

Bilawal setup Election Board
F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Chairman PPP, Bilawal Bhutto Zardari has constituted Party's Election Board for holding the Intra-Party elections. Fauzia Habib has been appointed as the convener of the Election Board. Amir Fida and Syed Sibtul Haider Bukhari have been appointed as members of the Board, Bilawal has instructed the Election Board to hold the Intra-Party elections in five weeks.



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President calls for political stability

— urges salaries, pensions raise in next budget, avoid downsizing; Pakistan to continue to play a role of responsible, peace-loving nation

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: President Asif Ali Zardari on Monday calling for enhanced cooperation with friendly regional countries in the areas of trade, economy, and climate and culture exchanges, reiterated that Pakistan would continue to play its role as a responsible and peace-loving nation.

The president, in his eighth address to the joint session of the parliament to mark the start of the new parliamentary year, said that Pakistan remained committed to regional peace, stability, and economic integration. He said that Pakistan's foreign policy would always be guided by national interests, international cooperation, and the principles of sovereignty and mutual respect.

Calling the "time-tested" ties with China a cornerstone of Pakistan's diplomacy, he said the country would continue to further strengthen economic and strategic ties with Beijing. "We will further cement our All-Weather Strategic Cooperative Partnership with China and continue to support the One-China Policy," he said and recalled his "fruitful" discussions with the Chinese leadership during his recent visit to China in which he invited them to make more investments in CPEC to improve regional and economic integration.

President Zardari said that both nations had reaffirmed their commitment to further strengthening economic cooperation and that the benefits of China Pakistan Economic Corridor would reach every corner of Pakistan. He deeply appreciated the support of "trusted" friends including Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Türkiye, and others who have stood by Pakistan in times of economic challenges.

"We are committed to further strengthening our longstanding historical, cultural, and economic ties with the friendly nations of the Gulf and Central Asia as well as the European

Union, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America," he stated. Referring to the arrest of top-tier ISKP terrorist Sharifullah, he said that the recent successful counterterrorism cooperation between the US and Pakistan was encouraging and both the nations should build on these successes to renew and enhance cooperation for joint goals.

President Asif Ali Zardari urged the federal government to increase salaries and pensions in the upcoming budget and reduce income taxes on salaried classes besides focusing on creating jobs, instead of downsizing. The president, in his annual address to the joint session of the parliament marking the beginning of the new parliamentary year, said that the common man, the labourers, and the salaried class were facing serious economic hardships with the people burdened by inflation, high prices of essential items, and rising energy costs.

He said that in the next budget, the Parliament and the government should provide real relief to the people. The government should take measures in the forthcoming budget to increase salaries and pensions, reduce income taxes on salaried classes and lower energy costs, which would help reduce the financial burden on them.

"At the same time, we should avoid downsizing and job cuts. Instead, our focus should be on creating jobs and utilizing trained manpower productively," the president added. President Zardari, who had the distinction of being the first civilian president to address the parliament for the eighth time, also called for promoting inclusive and uniform development, ensuring that no province, no district, and no village is left behind.

"The ignored and neglected areas demand urgent attention from the federal government. They also need investments in infrastructure, education, healthcare, and economic opportunities to address their sense of deprivation." President urged the parlia-



ment to empower the people, make decisions of national importance with consensus, encourage domestic and international investments for economic growth and job creation, foster social and economic justice, and ensure fairness and transparency in the system.

"As we embark on this new parliamentary year, I urge this House to focus on promoting good governance, and political and economic stability. Our people have pinned their hopes on parliament, and we must rise to meet their expectations. It is my first duty to remind you we need to work harder to strengthen our democratic system, restore public confidence in the rule of law, and put Pakistan on the road to prosperity," the president said in his address to the joint session of Parliament at the beginning of the 2nd parliamentary year.

As a civilian president to address the joint session of parliament for the 8th time at the beginning of a new President for national decisions with consensus, encouraging investment, fostering social, economic justice parliamentary year, the president stressed that the House should fulfill the responsibility entrusted to it and play its role in nation-building,

strengthening institutions and improving governance. In this regard, he said improving the taxation system was essential to moving forward as a country and called for reforming and expanding the tax net—not by overburdening those who already contribute, but by ensuring that every eligible taxpayer participated in nation-building. "The government should take measures in the forthcoming budget to increase salaries and pensions, reduce income taxes on salaried classes and lower energy costs, which would help reduce the financial burden on them. At the same time, we should avoid downsizing and job cuts. Instead, our focus should be on creating jobs and utilizing trained manpower productively," he added.

The session jointly chaired by Speaker of the National Assembly Sardar Ayaz Sadiq and Chairman Senate Syed Yousaf Raza Gilani, was attended by Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif and members of both houses of parliament, besides, governors, chief ministers, members of diplomatic corps, and media witnessed the proceedings from the galleries. The president spelled out a set of guidelines for the parliament and the incumbent government for the

economic and social growth ensuring political stability.

President for national decisions with consensus, encouraging investment, fostering social, economic justice. The president observed that the population dynamics of the country had changed. A combination of factors presented challenges they must address.

"The high rate of our population growth along with strategic drift in our administrative machinery has increased governance issues manifold. It is my considered opinion that this House should take its responsibilities seriously, and play its role in a real set of our governance and service delivery outcomes," he added. He said that they should work actively to promote inclusive and uniform development, ensuring that no province, no district, and no village was left behind. This House should ensure that development was not limited to a few selected areas but reached every nook and corner of the country. The ignored and neglected areas demanded urgent attention from the federal government.

The president said that they also needed investments in infrastructure, education, healthcare, and economic opportunities to address their sense of deprivation. Parliament was the one forum where any sense of deprivation could not just be aired constructively but also addressed with political empathy by the executive branch that was the test of real statecraft.

President Zardari observed that Pakistan should also diversify its exports, focusing on value-added goods and services. To explore new markets and build a competitive export-oriented economy, they needed to make our IT industry the key driver of economic growth. "We should focus on building digital and information highways, investing in IT parks, enhancing internet accessibility and speed, and supporting the growth of our technology-driven economy," he added.

The president also underlined the need of sustained support for small and medium enterprises, highlighting ensuring of easier access to credit, address procedural and bureaucratic hurdles, and creating of policies that promoted youth-led businesses. The young people should be encouraged to enter the business world through SME-focused programs, skill development initiatives, and accessible loan schemes, he suggested.

He further urged the House to play its role in improving the ease of doing business. Investors, small businesses, and international companies must find Pakistan an attractive destination for investment. "Today the common man, the labourers, and the salaried class are facing serious economic hardships. Our citizens are burdened by inflation, high prices of essential items, and rising energy costs," he said, urging the parliament and the government to provide real relief to the people.

The president noted that women constituted almost 50 per cent of the country's population but they were under-represented in every aspect of life. It was essential to empower them by enhancing their representation in various sectors. The most important intervention was to make women at the bottom of the social pyramid financially independent in accordance with the vision of Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto. The Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP) remained a crucial lifeline for millions of families. Its reach must be expanded, and cash transfers should be further enhanced, he added.

About country's youth that make up a huge proportion of current demographic, the president said that they needed hope and inspiration. "We should ensure that the children are not outside schools in Pakistan. Promoting higher education and enhancing research in universities should be our fundamental priority for creating a knowledge-based economy," he added.

SBP keeps policy rate at 12%

F.P. Report

KARACHI: At its meeting on Monday, the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) decided to keep the policy rate unchanged at 12 percent. The Committee noted that inflation in February 2025 turned out lower than expectation, mainly due to a drop in food and energy prices. Notwithstanding this decline, the Committee assessed the risks posed by the inherent volatility in these prices to the current declining trend in inflation.

At the same time, core inflation is proving to be more persistent at an elevated level and thus uptick in the food and energy prices may lead to increase in inflation. Meanwhile, economic activity continues to gain traction, as reflected in the latest high-frequency economic indicators. Moreover, the MPC viewed that some pressures on the external account have emerged due to rising imports amidst weak financial inflows. On balance, the MPC assessed the current real interest rate to be adequately positive on forward-looking basis to sustain the ongoing macroeconomic stability.

The Committee noted the following key developments since its last meeting. First, the current account turned into a deficit of \$0.4 billion in January 2025 after remaining in surplus over the past few months. This, coupled with weak financial inflows and ongoing debt repayments, led to a decline in the SBP's FX reserves. Second, large-scale manufacturing output declined during H1-FY25, despite a substantial m/m increase of 19.1 percent in December 2024.

Third, the shortfall in tax revenues from target widened further in January

and February. Fourth, both consumer and business sentiments improved during the latest waves. And lastly, on the global front, uncertainty has increased significantly amidst the ongoing tariff escalations, which may have implications for global economic growth, trade and commodity prices. In response to these developments, central banks in advanced and emerging economies have recently slowed the pace of their monetary easing.

Based on these developments, the Committee noted that the impact of sizable earlier reduction in policy rate is now materializing. The MPC reiterated the importance of maintaining a cautious monetary policy stance to stabilize inflation within the target range of 5 - 7 percent. This, along with structural reforms, is essential to achieve sustainable economic growth.

High-frequency indicators - including sales of automobiles, POL products and cement, as well as import volumes, credit to private sector, and purchasing managers' index - show that economic activity is gaining further traction. Moreover, latest pulse surveys show improved consumer and business confidence. Nonetheless, the Committee noted that the momentum depicted by these indicators is yet to fully reflect in LSM data, which contracted by 1.9 percent in H1-FY25.

The drag in LSM growth is mainly coming from a few low-weight sub-sectors, which have more than offset the positive momentum in key sub-sectors like textiles, pharmaceuticals, automobiles and POL. At the same time, in agriculture sector, latest information, including satellite imagery, indicates subsiding of downside risks

to Rabi crops after the recent rainfalls. The MPC expects economic growth to recover in H2-FY25 on the back of easing financial conditions. On balance, the Committee maintains its earlier real GDP growth projection of 2.5 - 3.5 percent for FY25, and expects economic activity to gain further momentum going forward.

Led by a broad-based acceleration in imports, the current account turned into a deficit in January 2025; shrinking the cumulative surplus to \$0.7 billion during July-January FY25. While import volumes have been rising consistently in line with the pickup in economic activity, the uptick in some global commodity prices further pushed up import payments in January.

However, robust workers' remittances, along with relatively moderate growth in exports, proved instrumental in financing the elevated imports. The MPC assessed that these developments are broadly in line with its expectation, and reaffirmed the FY25 current account balance projection of a surplus and a deficit of 0.5 percent of GDP. Nonetheless, net financial inflows remained weak, mainly due to a shortfall in planned official inflows.

At the same time, the MPC noted that the majority of debt repayments for the year have already been made. With lower debt repayments and expected realization of planned official inflows in the remaining months of FY25, the SBP's FX reserves are likely to reach above \$13 billion by June 2025. Going forward, the MPC emphasized the importance of strengthening external buffers in the presence of heightened global economic uncertainty.



PTI does not believe in mere claims, says Saif

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Advisor to the Chief Minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa on Information and Public Relations, Barrister Dr. Saif, has stated that the provincial government of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) has successfully implemented another public-friendly and welfare-oriented project. Under this initiative, the Solarization of Houses Scheme has been officially launched in the province.

In the first phase, 32,500 households will be provided with solar systems, with deserving families being selected transparently. A total of 130,000 households will receive solar systems, which include solar panels, batteries, fans, and lights.

Barrister Dr. Saif further mentioned that 30,000 households from the newly merged districts are also included in this initiative. Commenting on the project, he stated that this is a revolutionary step by the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government towards addressing the energy crisis. Under the leadership of Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur, the provincial government believes in taking practical steps rather than making empty promises.

He emphasized that, unlike Form 47 governments, PTI does not believe in mere claims and announcements. Instead, it is committed to delivering real results. Providing ease and convenience to the people of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa remains a top priority for the provincial government. Unlike traditional politicians who rely on hollow slogans, PTI has demonstrated its commitment to public welfare through tangible development projects since assuming power.

PPP always support govt: PM

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif Monday said the federation, provinces and all the political parties should work together to create a better future for the country.

He was speaking at an Iftar dinner hosted in honour of Chairman Pakistan People's Party Bilawal Bhutto Zardari and his party's leaders. The delegation of Pakistan People's Party led by Bilawal Bhutto Zardari held a meeting with the prime minister here and expressed complete confidence in his government.

He appreciated the leadership of People's Party for coming up to the public expectations in the four provinces and for playing an effective and vibrant role in improving living standards of the common man by cooperating with the government. The participants of the meeting paid tribute to the prime minister and his team for their untiring efforts to introduce economic policies that brought recent economic stability.

They said that Pakistan People's Party would completely support the government for its every step for the country's progress, economic stability and for improving lives of the common man. Pakistan People's Party members thanked the prime minister for consulting the allies in government affairs, for respecting their opinions and taking them into confidence. The delegation of People's Party reiterated its determination to fully cooperate with the prime minister for the progress of the country's economy.

Shehbaz for effective awareness drive to enhance outreach of Rs 20bn Ramadan Package: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif directed the relevant ministries, State Bank of Pakistan and private partners to revisit the ongoing awareness drive on the Rs20 billion Ramadan Package to enhance its effective-

ness and outreach and address the gap between the disbursement and withdrawal.

The prime minister, during his visit to the National Telecommunication Corporation Headquarters to monitor the execution of the program, was told that the around 2.8 million entitled accounts had been credited with Rs5,000 each and 683,000 of those had withdrawn the amount. "As 94% of accounts had been established, the withdrawal ratio is just 22%. There is a big gap between disbursement and withdrawal which shows a lack of awareness among the people," the prime minister remarked and also asked the SBP governor to join the campaign to make as many people as possible benefit from the program.

He appreciated the relevant ministries and partners for the construction and execution of this "comprehensive and wonderful" program and accepting the challenge of supporting the entitled deserving people during the holy month of Ramadan. "This was a new concept to say goodbye to the Utility Stores forever due to the massive complaints of 'worst' corruption of public money, which was also an injustice to the common man. The issue of poor quality and corruption have been done away with through a new modern digital wallet," he remarked.

The prime minister said that four million families comprising over 20 million people from across the country would benefit from the program which was the first ever such initiative by the government to disburse the cash amount through a transparent mechanism without any issues of quality or transparency. The provision of Rs5,000 to each family would enable the beneficiary family to purchase the commodities of their own choice, he added. He said that a validation system was a main component of the program, providing immediate correction of any mistake.

SC bench hearing super tax case dissolved

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Supreme Court's constitutional bench hearing the super tax case faced a major disruption as it was dissolved mid-session on Monday, says in media reports.

During the hearing, Justice Aminuddin Khan, head of the five-member bench, stated that Justice Aamer Farooq had previously ruled on the matter at the Islamabad High Court (IHC) and could no longer hear the case. Company lawyers requested an adjournment until after Eid-ul-Fitr, but the court rejected the plea, deciding

instead to proceed with daily hearings.

Justice Muhammad Ali Mazhar remarked that the case should at least begin, noting that separate paper books should be prepared for Section 4B and 4C of the Income Tax Ordinance. The court also granted time for the parties to engage legal representation and adjourned the case until tomorrow (Tuesday).

It is pertinent to mention that on July 21, 2023, the IHC had declared the imposition of billions of rupees in super tax illegal. The verdict, delivered by Justice Sardar Ishaq Khan, also nullified all recovery notices and deemed Section

4C of the Income Tax Ordinance unlawful.

However, three weeks ago, the Lahore High Court (LHC) ruled in favour of the Super Tax but reduced the rate from 10% to 4% for 16 sectors, including banking.

Over 350 petitioners challenged the tax, with representatives from the federal government and the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) opposing their stance. Amid these legal battles, the federal government has once again announced the imposition of the Super Tax for the year 2023, reigniting controversy over the tax's legitimacy.

Severed human arm found
F.P. Report

KARACHI: An investigation has begun as to who had thrown a severed human arm in Block 19 of Gulshan-e-Iqbal locality of Karachi which had been detached from the body following an accident on Shahrah-e-Faisal. Meanwhile, CCTV camera footage has emerged in which two black cars could be seen passing through the site of the incident at 6:30 in the morning.

Two Pak Navy Commodores promoted

F.P. Report

KARACHI: Commodore Kamran Ahmed and Commodore Kashif Munir of Pakistan Navy have been promoted to the rank of Rear Admiral.

Rear Admiral Kamran Ahmed was commissioned in Construction Branch of Pakistan Navy in 1993. The Flag Officer is a graduate of Pakistan Navy War College, Lahore and National Defence University, Islamabad. He has also done Masters in Naval Architecture from United Kingdom. The Admiral has an illustrious career covering vast experience of various Command and Staff appointments including Commandant Pakistan Navy Engineering College, Chief Naval Overseer (Pakistan) HANGOR project, Deputy General Manager (Ship Design) at Karachi Shipyard & Engineering Works, Manager Hull Engineering at PN Dockyard, Director Naval Construction and Assistant Chief of the Naval Staff (Projects) at Naval Headquarters, Islamabad.

Rear Admiral Kashif Munir was



commissioned in Marine Engineering Branch of Pakistan Navy in 1993. The Flag Officer is a graduate of Pakistan Navy War College, Lahore, and National Defence University, Islamabad.

The Admiral has an illustrious career covering vast experience of various Command and Staff appointments including Commandant PNS KARSAZ, Marine Engineering Officer Ex-PNS SHAHJAHAN,



Manager (Marine Engineering) at PN Dockyard, Director Ships Maintenance and Repair at Naval Headquarters, Chief Inspector of Naval Stores, Chief Staff Officer to Commander Logistics and Assistant Chief of the Naval Staff (Maintenance) at Naval Headquarters, Islamabad. In recognition of their meritorious services, both Flag Officers have been awarded Sitara-i-Imtiaz (Military).



PESHAWAR: Provincial Minister for Excise and Taxation Khaleeq Ur Rehman chairing his department's monthly review meeting.

Seminar on self-accountability held at UET Peshawar



F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: University of Engineering and Technology (UET) Peshawar organized a seminar on self-accountability as part of its ongoing anti-corruption awareness campaign. Musaddiq Abbasi, Advisor to the Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa on Anti-

Corruption was the chief guest. Vice-Chancellor UET Peshawar, faculty members, and students also attended. In his address, Musaddiq Abbasi underscored the pivotal role of the rule of law and justice in fostering prosperous societies. "Nations with robust accountability mechanisms and equitable

systems witness lower corruption and greater prosperity," he stated. He highlighted the need for systemic reforms, and emphasized on eradicating corruption opportunities within institutions, particularly targeting elite-driven corruption that diverts national wealth abroad. Mr. Abbasi urged stu-

dents to embrace self-accountability as a tool for societal transformation. "Change begins with the individual. By reforming ourselves, we can reform the world," he remarked. He encouraged youth to cultivate a habit of reading, particularly studying the Quran, the life of Prophet Muhammad (SAW), and the works of Allama Iqbal to build moral character. "Speak truth, reject falsehood, and let these teachings guide your practical lives," he added. The Vice-Chancellor of UET Peshawar welcomed Mr. Abbasi and thanked him for his insightful lecture on self-accountability and ethical governance. A commemorative shield was presented to the advisor. The seminar was part of a broader initiative to promote awareness about corruption, accountability, and personal integrity among students and stakeholders.

Building bonds: Iftar parties unite communities of all faiths

PESHAWAR (APP): Rawandar Singh, a 42-year-old Sikh, is all smiles and exudes high spirit of sharing and compassion as he seeks solace in dolling out dates and pakora among fasting Muslims during Aftar on returning home from his shop in Hashtnagri.

Wearing the traditional turban, Rawandar has been distributing packets of dates and other edible items among the fasting Muslims in Hashtnagri bazaar since 2012. Rawandar's father Awtah Sindh has started this noble practice and later passed on to his son. "I feel inner peace and satisfaction while doing the noble practice in the Holy month of Ramadan." "The soothing movement of distributing Aftar's items including dates, pakora, jalebi and others food dishes are still alive as fresh as today when I keenly observe my late father Awtah Singh handing over packets of Aftar food to Muslim brothers all along way from Hashtnagri to Mohalla Jogan Ramdas in interior City," Rawandar told APP while distributing dates and Pakora among fasting Muslims ahead of Iftar. "I strongly believe in interfaith harmony, love and brotherhood. Distribution of food in Ramadan is our mark of respect and admiration for our fasting Muslims' brothers and sisters besides giving us inner peace and satisfaction," Rawandar who is being helped by his son in dolling out of dates and Pakora told APP. Dewa Singh and his son Tajindar Singh, who are associated with telecommunication business in Hashtnagri Peshawar said that inviting people of different faiths in Aftar parties in Pakistan sends a strong message of love and brotherhood to world. "Without winning hearts and minds, we can't come closer to each other and could not develop a society whose inhabitants enjoy equal rights and respect for each other's faith," they said.



"Arranging Aftar parties and Ramadan camps for Muslims is not a new practice for us. Our forefathers did the same thing to express warmth, love and friendship to our Muslims brothers of Peshawar during Ramadan," they said, adding they are serving Aftar's foods to over dozens of fasting persons on daily basis and vowed to continue to do so in remaining days of holy month. Roadside Aftar parties are being seen at Qisa Khwani, University Road, Lady Reading Hospital, Takhto Jumat Cantonment, Tehkal, Spin Jumat and Ramadas where philanthropists invite people of different faiths for joint Aftar parties in an environment of sharing, friendship and care. The long sheets filled with food, dates, pakora, jalebi snacks, fruits and sweet beverages get fully occupied by the passerby, labourers and other segments of the society irrespective of caste, colour and creed. Haroon Sarbdayal, a representative of Hindu community in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and a founding member of Pakistan Council of World Religions said that all prophets and founders of all religions had promoted peace, forgiveness, patience, love and tolerance through their teachings, actions and deeds. He said that misperceptions among followers of different faiths could be removed by enhancing interaction and dialogues among all religious communities.

"We need to promote 'acceptance' instead of 'tolerance' because the former is more effective in establishing durable peace, patience, and pluralism in a prosperous society." He said that Ramadan is the month of tolerance and patience in which Hindu Community has started arranging Aftar parties for their Muslim brothers in Sindh. In Peshawar, he said a grand Aftar party would be arranged in last Ashra of Ramadan where leaders of all religions would be invited. He suggested establishment of a common study centres for followers of all religions where they could interact and understand each other's religion and organizing of Aftar parties to bring people of different faith closer. Maulana Tayyab Qureshi, Chief Khateeb of KP told APP that Ramzan being the ninth month of the Islamic calendar is observed by over 1.9 billion Muslims worldwide. "The Muslims seek forgiveness and mercy in this holy month besides having a blessed night of Lalatul Qadar." Highly appreciating the minorities' goodwill gestures of arranging Aftar parties and Dastarkhwan's for rozadars, he said these noble practices brings Muslims and minorities closer besides increasing their understanding about each others' faiths. "The interfaith harmony means bringing peace and tranquility among people through positivity and mutual coexistence and Ramadan strength social

bonds." He said inviting each others for Aftar parties cement bonds of love and brotherhood among people of all religions including Islam and Christianity. "The principles of interfaith harmony and mutual coexistence were clearly explained in Madina Charter (Meesaq-e-Madina) and Pakistan's founder Quaid e Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah's historic address on August 11, 1947 to the members of constituent assembly besides 1973 Constitution." Maulana Qureshi said the Madina Charter had provided complete and unprecedented religious freedoms to followers of all religions and there is a need of constant debate and discussion on its different clauses and articles for education and guidance of all imperative for lasting peace in the society. Terming charity an important component of Islam, he said it is more significant in Ramadan and people should give it to reputable charity organisations having an excellent service and clean accounts record. He said a list of reputable charities organisations was available in NECTA website, adding extra care should be made so that their charity can't go into the wrong hands. He said charitable initiatives such as arranging Aftar parties and Ramzan camps strengthen bonds of love and friendship besides bringing people of all schools of thoughts closer by promoting peace in society.

