

Karakoram Highway reopened
F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The National Highway Authority (NHA) has successfully reopened the Karakoram Highway after landslides blocked sections of the critical route. By prompt response to the landslide on karakoram highway that left people stranded on the Highway, NHA restored the traffic in a shortest possible time, said a press release.



@thefrontierpost

First national English daily published from Peshawar, Islamabad, Lahore, Quetta, Karachi and Washington D.C

www.thefrontierpost.com

Vol. XXXIXII

No. 45

Regd. No. 241

RAMAZAN 12 1446 -- THURSDAY, MARCH 13 2025

PESHAWAR EDITION

12 PAGES

PRICE. 30

Jaffar Express operation complete, hostages rescued

DG ISPR says all 33 terrorists killed; 4 FC personnel martyred during operation

F.P. Repor

RAWALPINDI: Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) Director General Lieutenant General Ahmed Sharif Chaudhry confirmed on Wednesday that no passengers were harmed during the clearance operation conducted by security forces after terrorists hijacked the Jaffar Express in Balochistan's Bolan district.

"All 33 terrorists have been sent to hell...four frontier corps personnel embraced martyrdom during the clearance operation," the DG ISPR said while speaking to media.

Divulging details of the incident, Lt Gen Chaudhry said the terrorists targeted a railway track in Bolan on March 11, stopped Jaffar Express and took passengers hostage. "The militants used hostages, including women and children, as human shields," he added.

Furthermore, he said that the attackers had placed the hostages in groups with suicide bombers sitting amongst them. The suicide bombers were taken out by security forces snipers," he added. The DG ISPR confirmed that the terrorists were in contact with their handlers in Afghanistan.

Earlier, the Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi praised the bravery and efficiency of the security forces,

stating that their timely action prevented a major tragedy. "Pakistan's brave security forces have sent over 16 terrorists to hell and foiled their evil plans with courage," he said. Naqvi condemned the attack on unarmed passengers, calling it an inhumane act.

"Those who target innocent civilians are enemies of the nation and the country," he added. The minister further warned of a larger conspiracy to destabilize Pakistan through terrorism in Balochistan. "Enemy forces are using terrorism to create instability, but with the support of the nation, we will defeat every such plot," he asserted. He also extended prayers for the speedy recovery of injured passengers and reaffirmed the government's commitment to ensuring national security.

Pakistan Railways has established a help desk at Rawalpindi Railway Station to provide information about the victims of the Jaffar Express attack. A group of terrorists launched the attack on the Peshawar-Quetta Jaffar Express, leaving the driver with severe injuries in the Bolan Pass area of Balochistan, targeting innocent civilians. The militants detonated a bomb on the railway track and then took over around 400 passengers including women and children



hostage. According to Pakistan Railways' spokesperson, families can get all necessary details from the desk, which is in direct contact with Quetta and Peshawar stations. Additionally, an emergency cell has been set up at Quetta Railway Station Inquiry Office for assistance.

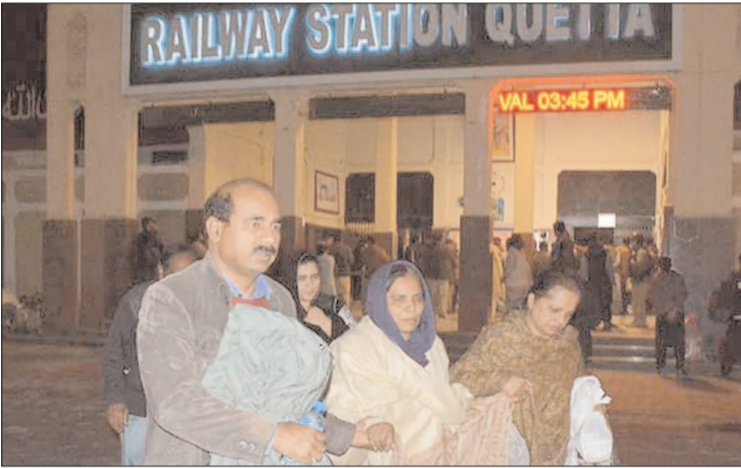
Passengers and their families can get information by calling 0819201210, 0819201211, or 117. Meanwhile, train operations from Quetta have been temporarily suspended which will resume after security clearance.

President Asif Ali Zardari strongly condemned a terrorist attack on Jaffar Express in Balochistan province and praised the security forces for their

effective and timely response. The president lauded the valour of security forces for rescuing the passengers of Jaffar Express and said that attacks on innocent civilians and passengers were inhuman and condemnable acts. The Baloch nation strongly opposed those elements who had taken unarmed passengers, elders and children as hostage, he added.

The president said neither any religion nor a society allowed such repugnant acts. He also prayed for the early recovery of those who sustained injuries during the attack, President Secretariat Press Wing said in a press release.

The Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif said that security forces officers and personnel were eliminating terrorists with bravery



and professional capabilities during the ongoing response.

This comes after terrorists attacked the Jaffar Express on Tuesday, taking hundreds of passengers hostage. The Prime Minister said despite difficult terrain, the morale of the security forces was high and they were pushing back the coward terrorists with their timely action.

The prime minister expressed the hope that the security operation would soon meet with success and the terrorists would be eliminated, PM Office Media Wing said in a press release. He said that inhuman terrorists who launched the cowardly assault at Jaffar Express at Dhdhar-Bolan Pass did not deserve any concession. Terrorists were the enemies of

progress and development of Balochistan province. The prime minister said targeting of innocent passengers in the holy and blessed month of Ramadan ul Mubarak proved it clearly that terrorists had no relation with Islam, Pakistan and Balochistan. He also expressed the resolve of continuation of fight against terrorism till complete eradication of this specter from the country.

Any conspiracy to spread chaos and lawlessness in the country would be foiled, he said, adding that they would never allow enemies of the country to succeed in their nefarious designs. The prime minister said in this fight against terrorism, the entire nation was standing shoulder to shoulder with their security forces.

US, EU condemn Jaffar Express attack

WASHINGTON, BRUSSELS: The US Embassy and the European Union's ambassador have strongly condemned the cowardly terrorist attack on the Jaffar Express in Balochistan.

In a statement, the US Embassy denounced the attack on Jaffar Express and the hostage-taking of passengers in Kachhi district. The Baloch Liberation Army (BLA) claimed responsibility for the attack, a group the US has designated as a global terrorist organization.

The embassy expressed heartfelt condolences and sympathies to the victims, their families, and all those affected by the tragic incident. It emphasised that the people of Pakistan have the right to live free from violence and fear.

The US reaffirmed its strong partnership with Pakistan, pledging to support the country in ensuring the safety and security of its

China vows firm support to Pakistan in combating terrorism

BEIJING: China on Wednesday strongly condemned the terrorist attack on Jaffar Express in Balochistan and vowed to continue its firm support to Pakistan in combating terrorism, maintaining solidarity, social stability and protecting the safety of civilians.

"We noted the reports and strongly condemn this terrorist attack," Chinese Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Mao Ning said during her regular briefing in response to a question regarding a terrorist attack on a train carrying over 450 passengers in Balochistan province. She said that China firmly opposes terrorism in any form and added: "We will continue to firmly support Pakistan in combating terrorism, maintaining solidarity and social stability and protecting the safety of civilians." China stands ready to strengthen counter terrorism and security cooperation with Pakistan and jointly keep the region peaceful, secure and stable, she added. — Agencies

citizens, standing by Pakistan during this difficult time.

Meanwhile, EU Ambassador Riina Kionka also condemned the attack in a post on social media platform X, stating, "We strongly condemn the terrorist attack in

Balochistan on March 11." She extended sympathies to the Pakistani people and the affected families, expressing deep concern for the hostages and calling for their immediate release, as the situation remains uncertain. — Agencies

FO urges India to lift restrictions on Kashmiris

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan today denounced India's decision to declare the Awami Action Committee, and the Jammu and Kashmir Ittihad-ul-Muslimeen as unlawful associations for five years, terming it a move to suppress political activities in Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJK).

Foreign Office Spokesperson Shafqat Ali Khan criticized the ban, stating that it reflects an attempt to stifle dissent and political expression in the region. He asserted that such actions demonstrate a disregard for democratic principles and international human rights laws.

The spokesperson urged the Indian government to lift restrictions on Kashmiri political parties, release political prisoners, and implement United Nations Security Council resolutions on Jammu and Kashmir.

Awami Action Committee is led by political and religious leader Mirwaiz Umar Farooq. Jammu and Kashmir Ittihad-ul-Muslimeen was founded by Maulana Mohammad Abbas Ansari, who led the organization until his passing in 2022. With this decision, the number of Kashmiri political parties and organizations banned by Indian authorities has now reached sixteen.

Earlier in the month, the FO rejected recent remarks made by India's foreign minister on Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) as "baseless claims" while asking his country to vacate the occupied areas of the region.

Journey of national development begins: PM

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif on Wednesday said that achieving economic stability was the first step while the journey of national development now began. The prime minister expressed these views during a meeting with presidents of various chambers of commerce in Pakistan.

The prime minister directed all ministries and relevant secretaries to formulate a policy action plan based upon the suggestions of the chambers of commerce after holding consultation with them. The delegations appreciated the government's economic stability measures and expressed gratitude for their inclusion in the consultative process, PM Office Media Wing said in a press release.

The prime minister said that everyone should work together for the development of the economy,

adding that resolution of the issues of the business community was a top priority and the government would fully support them. Despite difficult economic conditions, he said the Pakistani business community continued industrial and commercial activities.

"The government is taking every possible measure to facilitate the business community. Through FBR digitization and other reforms, the business community is being provided with facilities. The faceless clearance system has significantly reduced container clearance times at ports," the press release quoted the prime minister as saying.

Federal Ministers Rana Tanveer Hussain, Ahsan Iqbal, Muhammad Aurangzeb, Attaullah Tarar, Hanif Abbasi, Sardar Awaish Khan Leghari, Shaza Fatima Khawaja, Ali Pervaiz Malik, Minister of State Bilal Azhar Kayani, Special Assistant Haroon

Akhtar, Prime Minister's Coordinator Rana Ahsan Afzal, and other senior officials attended the meeting.

The prime minister sought suggestions from the business community for system reforms to enhance government tax revenue. Under the leadership of the prime minister, the country was moving towards development after achieving economic stability, the participants of the meeting said.

They said that for the first time, the government was demonstrating seriousness in addressing the issues of the business community. Inclusion of the business community in the consultative process, especially in budget discussions, was a positive step for which they were grateful to the prime minister, they further said. During the meeting, the presidents of the chambers of commerce presented their suggestions for resolving issues.

Saif flays Bilawal statement

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Advisor to the Chief Minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa for Information and Public Relations, Barrister Dr. Saif, has responded to Bilawal Bhutto Zardari's statement, saying that Bilawal Bhutto should first set his own house in order before criticizing others. He pointed out that the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) is in power in Balochistan, where just yesterday, an entire train was taken hostage by terrorists. "Will they also blame Ali Amin Gandapur for the situation in Balochistan?" he questioned.

Dr. Saif further stated that Sindh is currently held hostage by bandits from the Kacha area, while the province's rulers have been caught supplying weapons to these criminals. Meanwhile, street crimes and robberies have become routine in Karachi.

Bilawal, PPP leader discuss political situation

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Chairman Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) Bilawal Bhutto Zardari met with various party leaders at Zardari House, Islamabad, on Wednesday. During these meetings, he discussed the political situation and the overall conditions in their respective areas.

Among those who met him was Member of the National Assembly Mir Ghulam Ali Talpur, who briefed the PPP Chairman on the issues faced by the people of Badin and the measures being taken to address them.

Pakistan on track to become \$1tr economy by 2035: Ahsan

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Federal Minister for Planning and Development, Ahsan Iqbal, alongside Federal Minister Amir Muqam and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Finance Advisor, Muzzammil Aslam, held a press conference in Peshawar.

Iqbal announced that the second provincial workshop for the "Uraan Pakistan" program was successfully conducted in collaboration with the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government, following a similar workshop in Sindh.

Iqbal emphasized the importance of federal and

provincial governments working together to achieve national development goals. He noted that Pakistan has the potential to become a \$1 trillion economy by 2035, but this requires the cooperation of all provincial governments.

The federal minister highlighted the need for alignment between provincial projects and national development goals, particularly in key sectors like agriculture, industry, technology, energy, and job creation. He also stressed the importance of addressing population growth, which is among the highest in the

world, and providing food security, employment, and access to water for the growing population.

Iqbal announced that the government has launched initiatives to eradicate hepatitis C within three years, with 50% of the funding coming from provinces. Similar programs have been initiated to combat diabetes and stunting in children.

The minister emphasized Pakistan's potential to become an export-led growth economy, with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa being a key contributor, particularly in tourism and mineral resources.

Establishment of law and order must for development: KP CM

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: A provincial consultative workshop on the National Economic Transformation Plan 29-2025 (Uraan Pakistan) was held on Wednesday at the Chief Minister's House in Peshawar. The Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Ali Amin Khan Gandapur, was the chief guest at the workshop, which was attended by Federal Minister for Planning Ahsan Iqbal, Federal Minister Amir Muqam, provincial cabinet members, parliamentarians, and senior officials from both provincial and federal governments. The Uraan Pakistan program focuses on five key sectors for the country's sustainable economic development – exports, equity, E-Pakistan, energy & infrastructure and environment & climate change.

In his address to the workshop participants, Chief Minister stated that Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is moving for-



ward with Uraan Pakistan. "Despite political differences, we are determined to achieve Pakistan's economic development, and these differences will not stop our government from working for the stability and economic progress of Pakistan," he said. He stressed that the establishment of law and order is most essential, as it forms the foundation of development. He further added that Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has contributed to Pakistan in the past and will continue to do so in the

future. He said that the provincial government is working towards sustainable development through fiscal discipline, infrastructure development, energy efficiency, and social equality, with special focus on investing in sectors that have the potential for sustainable growth. In the first six months of the current financial year, a budget surplus of Rs. 169 billion was achieved, and a debt management fund of Rs. 70 billion has been established. He also mentioned that

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has successfully met the IMF target, and that investments are being made in productive sectors. Significant progress has already been made, aligned with Uraan Pakistan program, and the province will lead in this effort nationwide as well.

Touching upon major initiatives of the provincial government, the Chief Minister highlighted that Rs. 15 billion of private investment has been secured for industrial zones and that under the Insaf Rozgar

Scheme, entrepreneurs were provided loans amounting to Rs. 200 million, which created employment opportunities for more than 137,000 individuals. He stated that the government's vision for economic development is completely aligned with Uraan Pakistan. "The incumbent provincial government has initiated the revival of industrial zones in D.I Khan, Rashkai, and Haripur, attracting Rs. 435 million of private investment into these economic zones. Additionally, the establishment of software technology parks in Peshawar and Mardan has boosted IT exports, while mineral auctions have generated Rs. 5 billion in revenue for the government," he said.

He further noted that his government has provided interest-free loans to over 50,000 women-led businesses, offered training in engineering, digital skills, and technical fields to 81,000 young people, and enabled more than 500,000 students to benefit from the

provincial education card program. Referring to additional initiatives, he mentioned that the Health Card Plus scheme was reinstated, free medical facilities worth Rs. 30.4 billion were provided to 10 million families, and government assistance was extended for the construction of over 200,000 new houses. The provincial government is also taking concrete steps to promote e-governance and IT by introducing the Pamir.Digital Payment Gateway, the E-Domisel system, and a Digital Tax Collection System, along with providing IT training to more than 85,000 youth so that they are prepared to meet modern market demands.

The Chief Minister maintained that Rs. 5.5 billion in funds have been provided to Jawan Marakiz to promote young people. In addition, solar systems are being provided to 250,000 households; 1,000 schools have already received

solar systems, and over the next year, another 8,000 schools will be solarized. Similarly, 4,000 mosques have been equipped with solar systems with another 8,000 to follow, and government offices, colleges, universities, mosques, and madrasas are also being solarized.

Gandapur also highlighted developments in other sectors, and said that a mining cadastral system has been introduced in the province, under which more than 3,000 mines have been mapped, resulting in a royalty revenue of Rs. 5.7 billion. The process of land acquisition for a 365-kilometer-long Peshawar-DI Khan Motorway has been initiated, improvements have been made to the BRT service, and the number of daily commuters has increased to 150,000. He added that the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa afforestation program has been expanded, with forest cover increasing by 12%, and food security support projects worth Rs. 25 billion have been implemented.

Ihtesham takes notice of mismanagement in KP Paramedical faculty exam

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Provincial Health Advisor Ihtesham Ali has taken strict notice of the mismanagement in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Paramedical Faculty examinations and announced further tightening of the examination process. In a telephonic conversation with the Acting Chief Executive of the Paramedical Faculty, Dr. Abid Hussain, the Health Advisor instructed to make the examination process more stringent.

The Health Advisor emphasized solid steps to prevent the use of electronic devices and impersonation in the examination halls. He stated that conducting examinations in public institutions instead of private colleges for the first time is a significant achievement. Although there are initial challenges, moving examination halls from private to public institutions is no less than a challenge.

On the instructions of the Health Advisor, Dr. Abid Hussain has issued orders to the examination staff across the province. He directed that candidates arriving more than five minutes after the start of the MCQs paper should not be allowed to enter the hall, and thorough checking of students should be ensured.

He also instructed strict measures to prevent the use of mobile phones and Bluetooth devices, including thorough searches of candidates and, if necessary, deployment of police around the examination halls.

The Acting Chief Executive emphasized that any mobile phone seized during the examination would not be returned, and directed measures be taken to match the roll number photos with the candidates to prevent impersonation. He warned that legal action could be taken against staff for non-compliance with the pre-provided SOPs for the examination halls.

KPIC hears three complaints against govt depts

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Information Commission (KPIC) Chief Information Commissioner Farah Hamid Khan held a hearing on three complaints including complaints against the Sports Department's Directorate of Works, Police, and Health Services Academy, on Wednesday.

Public Information Officers (PIOs) from the aforementioned departments appeared before the commission. Muhammad Iqbal, a resident of Peshawar, had requested information from the Directorate of Works regarding the educational documents, experience, and seniority list of draftsmen working on various projects.

The PIO from the Directorate of Works assured the commission that the requested information would be provided within three days.

Muhammad Naeem Jan, another citizen, had requested information from the Police Department regarding an inquiry report. The Police Department's PIO assured the commission that the requested information would be provided within seven days.

In another case, Ubaid Hussain, a citizen, had requested information from the Health Services Academy regarding a tender process. The commission directed the Health Services Academy to provide the requested information within three days. KPIC is responsible for ensuring transparency and accountability in government departments by providing citizens with access to information.

Rule B-57 of Motor Vehicle Rules 1969 discussed

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: A meeting of the Provincial Cabinet's Committee on the implementation of Rule B-57 of the Motor Vehicle Rules 1969 was held in Peshawar on Wednesday, chaired by Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Law Minister, Advocate Aftab Alam.

The meeting was attended by Chief Minister's Special Assistant on Transport, Haji Rangiz Ahmad, Chief Minister's Special Assistant for Industry, Abdul Karim Khan, Secretary Transport Masood Younis, and other relevant officials.

During the meeting, Transport Department officials provided a detailed briefing on Rule B-57 of the Motor Vehicle Rules 1969.

They explained that due to the country's economic challenges, many vehicles have been in use for an extended period, resulting in significant revenue losses for the department.

Committee members offered their suggestions and feedback regarding the motor vehicle rules. Law Minister Aftab Alam emphasized the need for fitness and emission testing for old vehicles, following the Punjab government's model, to make vehicles more environmentally friendly and reduce road accidents.

KP Women Skill & Entrepreneurship employees announce strike

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: As many as 109 employees, including 90 women and 19 men of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Women Skill and Entrepreneurship Development Program have announced to take to the streets in protest against the non-implementation of regularization orders of Chief Minister after almost 50 days, on Tuesday. These employees were working under the KP Women Skill and Entrepreneurship Development Program and the Ready-Made Garments project, but have been struggling for their rights for the past three years.

According to the employees, on December 12, 2024, the Chief Minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa had directed the Secretary Industries and the Managing Director of the Small Industries Development Board (SIDB) to present a case for the regularization of these employees. However, despite the passage of 50 days, no progress has been made, leaving 109 employees without employment.

The employees' spokesperson Tahir Shah and the protesting employees said that 36 other SIDB employees had already been regularized in 2019, but they were being ignored. They warned that if their demands were not met, they would be forced to take to the streets and stage a strong protest.

Speaking to the media, a representative of the affected women, Madam Tasleem, said that the women employees who had been fired were facing severe financial difficulties. She appealed to the Chief Minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa to take immediate action to resolve the issue, so that they could support their families with dignity.

If the issue was not resolved despite the government's orders, the affected employees would be forced to take extreme measures.

Arbab Khizer flays prolong closure of Torkham Border

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz Additional Secretary Information Arbab Khizer Hayat strongly condemned the prolonged closure of the Torkham Border, terming it a massive loss for the business community, the national economy, and the general public.

He expressed grave concern over the government's indifference and flawed policies, which have resulted in the destruction of thousands of traders' businesses, causing losses worth billions of rupees on both sides.

Arbab Khizer Hayat emphasized that in the blessed month of Ramadan, the Torkham Border must be reopened immediately to alleviate the suffering of traders and the general public, as the patience of the business community has run out due to the enormous financial damage they have suffered.

He demanded that the government act responsibly and ensure that trade routes remain open at all times.

Arbab Khizer Hayat strongly condemned the fact that border trade has been left at the mercy of bureaucratic hurdles and unnecessary policies, which is a grave injustice to the economy and will not be tolerated under any circumstances.

He called upon the federal government to issue immediate orders to reopen the Torkham Border, preventing further hardship for the business community and the general public.

The Pakistan Muslim League (Nawaz) leader urged both nations to resolve disputes through dialogue, ensuring smooth and uninterrupted trade flow while safeguarding the interests of the business community and the People.



KMU General Hospital and PIC agreed to collaborate for healthcare integration

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: In a significant development in the healthcare sector, Khyber Medical University (KMU) General Hospital and the Pakistan Institute of Cardiology (PIC) Peshawar have decided to integrate their data systems through the Health Information Management System (HIMS). This initiative aims to enhance patient care by improving service exchange between the two public-sector institutions.

Vice Chancellor of KMU, Prof. Dr. Zia ul Haq, emphasized the importance of this collaboration, stating that the partnership between these institutions is not only essential for their growth but will also provide high-quality clinical services to patients. He further highlighted that KMU has established itself as a leading institution in medical education and research, and by incorporating clinical services, it is taking a vital step towards merging research with patient care.

KMU General Hospital will provide specialized services in diabetes, oncology, gastroenterology, and rehabilitation, with the potential to develop into a premier healthcare center for the region. Prof. Dr. Zia ul Haq also mentioned that PIC and KMU General Hospital can jointly establish a successful healthcare model, leveraging PIC's expertise to enhance KMU Hospital's service delivery. The exchange of knowledge, expertise, research, and resources between the two institutions will bring significant improvements in patient treatment.

