



International drug gang busted Innocent Pakistani family released from Saudi Custody

F.P. Report

LAHORE: In a major breakthrough against international drug trafficking, nine members of a gang involved in smuggling have been arrested for framing an innocent Pakistani family by swapping their luggage tags at Lahore Airport.

The family, who had been wrongfully detained in Saudi Arabia, has now returned home following intervention by the Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF) and special directives from Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi.

The ANF played a crucial role in securing the family's release by providing evidence to Saudi authorities, proving their innocence. As

a result, all five members of the family have safely returned to Pakistan.

Following their arrival, Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi visited the family at their residence, accompanied by Director General of the Anti-Narcotics Force, Major General Abdul Majeed. Speaking to the media alongside the relieved family, Naqvi commended the relentless efforts of the ANF in tracking down the real culprits and ensuring justice was served.

He expressed gratitude to the Saudi government for their cooperation in the matter and reaffirmed Pakistan's commitment to combating drug trafficking. He further announced that

the ANF team responsible for cracking the case would be awarded special prizes in recognition of their hard work and dedication.

"Such commitment is rare, and to successfully eradicate drug smuggling from the country, the ANF must be provided with sufficient resources," Naqvi stated.

The Interior Minister also reiterated the government's determination to eliminate drug-related crimes, particularly those targeting innocent citizens. He emphasized the need for vigilance against international smuggling networks and assured the public that stringent measures would continue against drug traffickers.

Parliamentarians call on CM Punjab

LAHORE (APP): Members of Provincial Assembly from different districts of Punjab called on Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif at her office, here on Monday.

Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) President Muhammad Nawaz Sharif also attended the meeting. MPAs from Rawalpindi, Attock, Murree, Chakwal, Wazirabad, Hafizabad, and Mandi Bahauddin were included. The discussions focused on the country's current situation, public concerns, and ongoing

development projects within the constituencies. During the meeting, CM Maryam Nawaz emphasized that Punjab is the only province where bread is available for just Rs. 12-

14. She highlighted that public satisfaction and feedback are the ultimate measures of the government's performance.

The chief minister also directed the Assembly Members to ensure timely completion of the Rawalpindi Ring Road project by December and stressed the importance of completing other develop-

ment initiatives in the Rawalpindi and Gujranwala divisions without delay.

PML-N President Muhammad Nawaz Sharif expressed his appreciation for the Assembly Members, calling them his strength and honor. He remarked, "By the grace of Allah Almighty, the hardships faced by the public are rapidly alleviating across the province. The improvements in every sector of Punjab are a direct result of CM Maryam Nawaz Sharif's dedication and hard work."

During the meeting, the

Assembly Members praised CM Maryam Nawaz for her exceptional performance in the province. They commended her efforts, noting that her leadership had revived memories of the successful tenures of Muhammad Nawaz Sharif and Shehbaz Sharif. The members particularly appreciated the transparent, merit-based completion of development projects, free from political bias, calling it a positive political tradition.

The Assembly Members also congratulated the Chief Minister for ensur-

ing the availability of subsidized and surplus fertilizer, which has significantly reduced farmers' reliance on middlemen. Other notable achievements highlighted were improvements in the health sector, the provision of free medicines, doorstep medical treatments, and the launch of initiatives such as the Honhaar Scholarships for talented students and the Suthra Punjab scheme. They also praised the Dhee Rani Program for collective marriages, which has garnered positive public feedback.

IHC acquits accused in drugs smuggling case

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Islamabad High Court (IHC) on Monday terminated the imprisonment sentence of an accused in drugs smuggling case and ordered to release him.

A division bench comprising Justice Mohsin Akhtar Kayani and Sardar Ijaz Ishaq Khan heard the appeal of accused Waseem Anwar against his conviction. At the outset of hearing, petitioner's lawyer appeared before the court and contended that his client is innocent, adding that a baseless case was made against him but real culprits were set free.

The bench earlier reserved the verdict and later terminated the sentence of the accused while announcing the decision. It may be mentioned here that Anti-Narcotics Control Rawalpindi had registered a case against the accused regarding smuggling of 27.600 kilogram opium and 176.400kg hashish.

PWPA chairperson visits women protection center

LAHORE (APP): Punjab Women Protection Authority (PWPA) Chairperson Hina Parvez Butt visited the Lahore Women Protection Center on Monday and listened to concerns of affected women. Accompanied by SP Iqbal Town Bilal Ahmed and SHO Wahdat Colony Ansar Nawaz, she directed relevant authorities to take immediate action to resolve the issues raised by the women.

During her visit, the women shared grievances about prolonged delays in the resolution of their cases. In response, Hina Parvez Butt emphasized the need for swift action, underscoring the importance of prioritizing women's issues to ensure they receive timely justice.

The chairperson reaffirmed the Punjab Women Protection Authority's commitment to advancing women's rights and well-being, stating that the organization is more proactive than ever in safeguarding women's interests.

"Under the principle of 'Safe Woman, Strong Punjab,' we are making every effort to protect and empower women," she said. She reiterated her determination to provide expedited justice to women, ensuring their voices are heard and their concerns addressed.

She also assured that her office remains open to all women seeking assistance and pledged to personally oversee the resolution of their cases.

Kundi hails overseas Pakistanis as nation's assets'

ISLAMABAD (APP): Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Faisal Karim Kundi on Monday lauded the invaluable contribu-

tions of overseas Pakistanis, calling them the country's "assets, capital, and ambassadors."

In a meeting with Senior Advisor Nassau County Office USA Chaudhry Akram, Kundi acknowl-

edged the crucial role of overseas Pakistanis in economic growth, national development, and enhancing Pakistan's global image.

The governor emphasized that peace and stability were fundamental to

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's economic progress, with a particular focus on investing in education.

"The youth of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa are highly talented, but they need guidance and support. Overseas Pakistanis can play a vital role in their mentorship and development," he said.

Chaudhry Akram commended the governor's initiatives on women's empowerment, youth engagement, and promoting a positive image of the province.

He reaffirmed the commitment of overseas

Pakistanis to Pakistan's prosperity and paid tribute to the security forces for their sacrifices in maintaining peace.

"Overseas Pakistanis will never forget the sacrifices of our security forces for the country's stability. We stand united for Pakistan's progress and well-being," he stated.

The meeting also touched upon the country's political landscape, security situation, and other pressing issues in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Renowned businessman Muhammad Ali was also present on the occasion.

CM sets new milestones in Punjab's development: Azma

LAHORE (APP): Punjab Information Minister Azma Bokhari has lauded Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz for her remarkable achievements in governance, stating that she is the first Chief Minister in the province's history to initiate over 80 projects within a year.

According to Bokhari, more than 50 of these projects have already been completed, demonstrating CM Maryam Nawaz's dedication and efficiency in improving the province's infrastructure and services.

Bokhari emphasised that Maryam Nawaz's leadership and perform-

ance are winning the hearts of the people. She pointed out that certain individuals are fearful of CM Maryam Nawaz's rising popularity and urged those who wish to compete with her to match her level of efficiency. She also criticized the spokespersons of opposing governments, who, according to her, are solely focused on finding faults in Punjab's initiatives rather than offering constructive solutions.

The Information Minister also noted that Maryam Nawaz's style of governance is gaining traction not just in Punjab

but across other provinces, reflecting her growing influence. She stressed that when a government fails to deliver after years in power, the public naturally gravitates towards a Chief Minister who is actively working to bring about change.

Bokhari concluded her remarks by highlighting the strong leadership of Mian Nawaz Sharif, stating that both the federal and provincial governments under his guidance are setting new standards of performance. She expressed confidence that 2025 will usher in a new era of progress and prosperity for Pakistan.

RUDA holds ballot for first school in Chahar Bagh

LAHORE (APP): The Ravi Urban Development Authority (RUDA) has successfully conducted the balloting ceremony for the first-ever school in its flagship project, Chahar Bagh, at the authority's headquarters on Monday.

This milestone marks a significant step in RUDA's commitment to fostering quality education within its developmental ecosystem. The ceremony was held at RUDA's head office and was attended by distinguished guests, including Rana Sikandar Hayat, Minister for Higher and School Education, as the chief guest, and Khalid Nazir Wattoo, Secretary School Education Department, as the guest of honor.

The balloting process was conducted by the Punjab Information Technology Board (PITB) to ensure transparency and fairness, resulting in

Lahore Grammar School (LGS), Lahore, emerging as the successful applicant. The event was attended by participating schools, committee members, and esteemed guests, reinforcing RUDA's commitment to merit-based selection and educational excellence.

Minister for Higher and School Education Rana Sikandar Hayat applauded RUDA's initiative and assured full support from his office for the development of educational infrastructure within the project. He emphasized the importance of education in shaping communities and appreciated RUDA's transparent and inclusive approach.

Speaking at the occasion, Imran Amin, CEO RUDA, emphasized the crucial role of quality education in urban development. He highlighted RUDA's efforts through its Special Initiatives,

Diversity, and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programs to uplift the educational landscape within its projects. He said RUDA's ongoing and upcoming developments, underscoring the authority's vision for integrated and sustainable urban growth.

The event underscored the significant pace of development of ChaharBagh as the par excellence developmental pilot project of RUDA. A reputable school within the community vindicates the strategic statement of RUDA as the innovative leader in the modern and sustainable urban development.

Senior RUDA officials along with Kashif Qureshi, Executive Director Commercial & Business Strategy and Director Special Initiatives, CSR, and Diversity, Fatima Ali Khan, were also present on the occasion.



KARACHI: Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah launches the National Immunization Days (NIDs) campaign by administering polio drops to a child.

Sindh CM inaugurates anti-polio campaign

KARACHI (INP): Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah launched the National Immunization Days (NIDs) campaign for February 2025 by administering polio drops to children and reaffirmed his government's strong commitment to eradicating polio and ensuring a healthier future for children throughout the province.

The launch event was held at the CM House on Monday and was attended by Secretary Health Rehan Baloch, IG Police Ghulam Nabi Memon, Commissioner Karachi Hassan Naqvi, Coordinator EOC Irshad Sodhar, Aziz Memon of Rotary and others.

The Chief Minister emphasised that polio eradication is not just a health campaign, it is a crucial fight for the well-being of Sindh's children. "We are determined to ensure that no child in Sindh suffers from this entirely preventable disease," he stated.

He added that the Sindh government is fully engaged in this mission and that he would personally oversee the progress of the campaign. The vaccination drive is scheduled to run

from February 3 to February 9 and aims to immunize over 10.6 million children under the age of five throughout Sindh.

CM Murad Ali Shah highlighted the urgency of vaccinating every child, noting that Pakistan is one of the last two countries in the world where polio is still present. "In 2024, 22 of Pakistan's 73 polio cases were reported in Sindh. The first case of 2025 has already been detected in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Dera Ismail Khan, reminding us that the virus remains a serious threat," he said. Environmental surveillance has also identified the presence of the poliovirus in several areas across Sindh, reinforcing the need for ongoing vigilance.

The Chief Minister commended the dedication of Sindh's 82,000 frontline polio workers, who go door to door often under challenging conditions to protect children from this debilitating disease. "These workers are the true heroes of this campaign," he added. To ensure their safety, we have deployed 21,844 security personnel," he announced, expressing deep appreciation for the Sindh police's efforts in safeguarding

health teams.

Sending a strong message against any resistance to the vaccination drive, the CM asserted, "We have zero tolerance for any threats or obstruction against our polio teams," he said and added that anyone attempting to hinder this campaign would face strict legal action.

"These workers are not just health staff; they are protectors of our children's future and deserve our full respect and support," he said. He also introduced a new performance scorecard developed by Chief Secretary Asif Hyder Shah to evaluate efforts at the district level. Best-performing districts will be recognised while under performing areas will be held accountable.

He urged parents to cooperate with the vaccination teams, saying, "Open your doors to the polio teams. Don't let myths or misinformation endanger your child's future," he said and added that the polio vaccine was safe, effective, and free of cost. "Even if a child has been vaccinated before, they need multiple doses to build strong immunity," he said.

a child and a teenager.

Naveed Shahzaad, a legendary figure in Pakistan's entertainment and academic circles, recalled Sidhwa's humor and wisdom, describing her as "a fearless storyteller who brought the complexities of South Asian history to life with empathy and grace."

Perin Boga said, "Sidhwa's legacy lives on through her books, which continue to resonate with readers worldwide." As a pioneering literary voice, she remains an enduring inspiration for writers and readers alike, she added. The event also featured a brief documentary on Sidhwa's life and writings with narrations from her novels Ice Candy Man and the American Brat. The guests and participants praised NSPP for arranging the event to pay tribute to Bapsi.

NIPP organizes special gathering to pay tribute to Bapsi Sidhwa

LAHORE (APP): The National Institute of Public Policy (NIPP) arranged a special gathering to pay tribute to the legendary author and masterful story teller of Pakistan, Bapsi Sidhwa, here on Monday.

It was attended by civil servants, academicians, intellectuals and participants in the National Management Course. Notable speakers were Muneeza Hashmi, Perin Boga and Naveed Shahzaad. National Institute of Public Policy Dean Dr Naveed Elahi welcomed the guests and eulogised Bapsi as the Pakistani novelist of worldwide acclaim.

He termed Bapsi a quintessential Lahori and said that her book 'The Beloved City: Writings on Lahore' is a testimony of her association with the city. Naveed Elahi stressed that

novels could have a profound impact on public policy. Bapsi's novels encourage critical thinking on serious issues of our society, he added. Acclaimed and seasoned broadcaster and producer Mrs Muneeza Hashmi recalled her meetings and friendship with Sidhwa. She said that she visited her regularly in Houston in the last few years before Sidhwa's death.

She said she came to know much later that Sidhwa was so close to her father Faiz Ahmed Faiz and that he had unwavering support for getting her book published in Pakistan and in Russia. Longtime family friend and fellow Mrs Perin Boga shared the memories of her family with Bapsi and her parents. She described Bapsi Sidhwa's life as a child with polio and difficulties she passed through as



KARACHI: People are dangerously travelling on the roof of a mini bus pass through Korangi road. —APP Photo

Police launch crackdown on habitual criminals

LAHORE (APP): Lahore Police have arrested over 2,800 Proclaimed Offenders (POs) and more than 1,000 Target Offenders (TOs) in a major crackdown throughout the month of January. According to a statement issued on Monday by the spokesman of Lahore Police, arrests were made across various police divisions.

In Cantt Division, 648 proclaimed offenders were apprehended, while 214 were caught in Civil Lines, 440 in the City Division, 553 in Iqbal Town, 437 in Sadar and 568 in Model Town. Additionally, the spokesman added that more than 1,000 target offenders were arrested, with 177 target offenders apprehended in the Cantt Division, 105 in Civil Lines, 300 in City Division, 257 in Iqbal Town, 163 in Sadar and 140 in Model Town Division.

CCPO Bilal Siddique Kamyana added that operations against dangerous and high-profile criminals were continued without any discrimination. He highlighted the use of modern technology in ensuring the arrests of these offenders. He also urged divisional officers to expedite the arrests and ensure swift investigations to ensure justice.

Senior Trade Leader announces full support for Swabi jalsa on February 8

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Senior Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) leader and a key figure in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's business community, Ghulam Bilal Javid, has announced his full support for the February 8 Swabi Jalsa. He made this announcement while attending an important PTI consultative meeting at Arbab Jehandad's hujra, where he addressed the party leadership, particularly PTI's provincial president, Junaid Akbar Khan, affirming his unwavering commitment to participate in the rally as per the

directives of his leader. On this occasion, senior trade leader and former Cantonment Board member Ghulam Hussain Chand, along with national footballer and senior trader leader Shahid Khan Shinwari, were also present with Ghulam Bilal Javid. They pledged their full participation in the rally and vowed to mobilize traders for the cause. Shahid Khan Shinwari contributed 3,000 PTI flags and presented a bouquet to provincial president Junaid Akbar Khan as a gesture of encouragement for the newly elected provincial leadership. Ghulam Bilal Javid

emphasized, "We fear neither bullets nor oppression. We will step out, and we will come out in great numbers." Congratulating PTI's newly elected provincial president Junaid Akbar Khan, he remarked, "We need fearless leaders like you who can unite the business community." He further stated that Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's business community has yet to find effective leadership that can unify and organize traders. He urged the party to free the PTI Trade Wing from the clutches of a so-called trader who has taken control over it. He stressed the urgent need for restructuring

the Trade Wing so that committed traders, ready to dedicate themselves to PTI's cause, can be properly mobilized under strong leadership. Today, provincial president Junaid Akbar Khan, former National Assembly Speaker Asad Qaiser, Senator Liaqat Tarakai, provincial general secretary Ali Asghar, MNAs Shahram Tarakai, Dr. Amjad Ali, Mehboob Shah, provincial ministers Aqib Khan, Faisal Tarakai, and MPAs Irshad Khan and Tariq Aryani visited the Swabi Anbar Interchange to oversee preparations for the upcoming jalsa.



PESHAWAR: Chief Secretary Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Nadeem Aslam Chaudhry chairing a meeting to finalize the preparations to mark Kashmir Solidarity Day.

Kashmir Solidarity Day Meeting held to finalize preparations in KP

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: A review meeting regarding the preparations for Kashmir Solidarity Day was held under the chairmanship of Chief Secretary Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Nadeem Aslam Chaudhry. The meeting was attended by secretaries of relevant departments, commission-

ers, and deputy commissioners. During the meeting, it was informed that on February 5, various events, including special walks, prayer ceremonies, photo exhibitions, and documentaries, will be organized to highlight the Kashmiri people's struggle for freedom. Awareness programs will also be held

in schools, colleges, and universities, while a one-minute silence will be observed at 9:00 AM. The officials confirmed that all preparations for the day had been completed. The Chief Secretary directed all departments and the administration to observe Kashmir Solidarity Day with full zeal to raise awareness at

the international level about the ongoing Indian atrocities in occupied Kashmir. He also addressed commissioners and deputy commissioners via video link, instructing them to ensure comprehensive preparations at divisional headquarters and district levels to emphasize the significance of the day.

KP slash property transfer tax 6 to 3 percent: Aslam

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Advisor to the KP Chief Minister on finance & Interprovincial Coordination Muzammil Aslam has said on Monday that the provincial government reduced property transfer tax from 6 percent to 3 percent in the previous budget. The KP government also requested the federal government to lower the tax rate. Mr. Aslam stated that high taxes on property transfers pose a significant hurdle for low-income individuals. However, he noted that the KP govern-

ment's stance has been vindicated, as the federal government is now considering reducing property tax rates. Muzammil Aslam stated that he was scheduled to meet Imran Khan, the founder of PTI, at Adiala Jail on January 30, but was made to wait for four hours and then turned back without reason. Aslam added that a writ petition has been filed in the Islamabad High Court today, February 3, to ensure the meeting takes place. KP Advisor on Finance, has issued a statement on inflation, stating that the

government is hiding the true picture of inflation. According to Aslam, today's inflation statistics reveal a 2.4% inflation rate, which is almost the lowest in 10-15 years. However, Aslam pointed out that the core inflation data tells a different story, with rural inflation at 10.4% and urban inflation at 7.8%. He emphasized that this is the type of inflation that destroys the purchasing power. Aslam also noted that the constant inflation will not be hidden from the public, especially in the age of social media.

AG Office employees union notified

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: After the withdrawal of the Shaheen panel from the elections of the Advocate General Office Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the Hamdard panel has been elected unopposed. An official notification has been issued in this regard. In the elections, two panels, Shaheen Group and Hamdard Union, were contesting against each other. However, the Shaheen Group announced its withdrawal from the elections, resulting in the unopposed election of the Hamdard panel.

New IGP KP calls on Provincial Assembly's Speaker

PESHAWAR (APP): The newly appointed Inspector General of Police (IGP) Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Chaudhry Zulfiqar Hameed, paid a courtesy call on Speaker Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly, Babar Saleem Swati, at the Speaker's Chamber here on Monday.

During the meeting, they discussed law and order, the role of law enforcement agencies, and institutional cooperation with public representatives. Speaker Babar Saleem Swati congratulated Chaudhry Zulfiqar Hameed on his appointment as IGP Khyber

Pakhtunkhwa and extended his best wishes to him. He emphasized that strong coordination between public representatives and institutions is essential for the stability and development of the province. IGP Khyber Pakhtunkhwa expressed his gratitude to the

Speaker and assured that KP Police will continue to take all necessary measures to ensure the safety and security of the people. Both sides also discussed matters of mutual interest and agreed to adopt a coordinated strategy for further improving law and order in the province.

KPCPWC concludes 7-day foundational training

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: In a significant step towards strengthening the child protection system in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Child Protection and Welfare Commission, with the support of UNICEF, has successfully conducted a 7-day: Level-I Foundational Training on Child Protection Case Management at Peshawar Barracks. Ensuring ethical and quality case management of child protection cases, KPCPWC has notified Level-I Foundational Course as mandatory program for all staff working in District Child Protection Units. And this training was offered to all newly recruited staff in the District Child Protection Units. Recognizing the urgent need to address child protection concerns, particularly for children on the move and Afghan Refugee children, KPCPWC has strategically deployed Child Protection Officers, Psychologists, and Social Workers across twelve CPUs. With UNICEF's support, this comprehensive training was designed to equip these professionals with the necessary skills and knowledge for effective case assessment and management. It emphasized proper referral mechanisms, legal protection services, and holistic support for children, families, and caregivers through judicial and social welfare systems. The closing session was graced by the Minister for

Social Welfare, SE & WE Department, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Mr. Qasim Ali Shah, who reaffirmed the government's unwavering commitment to protecting the children of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Recognizing the issues children suffer in KP, he acknowledged the fact to expedite scaling up Child Protection Units to all districts in KP and linking child protection work with all allied sectors and their social service workforce. Ijaz Muhammad Khan, Chief Protection Officer KPCPWC, expressed his gratitude to UNICEF and the various donor agencies like FCDO and Netherland supporting the government's cause to ensure the protection of children. He also encouraged participants to actively apply their newly acquired skills in protecting children and engaging with communities. Sohail Ahmad, Child Protection Specialist, UNICEF highlighted the significance of investing in the knowledge, capacities and supervision of child protection teams in District Child Protection Units. He said that such investments can guarantee quality support and services to chil-

dren who suffer violence and abuse. He also encouraged the staff to proactively strengthen coordination and collaborations with other relevant service providers to ensure comprehensive services to children and their families and also prioritize educating communities so as to ensure prevention of child protection issues. Dr. Wisam Hazem, Programme Manager, UNICEF extended appreciation to the KPCPWC for organizing the training for the new staff, and expressed UNICEF continued collaboration to supporting the government of KP in protecting children. He also highlighted the fact that with the growing sensitization on child rights, it is necessary that expand Child Protection Units to all districts and make those accessible to all communities. The KPCPWC, in collaboration with UNICEF and other stakeholders, remains steadfast in its commitment to building the capacity of child protection professionals and strengthening support mechanisms to create a safer and more secure environment for all children in KP.