Converting life imprisonment into death penalty: PHC issues notice

Humayun Khan

PESHAWAR: The Peshawar High Court (PHC) has issued a notice to Muhammad Ibrahim, who was sentenced to life imprisonment for murdering seven members of his own family, including his wife and children. The court has sought to enhance his sentence to death penalty, on Tuesday. PHC two-member bench, comprising Justice Sahibzada Asadullah and Justice Sabit Ullah, heard the case. The convicted murderer was accused of murdering his wife, Bano, and their children,

Suleman, Salman, and Jalal, as well as his uncle, Zada Khayab, his wife, Shakila, and their two-year-old daughter, Sumaiya on June 26, 2021, in the premises of Chakmani police station. The trial court had sentenced Muhammad Ibrahim to life imprisonment, but the appeal failed to prove that he was responsible for the murders. Instead, the appeal alleged that the police had implicated Ibrahim to cover up their own failure to investigate the case. The convict's lawyer argued that the prosecution had failed to provide

any concrete evidence to prove that his client was responsible for the murders. He pointed out that Ibrahim had himself taken his injured son, Hasib, to the hospital, which suggested that he was not involved in the murders. Additional Advocate General Nauman ul Haq Kakakhel argued that the police had collected evidence from the crime scene, which suggested that the murders were committed with a single weapon. He alleged that Ibrahim had initially been nominated as the complainant

in the case but later became the accused. The police had recovered a blood-stained shirt from the crime scene, which belonged to Ibrahim and had blood-stains on it. The police had also recovered the murder weapon, a pistol, from the crime scene, which was identified by Ibrahim. The court has issued a notice to Muhammad Ibrahim, seeking to enhance his sentence to death penalty. The court has also sought a response from the convict on why his sentence should not be enhanced.

Crackdown on overpricing and substandard food

Dozens arrested, heavy fines imposed

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The Rationing Controllor Office of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Food Department in Peshawar has released details of its recent crackdown against profiteers and hoarders over the past week. According to the report, inspections were carried out across Peshawar city and its suburbs, targeting various food-related businesses. Officials from the Rationing Controllor Office stated that inspection teams checked butchers, vegetable and fruit vendors, hotels, bakeries, general stores, and other businesses. As a result of price violations and overpricing, 16 butchers and 4 milk sellers were sent to jail, while FIRs were registered against 38 individuals and 60 others were arrested. Additionally, 285 businesses were fined

millions of rupees for violating food regulations. Provincial Minister for Food, Zahir Shah Toru, appreciated the successful operations of the inspection teams and reaffirmed that the crackdown against profiteering, hoarding, and substandard food will continue across the province. He emphasized that district administrations, the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Food Authority, and the Food Department officials are conducting uninterrupted actions to enforce official price lists and food quality standards. The Minister also urged the public to report cases of overpricing, hoarding, or the sale of substandard food by contacting the complaint cell of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Food Authority via toll-free number 0800-37432 or WhatsApp at 0345-1009348.

Siri Paye: A delight for food lovers in Iftar parties

PESHAWAR (APP): Renowned for its hospitality and warmth, Peshawar is particularly known for siri paye—a mouthwatering dish prepared from the pure meat of sacrificial animals, which is being sold like a hot cake for Iftar parties. With the start of holy month of Ramadan, the demand for siri paye for iftar parties has increased manifold in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa especially in Peshawar where the city's rich culinary tradition heats up, drawing food enthusiasts from far and wide. The delicious dish is famous for its deep, rich flavors and high nutritional value, making it a perfect choice for Iftar. The visitors are seen in large numbers on its shops in Qissa Khwani Bazaar, Hashtnagri, Namak Mandi in city and Fawara Chowk in the cantonment of Peshawar. These bazaars are bustling with tourists and visitors alike, eager to savor the delicacy during iftar to sehri. The dish is a mix of slow-cooked meat and bones of cows, oxen and buffaloes, simmered for hours to release the rich flavors and nutritious elements that have become an ifar staple in the city. One such visitor, Saqib Khan, a public sector employee from Swabi, told APP about his trip to Peshawar for the express purpose of enjoying this mouthwatering dish. "My family's visit to Peshawar is never complete without tasting the delectable cuisine of Sripaye," said Saqib, adding that the siri paye

in Namak Mandi is particularly famous across the city. "On invitation of my childhood friend for iftar party, I came here to enjoy Sripaye," he said. Dr Malik Riaz, Principal Medical Officer at Govt Hospital Pabbi Nowshera said the dish is not only delicious but also highly nutritious, particularly beneficial for people with low protein levels, weak bones, or anemia. He said the dish provides a healthy boost to energy, making it a popular choice during Iftar. One of the prominent sellers of siri paye in the city is Umar Ali, who runs a family-owned restaurant called "Nika Haji Nazeer Ahmed Paye," commonly known as Nika Siri Paye. Umar inherited the business from his father 33 years ago, who himself carried on the legacy of his father, Naik Mohammad, known as Nika, who is believed to have introduced siri paye to the city before partition. "Despite rising meat prices, the demand for siri paye remains high during Ramadan and it has always been a profitable business in the holy month," Umar said. The dish is made by slow-cooking the meat and bones in a clay pot over low heat for up to 20 hours, which helps retain the rich flavors. It is then served in traditional clay bowls, with larger bowls costing around Rs. 700 and smaller portions available for Rs. 300 to Rs. 350. The famous food remains a strong attraction for both local

residents and visitors from other districts and even overseas Pakistanis, who often place orders for frozen siri paye to take home when traveling abroad. The popularity of siri paye is not limited to Peshawar's residents. International food bloggers, like Thai vlogger Mark Wiens, who visited in 2018, have praised the dish, calling it one of the best things they have tasted in Pakistan. Alongside siri paye, the iftar parties also bring an increased demand for other food delights in Peshawar. The streets are filled with food stalls offering Chapli Kebab, rice beef polao and grilled fish with green tea, contributing to the city's vibrant food culture. Temporary stalls selling these hot favorites have sprung up across the city, catering to the growing demand for these warming dishes during Iftar. The eateries at Fawara Chowk, Qissa Khwani and Namak Mandi are especially crowded, with food lovers gathering from Iftar into late night, enjoying qehwa (traditional tea). In a city where food and tradition are closely intertwined, Ramadan's iftar parties bring both a rich culinary experience and a thriving business for local food vendors. Despite the challenges posed by inflation in KP, siri paye remains a symbol of Peshawar's enduring food legacy—its irresistible flavors drawing people from all walks of life to experience the essence of the city's hospitality.



PESHAWAR: Shopkeepers covered their stalls with plastic sheet during rain to keep the items safe. — INP photo



In brief

Governor visits Swabi F.P. Report

SWABI: Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Faisal Karim Kundi, on Monday visited the residence of former Jamaat-e-Islami Senator Mushtaq Ahmad Khan to offer condolences on the death of his brother. He was accompanied by Shuja Khanzada, also known as Shazi Khan, the Provincial General Secretary of the Pakistan Peoples Party Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, along with Member of the National Assembly Sardar Fatehullah Khan Miankhal and other party officials. During his visit, Governor Kundi expressed his sympathies to the bereaved family, prayed for the deceased's forgiveness and elevation in ranks, and wished patience for the grieving relatives.

Civil society rebuild cabins F.P. Report

BUNER: The Rising Youth Organization has rebuilt seven cabins affected by the fire in Pacha Bazaar and the owners appreciated their efforts for serving the humanity. The central chairman of the organization Atiqur Rehman Basikhel and colleagues Iqbal Jilani Sher, Bhader, Raj Wali Khan, Inaam advocate, Faisal Khan and Farhad Khan along with Pacha Bazaar Syed Wahid Khan relaunched business activities in the rebuild cabins. Speaking on the occasion RYO chairman told it is the aim to fully support the suffering of our people and thanks to God the Rising Youth has taken up the task. He added, there are clear proofs in the field of action that among the twenty cabins that were damaged by fire in Pacha Bazar, seven cabins of the very poor owners have been restored and business has started again and the poor are earning halal livelihood, which will further provide employment opportunities and the process of development will advance and bring prosperity and peace.

Corruption disclosed F.P. Report

LARKANA: A mega corruption scandal disclosed in Rice Research Institute shocked. An official letter has been issued by the Director planning & breeding to file an FIR against Siddheer Panhwar and other involved people. According to details, Siddhir Panhwar along with his colleagues broke the locks of the official store of the institution and stole the officially stored rice seeds, which illegally caused a loss of the lakhs rupee to the institute and they should be arrested immediately and legal action should be taken against them and strict measures should be taken against the elements involved in corruption. This serious matter has spread like fire among the residents of the area and experts related to agriculture and various circles and the organization is being demanded to conduct a transparent investigation and take legal action against those responsible.

PTI's protestors released on bail F.P. Report

SHANGLA: Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) workers from Shangla, who were arrested on November 26, have been released on bail. According to reports, the PTI workers were granted bail, and they returned to their homes in the early hours of Sunday. The workers were welcomed by PTI leaders, including former provincial minister Shaukat Yousafzai, who praised their determination and struggle.



JAMRUD: Activists of FATA Loya Jirga holding a rally for acceptance of their demands. — F.P. photo

FATA Loya Jirga observes 'Justice Day'

F.P. Report

JAMRUD: Justice Day (09 March) was observed at Bab-e-Khyber tehsil Jamrud, district Khyber on Sunday. It is to be mentioned here that three years back on 08 March, the Supreme Court of Pakistan decided formation of a larger bench to hear the case, lodged in the court against merging.

Under the banner of FATA Loya Jirga, a rally was organized that was attended by a large number of tribal elders and anti-merging tribesmen. The participants while carrying black flags and banners inscribed with slogans against merging of former region agencies into Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP). Addressing on the occasion head and general secretary of FATA Loya Jirga

Bismellah Khan Afridi, Azam Khan Mehsud, Malik Khan Marjan Wazir, Malik Muhammad Hussein, Malik Shakeel Khan Aurkzai, Malik Zayarat Gul Mohmand, Malik Waris and others said categorically condemned merging of ex-tribal region into KP province and said it was imposed on the tribesmen against their will.

They jirga members expressed their regret over the delay tactics of the Supreme Court of Pakistan and said that six years back they had filed a case against merging in the Court but in the last three years, a large bench had not been formulated that was injustice to them.

Since the first day, the tribal rejected merging and will not accept it till its abolishment, they remarked. They maintained that in merging the tribal

had been suffering a lot and besides their maximum representation ended in parliament, a quota system in jobs for the tribal youth also finished that deprived them of their right.

Presently the law and order situation was going from bad to worse in the former tribal region, they added and said with the introduction of Patwar and police system disputes among the locals had increased many fold.

They demanded of the government to revise the merging of the ex-tribal agencies, abolish the police and patwar system and restore their tradition and rites as prevailed in earlier. The jirga also demanded release of Malik Naseer Ahmad and other detainees. They marched from Takhta Baig to Bab-e-Khyber where it ended peacefully.

Woman, child among three killed in Mardan

F.P. Report

MARDAN: Three people including a woman and a child were shot dead when gunmen barged into their house after jumping a wall and opened fire on them in the jurisdiction of Rustam Police Station in Mardan.

Police sources said that the incident occurred in the locality of Taja Banda area of Mardan. Police further said that all the dead per-

sons which included a woman, an infant child and her father-in-law were killed due to "honour". According to first information report (FIR), the dead woman married Shahi Malik on her own choice two years ago.

Rustam Police after registering a case of triple murder started investigation. Human rights groups say the most common reasons for "honour killings" are that the victim

may have refused to enter into an arranged marriage or have been raped or sexually assaulted.

But killings can be carried out for more trivial reasons, like dressing in a way deemed inappropriate or displaying behaviour seen as disobedient. In Pakistan, hundreds of women are killed in this way each year. A much smaller number of men are murdered in such cases.

Crackdown against profiteers continue

F.P. Report

TOBA TEK SINGH: Deputy Commissioner Toba Tek Singh has mobilized all price control magistrates across the district to curb profiteering and overpricing during Ramadan.

In the past 48 hours, 63 price control magistrates inspected 20,547 shops across the district. Strict action was taken against violations, including overpricing and failure to display official rate lists.

A total fine of Rs. 141,500 was imposed, 299 shops were sealed, and 50 individuals were arrested. DC Muhammad Naeem Sandhu emphasized that no one will be allowed to engage in profiteering, hoarding, or adulteration. He directed all shopkeepers to prominently display the official price lists. He reaf-

firmed that ensuring maximum relief for citizens during Ramadan remains the top priority of the district administration.

CEO Education acts on student's complaint: CEO Education Toba Tek Singh Aqeela Intikhab has taken swift action on a student's complaint regarding irregularities during the matriculation examination, leading to the immediate replacement of the entire supervisory staff.

According to details, a student alleged that the superintendent and invigilator took their paper before the allotted time, causing them a disadvantage. Upon receiving the complaint, CEO Education promptly initiated an inquiry, which confirmed the irregularity and consequently, the examination staff was removed.

CEO Education Aqeela Intikhab emphasized that transparency and merit in examinations will be strictly ensured and no form of injustice will be tolerated.

Protesters block road F.P. Report

QUETTA: Protesters blocked Sariab Road near University Chowk on Monday for the arrest of those responsible for the murder of Javed Kurd, who was gunned down a day earlier in the Qambrani road area of the city.

Relatives of the slain Javed Kurd staged the protest, urging authorities to take immediate action against the suspects named in the FIRs.

Rs70m allocated for developmental projects F.P. Report

KARAK: Chairman District Development Advisory Committee (DDAC) Karak, has said that Rs 70 million has been allocated for the construction of 7 different roads in Karak district, including Chanikhel, Tehsil Chowk to Children's Hospital, Terry Bypass to Shagi village, Ghandi Kala to Indus Highway, Indus Highway Zarkhan Kala to Topi Kala, Lashti Korona to Anzar Mor and Sarki Lawaghar to Faqirabad roads.

DDAC chairman Khurshid said that the work on the above-mentioned roads as well as all the remaining roads of Karak district will be completed during the tenure of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf government. He further said that every promise made to the people will be fulfilled and the spirit and trust of the people will not be hurt in any way.

Two injured in road mishap: A collision between a Suzuki and a motorcycle in the Mithakhel Shawal Ada area, two people were injured as a result of the accident. As soon as the control received information, an ambulance reached the spot.

Habib Bank out of cash flayed: The people protested vigorously against the severe shortage of cash at the Habib Bank branch in Nari Panos. Local citizens, businessmen and social leaders gathered outside the bank and shouted slogans and demanded that the bank administration ensure the immediate availability of funds.

The protest was led by Shakir Manan, President of Nari Panos Development Movement, Maulana Zabihullah Haqqani, Haji Qabil Gul and President of the Reform Committee, Shirin Gul. The protesters said that there was no cash in the bank for several days, due to which the people were facing severe difficulties.

The business community is being particularly affected, as they depend on withdrawing and depositing money on a daily basis. If cash is not provided immediately, the protest will be expanded. Reform Committee President Shirin Gul said that the bank staff should realize the public's difficulties. If cash is not being kept due to security concerns, the government should provide additional security, so that the public's difficulties are reduced.

Admn takes action against price list violations in Dir

F.P. Report

LOWER DIR: In a week-long crackdown, the administration in Lower Dir took strict actions against shopkeepers violating the official price list. According to a spokesman, a total of 83 shopkeepers have been booked, 33 sent to jail, and 14 shops were sealed. Fines totaling Rs 341,100 have been imposed for various violations, including overcharging and selling sub-standard goods.

All Assistant Commissioners and Additional Assistant Commissioners carried out inspections across the district. They targeted shopkeepers involved in overpricing, selling unweighed poultry, stockpiling goods, selling underweight bread, and those who failed to comply with the official price list.

The crackdown resulted in 83 FIRs being filed, 33 shopkeepers being sent to jail, and 14 shops being sealed for violations. Furthermore, fines of 341,100 rupees were levied for infractions related to price control and quality standards.

The District Price Monitoring Control Room received 43 complaints from the public during the last week, the majority concerning butchers. All complaints were forwarded to the relevant Assistant Commissioners for further investigation, and legal actions were promptly taken.

The district has set up price monitoring desks staffed by officials from the District Administration, TMA, Food Department, Agriculture Department, Halal Food Authority, and the Livestock Department.

The official price lists issued by the district administration are displayed at all desks, allowing the public to easily verify prices and report violations, the spokesmen adds.

He said that price monitoring teams regularly inspected markets to ensure compliance with the official price list and to check for issues such as substandard food, incorrect or missing price lists, and overcharging.

Plantain drive: The elementary and secondary education department formally launched a tree plantation drive in schools during a function held at Timergara. The DEO Inayatullah Khan along with DDEO Fayazud Din and other officers planted various saplings. The DEO directed schools heads to plant more trees on their school premises.

Educational Expo 2025 held at Daybreak school

Syed Waliullah Shah

NOWSHERA: An Educational Expo 2025 was organized at Daybreak School System Hakimabad Nowshera, featuring various stalls and attracting significant interest from parents. The event showcased the talents of students through national songs, speeches, and other activities, which were thoroughly enjoyed by the audience.

The school's principal and staff welcomed participants and expressed gratitude for their attendance. The principal emphasized the importance of education as the foundation for national progress and highlighted the institution's commitment to promoting this goal.

"This grand event will prove to be a significant milestone for the educational betterment of our children. We should

encourage and support this purposeful Educational Expo, which highlights the talents of our children, so that we can make our dreams of educational progress a reality."

The institution remains committed to the betterment of its students through positive activities and encourages parents to participate in this important event and support the promotion of knowledge.

Survey exposes state of governance in Waziristan

F.P. Report

MIRANSHAH/ WANA: A public survey conducted at the local level in the merged tribal districts of South and North Waziristan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, has revealed surprising results regarding law and order, the eradication of corruption, and transparency in development projects.

According to the survey, 78% of the public supported the idea that local officials, police forces, and personnel from other relevant institutions should be transferred from their home areas to

other districts. The public believes that this move would effectively eliminate terrorism, bribery, robberies, and other criminal activities.

Public circles argue that some elements within the local administration and police force operate under the influence of powerful figures, making it difficult to control crime. They suggest that if these officials are posted to other districts, impartial action would be possible, ultimately ensuring lasting peace in the region.

Political and social cir-

cles have also urged the government to implement this policy immediately in light of the survey results so that the path to progress and prosperity in the merged districts can be paved.

Closure of Angoor Adda placed tribesmen in adversity: The Angoor Adda Gate on the Pak-Afghan border has remained closed for all types of movement for the past 23 months due to security concerns. As a result, not only have trade activities been suspended, but the local economy has also suffered significantly.

Constables recruitment process completed

F.P. Report

MULTAN: The recruitment process for male and lady constables in police has been completed for Bahawalpur district. The process was completed in four stages, and the final result has been announced according to the schedule.

According to the result, 341 male candidates qualified for the interview, out of which 102 were selected on open merit. Similarly, 65 female candidates qualified for the interview, out of which 21 were selected. Additionally, 21 minority candidates qualified for the interview, out of which 7 were selected. One ex-army person also qualified for the



interview and was selected. District Bahawalpur had a total of 137 successful candidates.

Chairman Recruitment Committee and Regional Police Officer Multan, Captain (R) Muhammad Suhail Chaudhry, District Police Officer Bahawalpur Asad Sarfraz, and AIG Information Technology CPO Lahore Bilal Mahmood Sulehri conducted interviews of successful candidates.

The final list of successful candidates has been released according to the schedule. On this occasion, RPO Multan said that candidates should trust in Allah Almighty, who is the Creator, Master, and Sustainer. Hard work, capability, and merit are your recommendations. No candidate should be misled by anyone. The recruitment process has been completed 100% on merit.

Lodhran secured second place in KPIs ranking across Punjab

Saqib Mushtaq

LODHRAN: Lodhran district has secured second place in the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) ranking across all districts of Punjab—a testament to the district's improving governance and service delivery.

The appointment of Dr. Lubna Nazir as the first female Deputy Commissioner of Lodhran district marks a historic milestone in the region's administrative history. Dr. Lubna Nazir has transformed the district's governance through her diligent efforts, working in alignment with the directives of Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif. By conducting surprise visits and overseeing operations round the clock, she has significantly improved service deliv-

ery at the District Headquarters Hospital and Tehsil Headquarters Hospitals.

Her proactive approach has benefited thousands of deserving families through initiatives such as the Ramadan Bazaar and firm action against illegal encroachments. Over the past four months, Dr. Lubna has worked tirelessly to elevate the district's administrative and civic conditions, ensuring fairness and transparency.

Since Lodhran was granted district status on July 1, 1991, no woman had ever held the position of Deputy Commissioner until now. The political culture of Lodhran has historically been dominated by "Thana culture" and court politics, which previously discouraged the Punjab government from appointing women to such



key positions.

However, under the leadership of Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif, the government has ushered in a new era of inclusivity and progress by appointing Dr. Lubna Nazir, a Grade 19 PAS officer, as Deputy Commissioner. She took charge immediately, treating her new role as an emergency assignment and prioritizing urgent issues.

With her strong profes-

sional skills, she has effectively addressed pressing civic issues, including sanitation, public parks, sewerage infrastructure, and staffing shortages. The residents of Lodhran have quickly recognized the positive impact of having a female Deputy Commissioner leading the district's administration.

Dr. Lubna Nazir has earned widespread appreciation from civil society, business leaders, lawyers,



media representatives, religious figures, and homemakers, all of whom have expressed gratitude to Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif for appointing such a brave, competent, and result-oriented officer.

In just two weeks, she has tackled longstanding challenges that have plagued Lodhran for years, including illegal encroachments, artificial inflation, hoarding, corruption in



government offices, poor sanitation, unresolved citizen complaints, favoritism in government affairs, inefficiency among subordinate staff, and absenteeism of doctors in government hospitals.

Dr. Lubna makes it a priority to personally listen to citizens' concerns in her office daily. She issues immediate orders and ensures that her office remains open to the public, making government assis-

tance accessible to all. Additionally, she has placed a special focus on addressing the grievances of persons with disabilities and women, ensuring their concerns are resolved on a priority basis.

