

FIA arrests 10 beggars
KARACHI (INP): The Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) Immigration has arrested 10 individuals from Karachi airport, who were allegedly involved in begging in Saudi Arabia under the guise of Umrah. According to FIA spokesperson, the arrested individuals hail from various cities in Pakistan, including Rajanpur, Kashmir, Naushahro Feroze, Lahore, Peshawar, Mohmand, and Larkana.

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PM launches anti-polio drive for 2025

Shehbaz vows to eradicate crippling disease

ISLAMABAD (APP): Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif on Sunday launched a nationwide anti-polio campaign for the year 2025 (Feb 3-9) by administering polio drops to children under the age of five. Addressing the launching ceremony, the prime minister reaffirmed his government's determination to eliminate the polio disease from Pakistan. He said that the national polio vaccination drive would target millions of children in the country to save their future and health. He hoped that the dedicated teams would work day and night to eradicate the disease, and would reach the far flung areas and villages, adding these teams would successfully meet the huge national responsibility by utilizing their complete energies.

The prime minister said that unfortunately, during the last year, a total of 77 polio cases were reported in the country which emerged as a huge challenge, besides posing a setback. This year, only one case was reported, he said, and expressed the resolve to eradicate polio at all costs; with dedicated team work and support from the international partners. The prime minister also expressed the hope that with international coordination and support, the crippling disease in the neighbouring brotherly country Afghanistan would end. He appreciated all the international partners including WHO, UNICEF, Bill Gates Foundation and the brotherly country Kingdom of Saudi Arabia for their commitment and efforts to the government

in its efforts to eliminate polio. Speaking on the occasion, PM's Coordinator on National Health Services Dr Mukhtar Bharat said that they had highlighted the number of polio cases which were reported last year and did not hide it from the international community. He said that positive outcome was being felt with concerted efforts by all the quarters and only one case was reported this year. He also appreciated the prime minister for his supervision without which they would not be able to get the desired results. PM's Focal Person on Polio Eradication Aysa Raza Farooq said that the polio vaccination was a public campaign in which all segments of society have to take part and urged the parents to coordinate and save their children

from polio. **PM visits NA speaker residence in Lahore** Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif visited the residence of National Assembly (NA) Speaker Sardar Ayaz Sadiq in Lahore on Sunday. He held a meeting with the speaker, which was also attended by NA Deputy Speaker Ghulam Mustafa Shah and Members of the National Assembly (MNAs) Khursheed Shah and Shazia Marri. The prime minister extended heartfelt congratulations to Deputy Speaker Ghulam Mustafa Shah on the wedding of his son, offering his best wishes and blessings for the newlyweds. Other prominent members of the National Assembly were also present at the occasion.

FC soldier laid to rest
ABBOTTABAD (APP):The funeral prayer of Frontier Constabulary (FC) soldier Khan Waiz, son of Shamreez Sunday was offered with full military honors in Abbottabad. Khan Waiz, a young soldier from the village of Kasaki in Abbottabad, was martyred in a terrorist attack on an FC convoy in Quetta. Displaying exceptional bravery, he fought alongside his fellow soldiers before making the ultimate sacrifice.



ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif administers polio vaccine to children at the inaugural ceremony of the National Polio Campaign 2025

Pakistan has always progressed in PML-N govt: Attaullah Tarar

LAHORE (APP): Federal Minister for Information and Broadcasting Attaullah Tarar has said that Pakistan's economy is improving, emerging from the risk of default, and moving towards development. Addressing workers in his constituency, he said Pinky Gogi and the Captain looted Pakistan and fabricated false narratives when the Al-Qadir case verdict was announced.

during the 22-day campaign would be fulfilled, highlighting improvements in the country's economic situation, declining inflation, and the Prime Minister's efforts to drive development. Positive economic news continues to emerge, he added. Tarar said that Pinky Gogi and the Captain harmed Pakistan and resorted to religious narratives when the Al-Qadir case verdict was announced.

However, he said, with their influence gone, the country is back on the path to progress. He criticized the former prime minister for selling watches, contrasting it with the current leadership's introduction of SOPs for Toshakhana. According to him, Pakistan has historically progressed under the PML-N, while opponents focused on amassing wealth rather than solving national issues.

He pledged to make Township an exemplary area and emphasized that under Uraan Pakistan, further development is expected this year. The stock exchange is reaching historic highs, and he urged workers to challenge those spreading misinformation. He also criticized opponents for neglecting national development and showing indifference to the sacrifices of young soldiers defending Pakistan.

PPP equally responsible for PECA Actg amends: Saif

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Barrister Dr. Saif, Advisor to the Chief Minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa on Information and Public Relations, has stated that the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) is equally responsible for the amendments to the PECA Act, having voted in favor of the act. The bill has now become a law after President Zardari's signature. In a statement, Dr. Saif urged the PPP to refrain from hypocritically opposing the act in the media,

emphasizing that both the PPP and the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) are equally responsible for the enforcement of "black laws" in the country. He added that these parties have collectively promoted lawlessness in Pakistan and will be held accountable for their actions. Dr. Saif warned that the day is not far off when these two parties will blame each other for their misdeeds. He criticized the political elite for causing irreparable damage to the country, prioritizing their

grip on power over the welfare of the people. The Advisor said that the people of Pakistan will hold both parties accountable for their actions. Currently, both parties are exploiting their power to oppress the people, but this will not last forever. Dr. Saif emphasized that the source of power lies with the people, and they stand with Imran Khan. The illegitimate federal government, established by stealing PTI's mandate on February 8, will not last long. The current elite have undermined the foundations of state institutions.

Iran unveils new ballistic missile

TEHRAN (AFP): Iran revealed a new ballistic missile on Sunday that it said was capable of traveling 1,700 kilometers, unveiling it in a Tehran ceremony attended by President Masoud Pezeshkian. State television broadcast images of the missile, dubbed Etemad, or "trust" in Persian, saying it had a maximum range of 1,700 kilometers (1,056 miles) and was "the most recent ballistic missile" built by the Iranian defense ministry. Western countries have grown concerned over advances in Iran's ballistic missile program, accusing it of destabilizing the Middle East. Iran's missiles, including this newest design, are capable of reaching its arch-foe Israel, which it targeted twice last year as the Gaza war spilled over. "The development of defense capabilities and space technologies... aims to ensure that no country dares to attack Iranian territory," Pezeshkian said in a televised address. The ceremony took place on Iran's national aerospace day and a few days before the 46th anniversary of the creation of the Islamic Republic on February 10, 1979.

Judges' transfer to IHC Islamabad Bar Association announces boycott

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Islamabad Bar Council, High Court Bar, and District Bar Association jointly held a press conference on Sunday to announce a boycott of the High Court and district courts on Sunday. Islamabad Bar Council chairman Aleem Abbasi said the lawyers community rejected the decision of law ministry to transfer the judges of high courts to the IHC. Meanwhile, he also criticized the judicial commis-

sion session of February 10. Islamabad High Court Bar Association President Riasat Ali Azad said the decision of boycott was a unanimous one. He raised serious objection to the recent transfer and said why a LHC judge was being brought into IHC. District Bar Association President Naeem Ali Gujjar said the lawyers community has a history standing for the strength of legal rights.

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Spurring trade war as North American allies respond Trump puts tariffs on Canada, Mexico and China

WASHINGTON (AP): President Donald Trump on Saturday signed an order to impose stiff tariffs on imports from Mexico, Canada and China, drawing swift retaliation and an undeniable sense of betrayal from the country's North American neighbors as a trade war erupted among the longtime allies. The Republican president posted on social media that the tariffs were necessary "to protect Americans," pressing the three nations to do more to curb the manufacture and export of illicit fentanyl and for Canada and Mexico to reduce illegal immigration into the U.S. The tariffs, if sustained, could cause inflation to significantly worsen, threatening the trust that many voters placed in Trump to lower the prices of groceries, gasoline, housing, autos and other goods as he promised. They also risked throwing the global economy and Trump's political mandate into turmoil just two weeks into his second term. Trump declared an economic emergency in order to place duties of 10% on

all imports from China and 25% on imports from Mexico and Canada. Energy imported from Canada, including oil, natural gas and electricity, would be taxed at a 10% rate. Trump's order includes a mechanism to escalate the rates charged by the U.S. against retaliation by the other countries, raising the specter of an even more severe economic disruption. "The actions taken today by the White House split us apart instead of bringing us together," Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said in a somber tone as he announced that his country would put matching 25% tariffs on up to \$155 billion in U.S. imports, including alcohol and fruit. He channeled the betrayal that many Canadians are feeling, reminding Americans that Canadian troops fought alongside them in Afghanistan and helped respond to myriad crises from wildfires in California to Hurricane Katrina. "We were always there standing with you, griev-

ing with you, the American people," he said. Mexico's president also ordered retaliatory tariffs. "We categorically reject the White House's slander that the Mexican government has alliances with criminal organizations, as well as any intention of meddling in our territory," Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum wrote in a post on X while saying she had instructed her economy secretary to implement a response that includes retaliatory tariffs and other measures in defense of Mexico's interests. "If the United States government and its agencies wanted to address the serious fentanyl consumption in their country, they could fight the sale of drugs on the streets of their major cities, which they don't do and the laundering of money that this illegal activity generates that has done so much harm to its population." The premier of the Canadian province of British Columbia, David Eby, specifically called on residents to stop buying liquor from U.S. "red" states and said it was

removing American alcohol brands from government store shelves as a response to the tariffs. China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs said the country's government "firmly deplores and opposes this move and will take necessary countermeasures to defend its legitimate rights and interests." China began regulating fentanyl-related drugs as a class of controlled substances in 2019 and conducted "counternarcotics cooperation with the U.S.," the ministry said, calling on the U.S. government to correct what it considers wrongful actions. The Ministry of Commerce in China said it would file a lawsuit with the World Trade Organization for the "wrongful practices of the U.S." and take measures to safeguard its rights and interests. The tariffs will go into effect on Tuesday, setting up a showdown in North America that could potentially sabotage economic growth.

Continued on Back Page

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Maryam pledges to enhance special education in Punjab

LAHORE (APP): Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif has said that the Punjab government is committed to enhancing special education systems across province.

Chairing a meeting to review various initiatives for the welfare of special children, here on Sunday, the CM said that special children are our special heroes. "We will achieve our goal of improving special education centers and systems" she said.

The CM highlighted the establishment of Pakistan's first government autism school in Lahore, which will ease the financial burden on parents. She stated, "The aim of rehabilitating special children is to empower them as productive members of society." She further noted that the school, currently in its final stages of construction, will offer free treatment to children with autism. "The autism school project will be completed within a record time of one year," she added.

CM Maryam Nawaz mentioned that 10 autism units have been established across

various special education institutions in Punjab, with the provision of necessary educational facilities already underway. She assigned Special Assistant to Chief Minister (SACM) Sania Ashiq the responsibility of overseeing the construction of the autism school.

During the briefing, the authorities shared that 9,206 assistive devices have been provided to special students, including 7,702 hearing aids, 360 wheelchairs, 300 walkers, 344 crutches, and 500 white canes. Additionally, 35 schools have been upgraded from middle to secondary level, and primary schools have been advanced to middle-level status to strengthen special education in the province.

The CM was informed that a project to upgrade 28 special education schools to Centers of Excellence is underway. A new curriculum tailored for special education students up to class 5, including Quran translation for hearing-impaired children, has also been developed. Plans are in place to offer specific skills courses, and a job fair for special students is

being organized in collaboration with private institutions. So far, 900 students have been registered, with 25 securing employment.

The CM said "14 special students have successfully completed the first batch of Special Education Vocational Matriculation." She also noted the ongoing development of the School Information System, aimed at raising the standard of special education in the province. Other projects in the pipeline include the Citizen Relationship Management system, a Special Education Mobile App, and a Smart Monitoring App.

The CM revealed that 586 students from special education centers have been integrated into regular schools. She announced the introduction of Punjab's first-ever grand sports gala for special education students, alongside the completion of eight new special school buildings and the approval of nine more. Additionally, a screening tool has been introduced to identify slow learners in special education centers.

Punjab takes steps to address shortage of senior registrars

LAHORE (APP): The Department of Specialized Healthcare and Medical Education has formally requested the Department of Primary and Secondary Healthcare to promote 59 medical officers of various specialties from grade 17 to grade 18 to fill the shortage of senior registrars in hospitals.

According to an official letter issued on Sunday, the Department of Primary and Secondary Healthcare has been urged to approve the promotion of medical officers to the post of registrar. This initiative is part of the Punjab government's ongoing efforts to strengthen the healthcare system and ensure the availability of experienced medical professionals in hospitals.

The promotion of medical officers is expected to improve patient care and enhance the efficiency of healthcare services across the province. The Punjab government continues to take fundamental steps to address challenges in the health sector, prioritizing the upgradation of medical staff to provide better medical facilities to the public.

Visitors run for life as lion breaks loose

LAHORE (INP): Sunday is a day for fun as families plan outings in the soft and pleasant winter sunshine but the weekly off day for the visitors of Lahore's Jallo Wildlife Park turned out to be a nightmare as they found a wild beast on the loose.

As the families along with their children were rushing to the Jallo Park for a memorable visit, they stormed out of the park with double speed as they spotted a lion out of its cage and on the prowl.

A wave of fear and panic gripped the visitors after the big cat came out of its cage as its safety reeling was damaged, said Rescue 1122 sources. Soon after receiving the report, Rescue 1122 team along with Wildlife Department personnel reached the site and made the lion fell unconscious before it could harm anyone.

Police officials said that the incident took place due to incompetence of the Punjab Wildlife Department of wildlife.

But the Wildlife Department officials were quick to put the blame on the negligence of the caretaker, claiming he deliberately opened the lion's cage. The Department swiftly ordered an inquiry by a three-member committee against poor Sharif Maseeh and got him arrested, saying a terrorism case will be lodged against him.

The three members of the inquiry committee are Lahore Zoo director, Wildlife Lahore director general and veterinary officer Safari Park. The inquiry will be completed in 12 hours. The unconscious lion later transferred to its cage where another injection was used to revive him, said Punjab Wildlife Department spokesman.

on providing fearless security for the country and to offer selfless service to the people of Pakistan. He reminded them to remain steadfast in combating terrorism, crime, and other threats.

The promotion ceremony was attended by promoted cops' families. The inspectors expressed their heartfelt gratitude to IG Punjab for his support.

Additional IG Punjab Sultan Ahmad Chaudhry, DIG Establishment One Suleman Sultan Rana, DIG Establishment Two Captain (ret'd) Liaquat Ali Malik, ASP Defense Shahrbano Naqvi, and senior officers, including ASPs in training, were present at the event.

9 dead, 1401 injured in 1215 RTCs in Punjab

LAHORE (APP): At least nine persons were killed and 1401 injured in 1215 Road Traffic Crashes (RTCs) in all 37 districts of Punjab during the last 24 hours.

Out of these, 616 people with serious injuries were shifted to different hospitals, while 785 victims with minor injuries were treated at the incident site by Rescue Medical Teams thus reducing the burden of Hospitals.

Furthermore, the analysis showed those 755 drivers, 51 underage drivers, 151 pedestrians, and 504 passengers were among the victims of road traffic crashes.

The statistics show that 231 RTCs were reported in Lahore which affected 280 persons placing the Provincial Capital at top of the list followed by Gujranwala 76 in with 80 victims and at third Multan with 70 RTCs and 84 victims.

According to the data 1138 motorbikes, 70 autorickshaws, 126 motorcars, 34 vans, 19 passenger buses, 41 truck and 103 other types of auto vehicles and slow-moving carts were involved in these road traffic accidents.



LAHORE: Federal Minister for Interior and Narcotics control Mohsin Naqvi meeting the innocent family who were detained in Saudi Arabia upon their release. —INP Photo

Sindh Governor stresses economic stability

KARACHI (APP): Sindh Governor Kamran Khan Tessori has stated that Pakistan needs economic stability rather than votes.

Addressing the Mega IT Test, SMIT Program ceremony at the Hockey Stadium, he said that 10,000 children participating in the test would soon become IT champions.

Governor Sindh Kamran Khan Tessori remarked that the participation of more than 10,000 young individuals proves that the province is on its way to becoming an IT hub. He added that the active involvement of Sindh's youth in the IT sector is a sign of future success. He further emphasized that the increasing inclination of young people

toward IT is an encouraging indicator of a bright future.

Speaking to the media, Governor Sindh Kamran Khan Tessori expressed his gratitude to Maulana Bashir Farooqui for his commendable efforts, stating that no amount of appreciation would be enough. He expressed confidence that the youth completing IT courses under this initiative would earn thousands of dollars.

Governor Sindh Kamran Khan Tessori humorously mentioned that he had wished for all participants to pass without a test, but Maulana Bashir Farooqui did not agree. He highlighted that a 12-year-old student trained under this program is

already earning PKR 500,000 per month and urged others to work hard, as earning millions of dollars in the IT sector is possible with dedication and effort.

Governor Sindh also noted that the doors of the Governor House have been opened to the public, and under the Governor's Initiative, 50,000 students are currently receiving free IT training there.

Responding to a question, Kamran Khan Tessori praised Chief of Army Staff General Asim Munir for his relentless efforts toward national prosperity.

Earlier, Governor Sindh also reviewed the arrangements for the Mega IT Test, SMIT program.

Jl leader terms Cholistan Canal project dangerous

KARACHI (PPI): The Amir of Jamaat-e-Islami Sindh, Kashif Saeed Sheikh, said on Sunday that the Cholistan Canal project is more dangerous than the Kalabagh Dam, which the people of Sindh cannot accept.

"In the light of the statement made by the WAPDA Chairman regarding the canal, the PPP should clarify its position, he demanded while addressing a meeting of JI district

leaders at the Quba Auditorium.

He termed the canal plan a bid to turn Sindh's fertile lands barren while developing other

province's uninhabited lands. The people of Sindh are deeply concerned about the federal government's move towards building canal, he added.

In accordance with the decisions made by the Sindh Peace Restoration Action Committee, a

protest will be held on February 16 on the Indus Highway in Shikarpur against lawlessness and corruption.

He called for full participation from the public in the protest against this important national issue. Sheikh further criticized the decision to allow bureaucrats to be appointed as Vice Chancellors, calling it an act of enmity rather than fostering education.

He informed that on

February 5, the Kashmir Solidarity Day will be observed across Sindh with full enthusiasm.

The provincial Amir further stated that the recent increase in salaries for each member of parliament was an injustice. Despite the skyrocketing inflation and worsening law and order situation, there was no reduction in the luxurious expenses and perks of the rulers and bureaucracy, he concluded.

Country needs to defend its products against foreign goods

KARACHI (PPI): Commenting on slapping enhanced duties of the US on products of China, Canada and Mexico, Pasban Democratic Party (PDP) Chairman Altaf Shakoor here

Sunday asked the government of Pakistan to also protect its own crops and products by rationalising taxes and duties.

In a statement issued by PDP, Mr Shakoor said the cotton and yarn sector in Pakistan was a glaring example of giving incentives of imported cotton and yarn at the cost of locally produced cotton. He said no other country in the world allows import of cotton free from duties and sales taxes. He said that imported duty-free and sales tax-free yarn is being sold in the domestic market and our Pakistani products could not compete with them.

He said that All Pakistan Textile Mills Association (APTMA) had been demanding from the federal government for immediate restoration of the

Export Finance Scheme (EFS) to its pre-Finance Act 2024 form that allowed the sales tax exemption and zero-rating on all local supplies used for export manufacturing.

"Pakistani mills are facing tremendous losses and closure due to misuse of the EFS, under which import of cotton and blended yarns are exempted from sales tax and duties." He said in Pakistan, local cotton farmers were being punished to make room for the imported cotton and yarn. This is a rare example of promoting foreign goods on local taxpayers money, says Shakoor.

He said as there was no duty and sales tax under the yarn imports under EFS, import of yarn increased by 254 percent during November 2024 compared to January 2024, under the pretext of being used in the export of textile products.

The PDP chairman demanded protection of local crops, farmers

and consumers.

The prices of sugar are on a higher side because the government allowed export of Pakistani sugar instead of allowing a surplus stock in the country to compel powerful sugar millers to reduce prices for benefits of consumers, says Shakoor.

He said: "The government takes decisions due to the pressure of powerful lobbies of millers, traders and bankers sitting in Parliament. Foreign loans are another reason why the government allows more incentives to imports at the cost of local produce."

The PDP chief said the government should take rational decisions keeping in mind the interests of Pakistan and its citizens. He said: "If our rulers want to become true patriots in terms of protecting the local economy, they should learn a lesson from the new US president Trump, who is fighting tooth and nail to protect the US economy."

DC reviews progress on Lahore Development Plan

LAHORE (APP): Deputy Commissioner Syed Musa Raza, chairing a meeting at his office on Sunday, reviewed the progress on the Lahore Development Plan (LDP). The meeting was attended by the MD WASA, CO MCL, Additional Deputy Commissioner Finance, all Assistant Commissioners, and other relevant officials.

The main objective of the meeting was to assess the ongoing developmental activities under the LDP and ensure that no obstacles hinder the progress of the project.

During the meeting, Deputy Commissioner Syed Musa Raza emphasized that the Lahore Development Program, under the supervision of the Chief Minister of Punjab, is not only a project aimed at public welfare but also a significant step towards improving the city's overall infrastructure. He said that all stakeholders must work together to ensure transparency in the process and maintain the quality of construction work without any

compromise. He further highlighted the need for contractors to use high-quality materials and adhere to the standards set for the project.

The DC stressed that the completion of developmental works must adhere to the deadlines, ensuring that the LDP will enhance the city's beauty and infrastructure. He also made it clear that there will be zero tolerance for any delays in the completion of the project. Meanwhile, Assistant Commissioners were monitoring the LDP progress in their respective areas. Assistant Commissioner Nishter Muhammad Saleem Asi on Sunday visited UC 241, 247, and 248, where he monitored ongoing developmental work and the uploading of related data. Assistant Commissioner of Allama Iqbal Town Khawaja Muhammad Umair Mehmood held a meeting to review the progress of MCL and WASA schemes under the LDP.

During his visit, Khawaja Muhammad Umair Mehmood noticed the poor quality of red tiles

used by the contractor and instructed them to replace the tiles with new ones.

Assistant Commissioner Ravi Tariq Shabbir visited Kashmiri Ghati, where preparations were being made for the upcoming PCC next week.

Assistant Commissioner Shalimar Dr. Anam Fatima visited UC 153, where road construction was ongoing. There was a delay in one of the roads due to the lack of clearance from WASA, but Dr. Anam Fatima resolved the issue immediately to avoid further delays.

DC Syed Musa Raza directed all relevant authorities to ensure that the LDP is completed on time and with high quality. He reiterated that the program must be carried out with complete transparency and according to the highest standards to contribute significantly to the city's development. He made it clear that any delay in the completion of the project would not be tolerated.

Shafay emphasizes key role of religious scholars in promoting harmony

LAHORE (APP): Provincial Minister for Auqaf and Religious Affairs Chaudhry Shafay Hussain met with religious scholar and teacher of Hadith at Jamia Ashrafia, Mufti Ahmad Ali, at Jamia Ashrafia here on Sunday.

During the meeting, they discussed the activation of Khatam-un-Nabiyeen University at the Quran Complex, the promotion of religious education, and matters related to seminaries and mosques.

Mufti Ahmad Ali congratulated Chaudhry Shafay Hussain on assuming the

portfolio of the Department of Auqaf and Religious Affairs and inquired about the well-being of former Prime Minister Chaudhry Shujaat Hussain.

