluster will be an attempt to disguise the humiliating truth that Russia has been proved to be very much not the great power of Putin's fantasies.

Small Ukraine fought an aggressor with four times its population, twenty times its economy and nuclear weapons to boot to a standstill. As the Ukrainians joke, "we used to think that Russia was the second army in the world - but now

we know it's the second army in Ukraine."

In the meantime Russia has become an economic vassal of China, has lost its strategic control of Europe's gas markets, a million of Russia's brightest and best have emigrated, and it has blown up any possibility of foreign investment by robbing foreigners foolish enough not to flee from their businesses. Putin has totally lost his soft power over his Central Asian neighbours and his pseudo-colony in Syria. His only remaining true allies are the Taliban, the Iranians and North Koreans. The BBC's brilliant Moscow correspondent Steve Rosenberg put his finger on it last December when he asked Putin whether he had done a good job of preserving Russia. The truth is that he's diminished and weakened it. As for betrayal of Ukraine, I have never met anybody in the Presidential administration on Bankova Street in Kyiv, nor any official in Washington who ever seriously thought that Ukraine would actually get their lost land back. That was a necessary fiction of the kind that needs to be told in wars. The minute Zelensky starts to talk about compromise, the troops in the trenches lose their motivation to fight on.

Trump's naked grab for Ukraine's supposedly great rare earth assets is undoubtedly distasteful (though it was in fact the Ukrainians themselves who began this narrative last November). Even more obnoxious is Trump's suggestion that Zelensky was somehow to blame for starting the war - which Trump crassly

described as a "conflict" rather than an unprovoked Russian invasion. But the Trump team is at least chucking out some foolish, empty pieties. NATO membership for Ukraine? Was never going to happen - not politically, not militarily, not even legally. Reconquest? You want it, you are going to have to take it. And Europeans - please spare us your histrionics about Chamberlain in Munich. If Europe had been serious about sanctioning Russia, they would have stopped buying Russian gas - which even now still accounts for 20 per cent of the EU's supply, and growing. Anyone still talking about fighting on and pushing out the Kremlin's troops is merely virtue signalling and writing cheques in someone else's blood. As Ukrainian military intelligence chief Kyrylo Budanov recently warned a closed session of parliament, there is a very real chance of a military collapse as Kyiv runs out of manpower. For all his rancour and ignorance, Trump has the best chance of bringing the war to an end - and in the process saving Ukraine from an even worse defeat.

What Ukraine has achieved in the field is not a defeat but a major military miracle. Like the Finns in the Winter War of 1939-40, they have emerged from a death struggle with Moscow with their independence and pride intact. Both Finland and Ukraine lost around a quarter of their territory to Russian invaders. But as long as Ukraine remains free and firmly in the Western camp, it will be they who won and Putin who lost.





# SCCI stresses adapting modern technology

— to flourish business and trade

## F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Sarhad Chamber of Commerce and Industry president Fazal Moqem Khan while emphasizing on strengthening of industries and academia linkages stated the world has rapidly changed into a global village where in importance and use of science and technology as well as artificial intelligence has been increased exponentially.

He was addressing an introductory session on KP Science and Technology and Innovation Strategy, jointly organized by Sarhad Chamber of Commerce and Industry and Directorate

General of Science and Technology, Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa here at the chamber house. Fazal Moqem asserted adoption of modern techniques and tools have become essential for promotion of business and trade.

He noted Science and Technology, and Artificial Intelligence has played a pivotal role in the development of society, which cannot be neglected.

Session was attended by SCCI senior vice president Abdul Jalil Jan, vice president Shehryar Khan, former senior vice president Shahid Hussain, members of the executive committee Aftab Iqbal, Ashfaq

Ahmad, S&T Deptt Secretary Muhammad Sheraz, DG Sajid Hussain, Strategy Focal Person Dr Nasrul Minallah, SCCI members Saddar Gul, Naeem ur Rehman, Syed Aftab Hayat, Qurat Ul Ain, Fazal e Wahid, Ishfaq Ahmad Paracha, Rashid Iqbal Siddiqui, Aqeel Kayani, Gul Rasool, Feroz Shah, Asif Khan, Secretary General Muqtasid Ahsan, along with traders and industrialists.

Moqem highlighted the role and importance of Science and Technology, and AI in a rapidly changing world. He said government, industries and academia collaboration would

efficiently promote Science and Technology and AI.

On the other hand, SCCI chief said use of modern tools for promotion of business and trade had become mandatory and hoped today's session would help traders to promote their business and trade in a better way.

During the session, participants were apprised on the KP Science and Technology Strategy through a multimedia presentation in a comprehensive manner.

Earlier, SCCI president Fazal Moqem Khan presented a written document of proposals to further modify and improve the strategy.



PESHAWAR: President Sarhad Chamber of Commerce and Industry Fazal Moqem Khan presenting SCCI Chambers' shields to Secretary S&T Department Muhammad Sheraz and DG Sajid Hussain.

## PSX witnesses bearish trend

ISLAMABAD (APP): The 100-Index of the Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX) witnessed bearish trend on Friday, losing, 938.23 points, a negative change of 0.82 percent, closing at 112,800.93 points as compared to 113,739.16 points on the last trading day.

A total of 455,394,404 shares were traded during the day as compared to 787,438,742 shares the previous trading day, whereas the price of shares stood at Rs21.524 billion against Rs33.097 billion on the last trading day.

As many as 451 companies transacted their shares in the stock market, 173 of them recorded gains and 219 sustained losses, whereas the share price of 59 companies remained unchanged.

The three top trading companies were Pak International Bulk with 35,412,456 shares at Rs.8.71 per share, K-Electric Limited with 24,737,842 shares at Rs.4.67 per share and Ghani Global Glass with 19,830,999 shares at Rs.9.15 per share.

Nestle Pakistan Limited witnessed a maximum increase of Rs.48.71 per share closing at Rs.7,345.84 whereas runner-up was Supernet Technologies Limited with Rs.43.75 rise in its share price to close at Rs.839.36.

Unilever Pakistan Foods Limited witnessed a maximum decrease of Rs.215.00 per share price, closing at Rs.22,900.00, whereas the runner-up was Rafhan Maize Products Company Limited with Rs.147.67 decline in its per share price to Rs.9,394.33.

## Gold price decrease

ISLAMABAD (APP): The price of 24 karat per tola gold decreased by Rs.2,000 and was sold at Rs 307,000 on Friday against its sale at Rs 309,000 on previous trading day, All Pakistan Sarafa Gems and Jewelers Association reported.

The price of 10 grams of 24 karat gold also decreased by Rs 1,714 to Rs 263,203 from Rs 264,917 whereas that of 10 gram 22 karat came down by Rs.1,571 to Rs 241,278 from Rs 242,849.

The prices of per tola silver decreased by Rs.38 to Rs.3,430 whereas that of ten gram silver came down by Rs.33 to Rs.2,940.

The price of gold in the international market also decreased by \$23 to \$2,930 from \$2,953 whereas the prices of silver in international market dipped by \$0.21 to \$32.94, the Association reported.

# SBP awards pilot license to Mashreq Bank Pakistan

— to operate as digital retail bank

## F.P. Report

KARACHI: The Governor, State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) awarded the first restricted license for pilot operations to Mashreq Bank Pakistan Limited (MBPL) in a special meeting held with the Board and senior management of MBPL. State Bank's Deputy Governor and senior executives were also present on this occasion.

This was yet another landmark, as earlier this year, a microfinance bank was granted the first Digital Retail Bank (DRB) license for commercial operations. MBPL is a wholly owned subsidiary of Mashreq Bank PSC (UAE), which brings with it a rich history of innovation, customer-centricity, and agility in the banking sector.

Mashreq Bank's extensive regional and global presence, including offices in Europe, Asia, Africa, and the US, provides it a strong foundation to emulate in Pakistan.

SBP introduced a regulatory framework for licensing full-fledged digital banks in 2022, enabling both fintech startups and traditional banks to establish fully digital banking services. The framework

offered two types of licenses: Digital Retail Bank (DRB) and Digital Full Bank (DFB), with operations conducted exclusively through digital channels. To foster competition, SBP adopted a cohort-based approach, initially granting upto five licenses. The initiative attracted significant interest, with 20 applications submitted by major financial players. After rigorous evaluation, SBP issued No-Objection Certificates (NOCs) to five institutions: Easypaisa Bank Limited, Mashreq Bank Pakistan Limited (MBPL), Raqami Islamic Digital Bank Limited (RIDBL), HugoBank Limited, and KT Bank Limited.

The Governor, SBP shared his expectations for MBPL to maintain high standards of excellence by leveraging cutting-edge technologies like artificial intelligence (AI) and cloud computing to offer seamless and personalized banking services. He further encouraged MBPL to contribute to the transformation of Pakistan's banking landscape by adhering to rigorous regulatory standards while fostering competition and innovation within the sector.

He reiterated SBP's

commitment to support innovation and progress in the financial sector, and that the introduction of a distinct licensing framework for digital banks is a strategic initiative to drive digital transformation and enhance financial inclusion. This framework has been designed to empower digital banks to meet evolving customer demands by offering convenient and accessible digital services. At the same time, he emphasized on the importance of building resilient digital infrastructures capable of withstanding cybersecurity challenges. He further added that as the financial world becomes more digital, safeguarding operations and customer data will be critical for ensuring trust and integrity in the financial system.

The digital banks are expected to play a crucial role in providing affordable financial services to underserved and unbanked populations. As digital banking evolves, SBP remains committed to ensuring that these banks prioritize technological innovation, seamless customer experiences, and strong regulatory compliance-key pillars for building a future-ready financial system in Pakistan.

# Lucky Cement announces a 5 for 1 stock split

## F.P. Report

KARACHI: Lucky Cement Limited (PSX Symbol: LUCK) announced a 5 for 1 stock split through its notice to PSX on Friday.

The said recommendation was made in its Board meeting held, which is subject to approval by its shareholders in an Extraordinary General Meeting (EoGM) to be held on March 18, 2025.

Once the stock split becomes effective, the existing 293 million ordinary shares for Lucky Cement Limited will be multiplied by the stock split factor of 5, resulting in 1,465 million ordinary shares. Similarly, the pre-split stock price of each share will stand divided by the same factor.

Stock splits are a common strategy employed by companies worldwide to enhance market accessibility, liquidity, and investor

participation. By reducing the price per share, companies make their stock more affordable to a broader range of investors, particularly small and retail investors, fostering a more inclusive shareholder base. A split also increases the number of shares in circulation, improving market liquidity and making trading more efficient without causing price volatility.

Moreover, a stock split signals confidence in a company's financial strength and long-term prospects, reinforcing investor trust and positioning the company for sustained success. Unlike issuing bonus shares, which have tax implications, stock splits provide a tax-efficient mechanism for shareholders to benefit from a company's growth.

M. Ali Tabba, CEO of Lucky Cement Limited, stated that, with the blessings of Allah, Lucky

Cement Limited and its subsidiaries have experienced significant growth over the years.