Moreover, she has successfully led crackdowns on financial fraud, ensuring the arrest of criminals who exploited women eligible for the Benazir Income Support Program (BISP) by illegally seizing their funds.



BUENOS AIRES: A flipped vehicle sits in flood waters after a storm in Bahia Blanca, Argentina.

BRICS' climate leadership aims hang on healing deep divides

LONDON (Reuters): Ambitions by the BRICS group to take on a greater climate leadership role, building on success last month at United Nations nature talks, depend on the countries overcoming fractious politics and entrenched disagreements over money.

As the United States has withdrawn from global efforts to combat climate change and, more generally, shifted its focus to promoting domestic interests, Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa - known collectively as the BRICS - are well-placed to influence the outcomes of high-profile meetings this year. They established their credentials by proposing a draft text that ensured agreement at the COP16 talks in February in Rome, a dozen sources told Reuters, potentially unlocking billions of dollars to help halt the destruction of ecosystems.

"Now BRICS has been able to come together in this fashion, (it) will influence our discussions in other platforms going forward," Narend Singh, deputy minister of forestry, fisheries and the environment, for South Africa said. South Africa is boosting its profile as holder of the G20 presidency this year, while another BRICS member Brazil prepares to host COP30 climate talks in November.

"BRICS can fill a space that needs to be filled at this moment in the multilateral negotiations," Brazil's chief negotiator at COP16, Maria Angelica Ikeda, said. Colombia's Susana Muhamad, president of the COP16 nature talks, said the BRICS countries were positioning to be "bridge

builders".

"They are trying to create this balance to represent the Global South in front of the far-right governments that are emerging in the US, Italy and Argentina," she said. "I understand there's a lot of countries wanting to join BRICS, because it's a way, if you have to confront something like the US, you are not alone." A British official present at the talks, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said other countries needed to consider what the BRICS' more muscular approach meant for global institutions.

But if BRICS' is to help fill the vacuum left by the United States under President Donald Trump, it has to address internal divisions over politics and finance. The group's refusal to assume the official financial obligations of donor countries could prove a stumbling block, Timo Leiter, a distinguished policy fellow at the London School of Economics, said. So far the middle-income BRICS have resisted demands from cash-strapped developed countries that they should share financial liability, complicating the quest for compromise at UN negotiations on climate funding and upcoming talks on development finance in Seville, Spain.

Of the \$25.8 billion in biodiversity-related financing in 2022, nearly three-quarters came from five sources: European Union institutions, France, Germany, Japan and the United States, data from the OECD showed. Diverging national interests among the BRICS, with Russia keen to maintain its sales of fossil fuels, while Brazil presses countries to decarbonise faster at COP30, may

also prove sticking points.

"They (the BRICS) are drastically different in terms of development stage and emissions trajectory," said Li Shuo, director of China Climate at Asia Society. "What ties them together is the geopolitical aspiration which leads to the question of can they agree to put forward an affirmative agenda." A test of the group's solidarity could be at a meeting in Bonn in June where countries begin to set out their COP30 negotiating positions, analysts said.

The Financing for Development conference in Seville in June could also prove pivotal, with ministers set to discuss global sustainability goals and ongoing reform of the international financial system. "This will be the perfect entry point for BRICS to advance their aim of changing the global order and having a stronger say in the global financial system," Leiter said. "The new US position is almost a gift." Shorter-term, the BRICS are likely to renew demands for more say in the running of the Global Environment Facility (GEF), which disburses much of the world's biodiversity finance.

GEF reform is a focus as richer countries cut development spending while demanding nature-rich countries do more to protect ecosystems such as the Amazon. "It's a problem that instead of having more money directed to nature and to biodiversity, we have countries updating their nuclear weapons, or buying more armaments," said Brazil's Ikeda. "At the same time, they're demanding from us, the mega-diverse countries more and more obligations."

Nigeria's anti-graft agency recovers \$500 million

LAGOS (Reuters): Nigeria's economic crimes commission said it recovered nearly \$500 million in proceeds of crime last year and secured more than 4,000 criminal convictions, its highest since the agency's inception more than two decades ago.

Africa's biggest energy producer, Nigeria has struggled for decades with endemic corruption, which many Nigerians say contributes to widespread poverty in the country. The Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), which investigates and prosecutes corruption in Nigeria, said in a report on Monday that some of the recovered money was reinvested in government projects. Nigeria is ranked 140 out of 180 on Transparency International's latest Corruption Perception Index. Besides cash, the EFCC said it also seized 931,052 metric tons of petroleum products, 975 real estate properties and company shares.

Heavy rains in Argentina kill 16 as dozens missing

BUENOS AIRES (AP): Heavy rains that flooded a city on Argentina's east coast in recent days have killed at least 16 people, officials said.

Rescue teams were searching for dozens of others reported missing, including two girls and two adults. Authorities said they were swept away by floodwaters unleashed by rains that began pelting the city of Bahia Blanca. Crews have evacuated more than 1,450 people from the city located south of the capital of Buenos Aires. Those evacuated include patients from a local hospital. Some 12 inches (300 millimeters) of rain have fallen in Bahia Blanca in recent days, when the historical monthly average is about 5 inches (129 millimeters).

France begins handing over military bases to Senegal

DAKAR (AP): France handed control of two military facilities to Senegal, beginning the formal process of withdrawing its military presence from the West African country amid its waning influence in the region. The handover follows the declaration by Senegal's President Bassirou Diomaye Faye late last year that all foreign troops would leave the country.

"The French side handed over to the Senegalese side the facilities and housing in the Maréchal and Saint-Exupéry districts, March 7, 2025," the French Embassy in Senegal said in a statement. "Located near the Hann Park, these districts were ready to be returned since the summer of 2024." France set up a joint commission with Senegal last month to organize the withdrawal, and the French army recently announced it had dismissed 162 Senegalese who worked on military bases in Dakar.

The French Embassy did not respond to an email seeking details on how many service members remain in Senegal. Senegal's new government has taken a hard-line stance on the presence of French troops as part of a larger regional backlash against what many see as the legacy of an oppressive colonial empire. France has faced opposition from some African leaders over what they described as a demeaning and heavy-handed approach to the continent. It has suffered setbacks in West Africa in recent years, including Chad, Niger and Burkina Faso, where French troops are no longer on the ground.

France has said it is planning to sharply reduce its presence at all its bases in Africa except Djibouti, including the 350 French troops in Senegal. It has said it could instead provide defense training or targeted military support, based on needs expressed by those countries.

Syrian govt still faces threat from Assad loyalists

DAMASCUS (BBC): In January, days after the first-month anniversary of the fall of the Assad regime in a lightning Islamist-led rebel offensive in Syria, a group of young men - some of them armed - were gathered, checking their phones in the nearly empty interior ministry headquarters in Damascus.

With Bashar al-Assad gone, they had arrived from Idlib, a region in the country's north-west that for years was the only opposition-controlled province in the country. Virtually overnight, they had been catapulted to positions once controlled by hand-picked Assad supporters and, led by Ahmad al-Sharaa, were in charge of a fractured country devastated by 13 years of civil war.

One of them, around 30 years old, had recently been appointed as a high-profile security official, and welcomed me to a room where any sign of the old regime had been removed. Tall and shy, the official made notes on his iPad while acknowledging that the new rulers faced enormous security challenges, including the threat coming from Assad loyalists. The dismantling of the decades-old apparatus behind the oppressive machine of the Assads, such as the country's army and the ruling Baath party, meant the sacking of hundreds of thousands of people.

"There are Assad-affiliated people who haven't engaged with the reconciliation process," said the official, who requested anonymity to be able to discuss sensitive issues, citing the new authorities' call for former members of the security forces to surrender their weapons and ties to

the old government. "Our eyes are on everyone, but we don't want to give the impression that we're after them. That's why there haven't been massive raids."

Since then the violence has escalated, particularly in the coastal provinces of Latakia and Tartous, a stronghold of the Assad family, but clashes were relatively contained. As forces linked to the government carried out an operation in the countryside of Latakia province, targeting a former Assad official, they were ambushed by gunmen.

At least 13 members of the security forces were killed, according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a UK-based monitoring group, in what a regional official described as a well-planned attack carried out by "remnants of the Assad militias". Initially limited to the Jableh area, the unrest spread more widely. Videos posted online showed heavy gunfire in different areas. The authorities sent reinforcements and, further clashes killed more than 120 people, the Syrian Observatory said.

It marked the most violent day since Assad's fall and the biggest challenge yet to interim President Sharaa's transitional government and his efforts to consolidate authority. According to the Institute for the Study of War, a research group, former Assad regime members are likely to form the most effective insurgent cells against Syria's new rulers with the ability to coordinate attacks.

"[They] already have pre-existing networks that they can leverage to rapidly organize insurgent cells.

These networks are military, intelligence, and political networks and criminal syndicates who were regime supporters and lost significant economic and political influence in the aftermath of Assad's fall," they said in a report. Syria's coastal areas are also the heartland of Assad's Alawite minority, an offshoot of Shia Islam. Its members held prominent roles in the Assad government but, with the arrival of Sunni Muslim-led rebels, lost the power and privilege they once had. They now say they are under attack and discrimination, despite Sharaa's pledges to respect different religious sects.

Activists said gunmen had killed dozens of male residents in Alawite areas, which will further exacerbate tensions - and possibly drive support for insurgents in their anti-government push. The Syrian Observatory said the gunmen were from the government's security forces, although this has not been verified. The authorities also faced resistance from the Druze forces in the south, although a deal was reached earlier this week.

The government in Damascus does not control the whole of Syria, where different factions - supported by different countries - exercise power over different regions. But for Sharaa, the challenge goes beyond the task of trying to keep the country safe. As Western suspicions over his intentions continue, his authorities are also struggling to get crippling sanctions imposed on Syria under the former regime lifted, a vital move to revive the economy of a country where nine in every 10 people are in poverty.

DR Congo offers \$5m bounties for rebel leaders

DR CONGO (BBC): The Democratic Republic of Congo government has offered a reward of \$5m (£4m) for help arresting three leaders of a rebel group which has seized much of the east of the country this year.

Corneille Nangaa, a former head of DR Congo's electoral commission, now leads the Congo River Alliance, which includes the M23 rebel group. He has addressed large rallies in the cities under the group's control. The bounty is also on offer for M23 leaders Sultani Makenga and Bertrand Bisimwa.

Last year the three men were prosecuted in absentia by a military court and given death sentences for treason. A reward of \$4m (£3) was also offered for the arrest of two journalists living in exile, and others the government describes as accomplices. But the chances of anyone being arrested appear slim.

In recent weeks the army has been no match for the Rwandan-backed rebels

who have captured large parts of the mineral-rich eastern DR Congo, including the region's two largest cities - Goma and Bukavu. So President Félix Tshisekedi has instead focused on trying to build international pressure for Rwanda to face sanctions for backing the rebels. Last year, a report by UN experts said up to 4,000 Rwanda troops were working with the M23 in DR Congo.

Thousands of people have been killed during the fighting and hundreds of thousands left without shelter after fleeing their homes. The Congolese government is also seeking US support in exchange for access to its minerals. DR Congo accuses Rwanda of trying to take control of its minerals, which include gold and coltan, used in consumers electronics such as mobile phones and computers.

In response to the reports that DR Congo was offering access to the minerals in exchange for military help fighting the M23 rebels, presidential spokeswoman

Tina Salama said on X last month that President Tshisekedi was inviting the US "whose companies source strategic raw materials from Rwanda, materials that are looted from the DRC and smuggled to Rwanda" to instead buy them from the Congolese - the "rightful owners". Rwanda denies looting minerals from DR Congo.

It no longer denies backing the M23 but says it is trying to prevent the conflict in DR Congo from spilling over into its own territory. Rwanda also accuses the Congolese government of working with a different armed group in DR Congo, which is linked to those responsible for the 1994 Rwandan genocide, in which some 800,000 people, mostly ethnic Tutsis were massacred. Both the M23 and Rwanda's government are led by Tutsis. The Congolese government denies working with the FDLR group accused by Rwanda of being a "genocidal militia".

Duterte says he will accept arrest if ICC issues warrant

HONG KONG/MANILA (Reuters): Former Philippines President Rodrigo Duterte said in Hong Kong that he was ready for possible arrest amid reports the International Criminal Court (ICC) was poised to issue a warrant over his years-long "war on drugs" that killed thousands.

The "war on drugs" was the signature campaign policy that swept Duterte to power in 2016 as a maverick, crime-busting mayor, who delivered on promises he made during vitriolic speeches to kill thousands of narcotics dealers. The office of the current President Ferdinand Marcos Jr said on Monday no official communication had been received from Interpol yet, but indicated Duterte could be handed over.

Our law enforcers are ready to follow what law dictates, if the warrant of arrest needs to be served because of a request from Interpol," Presidential Communications Under-

secretary Claire Castro told reporters. It was not immediately clear how long Duterte would stay in China-ruled Hong Kong - which is not a party to the ICC. Duterte was in the city to speak at a campaign rally attended by thousands of Filipino workers, hoping to boost support for his senatorial candidates in upcoming Philippine midterm elections. "Assuming it's (warrant) true, why did I do it? For myself? For my children? For you and your children, and for our nation," Duterte told the rally, justifying his brutal anti-narcotics campaign.

"If this is truly my fate in life, it's okay, I will accept it. They can arrest me, imprison me. 'What is my sin? I did everything in my time for peace and a peaceful life for the Filipino people," he told the cheering crowds in Hong Kong's downtown Southern Stadium, appearing with his daughter, the Philippines Vice President Sara Duterte. An elite Hong Kong

police unit for protecting VIPs was stationed in the vicinity of the hotel where Duterte is staying, according to a Reuters witness. The Hong Kong government's security bureau and police gave no immediate response to a request for comment. The Philippines presidential office dismissed speculation that Duterte might evade the law by visiting Hong Kong, while appealing to Duterte's supporters to allow the legal process to take its course.

During a congressional hearing last year into his bloody crackdown on drugs, Duterte said he was not scared of the ICC and told it to "hurry up" on its investigation. The firebrand Duterte unilaterally withdrew the Philippines from the ICC's founding treaty in 2019 when it started looking into allegations of systematic extrajudicial killings. More recently, the Philippines has signalled it is ready to cooperate with the investigation in certain areas.

Early summer could spell trouble for India's farms and factories

NEW DELHI (BBC): A shorter winter has literally left Nitin Goel out in the cold. For 50 years, his family's clothing business in India's northwestern textile city of Ludhiana has made jackets, sweaters and sweatshirts. But with the early onset of summer this year, the company is staring at a washout season and having to shift gears.

"We've had to start making t-shirts instead of sweaters as the winter is getting shorter with each passing year. Our sales have halved in the last five years and are down a further 10% during this season," Goel told the BBC. "The only recent exception to this was Covid, when temperatures dropped significantly." Across India as cool weather beats a hasty retreat, anxieties are building up at farms and factories, with cropping patterns and business plans getting upended.

Data from the Indian Meteorological Department shows that last month was India's hottest February in 125 years. The weekly average minimum temperature was also above normal by 1-3C in many parts of the country. Above-normal maximum temperatures and heatwaves are likely to persist over most parts of

the country between March and May, the weather agency has warned.

For small business owners like Goel, such erratic weather has meant much more than just slowing sales. His whole business model, practised and perfected over decades, has had to change. Goel's company supplies clothes to multi-brand outlets across India. And they are no longer paying him on delivery, he says, instead adopting a "sale or return" model where consignments not sold are returned to the company, entirely transferring the risk to the manufacturer.

He has also had to offer bigger discounts and incentives to his clients this year. "Big retailers haven't picked up goods despite confirmed orders," says Goel, adding that some small businesses in his town have had to shut shop as a result. Nearly 1,200 miles away in Devgad town on India's western coast, the heat has wreaked havoc on India's much-loved Alphonso mango orchards. "Production this year would be only around 30% of the normal yield," said Vidyadhar Joshi, a farmer who owns 1,500 trees. The sweet, fleshy and richly aromatic Alphonso is a prized

export from the region, but yields across the districts of Raigad, Sindhudurg and Ratnagiri, where the variety is predominantly grown, are lower, according to Joshi. "We might make losses this year," Joshi adds, because he has had to spend more than usual on irrigation and fertilisers in a bid to salvage the crop. According to him, many other farmers in the area were even sending labourers, who come from Nepal to work in the orchards, back home because there wasn't enough to do.

Scorching heat is also threatening winter staples such as wheat, chickpea and rapeseed. While the country's agriculture minister has dismissed concerns about poor yields and predicted that India will have a bumper wheat harvest this year, independent experts are less hopeful.

Heatwaves in 2022 lowered yields by 15-25% and "similar trends could follow this year", says Abhishek Jain of the Council on Energy, Environment and Water (Ceew) think tank. India - the world's second largest wheat producer - will have to rely on expensive imports in the event of such disruptions. And its protracted ban on exports,

announced in 2022, may continue for even longer.

Economists are also worried about the impact of rising temperatures on availability of water for agriculture. Reservoir levels in northern India have already dropped to 28% of capacity, down from 37% last year, according to Ceew. This could affect fruit and vegetable yields and the dairy sector, which has already experienced a decline in milk production of up to 15% in some parts of the country.

"These things have the potential to push inflation up and reverse the 4% target that the central bank has been talking about," says Madan Sabnavis, Chief Economist with Bank of Baroda. Food prices in India have recently begun to soften after remaining high for several months, leading to rate cuts after a prolonged pause.

GDP in Asia's third largest economy has also been supported by accelerating rural consumption recently after hitting a seven-quarter low last year. Any setback to this farm-led recovery could affect overall growth, at a time when urban households have been cutting back and private investment hasn't picked up.

mobilise local pools of cash. Zubairu said the AFC, which deploys \$2.5-\$3 billion each year, would scale up fund allocation "prudently" by choosing projects other backers could pile into.

It launched the pilot project InfraCredit to support pension fund investments in much-needed infrastructure projects, with oil-rich Nigeria's sovereign wealth fund providing guarantees on local currency debt.

AFC chief pushes to unlock billions from African pension funds

LONDON (Reuters): The Africa Finance Corporation said it is accelerating efforts to mobilise the continent's own money for investments, and tapping investors in the Middle East and Asia, as developing nations grapple with seismic shifts in geopolitics and funding flows.

Samaila Zubairu, chief executive of the AFC - a development finance institution owned by Nigeria's central bank and other African financial institu-

tions - said in an interview the lender is ready to weather a world in which the United States and Europe cut financial aid and turn increasingly inward. "The only thing we want ... to change, is to get domestic capital more available for investment within the continent," Zubairu said.

"We would accelerate our initiatives to mobilize domestic capital from African pension funds, African institutional investors, to invest domesti-

cally," he said, adding that in the long term, some \$15-\$20 billion could come from domestic pension funds. US President Donald Trump's America First agenda, and cuts in US aid money, could drain billions from projects in Africa. European countries are also slashing aid funding, with Britain redirecting much of it to boost defence spending.

Africa's low savings rates and shallow markets have stymied efforts to

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Rehmat Shah Afridi (Late)

Founder

Bilal Shah Afridi

Chief Executive

Jalil Afridi

Managing Editor

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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

Zelensky talks of peace, Russians make headway

THIS was something that was waiting to happen. With the United States President Donald Trump pausing aid and sharing of intelligence with Ukraine, its President Volodymyr Zelensky has been forced to talk more ardently about peace than ever before.

Russian forces were pushing back the Ukrainian army which has occupied the western Russian territory of Kursk since last August in an attempt to gain a bargaining chip at negotiations. Zelensky said, "We will do a lot of work here in Europe, with the US, and in Saudi Arabia (a meeting is scheduled between American and Ukrainian officials) – we are preparing a meeting to accelerate peace and strengthen the foundations of security."

This is a very different Ukrainian president who had pushed back Trump and his Vice President, J.D.Vance, at the Oval Office. "Today (Friday), intense work with President Trump's team has been going on at various levels – numerous calls. The topic is clear – peace as soon as possible, security as reliably as possible. Ukraine is fully committed to a constructive approach." Meanwhile, President Trump speaking to reporters at the White House said that he felt it was easier to deal with Russian President Vladimir Putin than with President Zelensky.

There was little doubt that without American military and financial support, Ukraine would not be able to withstand the Russian onslaught. The European support is inadequate. But it has to be admitted that it was the Ukrainians who fought the war the last three years, and it is they who resisted the Russian military might. There were no American soldiers in Ukraine as there were in Vietnam and in Afghanistan.

The Ukrainians have put up a brave fight and it is not to be downplayed. The question is whether forced to seek peace – and this is a war that Ukrainians did not start but it was Russia that invaded on February 24, 2022 – they can hope to get a fair deal.

Will the Americans under the Trump leadership exert enough pressure on Russia and Putin to recognise the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine? President Zelensky may not get his maximum claim of retrieving the Crimean Peninsula that Putin had occupied in 2014. It is also unlikely whether Putin would surrender the eastern Ukrainian Russian-speaking republics of Donetsk and Luhansk.

As many of the territorial claims in Eastern Europe, the Donbas region which includes these two republics has been in conflict with Russia. Putin used the existing opposition to incorporate them into Russia a little before he ordered invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

Zelensky and Ukraine now have to choose between the stand taken by Trump, who is insisting on peace between Ukraine and Russia, and Europe which has expressed support to Ukraine and is opposed to Russia's act of aggression in Ukraine.

If Zelensky chooses the Americans over Europeans, he may forego the option of Ukraine becoming part of the European Union (EU), and it will become isolated in the continent. He would make Ukraine fully dependent on the US, a European outpost of the US as it were the way Israel is in the Middle East. It is not an easy decision. Russia has wrought much destruction of Ukraine and it needs a very strong reconstruction programme. Trump would be interested only in getting access to the critical minerals in Ukraine, and he would not commit himself to the economic reconstruction of the country. He may be able to prevail upon Putin not to attack Ukraine, but that may not be a long-lasting commitment.

Once Trump's second term in office ends, Americans may change their stance, and so will Putin. It is of course a mess. But Trump can wash his hands off to say that he did not create the mess.

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Cairo plan a good start, but not a final destination

Faisal J. Abbas

INTERNATIONAL analysts would be well advised to keep a close eye on what happens in Saudi Arabia over the next few weeks, as it seems some of today's most pressing global problems might be resolved in the Kingdom.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky is due to arrive in the Kingdom on Monday for meetings with the Saudi leadership, hopefully to officially kick-start a series of talks that might put an end to the devastating Russian-Ukrainian war.

This is no coincidence but rather the direct result of years of trust-building and back-channeling, at which Saudi Arabia has excelled. While Riyadh condemned the Russian aggression against Ukraine at the UN, it maintained, and despite criticisms, close and solid diplomatic relations with Moscow, not just to support the OPEC+ agreement, which guarantees oil market stability at a time of grave inflation, but because it knew that at some point the international community was going to need an adult in the room.

Shortly afterward, the Saudi approach resulted in two prisoner swaps, with both the Russians and Ukrainians thanking Riyadh for its successful efforts.