Speaking on the occasion, Chaudhry Shafay Hussain emphasized the key role of religious scholars in promoting religious harmony, tolerance, and brotherhood, as well as in maintaining a peaceful environment. He said that Khatam-un-Nabiyeen University would be made functional in light of suggestions from religious scholars.

He said that the Quran

Complex building would be transformed into a true center for the promotion of religious education and that the cleanliness system at shrines and mosques under the Auqaf Department would be improved. The provincial minister said that people from all schools of thought would be included in the Quran Board and the United Ulema Board, and that further improvements would be made in the Department of Auqaf and Religious Affairs based on the recommendations of religious scholars.

24 cops promoted as inspectors

LAHORE (APP): A ceremony was held at the Central Police Office on Sunday to assign ranks to 24 officers promoted to the rank of Inspector.

The event, dedicated by IGP Punjab to the blind daughters of promoted Inspector Ahmad Bakhsh, highlighted the personal connection behind the promotions. The daughters of Faisalabad's Inspector Ahmad Bakhsh shared their emotions on their father's achievement.

IGP Punjab, along with senior police officers and under-training ASPs, personally assigned the new ranks to the inspectors. During the ceremony, IGP Punjab and other senior officers congratulated the

promoted inspectors and their families.

In addition, the under-training ASPs from the 51st Common held a consultation session with the promoted inspectors, discussing key issues surrounding rural and urban policing, as well as shared experiences.

IG Punjab emphasized the importance of the police service structure, revealing that over 26,000 promotions have been granted, with plans for further promotions within various police units, including CTD, Cyber & Organized Crime Unit, and Safe Cities.

In his address, IGP Punjab urged the newly promoted officers to focus

on providing fearless security for the country and to offer selfless service to the people of Pakistan. He reminded them to remain steadfast in combating terrorism, crime, and other threats.

The promotion ceremony was attended by promoted cops' families. The inspectors expressed their heartfelt gratitude to IG Punjab for his support.

Additional IG Punjab Sultan Ahmad Chaudhry, DIG Establishment One Suleman Sultan Rana, DIG Establishment Two Captain (ret'd) Liaquat Ali Malik, ASP Defense Shahrbano Naqvi, and senior officers, including ASPs in training, were present at the event.

LGH treats nearly 2mln patients for free in 2024

LAHORE (APP): In line with Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif's vision of 'Health for All', Lahore General Hospital (LGH) provided free medical treatment to nearly 2 million patients during 2024.

This was stated by Principal of Postgraduate Medical Institute (PGMI) and Ameer Uddin Medical College Prof. Dr. Muhammad Al-Fareed Zafar, while presiding over a performance review meeting on Sunday. During the meeting, Prof. Al-Fareed highlighted that 98,925 surgeries of various types were performed at LGH, further strengthening the hospital's commitment to providing quality healthcare. He said that under the guidance of Provincial Health Minister Khawaja Salman Rafique, significant improvements have been introduced, including the availability of senior consultants, enhanced medical facilities, a monitoring and feedback system, and phil-

anthropic support for free food services for patients and their attendants. He also mentioned the construction of guest houses for patient attendants, which has provided much-needed relief to citizens visiting the hospital.

He expressed confidence that these steps have increased public trust in the LGH administration and medical staff. He stated that the hospital's healthcare professionals remain committed to serving humanity with dedication and will continue implementing patient-friendly policies in 2025, ensuring that people from Punjab and beyond receive timely and high-quality medical care. He stressed that nothing is more important than human life, and therefore, health professionals must always remain alert and dedicated to providing the best possible medical facilities. He added that the hospital's improved performance this year compared to previous years is a testament to

teamwork and collective effort.

Medical Superintendent Dr. Faryad Hussain, while sharing the hospital's performance over the past year, stated that LGH conducted thousands of diagnostic procedures, including ultrasounds, X-rays, CT scans, MRIs, dialysis, ECGs, gastroscopies, neuroangiographies, and childbirths. He expressed satisfaction that under the leadership of Prof. Al-Fareed Zafar, Lahore General Hospital continues to expand its services and provide better healthcare facilities to an increasing number of citizens each year.

The hospital administration reaffirmed its commitment to maintaining high standards of healthcare and further enhancing medical services in 2025. They expressed their determination to continue making Lahore General Hospital an exemplary and state-of-the-art medical institution in Punjab's healthcare sector.

15 prominent personalities nominated to receive ‘Pride of KP’ awards

Syed Adnan

PESHAWAR: The 6th edition of the Matrix Pakistan Youth Summit, in collaboration with the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Youth Affairs Department, will honor 15 distinguished individuals with the 'Pride of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa' awards. The event is set to take place on February 11 at Agricultural University, Peshawar, and will be attended by notable government officials and social figures to recognize youth achievements.

These awards celebrate excellence, innovation, leadership, and social services across various fields.

This year's honorees include: Ehsan Zafar Abbasi, Young Pakistani Inventor Aftab Ahmed Founder & CEO, Assort Tech, Kashif Ali Founder & CEO, TechKhwa, Fayyaz Ahmed Jamsheed Barki, Adnan Khan, Zoha Malik Sher, Huzaifa Bahram Iqra Wakeel Khan, Farzana Ali Dr. Mohib Afridi Aqleem Orakzai, Masood Afridi, Asiya Khan, Obaidullah Khan

The Matrix Pakistan Youth Summit is one of Pakistan's largest youth events, expecting over 10,000 participants. More than 100 exhibitors and 50+ national and international partners will represent diverse industries and sectors.

The event will provide young individuals with valuable networking opportunities, knowledge exchange, and leadership training. Various panel discussions, keynote speeches, and interactive sessions will be organized to promote entrepreneurship, innovation, and leadership development.

Hasan Nisar, Founder & CEO of Matrix Pakistan, said "The Matrix Pakistan Youth Summit is not just an event; it's a movement dedicated to empowering the youth of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and recognizing their achievements. The 'Pride of KP' awards highlight the contributions of outstanding individuals shaping the province's future. Our mission is to create a platform where young leaders, change-makers, and industry experts can collaborate, learn, and create a lasting impact."

With a strong focus on youth empowerment and development, the 6th edition of the Matrix Pakistan Youth Summit will serve as a key platform to showcase young talent and mobilize them to play an impactful role in national progress.

ETEA conducts first computer-based Scholarship test for govt school students



F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The Educational Testing and Evaluation Agency (ETEA) has successfully conducted the first-ever Computer-Based Test (CBT) for the award of scholarships to students of 6th and 7th grades from government schools across Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP). This landmark initiative reflects the commitment of the Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa towards ensuring a fair, transparent, and technologically advanced examination system.

The scholarship program is aimed at providing talented students with fully funded education up to the 12th grade in leading educational institutions across the province. The computer-based tests were conducted from January 11 to January 27, 2025, covering all districts of KP smoothly and efficiently.

As per official data, a total of 13,251 students applied for 506 available seats across the province. Out of these, 12,104 students appeared for the test, whereas 1,147 remained absent.

The examination results indicate that 3,152 students successfully passed, while 8,939 students did not qualify. Additionally, 13 candidates were found using unfair means and have been reported for disciplinary action in strict accordance with ETEA regulations.

The data further reveals that out of the 12,104 students who appeared for the test, 9,902 were boys and 2,202 were girls. The passing percentage for male candidates stood at 26.8%, while female candidates recorded a passing percentage of 22.6%. Notably, in previous examinations, the overall passing percentage was only 10%. The introduction of the CBT has led to a significant improvement in the passing rate and has also enhanced the accuracy and efficiency of result compilation, enabling ETEA to announce results within 24 hours of test completion.

Previously, the scholarship test was conducted through traditional paper-based methods, which raised serious concerns regarding transparency, fairness, and efficiency. Manual testing left room for human error, delays in result compilation, and potential malpractices. However, with the adoption of CBT, ETEA has successfully addressed these challenges. The new system ensures a standardized, tamper-proof examination process, minimizing the possibility of unfair means and favouritism.

Sports Gala at New Islamia High School and College ends

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The month-long Sports Gala at New Islamia High School and College Peshawar concluded with a grand closing ceremony, celebrating the athletic achievements of over 450 students who participated in six different sports, including cricket, badminton, basketball, and volleyball.

The closing ceremony, held at the school's main campus, was graced by chief guest Abdullah Haqqani, alongside CEO Iftikhar Liaqat Ali, Administrator Muhammad Amjad, Academic In-charge Waheed, faculty members, and distinguished guests.

The event featured intense competition, with Islamian Markhor securing the cricket championship, while Warrior finished as the runner-up. In volleyball, Warrior claimed the top position, with Champion securing second place. The basketball tournament was won by Markhor, followed by Islamia Champion as the runner-up.

The chief guest distributed trophies and cash prizes among the winning and runner-up teams, commending their dedication and competitive spirit.

In their speeches, Abdullah Haqqani, Shah Khalid, and CEO Iftikhar Liaqat Ali congratulated the organizers and praised the efforts of teachers, staff, and students in making the event a success. They emphasized that sports play a crucial role in students' physical and mental development, fostering teamwork and resilience.

The speakers also stressed the significance of education, highlighting that no nation can progress without knowledge and technological advancements. They encouraged students to actively participate in extracurricular activities, which help in developing leadership, social awareness, and personal growth.

Administrator Muhammad Amjad, Academic In-charge Waheed, faculty members, and distinguished guests.



Khizar responds to Toru's allegations

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Additional Secretary Information, Arbab Khizar Hayat, has strongly condemned the allegations made by Provincial Minister for Food, Zahir Shah Toru, against Advisor to the Prime Minister, Engineer Amir Muqam, regarding the wheat scandal.

In a statement, Arbab Khizar Hayat said that leveling baseless accusations against Amir Muqam for political gains and cheap publicity is incomprehensible. He further claimed that the entire nation is well aware that the provincial food minister and Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) leadership are themselves involved in the wheat scandal.

He warned that legal action under the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA) would be taken against Zahir Shah Toru for making false and fabricated claims through a press conference. He accused the provincial minister of attempting to protect his own position by shifting blame onto Amir Muqam.

Referring to past cases against Amir Muqam, Arbab Khizar Hayat said that during PTI's tenure, dozens of fabricated cases were filed against him through the National Accountability Bureau (NAB), Federal Investigation Agency (FIA), and Anti-Corruption Department.



PESHAWAR: Sports journalists posing for photographers after friendly match between KP Sports Writer Association and Rawalpindi Islamabad Sports Journalists.

KPSWA beat RISJ by 71 runs in friendly match

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Sports Writer Association (KPSWA) defeated Rawalpindi Islamabad Sports Journalists Association by 71 runs. In the match played at Hayatabad Sports Complex, KP Sports Writers captain Asim Shiraz won the toss and decided to bat first and scored 206 runs for the loss of 4 wickets in the allotted 15 overs. Muhammad Yousuf played a brilliant innings of 115 runs not out, Shahid Afridi scored 53 and Arshad Yousafzai scored 12 runs.

In reply, the Islamabad Sports Writers Association team could score 135 runs in the allotted 15 overs. Javed Khan was the top batsman for Islamabad with 43 runs, Mohsin Ali 19 and Ayaz Akbar were dismissed for 14 runs. Irshad Ali and Bilal Afridi took 2 wickets each for KP Sports Writers. Shahid Afridi and Amjad Khan each took one wicket. AIPS General Secretary, Pakistan Sports Writers Federation President, Senior Sports Journalist Amjad Aziz Malik and Khyber Union of Journalists President Kashifuddin Syed distributed the prizes. Peshawar Press Club General Secretary Tayyab Usman and Khyber Union of Journalists Secretary Irshad Ali were also present on the occasion.

Senior sports journalist Amjad Aziz Malik said that the cricket match between sports journalists of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Islamabad is an important step. The aim of organizing this limited-overs match is to attract sports journalists to sports along with their professional responsibilities and provide them with an opportunity for entertainment. Finally, prizes were distributed among the players. The next match of the Friendship Media Cup will be played in Islamabad.

Unlocking KP's mineral reservoirs to bolster exports

PESHAWAR (APP): A total of 27 minerals types including emerald, feldspar, granite, limestone, quartzite, quartz, silica sand and soap stones with 289,968 tons production during 202-21 were found in KP, adding the province carried about 2900 million tons marble reserves which is about 95 percent of total reserves of Pakistan.

He said that over 5000 operational mines existed in Pakistan including the world largest salt mines of Kewra, fifth bigger copper and gold reserves and second most coal deposit besides billions of barrels of crude oil if properly explored can turn the country's economy.

"Six out of 15 slabs marbles are being wasted due to blasting at the sites besides gemstones especially in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa due to lack of patronage," he said. The lack of technology and professional training besides heavy taxes were making negative effects on mines, minerals and gemstones mining in KP.

Mamoor Khan, pattern-in-chief, All Pakistan Commercial Exporters Association (APCEA) said, "Pakistan is a home to diverse and rare varieties of gemstones deposits with a potential to export 800,000 carats of Rubby, 87,000 carats of Emerald and 5 million carats peridot per year."

During July 2021 to June 30, 2022, he said that 6.77 million experts made from gemstones while 193,132.85 USD exports were achieved in August and 422,004.6 USD in 2023 by APCEA. He claimed that USD 4 million gemstones exports were achieved by APCEA in 2021-22.

"Pakistan's exports potential to latent gemstone industry is estimated to be around USD 32 billion and I urge the government to give Namak Mandi the hub status of gemstone industry in Peshawar from where raw gemstones were being exported to China, Afghanistan, USA, Belgium and UK.

He said stoppage of smuggling of raw gemstones from KP to the foreign countries was a big challenge as it started adversely impacted the gemstone exports of the country.

The Economic Survey of Pakistan 2023 report revealed that approximately 8,813,025 metric tons (MT) of marble were produced in 2017-18, 7,990,473MT in 2018-19, 7,700,855MT in 2019-20 and 478,100 MT in 2021-22 (March-July) while the country marble exports stood as \$31,030 in 2016, \$28,166 in 2017, \$26,403 in 2018, \$25,377 in 2019, \$17,204 in 2020 and \$24,679 in 2021.

Similarly, according to KP Board of Investment and Trade (KP-BIT), KP has estimated 14 trillion tons a year of marble, limestone, dolomite, soapstone, silica and other mineral resources, 70 million carats of gemstones and 1.10 billion bbls of oil reserves potential.

"Despite such a huge mines and minerals potential in KP, its contribution in GDP is only three percent that needed to be enhanced by giving interest free loans to miners and reduce taxes on import of machinery and electricity cost," said Zahid Shinwari, former President of Sarhad Chamber of Commerce and Industry while talking to APP.

Similarly, about 82 million tons coal reserved were found only in Hangu and Orkzai including 9 million ton of developed reserves besides huge reservoirs of chromites in Shangla and Mingora Swat, requiring incentives to explorers for financial empowerment of local community.

The exploration of emerald gemstones' lease of Rs510 million for Swat was granted besides another mine lease for Shangla, claiming collection of about Rs 7 billion revenue last year from mineral, mines and gemstones to bolster exports.

Junaid Khan, Director General, Mines and Mineral Department said Mining Cadastre Portal has been introduced to facilitate investors.

The mapping of potential minerals, gemstones and mineral sites started with the assistance of the Geological Survey of Pakistan (GSP)," he said.

The mapping of about 30 percent areas in KP including Chitral, Orakzai and Kurram districts completed while remaining 70% of the province comprises mountain outer terrains to start soon. On the basis of GSP's survey, he said that the exploration of minerals would be started on scientific lines.

Besides an establishment of a gemstone laboratory and technical training and certification Center in the province, he said KP's mineral testing laboratories are being strengthened in term of equipment and machinery.

A mineral complex would be established at Hayatabad Peshawar for one-window facilities and consultancy services to investors. Offices in Chitral, Dir, Manshera, DI Khan and Swabi would be established and that about 350 cases were registered against illegal miners.

Junaid Khan said a mineral development and management company would be setup. About future projects, Junaid said that an exploratory study of lithium metal in Chitral besides other metallic minerals planned.

Abdul Karim, CM KP adviser said that 'exploration of decorative stones' in Mohmand, Bajaur and Khyber, exploration of metallic minerals including gold, silver, manganese, iron and chromite, development of rare metallic mines, coal, marbles, platinum, silver and gold reservoirs in Orakzai and strengthening of Project Management Unit (PMU) completed.

Besides infrastructure development of clusters of mining, he said that establishment of mineral checkpoints and Mines Safety and Mechanized Mining Centres were in pipeline.

Mohmand Marble City is being constructed on 350 acres of land and that a similar marble city is also being built in Buner.

He said over 28 units have already started production in Marble City Risalpur while 20 and 70 percent portions of Rashakai and Nowshera SEZ respectively earmarked for marble and mines industrial units. Pakistani cuisine recipes

Traders delegation meet SSP Operations

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: A significant meeting was held between SSP Operations Peshawar, Masood Ahmed Bangash, and a delegation led by senior trader leader and social activist, President of All Pakistan Car Dealers Association Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and Chairman of Peshawar Chamber Law & Order Committee, Ghulam Bilal Javid. Ghulam Bilal Javid congratulated the newly appointed SSP on his posting in Peshawar and discussed the issues faced by the business community in detail. During the meeting, Ghulam Bilal Javid proposed holding a large-scale meeting with the traders of Peshawar to openly discuss law and order concerns. The SSP Operations agreed to this proposal and assured that all senior trader representatives would be invited next week. On this occasion, Ghulam Bilal Javid expressed concern over the rise in street crimes, snatching incidents, and shop break-ins in Peshawar, particularly in Hayatabad, where crime rates have increased significantly.



In brief

Fire breaks out in shop, loss of lakhs rupeesBy Allah Dad Chandio LARKANA : Yesterday, a fire broke out in a shop in Larkana due to short circuit, destroying goods worth Rs 2 million. According to details, yesterday, a fire broke out in the grocery shop of Asif Sheikh Sheikh, a resident of Ghauspur locality of Larkana, due to which valuable goods worth Rs 2 million were burnt to ashes. However, as the fire spread, the neighbors came together to control the fire. However, due to the traditional negligence of the fire brigade, the fire brigade arrived late due to the information. Speaking to the media on this occasion, the affected shopkeeper said that he is poor and needs financial assistance.

One killed in Malakand firing

MALAKAND (APP): A shooting incident in Malakand has left one person dead and another injured on Sunday. According to Levies sources, the incident took place in the Aman Dara area of Malakand, where gunfire resulted in the immediate death of one individual, while another sustained injuries. Initial reports suggest that the motive behind the shooting was a property dispute. Levies officials have arrested two suspects and initiated further investigations.

7-year-old girl killed in Swabi

SWABI (APP): A 7-year-old girl was killed after being hit by a speeding loader vehicle in Swabi district on Sunday. Police said, the incident occurred in the Shewa Adda village of Swabi, where a fast-moving loader ran over the young girl, killing her on the spot. The body of the deceased child has been shifted to the hospital for a post-mortem examination.

3 outlaws arrested

DERA ISMAIL KHAN (APP): Dera police during the successful operations against the criminal elements arrested three outlaws including drug dealers, 2340 grams of hashish and weapon recovered from their possession in the limits of Shorkot police station. According to the police spokesman, on the direction of the District Police Officer (DPO) Dera Sajjad Ahmed Sahibzada operations against criminal elements are continuing indiscriminately. Shorkot police station under the leadership of SDPO ASP Muhammad Nauman along with SHO Khanzada Khan seized 2300 grams of hashish and 01 magazine of Kalashnikov with 07 cartridges from the possession of drug dealer Quadratullah son of Sarfraz resident of District Tank. Another drug peddler Zia ur Rehman son of Nizamuddin resident of Shorkot was arrested while police recovered 48 grams of hashish from his possession. Meanwhile, Rahmatullah son of Alam Sher resident of Himmat was arrested and police recovered 12 bore repeater gun with 25 cartridges from his possession.

Polio staff awarded

DIR LOWER (APP): To achieve 100% targets during the anti-polio campaign, the process of reward and punishment has been ensured in the light of the orders of Deputy Commissioner Dir Payen Muhammad Arif Khan. Additional Deputy Commissioner General Bashir Khan gave certificates of appreciation to doctors, paramedics and field polio workers on behalf of the district administration for their excellent performance in polio and timely completion of all targets during the campaign.

Foolproof security in place for anti-polio campaign

Shafiuddin Shafqi

KARAK: Foolproof security arrangements, search operations and strict checkpoints are underway for the upcoming polio campaign of Karak Police.

According to the details, full-proof security arrangements have been made for the upcoming polio campaign across the district on the instructions of District Police Officer Karak Shahbaz Elahi and a large police force has been deployed to ensure the safety of polio teams and the public.

In this regard, the police are also conducting large-scale search operations in different areas, while strict vigil is being maintained at the entrance and exit points of the district. Checkpoints

are being set up and every person and vehicle entering and leaving is being carefully checked.

A special strategy has been adopted for the security of polio workers for the polio campaign, under which all teams are provided with security by armed police personnel. Police personnel will be present in the field with the polio workers and provide them with all possible security. In addition, additional personnel have been deployed in sensitive areas and additional police patrolling has been done in different areas.

To prevent any untoward incident, The incident could have been prevented in time. In addition, the police are also searching for suspicious elements in

various hotels, inns, bus stands and other public places in the district. Meanwhile, the intelligence network has been further activated and information is also being collected through the police's auxiliary human resources in the surrounding areas.

DPO Karak has appealed to the public to fully cooperate with security agencies and immediately report any suspicious activity to the nearest police station. Karak Police is taking all possible measures to protect the public and polio workers.

The government is taking steps to ensure that this national campaign is a complete success and that innocent children are protected from a deadly disease like polio.

operation carried out against illegal electricity connections

N A W A B S H A H (APP):WAPDA officials, Police, Lady Police, and Rangers personnel conducted a joint operation to recover electricity arrears and eliminate illegal connections in different areas of Nawabshah city.

The checking and recovery operation was conducted in areas of Old Nawabshah, Jam Sahib Road, Jamshed Colony, Double Road, Maryam Road and other areas in order to prevent electricity theft and ensure recovery of arrears.

During the operation dozens of illegal connections were disconnected, while multi-frequency domestic and commercial connections were checked. Contingent Rangers and Police were present during the operation to deal with

any resistance.

During the operation, WAPDA SDO Zain Gujjar Syed Hubdar Ali Shah Syed Abrar Shah Maqbool Gupchani said that no concession would be entertained in cases of illegal connections and arrears and legal action will be taken against defaulters for the recovery of electricity bills on time and to improve the electricity supply system.

Rana Mubarak, Ghulam Sarwar Abdulwadood, Shah Nawaz, Muhammad Usman Jamali, Ajab Ali Kerio, Rahim Bakhsh Jamali Asif Rind Khalil Pathan Ghulam Hussain, Manzoor Sand Amjad Brohi Jam Khan Gopang Zahid Abbasi, Mukhtiar Mehar, Sikander and other WAPDA staff were present on the site.

Four meters disconnected over violations

MULTAN (APP): Sui Northern Gas Limited (SNGL) UFG Control Task Force on Sunday disconnected four meters over violations.

According to a spokesperson, During the operation, three meters were disconnected over using for commercial purposes and one meter which was taken off by consumer recovered and seized.

The company has vowed to continue these efforts to combat gas theft and illegal activities, ensuring uninterrupted gas supply to consumers.



