

**FIR of blast registered**  
PESHAWAR (APP): A case has been registered at the Counter-Terrorism Department police station regarding the recent explosion in the Umar area of Peshawar which claimed the life of Mufti Munir Shakir. Police said on Sunday that the FIR of the incident was filed by the SHO Umar against unknown militants. The report stated that police arrived at the scene after receiving information about an explosion outside a mosque.

# 3 FC soldiers martyred as many terrorists killed

**F.P. Report**

RAWALPINDI: Security Forces killed three terrorists, while five brave sons of soil embraced shahadat including three security forces personnel and two innocent civilians.  
“On 16 March 2025, a vehicle borne suicide bomber exploded himself on a security forces convoy in Nushki District” said an ISPR news release.  
Shuhada included Havildar Manzoor Ali (Age: 38 years, resident of District Nawab Shah), Havildar Ali Bilawal (Age: 39 years, resident of District Naseer Abad), Naik Abdul Raheem (Age: 34 years, resident of District Badin), Civilian Driver Jalal ud Din (resident of District Quetta) and Civilian Driver Muhammad Naeem (resident of District Kharan).  
“In the ensuing sanitiza-

tion operation, the terrorists were pursued and after intense fire exchange, three terrorists were effectively neutralized by the security forces,” said the release.  
Sanitization operations in the area would continue and perpetrators of this heinous and cowardly act will be brought to justice.  
Security forces of Pakistan, in step with the nation, remain determined to thwart attempts at sabotaging peace, stability and progress of Balochistan and such sacrifices of our brave soldiers and valiant civilians further strengthen our resolve.  
According to security sources, the attack was carried out by a suicide bomber affiliated with the banned Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA).  
The assailant rammed an explosives-laden vehicle into the FC convoy, causing a powerful blast that

was heard far and wide. Following the explosion, security forces immediately responded, killing four terrorists, including the suicide bomber, in retaliatory action.  
Rescue teams and security personnel rushed to the scene, and an emergency was imposed at local hospitals.  
Hospitals on high alert  
The explosion triggered an emergency declaration at hospitals in Noshki.  
According to hospital administration, five bodies and over 40 injured individuals were initially shifted to the Noshki Teaching Hospital for treatment.  
Due to the critical condition of several injured, they were later airlifted to Quetta by helicopter for advanced medical care.  
**PM, officials condemn attack**  
Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif strongly condemned

the terrorist attack, expressing deep sorrow over the loss of precious lives. He extended condolences to the bereaved families and prayed for the speedy recovery of the injured.  
PM Sharif also directed authorities to provide all possible medical assistance to the victims.  
Federal Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi, Balochistan government spokesperson Shahid Rind, and Sindh Chief Minister Murad Ali Shah strongly condemned the attack, expressing grief over the loss of lives.  
Interior Minister Naqvi extended condolences to the families of the deceased, calling the attack a “barbaric act” and reaffirming the government’s commitment to combating terrorism.  
“Targeting innocent people is the height of brutality,” he said.



ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif met FIA and IB officials who nabbed notorious gang leader involved in human trafficking.

## PM hails FIA, IB for busting human trafficking gang

**F.P. Report**

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif on Sunday appreciated the authorities and officials of the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) and Intelligence Bureau (IB) for nabbing the main ring-leader of a gang involved in notorious human trafficking.  
During a meeting with the authorities and officials of the FIA and IB in the presence of ministers and interior secretary, and

broadcast live on national TV channels, the prime minister expressed the hope that with the relentless and worthy efforts undertaken by these agencies, the obnoxious practice of human trafficking would end forever.  
He noted with appreciation the arrest of Usman Jajja involved in numerous human trafficking cases and said “the black business of human trafficking has earned bad name for Pakistan while a number of nationals lost their lives in boats cap-

sized incidents near Italy and Morocco which also created huge embarrassment for the country abroad.”  
The prime minister said that he called a meeting with all the authorities and officers to convey appreciation on his part and on behalf of the government and the people.  
He also urged the authorities and officers to gird up their loins and raise the country’s name by carrying out their official responsibilities with dedication.

The prime minister also awarded appreciation shields and cheques to different officials who took part in the operations to bust the gangs.  
During the meeting, Minister of State for Interior Talal Chaudhry and secretary Interior briefed the prime minister about the performance of the agencies. The director generals FIA and IB also briefed the prime minister about the arrest of gang leaders, operators and facilitators involved in the human trafficking.

## Four including 3 cops martyred in KP attacks

PESHAWAR (APP): At least four people, including three police personnel, were martyred, and three others injured in separate gun attacks on police stations, checkpoints, and a sui gas installation in the wee hours on Sunday.  
Police said that a cop was martyred when armed men attacked the Pajagi police post in Peshawar. Police responded with gunfire, forcing the attackers to flee and launched a search operation in the area to track down the assailants.  
Meanwhile, in Karak, miscreants launched attacks on Takht-e-Nasrati and Thana Khurram police station using heavy weaponry. District Police Officer (DPO) Shehbaz

Ilahi said that the police successfully repelled both attacks.  
However, an officer was martyred in the first attack. Police retaliation forced the attackers to escape, he added.  
In Bannu, terrorists attempted to attack the Spinah Tangi police checkpoint. Security personnel responded with gunfire, forcing the attackers to flee. No casualties were reported.  
Moreover, some militants attacked the Nasran police checkpoint in the jurisdiction of Gul Imam police station in Tank, injuring two policemen. Separately, a retired police officer came under a fatal gun attack in South

Waziristan’s Dabkot area.  
In a separate incident in Karak, militants attacked a Sui gas installation in Karak where one security guard was martyred, and another was injured. The attackers managed to flee after the assault.  
DPO Ilahi later confirmed that firing at both stations and the gas office had ceased.  
Earlier, police had reported attacks on six police stations and checkpoints in Bannu, Lakki Marwat and Tank in the early hours of Saturday. Officials said no casualty was reported as the cops were alert and they repulsed all the attacks with the support of local people.

## PIA to resume flights to UK after Eid

ISLAMABAD (INP): Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) will resume flights to the United Kingdom (UK) following the lifting of the European Union ban after Eidul Fitr, said Pakistan HC Mohammad Faisal. Dr. Mohammad Faisal, revealed that PIA flights to the UK will officially resume after Eidul Fitr.  
Speaking to the media during an Iftar dinner with journalists and TikTok influencers in London, Dr. Faisal stated that the first phase will include flights from London and Manchester to Pakistan, while efforts are underway to restore flights from Birmingham as well.  
He further mentioned that a special ceremony will be held to officially inaugurate the flight resumption, with media representatives in attendance.  
It is worth noting that after the European Union lifted the ban, PIA’s first flight to Paris took off on January 10, 2024, marking the end of a four-and-a-half-year suspension.  
The ban was imposed in June 2020 after a PIA plane crash in Karachi, followed by the then Aviation Minister’s controversial statement in Parliament, revealing that pilots were hired with fake licenses.  
Meanwhile, the process for Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) privatization has accelerated once again, with significant interest shown by prominent groups for the acquisition of PIA.

## PML-N, PPP agree to ensure implementation of projects

LAHORE (INP): A consultative meeting of the coordination committees of Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz and Pakistan People’s Party was held in Lahore.  
Both the parties agreed to continue working together and ensure immediate implementa-

tion of public welfare projects.  
They also decided to hold regular sessions on the first week of every month. During the meeting, leaders of both the parties reviewed development projects and public welfare initiatives launched by Punjab Chief

Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif.  
Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Mohammad Ishaq Dar led the Pakistan Muslim League-N delegation and delegation of Pakistan People’s Party was led by former prime minister Raja Pervez Ashraf.

## Saif plays Abbasi’s statement on ML-1

**F.P. Report**

PESHAWAR: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Adviser on Information, Barrister Dr. Muhammad Ali Saif, has termed Federal Minister for Railways Hanif Abbasi’s statement on ML-1 as an official declaration of “Goodbye China.”  
In his statement, Barrister Saif said that on the directives of Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, the Federal Railway Minister has effectively shown a red flag to China. He questioned the message being sent to China by Hanif Abbasi’s statement

about constructing ML-1 independently.  
This statement comes despite China’s recent decision to extend the repayment period for a \$2 billion loan by one year.  
The Adviser on Information stated that following Ishaq Dar’s negative remarks, Hanif Abbasi’s statement is another self-inflicted attack on Pakistan-China relations.  
He accused the Shehbaz-led government of deteriorating ties with China after already damaging relations with Afghanistan.  
He further stated that the

Railway Minister’s announcement to construct ML-1 without China marks a major policy shift. If the Foreign Office does not clarify this statement, it will be considered an official policy stance.  
Barrister Dr. Saif also criticized the government for its failure to pay PTV employees their salaries by the 16th of the month and sarcastically questioned whether ML-1 would be funded through ephedrine profits.  
He suggested that the minister’s statement seemed to be influenced by ephedrine.

## PILDAT board members meet PM

**F.P. Report**

LAHORE: Pakistan Institute of Legislative Development and Transparency (PILDAT) board members Majeeb ur Rehman Shami, Shahid Hamid and Ahmad Bilal Mehboob called on Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif here on Sunday.  
During the meeting, they apprised the premier about the affairs of the PILDAT. Shehbaz Sharif appreciated the role of PILDAT regarding betterment of democracy in the country.  
Federal Minister for Information and Broadcasting Attaullah Tarar and Punjab Assembly Speaker Malik Muhammad Ahmad Khan were also present in the meeting.

## Houthis say they are ready to escalate after US strikes Yemen

WASHINGTON/ADEN, Yemen (Reuters): Yemen’s Houthi movement said on Sunday it was ready to “meet escalation with escalation” after U.S. strikes targeting the Iran-aligned group over its threat to resume Red Sea shipping attacks triggered a diplomatic backlash from Moscow and Tehran.  
The strikes - which killed at least 31 people at the start of a campaign that one U.S. official told Reuters might continue for weeks - are the biggest U.S. military operation in the Middle East since President Donald Trump took office in January.  
The Houthis’ political bureau described the attacks as a “war crime.”  
“Our Yemeni armed forces are fully prepared to respond to escalation with escalation,” it said in a statement.  
Trump also warned Iran, the Houthis’ main backer, that it needed to end support for the group immediately. He said if Iran threatened the United States, “America will hold you fully accountable and, we won’t be nice about it!”  
In response, the top commander of Iran’s Revolutionary Guards said

the Houthis took their own strategic and operational decisions and Tehran would react decisively to any action against it.  
“We warn our enemies that Iran will respond decisively and destructively if they take their threats into action,” Hossein Salami told state media.  
Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov called U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio to urge an “immediate cessation of the use of force and the importance for all sides to engage in political dialogue,” Russia’s foreign ministry said on Sunday.  
Lavrov’s call to halt the strikes came as Trump has been pressing Moscow to sign a U.S. proposal for a 30-day ceasefire between Russia and Ukraine, which Ukraine accepted last week, but Russia has said needs to be reworked.  
Trump is also trying to bring Tehran to the negotiating table over its nuclear programme, while also ramping up sanctions pressure.  
**‘LIKE AN EARTHQUAKE’**  
Most of the 31 people confirmed killed in the U.S. strikes were women and children, Anees al-Asbahi,

spokesperson for the Houthi-run health ministry said in an updated toll on Sunday. More than 100 were injured, he said.  
Residents in Sanaa said the strikes hit a neighbourhood known to host several members of the Houthi leadership.  
“The explosions were violent and shook the neighbourhood like an earthquake. They terrified our women and children,” one of the residents, who gave his name as Abdullah Yahia, told Reuters.  
In Sanaa, a crane and bulldozer were used to remove debris at one site and people used their bare hands to pick through the rubble. At a hospital, medics treated the injured, including children, and the bodies of several casualties, wrapped in plastic sheets, were placed in a yard, Reuters footage showed.  
Strikes also targeted Houthi military sites in Yemen’s southwestern city of Taiz, two witnesses said on Sunday.  
Another strike on a power station in the town of Dahyan in Saada led to a power cut, Al-Masirah TV reported early on Sunday. Dahyan is where Abdul

Malik al-Houthi, the enigmatic leader of the Houthis, often meets visitors.  
**RED SEA ATTACKS**  
The Houthis, an armed movement that took control of most of Yemen over the past decade, said last week they would resume attacks on Israeli ships passing through Red Sea shipping lanes off Yemen if Israel did not lift a block on aid into Gaza.  
The Houthis had launched scores of attacks targeting shipping from November 2023, saying they were in solidarity with Palestinians over Israel’s war with Hamas in Gaza.  
The attacks disrupted global commerce and set the U.S. military off on a costly campaign to intercept missiles and drones that have burned through stocks of U.S. air defences.  
The group has not launched new strikes on Red Sea shipping since it halted attacks when Israel and Hamas agreed to a ceasefire in Gaza in January.  
But on March 12, the Houthis’ military spokesperson said the Houthi threat to attack Israeli ships would remain in effect until Israel resumed the delivery of aid and food into Gaza.

## Train operation suspended

QUETTA (INP): Train operations between Quetta and Chaman have resumed after five days, following the Jaffer Express incident. The Chaman Passenger Train, carrying 200 passengers, departed from Quetta at 8:30 AM. However, the departure of Jaffer Express and Bolan Mail remains suspended. According to railway officials, these services will only resume after track repairs in Mushkaf are completed.





KARACHI: Activists of Tehreek Jawan Pakistan (TJP) hold a rally in support of Pak Armed Forces in front of Karachi Press club. —INP Photo

## Vital to restore Lahore to its original form: Nawaz

LAHORE (APP): PML-N President Mian Muhammad Nawaz Sharif has said that it is important to restore the provincial capital to its original shape as old Lahore is very beautiful. He said this while presiding over a meeting along with Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz here on Sunday. The Lahore Authority for Heritage Revival (LAHR) has been established for restoration and conservation of historical heritage. Nawaz Sharif would be patron in chief of the authority. A sub-functional committee has been formed comprising relevant officers. The meeting agreed to identify and remove encroachments from historical places of Lahore. Nawaz Sharif directed the authorities to give alternate place for business and compensation to encroachers. A comprehensive plan was sought for revival of the heritage areas of Lahore and the provincial capital has been divided into six zones for heritage revival. A proposal to start revival of all zone heritage areas at

once was also discussed. The meeting was informed that underground shifting of electricity wires for beautification of the Mall Road is ongoing speedily. Five points in the city has been identified to make underground parking. Proposals and recommendations to restore 'Nila Gumbad' in its real form were also reviewed. A decision was made to restore Circular Road, Baghichian and Badru. Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz expressed concern over encroachments on Circular Road and in the surroundings of the historical gates. A direction was given to remove hurdles to display 'Manzar Nama' of Bhati Gate and other gates. The meeting also agreed to restore Shahi Qila, Jahangir Tomb, Noor Jahan Tomb, Shalimar Bagh, Baradari of Kamran Mirza and other places. A proposal to construct a pedestrian way from Shah Alam Market to Bhati was also discussed. Nawaz Sharif said that work aimed at restoring historical heritage should be com-

pleted as national obligation. He said that Europe had kept their cities intact in old form even after centuries. "In Europe, castles and old buildings are still present in their old form. Before the creation of Pakistan, Lahore was considered a heritage hub of the sub-continent. Due to encroachments, now nobody likes to go to historical bazaars," he added. Maryam Nawaz said that work continued on old Lahore and the good face of Lahore would be seen in few years. She said nobody would be allowed to set up encroachments and spoil the cities. "The historical gates of Lahore will be restored to their ancient form," she added. The meeting was told that there were 115 building in Lahore which had historical significance, and out of 75 ancient buildings of the colonial era work was being carried out on 48 buildings. It was informed that nameplates should be installed at the residences of Saadat Hasan Manto, Shorish Kashmiri and other literary figures.

## Drivers booked for speeding on Motorways

LAHORE (APP): In a major crackdown against reckless driving, the National Highways and Motorway Police (NHMP) took action against 54 drivers for exceeding speed limits on various motorways in the Central Region. The operation aimed to enhance road safety and curb life-threatening speeding incidents. According to the NHMP spokesperson, the special campaign was conducted on M-2, M-3, M-4, M-5, and the Lahore-Sialkot Motorway. Several FIRs were registered against offenders caught exceeding 150 km/h, and multiple arrests were made. As per official data: Lahore-Sialkot Motorway: 4 cases were registered, Lahore-Islamabad Motorway (M-2): 19 FIRs were filed, Lahore-Multan Motorway (M-3): 5 cases were registered, Multan-Pindi Bhattian Motorway (M-4): 6 FIRs were filed and Sukkur-Multan Motorway (M-5): 20 drivers were arrested. The NHMP reiterated that the speed limit for three-lane motorways is 120 km/h for private vehicles and 110 km/h for public transport. Violations of these limits pose a severe risk to public safety. "Ensuring safe travel on national highways is our top priority," said the spokesperson, emphasizing the department's commitment to enforcing traffic laws strictly. Authorities have warned motorists against speeding and urged compliance with traffic regulations to prevent accidents and ensure safer journeys for all road users.

## Kidney diseases increased across KP

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The prevalence of kidney diseases has dangerously increased across Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and the entire country. Taking painkillers without a doctor's prescription can weaken the kidneys, while delayed diagnosis of high blood pressure and diabetes is also contributing to the rising cases of kidney diseases. Speaking at an event held on the occasion of World Kidney Day at Peshawar General Hospital, Professor of Nephrology, Dr. Akhtar Ali, stated that kidney diseases have significantly increased across Pakistan, especially in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, yet there is a severe lack of

awareness among people, leading to a dangerous surge in these illnesses. He further mentioned that nearly 90 million people in Pakistan suffer from high blood pressure, while approximately 40 million people have diabetes, and these numbers continue to rise. Due to a lack of awareness, people across Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and the country are becoming victims of these diseases. Dr. Akhtar Ali emphasized that, unfortunately, the control level for blood pressure in Pakistan is quite low. According to data, only 3 to 5 percent of patients successfully manage their blood pressure, while the rest remain uncontrolled due to late diagnosis. As a result, kid-

neys gradually weaken, ultimately leading patients to undergo dialysis. Highlighting the importance of preventive measures, he stressed the need for public awareness campaigns to prevent kidney diseases. He advised that regular checkups for diabetes and blood pressure are crucial, maintaining body weight according to one's physique is essential, and drinking an adequate amount of water is necessary for healthy kidneys. Dr. Akhtar Ali also warned against the use of homeopathic medicines and self-medicated painkillers without a doctor's prescription, urging people to avoid such practices to protect their kidney health.

## Strict enforcement of traffic laws: Over 33,900 challans issued in 24 hours

LAHORE (APP): Under the directives of Additional IG Traffic, a strict crackdown on traffic violations and the swift issuance of driving licenses continue across Punjab. The traffic police have intensified their operations to ensure road safety and enforce traffic regulations with zero tolerance for violations. According to the Punjab Traffic Police spokesperson, more than 23,900 citizens availed licensing services in the past 24 hours. Among them, 7,700 individuals were issued learning driving licenses, while 8,300 obtained regular driving licenses. Additionally, over 7,600 people renewed their learning and regular licenses, reflecting an increased awareness and compliance

with traffic laws. Meanwhile, traffic enforcement actions remained rigorous, with over 33,900 challan tickets issued for various violations. Fines amounting to more than 18.9 million rupees were imposed, highlighting the authorities' commitment to ensuring discipline on the roads. In specific violations, 2,487 challans were issued for lane discipline violations, while 4,700 drivers were fined for operating vehicles without a valid license. Additionally, 1,190 cases of underage driving and 1,700 instances of motorcyclists riding without helmets were penalized. Speaking on the matter, Additional IG Traffic reiterated that following traffic

rules is a national responsibility and warned that strict action will continue against violators. He urged citizens to comply with traffic laws to avoid heavy fines and legal consequences. "Driving without a valid license will not be tolerated, and enforcement operations will persist across the province," he stated. Meanwhile, Additional IG Mirza Farhan Baig emphasized that recovery from defaulters of traffic fines will be ensured at all costs. Authorities have urged citizens to benefit from the service centers, licensing centers, and the online licensing portal for obtaining and renewing their driving licenses, ensuring compliance with traffic regulations.

## Police ensured foolproof security of churches

LAHORE (APP): On the directions of Inspector General of Police Punjab Dr. Usman Anwar, Punjab Police was on high alert during the Christian worship prayer programs in churches across the province including Lahore on Sunday. The IG Punjab directed the RPOs and DPOs to increase security arrangements of churches and personally monitor them. On the directions of IG Punjab, supervisory officers inspected the security arrangements of churches and important places. Additional police personnel and snipers were deployed at sensitive churches, Dolphin Squad, PRU, Elite teams ensured effective patrolling around churches. Police officers and personnel deployed for security remained on high alert and suspicious activities were closely monitored. On the instructions of the IG Punjab, search and sweep operations are underway around churches, Christian Residential areas and sensitive places. He said that the religious scholars, Christian community and members of peace committees should promote interfaith harmony.

## Constable arrested over woman's complaint

RAWALPINDI (APP): Rawalpindi Police arrested a constable and registered a case on a complaint filed by a woman in the open court. According to the Police spokesman, City Police Officer(CPO) Syed Khalid Hamdani taking notice of the complaint directed the Superintendent Police(SP) Saddar to investigate and take legal action. A woman had filed a complaint to the CPO, Rawalpindi in the open court that constable Faisal of Dharniyal police station had previously used to visit her house and was involved in using drugs with her brother. On the day of the incident, the said official visited her house, tortured the people present in the house and took away valuables. The Saddar Beroni Police Station registered a case and arrested the constable after the inquiry report of SP Saddar. At the same time, legal and departmental action has been initiated against him, and a challan will be issued with solid evidence after investigating merit. CPO Syed Khalid Hamdani said that police officers and personnel should be more careful and responsible in their actions and roles. "Abuse of authority, violence or ill-treatment is not tolerated under any circumstances and such people have no right to remain in the department."

## 2,235 arrested for kite flying this year

LAHORE (APP): On the instructions of Inspector General of Police Punjab Dr. Usman Anwar, Punjab Police is ensuring strict implementation of the Anti-Kite Flying Act in light of the Kite Flying Prohibition Amendment Bill. Giving details, the Punjab Police spokesperson said that this year, 2235 accused were arrested and 2187 cases were registered for violating the Anti-Kite Flying Act across the province, including Lahore, 424167 kites, 14635 spinning wheels were recovered and challans of 1876 cases were submitted. In the provincial capital Lahore, 616 suspects were arrested, 615 cases were registered, 20137 kites and 906 spinning wheels were recovered. Last year, 12525 suspects were arrested and 11866 cases were registered across the province including Lahore. The IG Punjab directed that the Kite Flying Prohibition Amendment Bill should be strictly implemented. RPOs, CPOs, DPOs should intensify the crackdown against kite flyers, kite sellers and manufacturers. The IG Punjab further said that deadly activities are not allowed at all and zero tolerance should be adopted against those involved in the bloody business. Elements involved in the online business of metal strings and kites should also be brought under the law.