PMLN Lawyer Fourm meeting held

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Muslim League Lawyers Forum's General Body meeting was held under the chairmanship of Provincial President Kifayatullah Khan Advocate. General Secretary Akbar Yousaf Khalil formally initiated the meeting, which began with the recitation of the Holy Quran by Shah Hussain Advocate. A large number of Forum members attended the meeting and expressed their views. Several lawyers lamented the central government's lack of interest in the Forum's affairs and strongly criticized the Forum's President and General Secretary. They pointed out that the central government has not yet made any arrangements for legal aid or other benefits for lawyers affiliated with the Forum. Furthermore, non-Muslim League lawyers still dominate the Attorney General's office. The President attempted to placate the members, assuring them that the government would soon address the Forum's grievances. On this occasion, the lawyers unanimously passed a resolution stating that they would meet with government officials this week to resolve the issue. Additionally, they decided that Forum officials would meet with the Prime Minister and party leader Mian Muhammad Nawaz Sharif, as recommended by Provincial President Engineer Amir Muqam, to apprise them of the Forum's concerns. Prominent leaders of the Lawyers Forum, including Alamzeb Khan, Musaratullah, Atif Nazeer, Salim Shah Hoti, Ashfaq Jhagra, Afroz Ahmed, Akhunzada Parvez, and Gul Rehman Mohmand Advocate, expressed their views on this occasion.

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: National University of Modern Languages (NUML) Rector Major General Shahid Mehmood Kiyani said that the university will start admission on the demands of students at Peshawar campus to play its role in educating the nation, on Monday. This he said while inaugurating NUML new campus at Peshawar, and added that the institution is transferred from old location for facilitation of students. He claimed that NUML's administration is committed for excellency in the educational sector. NUML's Rector claimed that the new campus is infrastructurally developed which ultimately improve the quality of education. He added that the new building will facilitate expansion of academic dis-



ciple at NUML Peshawar campus. He claimed that NUML has graduated thousands of students since its establishment in 1969 which latterly turned into university in 2002. He added that currently more than 29 thousand are enrolled in different disciplines. The Rector claimed NUML is providing various scholarships with special focus on students

belonging to erstwhile FATA region. He added that NUML stand 1st in Pakistan while secured 49th position across South Asian nations in teaching languages. Almost 1800 students are studying in NUML on scholarships in different disciplines under several programs in all campus across Pakistan, NUML's Rector said. He added that negotiation is in concluding stage

to obtain land at Defense Housing Authority (DHA) Peshawar for establishment NUML permanent campus. Regional Director NUML Peshawar Campus Khalil briefed the Rector regarding facilities available in the new building as well as ease in convenience to the students. He made a request for improvement NUML Peshawar's campus to its maximum strength.

Legal fraternity observes strike from court proceedings

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The legal fraternity observed strike from court proceedings to protest the murder of Advocate Ahmad Naseer Hussain Tanoli. As a result of the boycott, no lawyers appeared in court, and court hearings were postponed. The boycott was observed by various lawyer organizations, including the Peshawar High Court Bar Association, Peshawar District Bar Association, and the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Bar Council. Vice Chairman of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Bar Council, Ahmad Farooq Khatakat, Chairman of the Executive Committee, Akbar Khan

Kohistani, President of the Peshawar High Court Bar Association, Fida Gul Advocate, President of the Peshawar District Bar Association, Amjad Khan Marwat, and senior lawyers Aminur Rehman, Yasser Khatak, Ishaq Ali Qazi, and Ziarat Khan Advocate, strongly condemned the murder of Advocate Ahmad Naseer Hussain Tanoli. The lawyers demanded that the government immediately arrest the perpetrators and provide protection to lawyers, who are feeling insecure. They also called for the swift implementation of the Lawyers Protection Act, as the government has failed to provide security to lawyers. The lawyers urged the government

and law enforcement agencies to provide security to lawyers and bring the perpetrators to justice. The lawyers stated that they are being targeted and murdered, and the government is failing to provide them with adequate security. They demanded that the government take immediate action to address their concerns and provide them with a safe and secure environment to practice law. The boycott of court proceedings by lawyers in Peshawar has brought attention to the issue of lawyer safety and security in the province. The government is under pressure to take action to address the concerns of lawyers and provide them with adequate security.

Girls' Sports Olympiad at Peshawar Millennium School ends

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The Girls' Sports Olympiad at Peshawar Millennium School, Charsadda, concluded with colorful celebrations. The Assistant Commissioner (AAC), Sonia Naz, was the chief guest at the event, while School Directress Dania Shiraz and Principal Nusrat Nazir were also present on the occasion. The Girls' Sports Olympiad featured various competitions, including cricket, badminton, table tennis, tug-of-war, and other sports, in which the students participated with great enthusiasm. The chief guest, Sonia Naz, along with Directress Dania Shiraz and Principal Nusrat Nazir, distributed prizes among the winning teams and individuals who delivered outstanding performances. Speaking on the occasion, Directress Dania Shiraz and Principal Nusrat Nazir highlighted the school's overall performance, stating that Peshawar Millennium School, Charsadda, holds the distinction of securing positions in the top three and top twenty in the Peshawar Board every year. They emphasized that the school is committed to providing quality education while also offering students opportunities for extracurricular activities. Chief guest AAC Sonia Naz appreciated the school management for organizing the Girls' Sports Olympiad and acknowledged the importance of sports and recreational activities in students' physical and mental growth. She emphasized that sports help inculcate a healthy competitive spirit, patience, and resilience in students, which ultimately contributes to building a peaceful, civilized, and educated society. She further stated that along with academic excellence, character-building should also be a key focus so that students grow into responsible citizens who can serve their country effectively.

Governor highlights CPEC's role

PESHAWAR (APP): Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Faisal Karim Kundi, has emphasized that the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is not only a transformative project for Pakistan's overall economic growth but also a gateway to a new era of prosperity for the people of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Speaking to Amjad Aziz Malik, Administrator of the Chinese cultural center China Window, during their meeting at the Governor's House, Kundi stressed the importance of public awareness regarding CPEC's positive impacts. He said that seminars and workshops are essen-

tial to bridge the knowledge gap and ensure public engagement with the project's benefits. The Governor lauded the upcoming three-day international seminar on CPEC, scheduled for April, as a commendable initiative. He recommended inviting CPEC investors to participate in the event, as their experiences and insights could play a pivotal role in educating and inspiring the public. Governor Kundi assured full support and cooperation to China Window organizers, saying that the seminar's success could significantly boost international investor confidence

and promote further investment in Peshawar and other regions of the province. Earlier, Amjad Aziz Malik briefed the Governor about the joint collaboration between the Institute of Management Sciences (IMSciences) and China Window to organize the CPEC International Seminar from April 15-17 in Peshawar. The event will host 250 delegates from Pakistan and several other countries. The delegates will visit the Special Economic Zone and engage in discussions with local investors, creating opportunities for collaboration and mutual growth.



In brief

MCCI flays load shedding F.P. Report

MARDAN: Mardan Chamber of Commerce (MCCI) said that a conspiracy to be economically paralyzed in the name of taxes is underway and traders are being forced to leave business. The hike in the prices of petroleum products has broken the backbone of the traders unannounced load shedding of electricity and Sui gas and the rising prices of the day have made the lives of traders inaccessible. He expressed these views while addressing a press conference at the Takhtbhai Press Club, Saddam Khan Khattak, Sajjad Khan and Fazal Haq Khan were also Present. He said that the constant rise in prices of electricity, Sui gas, and other essential commodities by the central government has made the lives of the traders inaccessible because the business community is already suffering from various problems and the prices of existing petroleum products increasing the traders' difficulties have increased. Provincial General Secretary of The Markazi Tanzeem-e-Tajir Zahir Shah further said that the government should immediately provide relief to the traders, exempt taxes, and announce a special package for them. The business community is the backbone of the country's development, so they should be given maximum facilities so that they can play a vital role in the development of the country.

Polio eradication drive launched F.P. Report

WANA: A five-day nationwide anti-polio campaign began in South Waziristan Lower on Monday under heightened security to ensure the safety of health workers. A large police force has been deployed to facilitate the immunization drive, with District Police Officer Asif Bahadur personally overseeing security arrangements. Officials reported that the campaign aims to vaccinate 70,000 children under five across the district. To achieve this, 353 mobile teams have been assigned across 36 union councils, ensuring extensive coverage. Security measures have been reinforced in key areas, including Tehsil Wana, Birmal, Toi Khulla, and Shakai. Deputy Commissioner Nasir Khan, Additional Deputy Commissioner Kashmir Khan, and District Police Officer Asif Bahadur have urged parents to cooperate with vaccination teams, emphasizing that just two drops of the vaccine can shield children from a lifetime of disability. Running from February 3 to 7, 2025, this initiative is part of a broader national effort to eradicate polio from Pakistan. Officials have called on the public to support the campaign, ensuring a healthier, polio-free future for the next generation.

5-day anti-polio drive starts F.P. Report

LOWER DIR: A five-day anti-polio campaign that would continue from February 3 to 7 started here on Monday. During the campaign, 332570 children will be given polio drops. 1442 teams have been formed for the polio campaign. 317 area in-charges will monitor and supervise the polio campaign. About 21 thousand police and 250 Dir Levies personnel are performing duties to provide security to the polio field workers. In the light of the orders of Deputy Commissioner Dir Lower Muhammad Arif Khan, district administration officers and health department officials are visiting different areas, hospitals, transport hubs and transit points to monitor the polio campaign.

French team arrives at Mohenjo-Daro

F.P. Report

LARKANA: A delegation of French tourists arrived in the historical site of Mohenjo-Daro in Larkana district to visit. On this occasion, the delegation of foreign tourists was welcomed by Mohenjo-Daro in-charge Zaheer Ahmed Jokhio.

The delegation from France visited Mohenjo-Daro and visited various historical monuments including the Mohenjo-Daro Museum and the Great Bath.

On this occasion, the delegation of tourists said that Mohenjo-Daro is an ancient and cultural heritage. The people here have been civilized for thousands of years. They further said that they are very happy to visit Mohenjo-Daro after coming here. Meanwhile, the guide assigned to Mohenjo-Daro, Javed Sheikh, gave the delegation of foreign tourists detailed information about the ancient monuments. On this occasion, the security

arrangements for the French tourists were tightened.

Grocery shop turns into ashes as fire broke: A fire broke out in a shop due to short circuit, destroying goods worth Rs 2 million in Larkana.

According to details, 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.

Successful eye transplant operation with the support of WEF: In Larkana, with the support of the national private welfare organization Vision

(WEF), under the leadership of the head of the foundation Atif Riaz, Professor Dr. Shabbir Ahmed Bhutto, Head of the O p h t h a l m o l o g y Department of Chandra Hospital Dr. Abdul Aleem Mirani, Dr. Zakaullah Gopang, Dr. Naeem Akhtar Katpar of Sukkur Civil Hospital, along with their team Dr. Sajjad Abbasi, Abdul Hakeem Chandio, performed two successful eye transplant operations for the first time.

STP held protest: Sindh Taraqipasand Party (STP) Bاده held a protest demonstration from Media House to Haider Chowk against the construction of new dams on the Indus River.

Addressing the demonstration, leaders Zeb Ali Sario, Ali Anwar Askari, Farhan Soomro and others protested and said that the Indus River is the only source of livelihood for the Sindh nation. Punjab has already stolen Sindh's water and made the hinterland of Sindh barren.

Five days anti-polio vaccination campaign

F.P. Report

SHANGLA: Like other parts of the country, a comprehensive polio vaccination campaign has commenced in Shangla. On the directives of Deputy Commissioner Shangla, Muhammad Fawad Khan, all teams have been deployed to their respective areas. Strict and robust security measures have been put in place.

During this campaign, children under the age of five across the district will be administered polio drops. A total of 982 teams have been formed for this

purpose. Additionally, male and female government officials and volunteers, mostly from the Health and Education Departments, are actively participating in the campaign.

To ensure effective monitoring, various departmental heads have been designated to oversee the campaign in their respective areas. Fourteen officers have been assigned responsibilities at the Union Council level to supervise the teams' performance and provide regular reports.

Security arrangements for this campaign have

been intensified, with 1,658 police personnel, including 11 female officers, deployed to ensure a smooth and secure operation. The nation stands united in the mission to eradicate polio and achieve a polio-free Pakistan. Comprehensive planning has been carried out at the district level to meet this national goal.

Deputy Commissioner Shangla will personally monitor the campaign, and under the supervision of the District Health Officer, better results are anticipated from this round of the polio drive.

0.208m children to be vaccinated in Khyber

F.P. Report

LANDI KOTAL: Like elsewhere in the country, a seven days long polio eradication campaign has begun in Khyber on Feb 03 Monday (today) and will continue till Feb 09, 2025.

As per the health official all arrangements had been finalized to vaccinate approximately 0.208 million children below five years will be vaccinated in the campaign. Almost 945 mobile, transit and fix teams have been formulated to administer anti-polio drops to the children at their door steps, he added. Earlier, a high level

meeting of District Polio Eradication Committees (DPEC) was held at Deputy Commissioner (DC) office, Peshawar last day under the chair of DC, Khyber Capt (Retd) Bilal Shahid to review final preparations for the drive. Besides the DC, Khyber, the moot was attended by District Police Officer (DPO) Rai Mazhar Iqbal (via video link), Additional DC Ihasanullah, Dr Faisal of Health Department, representatives of World Health Organization, Education Department and other law departments.

The participants were briefed and a thorough dis-

cussion was made on overall polio plan, security measures, awareness, challenges being faced in immunization, refusals etc. Directions were issued to all stakeholders to play their due roles effectively to make the polio eradication drive successful.

The administrative high-up urged the parents to join hands with them to vaccinate their children so as to wipe out the curse of the country. Prior to it, DC Capt (Retd) Bilal Shahid administered polio drops to a child to formally open the campaign. It is to be stated here that a total of 77 polio cases have been detected across the country in 2024.



HYDERABAD: A view of an open manhole on Hala Naka Road, needs attention of authorities concerned.

Anti-polio drive kicks off in Zhob

F.P. Report

ZHOB: Member of the Balochistan Assembly Fazal Qadir Mandokhel says, polio is a paralyzing disease that has no cure, but multiple doses of the anti-polio vaccine and completion of the routine vaccination for children are essential to provide them with high immunity against the crippling disease polio.

MPA Fazal Qadir Mandokhel, flanked by the health officials, inaugurated the drive by administering anti-polio drops to children here at the DC complex. Officials of the dis-

trict administration and DEOC, including DHO Dr Syed Muzaffar Shah, Area Coordinator WHO Dr Ibrahim Kakar, N-STOP Officer Dr Aziz Kakar, CCO Saeedullah Lawoon, CBO Abdul Salam Mandokhel, local influencers and notables attended the inaugural ceremony.

Health officials say, during the three-day nationwide campaign that kicked off on Monday, over 68 thousand children, including nomadic population, will be vaccinated against polio in Zhob district that shares borders with Afghanistan and South

Waziristan. The MPA termed the drive a noble cause and stressed the need for zero tolerance during the campaign to eradicate the crippling disease poliomyelitis.

"Negligence on the part of health officials and polio workers will not be tolerated at all. Those officials and health workers showing leniency would face strict action," the MPA warned, adding we need to make sure that each and every child in every nook and corny of the district below five years of age is vaccinated against the crippling disease.



QUETTA: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif addressing a meeting on law and order situation in Balochistan.

2 robberies reported in Nowshera Syed Waliullah Shah

NOWSHERA: In separate incidents in Nowshera, police personnel deprived of his motorcycle, while a youth was robbed of his valuable mobile phone by unknown armed motorcyclists in front of police check post, on Monday.

According to details, Head Constable Jamat Khan, who was on duty at the Rasalpur Imam Bargah in Nowshera, had parked his motorcycle outside a shop in the Rasalpur market while he was loading easy-load. When he came out of the shop, his motorcycle had been stolen by unknown thieves.

In another incident, a youth named Imam-ul-Haq, was robbed of his valuable mobile phone by two armed motorcyclists near the Bara Bandah police checkpoint on the Nowshera-Mardan Road. The youth was drinking water on the roadside when the armed motorcyclists snatched his mobile phone at gunpoint and escaped.

Both incidents occurred within the jurisdiction of the Rasalpur police station. The police have registered separate cases and started investigations.

PML-N to mobilize workers F.P. Report

BANNU: Contacts have been started with political leaders of Bannu division to strengthen the PML-N in the southern districts and to bring heavyweight politicians into the party. Regular meetings with important figures have begun.

Those who lost by a small margin from Bannu will be fielded in the upcoming elections with the support of the party. There is a strong possibility that Haji Malik Nawab, an old associate of senior PML-N leader Mian Nawaz Sharif, will also be given important responsibilities at the center. Federal Minister Engineer Amir Muqam and Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif's husband Captain Safdar and other leaders will visit Bannu soon.

According to information received from expected sources, regular planning has been started to strengthen the Pakistan Muslim League-N in the southern districts on the model of 1993 and bring old and new politicians here under the shadow of the PML-N.

WSSCM okays Human Resource manual F.P. Report

MARDAN: The Board of Directors (BoD) of Water and Sanitation Services Company Mardan (WSSCM) has approved the company 1st Human Resource Manual. In the meeting, various decisions were also taken for the company sustainability and to increase the revenue.

The BoD 70th meeting held under the chairmanship of Chairman BoD Engineer Adil Nawaz while members Javed Hussain, Haroon Rashid, Mubina Razi u din, CEO Shahid Khan, RMO Zeeshan Arif, and AAC Noman Pervaz attended the meeting while Additional Secretary Local Government Noor Wali Khan and Budget Officer Finance Department Qazi Zia ur Rahman participated in the meeting through Zoom.

Feb 5 – Kashmir Solidarity Day

Assad Ullah Shah

FEBRUARY 5 is observed as Kashmir Solidarity Day in Pakistan and around the world. This day is dedicated to expressing support for the oppressed people of Jammu and Kashmir, who have been struggling for decades to achieve freedom and their fundamental rights.

Kashmir Solidarity Day was first observed in Pakistan in 1990 when the then Chief Minister of Punjab, Mian Muhammad Nawaz Sharif, and Jamaat-e-Islami leader Qazi Hussain Ahmed called for a nationwide strike and protests. Later, it was officially decided to observe this day annually at the national level. Since then, February 5 has been a public holiday in Pakistan, with special events, rallies, and gatherings held across the country.

The Kashmir conflict began in 1947 after the partition of the subcontinent when, against the wishes of the Kashmiri people, Maharaja Hari Singh decided to accede to India. Since then, the people of Kashmir have been resisting Indian occupation and demanding their right to self-determination as per United Nations resolutions. To oppress the freedom moment of Kashmiris, the Indian armed forces have unleashed brutal oppression in the occupied valley, and thousands of innocent Kashmiris have lost their lives in the struggle for freedom.

Every year on February 5, various activities are held in Pakistan, including a nationwide holiday, human chains, solidarity rallies, protests, prayers in mosques, and special broadcasts on media. In different cities across Pakistan, human chains are formed, while public and governmental events such as seminars and conferences are organized in support of the Kashmiri people. Electronic and print media air special programs to draw international attention to the issue.

Unfortunately, the inter-

national community has failed to play an effective role in resolving the Kashmir dispute. Despite United Nations resolutions, India refuses to grant Kashmiris their right to self-determination and continues to commit severe human rights violations in the region. However, the spirit of the Kashmiri people remains strong, and their struggle for freedom continues.

Kashmir Solidarity Day is not just a symbolic occasion but a reminder to Pakistan and the Muslim world that the fight for Kashmir's freedom is ongoing. This day places a responsibility on all of us to continue supporting the Kashmiri people, raise awareness on the global stage, and stand by them in their struggle. The day is not far when the sun of freedom will rise, and the people of Kashmir will finally achieve their right to self-determination.

The author is public serves at Press Information Department (PID) Peshawar.

Hamza Foundation hold blood donation camp

F.P. Report

BUNER: The residents of Kala Khela village of district Buner donated 51 bags of blood during a public blood donation camp organized by the Hamza Foundation Welfare Thalassemia Center and Blood Services Peshawar.

The blood donation camp held with the support of Dr. Fazal Khaliq and Habibullah Khan, at the historical Hujra of Habibullah Khan in collaboration with the local volunteer blood donors. Medical Director Dr. Tariq Khan conducted the check-up of the donors in which 11 volunteers were found unfit after detail checkup.

As many as 51 healthy volunteer donors donated their blood for saving precious lives of 1505 registered poor Thalassemia and

Hemophilia patients of Hamza Foundation. In address to the public at the conclusion of the camp, Dr. Fazal Khaliq and Habibullah Khan praised the volunteer s' spirit and commitment to this noble cause, emphasizing the importance of serving humanity.

The speakers encouraged the public and especially young generation to continue this tradition of altruism, underscoring that every donation could potentially save three lives. The Speakers also acknowledged the tireless welfare efforts of the Hamza Foundation.