He emphasized that the stock split is aimed at sharing this success story with a broader base of investors, both locally and globally. He further highlighted that the Company's strategy of reinvesting profits into growth and expansion has consistently delivered strong results and made it more resilient to economic shocks. Rather than relying on conventional means, Lucky Cement Limited continues to implement innovative measures to enhance shareholder value.

Citing the company's two share buybacks, he noted that shareholders who chose to retain their shares will now own a larger percentage of the Company for the same initial investment, benefiting from the Company's sustained growth.

# Standard Chartered announces winners of WomenInTech Cohort 6

## F.P. Report

KARACHI: The Standard Chartered Bank in partnership with INNOVentures Global (Private) Limited announced the winners of WomenInTech (WiT) Cohort 6 2024. The Standard Chartered Women in Tech (WiT) programme champions gender representation in technology entrepreneurship by providing training, mentoring, and grant funding to women-led ventures. Launched in Pakistan in 2019, the programme is dedicated to fostering economic and social development through innovation-

driven businesses. To date, 145 women-led businesses have graduated, with 33 receiving seed funding to accelerate their growth.

The Standard Chartered WiT programme received more than 1900 applications from over 103 cities and towns. 45 applicants were invited to pitch, based on their eligibility criteria and uniqueness of their start-ups.

This year marked a major milestone with the programme's redesign, aimed at bridging the funding gap for women entrepreneurs and supporting their journey toward greater access to capital. 10 finalists were awarded valida-

tion grants of PKR 1 million each, enabling them to implement and prove their business strategies in real market conditions.

Following this performance-based approach, three top-performing startups will now receive scaling grants of PKR 5 million, PKR 3.5 million, and PKR 2 million, providing them with the financial support necessary to expand operations, enhance technology, and reach larger markets.

Rehan Shaikh, Chief Executive Officer & Head of Coverage, Standard Chartered Bank Pakistan stated, "We are incredibly proud to celebrate the

remarkable achievements of this year's Women in Tech graduates. At SC Pakistan we believe in the power of diversity and innovation to drive meaningful change. As we celebrate the Cohort 6 Graduation Ceremony, we recognise the resilience and achievements of Pakistan's women entrepreneurs who contribute to the socio-economic upliftment of the country which is essential for the country's economic growth. This programme is a reflection of our continued commitment to creating pathways for women to access sustainable funding and scale their businesses."

## 14th Annual Corporate Social Responsibility Awards:

# Fatima Fertilizer wins two prestigious awards

## F.P. Report

KARACHI: The Fatima Fertilizer has been honored with two prestigious accolades at the 14th Annual Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Awards 2025, recognizing its unwavering commitment to sustainability and corporate social responsibility. The company was awarded the Corporate Non-Profit Partnership and SDG Pioneer Award.

The SDG Pioneer Award was presented to Fatima Fertilizer for being the first Pakistani company to align with the United Nations Development Programme's (UNDP) Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) framework.

Fatima Fertilizer has developed a comprehensive sustainability strategy covering six key themes and introduced innovative solutions such as the Sarsabz Pakistan App and the FasalPay Agri-Fintech platform, both of which empower farmers with digital advisory, financial inclusion, and sustainable agricultural practices. These initiatives play a vital role in enhancing food security in Pakistan by equipping farmers with the tools and knowledge to increase crop yields and adopt climate-smart farming techniques.

The Corporate Non-Profit Partnership Award recognized Fatima Fertilizer's strategic collaboration with UNDP, which has led to significant

advancements in sustainability and responsible business practices. This partnership includes leveraging the UNDP Impact Assessment Tool to develop its sustainability framework, aligning with global ESG (Environmental, Social, and Governance) standards to enhance corporate responsibility, and implementing a structured approach using UNDP's comprehensive online toolkit to drive measurable impact. Through these initiatives, Fatima Fertilizer aims to positively impact Pakistan's food security, the empowerment of women, environmental sustainability, and the advancement of innovative sustainable agricultural practices.

Speaking on this achievement, Rabel Sadozai, Director Sales and Marketing at Fatima Fertilizer, said, "These awards reaffirm our dedication to driving sustainable agricultural growth in Pakistan. By leveraging digital innovations and impactful partnerships, we are creating long-term value for our farmers, stakeholders, and the environment. Fatima Fertilizer remains committed to pioneering initiatives that align with global sustainability standards while empowering our agricultural community."

Asad Murad, COO of Fatima Fertilizer, while expressing his gratitude



said, "At Fatima Fertilizer, we believe that corporate responsibility goes beyond business success—it is about making a lasting impact on the communities we serve. These awards reaffirm our commitment to sustainability, innovation, and strategic collaborations that create meaningful change. By aligning our efforts with the UNDP's SDG framework, we are not only driving agricultural progress but also contributing to a more sustainable and prosperous Pakistan."

The International CSR Awards is Pakistan's first

and only registered CSR award, recognized by Pakistan's Intellectual Property Organization (IPO). The event gathers key stakeholders, including corporate leaders, government officials, NGOs, academia, and media, to celebrate excellence in corporate social responsibility.

Fatima Fertilizer's latest recognition underscores its leadership in sustainable business practices, reinforcing its role as a trailblazer in corporate responsibility and a key contributor to Pakistan's agricultural sector.

## Kitchen items' prices raised

ISLAMABAD (APP): The weekly inflation, measured by the Sensitive Price Indicator (SPI), went up by 0.27 percent for the combined consumption groups during the week ended on February 20, the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS) reported on Friday.

According to the PBS data, the SPI for the week under review in the above-mentioned group was recorded at 319.12 points as compared to 318.26 points during the past week.

As compared to the corresponding week of last year, the SPI for the combined consumption group in the week under review witnessed an increase of 1.21 per cent. The weekly SPI with the base year 2015-16=100 covers 17 urban centres and 51 essential items for all expenditure groups.

The SPI for the lowest consumption group of up to Rs 17,732 witnessed increase of 0.19 per cent and went down to 308.82 points from last week's 308.24 points.

The SPI for consumption groups of Rs 17,732 to 22,888; Rs 22,889-29,517; Rs 29,518-44,175 and above Rs 44,175, went up by 0.23 percent, 0.24 percent, 0.28 percent and 0.28 percent respectively.

During the week, out of 51 items, prices

of 11 (21.57%) items increased, 16 (31.37%) items decreased and 24 (47.06%) items remained stable.

The items, which recorded major decrease in their average prices on a week-on-week basis included tomatoes (2.81%), diesel (1.49%), pulse gram (1.24%), onions (1.16%), potatoes (0.90%), pulse mash (0.60%), LPG (0.58%), petrol (0.36%), rice basmati broken (0.34%), vegetable ghee 1 kg (0.32%) and pulse moong (0.30%).

The commodities which recorded major increase in their average prices on a week-on-week basis included bananas (11.89%), eggs (7.80%), chicken (4.47%), garlic (1.08%), sugar (0.65%), beef (0.52%), cigarettes (0.49%), mutton (0.22%), pulse masoor (0.15%) and washing soap (0.07%).

Year-on-year basis, the commodities that witnessed decrease included tomatoes (58.82%), onions (49.86%), wheat flour (37.05%), chillies powder (20.00%), electricity charges for Q1 (18.92%), pulse mash (12.03%), pulse masoor (11.43%), rice basmati broken (9.15%), diesel (8.07%), rice irri-6/9 (7.60%), petrol (6.97%) and LPG (1.32%).

## Rupee sheds 11 paisa against dollar

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Rupee on Friday depreciated by 11 paisa against the US Dollar in the interbank trading and closed at Rs279.57 against the previous day's closing of Rs279.46.

However, the buying and selling rates of the dollar in the open market stood at Rs279.95 and Rs281.45, respectively. The price of the Euro increased by Rs1.86 to close at Rs293.39 against the last day's closing of Rs291.53.

The Japanese yen came down by 01 paisa and closed at Rs1.85, whereas an increase of Rs2.21 was witnessed in the exchange rate of the British Pound, which was traded at Rs354.20 as compared to the last day's closing of Rs351.99.

# Not evaders but honest taxpayers penalized, says Mian Zahid

## F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Chairman of National Business Group Pakistan, the President of the Pakistan Businessmen and Intellectuals Forum, the President of All Karachi Industrial Alliance, the Chairman of the FPCCI Advisory Board, and the President and former provincial minister, Mian Zahid Hussain, said on Friday that the burden of electricity and gas theft and tax evasion should not be put on honest consumers.

It is difficult to catch those who steal electricity and gas, but all their losses are put on those who pay electricity bills, which worsens the homes

and businesses conditions of ordinary consumers, he said.

Mian Zahid Hussain said that the burden of the undocumented economy and tax evasion is also placed on taxpayers, which results in heartburn and violates the principles of justice.

Talking to the business community, the veteran business leader said that there are sectors that do not pay taxes and pay nominal taxes, including retailers, wholesalers, agriculture, real estate, transport, and SMEs, etc.

The volume of retail sales is equal to nineteen percent of the GDP, but this sector does not pay even one percent of direct taxes, which is regret-

table, he added.

Mian Zahid Hussain said that many sectors are not paying taxes, due to which the burden of taxes on manufacturing, services, and the salaried class has been greatly increased.

میان ظہی فرسٹ واریان متوفی روشن زری  
مکہ محمد اور دل میں ان کے مہینہ جہاد کو ملے اور وہ  
باشعہ ہوں۔ در ہیئت مقرر ہوں۔ یہ بیعت عطا کیا کرنا ہوں  
کس نے مقرر کیا والد متوفی سارو زری زری فوت ہوگئے ہے۔  
جسے داران مندرجہ ذیل ہیں۔ 1۔ عمران انی (ہر)۔ 2۔  
کلیات انی (ہر)۔ 3۔ شہاب انی۔ 4۔ محمد غزاد (ہر)  
5۔ کامران انی (ہر) فوت شدہ انی (ہر)۔ 5۔ شہین  
انی غور فوت شدہ ہیں۔ مندرجہ بالا متوفی کے شرعی حق  
داران ہیں اس کے علاوہ متوفی کا رکنی داران میں ہے۔ غلط  
پائی کی صورت میں کس طرح زبردست ہوگا۔  
المرقم۔ 35-1-23۔ محمد غزاد 1589-0381-47202

## Court Notice

In the Court of Abdul Haleem Civil Judge V/Ilaqa Qazi Buner at Daggar. Suit No. 215/1. Institution 26/10/ 2024. Date of hearing, 22/2/2025. Mst Shehramand VS Mst Behram Jan. Notice to No.3. Razimand Shah. 4.Said Zaman Shah sons. 6.Mst Amroz d/o Said Ahmed Shah (late) resident of Kalpani tehseel Gagra district Buner. Whereas in the above mentioned case the mentioned defendants can not be served in the ordinary way, it is, therefore, proclaimed that if the said defendants will/shall not appear personally or through duly authorized agent or pleader in the court at 8.30 am dated 22/2/2025 the proceeding will be taken ex- parte. Given under my hand and seal of this Court.





