

Bodies reach Islamabad
F.P. Report
ISLAMABAD: Mortal remains of four people, who were martyred in terrorist attack on Jaffer Express in Bolan, Balochistan on March 11, reached Islamabad. Minister for Religious Affairs Sardar Muhammad Yousuf received the coffins of the martyred at the Islamabad airport. Relatives and acquaintances of the martyred were also present at the Islamabad airport.

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452 trucks reached Kurram
F.P. Report
PARACHINAR: A convoy of 452 trucks loaded with daily use items was safely reached to the tribal district Kurram under the direct supervision of the Commissioner Kohat on the special directions of Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The joint efforts of all the law enforcement agencies and the said items were delivered to different areas of the district.

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ISPR DG urges unity to crush terrorism

Jaffer Express incident unfolds nexus between India, terrorists with handler operating from Afghanistan

Lt Gen Chaudhry reveals 18 personnel from army, FC among 26 martyred passengers

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) Director General Lieutenant General Ahmed Sharif Chaudhry on Friday shared details of the Jaffer Express incident, which revealed a strong nexus between India, the terrorist group and its handlers operating from Afghanistan via satellite phones behind the hijacking.

At a news conference alongside Balochistan Chief Minister Sarfraz Bugti, he screened several AI-generated, fake and old video clips that were aired by India's mainstream media, primarily provided by an internationally recognized terrorist group, to glorify the hijacking and build an anti-Pakistan narrative by spreading misinformation.

He also briefed the media about the difficult and mountainous terrain surrounding the incident site near Sibi, using a map slide, and the operation conducted by the security forces, as a result of which the hijackers were killed and the hostages were rescued in a precise and successful operation.

He said it was a rugged terrain, kilometers away from the road and population, with no mobile coverage, where physically reaching the site was a very difficult task. However, the ISPR DG said, personnel of the FC and the Army responded to the terrorist activity without any undue delay after the hijackers blew up a railway track with an IED and martyred three soldiers at an FC picket before hijacking the train on March 11.

Lieutenant General Ahmed Sharif said the terrorists were divided into multiple groups and had occupied the heights, taking a group of passengers hostage inside the train while the rest were held outside.

He added that, at the same time, an information warfare campaign was

underway, led by the Indian media to glorify the incident, which was inhumane, as innocent people were made hostages and targeted. He informed that terrorists had released a group of hostages selected on the basis of ethnic profiling, adding terrorists have nothing to do with humanity, nor with Pakistan, nor with Islam.

On the morning of March 12, he said FC and Army personnel first engaged the terrorists with ground-based snipers and took them out, which provided a change to some of hostages to sneak out from the captivity. "When terrorists were engaged, a group gets a chance, and they started running towards multiple directions. This is because, the snipers engage them," he added.

By midday, the ISPR DG said, the Zazaar company of the Special Services Group, was got in place which carried out their planning and situational assessment, differentiating between passengers and terrorists including suicide bombers before engaging them. "[...] First they clear the engine, and then the terrorists, who encountered them, they started taking them out. And then, bogey by bogey, they cleared the train. So, this is how it slowly and gradually developed into a successful operation," he said, adding no casualty happened to the hostages during this clearance operation.

He said the security forces successfully carried out a highly complex and meticulously planned counter-terrorism operation within 36 hours with professionalism an area where suicide bombers were present. He highlighted that the operation was executed with utmost professionalism, planning, and unwavering courage by Pakistan Army, Pakistan Air Force, Frontier Corps (FC), and Special Services Group (SSG), with the nation's prayers contributing to its

success.

He further revealed that links to the terrorist incident have been traced back to Afghanistan. "We have credible intelligence confirming that the networks orchestrating these attacks are operating from across the border in Afghanistan," he said.

The ISPR DG disclosed that among those involved was a key figure who has previously served in the Afghan Army and is now actively engaged in terrorist activities against Pakistan. "The entire chain of events points towards external involvement, specifically from elements based in Afghanistan," he added.

He lauded the bravery and professionalism of the forces who risked their lives to rescue innocent civilians from an imminent threat. "We are thankful to Allah and salute our brave sons who, with their detailed planning, foresight, courage, and devotion, saved precious lives in an extremely dangerous and challenging environment," he said. He recalled that after 2004, a national consensus was built against terrorism, which led to the formulation of a comprehensive National Action Plan (NAP). "All political parties and stakeholders sat together and developed this consensus, which became the foundation of the National Action Plan. The previous government further reviewed and revised it, resulting in a renewed commitment to counter-terrorism," he said.

He explained that the revised NAP includes 14 critical points that comprehensively address the root causes and mechanisms of terrorism. "If we focus on implementing these 14 points in letter and spirit, I believe terrorism can be eradicated," he said.

Responding to a question regarding the recent surge in terrorist activities, the ISPR DG said, "Without any hesitation, I would say that unless

these 14 points are fully implemented, it will be challenging to achieve sustainable peace." He urged all stakeholders, including political parties, institutions, and the public, to play their role in implementing the NAP, stressing that national unity and consensus remain essential for overcoming the menace of terrorism.

Questioned about why there was a rise in terrorism, he said the pace of implementation of the National Action Plan's 14 points needed to be considered first. He said law enforcement agencies conducted 59,775 intelligence-based operations, both major and minor, in 2024. So far in 2025, 11,654 IBOs have been carried out.

"This year, we are averaging 180 IBOs per day," he added. Meanwhile, around 1,250 terrorists were "sent to hell" in 2024 and 2025, while 563 security personnel were martyred in the line of duty, he said. Here's a structured and comprehensive English news story, capturing the details and tone of your provided text with attribution to DG ISPR:

Responding to a question regarding the rise in terrorist activities, the ISPR DG said, "Every moment, security forces are engaged in counter-terrorism efforts. Sacrifices are being made daily—soldiers, police officials, and even civilians are losing their lives to safeguard Pakistan's future. Children are being orphaned because of this fight." He further emphasized the continued threat emanating from Afghanistan, said, "We have irrefutable evidence that terrorist groups, including Khawarij and other factions, have established their leadership, recruitment networks, and training centers inside Afghanistan. Afghan nationals are involved in these activities, and they are providing sanctuary and facilitation to terrorists targeting Pakistan."

He highlighted the dangerous spillover effects after the withdrawal of international forces from Afghanistan. "A significant quantity of advanced military equipment, including night vision devices, has found its way into the hands of these terrorist organizations. This has enhanced their operational capabilities," he said. He also underlined Pakistan's firm stance against illegal activities fueling instability in the region. "Pakistan is taking decisive action against a wide range of illegal spectrums, including narcotics trafficking, smuggling, non-custom paid vehicles, and the massive mafias profiting from the smuggling of Iranian petrol and diesel," he said.

"These mafias, who have long operated freely and undermined Pakistan's economic and social stability, are now being confronted," he added. "They resist any effort that threatens their vested interests. But for Pakistan to realize its true potential and overcome its challenges, the state and its people must stand united."

He said, Commission of Inquiry on Enforced Disappearances is already there which is working since 2011. Whoever made a claim about mission person, has every right to go to this commission which is chaired by executives of judiciary. He said, out of a total 10,405 cases registered with this commission, as many as 8,144 cases had been resolved while 2,261 were under investigation and if we specifically speak about Balochistan, it was only 2,911 cases that reported by from the province. Out of 2,911, only 452 are "in balance" as rest of the cases has been resolved.

He said, the state has been resolving the issue of missing persons in systematic, methodological and institutional way. However, there are questions from the state that should not be gone unanswered. For



instance, the details of those who were involved in this atrocity in Bolan is still unknown. Who were they and are they not the missing persons.

The list of those who are part of Fitna ul Khawarij and getting training in Afghanistan should be shared so that the public could know their identity. In Karachi, those who dwelled on footpaths had been buried in thousands. They were also among the missing persons.

The people gone mission around the globe including UK and USA, he said, asking whether the people from any country resorted to build narrative against their armies. Are those who became victim of terrorism in Pakistan are not among the missing persons. The people of Pakistan needs to understand the motives behind their narrative.

To a query, he said Balochistan is a 44 per cent of Pakistan and 58 per cent of the province's terrain is mountainous and 20 per cent is desert and sparsely populated. Its very challenging intelligence environment vis-à-vis Balochistan. He said, the country all intelligence agencies worked day and night to find these leads to neutralize any potential incident through preemptive actions. There is no chest thumping in the work of intelligence and there is need to characterize such incidents as intelligence failure.

Govt to support businessmen to increase investment, exports

PM directs strict action against hoarders of sugar, profiteers

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif Friday said the government would extend all kinds of support to businessmen for bringing in investment and enhancing exports to achieve sustainable economic progress.

He was talking to a delegation of prominent businessmen here. He directed that a comprehensive scheme should be introduced for long-term investment in Pakistan. The prime minister said a committee had been formed regarding an export facilitation scheme to support exporters, adding the committee would soon present its draft of recommendations for approval.

He noted that with the grace of Allah and due to the efforts of his economic team, after gaining stability, the economy was moving speedily on the path of progress. "Everyone has to work together for the progress of the country's economy," he continued. The prime minister said resolution of issues of the business community was a top priority, adding the government was taking all possible steps to facilitate the business community.

The business community was being facilitated after the digitalization of Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) and other reforms, he remarked. The prime minister said clearance time of containers at ports had decreased substantially with the introduction of Faceless Custom Clearance System. He said training of youth was being ensured to provide the best manpower for the industries.

"We are further integrating the system by bringing all the institutions of professional training under one umbrella," he informed. Members of the delegation appreciated the efforts of the prime minister's economic team. They said the country led by the prime minister was moving towards progress after gaining economic stability.

The participants lauded the government for earning income through new revenue sources and enhancing the national treasury. They appreciated the Uraan Pakistan programme



EU, Bosnia envoys call on Premier

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Ambassador of the European Union (EU), Dr. Riina Kionka on Friday paid a courtesy call on Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif here at the Prime Minister's House. At the outset, the Prime Minister thanked the EU Ambassador for expressing condolences on the recent terrorist attack on Jaffer Express train in Balochistan and conveyed Pakistan's firm resolve to eliminate the scourge of terrorism from the country, said a Prime Minister's Office news release said.

Ambassador of Bosnia & Herzegovina, Emin Cohodarevic on Friday paid a courtesy call on Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif here at the Prime Minister's House. During the meeting, the Prime Minister highlighted the warm and brotherly relations between Pakistan and Bosnia & Herzegovina and fondly recalled the visits to Bosnia & Herzegovina by former Prime Minister Muhammad Nawaz Sharif, a Prime Minister's Office news release said.

and the roadmap of economic progress initiated under it. They said that the prime minister's initiatives to provide professional skills to youth and for progress of agriculture and industry particularly sending of 1000 students to China for advanced training were appreciable.

They were of the view that for the first time there was seriousness at the government level for resolution of problems of the business community. The business leaders thanked the prime minister for including the business community in the consultation process especially during the budget formulation. They paid tribute to the prime minister for leading efforts to increase revenue and bring down inflation.

Meanwhile, the Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif directed strict action against hoarders of sugar and the elements responsible for its artificial shortage, causing a price increase. He was chairing a review meeting on the supply and demand of

sugar and its provision to the common man on fixed prices. He said the government would not allow the hoarding of sugar and its artificial increase in price through speculation.

He said a report should be presented after conducting a crackdown on unfair profiteers and hoarders. He ordered that the supply and demand of sugar should be strictly monitored. He instructed the officials concerned to intensify contact with the sugar mills to monitor the supply and demand of sugar. He said sugar was available in the country in sufficient quantity.

Those who were creating a situation of artificial sugar crisis should be dealt with strictly according to law, he said adding in the blessed month of Ramadan ul Mubarak, the mafia would not be allowed in any way to exploit the common man. He directed the chief secretaries of the four provinces to ensure the supply of sugar to people at fixed rates.

JUI-F leader among four hurt in blast at mosque

F.P. Report

WANA: A deadly bomb explosion rocked the border town of Azam Warsak, South Waziristan, on Friday, injuring Maulana Abdullah Nadeem, the Amir of JUI-F Lower Waziristan, along with four others.

The attack, which took place inside a mosque during Friday prayers, has sent shockwaves through the already tense region. Following the explosion, the injured were immediately shifted to the headquarters hospital in Wana, where Maulana Nadeem was later transferred to Dera Ismail Khan for further medical treatment due to the severity of his injuries.

Among the injured were Rehmanullah, Maulana Noor Muhammad, and Shah Behran. According to DPO Bahadur Khan, a remote-controlled bomb was planted inside the pulpit, which detonated the moment Maulana Noor Abdullah began delivering his Friday sermon. Law enforcement agencies have launched an investigation, with authorities working to gather evidence and trace the perpetrators behind this calculated attack.

The news of Maulana Abdullah Nadeem's attack spread rapidly across the region, drawing crowds of distressed locals to the Wana headquarters hospital, reflecting the heightened tensions and growing fears among residents. This incident is not an isolated one—Lower Waziristan has been witnessing a disturbing trend of targeted attacks on religious leaders, scholars, and influential figures, many of whom have lost their lives in similar violent assaults.

Bilawal stresses unity to fight terrorism

F.P. Report

KARACHI: Pakistan People's Party Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari inaugurated the "I Work for Sindh dot com" app, developed by the Information Department of the Government of Sindh to support unemployed youth. The inauguration ceremony was held at the Chief Minister's House in Sindh, Karachi, and was attended by Chief Minister Sindh Syed Murad Ali Shah, Senior Minister Sharjeel Inam Memon, provincial ministers, special assistants, advisors, spokespersons, members of the business community, social media activists, and individuals from various other fields.

Speaking at the inauguration ceremony, Bilawal Bhutto Zardari stated that following the Jaffer Express hijacking, Pakistan's security forces bravely defeated the terrorists, for which he paid tribute to the Pakistan Army. He emphasized that a determined struggle will be waged against religious extremism and terrorism and reaffirmed the Sindh government's commitment to public welfare projects.

He stated that a clear stance has been taken in the National Assembly regarding the issue of new canals and that the people of Sindh seek greater employment opportunities. However, due to the limited availability of government jobs, the government will now focus on creating opportunities for direct employment. He added that, in addition to providing houses to flood victims, ownership rights are also being granted to women to help them achieve financial stability.



Bilawal Bhutto Zardari emphasized that the private sector plays a key role in job creation and encouraged its participation in this platform to provide employment opportunities for the skilled youth of Sindh.

He added that the PPP Youth Wing and PSF will launch a promotional campaign for the app to ensure that as many young people as possible can benefit from it. He also shared the good news that the people of Sindh will now have the opportunity to pursue education at major universities worldwide, including Oxford. He noted that inflation is decreasing, which is a positive development, and emphasized the government's commitment to maximizing the use of modern technology.

Addressing the ceremony, Chief Minister Sindh Syed Murad Ali Shah stated that the Sindh government has launched a job portal, allowing the province's youth to register themselves. He explained that this platform will connect job providers and job seekers in one place, helping to accelerate the province's

development.

He urged all job providers and job seekers to register on the portal as extensively as possible. The Chief Minister added that job advertisements for grades one to four will also be posted on the portal, while jobs for grades five to fifteen will be allocated through IBA to ensure complete transparency. He further stated that the portal will be linked to temporary job opportunities, enabling individuals working on various projects to access employment opportunities more easily.

Murad Ali Shah stated that the PPP has always emerged as the largest party of the people in Sindh and will continue to serve the province through its performance. He added that, under the vision of Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, a plan has been formulated to construct 2.1 million houses, of which more than 800,000 have already been completed. He further remarked that if the houses built for flood victims in Sindh were considered equivalent to a country, they would surpass the size of 800 countries worldwide.

PHC seeks response in disappearance of two brothers by police

Humayun Khan

PESHAWAR: The Acting Chief Justice of Peshawar High Court (PHC) Justice SM Attique ordered police, Counter-Terrorism Department (CTD) and the provincial government seeking a response by 7th April against enforced disappearance of the two brothers from their office at Gulbahar, Peshawar by police, on Friday.

The counsel for the petitioner informed the court that the two brothers had been missing for the past two months, and despite efforts, their

whereabouts remain unknown. He added that the brothers were involved in a property business and were taken away from their office in the presence of police.

However, the authorities have not provided any information about their location or the reason for their detention. Acting Chief Justice S M Attique Shah inquired about the nature of the brothers' work and the location from where they went missing.

The counsel replied that they were involved in a property business and were taken away from their office. The

counsel further stated that the brothers were taken away in the presence of police, and their whereabouts remain unknown.

PHC has sought responses from the provincial government, Ministry of Interior, relevant SHOs, and CTD authorities. The court has directed the respondents to submit their responses by April 7, seeking information about the disappearance of the two brothers and the actions taken by the authorities to recover them.

Lawyers approached Court against ban on freedom of move-

ment: A writ petition has been filed in the Peshawar High Court (PHC) against the ban imposed by the Cantonment Board administration on lawyers' vehicles entering without stickers. The petition, filed by Amin ur Rahman Yousafzai Advocate through Muhammad Rafiq Advocate requests the court to declare the ban illegal and unconstitutional.

The petition names the Ministry of Defense, Secretary Defense, Chief Secretary Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Cantonment Executive Officer Peshawar, and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

Bar Council as respondents. The petition argues that the ban imposed by the Cantonment Board Peshawar administration is illegal and unconstitutional, as it restricts lawyers from entering the cantonment to pursue cases.

Currently, multiple courts are functioning within the Peshawar Cantonment, and lawyers need to enter the area to attend to their cases, the writ stated. The petition claims that this ban will affect the dispensation of justice and is a violation of the fundamental rights guaranteed by the constitution. The petition further states that

lawyers have always upheld the law and the constitution, and this ban is against the laws and the fundamental freedom of movement guaranteed by the constitution. According to the petition, there are thousands of lawyers registered with the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Bar Council, including over 6,000 lawyers registered with the Peshawar High Court alone.

These lawyers regularly visit the cantonment to pursue cases, and this ban will cause them undue hardship and restrict their ability to perform their professional duties.

FIA arrests notorious fugitive

LAHORE (APP): The Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) continued its crackdown against human traffickers and successfully arrested a notorious fugitive involved in a visa fraud in Lahore.

A spokesperson for the FIA said, the accused, identified as Umar Tariq, was involved in defrauding innocent citizens through a visa scam. Tariq had promised to send them abroad, specifically to Canada, but failed to fulfill his promises, collecting large sums of money in return.

Tariq, who had been on the run since 2024, was a wanted criminal by the Anti-Human Trafficking Circle Lahore. He managed to swindle a total of 35 million rupees from various victims. After receiving the payments, Tariq went into hiding, but he was successfully apprehended during a raid in Lahore.

The FIA has launched a detailed investigation into the case, and the crackdown on human trafficking continues with full force. FIA officials have reiterated their commitment to a zero-tolerance policy towards human trafficking. "The arrested accused will face severe punishment in accordance with the law," said Director FIA Sarfraz Khan Virk. The ongoing efforts by the FIA reflect their dedication to ending human trafficking and ensuring justice for the victims, added Virk.

Police arrest four drug-peddlers

LAHORE (APP): Lahore police arrested four drug-peddlers from Gulshan-e-Ravi, here on Friday.

According to the police spokesperson, the accused were identified as Mughees, Babar, Allah Bakhsh and Kashif, all of whom were selling drugs in the streets and markets of Gulshan-e-Ravi.

The police said that the accused were arrested from different areas on a tip-off. A total of 4 kg 480 grams of hashish was recovered from the possession of the drug peddlers.

A case of drug trafficking has been registered against the accused and they have been handed over to the Investigation Wing.

Two suspects arrested

KARACHI (APP): The Mithadar police station in District City has arrested two suspects involved in the murder of a citizen Farhan Qasim during a robbery near a restaurant in Sachal area. The suspects, identified as Muhammad Kaleem and Nizamuddin, were caught with two pistols, rounds, and a motorcycle during a routine patrol and snap-checking operation, according to SSP City Arif Aziz on Friday.

The incident occurred on 27 January this year, when the victim and his brother had just withdrawn Rs. 0.9 million from a bank. The suspects followed them and shot Farhan Qasim in the head, killing him. CCTV footage from the scene captured the moment of the murder.

The arrested suspects are habitual criminals who have previously been jailed for multiple robbery and attempted murder cases. The case has been registered at Sachal Police Station in District East, and the suspects have been handed over to investigation authorities for further legal proceedings. Police are also interrogating them about their other accomplices.



LAHORE: Muslim worshipers offer Friday prayers during the holy fasting month of Ramadan at historical Mosque Masjid Wazir Khan. —APP Photo

Terror planning rooted in Afg-India, Governor Punjab

RAWALPINDI (APP): Governor Punjab, Sardar Saleem Haider Khan on Friday has condemned in the strongest terms, the terror act of Jaffar Train by the terrorists in Balochistan. He said that terror attacks are planned in Afghanistan and India.

The governor made these remarks at the funeral prayers of Lance Naik

Usman Shaheed of the Jaffar Express tragedy, in Awanpur, Fateh Jang.

"The soldiers of the Pakistan Army are saving our children from becoming orphans by sacrificing their lives, I pay tribute and salute to the Pakistan Army for foiling terrorist plans like the Jafar Express train", he said.

The governor further

said that terrorists have no religion. He urged for the unity among the political parties against the menace of terrorism. Sardar Salim said that the families of the martyrs would not be left alone as the doors of the Governor House are always open for the families of the martyrs of the security forces.

According to the details,

the funeral prayers were attended by the Governor of Punjab, military officials and a large number of citizens. The martyr was laid to rest with military honors.

The Governor of Punjab consoled the family of the martyr."I, and the entire Pakistani nation stand by the Pakistan Army in this war against terrorism", he said.

Hindus celebrate Holi at Krishna Mandir Lahore

LAHORE (APP): The Hindu community celebrated Holi with great fervour amid high security at Krishna Mandir in Lahore on Friday by smearing each other with brightly colored powder, dancing to festive music and feasting on traditional sweets prepared for the occasion.

Holi has its origins in Hindu mythology and lore and celebrates the divine love between the Hindu god Krishna and his consort Radha, and signifies a time of rebirth and rejuvenation.

Across the country, Hindu community, mostly dressed in all white clothes, celebrated the festival by hurling colored powder at each other. Children, perched on rooftops and balconies, flung water balloons filled with colored

pigments at passers by.

Similarly, Holi was celebrated across the country, especially in Mithi, Hyderabad, Jacobabad, Tharparkar areas of Sindh province, members of the Muslim community participated in Holi celebrations along with Hindus, expressing love and religious harmony.

Meanwhile, on the occasion of the Holi festival, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has said in his message that I extend my heartfelt greetings to the Hindu community across Pakistan on the joyous occasion of Holi. This festival, which announces the arrival of spring, symbolizes the triumph of love and goodness, gives a sense of vibrant energy.

He added that while cele-

brating new beginnings and the strength of renewed relationships, this day highlights the importance of building a stronger, more united nation and the inclusion of all citizens. May this festival of colors fill your lives with happiness, health, success and prosperity.

Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz, while issuing a message on the Hindu community's festival of Holi on Friday said that this beautiful festival of colors, Holi, is a symbol of love, peace and brotherhood. Pakistan is a beautiful blend of communities of different religions.

Everyone has equal rights and opportunities. I pray that this day brings a message of happiness, love and interfaith harmony to everyone, she added.

1.5 million tons of waste collected under Suthra Punjab program

LAHORE (APP): Local Government Minister Zeeshan Rafiq said that more than 1.5 million tons of waste was collected across the province so far under the Suthra Punjab Program. He also highlighted that 13,246 complaints were received from citizens in the last three months, all of which were addressed within 24 hours.

He was speaking while presiding over a review meeting at the Civil Secretariat on Friday, where officials including Secretary Local Government Shakeel Ahmed Mian, Special Secretaries Asia Gul, Arshad Baig, LWMC CEO Babar Sahib Din and Bahawalpur Waste Management Company CEO Naeem Akhtar were also present, while CEOs of all other waste management companies participated in the meeting through video link.

Local Government Minister Zeeshan Rafiq expressed satisfaction with the progress of the program, noting the establishment of 212 temporary collection points and 903 waste enclosures. "Currently, 15,742 vehicles and 145,000 equipments are working to support the cleaning efforts across Punjab", he mentioned.

The Minister stressed the importance of addressing pending complaints promptly and took notice of the shortage of waste containers in Gujranwala and DG Khan. He instructed the CEOs of the respective waste management companies to ensure an adequate supply of containers.

Scholarship approved for mines workers' children

LAHORE (APP): The 60th meeting of the Mines Welfare Board was held under the chairmanship of Secretary Mines and Minerals Department Pervaz Iqbal, which approved 100 per cent scholarships for mine workers' children pursuing professional degree programmes.