Now, building on the trust and strong relationship it built with President Donald Trump during his first term, Saudi Arabia is yet again the trusted and impartial facilitator between Russia, Ukraine, and the US.

When it comes to an issue closer to home — Gaza — and given the rejection (albeit expected) by both Israel and the US of the Arab League proposal, the world might have to again turn to the Kingdom for a diplomatic solution.

Just to be clear, the Arab League plan has been endorsed by all the attending leaders, or their representatives, in Cairo. It has also garnered the support of the UN secretary-general and a number of European countries.

However, if the atrocities in the war on Gaza have taught us anything, it is that we should not forget to secure the buy-in of the elephant outside the room: the US. Trump has clearly signaled that he sees no place for Hamas, and says he still believes the Palestinians need to be moved out during reconstruction.

Meanwhile, Israel, being the unreasonable player that it is, has predictably rejected any role for Hamas, as well as any involvement by the Palestinian Authority or the United Nations Relief and Works Agency.

Now, with those conditions, it is futile trying to convince Israel. Its Prime Minister, or should I say, Occupier-in-Chief Benjamin Netanyahu and his coalition of lunatics clearly want the status quo to continue till every last Gazan is either displaced or killed by weapons, malnutrition or illness. At the same time, Israel will continue its intimidation in the West Bank, which could result in the region reaching a boiling point, even during the holy month of Ramadan.

Trump, however, is a different political animal and — as unpopular as this sounds — a lot more straightforward to deal with. For instance, the US administration has already said it was open to ideas after the controversial Middle East Riviera plan was floated. The Americans also clarified that they are not putting boots on the

ground, and have also made public that they are having direct talks with Hamas and are willing to talk to the Iranians.

With a bit of logic, Washington can be convinced that Gazans who want to stay in their land while it is being rebuilt can do so, and if provided with a face-saving exit, Hamas could hopefully opt to do what is best for Palestinians, not for themselves (this will also require serious talks with Hamas, perhaps by Qatar and Egypt). Meanwhile, as part of the rehabilitation of the Palestinian Police that Jordan and Egypt has proposed to do, perhaps the Arab League could also help the Palestinian Authority rebuild its capabilities given that President Mahmoud Abbas has already signaled that an election can happen within a year.

We should also remember a few things. First, whether the Arab street likes him or not, Trump effectively has absolute power for at least the next two years, until the midterm elections. Second, that he can only serve four years in office, as US presidents cannot run for a third term. Third, Trump has kept the door open for further discussions to bring peace and prosperity to the region. This could include possible talks about a two-state solution, a longstanding condition placed by Saudi Arabia for normalization with Israel.

All of this means two things: Netanyahu can no longer claim that he calls the shots in Washington or bypass the president and address Congress directly. It also means that Trump is in a race against time to build a lasting legacy, and Saudi

Arabia and the rest of the Arab world are in a good place to help when it comes to Gaza compared with Netanyahu, who most likely will let him down — no matter what Washington offers him.

In that sense, I believe Egypt and the Arab League deserve a round of applause, and that the Cairo proposal should be seen as a good starting point rather than a final destination. To succeed, it will need further refining, ironing out wrinkles and, most of all, lots of glitter sprinkled over it.

People can ridicule Trump as much as they like, but the bottom line is that he is a businessman and, for him, it is all about the product, the pitch, and the profit.

With help provided by Riyadh when it comes to Russia and Ukraine, the continuing stabilization of oil markets, billions of dollars in trade deals and an ability to help Trump walk out of the White House as the man who achieved what no other president has done — a lasting peace in the Middle East — we do have a lot to offer in terms of the profit.

However, we need to act quickly in terms of the pitch and realize it will not be achieved by wishful thinking, but with political pragmatism, determined diplomacy and skillful salesmanship.

As for the product, if Trump wants to call it the Riviera of the Middle East, then so be it. I believe it is wrong to argue about packaging when it is the substance that matters.

If this \$53 billion Arab Riviera is being built by Palestinians for Palestinians and as part of an agreed Palestinian state, then the only thing left to do is to ensure Israel does not destroy it again in a few years.

World should be on the side of Gaza's children

Chris Doyle

A powerful and compelling child's-eye view of life in Gaza over a period of nine months was broadcast in a documentary last month. It received rave reviews, even from Britain's right-wing media. This was before a major outcry and anti-Palestinian pile-on forced the BBC to remove it from its streaming service.

"Gaza: How to Survive a War Zone" was jointly fronted by a 13-year-old Palestinian boy, Abdallah Alyazouri. It turned out that he also happened to be the son of the deputy agriculture minister in the Hamas administration governing Gaza — a technocrat. The ensuing hullabaloo brought unwelcome interventions from the British prime minister and the culture secretary, as well as Israeli officials, including the extreme right-wing ambassador to the UK, who opposes a Palestinian state.

Few critics bothered to watch the documentary. One commentator vented his fury and proclaimed that not only had he not watched it, but he also was not going to. If he had bothered, he would have heard plenty to counter the vicious anti-Palestinian myth that this was Hamas propaganda.

Many Palestinians made explicitly anti-Hamas statements. A Palestinian woman told the late Hamas leader Yahya Sinwar: "God damn you, Sinwar." Zakara, 11, one

of the child narrators, also castigated Hamas: "They caused all this misery."

The underlying reason for the anti-Palestinian backlash was that the documentary dared to do something that so many in the political and media classes refuse to do — humanize Palestinians, particularly children. For those who support their ethnic cleansing or genocide in Gaza, this was a disaster.

For them, Palestinians in Gaza should be mere numbers, compared to vermin, not real humans with hopes, fears and dreams. The story of the young Palestinian girl who became a TikTok celebrity thanks to her cooking show is precisely the sort of thing that Israeli leaders do not want to reach the outside world. It is one reason Israel continues to prevent international journalists from entering Gaza, even during a "ceasefire."

This BBC documentary saga highlighted a painful reality — that most of the world's ruling classes do not care about the lives of Palestinian children in Gaza.

One question I asked the day the documentary was pulled was: What was the BBC doing to safeguard the three Palestinian children it had filmed in the documentary? The BBC has a major duty of care toward these children. Abdallah claimed in an interview that the BBC had not been in contact

with them for over 18 months. Imagine this 13-year-old thinking he was going to be telling his story to the world, only for the documentary not only to be pulled, but for him then to be subjected to such hostile aggression.

All Palestinian children in Gaza are traumatized. Abdallah and all those his age have already experienced four major Israeli wars on the Strip.

Yet, over the last 16 months, Palestinian children, as well as adults, have endured pain and horror the likes of which nobody should have to experience. Israel has killed about 18,000 children. Many of the 110,000 Palestinians injured are children, given that nearly half the Strip's population is under 18. According to the UN, "Gaza is home to the largest cohort of child amputees in modern history."

Some have suffered brain injuries from explosions. Many have lost key members of their families, in some cases all of them. In medical circles, many refer to a sadly all-too-frequent scenario, "WCNSF" (wounded child, no surviving family).

On top of this, Palestinian children in Gaza have the highest levels of child malnutrition in the world, which will inevitably lead to stunting in younger children. All of this is a direct result of the policies of the Israeli government.

But what prospects do Palestinian children in Gaza have? Education for

660,000 of them has come to a grinding halt since Oct. 7, 2023. Many had already lost two years of their schooling due to the COVID-19 pandemic. According to the UN, 90 percent of schools have been damaged or destroyed. Israel has bombed all Gaza's universities. The territory is closed off from the world, as it has been pretty consistently since 2007. And these children do hear the news. They know Israel reimposed a full blockade on Gaza just as Ramadan was starting. They know the US president is encouraging the clearing out of Gaza's Palestinian population. They know that Israel is intending to resume full military operations, with references to unleashing hell, as if Gaza was not already a place fit for Hades.

The world should be on the side of Palestinian children, willing to hear their stories and to help in any way possible, given the genocide and the conditions Israel has imposed on Gaza. The BBC should have stood up to these powerful anti-Palestinian forces. It should have determined that telling the children's stories was more important than who the father of one of the children was. This situation is part of the wider malaise of dehumanization and anti-Arab racism that needs to be tackled if there is to be any hope of a real and lasting peace.

— Arab News

Pakistan's relentless battle against terrorism

A saga of sacrifice and struggle

Muhammad Mohsin Iqbal

PAKISTAN has long stood as a bulwark in the global war against terrorism, bearing immense human and financial losses to foster peace and stability. Before the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, Pakistan was a relatively peaceful nation. However, its strategic alignment with the Western bloc to counter Soviet expansion transformed it into an unintended battleground. As a consequence, Pakistan became a breeding ground for extremist activities, with bomb blasts and acts of terror becoming an unfortunate and recurring reality. Furthermore, the Kalashnikov culture and heroin addiction took root among the younger generation, severely impacting Pakistan's social fabric.

From the Cold War era to the post-9/11 world, Pakistan has paid a heavy price for its unwavering commitment to eradicating terrorism. Following the September 11 attacks, the United States launched the global war on terror, pressuring Pakistan to dismantle militant networks within its borders. The country faced immense challenges, including threats of being pushed back into the Stone Age and the persistent demand to "Do More." Despite enduring relentless criticism and diplomatic isolation, Pakistan sacrificed tens of thousands of lives and spent billions on counterterrorism efforts, yet it remains entangled in economic hardship and political instability.

The human cost has been staggering. Countless civilians and security personnel have lost their lives to terrorist attacks and military operations. The Pakistani armed forces, law enforcement agencies, and intelligence units have fought valiantly, often making the ultimate sacrifice. The widespread destruction of infrastructure and the displacement of communities have left deep scars on the

Economically, Pakistan has suffered immeasurable losses. The direct and indirect costs of terrorism, including the damage to infrastructure, loss of foreign investment, and decline in economic growth, have amounted to hundreds of billions of dollars. The instability caused by terrorism has deterred investors, slowed down industrial growth, and forced the government to divert significant resources towards security measures rather than development projects. Consequently, Pakistan has found itself increasingly dependent on international financial institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), leading to a cycle of economic hardship and inflation that has severely affected the common man. While Pakistan has suffered greatly, the irony is that regional players who contributed little or nothing to the fight against terrorism have reaped economic and strategic benefits. Certain countries have secured lucrative trade and defense agreements, receiving international support and investment despite their minimal involvement in counterterrorism efforts.

nation's psyche.

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While Pakistan has suffered greatly, the irony is that regional players who contributed little or nothing to the fight against terrorism have reaped economic and strategic benefits. Certain countries have secured lucrative trade and defense agreements, receiving international support and investment despite their minimal involvement in counterterrorism efforts. These discrepancies have been openly acknowledged by prominent world leaders, highlighting the double standards in global geopolitics. Pakistan, despite its sacrifices, continues to struggle economically and diplomatically, while others in the region have been rewarded with preferential treatment and economic opportunities.

In addition to this, the

United States has historically shaped its relationship with Pakistan based on strategic interests, engaging when needed and withdrawing when objectives were met. During the Cold War, Pakistan played a key role in countering Soviet influence, and post-9/11, it became a frontline ally in the war on terror. However, Washington's approach has often been transactional, leaving Pakistan to deal with long-term consequences once immediate interests faded. This pattern underscores the need for Pakistan to adopt a more self-reliant foreign policy that ensures its sacrifices translate into lasting national gains rather than temporary alliances dictated by external powers.

Despite these adversities, Pakistan's steadfast efforts against terrorism have earned sporadic international recognition. U.S. President Donald Trump recently acknowledged Pakistan's role in capturing a high-profile terrorist, describing its cooperation as vital to global security. Similarly, former U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton admitted that after leveraging Pakistan's support in defeating Soviet forces in Afghanistan, the U.S. abandoned it, leaving Pakistan to manage the fallout. This disengagement allowed militant groups to flourish, perpetuating instability in the region.

On the battlefield, Pakistan has achieved significant gains. Its armed forces and intelligence agencies have successfully dismantled major terrorist organizations, reducing the frequency and intensity of attacks. Landmark military operations such as Zarb-e-Azb and Radd-ul-Fasaad have played a pivotal role in restoring security to previously insurgency-ridden areas. The resilience of the Pakistani people, coupled with the sacrifices of their defenders, has prevented the country from succumbing

to extremism. Pakistan's extensive counterterrorism experience has positioned it as a crucial player in global security discussions. The expertise of its security apparatus is recognized internationally, providing an opportunity to assume a leadership role in counterterrorism cooperation. Diplomatic efforts, such as the Pakistan-Afghanistan peace process and regional stability initiatives, further underscore the country's commitment to fostering long-term peace.

As Pakistan assesses the ramifications of its prolonged engagement in the war on terror, it must reflect on both its losses and gains. The nation has endured profound human and economic suffering, faced diplomatic challenges, and contended with a distorted global narrative. Yet, its sacrifices have not been entirely in vain. The substantial decline in terrorist activities, the strengthening of security institutions, and the growing acknowledgment of its counterterrorism efforts are notable achievements.

Looking ahead, Pakistan must pivot towards economic recovery, strategic regional diplomacy, and proactive global engagement. Its sacrifices should yield tangible benefits through economic partnerships, infrastructural development, and equitable treatment in international forums. Only through astute policymaking and a balanced foreign policy can Pakistan ensure that its resilience translates into lasting gains, securing a stable and prosperous future for its people.

Trump’s presidency moves into a new phase with a critical test of his

DONALD Trump’s second presidency will take a novel path this week as he turns to Congress to enshrine part of his effort to transform the country — after weeks of wielding vast and questionable executive power.

House Republicans hope to vote on a bill to extend federal funding until the end of September. If they succeed, after dropping talks with Democrats on a bipartisan measure, they’ll trigger a showdown in the Senate that could end in a damaging government shutdown.

Democrats will then have to decide whether they’ll oppose the measure by mounting a filibuster. If they block it, they will risk taking the blame for shutting down the government unless they can convince the public it’s Trump’s fault. If they allow the measure to pass, they could again look like they lack the strength and purpose to resist Trump’s presidency.

The drama ahead of Friday’s funding deadline could have a serious impact on the lives and well-being of millions of Americans. A shutdown could force essential government workers to go without pay and see many more furloughed. It would disrupt services including airport security, border crossings and national parks. It would deepen the turmoil sparked by Trump’s return to the Oval Office as his brinksmanship on tariffs rocks the economy and Elon Musk’s indiscriminate shredding of the federal government causes chaos.

And Trump only heightened this uncertainty when he declined to rule out the possibility of a recession this year in an interview that aired Sunday on Fox News’ “Sunday Morning Futures.” Vowing to go forward with his trade war policies, Trump dismissed a slide in the stock markets, which are usually one of his favorite measures of eco-

nom ic performance.

The coming congressional theater will first pose an early test of House Speaker Mike Johnson’s capacity to enact Trump’s agenda with a minuscule Republican majority. Stopgap spending bills generally alienate conservative fiscal hawks and members of the far-right Freedom Caucus. But Trump is demanding unity from his side and is billing this measure — which freezes top-line spending but raises funding for his priorities, including defense and border security — as a down payment on deep government cuts to come.

Republican leaders are telling members that passing the stopgap funding measure, known as a continuing resolution, would give them more time to codify Musk’s government cuts in a future bill and avoid a GOP split that could hamper Trump’s ambitious agenda, including his push for huge tax cuts.

Still, the failure to produce detailed spending plans for individual government departments and the decision to push vital decisions down the road raises doubts about the House majority’s capacity to function. The bill does not, for instance, deal with the need to raise the government’s borrowing limit — another looming crisis that could cause economic contagion within weeks without prompt action. It also fails to codify Musk’s swing at federal government jobs and programs into law — perhaps because they’re increasingly divisive and could threaten GOP unity.

Trump is betting that support for Musk’s mission among MAGA base voters will convince GOP lawmakers who are usually skeptical of such measures to back this temporary fix.

“All Republicans should vote (Please!) YES next week,” he wrote Saturday on Truth Social, adding, “NO DISSENT.”

His strategy may be

Stephen Collinson

working. Texas Republican Rep. Chip Roy, a scourge of continuing resolutions, told Steve Bannon’s podcast last week he’d back “keeping the lights on” in government with a stop-gap bill to create time for Musk and his Department of Government Efficiency to keep wielding the spending ax. And Rep. Andy Harris, the chairman of the Freedom Caucus, said he fully supported the measure. “Congress must keep the government open so that DOGE can continue to eliminate waste, fraud and abuse in our government. This continuing resolution is necessary to advance President Trump’s agenda,” the Maryland Republican wrote on X.

House Democrats are resolved to oppose the bill in one of the most significant early moments of the new Congress. Rosa DeLauro, the top Democrat on the House Appropriations Committee, said in a statement that the plan is a “power grab for the White House and further allows unchecked billionaire Elon Musk and President Trump to steal from the American people.” The Connecticut lawmaker argued that by giving up on passing full-year spending bills, Republicans had handed their power to “an unelected billionaire.”

The Tesla chief has now pledged to consult with Republicans in Congress on his deep cuts to government jobs and spending, after lawmakers started to receive backlash from some of their constituents. Johnson hopes to codify the cuts in new measures late in the year — a much heavier lift than the current short-term patch.

Democrats are still struggling for an effective counter to Trump’s executive power blitzkrieg in his first six weeks in office. And their uncoordinated and futile protests during the president’s address to Congress last week

underscored the lack of internal coherence in the party on the way ahead.

If the stopgap spending bill reaches the Senate, party leaders will face a dilemma. For now, they are calling for a resumption of bipartisan negotiations on full-year budget bills shelved by Johnson and Trump, in what seems more like a public relations exercise than a serious political strategy.

A failure to block the measure — which the party has the power to do, given the 60-vote filibuster threshold in the Senate — could further demoralize supporters and underscore the impotence of Democrats in Republican-dominated Washington.

But if Democrats do block the bill and are instrumental in shutting down the government and vital services, they risk hurting their own constituents and distracting from the political heat that is beginning to build on Trump and Musk. Democrats want to show that the GOP can’t govern — and some lawmakers believe they shouldn’t get in the way of what they see as Trump’s chaos and malfeasance. Shutting the government to save it also seems like a logical stretch. And there’s political peril, too, since many Americans support the president’s aspirations to downsize the federal machine — even if some doubt his methods.

Sen. Andy Kim told CNN’s Jake Tapper on “State of the Union” on Sunday that Johnson’s failure to discuss a spending bill with Democrats showed a failure of Republican leadership. Kim called for a 30-day stopgap bill to allow talks to continue.

The New Jersey Democrat added of Johnson: “He’s really showing just how bad he is at governing right now. ... He’s the one that’s walking away from this bipartisan talk right now.”

But Kim exemplified the Democrats’ tricky position when he was asked whether he will oppose the stopgap bill if

it reaches the Senate. “Well, it’s not simple yet, because we don’t know what the House is going to do,” he said.

Some Democrats believe the short-term bill is largely irrelevant, since Trump, through Musk, has been making unilateral decisions to cut government programs, staff and agencies that Congress has already funded in a potentially unconstitutional process that faces several court challenges.

“Look, the president has been deciding how to spend the money any way he wants even when we have a budget that both Democrats and Republicans voted on,” Democratic Sen. Elissa Slotkin of Michigan said on NBC’s “Meet the Press.” “That’s a constitutional issue, right? Everyone knows Congress has the power of the purse. So, until I see some assurances that whatever we pass next week is going to ensure that the money is spent the way Congress intends, I’m going to withhold my vote until I see that.”

Sen. Patty Murray, the vice chair of the Senate Appropriations Committee, blasted the continuing resolution as a “slush fund” designed to give Musk and Trump more power over critical spending investments in states and districts that support students, veterans, families and patients. The Washington state Democrat added: “Instead of turning the keys over to the Trump administration with this bill, Congress should immediately pass a short-term CR to prevent a shutdown and finish work on bipartisan funding bills that invest in families, keep America safe, and ensure our constituents have a say in how federal funding is spent.”

But if Johnson and Trump get their way in the House, that path will be closed, and Senate Democrats will confront an unpalatable choice they don’t yet seem willing to face.

Black-Palestinian solidarity: We need to talk about what happened

Gerald Nesmith Jr

MORE than a month into his second term, President Donald Trump has already made good on many of his dreadful campaign promises. He has ordered mass deportation of migrants and asylum seekers; cancelled federal Diversity, Equity, Inclusion (DEI) programmes; cut funding to underprivileged Black and Latino communities; and pledged to expel foreigners who have participated in pro-Palestinian protests.

It is clear that if we are to survive the next four years, minorities and oppressed people of all stripes must build solidarity networks to stand together and resist. To do so effectively, we must address any outstanding issues that could undermine cross-community solidarity. One cannot say they care about women’s rights, public health, racial equality, education or any number of things that liberals claim to care about and then allow a genocide to go on.

The 2024 election took place in the shadow of Israel’s genocidal campaign against the people of Palestine. Despite the efforts of the Democratic Party to obfuscate and manipulate the issue, they could not simply wish away the horrifying images coming out of the Gaza Strip and the West Bank.

They faced a mass mobilisation of people in the streets, in the primaries and on college campuses calling for urgent action to stop Israel. In a desperate attempt to distract from the rightful criticism they were receiving for facilitating genocide, the Democratic Party took aim at the cross-sectional coalition that formed to support Gaza.

In particular, the Democrats sought to break up Black-Palestinian solidarity. One way they hoped to do so was to frame pro-Palestinian protesters as single-issue voters. They claimed that the Palestinian and Arab communities and their allies were invested only in the Palestinian struggle for freedom and did not care about the struggles of minority groups here in the US.

Democrats emphasised that what was happening in Gaza was an external issue that concerned only that specific group of voters. The idea was to convince Black people — as well as women, LGBTQ and other disadvantaged groups — that their solidarity with Palestine was pointless and that their interests lay with the Democratic Party, Joe Biden and Kamala Harris.

When confronted with the particularly callous “single issue” talking point, typically I would ask: What “single issue” is genocide? One cannot say they care about women’s rights, public health, racial equality, education or any number of things that liberals claim to care about and then allow a genocide to go on.

If someone is OK with the extermination of one group, why would they not be willing to approve the extermination of others when the time comes?

We got a glimpse of just how unserious the commitment of the Democratic Party and its liberal supporters to the rights of disadvantaged groups can be when they rushed to blame trans people for Harris’s defeat and some prominent members suggested dropping the “trans issue”.

The “single-issue voter” talking point was not the only one weaponised to undermine Black-Palestinian solidarity. The historic mobilisation on college and university campuses across the country was also attacked. Liberal media sought to portray pro-Palestinian activism not only as “anti-Semitic” but also as a pet project of the bourgeoisie, something only rich unaffected kids at Ivy League universities had time to care about.

What the media decided to leave out from this narrative was that mobilisations also took place at public universities and state schools, which Black and brown students

overwhelmingly joined. The fact that students of colour faced the brunt of police violence and criminal prosecution was also conveniently omitted from public conversation.