HYDERABAD: A camel cart holder on the way loaded with sugarcane to deliver sugar factory near Matari.



SARGODHA: Youngsters are playing cricket in the local ground at Qasim Park.

Women University in dire need of new hostels

MULTAN (APP): Women University Multan stands as the sole higher education institution in South Punjab exclusively catering to women, offering education across 27 disciplines and is in dire need of new hostels and classrooms.

Students as well as their parents, especially from remote areas including Laiba, Zainab, Mahim and some others appealed Punjab government to address the issue of hostel shortage. Spread over 40 acres, the university comprises a 13-acre City campus and a 27-acre Mati Tal campus

The university, under the leadership of Vice-Chancellor (VC), Dr. Kalsoom Paracha, attracts a large number of students, particularly from remote areas of South Punjab. However, a severe shortage of hostel facilities remains a significant challenge. Currently, the university accommodates 1,400 students in its hostels, while over 3,000 applications are rejected annually due to limited capacity. When media discussed the issue with VC, she remarked "It deeply saddens me to reject these requests, adding that she has repeatedly pursuing the issue.

She hoped that she would succeed to manage new hostels.

Women University Multan has witnessed a continuous rise in student enrollment, creating an urgent need for additional classrooms and resources. To a query about students' strength and new building, she apprised, every department requires at least three extra rooms to effectively manage the growing number of students.

The university also faces challenges in its transport system, operating 10 buses with only six drivers.

"Managing transport with limited staff is an ongoing struggle," Dr. Paracha noted.

Despite these hurdles, the institution remains committed to academic excellence. We have adjusted drivers by ensuring different timings, Dr. Paracha stated.

PTI workers to make Feb. 8 protest a success

F. P. Report

LOWER DIR: Pakistan Tahreek Insaf MPA Muhammad Azam Khan has said that party workers will observe Feb. 8 as a black day and will make it a success. He was talking to local journalists and speaking to party workers at the Balambat tehsil chairman office here on Sunday.

The Balambat tehsil chairman Shakir Shuiab was also present. The lawmaker said that the PTI mandate was stolen on Feb 8 last year, that was why his party had announced to mark it as a black day. The MPA said that thousands of the PTI workers from different constituencies in Lower Dir would participate in the proposed protest

rally at Swabi on that day. The PTI lawmaker said that people in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Sindh and Punjab had voted for his party but the public mandate was stolen and a hybrid regime was imposed upon the nation.

He said the PTI workers would no longer bear injustice with their leadership and they would take to streets to free the most popular leader who had been in jail.

The MPA said that he himself would lead a procession of workers from the Lower Dir district to participate in the Swabi protest rally.

Meanwhile, the PTI elected tehsil chairman Shakir Shuiab informed party workers at his office

that Rs 50 million development funds would be equally distributed among the village councils in his jurisdiction. He said that elected local government representatives affiliated with other political parties would also get equal funds. He made it clear that all funds would be distributed with due consultation of village councils' chairman.

He said that each village council would get Rs 1 million to Rs 1.2 million for small development projects. The tehsil chairman said that different mosques would be solarized. The chairman announced that the PTI workers convicted by military court would be given Rs 200,000 while special persons would be provided with wheelchairs.

Rescue personnel on high alert in Galiyat

NATHIAGALI (APP): Rescue personnel have been placed on high alert in various areas of Galiyat, including Changla Gali, Ayubia, and Nathiagali on Sunday, as tourists from across Pakistan flock to the region to enjoy the snow-fall.

District Emergency Officer Muhammad Arif Khattak visited Nathiagali to assess the preparedness

of rescue teams and emergency response units.

During his visit, he inspected key locations, reviewed the readiness of ambulances and emergency vehicles, and checked the availability of medical equipment and medicines.

He emphasized the need for all personnel to remain fully alert to respond promptly to any emergency situation, given the increased number of visitors in the area.

With a surge in tourist activity, the district emergency officer directed rescue teams to ensure swift action in case of any untoward incident, reaffirming the commitment of Rescue 1122 to public safety and smooth facilitation of visitors in the snow-covered region.

Anti-polio drive for gypsy children inaugurated

Hafiz Muhammad Aziz-ur-Rehman

AFIZABAD: Deputy Commissioner, Abdul Razzaq, inaugurated five-day anti-polio campaign to administrator drops of polio vaccine to gypsy children, today. District Health Officer Dr. Faiq Ali Tarar was also present on this occasion.

Talking to media, DC Abdul Razzaq said that health departments was constituted 998 mobile teams to give anti-polio drops to 238551 target children door to door, bus stands, railway stations, hospitals, and other public places in the district.

DC said that ulama, social workers, traders, parents, teachers and civil society could play their pivotal role for making anti-polio campaign successful and result-oriented to achieve goal of polio free Pakistan.

He directed the polio teams and other health officers to ensure hundred percent vaccination of target children during this campaign so that no child could be left without polio vaccination drops in the district.

Meanwhile, grand anti-encroachment operation is in full swings in the district while implementation on 'Suthra Punjab Programme' is underway on the directions of the Chief Minister of the Punjab besides construction work to build green belts alongside different roads also continue.

DC Hafizabad Abdul Razzaq visited different roads to check operation against encroachments, pace of work on green belts and cleanliness standard in different areas of the city. He said that public parks were also being upgraded to ensure provision of better recreational facilities to the citizens in the parks.

Making hosiery industry compatible to global manufacturers

FAISALABAD (APP): Pakistan's hosiery industry had been a major contributor to the national economy by enhancing textile exports volume and employment opportunities for millions.

This sector has a long history of manufacturing, exports and employment, meeting local hosiery needs and exporting knitwear to other countries, earning millions of dollars foreign exchange each year.

But, over the period due to fluctuating energy and raw material prices and changing economic policies of respective governments, this sector also suffered blow after blow that hindered its growth and competitiveness in global markets.

Presently, the challenges faced by this sector range from economic, infrastructural, compliance and policy issues as the experts emphasize concrete measures to make this sector compatible to global manufacturers.

"Economic and politi-

cal instability, shortage of raw materials and intense global competition posed threats to our Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs)," noted Muhammad Akram Khan, Manager of a local hosiery unit.

He suggested proactive measures like policy reforms, technological upgrades and branding strategies to overcome these hurdles. "We can enhance our hosiery exports and solidify our position as a leading textile exporter by addressing the challenges faced by our industry."

A technocrat Prof Dr Muhammad Afzal also mentioned to inconsistent political and economic policies as the foremost challenges being faced by the hosiery exporters in Pakistan.

"Inflation, fluctuating exchange rates and rising costs of production badly impact competitiveness of Pakistani hosiery in global market," he claimed. "Depreciation in rupee value also increased cost of import-

ed raw materials like synthetic fibers, dyes and machinery."

He mentioned to energy costs as another reason and said, "hosiery sector is highly energy-intensive, relying on uninterrupted power supply for knitting, dyeing and finishing processes. But, expensive electricity increases production costs and reduce profitability."

Dr Afzal stated that Pakistan produces a significant amount of cotton but availability of high-quality raw material still remains a challenge and hosiery manufacturers have to often import required fine yarns, synthetic fibers and specialized materials. "Dependence on imports, therefore, raises costs and disrupts supply chain due to shipping delays and fluctuating international prices."

He also referred to lack of modern spinning and dyeing facilities that affects production of high-quality goods and their appeal in interna-

tional markets in presence of stringent quality standards.

Another aspect highlighted by Dr Afzal was compliance of various international standards like environmental regulations, labor laws and quality certifications. "Obtaining and maintaining these certifications involves significant financial and technical investment is also a challenge for our SMEs. Many among them often fall short of meeting these requirements due to outdated manufacturing practices and lack of awareness about global compliance norms."

He said since Pakistan's hosiery industry competes with major neighboring and rival countries like India, Bangladesh and China, it needs better technologies and the government support to grab slots in international trade market.

"Therefore, we direly need investment in Research and Development (R&D) and improve design and man-

ufacturing processes to introduce new and trendy hosiery products in line with global fashion trends," he recommended.

As the global textile industry is increasingly focusing on sustainable and eco-friendly production processes, many international buyers prefer suppliers who follow sustainable practices like using organic fibers, water-efficient dyeing and reduced carbon footprints. Therefore, our hosiery industry must be incentivized with eco-friendly production technologies and proper regulatory frameworks.

Senior Vice Chairman Pakistan Hosiery Manufacturers & Exporters Association (PHMA) North Zone Hazar Khan sees the struck-up refunds as one of key challenges for hosiery exporters. "Although they face numerous problems, yet struck-up refunds, hike in energy tariff and high markup rates are their key challenges."

Appreciating the gov-

ernment measures for reviving industrial sector, he said, "if pending refunds are released, the SMEs in this sector will have a better chance to expand their exports despite difficult international market conditions."

He also suggested to easing out export procedures and regulatory frameworks to resolve complicated issues of hosiery exporters. "We require a versatile approach to overcome the challenges and strengthen Pakistan's position in global hosiery market."

He emphasized to streamline export procedures, ensure timely tax refunds and implement long-term policies to provide stable environment to exporters.

during previous year.

"This growth indicates potential of this sector, provided that its challenges were adequately addressed," he said.

"If the government, policymakers and industry stakeholders collaborate strategically, Pakistan's hosiery sector could overcome its challenges and strengthen its position in the global textile market."

He advised manufacturers to invest in modern machinery and automation to improve efficiency and product quality. "Promoting eco-friendly manufacturing practices and incentives for green production could help our exporters to align with global trends."

Since, our hosiery industry has immense potential for growth, employment generation and foreign exchange earnings, a stable business environment, competitive pricing and strategic investments in technology must be ensured to fully capitalize its potential.



Zelenskyy says excluding Ukraine from US-Russia talks about war is ‘very dangerous’

KYIV, Ukraine (AP): Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said Saturday that excluding his country from talks between the U.S. and Russia about the war in Ukraine would be “very dangerous” and asked for more discussions between Kyiv and Washington to develop a plan for a ceasefire.

Speaking in an exclusive interview with The Associated Press, Zelenskyy said Russia does not want to engage in ceasefire talks or to discuss any kind of concessions, which the Kremlin interprets as losing at a time when its troops have the upper hand on the battlefield.

He said U.S. President Donald Trump could bring Russian President Vladimir Putin to the table with the threat of sanctions targeting Russia’s energy and banking system, as well as continued support of the Ukrainian military.

“I think these are the closest and most important steps,” he said in the interview in the Ukrainian capital that lasted for more than an hour.

Zelenskyy’s remarks followed comments Friday by Trump, who said American and Russian officials were “already talking” about ending the war. Trump said his administration has had “very serious” discussions with Russia, but he did not elaborate.

“They may have their own relations, but talking about Ukraine without us — it is dangerous for everyone,” Zelenskyy said.

He said his team has been in contact with the Trump administration, but those discussions are at a “general level,” and he believes in-person meetings will take place soon to develop more detailed agreements.

“We need to work more on this,” he said, adding that Trump understandably appeared to be focused on domestic issues in the first weeks after his inauguration.

The nearly three-year war in Ukraine is at a crossroads. Trump promised to end the fighting within six months of taking office, but the two sides are far apart, and it is unclear how a ceasefire deal would take shape. Meanwhile, Russia continues to make slow but steady gains along the front, and Ukrainian forces are enduring severe manpower shortages.

Most Ukrainians want a pause in fighting to rebuild their lives. The country faces near-daily Russian attacks on homes, and strikes on power systems have plunged entire cities into darkness.

Millions of Ukrainians have been displaced, unable to return to their homes after vast tracts of the coun-



try’s east have been reduced to rubble. Nearly a fifth of Ukraine is now occupied by Russia. In those areas, Moscow-appointed authorities are swiftly erasing any hint of Ukrainian identity.

With Trump back in the White House, Ukraine’s relationship with the U.S., its largest and most important ally, is also at a tipping point.

In an initial phone call with Trump during the presidential campaign, Zelenskyy said, the two

agreed that if Trump won, they would meet to discuss the steps needed to end the war. But a planned visit by Trump’s Ukraine envoy, Keith Kellogg, was postponed “for legal reasons,” Zelenskyy said. That was followed by a sudden foreign aid freeze that effectively caused Ukrainian organizations to halt projects.

“I believe that, first and foremost, we (must) hold a meeting with him, and that is important. And that is, by

the way, something that everyone in Europe wants,” Zelenskyy said, referring to “a common vision of a quick end to the war.”

After the conversation with Trump, “we should move on to some kind of format of conversation with Russians. And I would like to see the United States of America, Ukraine and the Russians at the negotiating table. ... And, to be honest, a European Union voice should also be there. I think it would be fair, effective.

But how will it turn out? I don’t know.”

Zelenskyy cautioned against allowing Putin to take “control” over the war, an apparent reference to Russia’s repeated threats of escalation during President Joe Biden’s administration.

Without security guarantees from Ukraine’s allies, Zelenskyy said, any deal struck with Russia would only serve as a precursor to future aggression. Membership in the NATO alliance, a longstanding

wish for Kyiv that Moscow has categorically rejected, is still Zelenskyy’s top choice.

NATO membership is the “cheapest” option for Ukraine’s allies, and it would also strengthen Trump geopolitically, Zelenskyy argued.

“I really believe that these are the cheapest security guarantees that Ukraine can get, the cheapest for everyone,” he said.

“It will be a signal that it is not for Russia to decide who should be in NATO and who should not, but for the United States of America to decide. I think this is a great victory for Trump,” he said, evidently appealing to the president’s penchant for winners and business deals.

In addition, Zelenskyy said, Ukraine’s 800,000-strong army would be a bonus to the alliance, especially if Trump seeks to bring home U.S. troops who are stationed overseas. Other security guarantee proposals should be backed up by sufficient weapons from the U.S. and Europe, and support for Kyiv to develop its own defense industry, he said.

Zelenskyy also said a French proposal to put European forces in Ukraine to act as a deterrent against Russian aggression is taking shape, but he expressed skepticism, saying many questions remained about the

command-and-control structure and the number of troops and their positions. The issue was raised by French President Emmanuel Macron and with Trump, he said.

“I said in the presence of the two leaders that we are interested in this as a part of the security guarantee, but not as the only guarantee of safety,” he said. “That’s not enough.”

He added: “Imagine, there is a contingent. The question is who is in charge? Who is the main one? What will they do if there are Russian strikes? Missiles, disembarkation, attack from the sea, crossing of the land borderline, offensive. What will they do? What are their mandates?”

Asked if he put those questions directly to Macron, he smiled and said: “We are still in the process of this dialogue.”

Following a statement by U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio that the war has set Ukraine back by 100 years, Zelenskyy urged Rubio to visit Ukraine.

Rubio “needs to come to Ukraine, first of all, to see what Russia has done,” the Ukrainian president said. “But also to see what the Ukrainian people did, what they were able to do for the security of Ukraine and the world, as I said, and just talk to these people.”

One dead, thousands evacuated as Australia battles massive floods

SYDNEY (CNN): One person has died and thousands of others are under evacuation orders in Australia’s northeast after intense rain triggered dangerous flash floods that have inundated homes and businesses.

Flooding has hit large parts of the North Queensland coast since Friday, with the town of Ingham and the nearby city of Townsville heavily impacted. Residents in low-lying coastal suburbs and towns have been urged to evacuate immediately.

Queensland Premier David Crisafulli confirmed that one person had died in the flooding in Ingham on Sunday.

The woman drowned after a rescue boat she was traveling in capsized after hitting a tree on Sunday morning, according to CNN affiliate Nine News. State Disaster Coordinator Shane Chelepy said the woman was one of six people on the boat, with the five others rescued.

“That’s a really tight-knit community, our thoughts and prayers are with the family,” Crisafulli said.

Prime Minister Anthony Albanese said it was “heartbreaking news,” in a post on X. “My thoughts are with the family and the entire community at this awful time.”

Albanese said the federal government “will supply whatever resources are required to deal with this event.”

In the Townsville suburb of Bluewater, an emergency alert was issued Sunday, with local disaster-response officials telling residents “your life may be at risk.”

“Water is rising fast and there will be dangerous and life-threatening flooding,” Townsville Local Disaster Management Group said. “If you do not leave it may become too dangerous for emergency services to rescue you.”

Residents in Townsville’s “black

zone,” an area in the city most at risk from flooding, were warned to evacuate by midday on Sunday and Crisafulli said evacuation centers had been opened.

Queensland’s Department of Environment, Science and Innovation has warned residents to be wary of crocodiles that could be lurking in the floodwaters, according to Nine News.

“During flooding crocodiles can turn up in places they haven’t been seen before as they move about in search of calmer waters,” the department said in a statement.

“Expect crocodiles in all north and far north Queensland waterways even if there is no warning sign.”

Townsville, a city of about 200,000 people, was hit by devastating flooding in 2019 which was labeled by the then state premier as a “one-in-100-year event.”

Crisafulli said Sunday that this weekend’s rains

could match those conditions.

“Take precautions, prepare for the worst, listen to the advice. This is a serious event,” he said.

The flooding comes after days of torrential rain and damaging winds brought on by two low pressure tropical systems, according to the Australian Bureau of Meteorology.

Multiple areas have been hammered with 24-hour rainfall totals of up to 600 mm (about 23 inches), with some areas seeing 250 mm in just six hours, according to the bureau.

Torrential rain and heavy winds that could likely trigger further flash flooding are forecast to last through Monday, the bureau said.

Ingham could see its worst flooding in 60 years.

“The Herbert (river) reached 15.2 meters in that flood. It’s currently at 14.89 meters and rising. It’s expected to reach similar levels to 1967 during the day,” Crisafulli said.

Japanese mark the end winter with bean-throwing ritual to ward off evil spirits



TOKYO (AP) — Hundreds of people gathered Sunday at a Buddhist temple in downtown Tokyo, eagerly stretching their hands to catch the dried soybeans thrown at them in the hope of warding off evil spirits and inviting good luck.

Japan’s annual ritual of “mame-maki,” or bean-throwing, at Buddhist temples, Shinto shrines and homes sees people marking “setsubun,” the last day of the winter in the Japanese lunar calendar. Like rice, soybeans are considered a symbol of vitality and purity.

Inside the Zojoji temple in Tokyo, a number of people including sumo wrestlers, actors and other celebrities, dressed in formal kimonos, stood on an elevated podium, excitedly throwing the dried soybeans as the crowds gathered to happily pick the small packs of “fukumame.”

“Oniwa soto, Fukuwa uchi!” or “Demons out, fortune in!” everyone chanted in sync, loudly enough to be heard outside the temple, where hundreds queued up for the next session.

While the ritual is usually held outside, the rain on Sunday forced everyone to take cover inside the Zojoji temple.

Some lucky participants like Utako Iibuchi and her husband Masaaki collected about 20 packages of soybean, snacks and “mochi” rice cakes. The couple is a regular at the temple’s annual event. “This is the first time we’ve collected so much,” a beaming Utako Iibuchi said.

Japanese people also hold bean-throwing rituals at home, where usually the elder family member wears a red-faced demon mask and throws the beans at the others. Afterward, they eat the same number of beans as their age plus one, for good luck and health.

Bean events at home are largely for families with children, but the Consumer Affairs Agency has advised parents not to feed the dried soybeans to those under five to avoid risks of choking.

10th Int’l Military Quran memorization competition kicks off

MAKKAH (APP): The 10th International Military Quran Memorization Competition has commenced in Makkah, bringing together 179 participants from 32 countries the other day.

The competition, organized by the General Administration of Religious Affairs of the Armed Forces under the patronage of Saudi Defense Minister Prince Khalid bin Salman, aims to promote the significance of the Quran, encourage its memorization, and underscore Saudi Arabia’s role as the custodian of Islam’s holiest sites.

The event features six categories: full Quran memorization, as well as 20-part, 10-part, five-part, and three-part memorization, along with a special category dedicated to recitation and Tajweed (proper pronunciation).

Alongside the competition, a Quranic forum for religious affairs directors and Imams is being held, highlighting Saudi Arabia’s contributions to Quran printing, translation, and distribution. Discussions at the forum focus on the moral values derived from the Quran, the Kingdom’s religious initiatives, and the significance of Tajweed in deepening understanding of the holy book.

The General Administration of Religious Affairs is also conducting specialized training programs for religious affairs personnel within the armed forces, with a focus on Quranic teaching methodologies and skill enhancement for instructors and competition judges.

Maj. Gen. Mesfer Al-Issa, director of the General Administration of Religious Affairs and competition supervisor, described the event as a major initiative to honor the Quran. He emphasized Saudi Arabia’s commitment to fostering Quranic learning among military personnel, reinforcing the leadership’s dedication to religious education.

Al-Issa underscored the profound impact of the competition, particularly given its setting in the sacred cities of Makkah and Madinah. He noted that the Quran plays a vital role in shaping the character of soldiers, instilling psychological, behavioral, and spiritual stability.

The 14-day event will be held over two phases: the first 10 days in Makkah, followed by four

days in Madinah, where participants will visit the Prophet’s Mosque and other significant Islamic landmarks.

An advanced electronic evaluation system, “Insaf” (Fairness), is being employed to ensure transparency in scoring. Judges, including imams from the Two Holy Mosques and renowned Quranic scholars, provide immediate feedback to contestants on memorization, pronunciation, Tajweed, and accuracy.

Al-Issa highlighted that the participants are selected through rigorous national competitions conducted throughout the year to identify top military memorizers.

Beyond fostering memorization, the competition serves as a platform for military personnel from Islamic nations to engage in scholarly discussions, promoting moderate Islamic values and a deeper understanding of the Quran.

Al-Issa emphasized that the initiative strengthens the integration of Quranic teachings within Islamic armed forces, nurturing a generation of soldiers rooted in Islamic knowledge and guided by moral and spiritual principles.

Scores expected in Berlin to protest against far-right

BERLIN (AFP): Berlin on Sunday braced for scores of demonstrators to converge on the German capital to protest against the country’s conservatives’ norm-shattering overtures toward the far-right.

Organisers expect tens of thousands of people to turn up at 3:30pm (14:30 GMT) outside the Bundestag, Germany’s parliament building, and march towards the headquarters of the conservative CDU party.

On Saturday, more than 220,000 people already marched in cities across the country, including Hamburg, Leipzig, Cologne or Stuttgart, according to figures compiled by public broadcaster ARD.

Calls for protests began after conservatives of the Christian

Democratic Union (CDU) sought the support of the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) for a bill in parliament last week, less than a month ahead of a snap federal election.

Since the end of World War II, German parties have had an unwritten agreement not to work with the far-right at the national level.

But CDU chief Friedrich Merz, frontrunner ahead of the February 23 election, sought the parliamentary support of the far-right AfD this week.

The two parties successfully passed a non-binding resolution on Wednesday in an attempt to block undocumented foreigners at the border, including asylum seekers. On Friday, they failed to pass another

contentious bill to further restrict immigration.

Merz launched his all-out immigration crackdown after police arrested an Afghan man following a deadly knife attack a week ago against a group of kindergarten children. He “wants to cut through” the norm of not working with “right-wing extremists in one fell swoop,” said left-wing NGO Campact, one of the organisers of protests in Berlin. Many trade unions, civil society and human rights groups, churches and environmental activists have answered the call.

Centre-left Chancellor Olaf Scholz has warned that the conservatives and the far-right could soon join forces to govern the country, as has been the case in other countries.

