

### TTP key operative arrested F.P. Report

KARACHI: The Counter-Terrorism Department Intelligence Wing successfully traced down and arrested a key operative of the banned Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan Al-Khawarij, who flashed a threatening message at Mazar-e-Quaid. As per details, the arrest was made following an extensive surveillance operation, with exclusive footage of the suspect's movements across 34 different locations in Karachi.



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ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif announcing the declaration of meeting of Parliamentary Committee on National Security.

# Strategy to eradicate terrorist networks

Parliamentary National Security Committee stresses immediate implementation of National Action Plan

Saqib Mushtaq

ISLAMABAD: Parliamentary Committee on National Security on Tuesday strongly condemning the recent wave of terrorist activities, called for immediate implementation of the National Action Plan and a strategy to eradicate terrorist networks and counter logistical support.

The committee appreciated the bravery, courage, and professional expertise of the security forces and law enforcement agencies in counter-terrorism and reiterated Pakistan's unwavering commitment to eliminating terrorism in all its forms. The committee also expressed solidarity with the families affected by the terrorism activities.

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif read out the declaration unanimously adopted by the Parliamentary Committee. The in-camera meeting of the committee was convened here today under the chairmanship of National Assembly Speaker Sardar Ayaz Sadiq.

The committee appreciated the bravery, courage, and professional expertise of the security forces and law enforcement agencies in counter-terrorism. The forum emphasized the need for a strategic and united political resolve to face this threat with the full strength of the state and called for national consensus in the fight against terrorism.

The committee expressed serious concern over the increasing misuse of social media platforms by terrorist groups to spread propaganda, recruit followers, and coordinate attacks, stressing the need for immediate measures to curb this abuse. It also emphasized the need to establish procedures to block digital networks of terrorists.

Reaffirming its unwavering support for the Pakistan Armed Forces and law enforcement agencies, the committee acknowledged their immense sacrifices and the resolve for national defense, stating that the nation stands shoulder to shoulder with the armed forces, police, FC, and intelligence agencies in the war against terrorism.

The committee reiterated that no institution, individual, or group involved in collaboration with the enemy to harm Pakistan's peace and stability will be allowed to do so. The committee also expressed regret over the non-participation of certain opposition members and reiterated that the process of consultation will continue in the future. The session was attended

### Ruet body to meet on 30th F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Central Ruet-e-Hilal Committee, along with zonal committees, will convene on Sunday evening, to sight the moon of Shawwal, marking the potential end of the holy month. Committee's meeting will take place at the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Interfaith Harmony where religious scholars, meteorological experts will participate in the deliberations to verify moon sighting reports.

## Major steps by KP CM to strengthen police

— directs Rs5.5b to fulfill needs of cops

Syed Adnan

PESHAWAR: Chief Minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Ali Amin Gandapur, chaired an important meeting focused on strengthening the provincial police force. The meeting was attended by the Chief Secretary, Inspector General of Police, Additional Chief Secretary for Home Affairs, and senior officials from the Finance and Police departments.

To meet the urgent needs of the police, the Chief Minister approved the immediate release of Rs. 5.5 billion. Additionally, Rs. 3 billion has been allocated for bullet-proofing police vehicles and procuring modern equipment to enhance the force's operational capacity.

During the meeting, it was decided to establish Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) teams at the district level, equipping them with the latest technology and modern weaponry. In addition, Rs. 1.3 billion has been allocated to enhance the security of police stations and check posts, ensuring that law enforcement facilities are well-fortified. Furthermore, Rs. 500 million will be released to complete the construction of police stations and check posts that were previously included in the Annual Development Program but remained unfinished due to financial constraints.

To further strengthen the police force, Rs. 720 million has been allocated for the purchase of advanced equipment, including night vision goggles, sniper rifles, and other essential tactical gear. These modern tools will significantly enhance the force's capability to respond effectively to security

threats, especially during nighttime operations.

In a major move for police welfare, the Chief Minister also approved a salary increase for police officers to match those in Balochistan, while police personnel will receive salaries equivalent to their counterparts in Punjab. During the briefing, officials highlighted that police officers in Balochistan currently receive the highest salaries among all provinces, while Punjab offers the highest salaries to its police personnel. By implementing these salary adjustments, the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government aims to improve police morale and retention.

Speaking on the occasion, Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur reaffirmed that maintaining law and order is the top priority of his government. He emphasized that strengthening the police force is essential given the current security challenges in the province. He further assured that the government has been investing substantial resources in police development from the very beginning and will continue to provide funds on a priority basis to meet all necessary requirements.

He reiterated that no compromise will be made in equipping the police force to counter security threats effectively. "The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa police are bravely fighting terrorism, and we take immense pride in their sacrifices and performance. The provincial government will ensure that lack of resources does not become an obstacle in fulfilling their needs," the Chief Minister asserted.

## PTI refuses to attend NSC meeting

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) has refused to participate in the Parliamentary National Security Committee meeting. Addressing a press conference alongside Tahafuz-e-Aeen Movement leaders, PTI Secretary General Salman Akram Raja stated that the decision was made at a political committee meeting on Monday. No PTI representative will attend the meeting, except Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur, who will participate in his official capacity.

Raja emphasised that the PTI was against any military operation and demanded that Imran Khan be released on parole. Tahafuz-e-Aeen Pakistan head Mahmood Khan Achakzai questioned the legitimacy of the meeting, stating that an unconstitutional prime minister had no legitimacy to summon such a session.

Allam Raja Nasir Abbas and Sahibzada Hamid Raza echoed similar concerns, demanding that Imran Khan be included in key security discussions. Opposition leader in the National Assembly Omar Ayub criticised the short notice for the security meeting while highlighting that the PTI leaders were denied access to Imran Khan despite court orders.

Earlier, other parties of opposition alliance including Pashtunkhwa Milli Awami Party (PkMAP), Sunni Ittehad Council (SIC), Majlis Wahdat-e-Muslimeen (MWM) and Balochistan National Party-Mengal (BNP-M) had announced boycott of Parliamentary National Security Committee meeting.

## No agenda greater than national security: COAS

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Chief of Army Staff (COAS) General Syed Asim Munir on Tuesday called upon all elements of national power to demonstrate greater harmony among their ranks for lasting stability in the country and said that nothing was supreme than the national security. "There is no agenda, no movement and no individual greater than the security of the country," he said while addressing the Parliamentary Committee on National Security. For lasting stability, the COAS said all elements of national power must work in harmony "This [fight against terrorism] is a battle for our survival and the survival of our future generations."

He stressed the need for better governance and to transform Pakistan into a resilient and tough State, questioning that "how long will we continue to make countless sacrifices and fill the governance gaps with the sacrifices of the Pakistan Armed Forces and the blood of our martyrs?" The Army Chief urged the religious scholars to expose the distorted interpretations of Islam presented by the Khawarij, adding "Our existence is subject to the existence of our country; therefore, nothing is more important to us than the security of the country." To ensure Pakistan's security, he called for adopting a unified narrative, rising above political and personal interests. "Those who believe they can weaken Pakistan through these terrorists, today's message to them is clear: we are united, and together we will not only defeat them but also their facilitators," the COAS reiterated. "We have complete faith in Allah Almighty. No matter what happens, God willing, we will succeed," he added.

## Fazl disappointed with absence of PTI representatives from meeting

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (F) Chief Maulana Fazal-ur-Rehman expressed his disappointment at the absence of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) representatives from National Security Committee meeting. During the meeting, Maulana Fazal-ur-Rehman stated that if PTI had consulted him, he would have advised them to attend the meeting. Maulana Fazal-ur-Rehman stressed the importance of continuity in state policies, saying that the country's interests should be prioritized above all else, warning against Pakistan involving in other wars. The JUI-F head stated that Pakistan's participation in the war against Afghanistan and its alliance with the US after 9/11 were detrimental decisions that had far-reaching consequences for the country.

## Khawaja Asif slams PTI

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Defence Minister Khawaja Asif has strongly criticized Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) for refusing to attend the Parliamentary National Security Committee meeting. In a statement on social media platform X (formerly Twitter), Khawaja Asif accused PTI of prioritising Imran Khan over national security. He further condemned PTI's stance, stating that while Pakistan face terrorism threats, PTI continues playing politics for personal interests. He labeled this behavior as a betrayal towards the nation. It is noteworthy that PTI boycotted the security meeting, demanding that they be allowed to meet Imran Khan first before attending.

by Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, General Syed Asim Munir, ministers, parliamentary committee members, and senior officials from the military political leaders, Chief of Army Staff and intelligence agencies.

## Govt striving to resolve journalists problems: Tarar

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Information and Broadcasting Attaullah Tarar on Tuesday said the government was fully committed to addressing the problems being faced by journalist community.

"The government will continue to provide all pos-

sible support to enhance journalists professional capacity and promote press freedom," Attaullah Tarar said in a congratulatory message to newly-elected office-bearers of National Press Club, Islamabad.

The minister for information congratulated Azhar Jatoti on being elected as President, Nayyar Ali as

Secretary, and Waqar Abbasi as Finance Secretary of the NPC. Attaullah Tarar also congratulated other newly-elected office bearers and expressed his best wishes for them.

The minister reiterated that government fully believed in freedom of the press and freedom of expression.

## Military operation not solution: JI

F.P. Report

KARACHI: Ameer Jamaat-e-Islami Hafiz Naem ur Rehman said today that increasing security incidents in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan have raised concerns, with 57 attacks reported in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa alone. The situation is deteriorating, highlighting the need for a clear strategy to address the crisis, he added.

Addressing the press conference at Idara Noor-e-Haq in Karachi, he opined that security challenges

intensified after Pakistan aligned with the United States. Former President General Pervez Musharraf's decision to support the U.S. without consulting national stakeholders has had long-term consequences. Both civilians and military personnel have lost their lives in the ongoing conflict, he deplored.

A military operation is not a permanent solution, he maintained and suggested that a well-defined policy is required. Normalizing relations with Afghanistan is essential, and

Kabul must ensure that its territory is not used against Pakistan. Political representatives expressed readiness to mediate dialogue between the two nations, he assured.

The frequency of attacks in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, including 27 incidents within 24 hours, underscores the urgency of restoring peace. In Balochistan, the latest terrorist incident has been described as a failure of governance. The growing distrust among the Baloch population is another critical issue, he remarked.

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# HBK Ramadan Sports Gala kicks off at Peshawar Press Club



Shahid Afridi

PESHAWAR: The HBK Ramadan Sports Gala commenced with a grand ceremony last night at the Peshawar Press Club lawn. The Chief Minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Sardar Ali Amin Gandapur formally inaugurated the event by playing a badminton match.

The ceremony was attended by Provincial Minister for Sports Syed Fakhar Jahan, Adviser on

Information Barrister Saif, Adviser on Health Ehtesham Khan, HBK Chief Executive Dr. Muhib Afridi, Secretary Information Arshad Khan, President of Peshawar Press Club M. Riaz, Secretary of Peshawar Press Club Tayyeb Usman, Chairman Sports Committee Irfan Musa Zai and a large number of press club members.

Addressing the opening ceremony Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur

praised the journalists of the province for their sacrifices in fulfilling their professional responsibilities.

He acknowledged their crucial role in the fight against terrorism, stating that their contributions are widely recognized. He emphasized that in a restrictive environment such recreational events for journalists are essential and he commended the Peshawar Press Club administration for organizing the event.

The Chief Minister

assured that the journalist community remains a priority for the provincial government and pledged continued support in the future.

Earlier President of Peshawar Press Club M. Riaz thanked the Chief Minister for his presence and stated that the primary objective of the sports gala is to provide journalists with recreational opportunities alongside their professional duties.