In parallel, the Democratic Party also made some of its members of colour become the face of its unacceptable stance on Gaza. Biden’s UN Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield was instructed to vote down ceasefire resolution after ceasefire resolution and repeat the mantra about Israel’s “right to self-defence”. White House Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre had to avoid any and all questions about the Palestinians during pressers. Vice President Harris, herself, was tasked with “acknowledging” the humanity and suffering of the Palestinian people, while the Biden administration continued to approve weapons sales to Israel.

The Democratic Party used Blackness as a shield against any criticism and they did it under the guise of diversity. Unsurprisingly, the guise was dropped whenever Black or brown members of the party spoke out. In such cases, Democrats did everything possible to demonise and sideline them. When Member of Congress Cori Bush faced an unprecedented mass spending campaign by AIPAC to oust her in the primaries, none of the Democratic leadership came to her defence.

Nevertheless, the talking points worked and managed to penetrate even otherwise progressive spaces. A good example was an online conversation between content creator Tori Grier and TikTok star Maya Abdallah that took place in August.

Tori as a Black woman argued for voting for Harris, outlining her very real fears of a second Trump presidency, while Maya rightfully pointed out the Democratic candidate was refusing to stop facilitating a genocide. The fallout of the heated debate between the two spread online, with some social media users renouncing their solidarity. This is exactly where the political elite wanted us to be.

As the Democratic Party courted the Black community, it made no effort whatsoever to talk to the Arab Americans and other pro-Palestinian groups. And even in “courting” Black people, the Democrats still managed to be as condescending as possible, pulling out the tired and racist trope of “Black men becoming more conservative”.

It is this strategy and the party’s disingenuous framing of genocide and minority rights that I believe led us to the fascist fever dream that is the Trump presidency.

Many Arab Americans — as well as members of other minority groups — voted for Trump. I, as a Black man, would not have tried to convince these people to vote for the “lesser evil” while their families were being exterminated in Gaza.

Others in the Black community have felt differently. A small but vocal contingent of Black people on the internet has insisted that we should defy the boycott of Israel, “buy Starbucks” and stop supporting the Palestinian cause. While this was mainly a social media phenomenon, the effects in real life are there. When I talk to members of my community who may be less informed on what is happening overseas, the same few talking points arise: “Isn’t this conflict thousands of years old?” and “Israel is defending itself.”

The truth is, it is not the first time the Black community has been split over Palestine-Israel. Recall the clash between iconic Black writer Audre Lorde and fellow Black feminist June Jordan. In the early 1980s, Jordan openly criticised Israel for invading Lebanon and for its “genocidal aims as regards the Palestinian people”. Lorde rejected this stance. She understood the ways that the US entrapped and used Black people here and

abroad, but she was unable to connect it to the struggle of the Palestinians the way Jordan did. This fracture caused a deterioration in their relations.

While differences in opinion persist today within the Black community, ultimately, it is my belief that the contradictions present in defending the Democratic Party are increasingly becoming untenable to manage. The ways that Democrats use their platform to manipulate narratives — similar to the way Republicans do with their base — leads to confusion, not greater political participation from Black people.

For those who still embrace the talking points about the pro-Palestinian movement, it may be a good idea to ask what the Democratic Party has done to win their loyalty.

This is the party that in response to the police killing of George Floyd in the summer of 2020 decided to send its leadership to do a photoshoot in kneeling in Kente cloth but then spent \$17.4bn on funding the police countrywide two years later. This is also the party whose members and affiliated talking heads put a lot of effort into demonising the Black Lives Matter movement and stealing all popular momentum from it.

More recently, the Democratic Party went out of its way to push forward the highly unpopular “Cop City” project in Atlanta. The city, famously run by affluent Black Democrats, has taken draconian measures to ensure that all resistance — including from members of the Black community — to this police training campus project be squashed.

Let us also remember that while Trump is every bit of the monster Democrats claim he is, they themselves seem OK with him. That is because for years, the Democratic elite have relied on a host of rotating villains to keep them from having to fulfil any of their more progressive promises to their base. With this strategy in mind, in 2015-2016, they propped up Trump in the Republican primaries, believing that he would be the easiest candidate to beat.

In this context, the insinuation that the Democratic Party — or the Republican Party, for that matter — has the best interest of the Black population of this country in mind is not only insulting, but dangerous. To both of these parties, Black and Palestinian lives are of little concern; they matter only when or if it is politically and financially expedient.

Many Black Americans like me see the parallel between the historical ways in which our people have been harmed and what is happening in Palestine. The brutal apartheid and genocide of the Palestinian people directly relate to the mass killings and subjugation of Black people here in the US. There is a reason so many of the things we say in our community resonate with the people of Palestine and vice versa. Our mere existence is a threat to the status quo.

I see this realisation spread among my peers, and we all saw it at the Super Bowl, when Zulf-Qarnain Nantambu, a Black performer, raised a Sudanese and a Palestinian flag on stage during the half-time show.

The past 16 months of genocide in Gaza have brought to the fore the close connections between the US military-industrial complex and the Israeli one, between the US army and the Israeli occupation forces, between the US police and the Israeli security establishment.

With Trump and his cohort of white nationalist extremists already unleashing police and other security agencies onto vulnerable communities, we — Black and brown people, LGBTQ, and pro-Palestinian activists — face the same threat, the same source of aggression.

Our power lies in united resistance. To buck the established order, we have to stand together.

— *Aljazeera*

America needs Donald Trump right now. Here’s why

IT has now been more than three months since Donald Trump was elected the 47th president of the United States last November with a resounding victory over the sitting vice president, Kamala Harris.

A presidential election in the US is not a national referendum as much as it is 51 individual contests. Each state — plus the District of Columbia — has a proportional voice, based on population, in choosing the president. Candidates must win individual states. Some states nearly always vote for the Democratic candidate. Others are reliably Republican. Certain states, however, are less predictable and as such are referred to as swing states and usually have a significant impact on the final outcome.

President Trump won all seven 2024 swing states, turned a couple of blue (Democrat) states to red, and overwhelmingly won. He became only the second man in the nation’s history to win non-consecutive terms in the highest office in the land.

Trump achieved this despite a variety of court cases in multiple jurisdictions, an extraordinarily hostile media and a would-be assassin’s bullet on his way back to the White House. Trump’s poll numbers in the first weeks after being sworn in on January 20 were the highest they have ever been.

The international media were flummoxed. How did this brash, rude, overbearing man convince more than 77 million Americans to vote for him? The answer is much simpler than it may seem.

During the 2024 election cycle, poll after poll showed the same issues were of the greatest concern to the American public. In each of those priority topics, the public gave the Biden/Harris administration a failing grade. In some of the issues, Trump had clearly enjoyed more success in his previous four years in charge than the Democratic team had.

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limited diplomatic abilities, Americans suffered high inflation and rising interest rates. The price of petrol skyrocketed under Biden. Since trucks use fuel, the cost of everything trucks delivered, such as groceries or pharmaceuticals, jumped as well.

Basic food items, such as eggs, doubled in price. When feeding your family, buying medication and filling the fuel tank in the car become difficult for families, it is only natural to seek change. When interest rates are too high for a young family to buy a home, those families long for something different. Trump, whose economic track record as president, on several indicators, was considerably better than Biden’s until COVID-19 struck, promised that change.

The second priority for

Tim Constantine

Americans in virtually every poll was the open border with Mexico. On his very first day in office, Biden cancelled a number of border policies and projects that had been put in place by Trump during his first term. The result was disastrous. Harris was announced as the “border tsar”, but she did not even

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migrants who crossed into the country unlawfully between official entry points along the US-Mexico border. That is the lowest number since statistics have been maintained, and is a 97 percent drop from the peak of 250,000. That is the very definition of success. It is clear that simply enforcing the existing laws on the books and freeing border patrol agents

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The US border is more secure than it has ever been. Trump’s energy and environmental policies are expected to have a net positive effect on the US and global economies within a matter of months. Lower prices and more stability are anticipated.

The Trump team has set its sights on a number of other challenges as well — peace in Ukraine; rescuing astronauts stuck at the International Space Station; and shrinking the size of government through cutting waste, fraud and abuse. Each of these is difficult, even for Trump’s greatest detractors, to argue with. Does anyone want more war between Russia and Ukraine? Does anyone think government waste and corruption should be encouraged? Of course not.

A segment of Americans and certainly some global citizens as well, are agast at the abrupt, boisterous way in which Trump conducts himself. If they take the time to look past the bluster, however, and subjectively assess the results — such as peace, security, stability and prosperity — they will realise that the US, and indeed the world, need Trump at this moment in time.

After winning the election, Trump made Gaza a top priority. He assigned a team, headed by Steve Witkoff, to work with Egypt and Qatar on terms



PSX Rings Bell for gender equality on Int'l Women's Day

F.P. Report

KARACHI: Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX), in collaboration with UN Women, Women on Board Initiative, International Finance Corporation (IFC), Central Depository Company (CDC), Pakistan Institute of Corporate Governance (PICG), Alfalah AMC, and CFA Society Pakistan, proudly hosted a Gong Ceremony to celebrate Ringing the Bell for Gender Equality on International Women's Day, reaffirming its commitment to promote gender equality and women empowerment in the corporate sector. The event brought together distinguished leaders, professionals, and industry experts to celebrate the achievements of women and discuss strategies for fostering inclusivity in the financial and business landscape.

Women leaders from the corporate world & other sectors were invited as

esteemed guests for this august event, further highlighting the significance of gender inclusivity & leadership representation.

The session commenced with opening remarks by Dr. Shamshad Akhtar, Chairperson of the Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX), acknowledging the significance of International Women's Day and the role of women in economic development and social progress. She said, "Gender inclusivity is a key pillar of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), serving as both an initiator and driver of growth and sustainability. While the financial sector has historically been male-dominated, it is evolving, with women gaining greater representation as investors, managers, and entrepreneurs."

Progressive nations have dismantled barriers, defined stereotypes, and demanded concrete action to place women at the fore-

front. As a signatory of the Women's Empowerment Principles (WEPs), PSX is committed to advancing gender equality and fostering greater opportunities for women in the financial sector. PSX is committed to driving innovation and introducing new products that benefit women, ensuring they have greater financial inclusion and investment opportunities.

PSX is committed to leading by example and dedicated to fostering an environment where diversity thrives and where everyone's voice is not only heard but amplified and valued. Our mission is to prepare the economic growth and innovation crucial to our nation's future.

Following the opening address, symbolic Gong Ceremony was conducted to mark the occasion, emphasizing the need for continuous efforts toward achieving gender parity in Pakistan.

Dr. Zeelaf Munir, Chairperson of the Pakistan Business Council and MD/CEO of EBM, was invited as the guest of honor at the event, emphasized that gender equity is an economic necessity. She stressed that businesses and financial markets must take bold action to ensure women have equal access to leadership, investment, and opportunity.

The event also featured an engaging panel discussion with esteemed panelists, including Ms. Kanza Afzal, CFA, General Manager Finance & Planning, Engro Polymer & Chemicals Ltd, Ms. Shafaq Fauzil Azim, Acting President & CEO, Pakistan Institute of Corporate Governance (PICG), Ms. Naz Khan, Principal Country Officer, International Finance Corporation (IFC), Ms. Ammara Masood, CEO, NdcTech, & Independent Director, Central Depository Company (CDC), Ms. Saffina Danish Elahi,



Author & Entrepreneur and Ahmed Bozai, Country Officer, Citibank Pakistan.

The panel discussion, titled From Setback to Success: Resilience and Overcoming Career Chal-

lenges, focused on the journeys of women professionals, highlighting their perseverance in navigating obstacles and achieving success in their respective fields. The panel discussion was moder-

ated by Ms. Mashal Khan (Alfalah AMC).

The ceremony concluded with closing remarks by Mr. Farrukh H. Sabzwari, MD & CEO of Pakistan Stock Exchange, who reiterated

PSX's commitment to promote gender equality in the financial market not only to increase investor base but also increasing significance of gender equality in corporate leadership.

Minister reaffirms commitment to supporting insurance sector

ISLAMABAD (APP): Federal Minister for Finance and Revenue, Senator Muhammad Aurangzeb here on Monday reaffirmed government's commitment to supporting the insurance sector, recognizing its potential for significant private sector investment.

During a meeting with a delegation of chief executive officers from Pakistan's leading insurance companies, the minister said government wanted to diversify lending beyond the banking sector, urging the insurance industry to step up and meet the growing demand.

This includes expanding the sector by focusing on innovation, enhancing productivity, and driving further growth, he added.

The discussion focused on the growth of the insurance sector and its contributions to the national economy, with a particular emphasis on its impact on the health system, investments in Pakistan Investment Bonds (PIBs), capital markets, and long-term investment opportunities.

The minister assured the delegation that the government would continue to work closely with industry leaders and stakeholders to ensure the long-term prosperity of the insurance sector, which is a vital component of Pakistan's economic landscape.

He assured the group that the government would carefully consider their proposals, particularly regarding taxation and policy

measures necessary for the future growth of the industry.

He highlighted that the consultative process for the upcoming federal budget had been deliberately advanced this year.

Over 90% of the process has already been completed, with recommendations, proposals, and suggestions received from various stakeholders, including the insurance sector.

He emphasized that a team of experts at the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) was diligently reviewing each proposal submitted by different sectors, ensuring that the impact on the economy and revenue is thoroughly evaluated.

This process aims to

develop realistic and actionable policy interventions that will foster the growth of the industry and critical sectors of the economy.

Earlier, the delegation presented to the Minister and his team the key proposals and suggestions aimed at boosting the growth and productivity of the insurance sector.

The presentation also highlighted the current statistics of the industry, which boasts assets worth Rs 2,900 billion, alongside 20,000 direct and 234,000 indirect employees.

The sector's contributions were underscored, with Rs 613 billion in gross revenue premiums and Rs 373 billion in claims paid to date.

PSX loses 42 points

ISLAMABAD (APP): The 100-Index of the Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX) lost 42.36 points, a nominal negative change of 0.04 percent, closing at 114,356.34 points as compared to 114,398.70 points on the last trading day.

A total of 324,654,460 shares were traded during the day as compared to 404,365,056 shares the previous trading day, whereas the price of shares stood at Rs20,704 billion against Rs27,842 billion on the last trading day.

As many as 435 companies transacted their shares in the stock market, 194 of them recorded gains and 170 sustained losses, whereas the share price of 71 companies remained unchanged. The three top trading companies were Power Cement with 24,823,328 shares at Rs11.76 per share, Fauji Cement with 22,194,869 shares at Rs43.91 per share and Maple Leaf with 19,750,525 shares at Rs56.03 per share.

Unilever Pakistan Foods Limited witnessed a maximum increase of Rs378.76 per share closing at Rs23,698.91 whereas runner-up was PIA Holding Company LimitedB with Rs68.25 rise in its share price to close at Rs891.43.

Raffan Maize Products Company Limited witnessed a maximum decrease of Rs92.96 per share price, closing at Rs9,133.99, whereas the runner-up was Nestle Pakistan Limited with Rs74.35 decline in its per share price to Rs7,321.25.

Rupee sheds 10 paise

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Rupee on Monday depreciated by 10 paise against US Dollar in the interbank trading and closed at Rs280.06 against the previous day's closing of Rs279.96.

However, according to the Forex Association of Pakistan (FAP), the buying and selling rates of the dollar in the open market stood at Rs280.25 and Rs281.75, respectively.

The price of the Euro decreased by 11 paise to close at Rs303.13 against the last day's closing of Rs303.24, according to the State Bank of Pakistan.

The Japanese yen remained unchanged and closed at Rs1.89, whereas a decrease of 22 paise was witnessed in the exchange rate of the British Pound, which was traded at Rs361.00 as compared to the last day's closing of Rs361.22. The exchange rates of the Emirates Dirham and the Saudi Riyal increased by 03 and 02 paise to close at Rs 76.25 and Rs74.65, respectively.

Gold prices remain unchanged at Rs306,000 per tola: The price of 24 karat per tola gold remained unchanged at Rs306,000 on Monday. All Pakistan Sarafa Gems and Jewelers Association reported.

The prices of 10 grams of 24 karat and 10 gram 22 karat also witnessed no change and were trade at Rs 262,345 and Rs 240,491 respectively. The prices of per tola and ten gram silver were also sold on same rates at Rs,3,388 and Rs,2,904 respectively.

The price of gold in the international market remained constant at \$2,910 whereas that of silver remained unchanged at \$32.50.

Major achievement: SBA key members join Businessman Forum

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: A major achievement for the Businessman Forum, two important members of Sarhad Business Alliance (SBA), Abidullah Yousafzai, in presence of former FPCCI president Ghazanfar Bilour Faiz Rasool, Saddam Gul and Fazl e Wahid has also announced joining BF.

In a presence of Businessman Forum leader and former president FPCCI, Ghazanfar Bilour, Sarhad Chamber of Commerce and Industry Fazal Moqem Khan, senior vice president Abdul Jalil Jan and Faiz Rasool, the Car Dealers Association president and an important member of SBA Bakht Mir Jan Durrani, along with family members and friends announced joining into Businessman Forum.

Bakht Mir Durrani reposed full trust on leader-

ship of the Businessman Forum.

On the other hand, another important member of Sarhad Business Alliance (SBA), Abidullah Yousafzai, in presence of former FPCCI president Ghazanfar Bilour Faiz Rasool, Saddam Gul and Fazl e Wahid has also announced joining BF.

Leadership of the Businessman Forum welcomed joining of key members of SBA into the forum and stated the move was staunch evidence that BF is the only business community representative forum, which have full capacity to resolve traders issues by taking up with government and relevant authorities and at parliament level.

Ghazanfar Bilour while

speaking on the occasion said BF and SCCI have always rendered selfless services to the business community and played a central role in a real sense in resolution of the traders' problems.

He welcomed the joining of two important members of SBA into the Businessman Forum and called it a major achievement of the forum.

Ghazanfar Bilour reaffirmed commitment toward sustaining efforts for resolving the business community in future and expressed hope that BF will achieve its set goals, objectives and welfare initiatives for business community, selfless services and further achievement in the coming days.

Rwanda to boost economic and trade ties with Pakistan

ISLAMABAD (APP): High Commissioner of Rwanda to Pakistan, Fatou Harerimana Monday said the focus of his visit to the business centres of Punjab was to promote bilateral economic and trade relations between the two countries in various sectors.

His visit to various business chambers of Central Punjab including Sialkot, Gujranwala, Faisalabad and Lahore Chambers of Commerce and Industries, other trade organizations and various industrial sectors was of utmost significant for promoting bilateral trade between the two countries and enhancing collaboration with the business community. High Commissioner of Rwanda to Pakistan, Ms. Fatou Harerimana said in release issued here on Monday.

On her visit to the business centre of Punjab province and during interactions with the business community in various sectors, she reiterated that there was a lot of potential for future economic and trade relations between the two countries.

Rwanda's high Commissioner said that Pakistan and Rwanda are two

emerging economies, "We initiated dialogue with the local business community in important trade sectors including textiles and garments, education, pharmaceutical, coffee and tea, medical equipment, rice, packaging, sports, agriculture and discussed ways to expand bilateral relations in these sectors in the future."

High Commissioner of Rwanda to Pakistan, Fatou Harerimana visited business Chambers and industries of Central Punjab for five days and initiated dialogue with the business community for the promotion of bilateral economic and trade relations.

The delegation led by the High Commissioner of Rwanda started from the Industrial city Sialkot and visited a manufacturing and supplying industry for surgical equipment, manufacturing and exporting Industry for Textiles and garments, education institutions, Sports, aviator clothing, nomex flight suits, coveralls, bomber jackets, gloves, tactical gear, safety work wear and hunting apparel.

The High Commissioner of Rwanda also visited the University of Sialkot and also spoke to the Sports

industry and discussed the bilateral cooperation and future prospects for increasing bilateral ties in these sectors.

She visited the Sialkot Chamber of Commerce and Industry (SCCI) and met with the senior leadership of the business community to negotiate for increasing bilateral trade.

This tour resulted in enhancing trade ties, the possibility of extending/expanding to Rwanda; Collaborations in education and possible exchange of students and other collaborations in the education sector, She said. She said the major sectors like surgical and medical factories as well as soccer ball makers were among the areas of interest identified.

The High Commissioner also visited Gujranwala city and visited and started negotiations with the business community in Gujranwala Business Centre and Gujranwala Chamber of Commerce and Industry (GCCCI) to strengthen trade ties.

She also visited the rice industry and mills in Gujranwala to harness the potential in the commonality between two sides.

Nasir: Economic policies imperative for prosperity

ISLAMABAD (APP): President of the Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ICCI), Nasir Mansoor Qureshi, has emphasized the need for sustainable and long-term economic policies to steer Pakistan towards lasting progress and prosperity.

Speaking to representatives of the business community on Monday, Qureshi acknowledged that while the country's economy is showing signs of recovery, significant challenges still remain there, said a release issued here on Monday.

He stressed that political stability and continuity of economic policies are crucial for unlocking Pakistan's true economic potential.

The government must consult with industry leaders while formulating eco-

nomic policies to ensure a business-friendly environment that supports economic growth.

Qureshi highlighted the importance of establishing modern industrial zones equipped with state-of-the-art facilities. He urged the government to provide tax incentives, reduce regulatory hurdles, and improve logistical efficiency in these zones to attract both local and foreign investments.

Addressing Pakistan's immense tourism potential, Qureshi called for improved infrastructure and international promotion of tourist destinations.

He stressed that developing eco-tourism, heritage tourism, and religious tourism could attract a significant number of international visitors, generating foreign exchange and creating

employment opportunities.

He further emphasized the urgent need for comprehensive tax reforms. By reducing unnecessary taxes and broadening the tax net, the government can significantly enhance revenue without overburdening existing taxpayers, he said.

Qureshi also reiterated ICCI's commitment to serving as a bridge between the government and the private sector. ICCI is dedicated to resolving the concerns of the business community and ensuring a conducive environment for economic growth, he affirmed.

The ICCI president urged the government to collaborate closely with the business community to develop effective strategies that foster investment, create jobs, and ensure long-term economic stability.

KCCI sets March 31 deadline

KARACHI (PPI): The Karachi Chamber of Commerce & Industry (KCCI) today urged its members to renew their membership by March 31, 2025, to prevent automatic cancellation.

According to KCCU, the membership renewal process for the 2025-26 term is currently underway. As per the Trade Organizations Act 2013, members must submit the prescribed fee along with proof of income tax and sales tax returns, if applicable.

KCCI has informed members through letters, emails, and SMS alerts about the deadline. Those failing to renew by March 31 will have their membership automatically revoked and will be required to complete the full re-admission process.

To facilitate payments, KCCI has provided multiple options. Members can pay online, through bank challans at Bank Al-Habib, Habib Metropolitan Bank, Meezan Bank, and Faysal Bank, or by submitting a pay order directly at KCCI. Payment receipts and tax return documents must be sent to KCCI for confirmation.

Members who have not received a payment challan can contact the KCCI Membership Department during office hours for assistance. The chamber is also issuing membership cards and certificates required for business operations.