# Sindh Governor launches Pakistan Bachao Tehreek

KARACHI (PPI): Sindh Governor Kamran Khan Tessori announced the launch of the "Pakistan Bachao Tehreek" (Save Pakistan Movement) during the 14th Iftar/Dinner under the "Ittehad-e-Ramzan" initiative at the Governor House. The event underscored the need for unity amidst the current security challenges. The evening commenced with a recitation of the Holy Quran by Hafiz Wakeef from the United Republic of Comoros. Maulana Muhammad Yousuf Fareed and Maulana Hafiz Huzaifa Rahimi followed with Na'at recitations, while a special child offered a heartfelt tribute in praise of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). In response, Governor Tessori awarded the child a cash prize of PKR 50,000 and pledged an Umrah trip for the child

and his mother at his own expense. Addressing the gathering, Governor Tessori affirmed the inclusive nature of the Governor House, emphasizing its openness to all communities, sects, and religions. He conveyed greetings to the Hindu community on Holi and reiterated Quaid-e-Azam's vision of equal rights for all minorities in Pakistan. In his speech, Governor Tessori acknowledged Karachi's resilience against terrorism and highlighted the city's readiness to safeguard the nation. The newly announced "Pakistan Bachao Tehreek" will spearhead efforts to counter threats, starting from Karachi. He also reaffirmed his dedication to public service, assuring attendees that the Governor House remains accessible around the clock for addressing cit-

izen concerns. Highlighting cultural inclusivity, he shared that the Governor House has hosted various cultural and religious events, a tradition he promised to uphold. Governor Tessori announced plans to transform Sindh into an IT hub, with 50,000 youths currently receiving free IT training at the Governor House, preparing them for future opportunities in the digital sector. The evening concluded with a lucky draw. Hassan Bilal and Ahad received Umrah tickets, while plots in Smart City were won by Imdad Soomro, Maqsood Ahmed, Jibran Ali, and Sajjad Hussain. Muhammad Waseem from Rahim Yar Khan won a motorcycle, and cash Eid gifts were distributed to several attendees, including Mansoor Ahmed, Nadia, and Mehboob Ahmed.

## PR minister assures resolution of issues

LAHORE (APP): Pakistan Railways Minister Hanif Abbasi has assured railway employees that their issues will be resolved on a priority basis. He made this commitment during a meeting with Sheikh Muhammad Anwar, the Central President of the Railway PREM Union CBA, at the Railway Headquarters on Sunday. During the meeting, Sheikh Muhammad Anwar held a detailed discussion with the minister regarding the concerns of railway employees. He particularly highlighted the anxiety among workers regarding the government's proposed privatization of Pakistan Railways. He urged the minister to address these concerns to safeguard the interests of railway employees. The Railway PREM Union President appreciated

ed the government's efforts in restoring the railway system, resuming freight services, and implementing other key decisions. He also put forth a request to extend the profitable railway trains, particularly the Khushhal Khan Khattak Express (Peshawar to Karachi) and the Moosa Pak Train, to Dera Ghazi Khan. In response, Minister Hanif Abbasi gave a positive assurance and confirmed that the Moosa Pak Train would be extended to Dera Ghazi Khan after Eid-ul-Fitr. Addressing employees' financial issues, Sheikh Muhammad Anwar demanded the release of salaries before Eid. The minister promptly directed officials concerned to ensure immediate action on this request. Additionally, Sheikh Anwar highlighted

delays in employees' salaries, pending dues of retired staff, and payments owed to widows. Minister Hanif Abbasi assured that a sustainable strategy would be adopted to resolve these issues effectively. The Central President of the Railway Prem Union also expressed full support for the minister's vision for railway reforms and assured the union's cooperation in efforts aimed at the betterment of Pakistan Railways. In response, Minister Hanif Abbasi reiterated his commitment to bringing visible improvements and reforms in the railway sector in the near future. The meeting was also attended by Chief Executive Officer/Senior General Manager Aamir Ali Baloch and Railway Prem Union Central Vice President Abdul Qayyum Awan.

## Waterfowl flocks return to Punjab lakes

LAHORE (APP): Along with this, the local population was also included in this mission, which is playing an important role in protecting the environment by identifying illegal hunters. The provision of food for waterfowl was also ensured, which included measures to protect marine and aquatic flora and fauna. The Wildlife Force took strict action against illegal trappers and bird catchers, which resulted in a reduction in the trend of illegal hunting, they added. Meanwhile, Senior Provincial Minister Marriyum Aurangzeb recently expressed happiness in a statement over this progress and said that thanks to Allah Almighty, just as development is returning, waterfowl have also returned to Punjab. She said that the return of flamingos is a happy result of the one-year initiatives of Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif. Noted environmentalist Dr. Mahmood Khalid Qamar told APP that returning of flamingos is a good sign, as the local

environment is a sign of birds' acceptance. He said populations of flamingos are found in central Peru, both coasts of southern South America (mainly in the winter), Argentina, Uruguay, Paraguay, Peru, Bolivia, and southern Brazil. Stragglers have been reported on the Falkland Islands and Ecuador. The flamingo's most characteristic habitats are large alkaline or saline lakes or lagoons that usually lack vegetation. Describing waterfowl as an important part of ecological balance and natural system, Qamar said that the protection of these birds, lakes and ecological balance is actually the protection of life. If birds and lakes do not survive, humans will not survive either. It is worth mentioning here that other migratory birds that visit Pakistan every year include the Siberian Crane, Houbara Bustard, Bar-headed Goose, Common Crane, European Roller Ducks, Flamingos, Swans, etc.



LAHORE: Federal Minister for Planning Development & Special Initiatives Prof. Ahsan Iqbal take a ride of Scooty motorcycle jointly develop by China and Pakistan after inaugurating the Pacific Green Energy, Pakistan's newest electric vehicle company at Sundar Industrial Estate.

## Oil price reduction: Pakistani masses denied relief: PDP Chairman

KARACHI (PPI): Despite a significant reduction in global oil prices, the Pakistani government has failed to transfer this benefit to the public, drawing sharp criticism from Pasban Democratic Party (PDP) Chairman Altaf Shakoor. He expressed his disappointment, noting that while increases in global oil prices lead to immediate local price hikes, reductions are not passed on to consumers,

constituting economic exploitation of the masses by their own government. Shakoor in a statement highlighted the plight of Pakistani consumers, stating that both oil and sugar mafias exploit them without restraint. He accused sugar millers of raising prices during the holy month of Ramzan after being permitted to export sugar under the promise of stable local prices. Shakoor alleged that this exploitation

was silently supported by both government and opposition members, who have stakes in sugar mills. Further criticizing the power of these cartels, Shakoor lamented that no action is taken against them under competition and anti-cartel laws. He denounced the federal government's role in these issues as shameful and demanded an immediate reduction in oil prices by at least Rs15 per liter.





PESHAWAR: Cantonment Board staff removing encroachments near Sunehri Masjid Road. — INP photo

## Kundi condemns terrorist attacks in KP, Balochistan

PESHAWAR (APP): Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Faisal Karim Kundi, on Sunday condemned the terrorist attacks in various districts, including Karak, Peshawar, and South Waziristan and Noshki Balochistan.

Expressing deep sorrow over the martyrdom of seven police officers in KP and five personnel in

Noshki, the Governor paid tribute to the bravery of the police force.

Governor Kundi lauded the courage of the security personnel who fought valiantly against the terrorists.

He also offered heartfelt condolences to the families of the martyred officers and prayed for the elevation of their ranks in the Jannat.

Furthermore, he extended his best wishes for the swift recovery of those injured in the attacks.

Meanwhile, a bomb blast occurred on Dalbandin Road in Noshki, Balochistan, resulting in the tragic loss of five lives.

Governor Faisal Karim Kundi condemned the attack and expressed deep sorrow over the loss of

innocent lives. He extended heartfelt condolences to the bereaved families and wished a speedy recovery for the injured.

Governor Kundi said that the nation stands with the affected families in this difficult time. He condemned the terrorists, calling them enemies of humanity for shedding innocent blood.

## Muzzammil slams Govt for pocketing oil price benefits

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Advisor to the KP Chief Minister Muzzammil Aslam, has expressed concern over the government's decision to increase petroleum levy, stating that the Pakistani people are being deprived of the benefits of decreased global oil prices.

Instead, the government has pocketed the gains.

Aslam pointed out that the federal government has raised the petroleum levy from Rs. 60 to Rs. 70, whereas during Imran Khan's government, the levy was only Rs. 30 per liter.

He emphasized that the government is now collecting an additional Rs. 40 from the public through this levy, clearly indicating its disinterest in the welfare of the people.

Mr. Aslam's statement comes amidst concerns over the government's handling of finances and its impact on the general public.

## Ramazan floodlight tournaments in full swing

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The Ramadan Floodlights Tournament, organized by the Directorate General of Sports Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, is underway at Tehmas Khan Stadium, featuring 16 competing football teams.

On the opening day, an exciting match between Regi Football Club and Jamrud Club saw Regi clinch a 1-0 victory.

In the second match of the day, Shaheen Football Club defeated Charsadda Football Club by a single goal margin.

The tournament is being overseen by Organizing Secretary Zahir Shah and Peshawar Football Association's Anwar Khan.

Meanwhile, in the Ramadan Floodlights Cricket Tournament at Hayatabad Sports Complex, the Directorate General of Sports team, led by Director General Sports Abdul Nasir Khan, won its opening match and advanced to the next round.

Similarly, Yousaf Afridi delivered a stellar performance and was named Man of the Match.

The cricket tournament is being managed by Organizing Secretaries Imranullah and Abid Afridi.

The Ramadan Floodlights Tournaments are continue to provide thrilling sports action under the lights, bringing together teams and fans in the spirit of sportsmanship and competition.

## Strengthening trade organizations in Pakistan

Advocate Bassam Ahmed Siddiqui

PAKISTAN operates as a trade-driven economy, where more than 96% of business establishments fall under the category of small and medium enterprises (SMEs). These enterprises serve as the backbone of the country's socioeconomic landscape, contributing significantly to employment generation, industrial output, and overall economic growth. Yet, it is unfortunate that Pakistan currently ranks 136th in the World Bank's Ease of Doing Business Index, whereas merely only about 4% of the country's economic system is formalized with the rest operating informally due to regulatory barriers, operational procedures and inefficiencies of the institutions. Successive governments in Pakistan have been striving to enhance their taxpayer base and formalize businesses for over seven decades, yet these efforts have mostly remained unsuccessful. Despite numerous initiatives and reforms, the country continues to grapple with a narrow tax base, widespread tax evasion, and a significant informal economy. The estimated size of Pakistan's untaxed economy stands at PKR 50 trillion, yet this shadow economy not only evades taxes but also discourages participation in the formal sector, exacerbating revenue generation challenges. While the state continues to make efforts to lure in business community into legalizing their businesses, it needs to be ascertained why local businesses are not interested in formalizing their affairs.

It is an unfortunate reality that Pakistan remains one of the most challenging environments for the business community to operate in, a situation that significantly contributes to the country's persistent economic struggles. Despite its strategic location and vast potential, Pakistan's business landscape is marred by numerous challenges that hinder economic growth and development. Large corporations, multinational companies (MNCs), and IT companies have shown limited interest in operating in Pakistan, despite the country having a youthful population with a strong desire to engage in the contemporary digital environment. Approximately 60% of Pakistan's population is under the age of 30, presenting a significant potential workforce for the digital sector.

However, several factors deter major companies from investing in Pakistan encompassing political instability, regulatory and compliance issues and limited digital infrastructure. An important factor that needs to be highlighted is the role of the Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FPCCI), along with large and small chambers across the country, and the reasons behind their inability to effectively bridge the gaps between the private sector and the government. While all of these trade organizations have their respective significance, it is an undeniable fact that these organizations suffer from weak legal frameworks, governance issues, and limited policy influence.

Creating a favorable business environment and attracting international investment in Pakistan necessitates strengthening trade organizations and empowering them through policy reforms. This empowerment is crucial for fostering economic growth and improving the ease of doing business in the country.

One of the major legislative hurdles faced by trade organizations in Pakistan is their outdated regulatory framework. Most of the trade bodies operate under laws that do not align with contemporary economic realities, most specifically the digital realms. While the Trade Organizations Act 2013 governs their operations, yet it lacks provisions that may facilitate and promote the inclusion of new businesses, furthers transparency and minimizes inefficiencies. Furthermore, loopholes in the law allow for leadership disputes, bureaucratic delays, and inefficiencies, limiting their effectiveness in advocating for business interests. Lack of enforcement for existing regulations is another pressing issue as trade bodies often fail to comply with legal requirements regarding governance, financial transparency, and electoral processes.

This non-compliance results in credibility issues, preventing them from effectively negotiating trade policies with the government. Additionally, the absence of legal incentives for innovation and digital transformation restricts the efficiency of these organizations. Without legal mandates for digital adoption, many trade bodies continue to rely on outdated administrative procedures, limiting their role in facilitating trade and commerce.

While the state is primarily focused on enhancing the tax base and formalizing businesses in order to overcome budgetary deficits, relying solely on coercive strategies will likely fail to achieve the desired outcomes. Coercive measures, such as strict enforcement and penalties, may yield short-term compliance but are likely to culminate in long-term resistance.

In the current economic and political landscape, Pakistan cannot afford the consequences of such resistance, as it would undermine efforts to formalize businesses and expand the tax base. Political leadership as well as the institutions of Pakistan have to take a unique and unconventional approach since traditional methodologies have failed to work during the last seven decades.

First and foremost, the Trade Organizations Act has to be updated, simplified and devised in accordance with the contemporary environment of business. Traders and businesses have to be facilitated, legally protected and institutionally backed in order to lure them into paying their taxes without any pressure. Moreover, trade organizations and small chambers have to be given due powers and roles in policymaking as the private sector in Pakistan has the capacity and will to bring the country out of the present economic crisis. Strictness and compliance from government institutions are a prerequisite, yet traders and businesses must be duly respected and legally protected for them to contribute to the formalized economic system.

Concurrently, these trade organizations and small chambers must receive adequate support from the government, including funding, land resources, and other forms of assistance.

This support is crucial for them to effectively serve traders and act as a liaison between the government and the trading community. Trade organizations should be legally required to establish research and advocacy wings and this must be backed by government-backed tax-incentives. FPCCI and Chambers of respective administrative units have to be legally empowered to engage in international trade negotiations and agreements.

The government should establish a legal framework allowing trade bodies to participate in bilateral and multilateral trade discussions. This legal empowerment will help Pakistani businesses integrate into the global economy more effectively. Strengthening trade organizations and respecting businesses in Pakistan must be considered by the state as a prerequisite to bring the country out of this financial loophole, else we may lose seven more decades to establish a business-friendly environment and an independent economic system.

*The writer is currently working as an Advocate High Court and Legal Advisor of the Peshawar Chamber of Small Traders & Small Industry, Lower Dir Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Kurram Chamber of Commerce and Industry and Sarhad Business Alliance at Sarhad Chamber of Commerce and Industry.*

## Sherpao meets Afgthan Counsul General to discuss regional peace

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Quami Watan Party (QWP) Chairman Aftab Ahmad Khan Sherpao and Afghan Consul General in Peshawar Mohibullah Shakir on Sunday discussed matters of mutual interest, including the closure of the Torkham border, regional peace and stability.

A press release said that the Afghan consul general called on the QWP leader at Watan Kor here.

It said that the QWP leader and the Afghan consul general discussed various issues, including the closure of the Torkhm border and the problems faced by the Afghan citizens living in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Aftab Sherpao underlined the need for resolving all issues between Pakistan and Afghanistan through talks and said that the two

countries shared common religion, culture and history.

The QWP leader said that the closure of the Torkham border was causing millions of dollars of loss to both the countries, adding that the transporters, traders and common people were facing a host of problems due to the closure of the Torkham border.

He said the Pak-Afghan

trade volume was already low, therefore, efforts should be made to boost trade between the two countries.

He said that boosting trade would help improve bilateral relations between Islamabad and Kabul. He said that the Torkham border closure had created problems for Afghan patients seeking medical treatment in Pakistan.

Aftab Sherpao asked the federal government to extend the deadline for the Afghan refugees keeping in view the month of Ramadan and come up with an agreed upon timeline for their return to give them ample time to go back to their country.

He said that both the governments should take steps to remove trust deficit to improve their relations.



## Renowned social worker, educationist Nasim Akhtar joins PPP

PESHAWAR (APP): Renowned woman social worker, educationist and political personality of district Mardan, Nasim Akhtar announced joining PPP along with here associates on Sunday. President PPP Women-Wing Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and chairperson Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP), Senator Robina Khalid was chief guest on the occasion. Vice President Ashbar Jadoon, Anila Shehzad, Shayena Khan, Shehnaz Shamsher and Saima Bukhari other women leaders of PPP also attended the ceremony. Speaking at the occasion, Rubina Khalid, provincial president of the PPP women's wing and chairperson of BISP severely criticized the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government, saying that the chief minister of the province is a frivolous personality, whose incompetence has created a situation of conflict between the federation and the province. Criticizing Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur, she said that his poor strategy has caused serious damage to the province. She said that the provincial treasury was ruthlessly looted during the 12-year rule of the PTI and called for an independent investigation into the BRT, Billion Tree Tsunami and other corruption scandals

## Grilled fish draws people for Iftar parties at Peshawar's Namak Mandi

PESHAWAR (APP): As the holy month of Ramadan continues, a unique trend has emerged in Peshawar's vibrant food scene i.e grilled fish became a favorite dish for iftar parties, attracting a growing number of people to the famous Namak Mandi food street.

On Sunday, the area buzzed with shopping activity, as locals gathered to indulge in the mouthwatering taste of fish grilled to perfection with a variety of spicy sauces.

Nisar Ali, a 40-year-old fish vendor who operates a popular eatery at Namak Mandi, was seen working tirelessly to fulfill an ever-growing number of orders.

Surrounded by a substantial stocks of freshly unloaded fish, Ali and his team of three laborers cleaned and cocked various types of fish, including rahu, shermai, mahsher, and grass carp as its demands soars.

Nasir's efforts, despite the pressure of the busy iftar rush, were focused on serving timely meals to the ever-growing number of customers many of

whom demands for parcels for homes parties.

"The recent rise in the prices of meat and chicken has led to a shift in food choices during iftar. Seafood, particularly grilled fish, has become a more popular and affordable option for people here in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa," Nasir explained.

He noted that the demand for fish has soared, not only in Peshawar but across the province, providing a positive economic boost to local businesses.

Nasir Ali, who transitioned to the fish business 20 years ago after failing to secure a government job post graduation, now enjoys a successful career while also providing employment to three workers.

According to him, nearly 200,000 people are directly or indirectly involved in the fisheries sector in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

He added that the province's native fish species were more suited for local markets, as transportation costs from places like Karachi and

Balochistan made the fish less economical.

Many customers, like Riaz Khan, a resident of Nowshera, have developed a preference for grilled fish at iftar. "Grilled fish is my favorite dish, especially during Ramadan," Khan said, adding that he and his family had visited Namak Mandi to enjoy the delectable bites with sauces flavors.

He also noted that the prices of grilled fish were significantly lower than meat or chicken in Peshawar.

While Namak Mandi is becoming an increasingly popular food street for locals, Riaz Khan called for official recognition of the area as a designated food street, hoping to attract more visitors and boost the local economy after Ramadan.

Muhammad Zubair, Director Fisheries Department said that fish demands increased during Ramadan after prices of meat and chicken increased in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

He said Pakistan, a country rich in water resources from marine,



saline, and freshwater reservoirs, is home to a vast diversity of aquatic life.

According to the Fisheries Department, there are 531 species of fish across the country, including 233 freshwater species from rivers, lakes, and ponds in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Freshwater ponds cover an area of 60,470 hectares, and natural warm-water lakes span 110,000 hectares.

However, despite the abundance of resources, fish consumption in Pakistan remains low, with per capita consumption standing at just 2

kilograms per year compared to the global average of 17 kilograms in normal days. Professor Dr. Muhammad Naem from the Economics Department at the University of Swabi highlighted the profitability of fish farming and the significant potential it holds for boosting Pakistan's economy.

"If the country provides financial incentives to fish farmers, it could alleviate some of the economic challenges it faces," Dr. Naem said. He pointed to a notable increase in seafood exports, which earned the country over Rs12.40 bil-

lion, and that the promising future of Pakistan's fisheries sector, especially with the completion of the second phase of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).

In recent years, fish production in Pakistan has risen sharply.

In the 2016-17 financial year, the country produced 477,000 metric tons of fish, a significant increase from just 8,430 metric tons in 2010. However, challenges such as overfishing, water pollution, and the impacts of climate change continue to pose a threat to the sustainability of fish farming in Pakistan.

The indigenous sharma fish, found in the River Kabul, is particularly vulnerable due to pollution and overfishing. Muhammad Zubair, Director of the Fisheries Department, emphasized the need to take strict action to protect this endangered species, suggesting that measures like banning hunting and preventing the discharge of contaminated water into the river could help preserve it for future generations.

He called for further

In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the demand for fish farming is on the rise, and the provincial government is taking steps to support the industry's growth.

Under the "Development of Cold Water Fisheries Resources" project, joint federal and provincial efforts are underway to establish 297 trout lakes in Malakand and Hazara divisions.

Additionally, trout farming has become increasingly popular in these areas, with projects like the "Trout Village" initiative seeing the establishment of 93 trout fish farms.

These efforts are expected to boost fish production in the province, potentially increasing it from 400 metric tons to 740 metric tons in the coming years.

Usman Ali, General Secretary of the Swat Trout Fish Farming Association, stressed the importance of supporting trout farmers with incentives and improved infrastructure.

He called for further

development of trout farming in the region, citing the potential for substantial revenue generation. "A farmer with 50 marlas of land and proper water management can produce 3,000 kg of trout, earning about Rs2.5 million in profit," he explained.

Despite the challenges faced by the fisheries sector, such as the impact of climate change on trout farming, the potential for growth remains significant. With the right investments and policies, Pakistan could further tap into its fisheries resources, bolstering both its economy and food security.

As grilled fish continues to gain popularity in Peshawar's iftar scenes, the province's fisheries industry is poised for growth after investment.

With increased demand for seafood, particularly during Ramadan, and governmental support for fish farming, the sector has the potential to make a lasting impact on the local economy and provide a sustainable source of income for thousands of families.





## In brief

### 2 butchers send to jail F.P. Report

KOHAT: Deputy Commissioner Kohat Abdul Akram Chitrali has under the Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Program "Awami Agenda", paid a surprise visit to the various markets of KDA Kohat to provide relief to the people in the holy month of Ramadan and reviewed the prices, quality of daily use items i.e. vegetables, fruits, meat, grocery stores and other food items. He also reviewed the hygienic condition of the shops. He on this occasion, while acting on the complaints against some butchers, inspected their shops and sealed the shops of 2 butchers and sent them to jail for violating the official price list and poor cleanliness condition. He also took legal action against other shopkeepers and imposing heavy fines on them for violations. DC Kohat sternly directed the shopkeepers to ensure implementation of the official price list and improve the cleanliness conditions. He warned, in future there will be even bigger action on illegal profiteering and self-inflicted inflation.