It is noteworthy that the Peshawar Press Club has been organizing such events for several years and this marks the second consecutive year that it is being held in collaboration with HBK.

This year's Ramadan Sports Gala features five different games including badminton, snooker, table tennis, ludo and carrom board. More than 200 members are participating in the event, which will continue for a week.



PESHAWAR: SSP Operations Masood Ahmed is presenting cash prizes and commendation certificates to DSP Umer Afridi and other police officers for their outstanding performance.

## Negligence in education

# Nagri Bala Norakhel residents demand justice for vacant teaching positions

Sajjad Muhammad Khan

LOWER DIR: The Education Department (Female) Lower Dir is facing severe criticism for failing to advertise two vacant teaching positions at Government Girls Primary School Nagri Bala Norakhel, which has been termed a blatant injustice. The residents of Nagri Bala expressed these concerns while speaking to Frontier Post about their grievances.

According to local sources, the school currently has 172 enrolled students, but only two teachers are on duty, which has severely impacted the quality of education. Recently, the education department announced several teaching vacancies, but only one position was advertised for Nagri Bala school, despite there being three vacant positions.

Residents claim that in 2021, two teachers were appointed to this school, but they were later transferred to schools in other union councils. However, their vacant positions were never refilled. Despite multiple



requests, the relevant authorities have ignored the issue.

Furthermore, it has been observed that the transferred teachers are being kept as surplus staff in other schools, even though vacant positions exist in their respective union councils. According to the locals, this tactic aims to maintain the number of vacancies in specific areas while neglecting other schools in need.

The issue worsened after the ration-

alization process, as instead of reinstating the missing vacancies at Nagri Bala school, they were completely erased. Although it was initially promised that these positions would be filled through the Educational Testing and Evaluation Agency (ETEA), the matter has now been unnecessarily complicated with various justifications.

Residents argue that according to the rationalization policy, the school should have at least five teachers. However, with only two teachers currently present, the education of the students is suffering immensely. They have urged the Deputy Commissioner of Lower Dir, the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Education Minister, and the Education Director to take immediate action.

The locals have issued a strong warning that if the remaining two positions are not advertised and filled, they will be forced to block the main GT Road and may even proceed with shutting down the school as a form of protest.

# KP PA to introduce new rules, regulations after 37 years: Suraiya

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly is set to introduce new rules and regulations after 37 years, marking a historic milestone. This was stated by Deputy Speaker Suraiya Bibi during the meeting of Standing Committee on Rules, Procedures, Privileges, and Government held in the conference room of the provincial assembly.

The meeting was attended by MPAs Abdul Salam Afridi, Taj Muhammad Tarand, Malik Adeel Iqbal, Sher Ali Afridi, Dawood

Shah, and Anwar Khan, while MPAs Sajjadullah and Munir Hussain Laghmani participated via video call.

The session continued discussions from previous meetings, focusing on amendments to the assembly's rules and regulations. Deputy Speaker Suraiya Bibi informed the committee that this was a momentous occasion as the committee would repeal the 1988 rules of the KP Assembly and introduce new ones that would serve as a guiding framework for the assembly secretariat in the future.

Key amendments approved in today's session included new procedures for voting inside the house, rules governing debates during sessions, temporary suspension of disruptive members under extraordinary circumstances, removal of unauthorized individuals or those causing disturbances from galleries and lobbies, deletion of inappropriate words from members' speeches, suspension of rules in special cases, and several other significant revisions.

Former Special Secretary of the Assembly

and Chairman of the Technical Committee, Amjad Ali Khan, also attended the meeting. Deputy Speaker Suraiya Bibi adjourned further proceedings until Wednesday, March 19, 2025.

In her closing remarks, she expressed gratitude to all assembly members and committee officials for their dedicated efforts in bringing about these amendments. She also extended special thanks to Speaker Babar Saleem Swati for his keen interest in modernizing the assembly's decades-old regulations.

# Turkiye's 110th Çanakkale Victory Turkish Department of NUML commemorates Day



F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The Turkish Department of the National University of Modern Languages (NUML) today hosted a commemorative event celebrating Türkiye's 110th Çanakkale Victory and the official adoption of the Turkish National Anthem. The event was graced by the presence of H.E. Irfan Neziroğlu, Ambassador of the Turkish Embassy in Pakistan, who served as the Chief Guest. Also in attendance were DG NUML, Brig Shahzad Munir, the Education Attache and senior embassy officials, underscoring the

strong ties between the two nations.

At the outset, Ambassador Irfan Neziroğlu and Rector NUML, Maj Gen Shahid Mahmood Kayani HI(M) (ret'd), engaged in a bilateral discussion focused on enhancing academic and research collaborations. This high-level dialogue reaffirmed the commitment to deepening people-to-people connections and bolstering educational exchanges. The Rector expressed sincere gratitude to the Government of Türkiye and Düzce University for facilitating these academic initiatives,

which are set to provide students with access to world-class learning environments and promote long-term academic cooperation.

The event featured a welcoming address by Dr. Jameel Asghar Jami, Dean of the Faculty of Languages, followed by a captivating documentary showcasing the heroic legacy of Çanakkale's victory. Performances by both students and faculty of the Turkish Department added a dynamic cultural element to the celebration. In his speech, Ambassador Neziroğlu also paid tribute to the historic contributions of renowned poet Allama Iqbal and highlighted the enduring bond between Pakistan and Türkiye. He reiterated that, regardless of any challenges, Türkiye will steadfastly support Pakistan on every international platform.

Looking ahead, the Ambassador confirmed plans to expand the student exchange programs under the existing Memorandum

of Understanding, stating, "In the near future, we will welcome many more NUMLians to our Turkish universities." He urged the students to recognize their pivotal role in shaping not only the future of Pakistan but also the destiny of Türkiye and the broader Ummah, concluding with the powerful affirmation, "Together we stand strong."

Pro-Rector Academics, Dr. Safer Awan, extended his gratitude to the Ambassador and his team for honouring the occasion. He emphasized the importance of remembering and cherishing national history. In his speech, Dr. Awan stressed enhancing academic collaboration and excelling in the research field. In a symbolic gesture of enduring friendship and academic partnership, he presented a commemorative shield to Ambassador Neziroğlu.

Through initiatives such as this commemorative event, NUML continues to build bridges between cultures and empower students with global perspectives.

# Practical training of pharmacy students KMU, LRH Sign MoU

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: A significant Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) has been signed between the Khyber Medical University (KMU) Institute of Pharmaceutical Sciences (IPS) and the Pharmacy Services Department of Lady Reading Hospital (LRH) Medical Teaching Institution, Peshawar. The primary aim of this agreement is to equip pharmacy students with practical skills and align them with modern clinical pharmacy requirements.

The MoU was signed by Professor Dr. Sami Siraj, Director of KMU-IPS, and Dr. Azizullah, Pharmacy Manager of LRH, representing their respective institutions. According to the agreement, pharmacy students

will receive hands-on training under the supervision of experienced pharmacists at various departments of Lady Reading Hospital. The training will focus on drug formulation, quality dispensing, and the crucial role of pharmacists in patient treatment.

As part of this collaboration, LRH pharmacists will train students in the use of the Computerized Physician Order Entry (CPOE) system introduced in the public sector, accurate drug dosage administration, reviewing patients' medical history, and evaluating potential drug interactions. This agreement will further strengthen academic and research cooperation between the two institutions, fostering joint research, workshops, and

seminars. Through this partnership, students will gain exposure to real hospital settings, understanding the practical role of pharmacists in clinical pharmacy, medication management, and drug therapy. Additionally, they will be trained in standard drug labeling, safe dispensing practices, and patient awareness techniques, all of which will contribute to improving pharmaceutical practices.

Meanwhile, Vice Chancellor of KMU, Professor Dr. Zia Ul Haq, welcomed the agreement, stating that it will not only enhance the quality of pharmacy education in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa but also play a crucial role in making pharmacists more effective in their practical responsibilities.

# PAF pays tribute to 1965 war hero MM Alam

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Commemorating his 12th Death Anniversary, Pakistan Air Force has released a video tribute to

honor 1965 war hero Air Commodore Mohammad Mahmood Alam (Late).

Air Cdre M M Alam achieved the remarkable feat of downing 5 Indian Air Force jets in under

one minute during the 1965 war - A record that remains unbeaten till date.

The legendary PAF pilot shot down five Indian fighter jets piloting his F-86 Sabre jet plane, becoming an "Ace in a Day" on 7th September 1965. In total he achieved a feat of 09 confirmed kills and 02 probable during a period of 11 days.

The war hero was honored with the prestigious 'Sitara-e-Jurat' with BAR for his outstanding performance in the 1965 war.



# HUM LOG celebrates Holi

PESHAWAR (APP): In a vibrant celebration of love, respect, and unity, HUM LOG on Tuesday organized a special event for the Hindu community here, radiating the true spirit of interfaith harmony in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

The gathering, filled with joy and camaraderie, saw children, women, and youth exchanging warm Holi greetings, embodying the essence of togetherness beyond religious boundaries.

The atmosphere was painted with the colors of friendship as participants wished each other Holi Mubarak and shared the joy of the festival. Boxes of

sweets were distributed, symbolizing the sweetness of mutual respect and coexistence.

Prominent voices of interfaith dialogue, Haroon Sardab, James Cyprian, and Augustin Jacob addressed the gathering, emphasizing the importance of unity in diversity.

Their words echoed the true essence of a society where people of all faiths can coexist in peace and mutual respect. The event stood as a testament to the rich cultural fabric of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, where traditions blend seamlessly, and humanity triumphs over division.



# Delegation of pharmaceutical manufacturers meets CEO DRAP

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: A delegation of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Pharmaceutical Manufacturers Association (KPPMA), led by its President Mr. Imtiaz Ahmed, met with the newly appointed CEO of the Drug Regulatory Authority of Pakistan (DRAP) at his office in Islamabad to congratulate him. Director Control Drug DRAP, Mr. Noor Muhammad Shah, was also present on the occasion.

The delegation included General Secretary Muhammad Tahir, Vice President Medical Devices Muhammad Iqbal, Vice President Nutraceuticals

Faisal Kakakhel, Vice President Naeem Shehzad, President Hayatabad Industrialists Association Bakhtiar Khan, Dr. Yusuf Sarwar, Tahir Saleem, Abdul Rehman, Tariq Sohail, Bashir Khan, Nadeem Shehzad, and other members.

During the meeting, a detailed discussion was held on the challenges faced by the pharmaceutical industry. The KPPMA delegation highlighted the growth and issues of the pharma sector. The CEO of DRAP assured the delegation that all concerns raised would be addressed and promised that all possible measures would be taken for the betterment of the pharmaceutical industry.

# KP FA crackdown against substandard food

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Food Safety & Halal Food Authority continues its province-wide crackdown against adulteration and substandard food.

During recent operations, a significant quantity of adulterated and low-quality food items was seized across multiple districts.

According to the details issued by KP Food Authority spokesperson, raids were carried out in Peshawar Cantt, Haripur, and Mardan, targeting businesses involved in selling substandard and adulterated food products. In Peshawar Cantt's RA Bazaar, inspections were conducted by food safety team under the supervision of Director Operations Akhtar Nawaz in collaboration with the district administration.

The Mobile Food Testing Laboratory was used to test samples of milk, cooking oil used in fritters (pakoray), and samosa. Upon confirmation of milk adulteration and substandard oil quality, legal action was initiated against the violators.

# KP govt requested not to support proposed SIFC

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Frontier Mine Owners Association (FMOA) Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has expressed serious reservations over the Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC) drafted Minerals Harmonization Act 2025 of the federal government and has asked the provincial government to address them before its adoption from the provincial assembly.