HK, Shanghai lead losers on mixed day for markets

HONG KONG (AFP/APP): Shares in Hong Kong and Shanghai sank Monday on a mixed day for equity markets after data showing Chinese consumer prices slipped back into deflation stoked fresh concerns over the world's number two economy.

The reading compounded uncertainty on trading floors as investors struggle to keep up with Donald Trump's trade policy tinkering, while his refusal to rule out a US recession this year further rattled confidence. The president's on-again, off-again tariff threats against Canada, Mexico, China and others have left financial markets in turmoil and consumers unsure what the year might bring.

Traders are also keeping tabs on Beijing as Chinese leaders wrap up their annual rubber stamp parliament gathering where they set a 2025 annual growth target of around five percent, vowed to make domestic demand its main economic driver, and unveiled a rare hike in fiscal funding.

The need for more measures to boost the faltering economy was highlighted at the weekend by figures showing consumer prices fell 0.7 percent in February, the first drop in 13 months.

"The data only reinforces what's been clear for months -- deflationary pressures remain firmly

entrenched in the world's second-largest economy," said Stephen Innes at SPI Asset Management.

"The property sector remains stuck in the mud, domestic demand is weak, and despite a bounce in tech stocks, the broader wealth effect just isn't filtering through to consumers."

"Chinese retail investors might be riding the market rally, but the fact that household spending remains subdued suggests most are either tapped out or too cautious to dive into equities. A stock market pop doesn't fix a sluggish economy overnight."

Hong Kong stocks, which have surged 20 percent this year to a three-year high, lost almost two percent and Shanghai ended off 0.2 percent.

There were also losses in Singapore, Taipei, Bangkok and Jakarta, though Tokyo, Sydney, Seoul, Wellington, Mumbai and Manila rose.

London, Paris and Frankfurt rose in early trade.

The mixed start to the week followed a positive day on Wall Street where investors welcomed soothing comments on the economy from Federal Reserve boss Jerome Powell, which offset a slightly below par jobs data.

However, there is a growing worry about the growth outlook owing to

Trump's tariffs, federal job cuts and still-high inflation. Analysts described the jobs report as unspectacular, but good enough to suggest the labour market is not weakening precipitously.

The reading "shows private-sector demand for labour stayed strong just prior to the spike in economic policy uncertainty which has produced a sharp fall in business and consumer confidence", said Ray Attrill at National Australia Bank.

"As Pantheon Economics notes, it is the government sector, which added just 11,000 to payrolls last month compared to a prior six-month average of 35,000 that accounts for the modestly below-trend overall February result."

"The hit to payrolls from layoffs of federal employees instigated by DOGE lies in the near future," he added, referring to the Department of Government Efficiency run by Trump's billionaire ally Elon Musk.

Trump raised worries about a recession Sunday when asked by Fox News if a downturn was possible this year by replying "I hate to predict things like that".

He added: "There is a period of transition, because what we're doing is very big -- we're bringing wealth back to America," he said, adding: "It takes a little time."



In brief

KHA to host Ramadan hockey champions trophy

KARACHI (APP): The Karachi Hockey Association (KHA) is set to host the KHA Ramadan Inter Club Hockey Champions Trophy 2025, starting on the 15th of Ramadan at the Olympian Hanif Khan & Dr Junaid Ali Shah Sports Complex in Gulshan-e-Iqbal. The event was announced by Olympian Hanif Khan, Honorary Secretary General of the KHA. Top clubs and players from Karachi will compete in the eleven-a-side tournament, with matches scheduled daily from 3:30 pm to 5:30 pm. Clubs can register until the 13th of Ramadan by submitting their players', coaches', and managers' details to KHA officials. Gulfaraz Ahmed Khan and Dr S.A. Majid at the KHA office on University Road.

Haris, wife Muzna welcome first baby boy

LAHORE (Monitoring Desk): In a heart-warming update from the cricketing world, Pakistani fast bowler Haris Rauf and his wife Muzna Masood Malik have welcomed their first child, a baby boy. The joyful news was shared by his fellow cricketers, Shaheen Shah Afridi and all-rounder Shahdad Khan, through their official Instagram handle. However, the right-handed pacer has not yet confirmed the news. "Congratulations to [Haris Rauf] and family on the birth of his first child! Wishing health, happiness [and] prosperity for little one and the family. May Allah bless you," Shadab wrote on Instagram story. Similarly, Afridi also took to Instagram story and congratulated Rauf on birth of "your baby boy". "Wishing you and your family endless joy and happiness." The Pakistani pacer married his class fellow Muzna, who is also a model, in December 2022 in an intimate ceremony in Islamabad. Haris, who started his career with tape ball cricket, found his feet in international cricket after being picked up by Pakistan Super League (PSL) franchise Lahore Qalandars. Qalandars invested in Haris and sent him to Australia for high-class training.

Napoli win refreshes title hopes

ROME (AFP/APP): Napoli breathed fresh life into their Serie A title hopes on Sunday with a 2-1 victory over Fiorentina that ended a five-match winless run, while Atalanta routed Juventus 4-0 to stay in the hunt. Romelu Lukaku gave Napoli the lead on 26 minutes and Giacomo Raspadori doubled that on the hour before Albert Gudmundsson pulled a goal back for Fiorentina. Antonio Conte's Napoli climbed back to within a point of leaders Inter Milan, who came from two goals down to beat bottom side Monza 3-2 on Saturday. "We deserved the victory," said Conte. "We could have been a bit more efficient with our chances and managed the final part of the game with less anxiety because let's not forget that we dropped many points around the 90th minute in the last five games." Napoli, who won the title two years ago, were top at the end of January but have been playing catch-up with Inter after picking up just four points in five matches before beating Fiorentina at the Stadio Diego Armando Maradona.

No Pakistani players on ICC Champions Trophy 2025 team of the tournament

ISLAMABAD (Monitoring Desk): The International Cricket Council (ICC) on Monday announced its 'Team of the Tournament' for the Champions Trophy 2025, which concluded last week, with no Pakistani player making it on the prestigious list.

The ninth edition of the Champions Trophy saw India being crowned as the winners on Mar. 9 after they overcame New Zealand in the final. Pakistan ended their campaign in the home trophy without a win. "Several exceptional

performers lit up the tournament with the bat and ball," ICC said on its website. "The best of them made it to the Team of the Tournament."

The team includes six players from India, four from New Zealand and two from Afghanistan.

Here's what the side looks like:

1. Rachin Ravindra (New Zealand) 251 runs, 62.75 average, two hundreds
2. Ibrahim Zadran (Afghanistan) 216 runs, 72 average, one hundred

3. Virat Kohli (India) 218 runs, 54.5 average, one hundred
4. Shreyas Iyer (India) 243 runs, 48.6 average, two fifties
5. KL Rahul (wk) (India) 140 runs, 140 average, 42 highest score*
6. Glenn Phillips (New Zealand) 177 runs, 59 average, two wickets, five catches
7. Azmatullah Omarzai (Afghanistan) 126 runs, 42 average, seven wickets, one five-wicket haul
8. Mitchell Santner (c) (New Zealand) Nine wickets, 26.6 average, 4.80 economy

9. Mohammed Shami (India) Nine wickets, 25.8 average, 5.68 economy, one five-wicket haul
10. Matt Henry (New Zealand) Ten wickets, 16.7 average, 5.32 economy, one five-wicket haul
11. Varun Chakaravarthy (India) Nine wickets, 15.1 average, 4.53 economy
- 12th player: Axar Patel (India) Five wickets, 39.2 average, 4.35 economy.

Akram, Akhtar slam PCB's absence from CT presentation ceremony

KARACHI (Monitoring Desk): Following India's triumph in the ICC Champions Trophy 2025 final, speculation has emerged over the absence of Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) representatives during the prize ceremony.

Former Pakistan cricketers Shoaib Akhtar and Wasim Akram have raised concerns, questioning why no PCB official was present on stage despite Pakistan hosting the tournament.

India, led by Rohit Sharma, secured their first ICC ODI title in 12 years with a commanding win in the final. However, post-match discussions took a different turn as Akhtar pointed out the absence of PCB officials during the



presentation ceremony. "India have won the Champions Trophy title. But I observed a strange thing—no one from the Pakistan Cricket Board was present. Pakistan is hosting the Champions

Trophy. I don't understand the logic," Akhtar said. Akram also expressed similar concerns, stating that while PCB chairman Mohsin Naqvi was reportedly unwell, other officials, including Sumair

Ahmad and Usman Wahla, were present at the venue but did not take part in the ceremony.

"The question now is that we were the hosts, weren't we? How come even the CEO of the Pakistan Cricket Board or whoever was representing the chairman was not on the stage? Was he not invited? I don't know what the story is, but it definitely looked odd," Akram said on Sports Central's 'Dressing Room' show.

While there has been no official statement from the PCB regarding the matter, the speculation has sparked debate over the absence of a host nation's representation at an ICC event's final ceremony.

Brook withdraws from IPL to focus on England

NEW DELHI (AFP) : England batsman Harry Brook on Monday pulled out of the Indian Premier League, saying he needed "to recharge" and focus on international cricket.

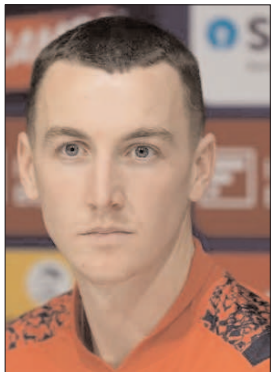
The 26-year-old, who is regarded as a front-runner to replace Jos Buttler as England white-ball captain, was signed to Delhi Capitals for the new IPL season beginning later this month.

"I have made the very difficult decision to pull out of the upcoming IPL," Brook, who plays Tests, ODIs and T20s for England, wrote on social media.

"I apologise unreservedly to the Delhi Capitals and their supporters."

Free-scoring batsman Brook also withdrew from his contract with the Delhi side last season after the death of his grandmother.

He now faces a possible two-year suspension under rules designed to prevent late pullouts from the money-spinning T20 league by overseas players. Exceptions can be made, mostly for injuries.



England play five Tests against India from June during their home summer this year, followed by an Ashes tour to Australia starting in November.

Either side of the India Tests, England host white-ball series against each of the West Indies, South Africa and Ireland plus a one-off Test against Zimbabwe in May.

"It is a really important

time for England cricket and I want to fully commit to preparing for the upcoming series," said Brook.

"In order to do this I need time to recharge after the busiest period in my career to date."

Buttler resigned as white-ball captain after England's dismal group-stage exit at the Champions Trophy, where they failed to win a match.

"I know not everyone will understand, and I don't expect them to, but I have to do what I believe is right and playing for my country remains my priority and focus," said Brook.

"I remain hugely grateful for the opportunities I have been given and the support I receive."

Brook played one previous season in the IPL, for Sunrisers Hyderabad in 2023, when he scored a 55-ball century against Kolkata Knight Riders.

The 2025 IPL begins on March 22 when defending champions Kolkata host Royal Challengers Bengaluru at Eden Gardens.



Wahab Riaz withdraws from National T20 cup

LAHORE (Monitoring Desk): Former Pakistan pacer Wahab Riaz has decided to sit out the National T20 Cricket Tournament, marking the end of his domestic cricket career.

The veteran cricketer, who was included in the Lahore Whites squad by the Lahore Region, has opted out due to his commitments with the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) and personal reasons, sources confirmed.

Currently serving as PCB's Head of Mentors, Wahab has been actively involved in mentoring young cricketers and shaping the board's player development strategies.

The former chief selector's decision signals a shift in focus toward his administrative and mentoring roles rather than continuing as a player in domestic competitions.

ICC reveals real reason behind Naqvi's absence from CT final

DUBAI (Monitoring Desk): The International Cricket Council (ICC) on Monday addressed concerns regarding the absence of Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) officials during the ICC Champions Trophy 2025 final ceremony.

The clarification came after questions were raised over the lack of Pakistani representation on stage, despite Pakistan being the official host of the tournament.

A spokesperson for the ICC, while speaking to a private TV channel, con-

firmed that Mr Naqvi, who was the designated representative of the host board, was unavailable and did not attend the final in Dubai.

"The ICC only invites the head of the host board — such as the president, vice president, chairman, or CEO — to participate in the awards ceremony. Other board officials, regardless of their presence at the venue, are not part of the stage proceedings," the spokesperson explained.

The ICC further clarified that these protocols have

been consistently followed in all of its tournaments and were not specific to the Champions Trophy.

The final, which was originally scheduled to be held in Pakistan, was shifted to Dubai after the Indian government refused to send its team to play in Pakistan. While most of the tournament took place in Pakistan, the decision to relocate the final had already sparked discussions regarding the visibility of the host nation during key moments of the event.

Speed king Merlier doubles up at Paris-Nice

PARIS (AFP): Belgian Tim Merlier burnished his reputation as the man to beat in the sprint finishes as he shot to a second straight Paris-Nice stage win on Monday.

The Soudal Quick-Step rider had to overcome being trapped behind a crash 20km to go to get back in touch with the lead peloton, where he faced reduced competition at a finish line tailor-made to test the fast men.

The 32-year-old Merlier also extended his overall lead in the standings after two stages of the race conceived as a mini Tour de France. Two-time Tour de France winner Jonas Vingegaard finished safely in the pack again and is 20 seconds adrift of Merlier in the rankings due to win time bonuses.

Stage two of eight was a flat 183.9km run from Montesson, just 20km west of Paris, to Bellegarde with the route heading down to the Loire Valley on Tuesday. The crash split the peloton and ended the race for Luke Durbridge and



Gorka Sorrairain.

It also allowed Jonas Abrahamson to continue his slog out front on an escape for longer than expected, as he was caught just 5km from the line and took the day's combativity award.

Stuck behind the crash were some overall contenders such as Mattias Skjelmose (Lidl-Trek), Joao Almeida of UAE Team Emirates and Ben O'Connor of Jayco-AlUla.

Tuesday's stage, which begins at the Magny-Cours motor racing circuit, is a

28.4km team time trial using the new format where key riders no longer need to wait for their teammates over the closing section.

The following two stages feature rolling hills as the race forges south and culminates with a pair of mountain stages this weekend. The action should go down to the wire with a chase up the fabled slopes of the Col d'Eze, offering a sweeping view of the French Riviera, before the peloton race full on to the denouement on Nice's Promenade des Anglais.

Amorim lauds Garnacho's 'complete game' in Arsenal draw



LONDON (Agencies): Manchester United manager Ruben Amorim was impressed by Alejandro Garnacho's performance as the winger put in a hard shift at Old Trafford during Sunday's 1-1 Premier League draw with Arsenal.

The Argentina international was a constant threat for the visitors from the right wing. The 20-year-old won four fouls, more than

any other player in the game, including the one that led to Bruno Fernandes's free-kick goal just before the break.

Garnacho, who also delivered two crosses and won the majority of his duels, fared better than his recent performances, after hitting the side netting in Thursday's 1-1 draw at Real Sociedad in the Europa League.

He had also faced criti-

cism for his reaction to being substituted during last month's 3-2 win over Ipswich Town, heading straight down the tunnel instead of joining the bench.

"I think Garnacho made a really complete game. He was upset last Thursday and today, he was amazing," Amorim told Sky Sports after Sunday's match.

Media reports had linked Garnacho, who joined United in 2020 as an academy player, with a move away from the club in January after Amorim dropped him from the squad along with Marcus Rashford in December, demanding higher standards and competitiveness.

But the manager later backed the former Atletico Madrid youth player, saying Garnacho had changed his attitude and was improving at United.

Swiatek, Medvedev sprint into Indian Wells fourth round

INDIAN WELLS (AFP/APP): Defending champion Iga Swiatek edged closer to an unprecedented third straight Indian Wells WTA title Sunday, overwhelming Dayana Yastremska 6-0, 6-2 to reach the fourth round.

Swiatek's 65-minute victory set the tone on a day that saw Daniil Medvedev spend just 10 minutes on court before ailing opponent Alex Michelsen retired.

Swiatek, the world number two from Poland, was in full control against hard-hitting Ukrainian Yastremska, swinging freely as she won the first 10 games. She converted six of her 11 break chances and didn't face a break point herself and it was virtually over by the time Yastremska got on the board with wins in her last two service games.

"It's always hard to finish a match like that," Swiatek said. "But I'm happy that I got my intensity up the last game and closed it with confidence." Swiatek next faces Czech Karolina Muchova, who trailed 3-5 in the first set but won 10 of the next 11 games to beat compatriot Katerina Siniakova 7-5, 6-1.

Russian 17-year-old Mirra Andreeva and 2023 Indian Wells champion Elena Rybakina joined Swiatek in dishing out bagels as they lined up a fourth-round clash.

Andreeva, who triumphed in

Dubai last month to become the youngest ever winner of a WTA 1000 event, beat Denmark's Clara Tauson 6-3, 6-0 in 63 minutes. Rybakina downed Britain's Katie Boulter 6-0, 7-5. Andreeva -- who beat Tauson in the final in Dubai -- said she found conditions on Stadium Court tougher than she made it look.

"I'm just happy the way I managed to stay in the game," she said. "I didn't give her much rhythm so I guess it was not bad -- but there's a lot of things to work on." Women's fourth seed Jessica Pegula of the United States, fresh off her first WTA title of the year in Austin, was another quick winner, putting away China's Wang Xinyu 6-2, 6-1 in just 62 minutes.

Pegula next faces Ukraine's Elina Svitolina, a 6-2, 6-4 winner over Danielle Collins. Medvedev headlined the men's lineup in the combined ATP Masters and WTA 1000 event, but he was barely underway when 20-year-old Michelson retired because of illness after dropping the first two games.

"Food poisoning or something like this, these things happen," said Medvedev, who was headed to the practice courts to tune up for a fourth-round clash with 10th-seeded American Tommy Paul. Paul beat Britain's 2021 Indian Wells winner Cameron Norrie, now ranked 77th

in the world, 6-3, 7-5.

— Gladiator —

Eighth-seeded Stefanos Tsitsipas, coming off his first title in almost a year in Dubai, beat Matteo Berrettini 6-3, 6-3 in a rematch of their Dubai quarter-final last week.

Tsitsipas dropped just eight points on his serve as he wrong-footed Italian with a variety of athletic shots, breaking him three times on the way to victory in 68 minutes.

After months in the doldrums Tsitsipas said he was relishing a new mental approach to the game.

"I just feel like I want to get out there on the court and be a gladiator, and that's how I approach every single match I get to play," he said.

Tallon Griekspoor, the world No. 43 from the Netherlands who shocked world number two and top seed Alexander Zverev in the second round, backed up his big win with a 7-6 (7/3), 6-3 victory over France's 29th seed Giovanni Mpetshi Perricard. Griekspoor fired 10 aces, dominating the first set tiebreaker, and didn't face a break point in the second set.

Griekspoor needed an hour and 16 minutes to secure the win, but in a season in which dropping the first set has become an alarming habit that was fast enough. "It feels nice to win a match in under one and a half hour," he said.

Vanuatu revokes citizenship of fugitive Indian Lalit Modi

NEW DELHI (Agencies): The prime minister of Vanuatu has ordered the cancellation of a passport issued by the island nation to fugitive Indian businessman Lalit Modi, who is wanted by Delhi in a corruption case.

The order came three days after India confirmed that Mr Modi had got citizenship of Vanuatu, a string of more than 80 islands in the Pacific Ocean. Mr Modi, the former chief of the Indian Premier League (IPL), is wanted for allegedly rigging bids during his tenure as the head of the world's richest cricket tournament.

Mr Modi, who has been living in the UK since 2010, has always denied the allegations. India has made several unsuccessful attempts to extradite him. On Friday, India's foreign ministry spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal told reporters that Mr Modi had applied to surrender his Indian passport in London. "We are also given to understand that he has acquired citizenship of Vanuatu. We continue to pursue the case against him as required under law," Jaiswal had said.

The news of Mr Modi becoming a Vanuatu citizen had made headlines in India, where he was once the face of the glamorous, cash-rich IPL tournament. He was a regular presence on the social scene, rubbing shoulders with Bollywood stars and India's elite. But on Monday, Vanuatu's Prime Minister Jotham Napat announced that his country had decided to cancel Mr Modi's citizenship.

Napat said a Vanuatu passport was a "privilege" and that "applicants must seek citizenship for legitimate reasons". "None of those legitimate reasons include attempting to avoid extradition, which the recent facts brought to light clearly indicate was Mr Modi's intention," a media release quoted Napat as saying.

He said that background checks and Interpol screenings conducted during Mr Modi's application for a passport had shown no criminal convictions. But, he added, that in the past 24 hours, he had been made aware that Interpol had twice rejected India's requests to issue an alert

notice on Mr Modi, citing a lack of "substantive judicial evidence". "Any such alert would've triggered an automatic rejection of Mr Modi's citizenship application," the release added.

The move is likely to bring relief to Indian authorities. Unlike the UK, Vanuatu does not have an extradition treaty with India. Extradition treaties allow repatriation of people accused of crimes between countries. A day earlier, Mr Modi wrote in a post on X (formerly Twitter) that there were no cases pending against him in any court in India and accused the media of peddling "fake news" about him. Mr Modi was instrumental in founding the IPL in 2008, which has now become a multi-billion-dollar industry. The main accusations against Mr Modi relate to rigging bids during the auction of two team franchises in 2010. He was also accused of selling broadcasting and internet rights without authorisation. In 2013, the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) banned Mr Modi from any involvement in cricket activities for life.



In brief

RCB to start monitoring encroachments

RAWALPINDI (APP): A comprehensive operation against encroachments has been launched on Abid Majeed Road and Range Road, where hundreds of illegal sheds, stalls, signboards, and iron grills have been demolished. CEO Syed Ali Irfan Rizvi stated that additional staff has been deployed in markets where encroachments have been cleared to maintain strict vigilance. This decision aims to ensure smooth pedestrian movement and traffic flow. The operation, led by Additional CEO Arshad Khan, is being carried out with the assistance of heavy police contingents. Heavy machinery is being used to demolish encroachments, including illegal sheds, stalls, and signboards outside shops. The Rawalpindi Cantonment Board has initiated a comprehensive anti-encroachment operation in various markets, removing encroachments from several key streets and markets.

10 drug peddlers netted

RAWALPINDI (APP): The Rawalpindi Police during the crackdown against drug peddlers on Monday arrested 10 suspects from different areas of the district with more than 11.5 kilograms of charas. According to the police spokesman, the Ratta Amral Police held three accused recovering about 5 kg of drugs from them. The accused Zahid was nabbed with 2.5 kg, Saud Nazir with 2.2 kg and Umar with 560 kg charas. Similarly, the Wah Cantt Police recovered 1.8 kg charas from accused Adnan, while the Dhamial Police nabbed accused Shahid Mansab with 1.22 kg of the contraband item. The City Police held two accused Riaz and Noman on the recovery of 1.2 kg and 550 grams charas respectively from them. Likewise, the Rawat, Mandara and Naseerabad Police arrested accused Farhat, Nadir Pervez and Adnan with 680 grams, 620 grams and 550 grams respectively of charas.