### Missing youth found murdered F.P. Report

NOWSHERA: The body of a missing youth was discovered near the banks of the Kabul River in Nowshera. Police said, Abdul Rehman, a resident of Mohalla Rehmanabad, Nowshera Kalan, had been missing for the past 15 days. His lifeless body was found yesterday near the riverbank. Sources indicate that the victim was murdered, and his body was tied with stones before being thrown into the river. After post-mortem examination, the body was handed over to the family. Abdul Rehman was a diploma engineer and was about to travel to Cyprus for work. The victim's family staged a protest at Shobra Chowk, demanding the immediate arrest of the culprits.

### Ramadan package distributed

MARDAN (APP): Sameem Orphan Care Pakistan distributed Ramadan food packages to 1,000 underprivileged families in Mardan, aiming to support those in need during the holy month of Ramadan. The packages included essential food items such as flour, cooking oil, sugar, rice, dates, lentils, chickpeas, beans, and gram flour. A distribution ceremony was held at a local wedding hall in Mardan, where Additional Deputy Commissioner (ADC) Relief & Human Rights, Mardan, Iqbal Hussain Khattak, was the chief guest. Several key figures, including Dr. Uzma from Sameem Orphan Care, Vice Chairman Salman Shah Bukhari, Atif Akram, Dr. Kinza, Engineer Saif Akram, and others, participated in the event. The packages were distributed among orphans, widows, disabled individuals, and other deserving families. Speaking at the event, Dr. Uzma emphasized that the initiative aims to ensure that financially struggling families can observe Ramadan with ease and joy. She stated, "Providing ration to needy families allows them to fully participate in the blessed moments of Ramadan without financial stress." Meanwhile, Salman Shah Bukhari highlighted that Sameem Orphan Care Pakistan has consistently distributed Ramadan packages to thousands of families in previous years.



SWAT: Provincial Minister for Livestock, Fisheries and Cooperative Fazal Hakim Khan talking to people during his visit to Mingora.

## Aftab welcomes PTI released workers

F.P. Report

KOHAT: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Minister for Law and Parliamentary Affairs Aftab Alam ADVOCATE, has after the release of his Party Worker and Chairman Bazid Khel, Kohat Aamir Khan who was arrested from D-Chowk, on November 26, gave a warm welcome on his

arrival in Kohat along with the party's local leadership and a large number of workers.

Talking on the occasion, the Law Minister said that we are proud of all the brave workers like Aamir Khan.

He added, the sacrifices of the party workers will not go in vain and InshaAllah, it will definitely pay off.

He further said that the workers are our precious asset and we will not forget them at any stage as they have supported us in difficult times.

The Minister declared that we are with the party workers and will not sit till the release of our last workers and the day is not far that all the jailed workers will be among us very soon.

## Protest by JUI against unrest Allah Dad Chandio

SHAHDADKOT: Last day, Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (JUI) held a protest demonstration against the increasing unrest and the illegal extraction of 6 canals from the river Indus in Kot Lal Bakhsh Mahesar area of Qamber Shahdadt district, on this occasion Ahmed Dinari, javed ali and others protested and said that robberies, robberies, murders and murders have become normal in Qamber Shahdadt district, but the administration is silent, while on the other hand, the federal government is making the Cholistan project by draining 6 canals from the Indus river and making the green land of Sindh a barren land, which has left the government's claims to develop the agricultural economy.

This is an attempt to push the minority, which Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam rejects, however, JUI has opposed interference in the problems of Sindh many times before, they demanded that the Cholistan project be rejected immediately.

## 4 Killed, as coaster overturns

RAWALAKOT (INP): At least four people, including a woman, were killed and several others injured in Rawalkot on Sunday morning when a coaster travelling from Kahuta, Haveli district to Rawalpindi overturned and plunged into a deep ditch. Rescue sources confirmed that four people died on the spot, while the injured were rushed to a nearby hospital, a private news channel reported.

The coaster was reportedly carrying passengers from Kahuta, Haveli district to Rawalpindi when the accident occurred, rescue official added.

The cause of the accident is yet to be ascertained, but officials suspect speeding or reckless driving may have contributed to the tragedy.

NEELUM (INP): Heavy snowfall has paralyzed land routes in the northern regions of Pakistan, particularly affecting the Astore area, where communication has been cut off.

The ongoing snowfall has intensified the cold in various mountainous regions, including the Neelum Valley of Azad Kashmir, causing travel disruptions and power outages.

The Meteorological Department has issued a forecast predicting more snowfall in the higher altitudes of Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan over the coming days.

Heavy snow is expected to continue in the upper districts, particularly in Chitral, Dir, Swat, Shangla, Kohistan, Mohmand, Bhattagram, Mansehra, Swabi, Peshawar, Charsadda, Nowshera, and Kohat.

Additionally, rain coupled with strong winds could be seen in the areas of Hangu, Karak, Lakki Marwat, Bannu, Khyber, Okzai, and both North and South Waziristan.

While the northern regions brace for further inclement weather, the plains will remain dry and hot for the next 24 hours.

The city of Lahore and other parts of Punjab will likely experience rain, while Karachi is expected to stay hot and humid.

In Karachi, temperatures are expected to reach between 34 to 36°C, with a minimum of 22.5°C. The city is experiencing northeast winds at 10 km/h and humidity levels at 61%. As the snow continues to fall in the northern areas, authorities are urging travelers to stay updated on weather forecasts and exercise caution on roads.

The Meteorological Department continues to monitor the situation, issuing advisories for those in affected regions.

# Heavy Snowfall disrupts life in northern region

MARDAN (APP): A modern electronic wheelchair was gifted to paraplegic patient Karishma, a talented yet underprivileged student from Mardan on Sunday.

She was injured in a shooting incident, where a bullet struck her spinal cord, leaving her lower body paralyzed and disrupting her education.

The welfare organization Friends of Paraplegics (FoP), dedicated to the rehabilitation of spinal cord injury patients, took Karishma under their care and transferred her to the

Paraplegic Center in Peshawar for comprehensive physical and psychological rehabilitation. As a result, she regained the ability to continue her education.

To support Karishma's aspirations and secure a better future for her, Friends of Paraplegics arranged a state-of-the-art electronic wheelchair for her. The organization not only utilized its own donations but also received financial assistance from Saira Welfare Trust and a Pakistani philanthropist,

Abdul Majeed, based in the USA.

Dr. Syed Muhammad Ilyas, CEO Paraplegic Center Peshawar, handed over the wheelchair to Karishma in a simple ceremony. She expressed immense happiness upon receiving it.

Meanwhile, FoP Chairman Sanaullah Khan and General Secretary Engineer IrfanUllah reaffirmed their pledge to continuing the mission of rehabilitating and supporting spinal cord injury patients at all costs.

# WASA employees selected for Umrah

FAISALABAD (APP): Water & Sanitation Agency (WASA) has selected its three employees would be provided 14-day Umrah package.

Managing Director WASA Aamer Aziz said here on Saturday that Assistant Director Muhammad Zeeshan, Sub-Engineer Ali Hassan and Complaint Clerk Irshad Ali were selected for Umrah and WASA would make all arrangements for them to perform Umrah rituals in the holy land of Saudi Arabia.

He said that the lucky draw was conducted as per the committee's decision and the selected employees would be provided 14-day Umrah package.

These fortunate employees were directed to submit their passports to the Administration Directorate WASA on urgent basis to complete the necessary travel arrangements.

WASA was committed for the welfare of its employees and it would continue to take initiatives for their well-being, he added. Deputy Managing

Director WASA Engineer Saqib, Director Admin Javed Ghani, Director I&C Arif Suryani, Director Revenue East Umar Ifitkhar, Deputy Director Finance & Admin Waseem Abbas Baloch, President CBA Union WASA Mian Maqsood Ahmed, General Secretary Chaudhary Binyameen Sahotra, Chairman Khalid Khan, Senior Vice President Chaudhary Zulfiqar Ali Kahloon, Deputy General Secretary Amir Rehmat and others were also present on the occasion.

# Cruel father kills 4-year-old daughter

JARANWALA (INP): A heartbreaking incident took place in Jaranwala, where a ruthless father allegedly strangled his 4-year-old daughter to death.

According to Jaranwala police, the

accused, Zakir Hussain, had put his daughter Aaliya to sleep beside him before allegedly committing the crime. The police said that the suspect, Zakir Hussain, is reported to be a drug addict.

The police said the incident occurred in the jurisdiction of City Police Station, Chak No 240 GB. Police have arrested the accused and initiated legal proceedings on the complaint of the victim's mother, Mafiha Bibi.

## Pir Baba police arrest Umar Deen killers

A R Abid Bunery

BUNER: Pir Baba police claimed to have arrested the killers of Umar Deen Daggar whom dead body was recovered from a home in Pirabai after missing for about 40 days.

The Pirbaba police have arrested owner of the house Shahzada his wife Maryam and Banu. According to the police, the accused have confessed to the crime.

During the police investigation, Umar Deen's mobile phone and auto

rickshaw were recovered from Swat district, Shahzada of Pirabi was declared suspicious because he had sold the rickshaw and mobile and



the dead body was recovered from his home.

During the search, the body of Umar Din was found buried in a pit from the his house.

# Glacial Melting: A threat to our habitat, ecosystem

GILGIT (APP): Often referred to as "Third Pole," the glaciers of Gilgit-Baltistan, are the most stunning natural wonders of Pakistan. These icy giants feed Indus River and its tributaries, serve as a source of freshwater for millions and a critical component of region's delicate ecosystem.

However, the accelerating pace of glacial melting due to climate change is posing an existential threat to this fragile environment. As temperatures rise, the glaciers are retreating at an alarming rate, leading to a cascade of ecological, social, and economic consequences.

According to Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the Himalayan region, including Gilgit-Baltistan, is warming at a rate faster than global average, leading to accelerated glacial retreat, with some glaciers losing up to 5 meters of thickness annually.

"When I was a child, the glaciers were much closer to our village," remarked Amina Bibi, a 45 year old farmer from Naltar Valley. "But, they continued retreating up the mountains every year. Our streams,

once flowing consistently, are now either drying up or flooding unpredictably."

Over the decades, hundreds of other residents had been eye witness to this phenomenon like Amina Bibi, as their farming had relied on glacier fed irrigation water since ages. However, the erratic water supply has made agriculture increasingly challenging.

"We used to grow wheat, barley and apricots without any trouble. Now, we have to rely on rain, which is seldom enough. Sometimes, we lose our entire crop due to droughts or sudden floods," said Amina Bibi.

For Amina and her community, the melting glaciers are not just an environmental issue but a threat to their survival. "If the glaciers disappear, what will happen to us? How will we feed our families?" she asks, in a voice tinged with despair.

She said, the region's forests are also under threat. The changing climate is affecting the growth patterns of trees and plants. Some species are struggling to survive, while invasive species are taking over.

These changes threaten

not only the environment but also livelihoods of local communities who depend on region's natural resources. Since glaciers act as natural reservoirs, storing freshwater and releasing it gradually during summer, the global warming has disrupted this balance.

Dr. Ali Rehmat, a glaciologist based in Gilgit, has spent over a decade studying the region's glaciers and terms the situation as worrisome. "The glaciers in Gilgit-Baltistan are retreating at an unprecedented rate. If this trend continues, we could lose up to 60% of our glaciers by the end of this century."

Dr. Rehmat explains that melting glaciers are not only reducing water availability but also increasing the risk of natural disasters. "Glacial lakes are forming at higher altitudes as their walls are often unstable, a small earthquake or a sudden increase in temperature can trigger a GLOF, causing massive destruction downstream."

He emphasizes the need for urgent action. "We need to reduce greenhouse gas emissions globally, but we also need local solutions. This includes better water

management, reforestation and early warning systems for GLOFs."

Glacial melting has far-reaching consequences, contributing to rising sea levels, altering weather patterns and disrupting ecosystems. In Gilgit-Baltistan, the immediate effects are felt in the form of glacial lake outburst floods (GLOFs), erratic water availability and the loss of biodiversity.

Shabbir Hussain, a 32-year-old tour guide from Skardu sees the impact of glacial melting in different perspective.

"This can be counterproductive for our tourism industry. Gilgit-Baltistan is known for its stunning landscapes with glaciers as major source attraction. When glaciers will retreat, tourists' influx would also decline," Shabbir says.

He recalls a time when Baltoro Glacier, the region's famous glaciers, was a must-visit destination for adventure seekers. "Now, the glacier is receding fast and becoming dangerous to trek on. Some of the routes we used to take are no longer accessible."

Shabbir feared that decline in tourism, due to glacial melting, is having a

ripple effect on local economy. "Many families here depend on tourism for their income. If the glaciers disappear, so will our livelihoods."

The melting glaciers are not just a threat to human beings but also the region's delicate ecosystem. Gilgit-Baltistan is home to diverse flora and fauna, much of whom is adapted to cold, high-altitude environment and glaciers retreat would extinct these species.

"The snow leopard, an iconic species of

Himalayas, is also vulnerable," says Dr. Rehmat. "This leopard relies on cold, rugged terrain for hunting and shelter. As glaciers melt, their habitat is shrinking, pushing them closer to extinction."

Despite challenges, there is still hope and efforts are on to mitigate impact of glacial melting as local and international organizations are working together to implement sustainable solutions.

One such initiative is installation of early warning systems for GLOFs.







# Cuba begins restoring power to capital Havana and outlying provinces

HAVANA (Reuters): Pockets of Cuba's capital Havana saw the lights flicker back on though vast areas of the city and country continued without electricity on Sunday morning, after a nationwide grid collapse that knocked out power to 10 million people.

Havana's electric company said on social media that approximately 19% of its clients in the city had seen power restored, but gave no estimate for full recovery.

Cuba's energy and mines ministry said early on Sunday it had fired up its Felton power plant, one of the country's largest and a major benchmark for restoring power in the eastern provinces. The country's largest plant, Antonio Guiteras, in Matanzas, was not yet online, the ministry said.

In Havana and elsewhere, the clock was ticking for many residents who worry scarce stores of frozen foods could begin to spoil after around 36 hours without electricity.

Much of the city of two million people - densely populated and a major tourism center - has been without power since around 8:15 p.m. (0015 GMT) on Friday.

Only popular tourist hotels, a few restaurants, and homes and businesses with their own generators had kept the lights on.

Cuba's grid collapsed on Friday evening after a transmission line at a substation in Havana shorted, beginning a chain reaction that completely shut down power generation across the island.

The Friday collapse marked the fourth nationwide blackout since October.

Cuba's oil-fired power plants, already obsolete and struggling to keep the lights on, reached a full crisis last year as oil imports from Venezuela, Russia and Mexico dwindled.

Even before Friday's grid collapse, many across the island had already been experiencing daily blackouts that reached 20 hours or more.

Cuba blames the mounting crisis on a Cold War-era U.S. trade embargo and fresh restrictions from U.S. President Donald Trump, who recently tightened sanctions on the communist-run government and vowed to restore a "tough" policy toward the long-time U.S. foe.

The government is pushing to develop large solar farms with help from China in a bid to reduce dependence on antiquated oil-fired generation.



LONDON, ENGLAND: Performers take part in London's St. Patrick's Day Festival in London, England. The Mayor of London's St Patrick's Festival celebrates contributions of the Irish community in London, with this year's theme focusing on sustainability and greening Britain's capital city.

# Not for Russia to decide on peacekeepers in Ukraine, Macron says



PARIS (Reuters): The stationing of peacekeeping troops in Ukraine, as proposed by Britain and France as part of a ceasefire agreement with Russia, is a question for Kyiv to decide and not Moscow, French President Emmanuel Macron said in an interview.

Macron and British Prime Minister Keir Starmer have been rushing to consolidate military support for Ukraine as U.S. President Donald Trump presses for a peace deal with Russia. Starmer hosted a virtual meeting on Saturday with Macron and other non-U.S. allies of Ukraine.

"Ukraine is sovereign. If it asks for allied forces to be on its territory, it's not something for Russia to accept or not," Macron said in a joint interview with several French regional newspapers published late on Saturday.

Russia has repeatedly rejected the idea of soldiers from countries belonging to the NATO alliance being stationed in Ukraine.

Macron said any peacekeeping force would consist of "a few thousand troops per country" to be deployed at key locations, adding a number of European and non-European countries were interested in participating.

But like other aspects of a potential truce, the form of any peacekeeping force remains uncertain.

Finland's President Alexander Stubb told BBC television that any firm commitments would come once there was a clear plan.

"There are anywhere from zero to 50 different ways they can help, boots on the ground is only one way. You can talk about intelligence, you can talk about different types of things but it's too early to commit right now," he said.

Britain and France both say they could send peacekeepers to Ukraine, while Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese said his country was also open to requests.

Russian President Vladimir Putin said on Thursday he supported in principle Washington's proposal for a 30-day ceasefire with Ukraine but that his forces would fight on until several crucial conditions were worked out.

Russia and Ukraine continued aerial attacks on each other, inflicting injuries and damages, officials said early on Sunday.

# Ivory Coast is losing US aid as al-Qaida and other extremist groups are approaching



KIMBIRILA-NORD, Ivory Coast (AP): With its tomato patches and grazing cattle, the Ivory Coast village of Kimbirila-Nord hardly looks like a front line of the global fight against extremism. But after jihadist attacked a nearby community in Mali five years ago and set up a base in a forest straddling the border, the U.S. committed to spending \$20 million to counter the spread of al-Qaida and the Islamic State group here and in dozens of other villages.

The Trump administration's sweeping foreign aid cuts mean that support is now gone, even as violence in Mali and other countries in the Sahel region south of the Sahara has reached record levels and sent of thousands refugees streaming into northern Ivory Coast.

Locals worry they have been abandoned. Diplomats and aid officials said the termination of aid jeopardizes counterterrorism efforts and weakens U.S. influence in a part of the world where some countries have turned to Russian mercenaries for help.

In Kimbirila-Nord, U.S. funding, among other things, helped young people get job training, built parks for cattle to graze so they are no longer stolen by jihadis on Malian territory, and helped establish an information-sharing system so residents can flag violent encounters to each other and state services.

"What attracts young people to extremists is poverty and hunger," said Yacouba Doumbia, 78-year-old chief of Kimbirila-Nord. "There was a very dangerous moment in 2020. The project came at the right time, and allowed us to protect ourselves."

"Seize a narrow prevention window"

Over the last decade, West Africa has been shaken by extremist uprisings and military coups. Groups linked to al-Qaida and the Islamic State group have conquered large areas and killed thousands in the Sahel and have been spreading into wealthier West African coastal states, such as Ivory Coast, Benin and Togo.

In 2019, President Donald Trump signed the Global Fragility Act that led to the initiatives in northern Ivory Coast. The U.S. goal in this area was to "seize a narrowing prevention window," according to this year's congressional report about the implementation of the bipartisan legislation.

Experts say local concerns help drive the popularity of extremist groups: competition for land and resources, exclusion, marginalization and lack of economic opportunities. Across the region, Islamic extremists have recruited among groups marginalized and neglected by central governments.

"Ivory Coast is one of the few countries that still resist the terrorist threat in the Sahel," said a U.N. official working in the country who was not authorized to speak on the matter publicly. "If we do not continue to support border communities, a minor issue could send them into the arms of extremists."

Trump issued an executive order in January directing a freeze on foreign assistance and a review of all U.S. aid and development work abroad. He charged that much of foreign aid was wasteful and advanced a liberal agenda. In 2020, when the jihadis struck a Malian village 10 kilometers (6 miles) away, Kimbirila-Nord in many ways fit the description of a community susceptible to extremism.

The lives of Malians and Ivorians were intertwined. People crossed the border freely, making it easy for extremists, who like residents spoke Bambara, to access Kimbirila-Nord. Many residents did not have identity cards and few spoke French, leaving them with no access to states services or official information. Different ethnic groups lived next to each other but were divided by conflicts over scarce natural resources and suspicions toward the state. And young people did not have opportunities to make money.

"We were very scared" when the extremists attacked, said Aminata Doumbia, the head of the village's female farmers cooperative. "Everyone was just looking out for themselves."

The Ivorian government runs a program that provides professional training, grants and microloans. But access is difficult in villages such as Kimbirila-Nord.

Kimbirila-Nord is home to refugees from Mali, Burkina Faso and Guinea, Sifata Berte, 23, fled there with his family two years ago from Mali. He is not eligible for the government-run program, but got training through the project funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development and now works as an apprentice in an iron workshop.

Other things the USAID-funded project set up included a network of community radios in local languages, so people could get access to information. It also used mobile government trucks to help tens of thousands of people across the region get their identity documents. And it brought people together with microcredit cooperatives and with a special committee of ranchers and farmers that helps resolve tensions over land.

"It's thanks to the project that we can sleep at night," Doumbia, the village chief, said. "We learned how to be together."

Equal Access International, an international nonprofit, designed and implemented the U.S.-funded project.

The USAID project also has been the only direct source of information on the ground in northern Ivory Coast on violent events for the U.S.-based Armed Conflict and Location Event Data Project, the main provider of data on violence in the Sahel.

The village had big plans

Ivory Coast became known as a target for extremists in 2016, when an attack on the seaside resort of Grand Bassam killed tourists. In 2021, a string of attacks occurred near the country's northern border, but the violence has been largely contained after Ivorian authorities, Western governments and aid groups rushed into this impoverished and isolated part of the country with military build up and development projects.

In 2024, the U.S. Africa Command provided over \$65 million to projects in Ivory Coast, most of which "focused on counterterrorism and border security" in the northern part of the country, according to the group's website. The Pentagon said in a statement that it was "not aware of any budget cuts that have undermined counterterrorism training or partnership programs in Africa."

Ivory Coast has the second-highest GDP per capita in West Africa, but according to the U.N. it remains one of the world's least developed countries. Many in remote villages like Kimbirila-Nord do not have access to running water.

"At first we thought that we only had to solve these problems with a military solution," Famy Rene, the prefect of Korbogo, the region's capital, said. "But we saw that this was not enough. We had to put in place programs that strengthen the resilience of the population."

Residents of Kimbirila-Nord had big plans before the U.S. froze aid. The U.S. was supposed to finance the first well in the village, help create a collective farm, and expand vocational training.

Now they fear they have been left alone to deal with extremists.

"If you forget, they will come back," said Doumbia, the village chief. "As long as there is war on the other side of the border, we must remain on a high alert."

# Turkiye calls on EU to lift Syria sanctions ahead of int'l conference

ISTANBUL (AFP): Türkiye on Sunday called on the European Union to unconditionally lift sanctions on the Syrian Arab Republic, ahead of an international aid conference in Brussels to which the war-torn country's new authorities have been invited.

Ankara, allied with Syria's new rulers who ousted president Bashar Assad and took power in December, views such a step as necessary for a "peaceful transition" in the country, Türkiye's foreign ministry said in a statement.

The European Union on Monday will host the ninth international conference in support of Syria. For the first time, representatives of Syria's government — the new interim authorities — have been invited to attend.

The event aims to raise international support for Syria's transition and recovery after more than 13 years of civil war.

The European bloc on February 24 already announced an easing of sanctions on Syria's energy, transport and banking sectors to relieve some of the challenges facing Ahmed Al-Sharaa, Syria's interim president.

But Europe and other powers remain wary over what direction Sharaa's Islamist group Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham (HTS) — which spearheaded the lightning offensive that toppled Assad on December 8 — may take Syria.