The financial model of this collaboration will be guided by PIC's successful systems, and PIC's expertise in civil work, technical services, clinical operations, finance, human resources, and diagnostics will play a crucial role in improving KMU Hospital's services. The Vice Chancellor further announced that in the next phase, KMU's nine remote campuses will also be linked with KMU General Hospital, ensuring that healthcare services reach remote areas of the province.

Dean of PIC, Dr. Shahkar Ahmed, reaffirmed PIC's commitment to this collaboration, stating, "Our doors are always open for cooperation and guidance. By formulating short, medium, and long-term strategies, KMU General Hospital and PIC can effectively achieve their shared goals." He also proposed the establishment of a model medical college, in collaboration with KMU General Hospital, featuring a 500-bed state-of-the-art teaching hospital.

To ensure the effective implementation of this partnership, it was decided that three joint working groups will be formed, focusing on civil work, finance, and clinical & diagnostic services. These groups will develop practical recommendations, leading to the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the two institutions. The collaboration will be officially approved by the KMU Syndicate and the PIC Board of Governors.

This collaboration marks a revolutionary step in the healthcare sector, ensuring high-quality medical care and leveraging the combined expertise of KMU and PIC to bring significant improvements in public health. Earlier, upon their arrival at KMU, Prof. Dr. Shahkar Ahmed and the PIC delegation were warmly received by Prof. Dr. Zia ul Haq and his team. They also conducted a detailed visit of KMU General Hospital, expressing satisfaction with the proposed healthcare services.

MoU inked between UoT Nowshera and SIDB

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed between the University of Technology Nowshera (UoT) and the Small Industries Development Board (SIDB) on Wednesday, here at the conference room of SIDB, in Peshawar.

The agreement was formally signed by Managing Director SIDB Habibullah Arif and Vice Chancellor of UoT Nowshera Prof. Dr. Imran Khan, in the presence of Special Assistant to the Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa on Industries Abdul Karim Tordher.

This agreement aims to foster collaboration between academia and industry, focusing on skills development, research and providing innovative solutions to support local industries.

Furthermore, this partnership is expected to create valuable opportunities for UoT students while contributing to the growth of small and medium-sized industries in the region.

President of Sarhad Chamber of commerce and industry Fazal Muqeem, Ex , chamber President Eng. Maqsood Anwar, Haji Waheed Arif Awan, Deputy Managing Director Imp. Eng. Zulfiqar Ali Shahibzada, Deputy Managing Director Estate, P&D Noman Fayaz, Director Finance Bashir Ahmad and renowned industrilust Nooruddin were also present on the occasion.

During the ceremony the Special Assistant to Chief Minister Abdul Karim Tordher termed the aforesaid agreement a milestone for opening new avenues for the students of UoT.

He said that this agreement will be a significant step towards fostering effective collaboration between the academia and industry. He added that this initiative will improve the industry through new research and innovative solutions for supporting the industrial sector in the province.



Terror on the tracks: The Jaffar Express hijacking and Pakistan's response

Muhammad Mohsin Iqbal

THE recent attempt by terrorists and extremists to hijack the Jaffar Express train in Balochistan is yet another reminder of the persistent threats facing Pakistan. Their aim was clear to spread chaos and fear while using innocent human lives as a shield to fulfill their nefarious ambitions. However, the swift and decisive action of Pakistan's security forces foiled this cowardly plan, reaffirming the nation's resolve against terrorism. The incident underscores the importance of continued vigilance and strategic countermeasures to eliminate elements that seek to destabilize the region.

On March 11, 2025, terrorists intercepted the Jaffar Express, which was enroute from Quetta to Peshawar. Armed with sophisticated weapons, they forced the train to stop near Mach, a town known for its rugged terrain

and historical vulnerabilities to militant activities. Their objective was not just to take hostages but also to create an international spectacle that would undermine Pakistan's security apparatus. Passengers, including women and children, were left terrified as the attackers attempted to use them as human shields to negotiate their demands. However, security forces, displaying remarkable courage and tactical brilliance, launched a swift operation. After intense hours of combat, the terrorists were neutralized, and the hostages were rescued unharmed.

This incident is not an isolated one. Balochistan, Pakistan's largest province by area, has long been a focal point of insurgency, terrorism, and foreign interference. The region's strategic importance due to its vast mineral resources and its proximity to major trade routes, including the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), has made it

a target for both internal and external actors. Separatist groups, funded and supported by hostile foreign intelligence agencies, continue to stoke unrest, aiming to weaken Pakistan's sovereignty over the province. These elements exploit ethnic grievances and socio-economic disparities, recruiting locals into their violent campaigns.

Externally, hostile forces have long sought to destabilize Balochistan by providing financial and logistical support to extremist factions. The involvement of Indian intelligence agencies in fomenting terrorism in the region has been well-documented, with high-profile cases such as that of Commander Kulbhushan Jadhav, an Indian spy caught in Balochistan on March 3, 2016, serving as a glaring example. Additionally, the presence of international terrorist organizations attempting to establish their foothold in the region remains a security concern. Their ultimate goal is

to disrupt Pakistan's progress, particularly the strategic projects linked to Gwadar port, which holds immense economic and geopolitical significance.

Internally, the lack of economic opportunities and underdevelopment in Balochistan has contributed to feelings of alienation among certain segments of the population. While successive governments have initiated development programs, the slow pace of implementation has allowed anti-state elements to exploit these grievances. However, the state's ongoing efforts, such as increased infrastructure projects, investment in education, and military-led rehabilitation programs for former insurgents, signal a commitment to addressing these challenges. The government's recent measures to improve security, enhance border management, and increase local representation in decision-making bodies are crucial steps toward long-

term stability.

In Pakistan, train-related terror attacks have been carried out multiple times in the past, particularly in Balochistan and Sindh. The targeting of railway infrastructure aims to disrupt connectivity, inflict economic losses, and spread panic. However, the resilience of Pakistan's law enforcement agencies has ensured that such attempts are thwarted with increasing efficiency.

As far as this incident is concerned, Islam strictly forbids the use of innocent lives, especially non-combatants, as shields or bargaining tools for personal or political gains. The Holy Quran states: "Whoever kills a person [unjustly]... it is as if he has killed all of humanity" (Surah Al-Ma'idah 5:32). This verse clearly emphasizes the sanctity of human life and categorically condemns the unjust killing or harming of innocent individuals.

Furthermore, the teachings of Prophet Muhammad (peace

be upon him) provide explicit guidelines on warfare and the treatment of non-combatants. The Prophet (PBUH) strictly prohibited the killing of women, children, elderly people, and those who are not engaged in combat. In a hadith narrated by Abdullah bin Umar (RA), the Prophet (PBUH) saw a woman killed during a battle and said: "She was not fighting! How could she be killed?" (Sahih Bukhari, Sahih Muslim). This demonstrates Islam's firm stance against harming innocent people, even during conflict.

Using innocent lives as a shield is not only a betrayal of Islamic teachings but also an act of cowardice. Islam promotes justice, righteousness, and the protection of human dignity. Terrorists who hijack trains, take hostages, or use civilians as shields are not only violating international laws but also committing grave sins in the eyes of Islam. Their actions are driven by personal and political motives,

not by the principles of Islam, which categorically forbids oppression and the unjust spilling of blood.

Moving forward, a multifaceted approach is required to prevent such incidents. Strengthening intelligence networks, deploying advanced surveillance systems, and ensuring real-time coordination between security agencies can significantly reduce the risk of future attacks. Equally important is addressing the root causes of extremism by accelerating economic development, improving governance, and countering hostile propaganda that seeks to mislead vulnerable populations. International cooperation in intelligence-sharing and counterterrorism efforts will also play a vital role in mitigating threats. Despite continuous challenges, Pakistan remains steadfast in its fight against terrorism, ensuring that no extremist agenda can prevail against the resilience and unity of its people.



In brief

Culprits shot killed driver F.P. Report

KARAK: A flying coach driver named Ibrahim was killed on the spot after being shot by unknown persons in the Mithakhel Shawal Ada area. As soon as the control received the information, an ambulance reached the spot. The medical team of Rescue 1122 shifted the dead body to the District Headquarters Hospital Karak for postmortem. Identification: Ibrahim, age 55 years (deceased), resident of Sabirabad. Meanwhile, Deputy Commissioner, Assistant Commissioner, and TMA officials carried out a grand operation against encroachments on the Main Indus Highway within the limits of Shaheedan and Spina Banda. Strict instructions were issued to take the goods of those who illegally encroached temporarily into government custody. And it was strongly emphasized that they should avoid encroachments in the future, otherwise strict legal action will be taken.

Driver, child killed in mishap F.P. Report

MURREE: A van carrying school children here on Wednesday fell into ditch as the vehicle went out of control of driver due to technical fault. The van was going from Galyat to Abbottabad, the police source said. As a result, the driver and a child were killed on the spot, he said, adding the eleven other children got injuries. The Rescue 1122 teams shifted the injured to Ayub Medical Complex and Benazir Shaheed Hospital. The doctors told the conditions of many injured children were critical, he added.

Section 144 imposed F.P. Report

MIRAN SHAH: All authority letters for possessing weapons have been revoked, and Section 144 imposed in North Waziristan for one month. A notification issued by Deputy Commissioner North Waziristan, Yusuf Kareem, stated on Wednesday that the display of all kinds of weapons is strictly prohibited throughout the district. The measure aims to maintain law and order in the district. The official statement further mentions that in addition to revoking all weapon authority letters, orders have been issued to shut down all illegal Wi-Fi devices and unregister SIM cards in the region.

Father and son shot dead F.P. Report

ABBOTTABAD: Unidentified gunmen on Wednesday shot dead a father and his son in Havelian Muslimabad area of Abbottabad. According to police, Mudassar Khan along with his father, Akhtar Khan were present at Khokhar Maira location when unknown assailants approached them in a car and started shooting. Both the father and son succumbed to their injuries on the spot. Police transferred the bodies to Havelian Hospital for further procedures. An investigation into the incident has been initiated to arrest the escaped attackers.

Facilitation of farmers stressed F.P. Report

TOBA TEK SINGH: An Agriculture workshop brought together farmers, seed dealers, ginning factory owners and agricultural experts, including Dr. Mahmood-ul-Hassan (NIAB Research), Dr. Jahanzeb (Ayub Agricultural Research), Dr. Nosher Khan (Deputy Director Agriculture Extension) and Assistant Director Agriculture Gojra Gulzar Shahid.

Intra-district connectivity bridge at verge of collapse

F.P. Report

SHANGLA: A bridge in Alpuri, the district headquarters of Shangla, is on the verge of collapse, posing a significant threat to thousands of vehicles that cross it daily. The bridge, constructed in the 1960s during the reign of the Wali of Swat, was initially designed to accommodate only a few hundred vehicles. However, with the passage of time, it has deteriorated and developed large potholes, making it a ticking time bomb.

The bridge connects Shangla to other districts, including Gilgit-Baltistan and Kohistan, and is a critical route for thousands of vehicles. Despite its importance, the bridge's condition has been neglected, and it's become a frequent topic of discussion on social media. Unfortunately, the elected representatives from the area have been accused of using delaying tactics to prevent the bridge's reconstruction.

The National Highway Authority (NHA) has conducted multiple surveys to assess the bridge's condition, but no tender has been issued for its reconstruction. Sources within the NHA claim that the reconstruction efforts are being hindered due to political reasons, as buildings owned by individuals affiliated with the Muslim League are located on both sides of the bridge. These individuals are allegedly being protected by the Muslim League in exchange for their loyalty.

The bridge's condition has been further compro-



mised by the passage of heavy vehicles, including tanks, during military operations. While some minor repairs were made after these incidents, the bridge's overall condition remains precarious.

Residents flayed prolonged load shedding in Ramadan: The residents of Shangla are facing severe electricity shortages, particularly during the holy month of Ramadan. Despite having a 72-megawatt power generation capacity from the Khan Khwar Dam, the district's electricity needs are not being met, with frequent power outages and load shedding.

The situation has worsened with the return of cold weather, and the recent rainfall has led to a new cycle of power outages. The district's main towns, including Alpuri, are experiencing prolonged power outages, affecting businesses, private laboratories, X-ray and hospitals, as well as the general public.

The construction of the Karora Hydro Power Project, which is expected to generate an additional 15

megawatts of electricity, is underway. However, the project's completion is still awaited, and the residents of Shangla continue to suffer from the electricity shortages.

Almost 74 senior and junior clerks reshuffled: District Education Officer (Male) Shangla has issued transfer orders for 74 clerical staff members in the district, following the directives of the Chief Secretary of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and the Secretary of Education.

The transfers include clerical staff from the District Education Office and Sub-Divisional Education Offices who had completed their two-year tenure at a single post. Some have been reassigned to schools, while others have been moved from schools to administrative offices.

DBA offered prayers for eternal peace of later lawyer: The District Bar Association Alpuri organized a collective Quran recitation ceremony to pay tribute to the late Mutawakkil Khan Advocate.

Rs2.23m distributed among 26 policemen

F.P. Report

LAKKI MARWAT: District Police Officer Lakki Marwat distributed cheques worth over Rs 22,37,000 among 26 police officials under the police welfare initiative. The financial assistance cheque the policemen received were meant for their medical treatment, dowry of their daughters and scholarships for their children.

DPO said on the occasion that police personnel were the valuable asset of the department and their welfare was the top priority of the government and provincial police officer Zulfiqar Hameed. He said that practical steps were being taken for the welfare and betterment of the police

force and addressing their financial problems.

"The move will help cops to discharge their professional responsibilities in a better way", he maintained. He said that the applications submitted by the police official for financial assistance were processed purely on merit so that every deserving official could get his due right. He expressed his resolve that such steps for the welfare of the police officials would continue in future as well.

Meanwhile, police signed an agreement with the private schools for provision of free education to the children of martyrs, veterans and serving police officials of the district. The agreement signing ceremony

was held at the police lines in the district Headquarters Complex Tajazai.

"Under the agreement, the management of 197 private schools of the district will provide free education to the children of martyrs of the police department", claimed the district police officer. He said that the children of veterans and serving cops would get a 50 percent fee concession in private schools.

The DPO said that the agreement had been signed under the police welfare initiative so that the children of martyrs, veterans and serving police officials could get quality education at high standard educational institutes.

Health staff to be made accountable for negligence

F.P. Report

TOBA TEK SINGH: CM Punjab Maryam Nawaz Sharif has taken strict notice of the tragic death of 7-year-old Asmara at Tehsil Headquarters Hospital (THQ) Kamalia due to an alleged wrong injection.

On the directives of the CM, Provincial Health Minister Khawaja Imran Nazir made an emergency visit to the hospital to inspect the facilities, administrative arrangements and ongoing investigation into the incident. Expressing deep sorrow over the child's death, CM Punjab stated that those responsible would be made an example to prevent such incidents in the future. She ordered an immediate inquiry and directed the health minister to personally oversee the investigation.

During his visit, Health Minister Khawaja Imran Nazir reviewed CCTV footage, recorded statements from patients and their attendants and received a detailed briefing from the hospital administration. He also inspected the emergency ward, treatment facilities, and medicine availability. He later visited the grieving family of the deceased child and offered condolences. He emphasized that CM Punjab Maryam Nawaz Sharif was deeply saddened by the tragedy and had

issued clear directives to ensure justice.

Based on preliminary findings, the health minister took decisive action by removing CEO Health Dr. Kashif Mahmood Kamboh, Medical Superintendent (MS) of THQ Hospital Kamalia Dr. Ijaz and the Chief Pharmacist from their positions. Additionally, a high-level inquiry committee has been formed to submit a comprehensive report, after which strict action will be taken against those found responsible.

The health minister also took serious notice of complaints regarding the non-availability of free medicines at the hospital, stating that Kamalia THQ Hospital is the first government facility where such complaints have emerged. He announced a full audit of the hospital's medicine supply and ordered a thorough review of three months' referral cases and six months' medicine records to identify any irregularities.

Khawaja Imran Nazir reiterated that under CM Punjab Maryam Nawaz Sharif's pro-health vision, free medicines are being provided to all government hospitals. He warned that any negligence or corruption in this regard would result in strict action.

The health minister was accompanied by Deputy Commissioner Toba Tek Singh Muhammad Naeem

Sandhu, Assistant Commissioner Kamalia Iqra Nasir, and a seven-member technical team. They inspected various hospital departments and prepared a detailed report on the situation. Issuing a stern warning to the hospital administration, Khawaja Imran Nazir directed that all necessary medical facilities be provided to patients without any negligence.

Quality healthcare services to be ensured F.P. Report

D I KHAN: Tehsil administration Paharpur is taking solid measures to ensure availability of quality healthcare services for citizens. As part of such efforts, Assistant Commissioner Paharpur Sohi Saleem paid visit to the Basic Health Unit (BHU) at Larr to review medical facilities and arrangements put in place for patients.

According to district administration, during inspection, she visited various sections of the BHU and checked availability of medical staff besides taking stock of medical equipment, and the overall cleanliness of the facility.

Protest against proposed canal system on Indus held F.P. Report

SUJAWAL: People from various walks of life, including nationalist party workers, religious groups, students, and civil society representatives, gathered at Shaheed Fazil Rahu Chowk in Jati town, Sujawal district. They protested against the six canals scheme, IRSA, and the federal government, accusing them of trying to deprive Sindh of its rightful water share and turning the region barren.

The protesters, carrying banners and placards, marched through the city's main streets and staged a sit-in at Jati town's main entrance, blocking traffic on the Jati-Sujawal road. Several leaders addressed the protesters, including Ashraf Thaheem of the Sindh Tarqi Pasand Party, Adil Laghari, Wafa Shah, Khalid Hussain Jat, Syed Mahetab Shah, and Nawaz Sheikh.

The speakers condemned the six canals scheme as a conspiracy against Sindh and the Indus River. They argued that neither national nor international law allows the exploitation of small provinces' resources. The federal government, they claimed, has no right to make unilateral decisions without the consent of the Sindh people.

The protesters emphasized that the people of Sindh had overwhelmingly rejected the six canals scheme, which they saw as an attack on Sindh's riparian rights. Adil Laghari noted that water scarcity had forced residents of tail-end areas to buy water at exorbitant prices, putting human life and the survival of aquatic creatures at stake in Sindh's coastal areas.

Mahtab Shah vowed that the people of Sindh would continue to resist the scheme until it was scrapped. He expressed concern about the Indus River and the fertility of Sindh's lands, which would be threatened if the six canals scheme was implemented. Ashraf Thaheem of STP urged the people of Sindh to draw international attention to this issue.

Similar protests were held in Daro, Bathoro, and Sujawal city, condemning the construction of canals on the Indus River and the inadequate water supply at the Kotri downstream.

Commissioner commits for Divisional Public School uplift F.P. Report

FAISALABAD: Commissioner Faisalabad Maryam Khan has initiated practical measures to transform Divisional Public School (DPS) into a top-tier educational institution. Under her patronage, the Board of Governors has decided to implement a uniform curriculum across all DPS campuses.

Students will now be taught a standardized curriculum consisting of Oxford and Punjab Textbook Board materials. Additionally, teachers will receive specialized training in collaboration with Oxford and other renowned educational institutions.

The Board of Governors has also approved the recruitment of teachers strictly on merit through the National Testing Service (NTS). Furthermore, it has been decided that teachers will initially be offered a one-year contract, which will be extended for an additional two years based on performance. Further extensions will be granted solely on the basis of exceptional performance during the contract period.

To reduce the financial burden on DPS, unnecessary staff will be downsized. Additionally, Commissioner Maryam Khan has approved the inclusion of four new members in the Board of Governors.

Maryam Khan with the approval of BOG has also granted approval for the appointment of competent and honest principals for the Main and Premier branches of DPS. Commissioner emphasized that all decisions will be made in consultation with the Board of Governors to restore parents' confidence in the institution. All recruitments, including teachers, will now be strictly based on merit.

Buner deprived from Deputy DEO female since 1991

F.P. Report

BUNER: Female education in Buner in a state of disrepair for since longtime, which is mainly due to the ignorance of the authorities and arrogance of lawmakers for their political interest at sake future generation.

The clear proof of this is that since the formation of Buner district in 1991, the post of Deputy District Education Officer for females has not been appointed from the beginning, while the important post of District Education Officer for females has been vacant for a long time.

DEO female is changed in two to four months or she leaves by using political influence to change herself without fitting in the office seat and the biggest abuse is that the DEO from other districts is given additional charge in Buner for most of the time on the post of DEO female. DEO district Mohmand Laili Khan has additional charge of DEO Buner which rotates twice a month and any additional charge if she is in charge, she will pay more attention to the original district of posting and will go around the district of additional charge.

Due to this situation, where the office affairs have come to a standstill, 944 teachers and 30466 female students of 200 primary schools are also affected, and 230 teachers and 3501 students of 43 middle schools and 500 teachers and 5300 students of 21 high schools, 350 teachers and 8074 students of 14 higher secondary

schools are affected while in total around 120 posts of SS teachers are also lying vacant in these schools and due to this the available staff members are under severe pressure along with the education of female students at the higher level and the results of the schools are also being affected badly.

Besides, Higher, high, middle and primary schools are facing a shortage of staff. There is a shortage of 11000 student desks for schools across the district and 179 classroom tables and 1528 chairs for teaching staff members as well, while the number of female students in Pacha Higher Secondary School, Changlai and many other high middle and primary schools is very high and there are seventy, eighty to hundred students in each room.

It is worthy to mention that the children of lawmakers and political elite as well as public servant neither attendant government school nor hospital. Moreover, the elite using public for their personal interest at the cost of marginalization of majority.

Dead body recovered: Police have recovered dead body of Umerdeen of Kitawar Daggar from inside home in Pirabai. The deceased was missing for 40 days and the police were investigating the case.

SHO told this scribe on cell, during investigation the deceased mobile last location was shown at Pirabai and after 39 days showed at Khwazakhela in Swat and his Riksha also traced at Matta in Swat.

WSSCM approves 2022-23 fiscal year audit

F.P. Report

MARDAN: The Board of Directors (BoD) of Water and Sanitation Services Company (WSSCM) has approved the audit report for the fiscal year 2022-23, on Wednesday.

The Annual General meeting held under the chairmanship of Chairman Board of Directors Engineer Adil Nawaz while members Haroon Rashid, Javed Hussain, Mubina Raziuddin, CEO WSSCM Shahid Khan, Regional Municipal Officer Zeeshan Arif, and Additional Assistant Commissioner Revenue Ibrahim Khan attended the meeting while Additional Secretary Local Government Noor Wali Khan and Budget Officer Finance Department Qazi Zia ur Rahman participated in the meeting through Zoom. During the meeting, the audit report for the fiscal year 2022-23 was presented and formally approved.

The report provided a comprehensive overview of the company's financial performance, transparency measures, and key operational achievements over the past year. Chairman commended the efforts of the staff in ensuring the company's financial discipline and service delivery. He emphasized the importance of accountability, sustainability, and continuous improvement in WSSCM's operations.