The meeting was attended by Mines Labour Welfare Commissioner Punjab, Riaz Ahmed Chaudhry, board members, and other officials. Significant decisions were made for the welfare of mine workers and their families, focusing on education, health, and housing facilities.

In the meeting it was decided that students securing more than 85% marks in Matric and Intermediate exams will be provided with laptops and e-

bikes. It was also decided to install RO plants in all MLW schools to ensure a continuous supply of clean drinking water, along with transport facilities for students. Furthermore, a "Best Teacher Award" will be introduced for science and arts teachers in every school. The Women's College Khewra and Model High School will receive 15 computers and furniture as part of the initiative.

In the health sector, significant steps were also taken, including the installation of MLW dispensaries and water filtration plants in Lundi Syedan (Rajapur District) and Basti Rohani (Dera Ghazi Khan District) at a total cost of 36.5 million rupees. To enhance medical facilities, it was decided to outsource the hiring of doctors, nurses, para-

medics and other staff in Mines Labour Welfare Hospitals. Moreover, a relief package of Rs 9.5 million was approved for 53 disabled mine workers to ensure their well-being.

Important decisions were also made regarding housing and welfare initiatives for mine workers. The construction of four labour barracks in Khushab and Mianwali districts was approved. Additionally, a pilot project will be launched to establish day-care centers for mine workers' children and provide meal services for employees. It was further decided to hire consultants to develop more effective policies and welfare plans for mine workers.

PTI must focus on saving country, not one individual: Azma Bukhari

LAHORE (APP): Punjab Information Minister Azma

Bukhari has said that national unity is impossible in the presence of movements that oppose the country and the military.

Speaking to the media outside the Punjab Assembly, she said Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) should talk about saving the country rather than focus-

ing on saving an individual. Azma said the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government was busy sending delegations to Afghanistan, while the public is burning in the flames of terrorism.

She said that national unity was urgently needed to tackle serious challenges like terrorism. To confront terrorism and all enemies of Pakistan, "we must unite, but it is difficult to unite when a faction of PTI sits there, refuses to condemn, and attacks its own military, added minister.

She stressed that for the country's security, everyone must come together. Bukhari called for the renewal of the National Action Plan (NAP), saying that a new NAP must be formed to effectively eliminate terrorism.

Sharjeel reveals forces undermining Pakistan's progress

F.P. Report

KARACHI: Sindh's Senior Minister Sharjeel Inam Memon stated that incidents like the Jaffer Express attack do not occur randomly but have underlying motives behind them.

While addressing the Sindh Assembly, the senior minister and provincial minister for information, transport, and mass transit, Sharjeel Inam Memon, said that the people of Balochistan have a sense of deprivation, and injustices were committed against them in the past. He noted that former President Asif Ali Zardari, despite not being in power, unconditionally apologized to the people of Balochistan and introduced the "Aaghaz-e-Huqooq Balochistan" package for their rights.

Sharjeel Inam Memon emphasized that Balochistan is a land rich in natural resources, and if peace and stability are restored, it can become a self-sufficient province. However, he claimed that the situation in Balochistan has been deliberately deteriorated, and certain forces do not want the region to progress.

Speaking about the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), he stated that its founder was Asif Ali Zardari, who transformed Gwadar into an international port. However, some forces are fearful of Pakistan's progress and are exploiting the local people for their vested interests.

Sindh's senior minister further stated that enemy nations of Pakistan, in collaboration with certain

neighboring states, are inciting conflict among Pakistanis and targeting citizens of Pakistan's allied countries. He referred to the suicide attack on foreign language teachers at Karachi University, stating that such incidents benefit anti-Pakistan forces.

Sharjeel Inam Memon praised the security forces for their operations against terrorists, saluting the brave personnel who freed the hostages of the Jaffer Express and eliminated the terrorists.

He urged those who truly support the country to lay down their arms and engage in dialogue. He stressed that everyone must work together to find a solution to this issue, as those receiving foreign funding to harm their own country are, in reality, its enemies.

LHC threatens emergency action over delayed water meter installations

LAHORE (APP): The Lahore High Court (LHC) on Friday warned of imposing emergency measures over the delayed installation of water meters, expressing dissatisfaction with the performance of the Water and Sanitation Agency (WASA).

Justice Shahid Karim heard a set of petitions, filed by Haroon Farooq and others, highlighting the ineffective measures to tackle smog. During the proceedings, WASA submitted a report stating that it was in the process of installing 1,000 water meters.

However, the court criticized the slow pace of

implementation and directed the agency to submit an updated report by next Friday.

The court also took up a report from the Transport Department, presented by a provincial law officer. It revealed that meetings had been held with 18 transport companies, who had licenses to manufacture auto and loader rickshaws. The report further stated that discussions were underway to convert loader rickshaws to electric power, with a proposal to turn metro stations into charging points.

To which, the court stressed the need to provide incentives to compa-

nies promoting electric vehicles and urged the government to formulate a policy to support the transition.

In a separate directive, the court suggested that the Defence Housing Authority (DHA) and the Lahore Development Authority (LDA) establish Miyawaki forests in all housing societies. It also proposed tax relief for individuals constructing environmentally friendly buildings.

The hearing was adjourned for a week, with the court seeking implementation reports from all relevant departments by next Friday.

Donate to free underprivileged prisoners before Eid

LAHORE (APP): The Punjab Home Department has launched an initiative to help release underprivileged prisoners who have completed their sentences but remain incarcerated due to unpaid fines or blood money.

According to the spokesperson for the Punjab Home Department, there are 150 such prisoners in various jails of Punjab who, despite having completed their sentences, are incarcerated due to non-payment of blood money or fines.

A total of 100 million rupees remains unpaid for their release. Philanthropists can pay the prisoners' blood money, compensation (Arsh), Daman, or fines under the Zakat scheme, after which the prisoners can be released before Eid.

This is a rare opportunity during Ramadan for the release of underprivileged

prisoners and for them to celebrate Eid with their loved ones. The spokesperson mentioned that last year, with a payment of 17 million rupees, 226 prisoners were released.

Individuals wishing to donate for the release of prisoners should contact the Punjab Jail Department.

To guide citizens and assist with the release of underprivileged prisoners, a 24-hour active helpline, 0429200498, has been launched. Detailed lists of prisoners and fines can be requested on this helpline. The spokesperson clarified that by depositing funds into the Punjab Prison Foundation's account, prisoners can be released before Eid.

The spokesperson further added that citizens can deposit the fine amount into the bank on behalf of a prisoner and submit the challan form at

the respective jail.

Donations for the release of underprivileged prisoners can be made to the Punjab Prison Foundation's Bank of Punjab account number PK37BPUN651000041890 0018.

The spokesperson emphasised that philanthropists should only make donations to the mentioned account of the Punjab Prison Foundation for the release of prisoners. Donations should not be made to any other institution, NGO, or individual for prisoner releases. No jail officer or official is authorized to directly receive money for the payment of fines or blood money.

Philanthropists are encouraged to participate generously in this noble initiative for the swift release of prisoners who have completed their sentences, added department spokesperson.

Collective action urged against six canals project

KARACHI (PPI): Rivers are a living reality, and obstructing their natural flow is both a crime and an act of ecological self-destruction. Water aggression is not just an attack on the federation's foundations but also a catastrophic threat to the entire region.

The destruction of the Indus River is not merely a matter of Sindh's survival; its devastation will push 250 million people into hunger, poverty, and environmental collapse. Supporting the ongoing mass resistance in Sindh to save the Indus River from annihilation is a historical duty of every individual, group, and nation concerned with its future.

This was stated by prominent intellectuals and public representatives gathered at the Karachi Press Club to discuss the looming threats to the Indus River during a seminar titled "Indus River: The Lifeline of Sindh Under Threat," organized by the National Trade

Union Federation Pakistan (NTUF) and the youth organization Alternate. NTUF Secretary General Nasir Mansoor presided over the event, emphasizing the ecological importance of the Indus Delta and coastal areas.

Zehra Khan from the Home Based Women Workers Federation stressed the river's living nature, warning against projects like the six Canal, which she likened to a "suicide bombing" for Sindh. She highlighted the global unacceptability of big dams and pointed to historical grievances over water agreements with India.

Sajjad Zaheer criticized the political handling of water issues, underscoring the economic dependency on agriculture and the broader implications for the region. He urged for a fight against projects threatening Sindh's water security, advocating for a collective struggle grounded in Marxist phi-

losophy.

Other speakers, including Tabassum Khoso, Mehnaaz Rehman, and Ali Ahmed Jan, echoed the calls for unity and resistance against ecologically damaging projects. They highlighted the adverse effects of corporate farming, unsustainable development, and historical injustices related to water distribution.

Dr. Asghar Dashti and Dr. Riaz Shaikh provided critical insights into governmental mismanagement and the socio-political dynamics exacerbating the water crisis. They called for an independent audit of WAPDA and modernization of water systems to address the ongoing crisis effectively.

The seminar concluded with a unified call to action, urging political, civil society, and grassroots movements to work together to protect the Indus River—a vital lifeline for Sindh and the broader region.

نی اے ایف میں، رسالہ پور

ٹینڈر برائے فراہمی پودہ جات بیج،
کھاد وغیرہ برائے مالیاتی سال 2024-25

نی اے ایف میں درسا پور کو مالیاتی سال 2024-25 میں کاشت کے لیے مختلف قسم کے (پھل دار، ساریدار) پودہ جات، گھاس، مختلف قسم کے بیج، کھاد، زرعی ادویات وغیرہ فراہمی کے لیے گورنمنٹ سے مندرجہ و تکریکیز، جزل آرڈر سلاز، زرعی ماگان سے ٹینڈر فارم دیا جائے گا جس میں اجناس کی اشاعت کے 15 یوم کے اندر آفیر انچارج، پرنسپل اسکوائر، نی اے ایف میں، رسالہ پور کے آفس میں بیج 10 بجے تک وصول کیے جائیں گے۔ ٹینڈر ای دن دوشہر 12 بجے کو ملے جائیں گے۔ ایکڑی انتظامیہ کو یقین حاصل ہے کہ تکنیکی وجوہات بنا پر کوئی بھی ٹینڈر رد کرے۔

آفیر انچارج، پرنسپل اسکوائر
نی اے ایف میں، رسالہ پور
فون نمبر: 0923-6313391
موبائل نمبر: 0323-9413312



ISLAMIA COLLEGE PESHAWAR

CORRIGENDUM / ADDENDUM

This is with reference to Advertisement published in the Daily "Mashriq", "Aaj" & "The Frontier Post" on 26.02.2025. The following amendments in the said advertisement should be noted:

- At Serial No. 02 (Associate Professor (BPS-20)**
Shariah & Law (02) should be read as Law (02).
- At General Instructions Serial No.1**
The closing date for submission of application form should be read as 15.04.2025 instead of 14.03.2025.

Note: Other terms and conditions will remain the same.

REGISTRAR
ISLAMIA COLLEGE PESHAWAR

Bukhari has said that national unity is impossible in the presence of movements that oppose the country and the military.

Speaking to the media outside the Punjab Assembly, she said Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) should talk about saving the country rather than focus-



PESHAWAR: People offering Friday prayers at Sunehri Masjid during the Holy month of Ramadan.

Crackdown on price gougers intensified in Peshawar

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Under the provincial government's public agenda to ensure the supply of essential food items at official rates, Commissioner Peshawar Division, Riaz Khan Mehsud, has taken charge in the field. According to Commissioner Mehsud, the crackdown on price gougers will be intensified in the second phase of Ramadan.

During the first ten days of the holy month, the district administration of Peshawar inspected 11,000 shops across the provincial capital. As a result, 974 shops were sealed for overpricing, while 395 price gougers remain in jail. Authorities have collected approximately 2.2 million rupees in fines, registered FIRs against 320 shopkeepers, and issued warnings to 5,310 violators for minor

infractions.

Similar operations are ongoing in other districts of Peshawar Division, including Nowshera, Charsadda, Mohmand (tribal district), and Khyber, with the goal

of providing maximum relief to the public.

Commissioner Riaz Khan Mehsud emphasized that all Deputy Commissioners have been directed not to show any

leniency towards price gougers.

He further ordered that those arrested should not be released before Eid to ensure strict enforcement of pricing regulations.



KMU's Dr. Maria recognized as Inspiring Woman in STEM

PESHAWAR (APP): Dr. Maria Ishaq Khattak, Assistant Professor of Dental Public Health and Head of Department at Khyber Medical University (KMU), has been honoured as an Inspiring Woman in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) by the Centre for IMPACT—a global health research initiative jointly led by Aga Khan University and University of York, UK.

The award was conferred in celebration of International Women's Day, observed globally on March 8.

Dr. Maria was celebrated

as a trailblazer in science and leadership, with the Centre for IMPACT highlighting her significant contributions to global health, qualitative research, and climate change.

In 2024, Dr. Maria played a key role in the Climate Change and Health Vulnerability Assessment (CHVA)

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, where she led the curriculum development for climate change and health and designed a specialist module, now integrated into the Master of Public Health (MPH) curriculum at KMU.

Her research involved engaging with community

members, advocacy groups, government officials, and postgraduate students, emphasizing the critical need for evidence-based policies to address the health impacts of climate change.

Furthering her dedication to impactful research, in February 2025, Dr. Maria secured a \$10,000 research grant from the Global Disaster Preparedness Centre and the American Red Cross.

Selected from over 1,600 applications worldwide, her project examines how socioeconomic incentives, such as the Benazir Income Support Programme and

one-time cash grants, can enhance climate resilience among informal workers in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Her research will contribute to developing policies that protect vulnerable communities facing environmental and economic challenges.

Dr. Maria's commitment to advancing climate research was further recognized when she was named a finalist for Cohort 4 of the Women in Science Fellowship, a prestigious program led by the Institute of Global Health and Development at Aga Khan University (AKU) in collaboration with the University of Oxford.

Al-Bait initiates Hajj arrangements: Osama Danish

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: This year, comprehensive arrangements have been made to facilitate Hajj pilgrims. They will receive the best possible services throughout their journey. Millions of pilgrims from around the world, including Pakistan, benefit from well-organized facilities every year.

Providing hospitality to the guests of Allah remains the top priority of Al-Bait Hajj Company.

To ensure the comfort of pilgrims, special arrangements have been put in place at various locations. Al-Bait Hajj Company is committed to offering top-tier services to millions of pilgrims. Managing Director Osama Danish

stated that Al-Bait has consistently provided excellent facilities in Medina for pilgrims, especially those from Pakistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Every year, Hajj arrangements are upgraded to meet current needs. Al-Bait plays a vital role in transportation, accommodation, and other essential services. This year, a

Pashto-speaking guide has been appointed to assist pilgrims from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Medina continues to uphold its tradition of excellence, with pilgrims expressing satisfaction over the services provided. Additionally, a new tourism service has been introduced to further enhance pilgrims' travel experiences.

City's iftar parties packed with devotees as dates offer warm welcomes

PESHAWAR (APP): In spite of high prices, the dates outlets on Friday here attracted faithful in substantial numbers for Iftar parties in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

All the fruits markets of Peshawar including Gul Bhar, Firdus, Hastnagri, Chamkani, Faqirabad, Boards, Tehkal, Cantonment, Pishtakhara, Kohat, Dalazak Roads and Qissa Khwani bazaar etc are flooded with different varieties of dates, attracting buyers despite its high prices.

Great rush of buyers was seen on dates outlets at these areas where the commodity was being sold like a hot cake.

"Dhaki Kajoor (date) is my prime choice for Iftar. I have bought four kilograms dates including two kilogram each for my married daughters as special Ramadan gift," said Fayaz Khan, a retired PST teacher and resident of Wapda Town Peshawar at Qissa Khwani bazaar while talking to APP. Owing to its delicious taste and numerous health and nutrition benefits, date is an integral part of almost every "Dastarkhwan" and a prime choice of the rozadars (fasting people) during Iftar parties.

The business of imported and locally produced dates (Kajoor) have get upward boom during Ramzan in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa including seven merged tribal districts where people thronged to its shop after Zuhar prayer.

This year, Muzafati date is being sold at Rs450-460 per kilogram compared to RsRs420-440 last year in Peshawar. Similarly, Iranian dates are being sold at Rs330-320 this year as against Rs280 per kg last year and its price is quite high this year that needed to be checked by the district administration in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Dhaki DI Khan's dates are also almost out of reach of poor people as it is being sold at Rs460-480 this year against Rs400-420 last year in Peshawar where high inflation and skyrocketing prices irked Rozadars.

"Despite its high prices, Ajwa Kajoor are my favorite item and my iftar party cannot be complete without it," said Nasir Ali, a property dealer while talking to APP at Hashnagri bazaar.

"I prefers Ajwa dates due to its better taste and numerous nutrition and health benefits. However my family and friends liked Dhaki dates of DI Khan during Iftar as it help in restoration of blood sugar levels after fasting all day."

Punjor dates are also attracting consumers in large number in local markets due to it's better quality and nutritious level. "My sister has requested four kilograms' dates but I purchased only two kilograms because of its high prices in Peshawar," said Nasir.

The consumers said it was the responsibility of the district administration to control prices of daily use items including dates in open markets during Ramadanul Mubarak and urged DCs to activate his staff to control price hikes during Ramadan.

15 March: Youm-e-Tahafuz Namoos-e-Risalat (PBUH)

Muhammad Mohsin Iqbal

MARCH 15 holds special significance in terms of the dignity and respect of Islam, as the government of Pakistan has also decided to observe it as the World Day Against Islamophobia, aligning it with Youm-e-Tahafuz Namoos-e-Risalat (PBUH). This initiative reflects the collective responsibility of the state and society to uphold the dignity of the Holy Prophet (PBUH), an obligation deeply enshrined in Islamic teachings.

The date was chosen in connection with the International Day to Combat Islamophobia, an international observance designated by the United Nations in 2022 to counter the rising tide of Islamophobia. The date marks the anniversary of the tragic Christchurch Mosque attacks in New Zealand on March 15, 2019, where 51 Muslim worshippers were martyred during Friday prayer. On March 15, 2022, the United Nations General Assembly unanimously adopted a resolution introduced by Pakistan's Permanent Representative to the UN, Munir Akram, on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), officially proclaiming March 15 as the International Day to Combat Islamophobia. This global recognition underscores the growing need to protect Muslim communities from hate speech, discrimination, and attacks on their religious beliefs, particularly blasphemous acts against the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH).

The Holy Quran repeatedly emphasizes the supreme status of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and commands believers to show him the highest respect. Allah says in the Quran: "Indeed, We have sent you (O Muhammad) as a witness, as a bearer of glad tidings, and as a warner. So that you (O people) may believe in Allah and His Messenger, and that you may assist and honor him, and glorify Allah morning and evening." (Surah Al-Fath 48:8-9). This verse establishes the fundamental duty of every Muslim to hold the Prophet (PBUH) in the highest esteem. Another verse states: "O you who have believed, do not raise your voices above the voice of the Prophet or be loud to him in speech as you are loud to one another, lest your deeds become worthless while you perceive not." (Surah Al-Hujurat 49:2). These commandments highlight that any form of disrespect towards the Prophet (PBUH) is unacceptable in Islam.

The Hadith literature further reinforces the duty of Muslims to protect and honor the dignity of the Prophet (PBUH). The Prophet himself said: "None of you will have complete faith until I am dearer to him than his father, his child, and all of mankind." (Sahih Bukhari, Hadith 15). This profound statement reflects that true faith is intertwined with absolute love and respect for the Prophet (PBUH). Another Hadith states: "Whoever harms the Messenger of Allah (PBUH), Allah will curse him in this world and the Hereafter, and He has prepared for him a humiliating punishment." (Sahih Bukhari). These teachings make it clear that disrespecting the Prophet (PBUH) is a grave sin that incurs divine punishment.

Throughout Islamic history, the Companions and the Rightly Guided Caliphs demonstrated unparalleled reverence for the Holy Prophet (PBUH). Their actions serve as an enduring example of how Muslims should respond to any offense against the Prophet's honor. During the caliphate of Hazrat Abu Bakr Siddiq (RA), he firmly declared that protecting the dignity of the Prophet (PBUH) was a sacred duty. He famously said, "May my parents be sacrificed for you, O Messenger of Allah! We will protect your honor at any cost." His devotion set a precedent for all believers.

Similarly, Hazrat Umar ibn al-Khattab (RA) was known for his fierce defense of the Prophet's (PBUH) honor. Once, a man was caught making derogatory remarks about the Prophet (PBUH). Hazrat Umar (RA) immediately declared such an act intolerable, emphasizing that no Muslim could remain silent in the face of blasphemy. His deep sense of responsibility towards preserving the Prophet's (PBUH) dignity made him a model of unwavering faith and action.

Hazrat Usman ibn Affan (RA) and Hazrat Ali ibn Abi Talib (RA) also upheld the sanctity of the Prophet (PBUH) with great devotion. Hazrat Ali (RA) famously said, "The Prophet (PBUH) is dearer to us than our own lives. Any insult towards him is an insult to our very existence." Such statements reflect the immense reverence that the Companions and the Caliphs held for the Prophet (PBUH), and they serve as a reminder for all Muslims to uphold this legacy.

The love and respect for the Holy Prophet (PBUH) among Muslims are unparalleled. From the time of the Companions to the present day, Muslims across the world have always regarded the honor of the Prophet (PBUH) as sacred. History bears witness that whenever blasphemous acts were committed, the Muslim Ummah united in defense of the Prophet's (PBUH) dignity. In contemporary times, incidents of blasphemy have been met with strong condemnation from the Muslim world, reinforcing the message that such actions will never be tolerated.

The observance of Youm-e-Tahafuz Namoos-e-Risalat (PBUH) is a significant step towards reaffirming the commitment of Pakistan and the Muslim Ummah to protecting the dignity of the Prophet (PBUH). The government's initiative to conduct awareness campaigns will help educate the masses about the religious, moral, and legal aspects of safeguarding the Prophet's (PBUH) honor. This effort is not just about responding to blasphemous content but also about strengthening faith, unity, and responsibility among Muslims.

It is the duty of every Muslim to not only love and respect the Prophet (PBUH) but also to ensure that his honor remains protected at all costs. However, this responsibility must be carried out with wisdom, patience, and adherence to the principles of justice as taught by the Prophet (PBUH) himself. The best way to honor him is to embody his teachings, promote his message of peace and justice, and counter any blasphemous narratives with knowledge, faith, and lawful action.

The observance of this day serves as a reminder that the love of the Prophet (PBUH) is an inseparable part of a Muslim's faith. As Pakistan takes the lead in reinforcing this commitment, it sends a strong message to the world that the dignity of the Prophet (PBUH) is beyond compromise. It is a call for unity, awareness, and action-so that every generation understands and upholds the sacred responsibility of protecting the honor of the beloved Prophet Muhammad (PBUH).

KPFA cracks down on adulteration

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Food Safety and Halal Food Authority has intensified its crackdown against food adulteration across the province, conducting large-scale inspections in Peshawar.

The operations resulted in the seizure and disposal of thousands of litres of counterfeit beverages, adulterated milk, and expired food items. Several shops and warehouses were also sealed, while heavy fines were imposed on violators.

In Peshawar, a raid was conducted on Ring Road following a tip-off, leading to the seizure of 240 cartons of expired fruit drinks that were intended for sale in the market. The food safety team promptly confiscated the drinks and initiated legal proceedings against the responsible parties.

Meanwhile, Provincial Minister for Food, Zahir Shah Toru, reaffirmed the government's commitment to eliminating food adulteration. Zahir Shah stated that strict action would be taken against individuals

endangering public health.

Similarly, in Abbottabad, food safety team conducted surprise visits across various localities and disposed of over 300 litres of adulterated milk, leading to the sealing of the shop. The team also issued improvement notices to ensure compliance with food safety standards.

Director General Wasif Saeed lauded the efforts of the inspection teams and directed them to further intensify operations during Ramadan to prevent the sale of substandard and adulterated food items.

Promoting balanced Iftar meals: A crucial step in addressing malnutrition

PESHAWAR (APP): Amid chirping birds in canopy trees signaling the start of a spring at village Dheri Mian Ishaq on River Kabul here, the sunrays casts its warm glow on mud house of Zakir (50), a determined fruit seller whose life changed dramatically after joining the painstaking business following the untimely death of his father due to pancreas cancer.

Taking control of his father's business in 2015 despite difficult financial position, Zakir concentrated on the sale of organic produce from the bustling Chamakan market at Peshawar from where he brings fresh fruits and vegetables daily to his hometown town in Nowshera district to cater people demands during Iftar parties.

Defeating poverty with share will power, Zakir who bought a rickshaw for transportation of fruits and

vegetables during Ramadan was now all smiles after seeing people's overwhelming response to organic fresh fruits and vegetables useful in combating malnutrition especially in children and lactating mothers.

Daily, Khan sells a variety of organic fruits and vegetables, including guava, apples, orange, peaches, ladyfinger, and ridged gourd in his shop to cater the rising consumers' demand for quality nutritious food and balanced diet for iftar parties.