Greece issues Santorini seismic activity warning

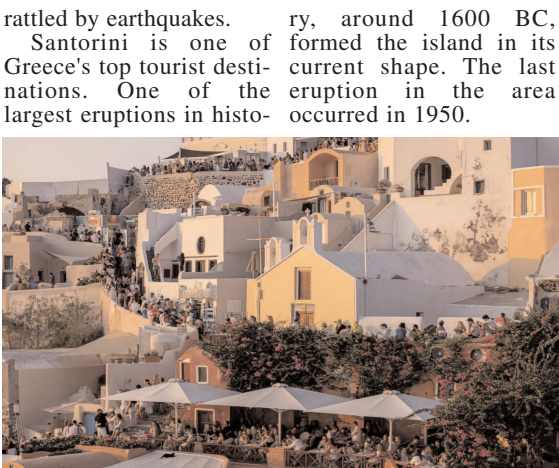
ATHENS (Reuters): Greek authorities have advised people on the Aegean island of Santorini to shut schools on Monday, avoid two small ports and refrain from gathering in indoor spaces after increased seismic activity in the area over recent days.

A series of tremors up to a 4.3 magnitude were registered on Friday and Saturday in the area between the volcanic island of Santorini and Amorgos, the civil protection ministry said in a statement on Saturday afternoon.

The ministry said the

activity was not linked to volcanic activity and was receding, but experts had proposed precautionary measures including the school closures on Feb. 3. They also urged people to not access or remain at the small port of Ammoudi and the harbour of Fira, which serves mainly cruise ships.

Earthquakes measuring between 2.8 and 4.5 struck the area on Sunday morning, according to the Athens Geodynamic institute, without causing damage. Greece sits on multiple fault lines and is often



rattled by earthquakes.

Santorini is one of Greece’s top tourist destinations. One of the largest eruptions in history, around 1600 BC, formed the island in its current shape. The last eruption in the area occurred in 1950.

UK to become first country to criminalise AI child abuse tools

LONDON (Aljazeera): The United Kingdom is set to become the first country to introduce laws against artificial intelligence tools used to generate sexualised images of children, in an attempt to curb a phenomenon that Home Secretary Yvette Cooper said was increasing.

The government announced on Saturday that it would make it illegal to possess, create or distribute AI tools that generate abusive images, making it a crime punishable by up to five years in prison.

AI tools are being used to generate child sexual abuse images by “nude-ifying” real-life images of children or by “stitching the faces of other children onto existing images,” said the government.

It will also be a crime punishable by up to three years in prison to possess AI “paedophile manuals” that teach people how to

use AI to sexually abuse children.

The new laws will also criminalise “predators who run websites designed for other paedophiles to share vile child sexual abuse content or advice on how to groom children”, punishable by up to 10 years in prison, said the government.

“This is a real disturbing phenomenon,” Cooper told Sky News on Sunday.

“Online child sexual abuse material is growing, but also the grooming of children and teenagers online. And what’s now happening is that AI is putting this on steroids.”

She said AI tools were making it easier for perpetrators “to groom children, and it’s also meaning that they are manipulating images of children and then using them to draw and to blackmail young people into further

abuse.”

“It’s just the most vile of crimes,” she added. “Other countries are not yet doing this, but I hope everyone else will follow.”

Cooper told the BBC on Sunday that a recent inquiry had found that around 500,000 children across the UK are victims of child abuse of some form each year, “and the online aspect of that is an increasing and growing part of it”.

The Internet Watch Foundation (IWF), a British non-profit focused on combating online abuse, has warned of the growing number of sexual abuse AI images of children being produced.

Over a 30-day period in 2024, IWF analysts identified 3,512 AI child abuse images on a single dark web site.

The number of the most serious category of images also rose by 10 percent in a year, it found.

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Trump tariff hike will leave no party unscathed

THE Chinese Foreign Ministry said that China firmly deplores and opposes the move by the United States to impose additional tariffs on all Chinese imports, and it will take "necessary countermeasures" to defend its legitimate rights and interests.

The remarks by a ministry spokesperson on Sunday came after the US decided on Saturday to impose a 10-percent tariff on goods imported from China. The White House said the 10-percent tariff is on all imports from China and on top of existing tariffs. The tariff hike will come into effect on Tuesday.

The US side cited the fentanyl issue in the US as the justification for the move. But as the Foreign Ministry spokesperson said this is just a pretext. "The additional tariffs are not constructive and will only harm the counternarcotics cooperation between the two sides in the future."

As the spokesperson pointed out, China has conducted counternarcotics cooperation with the US side in a broad-based way.

At the request of the US, China officially put all fentanyl-related substances under control on humanitarian grounds in 2019, making it the first country in the world to do so. The move played a vital role in preventing the illicit manufacturing, trafficking and abuse of these substances and has won full recognition from the international community including the US.

The US administration should objectively and rationally view the country's fentanyl crisis, which is a domestically driven problem for the US.

The tariff hike also severely violates World Trade Organization rules, and the Chinese Ministry of Commerce said in a statement released on Sunday that China will file a lawsuit with the WTO regarding the wrongful practices of the US in imposing tariffs on Chinese goods. It also stated that China will take corresponding countermeasures to firmly safeguard its rights and interests.

China has repeatedly stated that there is no winner in a trade war or tariff war, but it has been left with no choice but to respond to the US move. It will only be a matter of time before Beijing unveils its countermeasures toward the latest tariff move of the US side.

The tariff hike will not contribute to resolving the issues plaguing the US. Economists at the Peterson Institute for International Economics have predicted that the tariff hikes imposed on imports from Canada, Mexico and China will be passed on to consumers, resulting in higher prices for a wide range of goods. It is especially so with Chinese imports, as the US cannot find alternatives of huge amounts of Chinese imports that stretch widely across the US' consumer markets and industries.

Despite the protectionist measures the US has taken against China over these years, the trade volume between China and the US still hit \$688.28 billion last year, a year-on-year increase of 3.7 percent. It speaks volumes of the mutual benefit the two countries gain from the trade and economic cooperation.

The US tariff hikes only harm the economic and trade cooperation between the world's two largest economies. A review of the series of protectionist measures the US has initiated against China since the first Trump administration launched its trade war against China, clearly indicates tariff measures are not conducive to the interests of either side, nor to the rest of the world.

Beijing urges Washington to correct its wrong practices, maintain the hard-won momentum of China-US drug control cooperation, and promote the stable, healthy and sustainable development of China-US relations. Economic and trade relations between China and the US have been and should continue to be of a win-win nature. The two economies have strong structural complementarity and their links are crucial parts of the global industry and supply chains.

The Trump administration has said that the two countries have a shared responsibility to work together to resolve some common challenges faced by the world, that should include the well-being of the global economy. The two sides, as agreed by the two heads of state in their exchanges last month, recognize it is natural for countries to have divergences and disputes with each other, but they should seek to resolve them through appropriate means in a responsible way. Beijing therefore urges the US to meet China halfway, face the problems that have emerged, have frank dialogues, strengthen cooperation, and manage differences on the basis of equality and mutual respect. That's what they should do to prove the Sino-US relations have a new beginning rather than returning to the old trail that will only take a heavy toll on the mutually beneficial relations between the two countries.

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A calamitous war without end in Sudan

Hafed Al-Ghwel

THE civil war in Sudan, ignited in April 2023 by a ruptured power-sharing pact between the Sudanese Armed Forces and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces, has devoured the nation with a ferocity rivaling its darkest historical chapters.

Born from the embers of the ouster of Omar Bashir in 2019, the conflict represents the collapse of a fragile transition from military to civilian rule, as rival generals — Abdel Fattah Al-Burhan and Mohammed Hamdan Dagalo, commonly known as Hemedti — clashed over control of institutions, strategic resources, and the very future of Sudan.

More than 12 million people are displaced or facing famine as a result of the conflict; 15,000 are confirmed dead and many more remain uncounted beneath rubble or in mass graves. Meanwhile, the nation's economy, once hopeful with International Monetary Fund-backed reforms, has contracted by 40 percent, infrastructure lies in ruins, and 70 percent of hospitals in conflict zones are closed. Still the war rages on, metastasizing into a crisis on multiple fronts as external actors continue to pour fuel on the fire through their proxies.

The Rapid Support Forces, the roots of which lie in the Janjaweed militias of Darfur, has leveraged its paramilitary networks to seize territory and exploit gold mines, while the Sudanese Armed Forces relies on its conventional military apparatus and international legitimacy. Neither side has shown any willingness to compromise, and both are accused of egregious human rights violations, including indiscriminate bombings, gender-based violence, and the use of starvation as a weapon of war.

Civilians, trapped by siege tactics and opportunistic ethnic violence, endure a war without borders, rules or an endgame, a grotesque testament to the international community's inability to reconcile rhetoric with action.

Worryingly, the international community's handling of Sudan's civil war has been a masterclass in dysfunction. Competing diplomatic initiatives, fractured alliances, and a glaring absence of unified pressure have allowed the conflict to metastasize. Mediation efforts by regional organizations, hamstrung by divergent priorities and an inability to enforce agreements, have yielded little beyond symbolic gestures.

Even more disappointing, the UN, once a forum for collective action, now mirrors the world's disarray; Security Council resolutions languish without implementation, while rival powers exploit procedural gridlock to shield their own interests.

This international inertia has emboldened the warring factions, who interpret global inaction as tacit permission to pursue military gains over negotiation. Even calls for ceasefires to be honored, a minimal demand in the face of mass starvation, are treated as optional, with violations

met by silence rather than consequences.

Humanitarian agencies, meanwhile, operate in a lethal limbo. More than 25 million people require aid, yet convoys are routinely blocked, looted or attacked, leaving entire regions severed from deliveries of food, medicine, and other basic supplies. The deliberate targeting of infrastructure during the war, including roads, bridges and hospitals, has turned survival into a logistical impossibility for millions.

While other global crises command sustained attention and resources, the plight of Sudan is relegated to the periphery, its suffering compounded by a cynical arithmetic of geopolitics.

The conflict has laid bare the military's unyielding grip on power, as the rival factions, both of which were products of Bashir's regime, prioritize dominance over governance, rejecting even nominal civilian oversight. Decades of military entrenchment in Sudan's economy, controlling sectors from agriculture to gold mining, have rendered the prospect of democratic accountability nearly impossible. The war itself, rooted in the failure of a 2022 power-sharing agreement, exemplifies this defiance; rather than cede authority, the generals have weaponized state institutions, diverting 70 percent of national expenditures toward warfare while 90 percent of the population faces poverty. Civilian aspirations for representative governance now seem quixotic, as aerial bombardments and ethnic killings in Darfur erase communal trust. With media outlets shut down, universities shorn of dissent, and labor unions disbanded, the machinery of civic engagement lies in ruins, a casualty of war as profound as the cities reduced to ash. Given all these factors that have sent Sudan hurtling toward total collapse, is there any path to peace? Well, Sudan's complex war, now entrenched in its second year, defies simplistic narratives of eventual resolution. Neither side possesses the military capacity to achieve outright victory, yet both resist compromise, betting on attrition to exhaust their rival. The Sudanese Armed Forces and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces each have entrenched economic interests — control of gold mines, ports, and smuggling networks — that incentivize perpetual conflict over stable governance.

cal relevance. Diplomatic communiques tout "grave concern," yet lack the muscle to halt weapons flows or penalize obstruction.

The result is a self-perpetuating cycle: as the world dithers, the architects of the war consolidate power, aid access shrinks further, and the odds of any meaningful interventions dim.

In Sudan, the limits of a fractured international order are not theoretical, they are measured in empty stomachs and mass graves.

Domestically, the war has systematically disman-

tled the foundations of civil society, erasing a decade of grassroots mobilization that once promised a democratic transition. The pro-democracy movement, which mobilized millions to topple Bashir in 2019, now operates in fragments, its leaders jailed, exiled, or coerced into silence, while underground networks struggle to sustain resistance amid relentless crackdowns.

More than 1,000 activists have been detained since 2023, and 80 percent of civil society organizations report severe operational disruptions, crippling their ability to document atrocities or advocate for reform.

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Such deadlock is compounded by a fractured international system: global powers lack consensus, regional actors prioritize short-term security over stability, and multilateral institutions, stripped of enforcement tools, issue hollow appeals.

Even if battlefield exhaustion forces temporary truces, the absence of any credible mechanisms to demobilize forces, redistribute resources or address grievances ensures that ceasefires remain transactional pauses, not pathways to peace.

Yet history suggests that even intractable wars reach inflection points. In the case of Sudan, meaningful progress hinges on three factors: coordinated external pressure to alter the cost-benefit calculus of the war; a unified civilian front capable of transcending factionalism; and enforceable guarantees for military integration. External powers backing the Sudanese Armed Forces and the Rapid Support Forces must align penalties — asset freezes, travel bans, arms embargoes — with demands for good-faith talks.

Simultaneously, civilian coalitions in Sudan, though fragmented, could regain relevance by articulating a shared vision for post-war transition, leveraging grassroots networks that still command moral authority.

None of these guarantees peace, but without such conditions Sudan will descend into being a permanent failed state, its disintegration a blueprint for 21st-century conflict, while also imperiling the already fraught security dynamics in the Horn of Africa. Therefore, the question is not whether the fighting will end and peace prevail, but how many more millions must suffer before the world acknowledges that indifference is a policy choice and one with measurable human consequences.

The PA and Israel are allies in silencing the truth

Eman Mohammed

On December 28, 21-year-old journalism student Shatha Al-Sabbagh was assassinated near her home in Jenin. Her family accused snipers from the Palestinian Authority (PA) deployed in the camp of shooting her in the head. Al-Sabbagh had been active on social media, documenting the suffering of Jenin residents during the raids by Israel and the PA.

Just a few days after Al-Sabbagh's assassination, the authorities in Ramallah banned Al Jazeera from reporting from the occupied West Bank. Three weeks later, PA forces arrested Al Jazeera correspondent Mohamad Atrash.

These developments come as the Israeli occupation has killed more than 200 media workers in Gaza and arrested dozens across the occupied Palestinian territories. It has also banned Al Jazeera and refused to allow foreign journalists to enter Gaza. The fact that the PA's actions mirror Israel's reveals a shared agenda to suppress independent journalism and control public opinion.

To Palestinian journalists, that is hardly news. The PA has never been our protector. It has always been a complicit partner in our brutalisation. That is true in the West Bank and it was true in Gaza when the PA was in power there. I

complicity. As the PA was fighting to stay in power in Gaza after losing the 2006 elections to Hamas, its brutality escalated. In May 2007, gunmen in presidential guard uniforms killed journalist Suleiman Abdul-Rahim al-Ashi and media worker Mohammad Matar Abdo. It was an execution meant to send a clear message to those who witnessed it.

When Hamas took over, its government also imposed restrictions on press freedoms, but its censorship was inconsistent. Once, while documenting the new policemen's division, I was ordered to show my photos to a Hamas officer so he could censor any image he deemed immodest. I often managed to bypass these restrictions by swapping my memory cards preemptively.

The officers weren't fond of anyone overriding their orders, but instead of outright punishment, they resorted to petty power plays—investigations, revoked access, or unnecessary provocations. Unlike the PA, Hamas did not operate within a system of coordination with Israeli forces to suppress journalism, but the restrictions journalists faced still created an environment of uncertainty and self-censorship. Any violation on their part, however, was

The PA was often referred to as "cousins of Israeli occupation" – a grim acknowledgement of its complicity. As the PA was fighting to stay in power in Gaza after losing the 2006 elections to Hamas, its brutality escalated. In May 2007, gunmen in presidential guard uniforms killed journalist Suleiman Abdul-Rahim al-Ashi and media worker Mohammad Matar Abdo. It was an execution meant to send a clear message to those who witnessed it.

witnessed it myself.

Growing up in Gaza, I watched how my people were oppressed by Israeli forces and by the PA. In 1994, the Israeli occupation formally handed over the Strip to the PA to administer under the provisions of the Oslo Accords. The PA remained in power until 2007. During these 13 years, we saw more collaboration with the Israeli occupation than any meaningful attempt at liberation. For journalists, the PA's presence was not just oppressive, it was life-threatening, as its forces actively stifled voices to maintain its fragile grip on power.

As a journalism student in Gaza, I experienced this suppression firsthand. I walked the streets, witnessing PA security officers looting shops, their arrogance apparent in the brazen act of theft. One day, when I attempted to document this, a Palestinian officer violently grabbed me, ripped my camera from my hands, and smashed it to the ground.

This wasn't just an assault, it was an attack on my right to bear witness. The officer's aggression only ceased when a group of women intervened, forcing him to retreat in a rare moment of restraint.

I knew the risks of being a journalist in Gaza and like other media workers, I learned to navigate them. But the fear I felt near the PA forces' ambush points was unlike anything else. That was because there was never logic to their aggressive actions and no way to anticipate when they might turn on you.

Walking near the PA forces felt like stepping into a minefield. One moment, there was the illusion of safety, and the next, you faced the brutality of those who were supposedly there to protect you. This uncertainty and tension made their presence more terrifying than being on a battlefield.

Years later, I would cover the training sessions of Qassam Brigades under the constant hum of Israeli drones and the ever-looming threat of air strikes. It was dangerous but predictable – much more so than the actions of the PA.

Under the PA, we learned to speak in code. Journalists self-censored out of fear of retribution. The PA was often referred to as "cousins of Israeli occupation" – a grim acknowledgement of its

met with swift international condemnation—something the PA rarely faced, despite its far more systematic repression.

After losing control of Gaza, the PA shifted its focus to the West Bank, intensifying its campaign of media suppression. Detentions, violent crackdowns, and the silencing of critical voices became commonplace. Their collaboration with Israel was not passive; it was active. From surveillance to campaigns of violence, they play a crucial role in maintaining the status quo, stifling any dissent that challenges their power and the occupation.

In 2016, the PA's collusion became even more apparent when they coordinated with Israeli authorities in the arrest of prominent journalist and press freedom advocate Omar Nazzal, who had criticised Ramallah for how it handled the suspected murder of Palestinian citizen Omar al-Naif at its embassy in Bulgaria.

In 2017, the PA launched a campaign of intimidation, arresting five journalists from different outlets.

In 2019, the Palestinian Authority blocked the website of Quds News Network, a youth-led media outlet that has gained immense popularity. This was part of a wider ban imposed by the Ramallah Magistrate's Court that blocked access to 24 other news websites and social media pages.

In 2021, after the violent death of activist Nizar Banat in the PA's custody sparked protests, its forces sought to crack down on journalists and media outlets covering them.

In this context, the prospect of the PA returning to Gaza following the ceasefire agreement raises serious concerns for journalists who have already endured the horrors of genocide. For those who survived, this could mean a new chapter of repression that reflects the PA's history of censorship, arrests and stifling of press freedoms.

Despite the grave threats that Palestinian journalists face from Israel and from those who pretend to represent the Palestinian people, they persevere. Their work transcends borders, reflecting a shared struggle against tyranny. Their resilience speaks not only to the Palestinian cause but to the broader fight for liberation, justice and dignity.

Palestinian Authority stands at a crossroads

It is a sad irony that during this, the most acute period in Palestinian history, when there is such an urgent need for a strong and capable Palestinian Authority, one that could unite the governance over the West Bank and Gaza, it is barely functioning. Palestinians themselves have given up on it, and the Israeli government cynically continues to object to it taking over the running of affairs in Gaza while weakening it in the occupied West Bank. This is a short-sighted attempt to prevent Palestinian self-determination from ever materializing.

That the PA is in need of fundamental reform is indisputable, even by the admission of its own leadership, and consequently in July last year it signed a letter of intent with the European Commission that acknowledged the need for urgent reforms, a need that had only grown as a result of the war in Gaza.

Palestinians have been expressing their sense of dismay about the authority; in a poll carried out by the Ramallah-based Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research, 49 percent of respondents in the occupied territories supported the dissolution of the PA as a means of breaking the current deadlock.

Worse, however, is the fact that support for those who lead it is almost non-existent. Circumstances have inevitably rendered the PA unfit for purpose and unable to meet the current enormous challenges the Palestinian people are facing.

When it was established in 1994 by the Oslo Accords, the PA was designed to be a temporary governing body that would, in time, become a full-fledged government when a

final status agreement was reached, based on a two-state solution, whereby all outstanding issues between Israelis and Palestinians would be resolved. More than 30 years later, this has not happened, leaving the PA in limbo; a governing body but not a government, and not in control of much of its territory and people.

Furthermore, an election in the occupied territories for the office of president last took place in 2005, and for the Palestinian Legislative Council the following year. Two decades later, the legitimacy of those elected back then has completely diminished.

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The victory of Hamas in the 2006 legislative elections ultimately resulted in one of the most damaging developments for the Palestinian cause: the complete political separation of the West Bank, governed by the Fatah-led PA, and Hamas-governed Gaza. Since then, any attempts to heal the divisions between the two sides have repeatedly failed.

On top of this, the West Bank has been operating under an oppressive occupation and constant pressure to comply with Israeli demands; more than 60 percent of that territory is completely controlled by Israel, and even areas that are not are subject to the whims of the occupiers, such as Israel's decision to end the transfer of tax revenue it collects on behalf of the PA as agreed in the 1994 Paris Protocol.

Yossi Mekelberg

While such developments create a very difficult environment in which to deliver good governance and leadership, they are merely mitigating factors to the shortcomings of the PA itself, which has been tainted by incompetence, become increasingly authoritarian, and been less than transparent about the handling of public money.

When a new Palestinian government was formed last year, it pledged to introduce measures to improve transparency and fight corruption, to overhaul the justice system and

the necessary investments to rescue a political body it perceived as unpopular and corrupt.

Hence, the international community has helped keep the PA just barely afloat, ensuring only that it does not completely drown, not least because of its cooperation with Israeli security forces on counterterrorism efforts, cooperation that is perceived by many Palestinians as collaboration with Israel in efforts to curtail legitimate resistance to the occupation.

The end result is now that there is an urgent need for a fully functioning PA to take over the running of

Gaza, it has neither the competencies, leadership, nor public trust to do so, never mind the strong objections from the Israeli government.

However, the appointment last year of Mohammed Mustafa to lead a government of technocrats was a step in the right direction, as was the decision to establish an independent fund to oversee the reconstruction of Gaza, something that is still to be implemented.

As a consequence of the losses suffered by Hamas during the war, which have severely weakened it, let alone the disaster it brought upon its own people (without removing from Israeli authorities any of the responsibility they bear for the disproportionate response to Oct. 7), a reformed PA with new leadership could reclaim its role

in Palestinian society.

Hamas is not going to disappear as an idea, or even as a movement that still enjoys some level of popular support. But if allowing Hamas to participate in elections was a huge task before the events of Oct. 7, it is almost impossible in the aftermath, and most certainly not possible with the group in its current form.

It is not only Israel that opposes the participation of Hamas, but also Washington, most of Europe, and regional powers that see the group and what it represents as a threat to stability and any future peace process. Nevertheless, without the representation of all factions within Palestinian society it will be hugely challenging for any new political system to claim broad legitimacy.

This dilemma must be resolved also for the sake of receiving much-needed foreign aid. Last year's Beijing Declaration, in which 14 Palestinian factions, including Fatah and Hamas, agreed on a process of reconciliation between the two main groups, and recent talks during which they agreed to establish a government of technocrats after the war ends, demonstrated that creative solutions can yet be found.

The PA, like Palestinian society as a whole, finds itself at a crossroads now that the people of Gaza have suffered their worst disaster since the 1948 Nakba. But from the depths of this tragedy can emerge an opportunity to rebuild the PA with a new leadership, elected by the people, that is capable of meeting the challenge of uniting Palestinian society, reconstructing Gaza, and negotiating a peace with Israel based on a two-state solution.

