

Freight train derails
F.P. Report
OKARA: A freight train derailed near Cantt Railway Station in Okara on Saturday, with bogies detaching from the train and flying on to the GT Road. Railway administration and police rushed to the spot after the terrible accident and started rescue work. Local residents area also gathered at the site and started helping the Railway administration and police in rescue operation.

Third polio case detected
F.P. Report
ISLAMABAD: The Regional Reference Laboratory for Polio Eradication at the NIH has confirmed the detection of the third wild poliovirus type 1 (WPV1) case of 2025. The lab confirmed a polio case from District Larkana, Sindh. This is the second polio case reported from Sindh this year, bringing the total number of cases to two in Sindh and one in KP.

The Frontier Post

Govt committed to uniform progress of all areas: PM

F.P. Report

DERA GHAZI KHAN: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif on Saturday said that the federal government was committed to uniform progress and prosperity of all areas with uplift of backward areas like South Punjab by spreading a vast network of development projects.

Addressing a huge public gathering, the prime minister said when they came to power, the inflation had reached over 40 percent, but his leader Nawaz Sharif decided to sacrifice politics for the sake of the country.

With hard work and pro-development policies of the incumbent government, the inflation was capped below 2.4 percent while the interest rate had been reduced to 12 percent benefiting the investors, business people and farmers, he added. The prime minister, expressing his views in local Saraiki dialect, said that Nawaz Sharif and he had a strong relation with this region. During the year 2010, when the flood water and destruction was witnessed everywhere in these areas, he as a servant of the area, worked day and night to alleviate sufferings of the masses.

"I have come to convey that Nawaz Sharif and Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif are working day and night for the uplift of entire province, particularly for the South Punjab," he added. The prime minister said during his previous tenures, he had worked for the establishment of Danish schools, hospitals, provision of free medicines and livestock, award of scholarships, besides allocating extra quota for the youth of the area in different sectors.

The prime minister said the chief

Shehbaz to visit Azerbaijan

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: At the invitation of President of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev, Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif will pay a two-day state visit to the Republic of Azerbaijan from 24-25 February 2025. This marks Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif's second visit to Azerbaijan since assuming office in March 2024. He will be accompanied by a high-level delegation including Deputy Prime Minister/ Foreign Minister Senator Mohammad Ishaq Dar and other key members of the cabinet, reflecting Pakistan's strong commitment to deepening its engagement with Azerbaijan. During the visit, the two sides will engage in wide-ranging discussions on areas of mutual interest in order to further strengthen bilateral cooperation particularly in energy, trade, defence, education and climate sectors. Several MoUs/agreements in multiple areas of cooperation are expected to be signed between the two sides during the visit.

minister Punjab was spreading a network of hospitals and roads in the province, inaugurated facility of Kissan cards, different health and education centers, besides working for the establishment of Nawaz Sharif cancer hospital in Lahore. Earlier, the prime minister unveiled plaque of upgradation project of Farooq Ahmad Khan Leghari International Airport and performed ground breaking of dualization of 331km Indus Highway (N-55), Tranche-III of Rajanpur-DGKhan-DIKhan.

The prime minister was briefed by the relevant authorities about the salient features of these projects. The completion of the project would enhance connectivity between the southern parts of Punjab with southern districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa via DIKhan and help in boosting economic, trade and business activities.

The prime minister, in his speech, also announced construction of a cancer hospital in DG Khan and establishment of university in Rajanpur. The prime minister said

that an era of progress and prosperity had dawned upon the area in which the youth would get jobs opportunities. Federal ministers Ahsan Iqbal, Rana Tanvir Hussain, Attaullah Tarar and PM's advisor Rana Sanaulah also accompanied the prime minister. The prime minister also reiterated that seeking foreign loans was no solution to their economic issues and the country's future.

Without loans, they would change fate of the country by striving day and night and shedding sweat and blood, he said, adding that he did not believe in hollow slogans, and promised to ensure progress and prosperity of the backward areas. He maintained that the country's economy had stabilized.

The prime minister also praised all the leaders of the region for working hard for the uplift of their respective areas and mentioned minister for power who was working hard to provide relief over power tariff by bringing reforms. The prime minister further said for progress and development, peace was requisite.



DERA GHAZI KHAN: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif waving hands during public gathering.

940,000 patients treated under Sehat Card

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: In the past year, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Sehat Card Plus program, has provided free medical treatment to 940,000 patients across the province.

According to the government's one-year performance report, 72% of these patients received treatment in public hospitals, while 28% were treated in private healthcare facilities under the scheme. The provincial government has taken measures to enhance the healthcare sector.

For the current fiscal year, the government has allocated PKR 231 billion for the health sector—an increase of 13% compared to the previous year.

Hamas frees six Israeli hostages in Gaza

JERUSALEM (Reuters): Hamas freed six hostages from Gaza on Saturday, the last living Israeli captives slated for release under the first phase of a fragile ceasefire accord, in exchange for hundreds of Palestinian prisoners and detainees.

Eliya Cohen, 27, Omer Shem Tov, 22, and Omer Wenkert, 23, all seized from the site of the Nova music festival in Hamas' October 7, 2023 attack on southern Israel, were handed over to the Red Cross in Nuseirat, central Gaza, to be transported to Israeli forces. Dozens of fighters stood guard in a crowd that had gathered to watch the handover, as masked Hamas men armed with automatic rifles stood on each side of the three men, who appeared thin and pale, as they were made to wave from the stage.

Tal Shoham, 40 and Avera Mengistu, 39, were earlier released in Rafah in southern Gaza. The Hamas-directed releases, which have included public ceremonies in which captives are taken on stage and some made to speak, have

faced mounting criticism, including from the United Nations, which denounced the "parading of hostages."

Hamas rejected the criticism on Saturday, describing the events as a solemn show of Palestinian unity. It later handed over a sixth hostage, Hisham Al-Sayed, 36, to the Red Cross in Gaza City with no public ceremony. Al-Sayed and Mengistu have been held by Hamas since they entered Gaza of their own accord around a decade ago. Shoham was abducted from Kibbutz Be'eri along with his wife and two children, who were freed in a brief truce in November 2023.

The six are the last living hostages from a group of 33 due to be freed in the first stage of the three-phase ceasefire deal between Israel and Hamas that took effect on January 19. Sixty-three more captives, less than half of whom are believed to be alive, remain in Gaza. Shem Tov embraced his parents tightly, laughing and crying. "How I dreamt of this," he said, in a video distributed by the Israeli military.



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Toronto University delegation calls on Sharjeel Memon

F.P. Report

KARACHI: A delegation from Toronto Metropolitan University met with Senior Minister Sharjeel Inam Memon, where both the Sindh government and the university agreed to enhance educational partnerships.

The meeting and conference were attended by Secretary Universities and Boards Abbas Baloch, NED University Vice-Chancellor Sarosh Lodhi, as well as vice-chancellors from various universities in Sindh and other officials. The delegation from Toronto Metropolitan University was led by its President and Vice-Chancellor, Mohamed Lachemi. The discussions focused on strengthening academic collaboration, research partnerships, and educational projects between Sindh and Canadian institutions.

Speaking at the conference, Senior Minister and Provincial Minister for Information, Transport, and Mass Transit, Sharjeel Inam Memon, emphasized the importance of strengthening ties between universities and institutions. He stated that this partnership would play a key role in shaping the future of the nation and empowering the new generation.

He further stressed the need



to bridge the gap between the government, industry, and academia, highlighting that by leveraging each other's expertise and resources, they could promote innovation, economic growth, and social prosperity.

Sharjeel Inam Memon announced that student exchange programs between Toronto Metropolitan University, NED University, and other universities in Sindh would be encouraged. He assured that the Sindh government would further strengthen

partnerships with educational institutions. He also praised the efforts of the Secretary Universities and Boards and his team for organizing the meeting efficiently.

Speaking at the conference, Toronto Metropolitan University President and Vice-Chancellor Mohamed Lachemi expressed his delight at visiting Sindh and appreciated the progress in the education sector. He stated that Toronto Metropolitan University is ready to collaborate with educational institutions in Sindh to promote academic cooperation and innovation.

He further assured that the university would provide full support in research, teaching programs, and educational opportunities, adding that international collaboration could further improve the quality of education in academic institutions. On this occasion, Senior Minister Sharjeel Inam Memon also presented Ajrak and Sindhi topi as gifts to the distinguished guests.

Sharjeel addresses traffic problems and future solutions

KARACHI: Sindh's Senior Minister and Provincial Minister for Information, Transport, and Mass Transit, Sharjeel Inam Memon held a press conference was held in Rawal House, Rahukui, Tandojam.

Sindh's Senior Minister Sharjeel Inam Memon stated that today he met with transport officers in Hyderabad with various delegations, discussing various issues including heavy traffic. A meeting was held with the World Bank delegation in Karachi, where they were briefed on the Sindh People's Housing Project, and the World Bank representatives praised our project.

Speaking at the important press conference, Senior Minister Sharjeel Inam Memon said the world's largest housing project is started, under which 2.1 million houses will be constructed and in the first phase, 700,000 houses have been built. In April, the Sindh government's name will be included in the Guinness Book of World Records due to this project, as Sindh has accomplished this feat after a disaster.

Senior Minister Sharjeel Inam Memon said that when millions of people were affected, the leadership of the Pakistan Peoples Party worked

with vision and spirit of service for their rehabilitation. This project by the Sindh government is about to become a great project in the history of the world and has received international awards, which is an honor for Pakistan. Every Pakistani will be proud that we initiated this project. The 2.1 million houses mean arrangements for accommodation of millions of families and providing them livelihoods. We also have the statistics for women and men who are being granted ownership rights to these houses.

Criticizing the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf, he said that this party has tried every possible way to harm Pakistan. The terrorism incidents that occurred in the country, including Karachi and Hyderabad, were part of Imran Khan's conspiracy.

He mentioned that on the day Imran Khan was sentenced, there were no protests in any part of the country. He said that during his tenure, those whom Imran Khan wanted were arrested immediately, while people like Saqib Nisar were with Imran Khan, and then a so-called dam construction campaign began, which harmed the public. The Tehreek-e-Insaf deceived the entire nation. Imran Khan claimed he was removed from the government through a cipher, but in reality,

he was trying his best to destroy Pakistan, but God foiled his wicked intentions. He further stated that when Imran Khan sought help from foreign countries and received no positive response, he looked towards the same political parties he had previously spoken ill of.

He stated that the leaders of the Pakistan Peoples Party have made their place in this country through sacrifices. Despite so much oppression, none of our leaders spoke against the integrity of Pakistan. President Asif Ali Zardari, after the martyrdom of Benazir Bhutto has raised the slogan of solidarity and safety of Pakistan. He further added that Indus Highway project is important for Pakistan and incompletion of this project is damaging the country's economy.

He said the government of Sindh has paid its due share for the project yet it is still incomplete. He said the differences between police and lawyers should be resolved amicably because lawyers are important part of the society and also our brethren. Senior Minister Sindh further said that Pakistan People's Party is not afraid of any political party because in elections all these parties have fought the election against us and defeated. He prayed for the success of Pakistan in tomorrow's Champions Trophy cricket match against India.

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12,000 police officials deployed for security

LAHORE (APP): More than 12,000 policemen were deployed for security of Australia and England match of the ICC Champions Trophy at Gaddafi Stadium here on Saturday.

On the instructions of Inspector General of Police Punjab Dr Usman Anwar, officials remained high alert, ensuring comprehensive security for the players, officials, and cricket fans.

He emphasised that no stone should be left unturned to ensure the smooth and safe conduct of international matches. He said that effective and close coordination with the Pakistan Cricket Board, district administration, security agencies, and all relevant institutions must be ensured. A Punjab police spokesperson shared that more than 12,000 police officers and personnel were deployed for security of the Australia and England match. Snipers were positioned at residences, routes, the stadium, and surrounding buildings.

The Dolphin Squad, Police Response Units, and Elite teams carried out effective patrolling around key routes and locations, while Safe City cameras were used for continuous monitoring of the teams' routes, the stadium, and other important locations.



LAHORE: A cauliflower seller attracts customers by prominently displaying fresh cabbage on a truck at a Vegetable Market. —APP Photo

Governor Tessori lauds overseas Pakistanis

KARACHI (PPI): Sindh Governor Kamran Khan Tessori has highlighted the pivotal role of overseas Pakistanis and the Kashmiri community as ambassadors of Pakistan.

He delivered these remarks during his second address to overseas Pakistanis in Birmingham. Mr Tessori urged them to respect the law and maintain their identity as a source of national pride, while cautioning against the spread of unverified news on social media.

According to a statement by Sindh Governor

House today, he announced the establishment of centers throughout the UK under the Governor's Initiative, acknowledging the significant contributions of Pakistanis in the UK to their homeland's progress. He affirmed his commitment to continuously support them.

The governor also introduced the "Bell of Hope" at the Governor House in Karachi, providing round-the-clock assistance to the people of Sindh. Emphasizing unity and a positive image, he noted the crucial role overseas

Pakistanis play in bolstering the national economy through record remittances.

Highlighting the achievements of the Pakistani diaspora in the UK, he remarked on the ascent of individuals of Pakistani descent to high political offices, including the historic election of Sadiq Khan as Mayor of London for three consecutive terms.

Tessori concluded his address with special prayers for Pakistan's prosperity and development at Birmingham's central mosque.

APECC Cabinets took oath

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: All Pakistan Secretariat Employees Coordination Council (APECC) cabinets administered oath of their offices at Islamabad. Former Minister

Religious Affair and Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz leader Sardar Muhammad administered oath from Islamabad, Peshawar, Karachi, Quetta, Lahore, Gilgit Baltistan, and Azad Jammu and Kashmir cabinets.

APSECC Chairman Zafar Yousafzai, Syed Bilal Shah, Khalid Javed, Muhammad Asad Khan, Sher Zaman, Itaf Hussain, Shoaib Afridi, Faizan Afridi, Malak Shuja u Din, Muhammad Ikram and Fawad Zafar took oath of their offices.

CM to launch 'Maryam Nawaz Community Health Services' in Punjab

LAHORE (APP): Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif on Saturday taken a significant step toward enhancing the province's healthcare system with the announcement of the 'Maryam Nawaz Community Health Services'.

The initiative aims to address key health challenges in Punjab and will oversee 19 critical health sector tasks while streamlining the management of health-related issues across the province. Chairing a meeting on health services in Punjab here, the CM emphasized, "The 'Maryam Nawaz Community Health Services' will complete 19 crucial tasks, including a

comprehensive approach to health-related matters." She further revealed that 20,000 additional health inspectors would be hired through outsourcing to bolster the services' reach across Punjab.

She called for a detailed and immediate plan to implement the programme.

A main feature of the initiative is the integration of the existing Lady Health Worker Programme, with 39,000 lady health workers joining the workforce. The overall workforce of the 'Maryam Nawaz Community Health Services' will exceed 60,000 professionals, ensuring a robust healthcare network for the province.

CM Maryam Nawaz highlighted that the new services will also be responsible for the administration of polio and other vaccination programmes, and will ensure the maintenance of accurate patient records. She underscored that a complete mapping of community health services would be carried out under her leadership.

Earlier, the CM was briefed that 47 per cent of the population is covered by the current health services, while 53 per cent of them are uncovered. The meeting was informed that 93 per cent of the patients are satisfied with the government's reforms related to health services.



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Empowerment and Winter Tourism Initiative

Directorate of Youth Affairs KP ignites hope for youth

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The Directorate of Youth Affairs Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), under the visionary leadership of Dr. Nouman Mujahid, has once again reaffirmed its role as a beacon of empowerment for the province's youth by organizing a transformative three-day event aimed at fostering winter tourism, leadership, and community engagement.

The event "Winter Festival" organised by Eventourism in collaboration with Directorate of Youth Affairs, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa begins today and will be held from February 21 to 23, 2025, at the scenic Baragali Campus of the University of Peshawar, the event brought together 50 exceptional students from the newly merged districts of KP, celebrating their contributions to social development while equipping them with skills for the future.

Dr. Nouman Mujahid, Director of Youth Affairs KP, emphasized the Directorate's unwavering commitment to creating platforms that merge youth empowerment with tourism promotion. "Our mission is to ignite the potential of young minds while showcasing the untapped beauty of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa," he stated. "This event is not just about dialogue-it's about action, exposure, and inspiring our youth to become ambassadors of change and tourism in their communities."

Recognized as a pioneer in youth-centric initiatives, the Directorate has consistently championed programs that bridge opportunity gaps, particularly for students from remote and newly merged districts. Dr. Mujahid highlighted, "By investing in these young leaders, we are investing in the sustainable development and unity of our province."

The 50 participants-balanced in gender representation-were selected for their outstanding achievements in community-led activities, ranging from education advocacy to environmental conservation. Their inclusion underscores the Directorate's focus on inclusivity and recognition of grassroots changemakers.

The agenda seamlessly combined intellectual rigor with cultural pride and recreational activities:

- *Interactive Sessions*: Experts led discussions on winter tourism potential, leadership, and community development.
- *Exposure Visits*: Students explored Baragali's picturesque landscapes, highlighting KP's viability as a winter tourism destination.
- *Cultural Night*: A vibrant showcase of traditional music, attire, and folklore from the merged districts, fostering pride and unity.
- *Bonfire Games & Group Presentations*: Team-building activities and collaborative projects addressed local challenges, with innovative solutions presented to peers and mentors.

Furad Ali, Chief Organizer of the event, praised the Directorate's relentless efforts. "We are grateful to Dr. Mujahid and the Directorate for turning this vision into reality," he remarked. "Such platforms are vital for nurturing youth talent and bridging divides. These students will return home as catalysts for progress and advocates for KP's tourism potential."

The Directorate of Youth Affairs KP continues to lead initiatives that empower young people while positioning the province as a hub for cultural and ecotourism. With plans to expand such programs, the Directorate remains dedicated to transforming KP's youth into drivers of socio-economic growth.

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Games Peshawar beat Mardan to win women's table tennis championship



F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The thrilling competitions of the KP Under-22 Games continued on the third day. In the women's table tennis event at Abdul Wali Khan Sports Complex Peshawar secured victory by defeating Mardan 3-0 in straight sets. Peshawar's team included Alishba, Hooriya, Zainab, Adeena and Gulalai.

The closing ceremony was graced by the Provincial Minister for Labor, Fazal Shakoor Khan who distributed prizes among the winners. He was accompanied by Additional Director General Sports Rashida Ghaznavi, Regional Sports Officer Kashif Farhan, District Sports Officer Charsadda Ms. Mishal Malik, former DSO Tehseenullah, Judo Association President Masu Ahmed, and coaches Amna and Bushra, among others.

In the women's hockey final Mardan defeated Peshawar to claim the gold medal. The final match was highly intense with both teams launching aggressive attacks on each other's goalposts. Mardan managed to score two goals while Peshawar remained scoreless.

In women's volleyball Mardan, Peshawar and Hazara defeated Bannu to secure their spots in the final.

In the women's badminton competition held at Peshawar Sports Complex, Hazara Region emerged victorious, defeating Peshawar 3-0 in the final to clinch the championship title.

Meanwhile in the women's squash final held at Qamar Zaman Squash Complex, Peshawar defeated Hazara 2-1 in a closely contested match to secure the gold medal while Hazara settled for silver. Senior coach and chief organizer Munawar Zaman along with squash coaches Mr. Waseem Muhammad and Mr. Shakeel Ahmed, were also present at the event.

Pakistan on global stage: Champions Trophy and its far-reaching effects

Muhammad Mohsin Iqbal

After a prolonged hiatus, Pakistan is once again hosting a major international cricket tournament, the ICC Champions Trophy, started from February 19, 2025. This marks a significant milestone for the country, which had long been striving to restore its image as a safe and vibrant hub for international sports. The return of such a prestigious event not only rekindles the passion of millions of cricket enthusiasts but also carries profound economic, social, and diplomatic implications for Pakistan.

Economically, the Champions Trophy is poised to inject a substantial boost into the country's economy. The influx of international teams, officials, media personnel, and spectators is expected to generate significant revenue for multiple sectors, including hospitality, transportation, retail, and tourism. Hotels in major cities hosting matches have reported full bookings, and local businesses are witnessing a surge in demand. This increase in economic activity will not only benefit large corporations but also small vendors, who rely on such events for their livelihood. Additionally, broadcasting rights, sponsorship deals, and ticket sales will contribute to Pakistan's foreign exchange reserves, strengthening the financial outlook of the country's sports industry.

The tournament's social impact is equally profound. Cricket has always been a unifying force in Pakistan, transcending political and ethnic divides. The return of a high-profile event to home soil fosters national pride and provides the younger generation with much-needed inspiration. It sends a strong message to the world that Pakistan is ready to host global events, countering the negative narratives often associated with the country. Schools, universities, and sports academies across Pakistan are already abuzz with excitement, as the Champions Trophy rekindles a passion for cricket and encourages youth participation in sports. The success of this event could potentially lead to the revival of other sports as well, paving the way for broader investment in athletics and infrastructure. On the diplomatic front,

hosting the Champions Trophy will enhance Pakistan's image on the global stage. For years, Pakistan faced challenges in convincing international teams to play on its soil due to security concerns. The successful conduct of this event serves as a testament to the country's improved security situation and its capability to organize world-class sporting events. The participation of top cricketing nations reflects a growing confidence in Pakistan's ability to ensure the safety and comfort of visiting teams and spectators. Moreover, the tournament will provide an opportunity for international engagement, fostering better relations between Pakistan and participating nations. Cricket diplomacy has historically played a significant role in bridging political differences, and this tournament offers a platform for constructive dialogue and collaboration among nations.

Pakistan's ability to host international sporting events has been limited in the past due to security concerns. The unfortunate attack on the Sri Lankan cricket team in March 3, 2009 led to a prolonged isolation, forcing Pakistan to play its home series at neutral venues, mainly in the UAE. However, in recent years, Pakistan has successfully hosted bilateral series and international tournaments, including the Pakistan Super League (PSL) and tours by teams such as Australia, England, and New Zealand. The Champions Trophy marks the most significant multi-national tournament in Pakistan since the 1996 Cricket World Cup, co-hosted with India and Sri Lanka. The successful organization of this event will further encourage international sporting bodies to consider Pakistan for future global tournaments, such as the ICC Cricket World Cup and other marquee events.

Another key aspect of hosting the Champions Trophy is the enhancement of sports infrastructure. The government and Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) have invested heavily in upgrading stadiums, security arrangements, and training facilities. These improvements not only benefit cricket but also provide a foundation for developing other sports in the country. The tournament serves as a model for

future event planning, ensuring that Pakistan remains an attractive destination for international competitions.