In brief

Ali bags gold in Cycling C'ship

ISLAMABAD (APP): Ali Ilyas won a gold medal in the Albarka Bank 9th National Road Cycling Championship held here at the Iran Avenue on Friday. The event was inaugurated by Syed Azhar Ali Shah, President of the Pakistan Cycling Federation (PCF). The event was scheduled for February 20, but was postponed due to heavy rain, said a press release. The highlight of the day was the Men's Elite 112 KM road race, which showcased thrilling competition among the country's top cyclists. The winners include Gold Medalist: Ali Ilyas (SSGC) – 3 hours, 1 minute, and 37 seconds (Average speed: 37 km/h); Silver Medalist: Umar Farooq (Khyber Pakhtunkhwa); Bronze Medalist: Mohammad Shan (SSGC). The championship featured 130 male and female cyclists representing four provincial teams—Punjab, Sindh, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Gilgit Baltistan, IBex club and Balochistan—along with teams from Islamabad, SSGC, POF Wah, and Bikesistan Cycling Academy.

Omar, Noor grab deaf event titles

ISLAMABAD (APP): Omar, Noor have bagged the deaf event title of the 17th National Tenpin Bowling Championship here at the Leisure City Bowling Club, Safa Gold, F-7 Markaz. In the deaf event, Omar secured the first position with 149 points, while Wajid secured the second position with 137 points and Ghazanfar secured the third position with 125 points. In the women's competition, Noor-ul-Ain secured the first position with 122 points, while Jalina Qaiser secured the second position with 85 points and Rozina secured the third position with 82 points. The event was inaugurated by Chairman Pakhtun Action Committee, Javed Bangash. Pakistan Tenpin Bowling Federation Chairman Dr. Israr Hussain, President Ijaz-ul-Rehman, Secretary General Muhammad Hussain Chatha and former manager of the national football team, gold medalist Muhammad Irfan Khan Niazi, were also present on the occasion. Male and female players from all over the country are participating in the championship. Seven categories of competitions have been organized in the championship, including men's singles, men's doubles, team event, media event, ladies singles, amateur and deaf men's singles competitions. The championship will continue until February 25.

CAS dismisses Rubiales appeal

PARIS (Agencies): Luis Rubiales' appeal against a three-year Fifa ban from football has been dismissed. Football's world governing body suspended the former president of the Spanish Football Federation (RFEF) from any football-related activity for three years in October 2023. It followed a kiss on the lips of Spain player Jenni Hermoso during the medal ceremony after the team won the 2023 Fifa Women's World Cup final. On Friday the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) dismissed Rubiales' appeal, external on the grounds that "the sanction imposed is reasonable and proportional". CAS agreed with Fifa's appeals committee - who upheld the suspension in January 2024 - that Rubiales "behaved in a manner contrary to the principles of the Fifa Disciplinary Code". On Thursday, Spain's High Court convicted Rubiales of sexual assault for kissing Hermoso, 34, without consent and fined him 10,800 euros (£8,942).



KARACHI : Ryan Rickelton celebrates his maiden ODI ton.

Watson believes Maxwell may win CT for Australia

LAHORE (APP):Former Australian all-rounder Shane Watson has said that the explosive all-rounder Glenn Maxwell will dominate the ICC Men's Champions Trophy 2025 and win it for Australia. Speaking at the ICC Media Zone on Friday, Shane Watson said Maxwell, who won player of series in BBL 2025, has more cricket left in him and his best cricket is still to come. But with just one win from their last five ODI matches – and key bowlers Pat Cummins, Josh Hazlewood and Mitchell Starc all missing from the squad – questions have been raised about their ability to claim the trophy in Pakistan. However, Watson, member of the two-time ICC Men's Champions Trophy winning team and one of the four Event Ambassadors for the 2025 edition, insists they will be a tough team to beat, especially if their explosive all-rounder fires. Watson won player of the match in the final of the ICC Champions Trophy 2006 and 2009 editions besides hitting back-to-back 100s in the semi-final and final of the 2009 edition of Champions Trophy in South Africa knows very well what it takes to win titles for the country. "With what I have seen

recently, especially in the Big Bash, I believe he has some of his best cricket in front of him across the next two or three years and I would be very surprised if he does not dominate this Champions Trophy," Watson said. "He had that incredible innings against Afghanistan in the ICC Men's Cricket World Cup 2023, where he scored a double century, but he has struggled to be consistent at times. That's the nature of his role in the team. "Australia has the services of an inexperienced bowling squad in the absence of Pat Cummins, Josh Hazlewood and Mitchell Stark but he believed the Kangaroos will be very hard to beat, even if their bowling squad is not quite as experienced as it might otherwise have been. "The Australian bowling pack will be led by Nathan Ellis and Spencer Johnson who have 10 ODI caps between them with Sean Abbott is the most experienced of the lot with 26 ODI caps. "You have to be at your very best in this event, with this format – you have to hit the ground sprinting, let alone running," he said. Watson believes the fast bowlers may be inexperienced as a group in internationals but these quicks have all played high-pressure cricket in the Big Bash and other T20 tournaments

– they know how to execute under pressure. On the other finalist, Shane Watson believes India will once again be strong contenders and a major threat to the Australian dream. He said India have an incredibly strong squad and the conditions will suit them of course, adding that it's a squad that is used to hot and humid conditions, so they will be hard to beat. India have a similar player pool from the last World Cup, and that consistency is hard to overlook. "I really like Hardik Pandya, if he can stay fit then he can offer so much flexibility and skill – he's probably the key one for me." He also expressed his liking for the South African squad, adding that the Proteas made to the final in the last ICC Men's T20 World Cup and have so much talent there. On South Africa batting line-up, he said the batting line-up is so good, they have Heinrich Klaasen, who is one of the best short-format batters in the world, and David Miller as well. "I would be surprised if they don't get over the line in an ICC event soon because this generation has the talent and doesn't have the scars. If they do, the floodgates could well open," Watson added.

Dharmasena falls for 'beauty' of revamped Gaddafi Stadium

LAHORE (APP): The ICC elite panel umpire from Sri Lanka, Kumar Dharmasena, Friday fell for the beauty and grandeur of the revamped Gaddafi Stadium as he lavished praise on the new-look iconic stadium during his maiden visit to the stadium after infrastructural enhancements. The Gaddafi Stadium boasts of landmark achievements as the iconic stadium underwent remarkable transformation, adorned with modern amenities and infrastructure enhancements. The former Sri Lankan all-rounder, who is among the umpiring panel to supervise the England-Australia match of the ICC Men's Champions Trophy 2025 on February 22 (Saturday) and visited the stadium for the very first time since its reconstruction this month. In a video message posted on the social media platform (facebook) on Friday, he was all smiles and could be seen recording the happy moments at the iconic stadium where Sri Lanka won the ICC Men's ODI World Cup 1996. Dharmasena, 24 then, was part of the Sri Lankan squad. "I am so happy and privileged to be back here as an umpire. It is a historic ground especially for the Sri Lanka as we won its only ICC Men's ODI World Cup 1996 at the same venue some 29 years ago," he reminisced. The former all-rounder praised the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) for rebuilding the fantastic stadium in a record time. The Gaddafi Stadium was rebuilt in the record period of 117 days on the initiative of the Chairman PCB Chairman Mohsin Naqvi who wanted to provide immaculate facilities as per the international standard to the players and the public. The first match at the revamped Gaddafi was played between Pakistan and New Zealand during the tri-nation series on February 8, 2025.

Rickelton ton powers Proteas to big win over Afghans

KARACHI (AFP): Opener Ryan Rickelton struck a maiden one-day international hundred as South Africa routed Afghanistan by 107 runs in the Champions Trophy in Karachi on Friday. Rickelton cracked a 106-ball 103 with seven boundaries and a six to anchor South Africa's imposing total of 315-6 in the Group B match at the National Stadium. South Africa's pace attack of Kagiso Rabada (3-36), Wiaan Mulder (2-36) and Lungi Ngidi (2-56) then dismissed highly-fancied Afghanistan for just 208 in 43.3 overs. South Africa blunted the threat of Afghanistan's slow bowlers with star leg-spinner Rashid Khan going wicketless for 59 runs in his 10 overs. Rahmat Shah top-scored for Afghanistan with a fighting 92-ball 90 with nine boundaries and a six before he was the last man out. Chasing a formidable target, Afghanistan desperately needed a fast start but lost flamboyant openers Rahmanullah Gurbaz for 10 and Ibrahim Zadran for only 17 by the 10th over. Sediqullah Atal fell for 16 while skipper Hashmatullah Shahidi went without scoring as Afghanistan were left teetering at 50-4. Shah and Azmatullah Omarzai (18) took the score to 89 before Rabada and

Marco Jansen, who got rid of Mohammad Nabi, struck to effectively end Afghanistan's hopes. Rashid Khan briefly entertained the crowd with a quickfire 13-ball 18 including a six and three boundaries. South African skipper Temba Bavuma hailed a team performance. "It's a clinical performance," said Bavuma. "We got the rub of the green with the toss but it was a brave decision to bat first not knowing how it would play. "We took care of that, got a competitive score and then were clinical with the ball." Shahid rued a flopped batting show. "I think the batting was not good enough today," said Shahidi. "The pitch was helping their bowlers. We will move forward and play quality cricket in the next two games." Earlier, Rickelton was ably assisted by Bavuma (58), Rassie van der Dussen (52) and Aiden Markram (52 not out) to steer South Africa to a solid total after they won the toss and batted. Nabi, who finished with 2-51, provided an early breakthrough with his first ball by dismissing opener Tony de Zorzi, caught at mid-on for 11. Rickelton and Bavuma then added 129 for the second wicket as Afghanistan toiled in the field. Bavuma hit five boundaries in his 76-ball knock

before he was finally caught off a short Nabi delivery to give some joy to hundreds of Afghan fans in an otherwise sparse crowd. Rickelton, who has two Test centuries to his name but a previous best of only 91 in ODIs, completed his first white ball century with a single. Two runs later, however, he was gone, victim of an unlucky run out. Coming down the pitch to drive Rashid, Rickelton was forced to turn quickly and dive back into his crease as the bowler collected and fired the ball to wicketkeeper Rahmanullah Gurbaz. Rickelton appeared to make his ground but replays showed that his bat was slightly raised so not in the crease when Gurbaz whipped off the bails. Van der Dussen hammered two sixes and three boundaries in his 46-ball knock before falling to spinner Noor Ahmad in the 43rd over. It was left to Markram to take South Africa past the 300-mark, clubbing six boundaries and a six in a 36-ball 52 not out that helped the Proteas to add 50 runs in the last five overs. Australia meet England in another Group B clash in Lahore on Saturday. Pakistan, India, New Zealand and Bangladesh are in Group A. The top two teams from each group will qualify for the semi-finals.