The AGM also included discussions on future strategies, infrastructure development, and initiatives to improve water and sanitation services for the citizens of Mardan. The Board reiterated its commitment to strengthening the company's governance.

BISE moves toward digitization: BISE Mardan has taken another step toward digital transformation by signing a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Inter Boards Coordination Commission

(IBCC) to streamline the document verification process required for IBCC attestation, eliminating the need for students to bring physical verifications in sealed envelopes from BISE Mardan.

Under this initiative, students applying for verification at BISE Mardan will have their data directly accessible to IBCC once verified by the board. This will enable students to apply for IBCC attestation online via the IBCC Attestation Portal, ensuring a seamless and efficient process.

Speaking on the occasion, Dr. Ghulam Ali Mallah emphasized IBCC's vision of leveraging technology to facilitate students. "Our goal is to digitize and simplify document verification and attestation processes, ensuring transparency and efficiency. By eliminating logistical hurdles, we are making these services more accessible, particularly for students in remote areas."

Police kills four outlaws, arrests 530 POs



F.P. Report

NOWSHERA: In a joint operation with the Peshawar police, the Nowshera Cantt police have apprehended a notorious snatcher who was involved in several cases of robbery and murder. The accused, identified as Shakir, was killed in an exchange of fire with the police during a raid on his hideout in Peshawar.

District Police Officer (DPO) Abdul Rashid said that a case registered against the accused for his involvement in the murder of a man named Ihtisham, who was shot dead by unknown snatchers in the Dhoobi Ghat area near Press Club Nowshera.

DPO said that the police had been working tirelessly to apprehend the accused, and finally, they were able to track him down to his hideout in Peshawar. The accused was killed in an exchange of fire with the police during the raid.

Police have also recovered several other stolen items from the accused, including 21 motorcycles,

five cars, and gold ornaments worth Rs. 11 lakhs. The police have also arrested several other accomplices of the accused.

DPO Abdul Rashid briefed the media about the police's achievements in curbing crime in the area. He said that the police had arrested over 530 proclaimed offenders and recovered a large quantity of arms and ammunition, including 507 pistols, 32 rifles, 25 Kalashnikovs, and over 5,000 rounds of ammunition.

Civil society launches plantation drive

Allah Dad Chandio

LARKANA: Green Sindh Foundation (GSF) organized a tree planting program in Larkana, on this occasion addressing the event, Zulfiqar Ali Magsi said that the solution to environmental and climate problems is related to tree plantation.

Green Sindh Foundation is creating awareness about the importance of tree planting by running tree planting campaign. It is the responsibility of those who have the pen, the talented, and the well-known to play their role in protecting the environment and encouraging the people

who play a role in the awakening of trees in Sindh. While addressing, after in last Mutwali Syed Dost Ali Shah also informed about tree planting.

SPLA protests in favor of their demands: Sindh Professor Lecturers Association (SPLA) continued the protest demonstration for the fifth day last day for the acceptance of demands.

Protest demonstrations were held from the platform of SPLA, where the Professors wore black bands on their arms and continued the teaching process, during the protest, the professors

shouted slogans that it is illegal to build 6 canals over the Indus River, while this project should be completely terminated, and they raised slogans like forced transfer of Professor Lal Bakhsh Soho, and forced transfers, on this occasion, Malhar Sindh.

That legal action should be taken against the Secretary of Education Department of Sindh to save the education system and an order should be issued to solve the problem of Professor Lal Bakhsh Sohu, otherwise we reserve the right to widen the scope of the protest



Thursday, March 13, 2025



SANAA: Houthi supporters holding up their weapons during a protest against Israel's blockade of aid into the Gaza Strip, in Yemen.

Thousands celebrate a chief who will only rule for eight years

ADDIS ABABA (BBC): Thousands of people have been gathering in southern Ethiopia for one of the country's biggest cultural events. The week-long Gada ceremony, which ended, sees the official transfer of power from one customary ruler to his successor - something that happens every eight years. The tradition of regularly appointing a new Abbaa Gadaa has been practised by the Borana community for centuries - and sees them gather at the rural site of Arda Jila Badhasa, near the Ethiopian town of Arero.

It is a time to celebrate their special form of democracy as well as their cultural heritage, with each age group taking the opportunity to wear their different traditional outfits. These are paraded the day before the official handover during a procession when married women march with wooden batons, called "siinqee". The batons have symbolic values of protection for women, who use them during conflict.

If a siinqee stick is placed on the ground by a married woman between two quarrelling parties, it means the conflict must stop immediately out of respect. During the procession, younger women lead at the front, distinguished from the married women by the different colour of their clothing. In this pastoralist society women are excluded from holding the top

power of Abbaa Gadaa, sitting on the council of elders or being initiated into the system as a child. But their important role can be seen during the festival as they build all the accommodation for those staying for the week - and prepare all the food. And the unique Gada system of governance, which was added to the UN's cultural heritage list in 2016, allows for them to attend regular community meetings and to voice their opinions to the Abbaa Gadaa. Gada membership is only open to boys whose fathers are already members - young initiates have their heads shaven at the crown to make their rank clear. The smaller the circle, the older he is. As the global cultural body UNESCO reports, oral historians teach young initiates about "history, laws, rituals, time reckoning, cosmology, myths, rules of conduct, and the function of the Gada system". Training for boys begins as young as eight years old. Later, they will be assessed for their potential as future leaders. As they grow up, tests include walking long distances barefoot, slaughtering cattle efficiently and showing kindness to fellow initiates.

Headpieces made from cowrie shells are traditionally worn by young trainees. The only other people allowed to wear them are elderly women. Both groups are revered by Borana community members. Men aged between 28 and 32 are identified

by the ostrich feathers they wear, which are known in the Afaan Oromo language as "baalli".

Their attendance at the Gada ceremony is an opportunity to learn, prepare and bond as it is already known who the Abbaa Gadaa from this age group will be taking power in 2033. The main event at the recent Gada ceremony was the handover of power, from the outgoing 48-year-old Abbaa Gadaa to his younger successor. Well-wishers crossed the border from Kenya and others travelled from as far as Ethiopia's capital, Addis Ababa, to witness the spectacle. The governor of Kenya's Marsabit county was among the honoured guests. Thirty-seven-year-old Guyo Boru Guyo, seen here holding a spear, was chosen to lead because he impressed the council of elders during his teenage years.

He becomes the 72nd Abbaa Gadaa and will now oversee the Borana community across borders - in southern Ethiopia and north-western Kenya. As their top diplomat, he will also be responsible for solving feuds that rear their heads for pastoralists. These often involve cattle raiding and disputes over access to water in this drought-prone region. During his eight years at the helm, his successor will finish his training to take on the job in continuation of this generations-old tradition.

Not enough power to share: Political feud behind Duterte's downfall

MANILA (BBC): Just short of his 80th birthday, Rodrigo Duterte, a man who once vowed to purge his country through a bloody anti-drugs and crime campaign, found himself outmanoeuvred and in custody. The former president was met by Philippines police as he arrived in Manila on a flight from Hong Kong, where he had been rallying support for his candidates for the upcoming mid-term election among the large Filipino diaspora there.

The much-talked-about warrant for his arrest from the International Criminal Court (ICC) was, it turned out, already in the hands of the Philippines government, which moved swiftly to execute it. A frail-looking Mr Duterte, walking with a stick, was moved to an air force base within the airport perimeter. A chartered jet was quickly prepared to take him to the ICC in The Hague. How had this happened? How had a man so powerful and popular, often called "the Trump of Asia", been brought so low?

In vain, his lawyers and family members protested

that the arrest had no legal basis and complained that Duterte's frail health was being neglected. While in office, Mr Duterte formed an alliance with the Marcos family - the children of ousted dictator Ferdinand Marcos who had long been working on a political comeback. Mr Duterte could not run again in the 2022 election, but his daughter Sara, mayor of southern city of Davao, was also popular and a strong contender to replace him. However, Ferdinand Marcos's son Bongbong, who had been in politics all his life, was also well placed to win and very well-funded.

The two families struck a deal. They would work together to get Bongbong into the presidency and Sara into the vice-presidency, on the assumption that come the next election in 2028, her turn would come and she would have the formidable Marcos machine behind her. It worked. Both won their positions by a wide margin. Mr Duterte expected that his alliance would protect him from any blow-

back over his controversial presidency once he was out of power. The most serious threat hanging over him was an investigation by the ICC into his culpability for thousands of extrajudicial killings carried out during anti-drugs campaigns he ordered - after he became president in 2016, but also during his tenure as mayor of the southern city of Davao from 2011.

Mr Duterte withdrew the Philippines from the jurisdiction of the ICC in 2019, but its prosecutors argued they still had a mandate to look into alleged crimes against humanity committed before that, and launched a formal investigation in 2021. However, President Marcos initially stated that his government would not co-operate with the ICC. That position only changed after the dramatic breakdown of the Duterte-Marcos alliance. Strains in their relationship were evident from the earliest days of the administration, when Sara Duterte's request to be given control of the powerful defence ministry was turned down and she was

given the education ministry instead. President Marcos also distanced himself from his predecessor's mercurial policies, mending fences with the US, standing up to China in contested seas, and stopping the blood-curdling threats of retribution against drug dealers.

In the end, these were two ambitious, power-hungry clans aiming to dominate Filipino politics, and there was not enough power for them to share. Relations reached a nadir last year when Sara Duterte announced that she had hired an assassin to kill President Marcos, should anything happen to her. Late last year, the lower house of Congress, which is controlled by Marcos loyalists, filed a petition to impeach Ms Duterte. That trial is due to take place in the Senate later this year. If she is impeached, under the constitution, she would be barred from holding high political office, killing her long-standing presidential ambitions and weakening the political power of the Dutertes even further.

Colombia's new defense minister vows to reclaim territory lost to rebel groups

BOGOTA (AP): Colombia's newly appointed defense minister said that he will focus on taking back territory lost to rebel groups that have forced thousands to flee their homes this year. In an address to the nation's troops, Defense Minister Pedro Sánchez said that it was time for Colombia's military to "strengthen national sovereignty and protect" the nation's population.

The retired general hinted that Colombia's military, which had been recently asked to refrain from attacking rebel groups by the nation's government, will now take a more offensive role. "We cannot continue to allow our police and military to be spat at, attacked and have their throats slit as if they were inanimate objects" he said. The comments by Sánchez come just days after 28 police officers and a soldier were kidnapped by a

group of civilians in the western Cauca province amid clashes with the FARC-EMC rebel group. The soldiers were released.

Sánchez, a former air force general, was named defense minister in late February as the country faces its worst security crisis in a decade. In January, more than 36,000 people were displaced from their homes in the northeastern Catatumbo region, following a wave of attacks by the National Liberation Army in which an estimated 80 people were killed. The attacks prompted President Gustavo Petro to cancel peace talks with the rebel group that had begun in late 2022. Petro, who was a member of a rebel group during his youth, has attempted to launch peace negotiations with various armed groups under a strategy known as total peace. But while the strategy has led to some tem-

porary ceasefires, it has failed to produce lasting results.

Analysts say that groups like the ELN and the FARC-EMC have also taken advantage of ceasefires to recruit more fighters and tighten their grip over remote areas where they extort local businesses and control drug trafficking routes. "Our president has been very generous in searching for peace," Sánchez said. "But that genuine generosity has been betrayed by those who have continued to exert violence against our citizens." In 2016, Colombia signed a peace deal with the nation's largest rebel group, the FARC, in which more than 13,000 fighters laid down their weapons. But smaller criminal groups have filled the power vacuum left by the rebels, promoting the drug trade and illegal mining. Petro has accused the ELN's leadership of betraying its

revolutionary ideals and of becoming "greedy" drug traffickers.

Colombia's President said last week that the government would pay farmers in the Catatumbo region to replace coca plantations for legal crops in a bid to boost the region's development and starve ELN fighters in the area of cocaine funding. Sánchez is the first retired member of the military to serve as defense minister in Colombia in three decades. His appointment breaks with a tradition of selecting civilians to lead the defense ministry. The 52-year-old became a local celebrity in 2023, when he led an effort to rescue four indigenous children who had survived a plane crash in a remote patch of the Amazon rainforest. Sánchez retired from the military in February, shortly after President Petro picked him to lead the defense ministry.

Spain near end of four-year drought

MADRID (AFP): A drought that has parched fields and prompted water restrictions in Spain since 2021 could be over soon thanks to recent abundant rainfall, national weather agency AEMET said. When yearly precipitation figures are compared with the rain that has fallen in the past year, "we cannot speak of drought in Spain", AEMET spokesman Ruben del Campo told a press conference.

But a long-term measurement taking into account precipitation over the three previous years shows that the "amount of rain accumulated... remains below normal" in the country on the climate crisis frontline. "With the amount of rain falling now in March, it cannot be ruled out that this situation ends up being reversed," Del Campo said, adding "it is probable that we emerge in March" from the long-term drought.

Downpours in the first nine days of March have drenched Spain with an amount of rain that usually falls during the entire month, he said. The recent rainfall included Spain's wettest October on record, which culminated in the historic floods that devastated the eastern Valencia region and killed 232 people according to a government toll. Scientists say climate change driven by human activity is increasing the intensity, frequency and duration of extreme weather events such as droughts and floods.

Cargo ship's captain arrested

YORKSHIRE (BBC): The captain of a cargo ship has been arrested after it collided with an oil tanker in the North Sea. The Portuguese-flagged Solong and the US-registered tanker Stena Immaculate crashed off the East Yorkshire coast at about 10:00 GMT.

Humbeside Police said the 59-year-old man had been arrested on suspicion of gross negligence manslaughter following searches for a missing crew member of the Solong. Smoke is continuing to billow from the Solong, but Transport Secretary Heidi Alexander said both ships were expected to remain afloat.

German firm Ernst Russ, which owns the Solong, confirmed to the BBC that the man arrested is the master of the ship. It said he, along with the rest of the crew, were assisting the investigation. A crew member from the cargo ship was still missing and presumed dead after a search and rescue operation ended, according to Transport Minister Mike Kane. Whitehall sources have told the BBC there were Russians and Filipinos among the crew of the Solong. The BBC understands all 23 crew on board the Stena Immaculate are Americans. They are all in Grimby and are likely to be repatriated in due course. Police said they had begun a criminal investigation into the cause of the collision and was working with the Maritime and Coastguard Agency. The Marine Accident Investigation Branch was also undertaking a parallel preliminary assessment to establish the causes of the crash, police said. HM Coastguard confirmed 36 people had been taken safely to shore. Det Ch Supt Craig Nicholson said: "Humbeside Police have taken primacy for the investigation of any potential criminal offences which arise from the collision between the two vessels." He said the arrested man was in custody.

Following inquiries undertaken by my team, we have arrested a 59-year-old man on suspicion of gross negligence manslaughter in connection with the collision. "This follows the conclusion of search operations by HM Coastguard for the missing crew member of the Solong. "Our thoughts are with the family of the missing crew member, and I have appointed family liaison officers to make contact and provide support to the family." Smoke is continuing to billow from Solong. The ship's German owner, Ernst Russ, said it was supporting the missing crew member's family.

Whole families dead in recent Syria violence, says UN

DAMASCUS (BBC): Entire families, including women and children, were killed during the recent violence in Syria's coastal region, the UN human rights office says. A spokesman told reporters that the UN had so far verified the killing of 111 civilians, but that the actual figure was believed to be significantly higher.

Many of the cases were summary executions and appeared to have been carried out on a sectarian basis, with predominantly Alawite areas targeted in particular, he added. Gunmen supporting the Sunni Islamist-led government have been accused of carrying out revenge killings following a deadly ambush on a security patrol by loyalists of president Bashar al-Assad, who is an Alawite. A monitoring group has reported that more than 1,200 civilians, most of them Alawites, have been killed in Latakia, Tartous, Hama and Homs provinces.

The UN has welcomed the promise by Syria's interim President Ahmad al-Sharaa to form an independent investigative committee and to hold those responsible to account. The violence was the worst in Syria since Sharaa led the rebel offensive that overthrew Assad in December, ending 13 years of civil war in which more than 600,000 people were killed. Syria's north-west Mediterranean coast is the heartland of the Alawite sect, an offshoot of Shia Islam to which many of the former Assad regime's political and military elite belonged. Last week, security forces launched an operation in the region in response to a growing insurgency by Assad loyalists. The violence escalated,

after 13 security personnel were killed in an ambush by gunmen in the coastal town of Jableh.

Security forces responded by sending reinforcements to the region, who were joined by armed groups and individuals supporting the government. They stormed many Alawite towns and villages across the region, where residents said they carried out revenge killings and looted homes and shops. A spokesperson for the UN human rights office, Thameen Al-Kheetan, said that reports were continuing to emerge of the "distressing scale of the violence".

He said the UN, using strict verification methods, had so far documented the killings of 90 male civilians, 18 women, two girls and one boy. Initial reports indicated that the perpetrators were members of armed groups supporting the security forces and elements associated with the Assad regime, he added. "In a number of extremely disturbing instances, entire families - including women, children and individuals hors de combat - were killed, with predominantly Alawite cities and villages targeted in particular," he said, referring to combatants who have been captured, expressed an intention to surrender, or are incapacitated. "According to many testimonies collected by our office, perpetrators raided houses, asking residents whether they were Alawite or Sunni before proceeding to either kill or spare them accordingly. Some survivors told us that many men were shot dead in front of their families."

Assad loyalists also raided several hospitals in

Latakia, Tartous and Baniyas, according to Mr Kheetan. They clashed with security forces, reportedly resulting in dozens of civilian casualties, including patients and medics, as well as damage to the hospitals. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a UK-based monitoring group, said its civilian death toll had risen to 1,225, after another 132 people were reported killed, including 62 in the town of Baniyas. About 230 security personnel and 250 pro-Assad fighters have also been killed, according to its network of sources. Mr Kheetan said the UN human rights chief urged Syrian authorities to carry out prompt, thorough, independent and impartial investigations. "All those found responsible for violations must be held to account, regardless of their affiliation, in line with international law norms and standards. Victims and their families have the right to truth, justice and reparations," he stressed.

A spokesman for the new investigative committee set up by the government said it was already "gathering and reviewing evidence" and would present a report in 30 days. "No-one is above the law. The committee will relay all the results to the entity that launched it, the presidency, and the judiciary," Yasser Farhan told a news conference. The state-run Sana news agency also reported that four people had been arrested over "bloody violations against civilians" in a coastal village after they were identified in videos. Meanwhile, residents of the region said the situation appeared calm, with only sporadic gunfire heard overnight.

US education department plans to cut half its workforce

WASHINGTON (BBC): The US Department of Education is planning to cut about half of its workforce, as the Trump Administration works to slash the size of the federal government. The mass layoffs will impact nearly 2,100 people who are set to be placed on leave from 21 March.

Trump has long sought to eliminate the department, a long-cherished goal of some conservatives, but such an action would require approval by Congress. The department, which has an annual budget of around \$238bn (£188bn), employs more than 4,000 people. Established in 1979, the department oversees funding for public schools, administers student loans and runs programmes that help low-income students. A common misconception is that it operates US schools and sets curricula - that is done by states and local districts. And a relatively small percentage of funding for primary and secondary schools - about 13% - comes from federal funds. The majority is made up from states and local groups. The agency also plays a prominent role in administering and overseeing the federal student loans used by millions of

Americans to pay for higher education. "As part of the Department of Education's final mission, the department today initiated a reduction in force impacting nearly 50% of the department's workforce," a statement from Education Secretary Linda McMahon said. She said the cuts would impact all divisions in the department and were made to "better serve students, parents, educators, and taxpayers". The agency had 4,133 employees when Trump was sworn into office, an announcement from the department states. It has the smallest staff of all the 15 US cabinet-level agencies.

After the cuts, 2,183 people would remain, which included several hundred who retired or accepted a buyout programme earlier this year, the accountant said. The notice to employees said that all of those who are laid off would continue to receive their normal pay and benefits until 9 June, as well as a severance package or retirement pay based on how long they'd worked at the department. "The Department of Education will continue to deliver on all statutory programs that fall under the agency's purview, including formula

funding, student loans, Pell Grants, funding for special needs students, and competitive grantmaking," the email states. Reports have suggested that Trump, for weeks, has considered signing an executive order impacting the Department of Education, though he has not yet done so. Several of his executive orders have been met with lawsuits, as have Trump's dramatic cuts at agencies around Washington.

Several lawsuits have also challenged actions by the Department of Government Efficiency (Doge), a team aiming to slash government spending that's being led by Elon Musk. The agency has installed deputies at various agencies, slashed staff and accessed data across the government. For decades, Republicans have floated the idea of axing the Education Department. When Ronald Reagan ran for president in 1980, he pushed for its dismantling. It hasn't been done because it would take an act of Congress to accomplish, which in the current make-up would mean Trump would need Democratic support. Many conservatives have pointed to decentralising education and giving states and local governments more power.

Greenland's centre-right opposition wins election

GREENLAND (BBC): Greenland's centre-right opposition has won its general election, near-complete results show, in a vote dominated by US President Donald Trump's pledge to take over Denmark's autonomous territory.

With more than 90% of ballots counted, the Demokraatit party - which favours a gradual approach to independence - is getting nearly 30% of the vote, election officials say. Nalaraq, another opposition party which wants to immediately kick-off divorce proceedings from Copenhagen and have closer ties with the US, is polling second with about 25%.

Prime Minister Mute B Egede's Inuit Ataqatigiit (IA) - also a pro-independence party - is third with over 21%. Greenland - the world's biggest island, between the Arctic and Atlantic Oceans - has been controlled by Denmark, nearly 3,000km (1,860 miles) away, for about 300 years. Greenland governs its own domestic affairs, but decisions on foreign and defence policy are made in Copenhagen.

About 44,000 Greenlanders out of a population of 57,000 were eligible to cast their votes to elect 31 MPs, as well as the local government. Six parties were on the ballot. The Siumut party - Egede's

partner in a current left-wing governing coalition, is polling in the fourth place with nearly 15% of the vote. The other two parties are far behind, with Atassut on 7%, and Qulleq on just over 1%.

The voting took place at 72 polling stations scattered across the vast island. Greenland's strategic location and untapped mineral resources have caught Trump's eye. He first floated the idea of buying the island during his first term in 2019. Since taking office again in January, Trump has reiterated his intention to acquire the territory. "We need Greenland for national security.

The Frontier Post

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

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Opportune moment to set the stage for negotiations to end Ukraine crisis

THE Tuesday negotiations between the United States and Ukraine in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, have rekindled optimism that talks for ending the crisis in Ukraine, which is now in its fourth year, may be back on track.

As many observers and stakeholding parties stated, any move conducive to ending the grueling war is welcome. That is why Tuesday's development is cause for optimism.

In their joint announcement capping the meeting, the Ukrainian side agreed to a 30-day ceasefire plan; and the United States administration pledged the resumption of military and intelligence support for Kyiv.