Moreover, the Champions Trophy acts as a cultural bridge, showcasing Pakistan's rich heritage, hospitality, and enthusiasm for sports to the world. International visitors will have the opportunity to experience the country's diverse culture, historic landmarks, and culinary delights, leaving with a positive impression that can help promote tourism beyond the tournament. Media coverage of the event will further highlight Pakistan's vibrant cities and warm hospitality, countering long-standing misperceptions about the country.

Security remains a crucial aspect of hosting the tournament, and Pakistan has taken extensive measures to ensure a safe environment for all participants. The deployment of specialized security forces, coordination with international security agencies, and the implementation of comprehensive contingency plans underscore Pakistan's commitment to safeguarding the event. A smooth and incident-free tournament will serve as a confidence booster for future international engagements and will further establish Pakistan as a reliable host for global events.

The Champions Trophy also serves as a catalyst for nurturing local talent. Young cricketers will get the opportunity to witness top international players in action, motivating them to pursue the sport professionally. The exposure to high-level competition will contribute to the development of the national team, strengthening Pakistan's cricketing prospects on the global stage.

As Pakistan embarks on this historic journey of hosting the Champions Trophy, the tournament signifies far more than just a cricketing spectacle. It is a testament to Pakistan's resilience, its ability to overcome challenges, and its aspirations to be recognized as a global sports destination. The success of this event will open doors for future international engagements, benefiting the nation on multiple fronts. Beyond the boundaries of the cricket field, the Champions Trophy represents a moment of unity, pride, and progress for Pakistan, solidifying its place in the world of international sports.



PESHAWAR: Provincial President, PPP Women Wing and Chairperson Benazir Income Support Programme, Senator Rubina Khalid addressing party meeting.

PPA organizes 16th Pediatric Neurology Conference

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The Pakistan Pediatric Association (PPA) successfully launched the 16th Pediatric Neurology Conference, a significant academic event aimed at enhancing pediatricians' knowledge and skills in pediatric neurology to improve patient care.

Health Adviser to the Chief Minister, Intesham Ali, attended as the chief guest and expressed his appreciation for the initiative. He acknowledged the importance of pediatric neurology and assured the government's full support for such academic and scientific gatherings, recognizing their crucial role in strengthening healthcare services for children.

He further highlighted the provincial government's commitment to improving pediatric healthcare, including the operationalization of two major hospitals within this fiscal year, the establishment of newborn units in DHQ hospitals, and the development of state-of-the-art Neonatal Intensive Care Units (NICUs) at MTI Swabi, Nowshera, and the Women and Children Hospital in Abbottabad.

He also announced the upcoming inauguration of the Children's Hospital in Mardan by Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur, while work on hospitals in Swabi and Peshawar is progressing rapidly.

The conference featured prominent speakers, including Dr. Syed Bawar Shah, President of the Pakistan Pediatric Association, Dr. Athar Khalili, General Secretary of PPA, and Dr. Shenaz Ibrahim, President of the Pediatric Neurology Group.

They emphasized the urgent need to develop pediatric neurology in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and across Pakistan, stressing the necessity of more trained specialists and improved facilities for children with neurological disorders.

Additionally, Health Adviser Intesham Ali announced that a dedicated Board of Governors is being formed for the Khyber Institute of Child Healthcare, comprising experts to ensure the institution's efficiency and effectiveness.

The three-day conference brought together leading pediatricians, neurologists, and healthcare professionals from across the country and will be discussing advancements in diagnosing and treating pediatric neurological disorders.

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Al-Bait CEO vows to uphold century-old legacy of honesty

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The CEO of Al-Bait Tour Operating Company, Osama, said that Al-Bait was established three years ago, but his ancestors have been serving pilgrims visiting the Two Holy Mosques as guides for the past 43 years.

He stated that Al-Bait was founded to welcome and serve guests in the best possible way. Therefore, unlike traditional methods, artificial intelligence can now be utilized to enhance their experience. He expressed these views during an exclusive interview.

Osama further mentioned that Al-Bait has connections worldwide, including in Asia and South Asia. The company operates with utmost transparency and ensures the same level of honesty and integrity with all its clients and sub-tour operators.

He emphasized that Al-Bait has established its own high standards through hard work and dedication, which it is committed to maintaining. He expressed hope that those who collaborate with the company will uphold these same standards.

He added that Al-Bait is determined to continue working with the honesty and transparency set by their ancestors nearly a century ago.

In response to a question, he stated that Al-Bait welcomes all serious partners, including their Pakistani brothers, to work with them. However, he made it clear that there will be no compromise on quality and transparency, as trust, once lost, cannot be regained. He expressed hope that all partners will work with full dedication, keeping this principle in mind.

EnglishWorks: Administrators and Teachers NUML inaugurates Training

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The National University of Modern Languages (NUML) inaugurated the Country-wide Training of EnglishWorks : Administrators and Teachers at local hotel. The event marks a significant step in enhancing employability skills and English proficiency among Pakistani youth.

"EnglishWorks" is a U.S.-funded initiative under the Regional English Language Office (RELO) that equips young Pakistanis with essential skills for professional success. The program focuses on English communication for business and various professions, critical thinking, problem-solving, personality development, and 21st-century digital and soft skills. To date, 6,000 youth have benefited from the program. From 2023 to 2025, NUML is training an additional 2,655 students, preparing them for their future careers.

The inauguration ceremony was led by Rector NUML, Maj Gen Shahid Mahmood Kayani HI (M) (Retd), with Mr Jerrold Frank, Head of RELO at the U.S. Embassy in Islamabad, as the chief guest.

Addressing the gathering, the Rector NUML underscored the importance of employability skills for Pakistani youth and the need to train educators who can guide them toward successful careers.

He highlighted the role of such initiatives in strengthening Pakistan's socio-economic growth and global image as a progressive nation. Expressing gratitude to the U.S. Embassy, he emphasized how these programs empower young Pakistanis to excel in freelancing, e-commerce, and digital marketing, leveraging opportunities in the expanding economy.

Mr. Mr. Jerrold Frank expressed his happiness to be heading this exemplary initiative. Reflecting on his visits to various sites of the "EnglishWorks" program; stretched from Karachi to Khyber and Gilgit. He praised NUML's efforts in providing quality education, particularly in English and other languages, to uplift communities across the country.

The ceremony was attended by officials from RELO and NUML, along with a large number of English teachers from various cities across Pakistan, reinforcing a collective commitment to enhancing education and career opportunities for Pakistani youth.





In brief

Prices of meat irks consumers F.P. Report

MARDAN: The increased prices of meat and chicken has displaced the residents of Mardan district. The consumers were irked over the decision of district administration and food department for fixing meat rate of small animal as Rs1900 per kilogram, Rs850 per kilogram cow meat and Rs.1000 per KG marinated meat. They accused PTI Government for its failure to control prices of daily use commodities ahead of Ramazanul Mubarak. The consumers expressed the hope that the new rate announced by the district administration and Food Department will be reviewed to facilitate consumers ahead of the holy month of Ramazan.

Rishshaw union hold protest F.P. Report

LARKANA: The rickshaw drivers labor union held a protest demonstration in front of the press club against the growing unrest in the city and increase in gas prices. Due to unrest in Larkana city, rickshaws, wagons, buses, coaches and other vehicles are being looted from the citizens on the roads, while habitual criminals are robbing houses and killing those who resisted by firing bullets. In this way, common people, businessmen and the working class have also become unsafe. In various cities including Hyderabad, Sukkur and Dadu LPG gas is being sold at 240 rupees per kg, while in Larkana LPG gas is being sold at 280 rupees per kg due to which the working class of rickshaw drivers are becoming unemployed. Meanwhile, a two-day endoscopy workshop organized by Shaheed Benazir Bhutto Medical University and Chandka Medical College in Larkana with the support of Pakistan Society of Gastroenterology was held at the Gastroenterology Department of Chandka Teaching Hospital. Renowned professor Dr. Anwar Khan, Head of Jinnah Hospital Lahore Prof. Shahid Sarwar, Kashif Malik of Sheikh Zayed Hospital Lahore also participated and more than 200 post-graduates, general physicians, general practitioners, general practitioners and students operated on 20 patients suffering from stomach, duodenal and large intestine diseases and learned about the complications and the use of basic and modern methods in treatment.

Abdul Khaliq laid to rest F.P. Report

WANA: The assassination of renowned tribal leader and Presidential Award recipient, Malik Abdul Khaliq Wazir, has sent shockwaves across Wana, leaving the region in deep mourning. The veteran leader, known for his contributions to tribal society and his fearless advocacy for the underprivileged, was laid to rest in his ancestral village, Zeri Noor, amid a sea of grieving supporters. His funeral drew a large gathering of political figures, religious scholars, and locals, all united in sorrow and outrage over his brutal killing. Addressing the mourners, Maulana Issamuddin strongly condemned the assassination, calling it a heinous act that demands swift justice. The killing, which took place in broad daylight near the FC Cantt Area, local Police Lines, NADRA Center, and District Press Club Wana, has raised serious concerns over the security situation in the region. Many attendees questioned how such a high-profile figure could be targeted so close to key security installations without intervention.

Miscreant killed in Karak police retaliatory fire

F.P. Report

KARAK: A miscreant was shot dead in retaliatory fire by the police during an attack on police in Karak district on Saturday..

Police said, unidentified motorcycle riders opened fire on the Station House Officer (SHO) of Khurram police station in Karak. In response, the police immediately retaliated, killing one of the attackers while the other managed to escape.

Upon receiving information, a heavy contingent of police was dispatched from the headquarters to the crime scene. The police have cordoned off the mountainous area of Tookti and launched a search operation to apprehend the fleeing suspect.

Meanwhile, five people

were injured in a collision between a flying coach and a motor car in the Tookti Mor area of ??Tehsil Banda Daudshah. The flying coach was going from Peshawar to Bannu, while the car was going from Bannu to Peshawar. As soon as the control received information, the medical team of Rescue 1122 provided first aid to all the injured on the spot. Identification of the injured: 1.

Sanobar son of Akram, age 35 years 2. Zahidullah son of Gulzar Khan, age 45 years 3. Hamidullah son of Muhammad Mir Khan, age 54 years 4. Anwar Kamal son of Sher Nawaz, age 46 years, residents of Bannu, while 5. Muhammad Talha son of Naeemullah, age 10 years, resident of Mir Ali. Meanwhile, successful

operation of Sabirabad police, drug dealers arrested, arms and ammunition recovered. According to details, on the instructions of District Police Officer Karak Shahbaz Elahi, SHO of Sabirabad police station Rustam Khan along with a police team carried out successful operations against criminal elements in the suburbs of Sabirabad.

During which, a drug dealer Noor Hanif Shah son of Haider Shah was arrested along with 1045 grams of hashish, while two accused Muhammad Naeem and Mustansar Aziz were arrested and a pistol and a 223 bore rifle and a total of 145 cartridges were recovered from the possession of the accused. The police registered separate cases against the accused.

Price Review Committee sets steps for Ramazan

F.P. Report

LOWER DIR: The District Price Review Committee meeting at Timergara assessed market prices and decided to implement measures ensuring the availability of essential commodities at fair rates, particularly during the month of Ramazan.

The meeting was attended by Additional Deputy Commissioner Bashir Khan, District Food Controller Kashif Ihsan, Assistant Commissioners, Deputy Director Agriculture, Assistant Director Consumer Protection Council, Deputy Director Livestock, Assistant Director Halal Food Authority, Assistant Director Industries, representatives from Utility Stores Corporation, Education Monitoring Authority, traders, wholesalers, and other key stakeholders. A comparative analysis of food prices in neighboring districts was presented, followed by discussions on price regulation strategies for Lower Dir.

To ensure price stability, it was decided that price monitoring desks would be established in all tehsils and major markets under the supervision of Assistant Commissioners. These desks, comprising officials from the district administration, food department,

agriculture department, Halal Food Authority, and village councils, will address public complaints regarding price violations. Additionally, monitoring teams in designated uniforms will conduct regular inspections to enforce official price lists.

The committee also approved laboratory testing for dairy products across all tehsils to maintain quality standards. Checkposts will be set up at entry and exit points to curb hoarding and smuggling, with district administration and food department personnel overseeing enforcement.

To regulate the wholesale fruit and vegetable markets, daily price lists will be issued and shared via the district administration's official social media pages. Traffic congestion in major markets will be managed through temporary parking areas, with traffic police and Levies personnel deployed to ensure smooth flow.

Assistant Commissioners will hold regular meetings with traders and wholesalers to monitor market trends and compliance. A public complaint cell will be set up at the Deputy Commissioner's office, allowing citizens to report grievances via the District Control Room, Pakistan Citizen Portal,

Marastyal App, and Ikhtiyar-e-Awam platform. A public awareness campaign will be launched to encourage citizens to report violations.

For transparency, the official government rate list will be displayed in all markets and at monitoring desks. Regular market inspections will be conducted by Assistant Commissioners and Additional Assistant Commissioners, who will submit daily reports.

In a key relief initiative, a Ramadan Dastarkhwan will be set up at the Main Bus Stand and District Headquarters Hospital Timergara under the supervision of the District Social Welfare Officer, providing free meals to the underprivileged. To ensure law and order, police, Levies, and other law enforcement agencies will be deployed in major markets and public places. Elected representatives will be briefed on price control measures, anti-hoarding efforts, food quality checks, and official rate enforcement. The Education Monitoring Authority will provide daily reports on market regulations. Following deliberations, official price lists for groceries, dairy products, samosas, pakoras, meat, and other essentials were finalized for Lower Dir.

Admn holds Kuli Katchery

F.P. Report

KOHAT: The district Administration Kohat has under the Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Program "Awami Agenda", held the first ever Kuli Katchery of its kind for the local traders at Tehsil Plaza Kohat.

The Katchery was chaired by the Deputy Commissioner Kohat Abdul Akram while specifically participated by Sheryar Afridi MNA and Shafi Jan MPA as Chief Guests beside the officers of the district administration and Police, heads of Line Departments, Presidents of Markets,

Reps of Traders and elders.

On this occasion, the president of the bazaar, Ameer Khan Afridi welcomed the guests and thanked them for organizing the Katchery for traders. The participants openly presented their problems, most of which were related to the district administration, TMA, WSSC, electricity, gas, clean water, drainage, lease and security. The performance of the WSSC, TMA, Halal Food Authority, Industries and Sports Departments was severely criticized by the traders.

Referring to the problems and difficulties pre-

sented here, MNA Sheryar Afridi, MPA Shafi Jan and Deputy Commissioner Kohat said that all the problems presented will be considered sympathetically and all the government departments and institutions will be reformed.

They said, respect of every citizen of Kohat is dearer to them and will not allow any government officer or official to misbehave or disrespect the citizens. They assured that a follow-up Katchery within a month will be arranged again to apprise the business community of the progress on the issues presented here.



DARA ADAM KHEL: KP Minister for Law, Aftab Afridi inaugurating building of Government Girls Primary School, Sunni Khel.

Action against DMS LMH, SDO Pesco directed F.P. Report

KOHAT: Commissioner Kohat Division Syed Motasim Billah Shah has paid a surprise visit to the Liaquat Memorial Women and Children Hospital Kohat on Saturday night under the Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Program "Awami Agenda", where after seeing the plight of 21 newborn babies in the incubators of the nursery due to power outage from 2 lines and the generator malfunctioning, he called the Hospital's DMS and SDO PESCO. Despite hectic efforts both of them were not contacted.

The Commissioner Kohat has for this serious neglect of duties, suspended the DMS LMH and recommended immediate disciplinary action against him while a letter was also sent to the Chief PESCO for action against the SDO concerned.

Commissioner Kohat sent his staff to restore electricity to the hospital and saved the lives of 21 newborns. Commissioner Kohat Division also took serious notice of the pathetic cleanliness condition of the hospital and brought the head of the hospital and other related staff from home and the entire hospital was cleaned in the darkness of the night.

Mothers, patients and people present in the hospital appreciated the Chief Minister's Program "Awami Agenda" and termed the swift midnight action by Commissioner Kohat as highly satisfactory.

Security reviewed

F.P. Report

BUNER: A meeting regarding security in Ramzan held at all Police Stations across the district with the aim of maintaining peace during the holy month of Ramzan.

DSPs Circles Pir Baba Daggar Mandan have chaired the meetings. In these meetings station house officers Prayer leaders elders and presidents of bazar union leaders participated.

4th Dosti festival concludes at KKKUK

F.P. Report

KARAK: The closing ceremony of the 4th Dosti Peshawar Literature Festival (DPLF) 2025, Karak Chapter, took place at the old campus of Khushal Khan Khattak University Karak (KKKUK) on February 21st, 2025, marking the successful conclusion of the four-day event held from February 18th to 21st. The closing ceremony was graced by the presence of Vice Chancellor Prof. Dr. Naseer Ud Din as the chief guest.

In his address, Prof. Dr. Naseer Ud Din lauded the organizers for their efforts and assured them full support for future events of this nature. Registrar Dr. Ghani Ur Rehman, faculty members, administrative officers, students, and other distinguished guests also participated in the ceremony.

Dr. Muhammad Shafi, the keynote speaker at the closing ceremony, delivered an insightful address highlighting the philosophy of Ghani Khan's poetry. He also passionately advocated for the establishment of a Pashto department at KKKUK, urging the Vice Chancellor to consider the proposal.

The 4th DPLF proved to be a vibrant celebration of



literature, poetry, and the arts, effectively promoting harmony, friendship, and intellectual discourse. The festival served as a crucial platform, connecting writers, poets, and intellectuals to engage in stimulating discussions on a wide range of topics, including literature, history, and contemporary issues.

This year's festival emphasized the power of literature as a tool for fostering harmony, inclusivity, and mutual understanding among diverse communities. It also successfully inspired students and book lovers to actively participate in literary discussions and creative activities.

The event organizer Dr. Abdur Rauf while extending vote of thanks to event managers and participants said that the Karak Chapter featured a diverse program, including three keynote addresses, twenty parallel sessions, a Mushaira (poetry recital), and a three-day book fair held at the

Government Postgraduate College, Karak. "

These events provided ample opportunities for attendees to engage with literature and interact with prominent literary figures". Dr. Rauf added.

During the closing ceremony, Vice Chancellor Prof. Dr. Naseer Ud Din, Registrar Dr. Ghani Ur Rehman, and other distinguished guests distributed shields and certificates of appreciation to the faculty and student organizers in recognition of their contributions to the festival's success.

The festival successfully underscored the transformative power of words in building a more informed, harmonious, and culturally vibrant society. The festival organizers expressed their gratitude to all participants, sponsors, and supporters who contributed to making the event a resounding success. They reiterated their commitment to organizing future events that promote literature and culture.

UAJK hosts seminar

F.P. Report

MUZAFFARABAD: The Acting President and Chancellor of the University of Azad Jammu and Kashmir (UAJK), Chaudhry Latif Akbar, has emphasized the government's commitment to preserving and promoting mother languages through various initiatives, including the inclusion of local languages in the curriculum from primary to secondary levels. He expressed these views while addressing a grand seminar organized by UAJK to mark International Mother Language Day as the chief guest.

Delivering his speech in his native Gujar language, Chaudhry Latif Akbar highlighted that numerous languages have become extinct worldwide, underscoring the need to begin efforts for the revival, promotion, and

preservation of regional languages at the household level. He stated that as the head of his political party, he had previously pledged in the party's manifesto to take concrete steps for the promotion of mother languages. He further noted that while major languages spoken in the region, such as Gujar and Kashmiri, have strong linguistic communities, immediate measures are required to protect and promote other native languages as well.

Expressing his appreciation for the Institute of Languages at UAJK, he commended its significant contributions to the preservation, promotion, and revival of regional languages since its inception. However, he stressed the need to further expand these efforts.

Speaking on the occasion, Vice Chancellor of UAJK,

Prof. Dr. Muhammad Kaleem Abbasi, also delivered his address in his mother language, highlighting that native languages encapsulate cultural heritage, civilization, and history, making their promotion imperative for their survival. He announced that from March 2025, the Institute of Languages at UAJK will introduce various language courses, including a Kashmiri language course. He expressed his personal enthusiasm to enroll in the course to fulfill his aspiration of learning the Kashmiri language.

Dr. Abbasi further stated that the institute will also offer courses in other regional languages, including Gujar, Pahari, and Hindko. He emphasized that love for one's language, culture, region, and country is an inherent sentiment.

Reforming Ramazan price hikes

Marya Haleema

EVERY religion in the world has certain designated days, festivals, and rituals that its followers observe with deep devotion and reverence. These occasions not only serve as an expression of religious commitment but also extend their influence to other faiths and the global community, further highlighting their significance.

For the Muslim world, Ramazan is a sacred month that goes beyond being just a religious festival or a series of worship practices. It is a profound embodiment of spiritual purity, sacrifice, and selflessness. This month emphasizes piety, patience, and charity, where every act is performed with sincerity and a sense of divine blessings.

However, in Pakistani society, the arrival of Ramazan is often accompanied by a sharp surge in the prices of essential commodities, particularly those used for Ifar and Sehar. Dates, fruits, beverages, vegetables, and other

necessities witness an exponential rise in prices, making it increasingly difficult for the common person to afford them. Similarly, the preparations for Eid bring another wave of inflation, posing a major challenge that contradicts the true essence of this blessed month—simplicity and generosity.

In many other countries, governments take proactive measures during Ramadan and other religious festivals to stabilize prices, provide subsidies, and enforce strict monitoring to curb profiteering. Pakistan, too, needs to implement such policies to ensure that people can truly benefit from the blessings of Ramadan, rather than being burdened by skyrocketing inflation.

Despite being an Islamic republic, Pakistan struggles to ensure economic relief during Ramadan. Unlike other Muslim-majority countries where governments introduce price controls, subsidies, and relief packages for citizens, Pakistan often sees a lack of strict regulation. Hoarding, artificial inflation, and market

manipulation by profiteers become common, and the government's response is often delayed or ineffective. The absence of a strong check-and-balance system allows businesses to exploit the demand surge, making essential items unaffordable for the lower and middle classes.

Furthermore, Ramadan should be a time when community welfare initiatives are strengthened, ensuring that no one goes hungry or struggles to meet basic needs. However, in Pakistan, while private charities and welfare organizations play a significant role in providing relief, government-driven programs remain insufficient. Instead of enforcing strict policies against profiteering and black marketing, authorities often announce short-term relief measures that fail to provide sustainable solutions.

In many other countries, governments take proactive measures during Ramadan and other religious festivals to stabilize prices, provide subsidies, and enforce strict monitoring to curb profiteering. Pakistan, too, needs to

implement such policies to ensure that people can truly benefit from the blessings of Ramadan, rather than being burdened by skyrocketing inflation. The government must take concrete steps to regulate prices, introduce Ramadan relief packages, and hold exploitative businesses accountable so that this holy month remains a source of spiritual and communal upliftment, rather than a period of financial hardship.