Ijaz Ali Khan, the Founder Chairman of Hamza Foundation, expressed his gratitude to the organizers of the blood camp, the blood donation team, and the dedicated volunteers. He thanked



everyone involved for their contribution to alleviating the suffering of those in need of blood transfusions.

To mark the occasion, Coordinator Aleem Gul and Akhtar Ali of the Hamza Foundation, presented commemorative HF shields to Dr. Fazal Khaliq and Habibullah Khan as a token of appreciation for their support and collaboration.

Developmental projects reviewed

F.P. Report

TOBA TEK SINGH: Commissioner Faisalabad Maryam Khan made a surprise visit to Toba Tek Singh to review the progress of public welfare and development projects initiated by Chief Minister Punjab, Maryam Nawaz Sharif.

During the visit, she was briefed by Deputy Commissioner Muhammad Naeem Sindh on key performance indicators, the Suthra Punjab program, development schemes, the ongoing polio campaign, and revenue recovery targets.

The Commissioner directed the completion of 23 Basic Health Units (BHUs) and 5 Rural Health Centers by February 2025 to ensure access to essential healthcare. She emphasized maintaining quality in all healthcare projects and road construction efforts, instructing officials to use high quality materials.

Commissioner Maryam Khan also inspected the

under-construction Maryam Nawaz Clinic in Chak No. 321 and planted a tree to promote environmental sustainability. She visited the Suthra Punjab program's control room, urging faster resolution of public complaints and improved cleanliness efforts.

She concluded by urging the district administration and relevant departments to speed up the execution of welfare projects, ensuring timely and high-quality services for the public in line with the Chief Minister's vision.

Syed Khawar Shah Archery Academy secures position in 2025 Games: Athletes from Syed Khawar Shah National Archery Academy, Jhang, secured a historic victory while representing Faisalabad Division at the Khelta Punjab Games 2025, held in Lahore. Demonstrating exceptional skill, dedication, and passion, the players dominated the archery events, clinching the first position across Punjab.

On this occasion, internationally trained coach and Secretary of the Punjab Archery Association, Aman Ullah Shan, expressed his pride, stating that the young archers of Syed Khawar Shah National Archery Academy have not only proven their talent but also brought immense pride to Faisalabad Division. He further highlighted that the academy's mission is to engage youth in positive activities through sports and to provide them with opportunities for recognition at national and international levels.

District administration, the District Sports Department, and officials from the District Archery Association Jhang congratulated the victorious athletes. They noted that this remarkable achievement has not only elevated Jhang's status in the sporting arena but has also paved the way for young girls to actively participate in sports, inspiring a new generation of female athletes.



US wants Ukraine to hold elections following a ceasefire

NEW YORK/WASHINGTON (Reuters): The United States wants Ukraine to hold elections, potentially by the end of the year, especially if Kyiv can agree a truce with Russia in the coming months, President Donald Trump's top Ukraine official told Reuters.

Keith Kellogg, Trump's special envoy for Ukraine and Russia, said in an interview that Ukrainian presidential and parliamentary elections, suspended during the war with Russia, "need to be done". "Most democratic nations have elections in their time of war. I think it is important they do so," Kellogg said. "I think it is good for democracy. That's the beauty of a solid democracy, you have more than one person potentially running."

Trump and Kellogg have both said they are working on a plan to broker a deal in the first several months of the new administration to end the all-out war that erupted with Russia's full-scale invasion in February 2022. They have offered few details about their strategy for ending the deadliest conflict in Europe since World War Two, nor when they might unveil such a plan. The Trump plan is still evolving and no policy decisions have been made, but Kellogg and other White House officials have discussed in recent days pushing Ukraine to agree to elections as part of an initial truce with Russia, two people with knowledge of those conversations and a former US official briefed about the election proposal said.

Trump officials are also debating whether to push for an initial ceasefire before trying to broker a more permanent deal, the two people familiar with

the Trump administration discussions said. If presidential elections were to take place in Ukraine, the winner could be responsible for negotiating a longer-term pact with Moscow, the people said. The sources declined to be named in order to discuss sensitive policy and security issues. It is unclear how such a Trump proposal would be greeted in Kyiv. President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has said Ukraine could hold elections this year if the fighting ends and strong security guarantees are in place to deter Russia from renewing hostilities.

A senior adviser to Kyiv and a Ukrainian government source said the Trump administration has not yet formally requested Ukraine hold presidential elections by the end of the year. Zelenskyy's five-year term was supposed to end in 2024 but presidential and parliamentary polls cannot be held under martial law, which Ukraine imposed in February 2022. Washington raised the issue of elections with senior officials in Zelenskyy's office in 2023 and 2024 during the Biden administration, two former senior US officials said.

State Department and White House officials told their Ukrainian counterparts that elections were critical to uphold international and democratic norms, the officials said. Officials in Kyiv have pushed back on elections in conversations with Washington in recent months, telling Biden officials that hosting polls at such a volatile moment in Ukraine's history would divide Ukrainian leaders and potentially invite Russian influence campaigns, the two former US officials said. Asked about what the former Western

official and two other people familiar with the matter told Reuters, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said: "We do not have that information."

Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov was cited by the Interfax news agency on Jan. 27 as saying that direct contacts between Moscow and the Trump administration were not yet underway. The Russian Foreign Ministry says it is still waiting for the US to approve its new pick as Moscow's ambassador in Washington, a post currently unoccupied. Putin has said publicly he does not think Zelenskyy is a legitimate leader in the absence of a renewed electoral mandate and that the Ukrainian president does not have the legal right to sign binding documents related to a potential peace deal. According to the Russian leader, however, Zelenskyy could take part in negotiations in the meantime but must first revoke a 2022 decree he signed banning talks with Russia for as long as Putin is in charge.

The Ukrainian government source said Putin was using the election issue as a false excuse to disrupt future negotiations. "(He) is setting a trap, claiming that if Ukraine doesn't hold elections, he can later ignore any agreements," the source said. Ukrainian legislation explicitly prohibits presidential and parliamentary elections being held under martial law. The former Western official raised concerns about the US push for elections, saying lifting martial law could allow mobilized soldiers to leave the military, trigger an exodus of hard currency and prompt large numbers of draft-age men to "run for the border".

US aid agency is in upheaval during foreign assistance freeze

WASHINGTON (AP): Trump administration changes have upended the US agency charged with providing humanitarian aid to countries overseas, with dozens of senior officials put on leave, thousands of contractors laid off, and a sweeping freeze imposed on billions of dollars in foreign assistance.

Democratic senators warned the Trump administration against any effort to eliminate the US Agency for International Development as an independent agency, responding to growing fears among its supporters that such plans may be in the offing. Sen. Chris Murphy was one of a half-dozen Democrats on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee to argue in statements and on social media that President Donald Trump would have no legal authority to dissolve the agency.

Aid organizations say the funding freeze - and deep confusion over what US-funded programs must stop work as a result - has left them agonizing over whether they could continue operating programs such as those providing round-the-clock nutritional support to extremely malnourished infants and children, knowing that closing the doors means that many of those children would die. Current and former officials at the State Department and USAID

say staffers were invited to submit requests to exempt certain programs from the foreign aid freeze, which Trump imposed Jan. 20 and the State Department detailed how to execute on Jan. 24.

Three days later, at least 56 senior career USAID staffers were abruptly placed on administrative leave. Three officials said many of those put on leave were lawyers involved in determining what programs might qualify for waivers, helping write proposals and submitting those waiver requests as they believed they had been invited to do.

The officials spoke on condition of anonymity for fear of reprisal. A Trump administration directive that aid organizations interpret as a gag order has left them unwilling to speak publicly for fear of permanently losing US funding. In an internal memo Monday about the staffing changes, new acting USAID administrator Jason Gray said the agency had identified "several actions within USAID that appear to be designed to circumvent the President's Executive Orders and the mandate from the American people." "As a result, we have placed a number of USAID employees on administrative leave with full pay and benefits until further notice while we complete our analysis of these actions," Gray

wrote.

A former senior USAID official said those put on leave had been helping aid organizations navigate the "confusing process" to seek waivers from the aid pause for specific life-saving projects, such as continuing clean water supplies for displaced people in war zones. Others were identified as having been involved in diversity, equity and inclusion programming, which the administration has banned. A USAID human resources official who tried to reverse the action, saying there was no justification for it, was himself placed on leave, according to two of the officials who had viewed internal emails and verified them as authentic. Reporters from ProPublica and Vox first reported the emails on X.

The State Department and White House didn't respond to messages seeking comment about the staffing changes. The new leaders at USAID also abruptly laid off contractors who made up about half the workforce in the agency's humanitarian bureau, knocking them out of systems so that some vanished in the middle of videoconferences, the former senior official said. The targeted institutional service contractors do everything from administrative and travel support to grant processing and data analytics.

Rubio lays down ultimatum to Panama over canal

WASHINGTON (AFP): US Secretary of State Marco Rubio threatened action against Panama without immediate changes to reduce Chinese influence on the canal, but the country's leader insisted he was not afraid of a US invasion and offered talks.

On his first trip overseas as the top US diplomat, Rubio took a guided tour of the canal accompanied by its Panamanian administrator as a South Korean-affiliated oil tanker and Marshall Islands-flagged cargo ship passed through the vital link between the Atlantic and Pacific oceans.

But Rubio was said to have had a firmer message in private, telling Panama that President Donald Trump had determined that the country had violated terms of the treaty that handed over the canal at the end of 1999.

He pointed to the "influence and control" of China over the canal, through which some 40 percent of US container traffic passes. Meeting President Jose Raul Mulino, Rubio "made clear that this status quo is unacceptable and that absent immediate changes, it would require the United States to take measures

necessary to protect its rights under the treaty," State Department spokeswoman Tammy Bruce said. She did not spell out the consequences. But Trump has repeatedly refused to rule out military force. He imposed punishing tariffs on the top US trading partners -- Canada, China and Mexico.

Nearly 75 percent of cargo that went through the Panama Canal in the 2024 fiscal year came from the United States, with 21 percent from China, followed by Japan and South Korea, according to official statistics.

Sick, injured children begin crossing into Egypt

RAFAH CROSSING, Egypt (AP): A group of 50 sick and wounded Palestinian children began entering Egypt for treatment through Gaza's Rafah crossing, the first opening of the border since Israel captured it nearly nine months ago. Thousands of other Palestinians need such evacuations, health officials have said.

The reopening of the Rafah crossing represents a significant breakthrough that bolsters the ceasefire deal Israel and Hamas reached last month. Israel agreed to reopen the crossing after Hamas released the last living female hostages in Gaza. Rafah is Gaza's only crossing that does not enter into Israel. Egypt's Al-Qahera television showed several children being brought out on gurneys and transferred to ambulances on the Egyptian side. They were rushed to hospitals in the nearby Egyptian city of el-Arish and elsewhere. Footage showed one young girl whose foot had been amputated.

Zaher al-Wahidi, an official with Gaza's Health Ministry, said 37 of the children had crossed into Egypt. The ministry said around 60 family members were accompanying the children. "We urge for medical evacuations to be expedited through all possible routes. Thousands of lives depend on it," World Health Organization Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said on social media. The children are the first in what are meant to be regular evacuations of Palestinians through the crossing for treatment abroad. Over the past 15 months, Israel's campaign against Hamas in retaliation for the militants' Oct. 7, 2023, attack on southern Israel has decimated Gaza's health sector, leaving most of its hospitals out of operation even as more than 110,000 Palestinians were wounded by Israel's bombardment and ground offensives, according to health officials.

Remaining facilities are unable to perform many crucial treatments or specialized surgeries for wounds or diseases. Mohammed Zaqout, the director of hospitals with Gaza's Health Ministry, said more than 6,000 patients were ready to be evacuated abroad and more than 12,000 patients were in urgent need of treatment. He said the small numbers set to be evacuated will not cover the need, "and we hope the number will increase." Israeli forces closed the Rafah crossing in early May after seizing it during an offensive on the southern city. Egypt shut down its side of the passage in protest. Even before the Gaza war began, the Rafah crossing represented a crucial escape valve from the territory, where a 15-year Israeli-Egyptian blockade aimed at containing Hamas undermined health facilities and impoverished the population.

M23 rebel group advances in Congo

KAMPALA, Uganda (AP): After Rwanda-backed M23 rebels took control of the biggest city in eastern Congo this week, the man who emerged from the shadows to assert his leadership was not the group's long-time military leader.

Sultani Makenga, an ethnic Tutsi rebel leader sanctioned by both the US and the UN, was nowhere to be seen in Goma's Serena Hotel as the bearded Corneille Nangaa, in military fatigues, was ushered into the hall. Nangaa, who is not a Tutsi and who analysts say brings a more diverse, Congolese face to the group, told reporters of his plan to fight all the way to Kinshasa, the national capital a thousand miles away. The spectacle was significant because it captures the evolution of M23 from an ethnic Tutsi-dominated outfit more than a decade ago to one that's now actively seeking to be seen as a Congolese nationalist group. That's the case despite the military support it gets from neighboring Rwanda, according to observers and analysts in Africa's Great Lakes region.



GOMA: Members of the Congolese Red Cross stand amid body bags at the morgue of a Hospital.

Zelenskyy says excluding Ukraine from US-Russia talks 'dangerous'

KYIV AP): Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said that excluding his country from talks between the US 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 US 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 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 country'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 US, 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 US troops who are stationed overseas. Other security guarantee proposals should be backed up by sufficient weapons from the US and Europe, and support for Kyiv to develop its own defense industry, he said.

Kurdish-led group wants a secular and civil state in post-Assad Syria

HASSAKEH, Syria (AP): The commander of the main US-backed force in Syria said the recent ouster of the Assad family from power should be followed by building a secular, civil and decentralized state that treats all its citizens equally no matter their religion or ethnicity.

The commander of the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces, Mazloum Abdi, said in an interview that he recently met with Syria's newly named interim President Ahmad al-Sharaa in Damascus. He said the two sides are negotiating with the help of mediators to find compromises regarding Syria's future - including the future of the Kurds. Abdi added that US troops should stay in Syria because the Islamic State group will benefit from a withdrawal, which would affect the security of the whole region. The Assad family's 54-year rule in Syria came to an end in early December when insurgents led by the Islamist Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, or HTS, captured Damascus. The fall of Bashar Assad on Dec. 8 came after a nearly 14-year

conflict that has killed half a million people and displaced half the country's population.

Syrian factions that toppled Assad met in Damascus last week and named HTS leader al-Sharaa as the country's interim president. The groups suspended the country's constitution adopted by Assad in 2012 and officially dissolved the army and Syria's dreaded security agencies. "The fall of the regime was a historic step and based on that a new Syria should be built without restoring the Baath party or its ideology," Abdi said referring to Assad's once ruling Baath party that was also dissolved last week. "We want to move Syria forward together." Asked about the meeting in Damascus last week in which al-Sharaa was named interim president while the parliament, constitution and the army were dissolved, Abdi said: "We were not present there and we will not comment."

"The matter was not discussed with us," Abdi said adding that there are negotiations between al-Sharaa and the SDF and "our

stance will be based on the results of the negotiations." Abdi said that visits by SDF officials to Damascus will continue to try to reach an understanding with the new authorities. "We will continuously try to see how Syria of the future will look like," Abdi said, adding that the vision of the SDF is based on dialogue and understanding. Abdi revealed that members of the US-led coalition to fight the Islamic State group, including the US, Britain and France, are mediating between the SDF and authorities in Damascus. He did not go into details.

Abdi said his group wants Syria to remain a united country with a central government in Damascus. "Our vision of Syria is a decentralized, secular and civil country based on democracy that preserves the rights of all of its components," he said referring to the country's different religious groups, such as Sunni Muslims, Christians, Alawites, Druze and Yazidis and ethnic groups such as Arabs, Kurds, Turkmen and Armenians. "Syria is mixed and is not made up of

Sunnis only. There are other identities," Abdi said referring to the country's Sunni Muslims who are the majority in the country. There have been concerns that HTS, which is rooted in the Salafi-jihadi ideology, might be working on turning Syria into an Islamic state, although in recent years al-Sharaa has distanced himself from the group's earlier stances and preached religious coexistence.

Abdi said the Kurds of Syria do not want to break away from the country or set up their own autonomous government and parliament as is the case in northern Iraq. He said the people of northeast Syria want to run their local affairs in a decentralized state. "Syria is not Iraq and Iraq is not Syria and northeast Syria is not (Iraq's) Kurdistan," Abdi, whose forces control 25% of Syria, said. Most of the country's former insurgent factions have agreed to dissolve and to become part of the new army and security services, although it remained unclear exactly how that will work in practice. The SDF has not so far agreed to dissolve.

NK criticises Rubio, says it will respond strongly to US provocations

SEOUL (Reuters): North Korea on Monday criticized US Secretary of State Marco Rubio for calling it a "rogue state" in a media interview, saying his comments do not help US interests, state media KCNA said. North Korea's foreign ministry said the country will respond strongly to hostile US provocations, KCNA reported.

It is North Korea's first criticism of the Trump administration since President Donald Trump reentered the White House on Jan. 20. Yonhap news agency said. The ministry also condemned United States' new missile defence shield plan, saying that it makes it necessary for North Korea to strengthen its own military power, KCNA reported.

Trump last week signed an order that "mandated a process to develop an 'American Iron Dome,'" a next-generation US missile defence shield against ballistic, hypersonic, cruise missile and other forms of aerial attack. "The idea of a new missile defence system, which recalls the spectre of the dangerous 'Star Wars' plan of... the Cold

War, poses a risk of justifying an arms race under the pretext of coping with the 'threat' of adversaries, regardless of its feasibility," North Korea's foreign ministry said, according to KCNA. "The increasingly harsh global security environment urgently calls for us to constantly develop self-defence capabilities based on nuclear deterrence."

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Rehmat Shah Afridi (Late)

Founder

Bilal Shah Afridi

Chief Executive

Jalil Afridi

Managing Editor

Printed and published by Mahmood Afridi at Moraka's Printers, 27 Abdara Road, University Town, Peshawar.

Peshawar Office: 091-5700095, 0300- 9009001

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

E-mail: fppeshawar@thefrontierpost.com

Lahore Office: 0335-4026284

Email: fplahore@thefrontierpost.com

Islamabad Office: 0321-5066253

Email: mahmoodafridi@thefrontierpost.com

Karachi Office: 021-32213411, 0300-8340907

Email: fpkarachi@thefrontierpost.com

USA and Canada Toll Free Number 1-800-5905747

Prisoners are people, not political pawns

PERHAPS the defining characteristic of imprisonment is powerlessness; inherent in the loss of one's liberty is the loss of one's agency. Whether it be somebody jailed after due process, prisoners of war, or people abducted and held arbitrarily, in each case the welfare and future of those detained are the responsibility of the people holding them.

In some of the unresolved conflicts scarring the Middle East right now, there are too many examples of prisoners and hostages being mistreated, abused or threatened. On Saturday, The National published testimony from Lebanese civilian Moustafa Rizk who accused occupying Israeli soldiers of detaining him, his father and five other people at a military base where they were allegedly subjected to torture.

"They beat me with their hands and a stick. I felt my soul leave my body," Moustafa said, adding that soldiers interrogated him three times, with each session lasting several hours. When asked for more details, the Israeli army did not give an immediate comment, although the fearsome reputation of the country's interrogators seems to have preceded them, with Moustafa telling The National that a threat to send him to Mossad led him to start "freaking out – my heart left my body. Everyone knows what they're capable of in terms of torture. If they took me, I knew I wouldn't come back".

Meanwhile, in Palestine, even the outpouring of emotion that greeted Palestinian detainees as they were reunited with their families was overshadowed somewhat by some of the released prisoners' gaunt and sickly appearance. In the West Bank city of Ramallah on Saturday, Israel released 183 Palestinians in exchange for three Israeli hostages freed by Hamas in Gaza earlier in the day as part of a ceasefire deal. The National saw one man who had to be carried straight to an ambulance; some prisoners had lost patches of hair; and one family, after about a minute of embracing a middle-aged man, noticed that he was not wearing shoes.

For years, Israel has faced repeated and serious accusations about the ill-treatment of Palestinians in its prisons. Last year, a detention camp at Sde Teiman military base was at the centre of alarming stories of abuses taking place in the facility. In some cases, evidence of abuse has come from the Israeli security forces themselves, with soldiers and police recording videos of themselves tormenting and humiliating Palestinian detainees.

A lack of respect for international law and prisoners' rights has been a staple of Israeli occupation. However, it was also sometimes apparent during the release of Israeli hostages in Gaza. In several cases, Israelis have been paraded before the cameras as a piece of political theatre, sometimes amid chaotic and volatile scenes that would have been frightening for the disoriented hostages. On Saturday, three more Israeli civilians were released. Among them was Yarden Bibas, whose wife and two young sons were also abducted from the Nir Oz kibbutz during the October 7, 2023 attacks. Their fate remains uncertain and the sight of Mr Bibas, pale and flanked by armed fighters, is an unsettling one.

Prisoners, hostages or detainees – be they Palestinian, Lebanese or Israeli – are entitled to dignified treatment. All sides in these conflicts must do better, particularly in terms of ending detainment policies and practices that dehumanise prisoners. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office has said that negotiations on the second phase of the Gaza ceasefire will start today when he meets with US President Donald Trump's Middle East Envoy, Steve Witkoff, in Washington. Such talks will have a much better chance of success if all sides take action to prevent producing even more anguished and traumatised former detainees.

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Europe needs a Trump strategy

RARELY since the end of the Second World War have relations between European powers and the US faced such uncertainty. The 47th president has injected this fear into many relationships around the world, with Donald Trump shaking up some of the pillars of the international system. This comes at a time when many key European powers, including France and Germany, are facing their own internal challenges.

The relationship between the US and Western Europe has been at the heart of the primary economic and security alliance in that system. They form the bedrock of the world's most powerful military alliance, NATO. The US and European powers have joined together in many military interventions, such as against Daesh or in Kuwait in 1991. Since 2022, they have acted in concert to back Ukraine.

Take none of this for granted now. Trump sees Europe as having sponged off the US and become overly reliant on American military cover without being willing to pay for it. He is not the only American president to make this point, but he is prepared to do something about it.