"As spring sits in KP, the demand for organic produce surges," he said, adding some times he visited twice to Chamkani for more fresh fruits and vegetables ahead of Iftar.

However, he also highlighted the financial risks that come with selling of perishable goods during rainy and hot summer.

Dr. Riaz Khan, a chil-

dren's specialist at the Government Hospital Pabbi Nowshera, emphasized the critical role of a balanced diet in combating malnutrition, particularly among children, lactating mothers and elderly citizens.

"Healthy dietary practices must start early in children lives and breast-feeding is essential for proper growth and cognitive development of newborn," he reiterated.

According to Dr. Riaz, dietary guidelines suggested that total fat intake should not exceed 30% of daily calories, with saturated fats kept below 10%, warning that excessive salt intake can lead to hypertension and increase risk of the heart diseases.

Declaring malnutrition as silent killer, Dr Riaz said that it poses a significant threat to children's over health and cognitive development besides affect their physical growth.

He said Pakistan has ranked second in the region for stunting, with 40% of children are being affected by this condition annually due to socioeconomic imbalances, poverty and lack of excess to quality medical treatment.

"Alarmingly, many children especially in less developed districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa including merged tribal districts, Tank, Bagtaram, Kohistan and Chitral do not meet essential micronutrient needs due to high rate of poverty there.

He said studies indicated that upto 70% of children fall short on calcium, iron, zinc, and vitamin A, with a staggering about 50% suffering from vitamin C deficiency.

Dr. Riaz highlighted the pervasive issue of iron deficiency, which affects nearly half of children under five years of age, leading to developmental delays and

increased chances of pneumonia and other fatal ailment due to their weak immunity.

"As per National Health Survey of Pakistan report, one in three children are malnourished, with nearly 40 percent facing stunting and low weight at birth and five years of age," he maintained.

"The root causes of malnutrition include repeated use of unbalanced diets, vivacious poverty, limited access to healthcare and food insecurity.

Darya Khan, Provincial Coordinator at Nutrition International in Peshawar, said Govt was encouraging organic farming to address challenge of malnutrition especially in children and pregnant mothers during Ramadan.

He noted that people, who consumed regularly inorganic foods are more susceptible to various health issues and became

victims of strokes, stomach disorders, piles and cardiovascular and cardio-thoracic diseases.

"Promoting home-based agriculture can significantly improve nutrition level of Pakistan's 250 million population for whom provision of healthy diet was a big challenge," he argued. The longevity of life and health of communities in remote areas, such as Hunza and Swat, illustrated the benefits of organic and balanced diets.

The cultural shift toward organic food cultivation is gaining traction in urban centers like Islamabad, Lahore, Peshawar and Karachi, Darya Khan said, adding that organic farming has experienced an annual growth rate of 15% in Pakistan over the past decade which was a positive sign.

Dr. Zilakat Malik, former Chairman of the Economics Department at

the University of Peshawar, said that Pakistan suffered approximately \$3 billion annual losses due to micronutrient deficiencies, accounting for 1.33% of the nation's GDP.

He said that stunting in children and pregnant mothers have increased in KP due to high poverty rate after 2022 floods that affected agriculture and livestock immensely.

The experts called for an urgent intervention, such as promoting sustainable agricultural practices, enhancing women's access to education and income, and strengthening healthcare systems besides financial support to poor families during pregnancies for better mother-child health.

The spokesman of KP health department highlighted the government initiatives to promote balanced diet and combat malnutrition.

Under the Ehsas

Nashonoma program, he said that financial support is provided to poor families, with special focus on girls and lactating mothers.

He said that Rs2500 per month for newborn girls and Rs2000 for newborn boy are being given to poor parents for two years.

Additionally, he said that health records are maintained for beneficiaries to monitor the growth and health of children under two years to combat malnutrition.

He said the promotion of healthy diets and sustainable agriculture farming practices was imperative to defeat stunting.

By prioritizing nutrition and investing in food, education and healthcare, he said the common goal of healthy children for prosperous Pakistan could be achieved for which all segment of the society have to play a positive role on their part.



In brief

One killed over land dispute Syed Waliullah Shah

NOWSHERA: One man killed, and another was critically injured in a firing incident in Nowshera Kalan. The incident occurred when the victims were returning home after offering Fajr prayer, on Friday. The police have registered a case against the culprits and arrested one of the accused persons shortly after the incident. The police have also recovered the weapon used in the offense and are conducting raids to arrest the second accused. According to the report lodged with the Nowshera Kalan police, Adil, son of Adalat Khan, stated that he and his father were returning home after offering Fajr prayer at the Torsam Khan Mosque when they were ambushed by Sultan, son of Maroof Khan, and Kausar, son of Sultan, residents of Farm Korona Khushgi. The accused persons opened fire on them, resulting in the death of his father, Adalat Khan, on the spot. Another person, Ihsan Ullah, son of Waliullah, was injured in the firing incident. Adil miraculously escaped unhurt. The police have registered a case against the accused persons and initiated an investigation. The police have arrested one of the accused persons and recovered the murder weapon. Raids are being conducted to arrest the second accused. The motive behind the incident is reported to be a land dispute.

Uplift works on flyover inspected F.P. Report

HAFIZABAD: In order to provide better communicational facilities to commuters, the Punjab government is spending more than Rs. 882 million to construct Raily Flyover on Kot Sarwar Motorway Interchange to Gujranwala Road and rehabilitation of Hafizabad-Sheikhupura Road. This was stated by the Deputy Commissioner Hafizabad Abdul Razzaq while visiting under construction Flyover and Sheikhupura Road. Executive Officer Highway Department Asjid Ali and Deputy Director Development Tasawar Abbas. DC reviewed pace of work on the projects and checked quality of material being used in execution of the projects. He said that according to specification and timely completion of the projects was top priority of the district administration so that people of the area could get benefits of expenditures at the earliest. Meanwhile, the Senior officer of district account office Hafizabad Naeem Haider has been appointed District Accounts Officer Hafizabad, he assumed the chare of his post and started work. He directed the officers and officials of the office to perform their duties with passion of serving the people and adopt merit policy of the government. He warned his subordinate staff that corruption and negligence would not be tolerated at all.

Two killed in a road accident F.P. Report

SARGODHA: Two motorcyclists were hit to death by speeding dumper here under the jurisdiction of Satellite Town police station on Friday. Police spokesperson said that two people including Khawar (26) and Haq Nawaz (41) r/o Pindi Bhatian area were heading to Sargodha on motorcycle when all of sudden their bike hit with speeding dumper near Lahore road Chowk area Sargodha which resulted into their spot deaths.



HYDERABAD: State minster for Religious Affairs, Kheal das kohistani addressing during Holi festival ceremony.

36th syndicate meeting of KKKUK held

F.P. Report

KARAK: The 36th syndicate meeting of the Khushal Khan Khattak University Karak concluded in which several important decisions were taken on Friday.

The meeting presided by the university Vice Chancellor, Professor Dr. Naseer Ud Din took several administrative and academic decisions pertaining to the university matters. The meeting was also attended by representative of Higher Education Commission (HEC) Islamabad, Prof. Dr. Jamil Ahmed, Registrar Khushal Khan Khattak University Karak Dr. Ghani Ur Rahman, Treasurer Hafiz Ismail Khan, Director P&D Muhammad Rashad ,Controller of Examinations Muhammad Rahim,Director Academic and Research Dr Fasih Ur Rehman, Director QEC Dr. Muhammad Anwar, Deputy Director Audit Farid Jalal, Deputy Registrar Meetings Muhammad Ilyas, Assistant Professor Computer

Science Dr. Muhammad Zubair, Lecturer Computer Science Dr. Shad Muhammad, Additional Registrar Abdul Salam, Additional Secretary Establishment Department Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Jamal Ud Din, Deputy Secretary Finance Department Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Masood Ahmed Jan, Deputy Secretary Higher Education Archives and Libraries Department Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Rahmat Ali ,Principal GPGC Karak Muhammad Ajmal Khan, Sadiq Ullah, Naveed Bukhari and Muhammad Jan.

Earlier, Registrar Dr. Ghani Ur Rehman presented the agenda of the 36th syndicate meeting and all the participants gave their opinion on it. He appreciated the role of the Vice-Chancellor in framing detailed rules and regulations for the university, which will prove helpful in resolving university employees issues.

Similarly, other syndicate members also appreciated the role of Vice Chancellor Prof. Dr. Naseer Ud Din for solving the problems of the university consistently. The participants of the meeting lauded the efforts of the Vice-Chancellor for completing the infrastructure of the university in difficult times.

The syndicate took important decisions on various teaching and administrative matters besides forming committees in certain cases, so that it could be resolved in accordance with the rules and regulations of the University.

Vice-Chancellor Prof. Dr. Naseer Ud Din thanked the members of the syndicate for reposing confidence in his Vice-Chancellorship and reiterated that he should resolve all the problems of the employees without any delay and keeping aside personal likes and dislikes, will focus all attention on the betterment of the university.

Journalists hold protest against SHO Allah Dad Chandio

LARKANA: The journalists protested in front of press club against the Station House Officer (SHO) Civil Line police station Mazar Mahar attitude while stolen motorcycle and misbehaved morally and physically.

Addressing the demonstration on this occasion, Senior Journalist Mohammad Nawaz Umrani, Senior Vice President Ambart Lal, Sarfaraz Saleem Phalpoto, Abdul Khaliq Jagirani and others protested and said that the journalist who writes and speaks the truth is considered as the pillar of the country while the journalist plays the leading role in conveying the voices of the oppressed and the unreached people to the higher councils.

The journalists claimed that ten days after the police arrest, when he went to the Civil Line police station again, SHO Mazar Mahar SHO and a police official were sitting there, they strongly demanded from the Provincial Minister of Sindh Government Information Department and IG Police Sindh to take action against SHO Mazar Mahar , who is playing a role like the Hitler of the world, so that he does not misbehave with any journalist or common man, otherwise the scope of protest will be extended in Sindh from the platform of Sindh Journalist Union.

Solidarity rally held to condemn Jaffar Express accidents: A great protest rally was organized by Shaheed Ms. Benazir Bhutto Medical University (SMBBMU) Larkana against the recent Jaffer Express tragedy, the rally started from the administration block of Chandka Medical College Larkana and ended at the main gate of the college.

Soomro and led by Registrar Prof. Fahad Gibran Syal, was taken out to protest against the recent Jaafar Express tragedy, barbaric terrorism and massacre of innocent civilians. Speakers at the closing ceremony strongly condemned the tragic incident and acts of terrorism. He appreciated the timely action of Pakistan Army and also raised slogans in favor of the army.

2 laborers killed as salt mine collapses

F.P. Report

KARAK: Two laborers killed after a salt mine collapsed in the Srikhwa area of Karak. As soon as the control received information, two ambulances reached the spot.

The medical team of Rescue 1122 shifted both the dead bodies to the District Headquarters Hospital Karak for post-mortem. The deceased have been identified as Rasool Zaman, age 23, and Hidayatullah, age 28, residents of Mir Kalam Kala Karak.

DDAC commits for development: District Development Advisory Committee (DDAC) Chairman Khurshid Khattak has said that all the promises made will be implemented. DDAC is working with member National Assembly for the development and prosperi-

ty of the area and the future development plan will be decided with mutual consultation of the people.

DDAC Chairman said that with the joint a formal tender for the Niazi Stop Culvert to Srikhwa road has been made today, the maturity of which he had promised on the occasion of the Aman Mela Srikhwa. Khurshid Khattak said that this road was a long-standing demand of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf senior leader Hajat Ghani Malang and the people of the area, for which a special fund was approved.

OGDCL RC creates hurdles: OGDCL RC Shams Khattak started creating problems for the locals instead of providing employment. He is causing people to fight among themselves in the guise of employment, as a result of which the main gate of OGDCL Noshpa plant has

been closed for two days.

According to the details, instead of providing employment to the locals at OGDCL's new well number 11, disputes are being created between them. In the recruitment process, first the condition of DC letter is made, but later the candidates are lured by making excuses, due to which fights have become the norm.

A few days ago, the situation became more-tense after the clash at the main gate of OGDCL Noshpa plant, as a result of which the main gate of the plant was closed. Earlier, the people of the local villages also staged protest sit-ins for several days due to non-provision of facilities and reneging on the agreements made, due to which the government exchequer had to suffer a loss of crores of rupees due to the closure of the plant.

Teachers' shortage puts students' future at risk

F.P. Report

LOWER DIR: The elders of Nagri Bala village of Talash complained that the education of students at their village primary school for girls was at stake due to a shortage of teaching staff, raising concerns about their academic future.

Local elders, including Shakirullah, Ghaniur Rehman, Iqbal Hussain, and Shah Khalid, told local journalists at Timergara that Government Girls Primary School Nagri Bala was short of teachers. They requested the provincial minister of education, the Education Director, and the Deputy Commissioner of Lower Dir to take notice of the issue and resolve it amicably.

The elders said, the school currently accommodated 172 students but has only two female teachers, significantly affecting the quality of education. Under the rationalization policy, the school should have at least five teachers. "The shortage means that if one teacher is absent, the entire teaching responsibility falls on a single teacher", they described as unjust and unacceptable.

The elders urged the relevant authorities to immediately appoint at least two additional female teachers to ensure the students receive a proper education and secure their future.

Six injured on road: Six individuals sustained serious injuries in a collision between a passenger coaster and a motor car near Danwa, a suburban area of Timergara, on the Timergara-Chitral Highway.

According to Rescue 1122 sources, the accident resulted in severe damage to both vehicles. Upon receiving the emergency call, a medical team promptly arrived at the scene, administered first aid to the injured, and transferred them to the District Headquarters Hospital in Timergara. Hospital officials later confirmed that all injured individuals were in stable condition and out of danger. Authorities are investigating the cause of the accident, while locals have reiterated the need for improved road safety measures to prevent such incidents in the future.

Police helpless before land mafia

F.P. Report

MARDAN: A resident of Lundkhar Waqar Ahmed, has said that the land owned by his ancestors has been forcibly occupied by the influential land grabbing mafia of the area, which should be immediately released. He has submitted written applications to the police authorities several times against the mafia, but no response has been received yet.

During a Press conference at the Mardan Press Club On Friday, He claimed that 25 acres of land in Lundkhar Meshak is in the name of his father and other family members, including his cousin, whose

death is also known but despite this.

The opposing parties Qayyum son of Jafar, Ibrahim, Bahar, Qasim son of Sultan, and Ashfaq son of Mir Ali have illegally occupied 7 kanals 11 marla of land through force and fraud. After occupying the land, the opponents have also started settlement there and have filed false claims in the courts based on their influence in the area.

Official price to be implemented: Additional Assistant Commissioner Katlang Sahar Anwar inspected various markets to ensure implementation of the government price list. Inspection of meat,

poultry, fruit and vegetable shops, checking the government prices and instructing the shopkeepers to follow the price list.

Inspection of bakeries, grocery stores and milk shops inspections were conducted to ensure the quality and cleanliness of the items and instructions were issued to the shopkeepers to follow hygiene norms.

The district administration is proactive in ensuring the availability of items to the public at standard and fixed prices. Strict action will be taken against violators. The public is requested to contact the concerned authorities immediately in case of any complaint.

Four of family die in Dera

F.P. Report

D I KHAN: Four persons of same family including husband and wife and their daughter were killed and two children received serious injuries during a bloody clash between two brothers in Dera Ismail Khan.

Police said that the incident occurred in Sheru

Kehna area of Dera Ismail Khan where a clash erupted between two brothers which turned bloody when four members of the family including two women were killed in the firing.

The police further said that the reason behind the clash was still unknown. All the dead and injured were

later shifted to Mufti Mehmood Hospital. The deceased were later identified as Hafiz Saadullah son of Amanullah cast Sheikh was 55 years old, Abu Bakr son of Majeedullah cast Sheikh was 24 years old, 38-year-old woman who was wife of Saadullah, and their 13-year-old daughter (Sheen bibi).

Impact of social media on cultural landscape of Pakistan

Dr. Muhammad Anwar Farooq

THE culture of Pakistan is a rich and colourful picture drawn by the traditions of countless civilizations, faiths and ethnicities that resided in the country over millennia. It is a mixture of indigenous values and remote influences of Persian, Central Asian, South Asian and Islamic ones.

Pakistani culture features a number of main elements which are its languages, traditional dance & music, literature, arts and architecture. Cuisine, rich in flavors and diversity is another essential component. Religious and cultural festivals are a true reflection of the nation's rich social fabric. Pakistanis have a deep-rooted family values, hospitality and community ties hence its culture is a unique and living example of the history and identity of its peoples.

In this modern world, indeed, technology and social media have changed cultures in developed countries by changing methods of communication and social rela-

tionships. Social media sites have brought in a global culture, where trends, ideas and customs move fast from one border to another. Social media has also made content creation democratized, as people can make their cultural practices known to the world. Emojis, memes and instant messages have replaced conventional methods of communication as well. While this has facilitated worldwide connectivity, it has not come without challenges such as a reduction in face-to-face interaction and the spread of disinformation. Like the rest of the World, social media has had a profound effect on Pakistani society, changing the fabric of society for both good and bad.

Internet and social media users in Pakistan are growing day by day. Pakistan had around 87.35 million internet users as of January 2023 which has now further grown. Social media use is common, with 71.7 million users in January 2023. According to the GSMA Mobile Economy Report 2023, Pakistan's internet users are estimated to be 110-20 million by 2025. Statista's 2023 report esti-

mates social media users to be 85-90 million by 2025. The Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) forecasts a 10-12% annual growth in mobile internet subscriptions, which may exceed 140 million mobile broadband subscribers by 2025.

Social media has been an effective tool for cultural exchange and worldwide representation on the positive front. Social media sites have enabled Pakistanis to share their vibrant cultural heritage, such as music, food, fashion and customs, with the rest of the world. Pakistani television dramas, Sufi music and traditional wear such as shalwar kameez have become internationally recognized, evoking pride in local culture and generating opportunities for cultural diplomacy.

Furthermore, social media has given voice to marginalized communities such as women and religious minorities giving them a platform to fight for their rights and defy societal norms. Social media has played a pivotal role in catapulting such movements like "Aurat March" to success, and

this has trickled on to polarizing yet critical topics like gender equality, child labor, access to education and healthcare. Such has encouraged a culture of activism and accountability, allowing people to have the power to call for change and resist archaic traditions.

The most significant adverse impact is the loss of cultural values and the emergence of cultural homogenization. Western lifestyles and ideals, often fantasized about on social media, have started to dominate local ways of life, especially among young people. This has resulted in a change in attitudes towards family life, relationships and roles within society, at times causing conflicts between generations.

The biggest social media challenge is the propagation of disinformation and false news, which can fuel social, political and religious conflict. To combat this, more digital literacy initiatives need to be put in place to inform users on how to critically read online material. To restrict harmful content without stifling free speech, collaboration between the

government, internet companies and civil society organizations is also essential. The decline of traditional cultural values as a result of the overwhelming effect of globalized material presents another difficulty. This trend can be resisted by encouraging the creation and distribution of regional content that reflects Pakistani customs and values.

The impact of social media on mental health, particularly in young people, is another significant issue. Anxiety, despair, and low self-esteem are among the issues that can arise from the stress that comes from trying to live up to unrealistic beauty standards and lifestyles that influencers promote. Campaigns to raise awareness of social media's staged life and promote responsible online conduct can help with this. Higher education institutions and schools can take actions by incorporating mental health into their curricula. Additionally, the rise in online harassment and cyberbullying is a growing problem, especially for minorities and women. Enhancing laws and enforcement tools to defend users

from abuse online, while establishing safer online environments, is essential. Social media companies also need to step up by setting tougher rules and tools against harassment.

In the future, the solution is a balanced strategy that leverages the advantages of social media while solving its problems. Fostering digital entrepreneurship and innovation can generate economic opportunities, especially for women and youth. For instance, developing e-commerce and digital skills can enable people to use social media for business development. In addition, creating a culture of responsible use of social media, where citizens are aware of their online footprint and its contribution to society, is essential. By tackling these issues ahead of time and collectively, Pakistan can leverage the potential of social media to create a more inclusive, educated, and culturally rich society.

The writer is Director Institute of Humanities and Arts at Khwaja Fareed University of Engineering and Information Technology, Rahim Yar Khan, Pakistan.



DR CONGO: Following M23's takeover of the city of Goma, members of Congolese Red Cross and volunteers buried victims of the fighting.

Infection blamed for top Chinese lawmaker's absence from session

BEIJING (Reuters):The third-ranked leader of China's ruling Communist Party was absent from a key parliamentary session he had been due to open, with his stand-in attributing the absence to a respiratory infection. Zhao Leji, 68, was not among the senior party leaders in the Great Hall of the People, marking the first time in almost two decades that a member of the Politburo Standing Committee, the party's top echelon, was not at the high-profile event.

"Chairman Zhao Leji requested leave from this afternoon's meeting due to a respiratory infection," said Li Hongzhong, vice chairman of the National People's Congress Standing Committee, as he opened the plenary session in the Chinese capital. "I was entrusted ... to preside," he told more than 2,000 delegates gathered in the hall's main auditorium for the parliamentary meetings, set to conclude.

The announcement was a departure from the Communist Party's customary secrecy regarding the health of senior leaders. "It's certainly unusual for China's NPC speaker to miss the single most important occasion of the year," said Wen-Ti Sung, an analyst of Chinese politics at the Atlantic Council's Global China Hub. "This kind of occurrence is extremely rare." Zhao did not attend either the closing session of China's national political advisory body or the third meeting of the presidium of the National People's Congress (NPC), both, state media said, with no reason

given for his absence.

Until then, Zhao, a trusted confidant of President Xi Jinping who served five years as the head of the Communist Party's anti-corruption watchdog, had attended all his scheduled public meetings, state media summaries showed. Zhao's portrait still appears on the NPC website. While there is no official suggestion that Zhao's absence is caused by anything other than illness, China's former foreign minister Qin Gang missed a 2023 diplomatic summit in Indonesia for unspecified "health reasons", a foreign ministry spokesperson said at the time. He was later ousted from his job after a mysterious one-month absence from duties, allegedly due to an extramarital affair.

Li, Zhao's deputy, was "entrusted" to chair the meeting of the presidium or executive committee. The official People's Daily newspaper said. Li, 68, sits on the 24-member Politburo, the party's second-highest rung of power.

A member of the Politburo Standing Committee has not missed a major NPC plenary session since 2006, when former Vice Premier Huang Ju missed all the annual parliament sessions because he was ill in hospital, a government spokesperson said at the time. Huang, who was China's sixth-ranking leader, died in 2007, but authorities gave no cause of death. The Communist Party almost never divulges details of the health of top leaders or addresses concerns

about their age, making it difficult for analysts to track political dynamics. All leaders in the Politburo Standing Committee except Xi and Vice Premier Ding Xuexiang, 62, are expected to retire in 2027, when the next Communist Party leadership reshuffle is due.

Zhao was absent from a January 2022 study session of the 24-member Politburo chaired by Xi, state media footage showed. No reason was given for his absence and state media did not list those who attended. In 2022, Xi's immediate predecessor, Hu Jintao, was unexpectedly escorted out of the Great Hall of the People by two stewards during the closing ceremony of the previous Communist Party congress. He was "not feeling well" and had recently taken time to "recuperate", state media said at the time. The incident was highly unusual given the meticulous scene management of such events. Video footage was widely shared on Twitter but did not appear on China's heavily censored social media.

Besides chairing China's national parliament, Zhao heads its standing committee, which meets every two months to review drafts of new legislation and approve personnel decisions. Zhao delivered an annual report on legislative work at the second plenary session of the NPC, also held in the Great Hall. He attended opening session of parliament and met NPC delegates from the southwestern province of Sichuan, state media said.

Macron urges allies to plan 'credible security guarantees' for Ukraine

PARIS (AFP): French President Emmanuel Macron called on military chiefs from across Europe and beyond to draw up a plan "to define credible security guarantees" for Ukraine in the event of a ceasefire, the presidency said. His appeal, in a closed-door Paris meeting of top brass from more than 30 allied states, came as Ukraine endorsed an American proposal for a month-long ceasefire and agreed to immediate negotiations with Russia, in pivotal talks in Saudi Arabia.

Macron has sought to rally a European response to Washington's shock policy shift in US-Russia relations. The Paris meeting gathered representatives from 34 countries -- most of them from Europe and NATO, but also from Australia, New Zealand and Japan. There was no representative from the United States, which is the leading member of NATO. "This is the moment when Europe must throw its full weight behind Ukraine, and itself," Macron told the meeting, according to the Elysee.