Addressing a news conference here at Peshawar Press Club (PPC) on Tuesday, President FOMA Sherbani Khan Marwat said that the draft of the Act sent to Chief Secretaries of all provinces for approval from the provincial legislatures is an attempt to abolish provincial autonomy.

The FOMA chief was also flanked by the Senior Vice President Asghar Khan Afridi, Vice President Najab Khan, Secretary General Taimur Khan, Deputy General Secretary Aziz Tanoli, Secretary Finance Abdul Qayyum and district level presidents and other office bearers of the association.

Sherbani Khan Marwat said that the purpose of the Harmonization Minerals Act was aimed at its inclusion of the recommendations and redressal of the reservations of all public and public sectors stakeholders in consultations with provinces.

# KTH denies news report on Cath Lab

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: An English newspaper has published a misleading and baseless report following the inauguration of the state-of-the-art Cath Lab at the Cardiology Ward of KTH. The report did not include the official stance of the hospital administration.

The inauguration ceremony of the Cath Lab was held on March 13, 2025, at KTH. The event was graced by the Advisor to the Chief Minister on Health, Mr. Ihtesham Ali, as the chief guest. Following the ceremony, the Press Secretary to the Special Advisor issued an official press release. However, a private English newspaper distorted the facts by making unauthorized additions to the press release and publishing unfounded allegations without seeking the hospital administration's stance.





## In brief

### Police sign pact with schools

Syed Waliullah Shah

NOWSHERA: Police have signed agreements with various educational institutions to provide quality educational facilities to the children of martyred, serving, and retired police personnel, on Tuesday. DPO emphasized that martyred police personnel are a source of pride for them, and their services are worthy of appreciation. He added that the welfare and well-being of their families are a top priority. To achieve this goal, a meeting was held at the New DPO Kamalpur Conference Hall, where agreements were signed with private schools and educational institutions across the district. Under these agreements, the children of martyred police personnel will receive free education, while the children of serving and retired police personnel will be offered a 50% discount on educational fees. The Nowshera Police have made it clear that the welfare and well-being of police personnel and their families are their top priority. This initiative is a significant step towards providing quality education to the children of police personnel, who have sacrificed their lives for the country. The agreements signed with educational institutions will ensure that these children receive the best possible education, enabling them to become valuable members of society.

### Establishment of 'Jawan Center'

F.P. Report

KARAK: Chairman District Development Advisory Committee (DDAC) Karak Khurshid Khattak. MPA has said that approval of the establishment of a "Jawan Center" in Karak district has been included in the upcoming agenda of the provincial cabinet. After the approval, practical work will be started on it. In a statement, Khurshid Khattak MPA said that he along with the MNA Shahid Khattak moving forward as per the wishes of his electorate and taking the people into confidence at every stage so as to ensure the fair and better use of every penny of the government exchequer. Chairman DDAC Karak said that he will try to complete the "Youth Center" as soon as possible after its formal approval so that the local youth here can benefit from it.

### Court grants bail to accused

F.P. Report

BARA: Additional Session Judge (ASJ) Bara Fazal Gul, granted bail in Norocite case to alleged smuggler, on Tuesday. According to prosecution, the accused charged for having narcotics of quantity 200Kg hashish and 150Kg Opium. The counsel Farooq ur Rasheed and Arshad Iqbal Advocates argued the case on behalf of accused. They argued that prosecution claims and evidences are contradictory in the case. ASJ Bara ordered release of accused on bail after conclusion of arguments.

### Crackdown continues

F.P. Report

D I KHAN: District administration Tank has launched a crackdown against profiteering and hoarding to ensure availability of daily use commodities at affordable prices during the holy month of Ramadan. Additional Assistant Commissioner Tank, Hassan Shah along with Additional Assistant Commissioner Revenue, Saifullah Jan paid a surprise visit to the bazaar and inspected grocery and retail shops, as well as meat, fruit, and vegetable vendors.



SHANGLA: Members of Bar Association holding a rally for acceptance of their demands. — F.P. photo

## PPP expresses concern over law, order in KP

F.P. Report

LOWER DIR: The Pakistan People's Party (PPP) Lower Dir has voiced grave concerns over the worsening law and order situation in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, holding the provincial government responsible and demanding its immediate resignation. In a statement issued, the PPP Lower Dir leader and former NA-7 candidate Alam Zeb Advocate lamented the daily occurrences of bomb blasts and targeted killings in the province. He expressed alarm over the increasing number of attacks on religious scholars and civilians, stating that life and property are no longer safe.

Criticizing the government's inaction, he asserted that the provincial administration appears to be non-existent, while the so-called "government of change" has failed to maintain security. He emphasized that ensuring public safety is the foremost responsibility of any government, yet the province has become a stronghold

for terrorists, who operate with impunity.

"The province is burning, yet the government remains silent. The Chief Minister is inactive, and a government that fails to protect its citizens has no right to rule," he said. He further noted that in the past 12 years, neither development nor peace has been achieved in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. He called for the immediate resignation of Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur and the provincial government, citing their failure to restore law and order.

**SSC examinations:** The Board of Intermediate and Secondary Education (BISE) Malakand has released the date sheet for the annual matriculation examinations, which are set to commence on April 8. Talking to local journalists at Timergara, the Board's chairman Muhammad Naseem Khan said that over 111,000 students were expected to appear in the exams, for which roll number slips had already been issued to all candidates.

To ensure transparency, the board has implemented stringent measures, including the formation of special monitoring committees and the mandatory installation of CCTV cameras in examination halls, he added.

The official confirmed that examinations for ninth and tenth grades would be conducted under strict supervision. "A total of 537 examination centers have been established, with 130 designated exclusively for female students and 407 for male students," he informed.

The Chairman Khan highlighted the board's commitment to conducting fair examinations, noting that a special task force has been deployed to oversee the process and prevent malpractice. Furthermore, examination staff have been instructed not to collect question papers from designated banks before the scheduled time, in adherence to the prescribed code of conduct. He urged parents to support the board's efforts in ensuring a transparent and fair examination process.

## PML-N playing active role to eliminate terrorism

F.P. Report

MULTAN: Advisor to Prime Minister (PM) on Political and Public Affairs Rana Sanaullah Khan on Tuesday said that Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PML-N) in leadership of Nawaz Sharif played an active role to eliminate terrorism from the country.

Speaking to media, Rana Sanaullah said that after the Army Public school (APS) attack in 2014, the PML-N government convened an All Parties Conference (APC) and developed the National Action Plan (NAP) to combat terrorism. He stated that terrorism was significantly reduced through military opera-

tions, including Operation Zarb-e-Azb and Operation Radd-ul-Fasaad, which targeted militant hideouts and dismantled terrorist networks across the country. He highlighted that the upcoming meeting will focus on the security situation and the strategy to combat terrorism.

He mentioned that the military leadership will present their plan to Stamp out terrorism, while political leaders will share their views and offer guidance. Responding to PTI's claims of state bias, he accused PTI of using its resources against the state through propaganda and social media campaigns.

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## Maintenance of law top priority in Kohat

F.P. Report

KOHAT: An important meeting of the District Monitoring Implementation Committee was held under the chairmanship of Deputy Commissioner Kohat Abdul Akram at his office on Tuesday. Besides others, the meeting was also attended by the officers of the District administration, Pak Army, Kohat Police and other related departments.

The meeting was briefed in detail on the law and

order situation and the steps taken by the relevant departments and institutions.

Deputy Commissioner Kohat, on this occasion said that all resources will be used to maintain the revised National Action Plan and the law and order situation in the entire Kohat district. He added, the elements affecting the public peace will not be tolerated any way because peace is fundamental in the development and prosperity of any region.

On this occasion, there was also a detailed discussion on the illegal spectrum and necessary instructions were given to the authorities concerned in this regard. Deputy Commissioner stressed that all the departments should perform their duties diligently so that no miscreants can succeed in their nefarious designs. He also directed to taking adequate steps to remedy the smuggling and show zero tolerance in this matter.

## Microplastic a threat for biodiversity: Experts

F.P. Report

KARAK: Microplastics have become a significant environmental concern due to their widespread presence in ecosystems. PVC (polyvinyl chloride) microplastics are one of the most common types of microplastics found in the environment. A team of researchers from UVAS Lahore has studied the growing concern about microplastic in the environment and their potential impact on health.

Mice were randomly divided into control and treatment groups. The treatment group was divided into four groups on the basis of doses (0.1 mg/kg, 0.2 mg/kg, 0.4 mg/kg and 0.8 mg/kg respectively) and exposed to PVC microplastics mixed in their basal diets for a duration of thirty five days after a one week acclimatization period. The control group received a placebo.

The results showed that PVC microplastics caused significant toxicity in

mice. The treatment groups exhibited increased levels of oxidative stress and inflammation with an increase in quantity of MPs. Histopathological examination revealed damage to the liver and DNA damage were also observed through comet assay procedure. Gene expression analysis for two housekeeping genes, OGG1 and HPRT1, indicted a significant change in gene expression as a result of exposure to these MPs.

## Jirga plays crucial role in Pakhtun society, says Sardar Khan

F.P. Report

PABBI: Former provincial president Pakistan People's Party Sardar Ali said that forgiveness is a preferred act of Allah and that fighting and quarrelling are not solutions to problems.

PPP leader highlighted the significance of Ramadan in promoting patience, tolerance, and sacrifice. He also emphasized the need for a harmonious society, where people respect each other and resolve issues through peaceful means, such as the traditional jirga system in Pashtun culture.

The ceremony was attended by various dignitaries, including PPP leaders and local officials. The event marked a significant step towards resolving conflicts and promoting peace in the region. Khan announced that he would be hosting two iftar dinners, one for each party involved in the conflict, as a symbol of unity and reconciliation.

The local community praised Khan's efforts in promoting peace and resolving issues through dialogue and mutual respect. His initiative was seen as a positive step towards creating a more harmonious society.

## Police arrests 20 POs

F.P. Report

LARKANA: Police arrested 20 accused involved in crimes and wanted in various cases were arrested and arrested in different areas of Larkana police in various areas of Larkana police who are involved in serious crimes like bloodshed, robberies, thefts and drug dealing.

According to the details, the Darri police have arrested the accused Saddam, Kamran Abro along with 1050 grams of hashish and the accused Jonny Abro along with 1110 grams of hashish by carrying out successful operations at three different places and registered a case, Zahid alias Shahid Oad was arrested and locked up in the police station while Ratodero police took action and arrested two suspects Ghulam Jalbani and drug dealer Mukhtiar Arbani along with hashish while Waris Dino Machhi police arrested two accused in the murder case Fida Bhosan and Zubair Bhosan while Nodero Police arrested criminal and drug dealer Gulbahr Khokhar from their possession.

Almost 2500 grams of hashish has been recovered while in Rahmatpur area of Larkana, Rahmatpur police have arrested Rafiq Mashuri, who is absconding in the murder case, Irfan Korai, involved in drug peddling, along with 2000 grams of hashish and 06 gamblers along with cash, mobile phones and card addresses, have been done, while more legal and regulatory actions are going on, including the investigation of the arrested accused by the police.

**Journalists hold protest:** A few days ago, journalists of Shaheed Rani Press Club protested against the misbehavior of SHO Mazar Mehr of Civil Lines Police Station Mazar Mahar against senior journalist Abdul Khaliq Jagirani and threatening to file a false case against him.

## Bugti announces overseas youth job opportunities

F.P. Report

QUETTA: Balochistan Chief Minister, Mir Sarfraz Bugti announced that the provincial government has opened doors to dignified employment abroad for the unemployed youth of Balochistan.