It was an impressive turnaround following the ugly exchange between the US and Ukrainian leaders in the Oval Office on Feb 28, during which the whole world witnessed the president and vice-president of the host country berating and browbeating their guest for alleged ingratitude after he refused to accept the deal they had presented to him. That repugnant episode sent shock waves worldwide, particularly among the US allies, leaving many to rethink their previous faith in US security commitments and Washington's worthiness as a reliable partner.

Both Kyiv and Brussels are desirous of continued US security guarantees, so the US resuming its military assistance to Ukraine and information sharing will be especially heartening to them. Since the US administration suspended US military aid to and intelligence sharing with Kyiv after failing to steamroller the Ukrainian leader into agreeing to its proposal of assets without boots on the ground, Moscow has significantly upgraded its offensives against critical Ukrainian targets and made conspicuous headway on the battlefield. Despite European powers' emergency mobilization of local resources, it will take time to make up for the gap a potentially permanent US absence would leave. European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer, French President Emmanuel Macron and several other European leaders were thus quick to embrace the agreement.

However, what Von der Leyen praised as a "positive development", and Starmer called a "remarkable breakthrough", is only an initial step, as all the European leaders will be keenly aware. No doubt Washington is in favor of a swift solution. But the process seems destined to be protracted as it will be far more complicated than any television show, and the road ahead looks to be long and bumpy.

For one thing, Kyiv and Moscow are too divergent over what they want from a negotiated peace. Kyiv seems more convinced than ever that its future lies in the EU, even NATO; Moscow is adamant that is a no-no, and it wants a cast-iron commitment from Kyiv that Ukraine will never join NATO, along with territorial concessions from Kyiv.

While the self-proclaimed "master of the deal" has managed to strong-arm Kyiv into accepting its ceasefire arrangement, the latter has made it crystal clear that its decision hinges on Moscow coming fully on board — with the joint statement after the Jeddah meeting stating that "Russian reciprocity is the key to achieving peace" — and that is still up in the air.

Even if it does accept the temporary ceasefire, if Moscow will not accept anything short of its impossibly high demands for a negotiated end to the conflict and Kyiv refuses to meet them, there would appear to be little common ground on which the peace process can gain traction.

As hope-raising as the Tuesday agreement looks, there is no sign it is capable of delivering a lasting peace unless the two sides' historical animosity and mutual suspicion can be overcome and their incompatible demands reconciled.

The crisis has also revealed Europe in a very poor light. It will need to show some backbone if there is to be a security framework on the continent that is not held hostage to lingering Cold War mentalities.

Nonetheless, China remains hopeful that this will prove an opportune moment for the parties concerned to set the stage for dialogue and negotiations aimed at producing an acceptable solution that is just and sustainable. Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning reaffirmed that China will continue to play a constructive role with the international community by supporting all efforts conducive to the peaceful and permanent settlement of the crisis.

It is to be hoped that a 30-day cease-fire will be agreed and that it does prove to be the harbinger of the political settlement of the Ukraine crisis.

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Reimagining education: The case for creativity as a cornerstone of learning

Baseer Ali Rahman Khan

IN a time when learning is rigid and restrictive, education needs a major transformation-one that places creativity at its core. Traditional teaching methods, focused on memorization and one-way instruction, limit flexible thinking and hide the ever-changing nature of knowledge. By making creativity a priority, education becomes a space for innovation, helping students think critically and solve problems in new ways. This shift breaks away from outdated academic traditions, creating a dynamic learning environment where imagination and critical thinking come together, preparing students for a constantly changing world.

Creativity expert Sir Ken Robinson challenged the way we educate our children, championing a radical rethink of how our school systems cultivate creativity and acknowledge multiple types of intelligence. In reflecting on the intricate relationship between creativity and education emerge three overarching themes with notable clarity, each carrying profound implications that may be lightly touched upon:

First, the vast expanse of human creativity has been prominently showcased in recent times, reaffirming the limitless scope of human imagination and its unparalleled ability to generate novel ideas, artistic expressions, and innovative solutions. This compelling demonstration of creative potential underscores the imperative of fostering and nurturing such capacities within educational institutions and broader societal frameworks. For instance, the implementation of a Student Learning Outcomes (SLO)-based exam system serves as a prime example of how structured assessments can encourage critical thinking and creativity rather than rote memorization. Unlike traditional exams that emphasize recall, an SLO-based system evaluates students on their ability to apply knowledge, analyze complex problems, and generate innovative solutions. For example, in a literature course, instead of merely recalling plot details, students might be asked to reinterpret a classic story in a modern setting, showcasing their imaginative skills. Similarly, in a science class, students could be tasked with designing a sustainable energy solution for their community, reinforcing both creativity and problem-solving abilities. By shifting the focus from rigid memorization to meaningful learning experiences, an SLO-based exam system nurtures human creativity and prepares students for

real-world challenges.

Second, despite the extensive intellectual discourse and accumulated expertise spanning decades, an inescapable reality persists: the future remains inherently unpredictable. The trajectory of human progress is marked by uncertainty, with rapid technological advancements and evolving global paradigms rendering conventional predictive models increasingly inadequate. For instance, the rise of the internet and digital technology in the late 20th century reshaped global economies and social structures in ways few had anticipated. Similarly, the COVID-19 pandemic upended longstanding assumptions about public health, global supply chains, and remote work, forcing rapid adaptation across multiple sectors. The unpredictability of breakthroughs like artificial intelligence, which has outpaced regulatory frameworks and ethical considerations, further exemplifies this uncertainty. It is within this context of unpredictability that education assumes paramount importance, as it serves as the principal mechanism through which successive generations are equipped to navigate an ever-changing world. By fostering critical thinking, adaptability, and interdisciplinary knowledge, education ensures that individuals and societies can respond effectively to unforeseen challenges and emerging opportunities.

Third, and perhaps most significantly, there is a widespread recognition of the remarkable ingenuity inherent in children-an innate capacity for innovation that is too often overlooked. Time and again, we witness extraordinary demonstrations of youthful brilliance, exemplified by individuals whose talents captivate and inspire. Consider Gitanjali Rao, who, at just 15 years old, was named Time Magazine's first-ever "Kid of the Year" for her invention of a device that detects lead contamination in water. Similarly, Kelvin Doe, a Sierra Leone (a country located on the west coast of Africa), built his own radio station and battery-powered generators from discarded electronics to provide power in his community.

However, rather than viewing these instances as anomalies, we must acknowledge that all children possess extraordinary potential. The true failure lies not in their abilities but in an educational system that systematically diminishes creativity in favour of rigid conformity-an issue highlighted by Sir Ken Robinson, who famously

argued that schools prioritize standardized testing over fostering original thought, ultimately stifling children's natural curiosity and problem-solving skills.

It is against this backdrop that I direct attention to the intersection of creativity and education. It is my firm conviction that creativity should be regarded as an indispensable pillar of education, on par with literacy. However, traditional educational paradigms, shaped by historical and industrial imperatives, have relegated the arts and creative disciplines to the periphery, prioritizing subjects perceived as more pragmatic for workforce preparation. This hierarchical structuring of knowledge has led to a systemic undervaluation of diverse intellectual aptitudes, thereby stifling the very qualities essential for progress and innovation.

Children, by their very nature, exhibit an uninhibited willingness to explore, experiment, and take risks. Unencumbered by the fear of failure, they generate original ideas with remarkable fluidity. Yet, as they progress through conventional educational pathways, they are gradually conditioned to avoid mistakes, ultimately eroding their creative capacities. This cultural aversion to error extends beyond academia into professional environments, where risk aversion constrains innovation and limits transformative potential. Consequently, both the educational system and the professional landscape inadvertently suppress the very attributes that drive groundbreaking advancements.

The renowned artist Pablo Picasso once observed that "every child is an artist; the problem is how to remain an artist once we grow up." This assertion encapsulates a fundamental flaw in prevailing educational models: rather than cultivating creativity, they systematically diminish it. Rooted in the demands of industrial economies, contemporary education prioritizes narrowly defined academic proficiency, marginalizing talents that do not conform to rigid evaluative frameworks.

As a result, countless individuals with exceptional creative and intellectual gifts are led to believe they lack ability, merely because their strengths do not align with traditional academic metrics.

Moreover, the world is undergoing an unprecedented transformation, rendering obsolete the antiquated structures of education. The proliferation of higher education has led to the devaluation of academic degrees, necessitating an

urgent reassessment of how intelligence and success are defined. Intelligence is not a monolithic construct but rather a multifaceted phenomenon that manifests in various forms-visual, auditory, kinaesthetic, and abstract-each of which holds intrinsic value and practical applicability. To harness the full spectrum of human potential, educational institutions must adopt a more inclusive and adaptive approach, one that recognizes and nurtures diverse modalities of intelligence.

A poignant illustration of this principle is found in the life of Gillian Lynne, the renowned choreographer from Bromley, Kent, England, whose artistic contributions revolutionized the world of dance. As a child, she struggled with in conventional academic settings, prompting concerns about a potential learning disorder. However, a perceptive specialist discerned that her restlessness was not a deficit but rather an expression of her natural inclination for movement. By embracing her strengths and channelling them into dance, she was able to realize her full potential and achieve global acclaim. This narrative serves as a compelling testament to the necessity of broadening educational frameworks to accommodate and cultivate the unique gifts of every individual.

In light of these considerations, I propose a fundamental re-evaluation of our educational philosophies. Just as Al Gore, an American politician, environmentalist, and former vice president of the United States from 1993 to 2001 under President Bill Clinton, eloquently articulated the urgency of rethinking our ecological responsibilities, so too must we adopt a renewed conception of human ecology-one that acknowledges and fosters the full richness of human capability. The prevailing educational model, akin to an extractive industry, has sought to mine intellectual resources in a reductive and unsustainable manner. Moving forward, we must embrace a holistic, inclusive, and adaptive educational paradigm that accords creativity and innovation the same esteem as traditional academic disciplines.

Only through such a transformation can we equip future generations with the tools necessary to navigate an uncertain world, empowering them to contribute meaningfully and creatively to the evolving landscape of human progress.

The writer is a BS-19 officer of Provincial Management Service, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

President Asif Ali Zardari: A visionary leader, a symbol of democratic resilience

Syeda Tehseen Abidi

PRESIDENT Asif Ali Zardari, a seasoned statesman and unwavering symbol of democratic perseverance, once again demonstrated his statesmanship and commitment to Pakistan in his powerful address to the Joint Session of Parliament at the beginning of the 2nd Parliamentary Year on 10th March 2025.

As a spokesperson of the Government of Sindh and a proud citizen of Pakistan, I feel it is imperative to not only echo his powerful message but also remind the nation of the unmatched sacrifices President Zardari has made for the stability, progress, and unity of our beloved country.

A True Democratic Leader

President Zardari has addressed the Parliament for the eighth time-a testimony to his unshakeable commitment to democratic continuity. His statesmanship was evident in every word of his speech, where he called upon all elected representatives to put aside political differences and work together to build a stronger, inclusive, and prosperous Pakistan.

His call for political maturity, economic revival, and institutional strengthening is a timely reminder that our journey toward a better Pakistan is not possible without unity, consensus, and empathy for the people.

A Legacy of Sacrifice and Service

Let us not forget that President Zardari is the only civilian leader who bore the weight of national responsibility in the most testing times. His courage in the face of personal tragedy-especially after the assassination of Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto-is etched in the heart of every Pakistani. His iconic slogan "Pakistan Khappay" is not just a slogan-it is a national commitment. A pledge to preserve the federation at a time when the nation stood at a critical juncture.

It was President Zardari who voluntarily transferred powers back to Parliament through the historic 18th Amendment, strengthening federalism and provincial autonomy-something that continues to benefit every citizen across Pakistan, particularly the smaller provinces.

Economic Vision and Revival

President Zardari's speech highlighted key achievements of the current government:

- o Surge in foreign exchange reserves
- o Historic highs in the stock market
- o Massive rise in Foreign Direct Investment (FDI)
- o Reduction in the policy rate from 22% to 12%
- o Strengthening of economic indicators across the board

These positive developments are not coincidental-they are the result of a broader vision for economic stability, resilience, and investor confidence.

His emphasis on inclusive development, tax reforms, ease of doing business, and digital infrastructure is a roadmap for sustainable growth.

Championing the Underprivileged

A true tribute to Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto's legacy, President Zardari rightly stressed the importance of social justice, particularly through the Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP). He called for its expansion, acknowledging its role as a lifeline for millions of vulnerable families,

especially women. His unwavering commitment to women empowerment, youth development, SME support, and universal access to education and healthcare reflects his people-centric approach.

Focus on Governance and Deprivation

President Zardari aptly pointed out the need for a governance reset. He urged ministries to redefine objectives and deliver tangible results to regain public trust. His call to address the sense of deprivation in neglected regions, to empower youth, and to enhance rural infrastructure demonstrates his understanding of ground realities and regional disparities.

Agriculture, Connectivity, and Climate Action

With visionary foresight, President Zardari underscored the importance of:

- o Modernizing agriculture and livestock sectors
- o Improving water management and irrigation systems
- o Investing in fisheries and food exports
- o Tackling climate change and promoting renewable energy

His proud mention of Sindh's achievement in planting 2 billion mangroves and earning carbon credits is a testament to what effective environmental policy can achieve. He rightly called for replication of this success across Pakistan.

Defender of the Federation

President Zardari's principled stance on the unilateral decision regarding Indus River canals proves his deep loyalty to the federation. As President elected by all provincial assemblies, he stood up for equity and consensus, cautioning against decisions that could harm inter-provincial harmony. This is the true essence of statesmanship.

National Security and Foreign Policy

He reassured the nation of continued commitment to counterterrorism, praised the bravery of our armed forces, and advocated for the development of terrorism-affected areas to combat extremism at its root.

On foreign policy, President Zardari highlighted Pakistan's enduring friendships with China, Saudi Arabia, UAE, Turkiye, the US, and others. He reaffirmed Pakistan's strong diplomatic ties while advocating regional peace, stability, and economic cooperation.

Voice for the Oppressed

President Zardari's powerful words on Kashmir and Palestine reflect Pakistan's unwavering commitment to the oppressed. His speech was not only a message of solidarity but also a call to action for the international community to address human rights violations and injustice across the globe.

A Call for Unity and National Interest

President Zardari's speech was a masterclass in leadership. It was not merely a ceremonial address-it was a strategic vision, a heartfelt plea, and a roadmap for progress. As a spokesperson of the Government of Sindh, I join the President in urging all political forces to set aside divisions and work together for the people of Pakistan. Let us honor his lifelong sacrifices, his wisdom, and his commitment by transforming his vision into reality. Let us build a Pakistan that reflects the values of justice, inclusion, democracy, and unity.

Pakistan Khappay. Pakistan Paidabad.

Writer is Spokesperson, Government of Sindh

HK should fast-track integration of Greater Bay Area

Tu Haiming

THE "Outline Development Plan for the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area" was released six years ago, but the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region has been relatively slow in advancing the project. Now, Hong Kong needs to take more proactive measures to contribute to the GBA's development.

The development of Hong Kong and Macao SARs is intrinsically linked to the national goal of building a stronger Chinese nation. It is crucial for more Hong Kong residents to realize that the GBA is not just a strategic project for national development; it gives Hong Kong a golden opportunity to boost its

growth. Only by leveraging opportunities within the Greater Bay Area and connecting the mainland market, can Hong Kong transform into a "super value creator" and sustain growth.

Since the GBA is a shared home for Guangdong province, and the Hong Kong and Macao SARs, every member of Hong Kong society should see itself as a contributor to the GBA's growth.

The visit of Xia Baolong, director of the Hong Kong and Macao Affairs Office of the State Council, to Hong Kong after the Spring Festival holiday set a good example for Hong Kong. As the progress of the GBA's development has been slow, there is a need to urgently take measures to push the

initiative forward. Xia's visit to the Hetao Shenzhen-Hong Kong Science and Technology Innovation Cooperation Zone underscored the sharp contrast in progress between the two sides, as evidenced by the many skyscrapers in Shenzhen's zone juxtaposed against the undeveloped areas in its Hong Kong counterpart.

There was a time when Shenzhen used to learn from Hong Kong. Today, it has left Hong Kong far behind when it comes to fast-paced and efficient development. Looking at the tremendous changes across the mainland, the difference between the two cities becomes even more

striking.

Hong Kong should urgently catch up with the mainland's reform and development pace, and address each issue head-on to move forward.

Xia has urged Hong Kong to promote innovation to remove the hurdles to development, and engage with development zones such as Hengqin, Qianhai and Hetao, seize the opportunities created by the new round of industrial and technological revolution, and explore new development paths to boost development and strengthen connectivity with the mainland.

For example, it should align its rules with those of the mainland and integrate

with the GBA. But, as some say, won't the "one country, two systems" principle be undermined if Hong Kong were to align its rules and social and economic systems with those of the mainland? This is a misinterpretation of the SAR's relationship with the motherland.

As capitalism has evolved over time, Hong Kong's system needs to keep pace with the evolution. More important, the GBA's reform is aimed at boosting development, not undermining "one country, two systems". The principle should be to pursue the best solutions to problems no matter where they come from.

The GBA's success depends on enhanced

cooperation, especially between Guangdong and Hong Kong. Under the central government's leadership, Hengqin, a 106-square-kilometer island near Macao poised to become a free trade zone, is the innovation platform of Macao, while Qianhai, an area in Shenzhen with very high growth potential, and Hetao, a cooperation zone between Hong Kong and Shenzhen, can help boost Hong Kong's development.

Since cooperation is a multi-directional process, Hong Kong, with the strong support of the central government and Guangdong, has to play a bigger role in the development of the Greater Bay Area.

— China Daily

As stock slumps drain America’s 401(k)s, Trump props up his billionaire sidekick

AS Wall Street reeled for a second straight day on Tuesday, President Donald Trump chose not to appear with worried working people but to prop up the share prices and wealth of the world’s richest man – Elon Musk – with a bizarre sales pitch for Tesla on the White House South Lawn.

The optics of Trump responding on camera in this way to a stock exchange rout that has wiped billions from Americans’ retirement accounts amid anxiety over his trade wars and erratic leadership were striking. That was especially the case given public anxiety caused by sell-offs that have sent the S&P 500 down nearly 10% from its highs and Trump’s yet to be fulfilled vows as a candidate to quickly cut the prices of groceries.

In the 2024 campaign, Trump donned an apron and worked a McDonald’s fries station and clambered aboard a garbage truck in a fluorescent vest in effective photo-ops that stressed his kinship with regular Americans and the Democrats’ failure to connect.

But with mounting fears of a recession – a possibility Trump twice refused to rule out on Sunday, stunning markets – the president seemed most concerned about a fellow billionaire at the White House. Top aides meanwhile downplayed investor panic as a mere symptom of a “period of economic transition.”

Trump stood with Musk next to a gleaming line-up of the electric vehicle mogul’s pioneering models and condemned protests and threats targeting Tesla dealerships as the head of the Department of Government Efficiency shreds the bureaucracy and slashes government spending.

The president condemned Musk’s critics for treating him “unfairly,” adding, “You can’t be penalized for being a patriot.”

But the event raised questions over whether the president is becoming disconnected with the eco-

nomic suffering in the country – one of the trends that led to his election victory last year.

A new CNN/SSRS poll Wednesday showed 56% of Americans now disapprove of Trump’s handling of the economy – his worst rating on this issue of his entire White House career. The story is reversed on immigration with 51% saying they back the president’s approach.

Musk, the most powerful private citizen inside a presidential administration in modern times, is facing product boycotts and protests as he takes a chain-saw to the federal government. Most demonstrations have been peaceful, but police are investigating widespread reports of vandalism in some locations. The market value of Musk’s firms has also plummeted since he took on his polarizing new role in politics.

But thanks to Trump’s endorsement – and promise to buy a Tesla Model S – Tesla shares climbed 3.8% on Tuesday, heading in the opposite direction of the Dow Jones Industrial Average, which dipped 478 points (1.4%).

Asked whether his event for Tesla would boost the company’s sales and share prices, the president said, “I hope it does.”

At times, as Trump and Musk talked up the Teslas, they looked more like salesmen on a dealership forecourt than the world’s most powerful man and its wealthiest. Trump held a paper listing the prices of various models pictured by a Getty Images photographer that noted that a basic model can be leased for \$299 a month.

“Who else but this guy would design this and everybody on the road is looking at it,” the president marveled in front of a Cybertruck. Musk replied: “We want the future to look like the future.”

On a sunny March day in Washington, the president was in a good mood, and he cracked jokes as he bantered with a press pool and staff. In a more normal administration, the photo op might be passed off as simply a president highlighting a great American company. In 2021, for

Stephen Collinson

instance, then-President Joe Biden took a hybrid electric Jeep on a ride through the White House grounds.

But it’s a mark of how Trump and Musk have shattered the normal ethical conventions surrounding the presidency that the event took place at all. It represented a staggering conflict of interest for a president to conduct a sales pitch for a product owned by a member of his administration who is in a position to shape government policy and regulations to benefit his own firms. One reporter asked the DOGE chief whether he’d continue as Tesla CEO while in government. He replied that he would, as if it were the most normal thing in the world.

But there are new signs that Musk’s prominent role is backfiring with the public. In the CNN poll, only 35% of Americans had a positive view of the tech mogul, with 53% having a negative view. Roughly 6 in 10 Americans say he has neither the right experience nor judgment to change the way the government works.

Trump’s Tesla event came on another day of head-spinning exchanges with Canada that typified the volatility spooking markets. The president had threatened to slap a 50% tariff on Canadian steel and aluminum imports after Doug Ford, the premier of Ontario, broached a 25% surcharge on electricity exports to Michigan, Minnesota and New York. The escalation was defused after a telephone call between Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick and Ford, a Trump-style populist. The president praised the premier as “strong” as each side claimed the other had backed down.

The spat was the latest in an extraordinary series of disputes between the Trump administration and Canada, one of America’s closest allies, that has shattered the idea that the two nations, as well as Mexico, could form a trade bloc to compete with the European Union and China. Indeed, Trump again insisted Tuesday that Canada should become the 51st

state. The prospect of an all-out trade war, and the president’s other disruptive policies as he’s sided with enemies such as Russia and rebuked allies across the Atlantic, has conjured a febrile atmosphere that has rattled investors. Trump’s failure to rule out a recession this year in an interview with Fox News on Sunday was the last straw for the markets. His unpredictable policy moves are rocking economic sentiment at exactly the wrong moment, as hiring slows and consumer confidence ebbs.

Diane Swonk, chief economist at KPMG US, compared the situation to drivers pulled up at a broken stoplight, unwilling to cross a busy intersection because they fear getting into a crash. “That’s what we are seeing in real time right now. We are seeing uncertainty weigh on the economy,” Swonk told CNN’s Erin Burnett. “We are seeing it have a direct toll, we are seeing it on all the earnings calls ... where people say, ‘We can’t give you any guidance about where we are going because we don’t know what is going to happen with tariffs, we don’t know what is going to happen with borders.’”

But alongside Musk, Trump blamed stock market losses on his watch on Biden, whom he falsely said “gave us a horrible economy.” Trump added: “I think the market was going to go very, very bad” despite predicting last year stocks would soar when he took office.