Real draw Madrid derby in Champions League; Liverpool face PSG

NYON (Agencies): The Champions League has handed more heavyweight clashes when the draw for the round of 16 was made in Nyon, Switzerland. Defending champion Real Madrid's reward for removing 2023 title winner Manchester City on Wednesday is two city derbies against Atletico Madrid – the team it beat in the finals in 2014 and 2016. Bayern Munich was paired with Bayer Leverkusen – the Bundesliga leader against its defending champion, who played a tight 0-0 draw just last weekend. Liverpool were the top-seeded team in the draw after finishing first in the 36-team standings last month but still got a tough assignment as the Premier League leader was paired with number 15 seed PSG in Friday's draw. Liverpool and PSG have never met in knockout games in the Champions League or the old European Cup. Their previous meetings were in the group stage in 2018-19, trading home wins in a season that ended with Liverpool winning its sixth European Cup title. The first-leg games will be played on March 4-5, with the return games one week later.



Also in the draw, number two seed Barcelona were paired with Benfica – which they beat 5-4 in Lisbon one month ago – while Arsenal will face PSV Eindhoven and Inter Milan plays Feyenoord. Club Brugge, who got into the knockout stage in the 24th and final qualification place, will face Aston Villa, who they already beat in November. Borussia Dortmund will play Lille. The Madrid and German matchups were not possible in the old Champions League format where teams from the same country could not face each other in the round of 16. The new tennis-style seeded bracket allows for those derbies, and for teams to reunite after already playing each other in the league phase of the competition. The teams also learned their fate for the quarterfi-

nals and semifinals, should they progress, with the winner of the Liverpool and PSG tie facing the victors between Villa and Brugge. The winners of the Madrid derby will face either PSV Eindhoven or Arsenal. **The Champions League last 16 draw in full:** Club Brugge (Belgium) vs Aston Villa (England) Borussia Dortmund (Germany) vs Lille (France) Real Madrid (Spain) vs Atletico Madrid (Spain) Bayern Munich (Germany) vs Bayer Leverkusen (Germany) PSV Eindhoven (Netherlands) vs Arsenal (England) Feyenoord (Netherlands) vs Inter Milan (Italy) Paris Saint-Germain (France) vs Liverpool (England) Benfica (Portugal) vs Barcelona (Spain).

Andreeva defeats Rybakina in Dubai to become youngest WTA 1000 finalist



DUBAI (AFP): Teenager Mirra Andreeva toppled another seed at the Dubai Championships, upsetting Elena Rybakina on Friday to become the youngest player to reach the final of a WTA 1000 tournament. The Russian 17-year-old fought back from 1-3 down in the deciding set to beat seventh-seeded Rybakina 6-4, 4-6, 6-3 and move into the first WTA 1000 final of her career.

Andreeva is the youngest player to beat multiple Grand Slam champions at a tournament of this level having ousted Iga Swiatek, Marketa Vondrousova, and now Rybakina, en route to the final. The players had met once before, in Beijing in 2023, when Rybakina won in three sets. "Last time we played it

was a really tough match and I had a lot of opportunities and she as a really experienced player just didn't give me a chance and went for her shots and killed me in the end," said Andreeva. "I knew she was going to hit hard and hit big serves. I just tried to accept when things didn't go my way. I fought for every point and kept believing and in the end it went my way." Andreeva will face either Clara Tauson or Karolina Muchova in Saturday's championship match. A punishing backhand return from Andreeva earned her the first break of the match in game five and despite Rybakina's immediate response, the young Russian got back in front and closed out the opening set on the 46-minute mark. Having already saved six match points in her win over Paula Badosa in the round of 16, Rybakina looked ready to put up a fight against Andreeva

and the second set was a tight affair. The pair remained neck and neck until Rybakina found an opening when Andreeva double-faulted to face two set points at 4-5. Andreeva bounced the ball off the ground in frustration and received a code violation warning for ball abuse. Moments later, Rybakina took the match into a decider on a long defensive forehand from her opponent, as Andreeva dropped her first set of the tournament. Rybakina made the first move in the third, breaking for a 3-1 advantage but Andreeva reacted and swept the next five games to wrap up the win in two hours and 15 minutes. Andreeva will rise to a career-high number 11 in the world by virtue of reaching the final and could become the first 17-year-old to break the top 10 since Nicole Pietrangeli achieved that feat in 2007 if she lifts the trophy on Saturday.





## In brief

### Man arrested for acid attack on his ex-wife

RAWALPINDI (APP): A man was arrested on Friday for throwing acid at her ex-wife. The woman was on a bike with her father when the accused sprayed acid on her. The accused ran away from the spot, however the report was received at rescue 1122. According to spokesman 1122 service Muhammad Usman, the emergency crew rushed to the spot on Chakri Road on Friday morning, and shifted the victim and her father to the hospital after administering first aid. Central Police Office (CPO) Syed Khalid Hamdani took notice of the incident of acid attack and sought report from Superintendent of Police (SP) Saddar along with the order for immediate arrest of the accused. The police arrested the accused. According to the police spokesman, the Dharmal police took immediate action and arrested the woman's ex-husband Muhammad Riaz. The initial investigations revealed that the woman had divorced her ex-husband, which seems to be a result of personal enmity. Investigations have been carried out from all angles of the incident. The CPO appreciating the successful action by the police, reiterated that crimes against women, especially acid attacks, are unacceptable and the perpetrators will be punished to the fullest extent of the law.

### Quality education top priority

RAWALPINDI (APP): Developed countries have made their place in the world by acquiring modern and scientific education. This was expressed by Parliamentary Secretary Information and Culture Punjab, Shazia Rizwan while addressing the students during her visit to Government Girls Elementary School Dhok Elahi Bakhsh, here on Friday. Shazia Rizwan underlined the need to maximise the school enrollment. She said that the vision of CM Maryam Nawaz is that no child should remain out of school due to poverty or any reason and that a prosperous, educated and modern Punjab is in line with modern sciences. "Children should be provided with opportunities to develop their talents through participation in quality educational and co-curricular activities", she said. Shazia stressed that providing quality education to children should be the foremost responsibility. She enrolled some girls students in the school. Later, the parliamentary secretary planted a sapling in the school as part of the tree plantation campaign. She also involved the students by planting one sapling each as part of the tree plantation campaign and play their role in keeping the environment clean and green.

### Police bust bike lifting gang

RAWALPINDI (APP): Rawalpindi District Police have busted a bike lifting and street criminal gang and arrested its two members on recovery of six stolen motorcycles, weapons and other items, said a police spokesman here on Friday. He informed that Waris Khan police netted two accused namely Usama and Matuallah, allegedly involved in bike lifting cases and recovered six stolen motorcycles, weapons and other items. Superintendent of Police, Rawal Muhammad Haseeb Raja directed the police officers to accelerate ongoing operation against bike, car lifters and street criminals.



RAWALPINDI: District Administration placed a notice on the gate during arrangements for the ICC Champions Trophy cricket matches at Pindi Stadium. —INP Photo

## Pakistan to continue moral support to Palestinians: Aleem

ISLAMABAD (APP): Federal Minister for Communications, Privatization, and Board of Investment, Abdul Aleem Khan, held a detailed meeting with Palestinian Transport Minister Tariq Hussaini Zarab during the 4th Global Ministerial Conference on Road Safety in Morocco.

During the meeting, Minister Aleem Khan conveyed Pakistan's unwavering solidarity with the Palestinian people, emphasizing that the hearts of Pakistanis beat in unison with their Palestinian brothers and sisters, said a press release received here on Friday. The minister reiterated Pakistan's commitment to providing moral, diplomatic, and all kinds of support to Palestine, stating that the atrocities faced by Palestinians have deeply saddened every Pakistani citizen. "No matter how much we condemn these injustices, it will never be enough," he added.

Expressing optimism, Khan voiced hope that the Palestinian struggle for self-

determination would soon bear fruit, leading to the establishment of an independent Palestinian state.

Palestinian Transport Minister Tariq Hussaini Zarab expressed gratitude for Pakistan's steadfast support and cooperation. He lauded Federal Abdul Aleem Khan's sentiments, expressing confidence that Allah Almighty will grant Palestine its long-awaited freedom.

During the closing session of the 4th Global Ministerial Conference on Road Safety at Morocco, Bangladeshi Minister of Industry and Production Aadil-ur-Rahman Khan, Oman Deputy Minister Brigadier General Ali Al-Falahi and Maldives Minister of Transport M. Ameen separately held meetings with Federal Minister Abdul Aleem Khan and Pakistani delegation, in which they discussed inter-governmental cooperation, especially in the field of transport and communication.

The Fourth Global Ministerial Conference on Road Safety held in Morocco was considered more beneficial, especially

for developing countries.

Federal Minister Abdul Aleem Khan, while talking to foreign Ministers, said that Pakistan, a country of 240 million people, has the potential to further improve 40 percent of its communication infrastructure. We want mutual investment and cooperation from other countries in both business-to-business (B2B) and government-to-government (G2G) formats. Even in these circumstances, Pakistan's Motorways and Highways are moving towards improvement compared to the past, he added.

Federal Minister Abdul Aleem Khan said that despite the increase in traffic flow, accidents are being reduced and revenue is being increased and policies are being implemented in line with modern requirements to make travel safer.

The Foreign Ministers and Federal Minister Abdul Aleem Khan welcomed the three-day conference in Morocco and expressed their wishes for success for each other and their expectation of returning with pleasant memories.

### Aqeel calls PTI's press conference 'ridiculous'

ISLAMABAD (APP): Advisor to the Prime Minister on Legal Affairs, Barrister Aqeel Malik, called the press conference held by Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) leaders ridiculous, following their meeting with the Chief Justice of Pakistan.

Aqeel Malik alleged that PTI sought relief from the court beyond the law and constitution. In a press briefing on Friday, in response to the PTI leaders' press conference after their meeting with the Chief Justice, the advisor stated that the ten-point agenda presented to the Chief Justice by PTI clearly indicated that the party was seeking facilitation from the courts.

"All the cases against PTI are criminal in nature, and the courts will follow the law in criminal cases. No relief will be granted beyond the law and constitution," the advisor added.

He further stated that the cases related to May 9 and November 26 were not political in nature, as PTI had created anarchy under the guise of protest. "PTI holds protests without permission and creates anarchy. No one will be allowed to disturb the lives of citizens," he emphasized.

## HDBA delegation calls on CJP

ISLAMABAD (APP): A delegation of senior lawyers of Hazara Division Bar Association (HDBA), led by its President, Sardar Aman called on the Chief Justice of Pakistan, Justice Yahya Afridi, at the Supreme Court of Pakistan. The Chief Justice welcomed the delegation and stated that, as part of his commitment to strengthening access to justice in remote areas, he will visit remote areas of Hazara Division.

He emphasized the essential role and collective wisdom of both the bench

and the bar in ensuring an effective dispensation of justice, highlighting that their collaboration is fundamental for upholding the rule of law. He reiterated that without the support and cooperation of the legal fraternity, the objective of a fair and efficient justice system cannot be fully realized. The delegation expressed gratitude to the Chief Justice for his time and apprised him of the challenges faced by the Hazara Division Bar Associations and litigants and capacity-building initiatives for bar members,

particularly given the geographical remoteness of the Hazara Division.