This is one of the least complex issues for European powers to resolve. They at least know what they must do: boost defense spending to as much as 5 percent of their

national incomes. Some, like Poland and Estonia, are pushing ahead with this, motivated by fears of Russian aggression on the back of its invasion of Ukraine. It will be painful economically, but the path is clear.

But even if European powers do invest more, will Trump have their back? What happens if a NATO member is attacked and triggers Article 5, which requires its allies to assist? He has not confirmed that the US will honor this obligation.

Meanwhile, Greenland looms as the iceberg that could sink this titanic relationship. Trump wants Greenland to be part of the US. He told reporters on Air Force One: "I think we're going to have it." Yet the world's biggest island is sovereign Danish territory. Denmark is meant to be a US ally. Greenland is strategically important, halfway across the Atlantic and with significant mineral wealth. Denmark insists that Greenlanders have the right to determine their future. This is no minor territorial squabble. Denmark is a founding member of NATO and a member of the EU. Trump has not ruled out using force or economic coercion. It could compel many European powers to make a choice. The French Foreign Ministry has acknowledged that sending European troops to Greenland had been discussed, but Denmark does

not want to pursue this option for now.

Copenhagen will have to work hard with its European allies to ensure a unified and robust position to limit US ambitions. A compromise may be possible.

Many think this might be another Trump opening gambit. Is he pushing for greater access to Greenland for military bases and mineral rights? Quite possibly but, if so, what will he do on other issues?

Already, the trade wars have started. Trump has imposed tariffs on Canadian and Mexican goods, with both countries promising to retaliate in kind. The EU is on the president's list of targets, not least because the bloc exports far more to the US than it imports. The president believes tariffs will energize the US economy, though critics say they will just boost inflation. The EU does not seek a tit-for-tat tariff war but looks like it may have little choice.

Creative diplomacy may be required to limit the fallout. Trump will want to deliver on his protectionist promises, but can he be persuaded to minimize the tariffs?

As for broader geopolitical issues, European powers have concerns over how the US will handle Russia and Ukraine. Trump wants to end the war, something his predecessor made little progress on. Yet Ukraine and many Eastern

European and Baltic states fear peace could come at their expense and undermine their security.

In the Middle East, Trump has already shaken things up. His firm position with Israel got the ceasefire deal over the line, but will he ensure that phases two and three get implemented? Only he can ensure Israel abides by its commitments.

Europe needs this and other conflicts not just to calm down but to be resolved. Instability on its borders is far from being in its interest, as it is a driver of migration and extremism.

Iran was another divisive issue with Europe in Trump's first term. Much will depend on what the president's strategy will turn out to be. The EU will not be unhappy if Trump does as he has hinted and engage with Iran for a deal. European powers should encourage him down this path, trying along the way to help by making constructive suggestions as to the contours of what might be possible.

All this highlights why Europe needs a Trump strategy. The American president is making all the running and setting the agenda on his terms. That is his prerogative. But if core European interests are to be protected, the continent is going to have to pull together and find ways to engage the White House collectively. Acting unilaterally is unlikely to make much impact.

Canada's brewing disquiet

CANADA is in a MAGA world of trouble.

The nation's "dearest" and "closest" friend has declared a debilitating trade war by imposing stiff tariffs on most goods being imported into the home of unfettered capitalism – the United States of America.

The impulsive man-child who treats America's signature and most lucrative bilateral relationship like a yo-yo, is, of course, mercurial, Make-America-Great-Again, baseball-cap-wearing US President Donald Trump.

Threats and uncertainty are the defining features of Trump's belligerent foreign policy which fatally undercuts the jejune suggestion that he, unlike his trigger-happy predecessors, is the "peace now" candidate.

Compounding the palpable anxiety hovering over Canada like a heavy shroud is the fact that, at this crucial moment, the world's second-largest country is being led by what amounts to a caretaker government with a lame-duck prime minister at the soon-to-be-expired helm. That is not the ideal place for a usually sedate nation of more than 40 million to be in while it wrestles with a strutting, china-shattering bully acting out south of the 49th parallel. But true to self-absorbed history and haughty form, the governing Liberal Party is consumed by a leadership race that will pick a successor to the ditched-in-the-scrappard-like-a-spent-used-car – Prime Minister Justin Trudeau.

As the harried contest to replace Trudeau by March 9 takes quick shape, it seems to me, at least, that the Liberals are looking for a political saviour in all the wrong places.

As a general writing rule, I try to avoid making sweeping generalisations about a big place made up of lots of different people.

Still, I think it is fair to say that there is a brewing disquiet among many

Canadians Andrew Mitrovia about the present and future triggered by, among other pressing concerns, the egregious cost of housing and food, as well as a pervasive sense that the compact between citizens and their government has evaporated.

It is, I suppose, a familiar story that politicians along the narrow political spectrum in Canada have leveraged – generation after generation – in order to win elections with the often-disingenuous promise to make life better for "ordinary Canadians".

If the results of recent polls are accurate, the yapping, stunt-addicted Conservative Party leader, Pierre Poilievre, is on the cusp of becoming prime minister after spending almost 10 years in purgatory – the opposition benches.

Meanwhile, the flip head of the left-wing New Democratic Party, Jagmeet Singh, has failed to resonate with Canadians yearning for tangible solutions to urgent problems. As a result, the flailing socialists remain stuck, unable to escape the glib, self-satisfying delusion that they represent the "conscience" of Parliament. Desperate-to-cling-to-position-and-prestige Liberals have turned their doleful eyes to two leading candidates – who, in spirit and purpose, are a facsimile of one another – to try to prevent what is destined to be a drubbing in the next federal election that could take place as early as March.

Cocky Liberals have always believed that they have the almost divine right to lead Canada and that power is an entitlement rather than a privilege earned.

As such, the pursuit of power, not the common good, has been the Liberal Party's raison d'etre.

Predictably, the two candidates for the leadership position, Chrystia Freeland and Mark Carney, are establishment-hugging reactionaries who are commit-

ted to defending the status quo rather than seriously challenging it.

It is plain to anyone outside myopic partisans that neither Freeland nor Carney is a "retail" politician who enjoys that elusive touch which combines seriousness with accessibility.

Frankly, Freeland and Carney are as charismatic as a pair of mannequins.

Their stilted, bromide-filled performances on the abbreviated campaign trail, and, in Carney's curious case, in an inane "conversation" with comedian Jon Stewart are embarrassing proof of that. And both, by training and temperament, are technocrats who have decidedly more in common with the comfortable chattering classes they are now busy distancing themselves from, in convenient pursuit of run-of-the-mill voters.

The coming federal election will, like every election before it, tilt on two words: Change and hope.

As I have explained in an earlier column, governments have natural life expectancies. Then, the appetite for a "new, fresh beginning" becomes inevitable despite the futile attempts to resist this wave-like impulse.

That is the hard-to-overcome dilemma that Freeland and Carney confront. They will traffic in the fanciful idea that they are "change agents" who can offer, in words and deeds, discouraged Canadians renewed hope.

Given her long, entrenched links to a tired, performative Liberal government that Canadians have, on the whole, soured on, Freeland, in particular, faces a herculean climb to buck history and distance herself from the loser and liability she once served with such fawning deference in a variety of senior cabinet posts, including as finance and foreign affairs minister.

Having triggered his forced departure, Trudeau made a calculated point

during his news conference announcing his resignation in early January to remind Canadians that Freeland was, in effect, a Robin to his Batman.

"Chrystia has been by my side for close to 10 years now," Trudeau said. "She has been an incredible political partner through just about everything we have done as a government and a party over the past decade."

Ouch. For his self-serving part, Carney, the ex-Governor of the Bank of Canada and Bank of England, has reportedly surrounded himself with the same handlers who shepherded Trudeau Jr into the prime minister's office.

Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose.

If he prevails, Carney will not only be crowned leader of the Liberal Party but prime minister, as well. Canada's 24th prime minister will then have to deal with a prickly quandary that is sure to undermine his legitimacy: Carney does not hold a seat in Parliament.

Poilievre – who has done nothing else other than hold a seat in Parliament – will pounce and shout, justifiably, that Carney lacks the authority bestowed by Canadians via the ballot box to govern even for a short time.

All the while, Trump looms and crows that he will compel Canada by economic force to capitulate not only to his immediate demands but, ultimately, to become America's 51st state. Amid this costly brawl, Liberals appear determined, yet again, to choose gentility over brawn. They ought to be searching, instead, for a brass-knuckled protégé of the gritty, street-smart former prime minister, Jean Chretien, who, in the run-up to the calamitous Iraq war, wisely rebuffed joining the invading US-led "coalition" of the short-sighted.

He or she might just do the happy trick.

Kashmir and Pakistan: A union of faith, history, and destiny

Muhammad Mohsin Iqbal

KASHMIR has always held a central place in the heart of Pakistan, not merely as a geographical entity but as an inseparable part of its ideological and strategic framework. Its significance transcends political disputes and territorial claims, deeply intertwining with the spiritual, economic, and historical essence of Pakistan. It was this profound connection that led Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah to declare, "Kashmir is the jugular vein of Pakistan." This statement was neither rhetorical nor confined to a mere strategic perspective; rather, it encapsulated the essence of Kashmir's integral role in the very identity of Pakistan.

Religiously, Kashmir is an inseparable part of the Muslim world. Islam spread across the valley centuries ago, shaping its culture, traditions, and way of life. The region has produced renowned saints and scholars who played a vital role in spreading Islamic teachings across South Asia. The majority of Kashmir's population, adhering to Islam, has historically maintained strong religious, cultural, and emotional ties with the Muslims of Pakistan. The Partition of 1947 was a manifestation of the Two-Nation Theory, based on the distinct religious and cultural identities of Muslims and Hindus. It was, therefore, only natural that Kashmir, with its overwhelming Muslim majority, would align with Pakistan. However, the unjust and forceful occupation of the region by India contradicted the very basis of this division, leading to an unresolved conflict that continues to

weigh heavily on the collective conscience of the Muslim world. The struggle of the Kashmiri people for self-determination is not just a political battle; it is a religious duty for Pakistan to support them. The oppression, persecution, and human rights violations inflicted upon the people of Kashmir are a grave concern for the Muslim Ummah. The desecration of mosques, restrictions on religious gatherings, and brutal crackdowns during Islamic observances underscore the systematic efforts to suppress their faith. The spirit of Muslim brotherhood and the obligation to stand against injustice make Kashmir a cause that resonates deeply with Pakistanis. It is not just a land dispute; it is a matter of faith, dignity, and moral responsibility.

Beyond its religious significance, Kashmir is crucial for Pakistan's survival and prosperity. The valley is the origin of the major rivers that sustain Pakistan's agriculture, the backbone of its economy. The Indus, Jhelum, and Chenab rivers flow from the Himalayas through Kashmir into Pakistan, providing water for irrigation, drinking, and hydro-electric power generation. India's control over these water sources poses a perpetual threat to Pakistan's food and energy security. The Indus Waters Treaty, though an international agreement, has been repeatedly challenged by Indian policies aimed at altering the natural flow of these rivers. The potential weaponization of water remains an alarming possibility that underscores why Kashmir is more than just a territorial concern—it is a lifeline for Pakistan's agricultural and economic stability.

The geographical position of Kashmir further elevates its strategic importance. It serves as a natural gateway between South Asia and Central Asia, making it a crucial point for trade, security, and defense. The Line of Control (LoC) remains a volatile frontier where tensions frequently escalate, demanding continuous vigilance from Pakistan's armed forces.

Sir Owen Dixon, the former UN mediator on Kashmir, observed in his report to the United Nations in 1950, "The only just solution to the Kashmir dispute is a plebiscite under international supervision, allowing the people to determine their own future." Yet, despite international recognition of Kashmir as a disputed territory, the voices of its people continue to be suppressed. For over seven decades, Pakistan has stood by Kashmir, advocating its cause on diplomatic fronts, raising its voice in international forums, and extending moral and material support to its people. While global powers have often remained indifferent or complicit in India's oppressive policies, the resilience of the Kashmiri people and Pakistan's unwavering stance continue to keep the issue alive. The challenge remains formidable, but history has shown that no force can permanently suppress the will of the people.

The significance of Kashmir for Pakistan is not a matter of debate; it is a reality deeply embedded in its national, religious, and strategic fabric. The vision of Quaid-e-Azam, the sacrifices of the Kashmiri people, and the continued struggle for their rightful place in the world remain a collective responsibility of Pakistan. It is a cause that transcends political divides and resonates with every heart that believes in justice, freedom, and faith. Kashmir is not just an issue; it is an unfinished chapter of history that demands resolution in accordance with the aspirations of its people. Until that day comes, Pakistan will continue to stand firm, for Kashmir is not just a part of its geography—it is its soul, its faith, and its jugular vein.

What Trump’s ‘deportation blitz’ looks like in Ciudad Juarez

ON the first day of his repeat term as president of the United States, Donald Trump went about making good on his promises to make life hell for asylum seekers. Proclaiming a “national emergency” to pave the way for the deportation of millions, Trump also immediately cancelled the CBP One app that previously allowed undocumented people to apply for legal entry to the US by land from Mexico.

The cancellation reportedly leaves some 270,000 people from a wide array of nationalities stranded in Mexican territory, where many had been waiting almost a year in torturous limbo for CBP One appointments. This is to say nothing of the deadly odysseys that refugee seekers have long been forced to undertake prior to applying for said appointments – odysseys that have often entailed being continuously preyed upon by organised crime outfits and corrupt law enforcement officials alike, as well as navigating the notorious corpse-ridden Darien Gap between Panama and Colombia.

Predictably, Trump’s “deportation blitz” – as some outlets have dubbed it – has been a boon for the Mexican underworld and extortion-happy security personnel. When I arrived a week after Trump’s inauguration in Ciudad Juarez in the northern Mexican state of Chihuahua, which lies just across the border from the city of El Paso, Texas, I was told by a Venezuelan asylum seeker that the price of being smuggled the short distance into the US had suddenly soared to \$10,000 per person.

It was my first visit to Ciudad Juarez since April 2023, when I arrived shortly after a fire killed 40 people at a migrant detention centre abutting the border fence. There, Mexican immigration authorities had been dutifully participating in the war on asylum seekers waged by

former US President Joe Biden, who, contrary to Republican propaganda, deported more people than Trump did during his first term.

In 2023, the presence of asylum seekers in Ciudad Juarez was acutely visible, with many families camped out in front of the migrant detention facility. This time the streets were emptier, the frigid temperatures and an intermittently fierce, dust-laden wind having forced many to seek more substantial shelter.

With the city now facing an additional influx of folks from the opposite side of the border, too, the local authorities had undertaken to erect giant white tents to temporarily accommodate incoming deportees.

As I made the rounds of downtown Ciudad Juarez in search of asylum seekers to talk to, I met a Mexican man in his 40s who had himself been deported more than a decade earlier from Arizona, where he had worked at McDonald’s and Burger King and had cleaned houses for additional income. He told me that he was detained while out buying food and then imprisoned in an underground cell where Arizona’s authorities went about debating why it was that he had no fingerprints, refusing to believe his explanation that they had been erased by house-cleaning chemicals.

After three months without seeing the light of day he was released and deported to Mexico, he said, with special glasses to protect against blinding by the sun. He subsequently took up work in one of the US-owned maquiladoras in Ciudad Juarez – the infamous factories that have long enabled US corporations to exploit cheap labour just beyond the border fence while avoiding taxes and eviscerating workers’ rights. He had recently abandoned the maquiladora job as his employer’s constantly expanding demands did not allow him time to care for his three daughters.

Indeed, Ciudad Juarez has come to epitomise the

Belén Fernández

US-backed decimation of Mexico via so-called “free trade”. In his book Juarez: The Laboratory of Our Future, published four years after the signing in 1994 of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) that wreaked havoc on Mexican agriculture and drove countless campesinos north to the increasingly fortified US border, American writer Charles Bowden laid bare the link between the impoverishment and suffering of common Mexicans and the extractive nature of economic relations between the US and Mexico. He described US machinations as “planting ruin about the world and calling it our economic policy” – which is as good an explanation as any for the current “migration crisis”.

However, not only did the US “plant ruin” in Ciudad Juarez, it also backed an ostensible “war on drugs” that was launched in 2006 and saw an obscene quantity of Mexican soldiers and police deployed to the metropolis, which was quickly propelled to the position of world’s pre-eminent “Murder City”, the title of Bowden’s subsequent book published in 2010.

As Bowden pointed out, the narrative of never-ending wars between Mexican drug cartels provides a convenient alibi for ongoing violence in Mexico while handily obscuring the profound involvement of state security forces themselves in the drug trade – and in the lethal brutality that has characterised cities like Ciudad Juarez. Precise homicide statistics are impossible to come by, in part due to the all-too-common phenomenon of enforced disappearances, but most estimates put the city’s homicide total at well over 1,000 for 2024.

The next person I spoke with in Ciudad Juarez was a Mexican woman with grey hair and very few teeth who had planted herself in the road in front of the border crossing, wielding a

Styrofoam cup for donations from vehicles arriving from the US. Speaking to me in Spanish, she explained that her rent was due and that yesterday the Styrofoam cup had accumulated only \$8.

She then switched to fluent English, and in a southern US accent told me that she, too, had been deported from the US despite possessing a Green Card, and that her 34-year-old daughter had been shot and stabbed to death nine years ago in Ciudad Juarez. The woman suggested that I could probably find some asylum seekers if I just walked west along the border fence, and helpfully warned me to stay away from doorways as I might be grabbed and raped.

I added \$5 to the Styrofoam cup and walked west as instructed, the towering fence a constant reminder of my own privileged international freedom of movement as a US citizen and passport holder. At an intersection, I found a young Guatemalan woman and her daughter who were selling candy; they had been in Ciudad Juarez for three months, the mother told me, and had not yet determined an alternate plan of action following the cancellation of CBP One. If I wanted better chances of finding “migrants”, she said, there were a couple of shelters down the road.

These shelters were not marked, consisting of small, derelict constructions that lay practically in the shadow of the border wall but that at the very least provided refuge from the overpowering dust and wind. I gained access to one Evangelical-run shelter by striking up a conversation with a Venezuelan youth who had spent the past seven months in Mexico and had at long last been awarded a CBP One appointment date for January 28, ie eight days after the programme was abolished.

Inside the shelter were numerous Venezuelan families, many of the children barefoot and in shorts even as I shivered in my winter

coat and scarf. I spoke with a Venezuelan man in his 30s who did his best to exert optimism but acknowledged that the whole CBP One situation was a bit much to bear after the physical and psychological torment of the journey to Ciudad Juarez, noting: “It’s like swimming across a whole river just to drown on the other side.” By his account, he had escaped four kidnapping attempts in Mexico alone, which had been jointly staged by Mexican authorities and cartel operatives.

Back outside I encountered two Venezuelan men, aged 24 and 31, who had been washing windscreens at a convenience store before their windshield-washing tool had broken and the police had arrived to engage in habitual extortionary activity. I offered to buy them a replacement tool, and as we walked down Avenida Juarez towards the market – pausing for the obligatory selfie in front of the border crossing – the 24-year-old revealed that he had already been deported twice from the US, once from New York City.

Showing me a photo on his phone of him smiling atop the Brooklyn Bridge, he admitted that the American dream was not all it was cracked up to be: “No one in the US wants to talk to you; they don’t want you to get near them.”

The 31-year-old agreed that perhaps the US was overrated and that life was not necessarily worth living if you were just in it for the money.

The two debated whether to return to Mexico City to try to eke out a living or to stick it out in Ciudad Juarez, washing the eternal dust from car windscreens. Or, of course, they could give it another go at crossing the border. But whichever way they ultimately turn, the “ruin” of US economic policy has already been planted.

Back in 1998, Bowden called Ciudad Juarez the “ground zero of the future”. And the future, unfortunately, is now.

Trump’s race to honor his promises is bringing risk and turmoil to America and world

PRESIDENT Donald Trump is doing exactly what he said he’d do.

He’s launching hard-power trade wars to please voters marginalized by the globalized economy. He’s acting on despair over fentanyl’s murderous toll. He’s launched a migrant crackdown amid anxiety over a porous southern border. And the president, with the help of Elon Musk, is starting to gut the government that his supporters blame for their problems.

“When a president is elected by the People and then does what he promised to do, that’s democracy,” Vice President JD Vance wrote on X on Saturday night. “When a president is thwarted by unelected bureaucrats, that’s the oligarchy. President Trump refuses to bend the knee to that oligarchy. Buckle up!”

et Trump’s frantic push to honor campaign promises by a plurality of voters may come with a price.

Abroad, it threatens to compromise traditional American leadership and obligations the country has long set for itself, which are vital to the functioning of the global economy. International agreements and undertakings made to allies are also in peril — like the North American trade deal Trump trampled with huge new tariffs on Canada and Mexico and the treaty under which the US handed over control of the Panama Canal.

And at home, a quickening purge of federal government workers and erratic spending decisions have already called into question assistance that’s critical to the well-being of millions of citizens, as well as the legality of ousting scores of federal workers to fulfill Trump’s political whims.

As Trump’s second presidency enters its third week, there are growing questions over whether his radical disruption — which often flouts generations of US policy and even challenges the law — will fix any of the problems he was elected to solve.

Could it instead cleave deeper national divides, create economic chaos and pain for consumers — who elected him, in part, to lower prices — spike job losses, and leave America isolated after alienating its best friends in the world and destroying the international order?

Trump won’t hear of such talk. You can argue with his grasp of economics. But he’s promising a complete overhaul of the global, free trade economy and a rebuilding of the US manufacturing base — even if it throws American allies into economic crises.

The days of a rising tide lifting all boats are over. “MAKE YOUR PRODUCT IN THE USA AND THERE ARE NO TARIFFS!” the president wrote on Truth Social on Sunday. “Why should the United States lose TRILLIONS OF DOLLARS IN SUBSIDIZING OTHER COUNTRIES.”