While there are hopes Sharaa's authorities can stabilize the country and usher in an inclusive future, recent deadly violence targeting the Alawite minority to which Assad belongs has kept doubts floating.

EU foreign ministers have warned that the sanctions they eased could be reimposed if Syria's new leaders break promises to respect the rights of minorities and move toward democracy.

"Syria's economic security is essential for the country's stability and security," Türkiye's ministry said, adding that "economic opportunities and jobs need to be created."

"The sanctions must be lifted unconditionally and for an indeterminate period," it said.

Türkiye, which hosts nearly three million Syrian refugees, also urged reconstruction of Syria "to encourage returns."

Turkish deputy foreign minister Nuh Yilmaz will attend the Brussels conference.



DHAKA: Anti-fascist students block an intersection demanding the removal of bureaucrats loyal to autocratic former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's government, in Dhaka, Bangladesh, on Sunday.



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# American stance on Gaza follows G7 line

EVER since he had become president of the United States a second time on January 20, 2025, Donald Trump had been supporting Israel much more vehemently than his predecessor Joe Biden. Trump has been warning and threatening Hamas, and he had not said a word about the suffering of civilians in Gaza due to Israeli attacks there.

But on Friday, US Secretary of State Marco Rubio joined other foreign ministers of G7 – Canada, Germany, France, Japan, Italy, United Kingdom – in calling for humanitarian aid to civilians in Gaza and the need to protect them, apart from a call for an immediate ceasefire and the release of all hostages, Israeli as well as Palestinian.

There was also the mention of the two-state solution, something which Trump and his administration have been silent about. But the foreign ministers of the rich economies and democracies had reiterated that Hamas cannot have any role in the future governance of Gaza. It has been a stated position for quite some time, even as the United States had independently negotiated with Hamas on the release of an American with a dual citizenship – of Israel and America – and working with the Israeli army, and also of the bodies of Israeli-Americans among the hostages who had died.

There is also the contradiction that a ceasefire agreement can only happen between Hamas and Israel. It is indeed the case as well that the Fatah, which governs the West Bank and is in control of the Palestinian Authority, does not want Hamas as well. Fatah wants to take over the governance of Gaza. Unsurprisingly, Hamas is in charge of Gaza, and it is a party to the ceasefire mediated by Qatar, Egypt and the US. So getting Hamas out of the way is not going to be an easy thing.

But America signing the G7 foreign ministers' joint statement is important because for the first time Trump takes into its purview the plight of the civilians in Gaza. The joint statement said, "We reiterate the absolute need for the civilian population to be protected and that there must be full, rapid, safe, and unhindered humanitarian access, as a matter of absolute priority."

Trump's focus has been on immediate ceasefire in Gaza as well as in Ukraine, and he is not too bothered about the long-term solution in both cases. Trump has some idea about the contours of a settlement between Ukraine and Russia, a position more tilted towards Russia. In Gaza, he has shown no awareness or concern about the Palestinians.

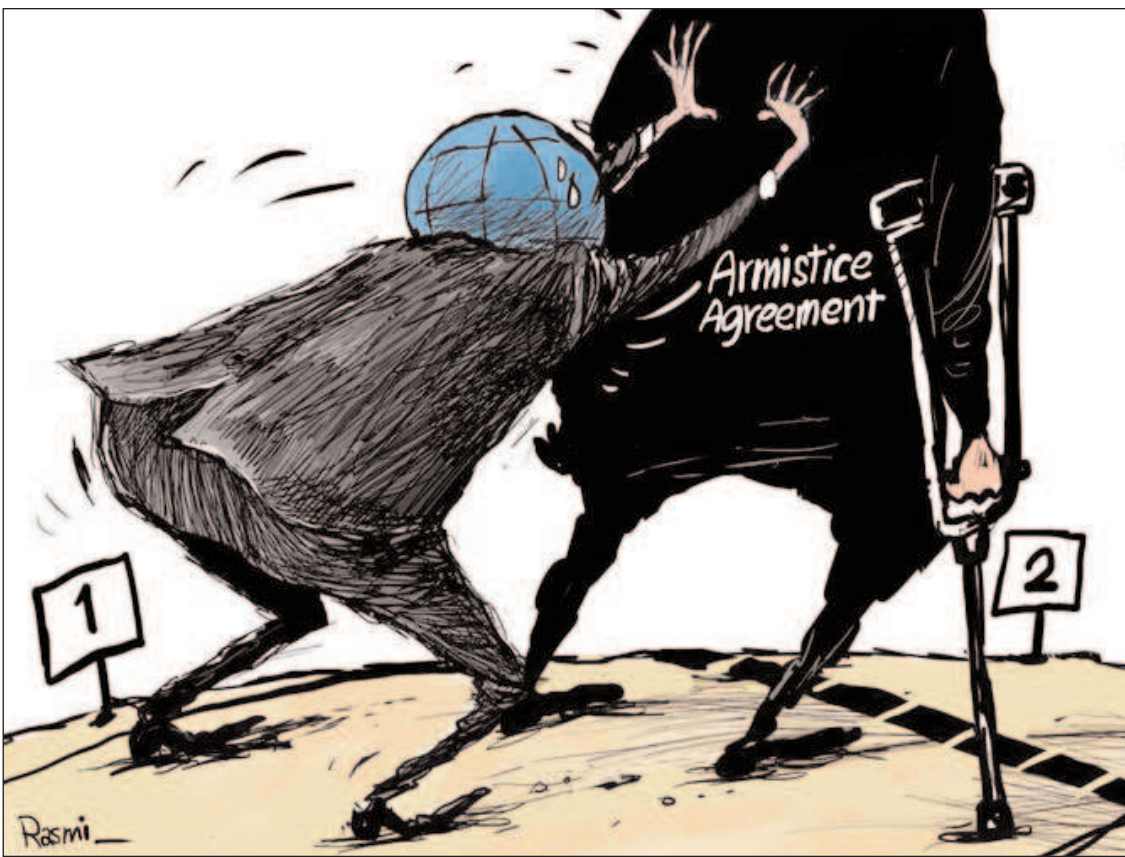
It is for this reason that the Americans signing the G7 joint statement becomes an important point. Trump is only too eager to break off with NATO, and with the European Union (EU), for more than one reason. But Trump seems to be aware that it would be a diplomatic blunder of parting company with the G7 countries. It is a club of the economically and politically privileged countries, and Trump wants to remain part of the group.

Of the six countries in the group, only Italy and Japan are supportive of Trump's policies, economic and diplomatic. The others, which include Canada, Germany, France and the United Kingdom, are at loggerheads with Trump on many issues, especially about tariffs, and about propping up NATO.

Trump's attitude towards G7 will become apparent only when he attends the summit meeting and what he will say when he interacts with other leaders in the group. He is sure to realise that America cannot stand alone in the world, and that it needs friends. The members other than Italy and Japan in the group assert their own foreign policy standpoint. So, Trump will have to tailor his stand to go with the group. There will be larger unanimity but he has to concede on matters of detail as well.

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# Turkiye and its outreach in Africa

Dr. Sinem Cengiz

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan once stated: "Turkiye wants to walk alongside Africa as a new world order is being established." This statement clearly reflects Ankara's policy on Africa amid the geopolitical shifts that have implications for the continent.

Africa, a continent increasingly known for rivalries among global powers, is going through a period of change in power dynamics. France's recent military withdrawals from the Sahel and West Africa have created a power vacuum that several actors, such as the US, China, and Russia, seek to fill.

Turkiye is carefully reading this regional zeitgeist in an attempt to secure economic and diplomatic dominance. Although a power play in Africa gives Turkiye limited room for maneuvering, its position as a middle power offers some advantages over global powers that have been affected by recent geopolitical shifts in the Middle East and beyond.

The regime change in the Syrian Arab Republic, for example, has jeopardized Russia's use of the country for its Mediterranean and African outreach. Both Syria and Ukraine have forced Russia to revise its strategy in Africa at a time when Western powers are gradually withdrawing from the continent.

While this Western withdrawal should play into the hands of the Kremlin, it has also opened the door for other actors, such as Turkiye, to enter the game. Thus, the growing Turkish geopolitical influence in Africa is challenged not only by the Russian presence but also by that of the Chinese, who view the continent as a "base" from which a rising China might best extend its global power.

In 2017, Turkiye established a military base in Somalia's capital, Mogadishu, at a cost of \$50 million. Like American and Chinese military sites in Djibouti, the Turkish base offers proximity to the Indian Ocean. Turkiye is also looking to fill the void left by the US across the Horn of Africa and into the Sahel.

It is important to understand Turkiye's motives for all of this, especially as some African countries

have ordered Western powers, including the US, to withdraw military personnel from their countries.

Diplomatic leverage, economic gains, security commitments, status-seeking, and global power competition are five major drivers behind Ankara's policy on Africa. As a G20 member, Turkiye evidently feels the need to engage with the continent, as have many other G20 powers.

By building closer relations with African states, Turkiye seeks their potential support within international platforms, including the UN General Assembly. In line with this aim, Ankara has increased the number of its embassies on the continent from 12 to 44 in two decades. It also holds an annual Turkiye-

Foreign Minister Mahmoud Thabit Kombo recently asked Turkiye to support a project that aims to provide electricity to 300 million people across the continent by 2030. Uganda has invited Turkish firms to invest in shipbuilding and port development to help boost tourism activities.

While the economy and trade are the primary motivating factors behind Turkiye's outreach to Africa, along with its historical and cultural ties to the region, in recent years the engagement has also taken on a military aspect. Maintaining economic gains is not easy, as it requires security commitments.

The transformation of the Turkish defense industry, with a clear shift from arms procurement to manu-

following the departure in late January of the French garrison that had been stationed there.

However, Turkiye wants to avoid being viewed predominantly as an actor that engages with the continent through military or security activity. Therefore, it adopts a more holistic approach to its relations with Africa, encompassing more than only military projects, including investments in education, such as scholarships for Africans to study in Turkiye.

As Joseph Nye, the political scientist who coined the term "soft power" in the early 1990s, pointed out, there is no difference between hard power and soft power in terms of the intended goals. Aware of this, Turkiye has been applying a combination of soft and hard power to expand its role in the Sahel and West Africa, in order to widen its sphere of influence.

This is paying off; African ambassadors and students who work or study in Turkiye have found that their time there can serve as a springboard that helps them rise to the level of ministers, as seen in Somalia, or even presidents, as in Ethiopia.

Mediation is another soft power tool that Turkiye aims to employ while pursuing its economic goals and maintaining its security commitments. After brokering a deal between Ethiopia and Somalia, Ankara now seeks a role in efforts to end the civil war in Sudan as well. It has also declared its intention to help resolve the dispute between Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of Congo, if both sides desire the assistance.

Turkiye's African outreach is considered, in diplomatic terms, an "overstretch," which means it brings with it both challenges and opportunities. Given the country's military and economic capabilities, and the disquieting risks the continent poses, Turkiye must therefore navigate its African policy carefully to ensure its strategy is sustainable.

The African continent, and in particular the Sahel and West Africa regions, are theaters for both global and regional powers, which offers Ankara incentives to get involved but also limits its room for maneuver.

***It is important to understand Turkiye's motives for all of this, especially as some African countries have ordered Western powers, including the US, to withdraw military personnel from their countries. Diplomatic leverage, economic gains, security commitments, status-seeking, and global power competition are five major drivers behind Ankara's policy on Africa. As a G20 member, Turkiye evidently feels the need to engage with the continent, as have many other G20 powers. By building closer relations with African states, Turkiye seeks their potential support within international platforms, including the UN General Assembly. In line with this aim, Ankara has increased the number of its embassies on the continent from 12 to 44 in two decades. It also holds an annual Turkiye-Africa Summit, at which it gradually institutionalizes its Africa policy.***

Africa Summit, at which it gradually institutionalizes its Africa policy.

Through bilateral trade and investment, Turkiye also seeks to build South-South cooperation. The total volume of trade between Turkiye and African nations increased substantially between 2003 and 2023, from \$1.35 billion to \$12.4 billion.

African partners are actively seeking further Turkish engagement. For instance, Tanzanian

facturing and sales, plays a key role in Turkiye's Africa policy. For example, Niger, Mali, Burkina Faso, and Chad have acquired Turkish drones, while other Sahelian countries have acquired a variety of other Turkish military equipment.

Turkiye has signed security cooperation agreements with most countries on the continent. It has also reportedly deployed military advisers and drones at the Abeche base in Chad,

# All eyes on Putin for next step to Ukraine peace

Luke Coffey

Global events can move quickly. Just two weeks ago, the world watched as Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky had a heated exchange with US President Donald Trump and Vice President J.D. Vance in the Oval Office. A planned rare earths mineral deal was scrapped at the last minute, and Zelensky was sent out of the White House in an unprecedented diplomatic standoff.

But hard work and sincere diplomacy can pay off. Behind the scenes, both sides worked tirelessly to repair the relationship, culminating in a high-stakes meeting in Jeddah this week that brought the US-Ukraine relationship back on track and set the stage for what could be the first meaningful step toward ending Russia's three-year invasion of Ukraine.

Trump has been clear about his desire to end the war, but since returning to office in January he has learned that this is easier said than done. The meeting in Jeddah was the first concrete step in that

night before the Jeddah talks, Ukraine launched its largest drone strike yet, sending nearly 400 to hit targets as far away as Moscow. Meanwhile Russia has continued its relentless bombardment of Ukraine with missiles and drones on a near-nightly basis.

When I visited the front lines in the Kherson region, it was clear that decisions made in Jeddah, Washington, or Moscow are often irrelevant to those fighting on the ground. For the soldiers in the trenches, survival is the only priority. Until an actual ceasefire is implemented — not just discussed — nothing will change for them.

Another major development in the war, and one that represents a significant setback for Ukraine, is Russia's counteroffensive in its Kursk region. Ukraine launched a surprise attack last August and captured a sizeable portion of territory. The idea was to hold on to this land as a bargaining chip for future negotiations. But over the past seven months, Russian forces — bolstered by thousands of

***The US and Ukraine also finalized the draft of the minerals deal that had been abandoned at the White House. Trump has even invited Zelensky back to the Oval Office, signaling a major turnaround in their strained relationship. As Secretary of State Marco Rubio said: "The ball is in Russia's court."***

process. One of Trump's biggest criticisms of Ukraine during the heated White House exchange was that he did not believe Zelensky was sincere about wanting peace. After Jeddah, that perception has changed. The US and Ukraine agreed to a temporary 30-day ceasefire on land, at sea, and in the air — a deal that could be extended if all parties agree. However, Kyiv would not implement it unless Moscow agreed to do the same. Forty-eight hours later, Russian President Vladimir Putin said he supported the idea of a ceasefire but added conditions that make its implementation uncertain.

The US and Ukraine also finalized the draft of the minerals deal that had been abandoned at the White House. Trump has even invited Zelensky back to the Oval Office, signaling a major turnaround in their strained relationship. As Secretary of State Marco Rubio said: "The ball is in Russia's court."

Last week I made my fourth visit to Ukraine since Russia's full-scale invasion in 2022. Anyone who has spent time there knows that Ukrainians want an end to the war. They endure nightly air raids, missile strikes, and drone attacks. They also understand the long-term threat that Russia poses if there are no real security guarantees. For those of us who have seen wartime Ukraine firsthand, it has always been obvious that the Ukrainian people want the fighting to end. Yet some around Trump question whether Zelensky shares this view. After Jeddah, there is no longer any doubt. It is now up to Russia to decide whether to pursue peace.

There is still a long way to go, and plenty of opportunities for setbacks. Even if a temporary ceasefire were agreed on, the war would be far from over. The

North Korean troops — have steadily regained control. Last week it appears that Moscow had completed its recapture of all the territory Ukraine seized.

It will be up to future historians to assess whether the Kursk offensive accomplished tactical objectives or if it was a strategic miscalculation. In the short term, however, it does not help Ukraine's position at the negotiating table. The loss of Kursk weakens its leverage.

After traveling around Ukraine this past week, I am certain of one thing: the Ukrainian people are exhausted from the war. But they also know they have no choice but to keep fighting as long as Russia continues its aggression. If there is to be any lasting peace, it must include security guarantees ensuring that Russia will not attack again. This is the biggest challenge for Kyiv. Trump has ruled out NATO membership for Ukraine and has shifted the responsibility for security guarantees on to Europe. However, because the US and most European countries operate under the same security umbrella, in practice it would be difficult to separate American and European commitments.

The road to peace is long, and the war is far from over. The ongoing fighting in Donetsk, Kursk, and Kherson proves that reality. The biggest question now is whether the progress made in Jeddah will hold. There is always the risk that Trump is looking for a short-term political victory rather than a lasting peace agreement. If the ceasefire collapses, the war will probably escalate again, and Ukraine may find itself in an even more difficult position than before.

For now, all eyes are on Moscow. The coming weeks will determine whether Russia is serious about peace or if the war will continue indefinitely.

# Gaza's silent epidemic

Hadeel Awad

capita in the world".

In July 2024, while on a field visit to Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital, I witnessed firsthand how one of the last functioning hospitals in Gaza was struggling to help those who had sustained injuries from explosive weapons. When I arrived at the hospital, there were many people injured due to several bombings.

I rushed to help as there was a severe shortage of staff. The first patient I attended to was an injured girl named Tala who was four years old. She had lost one of her legs due to the bombing and was crying and screaming intensely. Her mother, who was severely injured as well, could not come to help calm her down. I couldn't do much for the little girl except change her bandage and give her a painkiller.

Then I saw a young man

named Abdallah who was seriously injured and unconscious. Upon his arrival at the hospital, the rest of his leg was amputated. His father told me that Abdallah's grandmother and one of his siblings were killed.

I returned to the hospital in December 2024, where I came across two little girls, Hanan, 3 years old, and Misk, 1 year and 8 months old, who had lost their limbs and their mother in an Israeli raid a few months earlier. Hanan had both of her feet amputated, while her sister Misk lost one of them. Their aunt, whom I spoke to, told me of the struggle to take care of them.

Misk had just learned to walk when the bombing injured her foot. Hanan was old enough to understand and notice the feet of other children her age, asking

why hers were missing.

These are just a few of the stories of thousands of children whose childhood has been cut short by Israeli bombs. They are unable to run and play with their peers, suffering severe trauma in a place that cannot offer them even basic care.

Before this genocidal war, Gaza was already struggling with a large number of amputees, victims of the previous Israeli wars and assaults on peaceful demonstrations.

But there were some facilities and organisations helping them. The Hamad Hospital for Rehabilitation and Prosthetics was able to provide amputees with prosthetics.

Various initiatives provided psycho-social support and healing programmes to overcome the trauma and stigma. But all of these are now gone. Hamad Hospital was destroyed within the first few

weeks of the genocidal war.

Decimated hospitals and makeshift clinics are hardly able to provide any care for chronic diseases, much less for people with disabilities. The Rafah border crossing is now closed once again and none of the injured can travel for treatment. There is an urgent need for thousands of prosthetic limbs and assistive devices such as crutches and wheelchairs, but those have not been allowed in.

With the scale of destruction that Gaza's healthcare sector has suffered, it will take years for it to be rebuilt — and that is if Israel stops blocking aid as a form of collective punishment.

In this time, amputees will inevitably suffer not just from lack of care and rehabilitation but also from the deep psychological trauma that will remain unhealed. This will be Gaza's silent epidemic.



# No other land, no other truth

It was only on the occasion of the 25th Academy Awards, also known as the Oscars, that the category of documentary films was added to the list of awards. In the more than 70 years since then, the award has continued to play an exceptional role in highlighting a wide range of social and political issues, helping to bring them to the attention of the wider public.

This year's shortlisted documentaries included "Black Box Diaries," about sexual violence, and "Porcelain Wars," about the experiences of Ukrainian artists in the face of the Russian war on Ukraine. However, the members of the Academy chose as the winner "No Other Land," a film about aspects of the conflict between Israel and Palestine made by an Israeli-Palestinian collective of four activists: Basel Adra, Hamdan Ballal, Yuval Abraham, and Rachel Szor.

The Academy members chose it not because they did not think it would cause controversy, but because they knew it would, and for all the right reasons.

In the middle of the worst round of hostilities between Israelis and Palestinians since 1948, a film that focuses on the unremitting forced displacement of Palestinians from their homes in Masafer Yatta — an area in the South Hebron Hills of the West Bank that is home to 12 Palestinian villages with about 2,800 residents — has given a voice to one of the poorest and most defenseless Palestinian communities and their struggle for survival against the arbitrary Israeli occupation.

For that, the makers of this film fully deserve the accolades and applause that comes with the recognition by their fellow filmmakers.

The very existence of the Israeli occupation of Palestinian land and the treatment of the Palestinian people is disturbing in its oppressiveness, its ruthless-

ness, and how arbitrary it is. Denying people their basic rights has become the rule rather than the exception, and in many cases it is done for the sole purpose of demonstrating who the masters of the land are.

The story of Masafer Yatta goes back to the 1980s, when Israeli authorities designated this part of the occupied West Bank as "Firing Zone 918," a closed military site. Ever since then, residents have been at risk of forced eviction, the demolition of their homes, and forcible transfer. Two other villages, Khirbet Sarura and Kharoubeh, no longer exist because the homes of the people who lived there were razed to the ground.

The residents of Masafer

Yossi Mekelberg

cles over the course of four years, from 2019 to 2023. Its main strength lies in the fact that with minimal commentary, it lets viewers make up their own minds and pass their own verdicts on where they stand on what they see.

"No Other Land" is not an attempt to tell the entire history or explain the politics of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, nor does it offer any solutions. It focuses on how an occupation corrupts the occupier and renders it callous as it inflicts suffering on the occupied, hardly viewing them as human beings at all.

When they demolish the homes of Palestinians, they leave the occupants home-

Meanwhile, they rely on foreign humanitarian assistance to build or rebuild their homes and public facilities, only for them to be repeatedly demolished by Israel's security forces.

Interestingly enough, "No Other Land" has been heavily criticized from two diametrically opposed, but equally misguided, quarters — although the reaction from one of the groups of critics was a particular surprise.

The more obvious disapproval was voiced by Israeli officials, and right-wing politicians and commentators. One Israeli diplomat went so far as to say: "Under the guise of freedom of expression and art, antisemitic and anti-Israel rhetoric is celebrat-

**Just last month, Israeli human rights organization B'Tselem reported that Israeli security forces had demolished seven cinder-block structures with tin roofs that were the homes of seven families, leaving 54 people, including 28 children, homeless. They also destroyed four caves, two water cisterns, two water tanks, and three solar panels used by some of the families. This is the situation that "No Other Land" chronicles over the course of four years, from 2019 to 2023. Its main strength lies in the fact that with minimal commentary, it lets viewers make up their own minds and pass their own verdicts on where they stand on what they see.**

Yatta have found no success in their efforts to seek the protection of the Israeli legal system, which as a general rule sides with the occupation, and so demolitions have continued.

Just last month, Israeli human rights organization B'Tselem reported that Israeli security forces had demolished seven cinder-block structures with tin roofs that were the homes of seven families, leaving 54 people, including 28 children, homeless. They also destroyed four caves, two water cisterns, two water tanks, and three solar panels used by some of the families.