In response, the Chief Justice assured the delegation of his commitment in addressing their concerns under the Access to Justice program. Additionally, he informed the members of the delegation that Federal Judicial Academy (FJA) has uploaded the training programs on its website and the legal practitioners of Hazara Bar Division can take benefit from such courses for enhancing their legal expertise and professional growth.

## FJWU stands in firm solidarity with Kashmir

RAWALPINDI (APP): Fatima Jinnah Women University (FJWU) reaffirmed its unwavering support for the people of Indian Occupied Kashmir (IOK) by organizing a full day of activities to raise awareness and advocate for their rights.

The event, led by the Student Affairs Office, the International Relations Department, and the Department of Computer Arts, brought together students, faculty, and staff in a collective effort to highlight the Kashmir issue and urge global action.

The event featured the address by Mushaal Hussein Mullick, a prominent advocate for Kashmir, who strongly condemned the ongoing human rights violations in the region. She emphasized the need for the international community and human rights organizations to take a firm stand against the oppression of Kashmiris. She

expressing their solidarity and amplifying the voices of Kashmiris. In addition to academic discussions, students showcased their creativity through artwork and multimedia presentations, portraying the resilience and suffering of the Kashmiri people. Their efforts reflected a deep sense of responsibility and awareness, demonstrating how youth can play a crucial role in shaping public discourse and influencing global narratives on human rights issues.

The event concluded with Prof. Dr. Sarwat Rasul, Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, distributing certificates to participants in recognition of their contributions. A solidarity walk was also held, with students and faculty carrying banners and placards, calling on the global community to acknowledge and address the human rights crisis in the occupied Jammu and Kashmir.

## Thousands of tourists flock to enjoy Murree snowfall

RAWALPINDI (APP): The continuous snowfall has created a craze for thousands of tourists in Murree. A large number of vehicles were entered in the stunning city to enjoy pleasant weather, as per forecast by the MET office.

Murree Mall Road, Jhiga Gali, Ayubia, Kashmir Point and Ghora Gali were observed as the most visited points. Snowfall continued from time to time and the temperature of the city also dropped which led to an increase in cold. For the convenience of tourists,

additional personnel have been deployed in Murree. Traffic police, the local administration and other allied departments remained vigilant about massive movement of touring lot.

CTO Murree, Mughees Ahmed Hashmi was personally active in the field and was supervising all traffic arrangements. A number of vehicles were assisted by the traffic personnel in pushing out from slippage. The CTO congratulated the traffic wardens for performing their duties

efficiently during the extremely cold weather.

Regarding the snowfall in Murree, a traffic advisory was issued by him, the CTO said that tourists should come with a fully fitted and four-wheel drive vehicle and take necessary precautionary measures while traveling to Murree.

He urged the tourists to avoid parking their vehicles on main roads under any circumstances. The CTO further requested the citizens not to create double lines under any circumstances during snowfall.

## Fauzia encourages women to speak up against harassers

ISLAMABAD (APP): Federal Ombudsman for Protection against Harassment Fauzia Waqar on Friday emphasized the need for increased awareness and encouraged women to speak up and seek justice against harassers, urging victims to report incidents of harassment and take a stand against this pervasive issue.

In an exclusive conversation with a private news channel, Fauzia Waqar expressed alarm over Pakistan's dismal ranking of 145 out of 146 countries in the Global Gender Gap Index, emphasizing the need for women to be aware of their rights and report complaints to spark a much-needed discussion.

She further highlighted that women are disproportionately vulnerable to harassment, facing a significantly higher risk than their male counterparts.

She said to visit the FOHPAS website and fill out the online complaint registration form, adding that citizens must provide their personal details, complaint description, and supporting documents.

For immediate assistance, victims can reach out to the dedicated helpline at 0344-4367367, she added. Responding to a question, Ms Waqar explained that organizational harassment includes unwanted behaviour during recruitment, unnecessary questioning during interviews, limited career advancement opportunities, lack of equal treatment, inadequate training opportunities and

exclusion from decision-making processes all of which disproportionately affect women.

Furthermore, she highlighted the severe consequences of harassment, including psychological stress leading to hair loss, family disturbances and a significant impact on the country's economy, with estimates suggesting that harassment results in a staggering 30% loss to Pakistan's Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

Stressing the urgency of the matter, Fauzia emphasized that addressing harassment is a priority and urged women to come forward and report incidents, asserting that their voices will be heard and their complaints will be addressed.

## ICT admin cracks down on overpricing ahead of Ramzan

ISLAMABAD (APP): In a decisive move to protect consumers, the Islamabad district administration on Friday arrested 14 vendors for overcharging ahead of Ramzan. The operations targeted Sector I-8 and the vegetable market, with officials urging citizens to report violations of the official price list.

According to the spokesman of ICT administration here, the Islamabad district administration had launched a strict campaign against overpricing as Ramzan approaches. On

today, 14 vendors were arrested for selling goods at prices higher than the government-mandated rates.

On the occasion, Deputy Commissioner (DC) Islamabad, Irfan Nawaz Memon, called on citizens to support the administration's efforts. "We need the public's help to identify those who violate the official price list," he said. Memon stressed that enforcing the government's price list is the most effective way to address overpricing. The district administration

had been conducting regular inspections in markets to ensure compliance with the official rates. Vendors found charging more than the listed prices face immediate legal action. This initiative aims to prevent exploitation during Ramadan, a time when demand for essential goods typically rises.

Memon also encouraged residents to report any instances of overpricing. "If you see someone charging more than the official rates, inform us immediately," he said.

### F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Centre for Peace and Development Initiatives (CPDI) in collaboration with National Commission on the Status of Women (NCSW) and European Union (EU) organized a one-day roundtable dialogue on tackling the underrepresentation and discrimination of women in media. Attended by journalists, legislators, and rights activists, the event highlighted the alarming statistic that women constitute only 24% of news content, with Pakistan's figure even lower at 11%.

The dialogue aimed to address barriers limiting women's participation, explore strategies to enhance their representation in media leadership and content, and engage stakeholders in developing actionable policy recommendations to promote gender-inclusive media practices. Mr. Mukhtar Ahmad Ali, Executive Director of CPDI, asserted that freedom of expression and the right to information are fundamental human rights. He highlighted the numerous restrictions faced by media in Pakistan, where journalists, particularly women, encounter discrimination and underrepresentation. Noting that women make up 48% of the population yet only 5% are visible in media roles, he called for legislation to foster a supportive environment for women. While commenting that Pakistan is not safe country for women, he stressed that social and cultural changes are essential to shift mindsets, ensuring equal representation and participation of women across all sectors, alongside creating inclusive workplace policies in both private and government entities.

Amir Ghouri, Editor of



The News Pakistan, expressed concern over the current media landscape, where ownership by businessmen often objectifies women. He noted a declining contrast with the 1990s and emphasized the need for women to empower themselves. Mr. Ghouri called for structural changes in media organizations to improve women's representation and eliminate discrimination. He urged political parties to reserve safe seats for women candidates and ensure that at least 48% of ministries are led by women, setting a standard for other institutions, including media, to follow.

Ms. Farzana Bari, an educationist and women's rights activist, views the underrepresentation of women as a democratic issue rather than a cultural one. She emphasizes the need to change mindsets among both genders and proposes declaring gender inequality an emergency. Ms. Bari advocated for a national media campaign to promote gender equality in Pakistan and stresses that media should facilitate gender sensitization, ensure safe work environments, and provide childcare facilities to support women in the workforce.

Ms. Sehar Kamran, a member of the National Assembly of Pakistan, highlighted the discrimination and hostility women face in the Assembly. She stressed that progressive laws are ineffective without proper implementation and called for a collective societal effort to drive change. Despite women's quotas, their voices often go unheard due to limited opportunities. Ms. Kamran urged the media to play a vital role in raising awareness and promoting equal representation and participation of women across all sectors of society.

Ms. Tanzeela Mazhar, a media professional, addressed the harassment women face in society, criticizing the media's focus on entertainment over political issues. She highlighted women's vulnerability in digital media and called for collective action to improve representation. Advocating for a gender code in media channels, Mazhar emphasized creating inclusive spaces to combat systemic discrimination and underrepresentation, urging society and civil organizations to work together to raise awareness and address these pressing issues affecting women.

Disability rights activist Ms. Yusra Gillani criticizes the media for portraying people with disabilities as dependent and overlooking their achievements, particularly those of women. She urges media to improve accessibility, use sensitive language, and avoid victimizing narratives. She advocates for the recognition of the capabilities of people with disabilities in the media, moving away from pity and towards respect and inclusion.

Ms. Riffat Inam Butt, Secretary of the Law and Justice Commission at the Supreme Court, highlighted the constitutional protections for women's rights in Pakistan but noted significant challenges in implementation. Despite existing pro-women legislation, discrimination persists, particularly in the judiciary. She shared her experiences of inadequate facilities, such as the lack of women's toilets and childcare options. Butt emphasized the need for greater awareness and understanding of relevant laws to enhance protections for women effectively. Ms. Zahra Wadood Fatmi, Member of the National Assembly, highlighted that women face challenges globally, making gender equality a universal movement. She urged women to take a stand for their rights and actively advocate for their empowerment.

During discussions on collective strategies to expand civic spaces, participants emphasized the need for a mindset shift to address discrimination effectively. Suggestions included training journalists on accurate and safe reporting, including digital threat awareness, implementing anti-harassment committees under pro-women laws, and enacting suitable legislation to create inclusive spaces for women.



Commission’s meeting held

KABUL (BNA): The Administrative Commission convened under the leadership of Maulvi Abdul Salam Hanafi, Deputy Prime Minister for Administration of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan. The meeting gathered commission members to discuss pressing environmental issues. According to a press release from the Presidential Palace, the session featured detailed reports from various committees regarding their recent activities and initiatives.

Afghan families return home

KABUL (BNA): Dozens of Afghan families have returned to their homeland from Pakistan and Iran. A total of 135 families made their way back to Afghanistan, entering through key border crossings including Torkham in Nangarhar, Spin Boldak in Kandahar, Silk road in Nimroz and Islam Qala in Herat. On their arrival, the returning families received immediate assistance from the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan.