Speaking at the ceremony for handing over visas and other travel documents to selected youth under the Chief Minister's Youth Skills Development Program, the CM emphasized the government's decision to bring the youth closer to the state and provide them with equal opportunities for development.

He expressed happiness, stating that the first group of youth from Balochistan is now set to leave for employment abroad. This initiative will not only help them build a better future but also allow them to serve as ambassadors for Pakistan and Balochistan, supporting their families economically and sending remittances to the country. He urged the youth to work diligently, honestly, and with commitment abroad, avoiding any actions that could bring disrepute to Pakistan.

He highlighted that providing education and development opportunities to the

youth of Balochistan is the government's top priority.

Given the unique challenges faced by the province, unemployed youth are vulnerable to being recruited by anti-state elements, making it imperative to restore their trust in the state through merit-based governance," he added. The CM instructed the Department of Labor and Manpower and BTEV-TA officials to complete the process of sending the remaining trained youth abroad under this program by June of this year.

He also acknowledged the expression of happiness from the Chairman of the Pakistan People's Party, Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, regarding the success of the program, stating that it will be a milestone in providing a bright future for the youth of Balochistan. Mir Sarfraz Bugti advised the youth traveling abroad to make a pride for themselves through hard work and dedication, bringing honor to Balochistan and Pakistan. He emphasized that the government has invested public resources in providing training to the youth and ensuring job opportunities abroad.

Therefore, any youth who returns before completing the designated period will be required to repay

the expenses incurred on him.

The CM appreciated the efforts of the Advisor for Labor and Manpower, Sardar Ghulam Rasool Umarani, Chief Secretary Balochistan Shakeel Qadir Khan, Secretary of Labor, and Director General BTEV-TA Tariq Javed Mengal for the successful implementation of the Youth Skills Development Program.

He assured that the government will continue such initiatives to ensure the youth of the province have access to the best opportunities for development and economic stability.

Earlier, the Provincial Advisor for Labor and Manpower, Sardar Ghulam Rasool Umarani, Chairman of the Education Foundation Zafar Qadir, and DG BTEV-TA Tariq Javed Mengal also spoke at the ceremony, highlighting the importance and progress of the program.

At the end of the ceremony, the CM handed over visas and necessary documents to the selected youth under the Chief Minister's Youth Skills Development Program. The event was attended by provincial ministers, advisors, parliamentary secretaries, members of the assembly, and senior officials.

## Lawyers mobilized mass protests against police

F.P. Report

SHANGLA: A heated confrontation between lawyers and police in Shangla has sparked widespread protests and condemnation from the legal community. The dispute began last week when a verbal altercation between traffic police and lawyers in Alpurai, the district headquarters, escalated into a physical confrontation.

Despite initial efforts to resolve the issue amicably, the situation took a turn for the worse when a video of the clash went viral on social media. The police subsequently registered a case against the lawyers, prompting a fierce backlash from the legal community.

The Lawyers staged protest rally in Alpurai Chowk and held a demonstration outside the DPO

office, chanting slogans against the police and administration. The protesters condemned the police action, saying it was an attempt to humiliate and intimidate them.

The Shangla Bar Association has announced a boycott of court proceedings until further notice and demanded immediate action against the police officials involved in the clash. The association has also formed a committee to take up the matter at the highest level.

The lawyers have demanded the registration of a case against the police officials and their immediate transfer. They have also warned that some individuals are trying to impose their own brand of justice, above the law, and vowed to take action against them. The incident has sparked

widespread condemnation from the legal community, with the Peshawar High Court Mengora Bench Bar, Swat Bar Council, and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Bar Council, among others, expressing solidarity with the lawyers in Shangla.

**Two children drowned:** A devastating incident occurred in Shangla, where two children drowned in the River Indus. Despite a three-day rescue operation, the bodies of the children remain uncovered.

Meanwhile, a severe cold snap has gripped Shangla, with temperatures plummeting to record lows after a second day of rain and snowfall in the region. The inclement weather has caused disruptions to daily life, with internet services and mobile signals severely affected, leaving the communication system in disarray.

## Empowering women: Joint efforts urged

Shafi Ullah

MINGORA: In a significant step towards promoting women's rights, representatives from six districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa gathered in Fizatag to share experiences and strategies for addressing the pressing issues faced by women in their areas.

The event was attended by notable figures, including Saima Munir, head of Aurat Foundation, Swat, and representatives from Peshawar, Swat, Bajaur, Khyber District, Mardan, and Kohat.

Saima Munir emphasized the importance of legislation in empowering women, stating that the struggle to reduce violence against women and ensure equal inheritance rights will continue. To achieve this goal, the Joint Advocacy



Alliance, a platform comprising various social organizations from six districts, has been established. This alliance has referred over 300 cases to Peshawar in the past two years, addressing issues such as domestic violence, inheritance, cybercrime, and more.<sup>1</sup>

The Evaji Alliance, part of the Joint Advocacy Alliance, has made a significant impact, assisting over 4,000 women, men, transgenders, and minorities from diverse sectors. To further amplify their efforts, members of social

organizations from the participating districts were invited to share suggestions for solving women's problems, which will be forwarded to legislative bodies for consideration.

This collective effort aims to create a more equitable society, where women's rights are protected and promoted. As Saima Munir noted, the struggle for women's empowerment is ongoing, but with joint advocacy and legislation, a brighter future for women in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is within reach.

## Land procurement approved playground

F.P. Report

MARDAN: The Project Steering Committee (PSC) meeting chaired by Commissioner Mardan Division approved the purchase of 20 Canals of land for the establishment of a playground in Union Council Par Hoti.

The meeting was attended by Additional Deputy Commissioner, Assistant to Commissioner, District Sports Officer (DSO), representatives of Planning and Development Department and the Planning Officer of the Deputy Commissioner

Office Mardan.

The meeting considered various proposals for the establishment of a sports ground for the youth of the area. The Sports Department declared 20 Canals of private land located in the center of the Union Council as suitable for the project, which is accessible through a 20-foot road.

Additional Deputy Commissioner (Finance and Planning) and DSO Mardan briefed the meeting in detail about the land. It was also clarified in the meeting that funding for this project will be provided from the development funds of National

Assembly Constituency NA-22. Under this project, facilities such as a cricket academy, football, volleyball, basketball ground and badminton court will be provided which will help engage the youth in positive activities and promote sports.

The committee gave formal approval for the purchase of land after detailed deliberations. Commissioner Mardan Division Nisar Ahmed directed the District Sports Officer Mardan to meet the owners of the land and settle the legal matters so that any legal complications can be avoided in the future.





# UK energy minister in Beijing seeks to press China on emissions



BEIJING (AFP): UK enery minister Ed Miliband met officials in Beijing after vowing to press them on China's emissions as well as touchy topics such as Hong Kong and forced labour. British Prime Minister Keir Starmer has sought to boost engagement with China since coming to power in July, despite concerns over security and human rights crackdowns. Although it is the largest emitter of the greenhouse gases that drive climate change, China, the world's second-largest economy, is also a renewable energy powerhouse and aims to reach net zero by 2060. The UK has pledged to decarbonise completely by 2050 and has ramped up the transition to clean energy sources, which it claims will help boost its flagging economy. Miliband met with Wang Hongzhi, head of Beijing's National Energy Administration, for

the China-UK Energy Dialogue that London has said will be the first of regular "climate change talks between both countries moving forward". He also held talks with Vice Premier Ding Xuexiang at Beijing's ornate Great Hall of the People. Miliband is the third minister in Starmer's cabinet to visit China, writing in The Guardian newspaper last week that he will use the trip to "urge continued action from China... to tackle the climate emergency". "I consider it to be negligence towards today's and future generations not to engage China on this topic," he wrote. Official data showed last month that China missed a key climate target in 2024 and that emissions rose slightly as coal remained dominant, despite record renewable additions. The figures mean that China is off-track on a key commit-

ment under the Paris climate agreement, analysts said. London has said the UK will share with China "expertise on phasing out coal, having closed its last coal-fired power station last year." Miliband said he would also raise concerns over rights abuses in Hong Kong and the treatment of the Uyghur minority -- as well as "forced labour in supply chains" and Russia's invasion of Ukraine, which Beijing has never condemned. "Disagreement cannot be an excuse for disengagement," Miliband said. The energy minister also plans to invite Chinese counterparts to London later this year to renew formal climate dialogue between the countries, as the UK looks to play a leading role in global cooperation on the climate. "This is about protecting the British people now and for generations to come," he wrote.

# South African ambassador has to leave US by Friday

WASHINGTON (AP): The State Department says South Africa's ambassador to the United States, who was declared "persona non grata" last week, has until Friday to leave the country. After Secretary of State Marco Rubio determined that Ambassador Ebrahim Rasool was no longer welcome in the US and posted his decision Friday on social media, South African embassy staff were summoned to the State Department and given a formal diplomatic note explaining the decision, department spokesperson Tammy Bruce said. She said Rasool's diplomatic privileges and immunities expired and that he would be required to leave the United States by Friday. South African Foreign Ministry spokesperson Chrispin Phiri said in a television interview that Rasool was still in the US but would be leaving as soon as possible. Rubio announced his decision in a post on X as he was flying back to the United States from a Group of 7 foreign ministers meeting in Canada. In it, he accused Rasool of being a "race-baiting politician" who hates President Donald Trump. His post linked to a story by the conservative Breitbart news site about a talk Rasool gave earlier Friday in Johannesburg as part of a South African think tank's webinar. Rasool, speaking by video-

conference, talked about actions taken by the Trump administration in the context of a United States where white people soon would no longer be in the majority. It is highly unusual for the US to expel a foreign ambassador, although lower-ranking diplomats are more frequently targeted with persona non grata status. Rubio's decision was the latest Trump administration move targeting South Africa. Trump signed an executive order last month halting funding to the country. It criticized the Black-led South African government on multiple fronts, saying it is pursuing anti-white policies at home and supporting "bad actors" in the world like the Palestinian militant group Hamas and Iran. South African President Cyril Ramaphosa told reporters that Rasool would give him a report when he returned home. Ramaphosa said his government has "noted the displeasure that has been expressed by the United States," and particularly about Rasool's remarks, but stressed that he believed South Africa was in the process of rebuilding its relationship with the US. "This is a hiccup, a hiccup we are working on straightening out," he said. "We will engage with the United States of America in a formal way," Ramaphosa said. "We will do so with deep respect for them and for

President Trump as well. Our relationship with the United States is going to be put on an even keel, so I would like the people of South Africa not to have sleepless nights," Bruce said the United States expects a certain level of respect. "We've had a decent level of diplomacy with South Africa. There are some challenges, but you want people in each embassy who can actually facilitate a relationship," she told reporters. "And these remarks were unacceptable to the United States, not just to the president, but to every American." The Foreign Ministry spokesman said South Africa intended to raise questions with the US over Rubio seemingly announcing on social media that Rasool was no longer welcome in the US before informing him of the decision. Phiri said South Africa believed such matters should first be discussed through diplomatic channels. "But this is the reality that we also have to contend with with this administration. That it does seem as though Twitter (X) is the preferred mode of communication," the spokesman said in an interview on the South Africa Broadcasting Corporation. Bruce said the meeting with South African embassy staff was on Friday. Rubio's post went out at 4:42 p.m. on Friday.