This is the situation that "No Other Land" chroni-

less. When they destroy a school, children are deprived of education and future prospects. When they wreck a playground, they take away one of the small joys left to youngsters.

This is not about security; these people are not a security risk. And the Israeli Civil Administration, the governing body in the West Bank, has had more than 40 years to resolve, humanely and compassionately, the situation of these people, had it genuinely cared for them.

Instead, as a consequence of this intolerable situation, Palestinians live in fear of eviction and of being attacked by the security forces and settlers.

ed." Israeli Culture Minister Miki Zohar reacted to the film's triumph at the Oscars by stating that "turning the defamation of Israel into a tool for international promotion is not art, it is sabotage against the State of Israel."

But this film is neither anti-Israeli, nor antisemitic. It simply holds a mirror up to Israeli society and shows what is happening in that society's name in the West Bank, especially to extremely vulnerable communities. Do they not like what they see because it is an inconvenient truth which they would rather continue to deny, as they have done for so many decades? Probably, yes.

If they are disturbed by what they see in this film, they should demand that this inhuman treatment stop immediately. Breaking the mirror into pieces will not change the reality in the West Bank, nor the fact that those who do not speak up against the immoral and illegal behavior of Israeli forces are complicit in making the lives of innocent people a misery.

More stupefying, though equally misguided, has been the criticism of "No Other Land" by the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement. For it to claim that the "film indeed violates the BDS movement's anti-normalization guidelines," would be comical if it was not so tragically dogmatic and damaging.

The premise of this Israeli-Palestinian cooperative film venture is based on joint opposition to the unacceptable and unbearable conditions under which the occupied population is forced to live. By creating this film, and winning prizes at some of the most prestigious film festivals in the world, its makers are exposing many millions of viewers around the world to the ill-treatment of the people of Masafer Yatta.

This is not normalization, this is Arabs and Israelis fighting shoulder-to-shoulder against normalization of the occupation by those who support it and those who remain in willful denial of it.

Those among us who believe Israelis and Palestinians are destined to live in peace with one another, and must eventually be reconciled, are encouraged by this cooperation between those whose mission is to bear witness to the daily injustices and suffering caused by this conflict.

They should not be decried for that but should only enjoy our praise and undying support. At the end of the day, neither of the two peoples have another land and so they must learn to share this one with mutual respect and dignity.

# How can North Africa harness its 'green dividend'?

Hafed Al-Ghwel

The sunbaked deserts and wind-swept coasts of North Africa could power not just the region but much of Europe and Sub-Saharan Africa as well, offering a blueprint for energy resilience in an era of climate disruption.

Yet this potential remains constrained. While individual countries have made strides in the adoption of renewable energy, collective progress is hamstrung by decades of political discord, fragmentation, and infrastructural isolation. The region's transition to clean energy, driven by existential threats such as water scarcity, agricultural collapse, and volatile commodity markets, has unfolded in enforced silos.

These efforts, however impressive, are only mirroring the region's broader economic and diplomatic fractures. The urgency is undeniable. North Africa's energy demand is rising twice as quickly as the global average, straining budgets in hydrocarbon-importing states such as Tunisia and Morocco while putting pressure on exporters Algeria and Libya to reconcile their fossil fuel dependencies with ambitious decarbonization pledges.

Renewables now account for 40 percent of installed capacity regionally, yet their contribution to the overall energy mix lags at less than 5 percent, a disconnect that reveals systemic inefficiencies: Solar farms in the Sahara generate power hundreds of miles from population centers, wind projects along the Atlantic coast lack transmission links to neighboring grids.

This disjointedness inflates costs, limits scalability, and leaves countries vulnerable to the very external shocks — energy price spikes, climate disasters — they seek to mitigate.

Thus, we must revisit the mostly ignored fact that the case for closer regional integration is not ideological but pragmatic. For instance, a regional electricity market could help balance Morocco's midday solar surplus with Algeria's evening demand peaks, stabilize Tunisia's grid during windless nights, and export excess capacity to Europe or elsewhere.

Shared infrastructure would lower prices, attract foreign investment, and cushion against the droughts and heatwaves that ravage subsistence farmers. Technical solutions exist, from harmonized grid codes to cross-border auctions for renewable projects, and joint ventures in green hydrogen production.

What is missing is the political will to transcend the historical grievances that have frozen cooperation since the collapse of the Arab Maghreb Union in the 1990s.

Europe, with its decarbonization targets and energy diversification goals, has a vested interest in underwriting this integration, especially if the ensuing "green dividend" extends to Sub-Saharan Africa as a means, for example, of tackling the underlying drivers of migration.

Yet the path to realizing this goal hinges not on potentially "greenwashing" external actors but on the region's ability to

reframe renewables as a neutral domain insulated from broader tensions. North Africa, with its complementary resources and geographic proximity, is uniquely positioned to become a renewable energy hub, but only if its leaders confront the barriers that have long Balkanized progress.

In a nutshell, the region's chronic fragmentation stems from a combustible mix of historical grievances, clashing economic ideologies, and infrastructural neglect. Infrastructural deficits further compound this dysfunction.

Highways between major cities, such as Casablanca and Algiers, remain incomplete and cross-border rail links are nonexistent.

Electricity grids operate as isolated islands, with Morocco's advanced renewables infrastructure disconnected from Algeria's gas-fired plants or Tunisia's wind farms.

This physical disconnect mirrors institutional barriers.

Tariff regimes favor external partners over regional ones, while subsidies for fossil fuels, still dominant in Algeria and Libya, distort incentives for green investment.

Unfortunately, the costs of such fragmentation are rising. As global demand for green hydrogen and critical minerals grows, North African countries risk ceding competitive advantage to more integrated regions.

Europe's energy diversification post-Ukraine has intensified the focus on North Africa's renewables potential, but disjointed national strategies lack scale without regional interconnection.

The recent Algeria-Tunisia-Libya consultations, though exclusionary, hint at nascent recognition of shared challenges, one of which is to transition from energy Balkanization to integration because green growth requires that the tensions that have come to define the region for more than half a century be deprioritized.

Fortunately, renewables offer North Africa a rare opportunity to decouple electricity cooperation from entrenched geopolitical rivalries.

Existing cross-border grid infrastructure provides a technical foundation for this. Such exchanges, though currently hydrocarbon-dependent, could pivot to renewables as countries expand solar and wind capacities.

Moreover, other regional complements enhance the case.

Morocco's solar surplus could power Algerian industries during peak demand, or Tunisian wind energy could be channeled to Libyan cities battered by conflict-disrupted grids after dusk.

Such synergies require minimal political alignment, only agreements on pricing and transmission protocols. This way, a regional electricity market, linked by high-capacity interconnectors, could reduce dependence on costly or volatile fossil fuel backups, curb emissions, and reduce prices from Rabat to Sharm El-Sheikh.

Challenges persist, however. Power grids

remain mostly fragmented, with interconnection capacity underutilized as a result of incompatible regulations and chronic underinvestment. A proposal by COMELEC, a regional electricity cooperation oversight body formed in 1974 by the national utility companies of Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia, joined later by Libya and Mauritania, envisioned the introduction of an integrated electricity market by 2025, to be built on standardized tariffs and incentivized private sector participation.

Phased approaches such as these, starting with renewable-specific corridors or peak-time trading, could build trust without demanding full political reconciliation.

For Europe, which seeks stable, clean energy imports, supporting such incrementalism is pragmatic: Functional electricity markets in North Africa would preempt the need for politically fraught gas deals.

In a region where sunlight and wind transcend borders, electrons might yet achieve what diplomats cannot.

Achieving this will require decisive action on three parallel tracks. Firstly, governments must prioritize functional interconnectivity.

Existing bilateral projects, such as the Morocco-Spain undersea cable, demonstrate technical feasibility but remain exceptions.

A regional grid would demand standardized regulations, harmonized subsidy reforms, and joint investment in transmission infrastructure, possibly facilitated by multilateral lenders such as the African Development Bank.

Secondly, knowledge-sharing platforms could accelerate innovation. Algeria's geothermal experiments in the Sahara, Egypt's expertise in large-scale solar deployment, and Mauritania's wind projects each hold lessons for their neighbors.

Thirdly, sector-specific diplomacy must bypass broader political stalemates.

Renewable energy working groups, insulated from high tensions, could foster trust through incremental gains: agreements on shared grid codes, for example, or coordination of bids for international climate funds.

Critics argue that domestic instability, from fractured governance in Libya to Egypt's debt burdens, precludes such coordination.

Yet these challenges amplify the need for collective solutions. Otherwise, North Africa's green dividend will remain elusive.

The alternative, a patchwork of disconnected renewable projects, will just replicate the inefficiencies of the fossil fuel era.

By embracing interconnectivity as a strategic imperative, governments can transform energy from a source of division into a catalyst for shared resilience.

The window of opportunity is narrow but the rewards are profound: energy security, climate adaptation, and economic convergence.

In a region long defined by its fractures, cooperation is not idealism, it is simple arithmetic.

# Europe sets sights on Global South to build influence

One of the most striking features of Donald Trump's second presidency is how its unilateralism is eroding US soft power, including in the so-called Global South. This is creating a window of opportunity for other powers, including Europe, to fill the political and economic vacuum left in its wake, in areas such as Africa, the Middle East, South America, and the Asia Pacific.

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen turned her attention this week to Africa, building on her recent trips to South America and India, and the EU's interest in other key emerging markets, including the Gulf Cooperation Council.

Specifically, she co-hosted an EU-South Africa summit in Cape Town on Thursday with South African President Cyril Ramaphosa, who is the chair of the G20 this year.

The EU is South Africa's leading source of foreign direct investment, accounting for 53.7 percent of the total in 2022. Meanwhile, South Africa continues to be the EU's largest trading partner in Sub-Saharan Africa, with 49 billion (\$53.3 billion) worth of trade in goods in 2023.

The EU is also keenly aware that South Africa is the gateway to a much wider region on the emerg-

ing-markets-rich continent. In June 2016, the EU and South Africa, along with Botswana, Lesotho, Mozambique, Namibia, and Eswatini, signed the Southern African Development Community Economic Partnership Agreement. Through this, the EU either completely or partially eliminated customs duties on almost all imports from southern Africa. The agreement helps promote both bilateral and regional trade, opening up new opportunities to help achieve the goals of the EU-South Africa strategic partnership.

One of Africa's key attractions, from the EU perspective, is its huge stock of resource wealth, as Europe seeks to diversify its global supply chains following its realization it was over-dependent on Russian energy before the war in Ukraine. Sub-Saharan Africa has an estimated 30 percent of global reserves of critical raw materials.

The emerging-markets-rich continent has long been a super priority for the EU; von der Leyen's predecessor as commission president, Jean Claude Juncker, pushed for a "pivot to Africa," including the creation of a new Africa-Europe Alliance. Since the war in Ukraine began, this EU focus on Africa has intensified, with von der Leyen promoting the relationship as a key counter-

Andrew Hammond

weight to other prominent world powers, including Russia.

Brussels wants to encourage Africa as a champion of a rules-based, multilateral approach to world order. In the words of former EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs Josep Borrell, Europe seeks "a new, integrated strategy for and with Africa," based on an "equal partnership" rather than the "power politics" offered by some others, including Russia.

The EU's diplomatic serenading of South Africa contrasts sharply with that of the Trump team since it took office in January. US Secretary of State Marco Rubio and US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent failed to attend meetings of G20 foreign and finance ministers last month amid Trump administration's condemnation of the South African government.

One focal point of the Trump team's attacks has been the 2024 South Africa Expropriation Act, which aims to resolve ownership-inequality issues created by the pre-1994 Apartheid system of white-minority rule. The controversial law has drawn criticism for potentially disregarding private property rights, particularly those of the white minority, as it could permit the state

seizure of land without compensation. No land has been expropriated so far but Trump signed an executive order on Feb. 7 cutting aid to South Africa.

This reduction came amid wider USAID funding disruptions, as the Trump team has terminated the vast majority of the agency's programs. This represents a body blow to hopes of the international community meeting the UN's Sustainable Development Goals for financial loans and aid to Africa.

The US diplomatic rebuff of South Africa worries Europe, which fears foes, including Russia, will step into the economic and political vacuum left in its wake. This comes in a context of an increasing non-alignment among African nations, and developing countries across the wider world, on international issues such as the war in Ukraine.

With its wooing of world powers, Europe seeks to address the fact that few so-called "non-aligned" states imposed sanctions on Russia following its 2022 invasion of Ukraine. For many of these countries, diplomatic neutrality has significant appeal, not least because so many of them depend heavily on trade, aid, investment and/or weapons from both China and Russia, as well as the West.

Russian President Vladimir Putin has been hosting Russia-Africa summits since 2019 in an attempt to restore Moscow's influence in the region, which had faded after the collapse of the Soviet Union. He is keen to entrench a Russian economic and political foothold in the continent, as bilateral trade with Africa has risen significantly.

However, the most extensive diplomatic serenading of Africa has come from Russia's ally, China, which aims to better connect its huge Belt and Road Initiative infrastructure project with the continent's development. Trade between China and Africa has risen significantly, and more than 50 African countries are now participating in the Belt and Road Initiative.

Thursday's big EU-South Africa event, then, was only the latest manifestation of Europe's efforts to double down on Global South powers during von der Leyen's second term. Conscious of the unpredictability of the Trump team, and attempts by foes such as Russia to fill the power vacuum, the EU and other powers are seeking to bolster their economic and political relationships with key markets, including Africa, the Middle East, South America, and the Asia Pacific.

# Rohingya face starvation as the world turns away

Dr. Azeem Ibrahim

The World Food Programme last week announced yet another devastating cut to food aid for Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh. Rations will be slashed from a meager \$12.50 per month to an appalling \$6 per month — just 20 cents a day. For a population already on the brink, this latest reduction is catastrophic. The consequences will be dire: widespread malnutrition, increased disease and the potential collapse of a vulnerable refugee community that the world seems determined to forget.

The Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh's Cox's Bazar, the world's largest refugee settlement, were already suffering from food insecurity before this latest cut. In 2023, the World Food Programme was

forced to reduce food aid from \$12 to \$10 per month, then to \$8, before restoring it to \$12.50 following urgent pleas for funding. Even then, reports indicated rising levels of malnutrition, particularly among children, pregnant women and the elderly. Now, with rations halved to just \$6 per month, the international community is not just abandoning the Rohingya — it is starving them.

To put this into perspective, a single meal in the refugee camps currently costs about 50 cents. The new rations will not even cover two weeks of sustenance. Families that have already cut meals and portion sizes to survive will now have to make impossible choices. Parents will go hungry so their children can eat. Malnutrition, already

rampant, will become a full-blown health crisis. Stunted growth among children, increased maternal mortality and the spread of diseases like cholera and tuberculosis — exacerbated by weak immune systems — are all but guaranteed.

The World Food Programme attributes these drastic cuts to donor fatigue and a shifting global focus. Conflicts in Ukraine, Gaza and other regions have diverted aid money, leaving the Rohingya lower on the priority list. But humanitarian aid should not be a zero-sum game. Starving one group of people to fund assistance for another is not a solution — it is an indictment of global inaction.

The reality is that the international community is allowing this crisis to unfold. Bangladesh,

already struggling with economic pressures and political instability, is in no position to fully support the nearly 1 million Rohingya refugees in its territory. Meanwhile, the very countries that once championed human rights and condemned Myanmar's genocide against the Rohingya are now failing to provide the most basic humanitarian assistance to its survivors.

Beyond the immediate humanitarian catastrophe, this dramatic reduction in food aid will have severe political and security implications. Starving populations do not simply waste away in silence; they seek alternatives. For many Rohingya, this will mean embarking on perilous mig-

ration journeys to escape the camps, often falling prey to human traffickers who promise them safety in Malaysia, Indonesia or elsewhere. Others may turn to desperate measures, including illicit activities, to feed their families.

Moreover, extremist groups could exploit this crisis, preying on the hopelessness of a starving and abandoned people. Historically, famine and extreme deprivation have provided fertile ground for radicalization. Should any such elements gain traction within the refugee population, the ramifications would not be confined to Bangladesh alone but could spill across the region.

The Rohingya have been described as the most per-

secuted minority in the world. Driven from their homeland in Myanmar by a genocidal military campaign, they have spent the past seven years languishing in refugee camps with no clear future. Repatriation efforts have repeatedly stalled, as Myanmar remains unsafe and unwilling to take them back. Bangladesh has made it clear that it cannot host them indefinitely, yet third-country resettlement efforts have barely scratched the surface of the need.

With no path to citizenship, no right to work and now barely enough food to survive, the Rohingya are being pushed into an unlivable situation. The reduction in rations is not just an economic measure — it is a death sentence, imposed by bureaucratic indifference

and international apathy.

The World Food Programme and other humanitarian agencies must receive urgent funding to restore rations to at least their previous levels. Wealthy nations, particularly those that have spoken out against Myanmar's crimes, have a moral obligation to step up. The US, UK, EU and the Gulf states must increase their contributions to the Rohingya aid program.

Beyond emergency funding, longer-term solutions must be explored. One option is the creation of sustainable agricultural and livelihood programs within the camps, allowing refugees to produce their own food rather than relying entirely on external aid. Additionally, diplomatic efforts must be redoubled to pressure Myanmar into

accepting the safe, voluntary and dignified return of Rohingya refugees. The international community cannot simply abandon an entire ethnic group to slow starvation in makeshift camps.

The reduction of Rohingya food rations to \$6 per month is not a minor adjustment — it is a humanitarian crisis in the making. If action is not taken immediately, we will witness mass hunger, preventable deaths and the further destabilization of an already fragile region. The world has a choice: it can either prevent this disaster or bear the moral and political consequences of allowing it to happen. The Rohingya have already suffered enough. Starvation should not be added to their long list of injustices.





Rising terror attacks:

# Business community stands with armed forces

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Pakistan Industrial and Traders Associations Front (PIAF) Chairman Fahimur Rehman Saigol has strongly condemned the heinous terrorist attack on the Jaffar Express in Balochistan and praised the security forces for their effective and timely response in rescuing the passengers.

In a ceremony held here to honour those who lost their lives to fight against terrorists, PIAF Chairman Fahimur Rehman Saigol, Senior Vice chairman Nasrullah Mughal and Vice chairman Tahir Manzoor Chaudhry expressed deep concern over the tragic incident. They commended the bravery and dedication of the security personnel, stating that their courageous efforts ensured the safety of innocent passengers.

The PIAF leaders denounced the attack as a cowardly and inhuman act, emphasizing that such elements are enemies of Pakistan's peace, progress, and development. They stressed that those responsible deserve no leniency. They also extended

heartfelt prayers for the swift recovery of those injured in the attack. Despite the challenging terrain, they acknowledged the unwavering morale of the security forces, who effectively countered the terrorists through their prompt action.

The PIAF leaders affirmed that any conspiracy aimed at destabilizing the country would be thwarted, emphasizing that the entire nation stands united in solidarity with its security forces to ensure peace and stability.

The leadership lauded the valour of security forces for rescuing the passengers of Jaffar Express and said that attacks on innocent civilians and passengers were inhuman and condemnable acts. They said neither any religion nor a society allowed such repugnant acts.

The Baloch nation strongly opposed those elements who had taken unarmed passengers, elders and children as hostage. They said that security forces officers and personnel were eliminating terrorists bravely during the ongoing response.

"Despite a difficult terrain, the morale of the security forces is high and they are pushing back the coward terrorists with their timely action," Shehbaz said. They expressed the hope that the security operation would soon meet with success and the terrorists would be eliminated.

Faheem Saigol said that inhuman terrorists, who launched the cowardly assault on Jaffar Express at Dhadhar-Bolan Pass did not deserve any concession. "Terrorists are the enemies of progress and development of Balochistan province," he said.

"Targeting of innocent passengers in the holy and blessed month of Ramadanul Mubarak proves it clearly that terrorists have no relation with Islam, Pakistan and Balochistan," he added. He vowed the fight against terrorism would continue till complete eradication of this spectre from the country.

Any conspiracy to spread chaos and lawlessness in the country would be foiled, he continued, stressing that the government would never allow enemies of the nation to succeed in their

nefarious designs. "In this fight against terrorism, the entire nation stands shoulder to shoulder with the security forces."

Without complete peace, the dream of development and prosperity is elusive. The valiant personnel of police, armed forces and Rangers are rendering ultimate sacrifices and the nation will have to remember it, he said.

The heinous plans of anti-national and anti-social elements will never be allowed to be allowed," he said. The businessmen stand with the Balochistan government. He hoped police and other LEAs will bring this situation under control.

"Terrorists cannot shake the national resolve with such cowardly acts. The nation is united and the evil intentions of the enemies will be crushed," he added. He reaffirmed his full support for the security forces, and called for effective measures to eliminate elements seeking to destabilise the country. "The nation stands in solidarity with the families of the passengers during this difficult time," he added.



MULTAN: Labourers unloading tomato bags from delivery van at Vegetable Market.

## SEPA's pollution drive across Sindh F.P. Report

KARACHI: The Sindh Environmental Protection Agency (SEPA) has entered its fourth consecutive day of an intensive, province-wide campaign against air and noise pollution, demonstrating an unwavering commitment to safeguarding the environment and public health. This relentless drive, operating day and night, underscores SEPA's dedication to proactively addressing environmental hazards.

In Karachi, SEPA officials conducted rigorous vehicle emission checks in Liaquatabad. On Thursday, out of 19 vehicles inspected primarily MAZDA and Hino Models, 3 were found to be emitting smoke exceeding permissible limits according to the Sindh Environmental Quality Standards (SEQS). On Friday, the agency intensified its efforts, monitoring 36 heavy vehicles and identifying 8 violators, who were strictly reprimanded.

Concurrently, SEPA teams conducted noise level monitoring at various busy intersections across Karachi, revealing alarming levels significantly above tolerable limits.

The recorded noise levels, ranging from 69 dB at Karachi University to a concerning 94 dB in Liaquatabad, highlight the severe impact of noisy vehicles and urban noise sources on public health, particularly hearing-related issues.

Beyond Karachi, SEPA's province-wide drive continued with inspections of brick kilns in Tando Allahyar. Shah Khalid, Incharge of SEPA District Office Tando Allahyar, along with a dedicated team, assessed compliance with the Sindh Environmental Protection Act 2014.

Kiln operators were directed to utilize environmentally friendly fuels to minimize the impact on the Ambient Air Quality Index (AQI), with a stern warning of strict enforcement actions for violations.

## PRGMEA urges FBR to act against EFS misuse

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Pakistan Readymade Garments Manufacturers and Exporters Association (PRGMEA) has strongly opposed the recent amendments to the Export Facilitation Scheme (EFS), warning they will harm the apparel sector, particularly small and medium enterprises (SMEs).

PRGMEA former chairman Ijaz Khokhar urged the Federal Board of Revenue to take strict action against companies that misused the EFS facility instead of penalizing the entire export sector. He emphasized that SME exporters are already struggling and that delaying these amendments would help prevent further damage.

"A major concern is the reduced utilization period for imported raw materials, now capped at nine months, with extensions requiring board committee approval." The former chairman argued that apparel production involves multiple steps, including designing, sourcing, manufacturing, and shipping. Such a restrictive time frame will make it difficult for exporters to meet commit-

ments.