Asia is comparable to a living body composed of soil and water. The heart that beats inside the body is Afghanistan. The destruction of Afghanistan would be the destruction of Asia. And in its progress and prosperity lies the well-being of Asia. - Allama Iqbal

## Afghanistan-Russia trade declines sharply

KABUL (TOLONews): According to information from the Ministry of Industry and Commerce, trade between Afghanistan and Russia has seen a significant decline in the past ten months compared to the previous year. The ministry stated that in the past ten months, trade with Russia amounted to \$220 million, whereas this figure had exceeded \$322 million in the same period last year. During this time, Afghanistan exported goods worth \$3 million to Russia while importing \$217 million worth of goods from Russia. “Afghanistan’s trade with Russia in the first ten months of 1403 [Islamic calendar year] amounted to \$220 million, of which \$3

million were exports and \$217 million were imports,” Akhundzada Abdul Salam Jawad, the spokesperson for the Ministry of Industry and Commerce, told TOLONews. Meanwhile, the Chamber of Commerce and Investment has emphasized resolving trade-related challenges between Afghanistan and Russia to strengthen commercial ties. “The Islamic Emirate and the Chamber of Commerce and Investment are working to resolve agreements, transit, and transportation issues so that we can directly transport our export goods, especially Afghanistan’s fresh and dried fruits, to the Russian market, particularly to Moscow,” said Mirzaman Popal, the acting head of

administration and finance at the Chamber of Commerce and Investment. Some traders also urge the Islamic Emirate to address trade-related challenges with Russia. “We urge the leadership of both countries to work on enhancing imports and exports, as this can bring greater stability to the people of both nations,” said Omid Haidari, a businessman. According to the Ministry of Industry and Commerce, Afghanistan’s exports to Russia in the past ten months included raisins, minerals, dried apricots, and pressure cookers, while imports from Russia consisted of petroleum products, flour, raw materials for factories, and oil.

## Foreign aid cuts deepen economic hardship

HERAT (Amu TV): The reduction of foreign aid has significantly affected the ability of residents in this western Afghan city to afford basic necessities, local vendors and residents say. Street vendors selling fresh produce report a sharp decline in customers’ purchasing power since international assistance was curtailed. Farid Ahmad, a fruit and vegetable seller in Herat, said that as humanitarian aid from organizations has dwindled, many families can no longer afford to buy in the same quantities as before. “It has had a huge impact,” he said. “In the past, business was good. Now, people have less work and lower incomes, and it’s because of the cuts in aid. Before, a customer would buy a kilo of apples, but now they only buy a few.” Beyond market stalls, many Herat residents cite a dual crisis: reduced foreign aid and a decline in job opportunities. “People’s purchasing power has decreased because there is less money,” said Abdullah, a Herat resident. “The economic situation is very weak. People have no money, and there is no business.” The economic strain has been exacerbated by the fluctuating value of the afghani against the US dollar, a trend linked to the recent reduction in American aid. A deputy minister in the Taliban-led government told Amu that restrictions on US assistance have led to the suspension of operations for 50 organizations across the country. As foreign funding continues to wane, many in Herat worry that poverty and unemployment will only deepen in the months ahead.

## Baradar urge investment for economic growth

KABUL (TOLONews): Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, the deputy prime minister for economic affairs, has emphasized increasing investment for Afghanistan’s economic growth. He stated that nationwide security is currently ensured and that Afghanistan’s trade and diplomatic relations with various countries are expanding. “Security is ensured in the country, people’s wealth and honor are protected, large national projects are being implemented according to standards, and our diplomatic and trade relations are strengthening day by day,” he said in a meeting in Kabul. Abdul Wasi Khadem, the chief of staff of the prime minister’s office, said that a country’s economy depends on investment in the private sector. “Investors should play a role in establishing factories, expanding agriculture, boosting trade, and creating job opportunities for people,” he added. Meanwhile, the acting minister of public health expressed concern over the increasing number of citizens suffering from cancer and said that Afghanistan currently lacks standard hospitals for treating such diseases. “The people of Afghanistan suffer greatly from cancer and other dis-



eases and are forced to travel abroad for treatment. However, unlike in the past, traveling to neighboring countries has become more difficult, and costs have increased, stated Noor Jalal Jalali, the acting minister of public health. “We assure foreign investors that the investment law has been approved by the leadership of the Islamic Emirate, and investment opportunities in Afghanistan are available,” said Ahmadullah Zahid, deputy minister of industry and commerce. “Without the development of education, progress is impossible. Afghanistan needs to build its capacities and must focus on its

growth,” stated Mohammad Yunus Momand, the first deputy of the Chamber of Commerce and Investment. The acting ministers of energy and water, urban development, and housing emphasized the Islamic Emirate’s support for investors. Abdul Latif Mansoor, the acting minister of energy and water, described electricity as a fundamental necessity for industry and trade and stated that efforts are underway to make Afghanistan self-sufficient in energy production. “Every individual should consider what duty their country has upon them and what they can do under these circumstances. We

welcome investors,” he said. “All people must cooperate for the country’s development. Foreigners cannot rescue us from crises. If they were going to build Afghanistan, they would have done so during the 20 years they were present in the country,” stated Hamdullah Nomani, the acting minister of urban development and housing. Since the Islamic Emirate’s return to power, interim government officials have consistently emphasized investment opportunities in Afghanistan and have urged both domestic and foreign businesspeople to invest in various sectors of the country.

## Expired food and medicines destroyed



HELMAND (BNA): The authorities in Helmand province have destroyed thirty-four tons of expired and substandard food and medicines. Mawlawi Fazli Ahmad Shafuallah, the head of public health in Helmand, confirmed the destruction of

the items, emphasizing the importance of protecting public health. The destruction was conducted in the presence of the delegation to ensure transparency and accountability in the process. Dr. Sardar Mohammad Qasid, director of the food

and medicine department, urged local traders to avoid importing and selling expired goods that pose serious health risks to the community. He also called on consumers to remain vigilant and check expiration dates when purchasing food and medicines.

## Herat youth develops app to raise awareness

HERAT (Pajhwok): For the first time, a young man in western Herat has developed an online application to raise public awareness about non-communicable diseases including cancer and heart diseases. This application, named “NCD,” was created by Mustafa Kaihan Akrami, the head of a technology company in Herat, with the help of a team of colleagues, at a cost of around \$900 over the course of one and a half months. Eng. Akrami told a Pajhwok Afghan News that, due to the increasing prevalence of non-communicable diseases, he and his team decided to develop this informative app. Users can install it on their mobile phones or computers to receive reliable and scientific information about non-communicable diseases. He added that all the information in this program is based on the needs of the people, and utmost care has been taken in collecting this information. The goal is to make the information simple and understandable, so it could be easily accessible to the public. He said the app includes textual information and some audio content about non-communicable diseases such as cancer, heart disease, and diabetes. All the information has been gathered from doctors and professors in the relevant fields. He added: “The idea came to my mind when I saw many people lack sufficient knowledge about cancer diseases, and they often realize their illness too late. Our goal in creating this app is to increase awareness and help people lead healthier lives.” Referring to the importance of diseases prevention, he said: “Our message to the people and patients is that prevention is better than cure, and there are many ways to prevent diseases, with healthy nutrition being one of the most important. We need to improve our knowledge to prevent diseases.”

## Deputy PM calls on countries to abandon pressure tactics

KABUL (TOLONews): Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, the deputy prime minister for economic affairs, has urged the international community in a speech in Kabul to abandon the policy of exerting pressure and instead engage in positive interaction with the caretaker government. According to Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, pressure tactics not only fail to facilitate engagement but also drive nations and countries further apart. The deputy prime minis-

ter for economic affairs stated that the political and economic relations of the caretaker government with global nations are expanding. He further said: “I call on the countries of the world to cease their economic and political pressures on our country, as this benefits no one. History has proven that pressure does not foster engagement and relations; rather, it pushes nations and countries further apart.” Previously, officials of the caretaker government

have repeatedly emphasized the necessity of establishing good relations with other countries. Human rights issues, the formation of an inclusive government, and the fulfillment of the Islamic Emirate’s commitments under the Doha Agreement are among the conditions set by the international community, especially Western nations, for normalizing relations with the caretaker government. “Now is the time for countries to pave the way

for positive engagement with the Islamic Emirate, considering mutual interests,” Moeen Gul Samkanai, a political analyst, told TOLONews. Over the past three years, the Islamic Emirate has managed to expand its relations with regional and neighboring countries. Some of these nations have officially accepted Islamic Emirate ambassadors; however, no country has yet announced the formal recognition of Afghanistan’s caretaker government.

## More Taliban leaders could face arrest warrant requests

KABUL (Amu TV): Human Rights Watch has warned that additional requests for arrest warrants may be filed against Taliban leaders following their decision to withdraw Afghanistan from the Rome Statute, the treaty that established the International Criminal Court (ICC). The rights organization said the Taliban’s systematic repression of women constitutes not only a human rights violation but an international crime subject to prosecution by global judicial bodies. “The Taliban are accused of the widespread and systematic persecution of women and girls on the basis of gender, and it is possible that additional requests for arrest warrants will be submitted for other leaders involved in these crimes,” Human Rights Watch said in a statement. Heather Barr, associate director of the group’s women’s rights division, suggested that the ICC prosecutor may be preparing further legal action. “The prosecutor may be reviewing similar requests for arrest warrants against

other Taliban leaders implicated in these crimes,” she said. “This would be a significant step for the ICC, as it would send a clear message that the repression of Afghan women and girls is not just a human rights violation but an international crime.” The Taliban, which announced its withdrawal from the Rome Statute on Tuesday, maintains that the ICC has no legal authority over Afghanistan. The move follows an earlier request from the ICC prosecutor seeking arrest warrants for the Taliban’s supreme leader and the head of its supreme court. The decision has drawn condemnation from Afghan women’s rights activists, who have called for Taliban leaders to be held accountable for widespread human rights abuses. They argue that leaving the Rome Statute should not shield the group from prosecution. “Rejecting the Rome Statute is not new for the Taliban. From the very beginning, they have acted with impunity,” said Masouda Kohistani, a human rights activist. “Their

policies have driven millions to flee the country, while those who remain live under psychological and emotional distress. Afghans are enduring a slow, daily death, with no hope for the future.” Women who have been barred from work and education under Taliban rule have also urged the international community to act. “The Taliban’s attempt to escape accountability for their crimes against women is a blatant human rights violation,” said a resident of Badghis province. “The international community must not allow them to evade justice. We want an end to three years of suffering and repression.” The Rome Statute, adopted in 1998, established the ICC, which is tasked with prosecuting four core international crimes: genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes, and crimes of aggression. Afghanistan joined the treaty in 2003 under then-President Hamid Karzai. The Taliban’s withdrawal has cast uncertainty over efforts to hold its leaders accountable on the international stage.