"In view of the acceleration of peace negotiations," it was necessary to start planning to "define credible security guarantees" to make a lasting peace in Ukraine a reality, the French presidency reported. Macron as saying, Macron has teamed up with British Prime Minister Keir Starmer to lead efforts to form a "coalition of the willing" to enforce an eventual ceasefire in Ukraine. According to the Elysee, the military chiefs of staff from European and NATO nations -- including Britain and Turkey -- agreed that the security guarantees "should not be separated from NATO and its capabilities".

Such guarantees should be "credible and long-term, and should be accompanied by unfailing support for the Ukrainian army", according to the Elysee. More than three years since Russia invaded its neighbour, Europe is scrambling to boost its defences and break free from dependence on the United States. It has been unsettled by Trump renewing contacts with Russian leader Vladimir

Putin and criticising Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, raising fears that the US president may try to force Ukraine to accept a settlement favouring Russia. Trump suspended military aid and intelligence-sharing with Kyiv, though his administration late indicated it would lift the freeze after Ukraine endorsed then American proposal.

Macron later posted on X that "the ball is now clearly in Russia's court", and hailed the "progress" made in peace talks in Saudi Arabia. Ahead of the Paris defence meeting, French Defence Minister Sebastien Lecornu said: "We will reject any form of demilitarisation of Ukraine." "It is simply a question of looking ahead and thinking about what the Ukrainian army should be in the future," Lecornu added. The French president, who has pushed his country's defence industry to switch to "war economy mode", is set to meet with defence manufacturers, according to a member of his team. Defence ministers from Europe's five main

military powers -- France, Britain, Germany, Italy and Poland -- are to meet in the French capital. EU and NATO representatives and the Ukrainian defence minister will also take part. Those talks will centre on the "necessary rearmament of Europe" and military support to Ukraine, one of Lecornu's aides said. Starmer will, in turn, host virtual talks with leaders of the nations willing to help support the ceasefire.

Macron has said any European troops in Ukraine would be deployed only "once a peace deal is signed, to guarantee it is fully respected". He has also said he would be ready to discuss extending France's nuclear deterrent to European partners. Last week, EU chief Ursula von der Leyen unveiled a plan to mobilise around 800 billion euros (\$843 billion) for Europe's defence and help provide "immediate" military support for Ukraine. France also plans to raise defence spending, with Lecornu referring to a target of around 100 billion euros (\$109 bn) a year, compared to 50.5 billion euros in 2025.

Colombian president calls for referendum on health and labor reforms

BOGOTÁ (AP): Colombian President Gustavo Petro said he will call for a special election in which voters will be able to approve or reject labor reform and health reform, which have been stalled for months in congress.

In a nationally televised speech, Petro accused Colombia's senate of "mocking" voters and siding with the nation's "oligarchy" by turning down his efforts to reform the nation's labor laws and its health system. With dozens of activists and pro-government politicians standing behind him, Petro called on his supporters to mobilize in favor of his government's reforms.

"We have searched in our constitution for a path that will enable people to make decisions without intermediaries," Petro said. "Now the people must decide if they want to be slaves, or if they want to be free and respectable." Petro's proposal came just hours after a group of eight senators issued a statement saying they would reject the president's health reform in a crucial committee vote.

The Colombian president has often struggled to get legislation passed by the nation's congress, where his party lacks a majority of seats. During his presidential campaign in 2022, Petro promised he

would transform Colombia's health system by eliminating insurance companies that handle obligatory social security payments and put a government agency in charge of administering those funds.

Petro has accused insurance companies of mis-handling millions of dollars. But his health reform has been turned down several times by legislators who argue it would give too much power to government bureaucrats and say the government does not have the capacity to administer millions of patients. Petro, a leftist who has long advocated for more government intervention in the econo-

my, has also struggled to get his labor reform through congress. He has proposed increasing pay for nocturnal workers, and making it harder for companies to hire workers on short-term contracts. The special election that the president has called for is known as a "popular consultation" in Colombian legislation. To be carried out it must be approved by a majority Colombia's senate. In the consultation, voters must be presented with questions that have yes and no answers. At least a third of all registered voters must participate in the consultation in order for the results to be implemented.

16 dead after bus flips on highway in South Africa

JOHANNESBURG (AP): A bus lost control and flipped on a highway near Johannesburg's international airport, killing 16 as some were thrown from the vehicle, the transport ministry said. Ministry spokesman Collen Msibi said 12 people died at the scene and four at a hospital. Msibi said reports indicated that 11 passengers were critically injured and 24 had moderate to serious injuries.

"On arrival we found patients lying across the road," said William Ntlati, an emergency management spokesperson for the Ekurhuleni municipality. Two bodies were trapped in the wreckage, Ntlati said. Handbags, a lunch box and a water bottle were scattered among the debris. The crash occurred near Johannesburg's O.R. Tambo International Airport. No other vehicle was involved, and officials weren't yet able to determine the cause. The bus had been transporting people from the township of Katlehong, east of Johannesburg, and was a short distance from exiting the highway, officials said.

"We are lost for words. This is a disaster," said Andile Mngwevu, a city councilor. "To see so many bodies lying around is quite saddening, and the city really feels for the families who would have expected to see their loved ones return home later today." South African Transport Minister Barbra Creedy said she was "extremely concerned" since this was the third serious bus accident in the past week. She has instructed the Road Traffic Management Corporation to meet with all bus operators in the coming week to discuss ways to improve passenger safety.

It's Russia that may now be feeling the pressure

MOSCOW (BBC): As US Secretary of State Marco Rubio says, "the ball is now in Russia's court." This is a significant moment. The joint statement from the US and Ukraine, after a long day of talks in Jeddah, contains several key lines, perhaps none more important than this: "The United States will communicate to Russia that Russian reciprocity is the key to achieving peace."

We've heard a lot, in recent weeks, about what Donald Trump expects from Ukraine and what sort of blunt instruments the White House is used to bend Kyiv to its will. Now, it seems, it's time for Russia's intentions to be tested, in public. Donald Trump's dealings with Vladimir Putin have so far been shrouded in uncertainty, with no obvious sign of pressure to balance that being exerted on Volodymyr Zelensky. US-Ukrainian statement doesn't imply that Mr Trump has suddenly changed his tune towards Mr Zelensky. Theirs is a thorny relationship, born of many years of mutual mistrust. But the ugly cloud of acrimony generated by that fractious Oval Office encounter 11 days ago may start to dissipate as the real business of peace-making gets under way. With the immediate resumption of US intelligence sharing and security assistance to Ukraine, after a suspension that lasted mere days, it's Russia that may now be feeling the pressure.

These are still early days, with a mass of detail to be settled in subsequent negotiations. The statement speaks of "substantive details" on a permanent end to the war and the sort of guarantees Ukraine can expect "for their long-term security and prosperity". But the wording of the last paragraph echoes Washington's view that security and prosperity can be achieved through the conclusion of the much-discussed critical minerals deal, rather than the sort of concrete military assurances Kyiv has been seeking. Zelensky and Trump, it says, have agreed to strike a deal "as soon as possible". How a purely commercial arrangement can prevent hostile Russian action in the future is something that still has to be fleshed out.

UK helped Ukraine and US reach ceasefire deal

LONDON (BBC): The UK was "intimately involved" in helping Ukraine and the US reach an agreement over a proposed ceasefire deal with Russia, according to UK government sources.

Ukrainian President Zelensky has said he is ready to accept an immediate 30-day ceasefire but that it is up to the US to convince Russia to agree, after talks in Saudi Arabia.

The BBC has been told that over the past week there has been a concerted European effort, led by Sir Keir Starmer, to get the US and Ukraine back in good favour with one another. Sir Keir praised the "remarkable breakthrough" and called it an "important moment for peace in Ukraine". Russia has yet to respond to the ceasefire proposal and the US Secretary of State Marco Rubio has said the "ball is now in their court".

Following the announcement the Trump administration announced it would reinstate military aid to Ukraine and restart intelligence-sharing with Kyiv - after abruptly halting this after Donald Trump and Zelensky's row in the Oval Office. The UK sources say that last week the prime minister's National Security Adviser, Jonathan Powell, worked with his US counterpart Mike Waltz, and German and French officials, to fashion a plan for a ceasefire and the steps that might follow. Over the weekend Powell travelled to Kyiv to meet Zelensky and help draft a written proposal which included a temporary pause in fighting, then confidence-build-

ing measures such as an exchange of prisoners-of-war, the return of Ukrainian children taken by Russia and the release of civilians.

That proposal was agreed by the Ukrainians and the Americans, setting the stage for what happened in Saudi Arabia. Following the talks between White House and Ukrainian officials in Saudi Arabia, Sir Keir congratulated the two men on the agreement, adding "we now all need to redouble our efforts" to secure a peace deal for Ukraine. He said: "As both American and Ukrainian delegations have said, the ball is now in the Russian court. Russia must now agree to a ceasefire and an end to the fighting too."

Trump told reporters that US officials would discuss the deal with Moscow as he wanted to "get this show on the road". Labour MP Dame Emily Thornberry, who chairs the Foreign Affairs Select Committee, said Britain has played a "big part" in where things currently stand in the war in Ukraine, including proposals for a halt in fighting.

"I think we need to just pause this moment and appreciate the calm and optimism and hope," she told the BBC's Today programme. "We might have peace in Ukraine, this is a step along that road, it could happen and I think we need to at this stage kind of appreciate what it is that we have achieved and I think that Britain has played a big part in that." She also said that Powell had "earned his money", noting that the work he has done in helping Ukraine

and the US reach an agreement over a proposed ceasefire deal with Russia is an "achievement". Sir Keir will host a phone call of leaders which he has dubbed the "coalition of the willing" to discuss peacekeeping efforts aimed at deterring Russian President Vladimir Putin from launching future incursions into Ukraine. Those joining the call are "ready to help bring an end to this war in a just and permanent way that allows Ukraine to enjoy its freedom", he said. One aim of the European teams working behind the scenes has been to ensure that it is now Russia that is in the spotlight: does it want peace?

A UK source said "the ball is firmly in the Russian court. Will they reciprocate and stop the fighting to allow serious negotiations on a lasting peace or will they continue to slaughter innocent civilians?". Hundreds of thousands of people, most of them soldiers, are believed to have been killed or injured on both sides, and millions of Ukrainian civilians have fled as refugees, since Russia invaded Ukraine just over three years ago.

Russia's attacks on Ukraine have continued with Ukrainian authorities confirming one missile attack in President Zelensky's hometown of Kryvyi Rih - which killed one person - and an attack on a cargo ship in the port city of Odessa - which killed four Syrian nationals and damaged port infrastructure and grain storage facilities.

Bosnian Serb leader Dodik calls for Russia's help

SARAJEVO (Reuters): Bosnian state prosecutors ordered the arrest of Serb separatist leader Milorad Dodik and his aides for ignoring a court summons, a move which Dodik pledged to resist with help from Russia in a widening standoff over the fragile country. The dispute, which pits Dodik and his allies Russia and Serbia against the United States and the European Union, is one of the biggest threats to peace in the Balkans since the 1990s conflicts that followed socialist Yugoslavia's collapse.

It began after Dodik, the president of Bosnia's autonomous Serb Republic, defied rulings by the international envoy to Bosnia, whose role is to prevent the multi-ethnic Balkan state slipping back into conflict. Dodik was sentenced to a year in jail and banned from holding office for six years in a court ruling that he can appeal. In response, Dodik initiated laws barring state judiciary and police from the region. The state prosecutors' office then opened an investigation into what it described as an attack on constitutional order.

It asked for Dodik's arrest for failing to respond to a court summons, although it was unclear whether it intended to detain him and his allies or just accompany them to court. "This is a null and void business," Dodik said at a press conference in the region's centre Banja Luka,

showing the arrest warrant. "This is politically motivated and we don't want to take part in it." Dodik is planning to hold high-level meetings with Russian representatives in the coming days, Russia's TASS state news agency reported. Dodik told the press conference he would ask Russia to veto the extension of the European peacekeeping mission for Bosnia in the United Nations Security Council, which is due in November.

The EU peacekeeping force, EUPFOR, said that it had begun deploying reserve forces in Bosnia to maintain stability and security. It declined to give the number of troops but hundreds of new soldiers are expected to arrive. The State Investigation and Protection Agency confirmed it has received a request to assist the state court police in apprehending Dodik, the region's Prime Minister Radovan Viskovic and parliament president

Nenad Stevandic. Both officials dismissed the state court and prosecution as "unconstitutional institutions" at the press conference. Serb Republic Interior Minister Sinisa Karan said the region's police will act in accordance with Serb Republic legislation barring the state judiciary from its territory. "Nobody will be arrested and everyone will be protected," Karan told the ATV television.

Bosnia's Serb Republic

and the Bosniak-Croat Federation are two regions created after Bosnia's 1992-95 war in which 100,000 died. They are linked by a weak central government in a state supervised by an international authority, known as the high representative, currently Christian Schmidt. The Serb region's parliament convened in a bid to adopt a new constitution for the Serb Republic, which would annul all reforms agreed in decades following the signing of the US-backed Dayton peace agreement that ended the war. Schmidt warned that changing the constitution was a violation of the peace deal and represented "a serious danger". He called on MPs to reject "this attack on the constitutional order of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the multi-ethnic character of Republika Srpska". Dodik said he planned to label Schmidt's office a "criminal organisation" in the Serb Republic. Russia, Serbia and Hungary have supported Dodik, who has said his region should split from Bosnia and join Serbia. Moscow has called the Bosnian court's ruling "a strike on stability in the Balkan region". US State Department Secretary Marco Rubio, however, said that Dodik's actions were undermining Bosnia's institutions and threatening its security and stability, calling on US partners in the region "to join us in pushing back against this dangerous and destabilizing behavior".



LUXEMBURG: Sadar Waqar Ahmad advocate met with Charles Delogni, Ambassador of Belgium to Luxemburg along with Fabienne and Vladimir during his recent visit.

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Trade war could quickly spiral out of control

IT started with tariffs, but the trade war is quickly escalating beyond import taxes into a broader tit-for-tat battle. President Donald Trump's 25% tariffs on Canada offended leaders there to the point that Ontario fired back by yanking American booze from store shelves. Ontario Premier Doug Ford even threatened to slap a surcharge on or even pull the plug on electricity sent to three US states, raising the specter of power bill spikes or even blackouts. That angered Trump so much that he briefly vowed to hit all US imports of Canadian steel and aluminum with 50% tariffs, before cooler heads prevailed.

But on Thursday, Trump told reporters: "I'm not going to bend at all" on Canadian aluminum, steel and auto tariffs. His remarks came just hours ahead of a meeting between US and Canadian officials on trade. That meeting was "very, very productive," Ford told reporters after it ended, adding that he felt that "the temperature is being lowered." Ford said he plans to meet again with US Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick next week.

Meanwhile, Canada has requested consultation with the World Trade Organization (WTO) over US tariffs on steel and aluminum, the WTO said in a statement on Thursday. Canada claims the tariffs violate trade rules. It's easy to see how this trade war can quickly get out of hand. If world leaders aren't careful, they can get stuck in an escalatory cycle that's hard to escape.

"This game has exploded into other areas," said Mary Lovely, senior fellow at the Peterson Institute for International Economics. It's not just the US-Canada trade fight. China responded to Trump's initial 10% tariff hike in February by announcing retaliatory tariffs as well as new export controls and by adding Calvin Klein owner PVH Group to a government blacklist. The European Union on Wednesday fired back at Trump's steel and aluminum tariffs by taking aim at American jeans, boats and whiskey, much to the dismay of the US liquor industry. Asked about the retaliatory EU tariffs, Trump said: "Of course I will respond." And then he did.

Trump on Thursday threatened a massive tariff — 200% — on wine, champagne and other European alcohol. In other words, Trump has retaliated against the EU's retaliation to Trump's tariffs. What if the EU retaliates to that? The trade war escalation has alarmed investors, CEOs and economists — not to mention a growing chunk of the American public. "Is this going to spiral out of control?" Kent Smetters, faculty director of the nonpartisan Penn Wharton Model, told CNN in an interview. Smetters, a professor at the University of Pennsylvania's Wharton School, where Trump graduated from, now thinks it's a "toss-up" whether the US economy stumbles into a recession this year. The broadening out of the trade war was somewhat predictable.

After all, Trump is applying tariffs, a trade tool, to areas unrelated to trade such as immigration, fentanyl and protecting the dominance of the US dollar. Trump has even floated the use of tariffs to pressure Russia into a peace deal. "This is Donald Trump's Windex. He sprays it on everything," Lovely said, likening the president's love of tariffs to the dad in "My Big Fat Greek Wedding" who thinks Windex can solve any problem. "Any restraint we had over commercial policy staying in the commercial policy lane is gone. But I do have to say that in this case, the US started it." And Trump has signaled he's not ending it anytime soon.

Despite growing pushback from Wall Street, Trump has threatened a wide range of additional tariffs, including reciprocal tariffs scheduled for April 2. Those looming tariffs, if they move forward, could trigger further retaliation. "The last few weeks have reminded us that trade is emotional. Countries can take things personally. And there are big personalities involved these days," said Christine McDaniel, senior research fellow at George Mason University's Mercatus Center and a former trade official under President George W. Bush.

Ford, the Canadian politician who threatened to shut off US electricity and briefly slapped a 25% surcharge on electricity exports, has emerged as a particularly vocal opponent of Trump's trade policy. Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum, on the other hand, has taken a different approach. Sheinbaum said Wednesday that her country would wait until April 2 before responding to Trump's tariffs. All of this is just adding to the uncertainty facing investors and business leaders. "Human behavior is very difficult to model and predict. Trade economists had it pretty easy for 30 years. But we don't have models for this new world," said McDaniel. There is growing concern in Corporate America about the fallout of the trade war.

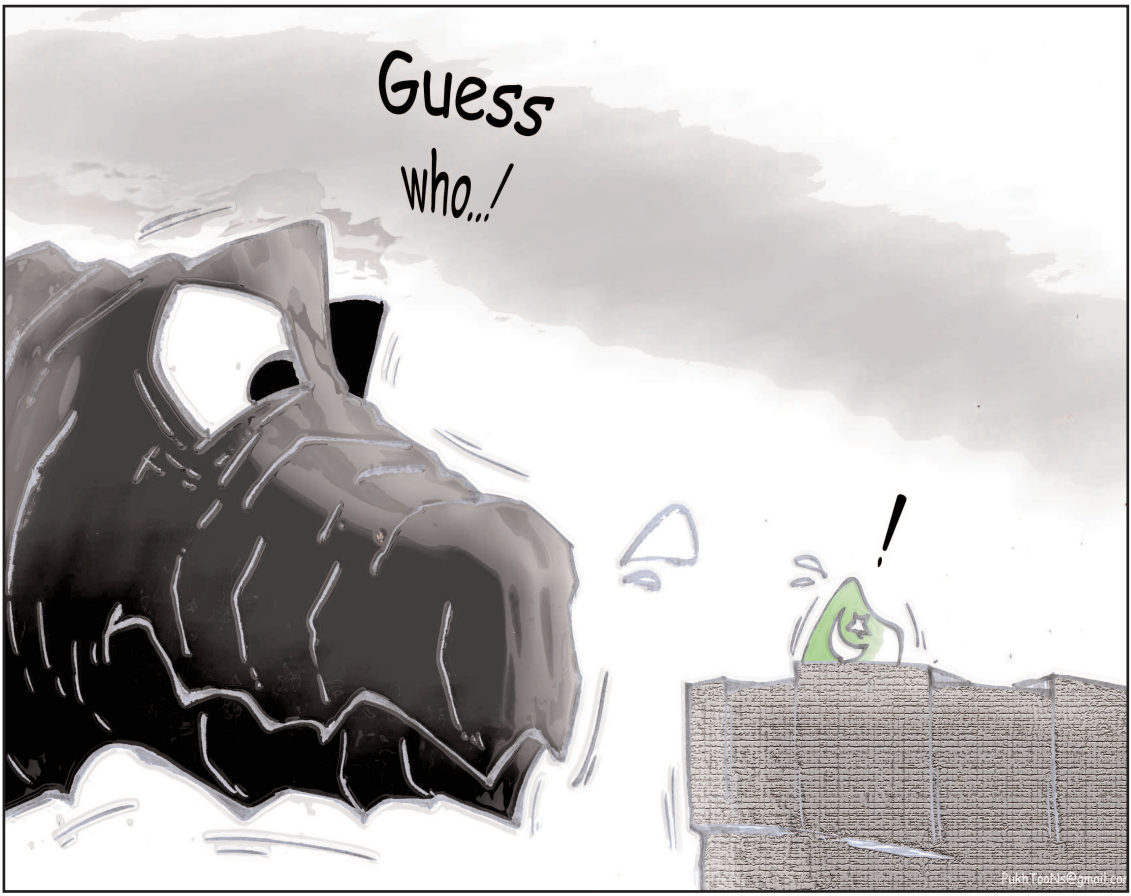
The Business Roundtable said Wednesday that its CEO Economic Outlook Index has dimmed and CEOs have cut their plans to hire and invest. The vast majority (85%) of CEOs oppose Trump's approach to trade, according to a straw poll of roughly 100 major US CEOs at the Yale Chief Executive Leadership Institute CEO Caucus. The Yale event, held in Washington on Tuesday and featuring the CEOs of JPMorgan Chase, Pfizer, American Airlines and other firms, revealed that 94% of CEOs polled are worried tariffs will be inflationary and 85% believe Trump's tariffs are backfiring.

Jeffrey Sonnenfeld, founder of the Yale Chief Executive Leadership Institute, told CNN that business leaders universally believe there are legitimate reasons to apply tariffs selectively. But Sonnenfeld said CEOs are "angry" over the shifting justifications offered by the administration for Trump's tariffs. "The broad-sweeping assault on allies instead of adversarial and rival nations has CEOs dismayed and embarrassed," Sonnenfeld said in an email. Of course, it's too early to know how the trade war will evolve — and what the ultimate impact will be on the economy and financial markets.

Foreign leaders may be reluctant to continue the escalatory cycle so as not to further damage their local economies. "They understand tariffs are bad for their economies. That could be a natural break in this tit-for-tat," said Lovely. It's also possible that Trump is forced to dial back the tariff pressure if the US economy starts to really weaken or if Wall Street throws an even bigger tantrum. "The president is in a tight spot, and every tariff (or threatened tariff) makes his position more difficult," Simon Johnson, head of MIT's Global Economics and Management group, told CNN in an email. "If he keeps going in this direction, prices will rise and the economy will slow even further."

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Enriched Uranium fuels Russia's war machine

Dmitry Gorchakov

ON Feb. 24, the pro-Kremlin outlet EA Daily reported that Tenex, a subsidiary of Rosatom, had resumed exporting low-enriched uranium to the United States. Citing data from the procurement tracking service ImportGenius, the report said that on Feb. 12, the vessel Atlantic Navigator II delivered a total of 100 tons of enriched uranium to the port of Baltimore.

In mid-November 2024, the Russian government imposed a temporary ban on exporting enriched uranium to the US until the end of 2025 and revoked current export licenses. This measure was a response to a US law passed six months earlier, which prohibits the purchase of enriched uranium from Russia starting in 2028. Until then, purchases are allowed only for limited quantities and require special approval to prove they serve US interests.

Russia's restrictions likewise include exceptions, allowing for one-time licenses to resume exports to the US According to the Kremlin, export permits are granted when they align with "Russia's interests." What are Russia's interests in this situation? More specifically, what are the interests of the Russian government and Rosatom?

First, there is the financial aspect: Rosatom earns approximately \$1 billion annually from exporting enriched uranium to the US. Additionally, Rosatom's reputation is at stake. The Kremlin values the state corporation as an instrument of both economic and political influence abroad. Given that Rosatom is one of the largest players in the global nuclear market, operating in dozens of countries and remains one of the few Russian exporters not heavily sanctioned, maintaining its status as a reliable supplier is crucial for both the Kremlin and Rosatom — at least as long as it remains possible.

This is why Rosatom's subsidiaries are keen to fulfill American contracts and continue operating in the US market. The United States is one of their most profitable and long-established markets, accounting for nearly half of Russia's enriched uranium exports. When Russia introduced its export restrictions in November, it was expected

that they would have little impact on overall supply plans. Rosatom and Tenex were anticipated to request — and receive — approval to continue exports to the US.

On Feb. 6, Centrus, the primary American buyer of Russian enriched uranium — which then resells it to other US consumers — said in its 2024 annual report that "as of today, Tenex has received three special licenses allowing it to export low-enriched uranium to us." Additionally, Centrus reported that "Tenex has informed Centrus of its plan to request additional export licenses to fulfill its contractual supply obligations."

Centrus preemptively requested exemptions from the US ban on purchasing Russian enriched uranium last year. The company obtained the necessary licenses from US government authorities for deliveries in 2024 and 2025. As a result, business entities on both sides of the ocean continue their trade relations despite formal bans, securing approvals and permissions from their regulatory agencies. Business is operating in a way that is convenient and familiar, receiving government endorsements despite the often harsh rhetoric from officials.