# Russia plans to launch large-scale lithium production

MOSCOW (Reuters): Russia plans to produce at least 60,000 metric tons of lithium carbonate in 2030, the natural resources ministry said, as Moscow seeks to reduce its dependency on imports and boost production of high-capacity electric batteries. Lithium and other critical minerals, including rare earth metals, have gained global attention in recent months, as US President Donald Trump aimed to counter China's dominance in the sector by offering production deals to Ukraine and Russia. Lithium, a metal essential for electric vehicle production, is included on the list of 50 minerals deemed critical by the US Geological Survey. Russia reported having 3.5 million tons of lithium oxide reserves. The US Geological Survey estimated Russia's lithium reserves at about 1

million tons in 2024, the world's 14th largest. Lithium oxide has about one third of pure lithium and lithium carbonate contains about 20% of pure lithium. "Industrial lithium production in the country will begin in 2030," the ministry stated. President Vladimir Putin said last month that Russia should speed up its plans to mine lithium deposits. Demand for lithium has surged in recent years as Russian companies work on the mass production of lithium batteries and electric vehicles. "The country has traditionally imported lithium, and it is now crucial to launch facilities swiftly and increase the extraction and processing of this strategically important resource for the economy," the ministry added. The ministry said it had issued exploration licenses for three major lithium deposits: Kolmozerskoye and

Polmostundrovskoye in the Murmansk region in north-western Russia, and Tastygskoye in the Tuva region, which borders Mongolia. All three deposits and their adjacent production plants are expected to become operational by 2030, the ministry said. In 2023, Russia mined only 27 tons of lithium as a byproduct at an emerald deposit in the Ural Mountains. Kolmozerskoye, which contains one-quarter of Russia's known lithium reserves, is operated by Polar Lithium, a joint venture between Russian metals giant Nor Nickel and the state-owned nuclear energy firm Rosatom. The private firm Arctic Lithium holds a license for Polmostundrovskoye, while Elbrusmetall-Lithium, a subsidiary of the state defence and industrial conglomerate Rostech, holds a license for Tastygskoye.

# Iran to respond to Trump letter after scrutiny

DUBAI (Reuters): Iran will respond to US President Donald Trump's invitation to talks after proper scrutiny, the foreign ministry said, accusing Washington of not matching actions with words. Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and President Masoud Pezeshkian have rejected Trump's letter and public exhortations for nuclear talks as deceptive and bullying. But Foreign ministry spokesperson Esmaeil Baghaei said a diplomatic response was in the works. "So far, we have no reason to publicise (Trump's) letter... Our response to this letter will be done through appropriate channels after full scrutiny," Baghaei said. The Iranian spokesperson noted contradictory signals from Washington which was voicing readiness for talks while also applying new sanctions on Tehran's economy. "Diplomatic negotiations have etiquette in that each side must recognise the other's interests and, more importantly, believe in fulfilling their commitments," Baghaei added during a televised press conference. "The US does not respect that and uses the possibility of negotiations as a propaganda and political tool." In his first term, Trump withdrew the US from a 2015 deal between Iran and major powers that had placed strict limits on its nuclear activities in exchange for sanctions relief. After Trump pulled out in 2018 and re-imposed sanctions, Iran breached and far surpassed those limits in the development of its nuclear programme. Western powers accuse Iran of seeking nuclear weapons by enriching uranium up to 60% purity, above what they deem is justifiable for a civilian programme. Tehran says the development of its nuclear programme is for peaceful purposes and that it respects its commitments under international law.

# Colombia to decide which NATO fighter jets to buy

BOGOTA (Reuters): Colombia will decide within months from which NATO country it will purchase fighter jets, new Defense Minister Pedro Sanchez said, acknowledging that illegal armed groups have taken advantage of peace efforts to strengthen themselves militarily. Colombia has been looking to replace its fleet of more than 30-year-old Israeli Kfir planes for more than a decade and is considering US-made F-16s, Sweden's Gripen and France's Rafale, Sanchez said in an interview. "This is an issue of sovereignty. We cannot leave Colombia unprotected in this capacity," said Sanchez, a former air force general who left the military to take up his ministerial post. He would not say how much Colombia will spend on the planes or how many it will buy, but the government said in 2023 it had a \$3.65 billion budget to purchase some 16 planes. Armed groups like the National Liberation Army (ELN) rebels, re-armed members of the demobilized Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and the Clan del Golfo crime gang have strengthened militarily and expanded territorially amid peace efforts, including negotiations with the government of President Gustavo Petro, Sanchez said. Petro, the country's first leftist president, promised to end a six-decade-long conflict that has killed 450,000 people, but with less than 17 months left in office has yet to ink any accords.

Participation in peace talks does not oblige armed groups to stop illegal activities, but Sanchez said continued drug trafficking and illegal mining allowed the groups to increase their fighting power. "They betrayed the Colombian people, they increased their narco-criminal power and it's necessary to fight it," Sanchez said. A potential decision by the United States to cut or suspend military aid would negatively impact operations against "the cancer of drug trafficking," Sanchez said, including efforts to combat cocaine production.

# Ukraine and Russia have conditions that could affect a ceasefire

WASHINGTON, MOSCOW (AP): A ceasefire in Russia's 3-year-old war in Ukraine hinges on Moscow accepting the US proposal of a 30-day pause in fighting as a confidence-building measure for both sides to hammer out a longer-term peace plan. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has warned that Russian President Vladimir Putin will look to delay such a temporary truce with conditions meant to divert the peace process and lengthen the war. Ukraine, which faced pressure to accept the ceasefire after US President Donald Trump blocked military aid and intelligence sharing, expects that he will threaten more sanctions on Moscow to push Putin into accepting the terms. As he disclosed that he will talk to Putin on Tuesday, Trump said that land and power plants are part of the conversation around bringing the war to a close, a process he described as "dividing up certain assets." But beyond the temporary ceasefire, both sides seem unwilling to make large concessions to the other, and both have red lines that they insist cannot be crossed. When Putin launched its full-scale invasion on Feb. 24, 2022, he demanded that Ukraine renounce joining NATO, sharply cut its army, and protect Russian language and culture to keep the country in Moscow's orbit. Now, he also demands that Kyiv withdraw its forces from the four regions Moscow illegally annexed in September 2022 but never fully occupied - Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhzhia and Kherson. Russian officials also have said that any peace deal should involve releasing Russian assets that were frozen in the West and lifting other US and European Union sanctions. The Trump administration has proposed putting potential sanctions relief on the table.

Along with that, Putin has repeatedly emphasized the need to "remove the root causes of the crisis" - a reference to the Kremlin's demand to roll back a NATO military buildup near Russian borders that it describes as a major threat to its security. He also argues that Zelenskyy, whose term expired last year, lacks legitimacy to sign a peace deal. Kyiv maintains that elections are impossible to hold amid a war. Trump has echoed Putin's view, speaking of the need for Ukraine to hold an election. Russian officials also have declared that Moscow won't accept troops from any NATO members as peacekeepers to monitor a prospective truce. Facing setbacks along the 1,000-kilometer (620-mile) front, Ukraine has backed away from demanding that its state borders be returned to pre-2014 lines, because it does not have the military force capable of reaching that end. Ukraine is asking for a peace deal cemented with security guarantees from international allies that will ensure that Russia is never able to invade again. In lieu of NATO membership - a long-sought desire by Kyiv that appears to be nearly impossible without US backing - what those guarantees might look like is taking shape in parallel talks led by France and Britain. A "coalition of the willing" envisions European boots on the ground and a strong military response if Russia were to launch a new offensive. Zelenskyy has insisted the Ukrainian army be strengthened to withstand future Russian offensives, a costly endeavor that will require quick and consistent support from international allies. A stockpile of weapons, capable of doing serious damage to Russian assets, is another demand. Kyiv also wants to bolster its domestic arms industry to lessen its reliance on allies, a reality that has

set Ukrainian forces back throughout the war. Ukraine has key demands from Russia as well. Kyiv refuses to cede more territory to Moscow, including those in partially occupied regions. Also, Ukraine is seeking the return of children illegally deported to Russia and thousands of civilians detained in Russian prisons. Both sides have red lines that are mutually exclusive making negotiations extremely challenging. The US has said both sides must make concessions. The fate of one-fifth of Ukrainian land now under Russian control is likely to take center focus. For Moscow, the presence of NATO member states, as either peacekeepers or a reassurance force outside of the alliance framework, is a red line. But Moscow hasn't mentioned any specific concessions. For Ukraine, which is in a weaker position, the question of territory held by Russia that it does not have the military means to retake is central. For Kyiv, it is both a red line and a potential concession. Zelenskyy has said his country will never recognize the territory as Russian. But Ukrainian officials concede that, while officially this always will be Kyiv's position, the occupied territories are likely to remain under Russian control for some time. "Partners know our red lines - that we do not recognize the occupied territories as the territories of the Russian Federation, and we do not recognize them," Zelenskyy told journalists recently. "This is my political will as president. And this is the political will of our people. This is a violation of international law and the Constitution of Ukraine." Ukraine also rejects restrictions on the size and capabilities of its armed forces as well as limits on its ability to join international alliances such as NATO and the European Union.

# Starmer, Macron work 'hand in glove' amid revived UK-French ties

PARIS (AFP): Prime Minister Keir Starmer and President Emmanuel Macron teaming up to lead Europe's backing of Ukraine during Donald Trump's tumultuous second presidency highlights a warming British-Franco relationship, insiders and analysts say. Relations between the cross-Channel neighbours nosedived during acrimonious negotiations over Britain's departure from the European Union following a shock 2016 referendum result. Starmer came into office in July vowing his Labour party would "reset" Britain's relationship with European allies, an approach he has doubled down on since Donald Trump's White House return and subsequent upending of US foreign policy. "From before coming into government, Keir Starmer has prioritised building a strong relationship with President Macron," said a Downing Street source, speaking on condition of anonymity. "It's clear that they have a warm personal relationship and complementary skills. There is huge respect on both sides, which was built before the current epochal challenge and is now invaluable." That challenge was thrown into sharp relief last month when Trump brought Russian leader Vladimir Putin in from the diplomatic cold by unilaterally opening negotiations with Moscow to end its war in Ukraine. Starmer, 62, and Macron, 47, quickly joined forces seeking to ensure that any agreement to end the three-year conflict would respect Ukrainian and European security -- an objective they continue to pursue together. The pair have gathered European leaders and other allies to respective summits in Paris and London as they attempt to assemble a "coalition of the willing" -- countries prepared to protect any ceasefire. Starmer and Macron say they are prepared to deploy troops to Ukraine, backed by US support, to deter Putin from violating any truce. They are trying to convince other nations to do the same or help through different types of support, such as logistics and surveillance. Starmer convened the latest meeting of interested countries in a virtual gathering of around 25 leaders. The meeting came after Macron on Tuesday told military chiefs from across Europe and beyond to move "from concept to plan" and "define credible security guarantees" for Kyiv. "The teams are working hand in glove," the Downing Street source

told AFP. Britain and France are acting as key intermediaries between Ukraine and Trump's administration. Both countries' national security advisers, along with Germany's, met a top aide to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky in the Polish capital this week. Those talks came after the Ukrainian delegation returned from Saudi Arabia where it had endorsed an American proposal for a 30-day ceasefire. The E3 national security advisers were also in Washington to meet their US counterpart Mike Waltz. Relations across the English channel have long been up and down. Centuries of conflicts between the countries preceded the signing of the "Entente Cordiale" in 1904, a series of agreements that served as a basis for forging a closer relationship. Elysee sources say Starmer and Macron struck up a positive relationship immediately, which has intensified since Trump resumed the presidency. Today's bonhomie is a far cry from 2021 when then Tory premier Boris Johnson told Macron to "donnez-moi un break" (give me a break) and "prenez un grip" (get a grip) over French anger about the Aukus military pact between Britain, America and Australia. In

2022, then candidate to be prime minister Liz Truss said "the jury's out" when asked if she saw Macron as a friend or foe. "The British-Franco relationship is the strongest it has been for years," Mujtaba Rahman, managing director for Europe at political risk consultancy Eurasia Group, told AFP. "Both the political principals and their principals are in constant contact. As Europe's two pre-eminent nuclear and strategic powers, this is a very good thing." Despite bilateral ties being warm, tensions linger over Brexit, including over fishing rights in UK waters. And there remains competition between the two nations. (The relationship) becomes a lot more complicated in the context of the EU," Anand Menon, UK director of the Changing Europe think-tank told AFP. "There are still lingering issues." Paris remains wary of Britain's long ties to the United States, suspecting it is too dependant on Washington, and at the end of the day could choose to put their "special relationship" first. Patrick Chevallereau, a former defence attache at the French embassy in London, agrees. "There has indeed been significant progress (but) there is still room for improvement," he told AFP.