## Taliban dismisses leadership disputes amid internal tensions

KABUL (Amu TV): Amid reports of rising internal tensions, Abdul Kabir, the Taliban’s minister for refugees, has rejected the idea that leadership is open to all, emphasizing the authority of their reclusive leader, Hibatullah Akhundzada. Speaking at a gathering in Kabul on Thursday, Feb. 20, Kabir insisted that Akhundzada remains the recognized leader and that Taliban officials are bound to follow him under all circumstances. “The Islamic Emirate is like a large house, and not everyone can run it,” he said. “Not just anyone can become Amir-ul-Mu’minin, prime minister, or minister of defense or interior. We have appointed a leader, and we follow him. However, we all maintain oversight of this house.” His remarks come at a time when the position of the Taliban’s deputy prime minister for political affairs has remained vacant for more than a month. Kabir, who previously held the role, has continued to oper-

ate from that office while also serving as minister for refugees, declining so far to vacate his former position in the Sapidar Palace. While Taliban officials have publicly denied any internal discord, they have repeatedly reaffirmed their loyalty to Akhundzada. Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, the Taliban’s deputy prime minister for economic affairs, echoed this sentiment in a speech in Kabul on Thursday, stating that “this system was established on the basis of internal obedience and respect. Obedience is a fundamental principle of the Islamic Emirate and will continue under all circumstances.” Yet reports suggest that divisions within the group run deeper. Some Taliban figures have been spending extended periods in the United Arab Emirates, officially for medical treatment or leisure, but sources indicate these absences may be linked to tensions with the supreme leader. Abdul Hakim Shara’i, the Taliban’s justice minister



and a close associate of Akhundzada, recently traveled to Dubai, reportedly with the leader’s approval. Analysts warn that internal rifts could become more severe. “These emerging disputes are deeply rooted and could prove even more significant than past divisions—whether during Afghanistan’s communist era, the mujahideen period, or the 20-year republic,” said political analyst Aziz Rafiee. One of the central points of contention is the consolidation of power in

Kandahar, where Akhundzada is based. Last week, in the absence of Interior Minister Sirajuddin Haqqani, Akhundzada replaced the Taliban police chief in Kandahar, further fueling speculation of power struggles within the Taliban. Sources also report that, under orders from Kandahar, a number of security officials in Kabul have been reassigned in recent weeks, reflecting the growing influence of Akhundzada’s inner circle in shaping key government positions.

## Afghanistan most landmine, explosive affected country

KABUL (Khaama Press): The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has announced that Afghanistan is one of the countries with the highest levels of contamination from landmines and unexploded ordnance. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) wrote on its X page that it has launched various support programs to raise public awareness about the dangers of mines and unexploded munitions. The Red Cross Committee added that in 2024, it has informed 243,000 people in five

regions of Afghanistan about the dangers of mines and explosive materials. Previously, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) in Afghanistan announced that 55 civilians are killed or injured every month in Afghanistan due to explosions from explosive materials. Meanwhile, the demining organization “Halo Trust” reported that contamination from improvised explosive devices (IEDs) in Afghanistan has reached over 65 square kilometers.

The organization also emphasized that by the end of 2022, this figure was around 53 square kilometers, and to date, contamination has been identified in 26 provinces of Afghanistan. These alarming figures highlight the ongoing challenges Afghanistan faces due to war-related remnants, posing a serious threat to public safety and hindering recovery efforts. Continued efforts in awareness and demining are crucial for reducing the risk and ensuring safer environments for civilians.

## US deports another group of migrants, including Afghans

SAN JOSÉ, Costa Rica (Amu TV): Costa Rica has received a group of deported migrants, including Afghan asylum seekers, as part of an agreement with the United States, officials said Thursday. The move is part of a broader crackdown on undocumented migration by US President Donald Trump, which has included increased deportation flig-

hts to countries willing to accept multinational migrants expelled from the United States. The migrants, deported from San Diego, California, were flown to San José, Costa Rica’s capital, before being transported by bus to a migrant shelter near the Panama border. Under the agreement with Washington, Costa Rica has agreed to tem-

porarily accept up to 200 deported migrants from various countries. Deportation or Voluntary Return? Costa Rican officials say the migrants are allowed to stay in the country for up to one month, during which authorities will coordinate voluntary returns to their home countries. “Most of them wish to return home,” said Omar

Badilla, Costa Rica’s deputy security minister, speaking at San José airport. He added that cases of migrants unwilling to return would be reviewed individually. The group consists entirely of families from Uzbekistan, China, Armenia, Turkey, Afghanistan, Russia, Georgia, Vietnam, Azerbaijan, Iran, Jordan, Kazakhstan, and Ghana.





KARACHI: President Asif Ali Zardari offering fateha over the sad demise of Dr. Zulfiqar Sial with MPA Sohail Anwar Sial.

## WB team hails Sindh's flood housing initiative

### Sharjeel tells Executive Directors of World Bank, 900,000 houses under construction

F.P. Report

KARACHI: The Executive Directors of the World Bank visited Pakistan for the first time in two decades and attended a presentation on the Sindh People's Housing for Flood-Affected (SPHF) programme, under which 900,000 housing units are under construction.

The meeting was held at CM House on Friday. It was attended by Provincial Minister Jam Khan Shoro, Haji Ali Hassan Zardari, and concerned provincial secretaries. The 25-member delegation was led by Executive Directors (EDs) from various countries, including Beatrice Maser (Switzerland), Robert Nicholl (Australia), Tereza Solbes (Spain), Zainab Ahmaed (Nigeria), Abdelhak Bedjaoui (Algeria), Lonkhuluko Magagula (Eswatini), Marlene Nzengou (central African Republic), Tauqir Shah (Pakistan), and Paul Bonmartin (France).

Senior Minister Sharjeel Memon, Minister of Planning and Development



Nasir Shah, and the Chief Secretary welcomed the delegation and provided a comprehensive briefing on the housing project to accommodate flood-affected individuals.

Sharjeel Memon credited Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, the Chairman of the Pakistan People's Party, and Murad Ali Shah, the Chief Minister of Sindh, for their leadership in disaster response, which included emergency relief and long-term rehabilitation efforts.

He reported that over 900,000 houses are currently under construction in Sindh, making this the largest housing initiative in the world. Khalid Mahmood Shaikh, the CEO of SPHF, highlighted the project's significant impact in providing sustainable housing solutions for flood victims.

The Chief Secretary of Sindh emphasised the importance of World Bank funding for the WASH project as part of the SPHF program, utilising their IDA grant. The World Bank delegation praised the initiative, acknowledging it as a model worthy of global recognition.

The Chief Secretary expressed gratitude for the Bank's ongoing support, highlighting its crucial role in the success of SPHF. One of the Executive Directors from the World Bank praised the initiative's transparency and impact, stating, "The Sindh Housing Project made us proud when it was recently showcased in the [World Bank] meeting in Nepal. The transparency demonstrated by the project is highly commendable."

## IMF confirms to visit Pakistan

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has confirmed that a delegation will visit Pakistan in mid-March to review the country's \$7 billion loan program.

According to IMF representative, Mair Benitez, the delegation will hold discussions with Pakistani authorities on the first review under the loan program. In addition to reviewing the loan program, the IMF delegation will also discuss Pakistan's request for climate financing.

Furthermore, a technical team from the IMF will visit Pakistan at the end of February to discuss technical aspects of climate financing. The technical team will assess potential arrangements for climate financing and engage in discussions on related technical matters.

## PTI leader flays govt

F.P. Report

FAISALABAD: Senator Barrister Ali Zafar of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) has expressed his concerns about the government's actions, stating that the delay in the pending rigging cases could result in the downfall of the current administration if evidence comes to light.

He revealed that over 80 petitions filed by PTI are still pending, and if even 50 percent of these petitions succeed, PTI would have a majority in Parliament. He accused the government of enacting legislation to delay the cases and protect its position.

Speaking to media, Zafar also addressed PTI's plans to hold a rally at Minar-e-Pakistan, emphasizing that the party wants to ensure the event does not coincide with the Champions Trophy match. He pointed out that PTI's rallies are meant to be peaceful, but the government has created disturbances to hinder them, which he believes exacerbates the situation.

Highlighting the success of PTI's recent rally in Swabi, Zafar warned that if the government refrains from creating obstacles or making arrests, the upcoming rally will be even larger. He criticized the government for preventing PTI from holding rallies in Punjab, stating that the government itself can hold rallies, but PTI is being denied the same opportunity.

Zafar further criticized the government for delaying the judicial process, pointing out that Yasmin Rashid remains in jail and her trial has yet to begin. He also noted that the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) had expressed dissatisfaction with the current judges and was pushing for the appointment of retired judges of its choice, despite many election tribunals being vacant.

The PTI leader concluded that the government's actions, including the delay in rigging case hearings and the manipulation of the judicial process, are part of a strategy to preserve its power. He emphasized that after Eid, PTI supporters will take to the streets, demanding justice and accountability.

**PTI leadership moves IHC:** PTI leadership has moved Islamabad High Court, seeking permission to meet Imran Khan. As per details, a joint petition was filed by PTI leaders Junaid Akbar, Sher Ali Arbab, Rauf Hassan, and Amjad Ali Hassan, and Amjad Ali Hassan, their lawyer, Ayesha Khalid. The petition stated that the PTI leaders were denied permission to meet the party founder the previous day.

# Pakistan cannot afford another martial law: Bilawal

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan People's Party (PPP) Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari has stated that Pakistan cannot afford another martial law.

He emphasized that his mother, Benazir Bhutto, taught him the values of democracy rather than revenge, which is why he firmly believes that "Democracy is the best revenge." Speaking at the Benazir Bhutto Memorial Lecture organized by the Oxford University Union, Bilawal highlighted the significance of democratic values, human rights, and the role of women in Pakistan. He praised his mother for fearlessly participating in politics despite facing immense challenges and restrictions against women in leadership roles.

He further stated that Benazir Bhutto paved the way for women in leadership, and today, Punjab also has a female chief minister. He reiterated that her life was dedicated to securing a better future for Pakistan, despite multiple assassination attempts against her.

Bilawal Bhutto Zardari asserted that Pakistan's future depends on the supremacy of the constitution, an independent judiciary, and a free press. He also criticized the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) laws, calling them "draconian", and reaffirmed that PPP continues to oppose them.

The PPP chairman expressed concern over the security situation in Balochistan, calling it alarming and in need of urgent attention. He also reiterated that Pakistan's nuclear assets are for national defense and will not be compromised under any external pressure. Bilawal also highlighted the progress made by the PPP government in Sindh, particularly in improving healthcare facilities, which he described as a model for other provinces.

The Government of Sindh, in collaboration with the Oxford Pakistan Programme (OPP), has announced two prestigious scholarships named after Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto and Shaheed Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto. These scholarships will be part of OPP's annual graduate scholarship program and will support highly talented students from Sindh in pursuing graduate studies at the University of Oxford.

Historically, access to institutions like Oxford has been largely limited to privileged students, leaving behind talented individuals from underprivileged areas. OPP is committed to breaking this barrier to ensure that world-class educational opportunities are not restricted to a specific class. Last year, OPP awarded scholarships to two students from Sindh and one from Balochistan, taking a step



towards bridging this educational gap. To further this objective, OPP is working with various government institutions to establish sustainable educational pathways for students from underprivileged areas, ensuring that educational opportunities are determined by merit rather than background.

Chairman Pakistan Peoples Party, Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, and Chief Minister of Sindh, Syed Murad Ali Shah, announced these two prestigious scholarships during their official visit to the University of Oxford. Chairman Bilawal was invited to a luncheon by the Principal of Lady Margaret Hall (LMH), Professor Stephen Blyth. During this event, he was briefed on the vision and initiatives of the Oxford Pakistan Programme (OPP) and discussed the fundamental support provided by Lady Margaret Hall to OPP. The luncheon was also attended by Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto's sister, Mohtarma Sanam Bhutto, renowned author, historian, and LMH alumna, Victoria Schofield, along with senior delegations from the Governments of Sindh and Balochistan.