Police arrest impostor

RAWALPINDI (APP): The Sadiqabad Police on Monday arrested an impostor who was checking people by posing as a police officer. According to the Rawalpindi Police spokesman, the accused Qamar Mumtaz while donning police uniform started checking passers-by and motorcyclists in the area of Sadiqabad Police Station. The police registered a case against the accused and arrested him. Meanwhile, the Sadiqabad Police nabbed proclaimed offender Ajmal Maqsood in a cheque dishonour case. The accused had been wanted to the police since the registration of the case against him in 2021.

7 accused held for illegal arms

RAWALPINDI (APP): The Rawalpindi Police on Monday arrested seven suspects for having illegal weapons and ammunition. According to the police spokesman, the Pirwadhai and New Town Police recovered a 30-bore pistol each from accused Usama and Umar respectively. Similarly, the Wah Saddar Police nabbed two accused Rawait and Iqbal recovering a 30-bore pistol each from them. Likewise, the Kahuta Police held three accused including Asad Rehman with a 30-bore pistol, and Abdul Rehman and Danish with a Kalashnikov each.

Governor KP meets Chairman Senate to discuss political

ISLAMABAD (APP): Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Faisal Karim Kundi on Monday met with Senate Chairman Syed Yousuf Raza Gillani to discuss the current political situation and parliamentary affairs in the country.

The meeting was also attended by senior parliamentary leaders of the Pakistan Peoples Party, who deliberated on the challenges faced by the province and the need for cooperation between the

federal and provincial governments.

During the meeting, the Governor briefed Chairman Gillani on the party's organizational efforts in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, public issues, development projects, and the law and order situation. Both leaders emphasized the importance of strengthening democratic institutions and fostering political harmony.

Yousuf Raza Gillani stressed that all political parties must work together

to strengthen the parliamentary system, while Governor Kundi highlighted the necessity of federal cooperation for the province's development.

The meeting also acknowledged and appreciated Governor Kundi's initiatives, including the organization of a farmers' convention, a convention for local government representatives, and a gathering of the party's ticket holders at the Governor House Peshawar.

President's address to Parliament historic: Shazia

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) Information Secretary and Member of the National Assembly, Shazia Marri, on Monday termed President Asif Ali Zardari's address to the joint sitting of Parliament as historic.

Talking to media outside the parliament, she said the President, in his speech, underscored democratic values, inclusive development, and a balanced foreign policy. "The address outlined a comprehensive vision for economic recovery, political stability, regional equality, and enhanced security," Marri remarked.

She said that President Zardari emphasized the need for national unity and collective efforts, urging the government to adopt a consultative approach by incorporating the views of all stakeholders in governance.

Highlighting key points from the President's address, Marri said he called on Parliament to rise above personal and political differences in the greater national interest.

"He advocated reducing the tax burden on salaried individuals, increasing wages, and lowering energy costs to provide relief to the common man," she added.

Marri also pointed out that special attention was directed toward the development and integration of Gilgit-Baltistan and Balochistan into the national development framework. She said President Zardari lauded the sacrifices of the country's security forces in the fight against terrorism and reaffirmed Pakistan's resolve to eliminate the menace. "The President stressed the importance of cooperation among institutions, provinces, and political parties to ensure national progress," she said.

Commenting on the conduct of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) lawmakers during the session, she criticized their behavior as "unparliamentary and disruptive." "It appears PTI has no concern for the country or its challenges. Their one-point agenda is to spread chaos and divide the nation," she alleged.

CDA unveils helicopter seed dropping plan for Margalla Hills

ISLAMABAD (APP): Capital Development Authority (CDA) in a unique approach, planned to use helicopter for spraying and seed-dropping in the Margalla Hills to promote plantation in hard-to-reach areas. It was decided in a meeting presided over by Chairman Randhawa here on Monday, attended by environmental expert Rizwan Mahboob, members of the Baku environmental team, and senior officers from the CDA's Environment Wing.

The meeting also decided to launch a comprehensive campaign to remove paper mulberry trees and replace them with environmentally friendly plants.

The initiative, spearheaded by CDA Chairman Muhammad Ali Randhawa, aims to address the growing concerns over pollen allergies caused by paper mulberry trees while promoting a sustainable urban environment. During the meeting, Randhawa emphasized the importance of the initiative, stating, "Planting environment-friendly trees is a continuous charity. We believe in a Green Islamabad and a

Green Pakistan, and no effort will be spared to achieve this vision."

The campaign has already seen significant progress, with 5,072 paper mulberry trees removed from F-9 Park and replaced with 10,000 new trees. The CDA plans to plant approximately 30,000 eco-friendly plants in F-9 Park during the spring season. Similarly, in the Shakarparian area, 10,000 paper mulberry trees will be removed, and 50,000 new plants will be planted.

Along the slopes of drains and roads, 1,000 paper mulberry trees will be replaced with 80,000 local, eco-friendly plants.

Across other sectors of Islamabad, an additional 10,000 paper mulberry trees will be removed, with 50,000 new plants taking their place. The CDA has also decided to involve the private and corporate sectors in this year's plantation campaign.

Chairman Randhawa directed that fruit-bearing, shade-providing, and flowering trees be prioritized to enhance the city's greenery and biodiversity.

Free 'Iftar Dastarkhwan' serves the needy in Capital

ISLAMABAD (APP): As the holy month of Ramadan continues, a free 'Iftar Dastarkhwan' had been set up in the federal capital, offering meals to hundreds of underprivileged individuals daily, including labourers, daily-wage workers, and the homeless.

Sponsored by local philanthropists and organizations, the initiative aimed to support those in need, fostering a spirit of generosity and communal well-being during Ramadan. Ateeq Afridi, founder of a leading youth-led volunteer organization, shared that his team had been organizing the Ramadan Meherban Iftar Dastarkhwan for the past nine years.

"The response had been incredible. Local and international students from leading universities are actively participating as volunteers," he said proudly. Ateeq highlighted that the Dastarkhwan served approximately 400 to 500 people daily. "Labourers, bike riders, taxi drivers, and others rely on this initiative to break their fast," he explained.

The menu included dates, bananas, pakoras, samosas, chicken gorma, naan, roti, halwa, and occasionally zarda, ensuring a fulfilling meal for all.

"Funding for the initiative comes from his circle of friends and well-wishers," he added. He emphasized that feeding the needy was considered as 'Sadqa Jariya' in Islam. "I urge everyone to contribute to this noble cause. These people are part of our society and look to us for support," he remarked. He vowed to continue to serve for his homeland and humanity.

Fatima, a dedicated volunteer for the past ten years, expressed her fulfillment in being part of the initiative. "I feel immense satisfaction in serving others. I will continue to contribute to humanitarian efforts in the future," she said.

Ocean Lee, a student at Bahria University, sharing her experience said, "It's heartwarming to be part of this initiative. The kindness and generosity of the people here are inspiring."

She pledged to remain engaged in volunteer work. Kaleem, a daily-wage laborer earning between Rs. 1,200-1,500 per day, shared his gratitude. "I am the sole breadwinner for my family.

This Dastarkhwan helps me save money for other necessities. It's truly a relief in these tough times," he said, offering prayers for those who organize the free meals.



ISLAMABAD: Founding Chairman NADRA Maj General (R) Zahid Ihsan unveils Pakistan's first Dematerialized ID Card during a historic ceremony in the federal capital.

'Dematerialized Digital Identity Card' launched on NADRA's silver jubilee

ISLAMABAD (APP): The National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA) has announced the launch of Pakistan's first "dematerialized digital identity card" during its Silver Jubilee ceremony on Monday.

This development marks a revolutionary milestone in the national identity system. The ceremony featured the unveiling of a commemorative coin by the State Bank of Pakistan, a special postage stamp by Pakistan Post, and a book chronicling NADRA's 25-year journey.

A special event was held at NADRA headquarters, with Major General (Retd.) Zahid Ehsan, the founding Chairman of NADRA, as the chief guest. Other attendees included Lieutenant General (Retd.) Asif Munir, Chairman of NADRA, the Special Secretary of Interior, Chief Statistician (Pakistan Bureau

of Statistics), Director General of Immigration & Passport, former NADRA chairpersons, board members, and senior officials.

In his written message, Federal Minister for Interior and Narcotics Control, Syed Mohsin Raza Naqvi, termed the launch of Pakistan's first dematerialized digital identity card as a significant step toward digital identity transformation.

He announced that after integrating this feature into the Pak ID mobile app, citizens will be able to store their identity cards on their smartphones. Additionally, a digital verification system will be introduced soon, facilitating secure and instant verification for various services under the World Bank-backed Digital Economy Project. The pilot phase of this initiative will begin on Independence Day 2025.

The minister also highlighted that

NADRA extends identity services to remote areas within the country and Pakistanis living abroad, while also assisting law enforcement agencies in national security matters.

To commemorate NADRA's 25-year journey, the State Bank of Pakistan issued a special commemorative coin, while Pakistan Post launched a special postage stamp. A documentary on NADRA's achievements was also screened, and a commemorative book was unveiled, receiving great appreciation from the attendees.

Speaking on the occasion, NADRA's founding chairman, Major General (Retd.) Zahid Ehsan, reflected on the organization's establishment and early journey, stating that NADRA has continuously evolved to turn its vision into reality and is steadily achieving new milestones in its development.

ANF recovers 311 kg drugs in 8 operations

RAWALPINDI (APP): Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF) while conducting 8 operations across the country managed to recover over 311 kg drugs worth more than Rs 256 million and arrested 11 suspects, said an ANF Headquarters spokesman on Monday.

He informed that 550 grams hashish was recovered from the possession of 2 suspects near a college in Lalazar Rawalpindi.

300 grams weed was recovered from a car intercepted near a hospital near GT Road Rawalpindi and a suspect was arrested. The arrested suspect

confessed to selling drugs to the students of educational institutions.

150,000 intoxicated tablets hidden in 2 trolley bags of a passenger going to Doha at Karachi Airport were recovered. 120 kg heroin and 120 kg crystal hidden in Akhtarabad Hazarganji Quetta area were recovered during an operation.

In 5th operation, a total of 19.2 kg hashish was recovered from two suspects rounded up in a passenger bus near Yaro Chowk, Chaman.

In 6th operation, 4.8 kg opium, 2.4 kg hashish and

9.5 kg heroin were recovered from two suspects netted near Ahmedpur Sial in Jhang.

25.2 kg hashish hidden in a truck which was full of vegetables near North Bypass Karachi was recovered and a suspect was arrested.

10 kg heroin was recovered from a car checked near Motorway Bridge Ring Road Peshawar and two suspects were arrested during the operation.

Cases have been registered against the arrested suspects under the Narcotics Control Act and further investigations are under process.



ISLAMABAD: Birds sitting on leafless tree during the cloudy evening in Capital city. —INP Photo

Education Board vigilant on SSC Exams

RAWALPINDI (APP): Zero tolerance policy is being strictly implemented during the ongoing annual examinations to eradicate the scourge of 'Booti' mafia. Students should be encouraged to put their cognitive potential into the writings.

This was expressed by the Chairman Education Board, Rawalpindi Muhammad Adnan Khan after a comprehensive visit at various examination centers set up in Tala Gang. He visited the examination centers in Tala Gang, Chakwal and Bhagwal, in connection with the Matriculation First Annual 2025 examination.

Speaking after the visit, he said that according to the vision of Chief Minister Punjab Maryam Nawaz, no negligence would be tolerated to eliminate cheating mafias. "Actions are being taken against the cheating mafia in a transparent and systematic manner", he said. He said that crackdown against the cheating mafia has been launched.

The Controller of Examinations Tanveer Asghar Awan too, visited various examination centers in Kamra, Bahtar and Attock. During the visit, he checked the seating plan of the candidates, lighting arrangements and the attendance of the invigilators. Issuing instructions to the examination staff, he said that they should perform their duty as a national duty. "It is your responsibility to provide the best facilities to the candidates appearing for the examination", he said.

Planning minister urges for action to tackle health challenges

ISLAMABAD (APP): Federal Minister for Planning, Development, and Special Initiatives, Ahsan Iqbal here on Monday emphasized the urgent need for comprehensive action to tackle the rising health challenges in Pakistan, particularly in light of alarming statistics related to diabetes, hepatitis, polio, and stunting.

Chaired a Project Steering Committee meeting on the Prime Minister's Programme for the Prevention and Control of Diabetes Mellitus, the minister highlighted that Pakistan ranks third globally for diabetes, first for hepatitis, and is among the leading countries in terms of polio and stunting.

The meeting was attended by Federal Health Minister Mustafa Kamal, the Secretary of Health, the Member of the Social Sector Planning Commission, the Member of Development Communications Planning Commission, chief health Ministry of Planning and senior officials from relevant departments, according to press release issued by planning ministry.

During the meeting, the health

department briefed the committee on the objectives of the Prime Minister's Programme for the Prevention and Control of Diabetes Mellitus.

The department explained that the program aims to strengthen the provision of essential health services, including diabetes-related services, across all provinces, Islamabad, Gilgit-Baltistan, and Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK).

The program's goal is to reach over 70% of the targeted population in various districts for preventive and promotive diabetes services through primary healthcare facilities, lady health workers, and population-level interventions.

"I am confident that through coordinated efforts, we can address these pressing health challenges effectively," said Ahsan Iqbal. "Over the past sixteen months, work has already started on this project to address the country's growing health concerns. Health indicators across various sectors are in decline, and immediate measures are essential to reverse this trend," he added.

Ahsan Iqbal stressed the need for

stronger coordination with provincial governments to ensure that disease prevention and health interventions are carried out effectively. He emphasized the importance of allocating a significant portion of the national budget to health to address these challenges adequately. "Public awareness campaigns are crucial to preventing these diseases, and they must be launched without delay. It's vital to recognize that harmful health factors affect both smokers and non-smokers," he added.

The Federal Minister also called for the federal government to play an active role in facilitating coordination among stakeholders. "The federal government will ensure that a minimum level of coordination is maintained among all parties involved," he said.

Ahsan Iqbal also welcomed the new Federal Health Minister, Mustafa Kamal, and expressed optimism regarding his leadership. He expressed confidence that Kamal would bring about significant improvements in the health sector. "I believe that under Minister

Kamal's leadership, we will see positive changes in the health sector," said Iqbal.

Iqbal also discussed plans to make Islamabad a model for health policies and practices for other provinces. He stated, "Islamabad will be developed as a role model for other provinces in terms of health initiatives."

In line with the awareness campaign, Iqbal directed the relevant departments to finalize the Terms of Reference (TORs) on an urgent basis. He emphasized the need for a unified approach in implementing health initiatives and stressed that working in silos would not be effective. "We must work in a coordinated and integrated manner to ensure success in this program," he said.

The minister also emphasized the importance of ongoing diabetes programs with other ongoing health initiatives to maximize the impact on the national budget. Additionally, he announced the formation of a special team to conduct baseline surveys and collect accurate data for the program.

"To ensure a unified approach, we

will designate teams to compile secondary data and provide guidance to the provinces," Iqbal said. "Provinces will be responsible for implementing their own health initiatives, while the federal government will provide support."

Highlighting the urgency of the situation, Iqbal stated, "There is an immediate need for national-level emergency measures to tackle diabetes, hepatitis, polio, and stunting. These health challenges must be addressed promptly."

Federal Minister Mustafa Kamal, in his remarks, echoed the need for strong coordination with provincial governments to address the country's health challenges. "Effective cooperation with the provinces is our top priority in tackling these health issues," he said.

Minister Kamal, on his first day as health Minister, expressed his gratitude for the opportunity to serve in the vital health sector. "It is an honor to serve in this critical field and contribute to improving the nation's health outcomes," he said.

Project kicks off at airport

KABUL (Pajhwok): Estimated to cost more than 73 million afghanis, a reconstruction project has begun at the Maulana Jalaluddin Mohammad Balkhi International Airport in northern Balkh province, the Ministry of Transport and Aviation said on Monday. On its X platform, MoTA said the project included construction of a large parking lot with a capacity to accommodate 1,000 vehicles and a waiting area for passengers.

Huge cache of weapons seized

KABUL (BNA): Security forces in Baghlan have seized a significant quantity of weapons and ammunition during operations conducted across multiple districts. Security personnel confiscated a range of military equipment, including two mortars, one PK machine gun, two Kalashnikov rifles, two M-16 rifles, 27 pistols, 3 mortar shells, 59 rounds of DShK heavy machine gun ammunition, one rocket-propelled grenade, 80 rounds of DShK ammunition, 6 82mm artillery shells, and three explosive barrels.

OIC envoy discusses Afghanistan with Turkish foreign ministry official

KABUL (Amu TV): Tariq Ali Bakheet, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation's (OIC) special envoy for Afghanistan, met with Cihad Erginay, Turkey's former ambassador to Kabul and current director general for South Asia at the Turkish Foreign Ministry, to discuss the situation in Afghanistan.

According to a statement from the OIC, the meeting focused on political, economic, and humanitarian issues in Afghanistan, as well as cooperation between the two sides in addressing these challenges.

The statement emphasized the importance of continued engagement to support the Afghan people and maintain "constructive dialogue with the Taliban." Both officials also explored ideas and approaches to address key concerns in line with OIC resolutions.

Bakheet highlighted Turkey's role in advancing the objectives outlined in OIC resolutions on Afghanistan and acknowledged Ankara's contributions to humanitarian and diplomatic efforts.

Heavy rain, floods predicted, says Ministry

KABUL (Pajhwok): The Ministry of Transportation and Civil Aviation (MoTCA) on Monday predicted heavy flash floods, snowfall and rainfall in some provinces.

On its X handle, MoTCA wrote that flash floods, heavy rainfall and snowfall will likely lash Herat, Uruzgan, Ghor, Badghis, Faryab, Balkh, Sar-i-Pul, Samangan, Bamyan, Daikundi, Ghazni, Khost, Paktia, Maidan Wardak, Logar, Parwan, Panjshir, Kapisa, Laghman, Kunar, Nuristan, Baghlan, Badakhshan and Takhar provinces from March 10 to 12.

The amount of snowfall in different places is expected to be between 10 and 30 centimeters and the amount of rainfall in different places is expected to be between 15 and 30 millimeters.

The ministry also wrote that in western provinces, including Salang, there is a possibility of strong winds, the speed of which is expected to be between 50 and 75 kilometers per hour in different places.

The Ministry of Water and Energy (MoWE) also predicted rainfall, snowfall and flash floods in different parts of the country in the coming three days.

The ministry asked residents of the mentioned areas to refrain from going near the banks of rivers during floods and inform downstream areas to about flooding to prevent human casualties.

Kabul Municipality cracks down

KABUL (BNA): Mawlawi Abdul Rashid, the Mayor of Kabul, in a meeting with representatives of construction and road-building contracting companies, emphasized that violations in project work are not acceptable to this office.

According to a report from this office, the Mayor of Kabul stressed the importance of speed and quality in project implementation. He stated that any violations by contracting companies will be investigated, and if any violations are detected, the contracts will be terminated.

He added that public welfare projects must be executed with honesty and precision, and contracting companies are required to complete projects according to standard designs and within the specified timeframe. No one is allowed to waste public funds with low-quality work.

The Mayor of Kabul also emphasized that safety and protection measures must be observed during projects.

He assured that national investors and local construction companies will be supported, provided that their construction work meets the established standards.

Acting Minister initiatives with UNFPA representative



KABUL (BNA): In a meeting held at the Ministry of Public Health, Acting Minister Mawlawi Noor Jalal Jalali engaged with Kwabena Asanti, the representative of UNFPA in Afghanistan, to discuss health initiatives aimed at enhancing healthcare delivery across the country.

Minister Jalali highlighted the importance of transitioning mobile health teams into fixed centers to provide consistent and reliable services to communities.

He underscored that these services should align with the national health policy to ensure they meet the needs of the population effectively.

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Afghanistan completes three major dam projects, says Minister

KABUL (TOLONews): The Ministry of Energy and Water says that three major dam construction projects in the country have been completed.

Matullah Abid, the spokesperson for the ministry, stated that five other major projects are currently under implementation and are expected to be completed soon.

He also added that the construction of the Pashdan Dam in Herat has progressed by 95 percent, while the Peltoni Dam in Paktia has achieved 20 percent progress so far.

According to the information provided by the ministry, the Shah Aros Dam, with a cost of \$250 million, has the capacity to irrigate 2,700 hectares of land and generate 1.2 megawatts of electricity.

The Pashdan Dam, costing \$117 million, can irrigate 13,000 jerbis of land and produce two megawatts of electricity.

The Omari Dam, with a cost of 127 million Afghanis, has the capacity to irrigate 560 hectares of land and generate six kilowatts of electricity, while the Paltuni Dam can irrigate 2,500 hectares of land and generate one megawatt of electricity.

Matullah Abid emphasized that the major projects implemented by the Ministry of Energy and Water this year include the Shah Aros, Omari, and Kamal Khan dams, which have been completed and put into operation.

Some experts stress that the construction and development of water dams play a crucial role in managing the country's water resources and meeting Afghanistan's energy needs.

"The construction of dams is very important, especially in terms of hydroelectric energy production, as it reduces dependence on imported electricity and creates job opportunities," said Economic expert Hasibullah Safi.

"The government must create a suitable environment for foreign investors in the energy sector, as energy is one of the key elements in production growth and economic development," said another economic expert, Abdul Naseer Reshtia.

This comes as the Deputy Prime Minister for Economic Affairs recently emphasized at the International Water Conference in Kabul that, given the global decline in water resources, sustainable and efficient water management in Afghanistan is essential.

Baghlan residents want hospital project completed

P U L - I - K H U M R I (Pajhwok): A number of residents of northern Baghlan province have asked for the resumption of work on a 100-bed hospital – a project that came to a halt six years ago.

The construction of the hospital in the Hussain Khel village of the provincial capital Pul-i-Khumri had started in 2015 and 70 percent of work on it was done by 2019. But the project has since been in a state of suspension. Residents of the province, seeking enhanced health facilities, called for the early completion of the hospital.

Farhad Ahmadzai, the village council chief, said: "My son fell ill some days ago. I took him to the provincial hospital which lacks the capacity to accommodate many patients."

As a result, he added: "Majority of residents take patients to other provincial hospitals, including Kabul, for treatment."

"If this hospital is made operational, residents won't need to take their patients to other hospitals," he argued.

Ahmadzai urged the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (IEA) to complete the remaining work on the hospital.

Sardar Wali, another resident of Pul-i-Khumri, noted the number of patients visiting the provincial hospital was rising constantly.

He pointed out the available services at the main hospital were not sufficient to meet the needs of patients. People are left with no option but to take their patient to Samangan, Kunduz or Kabul.

Wali said: "Most of construction work on the 100-bed hospital in Hussain Khel is complete. Only a small portion of it is unfinished. The government must complete the remaining work to address health problems of area people."

Zarmina, who bought her child to the provincial hospital, said: "I know about the half-finished work on a major facility in our village. The project has been halted for years."

"I wish the hospital should have been operationalised and qualified doctors appointed to it. This would have obviated the need for us to seek health services in other areas."