The aggressive rhetoric itself may serve as another propaganda tool for the Russian leadership. The purpose of mirror responses to Western sanctions is to demonstrate that, first, these sanctions do not intimidate Russia, and second, that Russia can retaliate just as strongly. But does Russia actually want to retaliate? There is no evidence that any contracts have been disrupted due to the Russian ban. On the contrary, Tenex (as well as the US side) continues to request and receive the necessary licenses to fulfill its contractual obligations, as I previously predicted. Moreover, while the US market accounts for about half of Rosatom's enriched uranium exports, Russian uranium only covers about 25% of US demand. So, it is not entirely clear who is more dependent on whom.

Furthermore, there is no reason to believe that the two-and-a-half-month gap in deliveries — from Nov.

19, 2024, when the last shipment was made, to Feb. 12, 2025, when deliveries supposedly resumed — was caused by the Russian ban rather than other factors. Unlike gas or oil, which are needed continuously in massive quantities, uranium deliveries — even between major partners — rarely exceed a few hundred kilograms per year. Deliveries are sporadic and do not follow a monthly schedule. For example, according to Comtrade trade data, intervals between shipments in 2024 lasted as long as three to four months.

US business, represented by Centrus, remains hungry for Russian uranium and is obtaining the necessary permits to continue buying it. However, this arrangement will not last forever. Starting in 2028, US law will completely ban all uranium imports from Russia. Until then, purchases under special permits are limited to a maximum of 476.5 tons of enriched uranium per year — and not more than 459.1 tons in 2027 — which is less than the US has been purchasing in recent years.

In 2023, amid uncertainty and panic over future supply chains, the US purchased a record volume of enriched uranium from Russia — the highest since 2013 — exceeding 701 tons and totaling \$1.2 billion. This made Russia the largest foreign supplier of enriched uranium to the US in both 2022 and 2023. However, in 2024, purchases from Russia nearly halved, dropping to 335 tons worth \$624 million, according to Comtrade's international trade data. Since Russian export restrictions — if they can even be called that — only took effect at the end of 2024, this decline in imports is certainly not due to any ban. Overall, the US imported less foreign enriched uranium in 2024 — 1,924 tons compared to 2,575 tons in 2023. Shortfalls were made up by suppliers like France, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom.

It is too early to say for certain that US imports of Russian enriched uranium peaked in 2023 and that the decline in 2024 reflects efforts by the previous presidential administration to boost domestic production, increase purchases from allies and reduce

dependency on Russia. There are too many unknowns within the opaque nuclear industry, even in the West. However, US bans appear to be backed by far more tangible actions and intentions than Russia's.

In recent years, Western countries have moved to reduce their reliance on Russian enriched uranium. Major companies such as the European consortium Urenco and the French company Orano have already begun expanding and restarting their own enrichment capacities. As Bellona predicted over a year ago, given the current expansion plans, Western countries could replace at least 60% of Russia's current enriched uranium supplies by 2030.

In 2024, following the passage of the US ban on Russian enriched uranium imports, the Biden administration selected six companies from the US and Europe for contracts to supply uranium enriched domestically, allocating around \$3.4 billion for the purpose. This initiative aims to stimulate the expansion and construction of enrichment facilities within the US, which currently meet only about one-third of the country's demand.

Despite his opposition to many of Biden's policies, President Donald Trump also supports investment in US uranium production. While he does not acknowledge the importance of low-carbon energy to mitigate climate change, his administration backs nuclear power as part of the US energy security strategy.

It is difficult to predict Trump's future actions, including how far his admiration for President Vladimir Putin might push him toward lifting sanctions. However, the measures aimed at strengthening US domestic uranium production and reducing reliance on foreign suppliers — not just Russia — align with Trump's broader goals and are likely to remain in place. Russia may therefore attempt to frame the resumption of uranium exports to the US as a goodwill gesture, despite strained relations. However, in reality, this is merely an attempt to extract as much profit as possible within the conditions set and dictated by the US.

The Moscow Times

Why Europe should donate frozen Russian assets to Ukraine right now

Nigel Gould-Davies

IN February 2022, Western governments froze Russian Central Bank assets in response to Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine. The total sum is estimated at around \$300 billion. Most of this — \$240 billion — is held in Europe.

The G7 has repeatedly declared that the assets will not be returned until Russia compensates Ukraine for the harm caused by its invasion. Moscow will never voluntarily compensate Ukraine — doing so would imply war guilt. Furthermore, the damage caused by Moscow greatly exceeds \$300 billion and the prospect of having Moscow's assets returned provides no incentive to the Kremlin to end the war. The G7's position is wholly illogical. So far, it has gone no further than agreeing to use interest earned on the assets to guarantee a \$50 billion loan to Ukraine. Yet it refuses to touch the rest of the money.

A debate has thus grown about whether to enforce Russia's obligation to pay compensation by transferring its assets to Ukraine without Moscow's consent. The new course of Washington's foreign policy now gives this question new urgency, having suspended aid to Ukraine and demanded that Europe shoulder the burden of the continent's defense. There is a real risk that America may withdraw all security support and even strengthen Russia by easing sanctions. Europe must therefore rapidly find the resources to sustain Ukraine while also rearming itself. Transferring Russia's frozen assets to Ukraine could do this.

Why not give the aggressor's money to its victim? It would have three immediate benefits. First, it would ensure that Ukraine's financial needs are met for several years to come. \$240 billion is nearly twice the total aid that Europe has given Ukraine since the start of the war. Second, it would free up Europe's resources to focus on its own costly rearmament. Third, it would send a powerful political message of unity and resolve to Russia.

Why has this not happened already? The main source of resistance comes from within Europe. France and Germany have led this along with figures like Christine Lagarde, head of the European Central Bank. They give four reasons why. The first is legal. Opponents argue that taking Russia's assets violates sovereign immunity, the principle that the state itself cannot commit a crime. They are incorrect. Several independent teams of leading legal scholars and international lawyers have established a safe and legal path to transfer Russia's assets under the doctrine of state counter-measure and have pointed out the precedents for doing so, such as US sanctions against Iran. While they have set out their views in scrupulous detail, their opponents have failed to respond beyond slogans like "sovereign immunity" that ignore the arguments and miss the point.

The second argument is financial. Opponents claim that, even if it is legal to do so, Russia's assets should not be given to Ukraine because other states — notably Saudi Arabia and China — would then sell their holdings of European public debt. This would raise borrowing costs and

weaken the euro, putting economies under further pressure.

This is very unlikely. If other depositors genuinely feared for the security of their assets, they would have withdrawn them when Russia's were frozen three years ago. Yet there was no capital flight from any Western financial system. Quiet threats by some surplus countries to sell European paper lack credibility. They would have to find buyers for these assets and alternative assets to invest in. There are no other large, rule-based economies running a deficit that could absorb these. Even if they attempted to do so, the eurozone has instruments to resist a speculative attack.

The third argument is commercial. Russia has signaled that it would seize Western corporate assets if its state assets were taken. All foreign businesses know that investments in Russia carry a high level of political risk, as evidenced by the private businesses Moscow has seized in the name of national security. Many have left for this reason. Those that remain — enriching both Russia and themselves in the process — have accepted these risks. There is no reason why risky, profit-driven decisions should deter European governments from taking actions that serve their overriding security interests.

The final argument is diplomatic. It proposes that Russia's assets could be used as leverage in peace negotiations. How this would work is not specified. But the implication is that returning Russia's assets could induce it to end the war. This gets Russia's calculus wrong. Russia did not launch its invasion for financial reasons, but to subordinate Ukraine and reorder Europe's security landscape. Moscow is not hoping that it will regain assets and the prospect of doing so plays no role in its war diplomacy. Its sole concern is to stop Kyiv from accessing them.

The leverage argument is also incompatible with the G7's established position on Moscow's assets. If Russia gets them back in return for a ceasefire, it will gain \$300 billion to finance its rearmament and, in due course, launch a further round of aggression against a drastically weakened Ukraine. After previous wars, defeated aggressors have been compelled to compensate their victims. Europe today has a unique opportunity to enforce compensation in the midst of war to prevent the aggressor's ultimate victory. None of the arguments against doing so are persuasive. While some will maintain that donating Russia's seized assets to Ukraine still carries risks, these must be weighed against those of inaction: an occupied Ukraine whose strength Russia adds to its own, and an imperiled Europe whose credibility lies in tatters. As the French Prime Minister Pierre Mendès-France said: to govern is to choose. Europe needs to make a decision.

Finally, consider the risks that Europe has already taken. It is giving weapons to Ukraine that kill Russian soldiers and is discussing deployment of its own forces, yet has not taken Russia's money and given it to Ukraine. This strategic contradiction gets Europe's priorities in the wrong order. History will not judge them kindly for their failure.

Incarcerated Palestinian women: A never-ending struggle

Raed Mohammed Mahmood Amer

SINCE the beginning of the Palestinian struggle, women have played a central role alongside men in resisting Israeli occupation. They have played a key role in all aspects, whether in the phase of preparing and building, or in the battle for liberation. This participation was not limited to the more traditional roles, but formed the essence of the Palestinian struggle.

Despite the growing sacrifices they continue to make, Palestinian women continue to bear the cost of this struggle. Since its inception, Israeli occupation has systematically targeted women through killings, torture, arrests, and other forms of oppression.

As it pertains to arrest and detention, thousands of Palestinian women have been placed in the occupation's prisons and military detention camps over the past close to six decades. Women have been used as

leverage to pressure armed resistance fighters, particularly those related to them. Arrests of their female family members have been used as a form of blackmail aimed at forcing the men to surrender. This abusive policy has only escalated since Oct. 7, amid Israel's ongoing assault on the Palestinian people in Gaza, Jerusalem, and the West Bank.

Since the start of the genocide, the arrest and detention of Palestinian women has spiked. According to our own data as prisoner's defense groups, Israeli occupation forces have since Oct. 2023 arrested at least 490 Palestinian women from Gaza, the West Bank, and Jerusalem. These arrests include women from all walks of life—at least 25 university students, six journalists, lawyers, mothers, wives of martyrs, and public figures such as parliamentarian Khalida Jarrar.

In addition, we have clear indications that there are a large number of female prisoners who were arrested from Gaza, that are being subject to the severe crime of enforced disappearances, with the occupation refusing to disclose their identities, the number of women being held, and the location of where they are being held.

Palestinian women currently in Israeli custody are enduring the most violent and dangerous period in the history of the prisoners' movement. They are enduring a wide array of severe violations that have also been practiced against men. Knowing that women are among the most vulnerable sectors of Palestinian society, the Israeli occupation has weaponized and used women's bodies against them in an attempt to inflict the most pain possible. These violations include rape, sexual, physical and

psychological assault, forced unnecessary strip searches, enforced starvation, and deprivation of female-related necessities among many other things. While women have historically suffered such violations at the hands of occupation authorities, these practices only became severely more frequent and violent since the start of the genocide in Gaza. Countless testimonies of liberated Palestinian women serve as proof to the widespread abuses taking place inside the Israeli occupation's prisons. The UN acknowledged reports of sexual violence, particularly against female detainees from Gaza.

A prominent example is Khalida Jarrar, a Palestinian Legislative Council member. She has endured all forms of abuse by the occupation, including solitary isolation, torture, starvation, and medical neglect. She

was placed in solitary confinement for five consecutive months before her release on Jan. 19, 2025 as part of the first batch of a prisoner exchange and ceasefire deal between the occupation and the Hamas movement. Among the worst violations that Jarrar faced was being denied the chance to attend the funeral of her daughter, who passed away while Khalida was in prison. Israel robbed Jarrar of her ability to bid her daughter farewell, like many other prisoners before and after her.

Another tragic example is the case of Israa Jaabis, who suffered severe burns on her body during her arrest. The Israeli authorities denied her medical treatment, exacerbating her already severe suffering. Additionally, female prisoner Hana Shalabi has been arrested and tortured several times. She went on a 44-day hunger strike in protest of being held without trial or

charge, also known as administrative detention, amid the harsh conditions in Israeli prisons. Such cases highlight the magnitude of violations faced by Palestinian female prisoners, where the occupation shows no concern for the lives of these detainees.

Despite these grave violations faced by Palestinian women in Israeli prisons, international human rights organizations and institutions remain silent in the face of these abuses. The international community has not made any serious efforts to hold the Israeli occupation accountable or exert pressure on it to halt these inhumane policies against Palestinian female prisoners. Palestinian female prisoners are enduring an ongoing journey of suffering, and their plight is a part of the unending violations of the occupation. Palestinian women continue to await freedom, hoping justice will prevail.

Duterte’ trial at ICC

Kathleen Magramo

AN elected leader once dubbed “The Punisher” was handed to The Hague to face trial for crimes against humanity over his brutal war on drugs, in a breath-taking reversal of fortune for a politician who once openly boasted about killing people and placing opponents on hit lists.

Rodrigo Duterte ran the Philippines for six turbulent years, during which he oversaw a brutal crackdown on drugs, openly threatened critics with death and tongue-lashed a host of global leaders from the Pope to former US President Barack Obama. On Wednesday, the International Criminal Court (ICC) in the Netherlands confirmed the former Philippines leader was now in its custody.

A former prosecutor, congressman and mayor, Duterte built his no-holds-barred reputation in the southern Philippine city of Davao. He swept to the presidency in 2016 on a populist – and popular – promise to replicate the hardline tactics of his hometown and wage war against drugs and drug pushers across the Southeast Asian nation. “All of you who are into drugs, you sons of b**ches. I will really kill you,” he told a huge crowd in one of his many characteristically profane-laced 2016 campaign speeches. “I have no patience, I have no middle ground. Either you kill me or I will kill you idiots.”

Once in power he unleashed what rights groups called “death squads” to eradicate drug pushers – many of the victims young men from impoverished shanty towns, shot by police and rogue gunmen as part of a campaign to target dealers. Police data said 6,000 people were killed. Some rights groups say the death toll could be as high as 30,000 with innocents and bystanders often caught in the crossfire.

Duterte’s blood-soaked presidency ended in 2022. Three years later, only 8 policemen had been convicted for 5 of the victims killed in the war on drugs, according to court documents. The ICC launched an investigation into allegations of “crimes against humanity” committed by Duterte during both his time as national leader and mayor of Davao.

Duterte has long denied the accusations of human rights abus-

es and contends the drug issue is one for domestic law enforcement. He has repeatedly said he will not kowtow to foreign jurisdiction and taunted the ICC, urging prosecutors to “hurry up” and move on him. Two days before his arrest, he slammed the ICC in a typically fiery speech to supporters in Hong Kong.

“From my own news, I have a warrant...from the ICC or something... these motherf**ers have been chasing me for a long time. What did I do wrong ?” he said. But the tide had suddenly turned. Authorities were waiting for Duterte to return from Hong Kong, and arrested him at the main airport in Manila, sparking chaotic scenes.

As the news filtered out, many were left in shock. Some flocked to churches in the majority Catholic country to attend impromptu mass to commemorate the thousands of victims of his drug war, seeing the move as a first step towards overdue justice. And just before midnight, Duterte was back on a plane – this time bound for the Netherlands in what appeared to be a stunning end to a stormy and violent stint at the top of Philippine politics.

In a Wednesday statement, the ICC said Duterte was “surrendered” to its custody, and a hearing would be scheduled in “due course.” It is unclear when he will make his first court appearance. Shortly before landing in Rotterdam, Duterte released a defiant video message on his Facebook page. “I was saying to the police and military that you do your job and I will take responsibility, so it has come to this,” he said.

“This will be a long legal proceedings, but I say to you, I will continue to serve my country. And so be it, if that is my destiny,” he added. The arrest likely owes more to Duterte being on the wrong side of a feud between two of the Philippine’s most high-profile families than the might of the ICC, which cannot carry out arrests on its own and relies on the cooperation of national governments to execute warrants.

Duterte’s clan was previously in an alliance with the famed Marcos political dynasty, with his daughter Sara Duterte-Carpio serving as deputy to current

President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. But in recent months the alliance collapsed, descending into public tirades and name-calling. In October, Duterte-Carpio aired a litany of grievances against the president in a two-hour livestreamed press conference, saying she “wanted to chop his head off.”

Then she said in an online news conference on November 23 that she had contracted an assassin to kill Marcos, his wife and House Speak Martin Romualdez if she were killed, a threat she warned wasn’t a joke. Marcos had said the Philippines will “disengage” from any contact with the ICC, as Manila does not recognize its authority over matters of national sovereignty. That’s because Duterte withdrew the Philippines from the court in 2019.

But under the ICC’s withdrawal mechanism, the court keeps jurisdiction over crimes committed during the membership period of a state. President Marcos said he was obliged to follow Interpol’s request to arrest Duterte. “Interpol asked for help, and we obliged because we have commitments to the Interpol, which we have to fulfil. If we don’t do that, they will not, they will no longer help us with other cases involving Filipino fugitives abroad,” Marcos said in a late-night presser after the plane carrying Duterte took off. Carlos Conde, a Philippines researcher for Human Rights Watch (HRW) Conde said Duterte’s swift arrest and removal was a “pleasant surprise” that caught also a lot of people off guard.

“The victims of the drug war – thousands of victims – have pretty much lost faith in the domestic accountability mechanisms in the Philippines. So, they were pinning their hopes on the ICC,” he told CNN. Nobel laureate Maria Ressa told CNN Duterte’s arrest marks a major moment for the country and signals that years of impunity can be ended. “It’s historic for the Philippines, it’s the first time a Philippine president has been arrested for crimes against humanity. That an Interpol-led arrest actually ended this impunity under president Duterte that now has him going to The Hague,” said Ressa, former

CNN Manila bureau chief and CEO and founder of news site Rappler.

Human rights campaigner Aurora Parong told CNN many advocates and drug war victims’ family members were elated with a momentary sense of relief after hearing Duterte had indeed been arrested. “But there is this mixed feeling of joy and hope and anxiety because we do not exactly know where this will end up to what will be the outcome. Will there really be accountability?” said Parong, who is also co-chair of the Philippine Coalition for the ICC (PCICC). But she cautioned it would be an excruciatingly long road to justice.

“It is time consuming. It will take years before there will be a conviction at the International Criminal Court. The waiting is really difficult for the victims and the families of the victims of the bloody war on drugs.” Located in The Hague in the Netherlands, the ICC investigates and prosecutes individuals for war crimes, crimes against humanity, genocide and crimes of aggression against the territory of its member states, of which there are 125. Duterte’s arrest and transfer is a significant victory for the body. The court cannot carry out arrests on its own and relies on the cooperation of national governments to execute warrants – which often rests on domestic politics and political will on whether to follow through.

Many of those on its wanted list remain at large, unruffled by the serious charges laid against them. The court has been rounded on by the United States for seeking the arrests of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Defense Minister Yoav Gallant on charges of war crimes and crimes against humanity for Israel’s military actions in Gaza following Hamas’ October 7, 2023, attack. The ICC simultaneously sought the arrests of top Hamas leaders, including Yahya Sinwar, who was later killed. Neither the US nor Israel are members of the ICC. The court has also issued a warrant for Russian President Vladimir Putin for his invasion of Ukraine, although it is unlikely the warrant will be served any time soon. Putin travelled to ICC member Mongolia last year, but was not arrested.

If there is no alternative to cuts

Polly Toynbee

IT did it before and it can do it again. Labour’s “new deal” employment programme was its 1997 flagship. Now those lessons, ignored and trashed in the Tory years, are being revived. While Labour was good at scrupulously monitoring the results of its social programmes, the Tories ruled by their gut instincts.

Faced with high unemployment and shocking numbers of youths who had been dumped and neglected, Labour’s new deal for young people worked. By 2002, it could rightly claim the virtual eradication of youth long-term unemployment. I followed the programme in detail, sitting in on jobcentre interviews, chasing results. How was it done? A total change of attitude and approach, from punitive to encouraging. Employment staff were retrained and put on a higher grade, becoming personal advisers to help remove obstacles to working. They offered 18- to 24-year-olds four well-organised options: a further education course, work on environmental projects or in a voluntary organisation, or a subsidised job with employers given £60 a week to take them on. “No fifth option” was the backstop sanction.

About 339,000 long-term unemployed young people found work by 2001. Deep distrust of the Department for Work and Pensions faded, as people discovered genuine help. There were other new deals for the over-50s, disabled people, and a particularly successful one for lone parents. Jobcentres were transformed from The Full Monty’s bolted-down plastic chairs and shouted interviews behind scratched Perspex to open, less threatening places.

But by 2009, in the aftermath of the bankers’ crash, nearly 1 million young people landed in jobcentres. Labour, determined not to see them become a lost generation, dashed to set up the future jobs fund. Employers were paid £6,500 to take an extra young person for six months, who were paid at least the minimum wage, creating 105,000 jobs. (A local panel, including unions, ensured the jobs were new, not substitutes.) I watched Jon, a depressed 19-year-old without qualifications who had despaired of work, amazed as his adviser in a Brighton jobcentre showed him all kinds of good jobs suddenly available. Cost-benefit analyses found people spent

70 fewer days on benefits and 43% were estimated to be in work after completing the programme – a high rate compared with other schemes, and well worth the high upfront cost. But the great George Osborne axe fell on this, as it did on so much else. Liz Kendall, the work and pensions secretary, has for a long time talked up this approach: she knows the research well and, bludgeoning the Treasury with the evidence, has reportedly extracted as much as £1bn for supporting disabled people into work, as well as the 1 million “needs” (young people aged 18-24 not in education, employment or training). That is a significant sum to spend on support programmes, say employment experts. It should create high-quality schemes. Kendall always promised more personal help by easing work coaches’ case-loads. She talks of the need to de-risk taking a job, so disabled people can trust they have the option to try a job but return at once to benefits if it doesn’t work out. Employers need to be more flexible with varying states of illness. She talks of no longer wasting time by harassing those who will never work, while neglecting many who could and want to. But here’s the hitch: actual cash returns will take time to score on the Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) and Treasury balance sheets.

The great question is: how big an axe will fall on disability benefits when she delivers her green paper next week? And, more importantly, how fast? Over time, if schemes work and if the economy perks up, then reducing the number of claims and their costs is possible. But cuts before that success will be brutal. What’s more, as economist Jonathan Portes points out, OBR reports show its forecast disability cuts never actually add up. For example, introducing Pip was supposed to be a cut, replacing the disability living allowance; OBR duly scored it, but Pip costs ballooned. Even in the time of truly vicious jobcentre persecution of claimants with sanctions, punishment didn’t work. Chivvying may urge some people into work, but research shows it has the contrary effect on those with mental ill-health. Squeezing over here bursts out elsewhere, in a half-starved system. With basic unemployment pay at a sub-survivable £393.45 a

month, anyone out of work for long is in a miserable state, and likely to describe their condition in medicalised terms. That’s not cheating; it’s a true expression when they apply for disability benefits that lift them above starvation. The country is sicker than it was, and sicker than its neighbours, physically and mentally, as the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) reports this week, with nearly 1 million more people on disability benefits than pre-pandemic. It’s not imaginary, they say, as it matches the rise in “deaths of despair”, from drugs, drink and suicide.

Jobs are far harsher than they once were, Prof Ben Baumber Geiger reports – physically and emotionally more stressful, with less personal control. Efficiency savings have killed off “light work” for frail people. What Labour does may help: a better NHS, less monstrous gig-working conditions and a better spirit of care. But any savage axe to living standards of hard-up disabled people wouldn’t encourage that. Labour would face a hefty backlash. Nor will voters approve, with 53% saying these benefits are too mean or about right, and only 26% saying they are too high.

No wonder disability benefits costs terrify the Treasury, and they are due to rise by £35bn in four years time. But here are alternative facts, equally true, if you shake the statistics kaleidoscope another way. The overall proportion of spending on benefits for working age adults and children is similar to 20 years ago, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation told me. And here’s another shake of the kaleidoscope from the IFS: the UK’s spending on working-age health-related benefits is comparable to that of other similar countries.

There are no easy billions to be had from the benefits budget, though much reform is needed within it. Look elsewhere: Starmer abolishing NHS England should render savings from this costly duplicate. Whitehall should shed extra staff acquired in Covid. But there are few painless options for large sums, as all the economic choices are terrible. But of all unpalatable ways for Labour to break its election promises, either by borrowing or by taxing more, the worst choice of all would be cuts and austerity, slicing deeper into public services.

Netanyahu’s power grab and extremist agenda are deepening Israel’s crisis

Imran Khalid

IT would not have been much to expect of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his government to take a long, hard look at themselves after Hamas’ attack on Oct. 7, 2023, which took place on their watch. One of the questions they should have asked themselves is how the divisions in Israeli society that they sowed during the months before the attack contributed to the lack of preparedness for such a cataclysmic event.