Israel now applying its ‘Gaza model’ in the West Bank

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict seems to have shifted from Gaza to the West Bank, with little international accountability, even though there are no hostages being held there.

While global observers grapple with the ramifications of the US foreign aid suspension and incendiary calls for the forced displacement of 1.5 million Gazans, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has played a pivotal role in delaying ceasefire negotiations. Meanwhile, in the West Bank, Israeli military operations continue to escalate, exacting a devastating toll on Palestinian civilians.

In recent weeks, Israeli military forces have intensified their presence in the West Bank, notably through the reoccupation of the Jenin refugee camp. This aggressive strategy mirrors historical patterns, drawing uncomfortable parallels to the policies of Ariel Sharon in the 1970s. Once again, the civilian population bears the brunt of military maneuvers as homes, roads and infrastructure are razed in the name of security.

The deployment of massive Caterpillar D9 and D10 bulldozers to demolish homes and widen roads in Jenin is eerily reminiscent of Gaza's long-standing plight. The Israeli military claims these operations target militant strongholds, yet the scale of destruction

suggests a broader objective — one that punishes entire communities rather than surgically addressing security threats. The Israeli army reported that its recent incursion in Jenin resulted in 18 Palestinian deaths and 60 arrests, yet it made no mention of the homes that were demolished or the families left homeless.

In the town of Tamun, south of Tubas, Israeli airstrikes claimed the lives of 10 Palestinians in what can only be described as a massacre. Elsewhere, the pattern of destruction continued: the Al-Taqwa prayer hall in Sur Baher was demolished under the pretext of lacking a permit, while businesses and homes in Jabal Al-Mukaber suffered a similar fate. The cumulative effect of these actions suggests an insidious strategy — one that seeks to impose the “Gaza model” on the West Bank, reducing Palestinian cities and refugee camps to rubble.

The expansion of Israeli military aggression cannot be separated from the inflammatory rhetoric of far-right Israeli officials, such as Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich, who openly advocate for the destruction of Palestinian communities. These calls for violence are not empty threats; they translate into real-world policies that systematically strip Palestinians of their homes,

Daoud Kuttab

rights and dignity.

Adnan Dmeiri, a former spokesperson for the Palestinian security forces, articulated the sheer absurdity of Israel's justification for these incursions. Speaking to Al-Monitor, he pointed out that the destruction of essential infrastructure — such as roads, water systems and power grids — serves no military purpose beyond collective punishment. The calculated targeting of civilian spaces under the guise of counterterrorism raises fundamental ethical questions. How can one claim to fight extremism while employing tactics that deepen resentment and suffering?

Eyewitness accounts paint a harrowing picture. Abu Fayeze, a resident of Jenin, likened the destruction to a second Nakba, a reference to the mass displacement of Palestinians in 1948. His words carry a chilling truth: for many, the loss of a home is not just a material setback — it is the erasure of history, identity and future prospects.

Similarly, Maysoun Khanfar, another displaced resident, described the trauma of being forced from her home in the dead of night, watching helplessly as entire neighborhoods were reduced to ashes.

The humanitarian crisis unfolding in Gaza and the West Bank demands an immediate response from

the international community. Yet, time and again, Palestinian suffering has been met with indifference or, worse, outright complicity. While some global leaders issue hollow condemnations, meaningful action remains elusive. The destruction of mosques, schools and hospitals — protected under international law — should elicit more than mere words of concern.

The Palestinian Ministry of Endowments and Religious Affairs has condemned the targeted destruction of places of worship, emphasizing the cultural and spiritual significance of these sites. Such violations underscore the need for accountability. The international legal framework, including the Geneva Conventions, explicitly prohibits the targeting of civilian infrastructure. Yet, in practice, enforcement is nonexistent when it comes to Israel's actions in the Occupied Territories.

If history has taught us anything, it is that silence emboldens aggressors. The world has watched this crisis unfold for decades, offering only sporadic interventions that fail to address the root causes of Palestinian suffering. Without substantive pressure — both diplomatic and economic — Israel has little incentive to alter its approach. The global community must demand an

end to the systematic destruction of Palestinian homes and the relentless cycle of displacement.

Beyond the statistics and political maneuvering, it is essential to recognize the human cost of this ongoing violence. The destruction in Tulkarem, Jenin and other West Bank areas is not merely about military strategy, it is about the everyday lives of people who are trying to survive under occupation. Families that once had homes, businesses and places of worship now face an uncertain future, stripped of the most basic of human necessities.

For every building reduced to rubble, there is a family left homeless. For every school destroyed, there are children who will struggle to access education. For every act of aggression met with silence, the message is clear: Palestinian lives are deemed expendable in the grand chess game of global geopolitics.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict cannot shift from one occupied area, Gaza, to another, the West Bank including East Jerusalem.

A just resolution requires international accountability, a halt to illegal settlements and recognition of Palestinian sovereignty. Sustainable peace cannot be achieved through military might, but rather through genuine dialogue and mutual recognition of rights.

Is DeepSeek a threat or an opportunity?

Amar Bhide

the laws of nature are naturally stable, the future is like the past in many ways. Provided with unambiguous feedback, AI models can be made more reliable through training, and even if the underlying process is unstable, or the feedback ambiguous, statistical predictions can still be more cost-effective than human judgment. Wildly off-the-mark ads served up by Google's or Meta's algorithms are still superior to advertising blindly, for example. Dictating texts to a mobile phone can produce transcription howlers, but it is still quicker and more convenient than tapping away on a small screen.

By 2022, resourceful innovators had discovered innumerable cases in which statistically based AI was better than the alternatives

propaganda machine routinely fabricated scientific and technological breakthroughs alongside real advances.

But relatively frugal, out-of-the-box innovations can be transformative. Just look at Musk's low-cost reusable rockets; India's successful Mars mission cost a mere \$73 million, less than the budget of the Hollywood sci-fi movie “Gravity.”

If vindicated, DeepSeek's technology could be to large language models what Tesla's AC breakthroughs were to electrification. While it cannot overcome the unavoidable limitations of backward-looking statistical models, it could at least make their price performance good enough for wider use. Those developing models would no longer have to depend on subsidies provided by large operators with an interest in locking

If this is true, demand for high-end AI chips will be lower than anticipated. That is why the DeepSeek news erased about \$600 billion from Nvidia's market capitalization in a single day, and hammered the stocks of other semiconductor manufacturers and companies that have invested in data centers or sell electricity to those centers. Certainly, DeepSeek's claims might turn out to be inaccurate. Many of Tesla's claims about his inventions following his AC breakthrough, for example, were wildly exaggerated, fraudulent even, and the Soviet propaganda machine routinely fabricated scientific and technological breakthroughs alongside real advances. But relatively frugal, out-of-the-box innovations can be transformative. Just look at Musk's low-cost reusable rockets; India's successful Mars mission cost a mere \$73 million, less than the budget of the Hollywood sci-fi movie “Gravity.”

that relied on human judgment, or at least good enough. As computer hardware and software improved, cases of cost-effective use were bound to expand.

But it was delusional to think that large language models were a great leap forward simply because they could converse like humans. In my personal experience, applications using these models have been worse than useless for doing research, producing summaries or generating graphics.

Nonetheless, reports of DeepSeek's prowess sent shockwaves through financial markets. It claims to have achieved AI performance of a quality that is on a par with OpenAI and Google using only low-end Nvidia chips, and at a fraction of the training and operating costs.

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Certainly, DeepSeek's claims might turn out to be inaccurate. Many of Tesla's claims about his inventions following his AC breakthrough, for example, were wildly exaggerated, fraudulent even, and the Soviet

them in. Less resource-hungry models could reduce demand for data centers or help direct their capacity toward more economically justifiable uses.

What about geopolitics? Last spring, a report by the Bipartisan Senate AI Working Group in Washington called for \$32 billion in annual “emergency” spending on nondefense AI, supposedly to better compete with China. Venture capitalist Marc Andreessen described the arrival of DeepSeek as “AI's Sputnik moment.” US President Donald Trump thinks the Chinese AI model is a “wake-up call for US industries,” which should now be “laser-focused on competing to win.” He has announced plans to impose new tariffs on semiconductor imports from China, and his predecessor imposed export controls on high-end AI chips.

In my book “The Venturesome Economy,” I argued that viewing transformatioal advances abroad as a threat to domestic well-being was misguided. Blindly pursuing technological or scientific leadership is a foolish enterprise. What matters most is the willingness and ability of businesses and consumers to develop and use products and technologies stemming from cutting-edge research, wherever it might come from. This is true of DeepSeek's open-source AI models as well.

US aid cut will deepen Rohingya crisis

Dr. Azeem Ibrahim

In a world increasingly defined by humanitarian crises, the US has long been a beacon of hope for those suffering from violence, displacement, and poverty. Yet, the new administration's recent decision to slash US aid to Myanmar and Bangladesh represents a stark departure from this legacy, with devastating consequences for millions of vulnerable people — particularly the Rohingya, a persecuted minority group that has endured unspeakable atrocities. The decision is not only morally indefensible but also strategically short-sighted, undermining US leadership on the global stage and exacerbating one of the most urgent humanitarian crises of our time.

The Rohingya, a predominantly Muslim ethnic group from Myanmar's Rakhine State, have faced

decades of systemic discrimination and violence. In 2017, the Myanmar military launched a brutal campaign of ethnic cleansing, killing thousands, razing villages, and forcing more than 740,000 Rohingya to flee to neighboring Bangladesh. The UN has described the military's actions as a “textbook example of ethnic cleansing,” and human rights organizations have documented widespread atrocities, including mass killings, sexual violence, and the deliberate destruction of communities. For those who survived, the refugee camps in Bangladesh's Cox's Bazar district became a precarious sanctuary, overcrowded and under-resourced, but a lifeline nonetheless.

US aid has played a critical role in addressing this crisis. Over the years, American assistance has

provided food, clean water, healthcare, and shelter to Rohingya refugees, as well as support for the host communities in Bangladesh that have generously taken them in. This aid has not only saved lives but also helped stabilize a volatile region, preventing the crisis from spiraling further out of control. By cutting this funding, the US administration is effectively abandoning the Rohingya at their most vulnerable moment, leaving them to face hunger, disease, and despair without the support they desperately need.

The impact of this decision will be felt far beyond the refugee camps. In Bangladesh, which already struggles with poverty and overpopulation, the withdrawal of US aid will place an unbearable strain on local resources. The country has shown remarkable

resilience and compassion in hosting nearly a million refugees, but it cannot do so indefinitely without international support. Without adequate funding, the already dire conditions in the camps will worsen, increasing the risk of disease outbreaks, malnutrition, and social unrest. This, in turn, could destabilize the region, creating a breeding ground for extremism and further displacement.

In Myanmar, the cuts to US aid will undermine efforts to address the root causes of the Rohingya crisis. While the Myanmar government has shown little willingness to hold the military accountable for its crimes or to grant the Rohingya citizenship and basic rights, US aid has been instrumental in supporting civil society organi-

zations, promoting human rights, and fostering dialogue between communities. By withdrawing this support, the US administration is sending a dangerous message to Myanmar's leaders that the US is no longer committed to holding them accountable for their actions. This could embolden the military to continue its campaign of repression against the Rohingya and other ethnic minorities, perpetuating the cycle of violence and displacement.

The decision to cut aid is particularly perplexing given the broader geopolitical context. China, which has long sought to expand its influence in Southeast Asia, has been quick to fill the void left by the US. Beijing has provided economic and military support

to Myanmar, shielding its government from international criticism and undermining efforts to hold the military accountable for its crimes. By withdrawing aid, the US is ceding ground to China, weakening its own position in the region and undermining its ability to promote democracy, human rights, and the rule of law.

Moreover, the cuts to US aid are at odds with the values that America claims to represent. The US has long been a champion of human rights and a leader in responding to humanitarian crises around the world. By turning its back on the Rohingya, the US administration is betraying this legacy and sending a message that the US is no longer willing to stand up for the most vulnerable. This not only tarnishes America's reputation but

also undermines its moral authority to advocate for human rights and democracy elsewhere.

The consequences of this decision will be felt for years to come. Without adequate support, the Rohingya will continue to languish in refugee camps, denied their basic rights, and unable to return to their homes. The conditions in the camps will deteriorate, increasing the risk of disease, malnutrition, and social unrest. The region will become more unstable, creating new challenges for the international community. The US will lose its standing as a global leader, ceding ground to authoritarian regimes, and undermining its own long-term interests.

There is still time to reverse this decision. The US must reaffirm its commitment to the Rohingya

and to the principles of human rights and humanitarian assistance. This means restoring aid to Myanmar and Bangladesh, increasing support for refugee programs, and working with the international community to hold the Myanmar military accountable for its crimes. It also means addressing the root causes of the crisis, including the systemic discrimination and violence that have forced the Rohingya to flee their homes.

The Rohingya crisis is a test of humanity. It is a reminder that the world cannot afford to turn its back on those in need, no matter how far away they are. By cutting aid to Myanmar and Bangladesh, the US administration is failing this test, with devastating consequences for millions of people. The US must do better.

‘Italian Trade Agency to revive Pak Industrial sector for economic stability’

ISLAMABAD (APP): Italian Trade Agency is determined to revive Pakistan’s Industrial sector and play its due role to promote business climate in Pakistan through financial, technical and Eco-friendly technologies for economic stability and sustainable growth.

This was stated by Dr. Salvatore Parano, Director, Ufficio ICE, Italian Embassy, Islamabad in a corporate meeting held at, FPCCI, United Business Group (UBG) Secretariat, Islamabad, said a press release issued here on Sunday.

During the meeting a wide range of Italian brands and International business trends came under discussion.

Dr. Salvatore Parano said climate change is affecting the business around the world but Pakistan is a potential country for production of Buffalo

Mozzarella (cheez) which is an important ingredient in world pizza industry including olive cultivation and food processing.

He added that Olive farming is also ideal because of sunny climate and soil in Baluchistan and Pothawar region in Punjab Province, because the environment these regions are quite suitable for Olive cultivation, while export of Olive oil can bring millions of foreign exchange for Pakistan.

Zafar Bakhtawari, Secretary General (UBG) said that high cost of doing business including exorbitant electricity and gas tariff coupled with heavy taxation are affecting business climate in Pakistan.

He quoted the marvelous struggle of Italy saying that Italy emerged after 2nd world war as an industrial

power house with a special focus on energy efficient technological developments in Europe.

He also lauded that Italian economy remained one of the strongest in the world despite COVID-19 pandemic ranking 8th in world top economies for its exports in automobiles, vehicles, pharmaceuticals and electrical machinery to Germany, France, and the United States.

Waqar Bakhtawari, former President, Chakwal Chamber of Commerce and Industry urged Dr Salvatore Parano to join hands with United Business Group for market research in Pakistan and exploration of cooperation for the promotion of Italian Brands in Pakistani market including cosmetics and pharmaceuticals.

In his concluding remarks, Dr. Salvatore Parano

said Italy is a leader in pharmaceuticals and E-Commerce is gaining momentum across the EU region.

The Italian Trade Agency is there to extend its helping hand to the Pakistani Business Community for guidance, advice and Italian brand presentation, he said.

Meanwhile, elaborating the role of Italian business cooperation in Pakistan, Ahsan Zafar Bakhtawari, former President, Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry showed interest for collaboration with Italian Trade Agency in textiles, surgical, rice and sports industries.

Dr Salvatore Parano assured to introduce Italian companies to enhance cooperation between Pakistan and Italy to further improve innovative economic sector in Pakistan.



SHEIKHUPURA: Federal Minister for Industries and Production Rana Tanveer Hussain talking to media.

PFC calls for single-digit interest rates

LAHORE (APP): The Pakistan Furniture Council (PFC) on Sunday called for lowering the interest rate to a single digit, an essential factor for reviving economy that will greatly help ease of doing business to compete the global market by boosting the exports.

Chairing a Board of Directors meeting here, CEO Pakistan Furniture Council (PFC) Mian Kashif Ashfaq highlighted that high interest rates have stifled economic growth with increasing the cost of doing business and due to absence of investors interest.

He argued that a lower interest rate would encourage businesses to borrow, invest and expand their operations, ultimately leading to job creation and economic development.

He said that industry was struggling due to rising production costs, limited access to affordable financing and an bleak economic conditions.

He said a single-digit interest rate would ease the financial burden on the private sector, particularly small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), which form the backbone of the economy.

He urged the government and central bank to adopt a pro-growth monetary policy and create a conducive environment for investment instead of lowering rate by one percent.

Kashif Ashfaq also stressed the importance of reducing reliance on foreign loans and enhancing domestic revenue generation to ensure long-term economic stability.

TDAP organizes seminar on export financing strategies

QUETTA (APP): The Trade Development Authority of Pakistan (TDAP), in collaboration with the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP), hosted a seminar titled “Unlocking Export Growth: Navigating Export Financing Strategies” at the Quetta Chamber of Commerce and Industry (QCCI).

The event highlighted SBP’s export financing schemes, including the Export Financing Scheme (EFS) and Long-Term Financing Facility (LTF), with TDAP providing critical insights into accessing these opportunities and

enhancing value addition to boost exports, said a news release received here on Sunday.

Director TDAP, Mola Dad reiterated TDAP’s commitment to supporting entrepreneurs by organizing awareness sessions across districts and guiding them through export procedures.

Zain ul Abideen, GSP Officer TDAP, emphasized the seminar as part of a broader series to empower local businesses. Vice President QCCI, Agha Gul Khilji urged for tailored financial schemes for

Balochistan, while SBP’s Aurangzeb Kakar and Tarqee Foundation’s Habtar Ali encouraged stakeholders to collaborate and address systemic challenges.

The seminar concluded with recommendations for forming a committee to suggest loan policy revisions to SBP and expanding awareness programs. TDAP pledged to enhance its efforts to showcase Balochistan’s resources on international platforms, reflecting its pivotal role in unlocking the province’s export potential and driving economic growth.

Food exporters team leaves for Saudi Arabia

LAHORE (APP): A 14-member delegation of Pakistani food exporters from south Punjab on Sunday left for Saudi Arabia on a ten-day visit to explore export avenues and strengthening trade relations.

Abdul Rehman, leader of the delegation, said that the visit aligns with Pakistan’s broader strategy to diversify exports and enhance trade with Gulf countries, reinforcing its position as a reliable supplier of quality food products. He said the delegation will engage in a series of result-oriented meetings with their Saudi counterparts to explore new business prospects and enhance bilateral trade.

has been witnessing steady growth, with Saudi Arabia emerging as a key market for various food products, including snacks and processed food. The delegation’s visit is part of ongoing efforts to boost exports, capitalize on Saudi Arabia’s high demand for quality food products, and strengthen trade ties between the two countries, he added.

He said the agenda includes engagements with major Saudi importers, distributors, and supermarket chains to identify opportunities for increasing the presence of Pakistani food products, especially snacks. “We will explore collaborations in food processing, packaging, and halal certification to meet Saudi

Arabia’s stringent food safety and quality standards,” he added.

Pakistan and Saudi Arabia share strong economic and trade relations, with food exports playing a crucial role in bilateral trade. This visit is expected to further strengthen economic cooperation by expanding market access for Pakistani food products.

Abdul Rehman expressed optimism about the potential for positive outcomes, including agreements and partnerships that could benefit both countries. He also noted the expectation of securing long-term contracts and increasing market share in Saudi Arabia’s growing food sector.

‘Ease of doing business must for growth’

ISLAMABAD: The Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce & Industry’s businessmen Panel (BMP) has said that not the extensive borrowing but improving the Ease of Doing Business Index of the country was vital to put the country’s economy back on track.

BMP Chairman Mian Anjum Nisar said that according to the World Bank’s Ease of Doing Business report, Pakistan’s ranking has fluctuated, reflecting persistent obstacles such as bureaucratic red tape, complex tax regulations, and insufficient infrastructure.

In the Doing Business report, Pakistan ranked 108th out of 190 economies, showing some improvement from previous years but still indicating significant room for enhancement.

cement. Previously the country was even worse off, standing at 136 in 2019.

In previous tenure, a high level steering committee was formed to oversee the progress of reforms on each of the 10 indicators measured under the ease of doing business report. This resulted in significant improvement in Pakistan’s rankings however the new government has come up with a new, more ambitious goal.

The FPCCI former president said that with continuous hike in cost of production in the country, what the Pakistan’s economy really needs is persistent and sound economic management, asking the authorities for undertaking economic reforms and improving the regulatory environment for better Ease of Doing Business level to boost foreign investment so that financial stability can be

achieved in the long-run.

He alleged all previous governments for extensive borrowing of forex during last five years to meet local expenditure, which had increased the burden of foreign debt of Pakistan substantially, instead of making serious efforts to enhance the ranking of Ease of Doing Business Index of Pakistan, as it is must to attract foreign as well as local investment and high economic growth.

He stressed the need for reducing cost of doing business, besides evolving a new price control mechanism, as huge taxation, rising oil prices and constant jump in electricity and gas tariffs have lifted the inflation to decades high level in 2024.

The BMP chief warned the authorities that inflation can hurt economic growth and a careful policy is required to keep it in control.

He said that the pace of inflation is skyrocketing at a time when the economic activity is slowing down.

As the oil prices have been increased and power tariff has gone up further, the chairman stated that the government has dropped a fuel bomb on the businessmen after it suffered an electric shock to meet the conditions of IMF for the revival of the stalled loan program- a recipe to shake the trade and industry.

He said that the decision would prove detrimental to the industries due to high cost of doing business and will also open the floodgates of inflation. In addition to making the electricity bills costlier and unaffordable for the consumers, the hike in base tariff would escalate prices of all household goods being widely used in every household, he added.

Anjum Nisar termed the

Pak’s global business potential highlighted

LAHORE (APP): With the positive feedback from the recent Davos summit, it is clear that Pakistan is increasingly being recognized globally for its business potential, innovative spirit, and the resilience of its people.

Maria Tauqir, a Pakistani host of the two-day Davos summit held last week at Switzerland, speaking here on Sunday to a delegation of women entrepreneurs said this mega event not only enhanced the visibility of Pakistan’s private sector but also strengthened the global perception of Pakistan as a country brimming with opportunities for

investment and collaboration.

She further explained that the summit was a testament to the growing importance of Pakistan in the global business community, highlighting its readiness to contribute to international development and trade. She said the summit also included a key visit to the World Economic Forum, where discussions centered around global economic trends, sustainable growth, and transformative ideas.

The forum acted as a bridge for forging new international partnerships, and for Pakistan, it was an invaluable opportunity to

present itself as an ideal destination for investment. The forum’s diverse participation reinforced the importance of collaboration across borders to solve global challenges, with Pakistan positioned as an essential player in these dialogues.

Maria, who is also General Manager Interiors Pakistan, highlighted the importance of showcasing Pakistan’s positive image on the global stage and reiterated ChenOne’s commitment to empowering women in Pakistan, creating opportunities for them to lead and succeed in the business world.

Making hosiery industry compatible to global manufacturers

FAISALABAD (APP): Pakistan’s hosiery industry had been a major contributor to the national economy by enhancing textile exports volume and employment opportunities for millions.

This sector has a long history of manufacturing, exports and employment, meeting local hosiery needs and exporting knitwear to other countries, earning millions of dollars foreign exchange each year.

But, over the period due to fluctuating energy and raw material prices and changing economic policies of respective governments, this sector also suffered blow after blow that hindered its growth and competitiveness in global markets.