She acknowledged the provincial hospital was providing considerable services but the number of visitors was high. Subsequently, people need to take their patients to other provinces.

Meanwhile, local authorities admitted Baghlan needed a well-equipped hospital. They said efforts were being made to complete the remaining work on the Hussain Khel hospital.

Public Health Director Dr. Abdul Qahar Ahmadi told Pajhwok Afghan News Baghlan needed a well-equipped hospital.

About 70 percent of construction work on the Hussain Khel project had been done, but the remaining part had been unfinished since 2019.

"The provincial hospital also needs to be upgraded from 100 beds to 200 beds. The remaining work on the hospital in Hussain Khel village will resume," he added.

Local authorities had already discussed with the contracting company and the Ministry of Public Health (MoPH) the resumption of work on the hospital, Ahmadi concluded.

Afghan military union demands US compensation



KABUL (TOLONews): The head of the union of generals, officers, and former soldiers of the country's security forces, Shaur Gul Pashtun, has called on the United States to pay compensation for the killing of two million people in Afghanistan and the destruction of the country's villages.

At a meeting in Kabul, Shaur Gul Pashtun criticized Uzbekistan for handing over seven Black Hawk helicopters to the US and urged neighboring countries to act responsibly, considering good neighborly relations and international laws.

"They destroyed millions of our weapons, two million people, and our villages. They must compensate us," said Shaur Gul Pashtun.

The head of the union of generals, officers, and former soldiers also called on the United Nations to defend the rights of the Afghan people.

"The international community, which defends human rights and international law, should also stand up for the rights of the Afghan people," he said.

At the same time, several former military officials have urged neighboring countries, particularly Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, to return all Afghan aircraft that landed in these countries following the fall of Ashraf Ghani's government.

"These military assets belong to the nation and the people. They were part of the Republic's structure to establish a national army and security institutions," said Afzal Aman, former deputy minister of defense.

"The fifty-year war in Afghanistan has taught us many lessons, and we must unite," said Kamran Aman, a former military officer.

The union of generals, officers, and former soldiers issued a resolution demanding that Afghanistan's airspace be protected by neighboring countries and emphasized the return of former military personnel to the country.

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Enterprising girls navigate new paths to learning

KABUL (Pajhwok): Many Afghan girls say they have not given up their pursuit of learning even after the suspension of education beyond the sixth grade. Instead of wallowing in despair, they are navigating new paths to translate their dreams into reality.

After the return of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (IEA) to power in August 2021, education for girls above the sixth grade was suspended, a ban that was later extended to university education.

However, IEA officials have repeatedly said the suspension of girls' education is temporary and that they will be allowed to return to studies once a suitable and proper environment is created.

But despite the passage of more than three years, the issue remains unresolved. Pajhwok's findings show some girls, deprived of school and university education, have made progress both in personal prosperity and educational domain.

From initial despair to discovering new learning opportunities, some innovative girls have embarked on new educational paths, focusing on religious studies, foreign languages, public speaking, miniature art, painting, calligraphy and other skills.

Alongside revising their school and university lessons, they have created new opportunities for personal growth and advancement.

From trauma to success Nabila Wahabzada, a resident of Kabul, recalls before the suspension of education for girls, she was a brilliant dentistry student in her class.

She explains in the early days of the suspension, she was deeply affected mentally. Emotionally disturbed, she felt time had stopped for her. "I couldn't sleep at night. In daytime, I had no motivation to work."

"I had no interest in going anywhere, or even talking to people around me. But after some time, I decided to restart pursuing my dreams and finding new ways of personal growth and progress."

She said, "Initially, I hammered out a plan to revise the textbooks from previous years. Then I started working as an intern in a dental clinic. After that, I enrolled in an English language course."

"In a year, I learned English well while reviewing my university lessons. I then learnt about an online university for female students, and now I am a dentistry student in the seventh semester at that university."

Hopeful of the restrictions on girls' education being lifted soon, she wants all girls to make the most of their time, using every possible means to continue learning.

Efforts for learning skills Hajira, who hails from Kabul, was in the 12th grade at the Naswan School

of Qala-i-Zaman Khan before the suspension of girls' education. She says: "This announcement was so shocking and disappointing for me, as I was also attending a preparatory course for the university entrance exam and had dreams of seeking higher education."

However, Hajira continued pursuing knowledge, completing courses in Quran recitation, English and computer skills in the past three years. She is now learning calligraphy and memorising the holy Quran.

While optimistic of schools and universities reopening soon for girls, she encourages females to continue striving for personal prosperity.

Many girls in Kabul, like Nabila and Hajira, continue to acquire different skills in a variety of fields and are striving for a bright future.

From staying at home to creativity Sara Zori, a resident of

Zaranj, the capital of Nimroz province, had qualified the university entrance exam and had been accepted into the Science Faculty.

However, due to the suspension of university education for girls, she was confined to home. "The news of the suspension of girls' education was a severe blow to my spirit. But after a while, I devised a plan for myself. Based on that, I wrote a book containing 10 true stories and learned the art of painting and poetry recital."

Interested in painting since the fifth grade, Sara says, "I gradually became familiar with different types of painting and colours through practice at home. In the past three years, I have learnt a lot."

Satisfied with her achievements over the past three years, she advises her peers: "Afghan girls should not give up in difficult situations; they should keep striving at home to reach their goals." Sara is also

currently learning the holy Quran and English.

Turning to miniature art Bahar Anwari, who previously studied at the Mathematics Department at the Herat University, says after the suspension of girls' education, she started teaching sixth-grade students the subject at a school.

In addition to teaching, she has turned to learning miniature art and has made progress in this field. She wants to teach miniature art to other girls as well.

Quest for medical education Setara Barakzai, a 19-year-old girl from Zaranj, is working hard for a better future. She was a ninth-grader when the curbs were imposed but continued revising her lessons. Additionally, she enrolled in online courses and is currently learning English, Arabic and public speaking skills.

"My achievements in the past three years may not be many, but I have tried to make the most of online courses. I do not want to sit idle. I am also trying to learn tailoring."

Setara, whose main interest is continuing her education in the field of medicine, hopes she and other girls will be able to realise their dreams. Doors to schools and universities will soon be open for them, she believes.

Experts hail new paths to education Abdullah Kakar Nesari, an educationist, told Pajhwok restrictions on girls' education were not permanent and those doors to schools and universities would eventually reopen for them.

He commented, "It is great that girls are using their time productively and turning to different educational pursuits. Girls who have been proactive have achieved great success."

Girls who are engaged in online education not only

learn but also earn academic certificates, according to the expert, who encouraged females to spend their time gaining knowledge and vocational skills.

Qazi Mohammad Hassan Haqqyar, a religious scholar, says religious and modern education is essential for any society. He argues without education, achieving success in this world and in the hereafter is impossible.

"It is excellent that girls have turned to various types of education. All families should encourage their daughters to pursue different forms of education until they are allowed to attend schools and universities."

He stated it was the government's responsibility to take steps to ensure that girls were granted access to education in academic institutions.

Pajhwok also tried to obtain views from interim government officials, but was unable to receive any response from them.



ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif interacting with PPP Chairman MNA Bilawal Bhutto Zardari during joint session of Parliament.

CJP pays tribute to women in Law profession

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Chief Justice of Pakistan Mr. Justice Yahya Afridi has paid rich tribute to women in law profession and to Women Judges for their contribution in upholding the rule of law and ensuring access to justice in Pakistan.

In a written message on the occasion of International Women Day, the Chief Justice of Pakistan has said that 'we, as an institution, renew our firm commitment to recognize and rejoice the invaluable contributions made by women in law in general and Women Judges in particular, in upholding the

rule of law and ensuring access to justice.

The increasing presence of Women in the Judicial profession marks not only gender equity but it also exhibits that Pakistan is a progressive and liberal democracy acknowledging the potential of its citizens and endeavouring to harness the potential. It strengthens public confidence in the legal system and fostering meaningful inclusivity, fairness, and a broader perspective in decision-making.

Their resilience, integrity, and dedication to justice have not only enriched our jurisprudence but have also set inspiring precedents for

future generations.

As we mark this occasion, we proudly acknowledge the progress made in promoting gender equality within the justice sector while energising us to do more. The Judiciary remains steadfast in its resolve to create an enabling environment where Women Legal Professionals can thrive, contribute, and lead without barriers.

Let us continue to work towards a justice system that reflects diversity and strength of our society, ensuring that access to justice is not just a promise but a stark reality for all'.

2 CTD cops martyred in Kohat target killing incident

F.P. Report

KOHAT: Two officers of the Counter Terrorism Department (CTD) were martyred in a firing incident on Tanda Dam Road, Kohat. According to reports, Mustafa and Zahid, both CTD officers, were on their way to Kohat city for duty when armed terrorists, lying in wait, opened indiscriminate fire on them.

Both officers, who were riding a motorcycle, were martyred on the spot. The attackers managed to escape, and a heavy police contingent has cordoned off the area to launch a search operation. The bodies of the martyred officers have been shifted to DHQ Hospital, Kohat.

Federal Minister for Interior Mohsin Naqvi has strongly condemned the firing attack on police personnel near Tanda Dam in Kohat. He paid tribute to the martyred police personnel, Ghulam Mustafa and Zahid ur Rehman, stating that their sacrifices will always be remembered.

Mohsin Naqvi expressed heartfelt condolences to the families of the martyr. He added that the brave police personnel of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Police have made immense sacrifices in the fight against terrorism. He further stated that Ghulam Mustafa and Zahid ur Rehman attained the made the eternal sacrifice and we salute them. Interior Minister reaffirmed that the sacrifices of the brave heroes of KPK Police will always be remembered.

Police repel Khawarij attack

F.P. Report

LAHORE: Punjab Police successfully repelled yet another terrorist attack on a border checkpoint between Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, marking the third major assault thwarted this week.

It reports that a group of 20 to 25 heavily armed terrorists launched an attack on the Lashani border checkpoint in Taunsa Sharif using rocket launchers and advanced weapons. However, Punjab Police officers swiftly retaliated, forcing the attackers into retreat. Reports indicate significant casualties among the terrorists.

The police spokesperson revealed that thermal imaging cameras played a crucial role in early detection, helping security forces counter the attack in time. RPO Dera Ghazi Khan and Capt (R) Sajjad Hassan Khan personally commanded the operation, while DPO DG Khan, Syed Ali, led the Quick Response Force (QRF) teams for an immediate counteraction.

A search operation is now underway in the border region to hunt down fleeing terrorists. DPO Syed Ali declared that these cowardly terrorist attacks will never shake the determination of Punjab Police. RPO Sajjad Hassan Khan reiterated that the morale of the police force is high, and all terrorist offensives will be crushed with full force.

Punjab IG Dr Usman vowed that no terrorist would be allowed to infiltrate Punjab, stressing that officers will stand firm to protect the public at any cost. With three major attacks thwarted in a week, Punjab Police remains on high alert along the KPK border, determined to eliminate terrorist threats before they can strike again.

Military courts should be limited to army personnel, says Hamid Khan

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The representative of the Lahore High Court (LHC) Bar and Imran Khan's counsel Hamid Khan completed his arguments against the trial of civilians in the military courts.

The hearing was resumed by a seven-member constitutional bench spearheaded by Justice Aminuddin Khan with the appeal against trial of civilians in the military courts. Supreme Court Justice Jamal Khan Mandokhail said the problem is not about the trial of civilians in military courts but the problem is what will the state do if civilians commit crimes that fall under the jurisdiction of Army Act?

"Can the jurisdiction of the Army Act be extended to civilians for committing crimes listed in the Army Act?" Justice Mandokhail raised a question. LHC Bar lawyer Hamid Khan said the provisions included in the Army Act under which civilians are tried are unconstitutional. "Now I will explain Article 175(3) of the Constitution in my arguments. It is clearly written in the Constitution that the judiciary shall be separate from the executive," he added.

"Tell me who was to separate the judiciary from the executive?" Justice Mandokhail asked and added, "Under Article 175(3), will the judiciary be

Omar Ayub accuses govt of suppressing media

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Leader of the Opposition in the National Assembly, Omar Ayub, has accused the government of suppressing the media and failing to maintain law and order. Speaking to the media outside Parliament along side Barrister Gohar, Ayub raised concerns over fuel smuggling at the Balochistan border and criticised the use of PECA laws to silence the press. He also lamented the deteriorating law and order situation in the country.

PTI Chairman Barrister Gohar expressed disappointment over President Asif Ali Zardari's address, stating that it failed to unite the nation. He claimed the president did not engage with the opposition and played no role in fostering national unity. Meanwhile, Sahibzada Hamid Raza asserted that PTI founder Imran Khan would be released within the next three months without any deal. He reaffirmed his stance, stating that Khan's release is imminent.

automatically considered separate from the executive? Or will the judiciary or the parliament declare the separation of the judiciary from the executive?" The Constitution is pretty much clear on this matter, there is no need for a declaration by parliament," Hamid Khan said.

Justice Muhammad Ali Mazhar said, "The majority decision said that military courts do not fall under Article 175(3). The Supreme Court decision looked at military courts in a historical perspective." Justice Mandokhail said, "According to you, under Article 175(3), the judiciary

will automatically be considered separate from the executive. This means that after 14 years of this article, military courts cannot exist even for soldiers.

Hamid Khan reiterated, "These (Military) courts can function only for members of the army." Justice Mazhar added, "If so, then you will have to admit that military courts are a parallel judicial system," adding that it is very important that Article 175(3) has to be clear in this matter. The Constitutional Bench adjourned hearing of case until 11:30am today.

Zelenskiy lands in Saudi Arabia for talks

JEDDAH (Reuters): President Volodymyr Zelenskiy landed in Saudi Arabia on Monday to meet Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, a day before talks between Ukrainian and US officials that Washington expects to deliver substantial progress towards ending the war with Russia.

The United States, once Ukraine's main ally, has upended its wartime policies in its stated pursuit of a rapid end to the fighting, engaging directly with Moscow while stopping military assistance and intelligence sharing for Kyiv. Grappling with the new approach in the White House, Ukraine has pushed for "pragmatic" relations after a disastrous Oval Office encounter between Zelenskiy and US President Donald Trump descended into acrimony last month.

Zelenskiy is expected later on Monday to meet the Saudi crown prince, whose country has played mediating roles since Russia's 2022 invasion, including brokering prisoner exchanges and hosting last month's talks between Moscow and Washington. Tuesday's talks between US and Ukrainian officials are the first official meeting

since Zelenskiy's abortive White House meeting, and Trump's Middle East envoy Steve Witkoff said he had high hopes going into the talks.

"I think that we're going over there with an expectation that we're going to make substantial progress," Witkoff said in an interview with Fox News. Asked if he thought Zelenskiy would return to the US to sign a minerals deal this week, Witkoff said: "I am really hopeful. All the signs are very, very positive."

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio, speaking to reporters en route for Jeddah on Monday, echoed that optimism, although he stressed there were still more details to be worked out on the minerals deal. Under huge pressure from Trump, Zelenskiy has been at pains to show they are on the same page, despite failing to win US security guarantees that Kyiv sees as vital for any peace deal.

Zelenskiy has said he will not attend Tuesday's talks with US officials and that the Ukrainian delegation will include his chief of staff, his foreign and defence ministers and a top military official in the presidential administration.

"On our side, we are fully committed to constructive dialogue, and we hope to discuss and agree on the necessary decisions and steps," Zelenskiy said in a post on X.

"Realistic proposals are on the table. The key is to move quickly and effectively." US officials said they were planning to use the meeting with the Ukrainians in part to determine whether Kyiv is willing to make material concessions to Russia to end the war. One US official said: "We want to see if the Ukrainians are interested not just in peace, but in a realistic peace." Trump said on Sunday he expected good results out of the upcoming talks, adding that Washington had "just about" ended a suspension of intelligence sharing with Kyiv.

Witkoff, who has been arranging the talks, has said the idea is to "get down a framework for a peace agreement and an initial ceasefire as well". Zelenskiy has called for a truce in the air and at sea, as well as a prisoner exchange, in what he says could be a test of Russia's commitment to ending the war.

NK fires missiles after slamming US-SK drills

SEOUL (Reuters): North Korea fired multiple ballistic missiles on Monday, hours after condemning the South Korean and US military drills for launching drills that Pyongyang called a "dangerous provocative act" that risked accidentally sparking a confrontation.

South Korea's military said the missiles were fired from North Korea's western region toward the Yellow Sea. The launch was the first reported ballistic missile test since US President Donald Trump took office in January. The missiles were believed to be close-range ballistic missiles, a South Korean defence ministry official said, referring to a type of weapon with a range of under 300 kilometres.

The US military, in a statement, condemned the missile launches and called on North Korea "to refrain from further unlawful and destabilising acts". The Indo-Pacific Command added that it would monitor the situation, which it said was not an immediate threat to the US or its allies. The allies' annual Freedom Shield drills are scheduled to run until March 20, although live-fire exercises remain suspended after South Korean jets mistakenly dropped bombs on a civilian town near the border last week, injuring 29.

North Korea has typically demanded that US-South Korea joint exercises be halted, branding them a prelude to an invasion. The South Korean military has said the joint drills aim to strengthen the readiness of the alliance to face threats such as North Korea. "This is a dangerous provocative act of leading the acute situation on the Korean peninsula, which may spark off a physical conflict between the two sides by means of an accidental single shot, to the extreme point," North Korea's foreign ministry said, according to state media outlet KCNA. The drills would harm US secu-

city, the ministry added.

Lee Young-su, chief of South Korea's Air Force, bowed in apology on Monday over the "unprecedented" accident last week in which two jets mistakenly bombed a South Korean village. "It was an accident that should never have happened, and it should never happen again," Lee told reporters. A pilot in one jet was pressed for time and did not double-check the target coordinates, while another pilot in the other jet followed and dropped bombs without noticing the incorrect coordinates, a South Korean military official said, citing the interim results of the military's investigation. The area hit by the accidental bombing in Pocheon, which is about 40 kilometres northeast of Seoul, was outside a training area near the border with North Korea. Residents in the area have long complained about the disturbance and risks coming from the exercises.

Elon Musk — for its role in achieving "this overdue and historic reform".

A few hours later, Musk responded: "Tough, but necessary. Good working with you. The important parts of USAID should always have been with Dept of State." Musk, with the blessing of President Donald Trump, has led a broad campaign of layoffs and downsizing within the federal government, arguing it was necessary to combat "waste" and "fraud".

Rubio announces 83% of USAID contracts cancelled

WASHINGTON (Reuters): The United States has cancelled 83 percent of all the programmes at the US Agency for International Development (USAID) following a six-week review, according to Secretary of State Marco Rubio.

"The 5,200 contracts that are now cancelled spent tens of billions of dollars in ways that did not serve, (and in some cases even harmed), the core national interests of the United States," Rubio wrote in a post on the social

media platform X.

Rubio did not specify exactly which programmes were being cancelled and which would be allowed to continue. However, he added that the remaining approximately 1,000 programmes would be administered "more effectively" under the State Department and in consultation with Congress. The top US diplomat also thanked the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) — an advisory body headed by billionaire

Elon Musk — for its role in achieving "this overdue and historic reform".

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Israeli team heads to Qatar for Gaza talks

JERUSALEM (AFP): Israel's negotiating team left for Qatar Monday for talks aimed at extending the fragile Gaza ceasefire, after Israel cut the Palestinian territory's electricity supply to ramp up pressure on Hamas. Ahead of the negotiations, Israel disconnected the only power line to a water desalination plant in Gaza, a move Hamas denounced as "cheap and unacceptable blackmail."

The first phase of the truce deal expired on March 1 with no agreement on subsequent stages that should secure a lasting end to the war that erupted with Hamas's October 7, 2023 attack on Israel. There are differences over how to proceed — Hamas wants immediate negotiations on the next phase, but Israel prefers extending phase one. Hamas accused Israel of renegeing on the ceasefire deal, saying in a statement Monday Israel "refuses to commence the second phase, exposing its intentions of evasion and stalling."

An Israeli official familiar with the negotiations told AFP the country's team had left for Doha. Media reports said the delegation was led by a top official from the domestic security agency Shin Bet. Israel has halted aid deliveries to Gaza amid the deadlock, and said Sunday it was cutting the electricity supply.

"We will use all the tools at our disposal to bring back the hostages and ensure that Hamas is no longer in Gaza the day after" the war, Energy Minister Eli Cohen said. The move echoed the early days of the war when Israel announced a "complete siege" on the Palestinian territory, severing the electricity supply which was only restored in mid-2024.

Hamas spokesman Abdul Latif Al-Qanoua said Israel's move will impact its hostages still held in Gaza.

"The decision to cut electricity is a failed option and poses a threat to its (Israeli) prisoners, who will only be freed through negotiations," Qanoua said in a statement on Monday. Germany and Britain both criticized Israel over its latest decisions. Germany foreign ministry spokeswoman Kathrin Deschauer said Gaza was "again threatened with a food shortage" and that cutting off electricity was "unacceptable and not compatible with (Israel's) obligations under international law."

British Prime Minister Keir Starmer's official spokesman told reporters: "We're deeply concerned by these reports and urge Israel to lift these restrictions." The Ramallah-based Palestinian Authority also slammed Israel, calling the move an "escalation in the genocide" in Gaza. The sole power line between Israel and Gaza supplies its main desalination plant, and Gazans now mainly rely on solar panels and fuel-powered generators to produce electricity. Hundreds of thousands now live in tents across Gaza, where temperatures currently reach a night-time low of about 12 degrees Celsius (54 Fahrenheit).

FIA arrests key accused in Greece boat tragedy

F.P. Report

SIALKOT: The Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) has arrested the prime suspect in last year's Greece boat tragedy, in which at least 40 Pakistanis lost their lives, officials said.

In a statement, FIA Gujranwala Circle confirmed the arrest of Usman Jajja, a notorious human smuggler, from Sialkot following an operation conducted on the directives of the federal interior minister. According to the agency's spokesperson, Jajja had been on the run since the incident and was accused of orchestrating illegal boat journeys to Europe. "The suspect had received millions of rupees from victims under the pretense of

facilitating their travel to Europe," the statement said.

Jajja was wanted in more than eight cases by the FIA Composite Circle

Gujranwala and is believed to be a key member of an international human smuggling network. Officials said he had been evading authorities since the Greece tragedy and had been hiding in Gilgit-Baltistan after securing bail in an unrelated case. Authorities said further investigations were underway, and raids were being conducted to apprehend other suspects involved.

"A nationwide crackdown is in place against human traffickers," said FIA Gujranwala Zone Director Abdul Qadir

Qamar, adding that no one would be allowed to play with innocent lives.

The arrest comes months after Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif ordered a countrywide operation against human smuggling networks and corrupt officials within the FIA who were allegedly aiding traffickers. The FIA has since dismissed 35 officials, while its former director general, Ahmad Ishaq Jahangir, was removed over delays in the investigation into illegal migration cases. The ill-fated boat, which sank off the Greek coast on December 14, 2024, had departed from Libya's Tobruk port with 175 irregular migrants, including a significant number of Pakistanis.