For the first few months of the war, the shock of Hamas’ surprise attack slowed down the main culprits among those who were cynically and relentlessly working to weaken checks and balances and undermine governance and transparency in Israel.

However, in recent months, Justice Minister Yariv Levin and Simcha Rothman, chair of the Knesset’s Constitution, Law, and Justice Committee—two of the chief architects of the assault on judicial independence—have renewed those efforts with unfortunate vigor. In one of the more public acts of trying to delegitimize the judiciary, Netanyahu, Deputy Prime Minister Yariv Levin, and Knesset Speaker Amir Ohana boycotted last month’s swearing-in ceremony of Justice Isaac Amit as Supreme Court president. This is the first time in Israel’s history that the heads of the executive and the legislative branches have shown such extreme disrespect to the legally elected head of the judiciary -- only because they wanted to install someone they considered

more “convenient” for the government.

If that was not bad enough, far-right demonstrators protested against the new president of the Supreme Court outside President Isaac Herzog’s residence, where the ceremony was held, in an effort to intimidate Amit and pressure the judiciary into greater compliance with the government. Amit’s appointment ended more than a year’s standoff between the judiciary and the politicians, leaving the Supreme Court with no permanent president due to the government’s unscrupulous efforts to change the rules of electing the top judge in the country to suit its political agenda. But failing to appoint a Supreme Court president of its liking has not deterred the government from its drive to control the appointment of all judges in Israel. While the nation remains focused on the fate of hostages in Gaza, Yariv Levin and Foreign Minister Gideon Sa’ar have pushed through sweeping judicial reforms, expanding political control over judicial appointments and limiting the High Court’s authority to overturn legislation. Their measures are not dissimilar to the ones that sparked massive antigovernment protests in 2023. This indicates that, in their brutish march to undermine Israeli democracy, entrench their power, and ensure Netanyahu’s corruption trial is never concluded, they have learned nothing from the damage they inflicted on national unity and security.

No one has faced greater pressure from Netanyahu’s administra-

tion than Attorney General Gali Baharav-Miara. The far-right simply cannot stand her devotion to the rule of law, accountability, and transparency in government. The attorney general has blocked the appointment of unqualified candidates to senior civil service positions. She also continues to remind the government of its responsibility to appoint a state commission to investigate the failures of Oct. 7 because it is necessary to learn from the catastrophic mistakes made. And she generally reminds ministers that they need to operate within the boundaries of the law. The response by ministers has been a concerted effort to fire Baharav-Miara and replace her with someone more convenient for their purposes. Ronen Bar, head of the internal security agency Shin Bet, is also walking with a target on his back. He is another whom this extremist government would like to get rid of. Bar admitted his responsibility for the failures of Oct. 7 and that he should leave this sensitive job when the time is right, but Netanyahu’s people are now trying to hasten his departure because the organization he leads is investigating severe breaches of security within the prime minister’s office. Again, they seek to replace him with someone willing to ignore alleged lawbreaking within Netanyahu’s inner circle, which has compromised national security.

And then there are the attempts to damage civil society organizations by singling out those whose activities concentrate on promoting

peace or human rights, especially those of minorities (mainly Palestinians), those who live in the Occupied Territories, and women and workers. According to a new bill proposed by a ministerial committee, the government will be able to tax donations from foreign governments to domestic nonprofits at a rate of 80%, while also instructing that courts need not consider petitions by groups “primarily financed by a foreign political entity.” Unlike right-wing groups, which are largely funded by wealthy private donors, peace and human rights organizations rely more on institutional funding. This measure represents yet another attempt to silence them.

All these measures add up to a crude and barely concealed attempt to diminish the oversight of government activities by the courts, civil society, and even the media. This paves the way for Israel to become a democracy in name only. It also opens the way for the government to further deprive the Palestinians in the Occupied Territories of any rights and access to those organizations that could help them stand up to the arbitrary nature of the occupation and further discriminatory acts against those who are citizens of Israel.

The idea of Israel as a democracy was always flawed in our eyes, but now even that pretense is disappearing. Under Netanyahu, Israel is veering toward authoritarianism, fueled by religious extremists whose policies not only oppress Palestinians but also erode the institutions that once safeguarded democratic governance.

Germany has been betrayed again on migration

Elisabeth Dampier

SOMEWHERE in Pakistan a plane is preparing to carry Afghans to Germany. It is the third one to take off since the election, after a pause before Germans voted in February. Since the fall of Kabul in 2021, Germany has flown in 36,000 Afghan asylum seekers, with another 10,000 waiting to come, even though almost none of them had any connection to Germany.

Some of them have even been arrested on arrival for using false papers. Heiko Tegatzat, the chairman of the Federal Police union, has warned that NGOs are teaching Afghans how to deceive the authorities: don’t mention if you have Taliban links; do claim you are persecuted. In one case NGO workers are said to have stated that an Afghan was at risk because he is gay, only for him to rage that he wasn’t when officials asked him about his sexual orientation.

The absurdity doesn’t end there. In Munich, public officials are under investigation for giving immigration permits in return for cash, handbags, events and limousine rides. Unsurprisingly, the German public, following the infamous 2015 asylum crisis and years

of expanding legal routes, want less immigration. Yet, despite the centre-right Christian Democratic Union (CDU)’s win in last month’s elections, it seems like this sincere wish is about to be betrayed.

That’s because the CDU has ruled out any deal with the hard-Right Alternative für Deutschland (AfD), which means it has to go into coalition with the Left-wing Social Democratic Party (SPD) and form an “Albania coalition” (so-called because the colours of the two parties are black and red, like the Albanian flag). Without the possibility of accepting the votes of the AfD, the CDU has little leverage in the coalition negotiations.

That’s why the SPD has felt confident to release a new immigration paper which calls for a move away from “limiting” to “regulating” immigration. While the CDU promised it will reduce immigration, this paper instead demands half a million immigrant workers every year; those who are in Germany illegally should, in most cases, be allowed to stay; deportation should become a last

resort; foreign nationals should be allowed to vote in Germany so long as they’ve lived there long enough; and anyone who lives in Germany for 25 years should get citizenship without any conditions, so presumably even if they can’t speak the language.

The SPD, formerly the party of the working class, seems to have decided that rather than trying to win back the voters it lost in the last election, it can instead introduce policies aimed at attracting an entirely different voting bloc. Having slumped to one of its worst electoral performances, with working-class strongholds like Gelsenkirchen being won by the AfD on comfortable margins, it has ended up reliant on the immigrant vote: Die Linke, a hard-Left party born out of East German communism, won 29 per cent of the immigrant vote, while the SPD won 28 per cent. Both parties promised more liberal immigration laws and more generous welfare.

Should this go ahead, Germany will find its already creaking infrastructure under even more pressure. The housing market is still

struggling to keep up with the pace of current migration, while the construction industry has seen profits falling as the cost of building materials increased and regulations worsened. If the CDU accepts any points of the SPD’s immigration working paper, it will betray its voters. Sixty-eight per cent of Germans want fewer asylum seekers and 57 per cent want asylum seekers who arrive illegally to be turned away at the border. A mere 3 per cent want more refugees.

That the AfD won 20.8 per cent of the vote, double the result of the last election, should then come as no surprise. Those who worried about immigration but put their trust in the CDU one last time will have nowhere else to turn to in future. After the election Friedrich Merz, leader of the CDU and likely the next chancellor, said that “Left politics is over.” But the many Germans who voted for a Right-wing Government seem to have yet again been given thoroughly Left-wing politics. By seeking a coalition with the SPD, and giving them the advantage by ruling out working with the AfD, Merz is in danger of disproving his own boast.

Conservatives shouldn’t dance on Reform’s grave

David Frost

WELL I did warn you. In December I wrote of possible Tory defections to Reform, that “the obstacle now isn’t so much policy... but rather a sense that Reform is still fragile, not fully organised, vulnerable to leading figures leaving or to simple infighting and chaos.”

And so it has proved. So, what are the implications of this week’s row for politics on the Right? Reform first. Like many Tories, I speak to lots of Reform members and supporters. This clearly isn’t about, or not only about, the personality clash between Nigel Farage and Rupert Lowe and the unedifying trading of accusations on social media. More important are the underlying disagreements about policy and tone.

Reform have attracted not just mainstream conservatives despairing of the Tory Party, but also a different and often younger group, the “very online Right”, as some call them. This group seems ready to flirt with policy ideas which are not really in the mainstream of British politics – for example deportation of non-dual national British citizens, or of those who are guilty of nothing more than a family relationship or association with people involved in the rape gangs.

There is also sometimes even an element of ethnonationalism, echoed in the weird discussion of whether Rishi Sunak could call himself English, but also seen in criticism of Farage for pointing out Reform can’t be at war with Islam, or in the anti-Muslim tone of some of the sniping at the party chair Zia Yusuf. Even if Rupert Lowe doesn’t endorse all these views – and I don’t believe he would – his campaigning certainly seems to be aimed at this group.

Happily for the country, but problematically for Reform, it’s a tiny group, not one you can build an electoral majority on. Moreover, appealing to it often seems to entail a particular political tone – at best that of pub ranting, at worst a whiff of street politics Tommy Robinson style.

Farage can see that these ideas mean death to Reform’s efforts to go mainstream. If you doubt it, look at the rest of Europe, where those populist parties that haven’t extirpated such thinking persistently underperform on the day in elections. However angry people are – and I agree they really are – Brits won’t vote in any numbers for this. I wouldn’t either. You don’t have to think Nigel Farage is perfect to see that the Farage/Yusuf axis, the plan to keep Reform on the robust but mainstream Right and to organise it into a force capable of getting out the vote, is surely the only possible way of putting it durably on the political scene.

If they are serious about doing so, then for sure Nigel Farage is going to have to work with a broader team, if he can find one. But does that mean that he needs to work with Rupert Lowe and Ben Habib specifically? I don’t think so. Now what does this mean for Conservatives? Many will see the Reform row as good news – though let’s wait and see what the impact on the polls actually is.

Certainly it may buy some time for Kemi Badenoch by relieving the pressure to match Reform quickly on policy and by scaring off any defections. But what’s good news for the Conservative Party is not always, or even necessarily, good news for conservatism. To put it bluntly – if the Reform Party did not exist,

how conservative do you really think the Conservative Party would be?

As I have said repeatedly over the last couple of years, there are tremendous reserves of bluster and complacency within what is left of the Party. Without some real world pressure, this could easily come to dominate. We heard it from some in the leadership campaign: “Labour will mess it up, Reform will blow up, let’s just wait for our voters to return and we’ll soon be back in our ministerial cars.” It could still happen. But what is the point of the Conservative Party being in power in 2029 if we aren’t going to do things that fix the country’s problems?

Yes, there is lots of outrage about Labour now. But if the Conservative Party comes back by default in four years’ time, then unless it is burning with anger and driven by a clear conservative determination to change the country, the temptation will be to drift and to accommodate what’s been done. That’s where Reform is so important to conservatism. It gives genuine conservative voters a choice. It forces the Tory Party to engage with and advocate actual conservative ideas and to develop policy accordingly. It removes the temptation to go Lib Dem and stops conservative voters being taken for granted. Let’s hope that’s what happens.

For sure, we don’t want a split vote on the Right in 2029. But conservatives also believe in competition. For now, Reform creates a competition to be the best opposition and to provide the best policy mix. For those of us who are concerned about getting the policy right, about seizing what may be the last opportunity to get the country onto a more conservative path, that is what really matters.



NEW YORK: Stock market numbers are seen as raders work on the floor of the New York Stock Exchange during morning trading in New York City. The market opened on an upward swing a day after the S&P 500 went into correction territory and with the Dow Jones on its way to a second-straight losing week and its worst weekly decline since June 2022.

Missing wheel from PIA Flight 306 found



F.P. Report

KARACHI: The missing wheel from Pakistan Airlines

(PIA) Flight 306 has been successfully located. The wheel was found

near the remote parking bay of Karachi's Jinnah International Airport, adjacent to the Ispahani Hangar.

Technicians from the airport's wheel shop discovered the tire next to the landing gear of a grounded Boeing 777 aircraft.

The Pakistan Airports Authority (PAA) confirms that there is no evidence of any casualties or property damage resulting from the wheel's detachment. The incident is currently under investigation by the relevant authorities.

Flight PK 306, operating on the Karachi-Lahore route, landed safely in Lahore as scheduled. It was during the post-landing inspection that the absence of one of the six main landing gear wheels was discovered.

Kitchen Items' prices up by 0.22pc



ISLAMABAD (APP): The weekly inflation, measured by the Sensitive Price Indicator (SPI), increased by 0.22 percent for the combined consumption groups during the week ended on March 13, Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS) reported on Friday.

According to the PBS data, the SPI for the week under review in the above-mentioned group was recorded at 320.75 points as compared to 320.04 points during the past week.

As compared to the corresponding week of last year, the SPI for the combined consumption group in the week under review witnessed an increase of 0.22 per cent.

The weekly SPI with the base year 2015-16 =100 covers 17 urban centres and 51 essential items for all expenditure groups.

The SPI for the lowest consumption group of up to Rs 17,732 witnessed increase of 0.10 per cent and went up to 309.65 points from last week's 309.33 points.

The SPI for consumption groups of Rs 17,732 to 22,888; Rs 22,889-29,517; Rs 29,518-44,175 and above Rs 44,175, went up by 0.17 percent, 0.18 percent, 0.22 percent and 0.25 percent respectively.

During the week, out of 51 items, prices of 12 (23.53%) items increased, 15 (29.41%) items decreased and 24 (47.06%) items remained stable.

The items, which recorded major decrease in their average prices on a week-on-week basis included onions (16.71%), potatoes (6.59%), garlic (5.29%), pulse gram (1.91%), eggs (1.55%), tea lipton (1.13%), pulse mash (0.49%) and tea prepared (0.39%).

The commodities which recorded major increase in their average prices on a week-on-week basis included tomatoes (36.43%), chicken (6.40%), bananas (6.05%), sugar (5.69%), LPG (1.44%), georgette & gur (1.32%) each, bread (1.13%), beef (0.57%), pulse moong (0.28%) and cigarettes (0.27%).

Year-on-year basis, the commodities that witnessed decrease onions (72.32%), tomatoes (51.96%), wheat flour (36.20%), chilies powder (20.00%), electricity charges for Q1 (18.92%), tea lipton (15.89%), pulse mash (14.98%), pulse masoor (12.38%), diesel (9.91%), petrol (8.55%) and LPG (5.35%).

The commodities which recorded an increase in their average prices on year-on-year basis included ladies sandal (75.09%), pulse moong (26.84%), powdered milk (25.93%), beef (21.35%), pulse gram (19.42%), chicken (18.72%), sugar (18.55%), vegetable ghee 1 kg (16.13%), vegetable ghee 2.5 kg (15.34%), shirting (12.98%), georgette (11.21%) and firewood (11.07%).

Pakistan Crypto Council launched to shape digital finance

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Pakistan Crypto Council (PCC) has been launched officially, marking a significant step in the country's efforts to regulate and integrate blockchain technology and digital assets into its financial landscape, ministry of finance said here Friday.

According to press release, the council would play a pivotal role in formulating policies, fostering innovation, and ensuring a secure and forward-thinking approach to crypto adoption in Pakistan.

Finance Minister, Muhammad Aurangzeb will serve as the Chair of the Pakistan Crypto Council, demonstrating the government's commitment to the evolving digital economy, Bilal Bin Saqib, the Chief Advisor to the Finance Minister on the Pakistan Crypto Council, has been appointed as the CEO of the Council, bringing his expertise in blockchain technology, investment strategy, and digital innovation to spearhead the initiative.

The Pakistan Crypto Council's immediate board members include Governor of the State Bank of Pakistan, Chairman of the Securities and Exchange

Commission of Pakistan (SECP), Federal Law Secretary and Federal IT Secretary. This diverse leadership structure ensures that regulatory oversight, financial stability, legal frameworks, and technological advancements are brought together to support Pakistan's crypto ecosystem.

The statement added that the formation of the Pakistan Crypto Council signifies the government's proactive stance in moving Pakistan to the forefront of the global shift towards blockchain technology and digital assets.

With regulatory clarity and a structured approach, Pakistan aims to foster a safe and compliant environment for investors, businesses, and innovators in the crypto space.

Speaking on the launch of the Council, Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb said that the world was moving rapidly toward digital finance, and Pakistan wishes to be a leader in the space.

"The establishment of the Pakistan Crypto Council is a step towards embracing innovation while ensuring that we create a regulatory framework that protects investors and

the financial system. We are committed to fostering a responsible and progressive crypto ecosystem that can contribute to Pakistan's economic growth," he said.

Speaking on the occasion, Bilal Bin Saqib, CEO of the Pakistan Crypto Council said the council was not just about regulations rather it is about creating an ecosystem where blockchain and digital finance can thrive.

"Our goal is to ensure that Pakistan becomes a competitive player in the global digital economy while prioritizing security, transparency, and innovation. By bringing together key stakeholders, we aim to strike a balance between progressive policymaking and fostering an environment where entrepreneurs and businesses can confidently explore the potential of blockchain technology," he said.

The Pakistan Crypto Council will focus on developing clear regulatory policies, engaging stakeholders from both the public and private sectors, and positioning Pakistan as a key player in the global digital asset landscape.

According to press release, as the council kicks off its operations, it will

prioritize establishing clear regulatory guidelines to facilitate crypto adoption; engaging with international crypto and blockchain organizations to ensure best practices; encouraging responsible innovation by working closely with key players in the industry, including fintech startups, investors, and blockchain developers; and protecting consumers and ensuring financial security through robust legal and compliance frameworks.

The launch of the Pakistan Crypto Council signals a new chapter in Pakistan's financial and technological evolution, reinforcing the country's stance that Pakistan is open for business and a leader in innovation in the digital finance sector.

It is pertinent to mention here that the Pakistan Crypto Council (PCC) is a government-backed initiative aimed at regulating, fostering, and integrating blockchain and cryptocurrency innovations into Pakistan's financial and economic framework.

Led by key policymakers, regulatory heads, and industry experts, the PCC is dedicated to establishing a robust and progressive digital asset ecosystem.

NUML, NITB sign MoU to boost collaboration in IT

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The National University of Modern Languages (NUML) and the National Information Technology Board (NITB) have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to foster collaboration between academia and the IT industry. The signing ceremony, held at NUML, was attended by Director General NUML Brig Shahzad Munir and CEO NITB Babar Majid Bhatti, along with senior officials from both institutions.

Speaking at the ceremony, Brig Shahzad Munir and Babar Majid Bhatti hailed the MoU as a significant step towards digital transformation and economic growth. They emphasized that this partnership is just the beginning of a long-term collaboration that will bring mutual benefits. Both reaffirmed their commitment to ensuring the effective execution and implementation of the agreement.

To oversee the implementation process, NUML has also established a Steering Committee, which will play a pivotal role in planning, executing, and monitoring various

initiatives under the MoU.

The primary objective of this partnership is to bridge the gap between academia and the IT industry by promoting research, development, and knowledge-sharing. Through this collaboration, both institutions aim to enhance technological readiness and support Pakistan's digital transformation efforts.

The MoU will facilitate joint research projects, allowing faculty and students to work on real-world IT challenges while contributing to the country's innovation ecosystem. Additionally, the agree-

ment will create opportunities for professional training and skill development in the IT sector. NUML students will have access to unpaid internships within NITB projects, providing them with hands-on experience and industry exposure. The collaboration will also involve the organization of joint workshops, seminars, and conferences, fostering a culture of continuous learning and engagement with IT professionals.

A key component of the MoU is the establishment of an Ideation Hub, which will serve as a platform for innovation and creativity

in the IT sector. This hub will encourage students, researchers, and industry experts to collaborate on cutting-edge solutions, driving technological advancements and economic growth.

This partnership reflects NUML's commitment to equipping students with the necessary skills to excel in the rapidly evolving digital landscape while supporting government-led IT initiatives.

Through this collaboration, both institutions aim to contribute to Pakistan's technological advancement and economic development.



With uncertainty comes growing economic risk for the Fed to weigh

WASHINGTON (Reuters):

Since U.S. President Donald Trump took office in January, he has imposed biting new tariffs, with more coming, begun a disruptive cull of federal jobs and spending, risked a political fracture with Europe, and acknowledged that an economy that was by most measures fine when he took over now faces some bumps, or worse.

Business and consumer sentiment have dropped, some measures of manufacturing have weakened, and the stock prices that contributed to record household wealth just as Trump was about to return to Washington have declined sharply, a possible precursor to slower spending among wealthier households that has propped up overall consumption.

Employment growth has largely persisted, and inflation has continued to moderate, according to the most recent data, but tariffs imposed by the U.S. and retaliatory actions from trading partners raise the chance that could reverse.

It's a lot to take in and next week Federal Reserve officials - the most important U.S. economic decision-makers outside of the new administration - gather in Washington to try to make sense of how the landscape

has shifted since they last met in January.

Fed Chair Jerome Powell has said it was "not for us to criticize...or praise" the administration's decisions, but he will have to manage the fallout, and if the landscape in January was uncertain, the risks that were largely speculative at that point have become more tangible.

A recent Reuters poll found near unanimity among economists that near-term recession risks have risen, while some top economic forecasters say slowing growth may be accompanied by still rising prices.

The two together could force Powell and his colleagues into difficult choices between supporting the economy and jobs with interest rate cuts, or keeping rates higher to ensure inflation and inflation expectations remain controlled.

The Fed is expected to keep borrowing costs steady at its March 18-19 meeting, but new economic projections will show how the group of 19 policymakers see Trump's first months playing out in terms of unemployment, inflation and growth, and the monetary policy needed in response. Investors expect the Fed to cut rates by three-quarters of a percentage point over the next nine

months, compared with the half-percentage point policymakers expected as of December.

In his last remarks ahead of the meeting, Powell gave "guidance on sticky inflation, inflation falling faster than expected, and an unexpected weakening of the labor market," SGH Macro Advisors Chief Economist Tim Duy wrote after Powell's appearance in New York last week, scenarios in which the Fed would either maintain the current high level of interest rates longer than expected, or approve further cuts. "He does not provide guidance on the combination of higher inflation and weaker employment. Of course, that's the most interesting policy question now."

The possibility of conflict between the Fed's 2% inflation target and maximum employment goals has crept into policymaker speeches as the breadth of Trump's tariff plans raised concerns they might deliver both an extensive price shock and, just as important for the Fed, a shock to public expectations.

Coupled with other actions that could slow growth, such as the firing of federal workers and the cancellation of federal contracts, Trump's first days have unleashed a contradic-

tory set of forces that leave the Fed to assess whether the things that could increase prices or the ones that could slow growth and employment come to dominate.

Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent called it all a period of "detox" to shift the economy away from public spending. Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick said even a recession would be "worth it" to put Trump's policies in place.

The blow to markets and sentiment has been significant.

The S&P 500 is down over 10% from last month's record, well below where it was when Trump's election set off a bout of optimism among businesses that he would keep a strong economy on track.

Rates on short-term Treasury securities have risen above long-term yields, with investors accepting less return on a 10-year note than for a three-month bill, an 'inversion' of the yield curve that sometimes signals a loss of confidence in the economy over the short term.

While Fed officials have been reluctant to put much weight on it, the gap between the 10-year and 3-month Treasuries was flagged in earlier Fed research as the most useful spread to monitor.

Pakistan, Oman agree to strengthen trade ties

MUSCAT (APP): Federal Minister for Commerce, Jam Kamal Khan on Friday met with Mr. Faisal Abdullah Al Rawas, Chairman of the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI), in Muscat.

The meeting was followed by an Iftar dinner hosted by the Chairman in honor of the visiting minister, said a release issued here.

Parallel to the meeting, a B2B networking session was organized by the Embassy of Pakistan in collaboration with OCCI, bringing together Pakistani business delegates and Omani businessmen to explore trade opportunities.

The meeting, which lasted over an hour, focused on enhancing bilateral trade between Pakistan and Oman. Chairman Faisal Al Rawas assured full support from OCCI and its regional branches, emphasizing his

desire to see Omani markets filled with Pakistani products.

Both sides agreed to activate the Joint Business Council between OCCI and the Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FPCCI) to facilitate deeper economic cooperation.

Federal Minister for Commerce Jam Kamal Khan stated, "Our current trade statistics do not reflect the true depth of our relationship. By simply removing logistical and communication hurdles, we can easily increase the current trade volume to two to three times its existing level."

The key to achieving this lies with the chambers of commerce of both countries. There is a need to enhance connectivity between OCCI and various chambers of commerce and industries in Pakistan.

Chairman OCCI agreed with the minister's views

and assured that platforms like Joint Business Councils would be actively utilized to strengthen trade ties.

The OCCI chairman also stressed the need for stronger business-to-business linkages and invited well-established Pakistani brands and businesses to set up operations in Oman, highlighting the country's welcoming investment climate.