For the policies to be truly effective, they must be designed with the common people in mind, ensuring that the benefits directly reach those who need them the most. In Pakistan, the policies implemented during Ramadan and other religious events should focus on practical, sustainable solutions rather than temporary fixes that fail to address the root causes of economic hardship. The government must establish a clear, transparent framework for price control, ensuring that businesses are not allowed to exploit consumers during high-demand periods like Ramadan.

Effective monitoring systems

need to be set up to track price fluctuations and ensure that they remain within reasonable limits. This would involve not only setting price ceilings but also regular checks and balances at the retail and wholesale levels, so that manipulative practices such as hoarding or creating artificial shortages can be promptly identified and addressed. Furthermore, the government must enforce accountability for profiteers, implementing strong penalties to deter those who take advantage of vulnerable populations during such a sensitive time.

Another important aspect is the distribution of resources. The government should collaborate with local communities, charities, and welfare organizations to set up efficient supply chains that ensure food and essential goods are available at affordable prices throughout the month. This approach would help direct relief to those in need, especially marginalized communities that often bear the brunt of inflation. Special attention should be given to the rural areas and poorer urban

neighborhoods, where people may struggle to access basic necessities at fair prices.

Moreover, subsidy programs should be tailored to address the specific needs of different income groups. This can include providing discounts on essential food items for low-income households or offering cash transfers to those in dire need. Such targeted measures would ensure that the benefits of the government's policies reach the most vulnerable, rather than being absorbed by wealthier segments of society who can afford the higher prices.

Lastly, the government should ensure that the implementation of these policies is not just reactive but proactive, focusing on long-term solutions that create lasting economic stability. By making these policies more people-centric, Pakistan can not only make Ramadan a time of spiritual reflection but also a time of economic relief for its citizens, fostering a sense of social justice and community solidarity.



US refusing to co-sponsor UN motion backing Ukraine

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

Washington has also objected to a phrase in a statement the Group of Seven nations was planning to issue next week that would condemn Russian aggression, two other sources told Reuters. The US refusal to agree to language that has been regularly used by the UN and G7 since February 2022 comes amid a widening rift between Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy and US President Donald Trump.

Trump is trying to rapidly end the war in Ukraine and sent a team to hold talks with Russia this week in Saudi Arabia without the involvement of Kyiv. Ukraine's allies have used the previous two Feb. 24 anniversaries of the war to reiterate their condemnation of Russia's invasion but this year it is unclear how the United States will approach it. At the UN

countries can decide to co-sponsor a resolution until a vote. The 193-member General Assembly is due to vote, diplomats said. General Assembly resolutions are not binding but carry political weight, reflecting a global view on the war.

"In previous years, the United States has consistently co-sponsored such resolutions in support of a just peace in Ukraine," one of the sources, who like the others requested anonymity to discuss sensitive matters, said. The first diplomatic source told Reuters that the resolution was being sponsored by more than 50 countries, declining to identify them. A second diplomatic source who also requested anonymity said: "For now, the situation is they (the US) won't sign it." Efforts are ongoing to seek support from other countries instead, including the Global South, the source added.

A spokesperson for the US diplomatic mission to the United Nations in Geneva did not respond to a request for comment. The G7 is planning to hold a call, three sources told Reuters, but so far the US is objecting to language on "Russian aggression". A statement issued by G7 foreign ministers last week contained no mention of

Russian aggression but did refer to "Russia's devastating war in Ukraine".

The row is a major political crisis for Ukraine, which has used tens of billions of dollars of US military aid agreed under the previous US administration to weather Russia's invasion and also benefited from diplomatic support. The draft UN resolution, seen by Reuters, "calls for a de-escalation, an early cessation of hostilities and a peaceful resolution of the war against Ukraine ... in line with the UN Charter and international law".

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

Erdogan's fight with Turkish business stirs concern

ANKARA (Reuters): President Tayyip Erdogan has escalated Turkey's battle with its top business group, expanding a broad political crackdown on dissent and raising the stakes for his government's economic turnaround programme, analysts say.

An Istanbul court banned international travel by two executives of the association TUSIAD in an investigation of their remarks on democracy that Erdogan characterised as undermining the government. At the group's general assembly last week, TUSIAD President Orhan Turan and Omer Aras, the chairman of QNB's Turkish banking unit, had criticised a government crackdown on opposition figures and journalists.

Aras said investigations into these people had shaken trust and damaged democracy. The opening of the investigation into his remarks triggered a fall in Istanbul stocks this week, though markets were steady. Upping the ante, Erdogan accused TUSIAD leaders of meddling in politics and profiting at the expense of the nation.

Authorities have carried out a wave of arrests, detentions and probes into opposition politicians, mayors and journalists in recent months that critics say aim to silence them and weaken Erdogan's rivals' electoral prospects. The

government dismisses this accusation and says the judiciary is independent. The latest probe into TUSIAD - a symbol of Turkey's wealthy business class whose influence has faded under Erdogan's watch - has prompted questions from some foreign investors who have cheered a U-turn toward more orthodox policies since mid-2023.

In footage broadcast by CNN Turk and other Turkish media, police officers led the executives Turan and Aras by their arms in front of the cameras through Istanbul's main courthouse. The court released both executives under judicial control measures after questioning and imposed the bans on international travel, state-run Anadolu Agency said.

TUSIAD has solidly backed the high interest rates and belt-tightening spearheaded by Finance Minister Mehmet Simsek in order to tackle inflation that soared as high as 85% in recent years, but that has begun to ease. "The interrogation of TUSIAD's president means that the policy support line between TUSIAD and Simsek is broken," said Arda Tunca, an independent economist and financial sector consultant.

The wave of legal action has targeted elected officials from various opposition parties, including a far-right leader and the CHP's

centrist Istanbul Mayor Ekrem Imamoglu, who is under investigation and is seen as a probable future presidential challenger to Erdogan. The European Parliament has condemned the "arbitrary dismissal and imprisonment of democratically elected mayors" across the country.

Ozgur Ozel, leader of the main opposition Republican People's Party (CHP), said Simsek should show international investors a picture of police walking TUSIAD's president into court to show the true "investment environment in Turkey". "No one would invest in a country where there is no legal security, no property security, and no freedom of expression," Ozel told reporters in Istanbul.

Istanbul prosecutors have said the TUSIAD leaders were being investigated for "attempting to influence a fair trial" and "publicly spreading misleading information". The executives' courthouse appearance came hours after Erdogan, in a speech to his ruling AK Party in Ankara, dismissed TUSIAD as a remnant of the past that had thrived on economic privilege and political influence. The AK Party's response has been "swift and ruthless" and could prompt TUSIAD to "fight on" despite the risks, said Global Source Partners analyst Atilla Yesilada.

Starmer backs Zelensky after Trump calls him 'dictator'

LONDON (BBC): Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer has backed Volodymyr Zelensky as a "democratically elected leader" after Donald Trump described the Ukrainian president as a "dictator". Sir Keir called Zelensky and told him it was "perfectly reasonable" for Ukraine to "suspend elections during wartime as the UK did during World War Two", Downing Street said.

Trump had earlier criticised Zelensky, saying he had done a "terrible job" and claiming "he refuses to have elections" in Ukraine. Zelensky's five-year term was due to end in May 2024, but elections have been suspended since martial law was declared after Russia's invasion. Sir Keir will travel to Washington DC next week for his first in-person meeting with Trump.

The PM has said he wants to use his meeting next week to discuss a "US backstop" that he says is necessary to deter Russia from attacking Ukraine again. But the deepening rift between the US and Ukraine has now increased the political jeopardy for him. In his phone

call with Zelensky, Sir Keir "stressed the need for everyone to work together", a Downing Street spokesperson said. "The prime minister reiterated his support for the US-led efforts to get a lasting peace in Ukraine that deterred Russia from any future aggression," they added.

Zelensky said they had discussed "upcoming plans and opportunities", adding: "UK's support matters indeed, and we will never forget the respect the British people have shown for Ukraine and our citizens." There has been widespread criticism of Trump's comments around the world - including from Sweden's prime minister as well as German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, who said it was "simply wrong and dangerous". Trump's former vice-president, Mike Pence, also criticised the comments, posting on X: "Mr President, Ukraine did not 'start' this war. Russia launched an unprovoked and brutal invasion claiming hundreds of thousands of lives."

Conservative leader Kemi Badenoch also

defended the Ukrainian leader, writing on X that Zelensky was "the democratically elected leader of Ukraine who bravely stood up to Putin's illegal invasion". But Badenoch said Trump was "right that Europe needs to pull its weight" and called on Sir Keir to "get on a plane to Washington and show some leadership".

Liberal Democrat leader Sir Ed Davey said calling Zelensky a dictator "must be where the line is drawn" and he hoped "the whole political spectrum... will speak with one voice in opposition to Trump's lies". Former Conservative PM Boris Johnson posted on X to say "of course Ukraine didn't start the war". "Trump's statements are not intended to be historically accurate but to shock Europeans into action," he added. The wider question is whether this moment leads to a shift in the UK government's willingness to criticise Trump. Often the read-outs - official summaries from the government of calls between the prime minister and world leaders - are quite bland.

NK flays US over AUKUS N-submarine deal

SEOUL (Reuters): North Korean state media criticized the United States for a nuclear submarine deal with Australia under the AUKUS partnership signed in 2021, calling it a "threat to regional peace." A commentary carried by KCNA said Washington should be wary of consequences for what it said were nuclear alliances, naming AUKUS and the trilateral cooperation with South Korea and Japan.

Australia just made its first \$500 million payment to the US under the AUKUS nuclear submarine deal. Under AUKUS, Australia will pay the United States \$3 billion to boost the capacity of the US submarine industry, and Washington will sell several Virginia-class nuclear-powered submarines to Australia in the early 2030s.

The KCNA commentary also argued the US sees North Korea as an obstacle to its establishment of hegemony in the region and said nuclear states will not sit idly by, referring to itself. North Korea has been criticizing the trilateral military cooperation between South Korea, Japan and the US and has called the relationship "the Asian version of NATO".

South Korea's defence ministry said that a joint air drill was held with the US with at least one B-1B strategic bomber taking part. The drill was to show extended deterrent capabilities by the United States in response to threats from North Korea's nuclear and missile program, the ministry said in a statement.

China begins repatriation from Thailand

BANGKOK (AP): An airlift carrying more than 1,000 Chinese nationals who had worked at online scam centers in eastern Myanmar began, after the rescued workers were taken across the border to Thailand and put on chartered flights to China.

Thailand, China and Myanmar have coordinated efforts over the past month to shut down the scam centers that bilked victims around the world out of billions of dollars through false romantic ploys, bogus investment pitches and illegal gambling schemes. Hundreds of thousands of people from Southeast Asia and elsewhere are estimated to have worked at such centers in Myanmar, Cambodia and Laos, with many who were recruited under false pretenses for other jobs found themselves trapped in virtual slavery.

Thai officials said recently that as many as 10,000 people may be repatriated from Myanmar from the online scam centers. So far, 16 flights, or about four a day, have been scheduled to repatriate the Chinese nationals, accompanied by police. Because of the large number of Chinese - the projected number so far is 1,041 - Thailand is allowing Beijing to handle most of their processing and investigations on their return to China.

Thai officials told reporters the rescued workers were being taken in batches of 50 across a bridge from Myanmar's Myawaddy to Thailand's Mae Sot, where they were processed - including with biometric scans - and sent on by bus to Mae Sot's airport. There they boarded China Southern Airlines planes, and about 200 Chinese citizens "suspected of involvement in fraud" were flown to an airport in the city of Nanjing, China's official Xinhua news agency said.

Thai authorities are overseeing the evacuation and processing of scam center workers from other nations. Last week, some 260 people from 20 nations, including many from Africa, crossed from Myanmar into Thai custody after they were reportedly rescued from scam centers. The organized repatriation of freed scam workers from nations other than China will begin, Thai PBS reported.

Thai Prime Minister Paetongtarn Shinawatra on a visit to Beijing earlier this month told Chinese leader Xi Jinping that Thailand would crack down on the scam networks.

Ukraine opposition leader seeks softer diplomacy to achieve peace

KYIV (Reuters): Former Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko called for a softer approach to diplomacy with the United States after a spat between Kyiv and Washington and offered to visit foreign capitals to improve the country's standing.

Poroshenko was president from 2014 to 2019 and is now the opposition leader in parliament. He remains a political rival to current President Volodymyr Zelenskiy, who beat him by a landslide in a 2019 election. He said Zelenskiy should stop "stadium behaviour" in dealing with US President Donald Trump, who branded the Ukrainian leader a "dictator without elections" for staying in power beyond his mandate and refusing to call a wartime election.

"This form of combat does not work in Ukraine's favour, however eloquent the arguments may be," he said in a video message. "Discussion with Trump requires diplomatic mastery, patience and calm so as not to react to his every statement," Poroshenko said, standing alongside a row of military vehicles.

Parliamentarians, he said, could help with diplomacy. "I am ready to go to Brussels or even Washington to save the situation," he said. "And there should be other experts and parliamentarians with authority in society." Authorities, he said, had tried to block plans by opposition parliamentarians to travel abroad to boost Ukraine's diplomacy.

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tery, patience and calm so as not to react to his every statement," Poroshenko said, standing alongside a row of military vehicles. Parliamentarians, he said, could help with diplomacy. "I am ready to go to Brussels or even Washington to save the situation," he said. "And there should be other experts and parliamentarians with authority in society." Authorities, he said, had tried to block plans by opposition parliamentarians to travel abroad to boost Ukraine's diplomacy. Poroshenko offered no criticism of the failure to hold an election, saying it could not be done "while there is no peace". He issued a new call for the creation of a coalition government of national union and an end to the "monopoly" of the president's office and political party in the country. In Kyiv, Zelenskiy told the US envoy for

Ukraine and Russia, Keith Kellogg, that Ukraine was ready to work quickly to produce a strong and useful agreement on investments and security with the United States.

Zelenskiy's verbal clash with Trump came as US and Russian officials held initial talks on ending the nearly three-year-old war -- Ukraine was not invited -- and Kyiv's rejection of a US proposal to develop rare earths in Ukraine. Poroshenko was hit last week by official sanctions imposed on security grounds, including an asset freeze and a ban on withdrawing capital from the country. He has been under investigation in connection with various allegations, including charges of helping Russian-backed separatists who seized large parts of eastern Ukraine in 2014 and a scandal over corrupt practices in military procurement.

US State Department revises China webpage

BEIJING (Reuters): The US State Department has changed references to China on its website, emphasising the trade deficit in an expanded section on economic ties, while dropping talk of working with allies and assistance to China on cultural and environmental issues.

The February 13 changes underscore the new administration's focus on trade and other priorities after removing a phrase last week from the department's Taiwan fact sheet about not supporting the island's independence, which angered Beijing.

China's economy is "one of the most restrictive investment climates in the world", read the expanded section on economic ties that highlighted the U.S.-China trade deficit and US businesses' concerns on the challenges of operating in China. "China also engages in unfair trade practices, including using forced labor and massive state subsidies, putting American businesses at a disadvantage, and making them complicit in China's human rights abuses," the webpage read.

A spokesperson for the State Department said "the China fact sheet on state.gov was updated to reflect the current

Administration's policies and priorities as they relate to China and the US-China relationship." The US embassy in Beijing did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Responding to a query on the changes, a spokesperson for China's foreign ministry described them as "distorting facts and slandering China's foreign policy, and hyping up so-called China-US strategic competition". Guo Jiakun, the spokesperson, added, "China is strongly dissatisfied with this."

The changes come after US President Donald Trump slapped an additional tariff of 10% on all imports from China, saying it failed to halt fentanyl trafficking. He plans further reciprocal tariffs on all nations that limit US access to their markets. The State Department also dropped the phrase "People's Republic of China (PRC)" from its country fact sheet on China, opting instead for "China". The site also features new language on countering Chinese cyber activity against US government bodies and critical infrastructure networks as well as efforts to obtain US cutting-edge technology for military purposes.

It emphasises the need to rebuild the US industrial base and shore up its lead in

artificial intelligence. An expanded section on China's role in international bodies accuses the ruling Chinese Communist Party (CCP) of attempting to "manipulate and subvert" such bodies as the United Nations. It seeks to "groom and install CCP members in leadership and other positions," the section adds. The site skips previous mention of "(working) closely with our allies and partners to defend our interests and values", saying instead that Washington will "follow the principles of reciprocity and fairness" in ties with China.

It also drops a section on US assistance to China that listed programmes for preserving Tibetan culture, environmental protection, human rights and combating drug trafficking. The omissions come as Trump embarks on a massive programme to reshape the US government, by attempting to dismantle the US Agency for International Development (USAID) and suspending foreign assistance.

The Biden administration routinely referred to the country by the abbreviation "PRC" for its official name, the People's Republic of China. Wen-Ti Sung, fellow at the Atlantic Council's Global China Hub, believes that the

revised language seems to "drive a hard bargain by raising complaints on economic policy issues" but also represents US softening on fundamental matters core to the Chinese ruling party's interests, namely regime security. China has thousands of years of history. But the People's Republic of China was established in 1949 after Mao Zedong's Communist forces won a bloody civil war against the Republic of China, whose government fled to the island of Taiwan.

"This shift in wording may entail that China's current political system ought to be considered the default setting for China, rather than just a temporary phenomenon for a particular moment in time," said Sung. "This shift may be Washington's signal to reassure Beijing that the US does not intend to challenge the Chinese Communist Party's rule." The three US-China joint communiques issued between 1972 and 1982 that form the basis of diplomatic relations use both terms, "PRC" and "China", to refer to Beijing. The United States has acknowledged the Chinese position that there is only one China and that Taiwan is part of China, but officially takes no position on Taiwan's sovereignty under Washington's "One China" policy.

US says it will drop immigration case against SpaceX

WASHINGTON (Reuters): The US Department of Justice said it would drop a case accusing Elon Musk's space technology company SpaceX of refusing to hire certain immigrants. The Justice Department last month signaled it could back away from the case, brought during Democratic President Joe Biden's term.

Musk, a top adviser to Republican President Donald Trump, is leading a commission tasked with identifying waste in the federal government. In a court filing in Brownsville, Texas, government lawyers asked a judge to end a pause in proceedings so they could file a notice of dismissal of the

case. The Justice Department said it would dismiss the case with prejudice, meaning it could not be brought again. Texas-based SpaceX and the Justice Department did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

The Justice Department in August 2023 filed an administrative complaint alleging SpaceX from 2018 to 2022 routinely discouraged asylum recipients and refugees from applying for jobs and refused to consider them. At the time, the department said SpaceX wrote in job postings and public statements that it could only hire US citizens and lawful permanent resi-

dents because of US export control laws. The department said export control laws did not impose such restrictions. SpaceX has denied wrongdoing. The company said in a November 16, 2023, court filing that export laws impose "strict limitations on who it can employ."

"SpaceX follows strict policies and procedures to both ensure compliance with all export control laws and regulations and also prevent any unlawful discrimination," the company said. SpaceX sued to block the administrative complaint, which would be heard in-house by an administrative judge.

The company said DOJ administrative judges are improperly appointed by the US attorney general because they are granted powers that should be reserved only for officials appointed by the president. A judge had temporarily blocked DOJ from pursuing the case while it weighed arguments from both sides. Trump and Musk have both been critical of the powers of federal agencies, including those like DOJ with in-house enforcement proceedings.

On his first day in office, Trump declared illegal immigration a national emergency. He has stepped up deportations and issued a broad ban on asylum claims.

Parading of bodies in Gaza abhorrent, UN rights chief says

GENEVA (Reuters): The United Nations rights chief said the parading of the bodies of hostages in Gaza was abhorrent and flew in the face of international law. Hamas handed over the bodies of four hostages to the Red Cross. The coffins had been placed on a stage, with armed Hamas militants in black and camouflage uniforms surrounding the area.

The bodies of Israeli infant Kfir Bibas and his 4-

year-old brother Ariel, the two youngest captives taken by Hamas in its October 7, 2023 attack, were transported to Israel. The bodies of the children's mother Shiri Bibas and a fourth hostage, Oded Lifschitz, were also handed over, under the agreement for a ceasefire in the Israel-Hamas war in the Palestinian enclave that was reached last month.

"Under international law, any handover of the

remains of deceased must comply with the prohibition of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment, ensuring respect for the dignity of the deceased and their families", UN rights chief Volker Turk said in an emailed statement in response to Reuters questions. During the handover, one militant stood beside a poster of a man standing over coffins wrapped in Israeli flags. It read "The Return of the War = The

Return of our Prisoners in Coffins". Red Cross staff held up white screens in an attempt to conceal the coffins from the gaze of the large crowds as they were loaded into their vehicles. "These operations should be done privately out of the utmost respect for the deceased and for those left grieving," the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) said in a statement.

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Did Biden blow the best chance of preventing war in Ukraine?

THE Trump administration caused a shock on both sides of the Atlantic last week by claiming that North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) membership for Ukraine is not "a realistic outcome of a negotiated settlement" for the war there. European countries said that they were still committed to having Ukraine in NATO. European Union chief diplomat Kaja Kallas said today that there should be no agreement "about Ukraine without Ukraine."

Former US National Security Adviser John Bolton even claimed that President Donald Trump has "effectively surrendered" to Russian demands. If so, it's a surrender that former President Joe Biden reportedly made before the war even began. While publicly insisting on NATO's "open door" policy, and refusing to negotiate with Russia on the issue, Biden privately told Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy in 2021 that Ukraine wouldn't join the alliance, Zelenskyy revealed on Friday.

"My first phone call with President Biden and my first question, will we be in NATO? He said, no, no. And I said, we will see," Zelenskyy said at the Munich Security Conference in Germany last week, referring to his first conversation with Biden in April 2021. "But to be very honest, United States, they never saw us in NATO. They just spoke about it. But they really didn't want us in NATO. It's true."

Biden himself told CNN in 2023 that there is no "unanimity in NATO about whether or not to bring Ukraine into the NATO family now, at this moment, in the middle of a war." (German Chancellor Olaf Scholz said something similar last year.) But Biden also said in the CNN interview that there must be "a rational path for Ukraine to be able to qualify to be able to get into NATO" and that he refused Russian demands to close the open door policy on principle.

By Zelenskyy's account, the door was never really open, and Biden was sticking to NATO's right to do something it never really intended to do. That approach may have been the worst of both worlds. The Russian government was convinced that NATO intended to use Ukraine as a weapon against Russia, while Ukrainians themselves were left in limbo. In fact, the invitation for Ukraine to join the alliance—just not now—may have given Russia an incentive to attack as quickly as it could and drag the war out as long as possible.

"We hear that Ukraine is not ready to join NATO; we know that. At the same time, they say it's not going to join tomorrow," Russian President Vladimir Putin told reporters a week before the invasion. "But by the time they get ready for it, it may be too late for us. So we have to decide this question now, right now, in the very near future."