Another issue is the requirement of a bank guarantee for enhanced face value, which disproportionately affects SMEs. Many lack the financial resources to secure such guarantees, potentially barring them from essential export facilitation benefits, he said, adding this policy limits their ability to expand into international markets.

The amendments introduced through SRO 301(I)/2025 will weaken Pakistan's competitiveness in apparel exports, he said.

Ijaz Khokhar highlighted that the industry is already struggling with rising production costs, energy shortages, and logistical challenges. Additional regulatory burdens will only worsen these issues, threatening jobs and reducing export potential. He noted that global buyers are highly sensitive to delivery timelines, and bureaucratic delays could result in lost orders.

"The new amendments impose unrealistic restrictions on raw material utilization and require bank guarantees SMEs cannot afford. These policies will negatively impact Pakistan's export growth

and textile sector," Khokhar stated.

He also expressed concerns over increased compliance burdens and policy uncertainty, which could weaken Pakistan's position against regional competitors like Bangladesh and Vietnam.

He stressed that exporters need a streamlined, transparent system to facilitate trade rather than complex regulations that create delays and additional costs. Exporters are already navigating economic challenges, including fluctuating currency rates and increasing freight costs. Introducing more hurdles will only make it harder for them to sustain operations.

Another major concern is the potential reduction in export-related incentives. PRGMEA leader warned that the amendments may lead to cuts in duty drawbacks and sales tax exemptions, which are essential for maintaining profitability. Delays in refund processing already strain garment manufacturers, and further disruptions could impact their cash flow. Small exporters rely heavily on timely refunds to reinvest in production and fulfill new orders.

## Call to establish National Crypto Council

LAHORE (APP): Pakistan Furniture Council (PFC) Chief Executive Officer Mian Kashif Ashfaq Sunday said the establishment of a National Crypto Council (NCC) is need of the hour for Pakistan to capitalize the opportunities offered by digital currencies.

He was of the view that by creating a robust regulatory framework, promoting awareness and fostering innovation, Pakistan can position itself as a forward-thinking player in the global digital economy.

Talking to reporters

here, he added, "It's right time to act now, as the world moves swiftly toward a de-centralized financial future." He stressed the need to align the country with global trends in digital currencies and blockchain technology. As the world rapidly embraces crypto currencies and de-centralized financial systems, Pakistan risks falling behind in this transformative economic shift. The NCC should work as a dedicated regulatory body to provide the framework needed to harness the potential of digital currencies while mitigating associated risks.

Mian Kashif Ashfaq said the primary role of the NCC should be to create a comprehensive regulatory environment for crypto currencies. This includes defining legal statuses, taxation policies, and anti-money laundering (AML) measures to ensure transparency and security. By establishing clear guidelines, National Crypto Council should foster trust among investors, businesses, and consumers, encour-

aging innovation and adoption in the digital finance sector. Moreover, it must play a pivotal role in educating the public and stakeholders about the benefits and risks of crypto currencies. With proper awareness campaigns,

Pakistan can combat misinformation and promote responsible usage of digital assets. This would also help in addressing concerns related to fraud, scams, and volatility often associated with crypto currencies, he asserted. Another critical function of the NCC should be to collaborate with international regulatory bodies and organizations to stay updated on global best practices. This would enable Pakistan to integrate seamlessly into the global digital economy, attract foreign investment and foster economic growth.

The CEO said the regulatory body should also facilitate the development of blockchain-based solutions for sectors of agriculture, healthcare, and supply chain management, driving efficiency and transparency.

### Lost documents

I have lost my original passport no AQ 1134151 in the Name zaqir ayub khan s/o Muhammad Ayub khan R/o North waziristan if some one found please contact 0333 9145206

## Incentivizing real economic activity critical: Shahid Imran

LAHORE (APP): Pakistan can lay the foundation for sustainable economic growth, reduce unemployment, and increase exports by regulating unproductive sectors, incentivizing real economic activity and ensuring capital flows into employment generating industries.

Convener of Federation of Pakistan Chamber of Commerce and Industry's Regional Committee on Food Shahid Imran expressed these views in a meeting with a South Punjab traders delegation led by Mian Zahid Iqbal Arain, here Sunday.

Shahid Imran said that incentivizing real economic activity is equally critical, therefore, the government should offer tax breaks, subsidies, and low-interest loans to industries with high job creation and export potential, like textiles, agriculture, IT, and manufacturing.

He said that the government must build a financial system that ensures capital flows into productive sectors. This requires reforming the banking sector to prioritize lending to small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and export-oriented industries.

Strengthening capital markets and encouraging venture capital can also support startups and innovative businesses, he remarked.

Shahid Imran viewed that unproductive sectors like real estate speculation and non-essential luxury imports, often divert resources away from productive investments. These sectors contribute little to GDP growth or employment while exacerbating income inequality. By imposing stricter regulations and higher taxes on such activities, Pakistan can discourage speculative behavior and redirect capital

toward more productive uses. For instance, taxing vacant urban land and luxury imports could free up resources for industrial and agricultural development, he said.

The Convener said Pakistan's economy faces significant challenges including trade deficit, low export level and high unemployment. To address these issues, he suggested, the country must regulate unproductive sectors, incentivize real economic activity, and create a system that channels capital into industries capable of generating jobs and boosting exports.

## Chase Value launches a grand new store in Hyderabad



F.P. Report

HYDERABAD: Chase Value launched a grand new store in Hyderabad on Saturday, located on Main Autobahn Road. The store offers a wide range of products for men, women, and children, including clothing, footwear, cosmetics, home décor, electronic appliances, and fashion and lifestyle items-all available under one roof. Staying true to its legacy, Chase Value continues to provide high-

quality products at wholesale prices throughout the year. The new store will uphold this tradition, offering the same diverse selection that has defined Chase Value's history.

The prestigious ribbon-cutting ceremony was attended by distinguished guests, including prominent business leaders, industry experts, and valued partners and government bodies.

The ceremony was attended by ChaseValue's

top executives, including Chairman Farooq Ghaffar, CEO Omar Farooq, Ali Mufti GM Marketing & Sales, and other team members. The Mayor of Hyderabad also honored the occasion with his presence.

Farooq Ghaffar shared their vision for expanding quality and affordable retail shopping across Pakistan. The event was a celebration of excellence, innovation, and customer commitment, reinforcing the brand's rep-

utation as a leading retail destination.

In addition to the new Hyderabad location, Chase Value operates multiple stores across Pakistan, catering to customers with an extensive collection of everyday essentials and fashion trends. From stylish apparel and accessories to premium beauty products and home essentials, each store is designed to provide a seamless shopping experience. Customers can always expect affordability, variety, and quality, making Chase Value a preferred choice for budget-friendly yet stylish shopping.

## SNGPL: 254 illegal connections disconnected F.P. Report

LAHORE: Sui Northern Gas Pipelines Limited (SNGPL) continues its aggressive crackdown against gas theft, disconnecting 254 illegal connections across Punjab, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and Islamabad. Additionally, fines amounting to Rs 2.65 million have been imposed on violators. In Lahore, the regional team disconnected 81 illegal connections, imposing a fine of Rs 0.81 million on gas thieves. In Faisalabad, 29 illegal connections were severed, with fines totaling Rs 0.26 million. Sheikhupura witnessed 7 disconnections, with a penalty of Rs 0.31 million.

The Multan team disconnected 45 connections due to gas theft, while 24 more were cut off for compressor usage. In Bahawalpur, 9 connections were disconnected for illegal gas use, and another 53 for unauthorized compressor installations.

Gujranwala's regional team disconnected 1 illegal connection and imposed a Rs 0.25 million fine on gas pilferers. Meanwhile, in Sahiwal, 5 connections were terminated, with fines amounting to Rs 1.03 million.

## Desperate need of breathing space: High lending costs choking industry

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce & Industry's Businessmen Panel (BMP) on Sunday observed that the high borrowing costs are indeed choking the industries at a time when they are in desperate need of breathing space as interest rate status quo displeased businesses across the country.

FPCCI former president and BMP Chairman Mian Anjum Nisar, while having a reality check, stated that country's economic house is not exactly in order. Inflation may be at record lows, but global risks are rising. The rupee is always one shock away from slip-

ping, oil prices are shooting up, and food costs are unpredictable. A premature rate cut at this stage not only increases private sector borrowing and spending but also risks fresh inflationary pressure and capital flight. The bank saw the danger and chose not to gamble, because the last thing Pakistan needs is another round of imported inflation.

Anjum Nisar observed that the cheaper credit makes businesses happy, but it must be kept in mind that growth built on artificial stimulus is never sustainable. Any reckless move could land Pakistan into another boom-bust cycle, and that is unaffordable this time.

Several experts hailed

the State Bank's cautious approach to keep the interest rate unchanged at 12 per cent on Monday, but the bulk of the business community was up in arms against the central bank for not bringing down the policy rate by 500 basis points even though inflation was as low as 1.5pc last month.

The central bank's decision to hit the brakes on its key policy rate cuts is a cautious move. Keeping interest rate unchanged at 12% came as a shocker to many, as the market was all but certain of yet another major reduction. Caught between market expectations and economic reality, the State Bank of Pakistan's call is tough but necessary.

While everything seems

to be going well for the economy, the SBP is not buying the optimism. The country has witnessed a series of aggressive slashes over the past six months. That indeed has helped revive the economy. Additionally, inflation now stands at a near-decade low of 1.5%, and authorities are hopeful of securing the \$1 billion tranche from the International Monetary Fund during the ongoing review. Overall, things look pretty good from this angle.

The businesses and consumers might feel left out in the cold. The SBP is playing the long game to ensure that rates do not just come down but also stay down. Also, let us not pretend this decision was all

about economic prudence. The bank's move simultaneously signals discipline to the IMF and reassures creditors, keeping its powder dry. The matter of fact is that despite positive indicators, the country's economy is still walking a tightrope. Calculated risks could be taken, but not with so many warning signs. One thing Pakistan needs right now is a steady hand on the wheel. The SBP's approach may seem frustrating, but restraint is sometimes the smartest strategy. I am not satisfied that SBP made a sound decision by not surrendering to pressure for rate cut. The economy needs sustainable steps to overcome challenges and improve

investors' confidence. He said the Monetary Policy Committee of the SBP had opted to follow a cautious approach by maintaining the policy rate at 12pc.

"With core inflation sticky at 7.8pc, pressure building on the external account due to rising imports and weak financial flows, along with declining forex reserves, are all valid reasons for this cautionary stance," he said. "Economic stability is still fragile and a risk-averse approach is justified."

Former President of the Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce and Industry said the entire business and trade community was disappointed with the monetary policy as the

central bank continues to base its decision on a heavy premium vis-à-vis core inflation.

"The SBP kept the policy rate at 12pc even though inflation was at 1.5pc last month, reflecting a premium of 1,050 basis points vis-à-vis core inflation."

The BMP had called for an immediate and single-stroke rate cut of 500bps to rationalize the monetary policy and align it with the vision of Special Investment Facilitation Council for revving up economic growth and exports.

He termed the unchanged policy rate disappointing, saying the State Bank had ignored persistent appeals by the business community to bring down the interest

rate to single digits. He urged the central bank to gradually reduce the policy rate and bring it to single digit so that loans can be accessed at lower rates.

He said keeping the interest rate unchanged was no catalyst for economic growth and had dampened the industry's expectations. This decision is a letdown for the business community and could further retard the economy, he said.





In brief

Shi Yuqi wins title

BIRMINGHAM (AFP): China's badminton world number one Shi Yuqi delivered a composed performance to see off Taiwan's Lee Chia-hao 21-17, 21-19 on Sunday, sealing his second men's singles title at the All England Open. Shi came from behind in the first game in Birmingham and pulled away as the gap in class between himself and his 22nd-ranked opponent became evident. Lee came out of the blocks firing and opened up a three-point lead, but Shi reeled off six straight points and never relinquished the lead. The tenacious Lee held an 8-7 lead in the second game but he could not pull away from his 29-year-old opponent, who also won the tournament in 2018. Shi was briefly made to sweat after his 20-16 lead narrowed to 20-19 but he held his nerve to seal victory.

Ayzaz wins bowling c'ship

ISLAMABAD (APP): Ayzaz ur Rehman emerged as the champion of the Ramadan Tenpin Bowling Championship 2025, held here at the Leisure City Bowling Club, Safa Gold Mall, F-7 Markaz. Ayzaz secured the top position with an impressive score of 379, beating senior players in the competition. Faizan took the second position with a score of 341, while Saleem Baig secured the third position with a score of 301. The President of the Tenpin Bowling Federation, Ijaz Ur Rehman, and Secretary General, Muhammad Hussain Chatta, distributed cash prizes and trophies among the winners. Speaking on the occasion, Ijaz said, "Bowling is gaining popularity in Pakistan, and we are committed to promoting this sport nationwide." He also requested the higher authorities, to direct the Inter Provincial Coordination (IPC) Ministry to allocate a place, approved by the Executive Committee of the Pakistan Sports Board, for an international bowling club. This will enable Pakistan to host the World Cup Championship, attracting over 100 participating countries, he said. He said this championship demonstrated the growing talent and enthusiasm for tenpin bowling in Pakistan, and the federation is dedicated to nurturing this talent and promoting the sport globally.

Draper stuns Alcaraz

INDIAN WELLS (Agencies): Britain's Jack Draper was helped by a video assistant referee-style review to earn a coming-of-age win over Carlos Alcaraz and reach the biggest final of his career. Draper, 23, stunned four-time major champion Alcaraz with a 6-1 0-6 6-4 victory in a dramatic Indian Wells semi-final. The British number one, who served out the match at the second attempt, will move into the world's top 10 for the first time in his career as a result. "I'm proud of myself but I'm already thinking about the final," Draper told BBC Sport. "I want to end this week in a great way. We can think about the other stuff afterwards." The pivotal moment of a bizarre match came when England's Draper was rescued by video technology in the third game of the deciding set - and went on to break Spanish world number three Alcaraz's serve. With the set at 1-1, and the game 15-15, the ball was judged by umpire Mohamed Lahyani to have bounced twice before Draper reached a drop shot.

## President awards trophy at 62nd National Open Polo C'ship final



LAHORE (APP): President Asif Ali Zardari watched the final of the 62nd National Open Polo Championship as the chief guest and presented the trophy to the winning team, DS Polo, at Lahore Polo Club on Sunday.

Former prime minister Raja Pervaiz Ashraf, Punjab Governor Sardar Salim Haider Khan, Bank

Alfalah Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Atif Bajwa, Lahore Polo Club President Malik Azam Hayat Noon, executive committee members, and a large crowd of polo enthusiasts witnessed an exhilarating final of the championship.

In a thrilling contest, DS Polo edged past FG Polo 7-6 in the

closing moments of the match. FG Polo dominated for four and a half chukkers, but DS Polo turned the game around with two decisive goals in the final minutes to claim the Bank Alfalah National Open Championship trophy.

For DS Polo, Lao Abelenda led the charge with four goals,

Max Will Charlton added two, and Daniyal Sheikh struck the winning goal. FG Polo's Raul Laplacette delivered an impressive performance with five goals, while Mian Abbas Mukhtar contributed one. President Zardari gave away awards in various categories: the Best Pakistani Polo Player Award was given to Hamza Mawaz Khan, while the Most Important Player Award went to Mian Abbas Mukhtar.

In the 0-4 goal category, the Best Player Award was given to Raja Samiullah, and the Most Improved Player Award to Muhammad Ali Malik; in the -2 to 0 goal category, the award was clinched by Abdullah Khattak, and in the 0-2 goal category, Chaudhry Hayat Mahmood was honoured.

In the 2-4 goal category, Raja Mikael Sami received the Best Player Award, Ibrahim Sultan was recognised with the Emerging Talent Award, and the Lady Player Award was given to Manam Faisal.

The Spirit of Polo Award went to Faisal Khan, the Most Valuable Pakistani Player Award to Ahmed Ali Tiwana, while the Best Foreign Player Award was presented to Max Charlton. The Syed Wajid Ali Trophy went to Daniyal Sheikh's mare Anatolia. Secretary Lahore Polo Club Lt. Col (retd) Umar Amir was recognised for his team's excellent performance.

## Norris holds off Verstappen to win rain-hit Australian GP



MELBOURNE (AFP/APP):Lando Norris kept his cool in a rain-hit and incident-packed season-opening Australian Grand Prix Sunday to edge world champion Max Verstappen with Lewis Hamilton 10th on his Ferrari debut. The pole-sitting Briton took the chequered flag by less than a second from the Dutchman, with Mercedes' George Russell third after a chaotic race in Melbourne that saw three drivers crash before the end of the first lap.

With the safety car repeatedly forced into action after a slew of accidents on the wet Albert Park circuit, Norris held on to clock a fifth grand prix win and second in a row after topping the podium at the final race of 2024 in Abu Dhabi. RB rookie Isack Hadjar, Alpine's Jack Doohan and Williams' Carlos Sainz -- last year's winner -- all failed to finish the first lap on a track made treacherous by earlier torrential rain.

Norris came into the season as favourite for the 2025 drivers' title and cemented his status as the man to beat. "It was amazing, a top race, especially with Max behind me. I was pushing, especially the last two laps -- it was a little bit stressful, not going to lie," said Norris.

"Tricky conditions, but there are the ones that are enjoyable and we ended up on top so I'm happy," Verstappen, who is aiming to become only the second driver to win five straight world titles after Michael Schumacher, was in the hunt early but an uncharacteristic error on lap 18 dented his chances until another safety car put him back in the frame.

"It was a difficult race, but at the end it was fun," said the Dutch star. "It was pushing, fighting for the win but I'm just happy to bring it home, score good points and this is a good start for us." In the unpredictable conditions, with rain on-and-off, Williams' Alex Albon was an encouraging fourth ahead of Mercedes' Kimi Antonelli on his debut. Aston Martin's Lance Stroll was sixth ahead of Nico Hulkenberg in a Sauber.

Ferrari's Charles Leclerc came eighth, with Norris' teammate Oscar Piastri and Hamilton rounding out the top 10. Russell was content with third, given the circumstances. "It was a great race to come home in P3. And well done to Lando, a race like that when you are leading is probably your worst nightmare," he said.

"I was quite enjoying it to be honest, hoping the two guys ahead made a mistake and I could slip through."

While torrential rain eased for the main event, the tricky conditions were rammed home when Hadjar skidded and hit the wall on the formation lap and was out before the race even started. The start was aborted and when the green lights finally came on, Norris, on intermediate tyres, made a clean jump and kept his position at the first corner.

- Max pressure - Verstappen also had a flying start and passed Piastri to go second while Leclerc moved up two places to fifth. But the race was interrupted minutes later when Doohan ploughed into the wall, then the experienced Sainz did the same on his Williams debut.

They restarted after a safety car with Norris holding his spot ahead of Verstappen and with Piastri they began pulling clear of fourth-placed Russell. With the track drying, the gap to Russell was eight seconds by lap 13. But with his tyres starting to wear, Verstappen brushed the gravel on lap 18 and Piastri flashed past back into second.

Norris and Piastri powered 18 seconds ahead of the Dutchman before Fernando Alonso put his Aston Martin into the wall on lap 34 and the safety car came out again.

All teams used the opportunity to make their pit stops with Norris and Piastri emerging on hards and Verstappen on mediums. After the safety car peeled off, Norris flew into a two-second lead before Piastri, pushing hard, skidded onto the grass to drop down the field as Verstappen powered past.

But again a safety car was required when Red Bull's Liam Lawson spun, with Norris, Verstappen and Russell the top three at the restart with seven laps left. Verstappen pressed Norris hard for the win when they got going again, but the Briton was able to hold on.

## American Jorgenson defends Paris-Nice title



NICE (AFP): Defending champion Matteo Jorgenson won the eight-day Paris-Nice race on Sunday, crossing the finish line on the French Riviera in second place as another American, Magnus Sheffield, won the stage from a solo attack. Visma's Jorgenson started out last Sunday as his team's co-leader with two-time Tour de France winner Jonas Vingegaard who

pulled out in midweek due to a hand injury.

"It was stressful, all week, but I did it," said Nice resident Jorgenson. "We knew it would be tough and draining. But everyone worked. I'm happy to be on this team and man, I won this race two years in a row." Jorgenson and Sheffield have been racing together since junior level. "I'm happy to see him win, I'll try and catch him later," said Jorgenson of Sheffield.

Jorgenson's teammates could barely hide their joy at seeing the Californian wrap up victory. "Matteo naturally stands out as a leader because he's probably the most committed of all," his French teammate Axel Zingle said.

"He's a perfectionist. He leaves nothing to chance. It's super motivating to evolve with a leader like that. We really want to do everything we can to support him as best we can." Vingegaard has been the undisputed leader at Visma for the Tour de France for the past three years and Jorgenson does not expect to dislodge the Dane.

"Not at all, that's not the plan at all," insisted Jorgenson, who plans to once again join forces with Vingegaard at the Tour de France this summer in support of a rider "much stronger" than himself.

The 22-year-old Sheffield of Ineos broke at the bottom of the final climb and crossed the summit and the finish line alone. Up-and-coming German hope Florian Lipowitz of Red Bull-Bora was second overall, while Dutch climber Thymen Arensman of Ineos was third, with Sheffield fourth and Australian rider Michael Storer rounding out the top five.

The final stage embarked Sunday under sunny skies from the famous Promenade des Anglais and effected a loop into the low Alps over three climbs.

The peloton swooped back down to the Riviera resort chasing Sheffield after a week dominated by testing, wintry conditions, a long way off the event's tagline of the "Race to the Sun". Denmark's one-day specialist Mads Pedersen attacked all day to ensure he picked up various bonus points to beat Jorgenson to the green sprint jersey by 62 points to 57. Lipowitz won the white jersey for best under-25 rider and Ineos ended as the top team.

## New Zealand romp to nine-wicket win in first Pakistan T20



CHRISTCHURCH (AFP/APP): Pakistan slumped to a nine-wicket defeat in the first Twenty20 against New Zealand in Christchurch on Sunday after failing to defend a meagre score of 91.

The tourists began the five-match series in disastrous fashion, reduced to 11-4 at the end of the fifth over after towering pacer Kyle Jamieson ran amok with the new ball.

They were eventually dismissed for their lowest score in a T20 on New Zealand soil and the home side romped to 92-1 off just 10.1 overs. Jamieson claimed three of the first four wickets to finish with 3-8 off four overs.

New ball partner Jacob Duffy returned later in the innings to sweep up the tail and, like Jamieson, claimed career-best T20 figures -- 4-14 off 3.4 overs.

"We had some pretty favourable conditions," player of the match Jamieson said of the Hagley Oval pitch which offered early movement.

"Myself and Duff, I'm sure we would take that pitch with us most places around the country if we could. "You keep the seam upright and hit the deck and just let the conditions do the work."

Pakistan never recovered from their top-order collapse, with only three players reaching double figures. New captain Salman Agha scored 18 and put on 46 for the fifth wicket with top-scorer Khushdil Shah, who struck three sixes in his 32 off 30 balls.