Trump announced 25% tariffs on goods from Canada and Mexico and 10% levies on Chinese imports that are due to come into force at 12:01 a.m. ET on Tuesday.

The president said Sunday evening that he plans to speak to leaders in Canada and Mexico on Monday, though gave no sign he’d change his mind.

“I don’t expect anything very dramatic. We put tariffs on. They owe us a lot of money, and I’m sure they’re going to pay,” Trump told reporters as he stepped off Air Force One.

His faith in tariffs — a familiar device that helped speed the descent into the 1930s Great Depression — represents a huge gamble.

“This is a self-inflicted wound to the American economy,” former US Treasury Secretary Larry Summers said on CNN’s “Inside Politics Sunday.” Summers, who served under Democratic President Bill Clinton, added: “I’d expect inflation over the next three or four months to be higher as a consequence, because the price level has to go up when you put a levy on goods that people are buying.” Dismantling government can also be dangerous.

A temporary spending freeze, hurriedly withdrawn by the White House last week, hinted at mayhem that could ensue if federal services on which millions depend go away.

Trump’s biggest moves so far reflect some of his lifelong obsessions, including a tendency to exert power over weaker adversaries. His supporters insist it works — cit-

ing Colombia’s retreat last week, in a showdown over migrant deportations, under the threat of economy-destroying US tariffs. They also credit Trump’s warning that “all hell will break loose” in the Middle East for recent the hostage releases by Hamas in Gaza.

But Trump’s extraordinary steps to transform US domestic and foreign policy at lightning pace also pose political and economic risks. His wielding of vast executive power could come across as an overreach that ignores voters’ most pressing concerns. And he risks driving US allies into the arms of adversaries like China.

It all amounts to a stunning blitz of economic, diplomatic and domestic power, happening by design at a fearsome pace, often without public transparency, that is almost impossible for citizens to process.

Trump’s power moves are shaking North America and the rest of the world

The president this weekend announced 25% tariffs on Canada and Mexico and imposed 10% tariffs on Chinese exports to the United States. He’s also renewing his demand that Canada become the 51st state. Trump has been coercing Denmark to hand over Greenland and Panama to give up control over its canal.

Secretary of State Marco Rubio warned Panama’s president Sunday that Washington would take “measures necessary to protect its rights” under the Panama Canal Treaty because Hong Kong-based firms own two ports near either end of the key waterway. Trump later warned: “We’re going to take it back, or something very powerful is going to happen.”

Trump has also frozen US foreign aid, which has been maintained for decades on the principle that fighting starvation, poverty and illness fosters global stability that makes Americans safer. Nongovernmental organizations are struggling to work out which services qualify for a State Department humanitarian waiver. The US Agency for International Development’s website just went dark. And Musk declared over the weekend on X that the agency responsible for saving millions of lives is “a criminal organization.” He added: “Time for it to die.” CNN reported on Sunday that top security officials at USAID were put on administrative leave after attempting to refuse access to agency systems to Musk’s Department of Government Efficiency officials, and multiple sources said the main office of the agency was unexpectedly closed on Monday.

At home, as it cranks up the pace of mass deportations, the administration Sunday revoked protection for 300,000 Venezuelans, leaving them vulnerable to being deported to their repressive, impoverished homeland.

Trump’s teams have accelerated a purge among law enforcement officials, firing more than a dozen prosecutors who worked on January 6, 2021, cases and demanding names of FBI agents ordered to work on Trump cases — a move that could potentially put the careers and livelihoods of thousands in peril.

Musk, the tech pioneer who has billions of dollars in contracts and potential conflicts of interest with the US government, stoked more disruption. His DOGE team has accessed the federal payments system, potentially allowing him to monitor and limit government spending, after the top civil servant at the Treasury Department — who had pushed back on questions about stopping certain payments — left unexpectedly last week.

Trump’s tariffs are a perfect metaphor for his presidency

Trump’s new trade wars encapsulate his unrestrained use of power and show how his beliefs contradict decades of conventional US global leadership. The massive tariffs he plans to impose on Canada and Mexico on Tuesday can be traced back to his long-held belief that America is being ripped off by almost every other nation.

The tariffs’ ostensible purpose is to punish American allies for failing to do more to crack down on undocumented migration and fentanyl reaching the United States.

Many Trump supporters see the president’s love for “beautiful” tariffs as leverage to force concessions from other countries and to allow him to deliver “wins,” which often seem less meaty than

he claims.

But this time, the imposition of tariffs is being billed as a victory in itself. “These are promises made and promises kept by the president,” White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt said Friday.

But the win will come at a cost.

Canada said Saturday it would impose retaliatory tariffs on more than \$100 billion in American imports. Several top provincial politicians, meanwhile, urged Canadians to start boycotting of US products, including wine and liquor.

Mexico is vowing to unveil its own response Monday. President Claudia Sheinbaum warned Sunday that talks, and not confrontation, are the best ways to solve problems. She said: “Sovereignty is not negotiable.”

While tensions have long boiled between the US and Mexico over border issues, problems at the northern border seem negligible.

According to US Customs and Border Protection statistics, only 43 pounds of fentanyl were seized at the northern border last year, compared with more than 21,000 pounds captured at the southwest border. And Canada has already pledged to spend \$1 billion on an enhanced border patrol operation.

Why is Trump turning on one of America’s best friends?

This begs the question of whether America’s No. 1 foreign priority is really addressing a threat from Canada, with which the US enjoys its most comprehensive trading partnership.

Trump’s turn against Canada — which effectively trashes the US-Mexico-Canada trade agreement that he signed in his first term and declared a great victory — risks pitching the economy of a trusted ally into a deep recession and costing hundreds of thousands of Canadian workers.

And while Mexico and Canada are in a vulnerable position because of their smaller economies, they can still hurt the US. Their retaliatory tariffs could raise prices on key goods — even as Trump vows to lower grocery costs for US shoppers.

Trump’s tariff attacks on Mexico and Canada also reverse a decadeslong project to integrate the US and Canadian economies — part of a broader US foreign policy goal of building a rules-based global order of free nations meant to promote prosperity and democracy.

In Canada’s case, this has meant coming to America’s defense, in its greatest hours of need — including after the September 11 attacks in 2001.

“History has made us friends, economics has made us partners and necessity has made us allies,” Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said Saturday. “That rang true for many decades ... from the beaches of Normandy to the mountains of the Korean Peninsula, from the fields of Flanders to the streets of Kandahar.”

Trump, however, seeks far greater control over the Western Hemisphere — which, together with his love of tariffs, is creating a 19th century vibe.

“Canada should become our Cherished 51st State. Much lower taxes, and far better military protection for the people of Canada — AND NO TARIFFS!” Trump wrote on Truth Social on Sunday from Florida, where he twice visited one of his golf courses over the weekend.

But the president’s threats are backfiring.

“It’s an act of economic warfare. And the president was clear just this morning that it is a direct attack on our sovereignty,” former Canadian Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland told CNN’s Fareed Zakaria on Sunday. Freeland, a candidate for the leadership of Canada’s Liberal Party, and therefore to replace Trudeau as prime minister, added: “Americans are going to be astonished by the Canadian response. We’re hurt, for sure, because we’re your friends and neighbors. But most of all, we’re angry, and we are united and resolute.”

Still, Trump isn’t hiding what he wants, and right now, he is wielding almost unaccountable power.

“We are led by someone who is not very mysterious. He’s going to tell you what he’s going to do and he’ll actually do it,” Rubio said on Sirius XM’s “The Megyn Kelly Show” last week.

Or, as Vance put it: “Buckle up.”

— CNN

Al-Sharaa and the Saudi date

INTERIM Syrian Arab Republic President Ahmad Al-Sharaa’s choice of Saudi Arabia as the destination for his first foreign visit aimed to deliver blunt messages inside his country and beyond. This is not only about Saudi Arabia being an economic and political heavyweight on the Arab, Islamic and international levels, but also about the new Saudi Arabia, which in a handful of years has become more open and witnessed rapid reforms and advances.

From the moment he succeeded in ousting the Assad regime, Al-Sharaa has shown that he is fully aware of the new balances of power in the region and of the actual interests of the new Syrian Arab Republic he is hoping to form.

It only took a handful of weeks to change the Syrian Arab Republic’s image. It is no longer a country that chases away its people and the keys to its fate no longer lie with the supreme leader in Iran or the czar in Russia.

These glimmers of hope reminded me of Syrians I had met years ago and who had lost all hope that their country could be saved. In September 2015, I was in Berlin and I witnessed the waves of Syrian refugees arriving in the country. I met a man who had taken a chance by riding one of the “boats of death” to flee the country. He told me: “Germany allowed me to feel my human dignity for the very first time.” One of his companions said: “I am excellent. I am eating three meals a day and I can sleep without fear of the Baathists or Daesh.” It pained me to see Syrians living in refuge in Germany rejoicing at eating regular meals and being away from Daesh and the Sednaya prison regime.

I recalled another day when I entered the office of a young man called Bashar Assad, who was in

the early years of his time in office. He spoke to me of the difficult economic situation, of the aging regime and laziness of the Baath Party. He also told me that the might of nations is not measured by their armies, but the strength of their economy. Early on, Bashar’s regime was afraid of showing any openness and the fragile thread that could have connected the president to the people and the people with each other was severed. “Mr.

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President’s” isolation grew. He did not grasp the meaning of an American tank toppling a statue of Saddam Hussein. He did not pause at how he was forced to withdraw his forces from Lebanon in the wake of the Lebanese people’s rage over Rafik Hariri’s assassination. He was afraid of making the necessary painful decisions and instead turned over the keys to his country to the so-called resistance axis.

Maj. Gen. Qassem Soleimani persuaded the master of the Kremlin of the benefits of saving the Assad regime. Tehran ignored the will of the majority of the Syrian people and Moscow committed the same mistake. The radicalism of the Syrian opposition alarmed several countries and, so, the ouster of the Assad regime was

Ghassan Charbel

delayed. The regime itself was deluded into believing that it would remain in power forever.

During those days, a young man called Ahmad Al-Sharaa endured years in jail, on the battlefield and in radicalism. In recent years, Al-Sharaa lived in the Idlib “statelet” alongside the various factions and got to know the people. It never occurred to anyone that he would one day

..... make it to the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus to declare the end of more than half a century of Assad rule. Al-Sharaa’s arrival on the scene surprised the region and the world. His statements only fueled the desire to learn more about him and how he thinks. In just a few weeks, he shed the image of Abu Mohammed Al Golani and was once again known as Ahmad Al-Sharaa. He said he wants to establish a Syrian Arab Republic that belongs to all of its people without exception. He wants a unified state, not a country that is composed of factions. He does not want to drag his country into endless wars and battles. He wants to involve all Syrians — inside the country and abroad — and to ensure the return of millions of refugees

whom the former regime had forced to live in tents in neighboring states or to beg for residency in far-flung countries.

Al-Sharaa’s appearance in Damascus was monumental and many feared that reprisals would ensue. But nothing happened. Al-Sharaa played a decisive role in averting disaster.

Recent weeks have led many to believe that Al-Sharaa spent his long time in Idlib preparing a detailed program for the people and supporting its sovereignty, territorial integrity and dream for stability and prosperity. Al-Sharaa’s meeting with the torchbearer of Saudi Arabia’s rise, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, was an extraordinary event that will certainly leave its mark on the new Syrian Arab Republic, its position in the Arab family and its international relations.

Al-Sharaa knows Saudi Arabia well. He was born in Riyadh and spent his childhood there. He also knows the current Saudi Arabia, which is a source of stability and a hub of investment partnerships and prosperity. He is aware of the Kingdom’s role in persuading Western countries to ease the sanctions on the Syrian Arab Republic ahead of lifting them completely. He is aware of the aid it can provide to his country in a world that is living on Donald Trump’s time.

He is also aware of the rapid regional developments and expectations. As he was in Saudi Arabia, Benjamin Netanyahu was heading to the White House, which has again chosen to live under the rule of the man of surprises and initiatives.

Al-Sharaa’s Saudi date is important for Damascus and Riyadh, as well as the Syrian Arab Republic and the Middle East’s stability. — Arab News

Iranians had already left it by then. They noted that he dealt the axis of resistance a deadly blow, but refrained from celebrating the feat. He diminished Russia’s military presence in the country without following this with acts of reprisal.

Al-Sharaa chose Saudi Arabia as the destination of his first trip abroad to underscore his realization of the constant importance of the Kingdom places on the Syrian Arab Republic remaining an effective member of the Arab world, as well as respecting the will of its people and supporting its sovereignty, territorial integrity and dream for stability and prosperity. Al-Sharaa’s meeting with the torchbearer of Saudi Arabia’s rise, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, was an extraordinary event that will certainly leave its mark on the new Syrian Arab Republic, its position in the Arab family and its international relations.

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— Arab News



100-Index of PSX witnesses bearish trend, loses 1,510 more points

ISLAMABAD (APP): The 100-Index of the Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX) witnessed bearish trend on Monday, gaining 1,510.72 points, a positive change of 1.32 percent, closing at 112,745.01 points as compared to 114,255.73 points on the last trading day.

A total of 401,456,556 shares were traded during the day as compared to 543,124,378 shares the previous trading day, whereas the price of shares stood at Rs20.351 billion against Rs27.973 billion on the last trading day.

As many as 450 companies transacted their shares in the stock market, 137 of them recorded gains and 262 sustained losses, whereas the share price of 51 companies remained unchanged.

The three top trading companies were WorldCall Telecom with 26,261,284 shares at Rs1.63 per share,

Bank of Punjab with 24,695,262 shares at Rs10.23 per share and Ghani Chemical with 22,003,898 shares at Rs20.03 per share.

Unilever Pakistan Foods Limited witnessed a maximum increase of Rs77.83 per share closing at Rs22,383.33 whereas runner-up was Sazgar Engineering Works Limited with Rs39.19 rise in its share price to close at Rs1,062.95.

Sapphire Fibres Limited witnessed a maximum decrease of Rs68.45 per share price, closing at Rs1,060.55, whereas the runner-up was Rafhan Maize Products Company Limited with Rs65.30 decline in its per share price to Rs9,483.33.

Rupee sheds 10 paise against dollar

Pakistani rupee on Monday depreciated by 10 paise against the US dollar

in the interbank trading and closed at Rs279.04 against the previous day's closing of Rs278.94.

However, according to the Forex Association of Pakistan (FAP), the buying and selling rates of the dollar in the open market stood at Rs279.60 and Rs281.10, respectively.

The price of the Euro decreased by Rs5.17 to close at Rs285.04 against the last day's closing of Rs290.21, according to the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP).

The Japanese yen came down by 01 paise and closed at Rs1.79, whereas a decrease of Rs4.08 was witnessed in the exchange rate of the British Pound, which was traded at Rs342.76 as compared to the last day's closing of Rs346.84.

The exchange rates of the Emirates Dirham and the Saudi Riyal increased

by 03 paise each to close at Rs75.97 and Rs74.39 respectively.

Gold prices up by Rs200 per tola to Rs292,400

The price of 24 karat per tola gold increased by Rs200 and was sold at Rs292,400 on Monday against its sale at Rs292,200 on previous trading day, All Sindh Sarafa Jewellers Association reported.

The price of 10 grams of 24 karat gold also increased by Rs171 to Rs250,685 from Rs250,514 whereas that of 10 gram 22 karat went up to Rs229,802 from Rs229,646.

The prices of per tola silver decreased by Rs5 to Rs3,265 whereas that of ten gram silver came down by Rs4 to Rs2,799.

The price of gold in the international market increased by \$2 to \$2,799 from \$2,797, the Association reported.



LAHORE: A shopkeeper attracts attention of customers by decorating various varieties of dates.

FPCCI supports tax incentive proposals

KARACHI (APP): The Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FPCCI), Monday, appreciated the proposed tax measures to facilitate investment by the general public in real estate and construction sectors.

President FPCCI Atif Ikram Sheikh, in a statement issued here, stressed on major tax incentives to revitalize the real estate and construction sector and highlighted that the 4 percent tax rate on sale and purchase of property has been a major obstacle in the development and commercial activities.

Atif Ikram Sheikh pointed out stagnation in the real estate sector and underscored the need of a comprehensive plan for its revival and rejuvenation, so that buying houses becomes affordable and viable for the masses.

FPCCI Chief proposed that taxes on housing and real estate sectors should be reduced to single digits; the government should provide all possible incentives for acquiring low cost and affordable houses and complete tax exemption should be given for building or buying a house for the first time by any Pakistani across the board.

He suggested encouraging commercial banks to facilitate housing finance and exempting overseas Pakistanis from withholding tax and allowing construction of three floors of residential houses in view of housing needs of a population of 250 million.

President FPCCI stressed that the government should move towards vertical development and high-rise buildings to provide decent housing to the masses with decent civic amenities in an efficient time-frame.

Mobile phone imports decreased

ISLAMABAD (APP): The import of mobile phones into the country has witnessed a decrease of 7.46 percent during the first six months of the current fiscal year (2024-25) as compared to the corresponding months of last year.

Pakistan imported mobile phones worth US \$ 733.425 million during July-December (2024-25) as compared to the imports of US \$ 792.581 million during July-December (2023-24), according to the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS).

Meanwhile, on a year-to-year basis, the import of mobile phones also dipped by 7.27 percent during the month of December 2024 when compared to the same month of last year.

PAA unveils development plan

F.P. Report

KARACHI: The Pakistan Airports Authority (PAA) has announced a comprehensive plan for the development and modernization of the country's airport infrastructure. The initiative includes the construction of a new greenfield D.I. Khan Airport and the upgradation and expansion of Sukkur, Skardu, and D.G. Khan Airports.

PAA's Director General, Air Vice Marshal Zeeshan Saeed, stated, "Modern, efficient, and world-class airports are more than just a dream. With the government's vision and commitment, we have a clear roadmap for transforming Pakistan's airports into state-of-the-art global gateways that will boost economic growth and tourism."

To ensure world-class standards, PAA has engaged renowned international and national consultants from Japan and Switzerland through a transparent and competitive bidding process. These experts will design modern terminals, enhanced taxiways, and expanded infrastructure to accommodate growing passenger and aircraft traffic.

Project Directors have also been appointed to accelerate the design phase



and oversee execution. They will act as a bridge between internal and external stakeholders, ensuring seamless coordination and high-quality development.

Additionally, PAA's Planning & Development Directorate has already initiated significant projects at Karachi and Lahore airports. These include the successful completion of Runway and External Roads Network at Jinnah International Airport, Karachi, and the ongoing expansion of Allama Iqbal International Airport, Lahore, aimed at improving passenger facilities.

Shipping activity at Port Qasim

KARACHI (APP): Four ships namely, Hong Kong, Lady Lily, Leader and Lila Confidence scheduled to load/offload Rice, Mogas and Chemicals, berthed at Grain Terminal, Oil Terminal and Engro Terminal on Sunday. Meanwhile three more ships, OM Shanghai, CL Diyin He and Kyra Zafria carrying Chemicals, Coal and Canola seeds also arrived at Outer Anchorage of Port Qasim during the same day.

A total of eight ships were engaged at PQA berths during the last 24 hours, out of them Chemicals carrier Lila Confidence left the port on Monday morning and another ship, M.T Torm Diana is expected to sail.

A cargo volume of 99,022 comprising 85,644 tonnes imports cargo and 13,378 tonnes export cargo was handled at the Port, including containerized cargo carried in 519 Containers (429 TEUs Imports and 90 TEUs export) during the last 24 hours.

There are 17 ships at outer anchorage of the port, out of them three ships namely OM Shanghai, CL Diyin He and Yun Ding 19 & another ship Seaspan Santos carrying Chemicals, Coal, Palm oil and Containers are expected to take berths at EVTL, LCT, PIBT and QICT respectively.

FBR organizes tax awareness session



F.P. Report

RAWALPINDI: The Federal Board of Revenue (FBR), through its Taxpayers Services Wing, conducted a tax awareness session at Punjab Group of Colleges, Satellite Town Campus, Rawalpindi. The session focused on revenue collection mechanism of FBR. The event was attended by the college director, Professor Chaudhry Muhammad Akram, Principal Asad Iqbal, faculty members, and students.

The FBR team included Second Secretary (Tax Education) Zafar Iqbal Khan and other members of the Taxpayers Services Wing.

During the session, the Second Secretary (Tax Education) delivered a

comprehensive presentation highlighting various measures taken by the FBR to maximize revenue collection. In his briefing, he urged students to become tax ambassadors by spreading awareness about tax obligations in their communities.

Speaking on the occasion, College Director Professor Chaudhry Muhammad Akram appreciated the FBR's efforts in tax collection and promoting a tax compliance culture in the country.

At the end of the session, an interactive Q&A session was held, where participants asked questions related to taxation.

This initiative is part of the FBR's continued efforts to enhance awareness of the tax system among the youth and promote a culture of tax compliance in Pakistan.

Sona Welfare Foundation: Spreading prosperity for healthy communities



F.P. Report

KARACHI: Sona Welfare Foundation (SWF) the implementing partner of FFC in alignment with its mandate to advance the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is committed

to sustainable development through its operational excellence to address pressing societal challenges. Working towards health equity underscores the core of SWF's mission of fostering resilient, thriving and prosperous communities. In order to address pervasive

physical deformities - including limb impairments and blindness - in Mirpur Mathelo area in partnership with Sehat Kahani a leading health care platform organized a two-day Disability Screening Camp (26-27 January 2025), which saw 315 persons

with disabilities (PWDs) meticulously assessed by a multidisciplinary team of expert which included renowned Orthopedic Surgeons, Ophthalmologists, General Physicians, and Surveyors from Karachi.

M D & C E O FFC/Chairman SWF Mr. Jahangir Piracha accompanied by his wife met with all the persons with disability, shared the burden of aggrieved and vowed to continue assisting+ and enabling communities in becoming productive and prosperous citizens of Pakistan. This Initiative is named as "Tum Akailey Nahi" enabled precise clinical categorization, root-cause analysis to curb recurrence, and personalized treatment pathways under expert guidance. This milestone reaffirms SWF's resolve to elevate health equity, ensuring dignity and well-being for all community members.