At the time, the Biden administration insisted that there was no need to negotiate on NATO membership, because it was irrelevant to Russian security. "We made clear to the Russians that we were willing to talk to them on issues that we thought were genuine concerns they have that were legitimate in some way, I mean arms control type things of that nature," Biden administration official Derek Chollet said in an April 2022 interview, two months after the invasion began. He argued that the war "was not about NATO" and "NATO is not a threat to Russia."

Officials on both sides of the Atlantic later admitted that Ukraine in NATO really was Putin's issue. US Director of National Intelligence Avril Haines told Congress in May 2023 that Russia's "immediate ambitions" were "ensuring that Ukraine will never become a NATO ally." NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg told the European Parliament in September 2023 that Putin had sent him a document asking for "no more NATO enlargement" as "a precondition for not invade [sic] Ukraine" a few months before the war.

NATO leaders have argued that closing the open door would infringe on Ukraine's sovereign right to "choose its own destiny." But an alliance is a two-way street. Every NATO member is committed to defending every other NATO member, which is why accepting new members requires a unanimous vote within the alliance. Committing French or American troops to defend Ukraine was never a Ukrainian decision alone. After three years of war, Ukraine is less independent than it ever had been. Russia has not only conquered but also formally annexed large chunks of Ukrainian land. Ukraine is now dependent on foreign aid just to keep the state running, not to mention an estimated \$486 billion in future reconstruction costs. Although the US and European countries are planning to provide Ukraine with a "security guarantee" after the war, it would come in the form of foreign peace-keeping troops rather than NATO membership on equal terms.

The war has not really been a victory for Russia, either. The possibility of having a friendly, docile Ukraine on Russia's borders is gone for good. With NATO countries' help, Ukraine has bombed inside Russia (including today) and even captured Russian territory. Putin's warnings became a self-fulfilling prophecy. Across the region, Finland and Sweden have both joined NATO in response to the war. Of course, the greatest cost comes in the scores of Ukrainians and Russians who were killed or permanently maimed. Casualty rates are a state secret in both countries, but independent estimates show that around 100,000 Ukrainians and 150,000 Russians had been killed by the end of November 2024. Every one of those deaths was a tragedy and a waste.

Putting Ukraine's future NATO membership on the table might not have been enough to avert war. Russia's demands on NATO and Ukraine may have proven impossible to satisfy in the end. But refusing to even discuss the central issue—essentially giving up before even trying—guaranteed that the war would break out. The fact that the United States did not even want Ukraine in NATO makes this stubbornness all the more wasteful.

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What China fears most about Trump's turn toward Russia

Simone McCarthy

US President Donald Trump's push to end the war in Ukraine appears poised to hand key concessions to Russia, leaving Kyiv and its European supporters on the sidelines as they face the prospect of a peace deal made over their heads.

But they aren't the only major players grappling with the fallout of Trump's pivot to Russia that has upended years of US foreign policy in a burst of rapid-fire diplomacy. In Beijing, too, the breakneck turn of events is seen to be raising questions about how the US peace drive will impact Chinese leader Xi Jinping's carefully wrought partnership with Russian President Vladimir Putin - and China's precarious relations with the Trump administration.

Just weeks ago, China appeared set for a key role in Trump's Ukraine peace efforts. The US leader had repeatedly suggested he could work with Xi, using China's economic sway over Russia to help end the conflict - important leverage for Beijing as it aims to avert a trade war with the world's largest economy. That would have aligned with Beijing's longstanding efforts to present itself as a neutral party and voice of the Global South that is ready to broker peace in the grinding conflict - even as NATO accused it of supplying Moscow's defense industry with dual-use goods. China defends its "normal trade."

Now, Beijing finds itself neither involved in the negotiations as a Russian ally nor a voice of global gravitas - so far, at least, left on the outside of the swift developments that observers say have surprised Chinese officials - and sent them scrambling to find an upside. The stakes are high for Xi, who for years has assiduously cultivated both a personal bond with his "old friend" Putin and his country's relations with Russia - seeing his northern neighbor as a pivotal partner in a larger power struggle with the West.

The Chinese leader took a calculated risk as Russian tanks rolled over the Ukrainian border three

years ago. His choice not to condemn that invasion and have his country serve as Putin's lifeline - lapping up Russian oil and supplying Moscow with key goods - lost Beijing the trust of Europe and galvanized American allies in Asia to work more closely with NATO. Chinese officials in recent days have voiced approval of the "agreement" between the US and Russia to start peace talks. "China supports all efforts conducive to peace talks," top diplomat Wang Yi said at a meeting of the United Nations Security Council Tuesday, the same day top Russian and US officials met in Saudi Arabia to lay the groundwork for negotiations on ending the fighting in Ukraine.

But comments from American officials in recent days are likely to have drawn attention from Beijing to potential underlying US objectives as it works with Russia. Top US diplomat Marco Rubio named the possibility for future "geopolitical and economic cooperation" between Washington and Moscow as among four key points discussed in Riyadh.

Days earlier, the Trump administration's Russia-Ukraine envoy Keith Kellogg told a panel discussion in Munich that the US hoped "to force" Putin into actions he was "uncomfortable with," which could include disrupting Russia's alliances with Iran, North Korea - and China.

Observers are skeptical that Washington could shatter the Russia-China relationship, given their deep alignment against the US-led order and Moscow's entrenched economic dependence on Beijing. But any worries that may be playing out in China about whether Trump - a leader who's repeatedly professed his admiration for both Putin and Xi - could unwind their bond is likely underscored by the echoes of past mistrust between the neighbors. Bitter territorial disputes along their lengthy shared border erupted in conflict between Soviet Russia and a young People's Republic of China in 1969 and were only largely resolved in the

1990s.

Then there's the diplomatic coup engineered by President Richard Nixon and his adviser Henry Kissinger, who exploited a split between the Communist-ruled neighbors to establish relations with Beijing and swing the Cold War balance of power in the US' favor. Though that history is unlikely to be repeated, observers say even a hint of a new shift in allegiances is a boon for Washington's goals. "Even if it's just 30% of a reverse Nixon" ... that's going to sow the seeds of doubt," said Yun Sun, director of the China Program at the Stimson Center think tank in Washington. "That's going to make Xi Jinping question the strategic alignment that (he spent) the past 12 years to build with Russia - maybe it's not that dependable, maybe it's not so solid."

If a day comes that China decides to invade Taiwan then, "the Chinese will have to look at their back and wonder - what is Russia going to do?" she added, referring to the self-ruling democratic island Beijing claims. "And for the United States, that's deterrence." But others say Beijing may have greater confidence in its ties with Moscow. "Chinese and Russian relations are in a league of their own, they have a strong basis and strong institutional connections in the past decades," said Yu Bin, a senior fellow at the Russian Studies Center of the East China Normal University in Shanghai.

Yu pointed to the two countries' efforts to push for multilateralism and build out their own international organizations like BRICS and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, as well as the need to maintain their own border stability. "I don't think either side would let that go because Trump is there for four years," he said. Instead, China is worried "that once Russia and the US patch up their differences and achieve some degree of peace in Ukraine, that would free the Trump administration to turn its focus to China," Yu said.

US Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth signaled as much last week, when he told European counterparts the US can't focus primarily on security on their continent when it must prioritize "detering war with China." Had Trump been unable to engage Putin directly, Beijing may have tried to ease some frictions with the US by working with Washington on bringing the Russian leader to the table - but now it's unclear whether China will take any role in future Ukraine peace negotiations.

However, observers say that if an accord is reached, Beijing could send peace-keeping forces to Ukraine via the United Nations and would be keen to play a role in the country's reconstruction. For now, Chinese officials have used a flurry of diplomacy in recent days to try and win back love lost with Europe - calling in public statements for "all relevant parties and stakeholders involved in the Ukraine crisis" to "engage in the peace talks process," in a nod to Europe's right to a seat at the table. At the same time, they've also looked to play up their potential to take a role, while implying that Trump's apparent turn to Putin proves Beijing's stance was correct all along.

Meanwhile, Ukraine, has raised the prospect that it could try and recruit China as its own ally. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, who has received little attention from Beijing since the start of the war, suggested as much following a Saturday meeting between top Chinese diplomat Wang and Ukrainian officials in Germany. "It is important for us to engage China to help put pressure on Putin to end the war. We are seeing, I think, for the first time, China's interest," Zelenskyy told a news conference Tuesday. "This is mostly due to the fact that all the processes are now accelerating." As to who should be at the negotiating table, the Ukrainian leader added it should be countries "ready to take responsibility for guaranteeing security, providing assistance, stopping Putin, and investing in Ukraine's recovery," CNN

Tired of winning?

Jonathan Sweet & Mark Toth

DURING the 2016 presidential campaign and again in the 2024 campaign, then-candidate Donald Trump repeatedly told the American public they would win so much, they would be "sick and tired of winning." Who would have thought America would have become "tired of winning" so early in Trump's second term?

It certainly seems that way when it comes to the US supporting a winning plan in Ukraine. Russia is dictating the terms, while the Trump administration appears to be obliging in order to get a deal done. Team Trump is dangerously out of sync and desperately needs a reset or it risks getting played by Russian President Vladimir Putin. One month into Trump's second term, his administration has already "bent the knee" to Putin on three key demands: NATO membership, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's legitimacy and presence during negotiations, and the retention of the four illegally and partially occupied annexed oblasts in September 2022 - Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhzhia and Kherson - and Crimea in March 2014.

And negotiations have not even begun in earnest yet. That is not winning - that is capitulation, also known as losing. As we warned might happen last week, Team Trump appears to have become lost in a "fog" of its own making. Troubling ill-advised concessions, as a result, inexplicably became an overarching White House mindset. Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth told the Ukraine Defense Contact Group on February 12 in Brussels, "We must start by recognizing that returning to Ukraine's pre-2014 borders is an unrealistic objective. ... The US does not believe that NATO membership for Ukraine is a realistic outcome of a negotiated settlement. ... There will not be US troops deployed to Ukraine."

Keith Kellogg, Trump's envoy for Ukraine, doubled down on Hegseth's "unrealistic objective" comment by adding, "I think there will be a certain agreement on the potential loss of territory." It was as if the Trump administration were negotiating with itself. Putin was already sensing blood in the water. During a January 28 interview with state TV channel Rossiya 1, he reiterated his claim that Zelenskyy is "illegitimate" and said that he has no right to sign any documents in potential peace negotiations. The Russian president continued saying, "Negotiations can be held with anyone, but due to [Zelenskyy's] illegitimacy he has no right to sign anything." Then on February 15, sensing weakness in Washington, Moscow hammered it home during a TASS interview with the pro-Putin former Ukrainian parliamentarian Viktor Medvedchuk to reiterate the Kremlin's false narrative about Zelenskyy's illegitimacy. The next day, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov doubled down on that message, saying, "Ukraine thus lacks sovereignty."

Secretary of State Marco Rubio, along with National Security Adviser Michael Waltz and US Envoy to the Middle East Steve Witkoff, began bilateral meetings with their Russian counterparts, consisting of Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and Russian Aide to the President Yuri Ushakov, in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, on Tuesday. The goal is to end the war in Ukraine. Absent,

however, were Kellogg, Zelenskyy, European leaders and NATO.

It is hard to have negotiations to end a war when the country invaded, and the NATO alliance supporting its defense, are not represented at the table. Zelenskyy told NBC's "Meet the Press" on Sunday that he "will never accept any decisions between the US and Russia about Ukraine" if Ukraine does not participate in those negotiations. Granted, this was just the opening round - a condition setter for future discussions. But the negotiations cannot solely be about what is in America's best interest. That is the perception, and Rubio's comment that "the US will be ready to engage Kyiv and European partners in the settlement process at later stages" only strengthens that narrative. Dictating terms to your allies is a bad look. Team Trump should have learned that lesson from the Biden administration's dealings with Ukraine and Israel. Dictating elections in Ukraine after a peace agreement is signed should be a non-starter. That would only validate Russian allegations that the Ukrainian government is illegitimate. How would the US guarantee Russia will not try to influence the election to emplace pro-Russia government? One need only look at recent elections in Moldova and Georgia - and arguably the US - to understand this threat.

Russia sought additional concessions during their initial meeting. Lavrov told the American delegation that "Moscow would not accept the deployment of NATO troops in Ukraine, whatever flag they were under." He also said there was "high interest" in lifting economic barriers between the US and Russia. Given all of the above, it certainly seems Team Trump is capitulating to Putin's negotiation demands. Putin is setting conditions to win; Team Trump is in a rush to bring the war to a conclusion and "stop the killing," whatever the cost. But the strategic cost would be high. The US is a founding member of NATO - a defensive alliance formed to deter Russian aggression in Europe. Trump's "America First" mantra does not mean NATO, Ukraine and Europe second. In terms of national security, the two go together.

It was Gen. George Patton who told us that "Americans love a winner and will not tolerate a loser. Americans play to win all the time." Team Trump is on the path to losing in Ukraine. The end state cannot be the easy wrong - in this case, throwing Ukraine and Europe under the bus to stop the war - versus the difficult right, enabling Ukraine to win the war. Nor does Trump have any business blaming NATO or Ukraine for the war in the first place, as he did Tuesday evening. That is not winning. That is loser behavior, to borrow from the president's own vocabulary. There has never been a plan to win the war in Ukraine - not under the Biden administration, not drafted by NATO and not by the Trump administration. Throwing money, weapons and ammunition at the problem without a plan has only prolonged a war that Ukraine could still win. Putin is at his absolute weakest, yet Team Trump forges ahead with peace plans that benefit only Russia and threaten the long-term security of Ukraine and Europe. The war may stop, but the killing will continue. Russia will erase the Ukrainian identity by a different means.

The Hill

In Germany, politicians hiding the truth

Paul Taylor

THE candidates to lead Germany's next government are avoiding telling voters painful truths before Sunday's crucial general election about Russia's war in Ukraine, the coming disengagement of the US from Europe and the huge defence funding that is needed. Instead, the debate has largely focused on how to revive the ailing German economy after two years of recession and how to control migration, which has fuelled support for the far-right Alternative für Deutschland.

The conservative CDU/CSU leader, Friedrich Merz, has swerved speaking about the need for massive borrowing to pay for a surge in defence spending because many of his supporters oppose extra debt. The Social Democratic (SPD) chancellor, Olaf Scholz, is dodging discussion of sending German troops to Ukraine as part of a possible European

security force if a ceasefire agreement is reached because part of his political base is either anti-militarist or Russia-friendly. After an emergency European summit on Ukraine in Paris on Monday, an irritable Scholz said talk of boots on the ground was "highly inappropriate".

Neither of the main contenders to run Europe's largest economy dares tell the domestic electorate just how dire Germany's security situation is looking, now that Donald Trump is pursuing a quick deal with Vladimir Putin - apparently largely on Moscow's terms - to stop the fighting in Ukraine and draw down US forces from Europe.

"Nobody wants to get caught speaking the truth before the election," says Jan Techau, a former defence ministry speechwriter who is now director of Europe at the consultancy Eurasia Group. "In the worst-case scenario, if Trump pulls off this deal with

Putin and carves up Europe into spheres of influence, Germany is very exposed."

Unlike France and the UK, Germany does not have its own nuclear deterrent, and its armed forces are rusty and understaffed after three decades of self-disarmament since the fall of the Berlin Wall. It is struggling to fully equip a brigade of 5,000 troops to deploy in Lithuania as part of Nato's deterrent presence.

Scholz declared a Zeitenwende (turning point) within days of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 and created a 100bn (£82bn) special fund to buy defence equipment. But he failed to follow up and convince Germans that times have truly changed and that the country must shed its postwar aversion to all things military. While military and intelligence officials say Russia could be ready to attack a Nato country by

2030, experts say it will take decades for Germany to fix its forces at the current rate.

Even the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine has not created a sense of urgency in Germany - a sense that time to rebuild the military is not infinite," says Thomas Kleine-Brockhoff of the German Council on Foreign Relations. The Kiel Institute for the World Economy has calculated that, at the current procurement pace, it would take nearly 100 years until the army had as many artillery howitzers as it possessed in 2004.

When the special fund runs out at the end of 2027, it will leave a 30bn a year budget hole just to keep defence spending at Nato's current target of 2% of GDP. It will take almost double that amount to reach the likely objective of 3% or more, which allied leaders are expected to set in June. If Trump starts pulling US

troops out of Europe, the bill will rise even higher.

Merz has said if he wins the election, he will start by cutting wasteful welfare spending and kickstart economic growth with tax cuts before considering extra borrowing. He has hinted that he is open to reforming the constitutional "debt brake" that severely limits government deficits to create more fiscal space for defence investment, and perhaps even to joint borrowing with European partners to fund common defence equipment.

The conservative frontrunner has blasted Scholz for his lack of leadership in the EU and has vowed to restore Germany's damaged relations with France and Poland, work more closely with the UK and take a lead in Europe's response to the war in Ukraine. Unlike Scholz, he supports supplying Kyiv with long-requested Taurus medium-range missiles able to hit targets inside Russia, subject to agreement among

European partners. A close parliamentary colleague says Merz is deeply pro-European and Atlanticist, and understands that Germany will have to borrow fast to boost defence.

However, the real questions are whether he will have sufficient political capital to borrow massively for defence and to fix Germany's broken infrastructure; whether he will have the parliamentary super-majority needed to reform the debt brake; whether he has the sense of urgency that has been largely missing during the past three years of centre-left government; and how far his likely SPD coalition partners will let him go in squeezing welfare to pay for defence.

By failing to prepare public opinion for the coming storm, Merz is storing up trouble for himself when the time comes, very soon, to make wrenching choices on public spending and borrowing.

The reasons why America has abandoned democracy

Andrew Mitrovica

THIS is Donald Trump's latest lie: He is a student of history. A few days ago, an emboldened US president shared this cryptic message with his gullible followers and, by depressing extension, a world already exhausted only weeks after his jarring return to the Oval Office. "He who saves his Country does not violate any law," Trump posted on X. The quote's provenance is unclear. But it resembles one attributed to Napoleon Bonaparte, by way of actor Rod Steiger who portrayed the messianic, self-appointed emperor of the French in the 1970 film, Waterloo.

Since Trump does not read books and likely avoids watching movies where he hasn't made a forgettable cameo, I suspect that co-president Elon Musk or some other sycophant whispered the pithy saying into his tin ear. Napoleon's admonition would, of course, be attractive to a strutting autocrat like Trump who is convinced that by divine right and intervention he, as president, is immune from prosecution and the law's restraints.

Still, Trump ought to have reached for French King Louis XIV's infamous declaration - "L'Etat, c'est moi" (The state, it is me) - better to describe his naked effort to erase even the, by now, performative features of America's atrophied "democracy". With his blizzard of chaotic words and deeds, Trump has made it plain that he never intended to abide by the oath to "preserve, protect and defend" the US Constitution or entertain the other two equal branches of government - Congress and the courts - that he treats with derision and contempt.

Trump is governing as he always wanted to govern - more potentate than president - doing as he pleases, when he pleases, free of fear and uninhibited by the damaging conse-

quences. If public opinion polls are a reliable measure, most Americans appear happy to discard the frayed remnants of the "democratic experiment" in the misguided belief that Trump - the swaggering strongman - will deliver them and their angry, ailing home from real or imagined foreign and domestic enemies. The persistent question is why so many Americans have thrown in their lot - with a missionary fervour - behind a blustering charlatan who considers the egalitarian ideals that triggered a revolution and the birth of a republic as irritating, anachronistic nuisances.

I believe that most Americans have abandoned democracy because democracy has abandoned most Americans. The pervasive patriotic symbols - the billowing-in-the-breeze stars and stripes, the hand-on-heart pledge of allegiance, the sometimes-soaring renditions of the Star-Spangled Banner - can no longer sustain the stubborn myth of America that the gilded few serve at the behest and in the interests of the less fortunate many. By my count there were at least four precipitating events that, combined, exposed finally this calculated pantomime and made, perhaps, Trump's emergence as America's defining political, if not cultural, force inevitable by prompting millions of Americans, including a good share of thoughtful citizens, to sour on the supposed profits and promise of democracy.

The lie at the core of America's phantom democracy was laid bare by the fabrications concocted and repeated with obdurate certainty by President George W Bush and evangelical company, including the entire US establishment in the White House, Congress and much of a war-giddy press. The fiction that Saddam Hussein had stockpiled and was poised to unleash weapons of mass

destruction led to a calamitous invasion in 2003 of Iraq that disfigured a sovereign country and killed countless innocents.

Rather than heeding the warnings, the gilded few dismissed the demonstrations of dissent by the enlightened many as the act of quislings who preferred to coddle a tyrant rather than confront him. The so-called "checks and balances" designed, in theory, to thwart Bush's catastrophic misadventure were, instead, marshalled to quash defiance - big and small - and empower a rogue regime bent on "regime change" elsewhere.

Bush and several unrepentant co-architects of this century's signature geopolitical debacle have prospered or are enjoying comfortable retirements. Meanwhile, the scores of Americans in uniform who did the invading, fighting, maiming, killing and dying have been largely forgotten.

The flooding swallowed homes and the livelihoods of mostly poor people who sought refuge on rooftops. There were more than 1,400 deaths. Amid the epochal destruction, the living were obliged to fend for themselves in desperate search of shelter, food, and water. By way of instructive contrast, Bush rushed in 2008 to the rescue of the profit-by-any-means-necessary bankers on Wall Street and beyond who engineered, in effect, a nationwide Ponzi scheme that triggered the near-collapse of America's greed-fueled economy built on a sandy foundation known as the sub-prime-mortgage (racket) crisis. When the enormous bill came due, Americans paid in full to staunch the metastasizing contagion that threatened the whole, decrepit house of cards.

All told, besieged taxpayers bankrolled \$7.7 trillion in "emer-

gency loans" to save a host of teetering banks from foreclosure while they struggled to stave off predatory creditors and make meagre ends meet during the "Great Recession" that lasted for two arduous years. Bush, a lifelong member of the gilded few, confirmed that his job was to protect his dear friends and enablers whatever the burden or cost the many were expected to endure or assume.

That shining, eloquent avatar of the resurgent Democratic Party, Barack Obama, capitalised on his humble roots to convince working- and middle-class Americans from coast to beleaguered coast that, unlike his craven, silver-spooned predecessor, he was the "everyman" they were yearning for. Alas, Obama understood that like Bush, his principal task was to ingratiate, not alienate, the prosperous powers-that-be who made him president.

Obama's trite, self-serving clarion call, "Yes, we can," was a cynical ruse meant to dupe Americans into believing that he was an ardent ally of the "we" and not the mendacious magnates. The practised facade dropped when it became apparent that the Obama administration refused to pursue seriously, let alone charge, any of the criminals-in-custom-tailored-suits responsible for the systemic fraud that produced such loss, heartache, and suffering among working- and middle-class Americans.