Following the meeting, both dignitaries engaged with business representatives participating in the B2B networking session. They spent around two hours interacting with the delegates, discussing their products, and appreciating the range and quality of Pakistani goods.

The visit marks a significant step in expanding trade and investment opportunities between Pakistan and Oman, further strengthening economic ties between the two nations.





In brief

Pakistan team qualifies for Davis Cup Jr final

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan showcased an outstanding performance and has qualified for the Davis Cup Juniors final at Kuching, Malaysia. On the fourth day of the Davis Cup Juniors, Pakistan team defeated Vietnam by 2-1 to secure a place in the final. In the opening singles match, Vietnam's Le Tien Anh defeated Abubakar Talha 6-2, 6-3. However, Pakistan made a strong comeback in the second singles, where Mikael Ali Baig outclassed Tran Duc Minh 6-1, 6-3. The decisive doubles match saw an exceptional performance by the Pakistani duo Hamza Roman and Abubakar Talha, who dominated Le Tien Anh / Vu Huy Hoang with a flawless 6-0, 6-0 victory, said a press release. With this win, Pakistan advances to the final, where they will face Indonesia in the title clash. Aisam-ul-Haq Qureshi, President of the Pakistan Tennis Federation (PTF), congratulated the team on their impressive performance and wished them the best for the final. "Focus on the final, and hopefully, you will bring home the victory. Our team is strong and well-balanced," he said. Col. (R) Zia-ud-Din Tufail, Secretary General of PTF, also congratulated the team on reaching the final and extended his best wishes for their upcoming match. Pakistan will face Indonesia in the final on Saturday.

Brook banned from IPL for two years

NEW DELHI (AFP): England batsman Harry Brook has been banned from the Indian Premier League for two years after he pulled out at the last minute to focus on international cricket, local media reported Friday. The 26-year-old, considered a frontrunner to replace Jos Buttler as England's white-ball captain, was signed to Delhi Capitals for the IPL season beginning next week. Brook also withdrew from his contract with the Delhi side last season after the death of his grandmother. The England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) has been informed about Brooks's ban, an unnamed official from the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) told the Indian Express newspaper. The ban was part of a policy "informed to each player before they registered their name for IPL auction last year", the official said. The rules are designed to prevent late pullouts from the money-spinning T20 league by overseas players. Exceptions can be made, mostly for injuries. Brook this week apologised on social media "unreservedly to the Delhi Capitals and their supporters" for pulling out of the league "to recharge" and focus on international cricket. Brook has played one season in the IPL, for Sunrisers Hyderabad in 2023, when he scored a 55-ball century against Kolkata Knight Riders. The 2025 IPL begins on March 22 when defending champions Kolkata host Royal Challengers Bengaluru at Eden Gardens.

Curry bags record 4,000th three-pointer

SAN FRANCISCO (AFP/APP): Golden State Warriors star Stephen Curry became the first NBA player ever to score 4,000 three-pointers on Thursday, extending his runaway lead as the greatest long-range shooter in basketball history in a blowout victory over the Sacramento Kings.

PM meets footballer from Hangu, offers financial support, employment

ISLAMABAD (APP): Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif on Friday met football player Muhammad Riaz from Hangu and offered him financial support worth Rs 2.5 million along with an employment opportunity.

The prime minister, taking notice of the financial difficulties faced by the national footballer, whose video of selling funnel cakes (Jalebi) recently went viral, invited him to the PM House.

Praising courage and determination of the football player, the prime minister said "You are the country's talented player, and we will not let your talent go to waste".

He said Pakistani youth were a valuable asset to the country, and providing

them with all types of facilities and resources for international competitiveness was the top priority of the government.

"Youth should actively participate in sports and other healthy activities," he remarked. He urged Muhammad Riaz to continue playing an active role in promoting football in Pakistan. The prime minister directed that Muhammad Riaz be given a job in his preferred federal department.

He also instructed that national players should be provided jobs in government institutions according to their abilities. The prime minister emphasized the need to accelerate efforts for the promotion of sports in the country.

"A strategy should be formulated for the welfare

of players representing Pakistan internationally and to provide them with sustainable employment opportunities," he said.

Muhammad Riaz thanked the prime minister for the financial assistance.

He also thanked PM Shehbaz Sharif for his efforts towards the welfare of the players and the promotion of sports.

On the occasion, the prime minister presented a cheque worth Rs 2.5 million to Muhammad Riaz.

The meeting was attended by federal ministers Attaullah Tarar, Shaza Fatima Khawaja, PM's Adviser Rana Sanaullah, Chairman of the PM's Youth Program Rana Mashhood Ahmed Khan, and Media Coordinator Badar Shehbaz Warraich.



ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif meets Muhammad Riaz, a football player from Hangu. —APP Photo

ICC Women WC qualifiers to be held in Lahore from April 9

LAHORE (APP): The International Cricket Council (ICC) on Friday announced the match schedule for ICC Women's Cricket World Cup Qualifier 2025 in Pakistan from April 9 to April 19.

The 15-match round-robin tournament will be staged in Lahore from 9 to 19 April in which six teams will compete for two places in the ICC Women's Cricket World Cup 2025 to be held in India in October-November 2025. Hosts Pakistan take on Ireland at the Gaddafi Stadium while the West Indies play Scotland at the Lahore City Cricket Association (LCCA) on the opening day.

The sixth edition of the Qualifier sees teams from four Full Members – Bangladesh, Ireland, Pakistan and the West Indies – compete with Associate Members Scotland and Thailand in the 15-match league tournament that will decide the two qualifiers for the ICC Women's Cricket World Cup 2025 to be held later this year. Australia, England, New Zealand, South Africa and Sri Lanka apart from hosts India, have already qualified for the World Cup by virtue of finishing in the top six of the 10-team ICC Women's Championship (2022-25).

Bangladesh, Ireland, Pakistan and

the West Indies play in the Qualifier as they finished from places seventh to 10th in the Women's Championship, while Thailand and Scotland made it as the next two best ranked sides in the ICC Women's ODI Team Rankings as of 28 October 2024.

Some exciting matchups in the tournament include Pakistan taking on the West Indies on 14 April in a day-night game at the Gaddafi Stadium, Bangladesh going up against the West Indies at LCCA on 17 April and sub-continental rivals Pakistan and Bangladesh clash at the LCCA on 19 April. ICC CEO, Geoff Allardice said: "We are pleased to announce the match schedule for the ICC Women's Cricket World Cup Qualifier 2025.

"The six competing teams are just one step away from the Women's Cricket World Cup and I am sure they will all be eagerly looking forward to the competition. "On behalf of the ICC, I would like to wish the teams all the best for the tournament in Lahore as part of the build-up to the Cricket World Cup later this year."

ICC Women's Cricket World Cup Qualifier 2025 match schedule (day matches begin at 09h30 and day/night matches at 14h00 local time)

Wednesday, 9 April
Pakistan vs Ireland – Gaddafi Stadium (Day)

West Indies vs Scotland – LCCA

(Day)

Thursday, 10 April

Thailand vs Bangladesh – LCCA

(Day)

Friday, 11 April

Pakistan vs Scotland – LCCA

(Day)

Ireland vs West Indies – Gaddafi Stadium (Day)

Sunday, 13 April

Scotland vs Thailand – LCCA

(Day)

Bangladesh vs Ireland – Gaddafi Stadium (D/N)

Monday, 14 April

Pakistan vs West Indies – Gaddafi Stadium (D/N)

Tuesday, 15 April

Thailand vs Ireland – LCCA (Day)

Scotland vs Bangladesh – Gaddafi Stadium (D/N)

Thursday, 17 April

Bangladesh vs West Indies – LCCA (Day)

Pakistan vs Thailand – Gaddafi Stadium (D/N)

Friday, 18 April

Ireland vs Scotland – Gaddafi Stadium (D/N)

Saturday, 19 April

Pakistan vs Bangladesh – LCCA (Day)

West Indies vs Thailand – Gaddafi Stadium (D/N).

Inothewayurthinkin wins Cheltenham Gold Cup



CHELTENHAM (AFP): Inothewayurthinkin denied Galopin Des Champs a third successive Cheltenham Gold Cup with a dramatic victory under jockey Mark Walsh, after four wins earlier in the day for trainer Willie Mullins.

The Gavin Cromwell-trained horse, a 15/2 shot, ran down odds-on favourite Galopin Des Champs in the closing furlongs to seal the win after the two-time defending champion had cruised to the front.

"Absolutely speechless. He was hanging in all the time that he was flat out, he's such a good horse," said Walsh after winning the race for the first time. "I'm just thrilled."

Mullins' Galopin Des Champs had been bidding to become the first horse to win the race, run over three miles and two furlongs, in three straight years since Best Mate in 2004, but came up just short. He finished six lengths back in second place, with 40/1 outsider Gentlemansgame in third. The shock result denied Mullins a fifth success from as many races, after winning the first four

on the card.

It was a seventh successive Irish win in the race considered the blue riband of jumps racing. Inothewayurthinkin was already the favourite for April's Grand National at Aintree, and Cromwell said he could still attempt an unlikely double. "What I don't know is the response we will get from him back home and I'll speak to JP and Frank (Berry the racing manager) -- potentially yes," he said when asked if his charge would bid to become only the second horse and first since Golden Miller in 1934 to complete the Gold Cup-Grand National double.

Synchronised, also owned by JP McManus, went to Aintree as the Gold Cup champion in 2012 but died after a fall during the Grand National.

On Friday, Galopin Des Champs struggled for his usual fluency under Paul Townend in the early stages of the race and was hampered when front-runner Ahoy Senor fell. The eight-year-old still managed to take the lead but was passed by Inothewayurthinkin at

the second-last fence.

"He's home and he's safe. He did avoid that danger and he knows what he's doing. He's home safe and that's all we want," Galopin Des Champs' owner Audrey Turley told the BBC. The drama started when Ahoy Senor took a crashing tumble, leaving Gentlemansgame and The Real Whacker in the lead.

Second-favourite Banbridge quickly faded as the eventual top two took control. Gentlemansgame held off Monty's Star for third but was still 18 lengths behind an ultimately dominant winner. "It's a very exciting time and I will treasure it," said McManus. "I'd like to see the race again. I don't think I took it all in." Corbetts Cross, another McManus horse, suffered a fatal injury in a heavy fall.

Mullins' quadruple In the day's first race, Mullins got off to a flying start as Poniros became the joint-longest-odds winner in modern Cheltenham history at 100/1 in the Grade One Triumph Hurdle.

Poniros, on his first start over hurdles, matched the previous records of Nortons Coin (1990 Gold Cup) and Hipparchus (1954 Grand Annual), edging out Lulamba by a neck.

Mullins' success continued with victories for favourites Kargese in the County Handicap Hurdle and Dinoblu in the Mares' Chase. Townend timed his run from the back of the field on Jasmin De Vaux to perfection to take the Albert Bartlett Novices' Hurdle and help Mullins equal his own record with a 10th winner of the week.

Pakistan clinches third gold at World Winter Games

KARACHI (Monitoring Desk): Pakistan continues its remarkable run at the Special Olympics World Winter Games in Italy, securing its third gold medal in the prestigious competition. Afaaq Khan delivered a stellar performance in the 100-meter snowshoeing event, claiming the top spot and adding to Pakistan's growing list of achievements. His victory underscores the country's rising prominence in international winter sports. This latest triumph marks Pakistan's third gold medal at the event.

Earlier, Muneeb Ur Rehman claimed gold in the 50-meter cross-country skiing event, further boosting Pakistan's medal tally.

The athlete from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa expressed his joy, stating, "This is my first time competing at the World Winter Games, and I've been preparing for this moment for seven years." He credited his coaches, Shumaila Iram and Mohammad Saleem, for their guidance and vowed to bring more medals to Pakistan in future competitions.

Pakistan's final medal count stood at six medals—three gold, one silver, and two bronze. Adding to the country's achievements, Moazzam Iqbal clinched gold in the 800-meter snowshoeing race, while Rovina Qurban secured a silver medal in the women's 50-meter cross-country skiing event.

The winning momentum continued as Saboor Ahmed and Ali Raza earned bronze medals in the snowshoeing 200-meter race. Other Pakistani athletes also performed impressively, with Manahil finishing fourth, Tabsum Nasir and Shah Galoon securing fifth place, Afaq Khan taking sixth, and Iqra Akram finishing seventh in their respective categories.

Swiatek to face Andreeva in Indian Wells semi-finals



INDIAN WELLS (AFP/APP): Defending champion Iga Swiatek beat Zheng Qinwen 6-3, 6-3 on Thursday, avenging her Olympics semi-final loss to the Paris Games gold medalist to reach the last four at Indian Wells.

The world number two from Poland will get a chance to avenge another upset loss in a semi-final clash with Mirra Andreeva -- the 17-year-old Russian who stunned her in the quarter-finals at Dubai last month on the way to becoming the youngest-ever WTA 1000 champion.

The top half of the draw will feature another semi-final grudge match as world number one Aryna Sabalenka takes on Australian Open champion Madison Keys -- who denied Sabalenka's bid for a third straight title in Melbourne.

Swiatek delivered another dominant performance as she continued her bid to become the first woman to win three titles in the California desert.

Swiatek, who won her first Indian Wells title in 2022, could also join Martina Navratilova as the only women to lift the trophy in back-to-back years.

After dropping just two games in each of her first three matches, Swiatek was broken twice as she faced her toughest test so far, but secured the victory with a flourish as she broke Zheng

at love in the final game after a brief shower paused play late in the second set.

"It was a weird match with all the breaks and everything, but I wanted to be composed and really focused and I'm glad that I did that," Swiatek said.

Swiatek converted all five of her break chances -- Zheng twice surrendering her serve in games she led 40-0.

Zheng did manage late breaks in each set, but neither those hiccups nor the brief shower that paused play in the second set proved much impediment to Swiatek.

"At the end it got really windy, which made it super tricky," Swiatek said. ""When the conditions change during the match you need to adjust quickly and it's not that easy. I'm happy that I was pushing until the end."

Swiatek admitted she was pleased to avenge her Olympic defeat -- a heart-breaking loss on the Philippe Chatrier court where the Polish star has won four French Open titles.

"It's not nice to lose to anybody, so for sure you want to have a little, like revenge, but it's nothing personal," Swiatek said.

She can settle another score against Andreeva, who kept her bid for another prestigious title on track with a 7-5, 6-3 victory over Ukrainian

veteran Elina Svitolina.

- Everything is different

- Andreeva belted 23 winners, breaking for a 6-5 lead on the way to taking the first set.

After Svitolina rallied from a 1-3 deficit to level the second, Andreeva won the last three games.

"I really like the way I play right now," Andreeva said, but added that her recent win over Swiatek would mean nothing when they meet again on Friday.

"(Friday) is going to be a new day, new match, new conditions, new country," she said. "Everything is different."

Top-seeded Sabalenka beat Liudmila Samsonova 6-2, 6-3 to set up a meeting with Keys, who eased past former world number four Belinda Bencic 6-1, 6-1.

As in her previous match, Sabalenka went down a quick break. But she won the next nine games to take a 6-2, 3-1 lead.

Samsonova pulled back a break as she leveled the second set at 3-3, but Sabalenka strung together another three games for the victory, lunging for a backhand passing winner on her first match point.

"I'm really excited," Sabalenka said, adding that the chance to face Keys again served as "motivation to get back that revenge".

"She played great there. I didn't play my best and I'm really happy that tomorrow I will have opportunity to get this revenge back."

Keys, coming off a tough three-set win over Donna Vekic, fired 30 winners to put away Bencic in just 64 minutes.

Keys is now riding a 16-match winning streak as she tries to become the first American woman to lift the title in the California desert since Serena Williams in 2001.



In brief

Azam Nazeer Tarar message on Holi Festival

ISLAMABAD (APP): Federal Minister for Human Rights Senator Azam Nazeer Tarar festive greeting message to the Hindu community on the joyous occasion of Holi. This festival of colors is a celebration of hope, renewal, and the triumph of good over evil. It reminds us of the strength found in diversity and the importance of harmony and mutual respect in our society." Pakistan is a nation where people of all faiths contribute to its progress and our Constitution guarantees equal rights and freedoms for all. Let this Holi be a time to strengthen the bonds of brotherhood and unity, fostering an inclusive and tolerant society. Wishing everyone dda happy, peaceful, and prosperous Holi.

IRSA releases 73,501 cusecs water

ISLAMABAD (APP): Indus River System Authority (IRSA) on Friday released 73,501 cusecs of water from various rim stations with inflow of 62,560 cusecs. According to the data released by IRSA, the water level in River Indus at Tarbela Dam was 1404.5 feet and was 2.5 feet higher than its dead level of 1402 feet. Water inflow and outflow in the dam were recorded as 20,400 cusecs and 20,000 cusecs, respectively. The water level in River Jhelum at Mangla Dam was 1060.3 feet, which was 10.3 feet higher than its dead level of 1050 feet. The inflow and outflow of water were recorded as 16,659 cusecs and 28,000 cusecs, respectively. The release of water at Kalabagh, Taunsa, Guddu, and Sukkur was recorded as 14,230, 24,429, 19,172, and 7020 cusecs, respectively. Similarly, from River Kabul, a total of 14,300 cusecs of water were released at Nowshera.

Five accused held with 90 litres of liquor

RAWALPINDI (APP): The Rawalpindi Police during operations against liquor suppliers on Friday arrested five accused recovering 90 litres of the commodity. According to the police spokesman, the Dhamial Police captured accused Zubair with 60 litres of liquor. Likewise, the Mandra and Naseerabad Police recovered 10 litres of liquor each from the accused Aitebar and Mahmood respectively. Similarly, the Ratta Amral and Waris Khan Police also held accused Abdul Razzaq and Mudassar respectively with 5 litres of liquor each. Meanwhile, three suspects were nabbed for having illegal weapons and ammunition. The Pirwadhai and Civil Lines Police arrested accused Imran and Suleman Qasim recovering a 30 bore pistol each from them, while the Chauntra Police arrested a 9 mm pistol from the accused Shahzad.

ICT Admin cracks down on price gouging

ISLAMABAD (APP): Islamabad District Administration has arrested 100 wholesalers and issued fines totalling Rs 350,500 on the 12th of Ramadan for violating price controls, on Friday. According to the DC Office, officials inspected 610 wholesale businesses as part of a crack-down on price gouging during the holy month. The operation focused on ensuring compliance with government-mandated price lists for essential goods. The city administration continues to offer subsidized rates on 15 fruit and vegetable items at 20 designated fair price shops.

Gillani calls for coordinated efforts to manage population growth

ISLAMABAD (APP): President Syed Yousuf Raza Gillani on Friday called for coordinated efforts with the input of the provincial governments, including the Azad Jammu and Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan, to manage the growing population in the country.

He said that the challenge of growing population needed collective efforts, especially the support of the provinces, to successfully implement the national action plan on population.

The president expressed these views while chairing a meeting on population management in the backdrop of the Supreme Court of Pakistan's 2018 suo-moto

action and the subsequent recommendations of the Council of Common Interests. Secretary of Ministry of Health Services, Regulation and Coordination, Dr Nadeem Mehbub, Director General Population Wing, Dr Soofia Yunus, and senior officials of the Ministry of Health attended the meeting.

During the meeting, President Gillani stressed the need to reduce the population growth rate and improve other relevant population indicators. He said that all stakeholders, including the provincial governments and the private sector, needed to be taken on board to raise

awareness about the challenge of rising population. He also emphasised the need to increase people's access to family planning services to fulfil their unmet needs.

During the meeting, it was informed that a National Action Plan on Population was implemented from 2019 to 2024, and a revised National Action Plan on Population from 2025 to 2030 had been developed in consultation with the provinces. It was further informed that the new plan was awaiting approval and would be discussed in the upcoming meeting of the Federal Task Force on Population.

Education Department accelerates action against Booti Mafia

RAWALPINDI (APP): Punjab Education Department has accelerated its campaign against cheating mafias during the ongoing matriculation examination 2025. Senior officers of the Punjab Education Department visited various examination centers of Rawalpindi region to review the conduct of annual examinations, during which three candidates were caught red-handed while cheating, orders were issued to take legal action against them.

According to the spokesperson of the Education Board Rawalpindi, on Friday, Chairman Education Board, Rawalpindi Muhammad Adnan Khan, DPI Colleges Punjab Syed Ansar Azhar, Director Colleges Sher Ahmed Satti, Controller Examinations Tanveer Asghar Awan, Secretary

Board Muhammad Fahmid visited various examination centers. During the visit, they reviewed the arrangements made by the Education Board and expressed satisfaction.

Speaking after the visit, DPI Colleges Punjab said that the effective and comprehensive strategy against the booti mafia and the best examination arrangements by the education board are commendable.

The efforts of Chairman Education Board, Rawalpindi Muhammad Adnan Khan and Controller Examinations Tanveer Asghar Awan were also appreciated. He said that the Rawalpindi board examination is being conducted as per the vision of CM Maryam Nawaz. Chairman Pindi Board Muhammad Adnan Khan visited various examination centers of Chakwal district. During

the visit, he checked the attendance of the CCTV cameras, examination staff and security arrangements.

During the visit he said that the intentions of the booti mafia were crushed due to the effective and comprehensive surveillance of all the examination centers. Controller of Examinations Tanveer Asghar Awan visited various examination centers.

While talking after the visit, he said that three candidates were caught red-handed while cheating, including two candidates, Attaullah Shah (regular candidate) of the examination center Government College of Technology Hattar Road, Taxila, roll number 922192, Hussain Ahmed (private candidate) of the examination center Government Boys High School PAC Kamra Attock.

Terrorists to face a befitting response, Abbasi

RAWALPINDI (APP): Federal Minister for Railways, Muhammad Hanif Abbasi has said that the enemies have attacked Pakistan, now they will face a response. He said that the final list of victims of the Jaffar Train tragedy including dead and wounded will be released soon.

Addressing to a press conference today at Railway Station Saddar, Hanif Abbasi said that decision has been taken at the highest government level to respond to the terrorists with the scale they deserve.

"The kind of game that foreign powers are playing, they have been given a befitting reply. The Zarar Company has proudly raised the name of Pakistan in the world by neutralizing 9 suicide bombers", he said.

Abbasi highlighted that the world is condemning the action of the terrorist organ-

ization, BLA for its heinous crime. "Women and children were used as shields, but the response of the security forces was accurate and very timely", he added.

The minister said that no one will dare to do such an act in future as a decision has been made at the national level to treat them just as the fight against Khawaraj is taking place in KPK. "They will be chased in Balochistan in the same way as the Khawaraj are being chased", he said adding that if terrorists hide in Afghanistan, the army will go there and kill them. It is impossible to allow the lives of youth and women to be played with.

He also condemned those in the country who made jokes about the incident. "The black sheep inside the country tried to ridicule this tragedy and the nation recognized those enemy-like people", said the

minister while pointing towards political opponents.

Responding to miscellaneous media questions, Abbasi said that the final figure of martyrs and injured in the train tragedy will be released by the government. He reiterated to bring improvement in national railways.

He informed media that concerned quarters have been directed to improve the punctuality of the train, cleanliness, and food quality which would be taken into consideration. He highlighted that rail cargo facilitation will be taken from Gawadar to Karachi and then to Kohat. Pak Railways will start making profit from rail cargo service.

"IG Railways has been tasked with vigilant and attentive surveillance to stop theft and smuggling of cargo", he said.

Media urged to drive Pakistan's population management agenda

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The media has a vital role to play in advancing the population management agenda in Pakistan, particularly in addressing the challenges posed by rapid population growth—a major hurdle to national progress and development.

This was the central theme of the National Media Coalition Meeting on Harnessing Media for Positive Social Change, organized by the Population Council with the support of UNFPA. Journalists from leading media outlets across Pakistan participated, emphasizing the media's power to shape public discourse, and policy action.

In his welcome remarks, Dr. Ali Mir, Senior Director, Population Council, stressed the urgency of tackling Pakistan's rapid population growth, which threatens economic stability, resource distribution, and the country's ability to meet its

development goals.

He highlighted the increasing strain on public services such as healthcare, education, and employment, underscoring the need for collective action. "The media has the power to inform, educate, and influence public perception, ultimately driving policies that promote sustainable population growth."

By shedding light on key issues, journalists can mobilize action and help address the challenges posed by an expanding population," he stated. Ikram ul Ahad, Deputy Manager Communication, Population Council, spoke about the global impact of media in shaping social change. "Media has played a transformative role worldwide by influencing policy discourse, challenging misconceptions, and amplifying critical issues."

In Pakistan, its dynamic presence offers a unique opportunity to advocate for evidence-based policymak-

ing, raise awareness about population growth, and promote family planning initiatives," he noted.

Ali Mazhar Choudhary, Director Communication, Population Council, led a session on effectively mainstreaming the population agenda through media. Coalition members worked on a strategic plan to advance the narrative of sustainable population growth, identifying key focus areas for media coverage.