Presently, the challenges faced by this sector range

from economic, infrastructural, compliance and policy issues as the experts emphasize concrete measures to make this sector compatible to global manufacturers.

“Economic and political instability, shortage of raw materials and intense global competition posed threats to our Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs),” noted Muhammad Akram Khan, Manager of a local hosiery unit.

He suggested proactive measures like policy reforms, technological upgrades and branding strategies to overcome these hurdles. “We can enhance our hosiery exports and solidify our position as a leading textile exporter by addressing the challenges faced by our industry.”

A technocrat Prof Dr

Muhammad Afzal also mentioned to inconsistent political and economic policies as the foremost challenges being faced by the hosiery exporters in Pakistan.

“Inflation, fluctuating exchange rates and rising costs of production badly impact competitiveness of Pakistani hosiery in global market,” he claimed. “Depreciation in rupee value also increased cost of imported raw materials like synthetic fibers, dyes and machinery.”

He mentioned to energy costs as another reason and said, “hosiery sector is highly energy-intensive, relying on uninterrupted power supply for knitting, dyeing and finishing processes. But, expensive electricity increases production costs and reduce

profitability.”

Dr Afzal stated that Pakistan produces a significant amount of cotton but availability of high-quality raw material still remains a challenge and hosiery manufacturers have to often import required fine yarns, synthetic fibers and specialized materials. “Dependence on imports, therefore, raises costs and disrupts supply chain due to shipping delays and fluctuating international prices.”

He also referred to lack of modern spinning and dyeing facilities that affects production of high-quality goods and their appeal in international markets in presence of stringent quality standards.

Another aspect highlighted by Dr Afzal was compliance of various international standards like

environmental regulations, labor laws and quality certifications. “Obtaining and maintaining these certifications involves significant financial and technical investment is also a challenge for our SMEs. Many among them often fall short of meeting these requirements due to outdated manufacturing practices and lack of awareness about global compliance norms.”

He said since Pakistan’s hosiery industry competes with major neighboring and rival countries like India, Bangladesh and China, it needs better technologies and the government support to grab slots in international trade market.

“Therefore, we direly need investment in Research and Development (R&D) and improve design and manufacturing processes

to introduce new and trendy hosiery products in line with global fashion trends,” he recommended.

As the global textile industry is increasingly focusing on sustainable and eco-friendly production processes, many international buyers prefer suppliers who follow sustainable practices like using organic fibers, water-efficient dyeing and reduced carbon footprints. Therefore, our hosiery industry must be incentivized with eco-friendly production technologies and proper regulatory frameworks.

Senior Vice Chairman Pakistan Hosiery Manufacturers & Exporters Association (PHMA) North Zone Hazrat Khan sees the struck up refunds as one of key challenges for hosiery exporters. “Although they

face numerous problems, yet struck-up refunds, hike in energy tariff and high markup rates are their key challenges.”

Appreciating the government measures for reviving industrial sector, he said, “if pending refunds are released, the SMEs in this sector will have a better chance to expand their exports despite difficult international market conditions.”

He also suggested to easing out export procedures and regulatory frameworks to resolve complicated issues of hosiery exporters. “We require a versatile approach to overcome the challenges and strengthen Pakistan’s position in global hosiery market.”

He emphasized to streamline export procedures, ensure timely tax

Court Notice

In the court of sidra jalal civil judge-III/ judicial Magistrate II matta swat. Case #.129/1 Institution 16/09/2024. Next Hearing 20/02/2025. Shamky vs fazal Muhammad. Notice to defendant.1) Fazal Muhammad. 2) khan Zameen sons. Dosham gul .3) Zayrat khan.4) Gul Zameen.5) Shafi Ullah.6) Aman ullah sons Fazal Muhammad r/o Gohal skhra tehsil matta district Swat. Whereas the above named cannot be served in ordinary manner it is therefore proclaimed or through duly authorized agent or pleader in the court on 20/02/2025. at 8.30 am. Ex-parte proceeding will be initiated against you. seal of the court.



In brief

Tickets sale from today

LAHORE (APP): Following the online sale of tickets available here for the ICC Men's Champions Trophy 2025 last week, physical tickets for the eight-team competition will go on sale at 15 hours Gulf Standard Time (GST) / 16 hours Pakistan Standard Time (PST) from February 3 (Monday). The physical tickets will be available to fans across 108 TCS centres in 26 cities of Pakistan (infographic attached). As announced previously, general stand ticket prices will start from 1,000 Pakistan Rupees, while premium seating will be available from 1,500 Pakistan Rupees across different categories for the 10 matches taking place in Karachi, Lahore and Rawalpindi. Hosts Pakistan will take on New Zealand in the opening match of the event at the National Stadium in Karachi on 19 February. Ticket information for the India matches to be played in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, on 20 and 23 February and 2 March, will be released in due course. In the meantime, fans can register their interest in tickets here. ICC Men's Champions Trophy Final tickets – to be played on Sunday, 9 March – will be available for purchase following the conclusion of the first semi-final in Dubai.

Karachi Hosts Challenge Cup

KARACHI (PPI): The grand football tournament, Challenge Cup, is currently underway in Karachi, organized by the Hamid Ismail Foundation. The tournament, being held at the Kikri Ground, features 32 teams from across Karachi, highlighting the talent and dedication of local footballers. According to a statement by Hamid Ismail Foundation, the matches are being played in an Eliminator Format. The tournament began on January 27 and will conclude with the final match on February 14. The winning team will be awarded a cash prize of one hundred thousand Pakistani rupees and the runner-up will receive fifty thousand rupees. Hamid Ismail, President of the foundation, remarked on the significance of the event, emphasizing its role in uniting communities and inspiring youth. He stated, "The Challenge Cup is not just a football competition, but a platform to bring communities together, inspire youth and highlight the rich sportsmanship culture among the local youth of Lyari and other Karachi." The tournament reflects the foundation's commitment to promoting unity and sportsmanship among the local youth.

Arsenal win at Man City

LONDON (Agencies): Arsenal rubbed salt into Manchester City's wounds after a miserable week with victory in a frantic Women's Super League meeting at Joie Stadium. It is a boost to Arsenal's hopes of securing a top-three spot and qualification for next season's Women's Champions League. Stina Blackstenius' late winner capped off the seven-goal thriller after City had battled to get themselves back into the game. During a week when England international Chloe Kelly's loan move to Arsenal ended a turbulent transfer saga, this result sees City drop to fourth in the table. Arsenal had taken a stunning 2-0 lead within eight minutes when Mariona Caldentey and Lotte Wubbren-Moy punished City's weak defending. Mary Fowler got one back for City before half-time and former Arsenal striker Vivianne Miedema drew them level minutes into the second half.



LAHORE: Players in action during 'Khelta Punjab' Inter-Division Games 2025 at Punjab Stadium. —APP Photo

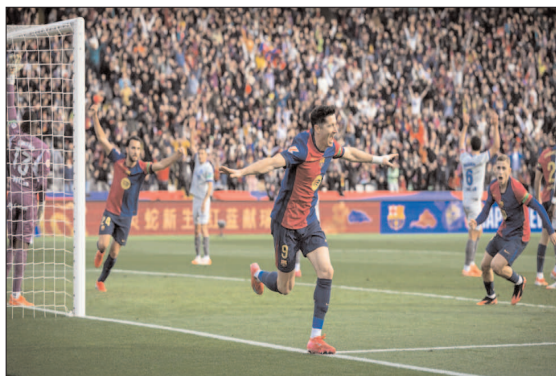
Lewandowski earns Barca win over Alaves

BARCELONA (AFP): Robert Lewandowski's second-half strike helped Barcelona beat Alaves 1-0 on Sunday to cut the gap on La Liga leaders Real Madrid down to four points.

The Catalans, third, capitalised with a narrow victory after the champions slipped up across town at Espanyol on Saturday. Barcelona trail second place Atletico by three points before the Rojiblancos face Real Madrid in a tasty derby clash next weekend, which could allow Hansi Flick's side to make up more ground.

Lewandowski netted from a Lamine Yamal cross to settle a hard-fought match in which Alaves largely frustrated the hosts. "Before the game we knew we had to win," Lewandowski told Movistar. "For us it's a moment in which we have less points than Atletico and Real Madrid, (but) first it's important that we win and later we can think about their points."

"We have to play well, win and then we can look at the league table and see how many points we have exactly." Flick's team struggled to get going in the early afternoon sunlight at the Olympic stadium. The Catalans created barely anything of note in the first half as Alaves resisted stubbornly. One mazy Lamine



Yamal dribble got home fans excited but there was little else to raise the pulse. Gavi and Tomas Conechny were both taken off after an ugly collision of heads.

'Patience' pays Lewandowski scuffed a shot narrowly wide and a low Pedri effort was comfortably fielded by Alaves goalkeeper Jesus Owono.

Flick brought on Frenkie de Jong and Eric Garcia at half-time to try and speed up Barcelona's game in possession and the team looked sharper as a result. Lewandowski sent a glancing header agonisingly wide of the far post soon before he broke the deadlock.

The veteran Polish forward produced a poacher's finish from close range after Yamal sent a cross-shot spinning towards him at the back post after 61 minutes. It was Lewandowski's 18th goal of the league cam-

paign, stretching his lead on Real Madrid's Kylian Mbappe as the division's top scorer to three.

"A game like today is very important," said Lewandowski. "We can't always win with four, five or six goals, sometimes teams like this come along who defend deep and well, but we have a chance if we play with patience, and in the end we scored one more goal than them so we're very happy."

Barca substitute Ferran Torres's curling effort was pushed away by Owono at full stretch as the Catalans tried to make the game safe. Flick's team could not produce a second but Alaves, who barely threatened Wojciech Szczesny's goal throughout, were not able to mount a comeback.

Later Sunday fourth-place Athletic Bilbao visit Real Betis among other matches.

Wasim Akram backs Babar as opener in Champions Trophy

LAHORE (INP): Legendary fast bowler Wasim Akram has backed star batter Babar Azam to open the inning for Pakistan in the upcoming Champions Trophy 2025.

Pakistan announced their squad for the tri-nation series and the upcoming tournament on January 31.

While opening batter Fakhar Zaman made a return to the 15-member Pakistan squad, Saim Ayub was left out due to an ankle injury.

At the time of the announcement, National selector Asad Shafiq said that former captain Babar Azam or Saud Shakeel will open the inning for Pakistan according to conditions.

Now, former Pakistan captain Wasim Akram also backed the idea of making the star batter open the inning for Pakistan alongside Fakhar Zaman in the Champions Trophy 2025.

"I would like to see [Mohammad] Rizwan as a middle-order batter and maybe ask Babar to open the inning. Babar has a brilliant technique. If he plays 50 overs and scores a hundred, the batting will revolve around him," he said during a media talk.

The Pakistan squad also featured surprising returns of all-rounders Khushdil Shah and Faheem Ashraf, a decision which has been met with much criticism.

Wasim Akram also expressed his surprise over the inclusion of Ashraf, saying, "I wish him all the best, he's a talented cricketer. But in the past 20 matches, his bowling average is 100, and his batting average is 9."

The former captain also called Khushdil Shah's inclusion a surprising decision.

Pakistan squad for tri-nation series, Champions Trophy 2025: Babar Azam, Fakhar Zaman, Kamran Ghulam, Saud Shakeel, Tayyab Tahir, Mohammad Rizwan (c)(wk), Usman Khan (wk), Faheem Ashraf, Khushdil Shah, Salman Ali Agha (vc), Abrar Ahmed, Haris Rauf, Mohammad Hasnain, Naseem Shah and Shaheen Shah Afridi.

British-Pakistani boxer Adam Azim wins world super lightweight title

LONDON (Web Desk): British-Pakistani boxer Adam Azim won the World Super Lightweight Boxing Championship, defeating reigning champion Sergey Lipinets in the ninth round.

The fight saw a turning point in the third round when Lipinets, increasing his pace, walked into a powerful left hook from Azim, leaving him flat on his back in the ring.

Following his victory, Azim hinted at his next challenge, calling out Dalton Smith: "You better be watching, my friend. I'm coming."

Hailing from Kotli, Azad Kashmir, Azim remains undefeated, earning global recognition. His father, Mohammad Azim, expressed immense pride, calling it a moment of honour for both Pakistan and the UK.

Former boxing champion Amir Khan, who travelled from Dubai to support Azim, hailed the win as historic, noting that Azim is only the second Pakistani boxer to achieve a world championship title. He also announced plans to visit



Pakistan with Azim to celebrate the triumph. After the fight, Adam Azim once again stated he will be better than Dalton Smith when the super-lightweight pair eventually clash.

Azim was under pressure to make a statement performance when he fought Sergey Lipinets last night and he delivered emphatically after he stopped the former world champion in nine rounds.

Neither fighter has put a foot wrong so far in their professional careers and after Smith became continental ruler, it was over to Azim to show what he could do against the tough Kazakh. Azim was expected to receive a stern test from his opponent, but he showed his class throughout as he dominated the

experienced fighter and even managed to score a third-round knockdown.

The Slough man would be deducted two points as his consistent body attacks strayed low on a couple of occasions, but there was never no doubt that they would prove costly. With Azim constantly landing heavy shots, the bout was eventually stopped in the ninth session and there appeared to be a sense of relief from Lipinets when the bout was called off.

Azim will now continue his march towards bigger fight, even world title contests, and he even had time to address his domestic rival in the fight's aftermath. "I'll fight whoever my team suggest, but do you know what, Dalton Smith, you'd better be watching mate - because you ain't that good, my friend," said Azim when speaking to Sky Sports.

"The guy you've been fighting in your last fight, he ain't all that. Trust me, I'm coming baby. It's still marinating, but when I do fight him, I'm going to teach him a lesson."



LAHORE: Player in action during 'Khelta Punjab' Inter-Division Games 2025 at Punjab Stadium. —APP Photo

James stars for Lakers amid Doncic trade reports

NEW YORK (Agencies): LeBron James inspired the Los Angeles Lakers to a 128-112 win over the New York Knicks amid reports Dallas Mavericks star Luka Doncic could soon become his new team-mate in a huge three-way trade deal.

James scored 33 points, 11 rebounds and 12 assists as the Lakers ended the Knicks' five-game winning streak at Madison Square Garden.

Shortly after the game finished, reports emerged that five-time NBA All-Star Doncic could be joining James on the west coast.

ESPN reported Anthony Davis, an NBA title winner with the Lakers in 2020, would head to Dallas as part of the deal, along with guard Max Christie.

The Mavericks would also get a 2029 first-round draft pick, while Maxi Kleber and Markieff Morris will head to the Lakers.

The three-way trade also

reportedly includes the Utah Jazz, who would get Lakers guard Jalen Hood-Schifino and a pair of second-round picks in this year's draft.

Slovenian Doncic, currently sidelined with a calf injury, has averaged 28.1 points, 8.3 rebounds and 7.8 assists per game for the Mavericks since being traded from the Atlanta Hawks in 2018.

The 25-year-old has been an NBA All-Star for the past five seasons and finished as the league's top scorer in 2024 to help his side reach the NBA finals.

Though Doncic could be seen as James' long-term successor, the 40-year-old showed he can still compete at the highest level with a standout display in New York.

"He led tonight with his spirit, his force, his voice," said Lakers coach JJ Redick.

"Obviously he played a fantastic statistic game, but from the beginning it was

very clear that he was on a mission."

Elsewhere, reigning NBA Most Valuable Player (MVP) Nikola Jokic scored 28 points with 13 rebounds and 17 assists as the Denver Nuggets won 107-104 against the Charlotte Hornets, who suffered a fourth successive defeat.

Aaron Wiggins scored a career-high 41 points as Western Conference leaders the Oklahoma City Thunder beat the Sacramento Kings 144-110.

Kyle Kuzma scored 31 points as the Washington Wizards ended a 16-game losing streak with a 105-103 victory at the Minnesota Timberwolves, while the Utah Jazz ended an eight-game losing run for their own with a 113-99 home win over the Orlando Magic.

The Atlanta Hawks were beaten 132-127 by the Indianapolis Pacers, despite 34 points and 17 assists from Trae Young.

Real Madrid fall at Espanyol as Atletico cut Liga gap

CORNELLÀ DE LLOBREGAT (AFP/APP): Real Madrid stumbled to a shock 1-0 defeat at struggling Espanyol on Sunday which left them leading La Liga by a single point.

Carlos Romero's 85th minute strike snatched victory for the relegation-battling hosts, provisionally 17th.

Atletico Madrid pulled within a point of Los Blancos with a 2-0 win against Mallorca earlier, ahead of next weekend's crunch derby clash at the Santiago Bernabeu.

Real Madrid were left furious after Romero was only booked for a cynical foul on Kylian Mbappe before going on to net the winner.

However, Carlo Ancelotti's side played far within them-

selves and did not do enough to take anything from what seemed on paper an inviting fixture.

"Espanyol played a very good game in my opinion, they defended very well, they did what they had to do. Could we have done more? Yes," Ancelotti told reporters.

The Italian coach was angry about the decision not to send off Romero.

"This foul, the decision the referee and VAR took was inexplicable, everyone saw it," continued the coach.

"It's important to protect the players. It was a clear foul, a very ugly tackle, lucky there's no serious injury."

"To us it's inexplicable that they didn't send him off."

Romero admitted he felt bad about scything down the

French superstar.

"I knew Kylian is impossible to stop when he's running, I stopped him how I could, it was a bit ugly," Romero told DAZN.

"I didn't like doing it and I said sorry. That's it and there's no more to it."

Espanyol largely kept the Spanish and European champions at bay in the first half.

Real Madrid were dealt a blow when Antonio Rudiger limped off in the first half, with their Champions League play-off tie against Manchester City less than a fortnight away.

Vinicius Junior found the net with Madrid's only chance but it was ruled out after Mbappe was adjudged to have fouled his marker.

Jofre Carreras had a low shot

saved by Thibaut Courtois at the other end on a rare Espanyol attack.

Madrid looked sharper at the start of the second half and Espanyol stopper Joan Garcia saved from Jude Bellingham and then Mbappe struck the post from a tight angle.

Los Blancos were furious when Romero was only booked for a cynical slide tackle from behind to hack down Mbappe as he broke over the halfway line.

Rodrygo jinked away from Romero before firing into the side netting and had another effort saved, while Garcia tipped away a vicious Mbappe strike as Madrid turned the screw.

The visitors were shocked by a swift Espanyol counter-attack which led to the breakthrough, with Omar El Hilali

crossing for Romero to volley home at the back post.

Los Blancos did not create much danger in seven minutes of added time and Espanyol's fans celebrated with abandon when Mbappe lashed over a late effort to end the game.

"This win is so important for us, we had to suffer... we knew we had to do it in front of our fans," added Romero.

- 'Very happy' -

Atletico Madrid secured a comfortable win over Mallorca to put the pressure on, ahead of Real's match.

Samuel Lino slid home in the 26th minute after a strong driving run by Giuliano Simeone, son of Atletico's coach Diego Simeone.

Antoine Griezmann, who started the game on the bench,

produced a superb lobbed finish to net the second in stoppage time and delight the Metropolitan stadium.

Atletico coach Simeone was able to celebrate his 500th La Liga match with the three points.

"I'm very happy for this journey, no doubt... it makes me very happy," he told reporters.

The Rojiblancos dominated the first half with Julian Alvarez impressing and Alexander Sorloth going close before Lino sent them ahead.

Mallorca, seventh, forged some chances of their own after the break in a tighter second period which was finally settled when Griezmann struck with a delightful chip.

On Sunday Barcelona, third, host Alaves as they try to keep on the tail of the top two.



In brief

Two bike lifters held

ISLAMABAD (APP): Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) Police's Kohsar team has arrested two wanted members of a notorious bike lifter gang involved in numerous motorcycle thefts and recovered two stolen motorbikes from their possession on Sunday. A public relation officer told APP that the Kohsar police team used technical and human resources and succeeded in apprehending a wanted member of a notorious bike lifter gang involved in numerous bikes lifting activities in various areas of Kohsar police station. He said the accused were identified as Sajjad Ali and Shan Ali. Police team also recovered two stolen motorbikes from their possession. The cases have already been registered against the nabbed accused and further investigation is underway. DIG Muhammad Jawad Tariq also directed officers for an effective crackdown against the accused involved in criminal activities and to take all possible measures to protect the life and property of the citizens. DIG further said that no criminal element will be allowed to disturb the peace of the people.

Two firecracker dealers held

RAWALPINDI (APP): Saddar Baroni police conducting an operation managed to arrest two firecracker dealers and recovered huge quantity of firecrackers. According to a police spokesman, Saddar Baroni police arrested two accused namely Ali Haider and Toheed on recovery of huge quantity of cotton balls, pomegranates, firecrackers and other items. The accused will be challaned with solid evidence. Those who endanger the lives of the citizens through fireworks cannot escape the grip of the law, said Senior Superintendent of Police, Saddar, Muhammad Nabeel Khokhar. Fireworks manufacturing, sale and purchase are a crime according to law, he said adding, the operations will continue against illegal businesses. The operation against firecracker dealers was being conducted on the directives of City Police Officer Syed Khalid Mahmood Hamdani.

Police launch crackdown

RAWALPINDI (APP): Rawalpindi District Police on the directives of City Police Officer (CPO) Rawalpindi have initiated a crackdown against professional beggars and managed to arrest 165 during last two days. According to a police spokesman, Police conducted operations against professional beggars and their facilitators in various areas, resulting in the arrest of 165 professional beggars during last two days and filed cases against them. Additionally, underage children were transferred to the shelter home. The CPO has issued clear instructions to the police officers to continue daily operations against beggars under their supervision. He urged the citizens not to give alms to the professional beggars and discourage them. If professional beggars are spotted in commercial or residential areas, the citizens are encouraged to immediately call the police at "Police Helpline-15". Police Stations, Anti-Beggary Squad and Traffic Police were conducting operations and netting professional beggars particularly from main roads and intersections. The spokesman informed that the crackdown was launched according to the vision of Chief Minister Punjab, Maryam Nawaz Sharif.

Kashmiris facing worst Indian state terrorism: Mushaal

ISLAMABAD (PPI): Mushaal Hussein Mullick, wife of jailed Kashmiri leader Mohammad Yasin Malik, and Chairperson Peace and Culture Organization, says India is involved in terrorism across the world.

She was addressing the

National Kashmir Conference in Islamabad on Sunday. Mushaal Mullick said Indian agencies are targeting those Kashmiris who are raising voice for Kashmir cause.

She expressed concern that India's terror network is expanding across the world.

She said the Kashmiris in Indian illegally occupied Jammu and Kashmir are facing the worst kind of state terrorism at the hands of Indian troops, but they are committed to getting their right to self-determination and freedom from Indian subjugation.

MDCAT: Probe reveals no proof of grace marks in retest

ISLAMABAD (INP): The inquiry into the MDCAT retest conducted by Shaheed Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto Medical University (SZABMU) has been completed, and the investigation report is set to be submitted to the high court.

According to details, the inquiry was initiated after candidates alleged that the retest featured grace marking, which was not proven.

A special nine-member committee formed by the Pakistan Medical and Dental Council (PMDC) prepared the investigation report. The retest was conducted on December 30, 2024, with over 12,500 students from across the country participating. SZAB-

MU followed the standard procedure for competitive exams and conducted pre-and post-exam analyses to ensure the test's integrity.