Pakistan Cables inaugurates PVC Compounding Plant at its new factory in Nooriabad



F.P. Report

NOORIABAD, Sindh: Pakistan Cables Ltd. successfully commissioned its new PVC Compounding Plant at its new factory located in Nooriabad, Sindh. Mr. Fahd K. Chinoy, CEO Pakistan Cables, inaugurated the plant and was joined by the team. With the addition of the new PVC Compounding Plant,

Pakistan Cables has significantly enhanced its capacity to cater to its own and external needs for PVC products.

First set up in 2007, the Company was the first in the industry to have its own PVC Compounding Plant at its factory located at SITE, Karachi.

As part of setting up its new factory in Nooriabad, the Company remains

focused on investing for higher efficiency, reliability, and diversification of operations through cutting edge technology.

According to Fahd K. Chinoy, "Through enhanced local production, Pakistan Cables has strengthened its position as a premier supplier for PVC compounds in diverse industries.

As the first and premier wires and cables manufac-

turer in Pakistan, we strongly believe in the economic potential of Pakistan and therefore remain committed to invest and grow the local industry for a stronger economy. This is a milestone achievement for our new factory which is re-shaping the industry standards".

Founded in 1953, Pakistan Cables is the premiere and most reputable cable manufacturer in Pakistan. It is the first and oldest wires and cable manufacturer listed on the PSX since 1955. It is also a member company of the Amir S. Chinoy (ASC) group.

The company has the largest geographical footprint in Pakistan with presence in over 200 cities. It is ISO9001:2015, ISO 14001:2015 AND OHSAS 18001:2007 certified and various cables type tested by KEMA, Netherlands.

Pakistan Cables is the only building material company in Pakistan that has its carbon emission reduction targets approved and validated by SBTi.

Growing use of nicotine pouches among youth raises health concerns in KP

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The increasing use of nicotine pouches, commonly sold under brands is becoming a concerning trend among young people in Peshawar and across Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Health experts warn that these pouches pose severe health risks, often considered more dangerous than cigarettes. Despite these warnings, the popularity of nicotine pouches continues to rise due to aggressive marketing on social media and other platforms.

Zahid Khan, a social worker, expressed deep concern over this growing trend, urging the government to take immediate action. "It is alarming that even students in universities, colleges, and schools are using these nicotine pouches. This issue needs urgent attention before it becomes a widespread crisis," he stated.

Yasir Khan, a government school teacher, also emphasized the harmful effects of nicotine pouches, calling them more dangerous than cigarettes and traditional smokeless tobacco

(naswar). "The government should impose a complete ban on these products and take strict action against those involved in their sale," he suggested.

Despite the evident health risks, nicotine pouches remain legal due to the absence of specific legislation. The in-charge of the Tobacco Control Program acknowledged this challenge, stating, "Since no laws have been enacted against nicotine pouches, our program cannot take direct action. However, we are collaborating with organizations

like Blue Veins to raise awareness through meetings and educational sessions."

He further emphasized that unless the government enforces strict regulations, these pouches will continue to be readily available in the market, posing a serious threat to future generations.

WHO estimated around 1.27 billion tobacco users world-wide Tobacco consumption alone accounts for nearly 5.4 million deaths per year and one billion people may die in this century if global tobacco

consumption remained at the current levels.

In Pakistan, in 2017, about 163,360 people died due to tobacco use 5000 Pakistanis are admitted to hospitals every day because of tobacco 1200 Pakistani children between ages 6 and 15 begin smoking every day.

Over the last 5 years, Pakistan has witnessed the use of innovative tobacco harm reduction (THR) products such as e-cigarettes and nicotine pouches.

Dr. Ahmad an Associate Professor at the Public Hospital says that these

nicotine pouches are more hazardous for health and it can crate cancer and other serious disease as it is harmful for the health.

He further inform that due to the toxins can be carried into the bloodstream and begin moving to other parts of body and damage the heart, brain, and stomach. Carbon monoxide is a poisonous gas that takes the place of oxygen in blood.

Assistant Commissioner Hayatabad highlighted the ongoing efforts to curb the sale of nicotine pouches. "We are confiscating these

pouches from markets and stores and ensuring their disposal. The Peshawar Commissioner has already launched a 'Drug-Free Peshawar' initiative aimed at protecting youth from nicotine and other harmful substances," she explained.

However, she stressed that without legislative support, enforcement remains a challenge.

"If lawmakers bring this issue to the assembly and pass legislation banning nicotine pouches, we can effectively protect our young generation from this harmful addiction," she

added. With the rapid rise in nicotine pouch consumption among youth, experts, educators, and officials unanimously agree that urgent action is required. Strong legislation, combined with awareness campaigns and strict enforcement, is the only way to prevent this emerging public health crisis.

Until then, the easy availability and increasing social acceptance of nicotine pouches will continue to put the health and future of young Pakistanis at serious risk.



In brief

Army deployed for Tri-Nation series

LAHORE (APP): The Federal Ministry of Interior has approved the deployment of the Army and Rangers in Lahore from February 5 to 10 for the upcoming Tri-Nation cricket series. According to the spokesperson for the Punjab Home Department, stringent security arrangements have been finalised for the tournament, which features Pakistan, New Zealand and South Africa. During the matches in Lahore, contingents of the Pakistan Army and Pakistan Rangers (Punjab) will be deployed to ensure security. The matches scheduled for February 8 and 10 will take place at the Gaddafi Stadium, Lahore. The spokesperson added that the Home Department had formally requested the federal government to deploy security forces in response to a police request. After the two matches in Lahore, the series will move to Karachi, where additional matches will be played on February 12 and 14.

Nadeem wins bodybuilding contests

RAWALPINDI (APP): Assistant Sub-Inspector Nadeem Akhtar of the Rawalpindi Police on Monday won the first position in the multi-category/multi-class bodybuilding competitions. Some 102 bodybuilders from the Rawalpindi Division participated in the contests organized by the District Bodybuilding Association Rawalpindi at the Rawalpindi Arts Council, a police spokesman said. ASI Nadeem belongs to the Elite Force. City Police Officer Syed Khalid Hamdani congratulated ASI Nadeem Akhtar for his excellent performance in the bodybuilding competitions. He said they were using all resources to bring out the talents of police officers by providing them with sports opportunities.

Kvitova returns to tennis after giving birth

PRAGUE (AFP): Two-time Wimbledon champion Petra Kvitova said Monday she was returning to the sport seven months after giving birth to a son. "After fifteen months being away from tennis and having my baby boy Petr, I'm coming back to the tennis circuit," Kvitova said in a video message on Instagram. She added she would return at Austin at the end of February and then continue at Miami in March. "I really miss tennis and I miss competing," added the 34-year-old Czech, who won Wimbledon in 2011 and 2014. The former world number two married her coach Jiri Vanek in July 2023. She announced the break due to her pregnancy on New Year's Day 2024 and gave birth to her son on July 7 last year. Kvitova has won 31 WTA singles titles.

Mavericks defeated in first game

NEW YORK (Agencies): The Dallas Mavericks were beaten 144-101 by the Cleveland Cavaliers just hours after Luka Doncic's shock trade to the Los Angeles Lakers. Five-time NBA All-Star Doncic was part of a three-way deal involving Lakers' Anthony Davis and Max Christie, who made the move to Dallas but were unable to play in Sunday's game at Cleveland. Sam Merrill came off the bench to score nine three-pointers as Eastern Conference leaders Cavaliers cruised to a comfortable victory. Evan Mobley scored 22 points with 11 rebounds and Darius Garland finished with 17 points and 10 assists.

Tickets for tri-nation series go on sale tomorrow

LAHORE (APP): The tickets for the tri-nation series involving hosts Pakistan, New Zealand and South Africa will go on sale at 4pm on February 4 (Tuesday).

The tri-nation series will be played between February 8 and February 14 at the Gaddafi stadium, Lahore and National Bank stadium, Karachi.

Besides the online tickets, physical tickets will be available at the eight designated TCS Express Centres while a maximum of 10 tickets can be purchased on one ID card.

The tri-nation series will mark return of international cricket and, in order to facilitate the fans, tickets available at an affordable pricing at PKR 350.

The weekend matches (Pakistan v New Zealand, 8 February at GSL) and (final, 14 February at NBS) will be available from PKR 500.

To encourage maximum fans to enjoy their favourite players in action at the GSL and NBS before the ICC Men's Champions Trophy 2025, the maximum ticket pricing for newly constructed enclosures in Lahore – Majid Khan and Zaheer Abbas (VVIP enclosures) at the Jinnah End will be available to fans at PKR 5,000 for Saturday's fixture, while Monday's fixture for fans will be available at PKR 4,000.

For Waqar Younis and

Wasim Akram (VVIP enclosures) at the Iqbal End, the fans can witness Saturday's match from PKR 3,500, while ticket for Monday's encounter will cost PKR 2,500. The VIP enclosures (Fazal Mahmood and Imran Khan) will be available to fans at PKR 2,000 for Saturday's fixture, while on Monday, the fans can enjoy the action from the same enclosures at PKR 1,500.

The premium enclosures (Rajas and Saeed Anwar) will be available to fans at PKR 1,500 for the opening match of the tri-series on Saturday, while Monday's fixture will cost fans ticket available at PKR 1,000.

The general enclosures (Hanif Mohammad, Imtiaz Ahmed, Inzamam-ul-Haq and Saeed Ahmed) at the Gaddafi Stadium will be available to fans at PKR 350 (Monday's fixture) and PKR 500 (Saturday's fixture). Moreover, first-class enclosures (Abdul Hafeez Kardar, Abdul Qadir, Javed Miandad and Sarfaraz Nawaz) will be available to fans at PKR 1,000 (Monday's fixture) and PKR 1,500 (Saturday's fixture).

In Lahore, the fans can also witness action from Gallery (hospitality) boxes at PKR 6,000 for Saturday's fixture and PKR 5,000 for Monday's fixture.

For Karachi's National Bank Stadium, the general enclosures (Asif Iqbal,

Nazar Mohammad, Waqar Hasan and Younis Khan) tickets will be available to fans at PKR 350 for Wednesday's fixture, while for the tri-series final on Friday the tickets will be available to fans at PKR 500.

For first-class enclosures (Imran Khan, Intikhab Alam, Wasim Akram, Wasim Bari and Shahid Afridi) entry tickets will be available for sale for Wednesday's fixture at PKR 750, while final on Friday will be available at PKR 1,000. Additionally, premium enclosures (Iqbal Qasim, Mohammad Brothers, Naseemul Ghani) will be accessible to fans at PKR 1,000 for Wednesday's fixture while tickets for Friday's fixture will be available at PKR 1,500.

VIP enclosures (Fazal Mahmood, Hanif Mohammad and Javed Miandad) tickets will be worth PKR 1,500 for Wednesday's fixture, while it will cost PKR 2,000 for the final scheduled on Friday. The VVIP enclosures (Majid Khan and Zaheer Abbas) located at the University End, will be available to fans at PKR 4,000 for Wednesday's fixture, while fans can buy tickets at PKR 5,000 for Friday's final match.

The Gallery seats will be available to fans at PKR 5,000 for Wednesday's fixture, while Friday's fixture will be available to fans at PKR 6,000.

Azhar Ali Shah contesting in ACC Congress meeting

ISLAMABAD (APP): President of the Pakistan Cycling Federation (PCF), Syed Azhar Ali Shah is contesting for a position on the Management Committee in the elections, to be held in Asian Cycling Confederation (ACC) Congress meeting at Bangkok, Thailand, on February 6.

Shah along with Nisar Ahmad International Relation director PCF will attend the ACC Congress meeting. They will depart for Thailand on Monday, to represent Pakistan at this significant gathering of Asian cycling leaders, said a press release. The ACC Congress is a key event where elections will be held to select the new President and members of the Management Committee of ACC.

Shah is contesting for a position on the Management Committee, a move that reflects Pakistan's increasing engagement in the development of cycling at the continental level. His participation in the ACC Congress is expected to strengthen Pakistan's role in international cycling and open new opportunities for the development of the sport in the country.

Shah has been a strong advocate for the promotion of cycling in Pakistan and has played a vital role in organizing national and international events under the banner of PCF. This participation will also provide an opportunity to discuss potential collaborations, training programs, and sponsorships that could benefit Pakistani cyclists.

PCF remains committed to enhancing

the standard of cycling in the country and ensuring that Pakistani riders get maximum exposure on international platforms.

UCI Ethics Commission declares Syed Azhar Ali Shah eligible for ACC: The Union Cycliste Internationale (UCI) Ethics Commission has declared Syed Azhar Ali Shah, President of the Pakistan Cycling Federation (PCF), eligible for candidacy in the Asian Cycling Confederation (ACC) Management Committee and as a voting delegate ACC member for UCI.

The decision was made after a thorough review by the UCI Ethics Commission Electoral, ensuring that Shah meets all the ethical and eligibility criteria required for these prestigious roles. His candidacy reflects his longstanding contributions to the development of cycling in Pakistan and Asia, said a press release.

Shah, who has been instrumental in promoting cycling across Pakistan, expressed his gratitude to UCI and ACC for their trust. "This is not just a personal achievement but a recognition of Pakistan's growing role in the international cycling community," he said. The upcoming elections for the ACC Management Committee and UCI voting delegates will play a crucial role in shaping the future of cycling in Asia. If elected, Shah aims to advocate for the development of cycling infrastructure, talent grooming, and international collaboration.

McIlroy overpowers Pebble Beach and wins in a runaway

PEBBLE BEACH, California (Agencies): Rory McIlroy played a game nearly as magnificent as the Pebble Beach scenery Sunday as he powered his way past a pack of contenders and closed with a 6-under 66 for a two-shot victory in the AT&T Pebble Beach Pro-Am.

McIlroy is one of the top attractions in golf, which only added to the appeal of the surprising sunshine and crashing surf at America's most famous coastal golf course. And just like that, a sleepy start to the PGA Tour season had some life to it.

On a day when six players had at least a share of the lead, McIlroy took the top spot for good with an 18-foot birdie putt on the 10th hole into a stiff breeze along the Pacific. He effectively ended the drama with a towering drive and a 7-iron into the 571-yard 14th hole, setting up an eagle putt from just outside 25 feet. "To win at one of the cathedrals of golf is really cool," McIlroy said.

Shane Lowry fell out of a share for the lead when he sent his second shot over a cliff to the right of the par-5 sixth. But he shot 31 on the back nine, including a birdie on the final hole for a 68 that gave him second place alone. Lucas Glover (67) and Justin Rose (68) were another shot behind.

Sepp Straka, who started the final round with a one-shot lead, had a 72 and tied for seventh.

Scottie Scheffler, the world's No. 1 player whose season was delayed by minor hand surgery from punctured glass while making ravioli, closed with a 67 and tied for ninth.

McIlroy has talked about this being an important year for him, though his focus was more on April through September — an 11th chance to complete the career Grand Slam at the Masters, a return home to Northern Ireland for the British Open, a road Ryder Cup at Bethpage.

This wasn't a bad start. "It's a really cool way to start the season," said McIlroy, who won for the second time in California. "To get this win this early means a great deal, and hopefully I'll keep the momentum going into Torrey Pines in a couple weeks' time."

The sixth hole began to separate the pack a little. In consecutive groups, Rose went over the cliff with his tee shot and Tom Kim hit down the hill toward the ocean with his second shot. Lowry followed him in the final group, leading to bogey. But really, McIlroy looked as though he was the player to beat from the second hole, when he hit a tough pitch from 50 yards

away over a bunker to a back pin with enough height and spin to set up a 2-foot birdie putt.

But it was after his lone bogey on the tough eighth hole where he pulled away — the 18-foot birdie on the 10th, a tee shot into 8 feet for birdie on the par-3 12th and finally get his due on the 14th hole. McIlroy drilled his drive for the third straight day over a tree, over the bunker complex and into the fairway. The previous two days, he had to settle for par.

This time, he cashed in for an eagle, extending his lead to four shots. And when he hit wedge into 3 feet for birdie on the 15th, it led to one of the best stress-free and gorgeous walks on the PGA Tour. Everyone else was left in a hopeless chase.

"When he's good, he's great. And when he's not great, he's good," Glover said. "There's a reason he's got 20-something wins and a bunch of majors and the game he has. Impressive round out there today under the pressure and under the conditions." McIlroy won for the 27th time on the tour and is 21st on the career victory list. He's been stuck on four majors since winning the PGA Championship 11 years ago, and that he is sure to be reminded of that as the Masters gets closer.



ISLAMABAD: Youngsters standing in queue for getting tickets for ICC Champions Trophy match, Digital purchase of the ticket is available now. Pakistan and United Arab Emirates hosted by the event from 19 February to 9 March 2025. —INP Photo

Zacky Farm Polo triumph over Sula Polo in 4th Jr Polo C'ship opener

LAHORE (Monitoring Desk): Zacky Farm Polo outpaced Sula Polo in the opening match of the 4th Junior Polo Championship 2025, sponsored by TCL Pakistan, commenced at Pakistan Park Polo Ground, marking the beginning of an exciting competition among young polo talents.

The tournament, a part of the Pakistan Polo Association's official calendar, features four competing teams including Sula Polo, Zacky Farm Polo, CTI Shipping, and Crewlogix Technologies. A large number of spectators, including families and polo enthusiasts, gathered to witness the thrilling first match and cheered on the young players, creating a lively and encouraging atmosphere. Maj (R) Babar Mehboob Awan, the club's secretary, along with former polo players, also attended the event.

The opening match saw Zaki Farms Polo Team secure a convincing 3-1 victory over Sula Polo Team. Zacky Farm Polo's star player, Zackaria Daud Ali Khan, stole the show by scoring all three goals for his team, leading them to victory. Sula Polo's lone goal was scored by Rabeel Noman Hussain. On Tuesday (February 4, 2025), Crewlogix Technologies set to face CTI Shipping in what promises to be another exciting contest.

Jibran Salman Butt elected President PWF

LAHORE (APP): Jibran Bin Salman Butt on Monday was elected as the President of the Pakistan Weightlifting Federation (PWF) for a year term (2025-2029) during the General Council meeting at the Pakistan Olympic Association (POA) House here. Hafiz Imran Butt, the outgoing president PWF, chaired the general council meeting. The election was conducted under the supervision of Advocate Zulfiqar Ahmed of the Supreme Court of Pakistan, who served as the chairman Election Committee.

Muhammad Jahangir, Deputy Secretary General of the Pakistan Olympic Association, monitored the electoral process on behalf of the Pakistan Olympic Association. A total of 25 affiliated representatives and members participated in the electoral General Council meeting. Jibran Bin Salman was elected as President, while Shiraz Muhammad, Sheikh Muhammad Anwar, Nafseem Ahmed, Abdul Sattar Rahi, and Sahira Munir were elected as Vice Presidents. Sidra Gul was chosen as General Secretary, and Mian Nasir Ahmed as Treasurer. Humaira Latif and Aqeel Javed were elected as Associate General Secretaries. The Executive Members include Muhammad Bilal, Muhammad Rashid, Nahla Maqsood Butt, Salma Faiz, and Muhammad Kashif.

The newly President PWF said that the federation is committed to promoting and developing a doping-free sport across the country.

Sri Lanka sweep would push Australia closer to greatness: Lyon

MELBOURNE (Agencies): Australia are not yet a great team but completing a series sweep in Sri Lanka would push them closer, according to spin bowler Nathan Lyon.

Australia won the first Test by an innings and 242 runs in Galle and will look to wrap up the series 2-0 with another win at the same venue when the second Test starts on Thursday. The world's top-ranked Test nation and reigning World Test Championship holders, Australia have won 10 out of their last 13 Tests since drawing the 2023 Ashes in England.

On their last tour of Sri Lanka, Australia gave up a 1-0 lead to split the two-match series with the hosts, who rebounded with an innings and 39-run win in the second Test in Galle.

Lyon said there was plenty of motivation in the Australian camp to avoid a repeat of that let-down.

"It's about us on our journey to becoming a great team, to make sure we go 2-0 up," he told reporters.

"We're on that journey, we're not there yet but that's our end goal."

"We want to be known as a great team, and part of that journey is when we close a window making sure we nail it shut, and we don't let anyone back in."

Australia's success has been compared with some of the nation's great Test teams led by Steve Waugh and Ricky Ponting.

Asked what would elevate the current group into greatness, Lyon said Australia still needed series wins in India and England. Australia were held to

2-2 draws on their last two Ashes tours of England and have not beaten India away since Adam Gilchrist's team took a 2-1 series win in 2004.

Australia are likely to retain the same three-prong spin attack of Lyon, Matthew Kuhnemann and Todd Murphy for the second Test after they took a total of 17 wickets in the first.

"I think we all complement each other really well, with three totally different bowlers with three totally different mindsets as well," said 37-year-old Lyon, who took seven wickets in the series-opener.

"I feel like I'm learning off Todd and Matt, and I feel like they're pushing me to try and get better as well."

"Hopefully I'm passing on a bit of knowledge here and there."

Teams gear up for FIH Hockey Women's Nations Cup

ISLAMABAD (APP): With just one month remaining till the start of the FIH Hockey Women's Nations Cup Chile 2025, the excitement is palpable as teams and fans alike gear up for this landmark event.

From February 23 to March 2, Santiago, Chile, will host the third edition of the FIH Hockey Women's Nations Cup, showcasing some of the most promising women's hockey teams from around the globe, said a press release.

The FIH Hockey Women's Nations Cup represents a crucial platform for teams ranked outside of the FIH Hockey Pro League, to demonstrate their capabilities on the world stage against some of the toughest opponents.

The tournament continues to act as a gateway to the elite levels of international competition, with the winner getting an opportunity to participate in the following season of the FIH Hockey Pro League.

This event will see eight teams battling it out for the title and promotion to the FIH Hockey Pro League 2025/26.

Pool A: Canada, Chile, Japan, United States; Pool B: Ireland, New Zealand, Scotland, South Korea.