Obama's shameful failure was proof of America's two-tiered "justice system" that condemned the destitute and insulated the rich. In this contemptuous context, it's only mildly surprising that milked and manipulated Americans have sought salvation from a demagogue who offers easy, instant answers to hard, ornery problems. Disappointment is sure to follow.

Trump's extremist border policies part of a global authoritarian moment

Andonea Dickson, Thom Tyerman

ON January 29, United States President Donald Trump signed an executive memorandum instructing his government to expand detention capacity at Guantánamo Bay's Migrant Operations Center. Speaking before the signing, Trump claimed the proposed 30,000 beds were necessary for "eradicating the scourge of migrant crime" and would hold "the worst criminal illegal aliens threatening the American people" whom the US did not "trust" would not seek to return if deported.

This came amid an onslaught of anti-migrant executive orders, including the Laken Riley Act, requiring the Department of Homeland Security to detain non-US nationals arrested, but not necessarily found guilty, for burglary, theft, larceny or shoplifting, thereby denying many migrants access to due process.

As extreme as these policies are, and even as they seem indicative of a present authoritarian moment, they are not unique to Trump nor to the US. Nor are they without historical precedent.

For decades, the US, the United Kingdom, and Australia have been experimenting with offshore detention abroad and increasing criminalisation of migrants at home. Tracing how these policies have evolved together, circulated across all three countries, coming in and out of favour, reveals how the roots of this current authoritarian moment in world politics go deeper than any one state, party, or political perspective. Rather, their roots lie in racialised carceral violence that gets continuously recycled and amplified through nation-state borders.

The US experiment with offshore detention began in the 1980s, with the opening of a detention centre in Fort Allen, Puerto Rico, and the introduction of "interdiction" policies which sought to intercept and return predominantly Haitian asylum seekers at sea to prevent them from reaching the US. In the 1990s, these policies were expanded with the naval base situated on Guantánamo Bay, used to detain 36,000 Haitian and 20,000 Cuban people seeking asylum between 1991 and 1996.

Shortly after, in 2001, the Australian government introduced the so-called Pacific Solution, which saw Nauru and Manus Island in Papua New Guinea incorporated into an elaborate architecture of offshore detention. These centres became marred by reports of human rights violations and extensive evidence of abuse and cruelty, yet the Pacific Solution persists to this day and was seen as a model to emulate by British governments.

The previous Conservative cabinet drew directly from Australia's offshore policy to design a plan to deport people seeking asylum to Rwanda. Although the plan was shelved when Keir Starmer's Labour Party came to power in 2024, he too has looked to Italy's off-shoring in Albania as a possible model to emulate.

In all these countries, the offshore infrastructure and related deterrent logic persist even when political vicissitudes dictate a shift away from incarcerating people offshore. Thus, in Australia, when the first iteration of the Pacific Solution was terminated in 2007, the physical spaces and legal framework of off-shoring remained intact, allowing for this policy to be easily reinvigorated and hardened with the Pacific Solution 2.0 in 2012.

When the Australian government moved the last person out of the Nauru detention centre in 2023, they never terminated their corporate contracts, allowing the centre to be repopulated with people seeking asylum only months later. One of the major effects of offshore detention is to exclude detainees territorially and therefore legally from ordinary rights and protections, as well as to isolate them from the support of community and advocacy networks. This is mirrored domestically by the growing criminalisation of migrants.

By creating new migration-related crimes, man-

dating the detention and deportation of noncitizens with criminal convictions, and removing avenues for appeal or representation, states have constructed an increasingly illegalised population without rights. At the same time, they have elided migration and criminality in public debate.

This sets the scene for politicians to compete with one another by offering deterrence through ever-expanding detention as the only possible solution, especially during election campaigns.

The US example of the 1996 Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act shows this clearly. Passed in the run-up to a presidential election, IIRIRA expanded the definition of "aggravated felon" and the scope of deportable noncitizens

alised in our societies. Harm and abandonment are fundamental to the international systems of immigration detention, not accidental by-products produced by a lack of monitoring or rogue individuals or corporations. Harm and abandonment are "by design". They are necessary features of coercive detention and deportation systems fuelled by political and financial profits built on this harm.

Yet, the violence and injustices of detention are constantly resisted. Around the world, protests, strikes, riots, and jailbreaks by detained people have been met with solidarity by civil rights campaigners, grassroots activists, faith groups, community organisers, lawyers, families and friends.

Conditions, abuses, judgements, and laws have

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One of the major effects of offshore detention is to exclude detainees territorially and therefore legally from ordinary rights and protections, as well as to isolate them from the support of community and advocacy networks. This is mirrored domestically by the growing criminalisation of migrants. By creating new migration-related crimes, mandating the detention and deportation of noncitizens with criminal convictions, and removing avenues for appeal or representation, states have constructed an increasingly illegalised population without rights. At the same time, they have elided migration and criminality in public debate. This sets the scene for politicians to compete with one another by offering deterrence through ever-expanding detention as the only possible solution, especially during election campaigns. The US example of the 1996 Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act shows this clearly. Passed in the run-up to a presidential election, IIRIRA expanded the definition of "aggravated felon" and the scope of deportable noncitizens (including retroactively).
.....

(including retroactively). The Act established close cooperation between immigration enforcement and local police, massively increasing detention and deportation figures and the militarisation of the US-Mexico border. Today, Trump's executive orders, and claims of defending against an "invasion" by "criminal illegal aliens", are an intensification of this existing system and its racialised logics of deterrence.

Like a carceral boomerang, this system of criminalising and incarcerating people who are seeking dignified life ricochets between its onshore and offshore incarnations within countries, as well as between countries. This criminalisation intensifies during election cycles, when borders become spectacles of political strength, with parties across political divides using tough on migration narratives to evidence their ability to govern the nation and to distract from failures in health services, housing, welfare, employment and more.

The past 12 months have been no exception, with elections in the UK and the US and now an impending election in Australia. Each of these elections has pivoted around a gross expansion of policy proposals for off-shoring detention, the deportation of large swaths of people, and the undermining, if not death, of our international protection regime. As the politicisation of migration continues, the goalsposts of what is deemed acceptable move ever towards the right, leading to policies that offer greater restrictions on rights and promise more harms.

This spectacle of cruelty also distracts from another failure - the very failure of these restrictive policies and the profound absence of political leadership on migration. What research shows again and again is how these policies do not deter people from arriving, but instead further harm people already margin-

been challenged, raids resisted, bonds posted, sanctuary policies passed, border enforcement agencies defunded, and local networks built to shut down detention sites and support people at risk of detention. This resistance and solidarity was demonstrated in a 23-day protest led by men incarcerated in the Manus Island detention centre, following the announcement of its closure in 2017, when Papua New Guinea ruled it unconstitutional. Despite intimidation by security forces intensifying and their access to food, water, and electricity being cut off, the men peacefully fought for freedom in place of re-incarceration in new sites, drawing on their ties to local Manusian communities and Australian advocates, while communicating their plight to an international audience.

The documented treatment of those held in offshore sites speaks to an authoritarianism in migration governance, one which promises to affect citizens and noncitizens alike. As Behrouz Boochani, poet, journalist, and former prisoner of Australia's immigration detention centre in Manus, describes in his book Freedom, Only Freedom: "The refugees have identified and exposed the face of an emerging twenty-first-century dictatorship and fascism, a dictatorship and fascism that will one day creep into Australian society and into people's homes like a cancer."

In the US, as elsewhere, grassroots coalitions between people with lived experience of detention and abolitionist organisers built over decades of struggle formed the basis of resistance under Trump 1.0, and they will do so again. For it is those bearing the brunt of the carceral state's attacks - and not the corporate liberalism of mainstream "left-wing" parties - that pose the strongest opposition and alternative to our present authoritarian moment.

Aljazeera

Russia-US meeting in Riyadh more than an icebreaker

Dr. Abdel Aziz Aluwaisheg

THE meeting held in Riyadh on Tuesday has turned out to be more than an ice-breaker. It was already significant as the first high-level meeting between Russia and the US since January 2022, when former Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Russia's Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov met in Geneva, a few weeks before the war broke out, but they failed to avert it.

By contrast the outcomes of the Riyadh meeting went beyond expectations. It took place in the offices of Saudi Arabia's Foreign Ministry and lasted more than four hours. The fact that it was held in the Kingdom showcases the country's diplomatic credentials and its efforts to achieve peace between Russia and Ukraine.

In a statement issued earlier this month, Saudi Arabia recalled that those efforts began at the start of the Ukraine crisis. This was when Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman called both President Vladimir Putin and President Volodymyr Zelensky on March 3, 2022, to offer the Kingdom's good offices to reach a political solution. After the Riyadh meeting, US Secretary of State Marco Rubio said the Kingdom was playing an "indispensable role" by bringing the parties together, expressing hope that it would continue this effort.

At the Tuesday meeting, Saudi Arabia's Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan facilitated the talks together with National Security Advisor Dr. Musaad Al-Aiban, the seasoned minister who is described as the man for difficult missions. On the US side there was

also a high-powered team led by Rubio, a former senator, on his first trip to Saudi Arabia. National Security Adviser Mike Waltz, who is also a former lawmaker from Florida, was on the team. Probably the closest to President Donald Trump was his Special Envoy to the Middle East Steve Witkoff, a real estate magnate known for successful dealmaking.

Outside of family, there is no one more trusted by Trump as Witkoff, CNN has reported. He was instrumental in getting the Israel-Hamas deal done even before Trump took office and his remit has now expanded to the Russia-Ukraine war. Lavrov, the veteran diplomat since the days of the USSR, led the Russian side, together with Kirill Dmitriev, who was born in Kyiv, Ukraine, studied at Harvard Business School, and began his career with stints at Goldman Sachs and McKinsey & Company. He has managed large private equity funds and completed a series of landmark transactions for Russia. He now heads the Russian Direct Investment Fund and is a confidante of Putin.

Following the meeting, Rubio said they agreed on four points. Firstly, to re-establish the "functionality of our respective missions in Washington and in Moscow," to facilitate progress. Secondly, the appointment of a high-level team to help negotiate an end to the conflict in Ukraine "in a way that's enduring and acceptable to all the parties engaged." Thirdly, to begin to discuss both the geopolitical and eco-

nomic cooperation that could result from an end to the conflict in Ukraine. Fourthly, they agreed to remain engaged at the same high level to "make sure that it's moving along in a productive way," Rubio said.

Waltz stressed the need for a permanent and quick end to the war, which has "turned into a meat grinder of people on both sides," revealing that as a "practical reality," there was going to be some discussion of territory, not ruling out possible concessions. Rubio indicated there would be sanctions relief. Witkoff described the talks as "positive, upbeat, constructive ... solution-based." He added: "We couldn't have imagined a better result after this session. It was very, very solid." The Riyadh meeting came just a week after Trump spoke to Putin telephonically. And Lavrov said after the talks the sides agreed to fast-track the appointment of new ambassadors and "lifting artificial barriers to the work of the US and Russian embassies and other missions." The two sides agreed to set up high-level working groups to begin exploring a negotiated end to the conflict. It was not immediately clear when these teams would first meet, but both said it would be soon.

For the main objective of this effort - ending the war - a high-level team from the two countries will begin to engage with the Russian side on "parameters of what an end to this conflict would look like." On the idea of a peacekeeping mission in Ukraine, Lavrov said Moscow

would not accept any troops from NATO members, stressing that Ukraine's bid to join the alliance was a major security issue.

Lavrov said: "We explained that the deployment of troops from the countries that are NATO members, even if they are deployed under the EU or national flags, will not change anything and will certainly be unacceptable for us." But he seemed to imply the possibility of a UN force. The presence of Witkoff and Dmitriev at the Riyadh talks is indicative of the two sides' ambition to move from the current crisis to a close economic relationship. Dmitriev told reporters that Russia and the US should develop joint energy and other ventures, including in the Arctic and other regions.

And Rubio said that once the Ukraine conflict was brought to an end, it could open "incredible opportunities" to partner with Russia "on issues that hopefully will be good for the world and also improve our relations in the long term." Realistically, there could be difficult hurdles before these ambitious ideas materialize. First, the US needs to persuade Zelensky and its NATO and EU allies of the value of its diplomatic approach to the crisis. Aware of this need, Rubio said: "There's going to be engagement and consultation with Ukraine, with our partners in Europe, and others. He did not specify dates but remarked that Trump was "not patient in terms of getting action." He drives. He drives hard. He wants to get things done. He's been wanting to do this, and he's moving very quickly."

Arab News

Let's be clear - US never had moral supremacy

Owen Jones

DONALD Trump's attempt to seize Ukraine's natural resources is another morbid symptom of the decline of US power. This may seem counterintuitive. Demanding half of all the revenues - not simply profit - flowing from Ukraine's minerals, oil, gas and infrastructure, worth a staggering £400bn, sounds like the behaviour of a bully defined by swagger and brawn. It has rightly been described as reducing Ukraine to the status of an economic colony of the US.

But it epitomises the total discarding of one of the three central pillars of US hegemony. The first was military supremacy. This was shattered by the calamities of Iraq, Afghanistan and Libya, which associated the US military with atrocities, violent chaos and humiliating strategic defeat. The US-backed defence of Ukraine can now be added to that list. The second was economic supremacy, which remains, but which was severely weakened by the 2008 financial crash and the longstanding failure of the US model to deliver a sustained rise in real wages. And the third - the remnants of which Trump is scattering to the four winds - was moral supremacy. This was always a fiction, but an important means of legitimising US dominance. It is now ash.

The US always defined itself as a land of freedom, in contrast to the tyrannies of the Old World, even though it enslaved 89% of its Black population just two lifetimes ago. When the US dabbled with European-style colonialism after the Spanish-American war, annexing the Philippines, members of the US elite founded the American

Anti-Imperialist League, warning that the US government sought to "extinguish the spirit of 1776" and "change the republic into an empire".

It proved an aberration, and the US sought more indirect means of control. When President Woodrow Wilson brought his nation into the first world war on the side of the allies in 1917, he denounced imperial Germany for abandoning the "humane practices of civilised nations" with its indiscriminate sinkings by submarines. "The world must be made safe for democracy," he declared, concluding: "A steadfast concert for peace can never be maintained except by a partnership of democratic nations."

When President Franklin Roosevelt similarly entered the second world war, he spoke loftily of "democracy's fight against world conquest". At the outset of the cold war, President Harry Truman warned that the world's people "may surrender to the false security offered so temptingly by totalitarian regimes unless we can prove the superiority of democracy". Indeed, the US and the Soviet Union presented their grand conflict, however misleadingly, as a clash of two universalist philosophies, both of which promised the liberation of all humanity: "freedom and democracy" on the one hand, and the end of capitalism and colonialism in favour of equality on the other.

Ronald Reagan was a rightwing Republican, and yet he proclaimed that the US only fought wars "to defend freedom and democracy",

that it was "a force for peace, not conquest" and "could have achieved world domination, but that was contrary to the character of our people".

Yes, all of this was founded in deceit. Claims of democracy were fatally compromised by the long-standing restriction of the rights of African Americans in the south, who had to win their rights through arduous struggle. Abroad, the US was guilty of innumerable horrors. In the 1960s and 70s, the US intervened to prop up South Vietnam's brutal military dictatorship, and carpet-bombed south-east Asia. In Cambodia alone, US bombing may have killed up to 500,000 civilians: one such campaign was named Operation Freedom Deal, underlining the Orwellian use of language to justify murderous domination.

In Latin America, the US helped instigate brutal military coups - "I don't see why we need to stand by and watch a country go communist due to the irresponsibility of its own people," said Henry Kissinger of Chile - and maintain vicious dictatorships, such as the Argentine junta.

In the Middle East, the pact with the Saudi tyrants, and the arming of Saddam Hussein, before the ruinous invasion of Iraq underlined US cynicism, and perennial support for Israel's subjugation of the Palestinians exposed US hypocrisy. That was before the US facilitated genocide, leaving its moral claims buried under rubble. Yet now Trump's open support for ethnic cleansing in Gaza and his suggestion that the US should take the land in aid of naked avarice, his

shameless desire to reduce Ukraine to a colony, even his clearly heartfelt desire to annex Canada. This is simply unapologetic brute force and greed, with no pretence to any majestic moral cause.

This leaves the western right with something of a problem. There was a rightwing jamboree in east London this week, grandly named the Alliance for Responsible Citizenship. The Daily Mail, with its usual reserve, summarised the speech of the Tory leader, Kemi Badenoch, like so: "It's time to get off our knees and start fighting for Western values." What exactly are those "values", now the lead western state - led by a man Badenoch considers a politically ally - has shed its old pretences?

The US no longer bothers to dress up its ruthless perceived self-interest in the garbs of high-minded principles. This is a major strategic mistake. These mythical moral claims helped win consent or at least acquiescence from the US public for the global projection of power: Hollywood's presentation of the US as "the good guys" taps into a self-perception that is important for many Americans. These claims also beguiled significant numbers of people around the globe, offering up natural allies for the US in each continent.

That is all dead now. And so all we are left with is a floundering superpower with depleted military prowess, a broken economic model, a crisis-ridden democracy and an openly sluggish demeanour. The fall of US power is anything but dignified.

The Guardian



IB Day 2025 celebrates excellence, growth, and innovation

F.P. Report

KARACHI: The International Baccalaureate (IB) community in Pakistan gathered at the Movenpick Hotel Grand Ballroom to celebrate IB Day 2025, an event dedicated to recognizing the impact, growth, and contributions of IB education in the country. Hosted by International Baccalaureate (IB) in collaboration with IBPAK, the event brought together educators, students, policymakers, and global IB leaders for insightful discussions, success stories, and a shared vision for the future of education in Pakistan.

The day commenced

with a warm welcome by IB students, followed by a recitation from the Holy Quran and the national anthem performed by the choir. A special video message from Mr. Olli-Pekka Heinonen, Director General of the International Baccalaureate, set the tone for the event, reaffirming IB's commitment to shaping future leaders through holistic education.

Farah Masood, Chairperson of IBPAK, provided an overview of IBPAK's initiatives, followed by an opening address from Chief Guest Makhdoom Mehboob Zaman, Minister of Rehabilitation, Government of Sindh.

Discussions on IB's growth and recognition in Pakistan were led by Uzma Shujjat, IB's Regional Manager for Africa, Europe, and the Middle East.

A keynote address by Matthew Glanville, IB's Director of Assessment, explored the role of technology in modern assessments, emphasizing innovative approaches to measuring student learning. The event also featured IB practitioners, who shared inspiring success stories, along with a special video highlighting IB's contributions to community service.

A panel discussion featuring IB educators and administrators provided

valuable insights into the program's implementation and impact in Pakistan.

The second half of the event was student-led, featuring an IB Journey presentation, a TED-style talk on inclusivity, and a Learner Profile performance. A dynamic Q&A session allowed attendees to engage directly with IB experts.

The event concluded with the presentation of mementoes and awards, followed by a thank-you note from Farah Masood.

IB Day 2025 was a testament to the growing strength of IB education in Pakistan, reaffirming its role in fostering critical thinking, global citizenship, and lifelong learning.



FAISALABAD: Federal Minister for Finance and Revenue, Senator Muhammad Aurangzeb, addressing the 3rd All Pakistan Chambers Conference.

Foster spirit of patriotism in youth essential: Bakhtawari

ISLAMABAD (APP): Secretary General of UBG (FPCCI), Zafar Bakhtawari, has stated that in order to foster the spirit of patriotism, it is essential for the youth to contribute to the development of their homeland rather than seeking their future abroad.

The educational institutions play a crucial role not only in providing academic knowledge but also in nurturing moral and social values among children, said a press release issued here on Saturday.

Speaking as the chief guest at the annual ceremony of 'The Spirit School' yesterday, he emphasized the importance of education and said that education plays a fundamental role in the progress of nations. He urged students to pursue

their studies with dedication and hard work so that the country's future can be bright.

He also stated that institutions like The Spirit School play a significant role in the academic and moral upbringing of young minds, and the efforts of teachers in providing an excellent educational environment are commendable.

Earlier, upon his arrival at the school, Zafar Bakhtawari was warmly welcomed by the school's director, Adnan Mukhtar, the principal, and teachers.

During the event, students presented engaging skits, speeches, and plays on various topics, with a particular skit highlighting the issue of water scarcity in the country, which drew

special attention from the audience.

The outstanding performances of the students were highly appreciated by the attendees.

School director Adnan Mukhtar shed light on the annual academic performance and stated that the institution is continuously striving to improve the quality of education.

He mentioned that the school's policies are based on modern educational principles, which help in refining the abilities of students. He also expressed his gratitude and happiness over the presence of the chief guest at the ceremony.

At the conclusion of the event, the chief guest, Zafar Bakhtawari, distributed awards among students who had excelled in their

examinations and appreciated the school's educational initiatives. He stated that such educational institutions are a guarantee of the country's bright future, as they focus extensively on the academic and moral training of students. Zafar Bakhtawari also expressed his commitment to continue supporting the promotion of education so that the youth of Pakistan can showcase their talents on a global level.

The Spirit School, a prominent educational initiative of the Superior School System, organized its annual event in a grand manner.

Under this project, more than 450 schools and colleges across the country are providing quality educational services.

CCP authorizes 'Nishat Hotels to acquire Hotel Margala'

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Competition Commission of Pakistan (CCP) has approved the acquisition of assets of M/s Hotel Margala Private Limited by M/s Nishat Hotels and Properties Limited.

Under the Sale and Purchase Agreement, Nishat Hotels and Properties Limited will acquire the assets of Hotel Margala, including leasehold rights to its plot on Srinagar Highway, the

entire built-up structure of the motel, fittings and fixtures, utility connections, associated deposits, and all movable property on the premises, said a press release issued here on Saturday.

As part of its competition assessment, the CCP examined potential concerns related to market dominance and the impact on competition following the merger. The relevant product market has been

defined as hospitality services, with the relevant geographic market determined to be Islamabad.

Hotel Margala, a 92-room facility, currently holds an estimated 5.46% market share in Islamabad's hospitality sector.

The transaction is horizontal in nature, as both companies operate within the hospitality sector; however, their geographic operations are distinct. Nishat Hotels and Properties

Limited primarily operates in Lahore, while Hotel Margala Private Limited is exclusively based in Islamabad.

Given the absence of a direct geographic market overlap, the transaction is unlikely to impact competitive dynamics or raise market concentration concerns. Furthermore, barriers to entry in the hospitality sector remain moderate, mitigating any potential anti-competitive effects.

Pakistanis establish over 8,000 new companies in UAE in one year

F.P. Report

DUBAI: Pakistanis have set up more than 8,000 new companies in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) over the past one year.

According to reports, a total of 47,000 Pakistani-owned businesses are now registered in the UAE.

The Dubai Chamber of Commerce

and Industry recorded the highest number of registration of new companies from Indian nationals, exceeding 16,500.

Egyptian citizens registered 5,300 new companies, followed by over 2,600 by British nationals.