# Italy, Spain not ready to back EU plan to boost Ukraine military aid

BRUSSELS (Reuters): Italy and Spain made clear they were not ready to back a European Union proposal to pledge up to 40 billion euros (\$43.67 billion) in military aid for Ukraine this year, with each country contributing according to the size of its economy. The proposal by EU foreign policy chief Kaja Kallas could mean a doubling of EU military support for Ukraine in its war against Russia's invasion as the bloc and its members gave some 20 billion euros in 2024. EU officials say it is vital to keep backing Ukraine on the battlefield amid uncertainty over the future of US support under Donald Trump's administration, which has ended Russia's diplomatic isolation and is pressing both sides to negotiate. US President Trump said he would speak to Russian President Vladimir Putin on Tuesday about ending the war. After a

meeting of foreign ministers from the EU's 27 countries in Brussels, Kallas said her proposal had "broad political support" and discussions were now going into details. The proposal has strong backing from northern and eastern European countries, according to diplomats. But some southern European capitals have been more reticent, reflecting a division between those geographically closer to Russia that have given more aid to Ukraine and those further away that have given less, as a share of their economies. Estonia, Denmark and Lithuania lead the field in Europe, having given more than 2% of their GDP in aid to Kyiv between January 2022 and December 2024, according to the Kiel Institute for the World Economy think tank. Italy, Slovenia, Spain, Portugal, Greece and

Cyprus are among those to have given the least, having provided less than 0.5% of their GDP. Hungary, which has the EU's most Russia-friendly government, is bottom of the EU table. Speaking before the meeting, ministers from Italy and Spain - the EU's third and fourth biggest economies - said it was too early to take a definitive position on the proposal. France has also raised questions about the plan, diplomats say. Italian Foreign Minister Antonio Tajani said the proposal would have to be discussed in depth and in the light of forthcoming developments. "We are waiting for the Trump-Putin telephone call to see if there will be any steps forward in order to reach a ceasefire," he said, adding that Italy also had to find money to boost its own defence spending. "There is a lot of expenditure to be tackled," he said. Spanish Foreign

Minister Jose Manuel Albares said: "We'll see how the debate goes, but at this point there's no decision on it." Albares said Spain had already committed to providing 1 billion euros in military aid to Ukraine this year. He said Madrid had not had to "wait for the High Representative (Kallas) to make any proposal" to show Kyiv could rely on its support. During the ministers' discussion on Ukraine, Slovakia signalled it would not obstruct the plan but also would decline to contribute, according to three EU diplomats. Both Hungary and Slovakia do not provide military aid to Ukraine but EU officials say they should not be able to block the proposal as contributions would be voluntary. "We will not be dragged into this, nor will we let Hungarian taxpayers' money be used to finance arms supplies to Ukraine,"



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## China's unorthodox plan to boost economy

CHINA has unveiled a plan to boost economic growth by stimulating consumerism in the country. The plan has made provisions for increasing wages and income, of creating tourism hot spots in snow-bound regions.

The plan was announced by the General Office of Communist Party of China Central Committee and the Central Office of the State Council, the Cabinet. The details have not yet been revealed as to how much the wage increases would be, and how much would be spent on creating the tourism centres.

There is a mention of asking the companies to provide for annual leave and vacationing of the workers and their families. So, far China had been focused on export growth. Its economic growth over the decades had been predicated on exports and also savings. But the emphasis has completely shifted to consumption-based economic growth.

The government has been encouraged to harp on consumption after the rebound in the housing sector and in the stock markets due to policy stimulus ushered in September last. Guo Chunli, vice president of the Chinese Academy of Macroeconomic Research, said, "The upward trends have helped to stabilise asset prices, which is a crucial prerequisite for consumers to feel more secure about their financial situation and be more willing to spend."

It is interesting that the Chinese government and the Communist Party of China are nudging people to marry and have more children on the one hand, and also asking them to spend more money on travel and other things like investing in real estate once again. Both these initiatives are addressed to the domestic domain. This is to ensure that China spends enough in the country to boost economic growth, and that Chinese people marry to have children to keep the demographic balance needed to keep the economy in top gear.

External observers and critics of China are likely to argue that the new policy of consumerism-led economic growth would not be of much benefit to the struggling global economy if the Chinese do not travel abroad or they do not buy foreign goods and services. Spending in China and on Chinese goods and services will benefit China but it will not help the struggling world economy.

But this is not likely to happen. It is not certain that the Chinese will become globe-trotters as had the Japanese and South Koreans in the earlier decades. There is indeed a thriving Chinese middle class which buoys up the Chinese economy, but the middle class is not large enough or rich enough to become conspicuous consumers the way Americans, Europeans and Japanese have been.

China is the second biggest economy but it is not too rich for middle class Chinese spend on luxury living at home and abroad. Chinese companies cannot increase salaries and wages of its employees beyond a limit because otherwise the companies would not be able to keep their margin profits high enough.

The other option for China is to attract foreign tourists, and to do so it would have to open up many parts of the country including Tibet. Chinese authorities might hesitate to throw open the country because of security concerns. China hopes to meet its growth target of 5 per cent in 2025 through its consumption programme. As any advanced economy, China's growth rate will not be as rapid or as high as it had been in the last 40 years, when it clocked 10 per cent growth annually. Its growth rate could stabilise at the new normal of 5 per cent, though when Xi Jinping took over in 2013, it was assumed that 6 per cent growth would be the new normal for China.

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## Palestinians' lives blocked by checkpoints

Yossi Mekelberg

ONE of the most visible and disturbing symbols of the Israeli occupation of the West Bank, one that makes the hardships of the Palestinians living there even more unbearable, are the checkpoints. The long wait to cross them, or often to be turned back, hinders people from getting to work, from getting to a medical appointment on time, from seeing family and friends or from reaching school. But above all it creates a strong sense of humiliation.

If you are a Palestinian, regardless of age or gender, you are at the mercy of young soldiers, often teenagers, who, after hours of making you wait, can decide whether you can continue to your destination. You can stand there for hours on end exposed to the elements — in the scorching summer heat or the cold and muddy conditions of the winter — enduring this routine that is at least as much about grinding the local population into submission as it is about security.

To be fair, many soldiers see their time on checkpoint duty as the worst part of their service because they feel the mental burden that comes with these daily episodes of friction with the local population.

I recall a conversation with a young soldier who told me that the thought of the power asymmetry between himself, armed to the teeth, and the civilians whose fear he could see in their eyes while they presented their IDs and begged him to let them pass kept him awake at night. It made it even more difficult, he said, if they were frail or sick or on their way to receive medical treatment, sometimes even for a life-saving procedure, or if they were pregnant and on the way to give birth.

However, there are also those soldiers who abuse this position of power — and they are usually able to

do so with complete impunity. Above all, checkpoints represent the banal routine of an oppressive occupation that is a blight on the daily lives of ordinary people, as well as demonstrating the asymmetric power relations between the occupiers and the occupied.

Nearly a quarter of a century ago, three Jewish Jerusalemite women of conscience, after encountering a military checkpoint in the West Bank for the first time, founded a non-governmental organization and named it Machsom Watch (Checkpoint Watch). There are now 500 women activists who expose and document the ills of the occupation, but above all the mushrooming number of checkpoints and how they operate.

For instance, they recently reported that on the first Friday of Ramadan, people who braved the wet weather from across the West Bank to reach the infamous Qalandiya Checkpoint, in the faint hope of reaching Jerusalem for prayers, were all turned back. Worse, they described the experience as follows: "Unlike previous Ramadan Fridays, (on this day) no attempts were made to prettify toughness of heart, no holiday greetings from the ruler, no (relaxing of the rules) like humanitarian passage and/or lighter restrictions for women, children and the elderly. All people, rejected regardless of gender, age and state of health, no longer had the right to observe their faith and pray at their holy shrine."

In other words, not a semblance of pretense anymore that checkpoints are a necessary evil of Israel's security within the Green Line; instead, they are simply about control and treating the entire Palestinian population as the enemy.

The network of checkpoints, dozens of them permanent, others temporary,

was spread out all over the West Bank well before Oct. 7, 2023, and since then many more have been appearing suddenly and with no warning, immediately disrupting lives.

In early 2023, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs documented 645 physical obstacles in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, ranging from 49 checkpoints constantly staffed by Israeli forces or private security companies to other occasionally staffed roadblocks, earth mounds, road gates, road barriers and trenches.

This figure did not include the Israeli-controlled area of Hebron, where there are dozens more checkpoints and obstacles, many equipped with metal detectors, surveillance cameras and facial recognition technology, and with facilities for detention and interrogation. To ensure the security of about 1,000 ultra-extremist settlers, the movements of at least 30,000 Palestinians who live in the Israeli-controlled part of the city have been turned into a living hell. And all these restrictions and obstacles are for the benefit of those who declare that under no circumstances do they wish for peaceful coexistence between equals in this city.

This extreme situation epitomizes the broader phenomenon of limiting the freedom of movement of Palestinians in the West Bank and the situation has worsened since the Oct. 7 attacks. Almost 100 more obstacles have been erected since then. This is in addition to the 712 km-long separation barrier, which Israel began building in 2002 and is the single largest obstacle to the free movement of Palestinians, but not Israelis.

Admittedly, Israel began erecting this barrier during the Second Intifada, with the aim of containing terrorist attacks inside Israel, but this does not explain

why it was not built along the Green Line. Instead, about 85 per cent of the barrier's route winds through the West Bank, which is occupied by Israel, and restricts and disrupts the freedom of movement of Palestinians either permanently or irregularly. The original idea might have been security, but with the influence of the leaders of the settlements and their political allies, it has become more an instrument to further a future annexation.

By now, the enormous number of restrictions by checkpoints that prevent, for instance, farmers from cultivating their land and people from getting to work or to worship, let alone the danger of being arrested and even shot should they be suspected of not following the instructions of those guarding the checkpoints, suggests that the balance between security and oppression has long since tilted toward the latter.

When ambulances are treated at checkpoints like any other vehicle, as some evidence suggests, this is deliberately reckless and is simply about demonstrating who rules the roost in this land. For most Palestinians, this is their only engagement with Israelis and it leaves with them an extremely bad taste in their mouth. While the morality, or more accurately the immorality, of this situation does not need much elaboration, it leaves open the question: How do those who design and impose these policies think that they could possibly be serving Israel's interests?

After all, they only increase resentment, damage the economy and leave many Palestinians feeling humiliated.

But the messianic ultranationalists, in addition to satisfying their power trip, believe that all this expedites annexation and even transfer, leaving peace and reconciliation between the two peoples so much harder to achieve.

## Adapting higher education to tech revolution

Jin Li

CHINESE universities have developed at a rapid pace by leveraging the benefits of reform and opening-up. But today, when they face the dual challenge of keeping ahead of the global changes and coping with slowing economic growth, they need to deepen reforms to maintain their global status and help advance Chinese modernization.