These teams will bring their A-game to Santiago, each aiming to seize the opportunity to elevate their status in the international hockey community.

The competition starts off with pool matches. Each team will play against every other team in their pool once, with the top two

teams from each pool advancing to the knockout stage, culminating in the grand final on March 2, where the new champions will be crowned.

FIH President Tayyab Ikram, speaking about the upcoming FIH Hockey Women's Nations Cup Chile 2025 said, "On behalf of FIH, I would like to express our sincerest thanks to all stakeholders involved in the organisation of this Nations Cup, starting with the local authorities the City of Santiago in particular and the Chilean Hockey Federation for their hospitality and professionalism."

In its first two editions, the Nations Cup, involving some of the best teams in the world, has proven to be a really exciting tournament."

Marcus Rashford joins Aston Villa on loan

LONDON (Agencies): Manchester United forward Marcus Rashford has joined Aston Villa on loan, both Premier League clubs announced, bringing to an end a difficult few weeks for the England striker after he was frozen out at Old Trafford.

Rashford, who has been capped 60 times by England, will join Villa until the end of the 2024-25 season.

"I was lucky to have a few clubs approach me but Aston Villa was an easy decision. I really admire the way that Aston Villa have been playing this season, and the manager's ambitions. I just want to play football and am excited to get started," Rashford posted on social media late on Sunday.

"I would like to thank Manchester United and Aston Villa for making this loan deal happen ... I wish everyone at Manchester United all the best for the rest of the season," he added.

Rashford has scored 138 goals in 426 appear-



ances for Manchester United after coming through the club's youth system and breaking into the senior side in 2016. He has lifted the Europa League, two FA Cups and two League Cups.

However, the striker had not featured for United since mid-December after admitting he was ready for a new challenge in his career.

United manager Ruben Amorim called into question the forward's work rate and defended his decision to again omit

him from his squad for their win over Fulham last month, insisting he would rather put a goalkeeper coach on the bench than a player not giving their all.

Rashford has also scored 17 goals for England. He has played in two World Cups and two European Championships for his country.

Villa have also signed Spanish fullback Andres Garcia from Levante and Dutch striker Donyell Malen from Borussia Dortmund in the January transfer window.



In brief

Safe City issues 900 e-challans

ISLAMABAD (APP): Islamabad Traffic Police (ITP), through the Safe City e-challan system, have intensified efforts to enforce traffic laws, issuing over 900 e-challans in January alone. An ITP official told APP on Monday that ITP issued over 900 e-challans in January alone, while more than 277,000 tickets have been issued to date for various traffic violations. He said the implementation of the e-challan system, in line with international standards, ensures strict adherence to traffic laws in the federal capital. Using data from the Excise and Taxation department linked database, legal action is also being taken against violators. In this process, violators receive e-challan notifications on their mobile numbers, making the system more efficient and transparent. The issued challan tickets are also sent directly to the vehicle and motorcycle owners' homes. In cases where the fine is not paid within the stipulated time, the challan copy is affixed to the vehicle's master file at the Excise and Taxation office. Moreover, it has been ensured that until the fine is paid, the vehicle or motorcycle cannot be transferred to another person's name. In order to facilitate citizens in paying fines, easy options such as mobile wallets and bank account payments have been provided. DG Safe City, Shakir Hussain Dawar said that the Safe City E-Challan system is yielding positive results. He further mentioned that due to the effective monitoring through this system, fatal accidents and other traffic violations have seen a significant decline. DG Shakir added that, the e-challan system, utilizing Safe City's cameras, is continuously being improved to make it more effective. The main goal of this system is to utilize modern technology to prevent accidents and ensure strict adherence to traffic laws.

Crackdown against illegal weapons

ISLAMABAD (APP): Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) Police have expedited their ongoing crackdown on illegal weapons, arresting 14 individuals in the last 24 hours and registering 11 cases at various police stations, on Monday. A public relations officer told APP that the operation is being carried out under the special directives of Inspector General of Police (IGP) Islamabad, Syed Ali Nasir Rizvi. In this regard, 14 accused involved in possessing illegal weapons were arrested during the last 24 hours. Police teams also recovered nine pistols and one rifle with ammunition from their possession. Additionally, 11 cases were registered against them at various police stations. 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 Shoaib 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, he added.



ISLAMABAD: Chairman Senate, Syed Yousuf Raza Gilani in a meeting with Mr. Zach Harkenrider, Minister counsellor for political affairs of the embassy of the United States of America. —APP Photo

Pakistan-US enjoying longstanding, broad-based relations: Gilani

ISLAMABAD (APP): Chairman Senate Syed Yousuf Raza Gilani on Monday said that Pakistan's relations with the United States constituted an important element of its foreign policy and both countries have a longstanding and broad-based relationship with the US.

He said that we are desirous to deepen and broaden this relationship and to continue working closely with the US to promote regional and international peace and stability. US Embassy's Minister Counselor for political affairs Zach Harkenrider called on the Chairman Senate today in Islamabad and exchanged views on matters of bilateral significance.

Chairman Senate also congratulated US President Donald Trump on his victory in the elections. He said that we are desirous of working closely with the new Trump administration to foster a peaceful and secure future that respects the sovereignty and aspirations of all nations.

Chairman Senate observed that our bilateral relationship is on the upward trajectory and it is important to maintain the current positive momentum. The Chairman Senate also expressed the desire to work with the US on

diverse areas including climate change, mitigation and adaptation, energy transition, water management, climate-smart agriculture biodiversity and waste management.

He said that US investment in different sectors would be more productive for the Pakistani economy and would help in sustainable economic development. He, however, underscored the need to further increase the trade volume between the two countries. He also encouraged US companies to explore new areas for investment in Pakistan. We are desirous of diversifying our bilateral trade relationship with the US, Chairman Senate said.

The Chairman Senate also acknowledged the importance of high-level visits and recalled that during his tenure as Prime Minister from 2008-2012 fruitful discussions took place. He said that there is a need to further expedite parliamentary and high-level exchanges and promote people-to-people contacts.

Chairman Senate informed that during the recent past, he was able to witness the signing ceremony of an event in which Punjab and California were declared sister states. During the meeting,

Chairman Senate also expressed deep sorrow over the recent aircraft crashes in the US acknowledging the tragic loss of lives and extending condolences to the families affected.

Chairman Senate emphasized Pakistan's role in regional peace including efforts to facilitate stability in Afghanistan and support ongoing dialogue for peace and security in South Asia. Highlighting the importance of regional peace, the Chairman Senate observed that peace in the region would have a lasting impact on global peace and stability.

Chairman Senate Syed Yousuf Raza Gilani observed that we are focusing on peaceful development and doing our best to avoid getting into a conflict or bloc politics. Our focus is on geo-economics rather than geopolitics, Gilani said.

He further said that we want to have better and constructive relations with all regional countries despite bilateral challenges that afflict the region. He also lauded the Pakistani diaspora's role and said that the diaspora is playing a crucial role in bridging the relationship between the two countries and people-to-people contacts are a significant aspect of this relationship.

NCRC hosts consultation with Child Advisory Panel



F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The National Commission on the Rights of Child (NCRC) conducted an Orientation and Awareness Consultation of the Child Advisory Panel (CAP) on the Use of Harmful Substances among Adolescents, bringing together young voices to discuss the dangers of substance abuse and ways to prevent it.

The Child Advisory Panel (CAP) is a truly inclusive platform, ensuring that children from all backgrounds have a voice in decision-making. The CAP includes representatives from religious minorities, the transgender community, differently-abled children, and youth from all provinces of Pakistan, fostering diverse perspectives and experiences.

This inclusive representation strengthens the panel's ability to address challenges faced by children across the country and

advocate for policies that reflect their needs.

The event began with an ice-breaking activity, introducing all CAP members and fostering a welcoming and interactive environment. This was followed by a discussion on the mandate and functions of the NCRC, ensuring that participants understood the Commission's role in protecting and promoting children's rights in Pakistan.

A key component of the session was the zero-tolerance policy on bullying, reinforcing a safe and supportive space for young people to express their thoughts. The CAP members were also introduced to articles of the Constitution that safeguard child rights and protection, emphasizing the legal framework in place to ensure their well-being.

The consultation then shifted to the core topic of harmful substances, exploring what these substances

look like, how they affect adolescents' mental and physical health, and why substance abuse is a growing concern. Participants engaged in a thought-provoking discussion, sharing their insights on the causes and consequences of harmful substance use.

The CAP members were asked for their recommendations on preventing harmful substance use among adolescents. Their suggestions will contribute to future awareness campaigns and policy initiatives aimed at protecting children and youth from the dangers of substance abuse.

The session concluded with a summary of recommendations and thank-you note to all participants for their active engagement. The NCRC remains committed to amplifying children's voices and taking actionable steps to safeguard their rights and well-being.

ANF recovers over 12 kg drugs in nine operations

RAWALPINDI (APP): Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF) while conducting nine operations across the country recovered 12.636 kg drugs worth over Rs 20 million and arrested 10 suspects, said an ANF Headquarters spokesman here on Monday.

He informed that 500 grams hashish was recovered from an accused arrested near a university in Karachi.

The arrested accused confessed to selling drugs to the students of educational institutions. In two separate operations at Lahore International Airport, 69 cocaine-filled capsules were recovered from the stomach of two foreign nationals going to Muscat.

570 grams ice was recovered from a parcel booked for New Zealand through a courier office in Karachi.

2.1 kg ice was recovered from a vehicle intercepted near Cavalry Ground Masood Anwari Road, Lahore in Lahore and 2 suspects were arrested during the operation.

Crackdown on Drugs in Schools: Naqvi vows tough action

ISLAMABAD (APP): Federal Interior Minister and Minister for Narcotics Control Mohsin Naqvi has lauded the Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF) for its ongoing crackdown on drug sales, particularly in educational institutions across the country.

During a high-level meeting, Minister Naqvi praised Director General ANF Major General Abdul Mueed and his team for their dedication and performance. He stressed the need for strict and continued action against those selling drugs, especially ice (crystal meth), to students.

To curb drug smuggling, the minister directed authorities to tighten airport security and take decisive action against traffickers using drones in border areas. "Major drug dealers must be brought to justice at all costs," he emphasized.

Minister Naqvi also commended ANF for successfully securing the release and return of a Pakistani family from Saudi Arabia, acknowledging their efforts despite limited resources.

The meeting, chaired by the minister, included DG ANF Major General Abdul Mueed, Regional Director ANF Brigadier Sikandar Hayat, Director Enforcement Brigadier Imran, and Director Intelligence Colonel Kamran. Several key decisions were made to further strengthen anti-drug operations nationwide.

Interior Minister condemns attack on polio team in Jamrud: Federal Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi has strongly condemned the attack on an anti-polio team in Jamrud, which resulted in the martyrdom of Police Constable

Abdul Khaliq.

Expressing deep sorrow over the tragic incident, Minister Naqvi paid tribute to the slain officer, acknowledging his dedication and sacrifice while on duty. He extended heartfelt condolences to Abdul Khaliq's family, assuring them of the government's support.

"Police Constable Abdul Khaliq attained the highest rank of martyrdom while protecting those working to secure our children's future. His dedication and sacrifice are commendable," said the Interior Minister.

The attack highlights the persistent challenges faced by healthcare workers and security personnel involved in the polio eradication campaign in Pakistan. Authorities have vowed to take stringent action against those responsible for the assault.

PNCA to host two-day cultural events on Kashmir Solidarity Day

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Pakistan National Council of the Arts (PNCA), in collaboration with the Ministry of Kashmir Affairs and Gilgit Baltistan will arrange a series of cultural events from February 4-5 at Pakistan to mark Kashmir Solidarity Day.

According to an official of PNCA, the events are aimed at highlighting the struggles, sacrifices, and resilience of the Kashmiri people through various artistic expressions, including documentaries, photography, theatre, puppetry, and traditional folk music.

The activities will begin with a special documentary screening and a photographic exhibition, running from February 04 to 05 in the main lobby of PNCA. The exhibition will feature a powerful visual narrative

of the historical and ongoing struggle of Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJK), along with captivating images showcasing the region's breathtaking landscapes and rich cultural heritage.

On February 05, a special puppet show will take place at PNCA Hall to engage younger audiences by creatively depicting the resilience of Kashmiris through the art of puppetry.

While a theatre drama titled "Katehra" will be staged as a part of the activities. The play, set in a courtroom, symbolizes the oppression faced by Kashmiris and their unyielding struggle for justice and self-determination.

The evening will conclude with a Kashmiri Folk Music Night which will feature renowned

Kashmiri folk artists performing soulful melodies that reflect the deep cultural roots, love, and resilience of the Kashmiri people.

PNCA has invited the public to attend these events to express solidarity with the people of Kashmir and appreciate the artistic portrayal of their ongoing struggle.

The event is expected to witness participation from the government officials, diplomats, artists, and cultural enthusiasts, making it a significant occasion to reaffirm Pakistan's unwavering support for the Kashmiri cause.

It is a regular feature for PNCA to mark Kashmir Solidarity Day through arranging such activities to educate the younger generation about the Kashmir cause.

SSP leads crackdown on kite selling, nabs five

ISLAMABAD (APP): Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) Police have intensified their crackdown on kite sellers, arresting five individuals and seizing more than 50,000 kites and 10,000 spools of string in an ongoing operation against the illegal practice.

Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Operations, Muhammad Shoaib Khan, held a press conference on Monday at the Rescue 15 Field Office, highlighting the police's efforts to curb kite selling and flying in the federal capital.

SSP Shoaib Khan said that as part of the operation, ICT Police, particularly Shahzad Town Police Station, led successful raids that resulted in the arrest of five kite sellers.

He stated that multiple police teams have been deployed to track down

and apprehend more offenders, with numerous cases already registered against violators.

Addressing the media, SSP Shoaib Khan emphasized that kite flying and selling are illegal and pose serious risks to public safety. "Kite flying is a dangerous and unlawful activity. Those involved will face strict legal consequences," he warned.

Shoaib Khan urged parents to educate their children about the dangers and legal implications of kite flying and called on citizens to fulfill their social and legal responsibilities in preventing this menace.

A public relations officer told APP that ICT Police have also launched awareness campaigns across the city, including announcements in mosques within police station jurisdictions, to inform residents about the

risks associated with kite flying. "This dangerous activity can lead to life-long disabilities or even fatalities," the SSP cautioned, assuring that the crackdown will continue with full force.

In addition to taking action against kite sellers, SSP Shoaib Khan reiterated that ICT Police have adopted a zero-tolerance policy against illegal weapons, drug trafficking, and land mafias. "We are conducting indiscriminate operations against those involved in such crimes. Patrol units have been further mobilized, and strategic changes have been made to enhance their effectiveness," he stated.

Shoaib Khan reaffirmed the police force's commitment to ensuring public safety, emphasizing that protecting lives and property remains their top priority.

Pakistan supporting Kashmir cause politically, diplomatically: Dr Tariq

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) MNA, Dr Tariq Fazal Chaudhry on Monday said that Pakistan was supporting Kashmir cause politically, diplomatically and morally to pressurize India to impede its atrocities against innocent Kashmiri people who were struggling for fundamental right to self-determination.

Addressing a press conference, Dr Tariq who is member of Parliamentary Committee on Kashmir, expressed the commitment that Pakistan and Kashmiris across the world would observe Kashmir Solidarity Day with enthusiasm and zeal to give strapping message to India that Pakistani people were standing with Kashmiris in this difficult time.

He said that the present government and all previous governments of Pakistan had highlighted India's gruesome human rights violations in Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJK) at all available international forums. "We want resolution of Kashmir issue as per United Nations' Charters and all its resolutions to give Kashmiris plebiscite which is their long-lasting

demands," he added.

Dr Tariq urged the internationally community to play its more effective role to elevate voice for Kashmiri people as compared to past and reiterated that Kashmiris were continuing their struggle for right to self-determination for decades.

He stressed that durable peace in South Asia could not be established without resolution of Kashmir dispute, adding that India killed thousands of Kashmiris, several injured by Indian troops through using pellets guns and imposed black laws despite that Kashmiri people were continuing their freedom movement against India tyranny.

MNA said that Kashmir cause was a so close to Pakistani masses' hearts and same else Kashmiris were breathing for Pakistan, who was appraising the world regarding Indian human rights violation in IIOJK comprehensively.

Talking about Kashmir Solidarity Day on February 05, Dr Tariq Fazal said that walks, rallies, seminars, and other event would be arranged in federal capital, provincials' capitals, districts levels and Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) to give

effective message and show unwavering commitment that we all were with IIOJK people.

He informed that main walk would be organized at Constitutional avenue here which will attend by political leaders, students, media men and people belong to various segments of society.

MNA said that Pakistan Television and private channels will telecast their programmes and documentaries to highlight Indian barbarism on oppressed Kashmiri people. "As banners and stickers have already displayed on various points in the federal capitals and provincials' capitals regarding the Kashmir solidarity day," he maintained.

He said that political leaders would make human chain at five points of AJK while Pakistani foreign mission will also organize event to expresses the solidarity with Kashmiris. Responding to a question, he said that the present government was committed to tackle all issues about AJK, adding that Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif always showed commitment to resolve the matters of AJK and initiated development projects there.

Patients for treatment referred

KABUL (BNA): The Afghan Red Crescent Society (ARCS) has announced that it will provide critical treatment for 28 patients diagnosed with heart hole conditions by referring them to six hospitals in Kabul. This initiative underscores ARCS's ongoing commitment to addressing healthcare needs within the community. In previous efforts, the society has facilitated the treatment of children with similar conditions, both domestically and abroad.

5 health centers constructed

WARDAK (BNA): The Public Health Directorate has announced that over 90% of residents in Maidan Wardak province now have access to essential healthcare services. Dr. Rasool Khan Nazari, the Director of Public Health for the province, confirmed to a reporter from the Bakhtar News Agency that this year, the department has successfully constructed five health centers and two ambulance buildings across the districts of Narkh, Saydabad, and Chak.

Kabul residents face high food prices despite dollar drop

KABUL (TOLONews): Some residents of Kabul complain about the high prices of food items, saying that despite the decrease in the dollar exchange rate, the prices of essential goods remain high. According to reports, since last Sunday, the value of one US dollar has dropped by about 5 afghani. Based on the latest announcement from the Central Bank, today's exchange rate for one US dollar is set at 73.85 afghani. "Everything has become expensive, not just flour, but also gas, oil, rice, potatoes, and onions have increased in price," stated Mohammad Anwar, a Kabul resident. "When the dollar rate goes up, traders increase

food prices, but when the dollar rate goes down, there is no change in prices," said Samiullah, another Kabul resident. "Both the government and traders have the ability to reduce prices, but ordinary people do not have such power," said Mahmood, another resident of Kabul. The Afghanistan Chamber of Commerce and Investment said that fluctuations in the dollar rate affect food prices and hopes that practical steps will be taken to lower prices. "The supply of afghani in the market has decreased, which has led to an increase in the dollar rate. Efforts should be made to ensure that this increase does not signifi-

cantly affect prices, and both the Islamic Emirate and traders should pay attention to this issue," said Khan Jan Alokozai, a member of the chamber's board of directors. Meanwhile, the Kabul Municipality emphasizes that it is working to control prices in the markets. "The Kabul Municipality is making every effort to prevent overpricing, and the prices set by the Commission for the Prevention of Hoarding and Price Control should be implemented in the markets," stated Nematullah Barakzai, a representative of Kabul Municipality. Afghanistan is one of the countries that imports most of its essential goods from abroad.

Trade with Central Asia reaches \$1.6m

KABUL (TOLONews): The Ministry of Industry and Commerce has announced that during the current solar year, Afghanistan's trade with five Central Asian countries has reached a value of \$1.696 billion. According to Akhundzada Abdul Salam Jawad, the ministry's spokesperson, \$112 million of this amount consists of exports, while \$1.584 billion accounts for imports. "The trade between Afghanistan and the Central Asian countries—Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Turkmenistan—continued normally over the past ten months of solar year 1403, reaching a total value of \$1.696 billion, of which \$112 million were exports and \$1.584 billion were imports," said the spokesperson. Afghanistan's exports to these countries included fresh and dried fruits, various juices, talc stone, and agricultural products such as asafetida (hing), potatoes, and onions. In return, Afghanistan imported electricity, fuel, wheat flour, cooking oil, raw materials for factories, chemical fertilizers, and cement from Central Asian countries. Economic experts believe the increase in trade between Afghanistan and Central Asia is valuable for regional and international trade growth and emphasize the need for further expansion of commercial ties. "Central Asian countries can be a good market for us. If you look at it, they largely want to connect South Asia with Central Asia through Afghanistan after the Ukraine war. However, unfortunately, Afghanistan faces many challenges," said Mohammad Nabi Afghan, an economic analyst. "Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan are Afghanistan's neighboring countries. When Afghanistan's economic strategy is implemented, we primarily need to engage with our neighbors," said Mohammad Asif Stanikzai, another economic analyst. According to statistics, Afghanistan's total trade value in 2024 amounted to \$12.422 billion, with \$1.803 billion in exports and \$10.619 billion in imports.

High-level meeting at Presidential Palace focuses on administrative reforms



KABUL (BNA): A meeting convened at the Presidential Palace, organized by the Directorate of Administrative Reforms and Civil Services, aimed at advancing the simplification and standardization of operations within various ministries and departments of the Islamic Emirate. In an official statement, Mufti Shahzad Noor Rashid, the head of the Directorate, reported remarkable progress since the Islamic Emirate took governance. His team has simplified 938 administrative processes, conducted capacity-building workshops for 10,000 individuals nationwide, and facilitated the recruitment of 31,025 personnel

through open competitive examinations. Mufti Shahzad emphasized that these simplifications are only a part of a larger reform agenda. A key focus moving forward is the establishment of electronic exam centers, which he believes will enhance efficiency and provide a more accessible system for citizens interacting with government services. Deputy Prime Minister for Administration, Maulvi Abdul Salam Hanafi, addressed the meeting, stressing the necessity of simplification and standardization in achieving strategic goals and fostering economic growth. He remarked, "These are core

principles for all administrative functions. Without implementing them, we will not be able to fully achieve our strategic goals or foster the economic growth that Afghanistan needs." Mawlawi Hanafi pointed out that many government institutions still rely on outdated procedures that require urgent reform, which not only obstructs development but also leads to public dissatisfaction. He argued that successful administrative reforms are crucial for the nation's economic development, proper budget management, and the execution of developmental projects. The Deputy Prime Minister highlighted that reduc-

ing unnecessary bureaucracy, lowering costs, and ensuring timely service delivery are essential for creating a more efficient government. He reiterated the pivotal role of the Department of Simplification and stressed that e-government reforms are critical to the overall success of these efforts. In conclusion, Mawlawi Hanafi urged all government officials to prioritize their responsibilities, enhance service quality, and work collaboratively to eliminate unnecessary paperwork and administrative bottlenecks. The Islamic Emirate remains committed to implementing these vital reforms across the country.