There is no public sign that Trump is thinking about changing course, despite the painful market losses that are not only leaving many citizens scared for their future retirement funds but also making life uncomfortable for those who are already retired and have to live on their diminishing 401(k)s.

This prompts the question of whether Trump is serious about his desire to transform the world trading system and the US economy whatever the cost.

White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt argued on Tuesday that the current short-term pain would be a distant memory

when Trump’s policies come to fruition.

“What the president envisions for this country is for the United States of America to be a manufacturing superpower, where there are American factories and businesses owned by Americans producing goods that we are exporting to the rest of the world,” Leavitt told reporters. “Those revenues will stay here. It will increase wages for people here in our great country. It will ensure our national security and it will boost the morale of the American people to have thriving industries again.”

The goal of bringing jobs back to the US from low-wage economies abroad is commendable, and Trump’s plan to remodel the economy is a response to the hollowing-out of industrialized areas and the uneven benefits of globalization. These themes have helped him twice win election to the White House, and there is no doubt he’s responding to the aspirations of his voters.

Yet such a fundamental reshaping of the economy could take decades, and there’s no certainty that big business will take costly decisions to relocate in the less than four years Trump has left in the White House. In the meantime, tariffs, which result in higher prices for consumers, could cause huge economic damage. And trying to recreate a 20th century economy in a new era dominated by the implications of an artificial intelligence revolution might be a retrograde bet in any case.

After his uncharacteristic lack of bombast over the economy on Sunday, Trump is back to invoking a golden age. Asked about the possibility of a recession, he replied, “I don’t see it at all.” He added, “I think this country is going to boom.”

But the doubt created by the president’s weekend equivocation on the issue will take time to dispel. And he did a better job cheerleading for his friend’s car company Tuesday than convincing his doubters he’s got a plan to make the economy great again.

— CNN

Arrests of Columbia pro-Palestine activists will not save Israel’s image

Olamide Samuel

IN April 2024, students across the United States were mobilising to demand an end to their universities’ complicity in the genocide in Gaza.

I wrote an article explaining why I saw the emergence of these protests, and especially those at Columbia University’s New York City campus, as a turning point in the global movement for Palestinian rights and liberation.

Now, almost a year later, the federal government is fiercely cracking down on these protests, and punishing the brave souls who played a leading role in them, to protect Israel from scrutiny and conceal its undeniable complicity in its genocide.

This month, Trump’s government, guided by his newly formed multi-agency Task Force to Combat Anti-Semitism, announced the cancellation of roughly \$400m in federal grants to Columbia University over what it deemed a “failure to protect Jewish students from antisemitic harassment”.

Further, Trump’s Secretary of State Marco Rubio made a promise to revoke “the visas and green cards of Hamas supporters in America so they can be deported” – “Hamas supporter” in this context is of course just a code word for anyone who supports Palestinian rights and objects to Israel’s repeated violations of international law.

Rubio’s statement was not an empty threat.

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The information currently available to us about the case of Mahmoud Khalil points to a grim reality: Washington is willing to deport a legal permanent resident for playing a prominent role in protests that were critical of and upsetting to Tel Aviv. It seems the current administration is so committed to pleasing Israel and crushing students’ objections to genocide that it is willing and eager to stamp on core American rights, values and liberties. But this unprecedented crackdown is also indicative of the success of these protests. Trump is willing to risk so much to silence the anti-genocide cry coming from American universities because these protests – once dismissed as meaningless “noise” on campuses detached from wider society – have succeeded in toppling a critical pillar of Israel’s well-established public relations strategy in the West. Student protests put the Palestinian struggle at the top of the national agenda, and encouraged many Americans who are normally oblivious to the events in the Middle East and get their news and commentary strictly from pro-Israel sources, to pay attention to what’s happening in Gaza. As they started to pay attention, many realised Israel is not a democratic oasis in a region full of war-crazed barbarians as it has long pretended to be, but a colonial outpost, an apartheid state currently enacting genocide upon a captive population. As people turned to on-the-ground sources to understand what students on American campuses are so passionately protesting against, the contrived image of Israel as a moral force “merely defending itself from terrorists” has crumbled. This is not just sentiment. In a Gallup poll published this month, Americans’ support for Israel polled at an all-time low, and sympathy for the Palestinian plight was at an all-time high. The American administration’s ongoing clampdown on student protesters is a testament to its desperation to save this crumbling facade. In its efforts to silence criticism of Israel on American campuses, the American administration is following a well-worn playbook. Taking its cues from Tel Aviv, it is conflating anti-Zionism with anti-Semitism and then claiming it must stamp out anti-Zionism just like it works to stamp out anti-Semitism, in the name of public safety and “shared values”. This script has gained increased traction in Congress since the beginning of the genocide in Gaza. In December 2023, the Republican-controlled House of Representatives passed a measure (House Resolution 894) that rejects the “drastic rise of anti-Semitism in the United States and around the world” and then goes on to “clearly and firmly” state that “anti-Zionism is antisemitism”.

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Earlier this week, Mahmoud Khalil, a Palestinian graduate of Columbia University who played a prominent role in last year’s Gaza protests there, was arrested by United States Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents (ICE) at his Manhattan flat, in front of his American wife, who is eight months pregnant. Despite holding a Green Card, he is now being threatened with deportation. The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) accused the former student of “leading activities aligned to Hamas”.

It is unclear whether he is facing any actual charges or being accused of a crime that could warrant this treatment. The information currently available to us about the case of Mahmoud Khalil points to a grim reality: Washington is willing to deport a legal permanent resident for playing a prominent role in protests that were critical of and upsetting to Tel Aviv.

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Politicians who support the conflation of anti-Zionism with anti-Semitism claim they are doing so to combat hatred. Yet, we see, time and again, how these same forces remain silent when Jewish activists are expelled from protests or face police violence for standing with Palestinians. If their genuine concern was anti-Semitism, they would be equally committed to defending the rights and safety of Jewish people who align with the Palestinian cause. Instead, they use the mere whisper of “anti-Semitism” to smear entire protest movements, all while funnelling billions in aid to a foreign government that has systematically denied Palestinians their humanity and statehood for more than seven decades.

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The truth is, the student activists at Columbia – like those at countless other universities – did not invite oppression or orchestrate some campaign of hate. They stood up for Palestinian human rights. They urged their institution to stop profiting from, or ignoring, the mass killing of Palestinians in Gaza. In return, the federal government is punishing them and their school with savage fury, ensuring no academic institution dares replicate their protest without risking financial devastation.

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But the administration’s efforts have clearly backfired. The wave of pro-Palestine activism that originated at Columbia has only been magnified by the administration’s crackdown and the raw images of human suffering pouring out of Gaza.

— Aljazeera

Trump wants to deport foreign students like me. Universities must defy him

WHEN I arrived to study in the United States, the terrifying spectre of deportation was the last thing on my mind.

As a Brit – a citizen of “the First World” – I was supposedly the beneficiary of the “special relationship” between the US and the United Kingdom.

As awful as it was, deportation happened to asylum seekers from Mexico or Haiti, in a world far removed from the snow-capped hills of Ithaca in upstate New York, home to Cornell University where I study. Or so I thought.

In January, as I taught a class on African American literature, I received a text message that caused me to nervously peer out the window for danger on the street below.

Agents from Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) had been spotted conducting raids in downtown Ithaca. I had reason to be afraid: the day before, President Donald Trump had signed an executive order asking agencies to consider deporting foreign students who, like me, faced disciplinary action for activism on Palestine.

The order requires universities to “monitor for and report activities by alien students and staff” and calls on the secretary of education to provide an inventory of court and disciplinary cases involving alleged anti-Semitism at universities.

Mischaracterising the antiwar protests that took place across US campuses last year, Trump was quoted as saying in a White House fact sheet: “To all the resilient aliens who joined in the pro-jihadist protests, we put you on notice: come 2025, we will find you, and we will deport you.”

Trump’s words have since become reality. On Saturday night, ICE immigration agents arrested Mahmoud Khalil, a

Palestinian who led the encampment at Columbia University, and transferred him to a detention facility in Louisiana, a thousand miles away from his heavily pregnant wife, who remains in New York City. His status as a permanent resident holding a green card did little to protect him.

By taking unprecedented steps to punish students for peaceful activism against Israel’s war in Gaza, universities paved the way for Trump’s order and the raids that have now begun.

These institutions face a fork in the road: they can comply with the order and become complicit in a crackdown on dissent, or they can stand up to Trump and his clan of bullies, protect their students and hold fast to their stated values of freedom of expression.

Universities must demonstrate whether they are for the First Amendment, or against it.

I, myself, was suspended following the student takeover of a career fair in September 2024, featuring Boeing and L3Harris – companies that have supplied Israel with some of the weapons it has used to carry out its war on the Palestinian population – described as genocide by leading human rights groups.

Many of the 100 or so students who took part in the protest were involved in previous actions, including a major encampment that lasted over two weeks and occupations of major academic buildings.

But in an unprecedented move, Cornell singled out 15 of us for suspension, mostly Black, Muslim, Arab and Jewish students. Four of us are international students and could face deportation. In addition, Bianca Waked, a Canadian Arab student, who was suspended in April 2024 for leading a protest encampment on campus, also faces this prospect.

Amandla Thomas-Johnson

Though there was no suggestion that my actions were anti-Semitic or violent in any way during subsequent disciplinary proceedings, I was banished from campus and could not go to the library or visit my academic department.

As I live in a private residence on campus, I was effectively placed under a form of house arrest for a month before my suspension was lifted.

All this for taking a stand against the wanton annihilation of innocent people.

Still, I was one of the luckier ones.

Four students were arrested by campus police for shoving and resisting officers; the charges of three of them were either dropped or will be dismissed pending a period without further charges.

At least one student was evicted from campus accommodation, while others were prevented from attending Shabbat or Muslim prayers on campus.

In one high-profile case, Momodou Taal, a fellow British student, was suspended and threatened with deportation.

Experts have warned that the Trump presidency is intent on using Gaza protests as a tool to wage a wider “war on woke” against progressive thought at US universities. And so by punishing us in this way, Cornell and other universities have left the door wide open for Trump’s book-burning insurgents to run riot.

The suspensions are embarrassing for an institution that prides itself on freedom of expression and a legacy of student protest. Indeed, freedom of expression was the 2023-2024 university theme.

Ironically, while punishing us for a takeover of a career fair, the university still boasts on its website about its progressive history,

which includes the 1969 Willard Straight Hall takeover, in which Black students occupied the campus, protesting against institutional racism. On that occasion, Cornell was willing to meet some of the demands of its students and opened the first department of Africana Studies in the US.

The level of censorship at the university became a matter of public embarrassment on February 3, during a keynote lecture by the distinguished activist and academic Angela Davis.

Davis was introduced by one of Cornell’s most senior Black administrators, Marla Love, the dean who oversees the department that handed down my suspension and confinement.

Highlighting that Davis’s work “challenges us to confront the injustices of today”, Love billed the lecture as a meditation on the contemporary relevance of Dr Martin Luther King in tackling “war and militarism, imperialism, human global suffering and governmental abuses of power”. Davis did just that: she challenged injustice, just not in the way the university leadership would have hoped.

“It was from him [Dr Martin Luther King] that we learned about the indivisibility of justice. It is not possible to call for justice for some and leave others outside of the circle of justice,” she said, before going off-topic.

“I understand that there are those that cannot attend this evening because they have been banished from this community because of their efforts to criticise the anti-democratic forces of the State of Israel,” Davis said.

During the question-and-answer session, Davis’s dissident, an undergraduate student, revealed that the university had barred them from fielding questions about Palestine or, ironically, about censorship on campus.



SCCI urges govt to make Azakhel dry port functional

— launch of cargo train from Peshawar demanded

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The Sarhad Chamber of Commerce and Industry president Fazal Moqem Khan demanded abolishment of SRO-121, allowing loose cargo, launch of cargo train from Peshawar and pragmatic steps to make Azakhel dry-port fully functional and elimination of rechecking of export-goods laden vehicles at Karachi port.

The SCCI chief called for review on custom duties/tariffs and immediate restoration of Pak-Afghan mutual trade through the Torkham border.

He made these demands while speaking to members during the visit of Chief Collector Custom Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Khawaja Khurram Naeem here at the chamber house on Wednesday.

Meeting attended by SCCI senior vice president Abdul Jalil Jan, former presidents Haji Muhammad Asif, Fuad Ishaq,

Zahidullah Shinwari, Haji Muhammad Afzal, former vice president Malik Niaz Muhammad Awan, members of the chamber executive committee Ziaul Haq Sarhadi, Ashfaq Ahmad, Nadeem Rauf, Gul Zaman, Sultan Muhammad, former provincial chief APECA Mushtaq Ahmad, Rashid Iqbal Siddiqui, Affat Ali Khan, Atif Rasheed Khawaja, Mazharul Haq, Ihsanullah, Khalid Sultan Khawaja, Rehman Gul, Custom Clearing Agents, Secretary General Muqtasid Ahsan, traders, importers and exporters.

Collector Custom (Appraisal) Peshawar Maten Alam, Custom Collector (Enforcement) Peshawar Ziaul Shams, PRO Custom Office Peshawar Aftab Ahmad were accompanied by Chief Collector Custom Khawaja Khurram during the visit to the chamber house.

Moqem briefed the chief collector about traders' reservations over

closure of Torkham border for the last 21 days, bureaucratic hurdles in carrying out smooth trade, hurdles, ban on dollar declaration and other problems.

The SCCI chief said the business community has faced severely hardships owing to prevailing circumstances.

He urged the government, customs department and other relevant authorities to facilitate traders under the one-window operation, because mutual trade, export and national economy would only flourish by easing difficulties of the business community.

He stated closure of Torkham border on petty issues was not only compounding miseries for traders but it also brought negative impacts on bilateral trade and economy of the both countries.

Approximately, 4million dollars bilateral trade between Pakistan and Afghanistan had suffered

owing to the closure of the Torkham border for the last 21 days, Moqem said.

Other speakers include former presidents Fuad Ishaq, Haji Muhammad Afzal, Zahidullah Shinwari, Faiz Muhammad Faiz addressed the meeting and pointed out hurdles in Pak-Afghan bilateral trade, discrepancies and drawbacks in policies and border management system, imposition of heavy duties tariffs, taxes and other issues and gave number of proposals for their resolution.

Later, Chief Collector Custom Khurram Naeem while responding to various queries of the participants stated that the Custom department is taking practical steps to carry out smooth cross border trade and export.

He assured that the Customs department will take issue of border closure, along with other problems of the traders with relevant authorities and address them amicably.



PESHAWAR: President Sarhad Chamber of Commerce and Industry Fazal Moqem Khan presenting a shield to Chief Collector Custom Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Khawaja Khurram Naeem at Chamber's House.

Stock Exchange loses 93 points

ISLAMABAD (APP): The 100-Index of the Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX) shed 93.12 points on Wednesday, a negative change of 0.08 percent, closing at 114,084.54 points as compared to 114,177.66 points on the last trading day.

A total of 299,630,187 shares were traded during the day as compared to 318,518,329 shares the previous trading day, whereas the price of shares stood at Rs20.262 billion against Rs22.883 billion on the last trading day.

As many as 432 companies transacted their shares in the stock market, 159 of them recorded gains and 213 sustained losses, whereas the share price of 60 companies remained unchanged.

The three top trading companies were Sui South Gas with 18,257,617 shares

at Rs36.84 per share, At-Tahir Limited with 14,884,025 shares at Rs38.91 per share and Bank of Punjab with 14,382,419 shares at Rs13.09 per share.

PIA Holding Company LimitedB witnessed a maximum increase of Rs55.05 per share closing at Rs864.25 whereas runner-up was Unilever Pakistan Foods Limited with Rs53.60 rise in its share price to close at Rs23,339.60.

Pakistan Engineering Company Limited witnessed a maximum decrease of Rs28.84 per share price, closing at Rs691.61, whereas the runner-up was Ghandhara Industries Limited with Rs19.75 decline in its per share price to Rs646.26.

Gold prices up by Rs500 to Rs306,500 per tola
The price of 24 karat per

tola gold increased by Rs.500 and was traded at Rs.306,500 on Wednesday as compared to its sale at Rs306,000 on previous trading day, All Pakistan Sarafa Gems and Jewelers Association reported.

The prices of 10 grams of 24 karat also increased by Rs.429 to Rs 262,774 from Rs 262,345 whereas the prices of 10 gram 22 karat gold also went up by Rs.393 to Rs.240,884 from Rs 240,491 respectively.

The prices of per tola went up by Rs.52 to Rs3,440 whereas that of ten gram silver went up by Rs45 to Rs.2,949 respectively.

The price of gold in the international market increased by \$5 to \$2,915 from \$2,910 whereas that of silver increased by \$0.50 to \$33.00, the Association reported.

ICCI leaders condemn Jaffar express attack

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ICCI) leadership has strongly condemned the heinous terrorist attack on the Jaffar Express in Balochistan and praised the security forces for their effective and timely response in rescuing the passengers.

In their statements, ICCI President Nasir Mansoor Quresh, Senior Vice President Abdul Rehman Siddiqui, and Vice President Nasir Mehmood Chaudhry expressed deep concern over the tragic incident, said a press release issued here on Wednesday.

Court Notice

In the Court of Qurat-ul-Ain Rashid, Senior Civil Judge/Judge Family Court Swabi. Mst. Hizra Shakir VS Shakir Khan, Suit Number: 346/FC, Institution Date : 14-11-2024, Hearing Date : 27-03-2025, Subject: Dower, Notice to: Shakir Khan S/o Sahib Khan R/o Ocharian, Humtor, Teh, & Distt, Abbottabad, presently abroad. The service through ordinary means is difficult, so you are informed to attend the Court on 27-03-2025 personally, through counsel or attorney to avoid ex-parte proceeding.

Court Notice

In the court of Rabia Abbasi senior civil judge/Alia Ilaqa Qazi Swat. Case No. 224/1 institution. 17/12/2024. Next Hearing date 13/03/2025. Imran Ullah s/o Badshah r/o panr Muhalla fazzal colony Mingora Tehsil Babozai District swat. VS.1) Noor-ul-Haq s/o Muhammad Youasf. 2) Muhammad Youasf s/o unknown r/o Muhalla Madakhel Tootlai Khadokhel District Buner. 3) Akbar Bacha s/o Ghulam Sarwar r/o Bartana Matta district Swat. Whereas the above named cannot be served in ordinary manner it is therefore proclaimed or through dually authorized agent or pleader in the court on 13/03/2025, at 8.00 am. Ex-parte proceeding will be initiated against you.

Court Notice

In the Court of Jauhar Ali Safi Civil Judge I/Alaqa Qazi Buner at Daggar. Suit No.592/1, Institution 7/12/2023. Date of hearing. 17/3/2025. Hamed Rasol etc VS Mian Said Dost etc. Notice to No.54.Mumtaz Ahmed s/o Gul Ahmed. 59.Shah Room Khan.72.Abdullah s/o Hamesh Gul.79. Rehmatullah. 80.Fareedullah. 17.Mst. NasreenBegum. 34.Mst Razia d/o Darvesh.58.Umer Ali s/o Muhasim Billah.65.Nor Basher.66.Sher Azam Khan.67.Sher Zaid Khan. 68.Riaz Ali Khan.69.Nisar Ali Khan.70.Samad Ali Khan sons of Sher Ali Khan. 71.Muhammad Ayub s/o Alesh Khan. 73.Fazal Hakim. 74. Burhan sons. 75.Msts Noor Jihan. 76.Rouh Alza. 77.Bakht Zeba daughters of Fazal Karim.78.Fazal Ibrar s/o Burhan.83.Fazal Subhan Wali s/o Shah Wali.84. Nasar Ali Shah s/o Zafar Khan. 85.Saleem s/o Abdul Hamed resident of Elai thesel Daggar Buner. 38/1.Mst Anmul. 38/2. Parkha daughters. 38/3.Malak Asad.38/4. Malak Abid. 38/5.Malak Sajjad resident of Sultanwas thesel Gadezal Buner. Whereas in the above mentioned case the mentioned defendants can not be served in the ordinary way, it is, therefore, proclaimed that if the said defendants will/shall not appear personally or through dually authorized agent or pleader in the court at 8.00 am dated 17/3/2025 the proceeding will be taken ex- parte. Given under my hand and seal of this Court.

Graana.com join hands with Vortex Developers

F.P. Report

KARACHI :Graana.com, Pakistan's premier online real estate marketplace, has announced a strategic partnership with Vortex Developers to showcase and market the prestigious Vortex5 corporate development. This collaboration highlights Graana.com's commitment to presenting distinguished real estate opportunities and fostering industry excellence.

Vortex5 is a joint venture of four prominent real estate entities aiming to set new benchmarks for integrity, professionalism, and sustainable growth within Pakistan's real estate sector. Strategically located in Mumtaz City, with optimal connectivity to Islamabad and Rawalpindi, Vortex5 is positioned to become a premier corporate address in the region. The development is designed to provide a sophisticated and functional corporate environment, setting new standards for luxury and efficiency.Farhan Javed, Group Director of Graana.com, expressed enthusiasm about the partnership, stating that Graana.com is honored to collaborate with Vortex Developers on this landmark project. He emphasized that the alliance reflects the company's dedi-



cation to presenting exceptional real estate opportunities and supporting developments that redefine industry standards. Jahanzaib, a partner at Vortex Developers, also welcomed the collaboration, noting that Graana.com's established reputation and market influence will be instrumental in communicating the unique attributes and value of Vortex5 to a discerning clientele. He further stated that this partnership would significantly contribute to realizing the vision for a distinguished corporate enclave.

Graana.com's involvement reinforces its role as a leading platform for the promotion of high-caliber real estate projects. Through this collaboration, the company

expands its portfolio of premium offerings while continuing its mission to provide comprehensive and discerning real estate solutions. Graana.com aims to leverage its extensive market reach and expertise to showcase the Vortex5 development, ensuring maximum visibility and engagement within the corporate real estate sector.Vortex5 offers seamless connectivity to major urban centers, with close proximity to Islamabad International Airport. The project also aligns with sustainable development principles, reinforcing Graana.com's focus on responsible growth. With its architecturally distinguished design, prominently visible from the Srinagar Highway,

Vortex5 is poised to become a landmark corporate development in Pakistan.Graana.com is recognized as Pakistan's leading online real estate marketplace, providing comprehensive solutions for buyers, sellers, and renters.

The platform emphasizes transparency, credibility, and innovation, establishing itself as a trusted and authoritative name in the industry. Meanwhile, Vortex Developers, a collaboration of four leading real estate professionals, is committed to delivering premium corporate environments and sustainable development. Their latest project, Vortex5, is strategically positioned in Mumtaz City, offering exceptional accessibility and a high-end corporate setting.

Markets mixed as Trump trade policy sows uncertainty

HONG KONG (AFP/APP): Asian and European equities were mixed Wednesday as investors fret over President Donald Trump's ever-changing trade policies amid increasing concern that his tariffs could send the US economy into recession.