The detailed analysis of the retest did not find any evidence of grace marking. Instead, it revealed that 2,061 students scored above 170 marks, with 1,496 students from Punjab achieving this feat.

It is to be noted that MDCAT 2024 retake was held on the order of Sindh High Court (SHC) over complaints of paper leak.

Following the orders, the Sindh government tasked IBA Sukkur to conduct the Medical and Dental College Admission Test 2024 entry test. Meanwhile, the

Medical and Dental College Admission Test (MDCAT 2024) would be conducted once again in Islamabad on December 22, the sources said.

The Pakistan Medical and Dental Council (PMDC) has been informed about the updated MDCAT 2024 schedule. Decisions regarding the roll numbers of candidates and examination centers are expected to be made next week, sources added.

Sources further said more than 30 examination centers across Islamabad for the test will be established for 17,597 candidates registered for the Medical and Dental College Admission Test 2024 retake.

Rawalpindi CPWB rescues 12,000 Children

ISLAMABAD (APP): District Officer of the Child Protection and Welfare Bureau (CPWB) in Rawalpindi Rao Khalil Ahmed Sunday revealed that the Punjab Chief Minister is prioritizing child protection where a new child protection policy will be signed soon and over 12,000 children have so far been rescued and rehabilitated.

Rao Khalil, CPWB Rawalpindi, revealed in an exclusive interview with PTV News that a comprehensive Child Protection Policy is being finalized and will be signed soon, marking a significant milestone in revolutionizing welfare services for vulnerable children.

The CPWB initiated its operations in Rawalpindi in 2008 and has since been working tirelessly to protect vulnerable children, he added. According to Rao Khalil, the Punjab Chief Minister Maryum Nawaz has taken a special interest

in child protection, leading to significant advancements in the sector.

The establishment of child special courts has also streamlined legal procedures, ensuring swift justice for victims of child abuse and exploitation, he added. Rao Khalil emphasized that the upcoming policy will further strengthen the CPWB's efforts to safeguard children's rights and provide them with a secure and supportive environment.

The policy is expected to address key issues such as child beggary, child labour and child trafficking and will introduce new measures to prevent and respond to these crimes, he added.

Rao Khalil praised Sara Ahmad, the Chairperson of the Child Protection & Welfare Bureau, Punjab, for her dedication to the cause and the organization's enhanced services for child protection.

Sara Ahmad has been

leading the bureau's efforts to promote the welfare of destitute and neglected children throughout Punjab, he mentioned.

Her commitment to the cause is truly commendable, and the increase in services for child protection is a testament to her leadership, he added.

Rao Khalil also elaborated on the categories of children that the Child Protection and Welfare Bureau (CPWB) caters to, including abandoned, orphaned and vulnerable children. He further emphasized the importance of awareness and timely reporting of child abuse cases.

To facilitate this, Rao Khalil highlighted the 24/7 helpline service, 1121, which provides a platform for reporting child abuse cases and seeking assistance. This helpline plays a crucial role in spreading awareness and ensuring prompt action against child exploitation.

Electric buses win accolades

ISLAMABAD (APP): Civil society organizations and environmental activists have welcomed the government's decision to introduce electric buses in Islamabad, terming it a "significant step" towards reducing air pollution and promoting sustainable transportation.

These electric busses have been operated on 13 routes including Faizabad to Nust Metro Station, Faizabad to Allama Iqbal Open University, Pak Secretariat to Kachhari Metro Station, National Library to Pims Metro Station.

Similarly, other routes include Pims to Bari Imam,

D12 from Nust Metro Station, Pims to Nust Metro Station, Pims to Golra Sharif, Abpara to Tiramari, Khanna Pul to Nellore, Faizabad to Peer Wadhai Mor, Golra Mor to Wah Cantt and routes from Golra Mor to I-16 are included.

Environmental expert Muneer Ahmed said the electric buses will not only reduce greenhouse gas emissions but also contribute to a cleaner and healthier environment. "We have been advocating for eco-friendly transportation solutions for years, and it's heartening to see the government tak-

ing concrete steps in this direction," he stated.

A commuter Ameen Faheem said, "The electric bus is a game-changer for me adding that I can finally enjoy a peaceful commute without the noise and pollution of traditional buses." Electric buses can significantly improve public health by reducing exposure to air pollutants and noise pollution.

Civil society members, however, emphasized the need for a comprehensive plan to ensure the success of the initiative, including the establishment of a reliable charging infrastructure and the training of drivers.



ISLAMABAD: Banners displayed at Front of Parliament House in connection with 5th February Kashmir Solidarity day. —APP Photo

Awareness walk against kite flying, organized

RAWALPINDI (APP): Gungmandi police here on Sunday organized an awareness walk against kite flying and aerial firing, said a police spokesman.

He informed that Gungmani police on the directives of City Police Officer (CPO) Rawalpindi Syed Khalid Hamdani, organized awareness walk for complete prevention of kite flying and aerial firing.

He said that a series of awareness walks were conducted regarding prevention of kite flying and aerial firing. Station House Officer (SHO) Gungmani Police Station, several other police officers, citizens, traders and students participated in the walk.

The spokesman said that walks are being organized in different areas of the district to spread awareness to the citizens about the harms of kite flying and aerial firing. Special awareness pamphlets were distributed during the walk and awareness banners were also displayed at different points.

Kite flying is a dangerous game and it's a crime. After the amendment in the law, kite flying is a non-bailable offence, and the accused could be punished with imprisonment from 3 to 7 years and a fine amounting to Rs 500,000 to 5 million, he added.

Romina highlights wetlands' role

ISLAMABAD (APP): Coordinator to the Prime Minister for Climate Change, Romina Khurshid Alam has called for urgent action to safeguard the world's wetlands, emphasizing their significant role in environmental preservation, biodiversity, and combating impacts of climate change.

In her message on World Wetland Day being observed under the theme "protecting wetlands for our common future", Romina Khurshid highlighted the indispensable role wetlands play in ensuring environmental sustainability, supporting biodiversity, and mitigating the impacts of climate change.

She called for strengthened global and national efforts to safeguard these vital ecosystems.

The United Nations has designated February 2 as World Wetland Day to commemorate the adoption of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands in 1971.

As part of Pakistan's commitment to the Ramsar Convention, the country has designated 19 wetlands of international importance, including the famous Keenjhar Lake, Rann of Kutch, and the Haleji Lake, which support a wide variety of wildlife, especially for around 2 million migrato-

ry birds from countries in Central Asia, Siberia, and northern parts of Europe.

PM's aide stated that although the country contributes only 1% to global greenhouse gas emissions, has been ranked as the 5th most climate-vulnerable nation. This stark disparity highlights the country's heightened risk to the effects of climate change, such as extreme weather events, floods, droughts, and rising temperatures, which pose significant threats to its population, economy, and place additional pressure on its wetland resources.

She stated that climate change has exacerbated the challenges faced by wetlands in Pakistan. Rising temperatures, changing rainfall patterns, and increasing sea levels are causing wetlands to shrink disrupting the delicate balance of these ecosystems.

She emphasized that wetlands act as natural buffers against floods and function as carbon sinks, absorbing significant amounts of carbon dioxide which helps mitigating the effects of global warming.

Romina Khurshid Alam reaffirmed the government's commitment to protecting these vital ecosystems by strengthening environmental poli-

cies, promoting sustainable water management, and working closely with local communities to ensure that wetlands are preserved for future generations.

"Pakistan has shown resilience in the face of climate change, and our government is continuously taking steps to address environmental degradation. Wetlands, especially in regions like the Indus Delta, play a crucial role in maintaining the ecological balance and supporting livelihoods," she said.

To enhance awareness about the importance of wetlands, Alam called on all segments of society including government, private, civil society, and individuals to engage actively in conservation green initiatives. This involves reducing pollution, expanding green spaces, and educating local communities about the benefits of preserving healthy wetland ecosystems.

"As we observe World Wetland Day, it is essential that we commit taking action not just today but every day to safeguard the wetlands and the countless species that depend on them," she noted. "By collaborating, we can preserve these precious resources and build a sustainable future of environment".

ICT Police nab 2,637 lawbreakers, seize looted cash

ISLAMABAD (APP): Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) Police launched an extensive crackdown against criminal elements in the federal capital last month, busting 2,637 accused laws and seizing looted cash and valuables worth over Rs 244 million. A public relation officer told APP that, in this regard, the Islamabad police arrested a total of 2,637 accused involved in different criminal activities and recovered cash and valuables worth over 244 million rupees from their possession.

Moreover, 228 accused of 99 gangs involved in robbery activities were also arrested. He said during the ongoing "Nasha ab Nahi" movement in the federal capital, a total of 205 drug dealers were arrested, and 27 kilograms of hashish, 72 kilograms of heroin, 11 kilograms of ice, 1,907 liters of liquor and intoxicating pills were recovered from their possession. Additionally, 365

accused involved in tempering activities and property crimes such as theft, robbery, burglary, vehicles, and motorcycle theft were arrested. Police teams also recovered cash, vehicles and motorcycles from their possession. The Islamabad Police also carried out extensive operations against those possessing illegal weapons and arrested 334 accused and recovered 50 rifles, five carbines, 540 pistols and 33 daggers from their possession.

Similarly, during various operations against professional beggars and their facilitators throughout the city, 609 individuals were arrested. The Islamabad Police also conducted indiscriminate operations against proclaimed offenders, court fugitives and target offenders and arrested 371 accused.

Deputy Inspector-General of Police (DIG) Muhammad Jawad Tariq said that the Islamabad Police is also utilizing all available resources to ensure the eradication of

drug dealers and criminal elements from the federal capital. DIG further said that the Islamabad Police will bring those involved in the heinous crime of drug and alcohol trafficking to justice.

ICT Police arrest 13 suspects, seize 13 illegal weapons: Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) Police have intensified their crackdown against illegal weapons, arresting 13 individuals and recovering 13 illegal firearms, including nine pistols and four rifles, along with ammunition, in the past 24 hours.

A public relation officer told APP on Sunday that the action was taken under the special directives of Inspector General of Police (IGP), Syed Ali Nasir Rizvi, as part of a broader campaign to curb illegal weapons and enhance public safety.

In this regard, 13 accused involved in possessing illegal weapons were arrested during the last 24 hours. Police teams also recovered 09 pistols, 04 rifles and guns

with ammunition from their possession. Additionally, 13 cases were registered against them at various police stations.

Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Operations Muhammad Shoaib Khan said that the aim of the campaign is to prevent crime in the city, rid the city of illegal weapons, and ensure the safety of citizens' lives and property.

SSP further said that, actions against criminal elements across Islamabad will be intensified, and a comprehensive strategy will be adopted to address this issue. No element will be allowed to disrupt public peace, use illegal weapons in the federal capital, or spread fear and panic among citizens. Citizens who possess licensed firearms are requested to register them with their respective police stations and cooperate with the Islamabad Police during the ongoing campaign against illegal weapons, Shoaib Khan added.

Govt envisions transformation of public institutions by integrating modern technology

ISLAMABAD (APP): The recent transformation of public institutions in the federal capital through improved infrastructure, integration of modern technology, and an enhanced learning environment for the younger generation has marked a significant shift towards a more progressive education system.

With a strong commitment to digitalization and innovation, the government is taking several steps to ensure that public schools keep pace with modern educational demands. The Federal Directorate of Education (FDE), with the support of the relevant ministry, has introduced various measures under new education policies to make learning

more interactive and effective.

In an interview with APP, the Director Colleges, Professor Shahid Mehmood Abbasi, who is also the Principal of Islamabad Model College for Boys I-8/3, highlighted the shift from traditional teaching methods to technology-driven solutions. "Gone are the days when a child simply read from a book while the teacher explained. Today's students come to class already exposed to a wealth of information, thanks to IT tools," he said.

To align with the changing educational landscape, smart classrooms equipped with smart boards, Chromebooks, and digital learning tools are being introduced. Teachers have undergone

specialized training to effectively integrate these technologies into their lessons. "We've ensured that modern facilities, such as computer labs, smart classrooms, and e-libraries, are available across institutions. Even junior students are being introduced to AI and IT tools to cultivate interest and build foundational skills early on," Abbasi added. The initiative also includes the provision of Chromebooks to students, allowing them to engage in interactive, self-paced learning.

"This approach not only enhances their learning capacity but also makes education enjoyable. Students now have access to recorded lectures, educational resources, and external web links,

which they can revisit at their convenience," he explained. He credited Federal Secretary Education, Mohyuddin Ahmad Wani, for setting targets across institutions to develop smart classrooms and replicate other modern facilities.

About expanding technical education and career readiness, Abbasi said that FDE is equally focused on technical education and career counseling. Specialized technical labs are being established in 16 institutions, providing students with hands-on training in trades and IT-related skills, such as web development.

"We aim to prepare students for the future job market by equipping them with employable skills. Career counseling

sessions are also being organized to guide students in choosing suitable career paths based on global trends," Abbasi stated. A six-week web development course was recently organized at his college, where students showed great interest. About promotion of sports and extracurricular activities, he said that beyond academics, the government is emphasizing physical fitness by developing open gyms and sports facilities in both boys' and girls' institutions.

"Students actively participate in various sports competitions held in institutions, fostering a healthy lifestyle," Abbasi noted. Additionally, the FDE has launched a kitchen gardening ini-

tiative to instill environmental awareness and encourage sustainable living. "We're encouraging children and their families to grow organic vegetables at home. This not only provides fresh produce but also strengthens their connection to nature," he remarked.

To inculcate book-reading habits, school libraries are being modernized with new books and e-library setups, allowing students access to online resources. Additionally, classroom libraries for younger children are being introduced to improve reading habits and vocabulary. Abbasi revealed that public institutions are now attracting students from private schools, thanks to the recent improvements.

Taliban shut down school

BAMIYAN (Amu TV): Taliban officials have shut down Tasa'ud School, an educational institution serving orphans and impoverished children in Bamiyan province, according to local sources. The closure came after Taliban members reportedly entered the school days earlier and ordered staff and teachers to vacate the premises. Sources say Taliban fighters harassed, beat, and insulted staff and students before seizing their mobile phones.

100 prisoners deported

KABUL (BNA): The Neighbor country's government has handed over a total of 141 Afghan prisoners to the Directorate of Migrant Transfers. Bakht Jamal Gowhar, the head of migrant transfers at Torkham, informed the Bakhtar News Agency that the group includes men, women, and children from various provinces, including Kunar, Kapisa, Maidan Wardak, Kunduz, Khost, Kabul, Baghlan, Laghman, Paktia, Bamyan, Uruzgan, and particularly Nangarhar.

Stanikzai warns against deification of Taliban leader



KABUL (Amu TV): Abbas Stanikzai, Taliban's deputy foreign minister, has cautioned against treating the Taliban supreme leader, Hibatullah Akhundzada, with what he described as "prophetic or divine" reverence, according to an audio recording of his remarks that recently surfaced. Stanikzai said in the recording that Akhundzada remains the leader of the Taliban only as long as he adheres to "the path of God." He also warned that Afghanistan's history has seen many leaders like him and that the country should not be destroyed for his sake. "You are our leader only as long as you walk in the path of God," Stanikzai said in the recording, the time and location of which remain unclear. "If you stray even one step from God's way, you are no longer my leader, and I do not recognize you."

His comments mark the latest sign of internal rifts within the Taliban's ranks. Last month, Stanikzai publicly criticized the continued closure of schools for girls, arguing that there is no religious justification for the ban. In his latest remarks, he appeared to indirectly reference the Taliban's restrictions on women's education, saying that not every order issued by Akhundzada should be considered absolute.

Since returning to power

in 2021, the Taliban have imposed sweeping restrictions on women and girls, barring them from secondary and higher education as well as most forms of employment, including medical training. The policies have drawn widespread condemnation from the international community and deepened Afghanistan's isolation on the global stage.

As divisions within the Taliban leadership grow, political opposition outside Afghanistan is also gaining momentum. The National Resistance Council for the Salvation of Afghanistan, a coalition of exiled Afghan politicians, has announced that its representatives recently met in Ankara, Turkey, with Kimberly Lowe, a US Senate candidate from Virginia, and Aziz Sadat, a senior adviser to the Global Peace Foundation.

According to a statement from the council, the meeting focused on renewed US efforts to support the formation of an inclusive government in Afghanistan. The group cited Lowe as saying that the Trump administration intends to prioritize Afghan peace efforts.

"The new US administration under Trump has placed Afghanistan's peace process among its priorities," the council's statement read. "It understands the suffering and hardships of the Afghan people and is

committed to standing with them in pursuit of a genuine peace and an inclusive government."

Ehsan Nairo, a spokesman for the National Islamic Movement of Afghanistan, said that on Saturday, Marshal Abdul Rashid Dostum, a key opposition leader, hosted representatives from the United States Institute of Peace and the National Resistance Council in Ankara. The discussions, according to Nairo, focused on finding a sustainable pathway toward peace and stability in Afghanistan.

Lowe, however, has not explicitly confirmed that Afghanistan was discussed in her meetings. In two separate posts on X (formerly Twitter), she wrote only that she was in Turkey for "historic meetings" and "peace initiatives."

The Trump administration has yet to outline its policy toward Afghanistan, beyond Trump's repeated statements about reclaiming military equipment left behind in the country.

Meanwhile, diplomatic pressure on the Taliban is intensifying. According to sources, Washington's increased economic and political pressure on the Taliban has coincided with internal rifts between the Haqqani faction and Kandahari Taliban leaders, particularly over the recent removal of Abdul Kabir as deputy prime minister and his reassignment to the Ministry of Refugees.

Adding to the Taliban's challenges, the chief prosecutor of the International Criminal Court has reportedly submitted a request for the arrest of the Taliban's leader and chief justice, a move that could further isolate the regime on the global stage.

Paltuni Dam construction reaches 20% completion

PAKTIKA (TOLONews): Matiullah Abid, spokesperson for the Ministry of Energy and Water, told TOLONews that the construction of the Paltuni Dam in Paktika province has progressed by 20%.

He stated that the dam will have the capacity to irrigate 2,500 hectares of land and store 107 million cubic meters of water.

Once operational, the Paltuni Dam will generate 935 kilowatts of electricity per hour.

Matiullah Abid further said: "The Paltuni hydropower project in Paktika is one of the key projects of the Ministry of Energy and Water. Its construction is about 20% complete. This dam will be able to irrigate 2,500 hectares of agricultural land, generate one megawatt of electricity, and store 107 million cubic meters of water annually."

Experts emphasize that dam construction plays a crucial role in boosting agriculture and power generation, calling for increased investments in energy production within the country. Economic expert Basir Tareqi said: "We must utilize our own resources. Afghanistan has rivers like Kunar and Panjshir, and overall, the country has the potential to generate 30,000 to 33,000 megawatts of electricity."

Another expert, Qutbuddin Yaqubi, said: "Managing water resources, improving agriculture, generating energy, creating jobs, and enhancing the economic situation are all vital benefits of building dams."

The Paltuni Dam, located 12 kilometers from Sharan, the capital of Paktika, is being constructed with a height of 30 meters, a length of 260 meters, and a width of 112 meters. The project, aimed at seasonal water storage for irrigation and agricultural development, is valued at over 851 million afghani.

Taliban ban images and graphics on book covers

HERAT (Amu TV): The Taliban's Ministry for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice in Herat has banned images and graphics on book covers, according to local sources.

Booksellers say they have been forced to cover book covers with stickers to comply with the new directive. Some report that the ban has hurt book sales, as visual design plays a significant role in attracting readers.

The restriction is the latest in a series of Taliban-imposed bans targeting cultural and educational spaces. While the group has previously enforced bans on depictions of living beings in provinces under the influence of its supreme leader, Hibatullah Akhundzada, this is the first time

booksellers have been directly affected.

Impact on booksellers and readers

At a recent book exhibition in Herat, many books on display had stickers covering their covers to hide images and graphics.

"Book cover images are crucial for sales—about 80 percent of sales depend on them," said Mohammad Shafiq Farooqi, a bookseller in Herat. "Now, we either have to cross out the images or cover them with stickers."

Hamed Rasooli, an event organizer, echoed the concern, saying visual design helps attract readers.

"Graphics and images are an essential part of books. They grab attention and encourage people to

read," Rasooli said.

Some residents of Herat criticized the Taliban's decision, arguing that book cover designs are a key factor in promoting literacy.

"For selling books, two things are crucial: the title and the cover image," said Farooq Mahmoodi, a resident of Herat.

Another Herat resident, Basir Ahmad Bahadori, added, "A book's appeal comes from two elements: its title and its images."

Censorship beyond book covers

Booksellers also say the Taliban have banned the sale of certain psychology and political books.

The prohibition on images follows previous Taliban restrictions on broadcasting depictions of

living beings, outlined in Article 17 of the group's laws on virtue and vice. These policies have been strictly enforced in Kandahar, Maidan Wardak, Takhar, Helmand, Badghis, and Nangarhar, provinces seen as strongholds of Akhundzada's rule.

However, critics have pointed out the double standard in the Taliban's enforcement. While banning images in public, many Taliban officials and provincial leaders continue to post photos and videos of themselves on social media.

409,000MT transported via railways

KABUL (Pajhwok): About 408,876 metric tonnes of goods were transported through railways from four Afghan ports during the past one month, the Ministry of Public Works (MoPW) said on Sunday.

On his X handle, MoPW spokesman Mohammad Ashraf Haqshenas wrote these transportations occurred in last month of 1403 solar year.

He said 302,327 tonnes were transported through Hairatan Port, 27,045 tonnes via Aqina Port, 70,564 tonnes through Torghundi Port, and 8,940 tons via Khawaf-Herat, totaling 408,876 metric tonnes.

These transportation included fuel and other items, the spokesman added.

According to Haqshenas, the shipments included 1,698 tonnes transit and export goods. But he did not name the items. He explained MoPW was trying to create favorable conditions for more transactions and to provide convenience to traders.

Kandahar Cement Factory nears completion, set to open in six months

K A B N D A H A R (TOLONews): The construction of the Kandahar cement factory, costing \$100 million and covering 100 acres of land near a cement mine in Kandahar's industrial park, is now 95% complete.

According to officials, with the installation of technical equipment, the factory will be able to commence cement production within the next six months.

In its initial phase, the factory is expected to produce 1,500 tons of cement per day, with a planned increase to 5,000 tons daily in subsequent phases.

Abdul Bari Walizada, the factory's director, told

TOLONews: "The construction work of this factory is 95% complete. Currently, the installation of technical equipment is underway, and we expect operations to begin within six months."

Abdul Qahir, the head of the factory's reconstruction safety, said: "At present, we have the capacity to produce up to 30,000 cement bags daily, but we have also started building a larger factory. Once it becomes operational, production will increase to 100,000 bags per day." Officials from Kandahar's Directorate of Mines and Industries state that such investments can contribute to the country's

reconstruction and self-sufficiency.

Sayed Sarwar Amani, the head of Kandahar's Chamber of Industries and Mines, said: "In the future, not only will the southern region of the country achieve self-sufficiency in cement production, but we will also export to other regions. As a result, cement imports from abroad will decrease." Once production begins, the factory is expected to create job opportunities for 2,000 people.

Some workers at the factory have urged officials to provide more job opportunities within the country.

Basir Ahmad, a worker, said: "Such investments are

very beneficial for the people because they help reduce unemployment and poverty." Another worker, Noor Rahman, said: "Many workers, including myself, are employed here. I urge investors to increase such large-scale investments so that more job opportunities can be created."