Additionally, 1,718 companies were registered under Iraqi companies while Turkish citizens estab-

lished 1,314 businesses.

Pakistani Ambassador to the UAE Faissal Niaz Tirmizi stated that the growing number of Pakistani investors in the UAE was beneficial for both countries.

He emphasised that increased Pakistani business activity in Dubai would lead to higher remittances back home.

Buffett's Berkshire posts record profit on insurance, investments

WASHINGTON (Reuters): Warren Buffett's Berkshire Hathaway (BRK.A), opens new tab on Saturday posted its third straight record annual operating profit, bolstered by increases in underwriting earnings and investment income in its insurance businesses.

Much of that income came from Berkshire's enormous cash stake, which ended 2024 at a record \$334.2 billion, twice as much as a year earlier.

In his annual letter to Berkshire shareholders, Buffett assured that Berkshire would prefer investing in businesses to holding cash.

But he also said his Omaha, Nebraska-based conglomerate "did better than I expected," though 53% of its 189 operating businesses posted lower earnings.

He attributed the improvement in part to higher yields on U.S. Treasury bills, and improvement at the Geico car insurer, which benefited from improved pricing and tighter underwriting as loss rates from accidents declined.

"Those were incredible numbers," said Thomas Russo, a partner at Gardner Russo & Quinn in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, which has owned Berkshire stock since the 1980s. "You really saw the power of Berkshire's insurance operations and investments." Operating profit rose 27% to \$47.44 billion in 2024 from \$37.35 billion a year earlier.

Fourth-quarter operating profit also set a record, rising 71% to \$14.53 billion, or about \$1,010 per Class A share, from \$8.48 billion a year earlier, reflecting gains in its insurance operations and from foreign currency changes.

Quarterly net income totaled \$19.69 billion, or \$13.695 per average equivalent share, as the value of Berkshire's holdings in Apple (AAPL.O), opens new tab, American Express (AXP.N), opens new tab and other stocks increased. For the year, net income totaled \$89 billion.

SBP issues Raast participation criteria

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The State of Bank of Pakistan (SBP) has issued Raast Participation Criteria outlining minimum requirements for the entities desirous of becoming the Raast participants and have the necessary functional and technical capabilities to provide digital payment services to their customers through Raast.

Raast is a state-of-the-art instant payment system

launched by the SBP in 2021 to facilitate instant, safe and efficient transfer of funds across the country i.e. "instant payments - Pal Bhar Mein. Mulk Bhar Mein". Raast offers bulk payments facility, person-to-person (P2P) transfers, person-to-merchant (P2M) payments, and payment initiation services.

Since its launch, forty-four (44) entities including SBP Regulated and Government entities have

been on-boarded on Raast as the participants.

SBP envisages that the issuance of Raast Participation Criteria will facilitate the prospective participants in onboarding on Raast, significantly enhance the number of participants, promote digital payments, and encourage innovation and competition in the payments market. Further details available at: <https://www.sbp.org.pk/psd/2025/C1.htm>

US stocks end week with huge losses, fear index soars

NEW YORK (AA) : The New York Stock Exchange closed the last trading day of the week with sharp declines due to weak US economic data and concerns related to inflationary pressures.

Concerns that President Donald Trump's economic and trade policies may increase inflationary pressures and policy uncertainties continued.

The composite Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI), which includes manufacturing and services sectors, fell 2.3 points on a monthly basis to 50.4, and recorded its lowest in 17 months.

Citing PMI figures, Chris Williamson, chief business economist at S&P Global Market Intelligence, said the optimistic mood seen among US businesses at the beginning of the year has been replaced by uncertainty related to government policies.

Data released by the University of Michigan showed that consumer confidence fell with tariff concerns; the consumer confidence index revised downward to 64.7 in February.

Consumers' short-term inflation expectations rose from 3.3% to 4.3% in February, the highest since November 2023, and long-term also rose from 3.2% to 3.5%; it was the largest monthly increase since May 2021.

Existing home sales in the US also fell 4.9% in January.

At the beginning of the week, Trump pointed out that the tariff rate to be applied to automobiles, pharmaceuticals and chips

could be around 25%, and he would probably make an announcement on the tariffs April 2.

Trump also stated that he would add timber and forest products to the list of products he planned to impose tariffs on.

The Dow Jones Industrial Average dropped 1.69%, or 748.63 points, to end the day at 43,428.02.

The S&P 500 fell 1.71%, or 104.39 points, to 6,013.13, a historically high level.

The Nasdaq Composite was off 2.2%, or 438.36 points, to 19,524.01.

The VIX Index, also known as the "fear index," soared 16.28% to 18.21.

Reuters add: US business activity stalling, consumers' inflation expectations surge

U.S. business activity nearly stalled in February amid mounting fears over tariffs on imports and deep cuts in federal government spending, erasing all the gains notched in the aftermath of President Donald Trump's election victory.

The tumble in activity to a 17-month low reported by S&P Global on Friday was the latest in a string of surveys to suggest that businesses and consumers were becoming increasingly rattled by the Trump administration's policies.

Business and consumer sentiment soared following the Republican's November 5 victory on hopes for a less-stringent regulatory environment, tax cuts and low inflation.

"The Trump business honeymoon is over, it

seems," said Kyle Chapman, FX markets analyst at Ballinger Group.

S&P Global's flash U.S. Composite PMI Output Index, which tracks the manufacturing and services sectors, fell to 50.4 this month. That was the lowest reading since September 2023 and was down from 52.7 in January. A reading above 50 indicates expansion in the private sector.

The services sector accounted for the drop in the PMI, contracting for the first time since January 2023. Manufacturing activity rose to an eight-month high, though that was attributed to "front-running potential cost increases or supply shortages linked to tariffs."

COURT NOTICE

In the Court of Ms Malha Allaouddin Senior Civil Judge Family Court Kohat, Suit no. 212/FC Date of hearing 04-03-2025, Titled:- Mst. Shahnaz Begum Vs Azaz all Son of Hamza Ali (2)Malak Asher Hussain Son of Hamza Ali R/o Ibrahim Zai District Hangu presently R/o (now in Abroad) (Defendants) Whereas the above plaintiff has instituted a family suit of Dower against you defendants in which date of hearing 04-03-2025 is fixed for your appearance Since your intimation/service is not possible through ordinary means/mode therefore you defendants is intimated through this publication to appear before this court by person or by pleader on date fixed 04-03-2025 otherwise court shall be proceeded in accordance with law order Issued on 13-02-2025 (Court of S C.J.F.C.Kohat)



In brief

Andreeva becomes youngest WTA champion

DUBAI (AFP): Russian 17-year-old Mirra Andreeva wrapped up a fairytale week in Dubai by becoming the youngest ever WTA 1000 champion with victory over Clara Tauson on Saturday. After ousting three Grand Slam winners, including second-seeded Iga Swiatek, en route to the final, Andreeva ended Tauson's own dream run at the tournament with a 7-6 (7/1), 6-1 victory against the Dane. It was a performance that didn't just earn Andreeva a maiden WTA 1000 trophy, but also secured her top-10 debut with the Russian expected to rise to number nine when the new rankings are released on Monday. Tauson had been a giant-slayer herself this week, knocking out world number one Aryna Sabalenka on her way to the biggest final of her career. The 22-year-old entered the clash with Andreeva leading the tour with 15 match-wins so far this season. She was looking to add a second title to her tally in 2025, and fourth overall, but Andreeva had other ideas, as she overcame her big-hitting opponent in one hour and 46 minutes of all-court prowess. In the youngest WTA 1000 final since the category was introduced in 2009, Andreeva played a near-perfect opening-set tiebreak to take the lead after 60 minutes of play. She upped the ante in the second set, breaking twice for a 5-1 advantage and served out the win at the first time of asking. On Monday, Andreeva will become the first 17-year-old to be ranked in the top 10 since Nicole Pietrangeli in 2007.

Von Allmen leads Swiss 1-2-3

CRANS-MONTANA (AFP): Newly-crowned world champion Franjo Von Allmen won the men's World Cup downhill in Crans-Montana on Saturday, leading a rare Swiss sweep on home snow ahead of Marco Odermatt and Alexis Monney. Von Allmen narrowly avoided disaster as he made a shaky landing on the final jump, but the 23-year-old recovered to earn his second career World Cup win, clocking 1min 56.07sec to bump Odermatt down to second place. Odermatt, at 0.13sec, was denied an eighth win of the season but increased his lead in the overall World Cup standings to 400 points as he bids for a fourth straight crystal globe. He could further stretch his advantage in Sunday's super-G. Monney, who took downhill bronze at the world championships earlier this month, again finished third, 0.42sec behind Von Allmen, whose win followed his breakthrough triumph on the circuit in the super-G at Wengen in January. "The first World Cup victory in downhill, especially here with the home crowd and two other Swiss guys on the podium, it feels amazing," said Von Allmen, who has shot to prominence in his second season at the top level. "I had two or three little mistakes where I left my position, where the ski went not the way I wanted it to. In the end I was quite surprised that it was enough for first place." In front of a tide of red-and-white flags, Swiss skiers completed the country's first downhill 1-2-3 since March 1987 on a course that will host the next world championships in two years' time. "It's unbelievable. We've already had some special races this season with two on the podium," said Odermatt.

Inglis trumps Duckett as Australia defeat England in record chase



LAHORE: Josh Inglis celebrates his century.

Pakistan's CT next round qualification chances 'on the line'

LAHORE (APP): With Pakistan due to play against arch-rivals India in their second match of the ICC Champions Trophy 2025 at the Dubai Cricket stadium on Sunday (tomorrow), the Green Shirts must win against India otherwise the chances of Pakistan's qualification to the next round are on the line. Having lost to New Zealand by 60 runs in the tournament opener at the National Stadium, Karachi, Pakistan cricket team must earn a win against India to keep their chances alive of staying relevant in the Champions Trophy otherwise they face an early exit. Pakistan are languishing at the bottom of the points table behind Bangladesh on lower net run rate (NRR) with no points while New Zealand sit top of the table over India with a better NRR and two points from one match. Pakistan's campaign for the ICC Champions Trophy faced early set-back when in-form opening batter Saim Ayub was ruled out due to ankle injury while

Fakhar Zaman's muscular sprain further dented the chances. Fakhar Zaman's batting was hampered by injury and Pakistan could not chase the target. On the other hand, Indian cricket team is in red-hot form and overcame England 3-0 in the white-ball series in India last month as part of the ICC Men's Champions Trophy preparations. Shubman Gill was the player of series with 259 runs in three matches and hit one hundred and two 50s in the series. Shubman Gill was also player of the match in India's first match of the ICC Champions Trophy as he scored 101 not out against Bangladesh. India are without the services of their match-winner Jasprit Bumrah but Mohammad Shami has returned to the international cricket with a five wicket haul against Bangladesh while the rookie pacer Harshit Rana is firing on all cylinders. Pakistan are under pressure to win while they will further be tested by the presence of a huge Indian fan support at the Dubai

International Cricket Stadium (DICS) but the mettle of individuals and team is tested under pressure. A Pakistan-India contest provides the right platform to test one's skills. A Pakistan-India match also provided an opportunity to the cricketers to become a hero overnight. Score a big hundred or give a commanding bowling performance and become a hero for eternity. Who knows Babar Azam, Salman Agha can etch their names in the minds of the cricket fans through a scintillating performance or Shaheen Shah Afridi, Haris Rauf or Naseem Shah can turn the tables on India. It is do or die situation for Pakistan and they must win their last two group A matches with big margins to keep their chances of playing the second semifinal of the Champions Trophy at the iconic Gaddafi stadium. In case Pakistan lose against India, it is not only the Champions Trophy title but position of many players is on the line.

Cross Country Championships on Sunday

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Cross Country Championships 2025, will be held in here at the Fatima Jinnah Park (F-9) Islamabad on Sunday. Speaking at a press conference here at Pakistan Sports Complex Chairman South Asian SAAF Maj Gen. (R) Mohammad Akram Sahi lauded the preparations for SAAF cross country by Local Organizing Committee (LOC), headed by Brig Sultan Mehmood Satti, (R), Chairman Islamabad Athletics Association (IAA). The event is being conducted under the auspices of Athletics Federation of Pakistan (AFP), he said. Meanwhile, Satti said this is the first time in 77 years that SAAF Cross Country is being held in Pakistan. Last SAAF Games were held in Islamabad in 2004. Akram Sahi (Ex-President AFP), is presently Chairman SAAF. It's due to his untiring efforts that the Honour of hosting this SAAF Cross Country by AFP has seen the light of the day, he said. He said all member countries (Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka) of SAAF had shown interest to participate in this mega event. However at the last moment due to unavoidable circumstances, Indian and Bhutan Teams could not make it. Other member countries featuring in the championship include Bangladesh, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. The competitions will be held in two categories including Men 10km and Men under 20 years 8km. Track of 2km is made, for Category - 1(5 Laps) Category -2 (4 Laps), he said. Satti said teams have been fully facilitated from boarding & lodging point of view. Due to relentless efforts of AFP, Pakistan has emerged in the World Olympics Scene, with Pride of Pakistan, Arshad Nadeem with a gold medal and breaking Olympic Record in Javelin Throw. After Cricket, Pakistani Nation has started taking interest in Athletics also like Marathons, Cross Countries, National Athletics Events being organized of International Standards, he said. He said for holding this event the credit also goes to Ministry of Inter Provincial Coordination (IPC), Pakistan Sports Board (PSB) and AFP. Ministry of IPC and PSB are totally supporting the SAAF Cross Country. All Ministries (MOI, MOFA, Tourism) and Departments (JG ICT), IG (Punjab), Commissioner ICT, Chairman CDA Islamabad), are hand in glove with AFP, to make this Event a success, he said and also thanked the Rudn Enclave Housing Society for the sponsorship and making the event a success.

LAHORE (AFP): Josh Inglis hit a maiden century to help Australia chase down the highest target in Champions Trophy history in a five-wicket win over old rivals England in Lahore on Saturday. The 29-year-old Inglis, who was born in England, smashed an unbeaten 86-ball 120 as Australia chased down 351-8 in 47.3 overs to open their Group B account at Gaddafi Stadium. The blistering performance from Inglis not only trumped England opener Ben Duckett's 143-ball 165 -- the highest individual score in event history -- but enthralled a near-capacity 31,000 weekend crowd. Inglis carted six sixes and eight boundaries, including the winning maximum off express fast bowler Mark Wood. Australia were struggling at 27-2 with Travis Head (six) and skipper Steve Smith (five) falling to Jofra Archer and Wood respectively. "It was a fantastic innings from Inglis. 350 is a pretty good score, but it was wet and the dew was a worry." Earlier, Duckett smashed his highest ODI score, and third century, as England built a commanding total after being sent in to bat on a flat pitch. Duckett hit 17 fours and three sixes to better the previous best individual score of 145 in the Champions Trophy. New Zealand's Nathan Astle (2004) and Zimbabwean Andy Flower (2002) had shared the record. England also surpassed the previous highest innings tally in

ing 63-ball 69 with 70 still needed. Inglis brought up his hundred with two sixes off Carse and one against Archer, reaching the three-figure mark off 77 balls. Glenn Maxwell played a trademark fiery knock of 32 not out from 15 balls with two sixes and four boundaries as Australia took 226 runs off England's pace trio of Wood, Archer and Carse. "We thought 350 was chaseable," said Smith. "The two keepers (Inglis and Carey) have been batting beautifully. Josh played shots all round the ground." Smith joked: "I don't know if Josh still has an English passport, but he's not going anywhere." England skipper Jos Buttler blamed the dew for his team's struggles with the ball. "A fantastic game, both sides played well, credit to Australia," said Buttler. 'Dew worry' "It was a fantastic innings from Inglis. 350 is a pretty good score, but it was wet and the dew was a worry." Earlier, Duckett smashed his highest ODI score, and third century, as England built a commanding total after being sent in to bat on a flat pitch. Duckett hit 17 fours and three sixes to better the previous best individual score of 145 in the Champions Trophy. New Zealand's Nathan Astle (2004) and Zimbabwean Andy Flower (2002) had shared the record. England also surpassed the previous highest innings tally in

tournament history of 347-4 by New Zealand against the USA at The Oval in 2004. Duckett added 158 for the third wicket with Joe Root, who made a measured 68 off 78 balls, to set the platform for a big total against a weakened Australian attack. Missing star pace trio of Pat Cummins, Mitchell Starc and Josh Hazlewood, Australia's attack of Spencer Johnson, Ben Dwarshuis and Nathan Ellis struggled to contain England. Duckett was finally dismissed by part-time spinner Labuschagne in the 48th over, improving on his previous highest of 107 not out against Ireland at Bristol in 2023. England adopted the same aggressive style of batting with opener Phil Salt dispatching a boundary and a six in the first over before falling to Dwarshuis in the second over for 10. Dwarshuis also removed Jamie Smith for 15 before Duckett and Root stabilised the innings. Harry Brook, on his 26th birthday, made three. Captain Jos Buttler (23) and Livingstone (14) also had brief stays before Archer delivered some late impetus with an unbeaten 21 off 10 balls. Dwarshuis was the best Australian bowler with 3-66 while spinners Adam Zampa and Labuschagne took two wickets apiece. Arrivals India and Pakistan meet in a high-voltage Group A game in Dubai on Sunday.

Fernandes inspires Man Utd fightback for Everton draw



LIVERPOOL (AFP): Bruno Fernandes inspired a Manchester United rally from two goals down to avoid another damaging defeat for Ruben Amorim in a 2-2 draw at Everton on Saturday. United were headed for a ninth defeat in their last 13 league games as goals from Beto and Abdoulaye Doucoure put the Toffees 2-0 up inside 33 minutes. The visitors had not mustered a shot on target until Fernandes' free-kick pulled a goal back 18 minutes from time before Manuel Ugarte's equaliser salvaged a point for United. More late drama was to come as Everton were awarded a penalty deep into stoppage time, only for referee Andy Madley to overturn his decision after a VAR review. A point edges Everton up to 12th, while United remain in 15th. "We start the game too late," said Fernandes. "Every time we concede a goal and are down it is the only time we start to take a little bit more risk and pass forward. We need to start games like that because we are in a situation where we need to win games and create chances to score goals." Everton were in a battle for survival when David Moyes returned for his second spell in charge last month, but they have taken 14 points from a possible 18 in their last six games to ensure their 71-year stay in the top flight will not come to an end. "I know they're not in a

great position but we're still up against a side who have a tradition of winning games and being very successful," said Moyes. "So getting a point today is not the worst result, but it feels disappointing after being 2-0 up." Amorim conceded before the game that Moyes, who himself was sacked after less than a season in charge of United in 2014, was doing a better job than he has managed since arriving from Sporting Lisbon in November. When the sides last met in Amorim's first home league game, United cruised to a 4-0 win at Old Trafford, but he has managed just three victories in 13 Premier League games since. Everton have just five more matches to come at Goodison Park before they move to a new 53,000-capacity stadium next season. The home fans and team are determined to make the most of what is left at the club's home since 1892 and put a United side lacking in confidence under pressure from the off. Shamolic defending But when Everton did take the lead on 19 minutes it was thanks to comedic United defending. The Red Devils had multiple chances to deal with a corner into the box before the ball eventually broke for Beto to fire into the ground and over Andre Onana. The striker has been transformed since Moyes' return, scoring five times in his last four Premier

League appearances after netting just four times in his first 44 for the club. Beto also had a big part to play in the second as his cross fed Jack Harrison when Onana could only parry the winger's shot, Doucoure outmuscled Harry Maguire to head in the loose ball. Not for the first time, Fernandes was United's one source of inspiration. The Portugal international's free-kick wrong-footed Jordan Pickford to kickstart the fight-back. Another Fernandes free-kick was the source of the equaliser as this time Ugarte pounced on Beto's headed clearance to fire in his first goal for the club. Both sides had chances to win it in a thrilling finale. Beto planted a header from close range too close to Onana, while Pickford tipped over Fernandes' dipping effort from the edge of the box. United, though, were fortunate to escape in added time when Ashley Young looked to have been pulled down by a combination of Maguire and Matthijs de Ligt. The referee pointed to the spot but was instructed to take a second look and overturned his decision to save Amorim from further embarrassment. "I thought the on-field decision looked the correct decision," added Moyes. "I'm a bit surprised he was asked to go to VAR because I thought that it looked difficult to change your mind on that."



DUBAI: Mohammad Rizwan takes a look at the pitch.



In brief

ITP take action against parking violators

ISLAMABAD (APP): Islamabad Traffic Police (ITP) have launched a strict crackdown against wrong parking violators, taking action against 7,883 drivers and impounding 253 vehicles for occupying footpaths this month. Special squads have been deployed to ensure smooth traffic flow and pedestrian access. A public relations officer told APP on Saturday that the Inspector General of Police (IGP) Syed Ali Nasir Rizvi had issued special directions to curb wrong parking and clear pedestrian areas. Following these directives, traffic police teams are conducting operations across the city to remove illegally parked vehicles and prevent encroachments on footpaths. Chief Traffic Officer (CTO) Captain (retd) Syed Zeeshan Haider has instructed all Zonal DSPs to ensure strict enforcement of traffic laws and take action against those disrupting traffic discipline. "The right of pedestrians to use footpaths will be ensured, and no vehicle will be allowed to park there," the CTO Zeeshan said, adding that designated parking spaces at shopping centers must be used. He also emphasized the importance of public awareness campaigns to educate citizens on responsible parking. He further stated that ensuring convenience for road users by maintaining traffic discipline is a top priority, and every possible effort will be made to achieve this goal. The CTO Zeeshan added that special squads have been formed to remove illegal parking and clear footpaths, warning that indiscriminate action will be taken against violators.

Police arrest 11 outlaws

RAWALPINDI (INP): Rawalpindi police in an action against suspected drug peddlers, bootleggers, and other law-breakers here on Saturday arrested 11 accused besides recovering charras, liquor, and other items from their possession, said a police spokesman. He informed that Jatli police in an operation arrested a proclaimed offender namely Khalid wanted in a murder case registered in Jatli Police Station in August 2023. Mandra police rounded up three accused Javad, Umar and Khazir for sexually abusing and recording inappropriate video of an 18 old boy. In another operation, Jatli police arrested an accused Khalid for fireworks at a wedding ceremony. The spokesman said that Jatli police also arrested an accused for carrying firecrackers and recovered huge quantity of firecrackers from his possession. Rawat police arrested Jahad Gull with 1230 grams charras and Taxila police rounded up Numan with 620 grams charras. Similarly, Bani police arrested Kashif for having 30 liters liquor while Pirwadhai police netted Ali with 20 liters liquor. Morgah police in their operation arrested Afzal for having 10 liters liquor. Cases have been registered against all the accused while further investigations are underway.