Global markets have endured severe volatility this month as the president looks

to ramp up pressure on global partners by imposing or threatening hefty duties on their goods, citing huge trade imbalances.

In the latest move, sweeping 25 percent levies on all US aluminium and steel imports came into effect at midnight in Washington (0400 GMT Wednesday), hitting numerous nations

from Brazil to South Korea, as well as the European Union.

On Tuesday, Trump threatened to double those on Canada after the province of Ontario imposed an electricity surcharge on three US states. The president called that off after Ontario halted the charge.

The on-off nature of the

trade policies has fuelled uncertainty in markets, and has sent the VIX "fear index" of volatility to its highest level since August.

Traders appeared largely unmoved by Trump's attempt to soothe worries over a recession after he warned at the weekend of "a period of transition" and refused to rule out a downturn.

Google Wallet now available for UBL customers in Pakistan

F.P. Report

KARACHI: UBL has become one of Pakistan's first banks to enable Google Wallet for its Mastercard and Visa Debit Cards. By adding their cards to Google Wallet on Android and Wear OS devices, UBL customers will now be able to enjoy a faster and more secure way to pay. This convenient facility allows cardholders to tap and pay at stores, shop online, and make in-app purchases effortlessly.

With the increasing adoption of digital payments, this new feature provides UBL customers with greater convenience and security in everyday transactions. Google Wallet ensures that card details remain protected using advanced security features, including industry-standard tokenization and biometric authentication or device passcodes for secure trans-



actions.

Getting started is simple. Customers can download Google Wallet from the Play Store, add their UBL Debit Card, and start making contactless payments instantly. If their device is ever lost or stolen, they can use Google's "Find My Device" feature to lock or wipe their data remotely, keeping their information secure.

To commemorate this milestone, senior represen-

tatives from Google, Visa, Mastercard, and Thales, visited UBL's Head Office in Karachi, on March 12th, 2025 to discuss the strategic opportunities in Pakistan's digital payment ecosystem.

The visiting delegation included Chen Way Siew, Financial Institutions, Network & Transit Partnerships Lead - Google, Umar Khan, Country Manager - Visa, and Arslan Khan, Country Manager -

Mastercard. UBL was represented by Ijaz Farooq, Deputy CEO, Munawar Raza Shah, Chief Operating Officer, Sohail Aziz, Chief Information Officer, Sharjeel Shahid, Group Executive Digital Banking and other senior executives.

UBL continues to lead the way in bringing innovative digital payment solutions to its customers, making everyday banking easier and more accessible.

Chicken cost amplify by Rs152/kg in twin cities

ISLAMABAD (APP): The price of chicken increased by Rs 152 per kg compared to the cost of the last two months from last days of December 2024 to the current month of March 11, before the holy month of Ramadan.

According to the market survey conducted by APP here Wednesday, the price of poultry chicken increased to Rs 485 per Kg in the twin cities of Islamabad and Rawalpindi.

The last month until December 30, 2024 chicken was sold at Rs 333 per kg, which was less than the previous month's price hike in poultry prices in the retail market.

The poultry consumables, chicken and eggs prices have been reduced for the past few weeks, and are once again out of reach of the public.

The prices of poultry items have increased by 30 percent in the twin cities of

Islamabad and Rawalpindi during the last two months, which has created huge volatility in the market.

According to the market survey, during the past two months in the twin cities, 32 percent increase was witnessed in the price of chicken, while a 25 per cent increase in the price of poultry eggs in the last eight weeks.

According to the survey, the price of live chicken in the twin cities was between Rs 470 per 480 kg from the last week of February 2025.

Similarly, chicken meat is sold at Rs 770 to 780 per kg in the market of both cities.

During this time, it was also found that poultry eggs used to be sold at Rs 300 to Rs 310 per dozen in the market of both cities.

Meanwhile, talking to APP, the former Chairman Pakistan Poultry Association (PPA), Chaudhry, Muhammad Ashraf said the

increase in the current prices of poultry is due to demand and supply issues.

PPA ex. Chairman said that the increase in poultry business inputs and cost of doing business was seen across the country due to which the market was in crisis.

He said that many people related to the chicken business in the country were affected by the current crisis and especially small businesses and poultry farms were closed, adding the poultry business in the four provinces including Punjab, Sindh, Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is suffering from the current economic crisis.

Chaudhry Ashraf said that the country's economic conditions are also an important issue and the poultry feed ingredients imported from foreign countries are very expensive, in which soybean is important.



HONG KONG: Consul General Riaz Ahmed Shaikh cutting a ribbon to inaugurate Pakistan Pavilion at APLF Leather Exhibition.



In brief

Pak athletes qualify 100m race relay finals

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan's Muhammad Afaq, Tabassum Nasir, and Shah Galoon have qualified for the finals of the 100m race and 4x100m relay divisioning race, respectively in the 12th Special Olympics World Winter Games at Turin, Italy. According to details issued here, all 10 Pakistani athletes will be in action in cross-country skiing and snowshoeing events finals on Thursday. In the final round of the 50-meter cross-country skiing race, Pakistan's two skiers, Rovina Qurban and Muneeb Ur Rehman, will compete for medals. Both athletes will also participate in the 100-meter final race on March 15. In the 200-meter snowshoeing final races on Thursday, four Pakistani female athletes and three male athletes will compete, while Moazzam Iqbal will be in action in the 800-meter race. The 100-meter and relay snowshoeing races will be held on March 14, while the 400-meter race is scheduled for March 15. Special Olympics Pakistan Chairperson Ronak Lakhani met with the Pakistani athletes and congratulated them on reaching the finals. She said that this achievement is the result of five years of hard work, and now the athletes have made it to the finals of the World Winter Games. She urged the people of Pakistan to pray for the success of these special athletes.

Van Dijk has 'no idea' over his Liverpool future

LONDON (AFP): Liverpool captain Virgil van Dijk has admitted he has "no idea" if he will remain at Anfield after this season. Van Dijk is out of contract at the end of the current campaign and is yet to agree a new deal with the Premier League leaders. Talks have been ongoing for some time and the Netherlands centre-back is keen to extend his stay on Merseyside. But until a new deal is finally agreed, the 33-year-old conceded he cannot guarantee being in a Liverpool shirt when next season starts. "I still have no idea at the moment. Genuinely," Van Dijk said after Wednesday's Champions League exit against Paris Saint-Germain. "At the moment I don't even know what will happen next year. If anyone says they do know, they are lying to your face. "Everyone knows there are some conversations behind the scenes but that is about it." With Liverpool 15 points clear at the top of the Premier League and facing Newcastle in the League Cup final on Sunday, Van Dijk is focused on ensuring his team enjoy a memorable end to the season, rather than worrying about the future. "It is not on hold. Nothing on hold," he added. "Listen, there are 10 games to go and that is my full focus. "If there is news, you guys will know it. I don't even know myself." Losing 4-1 on penalties against PSG after the Ligue 1 leaders won 1-0 in the Champions League last 16 second leg at Anfield was a major blow to Van Dijk and company. It means Reds boss Arne Slot must lift his team for Sunday's Wembley showdown against an injury-hit Newcastle. Van Dijk is confident Liverpool will be able to move on quickly from the PSG disappointment. "You always have to learn from difficult moments. That's life. That's life of any human being, but us footballers as well," he said.

ICC thanks PCB for successfully hosting of ICC Champions Trophy 2025

ISLAMABAD (APP): The International Cricket Council (ICC) has thanked the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) for successfully hosting the ICC Men's Champions Trophy 2025 and to the Emirates Cricket Board (ECB) for staging of five matches.

India claimed the Champions Trophy title for the third time after defeating New Zealand by four wickets at the Dubai International Stadium on Sunday.

The event, which took place from February 19 to March 9, saw Pakistan host their first global cricket tournament since 1996. The tournament was hosted

across four venues: Karachi, Lahore and Rawalpindi in Pakistan and Dubai in the United Arab Emirates.

ICC Chief Executive, Geoff Allardice said, "We would like to thank and congratulate the Pakistan Cricket Board for successfully hosting the ICC Men's Champions Trophy 2025.

"As this was the first global multi-team cricket event played in the country since 1996, this event was of huge significance for the PCB, and all those involved in renovating the stadiums, preparing the playing surfaces, delivering the matches and hosting the teams and visitors should be very proud of their efforts.

"The ICC would also like to thank the Emirates Cricket Board for staging five of the matches in Dubai and continuing to provide great support to the ICC in staging its major men's and women's events.

"The tournament once again showed the importance of ICC events as fans all over the world watched and followed it with great enthusiasm either at the venues or on satellite and digital channels. "Thanks to the eight participating teams for making it such a compelling event, and congratulations to India for winning a third Champions Trophy title in a memorable final," he said.

McIlroy doubts injured Woods will play in 2026



MIAMI (AFP): Rory McIlroy believes Tiger Woods is unlikely to play any golf this year but is backing the 15-time major champion to attempt a comeback after his latest injury woe.

Woods stunned the world of golf on Tuesday after revealing he had suffered a ruptured Achilles tendon as he prepared to make his return to competitive golf, potentially at next month's Masters in Augusta.

However his injury, which typically requires several months of recovery and rehabilitation, torpedoed his planned comeback, and cast a shadow over the remainder of the season.

Speaking on Wednesday on the eve of the opening round of The Players

Championship in Florida, Northern Ireland star McIlroy expressed his sympathy for Woods' plight.

"It sucks," McIlroy said of Woods injury.

"He doesn't have much luck when it comes to injuries and his body. Obviously he was trying to ramp up to get ready for Augusta, and Achilles surgeries obviously aren't fun. "We obviously won't see him play golf this year, and hopefully we see him maybe play in 2026."

McIlroy, though, believes the fiercely driven Woods will do all he can to be competitive when he does eventually return to fitness. "He'll try. I know he'll try," McIlroy said. "But that's a question for him, not

for me. I obviously don't know what's in his head. But judging by prior behavior, he'll definitely try."

McIlroy meanwhile reflected on his own career as he gears up for his latest tilt at next month's Masters -- the only major championship missing from his collection of US Open, British Open and two PGA Championships.

The 35-year-old star said he would know when the time was right to retire -- and would rather walk away from the sport before his form starts to decline.

"Whenever I feel like the time is right, I'll have no problem moving aside and letting the next generation do their thing," McIlroy said.

"When I've achieved everything I want to achieve in the game and I get to the point where I don't think I can maybe do that anymore. I'd also like to walk away with a little bit left in the tank.

"I don't want to be out there embarrassing myself. I'd like to walk away maybe a little before I should.

"I think if you can come to terms with that and walk away on your own terms, then that's a good thing."

Emma Alam receives UAE golden visa

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistani renowned figure in memory sports, speed reading, and mind mapping Emma Alam, has been awarded the United Arab Emirates (UAE) golden visa for her exceptional achievements.

The UAE Golden Visa is a rare recognition, typically granted to investors, entrepreneurs, and highly skilled professionals in fields such as technology, medicine, and arts, said a press release. Emma's award stands out as she receives this honor based on her remarkable accomplishments in the intellec-

tual field of memory sports and Super Learning.

The UAE Golden Visa is a long-term residency visa introduced by Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum in 2019. This visa reflects the UAE's dedication to attracting and supporting top talent globally, allowing recipients to live and work in the country for up to 10 years.

As the World Memory Champion, World Speed Reading Champion, and World Mind Mapping Champion, Emma's recognition highlights the global importance of intellectual achievements.

Emma's success is largely attributed to the mentorship of Sania Alam, who trained her at Futuristic Learning. Under Sania's guidance, Emma refined her skills and achieved extraordinary milestones.

The institute's trainees collectively hold six Guinness World Records and have achieved numerous prestigious accolades.

Emma is also a member of Pakistan's Prime Minister's National Youth Council, where she represents Pakistan's youth and contributes to shaping policies that benefit young people of Pakistan.

Talha Waheed sets Guinness World Record for most serves in a minute

ISLAMABAD (Monitoring Desk): Pakistani tennis player Talha Waheed has set a new Guinness World Record for the most number of serves in a minute, 59, breaking the previous record of 42, the Pakistan Tennis Federation (PTF) said on Wednesday.

The PTF described Waheed as a seasoned competitor who was featured in national and international matches with "an impressive record" in the 35+, 40+ and 45+ doubles categories, in addition to winning multiple national titles. Waheed has also attained a career-high International Tennis Federation ranking of 144 in the 40+ doubles category.

The Pakistani tennis player followed a "rigorous three-month training regimen" after which he made his official attempt to set the record on Nov. 8, 2024, in Pakistan's eastern city of



Lahore, the PTF said. Waheed adhered strictly to Guinness World Records guidelines in his attempt, the federation said.

"On March 10, 2025, Waheed received official confirmation from Guinness World Records, declaring him the new world record holder," the PTF said. The previous record was achieved by American tennis player John Perry in

2019, who registered 42 successful serves in one

minute. PTF President Aisam-ul-Haq Qureshi and other tennis players congratulated Waheed on this remarkable achievement.

"Talha's achievement is unique and securing a place in the Guinness Book of World Records is no easy task," Qureshi said. "This will serve as a great inspiration and a major boost for tennis in Pakistan."

Pakistan has a modest tennis presence, with Qureshi being the most suc-

cessful player to reach Grand Slam finals in doubles. Despite limited infrastructure and funding challenges, the PTF continues to promote the sport to increase international representation in a country where cricket dominates.

Tennis has also taken a step back in the country over the past year with the rise of Padel. This is not the first time a Pakistani has set a Guinness World Record. Previous record holders include Ali Moeen Nawazish who passed 23 A-level subjects, Naseem Hameed who became South Asia's fastest woman and the city of Karachi which created the largest human-formed national flag.

Martial artist Muhammad Rashid also holds multiple records for smashing objects, showcasing Pakistan's global excellence and determination.

Butler joins Islamabad United



ISLAMABAD (APP): The franchise in Pakistan Super League (PSL), Islamabad United, has announced Ian Butler as the team's bowling coach for PSL Season 10.

Islamabad United is excited to welcome Ian Butler as the new bowling coach for PSL 10. Butler, an experienced bowling coach with a strong track record in international and franchise cricket, will be making his debut in the PSL.

We are excited to see him with Islamabad United's

coaching setup, led by head coach Mike Hesson, said a press release.

Butler on joining Islamabad United said, "I'm really excited to be part of Islamabad United for PSL 10. This will be my first experience coaching in Pakistan, and I've heard great things about the passion for cricket here. Islamabad United has a fantastic legacy in the PSL, and I'm looking forward to working with the talented bowling group to help the

team push for another title. I'd also like to acknowledge Azhar Mahmood, who has done a fantastic job with this team, and I hope to continue building on that."

At the same time, the franchise also bids farewell to Azhar Mahmood, who is currently working with the Pakistan national team.

Azhar played a key role in Islamabad United's success both as a player and a coach, winning PSL 1 in 2016 as a player and as an assistant coach in 2024.

Islamabad United Owner, Ali Naqvi, expressed his gratitude for Azhar's contributions, "Azhar Mahmood has been a true Islamabad United legend. From winning our first PSL title as a player to returning as a coach and helping us win PSL 9, he has played a vital role in our journey.

His experience, leadership, and mentorship have been invaluable. We are

incredibly grateful for everything he has done for Islamabad United, and while we will miss him, we wish him the very best in his continued role with the Pakistan national team."

Islamabad United's Head Coach, Mike Hesson, welcomed Butler to the franchise while thanking Azhar Mahmood, "Butler brings a wealth of experience in developing bowlers and fine-tuning their skills at the highest level.

"His ability to work with both established players and emerging talents will be a massive asset for us. We're confident that his expertise will add to the strong coaching unit we've assembled. At the same time, I want to express my gratitude to Azhar Mahmood, who played a crucial role in Islamabad United's success last season. He has left a strong foundation, and we appreciate everything he has done for this team."

PCB expands women's cricket horizons with 90 domestic contracts

KARACHI (PPI): The Pakistan Cricket Board today unveiled domestic contracts for 90 women cricketers for the 2024-25 season, marking a significant step in boosting the country's women's cricket scene. The package includes players from various categories, spotlighting 18 Pakistan U19 players and 10 capped national team players.

The young U19 talents will gain from monthly retainers as they leverage their experience from the ACC Women's U19 Asia Cup 2024-25 and the ICC Women's U19 World Cup 2025. The Women's National Selection Committee, featuring for-

mer Test cricketer Asad Shafiq and ex-international Batool Fatima, recommended these players.

Contracts are distributed across the nation, reflecting players' potential and domestic performances, and will run from July 2024 to June 2025. This initiative aims to broaden the talent pool at the grassroots level and encourage young athletes to pursue professional cricket. The announcement follows the inaugural domestic contracts awarded in 2023-24 and includes additional benefits like match fees, daily allowances, and prize money shares for emerging and U19 players.

Two players from TCA selected in Multan region team



F.P. Report

LODHARAN: Humayun Altaf from Tareen Cricket Academy has been selected for the National T20 Cup from the Multan region, while Muhammad Sadaqat has been selected as a reserve player. The owner of Tareen Cricket Academy, Ali Tareen, along with the academy management, has congratulated both players and extended their best wishes. Humayun Altaf and Muhammad Sadaqat expressed their gratitude to Ali Khan Tareen and the Tareen Cricket Academy management for providing excellent facilities at the academy. They pledged to deliver their best performances in the National T20 Cup.

PSG stun Liverpool on penalties to make Champions League quarters



LIVERPOOL (AFP/APP): Paris Saint-Germain produced a historic turnaround to progress to the Champions League quarter-finals at Liverpool's expense as they triumphed 4-1 on penalties after a 1-0 second leg win at Anfield.

Never in Liverpool's history had they lost a European tie after winning the first leg away from home but Ousmane Dembele's early strike brought the French champions level at 1-1 on aggregate.

PSG were then perfect

with their four spot-kicks, while

Gianluigi Donnarumma saved from Darwin Nunez and Curtis Jones. Luis Enrique said before the game that the winners would progress to the final and PSG will be supremely confident of

reaching the semi-finals at least as they will face Aston Villa or Club Brugge in the last eight.

"Both of the teams deserve to go to the next phase," said PSG boss Luis Enrique.

"We were better in Paris and they were better here, but I think my team at Anfield, in a special stadium showed great personality and character."

A famous victory for the Parisians was deserved over the tie after they dominated the first leg only to be denied by the brilliance of Alisson Becker in the Liverpool goal before Harvey Elliott snatched a late winner. The roles were reversed this time as Liverpool were made to rue not making more of their chances.

"Over 90 minutes we didn't deserve to lose today, over 180 minutes maybe it was deserved," said Liverpool boss Arne Slot.

"We ran out of luck after last week." Brilliant play by Alexis Mac Allister should have created the opener on four minutes when the Argentine's cross picked out Mohamed Salah, whose goalbound effort was deflected over by Nuno Mendes.

PSG took 10 minutes to ride out the storm from the home side before finding their feet. The visitors took the lead on 12 minutes when Ibrahima Konate could only turn Bradley Barcola's cross beyond Alisson to leave Dembele with a simple finish.

The French international has now scored 23 goals in his last 17 games and could have had more before the end of the night. PSG who had the better openings to extend their advantage before half-time.

Twice Alisson had to be at his sharpest to race off his line and save one-on-ones against Barcola and

Dembele. PSG beat Liverpool to the signing of Khvicha Kvaratskhelia in January and the Georgian proved a constant menace to the Reds' defence.

Kvaratskhelia's shot from Dembele's cross was arrowing towards the top corner until a deflection from Ryan Gravenberch took it just over the crossbar. Improved second-half performances have been a common theme of Slot's first season at Liverpool and the hosts came roaring out of the traps after the break. Dominik Szoboszlai had a goal ruled out for offside against Luis Diaz earlier in the move.

Szoboszlai then had a goalbound effort blocked by Willian Pacheco before Donnarumma made a vital stop from Diaz from the resulting corner.

Liverpool's momentum could have been halted by the loss of Trent Alexander-Arnold to a

knee injury after the right-back landed awkwardly. But his replacement, Jarrell Quansah, was inches away from winning the tie when his header came back off the inside of the post.

PSG barely threatened during the second half of the 90 minutes but Liverpool were left hanging on for penalties in extra time. Lucas Beraldo's header and Desire Doue's shot flew just wide before more Alisson heroics kept PSG at bay with a stunning stop to turn Dembele's curling effort round the post.

However, Alisson could not save them in the shootout as it was the other goalkeeper who was the hero.

Donnarumma produced great saves to deny Nunez and Jones, either side of four confident strikes from Vitinha, Goncalo Ramos, Dembele and Doue to send PSG into the last eight.



In brief

IRSA releases 69,047 cusecs of water

ISLAMABAD (APP): Indus River System Authority (IRSA) on Wednesday released 69,047 cusecs of water from various rim stations with inflow of 56,590 cusecs. According to the data released by IRSA, the water level in River Indus at Tarbela Dam was 1405 feet and was 3 feet higher than its dead level of 1402 feet. Water inflow and outflow in the dam were recorded as 20,800 cusecs and 20,000 cusecs, respectively. The water level in River Jhelum at Mangla Dam was 1075.5 feet, which was 25.5 feet higher than its dead level of 1050 feet. The inflow and outflow of water were recorded as 14,743 cusecs and 28,000 cusecs, respectively. The release of water at Kalabagh, Taunsa, Guddu, and Sukkur was recorded as 19,700, 26,900, 23,300, and 7100 cusecs, respectively. Similarly, from River Kabul, a total of 12,300 cusecs of water were released at Nowshera.

ICT Admin crackdown on price gouging continues

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Islamabad district administration's (ICT) campaign against price gouging continued for a tenth day, resulting in 619 inspections, 128 arrests and Rs 176,000 in fines. According to DC office, Assistant Commissioners and Price Control Magistrates conducted the operations throughout the city. Those arrested were found to be violating established price lists. Deputy Commissioner (DC) Irfan Memon emphasized the administration's commitment to enforcing price controls and ensuring the availability of affordable goods. He stated that there would be "no compromise" on quality or pricing. The administration is also actively monitoring supplies at Ramadan bazaars and fair price shops to ensure adequate stock for consumers. The DC's office is conducting daily inspections and meetings with citizens, and a 24/7 helpline remains active for complaints.

International Women's Day celebrated

RAWALPINDI (APP): Rawalpindi Women University (RWU), in collaboration with SOS Foundation, organized an event to commemorate International Women's Day. Senior parliamentarian Tahira Aurangzeb was the chief guest at the event. Addressing to the audience, the chief guest highlighted the significance of women's education, empowerment, and equal rights. Tahira Aurangzeb reinforced the idea that every day is a Women's Day, she praised Chief Minister Punjab, Ms. Maryam Nawaz Sharif, for her remarkable efforts in transforming the province, and highlighted the "Suthra Punjab" initiative, "Just as a woman nurtures her home, Maryam Nawaz is beautifying the Punjab province," she added. Tahira further underscored the crucial role of education in economic and social progress, and encouraged students to pursue education with determination. Vice Chancellor Prof Dr Anila Kamal in her welcoming address emphasized the need to accelerate actions rather than mere discussions on women's rights. She highlighted the "Each One, Teach One" initiative, urging every student of Rawalpindi Women University to educate at least one illiterate individual. "Education is the most powerful tool for women empowerment, and it is our collective responsibility to share our knowledge with others," she said. Prof Dr Anila Kamal further elaborated that RWU is not only providing high-quality education but also fostering leadership skills and social awareness among students.