Both Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto and Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto studied at the University of Oxford. These scholarships pay tribute to their legacy and offer young individuals from Sindh the opportunity to pursue world-class education and bring positive change to their communities.

Speaking on this occasion, Bilawal Bhutto Zardari stated: "OPP is creating opportunities for Pakistanis, especially talented students from underprivileged backgrounds. I want to thank the Governments of Sindh and Balochistan for launching scholarship programs in collaboration with OPP for students from their provinces."

The Oxford Pakistan Programme is led by a team of Oxford University academics and alumni, including Professor Adeel Malik (University of Oxford), Dr. Talha J. Pirzada (Lecturer in Material Science), Haris Zaman (corporate lawyer in London), and former Oxford student Manahil

Saqib. OPP supports students and researchers of Pakistani origin through scholarships, hardship funds, the annual Iqbal Lecture, and the Graduate Access Programme.

On this occasion, Chief Minister of Sindh, Syed Murad Ali Shah, said: "These scholarships will provide students from Sindh the opportunity to study at one of the world's best universities. Not only will these students benefit from this opportunity, but Sindh as a whole will also gain when these scholars return to their communities with knowledge and skills to drive progress."

This initiative reflects the commitment of the Government of Sindh and OPP to invest in education and nurture future leaders. Under this fund, each year, six outstanding students from Sindh will receive financial support for graduate degrees at Lady Margaret Hall, Oxford. Three of these scholarships will be awarded to women under the "Shaheed Benazir Bhutto Scholarship" and three under the "Shaheed Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto Scholarship." Pakistani scholar and former Oxford Union President, Israr Khan, has also played a key role in facilitating these scholarships.

Secretary of Finance for the Government of Balochistan, Imran Zarkoon Khan, stated: "We take pride in the fact that Balochistan was the first province to launch these scholarships. We hope this initiative will create new opportunities and enable talented students from Balochistan to succeed at Oxford and contribute to the development of the province."

The Oxford Pakistan Programme is playing a transformative role in supporting Pakistani students at Oxford through various initiatives. So far, OPP has provided financial assistance of over £600,000, enabling 48 Pakistani graduate scholars to pursue their studies at Oxford. The partnership between OPP and the Government of Sindh is part of this larger mission to ensure that talented students from Sindh, Balochistan, and other underprivileged areas have access to world-class education.

## Termination of employees: PHC seeks reply from KP

Humayun Khan

PESHAWAR: The Peshawar High Court (PHC) has issued a notice to the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government, seeking a response regarding the termination of government employees recruited during the caretaker government's tenure, on Friday.

The petition, filed by Syed Muhammad Ali Shah Bacha, provincial president of the Pakistan Peoples Party, through advocates Gohar Rahman and Bilal Durani, argues that the employees were recruited through a proper process and that the legislation aimed at terminating them is unconstitutional and violates their fundamental rights.

The court, comprising Justice Syed Arshad Ali and Justice Khurshid Iqbal,

heard the initial arguments and directed the provincial government to respond.

The petitioners' lawyers 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 petitioner contend that this legislation is a violation of fundamental rights and that the employees are being targeted for political revenge simply because they were recruited during

the caretaker government's tenure.

The petition requested 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 court has sought a response from the provincial government, directing them to explain their position on the matter. 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.

## Hamas says it is investigating possible error over hostage body

JERUSALEM/CAIRO (Reuters): Hamas said on Friday it was investigating a possible error in identifying human remains handed to Israel under a ceasefire deal as Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu threatened retaliation for failing to release the body of hostage Shiri Bibas.

Hamas was due to hand over the bodies of Shiri Bibas and her two sons Kfir and Ariel on Thursday, along with the remains of a fourth hostage under the ceasefire deal that has halted fighting in Gaza since last month. Four bodies were delivered and the identities of the Bibas boys and the fourth hostage, Oded Lifshitz, were confirmed.

But Israeli specialists said the fourth body was that of an unidentified woman and not Bibas, who was kidnapped along with her sons and her husband, Yarden, during the Hamas attack on Israel on October 7, 2023. Basem Naim, a member of the Hamas political bureau, said "unfortunate mistakes" could occur, especially as Israeli bombing had mingled the bodies of Israeli hostages and Palestinians, thousands of whom were still buried in the rubble.

"We confirm that it is not in our values or our interest

to keep any bodies or not to abide by the covenants and agreements that we sign," he said in a statement. Hamas said separately that it would investigate the Israeli assertions and announce the results.

The failure to hand over the body and the staged public handover of the four coffins on Thursday, caused outrage in Israel and drew a threat of retaliation from Netanyahu. "We will act with determination to bring Shiri home along with all our hostages — both living and dead — and ensure Hamas pays the full price for this cruel and evil violation of the agreement," he said in a video statement, accusing Hamas of acting "in an unspeakably cynical manner" by placing the body of a Gaza woman in the coffin instead of Bibas.

Hamas said in November 2023 that the children and their mother had been killed in an Israeli air strike and Thawabta said Netanyahu "bears full responsibility for killing her and her children." But the Israeli military said intelligence assessments and forensic analysis of the bodies of the Bibas children indicated that they were deliberately killed by their captors.

Netanyahu gave no details on a possible Israeli

response, but the incident underscored the fragility of the ceasefire agreement reached with US backing and with the help of Qatari and Egyptian mediators last month.

Six living hostages are due for release on Saturday in exchange for 602 Palestinian prisoners and detainees, according to Hamas, and the start of negotiations for a second phase of the ceasefire is expected in the coming days. "Hamas must return the hostages as agreed in the ceasefire—the living and the deceased," Israeli military spokesperson Nadav Shoshani said in a statement on social media platform X. "They have to bring Shiri back, and they have to release the 6 living hostages expected tomorrow."

As the tension over the Gaza ceasefire rose, Netanyahu ordered the Israeli military to intensify operations in another Palestinian territory, the occupied West Bank, after a number of explosions blew up buses standing empty in their depots near Tel Aviv. No casualties were reported but the explosions were a reminder of the campaign of suicide attacks on public transport that killed hundreds of Israeli civilians during the Second Intifada in the early 2000s.



ISLAMABAD: Chief Justice of Pakistan, Justice Yahya Afridi in a group photo with opposition leadership at Chief Justice House.

## PM launches

(Continued from Page 1)

The prime minister, in a meeting with a delegation of the Pakistan Retail Business Council headed by Chairman Ziad Bashir, said that the retailers already under the tax net would not be burdened further rather efforts were being made to bring more retailers into the tax net, according to a PM Office press release.

He told the delegation members that the steps were being taken to curb smuggling in the guise of used goods. The prime minister urged the local industry to adopt innovation and modern technology to enhance exports and compete in the international market. He said that besides introducing reforms in the Federal Board of Revenue, the government was also taking measures to promote a cashless economy.

The members of the delegation lauded the efforts by Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and his team for economic stability. They viewed that the significant reduction in inflation and policy rate was leading to an increased consumption and production of goods. The delegation members expressed the hope that the measures being taken by the government would further reduce the inflation rate and that the operational industry was begetting new employment opportunities.

They said that the government's reformative measures would have far-reaching positive impacts on the economy and bringing more retailers into the tax net would increase revenue. They also acknowledged the government's efforts to resolve the issues faced by the retailers already in the tax net.

Besides CEO of Service Sales Corporation and CEO of Beechtree Shahryar Bakhsh, the federal cabinet members Ahsan Iqbal, Jam Kamal Khan, Ahad Khan Cheema, Muhammad Aurangzeb, Rana Tanveer Hussain, Ali Pervaiz Malik and relevant senior officers attended the meeting.

**Shehbaz presented three year plan for professional training of youth, employability:** Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif chaired an inter-ministerial meeting on a three year plan regarding professional training of youth and their employability.

During the meeting, he was presented the plan about professional training of manpower in the fields of information technology, industry, nursing and other areas for seeking jobs in Pakistan and abroad. He said the capable manpower of Pakistan was a real asset.

It was priority of the government to equip the youth with professional training according to the demand at the international level, he added. He directed an increase in the institutions for training of nurses.

He said training of nurses according to international level should be ensured, adding while providing professional training to youth in different fields, the demand in local industries and international market should be kept in view.

He assured that National Vocational and Technical Training Commission (NAVTTTC) would be given all required funding for the professional training of youth. NAVTTTC should blacklist the training institutions which had bad performance and encourage those showing good results, he added.

NAVTTTC, ministries of information technology, overseas Pakistanis and health presented their programmes for the professional training of youth. The meeting was informed that during the current year, NAVTTTC had provided training to 60,000 youth and by June 2025, it would impart training to 141,000 more youth. While in 2026, 250,000 and in 2027, 337,000 youth would be trained in different fields.

It was also told that under NAVTTTC, more than 29,000 persons were trained and subsequently they got jobs in Saudi Arabia while a target is set to provide professional training to 40,000 youth in 2025, 100,000 in 2026 and 150,000 in 2027 for acquiring jobs in Saudi Arabia. Similarly, according to the target, by December 2025, 50,000 trained Pakistanis would get jobs in other countries while 100,000 would be employed abroad in 2026 and 200,000 in 2027.

It was briefed that the accreditation of Pakistani training institutes under NAVTTTC, with international institutions was continuing rapidly. By June 2025, according to the target, accreditation from 72 institutions would be acquired.

Police and rescue teams reached the spot and shifted the dead and injured to hospital. Five of the deceased were identified as Maqsood, Sunny, Saleem, Imran and Laba. Road accidents are quite common in Pakistan, making it one of the hazardous countries. Pakistan has one of the world's worst records for fatal traffic accidents, blamed on poor roads, badly maintained vehicles and reckless driving.

## Eight killed in Kasur road mishap

F.P. Report

KASUR: At least eight persons were killed and two others suffered injuries when a mini-van plunged into a drain in Kasur in the wee hours of Friday.

According to details, the accident occurred on Raiwind Road near Khara Morr where a mini-van returning from a marriage function fell into drain, killing eight persons on the spot and injuring two others.

Police and rescue teams reached the spot and shifted the dead and injured to hospital. Five of the deceased were identified as Maqsood, Sunny, Saleem, Imran and Laba. Road accidents are quite common in Pakistan, making it one of the hazardous countries. Pakistan has one of the world's worst records for fatal traffic accidents, blamed on poor roads, badly maintained vehicles and reckless driving.

## Faisal withdraws suit

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Member National Assembly Faisal Amin Gandapur, the brother of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Chief Minister has withdrawn a Rs 100 million defamation case against Brigadier (retd) Mahmood Shah and others, on Friday.

The case was disposed of by Additional District and Sessions Judge after Faisal Amin's lawyer filed a petition to withdraw the case. According to the written verdict, both parties appeared in court, and Faisal Amin's lawyer requested to withdraw the case. The court accepted the request and disposed of the case.

During the case proceedings, Faisal Amin had alleged that Brigadier (retd) Mahmood Shah had accused the Gandapur tribe of supporting terrorists on a private news channel show, which damaged his and his tribe's reputation.