Bootlegger arrested with liquor

RAWALPINDI (APP): Sadiqabad police have arrested a bootlegger and recovered 200 liquor bottles and 50 liters 'desi' liquor from his possession, said a Police spokesman here on Saturday. He informed that Sadiqabad police in an operation managed to net a bootlegger and recovered 200 liquor bottles and 50 liters 'desi' liquor from his possession. The accused was allegedly involved in supplying liquor in different areas of Sadiqabad Police Station. The spokesman said that Rawalpindi district police on the directives of City Police Officer.

PML-N's Tariq urges PTI to prioritize national interest

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) senior leader Tariq Fazal Chaudhry Saturday issued a clarion call to PTI, urging them to abandon their rigid stance and join hands to achieve a consensus that puts the country's needs above all else.

In an exclusive talk with a private news channel, Tariq Fazal urged the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party to play a constructive role in breaking the current political deadlock, adding, that by doing so, PTI can help pave the way for a more stable and

prosperous Pakistan.

He stressed PTI to reconsider its stance and join forces to achieve a consensus that prioritizes the country's interests.

"The economy and terrorism pose significant threats to our nation, and it is imperative that we, as political forces should join hands to combat these challenges," Tariq Fazal Chaudhry emphasized.

"We must shift our focus away from hateful attitudes and instead adopt a collaborative approach to governance, prioritizing the well-being and prosperity of our great nation," he added.

"I urge PTI to refrain from using the media as a platform to air their grievances and instead engage in constructive dialogue with other political forces to find solutions," Tariq Fazal stressed.

Responding to a query, Tariq Fazal further emphasized the need for a comprehensive discussion on election reforms, highlighting that even PTI's demands for a commission should be addressed through dialogue rather than confrontation, ensuring a peaceful resolution that upholds the democratic process.

ANF recovers over 88 kg drugs in six operations

RAWALPINDI (APP): Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF) while conducting six operations across the country managed to recover over 88 kg drugs worth over Rs 24.8 million and arrested 11 accused, said an ANF Headquarters spokesman here on Saturday.

He informed that 5 kg opium was recovered from the possession of an accused rounded up near a university in Jamshoro. The arrested accused confessed to selling drugs to the students of educational institutions.

In an operation conducted in Johar Town, Lahore, 30 kg opium and 18 kg hashish were recovered from three vehicles and a house while five suspects were arrested.

15.6 kg hashish hidden in a vehicle near Kak Pul Expressway, Islamabad, was recovered and a suspect was arrested during the operation.

12 kg hashish was recovered from a vehicle intercepted near the motorway bridge on Ring Road, Peshawar and two suspects were arrested.

6 kg heroin hidden in the secret cavities of a vehicle intercepted near M-1 Motorway, Islamabad, was recovered and a suspect was netted.

1 kg heroin and 430 grams ice were recovered from the possession of an accused, going in a passenger bus near M-1 Motorway, Islamabad, and an accused was arrested.

Separate cases have been registered against the arrested accused under the Narcotics Control Act and further investigations are under process.

Accused in maid killing case to undergo DNA test

RAWALPINDI (APP): Accused Rashid Shafiq has been handed over to police for his DNA and polygraphy test, while the wife of the accused has been sent to jail on a 14-day remand.

According to the details, the police presented the accused Rashid Shafiq and his wife Sana Rashid, in the court of Civil Judge Imran Qureshi after completing a total of 8-days of remand.

The investigation officer informed the court that the investigation was almost complete and the instrument of torture/murder in the form of a pipe had also been recovered, but the

accused had to be taken to the forensic lab in Lahore for DNA matching, for which he requested the court for physical remand of 5 more days. The IO further informed the court that the interrogation of the wife of the accused, Sana Shafiq has been completed and she might be sent to jail on a 14-day judicial remand.

After hearing the arguments of the lawyers of the parties, the court has once again handed over Rashid Shafiq to the police on a physical remand of 4 days. The court directed the investigating officer to produce the accused in court

again on February 25.

The court, while sending the accused's wife Sana Shafiq to jail on a 14-day judicial remand, directed that the accused be produced in court again on March 07.

It may be recalled that on February 11, Bani police station had registered a case against the owner of the house Rashid Shafiq, his wife Sana Rashid resident of Asghar Mall, and another maid Rubina, in which it was alleged that they brutally tortured a 12-year-old maid Iqra. She was brought to the hospital in a very critical condition and died in the hospital.

ADB, CDA discuss development of Inter-City Bus Terminal

ISLAMABAD (APP): A high-level delegation from the Asian Development Bank (ADB) met with Chairman Capital Development Authority (CDA) Muhammad Ali Randhawa to discuss key development projects, including the establishment of the Islamabad Inter-City Bus Terminal.

During the meeting, Chairman Randhawa was briefed on the completion of the preliminary feasibility report for the Islamabad Inter-City Bus Terminal project.

The proposed terminal is set to integrate with the

city's existing Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) system and electric bus services, aiming to enhance urban mobility and reduce traffic congestion in the federal capital.

Chairman Randhawa emphasized the need for ADB to develop a comprehensive financial model for the project, which will also include charging infrastructure to support electric buses.

He further highlighted the importance of ADB's technical expertise in preparing the Islamabad Transport Master Plan, a long-term strategy to mod-

ernize the city's transportation network.

In addition, the Chairman urged ADB to assist in securing carbon credits for environmentally sustainable initiatives, underscoring the CDA's commitment to green urban development.

The meeting concluded with Chairman Randhawa reaffirming CDA's dedication to collaborating with ADB on the construction and development of Islamabad, ensuring the city's growth aligns with modern urban planning standards and environmental sustainability.

Police arrest 127 kite flyers, sellers

RAWALPINDI (APP): Rawalpindi district police have arrested 127 kite flyers, sellers from different city areas on Friday, said a Police spokesman here on Saturday. He informed that Rawalpindi district police on the directives of City Police Officer (CPO) Rawalpindi Syed Khalid Hamdani launched a full-scale operation against kite flyers and those involved in aerial firing.

After the announcement of the Kite Association to celebrate Basant on Friday and Basant Night in Rawalpindi city on Thursday night, defying the Punjab government's orders of a complete ban on kite flying and selling, Police had finalized all the arrangements to control the illegal activity. Police on the orders of the CPO launched a crackdown against kite flying and aerial firing and utilized all available resources to control the illegal activity.

Over 127 persons involved in kite flying and aerial firing were rounded up from Waris Khan, Rattaamral, Airport, Bani, Gunghandi, New Town, Pirwadhai, City, R.A.Bazar, Westridge, Cantt, Naseerabad, Saddar Wah and Civil Lines areas and over 5000 kites with 127 strings were recovered from their possession.

Police also recovered Kalashnikovs and pistols from the possession of the arrested accused. The spokesman informed that Police teams were continuously engaged in a crackdown against kite flying across the city. Legal action was also taken against the owners of the buildings from where the accused were flying kites. A number of persons involved in kite flying were also identified through videos. Following the ban on kite flying and the sale and purchase of

kites and string, the Deputy Commissioner (DC) Rawalpindi and CPO had issued orders for the arrest of those involved in kite flying or kite selling.

The instructions were given to all police stations and the Special Branch to ensure the arrest of kite sellers and flyers. The Kite Association had declared that they would hold Basant Night and the festival, despite the ban. Despite the police crackdown and raids, a large number of kites and string rolls were delivered to the kite flying lovers in Rawalpindi. Orders for kites were also being placed on social media using coded terms for delivery to homes.

The SHOs of various police stations were issuing announcements via loudspeakers in mosques and neighbourhoods, attempting to stop kite flying on Thursday night and Friday.



ISLAMABAD: A vendor displaying and selling wooden stools and nests to attract customers at roadside in the Federal Capital. —APP Photo

CM performance highly commendable; Maryam

RAWALPINDI (APP): We cannot make a narrative of corruption and disorder, but we make a narrative of performance. One year performance shown by the CM Mayam Nawaz Sharif is commendable.

This was expressed by Senior Provincial Minister Maryam Aurangzeb while addressing at the inaugural ceremony of "Suthra Punjab Programme", here on Saturday. Minister for Local Governments, Zeeshan Rafique also attended the ceremony.

Maryam Aurangzeb said that the Suthra Punjab Programme was launched in March 2024. An integrated sanitation system has been started in cities and villages, including the 21 Tehsils of Rawalpindi.

"The applause of the participants in the hall is showing that the performance of the Punjab Chief Minister is unparalleled", she said.

Maryam termed Suthra Punjab Programme a revolutionary initiative of the government which is not only subjected for cleanliness but it has also created 100,000 jobs. "The next step is to include this initiative in the Waste to Energy programme", she added.

Maryam maintained that the previous government conspired against this country for 4 years. PM Shabbaz Sharif worked day and night for the country's economy and brought the country out of darkness by providing

electricity. Those who shouted slogans of the country defaulting are disappointed. She highlighted that inflation has reached its lowest level in 9 years, and the interest rate has also reduced.

The people of Pakistan have confidence in the leadership of the PM Shabbaz Sharif and Maryam Nawaz, she said adding that the Chief Minister of Punjab has shown unparalleled performance in a year that people of other provinces also acknowledge.

Underlining the key initiatives by the Punjab government, the minister said 50 thousand students were given scholarships, under the Apna Ghar Apna Chatt program, houses are being given to the deserving people and free medicines for the deserving is available for the needy. "The OPD of Nawaz Sharif Cardiology Hospital Sargodha will start in June. The construction of 700 roads will be completed by June 2025", she informed.

Maryam went on saying that the sewerage system has been completed in 139 cities. Medical treatment facilities will be provided at the doorstep through lady health inspectors and The Dhee Rani program of Punjab's daughter Maryam Nawaz is a high-profile program of mass marriages.

Kisan cards were issued for farmers, interest-free loans are being given to farmers. A subsidy of Rs

1.0 million is being given through the tractor scheme. Under the environment-friendly vision of the Chief Minister, E-buses have been introduced in Lahore. By August, 550 e-buses will come across Punjab and by next year, 500 more e-buses will come. Metro bus service will also be started in Gujranwala and Faisalabad, she added.

She said that a programme worth Rs.40.0 billion for clean water has been started in Rawalpindi. "Rawalpindi's first maternity and child hospital will also be started in December", she informed.

Provincial Minister for Local Governments Punjab, Zeeshan Rafique, while addressing the ceremony, said that a uniform sanitation system has been started in all the cities and villages of Punjab. "The Suthra Punjab Programme is a unique program of its kind in the country in which more than 125,000 people will get employment under", she added.

The ceremony was attended by parliamentarians Tahira Aurangzeb, Hanif Abbasi, Engineer Qamar-ul-Islam, Commissioner Rawalpindi Division, Amir Khattak, RPO Babar Sarfraz Alpa, DC Rawalpindi Hasan Waqar Cheema, Parliamentary Secretary for Information and Culture Punjab Shazia Rizwan, MPAs and officers of the district administration.

Over 900 cameras to monitor champions Trophy security

ISLAMABAD (APP): Islamabad Capital Police has implemented comprehensive security measures for the upcoming ICC Champions Trophy, ensuring a foolproof plan for the safety of teams, officials, and spectators.

A public relations officer told APP that more than 5,800 security personnel will be deployed across the federal capital to oversee the security arrangements.

The Safe City Islamabad is conducting surveillance through over 900 cameras to monitor the movement of cricket teams from airports to hotels and stadiums.

He said that all routes and residences are under 24-hour surveillance using drone cameras, 202 body-worn cameras, and a vehicle tracking system.

All law enforcement agencies involved in securing the matches are working in full coordination with Safe City Islamabad.

Security plan finalized

for Champions Trophy, 5,800 police personnel deployed:

Inspector General (IG) Police, Syed Ali Nasir Rizvi, chaired a crucial late-night meeting regarding the security arrangements for the upcoming ICC Champions Trophy.

An official told APP on Saturday that the senior officers from Islamabad and Punjab police participated in the meeting. He said the officials were briefed on the comprehensive security plan for the cricket teams.

IG Rizvi stated that 5,800 police personnel would be deployed to ensure security during the matches. He said full-scale security measures would be in place for the movement of the cricket teams.

IG Rizvi emphasized

that hosting the Champions Trophy in Pakistan was a positive development and assured that all necessary security arrangements had been finalized.

To maintain smooth traffic flow, citizens would be informed about alternative routes. IG said the movement routes of the teams would be monitored using drone cameras and smart vehicles. Senior officers would provide continuous briefings to the deployed personnel, ensuring that all security protocols were strictly followed. He added that every officer on duty must display their security card at all times. "This is an extremely important duty, and every officer must perform it with utmost dedication," IG said.

Rang-e-Pakistan festival commenced with cultural grandeur

ISLAMABAD (APP): The much-awaited Rang-e-Pakistan Festival officially commenced on Saturday at Lok Virsa featuring a number of cultural activities and stalls depicting heritage of different provinces.

The festival is being arranged under the auspices of the Lok Virsa, National Heritage and Culture Division. The festival was inaugurated by Federal Secretary for National Heritage and Culture, Hassan Nasir Jami, who emphasized the importance of preserving and promoting Pakistan's rich cultural, historical, and literary heritage.

The three-day festival, running from February 22 to 24, will be open daily from 10 AM to 10 PM at the Lok Virsa Complex, Shakarparian, offering an immersive cultural experience to visitors from all walks of life. A large number of attendees from the twin cities have gathered with great enthusiasm to celebrate Pakistan's diverse cultural traditions.

The festival provided a platform for skilled craftsmen, folk artists, and artisans to showcase their talents at a national level. The primary objectives of the festival include honoring skilled artisans, preserving traditional

crafts, and ensuring their transmission to future generations.

Lok Virsa, as a key institution promoting Pakistani culture, is dedicated to fostering gender equality, ensuring that both male and female artists receive equal opportunities to present their talents and gain recognition. Many female artists are also actively participating in the festival, exhibiting their artistic skills and cultural contributions.

The visitors can explore a wide range of engaging activities, including an artisans' craftsmanship exhibition featuring traditional and contemporary craftsmanship from across Pakistan, musical performances showcasing folk, classical, and contemporary music, and storytelling sessions reviving the rich oral traditions of Pakistan.

Cultural dance shows presenting traditional performances reflecting the country's ethnic diversity, qawwali sessions with spiritual and soul-stirring musical renditions, and puppet shows entertaining children and families are also part of the festival. Additionally, there are cultural and historical book exhibitions displaying literary treasures,

traditional food stalls offering authentic and delicious regional cuisine, and a calligraphy exhibition showcasing exquisite works from renowned artists.

All subsidiaries of the Ministry of National Heritage and Culture, including the Pakistan National Council of the Arts, Pakistan Academy of Letters, Department of Archaeology and Museums, Department of National Language Promotion, National Library of Pakistan, and Quaid-e-Azam Academy, have set up dedicated stalls, highlighting their contributions to the preservation and promotion of Pakistan's cultural identity.

Folk music, traditional dance, and regional cuisines are among the major attractions of the festival, drawing large crowds eager to experience Pakistan's artistic heritage. Every aspect of the festival has been carefully curated to ensure an engaging and enjoyable experience for all attendees. The Rang-e-Pakistan Festival will continue in full grandeur until February 24, offering a unique opportunity for visitors to celebrate and cherish Pakistan's cultural legacy.

IEA's scholars to implement Sharia

KABUL (Ariana News): Minister for the Propagation of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice, Mohammad Khalid Hanafi, has said that the Islamic Emirate trusts its own religious scholars in implementing Sharia. Speaking in an event attended by tribal elders and scholars, Hanafi said that there have been differences of opinion in every century, but the Islamic Emirate has a responsibility to maintain its unity.

Taliban publicly flog woman in Herat

HERAT (Amu tv) : Taliban publicly flogged a woman in Herat province on charges of extra-marital relations, the Taliban Supreme Court said in a statement on Saturday. According to the statement, the woman was sentenced to six months in prison and received 15 lashes after a ruling by a Taliban court in Herat, which was later approved by the Supreme Court. The Taliban's judiciary has intensified the use of corporal punishment in recent weeks.

India to allow ambassador-level IEA post

KABUL (Ariana News): India's government is expected to accept a top Islamic Emirate representative to the country soon, the latest step from New Delhi to improve ties with Kabul and counter China's growing influence in Afghanistan, Bloomberg reported.

The IEA official won't be recognized as a diplomat by India but will be the top representative for the government there. The IEA won't be able to fly its flag

at the embassy, at events or on official vehicles, according to Bloomberg.

Najib Shaheen, a diplomat in his early 30s at the Afghan embassy in Doha, is the main contender for the ambassador-level role in New Delhi. He has worked with the IEA for almost a decade, and is the son of the IEA's ambassador to Qatar. Shawkat Ahmadzai, who works at the ministry of foreign affairs, is another

candidate being considered for the role.

Only a handful of countries, including China, Pakistan and Russia, have accepted diplomats from the IEA, which seized power in Afghanistan in 2021.

India and Afghanistan agreed to resume bilateral trade after senior representatives from both sides met in Doha in January. The IEA also recently sent an administrator to Mumbai to serve as acting consul-general.

Afghanistan, Uzbekistan seek to expand cooperation on key projects

KABUL (TOLONews): On the first day of his visit to Uzbekistan, Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, the deputy prime minister for economic affairs, met with Uzbekistan's deputy prime minister to discuss strengthening trade and transit relations, as well as the establishment of joint trade zones.

During the meeting, Mullah Baradar emphasized the urgent commencement of the Trans-Afghan project and the 500-kilovolt transmission line in Afghanistan.

The deputy prime minister for economic affairs, who is accompanied by a high-level delegation, also highlighted the religious, cultural, and ethnic ties between Afghanistan and Uzbekistan.



Meanwhile, Uzbekistan's Deputy Prime Minister Jamshid Khodjaev expressed his country's readiness to invest in various sectors in Afghanistan.

Hamdullah Fitrat, the deputy spokesperson of the Islamic Emirate, said: "The purpose of this visit is to expand political, economic, transit, and trade relations between Afghanistan and Uzbekistan, as well as to create opportunities for attracting Uzbek investments into Afghanistan. Additionally, officials from both countries

will discuss cooperation in various sectors."

The Afghanistan Chamber of Commerce and Investment has also emphasized the significance of this visit in expanding economic and trade relations between the two countries, calling for the implementation of commitments made between Afghanistan and Uzbekistan.

Khanjan Alokzai, a board member of the

Chamber of Commerce and Investment, stated: "We believe that practical steps should follow the discussions in this visit. Additionally, key sectors such as energy, railways—especially the Trans-Afghan project—and other critical projects for Afghanistan must be addressed."

Economic analyst Ahmad Ferdaws Behgozin underscored the importance of foreign

relations, stating: "Maintaining strong ties with neighboring and other countries can significantly enhance Afghanistan's economic capacity. The more we engage in economic exchanges with other nations, the more we can integrate our domestic economy with the global market."

It is worth mentioning that the Islamic Emirate delegation, led by the deputy

prime minister for economic affairs and including representatives from the Ministries of Industry and Commerce, Mines and Petroleum, Transport and Civil Aviation, Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock, as well as the Central Bank and Ministry of Finance, traveled to Uzbekistan for a two-day visit aimed at strengthening trade and economic relations.

Taliban inaugurate two power projects in Kabul



KABUL (Amu tv): The Taliban-run Ministry of Energy and Water inaugurated the Bati-Kot substation project and a 220-kilovolt transmission line from Arghandi to Bati-Kot in Kabul on Saturday.

The projects, valued at \$25.4 million, were launched during a ceremony attended by Taliban Energy and Water Minister Abdul Latif Mansour and Kabul Governor

Aminullah Obaid.

According to Taliban statement, the initiative is part of a larger 500-kilovolt transmission line supplying electricity from Uzbekistan to Afghanistan.

Afghanistan remains heavily reliant on imported electricity, primarily from Central Asian nations, to meet domestic energy demands.

In December 2024, Da

Afghanistan Breshna Sherkat (DABS), the state-run power company, announced that it had extended its electricity import agreement with Uzbekistan until the end of 2025. The deal was signed in Uzbekistan between Abdul Bari Omar, the Taliban-appointed acting chief executive of DABS, and the leadership of Uzbekistan's National Electricity Company.

Taliban resume house-to-house searches in Kabul

KABUL (Amu tv): Taliban have resumed house-to-house searches in parts of Kabul, heightening concerns among residents, according to sources who spoke to Amu.

The searches began Saturday morning in the Khair Khana neighborhood north of the city and could expand to other areas of the capital, the sources said. Taliban have not provided an official explanation for the renewed inspections, which some Kabul residents say have deepened fear and distrust in the city.

The searches come at a time of reported internal divisions within the Taliban and a series of security incidents across the country. Human rights organizations have previously raised alarms over the group's growing restrictions on civil liberties since returning to power in August 2021. It remains unclear how long the latest operation will continue.

In February 2022, the Taliban conducted widespread house searches throughout Kabul, a move they claimed was aimed at uncovering criminal activity. At the time, Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid described the effort as a "clearing operation," asserting that homes were raided only if authorities had received specific reports of illegal activity. However, Western diplomats and rights groups suggested that the searches had targeted ordinary citizens rather than criminals.

The latest round of inspections has renewed concerns about the Taliban's approach to governance and security, as Afghans navigate an increasingly repressive environment under their rule.

Tribal elders work to resolve ethnic disputes



HERAT (TOLONews): Dozens of tribal elders from the eastern provinces of the country have traveled to Herat and Nimroz provinces to bring ethnic groups closer together and resolve disputes among some ethnic communities.

These elders emphasize that all ethnic groups residing in Afghanistan are the rightful owners of this land and have always stood against invaders throughout history.

"The ethnic groups of Afghanistan have experienced many wars and hardships, and now it is time for us to unite. We should no longer say that one person is from Herat, another from

Laghman, Kunar, Kunduz, or Panjshir. All our ethnic groups are one, and we must unite more than ever," said Ahmad Jan, a tribal elder from Kunar.

Amanullah Malikzada, a tribal elder from Herat, said: "If there is any conflict in the east of the country, we are ready to take action to ensure peace and bring people closer together. The tribal elders who have come here have declared that if there are disputes among ethnic groups, they will work to reconcile them."

At the same time, another group of tribal elders from the eastern provinces has traveled to Nimroz.

They stress that Afghanistan is the common home of all Afghans, and solidarity and unity among different ethnic groups must be strengthened.

"According to Sharia, defending Islam and our land requires the unity of Afghanistan's ethnic groups. If the ethnic groups of our country are not united, enemies will attack us from all sides," stated Mohammad Qasim Khalid, the governor of Nimroz.

"We Afghans have always lived alongside each other. Our fathers and ancestors lived together in this common land, and it is part of our culture and tradition for different ethnic

groups to be united," said Ebadullah Momand, a tribal elder from Nangarhar.

Some tribal elders who visited Herat's recreational sites say that now that security has been ensured across the country, citizens should travel to different provinces to learn more about each other's cultures and traditions.