Jahadad Khan scored 17 at a run-a-ball before the innings ended with eight balls still to be bowled. Pakistan's previ-

ous lowest T20 score in New Zealand was 101 in a 95-run loss in Wellington in 2016. Opener Tim Seifert got New Zealand off to a flying start with 44 off 29 balls, striking seven fours and one six.

Finn Allen on 29 and Tim Robinson on 18 completed the chase off the first ball of the 11th over. Agha said Pakistan would need to adapt to what could be green conditions again for the second match in Dunedin on Tuesday.

"It was obviously difficult, they were bowling in the right area and there was swing and seam for them as well," he said. "But we didn't bat up to the mark. "Always in New Zealand, the new ball does a bit and we have the bowlers who can do that too. "We don't have much time. We need to regather as quickly as we can."

# Arsenal edge out Chelsea, Fulham beat Spurs

LONDON (AFP): Chelsea's challenge for a place in next season's Champions League faltered in a toothless 1-0 defeat at Arsenal on Sunday as Fulham beat Tottenham 2-0. Mikel Merino scored the only goal of a disappointing contest at the Emirates as Arsenal pulled clear in second place and to within 12 points of runaway leaders Liverpool.

Chelsea badly missed the presence of the absent Cole Palmer due to injury as they meekly surrendered to a damaging defeat for their hopes of a top-four finish. The Blues remain in fourth for now but have five sides from Manchester City in fifth to Aston Villa in ninth within four points of Enzo Maresca's team.

Both managers are hoping to be stronger

after the upcoming international break. Bukayo Saka is nearing a return for Arsenal, while Maresca is confident of having Palmer, Nico Jackson and Noni Madueke back when they are next in action at home to Tottenham on April 3.

"We did enough to deserve to win the game," said Arsenal boss Mikel Arteta. "Now we have the international break so let's take a chance to breathe and bring some players back hopefully." Arsenal have struggled badly for goals since the loss of Kai Havertz to a season-ending injury forced midfielder Merino into a makeshift centre-forward role. The Spanish international proved the match winner from a corner as he looped a



header from Martin Odegaard's delivery inside the far post on 20 minutes.

Chelsea barely threatened but were nearly gifted a route back into the game when David Raya

fumbled Marc Cucurella's shot and the ball trickled wide. At the other end, Chelsea's Robert Sanchez made a brilliant stop to prevent Merino doubling Arsenal's lead with the

best effort of the second half. But the game petered out with little goalmouth action as a limp performance will do little to quieten the critics of Maresca's style of play among the Chelsea support.

"There was not a big difference in the two games between us," said Maresca. "Given the injuries, we fought until the end."

Spurs' European hangover Tottenham kept

their season alive by reaching the Europa League quarter-finals with victory over AZ Alkmaar on Thursday, but suffered the latest in a series of European hangovers at Craven Cottage. Victory for Fulham propels Marco Silva's men into the race for Champions League places as they climb to eighth, four points off the top four and three outside the top five.

A top-five finish will almost certainly secure a place in Europe's top club competition next season thanks to the strong performance of English sides in European competitions. Spurs, though, have struggled to handle the burden of Thursday nights when it comes to their Premier League form. Ange Postecoglou's

side have won just three times in the 10 league matches that have followed a mid-week Europa League fixture. "It's been a difficult campaign for sure," said Spurs captain Son Heung-min.

"But I feel we've lost too many games that we should have got stuff out of, and this was one of those games." Fulham had to wait until 78 minutes to take the lead when Rodrigo Muniz steered home from Andreas Pereira's pass. Ryan Sessegnon then curled in a brilliant second in action later on Sunday when Ruben Amorim's team visit lowly Leicester.





## In brief

### 4 POs arrested

RAWALPINDI (APP): The Rawalpindi Police on Sunday arrested four proclaimed offenders including three wanted in a kidnapping-cum-murder cases and one involved in a theft case. According to the police spokesman, the victim Muqadar Khan was kidnapped and murdered by the criminals in the jurisdiction of Rawat Police Station. The Rawat Police registered the case of incident against unknown suspects. During investigations, the police used all means including human intelligence and found the accused Bilal, Amir Khan, and Ismail had kidnapped and the killed Muqadar Khan over a money dispute. The police arrested all the three accused. In another case, the Pirwadhai Police nabbed the proclaimed offender Habibullah, who had committed a theft in 2021 and was in the hiding since then.

### Six accused held with drugs

RAWALPINDI (APP): The Rawalpindi Police during operations against drug suppliers on Sunday held six suspects with more than 8 kilograms of drugs. According to the police spokesman, the Sadiqabad Police recovered 250 grams of ice and 110 grams of heroin from accused Faisal. The Pirwadhai Police nabbed accused Umair with 2.4 kg charas while City Police arrested accused Rameez recovering 2.2 kg of the contraband item. The Dhamial Police took two accused Shayan and Asad Sarwar on the recovery of 1.48 kg and 550 grams charas respectively, while the Ratta Amral Police recovered 1.4 kg of the contraband item from accused Wisal.

### Shopkeeper nabbed

RAWALPINDI (APP): The Westridge Police on Sunday nabbed a shopkeeper for allegedly harassing a 10-year-old girl. According to the Rawalpindi Police spokesman, the victim's mother, in a complaint filed with the Westridge Police, alleged that the shopkeeper Jahangir harassed her daughter through indecent acts when she had gone to his shop to buy stationery. The Westridge Police registered a case and arrested the accused. Superintendent of Police Potohar Talha Wali said that abuse and harassment of children and women were intolerable, and directed the Westridge Police to prepare a challan against the accused with solid evidence so that he should be got punished by the court.

### 4 illegal arms owners held

RAWALPINDI (APP): The Rawalpindi Police on Sunday arrested four suspects during action against illegal arms owners and 11 Tenancy Act violators in search operations. According to the Rawalpindi Police spokesman, the Taxila Police held three accused Abu Bakr, Fazal and Adnan recovering three 30-bore pistols with ammunition from them. Similarly, the Dhamial Police nabbed accused Saeed with a dagger. Meanwhile, the police conducted search operations in different areas to check the data of houses, owners and tenants, and took into custody 11 accused for violation of the Tenancy Act. The arrested suspects included Aamir, Farooq, Waseem, Ehtesham, Naeem, Yunus, Shiraz, Aqib, Javed, Moazzam and Zewar Shahbaz.



ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Parliamentary Affairs Dr. Tariq Fazal Chaudhry as chief guest attends the International Conference on 'The Role of Neutrality in strengthening International PEACE' organized by Embassy of Turkmenistan at local hotel. —INP Photo

## Punjab govt initiates Rs4.5b project in Murree

ISLAMABAD (INP): Director General of the Walled City of Lahore Authority Kamran Lashari Sunday disclosed that the Punjab government has initiated a Rs4.5 billion project in Murree aimed at revamping the hill station's infrastructure to attract tourists, which will be completed within a year and a half under the direct supervision of the chief minister.

Talking to PTV news channel, Kamran Lashari shared the plan for restoring shops and buildings around the General Post Office (GPO) to Mall Road which will revive their original glory and tradition. "The Rs4.5 billion Murree project will transform the hill station into a world-class tourist destination, showcasing Pakistan's natural beauty and rich cultural heritage," said Kamran Lashari.

"The project will focus on sustainable development, ensuring that Murree's natural environment is preserved while providing modern amenities and infrastruc-

ture to tourists."

"By revitalizing Murree's infrastructure, we aim to boost tourism, create jobs and stimulate economic growth in the region, making it a premier destination for domestic and international tourists."

"Present government is also starting the glass train in Murree soon, providing tourists with a unique and unforgettable experience, he said, adding, by revitalizing Murree's infrastructure, we aim to boost tourism, create jobs, and stimulate economic growth in the region."

Responding to a query, he stated that this initiative aims to preserve the historical charm of the area while promoting tourism, he added.

The Walled City of Lahore Authority has been working tirelessly to restore and beautify various landmarks and areas within the city, including heritage sites associated with Sufi poets, shrines, gurdwaras and churches in various cities of Punjab, he added.

He also announced plans to facili-

tate visits to Sufi shrines for school and college students in Lahore.

"To promote cultural awareness and spiritual education among the youth, we will arrange visits to Sufi shrines, including Data Darbar and others, with affordable ticket prices and guided tours," said DG Lashari.

This initiative aims to provide students with a deeper understanding of Pakistan's rich cultural heritage and the significance of Sufism in the country's history, he added.

He added the growing interest of Sikh tourists in visiting Pakistan, particularly Punjab and appreciating the country's hospitality, adding, this trend is expected to continue, with more opportunities emerging for international tourists to explore Punjab's rich cultural heritage.

The growth of tourism in Pakistan is not limited to Sikh tourists, as visitors from around the world are drawn to the country's diverse attractions, including its natural beauty, historical sites, and cultural events, he mentioned.

## IG Rizvi issues key directives to enhance security

ISLAMABAD (APP): Islamabad Capital Police Inspector General (IGP) Syed Ali Nasir Rizvi has directed officers to enhance patrolling and conduct surprise checks across the district to ensure public safety and crime prevention.

A public relations officer told APP on Sunday that IGP Rizvi emphasized the need for an immediate and timely response to all emergency calls received via the police helpline (15).

IG Rizvi urged officers to improve mutual coordination and actively exchange information to strengthen law enforcement efforts. Additionally, he directed them to regularly inspect on-duty personnel and keep them briefed on their responsibilities.

Highlighting the increasing rush in markets, the IG Rizvi stressed that police deployment in commercial areas should be made more effective. IG also instructed officials to enhance surveillance through Safe City cameras for efficient city monitoring.

## Pakistan stands firm against terrorism, Dr. Tariq says

ISLAMABAD (APP): Federal Minister for Parliamentary Affairs Dr. Tariq Fazal Chaudhry has strongly condemned the recent terror attacks in Pakistan, reaffirming the government's commitment to eliminate terrorism and protect the country's sovereignty as a top priority.

In an exclusive interview with PTV News, Federal Minister for Parliamentary Affairs urged all political parties to come together and engage in a national dialogue to address the current security issues.

He emphasized the importance of stability, which can be achieved through mutual understanding and negotiation among all political parties.

He invited all parties to work together to find a solution to the present security issues, putting aside their differences for the sake of national interest and sovereignty. Dr. Fazal has reaffirmed that national security and sovereignty remain the government's top priority.

He emphasized the importance of a national dialogue at this critical time, highlighting the need for collective efforts to address the country's challenges and ensure the protection of its sovereignty.

Regarding the proposal for an in-camera parliamentary meeting to discuss terrorism issues, Dr. Tariq Fazal Chaudhry expressed his personal endorsement, stating that such meetings have occurred in the past as well. He emphasized that for the sake of national security, it is essential for lawmakers to come together and engage in confidential discussions.

To another question, Minister for Parliamentary Affairs has accused India of involvement in recent terror attacks in Pakistan, alleging that terrorists arrested in Pakistan possess advanced weapons not readily available in their areas, suggesting external support.

Chaudhry claims that India, in collaboration with Afghanistan, is backing

these terrorist groups.

Responding to another question, Tariq Fazal Chaudhry has expressed his intention to meet with Maulana and Achakzai to discuss terrorism and find solutions. He believes that if the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party sits down with these experienced politicians, they will be able to make progress on this critical issue.

Fazal Chaudhry has also urged the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party to refrain from creating instability and instead engage in mature discussions to address terrorism for the greater good of the nation.

He further emphasized in a reply of question for the importance of equality for the Baloch people, particularly the youth, stating that they will receive equal rights. He highlighted the precedent set by former Prime Minister Mian Nawaz Sharif, who included Abdul Malik Baloch in his cabinet, along with other Baloch representatives in federal cabinets.

## Japan terms Pakistan important country

ISLAMABAD (APP): Professor Masayuki Masuda, Division head at the National Institute for Defense Studies (NIDS), stated that Pakistan has played a vital role in regional stability and is seen as committed to promoting peace amidst growing challenges.

Prof Masuda was speaking held at an international seminar organised by the Institute of Regional Studies (IRS) the other day.

He suggested that Pakistan and Japan, having both experienced significant human and economic losses due to conflicts and wars, were uniquely positioned to collaborate on promoting peace, said a press release issued here on Sunday.

Prof. Masuda also stressed that Japan's "Free and Open Indo-Pacific" concept aimed to foster regional peace and prosperity, which aligns with

Pakistan's connectivity interests. He called for increased cooperation in areas such as telecom, AI, and climate change, which would benefit both nations.

Speaking on the occasion, NIDS Senior Fellow Masahiro Kurita clarified that Japan's growing cooperation with India, even within the QUAD framework, was primarily focused on political and economic cooperation, and should not impact Pakistan's security concerns. He acknowledged that perceptions of Pakistan were influenced by its deepening relationship with China, but emphasized Pakistan's balanced approach, demonstrating its commitment to fostering broad international ties for enhanced connectivity.

Amb. Jauhar Saleem, President IRS, stated that Pakistan-Japan cooperation was a factor of stability at a time when great power

competition was intensifying. He emphasized upon the shared values and interests which bound the two countries in cordial and cooperative ties, and called for building on this foundation to further enhance multifaceted cooperation. He also advocated increased political dialogue, cultural exchanges and people-to-people contact to foster yet greater understanding of each other's perspectives.

Amb Farukh Amil, Chairman IPO and former Ambassador to Japan, affirmed Pakistan's long-standing desire to strengthen development partnerships with Japan. He also emphasized Japan's technological leadership and the critical importance of collaboration in technology and innovation for Pakistan's future economic and security progress while praising Japan's unconditional humanitarian aid during natural disasters.

## Eid preparations shift into high gear

ISLAMABAD (APP): As the holy month of Ramadan draws near to a close, Eid preparations have shifted into high gear in the twin cities of Rawalpindi and Islamabad.

The streets were abuzz with activity, and the festive atmosphere was palpable.

Residents were thronging markets and shopping centers to purchase new clothes, shoes, and accessories for the upcoming Eid-ul-Fitr celebrations.

The city administrations have also swung into action, with sanitation teams working to ensure that the streets and markets are clean and tidy for the Eid celebrations. Kosar Tareen a local resident said

"I'm excited to buy new clothes and shoes for my family and Eid is a time for celebration and joy, and I love the festive atmosphere in the markets."

She said Eid shopping was a family tradition for them adding that they love coming to the markets together and finding new things to wear and decorate their home. The markets were so crowded and lively during Eid shopping season and it's a great time to catch up with friends and family while shopping, she stated.

Zaheer, clothing store owner said "Eid is our busiest time of the year and we start preparing months in advance to make sure we have enough stock to meet

the demand." He said their sales increase by at least 50% during Eid adding that it's a great time for business, and they are grateful to customers for their support.

He further stated that they love decorating store for Eid adding that It's a great way to get into the festive spirit and attract customers.

He added Eid is a time of celebration and generosity and they offer special discounts and promotions to customers during this time.

"We work hard all year round, but Eid is the highlight of our business."

We enjoy serving our customers and helping them find the perfect gifts and outfits for the occasion, he stated.

## ICT admin conducts over 1,650 raids

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Islamabad's district administration has intensified market inspections during Ramadan, conducting over 1,200 operations against retailers accused of overpricing essential goods.

Meanwhile, the officials report that fines totaling more than Rs 1.5 million, hundreds of arrests, and temporary shop closures in a bid to stabilize prices and protect consumers.

In this regard, Deputy Commissioner (DC) Islamabad, Irfan Nawaz Memon has chaired a assessed enforcement efforts since the start of Ramadan.

All assistant commissioners and price control magistrates presented reports on inspections, penalties, and detentions.

Assistant commissioners carried out 1,289 market

inspections across the district, leading to the arrest of 290 retailers accused of overcharging customers. Fines totaling Rs 1.112 million were imposed during these raids, according to official data.

Separately, price control magistrates conducted 4,568 inspections, resulting in 711 arrests and fines of Rs 448,500. Authorities temporarily sealed 11 shops found repeatedly violating government-mandated price lists. On the occasion, the DC instructed officials to prioritize public grievances and ensure immediate action on complaints filed via the district helpline. He emphasized a zero-tolerance policy toward overpricing, urging "strict, indiscriminate enforcement" against violators.

Officials were directed to monitor markets daily,

particularly for staples like flour, sugar, and cooking oil. The DC reiterated that providing affordable essentials during Ramadan was a "top administrative priority," with teams ordered to submit hourly updates on price trends.

## 2 street criminals held in R A Bazaar

RAWALPINDI (APP): The R A Bazaar Police on Sunday held two accused involved in street crime incidents. According to the Rawalpindi Police spokesman, the accused Shehryar and Sarfaraz used to rob the citizens on gun point. Besides weapons, Rs 33,000 snatched from the victims was also recovered from the accused, the spokesman said.



ISLAMABAD: A large number of people busy filing drinking water at a water filtration plant at I-10 sector. —APP Photo



Journalists' Day marked

KABUL (BNA): Afghanistan celebrated National Journalists' Day in Kabul, bringing together media representatives, journalists, and university professors to discuss press freedom and professional standards in the country. Speaking at the event, Sayed Yasin Mateen, head of the Afghan Journalists' National Center, reaffirmed the organization's commitment to supporting journalists and addressing their challenges.

1,500 children hospitalized

BALKH (TOLOnews): A number of doctors at Abu Ali Sina Balkhi Regional Hospital report that 1,500 children in Balkh have been infected with measles over past three months. Doctors at the hospital told TOLOnews that among these cases, 490 children have been treated and discharged. In addition to these inpatients, the hospital receives around 30 outpatient cases daily, who are prescribed medication and given medical advice before being discharged.

## Afghanistan-Kazakhstan trade surpasses \$430m in 1403, says Ministry

KABUL (TOLOnews): The Ministry of Industry and Commerce reported that in the eleven months of the year 1403 (solar calendar), trade between Afghanistan and Kazakhstan exceeded \$430 million.

Akhundzada Abdul Salam Jawad, the spokesperson for the ministry, stated that \$45 million of this amount was from exports.

The spokesperson added: "Afghanistan's trade with Kazakhstan in the 11 months of 1403 amounted to \$430 million, of which \$45 million were exports and \$385 million were imports."

Kazakhstan, recognized as one of the strongest economies in Central Asia, has expanded its trade and economic relations with

Afghanistan since the return of the Islamic Emirate.

Meanwhile, the Chamber of Commerce and Investment considers Central Asian countries, particularly Kazakhstan, as a good market for Afghan goods and emphasizes increasing exports to the country.

Khanjan Alokozay, a board member of the Chamber of Commerce and Investment, told TOLOnews: "Our trade is increasing day by day. Most of our flour consumption is entirely imported from Kazakhstan, along with wheat, oil, and other goods. In total, our trade with Central Asia exceeds \$800 million, of which \$400 million is with Kazakhstan."

"Visa facilitation for Afghan traders, the ability

to transfer money between

Afghan banks and Kazakhstan, and strengthening transportation infrastructure—which can ease the transfer of goods—are factors that can help improve trade relations between Afghanistan and Kazakhstan," said Qutbuddin Yaqubi, an economic analyst.

According to the ministry, Afghanistan's main exports to Kazakhstan include fruit juices, non-alcoholic beverages, raisins, vegetables, licorice, onions, pressure cookers, and grapes. The key imports from Kazakhstan include flour, sheet metal, flax, wheat, raw materials for industrial factories, chemical fertilizers, and petroleum products.

## IE responds to concerns over women's rights

KABUL (TOLOnews): Saif-ul-Islam Khyber, spokesperson for the Ministry of Vice and Virtue, has dismissed concerns from various countries about the situation of women in Afghanistan, calling them "unfounded."

In response to remarks made at a UN side event on Afghan women, Khyber stated that such claims are merely an attempt to "mislead public opinion."

Khyber reaffirmed the Islamic Emirate's commitment to women's rights, stating: "Since the Islamic Emirate came to power in Afghanistan, it has ensured that all women receive their Islamic rights as prescribed by Sharia law. The Emirate remains committed to protecting women's rights and has demonstrated this in practice."

However, some women's rights activists and political analysts are urging the Islamic Emirate to uphold women's rights, including the right to education and employment.

Zarif Danishjoo, an advocate, stated: "Our request to the Islamic Emirate is to reopen schools for girls, as education is the only hope for a nation's future."

Lima Shirzai, a women's rights activist, said: "Afghan women and girls want to work like women in other Islamic countries so they can contribute to Afghanistan's growth and development while playing a role in raising and educating their children."

Previously, representatives from Canada, the Netherlands, Albania, Australia, and several other countries expressed concerns about the situation of women in Afghanistan. They emphasized that practical steps are needed to ensure women's rights in the country.

## Progress on TAPI gas pipeline

KABUL (BNA): The construction of the TAPI gas pipeline has advanced by 10 kilometers, according to Homayoun Afghan, spokesperson for Afghanistan's Ministry of Mines and Petroleum. In a recent video announcement, Afghan highlighted the ongoing efforts of the Islamic Emirate to develop the nation's energy infrastructure.

As warmer weather approaches, Afghan indicated that the pace of construction for the TAPI project is expected to increase. This initiative is a key priority for the Islamic Emirate, aiming to enhance Afghanistan's energy capabilities.

The TAPI pipeline, which will transport natural gas from Turkmenistan to Pakistan and India through Afghanistan, is regarded as one of the largest and most significant energy projects in the region.

## Sweet shops in Herat thrive during Ramazan despite economic hardships

HERAT (TOLOnews): During the holy month of Ramadan, sweet shops in Herat have witnessed a surge in demand, as residents prepare traditional sweets for iftar.

As iftar time approaches, pastry shops are packed with customers buying cakes, cookies, jalebi, and dates to complete their evening meals.

Bismillah Taheri, a resident of Herat, stated: "During Ramadan, the consumption of cakes, cookies, jalebi, and dates increases significantly in Herat."

Abdul Ahad, another Herat resident, said: "During this blessed month, people traditionally break their fast with jalebi, dates, cakes, and cookies." However, while demand remains high, some vendors report a decline in purchasing power compared to last year.

Nasir Ahmad, a sweet seller in Herat, said: "Sales are good, but they have decreased compared to last year because people have less financial means."

Abdul Ghafour, another vendor, stated: "People in



Herat usually begin their iftar with sweets such as dates, jalebi, cakes, and traditional pastries."

Abdul Rauf, a pastry shop owner, emphasized the cultural significance of sweets, saying: "Eating cakes, cookies, and dates at iftar is a long-standing tradition in Herat."

Besides the increase in sweet production, some bakery workshops in Herat

are managed by women, providing employment opportunities while producing high-quality local sweets.

Jamila Barakzai, who runs one such bakery, stated: "Our sweets are very popular. Gosh-e-Fil and sesame halwa are among our bestsellers. Additionally, we also prepare traditional foods like ashak, mantu, bolani, and samosas during Ramadan."

Although economic difficulties and rising prices have impacted many businesses, Herat's sweet shops continue to thrive, maintaining a central role in Ramadan traditions.

For many families in Herat, consuming various sweets during Ramadan, especially at iftar, remains a cherished tradition that is an essential part of their evening meal.

## Limited space in museum: 150 artifacts on display

GHAZNI (TOLOnews): Officials from Ghazni's Directorate of Information and Culture say that due to limited space, around 4,000 historical artifacts from the province are being stored in museum warehouses rather than being displayed.