These included the links between rapid population growth and climate change, women's empowerment, female education, the integration of population welfare indicators in the NFC Award, political will, the role of Lady Health Workers (LHWs) in family planning, and incorporating family planning services into social protection networks.

Ikram Junaidi, Senior Reporter at Daily Dawn, shared insights on the challenges journalists face in reporting population-relat-



ISLAMABAD: President Syed Yousuf Raza Gillani chairs a meeting on population at Aiwan-e-Sadr. —APP Photo

Ahsan: True teachings of Islam as a powerful tool against Islamophobia

ISLAMABAD (APP): Minister for Planning, Development and Special Initiatives Professor Ahsan Iqbal on Friday said Islam was a religion of peace, harmony and brotherhood, which always rejected extremism in all its forms.

"Today, we must promote the true teachings of Islam and focus on building the character of Muslims, especially the youth through education, which played a vital role in spreading Islam's message worldwide," he said during his address at a seminar.

The event was organized by the National Rahmatul-lil-Alameen Wa Khatam an-Nabiyin Authority in connection with the United Nations International Day to Combat Islamophobia, under the theme, "Combating Islamophobia Through Character Building." Ahsan Iqbal pointed out that Islam was not spread through force or warfare, but

rather through the exemplary conduct and character of Muslim traders, whose actions attracted people from diverse cultures to the greatness of Islam.

Today, he said it was unfortunate that despite constituting approximately 2.5 billion people nearly a quarter of the world's population, Muslims stood vulnerable in front of a population of 10 million people due to a failure to fully embody the true spirit of Islam.

The minister stressed the importance of instilling a lifelong pursuit of knowledge in the younger generation, aligning this pursuit with the teachings of the Holy Qur'an and the life of Hazrat Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him). The minister highlighted the importance of gaining power through contemporary education, promoting the culture of tolerance and ensuring rule of law and justice,

so that no one could dare to cast an evil eye on them or commit any blasphemy against their religion and sacred personalities.

"Islam does not permit anyone to dictate the faith and beliefs of others, nor does it allow the taking of innocent lives," he remarked, addressing the destructive tendencies of extremism and terrorism, which starkly contrast with the core teachings of Islam.

The minister urged the Chairman of the National Rahmatul-lil-Alameen Wa Khatam an-Nabiyin Authority, as well as educational institutions and relevant stakeholders, to prioritize the character building of youth in line with the teachings Holy Qur'an and the Seerat of Hazrat Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him), to ensure that they grew into morally upright individuals, practicing Islam both in letter and spirit.

ANF recovers 927 kg drugs in 8 operations

RAWALPINDI (APP): Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF) while conducting 8 operations recovered over 927 kg drugs worth more than Rs 188 million and arrested 8 accused, said an ANF Headquarters spokesman on Friday.

He informed that 1.490 kg ice hidden in the luggage of a passenger going to Riyadh was recovered at Karachi International Airport. 500 kg opium and 50 kg ice were recovered from Mashkel area of Washik in Balochistan. 291.6 kg hashish and 64.4 kg opium were recovered near Samanabad in Faisalabad and two suspects were arrested during the operation.

9.950 kg hashish, 1.5 kg ice and 1.2 kg opium were recovered from a house in Shahpur Kanjan in Lahore during an operation and a woman was also arrested. 3 kg ice was recovered from a car intercepted near Balili Road in Quetta and a suspect was arrested. In another operation near Shahpur Kanjan Lahore, 2.4 kg hashish was recovered from the possession of a drug dealer. 1.2 kg hashish, 2 grams cocaine and 150 grams ice were recovered from a Nigerian checked near a hospital on GT Road Rawalpindi. 12 grams cocaine and 300 grams ice were recovered from a Nigerian woman rounded up near G-10 Islamabad.

Women MPs, civil society to collaborate in combating deadly trans fats



Saqib Mushtaq

ISLAMABAD: The Centre for Peace and Development Initiatives (CPDI), in collaboration with the Women's Parliamentary Caucus (WPC) hosted a roundtable discussion titled "Women's Right to Health: Eliminating Trans Fats for a Healthier Future" at PIPS, Islamabad. This crucial event, organized in line with International Women's Day 2025 under the theme "Invest in Women: Accelerate Progress", brought together policymakers, public health experts, civil society representatives, and media professionals to address the pressing issue of industrially produced trans fatty acids (iTFA) and partially hydrogenated oils (PHOs) in Pakistan's food supply and their disproportionate impact on women's health.

The event commenced with remarks from Dr. Shahida Rehmani, Secretary of WPC, and Mr. Mukhtar Ahmad Ali, Executive Director of CPDI, who underscored the need for immediate legislative and policy interventions to ban PHOs and regulate iTFA levels in Pakistan's food supply.

The speakers delved into the adverse health effects of trans fats and highlighted global best practices for their elimination. It was emphasized that reducing iTFAs is not just a public health imperative but also a matter of social justice and gender equality. iTFAs disproportionately affect women's health and exacerbate the risk of cardiovascular diseases, as well as complications during pregnancy. It was pointed out that the cost of trans-fat intake due to premature mortality from CVD in Pakistan is estimated to be USD 459 million per annum.

It is important to note that civil society organizations such as CPDI, Pakistan National Association of Heart (PANAH), Heartfile and Pakistan Youth Change Advocates (PYCA) are collaborating with government ministries, regulatory bod-

ies, and UN agencies (WHO, UNICEF) to advance policies aimed at eliminating industrially produced trans fatty acids from the food supply chain and a complete ban on PHO. A high-level panel discussion titled "Women's Health and Legislative Action" followed which was moderated by Dr. Saba Amjad, CEO of Heartfile. Distinguished panelists included Syed Hussain Tariq, Chairman, Standing Committee on National Food Security and Research. He also encouraged enhanced coordination with the Ministry of Law and Justice to develop draft legislation that prioritizes the issue of trans fats and PHO Ban in the country.

The Chief Guest Dr. Shahida Rehmani commended CPDI, WPC, and PIPS for their efforts in highlighting this critical issue and encouraged continued dialogue and policy engagement on women's health and nutrition.

As a key outcome of this dialogue, CPDI, WPC, and partner organizations will work towards drafting a policy brief outlining specific recommendations for the government to enforce a complete legislative ban on PHOs, strict enforcement of iTFA regulations in the food supply chain, develop and implement national standards for healthier food alternatives, launch public awareness campaigns to educate women and families on healthier dietary choices, encourage research and data collection on gender-specific health impacts of iTFAs and a complete ban on PHO in the country.

This International Women's Day, CPDI, its partners and WPC have reaffirmed their commitment to ensuring women's right to good health through effective legislative advocacy and multi-stakeholder collaboration. By addressing the harmful effects of trans fats and promoting policy-driven solutions, this initiative will contribute to a healthier and more equitable future for women in Pakistan.

MAIDAN SHAHR (Pajhwok): A motorcyclist was killed and three other people sustained injuries in two separate traffic accidents in Chak and Narkh districts of central Maidan Wardak province. Provincial police spokesman Yousuf Israr said one accident happened in Ghalu Ghondai area of Narkh district and the other in Regrishon area of Chak district. A pickup truck hit a motorcycle in Ghalo Ghondai area and killed the motorcyclist, he said.

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BALKH (Amu tv): The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) organized an exhibition in Mazar-e-Sharif, Balkh province, this week to mark International Women's Day, showcasing products made by women entrepreneurs. In a statement on X, UNHCR's Afghanistan office said several exhibitions featuring handicrafts were also held in Kabul as part of the week's events.

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Asia is comparable to a living body composed of soil and water. The heart that beats inside the body is Afghanistan. The destruction of Afghanistan would be the destruction of Asia. And in its progress and prosperity lies the well-being of Asia. - Allama Iqbal

Afghanistan approves 252 projects worth 74 billion Afghani

The deputy spokesperson of the Islamic Emirate said that the funding for these projects has been sourced from domestic revenues, providing direct and indirect employment

"This is a major achievement—not only in terms of road construction but also in providing job opportunities for Afghans. Next year, investment in

"In Afghanistan's economic system, the more we can invest in infrastructure projects related to the country's foundation, the more effective it will be," said Iraj Faqiri, another economic expert. Following the return of the Islamic Emirate to power and the reduction of global humanitarian aid to Afghanistan, the interim government has consistently emphasized that all projects and salaries of government employees are funded from domestic revenue.

Iran to help Afghanistan implement water, power projects



Mansour assured the Iranian ambassador the Islamic Emirate welcomes strengthening of develop-

The two sides also discussed water shortages and drought.

Renew vehicle documents or face action

The source wrote under duress, the vehicles whose documents are not renewed from previous years up to 1934 are exempted from 90 percent of the outstanding tax, vehicles, from 1935 to 1937 are exempted from 80 percent, and vehicles whose documents are not renewed from 1939 to 1401 are exempted from 70 percent of the tax. The traffic police urged vehicle owners whose documents are still valid to take advantage of this opportunity and renew their vehicle documents, otherwise they will face legal action.

3 killed, 19 injured in Paktia, Baghlan accidents

It said the injured including four women and three



Elsewhere, Paktia police spokesman Munib Zadran said that three people, including a woman, died in a traffic accident on the

Both accidents were blamed on carelessness of the drivers.

Sancharak: city deprived of basic services

"We have a beautiful town, but we don't have electricity. Everyone is forced to rely on solar power. Our roads are in poor condition, and these problems must be resolved as soon as possible," said Mohammad Anwar, a resident of Sancharak.

Javid Hassanzada, another resident of Sancharak, emphasized: "Our request to the authorities is to install pipelines from Khoshdar water as soon as possible so that people's problems can be solved."



Muttaqi meets Oman ministers, trade leaders



Muttaqi discussed economic issues, direct flights between the two countries and the problems of Afghans living in Oman with his interlocutors.

Badr bin Hamad Al Busaidi promised to provide amnesty for the release of Afghan prisoners in the country on special occa-

The Ministry of Aوقف and Religious Affairs of Oman expressed its readiness to share experiences and cooperate with the Ministry of Guidance, Hajj and Aوقاف of Afghanistan.

Calls for concrete action to support Afghan women at UN meeting



The permanent representative of Albania to the United Nations, Suela Janina, said: "Afghan women do not need only our solidarity, you already have it, but you don't need our attention, you already have it. What you need is action—concrete action."

Meanwhile, some women's rights activists in Afghanistan hold different views. "Afghan women's demands should be considered, and the closed doors should be reopened.

Taliban security commission meets in Kandahar

The meeting comes amid ongoing reports of internal divisions within the Taliban leadership, particularly between the Kandahar faction and the Haqqani network. Notably absent was Interior Minister Sirajuddin Haqqani, whose deputy, Ibrahim Sadr, attended in his place. A source previously confirmed to *Amu* that several high-ranking Taliban officials had traveled to Kandahar for discussions with Akhundzada.

Herat commemorates anniversary of uprising against communist regime



During the ceremony, Herat officials referred to political pressures from some countries, including the United States, on the Islamic Emirate, emphasizing that these pressures are ineffective and that these countries should learn from Afghanistan's history.

The Hoot 24 uprising of the people of Herat against the communist regime is considered one of the bloodiest and most horrific events in the country's modern history. According to historical accounts, this uprising marked the beginning of further revolts by Afghans against the communist regime and the Soviet Red Army in the country.



ISLAMABAD: Commander Bahrain National Guard, General Shaikh Mohammed Bin Isa Bin Salman Al Khalifa, called on Chief of the Naval Staff, Admiral Naveed Ashraf, at Naval Headquarters.

Militants facing losses in KP terror attacks

Syed Adnan

PESHAWAR: The recent wave of terrorism in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa continues, with attacks targeting security forces and police. However, counter-operations have resulted in heavy losses for militants, as security forces have successfully conducted multiple operations across various districts, eliminating and arresting dozens of insurgents.

Sources reveal that in some key districts, officers of Grade 17 (DSP level) have been appointed as DPOs, despite having relatively less experience compared to seasoned officers.

Similarly, some weaker officers, appointed during the tenure of the former IGP, have posed serious challenges for the police. Their ineffective strategies have negatively impacted security operations.

Recent counter-terrorism operations in Khyber, Bajaur, North Waziristan, Bannu, and Tank have led to the elimination of several terrorists. The combined efforts of the Pakistan Army and police are aimed at dismantling terrorist networks. However, weaknesses in police leadership have made it difficult to achieve desired results.

These terrorist incidents

have created fear among the public, while the business community is also facing uncertainty. In response, the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government is considering strengthening security forces and deploying experienced officers in high-risk districts.

Experts believe that improving law and order in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa requires the appointment of experienced police officers, the use of modern technology, and intelligence-based operations. If these aspects are neglected, the fight against terrorism could become more prolonged.

Bahraini Commander calls on Naval Chief

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Commander Bahrain National Guard, General Shaikh Mohammed Bin Isa Bin Salman Al Khalifa, called on Chief of the Naval Staff, Admiral Naveed Ashraf, at Naval Headquarters, Islamabad.

Upon arrival at Naval Headquarters, Commander Bahrain National Guard was received by Naval Chief. The dignitary was also introduced to the Principal Staff Officers at Naval Headquarters. During the meeting, both leaders discussed matters of mutual interest, regional maritime security situation, and avenues for enhanced cooperation in defence, training, and security. Admiral Naveed Ashraf highlighted Pakistan Navy's initiatives for ensuring maritime security and regional stability through Regional Maritime Security Patrols.

General Shaikh Mohammed Bin Isa Bin Salman Al Khalifa appreciated and acknowledged Pakistan Navy's contributions and unwavering commitment to collaborative maritime security efforts in the region. Both leaders pledged to further strengthen and diversify the scope of existing bilateral defence relationship.

Pakistan and Bahrain share longstanding brotherly relations, with close naval cooperation, particularly in training and maritime security. The visit of the Commander Bahrain National Guard is expected to further enhance bilateral collaboration between the two countries.

Saif lashes out at Asif

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Advisor to the Chief Minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa on Information and Public Relations, Barrister Dr. Saif, has stated that Khawaja Asif's claim about settling terrorists in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is misleading and baseless. Such allegations are merely an attempt to cover up the federal government's failure in combating terrorism.

Barrister Dr. Saif challenged Khawaja Asif to identify even a single terrorist who has been settled in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. He questioned why, if the Defense Minister truly has knowledge of terrorists being resettled, he has not taken action against them instead of making accusations. He reminded Khawaja Asif that as Defense Minister, he is responsible not just for the borders of Islamabad but for the entire country. It is unfortunate that despite holding such a critical position, Khawaja Asif is engaging in political rhetoric on a sensitive issue like terrorism.

Furthermore, Barrister Dr. Saif emphasized that combating terrorism requires practical measures, not just statements. He also remarked that while Khawaja Asif has apologized for supporting martial law, it would be more appropriate for him to also apologize for Form 47. Apologizing decades later holds no real significance. He added that Khawaja Asif should also seek forgiveness from Rehana Dara for becoming an MNA through Form 47.

Lastly, he stated that as Defense Minister, Khawaja Asif should take responsibility for the Balochistan incident and step down from his position.

KP govt takes leap towards financial transparency, governance efficiency

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) has marked a significant milestone with the launch of an Integrated IT Portal for Public Sector Entities with the aim to ensure strict financial discipline, transparency in the utilisation of public exchequer, and improve public service delivery.

The Integrated IT Portal, developed with technical support from the FCDO-funded Sub-National Governance (SNG) Programme, is designed to revolutionise the financial oversight and governance of 181 public sector entities (PSEs) in KP. This centralised platform, featuring real-time financial and operational Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), interactive dashboards, and automated reporting mechanisms, empowers the Corporate Governance Unit (CGU) of Finance Department to monitor, manage, and ensure the fiscal discipline of PSEs effectively.

Formal launching of the Integrated IT Portal took place at the Chief Minister's House in Peshawar with Chief Minister Ali Amin Khan Gandapur as the chief guest. The event was attended by Advisor to the Chief Minister on Finance, Muzammil Aslam, senior officials from various departments, and representatives of partner organizations.

The provincial government currently has 183 public sector entities, including autonomous and semi-autonomous bodies, universities, teaching hospitals, municipal services delivery units, and other public sector organizations. This new integrated IT portal has been designed to enhance financial oversight and operational efficiency across all these entities, making Khyber Pakhtunkhwa the first province in Pakistan to introduce such a system.

With the launch of this portal, its use is now mandatory for all public sector entities of the provincial gov-



ernment. The system features financial performance indicators, interactive dashboards, and an automated reporting mechanism, enabling better decision-making, monitoring, and financial governance.

During the event, the first-ever Service Delivery Performance Monitoring Report was also presented. This report, developed with the assistance of the Sub-National Governance Program, was initially piloted in three departments but has now been extended to all government departments and subordinate entities.

The monitoring framework serves as a key policy document aimed at promoting transparency and accountability in public sector operations. It reflects a comprehensive assessment of all provincial departments' budget execution and service delivery performance.

Developed through extensive IFMIS training and capacity-building workshops, the report provides critical insights into departmental efficiencies, resource optimisation, and alignment with strategic development goals. Speaking at the event, Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur congratulated the relevant authorities on the successful launch of the portal and the preparation of the monitoring report.

He directed all institutions to ensure full compliance with the por-

tal's implementation by July 1, 2025, warning of action against non-compliance. "We should have adopted such modern reforms much earlier," the Chief Minister remarked, emphasizing that leveraging technology is essential to tackling contemporary governance challenges. He highlighted that his administration initiated work on this digital transformation soon after taking office, achieving significant progress in just one year.

The Chief Minister stressed that the ultimate goal of these reforms is to enhance service delivery and strengthen the province's financial independence. He cited fiscal improvements, including the presentation of a Rs169 billion surplus budget, the establishment of a Debt Management Fund with an initial PKR 30 billion (aiming to increase it to PKR 150 billion), the restoration of the Sehat Card health insurance program, and the doubling of funding for various welfare initiatives and education scholarships.

The event also featured speeches by Advisor to the Chief Minister on Finance Muzammil Aslam, Finance Secretary Amir Sultan Tareen, and representatives of international partner organizations, who praised the initiative as a step toward efficient governance and financial transparency.

Hamas says it will release a US-Israeli hostage and 4 bodies

JERUSALEM (AP): Hamas said on Friday it has accepted a proposal from mediators to release one living American-Israeli hostage and the bodies of four dual-nationals who had died in captivity.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office cast doubt on the offer, accusing Hamas of trying to manipulate talks underway in Qatar on the next stage of the Israel-Hamas ceasefire. The militant group in the Gaza Strip did not immediately specify when the release of soldier Edan Alexander and the four bodies would occur — or what it expected to get in return.

Alexander was 19 when he was abducted from his base on the border with Gaza in southern Israel during the Hamas attack on Oct. 7, 2023 that sparked the war. It was not clear which mediators had proposed the release to Hamas. The United States, led by the Trump administration's hostage envoy Steve Witkoff, has been pushing for a proposal that would extend the truce and see a limited number of hostage for prisoner exchanges.

Following the Hamas statement, Netanyahu's office said Israel had "accepted the Witkoff outline and showed flexibility," but said that "Hamas is refusing and will not budge from its positions." "At the same time, it continues to use manipulation and psychological warfare — the reports about Hamas' willingness to release American hostages are intended to sabotage the negotiations," the prime minister's office said.

It added that Netanyahu would

convene his ministerial team on Saturday night to receive a detailed report from the negotiation team and "decide on the next steps for the release of hostages." The first phase of the ceasefire ended two weeks ago.

The White House last week made a surprise announcement, saying that American officials had engaged in "ongoing talks and discussions" with Hamas officials, stepping away from a long-held US policy of not directly engaging with the militant group. That prompted a terse response from Netanyahu's office. It was not immediately clear whether those talks were at all linked to Hamas' Friday announcement about the release of the American hostage.

In a separate statement, Hamas official Husam Badran reaffirmed what he said was Hamas' commitment to fully implementing the ceasefire agreement in all its phases, warning that any Israeli deviation from the terms would return negotiations to square one. The ceasefire has paused the deadliest and most destructive fighting ever between Israel and Hamas. The first phase allowed the return of 25 living hostages and the remains of eight others in exchange for the release of nearly 2,000 Palestinian prisoners.

Israeli forces have withdrawn to buffer zones inside Gaza, hundreds of thousands of displaced Palestinians have returned to northern Gaza for the first time since early in the war, and hundreds of trucks of aid entered per day until Israel suspended supplies. Israel has been pressing Hamas to release half of the remaining hostages in return for an extension of

the first phase, and a promise to negotiate a lasting truce. Hamas is believed to have 24 living hostages and the bodies of 35 others.

Two weeks ago, Israel cut off all supplies to Gaza and its more than 2 million people as it pressed Hamas to agree. The militant group has said that the move would affect the remaining hostages as well. Hamas wants to start negotiations on the ceasefire's more difficult second phase, which would see the release of remaining hostages from Gaza, the withdrawal of Israeli forces and a lasting peace.

The militant group said with support cut off to Gaza, some 80 percent of the population has now lost access to food sources, with aid distribution halted and markets running out of supplies, while 90 percent are unable to access clean drinking water. In Jerusalem, some 80,000 Muslim worshippers prayed on Friday at the Al-Aqsa mosque compound for the second week of Ramadan, according to the Islamic Trust, which monitors the site. Israel is tightly controlling access, allowing only men over 55 and women over 50 to enter from the occupied territory for the prayers.

"The conditions are extremely difficult," said Yousef Badeen, a Palestinian who had left the southern West Bank city of Hebron at dawn to make it to Jerusalem, said. "We wish they will open it for good." Hamas accused Israel of escalating a "religious war" against Palestinians with what it called the "systematic targeting of Muslim religious practices" through its restrictions at Al-Aqsa mosque.

US, Israel look to Africa for resettling Palestinians uprooted from Gaza

JERUSALEM (AP): The US and Israel have reached out to officials of three East African governments to discuss using their territories as potential destinations for resettling Palestinians uprooted from the Gaza Strip under President Donald Trump's proposed postwar plan, American and Israeli officials say.

The contacts with Sudan, Somalia and the breakaway region of Somaliland known as Somaliland reflect the determination by the US and Israel to press ahead with a plan that has been widely condemned and raised serious legal and moral issues. Because all three places are poor, and in some cases wracked by violence, the proposal also casts doubt on Trump's stated goal of resettling Gaza's Palestinians in a "beautiful area." Officials from Sudan said they have rejected overtures from the US, while officials from Somalia and Somaliland told The Associated Press that they were not aware of any contacts.

Under Trump's plan, Gaza's more than 2 million people would be permanently sent elsewhere. He has proposed the US would take ownership of the territory, oversee a lengthy cleanup process and develop it as a real estate project. The idea of a mass transfer of Palestinians was once considered a fantasy of Israel's ultra-nationalist fringe. But since Trump presented the idea at a White House meeting last month, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has

hailed it as a "bold vision."

Palestinians in Gaza have rejected the proposal and dismiss Israeli claims that the departures would be voluntary. Arab nations have expressed vehement opposition and offered an alternative reconstruction plan that would leave the Palestinians in place. Rights groups have said forcing or pressuring the Palestinians to leave could be a potential war crime. Still, the White House says Trump "stands by his vision."

Speaking on condition of anonymity to discuss a secret diplomatic initiative, US and Israeli officials confirmed the contacts with Somalia and Somaliland, while the Americans confirmed Sudan as well. They said it was unclear how much progress the efforts made or at what level the discussions took place.

Separate outreach from the US and Israel to the three potential destinations began last month, days after Trump floated the Gaza plan alongside Netanyahu, according to the US officials, who said that Israel was taking the lead in the discussions. Israel and the US have a variety of incentives — financial, diplomatic and security — to offer these potential partners. It is a formula that Trump used five years ago when he brokered the Abraham Accords — a series of mutually beneficial diplomatic accords between Israel and four Arab countries. The White House declined to comment on the

outreach efforts. The offices of Netanyahu and Ron Dermer, the Israeli Cabinet minister and Netanyahu confidant who has been leading Israel's postwar planning, also had no comment.

But Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich, a longtime advocate of what he calls "voluntary" emigration of Palestinians, said this week that Israel is working to identify countries to take in Palestinians. He also said Israel is preparing a "very large emigration department" within its Defense Ministry. Here is a closer look at the places the officials say have been approached.

The North African country was among the four Abraham Accord nations that agreed to normalize diplomatic relations with Israel in 2020. As part of the deal, the US removed Sudan from its list of state supporters of terrorism, a move that gave the country access to international loans and global legitimacy. But relations with Israel never took off as Sudan plunged into civil war between government forces and the RSF paramilitary group.

The conflict has been marked by atrocities, including ethnically motivated killing and rape, according to the UN and rights groups. The International Criminal Court is investigating alleged war crimes and crimes against humanity, and then-President Joe Biden's administration in January said the RSF and its proxies were committing genocide.