"When we return to our province, we will convey the message of the people of Herat to them. Surely, they will also come here and see its beauty. In the past, such security did not exist, and we could not travel freely, but now security is established, and we can travel anywhere in Afghanistan, day or night," stated Abdul Wali, a tribal elder from Laghman.

"I am 42 years old, and in my entire life, I have never experienced such security, stability, and peace. Since the Islamic Emirate came to power, security has greatly improved, and this is the first time I am visiting Herat," Mohammad Dawood, a tribal elder from Nangarhar, expressed.

In recent months, tribal elders from different parts of the country have started traveling to other provinces. They say that their goal in these trips is to resolve ethnic disputes and strengthen unity and harmony among Afghan citizens.

Mansoor: Engagement with world must be based on respect

KABUL (TOLONews): Abdul Latif Mansoor, the acting minister of energy and water, emphasized the need for mutual respect in Afghanistan's engagement with the world during a ceremony in Kabul.

Speaking at the inauguration of a substation in Kabul, Mansoor said that the interim government's political relations with other countries are improving and that the world must view Afghanistan with dignity and respect.

The acting minister of energy and water stated: "If you engage with us, we are ready to interact with the entire world based on the principles required by Sharia and the mutual respect that exists globally. However, if your policy treats us as subordinates, sees us as an inferior nation, and considers yourselves superior, such engagement will not be acceptable."

In his speech, Mansoor highlighted the importance of maintaining unity and coexistence among



Afghan citizens in the current circumstances.

He said: "Our political and economic relations with the world continue, and as you can see, some embassies in certain countries have been handed over to the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan."

Engagement with the international community based on Islamic principles and mutual respect has been a core demand of the Islamic Emirate, reiterated frequently by its officials in various events.

Political analyst Moeen

Gul Samkanai told TOLONews: "Whether we like it or not, we must first resolve some internal issues within our country before addressing international matters. Only then can Afghanistan achieve lasting peace and stability."

Three days ago, the Deputy Prime Minister for Economic Affairs, in a program held in Kabul, also urged the international community to lift political and economic pressures on Afghanistan and to engage in constructive dialogue with the interim government.

Iran completes 100 Km of border infrastructure with Afghanistan

KABUL (Khaama Press): The Deputy Commander of the Northeast Ground Forces of the Islamic Republic's Army announced that 100 more kilometers of the necessary infrastructure for the continued border closure project between northeastern Iran and Afghanistan have been completed.

Sadegh Noori added that despite the challenging weather conditions throughout different seasons, the project has made significant progress.

Iranian media reported on Friday, February 21, that this announcement came during Noori's visit to the

Iran-Afghanistan border assistance project. The report highlighted his remarks on the ongoing progress of the strategic border closure plan.

He emphasized that over the past year, during the initial stages of this strategic project, 50 kilometers of wall construction has been completed as part of the first phase.

According to the deputy commander, the closure and wall construction along the northeastern borders of Iran and Afghanistan is one of the most significant active projects in the country. It is being built based on the latest scientific,

technical, and engineering methods by the army's engineering forces.

This official further clarified that despite the difficult weather conditions throughout the year and the region's unsuitable soil, significant progress has been made on the project.

The report mentioned that the overall project spans 953 kilometers, with over 300 kilometers already under construction in the first phase in the Khorasan Razavi region.

The border closure plan, which covers 300 kilometers between Afghanistan and Iran, was launched by the Islamic Republic a year

ago to prevent the illegal entry of migrants and the smuggling of drugs into the country.

The ongoing construction of the border wall reflects Iran's firm stance on controlling its borders and tackling illegal migration and drug trafficking. While the project faces challenges due to harsh environmental conditions, the progress made so far highlights the commitment of the Iranian military in implementing this key security initiative. The success of this project could set a precedent for future border management strategies in the region.



KABUL (TOLONews): The Ministry of Interior stated that special forces have been assigned to major national and infrastructure projects to ensure their security.

Abdul Matin Qane, the ministry's spokesperson, emphasized that the Islamic Emirate has taken serious measures to safeguard development projects, particularly in transit and commercial sectors.

"After forty years, Afghanistan is now on the path of progress. There may be countries that do not want this process to continue, but Afghanistan is striving to become a transit hub in Asia and improve its trade and economy," he said.

The spokesperson also highlighted the significance of infrastructure projects, stating that 200 special forces personnel

have been deployed to protect the Qosh Tepa project under the order of the Islamic Emirate's leader.

"The Qosh Tepa project, which is a national project for all of us, has commenced. Alongside its launch, Sheikh Sahib (may Allah protect him) ordered the deployment of 200 special forces to secure the project. We assess projects based on their needs and

sign agreements with private companies and investors to ensure their security," he added.

However, some economic experts believe that while security is crucial for attracting investment, it is not sufficient on its own. They argue that the Islamic Emirate should provide special incentives and privileges for investors.

"Investment laws in Afghanistan should be simplified, incentive packages should be offered, and the necessary conditions should be provided for investors. These factors include land distribution, electricity supply, and access to raw materials," stated Abdul Naseer Rishita, an economic expert.

Meanwhile, yesterday, the deputy prime minister for economic affairs announced in a meeting in Kabul that Afghanistan is expanding its diplomatic and trade relations with regional countries. He also urged the private sector to invest in various fields.

President urges need for global cooperation to address challenges

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: President Asif Ali Zardari urged the need for global cooperation and partnerships to address challenges like climate change, poverty, and disinformation. He called for promoting collaboration among countries to ensure inclusive and sustainable development.

The President gave these remarks while speaking to the participants of the 5th International Workshop for Leadership & Stability organized by the National Defence University (NDU), who called on him, at Aiwan-e-Sadr on Saturday.

Currently, 64 foreign participants from friendly countries and 32 Pakistani participants from diverse sectors including business leaders, diplomats, government officials, representatives of think tanks, media, and young professionals are attending the workshop. NDU has been organizing the workshop for parliamentarians, senior policy makers, diplomats, consultants and senior executives from worldwide.

Addressing the participants, the President said that Pakistan was the

gateway to landlocked Central Asian countries, who were welcome to benefit from Gwadar port to promote shared development and prosperity. Reaffirming Pakistan's commitment to regional connectivity and economic collaboration, he invited international partners to work together toward a secure and sustainable future. "A stable world is essential for shared progress," he added. He said that the world faced a range of economic, environmental, security, disinformation and technological challenges, which required global cooperation to address them.

Highlighting the role of leadership, the President said that it was the responsibility of leaders to create opportunities for collaboration and work for the betterment of people and shared peace and prosperity. He said that leadership had the responsibility to unite people around a shared vision and motivate stakeholders to achieve sustainable development goals. He asked the participants to choose dialogue over division, cooperation over conflict, and hope over fear to create lasting change. He also encouraged participants to translate their insights

from the workshop into real-world solutions.

The President congratulated the participants on completing the course and lauded NDU for organizing the workshop, stating that such initiatives played a crucial role in shaping perspectives on leadership, governance, and stability.

Earlier, the President was briefed about the aims and objectives of the workshop. It was informed that the workshop provided a platform to share Pakistan's perspective on diverse global issues and promote dialogue with the world.

Meanwhile, the President Asif Ali Zardari has arrived in Lahore on a two-day visit. According to sources, he will meet Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif at Governor's House to discuss challenges faced by the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) in Punjab.

He is also expected to hold meetings with the PPP Punjab leaders to address concerns, particularly those raised by the governor. Reports suggest that Zardari aims to ease political tension between the PPP and PML-N, paving the way for reconciliation.



ISLAMABAD: President Asif Ali Zardari in a group photo with participants of 5th International Workshop for Leadership and Stability organized by National Defence University, at Aiwan-e-Sadr.

IHC Bar challenges judges' seniority list

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Islamabad High Court Bar has moved the Supreme Court of Pakistan, challenging the judges' seniority list.

President IHC Bar Riasat Ali Azad has filed the petition under Article 184(3). "The President is not enjoying unlimited powers to transfer judges' under Article 200 clause (i)," according to the petition. Petitioner has also argued that the judges could not be transferred from one high court to other without public interest.

Earlier, five judges of the Islamabad High Court (IHC) have also challenged the seniority list of judges in the Supreme Court of Pakistan. A 49-page petition, filed under Article 184(3), stated that the President's powers to transfer judges are not absolute and should be conditional upon the Judicial Commission's approval.

The petition, filed through lawyers Munir A. Malik and Barrister Salahuddin, named the federal government, transferred judges, and high courts as respondents. It also seeks a stay order against the transferred judges, including Justice Sardar Mohammad Sarfraz Dogar, who recently took oath as the acting chief justice of the IHC.

The petitioners, including Justice Mohsin Akhtar Kayani, Justice Tariq Mahmood Jahangiri, Justice Babar Sattar, Justice Rafaqat Imtiaz, and Justice Saman Rafat, have raised 13 pleas before the court. They contended that judges cannot be transferred from one high court to another without public interest. This move comes after IHC judges wrote a letter to President Asif Ali Zardari and Chief Justice of Pakistan Justice Yahya Afridi, expressing concerns over the appointment of the chief justice of the IHC. They had requested that the chief justice be appointed from among the three senior judges of the court itself.

Kundi meets PPP leaders

F.P. Report

MULTAN: Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Faisal Karim Kundi, on Saturday visited the Gilani House in Multan where he met with Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) leaders, including Members of National Assembly Syed Ali Haider Gilani, Qasim Gilani, Ali Musa Gilani, and other party leaders and workers.

During the meeting, discussions were held on the country's political situation, party affairs, and public issues. Governor Faisal Karim Kundi emphasized that the PPP would continue its struggle for the development of the country and public service.

He urged party workers to remain active in spreading the party's ideology and manifesto to the public. Kundi expressed confidence that the time would come when Bilawal Bhutto Zardari would become the Prime Minister of Pakistan.

Syed Ali Haider Gilani and others thanked Governor Kundi for his visit and assured him that the party leadership and workers were united and committed to advancing their mission of serving the people. Senior party leaders present at the meeting also engaged in detailed discussions on the political affairs of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and South Punjab. The meeting concluded with an agreement to further strengthen organizational matters and collaborate on solving public issues.

KP CM inagurates Jaroba Dam

— announces Rs2b interest-free loan for students

Syed Waliullah Shah

NEWSHERA, PESHAWAR: Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Ali Amin Khan Gandapur, visited Nowshera district on Saturday, where he formally inaugurated the newly constructed Jaroba Dam. He was accompanied by provincial ministers Aqibullah Khan, Mian Khalique-ur-Rehman, and MNAs and MPAs elected from Nowshera.

Constructed at a cost of PKR 777 million, the 115-foot-high and 697-foot-wide dam is expected to bring 930 acres of barren land under cultivation by providing 4.65 cusecs of irrigation water. Additionally, a 6.15-kilometer-long canal has been constructed to facilitate irrigation in adjacent villages. Apart from irrigation, the dam will also improve water storage and supply for domestic use. It is set to provide 0.75 cusecs of drinking water, benefiting a population of 22,000 people.

Speaking at the inauguration ceremony, Ali Amin Gandapur said "The provincial government has successfully completed the Jaroba Dam project, now local communities should utilize it immensely." To address the drinking water shortage, he announced an additional Rs 20 million for water supply projects in the area. Furthermore, he pledged the construction of the remaining two kilometers of road and announced the inclusion of a Rural Health Center (RHC) in Jaroba in next year's budget.

In a significant move to support underprivileged families, the Chief Minister announced a special solar system package for 250 deserving households in Jaroba. "The government is well aware of the challenges faced by the people and is committed to addressing them on a priority basis," he assured.

Expressing concern over the region's underdevelopment, Gandapur lamented, "It is unfortunate that this area still remains backward in this era." Addressing the youth, he urged them to pursue educa-

tion and uphold strong moral values, as these are the true pathways to progress. He emphasized that the provincial government is creating opportunities for young people across all sectors to help them move forward in life.

Meanwhile, the Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Ali Amin Khan Gandapur, on Saturday attended the convocation ceremony of the Institute of Management Sciences (IM Sciences) Peshawar where he awarded degrees and gold medals to graduating students. A total of 260 graduates received their degrees, while six outstanding students were honored with gold medals and another six with silver medals.

The convocation was also attended by Provincial Minister for Higher Education Meena Khan Afridi, IM Sciences management and faculty members, graduates, and their parents. Addressing the convocation, Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur felicitated the graduates, their parents, and the university faculty and said that as graduates are stepping into professional life, they should contribute to the progress of the country and the province through hard work and dedication.

Announcing a major initiative, the Chief Minister stated, "We are launching an interest-free loan program worth PKR 2 billion to support professional degree holders in starting their own businesses and startups" adding that graduates should not focus solely on securing jobs but should explore opportunities in entrepreneurship and innovation. He further highlighted that nations investing in modern research and sciences today will lead the future. "Pakistan's economic future depends on research, innovation, and locally-driven startups," he asserted. Expressing his delight at attending the convocation of a prestigious institution like IM Sciences, the Chief Minister remarked, "It is always a pleasure to visit institutions that are self-sustainable, as true autonomy lies in self-sufficiency."

PTI apprises CJP of ills plaguing country: Omar

F.P. Report

SARGODHA: Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) leader Omar Ayub said on Saturday the objective of meeting Chief Justice of Pakistan Justice Yahya Afridi, expressing concerns over the appointment of the chief justice of the IHC.

Speaking to media outside the anti-terrorism court in Sargodha, he claimed that the party had informed the CJP about the issues plaguing the country. "We hope there will be supremacy of constitution and law and order in the country," he said. He said the PTI leaders were embroiled in fake cases and there was no relief in sight.

Ayub, who is also opposition leader in National Assembly, said the PTI would formally hand over its suggestions on an effective judicial system to the chief justice of Pakistan. He said the party had a competent legal team. He said the masses would continue to face frustration in the absence of a robust legal and judicial system.

He said the PTI leaders recently tried to meet Imran Khan in jail but the government twice denied the

opportunity. 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 had been facing.

Sources said 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.

Meanwhile, the PTI Chairman Barrister Gohar Ali Khan said on Saturday that Chief Justice of Pakistan (CJP) Justice Yahya Afridi had advised the party to remain part of the political system and not to boycott it.

Speaking to reporters at district courts in Islamabad, he said that the PTI had a long charge sheet against the government. "We are not pleased with the coun-

try's judiciary. And we conveyed our concerns to the CJP in our meeting with him yesterday," he said, adding, "Treating the party in such a manner is not a good omen for democracy in the country."

Barrister Gohar said that no matter to whom former prime minister and PTI founder Imran Khan's letters were addressed, he, in his correspondence, had raised some serious issues so that there could be no further divide between the Pakistan Army and the masses.

"PTI's house is in order, and there is no truth in reports of the formation of a forward bloc," the PTI chairman said categorically, adding, "Sher Afzal Marwat's expulsion from the PTI was the party's internal matter. Whosoever violates the discipline, has to face action." Barrister Gohar again said that Imran Khan would decide about the future of those PTI leaders who had left the party in the wake of the May 9 violence. "Even Akbar S. Babar calls him a PTI leader. This is the state of mind of an individual."

Trump fires chairman of Joint Chiefs of Staff

WASHINGTON (AP): President Donald Trump abruptly fired Air Force Gen CQ Brown Jr as chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, sidelining a history-making fighter pilot and respected officer as part of a campaign led by his defense secretary to rid the military of leaders who support diversity and equity in the ranks.

The ouster of Brown, only the second Black general to serve as chairman, is sure to send shock waves through the Pentagon. His 16 months in the job had been consumed with the war in Ukraine and the expanded conflict in the Middle East.

"I want to thank General Charles 'CQ' Brown for his over 40 years of service to our country, including as

our current Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. He is a fine gentleman and an outstanding leader, and I wish a great future for him and his family," Trump posted on social media.

Brown's public support of Black Lives Matter after the police killing of George Floyd had made him fodder for the administration's wars against "wokeism" in the military. His ouster is the latest upheaval at the Pentagon, which plans to cut 5,400 civilian probationary workers starting next week and identify \$50 billion in programs that could be cut next year to redirect those savings to fund Trump's priorities.

Trump said he's nominating retired Air Force Lt. Gen. Dan "Razin" Caine to be the next chairman. Caine

is a career F-16 pilot who served on active duty and in the National Guard, and was most recently the associate director for military affairs at the CIA, according to his military biography.

Caine's military service includes combat roles in Iraq, special operations postings and positions inside some of the Pentagon's most classified special access programs. However, he has not had key assignments identified in law as prerequisites for the job, including serving as either the vice chairman, a combatant commander or a service chief. That requirement could be waived if the "president determines such action is necessary in the national interest."

KP govt taking steps to establish peace: Saif

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Adviser to the Chief Minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa on Information and Public Relations, Barrister Muhammad Ali Saif on Saturday reiterated that the government was taking all necessary steps to establish permanent peace in the area.

In separate meetings with delegations from Kurram here, he urged both parties to play a key role in restoring peace and assured them that Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur was sincerely working towards a lasting solution to the century-old dispute.

The meetings focused on the security situation in the district, with both delegations expressing their concerns and urging strict action against miscreants, said a press release issued here.

They reaffirmed their commitment to fully implementing the peace agreement and assured complete cooperation with security forces and the government to restore peace.

The delegations emphasized that anti-social elements are enemies of Kurram's peace and called on the government to take decisive action to eliminate them. They highlighted that unrest in the region is disrupting education, trade, and other economic and social activities.

Saif advised both sides to distance themselves from miscreants and support the government in curbing their activities. He warned that these elements were attempting to incite sectarian tensions but assured that the government would never allow them to succeed. He stressed that such individuals were not just enemies of Kurram but of the entire state.

Torkham border shut down

F.P. Report

LANDI KOTAL: Torkham border suspended for traffic as well as pedestrian movement when on Friday night the Afghan officials attempted to build a post in disputed territory at the zero point of the crossing, border security officials informed.

Shutting down of the border not only halted Pak-Afghan export and import on Saturday but also hundreds of pedestrians stranded at both sides of the crossing, official informed.

According to the clear agents, Torkham on the direction of custom officials' scores of trucks, loaded with perishable export items (fruits and vegetables) were sent back to Peshawar to avoid financial loss to the exporters.

Following the eruption of tension between the two neighboring countries, their border security forces assumed position at the border, locals said. Since long, officials of both countries have been restraining one another from constructing new posts or building in so-called restricted territory adjacent to the zero point.

Pakistan, UAE DPMs explore avenues

ISLAMABAD (APP): Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Senator Ishaq Dar held a bilateral meeting with his UAE counterpart Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan wherein they engaged in comprehensive discussions to further strengthen the longstanding bilateral fraternal ties.

In the meeting held in Abu Dhabi at the invitation of the UAE deputy prime minister and foreign minister, the two sides explored avenues to enhance bilateral cooperation across key sectors, including trade, investment, energy, defense, and people-to-people connections, a Foreign Office press release said Saturday.

The two leaders also exchanged views on regional and global developments of mutual interest,

underscoring the importance of promoting peace, stability, and shared prosperity. Senator Ishaq Dar congratulated the UAE leadership on the successful organization of the World Governments Summit 2025, in Dubai from February 11-13, 2025, and commended the UAE's visionary initiatives in fostering global dialogue and cooperation.

He reaffirmed Pakistan's commitment to deepening its multifaceted partnership with the UAE and highlighted the pivotal role of the Pakistani diaspora in the UAE, describing them as a bridge between the two nations.

Senator Dar also expressed gratitude for the UAE's consistent support for Pakistan's economic development and progress. In response, Sheikh

Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan reiterated the UAE's steadfast commitment to strengthening its strategic relationship with Pakistan.

He acknowledged Pakistan's significant contributions to regional stability and expressed appreciation for the positive role played by the Pakistani community in the UAE's development. The two leaders agreed to maintain a regular high-level engagements and consultations to further solidify bilateral ties and coordinate on regional and international issues of mutual concern.

The meeting concluded on a positive note, with both dignitaries expressing optimism about the future of Pakistan-UAE relations and their shared vision for a prosperous, peaceful, and stable region.



NEWSHERA: Chief Minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Ali Amin Gandapur inaugurating newly constructed Jaroba Dam.

US proposes Ukraine UN text omitting mention of occupied territory

UNITED NATIONS (AFP): The United States proposed Friday a United Nations resolution on the Ukraine conflict that omitted any mention of Kyiv's territory occupied by Russia, diplomatic sources said. Secretary of State Marco Rubio urged UN members to approve the "simple, historic" resolution.

Washington's proposal comes amid an intensifying feud between President Donald Trump and President Volodymyr Zelensky which has seen Trump claim it was "not important" for his Ukrainian counterpart to be involved in peace talks. It also appeared to rival a separate draft resolution produced by Kyiv and its European allies, countries that Trump has also sought to sideline from talks on the future of the three-year-old war.

The Ukrainian-European text stresses the need to redouble diplomatic efforts to end the war this year, noting several initiatives to that end, while also blaming Russia for the invasion and committing to Kyiv's "territorial integrity." The text also repeats the UN General Assembly's previous demands for an immediate and unconditional withdrawal of Russian troops from Ukraine.

Those votes had wide

Trump says 'not forcing' Gaza resettlement plan

WASHINGTON (AFP): US President Donald Trump has appeared to soften his plan to take control of war-torn Gaza and relocate its more than two million residents to nearby countries, saying he was only recommending the idea.

Trump triggered shock earlier this month when he presented his plan, in which Washington would take over the territory and rebuild it while pressuring Egypt and Jordan to accept displaced Palestinians. But in an interview Friday, the Republican president conceded that the leaders of Jordan and Egypt had rejected the plan, calling the displacement of Palestinians against their will unjust. "I was a little surprised they'd say that, but they did," Trump told Fox News Radio's "The Brian Kilmeade Show," adding that the United States was paying those countries "billions of dollars a year" in aid. "The way to do it is my plan. I think that's a plan that really works, but I'm not forcing it," Trump said. "I'm just gonna sit back and recommend it."

support, with around 140 of the 193 member states voting in favor. Washington's text, seen by AFP, calls for a "swift end to the conflict" without mentioning Kyiv's territorial integrity, and was welcomed by Moscow's ambassador to the UN Vassily Nebenzia as "a good move" — but stressed that it did not address the "roots" of the conflict.

"The United States has proposed a simple, historic resolution in the United Nations that we urge all member states to support in order to chart a path to peace," Rubio said in a statement Friday, without commenting in detail on the contents of the proposed resolution. In a break with past resolutions proposed and supported by Washington, the latest draft, produced ahead of a General Assembly meeting Monday to coincide with the third anniversary of the war, does not criticize Moscow.

Instead the 65-word text begins by "mourning the tragic loss of life throughout the Russia-Ukraine conflict." It then continued by "reiterating" that the United Nation's purpose is the maintenance of "international peace and security" — without singling out Moscow as the source of the conflict.