As a result, only 150 historical artifacts are currently on display at the Ghazni Museum.

The head of Ghazni's Information and Culture Department stated: "Currently, around 3,000 to 4,000 historical artifacts from the Islamic and Buddhist periods are preserved in the Ghazni Museum. Their condition is satisfactory, and they are periodically maintained. However, the province urgently needs a standard museum."

Meanwhile, cultural

experts in Ghazni are calling on authorities to build a modern museum to better preserve and display these artifacts.

Mohammad Shafiq Yawari, the museum's director, said: "If a standard museum building is constructed, we can properly showcase historical artifacts. This would not only help preserve them but also attract both domestic and international tourists."

Agha Mohammad Khushizadah, a cultural activist in Ghazni, expressed concerns about the current storage conditions and stated: "Despite the museum covering six acres, historical artifacts are still kept in warehouses. During the rainy season, while museum officials try to prevent water leaks,

humidity still seeps into the storage areas, which could damage these valuable artifacts over time."

Another cultural expert, Sayed Nasir Ahmad Neha, highlighted the importance of preserving artifacts from the Ghaznavid era, saying: "Artifacts from the time of Sultan Mahmud Ghazni and other rulers are part of our cultural heritage. They are significant for attracting foreign tourists. If a proper space is designated for them, visitors from around the world will have the chance to see them."

Cultural experts stress that Ghazni is one of the oldest centers of Islamic civilization and history in the region, and greater efforts are needed to preserve its historical monuments and cultural heritage.

## British couple moved to maximum-security prison

KABUL (Amu TV): Taliban have transferred a detained British couple to a maximum-security prison and have separated them.

Peter Reynolds, 79, and his wife, Barbie, 75, were arrested in February in Bamian province along with a Chinese-American citizen and their translator. Their daughter, Sarah Entwistle, has raised concerns over her father's worsening health, saying he is suffering from a chest infection, severe eye infections, and digestive issues due to inadequate prison conditions.

"We have heard that he now has a chest infection, severe infections in both eyes, and serious digestive problems caused by poor nutrition. Without immediate access to necessary medication, his life is in serious danger," Entwistle

told The Sunday Times.

She also alleged that her father had been beaten and chained in prison and that her mother had been denied access to see him.

Peter and Barbie Reynolds have lived in Afghanistan since 2006, working on educational projects. Before their arrest, they were running five education programs for children and mothers, as well as another initiative in Bamian with Taliban approval. The couple, who married in Kabul in 1970, also established a nonprofit organization, "Rebuild," to support education in Afghanistan.

The Taliban's Ministry of Interior confirmed on February 25 that the couple, along with the Chinese-American national, had been detained but did not provide details on

the charges. Security analysts warn that Taliban prisons are notorious for harsh treatment and a lack of oversight.

"The Taliban's treatment of prisoners is completely inhumane and violates all human rights standards. Many detainees face torture, humiliation, and even death in Taliban prisons," Bismellah Taban, an analyst, said.

Taliban have previously detained foreign nationals, particularly American citizens, and later negotiated prisoner swaps for high-profile figures with ties to al-Qaeda.

In January, the Taliban secured the release of Khan Mohammed, a senior militant accused of orchestrating rocket attacks on U.S. forces, in exchange for two detained Americans, Ryan Corbett and William McKenty.

## Bibi Koh: A mother's fight for survival with psychological wounds



KABUL (Pajhwok): Bibi Koh, one of many women whose life has been shattered by the wars of the past four decades in Afghanistan, has endured endless hardships after the disappearance of her husband and the disability of her only son.

However, her psychological wounds remain unhealed.

More than 50 percent of Afghanistan's population is grappling with psychological issues due to nearly four decades of war.

The Ministry of Public Health (MoPH) is working

to address this problem by increasing the number of psychological specialists and improving counselling services.

**Suffering from husband's disappearance, son's disability**

Bibi Koh, 73, from Balkh province, married a craftsman in Mazar-i-Sharif 43 years ago at the age of 30. The result of this marriage was a son and a daughter.

With tears in her eyes, she told Pajhwok Afghan News: "My husband was a kind man, he loved me a lot. One day, he went to

work, but never returned. His fate, whether alive or dead, remains unknown to this day."

She didn't know in which year her husband went missing.

She added after her husband's disappearance, she was lost as to how she would care for her son and daughter, but with determination, she started working in people's homes to earn a living for herself and her children.

This grieving mother said that after enduring years of hardships, her son and daughter grew up to adulthood. She married off her daughter, and her son, who had become her helper, also got married. Her life, and that of her family, reached a point of happiness and calm once again, but soon after, war and insecurity once more snatched away their peace.

During the previous government, her only son was injured in an explosion in Balkh, and both his hand and one leg were paralysed.

The disability of her son broke this mother's heart

even more, adding another psychological blow that still manifests in her. While talking, sometimes she repeats words, sometimes forgets what she was saying and falls silent, and sometimes she laughs or tears fill her eyes. All of this shows that, in addition to her other difficulties,

Bibi Koh is deeply suffering from mental and psychological issues.

Having spent her youth raising her two orphaned children, now in her old age, when it should be time for her son to take care of her, a much bigger responsibility has fallen on her shoulders, as she now has to support her disabled son, daughter-in-law, and six grandchildren.

She says that since she could no longer work in people's homes, she thought of opening a shop. For this reason, she came to Kabul about five years ago, but her disabled son, daughter-in-law, and grandchildren still live in Mazar-i-Sharif, as she cannot afford the rent in Kabul.

Now, Bibi Koh has set

up a wooden booth on a mobile cart next to Zarghona High School in the Shahr-i-Naw area of Kabul, where she sells stationary and some snacks for children.

She says coming to Kabul with empty hands and starting this business was a big challenge for her. But she worked in the home of a trader for a while to save enough money to start her business.

Bibi Koh says that she now lives in a room provided by that businessman, and the money she earns from her booth is sent to her disabled son's family in Mazar-i-Sharif.

Her eyes were fixed on old photos of her son, before he was paralysed. This mother, with eyes full of tears, said: "Old age on one side, the pain of my child on the other... If I'm not here, who will give him bread?"

She added, "Since the day my child became disabled, and since my husband went missing, I haven't had a moment of peace. My thoughts wander

all over, my ears don't hear properly, my blood pressure and cholesterol are high, and I have no choice but to stay here. What am I doing here?"

This grieving mother believes that war and insecurity are the causes of her own misery and the suffering of the people of Afghanistan. She considers peace achieved as a valuable treasure and hopes that it will last, wishing for the country to never witness war and insecurity again.

**Worrying number of psychological problems in Afghanistan**

Bibi Koh is not the only one affected by the wars of the past four decades and suffering from psychological issues.

Dr Sharafat Zaman, a spokesman for the Ministry of Public Health, told Pajhwok Afghan News that, according to a survey conducted in recent years, about 50 percent of the people in Afghanistan are suffering from some form of psychological problem.

**Psychological challenges, need for more spe-**

**cialists**  
Dr Abdul Jalil Amarkhil, a psychologist in Kabul, said that over four decades of war in the country have left millions of widows and orphans behind. When a woman loses her father, son, brother, or husband, and the responsibility of providing for the family falls on her, this situation can lead to psychological problems.

He added: "There are very few psychologists in Afghanistan, and people rarely visit health centres because of social stigma; they fear that if they go to a psychologist, they will be considered crazy. As a result, psychological disorders are increasing every day."

He emphasised that, in addition to raising awareness among the people about visiting psychologists when they observe signs of psychological problems, serious attention should also be given to increasing the number of specialists in this field.

**Efforts by MoPH to improve mental health**

Dr Sharafat Zaman said

that the ministry is currently paying serious attention to mental health and increasing the number of specialists in this field.

According to him, mental health services are provided in an integrated manner at 4,517 health centres across the country, where patients receive psychological counselling. Additionally, in 437 comprehensive health centres, both psychological and social counselling services, as well as pharmaceutical treatment, are provided.

He added that so far, 129 specialists in mental health have graduated from the Ministry's specialist programme and are currently working in hospitals across four regions of the country, with one mental health hospital in Kabul.

Dr Zaman noted that currently, 1,100 social and psychological counsellors have been deployed by partner organisations across the country, and 600 other psychological counsellors have been recruited in government health centres to provide counselling services.



# Gandapur advocates talks with Afghanistan for lasting regional peace

Says refugees return should be in line with Pashtun traditions

## F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Chief Minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Ali Amin Khan Gandapur has stated that with the change in federal leadership, law and order deteriorated, particularly in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. He criticized the federal government for comparing KP and Balochistan's situation with Punjab to score political points, calling it regrettable.

Speaking at a press conference on Sunday evening, where he outlined the government's one-year performance he said that the current security crisis was a direct result of federal negligence. He urged serious action before matters worsen.

Gandapur revealed that he has consistently advocated for dialogue with Afghanistan to ensure lasting peace in the region. Although the federal government has now agreed to talks, no significant progress has been made, despite KP's preparation of Terms of Reference (TORs) and the hosting of multiple jirgas and meetings.

In response to a question on police strengthening, Gandapur admitted that historically, the police had been neglected. However, under his leadership, efforts are underway to provide the force with modern weapons, vehicles, and equipment. Regarding the repatriation of Afghan refugees, he said, "Afghans are our neighbors and will remain so. Their return should be conducted respectfully and in line with

Pashtun traditions, ensuring that necessary resettlement arrangements are made inside Afghanistan beforehand."

He lauded the KP police and citizens for being on the front lines against terrorism and warned that criticism of the police force would not be tolerated. On financial matters with the federal government, Gandapur reminded that despite the merger of the former tribal areas in 2018, KP still has not received its due share in the National Finance Commission (NFC) Award.

"If this issue is not addressed, we will be forced to protest, and this will be a united movement involving all political parties, citizens, and government employees," he warned. He further added that the federal government owes KP over Rs. 2 trillion in net hydel profits and billions more under the accelerated development program for the merged districts and security operations.

"If we are granted our constitutional rights, we will be able to strengthen our police force and address the grievances of the merged districts," Gandapur said, warning that public trust is eroding due to these delays, which could hinder the fight against terrorism.

Chief Minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Ali Amin Khan Gandapur, stated that when his government assumed office, the provincial treasury only had enough funds to cover 15 days of salaries. However, through effective

financial management, the government has presented a surplus budget of Rs. 169 billion over the past year. Without imposing any new taxes, provincial revenues have increased by Rs. 55 billion, Rs. 72 billion in outstanding payments have been cleared, and an additional Rs. 30 billion has been allocated for development projects. The Chief Minister said that the province was burdened with Rs. 752 billion in debt when they came to power. Yet, over the past year, not a single rupee in new loans was taken. Instead, Rs. 50 billion of existing debt has been repaid. He added that, in line with Imran Khan's vision of financial autonomy and self-reliance, the provincial government established a Debt Management Fund with an initial allocation of Rs. 30 billion, which will be increased to Rs. 50 billion by the end of this year.

The Chief Minister highlighted that the government is focusing on sectors with high potential. He pointed out the vast net hydel power generation capacity within the province, which is now being harnessed. By 2028, the province aims to significantly increase its own electricity production. A transmission line project worth Rs. 18 billion is underway to supply this electricity at lower rates to local industries, which will foster industrial growth and create job opportunities. During Ramadan, the provincial government will disburse a Rs. 20 billion package to support deserving households. Over the past year, all scholarships

and stipends have been doubled. The zakat payment has been raised from Rs. 12,000 to Rs. 25,000, while the financial assistance provided for dowries has been increased from Rs. 25,000 to Rs. 200,000. The Chief Minister said that endowment funds have been established to make deficit-running institutions financially independent, including universities and Water and Sanitation Services Companies (WSSCs). He expressed confidence that by the end of the year, these institutions will be standing on their own feet.

Gandapur stressed that the increase in provincial revenues was not due to new taxes but was a result of plugging financial leakages and improving governance. "This money was already within the system but was being siphoned off due to poor financial controls," he noted. The Chief Minister also addressed the issue of incomplete development projects that were dragging on for years, leading to ballooning costs and losses to the public exchequer.

"We have identified these projects and prioritized their completion within this fiscal year," he said. He emphasized that his government's performance is based on facts and records, without any exaggeration, and credited his team and cabinet members for their contributions. Commenting on the security situation, Gandapur said that under Imran Khan's federal government, the country enjoyed exemplary peace.



PESHAWAR: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur addressing a press conference alongside cabinet members at CM Secretariate.

## Russian Federation navy ships visit Karachi

### F.P. Report

KARACHI: A Russian Navy Flotilla, comprising frigates RFS REZKIY and RFS ALDAR TSYDEN-ZHAPOV, along with medium sea tanker RFS PECHENGA, arrived in Karachi for a goodwill visit from 15 to 18 March 2025.

Upon arrival, the Russian warships were accorded a warm welcome by officials of the Pakistan Navy, along with the Russian Consul General and Defence Attaché.

During the port call, the crew of the visiting ships



will engage in professional discussions with Pakistan Navy personnel and participate in bilateral ship visits. Furthermore, Russian and Pakistani naval ships will conduct joint exercises aimed at enhancing interop-

erability and maritime cooperation.

Regular port visits and joint exercises between Pakistan Navy and Russian Navy continue to strengthen bilateral ties, deepen naval collaboration, and

foster mutual trust.

The visit of Russian Flotilla marks a significant milestone in maritime diplomacy, reinforcing security and defence cooperation between the two nations.

## Xi declines EU invitation to anniversary summit

BEIJING (Reuters): Chinese President Xi Jinping has declined an invitation to visit Brussels for a summit to mark the 50th anniversary of EU-China diplomatic ties, the Financial Times reported on Sunday.

Beijing told EU officials that Premier Li Qiang would meet the presidents of the European Council and Commission instead of Xi, the FT said, citing two people familiar with the matter whom it did not identify.

The Chinese premier usually attends the summit when it is held in Brussels, while the president hosts it in Beijing, but the EU wants Xi to attend to commemorate half a century of relations between Beijing and the bloc, the newspaper said.

Tensions between Brussels and Beijing have grown since Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022, with the EU accusing China of backing the Kremlin, the FT said. Last year, the

European Union also imposed tariffs on Chinese electric vehicle imports.

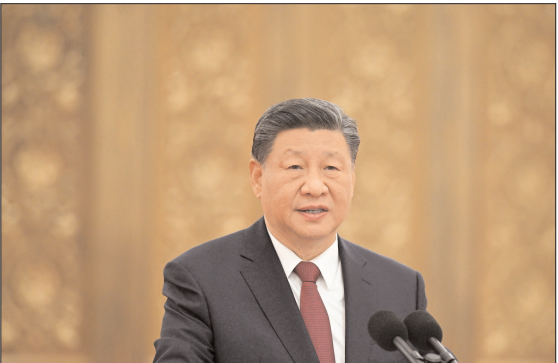
China's Foreign Ministry and the EU did not immediately respond to Reuters requests for comment.

"Informal discussions are ongoing, both about setting the date for the EU-China summit this year and the level of representation," an EU official told the newspaper, while the Chinese ministry was quoted as saying it did not have any information to provide on the matter.

China, the world's sec-

ond-biggest economy, and the EU, its third-largest, spent most of 2024 exchanging barbs over allegations of overcapacity, illegal subsidies and dumping in each other's markets.

In October, the EU imposed double-digit tariffs on China-made electric vehicles after an anti-subsidy investigation, in addition to its standard car import duty of 10 percent. The move drew loud protests from Beijing, which in return, raised market entry barriers for certain EU products such as brandy.



## RAW behind terrorism in Balochistan

Continued from Front Page

"There is no requirement for any large-scale operation in Balochistan as our security forces are already dismantling terrorist networks."

Sanaullah also reiterated his long-standing allegation that India's intelligence agency, Research and Analysis Wing (RAW), was actively involved in destabilizing Pakistan by funding and arming terrorist elements.

He described RAW as the "mother of terrorists," responsible for bringing together various militant factions operating within Pakistan. "RAW is playing the role of the mother of terrorists. They are providing funding, weapons, and support to various militant groups, whose ideologies do not even align," he claimed.

On the recent Jafar Express attack, Sanaullah said that the speed with which Indian media reported on the incident suggested foreknowledge of the attack.

er to ejecting Ukrainian forces from their month-old foothold in the western Russian region of Kursk. Trump said in a social media post on Friday that there was "a very good chance that this horrible, bloody war can finally come to an end." He also said he had "strongly requested" that Putin not kill the thousands of Ukrainian troops that Russia is pushing out of Kursk.

Putin said he would honor Trump's request to spare the lives of the Ukrainian troops if they surrendered. The Kremlin also said on Friday that Putin had sent Trump a message about his ceasefire plan via Witkoff, expressing "cautious optimism" that a deal could be reached to end the conflict.

In separate appearances on Sunday shows, Witkoff, Secretary of State Marco Rubio, and Trump's national security adviser, Mike

NEW YORK (Reuters): U.S. President Donald Trump is expected to speak with his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin this week on ways to end the three-year war in Ukraine, U.S. envoy Steve Witkoff told CNN on Sunday after returning from what he described as a "positive" meeting with Putin in Moscow.

"I expect that there will be a call with both presidents this week, and we're also continuing to engage and have conversation with the Ukrainians," said Witkoff, who met with Putin on Thursday night, adding that he thought the talk between Trump and Putin would be "really good and positive."

Trump is trying to win Putin's support for a 30-day ceasefire proposal that Ukraine accepted last week, as both sides continued trading heavy aerial strikes through the weekend and Russia moved clos-

er to ejecting Ukrainian forces from their month-old foothold in the western Russian region of Kursk.

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In separate appearances on Sunday shows, Witkoff, Secretary of State Marco Rubio, and Trump's national security adviser, Mike

Waltz, emphasized that there are still challenges to be worked out before Russia agrees to a ceasefire, much less a final peaceful resolution to the war.

Asked on ABC whether the U.S. would accept a peace deal in which Russia was allowed to keep stretches of eastern Ukraine that it has seized, Waltz replied, "Are we going to drive every Russian off of every inch of Ukrainian soil?" He added that the negotiations had to be grounded in "reality."

Rubio told CBS a final peace deal would "involve a lot of hard work, concessions from both Russia and Ukraine," and that it would be difficult to even begin those negotiations "as long as they're shooting at each other."

**ADDITIONAL MEASURES**

Trump has warned that unless a ceasefire is reached, the conflict

described Maulana Fazlur Rehman as a respectable politician, stating that Pakistan needs his leadership.

He stated that action would be taken against all illegal parking operations in Sindh, and urged unemployed youth in the province to register on the "I Work for Sindh" portal to access job opportunities.

He stated that withdrawing support for the government is a minor issue, Sindh is prepared to take an even bigger step if necessary, but there will be no compromise on Sindh's rights.

## Toll in North Macedonia hip-hop gig blaze rises to 59

SKOPJE, North Macedonia (AFP): A fire tore through a nightclub in North Macedonia early Sunday, killing 59 people, apparently after on-stage fireworks set the place ablaze, authorities said, announcing arrest warrants for four people.

They said 155 injured people had been taken to hospitals across the country, 18 of them in critical condition. Some of the serious cases were to be taken to other European countries for treatment.

The blaze started in the Club Pulse in the eastern town of Kocani around 3am, as the place was packed with more than 1,000 mostly young fans attending a concert by a popular hip-hop duo called DNK.

"Initially we didn't believe there was a fire. Then there was huge panic in the crowd and a stampede to get out," one young woman who was at the concert told local media outside a hospital in the capital Skopje.

Fire crews and paramedics responded quickly and "tried to resuscitate people [...] but it wasn't enough," said the woman,

who was waiting outside for one her friends, who was being treated for burns to his hand.

The fire was probably caused by the use of pyrotechnic devices "used for light effects at the concert", said Interior Minister Pance Toskovski, who visited the scene with Prime Minister Hristijan Mickoski.

"Sparks caught the ceiling, which was made of easily flammable material, after which the fire rapidly spread across the whole discotheque, creating thick smoke," Toskovski said.

The interior ministry announced that arrest warrants had been issued for four people in relation to the tragedy, and a criminal investigation opened. They did not immediately give further details about those targeted by the warrants.

"According to the information that we have, there are 59 persons deceased of which 35 are identified. Of the identified, 31 persons are from Kocani and four from Stip," Toskovski said.

"The number of wounded, according to latest information up to noon

(1100 GMT), is 155 persons who are in hospitals across the country," Toskovski said.

"Preparations are being made to transport people seriously injured in the fire in Kocani to top hospitals in several European countries," the head of North Macedonia's Crisis Centre, Stojanche Angelov, said.

The head of the Kocani hospital, Kristina Serafimovska, told media that the patients being treated there were aged between 14 and 25.

"Seventy of the patients have burns and carbon monoxide poisoning," she said.

One of the members of the DNK duo that had performed, Vladimir Blazev, had burns to his face and needed assistance breathing, his sister told local media outlets.

"Very sad day" "This is a difficult and very sad day" for the country, Prime Minister Mickoski wrote on his Facebook account.

"The loss of so many young lives is irreparable, and the grief of their families, their loved ones and their friends is immeasura-

ble," he said.

Videos posted on social networks and shot before the fire showed the use of "stage fountains", which are a type of indoor fireworks used during performances.

Other videos published by media showed huge flames emerging from the building, a two-storey white structure in Kocani, a town with 30,000 residents.

An AFP photographer in the town saw military medical vehicles arrive to reinforce staff at the local hospital tending to some of the injured.

Leaders of neighbouring countries offered help.

Bulgarian Prime Minister Rossen Jeliazkov spoke on Facebook of the fire being "a huge human tragedy" and offered to have his air force fly some of those injured to medical facilities in the Bulgarian capital Sofia and the city of Varna.

Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis said on X, formerly Twitter, that he sent "heartfelt condolences to the people of North Macedonia for the lives lost in the tragic fire".

## Pakistan need economic alliance, govt to be able to woo Fazl: Ahsan

### F.P. Report

NAROWAL: Federal Minister for Planning and Development Ahsan Iqbal has said that Pakistan need economic grand alliance instead of political alliance of the opposition parties. Talking to media in Shakargarh after visiting the family of martyred Akmal Hussain, Federal Minister said that JUI Chief Maulana Fazl-ur-Rehman will not move into alliance with PTI as the government will be able to woo him.

He said martyred jawans were asset of the country and their sacrifices will not be forgotten. Ahsan Iqbal claimed PTI allowed the terrorists to move in the country.

Ahsan Iqbal said, "No one can look at the country with a dirty eye during the presence of our brave soldiers."

He said Jafar Express incident was the worst, brutal act of terrorism, adding that enemies were making a sinister attempt to stop CPEC and the development of Balochistan.

Federal Minister claimed PML-N defeated the worst form of terrorism in 2013.

He said before 2018, there was complete peace in the country. Ahsan Iqbal said the leniency of the PTI government gave an opportunity to terrorism to flourish. He claimed PTI put politics above the interests of the country.

Ahsan Iqbal claimed when the interests of the country are in question, there is no politics of any kind in front of them. He urged the nation to face the challenges with complete unity and solidarity.