According to local officials, in addition to the construction sector, several other production factories, including those for animal feed, oil, and flour, have recently started operations in Kandahar. These businesses not only strengthen domestic production but also provide employment for many people.

US Senator calls for support for Afghan refugees amid resettlement uncertainty

WASHINGTON (Amu TV): US Senator Greg Stanton has reaffirmed his commitment to supporting Afghan refugees, particularly those who worked alongside American forces and are now seeking resettlement in the United States.

During a visit to a refugee resettlement center in Arizona, Stanton met with several Afghan families and pledged to do "everything in his power" to assist them.

"I met with Afghan families at the Arizona refugee center this week," he wrote in a post on X, sharing a video of his visit.

"Our Afghan allies risked their lives to help US troops. We owe it to them to do everything we can to help them find stability and opportunity here—including passing the Afghan Adjustment Act."

Stanton's remarks come as President Donald J. Trump has moved to suspend most foreign aid and development assistance, a deci-



sion that has also halted the resettlement of more than 40,000 Afghan refugees awaiting relocation to the United States.

Many of these Afghans worked alongside US troops during America's 20-year presence in Afghanistan and are now at risk of reprisals from the Taliban.

Some Afghan refugees have described facing arrests, torture, and death threats due to their past affiliations with the US military.

With the future of their resettlement uncertain, advocates and lawmakers, including Stanton, have continued to push for greater protections for those left behind.

2,775 people killed, injured in 639 traffic accidents nationwide

KABUL (Pajhwok): Nearly 770 people have been killed and 2,008 others wounded in 639 traffic accidents in the first 10 months of the ongoing solar year nationwide, Pajhwok Afghan News has learned.

Figures, however, showed 32 percent drop in casualties in the past five months now compared to the past.

More than half of these deaths and injuries occurred in Ghazni, Samangan, Maidan Wardak, Baghlan, Laghman, Faryab, and Badakhshan provinces, with the highest number of deaths and injuries occurring on December 29; on that day, 50 people were killed and 70 others injured in two incidents in Ghazni, and five people were killed and injured in Parwan.

Figures recorded with Pajhwok showed that 68 percent of all fatalities and injuries are adult males, eight percent are females, eight percent are children, and 16 percent are persons of unknown gender. According to previous Pajhwok reports, the reason for the higher number of fatalities and injuries among men in traffic accidents is that they travel more than children and

women.

Similarly, Pajhwok Afghan News' findings showed that the highest number of people killed in Ghazni, Badakhshan, Baghlan, and Faryab, while the highest number of people were injured in Ghazni, Maidan Wardak, Samangan, and Laghman provinces.

The death toll could be higher because this figure is only for the 639 traffic accidents that Pajhwok Afghan News Agency has reported; Pajhwok did not report traffic accidents in which no one is killed or fewer than five people got injured.

91 people killed, 280 injured in Ghazni, 78 killed, 87 injured in Badakhshan, 66 killed, 110 injured in Baghlan, 58 killed, 109 injured in Faryab, 43 killed, 155 injured in Samangan, 42 killed, 51 injured in Herat, 37 killed, 156 injured in Maidan Wardak, 32 killed, 140 injured in Laghman, 28 killed, 115 injured in Parwan, 26 killed, 57 injured in Nangarhar, 25 killed, 103 injured in Bamyani, 24 killed, 39 injured in Balkh, 22 killed, 31 injured in Helmand, 20 killed, 48 injured in Farah, 15 killed, 34 injured in

Daikundi, and 15 killed, 39 injured in Kapisa.

Similarly, 14 killed, 54 injured in Jawzjan, 14 killed, 24 injured in Nuristan, 14 killed, 19 injured in Uruzgan, 12 killed, 22 injured in Ghor, 12 killed, 75 injured in Logar, 12 killed, 24 injured in Sar-e-Pul, 10 killed, 43 injured in Badghis, 8 killed, 19 injured in Kabul, 8 killed, 6 injured in Panjshir, six killed, 30 injured in Kandahar, six killed, 30 injured in Kunar, five killed, 11 injured in Khost, five killed, 27 injured in Paktia, five killed, 25 injured in Zabul, four killed, 14 injured in Kunduz, four killed, 13 injured in Paktika, three killed, nine injured in Nimroz, and three killed and nine injured in Takhar.

Traffic accident statistics recorded by Pajhwok show that the number of fatalities and injuries due to traffic accidents has decreased by nearly 32 percent compared to the first five months of the current solar year.

In the first five months, 1,648 people were killed and injured in 458 traffic accidents, and in the last five months, 1,127 people were killed and injured in 181 traffic accidents.

According to the findings, the number of traffic accidents in the first five months of this year was high because there were two Eids during this period and many traffic accidents occurred during the previous Eid-ul-Fitr and Eid-ul-Adha.

Reasons behind traffic accidents and solutions

Wahidullah, a resident of Kunar's Asmar district was injured in the Ghazni traffic accident said: "I was going to Kandahar, I bought a ticket in Kabul, I was on my way out when suddenly this accident happened, the vehicle was also driven in a high speed. My request to drivers is that this road is not a one-way road, they should be very careful." Farzad Akbari, a resident of Mazar-i-Sharif's seventh Police District, said: "About eight months ago, his cousin lost his life in a traffic accident, saying it was a very painful event."

He called on drivers and said: "My dearest cousin lost his life in a traffic accident. It is a very painful thing. However, I urge all drivers to not drive too fast and to be careful."

Akbari also called on the government to prevent these incidents, as traffic

accidents have increased in recent days.

Khalifa Raosul, a resident of western Herat province, said around one month before six people were killed in a traffic accident and around 16 people, including their relatives, were injured.

He said: "The government should hold a meeting with companies to control vehicle speed; because this [Kabul-Herat] highway is a public road and connects one province to another; there is a lot of traffic on it and drivers should be careful."

Mohammad Nabi Afghan, Deputy Chairman of the Land Transport Coordination Council, told Pajhwok Afghan News unfortunately many traffic accident happens on highways and it has different factors.

He said the construction of substandard and poor roads, the presence of large boulders on highways, the movement of vehicles on both sides of the highway, lack of weight control, the lack of specialized personnel in the construction and design of highways, the presence of substandard policies in the transportation sector, the presence and increase of vehicles

that violate Afghanistan's traffic laws, the conflict of policies, plans, and plans of transport-related agencies, the lack of coordination between traffic and transportation agency officials, forcing drivers to drive for more than eight hours, and some other factors are some of the factors that cause many traffic accidents on highways.

He asked on government to take action in this regard and added: "The causes of traffic accidents are different, but most of them are attributed to the government, we have talked a lot and discussed it repeatedly over the past two to three years since the takeover of the IEA, and I have also spent a lot of resources on these issues."

Mohammad Nabi said: "Roads should be built according to load; the design and structure of the road are from the time of Zahir Shah, there is a large volume of traffic on it, four to five thousand vehicles travel on it every day, and right-hand traffic is allowed to pass freely."

Referring to the recent decline in traffic accidents, he said: "There has been a slight decrease, there is more and more control,

checkpoints have been set up, but roads need to be built, control has been established and people have become aware."

He said that there are also problems among drivers, and transport companies also have their own problems and mistakes that they must pay attention to and prevent.

Col. Abdul Wadud Khairkhawa, told Pajhwok Afghan News that unfortunately more traffic accidents happens and people's lives are lost.

Referring to the casualty figures caused by traffic accidents, he said: "The numbers you get from health centers are accurate because all victims are registered there and are relatively accurate, but your statistics are lower for traffic accidents, more than a thousand cases have been registered, the deaths are accurate, and the number of injuries may be three percent higher than your figures."

The poor quality of roads and bridges, obvious and hidden technical problems and malfunctions of vehicles, carelessness and unprofessionalism of drivers, negligence of transport companies, and the hiring

of inexperienced people by these companies are the causes of traffic accidents on highways, said Khairkhawa.

Referring to the traffic control and the prevention of traffic accidents, he said: "Traffic flow should always be under control; fortunately, we have this plan, we send the plans to the relevant managements and it is already working, it is the efforts of this administration that these incidents are rare... Our roads are under control, our traffic police are working actively, and the traffic administration keeps everything under control by creating sound policies and sending them to the relevant managements, and we strived to prevent traffic accidents from occurring on the highways."

He also believed that lack of coordination and conflicting policies between traffic and transportation agencies were the causes of traffic accidents, but added that this problem has been addressed in the newly developed plan of this agency, and with its implementation, this shortcoming would be eliminated.

Qatari PM calls on Hamas, Israel to begin immediate talks on Gaza

DOHA (Reuters): Qatar's prime minister on Sunday called on Israel and Hamas to immediately begin negotiating phase two of the Gaza ceasefire, adding that there is no clear plan for when talks will begin.

"We demand (Hamas and Israel) to engage immediately as stipulated in the agreement," Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani said at a press conference held jointly with Turkey's foreign minister in the Qatari capital Doha on Sunday. According to the ceasefire agreement, negotiations on implementing the second phase of the

deal should begin before the 16th day of phase one of the ceasefire, which is Monday.

Israel and Hamas last month reached a complex three-phase accord that has halted the fighting in Gaza. Hamas has so far released 18 hostages in exchange for Israel releasing hundreds of Palestinians held in Israeli prisons.

There are more than 70 hostages still held in Gaza. The second stage of the accord is expected to include Hamas releasing all remaining hostages held in Gaza, a permanent end to hostilities and the

complete withdrawal of Israeli forces from the enclave.

"There is nothing yet clear about where the delegations will come and when it's going to take place," Sheikh Mohammed said.

Mediators have engaged with Hamas and Israel over the phone and Qatar has set an agenda for the next phase of negotiations, he said. "We hope that we start to see some movement in the next few days. It's critical that we get things rolling from now in order to get to an agreement before day 42," Israeli Prime Minister

Benjamin Netanyahu's office said he would begin negotiations on phase two of the agreement on Monday in Washington, when he is set to meet U.S. President Donald Trump's Middle East Envoy, Steve Witkoff.

During his meeting with Witkoff, Netanyahu will discuss Israel's positions in respect to the ceasefire, the prime minister's office said.

Witkoff will then speak with officials from Egypt and Qatar, who have mediated between Israel and Hamas over the past 15 months with backing from Washington.



WAUKEGAN, ILLINOIS: Activists march through a neighborhood protesting a recent increase of activity in the area by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents.

Syria President arrives in Saudi Arabia

DUBAI (Arab News): Syria's President Ahmed Al-Sharaa arrived in Saudi Arabia on Sunday in his first foreign trip since he assumed power, local media has reported.

Syrian state news agency Sana earlier reported the president was accompanied by the country's foreign minister, Asaad Hassan Al-Shibani.

Al-Sharaa will meet Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman in Riyadh, SANA reported.

A picture posted on X by the Syrian presidency showed Al-Sharaa and his foreign minister en-route to Saudi Arabia.

Al-Sharaa has been appointed Syria's president, almost two months after his group helped topple Bashar Al-Assad.

Last month, Saudi Foreign Minister Faisal bin Farhan has visited Damascus and said the kingdom was engaged in talks with Europe and the US to help lift economic sanctions imposed on Syria that had decimated its economy.

Naqvi commends NA speaker's role for govt-PTI talks

E.P. Report

LAHORE: Interior Minister Syed Mohsin Naqvi on Sunday praised National Assembly Speaker Sardar Ayaz Sadiq for his efforts to bring the government and the PTI closer to each other through dialogue.

Talking to the speaker in Lahore, the minister said that Ayaz's efforts to bring both sides to the negotiating table were praiseworthy.

Matters of mutual interest and the country's overall situation came under discussion at the meeting.

There was also an exchange of views over the PTI's decision to boycott the talks.

Both expressed satisfaction over the improving economic situation of the country.

Likewise, the steps taken by the government for the resolution of the people's issues were also discussed.

PECA aims to curb fake news, says Tarar

LAHORE (APP): Federal Minister for Information and Broadcasting Attaullah Tarar has reiterated that the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA) is aimed at eliminating fake news and addressing the damages caused through social media.

Speaking as the chief guest at the oath-taking ceremony of the Associated Press of Pakistan (APP) Union on Sunday, he emphasized that social media cannot be left unchecked under the guise of journalism.

He warned that fake propaganda, false news, harassment, child abuse content, threats to national security, economic uncertainty, and personal defamation are being spread online, creating unrest in society.

To regulate digital platforms, Tarar announced the establishment of a Digital Media Protection Authority, which will include members from the private sector, press clubs, and journalist organizations. Journalists and IT professionals will also be part of its tribunal. The authority will ensure swift decision-making, with tribunals required to pass orders within 24 hours, and appeals can be made to the

High Court and Supreme Court. The minister assured that all stakeholders will be consulted before finalizing the framework.

"This is a crucial step in addressing the threats posed by social media," said Tarar, adding that the law will help curb misinformation and malicious content. He urged journalistic organizations to support the legislation, which incorporates global best practices.

The minister also addressed the damaging effects of corruption, stating that it has caused irreparable harm to institutions. He reaffirmed the government's commitment to reforming institutions under the Ministry of Information, making them profitable and efficient. He praised APP Managing Director Asim Khichi for exposing corruption within the organization and vowed to bring such cases to their logical conclusion.

He further highlighted the vital role of national institutions like Pakistan Television (PTV), Radio Pakistan, and APP in promoting Pakistan's image globally. He recalled that Radio Pakistan had the honor of announcing Pakistan's independence first, while PTV continues to play a key role in cultur-

al promotion. Recognizing the struggles of journalists, Tarar assured that addressing their challenges remains a top priority. He announced that funds will be allocated in the upcoming budget for journalists who pass away during service.

Upon his arrival at the Radio Pakistan Lahore office, Attaullah Tarar was warmly received with drum beats, horse dances, and rose petal showers. He administered the oath to the newly elected APP Employees Union officials, congratulating them on their election.

Emphasizing the importance of employees as a national asset, he urged them to work with dedication and integrity for the betterment of their institution. He also assured the resolution of employee issues and distributed shields among the participants.

The event was attended by PML-N leader Begum Sajida Farooq Tarar (mother of the minister), Coordinator for Heritage and Culture Farah Diba, Director General Radio Sheikh Saeed, Bureau Chief APP Lahore Talib Hussain, and several senior journalists and media professionals.

Israeli military blows up several buildings

RAMALLAH/JERUSALEM (Reuters): The Israeli military blew up several buildings in the occupied West Bank on Sunday in a series of simultaneous explosions that the Palestinian state news agency said had leveled around 20 buildings in the Jenin refugee camp.

Thick clouds were seen rising from the Palestinian city where Israeli forces have been conducting a massive operation for nearly two weeks that the Israeli military says is targeted at local militants, including seizing weapons stockpiles.

Asked about the simultaneous demolition of buildings in Jenin, a spokesperson for the military said "several structures used as terrorist infrastructure" had been dismantled. More details would be released later, the person said.

The Palestinian Jenin Government Hospital Director Wisam Baker told the Palestinian state news agency that part of the hospital was damaged in the explosions but that there had been no casualties.

Jenin is a crowded township built for descendants of Palestinians who were driven out, or fled their homes, in the 1948 war when the state of Israel was established.

The refugee camp there has been a center of militant activity for decades and the target of repeated raids by Israeli security forces.

Israeli forces, backed by helicopters and armored bulldozers, began the assault on the city on Jan. 21, two days after Israel reached a ceasefire in Gaza with militant group Hamas.

Hamas on Sunday called for an "escalation in the resistance" against Israel following the demolition of buildings in Jenin.

The Palestinian Authority, a Hamas rival, exercises limited governance over the West Bank where around 3 million

Palestinians live and over which Israel maintains overall military control. Israeli forces have engaged in gunbattles with local militants since the operation began.

Defense Minister Israel Katz on Wednesday said security forces would stay until the operation is complete, without saying when that would be.

At least 25 Palestinians have been killed since the Israeli military operation began, including nine members of armed groups, a 73 year-old man and a two-year-old girl, according to Palestinian officials. The Israeli military says it has killed at least 35 militants and detained over 100 wanted individuals.

Dozens of homes and roads have been destroyed by Israeli forces in the latest campaign. The Palestinian state news agency also said that a 27 year-old man had been killed on Sunday by Israeli forces raiding a refugee camp near Hebron.



POTLAVA: This handout photograph taken and released by the Ukrainian State Emergency Service on February 2 shows rescuers working at a damaged residential building a day after a missile strike in Potlava.

Turkey says it killed 23 Kurdish militants in Syria

ANKARA (Reuters): Turkey said on Sunday it had killed 23 Kurdish militants in northern Syria, the latest in a series of strikes against them which have continued since US President Donald Trump took office last month.

The defense ministry said the militants belonged to the Syrian Kurdish YPG militia and

the outlawed Kurdistan Workers Party, or PKK.

Turkey regards the PKK and YPG to be identical, while the United States views them as separate groups, having banned the PKK as terrorists but recruited the YPG as its main allies in Syria in the campaign against ISIS.

Turkey has long called on Washington to with-

draw support for the YPG, expressing hope that Trump would revise the policy of the previous administration of President Joe Biden.

Turkish forces and their allies in Syria have repeatedly fought with Kurdish militants there since the toppling of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad in December.

Turkey has said that the Syrian Democratic Forces, or SDF – a US-backed umbrella group that includes the Kurdish YPG – must disarm or face military intervention.

Under the Biden administration the United States has had 2,000 troops in Syria fighting alongside the SDF and YPG.

PTI to march towards Islamabad with full preparation: Junaid

E.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) KP President Junaid Akbar Khan said that they will march towards Islamabad with full preparation this time.

Talking to media on Sunday, the newly appointed provincial president said that he will try to fulfil his responsibilities given by the party founder Imran Khan.

"We were not expect-

ing live bullets on us last time. We'll come with complete preparation this time," Junaid Akbar said.

According to MNA Junaid Akbar, he doesn't want any confrontation with the government and institutions.

He added that PTI will hold a historical power show in Swabi on February 8.

PTI's KP president was of the view that Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur will focus on

the governance in the province while he will handle the party affairs.

"I am not in the race of getting any ministry. The changes in the government is the mandate of chief minister and I have nothing to do with it," he said.

Meanwhile, PTI's preparations for Swabi rally are in full swing.

According to party sources, all leaders have been instructed to mobilise workers, with

each Khyber Pakhtunkhwa MNA tasked to bring at least 500 supporters. To ease financial strain on leaders, workers have been asked to arrange their own transport.

Additionally, every national and provincial assembly member has been given specific tasks to ensure the event's success.

PTI workers from Punjab will also be invited to participate.

Russia and Ukraine trade blame for attack on Kursk school

MOSCOW (AFP): Kyiv and Moscow traded blame on Sunday for a strike on a school in a Ukrainian-occupied town in Russia's Kursk region, while Kyiv said new missile and drone attacks killed at least 18 people in Ukraine.

Fighting in the nearly three-year war has shown no signs of easing despite US President Donald Trump's promise to quickly reach a ceasefire after he took office on January 20.

The Ukrainian Air Force said four people were killed in a Russian attack with a guided aerial bomb Saturday on a former school building sheltering civilians in the town of Sudzha. It said four others were seriously wounded and 80 people were rescued from the rubble.

"Hitting civilians with bombs is a signature style

of Russian criminals! Even when the civilians are local residents, Russians," it said. Russia did not give a toll, but accused Kyiv of targeting the school in a "crime that has no forgiveness and no statute of limitations".

"The Ukrainian Armed Forces committed another war crime by launching a targeted missile strike on a boarding school in the city of Sudzha," Russia's defence ministry said.

Russian investigators announced they had opened a criminal case against a Ukrainian commander who they said was behind the attack.

Kyiv launched a surprise operation into the Kursk region last August, seizing dozens of villages and small towns including Sudzha — home to about 6,000 people before the fighting.

Ukrainian President

Volodymyr Zelensky called Russia "devoid of civility", sharing a video on social media showing a heavily damaged building, as well as a wounded man lying on the ground.

"They destroyed the building even though dozens of civilians were there," Zelensky said in a post on X. "Russian bombs destroy Ukrainian homes the same way. And even against their own civilians, the Russian army uses similar tactics."

Across Ukraine, at least 18 people were killed as Russian strikes pumelled the centre and east of the country overnight Friday into Saturday, according to regional authorities and police.

Fourteen people, including two children, were killed in the city of Poltava after a missile hit a residen-

tial building early Saturday, the local administration said. Officials said at least 17 people were wounded as rescuers used cranes to comb the ruins of the smouldering building for survivors.

"On the fifth floor, a woman, my friend, was carried out," said Poltava resident Olena Svryyd. "She's not alive. She was crushed by the wall. There were a lot of casualties."

Another three people were killed over the weekend in the Sumy region, and one in Kharkiv, according to Ukrainian authorities.

Each side accused the other of new attacks on Sunday. Ukraine said an elderly woman was killed in Russian shelling of the Kherson region. Russia said two people died in Ukrainian drone attacks on the Belgorod region.

Trump puts tariffs on Canada, Mexico and China

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A new analysis by the Budget Lab at Yale laid out the possible damage to the U.S. economy, saying the average household would lose the equivalent of \$1,170 in income from the taxes. Economic growth would slow and inflation would worsen, and the situation could be even worse with retaliation from other countries.

Democrats were quick to warn that any inflation going forward was the result of Trump's actions.

"You're worried about grocery prices. Don't raising prices with his tariffs," Senate Democratic leader Chuck Schumer of New York wrote in a series of posts on X. "You're worried about tomato prices. Wait till Trump's Mexico tariffs raise your tomato prices," read another. "You're worried about car prices. Wait till Trump's Canada tariffs raise your car prices," read another.

A senior U.S. administration official, speaking

on condition of anonymity to brief reporters, said the lower rate on energy reflected a desire to minimize disruptive increases on the price of gasoline or utilities. That's a sign White House officials understand the gamble they're taking on inflation. Price spikes under former President Joe Biden led to voter frustration that helped return Trump to the White House.

The order signed by Trump contained no mechanism for granting exceptions, the official said, a possible blow to homebuilders who rely on Canadian lumber as well as farmers, automakers and other industries.

The official did not provide specific benchmarks that could be met to lift the new tariffs, saying only that the best measure would be fewer Americans dying from fentanyl addiction.

The order would also allow for tariffs on Canadian imports of less

than \$800. Imports below that sum are currently able to cross into the United States without customs and duties.

"It doesn't make much economic sense," said William Reinsch, senior adviser at the Center for Strategic and International Studies and a former U.S. trade official. "Historically, most of our tariffs on raw materials have been low because we want to get cheaper materials so our manufacturers will be competitive ... Now, what's he talking about? He's talking about tariffs on raw materials. I don't get the economics of it."

With the tariffs, Trump is honoring promises that are at the core of his economic and national security philosophy. But the announcement showed his seriousness around the issue as some Trump allies had played down the threat of higher import taxes as mere negotiating tactics.

The president is prepar-

ing more import taxes in a sign that tariffs will be an ongoing part of his second term. On Friday, he mentioned imported computer chips, steel, oil and natural gas, as well as copper, pharmaceutical drugs and imports from the European Union — moves that could essentially pit the U.S. against much of the global economy.

Trudeau warned of economic pain as the tariffs take effect and encouraged Canadians to "choose Canadian products and services rather than American ones." But he also voiced optimism in the enduring relationship between the two countries.

"It is going to have real consequences for people, for workers on both sides of our border. We don't want to be here. We didn't ask for this, but we will not back down in standing up both for Canadians and for the incredible successful relationship between Canada and the United States," Trudeau said.