US aid cuts won't harm environmental projects



KABUL (TOLONews): The National Environmental Protection Agency (NEPA) stated that the suspension of US foreign aid has had no impact on Afghanistan's environmental projects. Noorullah Amin, head of climate change at the agency, said that international organizations working in environmental protection have approved four proposed projects from Afghanistan's NEPA. Amin said: "Fortunately, our four projects have been approved by the Multilateral Fund and the Environmental Facilities Fund. The implementation of environmental projects has not faced any signifi-

cant impact, and fortunately, progress has been made in this area." NEPA said that since the beginning of winter, 3,644 businesses, including high-rise buildings and factories, have been inspected, and currently, no high-rise building operates without a filter. Zainul Abedin Abid, the deputy of the agency, said that air pollution levels in the first ten months of this year have decreased compared to last year. He also announced plans to improve the country's air and water quality. "Climate change is a humanitarian issue, and interaction should be the

approach in this regard. Instead of political considerations, a cooperative approach should be adopted because these changes have the greatest impact on the elderly, children, and women in society," said Abid. Abid also called on the international community not to politicize the issue of climate change and to compensate affected countries, including Afghanistan. The deputy of NEPA said: "This year, the agency has finalized seven measures that contribute to reducing and preventing air pollution. These measures have been submitted to the high leadership, and some have already been approved." The head of climate change at the agency also announced the completion of Afghanistan's Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) document, its submission to the United Nations through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and ongoing work on a joint \$20 million plan with the Ministry of Energy and Water to manage the country's water resources.

Reconstruction of Herat's Great Mosque nears completion

HERAT (TOLONews): Local officials in Herat say that the restoration and reconstruction work on the Great Jami Mosque of this province, which suffered severe damage in last year's earthquake, is 90% complete. According to them, the minarets and iwans of this mosque, which endured the most damage, have now been rebuilt. The Great Jami Mosque of Herat is one of the masterpieces of Islamic architectural engineering, with a history spanning nearly a thousand years. It remains standing with its strong columns. Raqibullah Rezvani, the head of historical monuments at the Herat

Directorate of Information and Culture, said: "We were able to prevent the destruction of the minarets of the Great Jami Mosque. So far, the restoration work of six minarets has been completed, and only one remains, which will soon be finished. Additionally, the Maqsurah castle was restored last year after the earthquake, and the restoration of the northern and southern castles is still ongoing." Historical monument engineers emphasize that the historical authenticity of this mosque has been fully preserved during the restoration process, and all reconstruction steps are carried out in accordance

with its original architecture. Aziz Ahmad Rasooli, the head of the Great Jami Mosque restoration project, stated: "We are not making any changes to the structure of the mosque, and all restoration work is being done using traditional methods. The tiles used in the reconstruction are the same authentic traditional tiles, with no alterations to their color or design." The exterior walls of the Great Jami Mosque of Herat are adorned with traditional tiles and historical inscriptions. The craftsmanship of Herat's artisans over the centuries has enhanced the beauty of this valuable structure.

Cultural affairs expert Abdul Jalil Tawana said: "The Great Jami Mosque holds a special place in the Islamic world. All of Herat's historical monuments, including the Great Jami Mosque, Gazargah, the Citadel, the Musalla complex, and the historical structures of Chisht district, have immense cultural and historical value. Many domestic and international tourists visit Herat to see these unique historical sites and Islamic art." The Gran Jami Mosque of Herat is one of the largest mosques in the Islamic world, with a historical background spanning nearly a thousand years.

One dead in firing incident at UN Compound in Kabul

KABUL (Khaama Press): A shooting incident at a United Nations compound in Kabul has left one person dead and another injured, according to the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA). According to the report that a shooting incident at a United Nations compound

in Kabul has resulted in one death and one injury. The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) confirmed the incident in a statement on Monday. The statement revealed that Taliban guards were involved in the shooting. Authorities are currently

investigating the incident to determine the cause and circumstances. This is a developing story, and more details are expected as the investigation unfolds. The situation highlights ongoing tensions and security concerns in Afghanistan, especially

involving the Taliban's control over key locations. UNAMA has yet to provide further details about the identities of those involved or the exact circumstances of the shooting, but the incident raises concerns about the safety of international personnel in Afghanistan.

Acting Health Minister meets elders of Zarmat district

GARDIZ (BNA): Mawlawi Noor Jalal Jalali, the Acting Minister of Public Health, met with tribal elders from the Zarmat district of Paktia province at his office. According to the Ministry of Public Health, in the meeting the construction of a public hospital in Zarmat district and the necessary equipment were discussed. The tribal elders of Zarmat district emphasized the importance of providing quality health services to patients and requested the Ministry of Public Health's leadership to build a public hospital in the district.



The Acting Minister of Public Health, after listening to their requests and suggestions, assured that the ministry would address their concerns.

Officials tackle urban challenges

KABUL (BNA): Acting Minister of Housing and Urban Development, Sheikh Hamdullah Nomani, met with Kabul Governor Mawlawi Aminullah Obaid to discuss key urban challenges and ongoing development efforts in the capital. During the meeting, Governor Obaid highlighted the city's pressing issues, proposed solutions, and outlined current development initiatives. Discussions also covered major projects, including the New Kabul City national initiative, the Kabul Administrative Complex, mosque construction in the capital, urban expansion, and the importance of close collaboration between government agencies. Minister Nomani emphasized practical strategies aimed at resolving existing problems and laying the foundation for a more developed and well-organized Kabul.

Norwegian People's aid suspends operations

KABUL (TOLONews): Following the 85-day suspension of US foreign aid, the Norwegian People's Aid organization has now announced the cessation of its activities in 12 countries, including Afghanistan. In a statement, the organization said that the US State Department has instructed them to immediately halt all activities related to US financial aid. "The leaders of the Islamic Emirate should invest in larger projects, just as they have started work on some initiatives so that the people of Afghanistan can find employment in them," said Ismail Zadrani, an economic analyst. Previously, the Ministry of Economy had also announced the suspension of operations of 50 aid organizations in Afghanistan. The ministry emphasized that organizations operating in vital sectors

are crucial and stressed that essential activities related to security, preventing human casualties, poverty reduction, and addressing environmental challenges should not be politicized. Abdul Rahman Habib, spokesperson for the Ministry of Economy, said: "Due to the prolonged imposed wars, a significant amount of landmines and unexploded ordnance pose a serious threat to our people in various parts of the country. The suspension of certain essential activities by some foreign organizations in this area, due to changes in US policy, has led to a loss of trust in the principles and objectives of humanitarian aid and respect for human dignity under the United Nations framework worldwide." Unemployment and poverty have forced some Afghan citizens, particularly Kabul residents, to wait

on the streets of the capital for daily wage work. Javid, a 55-year-old man, waits daily on a Kabul street in the hope of finding a job. Supporting a family of nine, he said that over the past month, he has only found work twice. "There is no work. You see these people—they are extremely needy. Many of them don't even have lunch, let alone knowing how they will get through the night," said Javid, a resident of Kabul. Meanwhile, following the suspension of US foreign aid, the United States Agency for International Development's website has gone offline without providing any details. These developments come as a US senator has once again urged the country's president to halt the weekly transfer of \$40 million in aid to the Islamic Emirate.

Iran requests IEA's cooperation to open new Bamiyan hospital



KABUL (Ariana News): Iran's acting ambassador in Kabul, Ali Reza Bikdeli,

has asked the governor of Bamiyan province to speak to the Islamic Emirate's leadership to allow the inauguration of the newly-built 120-bed Khomeini

Hospital in the province. According to a press release from the governor's office, Bikdeli stressed that the construction of the hospital has been completed, but they have faced challenges in terms of opening the facility. Bamiyan Governor Abdullah Sarhadi has assured him that he will discuss the matter with the leadership of the Islamic Emirate. Meanwhile, Afghanistan's acting ambassador in Tehran and the Afghan consul general in Mashhad recently met with Iranian Foreign Ministry officials to discuss the expansion of bilateral relations as well as consular issues.

Steps taken for peace in province, says KP CM

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur has announced significant progress in overcoming major challenges in Kurram district through the traditional Jirga system.

Speaking to the media, Gandapur emphasized that the government has taken serious actions to establish peace in the region and will take stringent measures against those who obstruct peace. He specifically mentioned that miscreants in some areas of Kurram have been identified and dealt with, ensuring the eradication of the issue from its roots.

"Jirgas have played a crucial role in solving ongoing problems in Kurram, which has been a recurring challenge. The government is fully committed to facing every challenge head-on. Bunkers, which were once a barrier to peace, are now being demolished daily. Additionally, we have delivered four large consignments of ration to the area," said Gandapur.

In a related development, a Jirga held in Islamabad to foster peace in Kurram concluded on a positive note. The gathering, hosted at the residence of former Senator Sajjad Syed Mian, began with a meal for the elders before the formal discussions began.

Mian addressed the attendees, stressing the importance of unity among the elders in the region to facilitate lasting peace. "The people of Kurram are yearning for peace and our collective efforts will help bring it," he said. The Jirga focused on critical issues, including the prevention of social media misuse and the establishment of peace in the region. The elders agreed on measures to ensure the protection of each other's rights and discussed legal actions against individuals spreading hate speech online. The second session of the Jirga, which will involve elders from both sides, is scheduled to take place in Peshawar.

The security situation in Kurram has been tense, with shootings and clashes causing the closure of transportation routes for the past four months, leaving over half a million

people trapped in the area. In response, the local Jirga has proposed strict legal action and severe punishments for those found responsible for spreading hateful content on social media. Efforts to bring peace to Kurram through the Jirga system and government action continue to show promise, with optimism that lasting peace and order will soon be restored in the region.

KP CM directs strict monitoring of teachers' attendance in schools: Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Ali Amin Khan Gandapur, chaired a high-level meeting on Monday at the Chief Minister's Secretariat, to take stock of the performance, mandate, and challenges of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Education Monitoring Authority (KPEMA). Senior officials, including Secretary Education Masood Ahmad, Director Education Samina Altaf, and KPEMA Director General Sohail Khan and others attended the meeting.

In the meeting, Chief Minister issued directives for the urgent provision of furniture to government schools. He further directed that data should be collected on missing facilities in the schools; and desks and chairs should be provided immediately. "No student in government schools should have to study without proper seating arrangements", he made it clear and directed the high ups of education department to address other essential facilities missing in schools.

He also directed for the immediate construction of boundary walls and washrooms, with priority given to girls' schools. He assured that the government would provide all necessary resources on a priority basis to improve schools' infrastructure. In order to enhance the quality of education in remote areas, the Chief Minister directed strict monitoring of teachers' attendance and called for reinstating rewards for high-performing schools and teachers simultaneously. He mandated disciplinary action against underperforming teachers and schools, stressing that absenteeism among teachers in government schools would not be tolerated.

He affirmed that actions based on

KPEMA reports would be implemented without delay. Chief Minister agreed with the proposal for establishing a dedicated wing for ensuring quality education in public sector schools within KPEMA and instructed officials to formalize the proposal for approval. Additionally, he directed that monthly provincial review meetings of authority be held on monthly basis. In order to further strengthen KPEMA, the Chief Minister instructed the finance department to provide required funds for providing modern gadgets and digitizing all monitoring processes.

Officials briefed the meeting that every government school in the province is inspected at least once a month. The province has a total of 34,724 government schools, including 28,372 in settled districts and 6,397 in merged districts. Additionally, 2,174 girls' community schools and 1,074 double-shift schools are also under monitoring. The meeting was informed that monthly monitoring and annual school censuses are conducted using android app, ensuring real-time uploads. The reports and analytics are made available online for all stakeholders.

Officials further reported a significant reduction in teacher absenteeism, with rates dropping from 23% to 14% in settled districts and from 27% to 23% in merged districts. The Chief Minister directed further efforts to bring absenteeism down to zero. To enhance transparency and reduce human intervention, KPEMA launched the Online Action Information Management System last year.

Through this system, 27,856 actions have been reported by KPEMA, while district education officers have taken 11,503 actions, resulting in fines amounting to Rs. 12 million. Moreover, the monitoring authority's data collection on textbook requirements led to cost savings of Rs. 7 billion for the 2024-25 academic year. The Chief Minister reiterated the government's commitment to ensuring quality education for all students and pledged continued efforts to improve public schooling across the province.



ISLAMABAD: Ambassador of Japan, Akamatsu Shuichi called on Naval Staff Admiral Naveed Ashraf at Naval Headquarters.

Cop martyred in Jamrud

F.P. Report

JAMRUD: A police cop was shot dead by unknown assailants at Ghandi, Sekhi Pul area of Tehsil Jamrud; district Khyber on Monday, when he was reportedly conducting security of polio vaccination team.

The local police official while confirming the mishap said that the deceased, Constable Abdul Khaleq was on his way to carry out his official duty in polio campaign when he was intercepted by unknown motorcycle riders who opened indiscriminate firing on him and killed him on the spot.

The killer successfully managed to escape after committing the assault, the official added. Soon after the incident, the security forces officials rushed to the site, cordoned off the area and shifted the body to Jamrud health center for the medico-legal formalities.

Evidence was collected from the spot and investigation was initiated to trace the killers, official informed. Last month a local polio worker was reportedly threatened by unidentified armed motorcycle riders in Jamrud. It is to be mentioned here that in other parts of KP, a seven days long polio campaign has begun in Khyber on Monday in which 0.208 million children below five years will be vaccinated against the disease.

PECA aims to curb fake news: Tarar

F.P. Report

LAHORE: 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, he emphasized that social media could not 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 were 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 would also be part of its tribunal. The authority will ensure swift decision-making, with tribunals required to pass orders within 24 hours, and appeals could be made to the High Court and Supreme Court. The minister assured that all stakeholders would 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 had 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 further highlighted the vital role of national institutions like Pakistan Television (PTV), Radio Pakistan, and APP in promoting Pakistan's image globally.

Recognizing the struggles of journalists, Tarar assured that addressing their challenges remains a top priority. He announced that funds would be allocated in the upcoming budget for journalists who pass away during service. 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 employees 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.

Meanwhile, the Federal Minister for Information, Broadcasting, National Heritage and Culture Attaullah Tarar and Prime Minister's Media Coordinator Badar Shahbaz Warraich also visited the residence of DG PEMRA (Legal) Tahir Farooq Tarar, to offer condolences on the death of his elder brother Mukhtar Ahmed Tarar. The Federal Minister for Information and the Prime Minister's Media Coordinator expressed their heartfelt condolences and sympathy to Tahir Farooq Tarar and other family members and offered Fateha for the departed soul. The minister said he was deeply saddened to hear the news of the demise of Tahir Farooq Tarar's elder brother.

Sindh Assembly passes agri tax law

F.P. Report

KARACHI: The Sindh Assembly on Monday passed the Sindh Agricultural Income Tax Bill 2025 into law as part of Pakistan's commitments under the International Monetary Fund (IMF) programme, while expressing grievances over the Centre's failure to engage provinces in talks with the lender of the last resort.

The law seen as part of Pakistan's economic reforms under the IMF's \$7 billion agreement spanning 37 months, entails increased tax on agricultural incomes while underscoring the need to boost revenue collection and reduce recurrent deficit to complete the loan programme.

A provincial cabinet meeting, chaired by Sindh Chief Minister Murad Ali Shah, earlier approved the proposed law. Shah, while addressing the Sindh Assembly session, fiercely defended the province's taxation policies, pointing out that agricultural tax was already in place and being collected.

Slamming the federal government's move to transfer tax collection to the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR), the CM accused the federal government of deliberately keeping provinces out of the loop when it discussed a loan deal with the IMF. "The FBR itself told the IMF that agriculture is not taxed," Murad said, adding that the federal government initially assigned FBR to collect the tax last May but later forced provinces to implement the measure.

"The FBR has failed to meet its targets while burdening taxpayers further," the CM said. Shah also highlighted Sindh's stance on provincial

autonomy, asserting that the Sindh Revenue Board (SRB) has consistently met its targets and that sales tax should be handed over to provinces. He noted that Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa had already passed the agricultural tax bill, while Balochistan's cabinet had also approved it.

"We don't want the IMF programme to suffer because of us, but rushing this tax will create problems," he said, adding that the implementation timeline had already been pushed to January 2025 and later to September 30. Pointing to drought-like conditions in parts of Sindh, he highlighted that the persistent shortage of irrigation water was affecting thousands of acres of farmland, including his own, which had become barren due to the construction of a dam. "Hasty decisions on taxation can disrupt farming," the CM said, emphasising the importance of agriculture for food security. Earlier, Sindh Law Minister Zia Lanjar, while presenting the bill, stated that the tax formula had been structured under the existing regime, emphasising Pakistan had to fulfil several agreements under the IMF programme.

This progressive legislation aims to strengthen the province's tax collection framework and enhance fiscal responsibility within the agricultural sector. Under this new law, the Sindh Revenue Board (SRB) will be the authority responsible for collecting and enforcing the agricultural income tax, ensuring a streamlined and efficient process.

The law proposes that agricultural income up to Rs600,000 annually will be exempt from tax, while the maximum tax rate for income

exceeding Rs5.6 million annually will be 45%. Agricultural income has historically been taxed much lower than other sectors, despite contributing 23% to the GDP, employing 35% of the labour force, and bringing in an annual income of around Rs9 trillion.

A progressive super tax has also been introduced, with no super tax on annual agricultural income up to Rs150 million and a maximum of 10% super tax applying to income exceeding Rs500 million annually. Additionally, the law aims to include corporate farming in the tax net. Small companies will be subject to a 20% tax rate on their annual agricultural income, while large companies will face a tax rate of 29%.

Notably, livestock has not been included in the tax net, and the advance agricultural income tax, based on land cultivation, will no longer be levied. The payment, collection, and filing of agricultural income tax will be fully automated for greater efficiency. The new landmark law represents a significant policy shift by assigning the administration of the Agricultural Income Tax to the SRB, which has a proven track record in tax collection, according to a Sindh government statement.

"It is expected that this new legislation will broaden the tax base, improve transparency, and ensure equitable contributions from the agricultural sector, which is vital to Sindh's economy," the statement added. Pakistan, which aims to boost its finances after securing a \$7 billion IMF bailout in September 2024, with the first review set for late February, has been struggling with boom-and-bust cycles for decades, leading to 22 IMF bailouts since 1958.

President embarks on state visit to China today

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: President Asif Ali Zardari will undertake a five-day state visit to China from today (Tuesday) at the invitation of Chinese President Xi Jinping. During the visit, the President would hold meetings with Chinese leadership, including President Xi Jinping, Premier Li Qiang and other senior Chinese leaders in Beijing.

The discussions will encompass the full spectrum of Pakistan-China relations, with a particular focus on economic and trade cooperation, counter-terrorism and security collaboration, China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and future connectivity initiatives. The two sides would also exchange views on the unfolding global and regional geopolitical landscape, and bilateral cooperation at multilateral fora. At the special invitation of the Chinese government, the President would also attend the inaugural ceremony of the 9th Asian Winter Games in Harbin, Heilongjiang province of China.

Car bombing kills 20 in Syria's Manbij

DAMASCUS: A car bomb has killed at least 20 people and injured many others on the outskirts of Manbij in northern Syria, the Syrian presidency has said. Monday's blast was the deadliest attack in the country since the fall of President Bashar al-Assad in December of last year. The incident was also the seventh car bombing in just over a month in the area, which has seen fighting between Turkish-backed forces and a Kurdish-dominated group.

The office of Syria's new President Ahmed al-Sharaa condemned the "terrorist" attack, saying that it will pursue accountability for the incident. "This crime will not pass without the strongest punishment for its perpetrators, so they become an example for anyone who considers compromising Syria's security or harming its people," the presidency said.

Hospital workers told the Associated Press news agency on Monday that

the car detonated near a vehicle at night carrying mostly agricultural workers.

The Syrian Civil Defence, known as the White Helmets, said at least 11 women and three children were killed in the attack.



"Everyone of these victims had families and dreams," the rescue group said in a statement. "Their effort to earn a living turned into death and wounds. Justice for them must be achieved, and the perpetrators of this crime must be held accountable." So far, no group has claimed responsibility for the explosion.

On Saturday, a car bombing in the city also killed four people and wounded nine others, state news agency SANA reported. Jameel al-Sayyid, a Manbij activist and journalist, told the Associated Press that the recurring attacks have forced residents to become more vigilant. "There are efforts from the people of Manbij to focus on protecting some

neighbourhoods as well as setting up surveillance cameras in the main neighbourhoods of the city," al-Sayyid said.

Throughout the Syrian war, which began in 2011, control over Manbij – which sits to the south of the Turkish border and to the east of Aleppo – has changed numerous times. In December, Turkish-backed groups captured it from the US-backed, Kurdish-dominated Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), which denounced Monday's bombing. The SDF suggested – without evidence – that what it called Turkiye's "mercenaries" are behind the attack.

Turkiye, a NATO ally of the US, views the SDF as an extension of the People's Protection Units (YPG) and the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), which it considers "terrorist" groups. Al-Sharaa, a former rebel leader who assumed the presidency on a transitional basis earlier this month, is set to visit Turkiye later this week. — Aljazeera






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