ISLAMABAD: Chinese Ambassador to Pakistan, Ambassador Jiang Zaidong addressing at a seminar on "China's Spring: China's Opportunities, Shared by the World" Institute of Strategic Studies, Sector.

Govt to elevate quality of medical education: Mustafa Kamal

ISLAMABAD (APP): Federal Minister for Health, Syed Mustafa Kamal on Wednesday reaffirmed the government's commitment to take all necessary steps to elevate the quality of medical education in Pakistan.

During meeting with the President Pakistan Medical and Dental Council (PMDC), Dr Rizwan Taj, the minister emphasized the importance of upgrading the medical education to meet international standards.

Syed Mustafa Kamal acknowledged the contributions of Pakistani doctors worldwide, stating, "Doctors from Pakistan are making the country proud not only

in the Middle East, the United States, and Europe but across the globe."

"We must ensure that this tradition of excellence continues in the future." He said, "We need to ensure that the education imparted in our medical institutions aligns with global benchmarks."

Syed Mustafa Kamal directed that PMDC, in collaboration with the Ministry of Health, take effective measures to enhance the medical education system.

The meeting was aimed at reviewing and improving the quality of medical education in Pakistan. The meeting discussed the current medical education sys-

tem in the country.

During the meeting, PMDC President Dr Rizwan Taj briefed the minister on the existing medical education framework and ongoing initiatives to enhance its standards.

Both agreed on the need to further improve the quality of medical education to align with international benchmarks.

The meeting concluded with a shared commitment to ensuring high-quality education in Pakistan's medical institutions, equipping future healthcare professionals with the skills and knowledge necessary to compete globally.

Kundi urges for promoting harmony in Ramzan

ISLAMABAD (APP): Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Faisal Kareem Kundi on Wednesday urged country people to promote peace and harmony in this sacred month of Ramzan.

Addressing a Ramzan free ration ceremony, the governor said that this month reminds us gratitude and devotion and encourages for compassion, kindness and service. He said, "Our armed forces are paying great sacrifices in safeguarding this motherland." He added, "Whole nation respect and regard this dedication, devotion and sacrifices of our armed forces."

He strongly condemned the Balochistan incident and added that some anti-state elements are active to destabilize the country.

Faisal Kundi said, "We have to work together for peace and development of Pakistan." Senator Talha Mehmood said that many organizations are doing commendable work to support deserving segments. He appreciated the efforts of various organizations that are making a positive impact in the society.

Police nab 3 drug peddlers

RAWALPINDI (APP): The Rawalpindi Police on Wednesday continued operations against criminal elements, and arrested three drug peddlers with over 5 kilograms charas and seven other accused with 60 litres of liquor.

According to the police spokesman, the Ratta Amral Police recovered 2.2 kg charas from accused Zubair, while the Jatli Police held accused Ehtesham with 1.7 kg of the contraband item.

Similarly, the Gujar Khan Police nabbed accused Showki alias Saji recovering 1.14 kg charas from his possession. During actions against liquor suppliers, the City and Kahuta Police netted accused Adil and Ijaz respectively with 10 litres of liquor each.

Likewise, the R A Bazar Police held four accused including Arsalan with 10 litres, Ghulam Abbas and Arsalan Bashir with 8 litres each, and Shehryar with 15 litres of liquor. Similarly, the Bani Police recovered 5 litres of liquor from accused Shahzeb. Meanwhile, the Cantt Police arrested accused Ehsan-ul-Haq with a 30 bore pistol, while the Naseerabad Police recovered a dagger from accused Rakib.

No external or internal power can destabilize country, says Hanif Abbasi

ISLAMABAD (APP): Federal Minister for Railways Muhammad Hanif Abbasi vehemently denounced the heinous terrorist attack on Jaffar Express in the Bolan Pass area of Balochistan, assuring the nation that no external or internal power can succeed in destabilizing Pakistan.

In an exclusive interview with a Private news channel, minister asserted that it was not

merely a security issue, but a blatant attempt by foreign powers to destabilize and undermine the sovereignty of the country.

Railway minister denounced the brazen assault on Jaffar Express in Balochistan, implicating foreign powers and local militant outfits like the Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) in a nefarious plot to undermine Pakistan's stability.

Abbasi further revealed

that the railway scanners were also malfunctioning, compromising the security protocols in place.

He emphasized that present government is resolute in its commitment to eradicate terrorism and bring about a conclusive end to this menace, stressing that national unity is imperative at this critical juncture. He condemned the attack as a "cowardly and heinous act" that is deeply distressing.

WHO Representative calls on Health Minister

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Representative of the World Health Organization (WHO) in Pakistan, Dr. Luo Dapeng, along with his delegation, met with Federal Minister for Health Syed Mustafa Kamal to discuss ongoing collaboration and key health priorities.

During the discussion, the WHO Representative briefed the minister on various health initiatives being implemented in partnership with the organization.

Mustafa Kamal acknowledged WHO's longstanding support in strengthening Pakistan's healthcare system and appreciated its continued assistance during chal-

lenging times.

Dr. Luo Dapeng congratulated the minister on assuming office and extended his best wishes for his tenure.

The meeting focused on mutual areas of interest, including ongoing WHO-supported projects across Pakistan.

"The WHO has played a vital role in Pakistan's health sector for decades, and we deeply value its contributions," said Minister Mustafa Kamal.

"WHO has stood by Pakistan in every difficult moment, and we remain committed to enhancing this collaboration for the well-being of our people."

Dr. Luo Dapeng expressed confidence in the minister's leadership, stating, "Your vision and leadership will bring significant improvements to Pakistan's healthcare system."

The minister assured the WHO delegation that his office and the Ministry of Health are fully committed to making healthcare services more accessible and efficient for the public.

At the conclusion of the meeting, Minister Mustafa Kamal thanked the WHO delegation for their visit and reaffirmed Pakistan's dedication to working closely with the global health body to achieve shared health goals.

ANF recovers over 61 kg drugs in 8 operations; arrests 10 suspects

RAWALPINDI (APP): Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF) while conducting 8 operations across the country recovered over 61 kg drugs worth more than Rs 4.5 million and arrested 10 suspects, said an ANF Headquarters spokesman on Wednesday.

He informed that 500 grams hashish was recovered from the possession of an accused rounded up near the bus stand on GT Road, Rawalpindi. The arrested accused confessed to selling drugs to the students of educational institutions.

In another operation, 2.382 kg ice hidden in the trolley bag of a passenger going to Saudi Arabia was recovered at Islamabad International Airport.

In the third operation, 312 grams hashish was recovered from the shoes of a passenger going to Dubai at Islamabad International Airport. 100 capsules filled with heroin were recovered from the stomach of a passenger going with a woman to Jeddah at Lahore Airport. 94 grams heroin was recovered from a parcel sent to the Maldives through a courier office in Karachi.

A total of 36 kg hashish was recovered from a car and a motorcycle checked near the railway gate in Gujrat and 3 accused were arrested. 15.6 kg hashish was recovered from an abandoned motorcycle near the bus stop on GT Road, Peshawar.

In the 8th operation, 6 kg hashish was recovered from the possession of two women netted near Iqbal Shaheed Toll Plaza, Attock. Cases have been registered against the arrested accused under the Narcotics Control Act and further investigations are underway.

27 bottled water brands declared unsafe: Parliamentary Secretary

ISLAMABAD (APP): The National Assembly was informed that 27 brands of bottled drinking water have been declared unsafe for consumption, while 194 brands have been deemed safe.

During the Question Hour, Parliamentary Secretary Nighat Shakeel Khan responded to a query from Sehar Kamran, stating that the Pakistan Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (PCSIR) is actively monitoring water quality.

She explained that regular testing is conducted to ensure compliance with safety standards. If a brand fails to meet the standards, it receives three warnings before its license is revoked and its production facility is sealed. The Speaker of the National Assembly emphasized the importance of monitoring the quality of various mineral water brands available in the market and directed a detailed report on the matter to be presented to the House.

In response to a question from Shagufta Jumani, Nighat Shakeel mentioned that the National Institute of Oceanography operates under the Ministry of Science and Technology. However, the institute currently lacks a dedicated research vessel and relies on collaborations with international organizations for research activities.

She stressed the need for increased resource allocation to strengthen its research capabilities.

Majority of polling stations established within one kilometer: Minister

ISLAMABAD (APP): Federal Minister for Parliamentary Affairs Dr. Tariq Fazal Chaudhry informed the National Assembly that the majority of polling stations in the recent general elections were established within a one-kilometer radius to ensure voter convenience.

He made these remarks during the Question Hour session in the National Assembly on Tuesday while responding to a query by Member of Parliament Aliya Kamran.

Dr. Chaudhry highlighted that according to the Election Act, it is mandatory to establish

polling stations within a one-kilometer distance for voters.

He further elaborated that in the 2018 elections, a total of 85,058 polling stations were set up, whereas in the 2024 elections, an additional 7,000 polling stations were added to facilitate the electoral process.

He assured the House that the entire procedure was conducted in full compliance with the provisions of the Election Act.

The minister also noted that in most polling stations, entry and exit routes were kept separate to maintain order and ease

the flow of voters. He added that in cases where such facilities were not available, the House would be informed accordingly.

Addressing concerns over polling station locations, Dr. Chaudhry acknowledged that some stations were established beyond the one-kilometer radius due to security and logistical reasons.

However, he reassured the National Assembly that all necessary protocols and regulations were strictly followed in such instances to uphold the integrity and accessibility of the electoral process.

Foolproof security being provided to foreign workers: Senate body told

ISLAMABAD (APP): A meeting of the Senate Standing Committee on Communications, chaired by Pervaiz Rashid, was held here on Wednesday. The committee members, namely Senators Saifullah Abro, Muhammad Tahir Badar, Qasim Ali Jeegar, Muhammad Abdul Qadir, Jam Saifullah Khan, Fawzia Arshad, Pojoo Bheel and Kamil Ali Agha attended the meeting.

The committee during its meeting discussed a matter of public importance moved by Senator Pojoo Bheel regarding the collection of toll tax by the National Highway Authority (NHA) without the completion of a 17 km road from Rajarasti to Umerkot, said a press release.

Senator Pojoo Bheel highlighted the importance of the road and the substandard material used by the NHA department. He stated that the NHA had started

collecting toll tax without completing the project. The senator also drew the committee's attention to the fact that despite payments made to the NHA, they had not constructed new small bridges connecting many villages and were using the old ones.

The Chairman of the National Highway Authority briefed the committee that the NHA was assigned the construction of the said road in 2011, which spans 154 km, and that they have completed 100 km of the project.

He further stated that the toll tax was imposed on January 23, 2025, but collection was suspended upon receiving notice on January 30, 2025. The width of the old road was 5.0 meters, which has now been extended to 7.3 meters, along with a 2.0-meter shoulder, he added. The Chairman of the NHA assured the

committee that they would complete the project within the stipulated time with high-quality construction and would address all concerns raised by the committee.

The Chairman Committee directed NHA to conduct a third-party evaluation of the entire project and also instructed them to send a team from Islamabad for an inspection of the work.

After consultation with the concerned authorities regarding the consideration of PSDP proposals of the Ministry of Communications for the financial year 2025-26, the committee decided to take up the matter after discussions between the NHA and the Planning Division.

While discussing further projects of the NHA, committee members expressed serious concerns about the security of foreign companies operating in

Pakistan. The Chairman of the NHA stated that only one Chinese company is working on a project in the Shikarpur area and that they are providing foolproof security to foreign workers. In response to a question about high-risk areas, he mentioned that security challenges persist in Sindh, Balochistan, and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, particularly in areas bordering Afghanistan.

Senator Saifullah Abro highlighted that the people of Sehwan Sharif are facing severe difficulties due to a narrow 1.5 km stretch of road in the area and suggested its expansion. Senator Dost Ali Jeegar seconded his recommendation. Following the Chairman Committee's direction, the Ministry of Communications committed to begin the expansion work on the Sehwan Sharif road. During the meeting, the

Chairman also expressed serious concerns regarding the shortcomings of the Pakistan Post Office Department (PPOD) in delivering pay orders to needy individuals in Punjab during the month of Ramadan. A PPOD representative briefed the committee, stating that they had deputed more than 7,500 officers/officials to carry out the project. She assured the committee that all staff members were highly energetic and committed to ensuring timely service delivery. She further explained that the project was executed in collaboration with the Bank of Punjab, which was responsible for providing the addresses of beneficiaries. However, the bank failed to submit the addresses in the required format, which became a major hurdle in the project's execution. She revealed

that PPOD received a total of 53,030 pay orders instead of the expected 500,000 and made every effort to distribute as many as possible within the prescribed timeline. The Chairman of the committee directed that the assigning authority of PPOD project and other responsible for this task be summoned to the next meeting. He also expressed concerns over the poor performance of Pakistan Post Office compared to private entities. Furthermore, he instructed the department to submit a concrete proposal aimed at strengthening and improving the Pakistan Post Office services. Additionally, the Chairman emphasized the need to print new postage stamps and directed officials to present samples of both old and new stamps for comparison in the next meeting.



ISLAMABAD: An attractive view of pedestrian bridge over 7th avenue beautifully decorated with lights in the holy fasting month of Ramadan. —APP Photo

2 brothers killed in clash

MAIDAN SHAHR (Pajhwok): At least two people have been killed and a third injured in an armed dispute between locals and nomads in central Maidan Wardak on Wednesday. The dispute over mountain bushes took place in Jangjai village of Sayedabad district. The alleged killers fled the area after the incident, but security forces succeeded to detain them from neighboring Ghazni and Logar provinces and they will be referred to judicial authorities after investigations.

The Frontier Post

AFGHANISTAN

Ramazan 12, 1446 — Thursday, March 13, 2025

Senior Taliban officials travel to Kandahar for talks with their leader

KABUL (Amu TV): A group of senior Taliban officials has traveled to Kandahar for high-level talks with their reclusive leader, Hibatullah Akhundzada, to discuss pressing internal matters, sources told Amu.

A senior security official in Kandahar, speaking on condition of anonymity, said that key officials from the Taliban's defense and interior ministries, along with representatives from other departments, arrived in

USAID budget cut by 83%; Ministry warns of negative impact

KABUL (TOLONews): The Ministry of Economy has stated that the 83% budget cut of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) will have a negative impact on aid programs for people in need worldwide.

Abdul Rahman Habib, the ministry's spokesperson, emphasized that humanitarian programs and aid efforts should not be politically exploited.

The spokesperson further stated: "The purpose of humanitarian aid is to support individuals in emergency situations, natural disasters, or those suffering from economic hardship. According to humanitarian laws, neutrality and respect for human dignity are fundamental principles of these aid efforts. Therefore,

organizations and countries should not use them as a tool for political objectives."

Recently, Marco Rubio, the US Secretary of State, officially announced the 83% cut in USAID's programs following a six-week review. Rubio also stated that cutting 83% of the agency's programs, amounting to tens of billions of dollars, is not in line with US national interests and, in some cases, could be detrimental to the country.

Rubio emphasized that the remaining programs will continue under the supervision of the US State Department.

Meanwhile, some residents of Kabul have expressed concerns over job shortages and rising poverty. They have urged offi-

cials to take steps toward creating job opportunities.

Mohammad Qasim, a Kabul resident, said: "We are poor and helpless, and there is no work. We ask people to help us."

Zarifa, another Kabul resident, stated: "I ask the government and aid organizations to assist me. Many times, I have to put my orphans to bed hungry."

This comes as various organizations in Afghanistan continue to express concerns about the humanitarian crisis caused by poverty and climate change.

For the past 63 years, USAID has provided humanitarian and development assistance to various countries and has played a constructive role in numerous international projects worldwide.

18 health centers closed

KABUL (Khaama Press): The Save the Children organization in Afghanistan has reported that 18 health centers have been shut down due to a reduction in funding. The closure of these centers has significantly impacted healthcare access for Afghan children, leaving many vulnerable to various health issues.

The organization warned on Tuesday March 11 that if immediate financial support is not provided, an additional 14 centers will be forced to close in the coming weeks.

The organization emphasized that the reduction in funding has put Afghan children at greater risk, especially those suffering from malnutrition. Programs designed to address child malnutrition have already been suspended due to the financial shortfall. This has exacerbated the already dire situation for children in need of urgent medical care.

Save the Children also highlighted that more than 134,000 children are currently under the care of 32 healthcare centers supported by the organization. With the ongoing financial constraints, these children are at risk of losing access to essential medical services. This situation is especially concerning given the high rates of child malnutrition in the country.

One of the centers in northern Afghanistan, which treats over 2,000 patients each month, is set to close due to budget shortages. As a result, hundreds of malnourished children will no longer have access to emergency medical care. Dr. Hanif, a worker at the center, pointed out that these clinics are the only healthcare option for people in the region, and there are no local doctors or nurses available.

The ongoing restrictions imposed by the Taliban on women's education and employment have raised concerns about the worsening health crisis, particularly regarding maternal and child healthcare.

The United Nations has already warned about the potential collapse of Afghanistan's healthcare system, highlighting the devastating impact of these decisions on the country's most vulnerable populations.

The Trump administration's suspension of foreign aid, including an 83% reduction in USAID support, has profoundly impacted Afghanistan. The UN warns that this could result in over 1,000 maternal deaths between 2025 and 2028. Additionally, organizations like Concern Worldwide have faced redundancies and program cuts, further straining humanitarian efforts.

The reduction in aid has exacerbated Afghanistan's humanitarian crisis, with over 9 million people will lose access to vital services. This situation underscores the critical need for sustained international support to address the country's pressing challenges.

'Women face horrific wrongs under Taliban'

KABUL (Amu TV): UN Secretary-General António Guterres condemned the Taliban's systematic oppression of Afghan women, calling it the most extreme example of a growing global assault on gender equality.

"Women and girls are still confronting a horrific set of wrongs against their rights. We see it more than anywhere else in Afghanistan," Guterres said during a town hall meeting with civil society at the 69th session of the Commission on the Status of Women in New York.

He warned that sexual violence in conflict zones, from Haiti to Sudan, combined with rising discrimination and violence against women worldwide, threatens to reverse decades of progress on gender equality.

A 'red alert' on women's rights

Guterres issued a "red alert" over what he described as a "furious kickback against equality," urging world leaders not to trade women's rights for political convenience.



"Do not sacrifice equality for false expediency," he warned. "It is a miscalculation, a misunderstanding of how societies thrive. It is short-sighted. It is wrong. And it must end."

The UN chief urged governments to prioritize funding for women and girls, strengthen protections for women's rights defenders, and combat digital misogyny, warning that artificial intelligence and other technologies are increasingly

reinforcing gender biases.

Guterres praised civil society organizations for their role in advancing gender equality but acknowledged that activists are facing mounting threats, violence, and even murder.

He reaffirmed the United Nations' commitment to gender equality through its Gender Equality Acceleration Plan, which aims to increase support for women's organizations and ensure women's full participa-

tion in decision-making, business, and peacebuilding.

"Let's never forget that inequality is a question of power. Power is never given; it must be taken. Together, we must seize it," he said.

Guterres emphasized that the world is at a critical juncture for gender equality and called on leaders to uphold their commitments, warning that failing to do so would undermine global progress.

Jennifer condemns Taliban human rights violations



DUBLIN (Amu TV): Ireland's Minister for Health, Jennifer Carroll MacNeill, has strongly condemned human rights abuses under Taliban rule, pledging continued support for Afghan women and girls.

During a meeting with members of the Afghanistan Women's Forum, MacNeill denounced the Taliban's escalating restrictions on women's rights, according to a statement posted by Ireland's mission to the United Nations on X. "Ireland will continue to stand with Afghan women and girls," she said.

More than three years after the Taliban returned to power, Afghan women and girls remain deprived of even their most basic rights. Activists have described life under the

Taliban as suffocating, with one saying, "Even breathing has become difficult for women."

The Taliban have issued nearly 100 decrees restricting women's rights, with at least five new bans imposed over the past year. Their leader has further tightened restrictions under a newly enforced Amr bil Ma'ruf (Promotion of Virtue) law, severely limiting women's freedom.

Among the latest measures, women have been banned from studying at health science institutes, they are prohibited from working with both domestic and international organizations, their salaries in certain sectors have been cut and the Taliban have declared women's voices and faces awrat (to be concealed).

Moreover, residential buildings in areas where women are present must now have covered windows.

As Taliban restrictions intensify, international legal efforts to hold the group accountable have gained traction. The International Criminal Court (ICC) prosecutor has formally requested arrest warrants for the Taliban's supreme leader, Hibatullah Akhundzada, and the group's chief justice.

The move has received backing from nine countries, including the United Kingdom, France, Denmark, and South Korea, in what could mark a significant step toward addressing gender persecution under Taliban rule.

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Organized car theft gang arrested in Nimroz



NIMROZ (TOLONews): Local authorities in Nimroz have announced the arrest of an organized armed gang of car thieves in the province.

This group is accused of stealing vehicles in Nimroz and neighboring provinces, as well as on highways, and then transporting them to other provinces and even outside the country.

Mohammad Qasim Khalid, the governor of Nimroz, said: "They stole these vehicles and later sold them multiple times in Helmand, Kandahar, Paktia, and Ghazni. One of these cars was found in Khost and another in Kunduz."

Fifteen stolen vehicles have been recovered from this gang, but local officials say many more vehicles

were stolen by this group and sold multiple times.

They assured that security forces will recover all the stolen vehicles from this gang.

Bahram Haqmal, a civil society activist, said: "The government should pay more attention to these organized groups and investigate the root causes of these thefts."

Nazar Ali Yousafzai, another civil society activist, stated: "The key members of these gangs must be identified. If they are hiding in neighboring provinces or other countries, they should be tracked down and arrested."

Local officials in Nimroz reported that security forces have arrested approximately 1,500 people over the past year on

various criminal charges.

Gul Ahmad Qudrat, the spokesperson for the Nimroz Police Command, said: "In the past year, 1,474 individuals have been arrested by the criminal investigation department of Nimroz police on various charges. Among them, 430 were accused of theft, 126 were involved in personal disputes, and the rest were detained for other crimes."

Haseebullah, a resident of Nimroz, said: "We urge the courts to process the cases of these individuals and punish them so they do not commit crimes again."

In recent months, security forces have launched extensive operations in Nimroz city and its districts in response to thefts and other crimes.

Consultative meeting held to support small businesses

N A N G A R H A R (TOLONews): A consultative meeting was held in Nangarhar by a supporting organization to collaborate and address the challenges faced by small businesses.

Officials and organizers of the meeting stated that its objective was to assess traders' problems and provide them with facilities.

"In this meeting, issues related to electricity, marketing, and access to financial resources were discussed. Solutions will be sought for these issues, and the concerns will be presented to the relevant departments," stated Shakerullah Stanikzai, Deputy

Director of Industry and Commerce in Nangarhar.

According to officials, 120 traders participated in the meeting and shared their problems and demands.

"Our goal is to bring these individuals together so that, through coordination, relevant institutions, banks, the private sector, and international organizations can discuss existing opportunities and challenges to find solutions. Additionally, small traders attending the meeting can meet with bank representatives and negotiate loans," stated Naqibullah Durani, the meeting organizer.

Zakerullah Habibzai,

who established a construction materials factory in Jalalabad nearly a decade ago, participated in the meeting to seek advice from other businessmen and expand his business.

Zakerullah Habibzai, a trader, said: "Initially, we started producing a few types of construction materials, but over time, we managed to expand our production to 72 types. When launching this initiative, we thought about how we could create job opportunities for our fellow citizens while also promoting agricultural production in this area."

Traders found such consultative meetings benefi-

cial for their business activities and called for their continuation.

"The development of small businesses and sharing challenges ahead are important topics for us," stated Rafiqullah, another entrepreneur.

"We can directly convey our voices to the authorities so they can find solutions to our problems," stated Abdul Jabbar Naizi another entrepreneur.

The organizers also added that, to support small businesses, representatives from certain private sectors were invited to introduce Islamic financing options and facilitate loan access.

Police motorcycle unit set up in Balkh to prevent crimes

MAZAR-I-SHARIF (Pajhwok): A 46-member police motorcycle unit has been set up in northern Balkh province of Afghanistan in order to strengthen security, the force announced on Wednesday.

"The Balkh Police Headquarters has established the 46-member unit equipped with military gear to prevent criminal activities and respond swiftly to security incidents," the police headquarters said in a statement.

It said the unit will operate 24/7 to improve the security situation in Mazar-i-Sharif, the provincial capital, and take effective measures to maintain stability.

The statement added that



the unit would respond swiftly to any incident and play an active role in ensuring security across the city.

Additionally, the statement quoted Balkh Police

Security Chief Ahmad Zia Khalid as assuring that "this unit is committed to preventing criminal activities and ensuring public safety."

Earlier, similar security units have been established in several other provinces of the country to enhance maneuverability and law enforcement tasks.

UN to hold meeting on opium cultivation and drug trafficking in Afghanistan

KABUL (Khaama Press): The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) is hosting a meeting to examine drug trends in Afghanistan. This session, scheduled for Wednesday, March 12, aims to address critical issues surrounding drug production and trafficking in the country.

The meeting will focus on the Taliban's decree banning the cultivation and trafficking of illicit drugs.

This controversial ban has raised concerns about its enforcement and effectiveness, with ongoing challenges in combating drug-related activities.

In addition to discussing the Taliban's ban, the meeting will also address the issue of drug trafficking from Afghanistan to neighboring countries.

The trade of illicit substances remains a significant concern, as Afghanistan is a major pro-

ducer of opiates, which continue to fuel the global drug trade.

The session will be attended by key figures, including Roza Otunbayeva, the UN Secretary-General's Special Representative for Afghanistan and head of UNAMA. Her participation highlights the United Nations' ongoing commitment to addressing the growing drug crisis in Afghanistan and the surrounding region.

Previous reports from the UNODC have indicated that opium poppy cultivation in Afghanistan increased in 2024 compared to the previous year. This alarming rise has prompted increased international attention and calls for more effective measures to combat drug production.

The continued rise in drug production and trafficking from Afghanistan requires immediate and coordinated action. The

UNODC meeting represents a critical opportunity for international stakeholders to collaborate on strategies to combat this growing issue, which has far-reaching consequences for both Afghanistan and the global community.

Efforts to address this crisis must prioritize sustainable solutions that involve both enforcement and development initiatives in Afghanistan and neighboring countries.

According to the IOM, both Iran and Pakistan have

intensified efforts to deport Afghan migrants, leading to a sharp increase in the number of returnees expected in 2025. This trend is seen as a response to mounting pressure to manage migrant populations within these countries, affecting thousands of Afghan families who had sought refuge there.

Italy donates 3.5m to help Afghan returnees

KABUL (Khaama Press): Italy has donated 3.5 million to support Afghan returnees, particularly those returning from Iran and Pakistan amid increased deportations.

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) in Afghanistan has reported a 3.5 million donation from Italy to support Afghan

returnees. This funding will specifically be used to assist those returning from Iran and Pakistan, addressing the growing number of Afghan migrants returning home under increasingly difficult conditions.

The organization further mentioned that its goal is to assist 25,000 returnees over the next 12 months. These

efforts will provide critical support for reintegration, including access to housing, education, and employment opportunities. The IOM's initiative aims to ease the transition for returnees and reduce the hardships they face upon returning to Afghanistan.

The IOM announced on Wednesday, March 12 that

this financial aid would help facilitate the return of Afghan migrants who have been forced to leave their host countries. This funding is expected to address the needs of those facing challenges in reintegrating into Afghan society after returning from abroad.

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intensified efforts to deport Afghan migrants, leading to a sharp increase in the number of returnees expected in 2025. This trend is seen as a response to mounting pressure to manage migrant populations within these countries, affecting thousands of Afghan families who had sought refuge there.



ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif meeting with presidents of Chambers of Commerce across country.

PHC extends two PTI's leaders protective bail

Humayun Khan

PESHAWAR: The Peshawar High Court has extended the protective bail of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) leader Khadija Shah and Tehsil Chairman Swabi Attaullah Khan till 15th April, on Wednesday.

A two-member bench, comprising Justice Sahibzada Asadullah and Justice Aurangzeb, heard the petition filed by Khadija Shah, while the counsel Alam Khan Adenzai advocate appeared on behalf of petitioner.

The court inquired about reports from the Interior Ministry and the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) regarding cases against her. The Assistant Attorney General Dawlat Khan informed the court that the Interior Ministry's report is still pending, while the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) is conducting an inquiry against Khadija Shah in Lahore. NAB's prosecutor stated that no response has been received from the anti-corruption watchdog.

The court directed the Interior Ministry and NAB to submit their reports and adjourned the hearing until April 15. In a separate case, the court extended the protective bail of Tehsil Chairman Swabi Atta Ullah Khan and directed him to appear before the relevant courts. The Assistant Attorney General informed the court that no cases had been registered against Atta Ullah Khan by the federal government or FIA, but cases were pending against him in Punjab. The court extended protective bail and directed him to appear before the relevant courts in Punjab. The court also disposed of Swabi Tehsil Chairman's petition.

Court adjourns hearing against appointment of Junior Judges to Supreme Court: The Peshawar High Court (PHC) has adjourned the hearing of a petition challenging the appointment of junior judges to the Supreme Court, overlooking senior judges. The counsel Malik Suleman advocate, who argued that the

appointment of junior judges is illegal, unconstitutional, and against the decisions of the Supreme Court, on Wednesday.

PHC's divisional bench comprising Justice Syed Arshad Ali and Justice Fazal Subhan, heard the petition and adjourned the hearing due to the petitioner's request for more time to address objections raised by the registrar's office regarding seniority lists.

The lawyer Malik Suleman argued that the Judicial Commission's decision on February 10 to appoint junior judges to the Supreme Court, bypassing senior judges, is a violation of Article 227 and Section 224-A as well as General Clauses Act, 1897. He claimed that the appointment of junior judges undermines the independence of the judiciary, which is essential for protector of the fundamental rights.

The petitioner also argued that the current Chief Justice of the Supreme Court was also appointed bypassing two senior judges, which is unjust and creates the impression that the government is appointing its preferred individuals to key positions. He requested the court to declare the appointment of junior judges as null and void and to direct the Judicial Commission to reconsider the appointments.

The court, after hearing the arguments, postponed the hearing due to the petitioner's request for more time to address objections raised by the registrar's office. The court directed the petitioner to submit the necessary documents and adjourned the hearing until further notice.

The petition has sparked a debate about the independence of the judiciary and the appointment of judges to the Supreme Court. The petitioner's arguments have raised concerns about the potential politicization of the judiciary and the need for transparency and merit-based appointments. Similarly, in another writ has challenged appointment of Junior Judge as Acting Chief Justice PHC but Registrar Office has raised objection on it.

China, Russia, Iran to hold N-talks in Beijing

BEIJING (Reuters): China will hold a meeting on Friday in Beijing with Russia and Iran on the Iranian "nuclear issue", its foreign ministry said, with both nations sending their deputy foreign ministers.

Ties between Iran and Russia have deepened since the start of the Ukraine war in 2022, with a strategic cooperation treaty signed in January. Both have good relations with China. China's Vice Foreign Minister Ma Zhaoxu will chair the meeting, Mao Ning, a spokesperson of its foreign ministry, told a regular press conference on Wednesday.

The meeting will follow a closed-door gathering of the United Nations Security Council in New York the same day regarding Iran's expansion of its stocks of uranium that are close to weapons-grade. Last week, Russia said Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov discussed international efforts to tackle Iran's nuclear programme with its ambassador, Kazem Jalali, after reports that Russia agreed to help US President Donald Trump's administration in communicating with Iran.

Tehran has long denied wanting to develop a nuclear weapon. However, the UN atomic watchdog IAEA has warned it is "dramatically" accelerating enrichment of uranium to up to 60 per cent purity, close to the weapons-grade level of roughly 90pc.

Iran reached a deal, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, with Britain, China, France, Germany, Russia and the United States in 2015, that lifted sanctions on Tehran in return for curbs on its nuclear programme. But Washington quit the plan in 2018 during Trump's first term, and Iran began moving away from its nuclear-related commitments. China has said it supports Iran in safeguarding its legitimate rights and calling for an early resumption of the Iranian nuclear talks.

Houthis to resume attacks

SANAA: Yemen's Houthis have announced that they will resume attacks on Israeli ships after their deadline for Israel to allow the resumption of aid deliveries into Gaza passed.

The armed group said that it was "resuming the ban on the passage of all Israeli ships" in the Red Sea because Israel failed to honour the deadline the Houthis announced on Friday. The Iran-aligned Yemeni group said the ban would take effect immediately, adding that "any Israeli ship attempting to violate this ban shall be targeted in the declared zone of operations".

The "ban" also covers the Arabian Sea, Bab al-Mandeb Strait, and the Gulf of Aden, the group said. The Houthis, who control much of the Arabian Peninsula's poorest country, maintained a campaign targeting the busy sea route as Israel bombarded Gaza. The attacks affected global trade, forcing a significant volume of maritime traffic between Asia and Europe away from the Suez Canal to take the far longer journey around Africa.

The group halted its drone and missile attacks, which had targeted vessels with tenuous Israeli links when the Gaza ceasefire was declared in January.

However, it threatened to resume the attacks when Israel blocked all aid into war-battered Gaza on March 2, in the hope of pressuring Hamas into releasing the remaining captives it took in its October 7, 2023 attack. The attacks will continue until Israel allows aid deliveries in Gaza, the Houthis added in their statement on Tuesday. — Aljazeera

Sindh govt achieves progress through digital transformation: Murad

F.P. Report

KARACHI: Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah presented a 171-page report detailing his government's achievements from March 2024 to March 2025 saying that the Government has achieved remarkable progress over the past year through digital transformation, infrastructure development, and agricultural advancements.

He added that these initiatives have significantly impacted public services, business facilitation, and socio-economic growth. The presentation, held at the CM House, highlighted key initiatives in healthcare, education, IT, water management, agriculture, and governance reforms, including the implementation of e-systems.

Sindh's healthcare sector has witnessed significant progress and expansion over the past year, marked by groundbreaking initiatives, increased patient access, and technological advancements across numerous medical institutions.

Health Care: The NICVD Karachi reported treating a staggering 1.4 million patients, performing over 5,000 cardiac interventions and surgeries, and conducting tens of thousands of diagnostic and imaging services. The NICVD also expanded its free pediatric cardiac services to Quetta, demonstrating its commitment to reaching underserved populations. The Sindh Institute of Cardiovascular Diseases (SICVD) has also made strides, establishing a cardiac emergency center in Baldia Town and launching a stroke program in Sukkur. Notably, the SICVD has treated over 119,000 patients from outside Sindh, highlighting its regional importance.

The Institute of Medical Science, Gambat continues to excel in organ transplantation, completing over 200 liver transplants and 100 kidney transplants. The institute has also embraced advanced technology, launching robotic cath lab and joint replacement facilities. Significant capacity enhancements were seen across the province. Jinnah Postgraduate Medical Center (JPMC) operationalised a second robotic surgical system, while Liaquat University of Medical & Health Sciences (LUMHS) is in the process of procuring one. District Hospital Thatta was upgraded to a Teaching Hospital, and a 100-bed hospital at PIB Colony, Karachi, is set to become operational. The Indus Hospital in Karachi is also undergoing a major



expansion, receiving a Rs. 5 billion grant to increase its bed capacity.

Dow University of Health Sciences (DUHS) has operationalised a linear accelerator for cancer treatment and reported significant numbers of liver, renal, and bone marrow transplants. The Sindh Institute of Urology & Transplantation (SIUT) has launched Pakistan's first robotic center and PET CT unit, significantly enhancing cancer diagnostics and treatment capabilities.

The Shaheed Mohtarman Benazir Bhutto Institute of Trauma has expanded its services, treating 70,000 patients and establishing new units for thoracic surgery, interventional radiology, and plastic surgery. Trauma and Emergency Response Centers have also been established in Larkana. The Sindh Institute of Advanced Endoscopy and Gastroenterology introduced advanced procedures like Radio Frequency Ablation (RFA) for liver tumors, while the Sindh Institute of Child Health & Neonatology (SICHN) operationalized new ICUs and pediatric units across Sindh.

JPMC received a new Cyberknife machine for cancer therapy and signed an agreement for operational autonomy of its radiation oncology section. The Sindh Integrated Emergency Health Services expanded its ambulance services and launched a hypertension project, with plans to add more emergency response vehicles and complete district headquarters hospitals. Sindh Emergency Rescue Service 1122 refurbished emergency rooms in various district hospitals and established satellite stations on major highways for improved rescue coverage.

The ChildLife Foundation has transformed pediatric emergency care in Sindh, establishing numerous

emergency and telemedicine centers and significantly reducing infant mortality rates.

"We have transformed pediatric emergency care in Sindh by establishing nine international-standard emergency centers and 106 telemedicine centers, significantly reducing infant mortality rates in Sindh to 2.9pc, compared to 5.4pc nationwide. Quoting the Global health reports said that that Sindh's public pediatric emergency facilities now match or surpass private hospitals in quality, with Sheikh Zayed Children's Hospital Larkana and Civil Hospital Karachi achieving a 1.2 per cent mortality rate, better than the 1.4 pc at Aga Khan Hospital and far below the 6.3pc average in 19 similar countries.

The Mamta Program disbursed Rs. 2.6 billion through its Conditional Cash Transfer model, benefiting pregnant and lactating women. The Emergency Livelihood Support program provided income support to vulnerable households, while the Oxford Pakistan Programme (OPP) offered scholarships and launched initiatives like STREAM and Middle TECH to enhance education and skills development. These advancements demonstrate a strong commitment to improving healthcare access and quality in Sindh, with a focus on technological innovation and expanding services to reach all segments of the population.

Education & IT Development: In a bid to promote digital literacy, the People's Information Technology Program awarded scholarships to 13,428 students in three universities. Of these, 1,171 students have completed their education, and 2,528 have secured jobs. Additionally, an IT boot camp trained 1,500 graduates, with 870 successfully becoming self-employed.

Moody's revises Pakistani banks' outlook to positive, citing resilience

ISLAMABAD: Moody's Ratings has revised its outlook on Pakistan's banking sector to positive from stable, citing improved operating conditions and resilient financial performance, it said on Wednesday.

The shift corresponds to the government's (Caa2 positive) improved outlook, supported by banks' significant exposure to sovereign debt. "We have changed our outlook on Pakistan's banking system to positive from stable to reflect the banks' resilient financial performance as well as improving macroeconomic conditions from very weak levels a year ago," according to the Moody's statement.

Moody's last downgraded Pakistan's banking sector on March 3, 2023, lowering the long-term deposit ratings of five major banks — Allied Bank Limited (ABL), Habib Bank Ltd. (HBL), MCB Bank Limited (MCB), National Bank of Pakistan (NBP), and United Bank Ltd. (UBL) — to Caa3 from Caa1.

"The positive outlook on the sector also mirrors the Government of Pakistan's (Caa2 positive) positive outlook, with Pakistani banks having significant exposure to the sovereign through their large holdings of government securities, which account for around half of total banking assets. "However, Pakistan's long-term debt sustainability remains a key risk, with its still very weak fiscal position, high liquidity and external vulnerability risks," according to the report.

The credit rating agency anticipates Pakistan's economy to expand by 3% in 2025, compared with 2.5% in 2024 and -0.2% in 2023. "Inflation is also significantly easing, which we estimated at around 8% for 2025

from an average of 23% in 2024," it said adding, "Problem loan formation will slow as borrowing costs and inflation reduce, although net interest margins will narrow on the back of interest rate cuts."

"Banks will maintain adequate capital buffers, supported by subdued loan growth and solid cash generation, despite dividend payouts remaining high." Moody's said the outlook revision to positive from stable reflects a better operating environment. "Pakistan's economic outlook is improving from very weak levels, with enhanced government liquidity and external positions compared to 2024."

Moody's noted that Pakistan's \$7 billion, 37-month IMF programme, approved in September 2024, provides a credible external financing source for the coming years. "We forecast GDP growth of 3% in 2025 and 4% in 2026, up from 2.5% in 2024, further driven by a 10 percentage point cut in interest rates since the start of the monetary policy easing cycle in June 2024."

"We expect inflation to slow sharply to around 8% in 2025, from an average of 23.4% in 2024. We expect that lower inflation and policy rate cuts will spur private-sector spending and investment in Pakistan from current low levels." Moody's however warned that banks' high exposure to government securities increases asset risk.

"As of September 2024, government securities accounted for 55% of banks' total assets. This significant exposure links banks' credit strength to that of the sovereign, which is improving from very weak levels.

"Although problem loans have deteriorated to 8.4% of total loans as of September 2024 from 7.6% in the prior year, overall loans account for only 23% of banks' total assets," it said.

Moody's said the removal of the advance-to-deposit ratio (ADR) tax for 2025 was expected to ease pressure on banks to expand lending, while demand remains subdued despite lower borrowing costs. It also noted that the ADR-linked tax incentive required banks to reach a 50% advance-to-deposit ratio by end-2024, with noncompliance triggering an additional 10-15% income tax.

Following recent interest rate cuts that have reduced the policy rate to 12%, margins will narrow as local banks derive the bulk of their earnings from the interest they receive on large investments in government securities, which are yielding lower returns compared with last year, it added. "Concurrently, downward asset repricing will only be partly offset by lower funding costs, while growth in business activity and non-interest income will not fully counterbalance margin compression. "We expect banks' return on assets to moderate to around 0.9%-1.0% in 2025," it said.

The financial services provider said that Pakistan's foreign exchange (FX) risks had reduced in response to a rise in State Bank of Pakistan's foreign exchange reserves since the unlocking of the IMF program. In its report released in November last year, Moody's said interest costs in Pakistan would account for close to 40% of total spending in 2025, up from around a quarter in 2021. — Agencies

Zelensky says 30-day ceasefire could be used to draft peace plan

KYIV (Reuters): Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky on Wednesday hailed a meeting between the US and Ukraine this week aimed at ending Russia's invasion and said a proposed ceasefire could be used to draft a broader peace deal.

The United States said on Tuesday it was resuming military aid and intelligence sharing with Ukraine after US and Ukrainian officials agreed in Saudi Arabia on a 30-day ceasefire with Russia. "I am very serious (about a ceasefire) and for me it is important to end the war," Zelensky said during a briefing in Kyiv, where he described the resumption of US aid and intelligence as very positive.

"We are ready for a ceasefire for 30 days as proposed by the American

side." Zelensky added that the Jeddah meeting had helped "de-escalate" tensions between the US and Ukraine after a White House clash between him and President Donald Trump last month. US Secretary of State Marco Rubio said after the talks in Jeddah that the US would now take the offer to Russia, and that the ball was in Moscow's court. The Kremlin said on Wednesday it was awaiting details from Washington on the 30-day ceasefire proposal.

Meanwhile, talks between the US and Ukraine aimed at ending the war with Russia took place in Jeddah on Tuesday, Saudi Press Agency reported. The administration of US President Donald Trump agreed to lift its suspension of military aid and intelligence sharing for Ukraine, and

Kyiv signaled that it was open to a 30-day ceasefire in the war with Russia, pending Moscow's agreement, American and Ukrainian officials said following the talks.

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio said the US would present the ceasefire offer to the Kremlin. "We're going to tell them this is what's on the table. Ukraine is ready to stop shooting and start talking. And now it'll be up to them to say yes or no," Rubio said.

The talks were held at the direction of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman and took place in the presence of the Kingdom's Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan and Minister of State and Member of the Council of Ministers Musaed bin Mohammed Al-Aiban.

UAE presidential adviser delivers Trump letter to Tehran

DUBAI (Reuters): A letter from US President Donald Trump to Iran's clerical establishment has been delivered by Anwar Gargash, diplomatic adviser to the president of the United Arab Emirates, Iran's foreign ministry spokesperson and state media said on Wednesday.

Trump, who said last week he had sent a letter to Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei proposing talks on a nuclear deal, has warned that "there are two ways Iran can be handled: militarily, or you make a deal" that prevents Tehran from acquiring nuclear weapons.

Khamenei, who has the final word in Iranian state matters, promptly responded that Tehran would not be bullied into talks with "excessive demands" and threats. On Tuesday, Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian said Tehran would not negotiate with

threats hanging over its head, telling Trump in an outburst to "do whatever the hell you want", Iranian state media reported.

Gargash met Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi on Wednesday, Iranian state media said. Iranian foreign ministry spokesperson Esmail Baghaei did not give details about the meeting. The UAE, one of Washington's key Middle East security partners and host to US troops, also maintains warm ties with Tehran. Despite past tensions, business and trade links between the two countries have remained strong, with Dubai serving as a key commercial hub for Iran for more than a century.

While leaving the door open for a nuclear pact with Tehran, Trump has reinstated the "maximum pressure" campaign he applied in his first term as president to isolate Iran from the global economy and drive its oil

exports towards zero. In 2018, Trump exited Tehran's 2015 nuclear deal with world powers and reimposed sanctions that have crippled its economy. Tehran reacted a year later by violating the deal's nuclear curbs.

Iran has long denied wanting to develop a nuclear weapon. However, its stock of uranium enriched to up to 60% purity, close to the roughly 90% weapons-grade level, has jumped, the International Atomic Energy Agency said late last month. Separately, Araqchi denounced a closed-door UN Security Council meeting on Wednesday about Iran's nuclear work as a new process that puts into question the goodwill of states requesting it. Six of the council's 15 members — France, Greece, Panama, South Korea, Britain and the US — requested the meeting over Iran's expansion of its stock of close to weapons-grade uranium.