If universities view reforms as a way to extend their academic reach or compete for resources, they could become less efficient. Therefore, they should focus on structural reforms to improve their quality and performance, and foster sustainable innovation.

For example, Fudan University has adjusted the structure of academic disciplines, with interdisciplinary majors accounting for 20 percent of its undergraduate admissions. In the next phase, it plans to focus new undergraduate enrollments on interdisciplinary fields, in order to promote innovation.

The university is enrolling more students in fields critical to national strategies and societal needs. It is focusing on pio-

neering future industries by consolidating its resources and establishing six innovation-oriented schools in fields such as integrated circuits, computing and intelligence, biomedical engineering, intelligent robotics and advanced manufacturing, intelligent materials and future energies, electronics and information and future space. This initiative is aimed at reshaping its engineering disciplines.

To boost its faculties' development, the university is focusing on talent development, especially nurturing young talents, ensuring teachers fulfill their responsibilities, reforming the evaluation and incentive systems, facilitating the orderly mobility of teachers, and enhancing support for basic research.

Furthermore, higher education reforms should be people-centric, creating a virtuous cycle of education, technology and talents. As universities cultivate talents to advance the cause of the nation, university reforms should be focused on the people.

To begin with, it is essential to cultivate individuals who think big,

because thinking big is not the exclusive domain of geniuses and authorities. Young students acquiring knowledge and skills should set goals: to promote human progress, explore the unknown, and contribute to the nation and its people.

Studies carried out by Fudan University's Institute of Higher Education and other universities in the country show that some students, even highly talented ones, are losing their interest in research and innovation, partly because the pressure of exams stifles their curiosity and creativity. That's why Fudan University advises both teachers and students to learn from their mistakes, fostering a robust system of innovation — and aims to cultivate more young talents who dream of finding solutions to the problems facing the country and the world.

There is also a need to cultivate individuals who are multitasked or have a broad perspective, because such individuals can independently build their knowledge framework and become innovators in interdisciplinary fields. In fact,

Fudan University is advancing "AI plus" reforms by including AI instruction in all its programs to cultivate versatile talents and innovators.

Recognizing that excessive dependence on AI may impede a student's creativity, the university provides guidance on mastering the guidance on mastering and transforming AI tools, with a focus on curbing the potential misuse of AI technologies.

Moreover, Fudan University offers students a course called the "path to national rejuvenation", which integrates various courses, and combines values with acquisition of knowledge and skills. This approach aims to strengthen students' resilience and boost their confidence.

With 2025 marking the 120th anniversary of its establishment, Fudan University pledges to continue deepening reforms, fostering innovation, and contributing more to the advancement of Chinese modernization. This year's Government Work Report has set clear requirements for deepening comprehensive reforms in higher education, making reforms in universities essential for advancing Chinese modernization.

## Pakistan's evolving national security: Challenges and imperatives

Muhammad Mohsin Iqbal

PAKISTAN'S national security has remained a dynamic concept, evolving with the passage of time in response to both internal and external challenges. In the modern world, a nation's security is no longer determined solely by its military strength but by the resilience of its institutions, economy, and society. The convening of another National Security meeting under the chairmanship of the Sardar Ayaz Sadiq, Speaker of the National Assembly reflects the gravity of the challenges Pakistan faces today. It is imperative that this session builds upon the insights and resolutions of previous meetings to formulate policies that secure Pakistan's survival in the current global scenario.

Over the years, Pakistan has sought to institutionalize its approach to national security. Several national security meetings have been convened at critical junctures in the country's history, shaping policies that have impacted its stability and growth. The establishment of the National Security Council under various governments was an effort to ensure a structured and comprehensive security policy.

The previous policies emphasized the importance of economic security alongside military preparedness, recognizing that economic stability forms the backbone of national resilience.

These were the product of extensive consultations with all stakeholders and marked a shift in Pakistan's approach, moving from a purely defense-oriented security framework to a broader, more inclusive strategy that encompassed human security and economic development.

Despite these measures, security threats have continued to evolve, requiring continuous adaptation. The recent resurgence of terrorism, particularly in Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, poses a grave challenge. The hijacking of the Jaffar Express and the tragic loss of innocent lives underscore the urgency of addressing insurgency with a renewed and strategic counterterrorism approach.

The persistence of groups such as the Baloch Liberation Army and the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan demonstrates the necessity of strengthening intelligence networks, deploying modern surveillance technologies, and enhancing inter-agency coordination to neutralize such threats before they materialize into devastating attacks.

Hybrid warfare, too, has emerged as a formidable challenge. Pakistan is increasingly being targeted by misinformation campaigns, cyber threats, and psychological operations aimed at weakening national institutions and sowing discord within the population.

The rise of social media as a battleground for perception management necessitates the development of a robust cybersecurity infrastructure. This meeting must address ways to counter misinformation, protect digital assets, and educate the public about hybrid threats that seek to destabilize the country from within.

Economic stability remains a fundamental pillar of national security. The depreciation of the rupee, inflation, and the ongoing energy crisis are not merely financial concerns but also national security imperatives. A weakened economy exposes the nation to external pressures and undermines its ability to maintain strategic independence. Aligning Pakistan's economic policies with long-term security objectives is essential.

Trade partnerships with key allies such as China, Saudi Arabia, and Gulf nations must be strengthened, while economic diplomacy should play a central role in reducing external dependencies. The expansion of industrial and technological sectors can further bolster economic security, reducing reliance on foreign aid and ensuring sustainable development.

Regional stability is another key concern. The situation in Afghanistan remains uncertain, with continued instability along

Pakistan's western border. Effective border management, increased intelligence sharing with regional allies, and diplomatic engagement with Afghanistan's leadership are essential to prevent the spillover of violence and extremism into Pakistan. Tensions with India, particularly over Kashmir, continue to shape Pakistan's security policies. While military preparedness remains crucial, diplomatic avenues must also be explored to prevent escalation and ensure that Pakistan's security interests are safeguarded through regional and international engagement.

Internal political stability plays a critical role in shaping national security. Political polarization and institutional conflicts weaken the state's ability to respond effectively to security threats. National security should be a non-partisan issue, where collective decision-making takes precedence over political rivalries.

Civil-military relations must be based on a model of cooperation, where national interest dictates strategy rather than individual or institutional ambitions. Parliament, security forces, and civil institutions must work in harmony to develop policies that ensure stability and progress.

The success of this national security meeting will depend on the adoption of clear, actionable strategies. A stronger and more empowered National Security Council should be institutionalized, ensuring that security decisions are made within a structured and permanent framework rather than on an ad hoc basis.

Counterterrorism measures must be intensified through better coordination among intelligence agencies and the deployment of modern surveillance technologies.

The revival of the National Counter Terrorism Authority can play a crucial role in consolidating efforts against insurgent threats.

Diplomatic engagement remains an essential tool in securing Pakistan's national interests.

Active participation in regional peace dialogues, improving relations with neighboring countries, and utilizing forums such as the Organization of Islamic Cooperation to advocate for Pakistan's security concerns can help build alliances that strengthen national resilience. Strengthening partnerships with China, Turkey, and Gulf nations while maintaining balanced relations with Western powers will ensure that Pakistan remains strategically positioned in an increasingly polarized global environment.

Public engagement and national unity are fundamental to long-term security. A strong and cohesive society acts as the first line of defense against internal and external threats. Promoting interfaith harmony, fostering national integration, and ensuring equitable development across provinces can address socio-economic disparities that often lead to unrest and extremism. Strengthening local governance structures will improve law enforcement, service delivery, and overall governance, reducing the space for elements that seek to exploit governance gaps.

The decisions made in today's national security meeting will have long-lasting implications. Pakistan stands at a critical crossroads where its survival depends on a well-coordinated approach that integrates military strength, economic resilience, political stability, and diplomatic foresight. National security can no longer be viewed in isolation from economic and social factors.

It is the combined strength of these elements that will determine Pakistan's ability to navigate the complexities of the modern world. The success of this meeting will be measured not just by the policies it proposes but by the commitment of all stakeholders to their effective implementation. If the resolutions of this session lead to decisive actions, Pakistan can emerge stronger, more secure, and better prepared for the challenges that lie ahead.



# Trump’s sudden U-turns create regional unease

**D**ONALD Trump’s flip-flops have confused both Palestinians and Iranians and stoked regional tensions during this month. On the one hand, Trump chose to threaten Hamas, which the US branded a terrorist organisation in 1997. He proclaimed a “last warning” to Hamas to release Israeli captives held in Gaza and/or suffer elimination. “I am sending Israel everything it needs to finish the job, not a single Hamas member will be safe if you don’t do as I say,” Trump posted on his social media platform.

To back up his bluster, Trump has restored delivery of 900-kilogramme bombs suspended during the Biden administration and pledged another \$12 billion in arms for delivery to Israel which had already received \$20.5 billion worth of arms under ex-President Joe Biden.

On the other hand, his outburst was preceded by and, perhaps, predicated on the revelation by Israeli columnist Barak Ravid in Axios that the US has been holding direct talks with Hamas in Qatar where negotiations have been mediated by Doha and Cairo. The US envoy for hostages Adam Bohler has been involved in lengthy meetings with Hamas which have focused on releasing captives and strengthening and extending the ceasefire.

Hamas officials have said that these talks could advance to Gaza’s post-war governance and reconstruction. Hamas supports the Egyptian plan, endorsed by the Arab and Islamic summits, for rebuilding devastated Gaza over five years under a non-partisan committee of Palestinian technocrats. This would require

Hamas to end its administration of the strip and for its militia to abide by the ceasefire. Neither Hamas nor the Trump administration regard direct talks as unprecedented. Instead, there is recognition that they are essential when trying to defuse conflicts. Hamas and other Palestinian factions, however, regard direct talks

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Mohamad Alasmar

Iran’s ultimate authority — responded by saying a “bullying govern-ment” — not mentioning the US by name — was not aimed at “solving problems” but imposing its agenda on Iran. He argued, Trump’s conditions “will be about defence capabilities, about international capabilities of the country.” The US “will urge

Iran’s ultimate authority — responded by saying a “bullying govern-ment” — not mentioning the US by name — was not aimed at “solving problems” but imposing its agenda on Iran. He argued, Trump’s conditions “will be about defence capabilities, about international capabilities of the country.” The US “will urge sides to unconditional compliance as soon as he took office. Trump’s sanctions and threats have undermined Iran’s moderate President Massoud Pezeshkian who campaigned in the June 2024 election to press for resuming negotiations. The conservative-dominated parliament has sacked Economy Minister Abolnaser Hemmati and forced the resignation of Vice President Mohammed Javad Zarif, both prominent reformists. This could not have happened without the approval of Khamenei. Pezeshkian responded to the rebuff by saying, “My position has been and will remain that I believe in negotiations [on the nuclear programme] but now we have to follow the parameters set by the supreme leader.” Just as US policy “parameters” are set by the erratic Trump. On the global scene, Trump has created chaos and consternation. He has proposed and postponed tariffs on imports from Canada and Mexico but has not dropped his call for Canada to become the 51st US state despite Canadian rejection. He has vowed to annex the Panama Canal and Denmark’s Greenland territory. He has distanced the US from NATO, prompting Britain and Europe to scramble to boost defence spending and he has called on Ukraine to make a disadvantageous peace with Russia. To save the US taxpayers’ money, Trump has also suspended 83 per cent of the funding for the US Agency for International Development USAID, depriving communities USAID directly helps and international agencies of funds for food and medicine for the world’s poorest communities.

leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, Trump offered to reopen talks on limiting Iran’s nuclear programme in exchange for lifting sanctions which have crippled Iran’s economy. However, this was coupled with talks on Iran’s ballistic missiles arsenal and regional activities and coincided with ratcheting up the US “maximalist sanctions” regime which is intended to bring to zero Iran’s oil sales, the government’s chief source of revenue. It is reported that US naval vessels could also hijack in international waters ships loaded with Iranian oil bound for customers. In a not-so-veiled threat of military action, Trump stated, “We have a situation with Iran that, something’s going to happen very soon. Very, very soon.” Khamenei — who is

Iran’s ultimate authority — responded by saying a “bullying govern-ment” — not mentioning the US by name — was not aimed at “solving problems” but imposing its agenda on Iran. He argued, Trump’s conditions “will be about defence capabilities, about international capabilities of the country.” The US “will urge sides to unconditional compliance as soon as he took office. Trump’s sanctions and threats have undermined Iran’s moderate President Massoud Pezeshkian who campaigned in the June 2024 election to press for resuming negotiations. The conservative-dominated parliament has sacked Economy Minister Abolnaser Hemmati and forced the resignation of Vice President Mohammed Javad Zarif, both prominent reformists. This could not have happened without the approval of Khamenei. Pezeshkian responded to the rebuff by saying, “My position has been and will remain that I believe in negotiations [on the nuclear programme] but now we have to follow the parameters set by the supreme leader.” Just as US policy “parameters” are set by the erratic Trump. On the global scene, Trump has created chaos and consternation. He has proposed and postponed tariffs on imports from Canada and Mexico but has not dropped his call for Canada to become the 51st US state despite Canadian rejection. He has vowed to annex the Panama Canal and Denmark’s Greenland territory. He has distanced the US from NATO, prompting Britain and Europe to scramble to boost defence spending and he has called on Ukraine to make a disadvantageous peace with Russia. To save the US taxpayers’ money, Trump has also suspended 83 per cent of the funding for the US Agency for International Development USAID, depriving communities USAID directly helps and international agencies of funds for food and medicine for the world’s poorest communities.

# A fateful moment looms as Trump’s team seeks to bypass the judiciary

Stephen Collinson

**T**HE most chilling aspect of a new White House claim of boundless executive power is not whether officials ignored a judge’s order to halt deportations of Venezuelan alleged gang members.

It’s that some senior Trump administration aides seem not to care if they did. There are even claims that some judges are simply too junior to question the actions of a president.

The furor caused by the administration’s peacetime use of wartime powers under the 18th-century Alien Enemies Act is the latest, and perhaps most overt, sign of President Donald Trump’s sense of omnipotence. He’s also betting voters will reward him for, in his view, keeping them safe with ruthless immigration enforcement rather than recoil from his challenges to the Constitution.

The growing showdown is so critical because the courts are one of the final checks on Trump’s power after he crushed opposition in the Republican Party and helped shut the Democratic Party out of any power in any branch of government in Washington.

The administration’s transformational willingness to test bedrock constitutional principles was laid bare in a stunning interview of senior White House adviser Stephen

Trump’s border czar Tom Homan, who expressed contempt for the notion that Trump’s border crackdown could be constrained. “We’re not stopping. I don’t care what the judges think. I don’t care what the left thinks. We’re coming,” Homan told Lawrence Jones of Fox News.

The idea that the White House would ignore what judges say threatens the most basic building blocks of constitutional government that every American kid learns in civics class.

The administration’s mindset infuriated the judge in the deportations case, who is investigating whether the White House ignored his orders Saturday to halt the deporting of expelled alleged gang members and return flights carrying them to the US.

The administration is arguing, among other things, that it didn’t violate Boasberg’s order from the weekend since his oral order from the bench said the government must turn around planes carrying individuals subject to Trump’s proclamation around, but his written order did not.

An exasperated Boasberg summarized the DOJ’s reasoning as: “‘We don’t care, we’ll do what we want.’”

Boasberg gave the DOJ’s lawyers until

revulsion of rule by an absolute monarch. “I have an Article II, where I have to the right to do whatever I want as president,” he said in July 2019, during his first term. Article II of the Constitution lays out the duties of the presidency — but it does not confer unfettered executive authority.

People don’t normally reach the heights of the West Wing without understanding the basics of history and American jurisprudence. So the comments by Miller and Homan seem to hint at a second-term corps of officials keen to fulfill Trump’s dreams of kingly might.

“Where it gets scary and this is what was so frightening about the interview is when he starts saying ‘I don’t care what the courts say — we have the right to do it anyway’ and he wouldn’t even commit to following even a Supreme Court order’ — that’s why we are so obviously in a constitutional crisis,” Brettschneider said.

The battle over the deportations to a notorious prison in El Salvador is only the latest sign that the administration plans to claim almost limitless presidential power on issue after issue two months into Trump’s jarring second term.

Trump is betting that his Republican allies will do nothing to rein him in, that his Democratic foes are

**Miller argued that since Trump was flexing his powers as commander in chief, the courts had no right to hold him to account, defying one of the tenets of American democracy upheld through the three branches of government. He said the Alien Enemies Act, which has a dubious historical legacy, was “written explicitly to give the president the authority to repel an alien invasion of the United States.” Miller added: “That is not something that a district court judge has any authority whatsoever to interfere with, to enjoin, to restrict, or to restrain in any way.” Putting aside the White House claim that the United States is subject to an invasion by Venezuelan gang members — which rests on questionable legal ground — a senior aide to the president is essentially arguing his boss has absolute power. “You can read the law yourself,” Miller said. “There’s not one clause in that law that makes it subject to judicial review, let alone district court review.” The President escalated his assault on the independent judiciary Tuesday, calling for the impeachment of Judge James Boasberg over his temporary halt to the deportations of alleged gang members. He called the judge “a troublemaker and agitator” on Truth Social and implied that his victory in the popular vote and all seven swing states in last year’s election granted him greater power to judge the legality of his own actions than a federal judge — in a misreading of Supreme Court precedent. ‘I don’t care’ Miller’s certitude was mirrored Monday by Trump’s border czar Tom Homan, who expressed contempt for the notion that Trump’s border crackdown could be constrained. “We’re not stopping. I don’t care what the judges think. I don’t care what the left thinks. We’re coming,” Homan told Lawrence Jones of Fox News. The idea that the White House would ignore what judges say threatens the most basic building blocks of constitutional government that every American kid learns in civics class. The administration’s mindset infuriated the judge in the deportations case, who is investigating whether the White House ignored his orders Saturday to halt the deportations of expelled alleged gang members and return flights carrying them to the US. The administration is arguing, among other things, that it didn’t violate Boasberg’s order from the weekend since his oral order from the bench said the government must turn around planes carrying individuals subject to Trump’s proclamation around, but his written order did not. An exasperated Boasberg summarized the DOJ’s reasoning as: “‘We don’t care, we’ll do what we want.’” Boasberg gave the DOJ’s lawyers until Tuesday to come up with data about the timing of the deportation flights that they refused to provide on Monday.**

Miller with CNN’s Kasie Hunt on Monday.

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“I don’t care” Miller’s certitude was mirrored Monday by Tuesday to come up with data about the timing of the deportation flights that they refused to provide on Monday.

“This is a showdown. This is akin to inter-branch March Madness,” former Federal Judge John E. Jones III told CNN’s Kaitlan Collins.

Constitutional experts said Miller’s argument clashed with the landmark Supreme Court case Marbury v. Madison, which established the high court’s authority by finding among other key principles that the actions of the executive branch are subject to judicial review.

“The whole point of Marbury v. Madison ... is that you go first to the district court for federal questions and questions of constitutional law, so he’s not understanding that,” said Corey Brettschneider, a Brown University professor and host of the podcast “The Oath and the Office.” “If you think that the Supreme Court can ultimately opine, then you think the district court can opine on these matters.”

CNN legal analyst Elliot Williams also narrowed in on Marbury v. Madison. “The Supreme Court rules in 1803 that (it) has the authority to review the actions of the executive and legislative branches of government. ... The president’s actions can be reviewed by a court — that is basic American history.” Williams went on: “The idea that somehow there’s a class of actions that cannot be reviewed is nonsense. Everybody who lived through the 2000s knows that the war on terror was litigated in the courts over and over.”

Trump has long advanced the belief that the presidency confers ultimate power, even though this conflicts with the principles of a nation built on

too weak to slow him and that procedural traditions in the courts can only rule on his disruption in retrospect.

“We are unafraid to double down, and to take responsibility and ownership of the serious decisions that are being made,” White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt said Monday. “The president was elected with an overwhelming mandate to launch the largest mass deportation campaign in American history, and that’s exactly what he is doing.”

Constitutional and legal fights can often feel remote to the more pressing daily concerns of citizens outside Washington — as Democrats found to their cost last year when they based at least part of their election campaign on the need to defend institutions that many Americans feel are not responding to their needs.

But the outcome of the migrant flights drama — and challenges to other far-reaching administration initiatives, such as the attempt to overturn birthright citizenship and Elon Musk’s evisceration of the federal government — will be critical to deciding how America will be led and what kind of country it will be for the next four years and possibly for years afterwards.

In a White House dominated by an all-powerful commander in chief, officials harbor a conception of the Constitution that most Americans would not recognize.

When Hunt raised the separation of powers in relation to the use of the Alien Enemies Act to deport migrants — apparently without due process — Miller replied: “Yes, separation of powers. This is the judiciary interfering in the executive function.”

# UK’s strategic balancing act as it seeks new partners

**I**N response to the Arab reconstruction plan for Gaza that was agreed at the extraordinary summit in Cairo this month, the UK joined its European allies in backing the initiative, which aims to rebuild the Strip in phases without displacing its Palestinian population.

In a joint statement, the foreign ministers of France, Germany, Italy and the UK welcomed the plan, emphasizing the need for Gaza to be governed temporarily by a committee of independent experts, with international peacekeepers ensuring security. Their message was clear: Hamas “must neither govern Gaza nor be a threat to Israel anymore” and the Palestinian Authority should take on a central role in governance, backed by a reform agenda.

The UK’s support for this initiative aligns with its long-standing humanitarian commitments. London has provided more than £819 million (\$1 billion) in bilateral aid to the West Bank and Gaza since 2009 and its contributions to UNRWA bring the total to £1.7 billion.

As London deepens its commitment to the Arab reconstruction plan, another urgent call is echoing from within: the need for the country to take a decisive lead on Palestinian rights. The Britain Palestine Project — a UK-based charity — has urged the government to step up, advocating for a more prominent role in addressing the conflict. With recent public opinion polls revealing widespread support for a foreign policy driven by humanitarian principles and international law, the group is pushing for the government to reflect these values in its

approach to Palestine.

However, the political implications of this position are far-reaching. Washington, under President Donald Trump, has firmly opposed the Arab reconstruction plan, favoring an alternative vision that seeks to reshape Gaza’s political and demographic landscape. By backing the Arab approach, the UK risks straining its relationship with a key ally.

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enhance trade between the UK and GCC countries by £8.6 billion to £15.8 billion by the same year. In December, the Department for Business and Trade confirmed the UK’s commitment to its free trade agreement negotiations program, with a target to deliver results by July. Negotiations with the GCC resumed in September and, since

new partners. One such important avenue is the Gulf Cooperation Council. The ongoing negotiations for a free trade agreement with the Gulf states are seen as a major economic opportunity, with the potential to boost bilateral trade by 16 per cent. According to the UK government, a deal with the GCC would lead to substantial economic benefits for the UK, both in the short and long term. In fact, an ambitious trade deal could contribute an additional £1.6 billion to £3.1 billion to the UK’s gross domestic product by 2035. Moreover, it could

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ment to intervene, stating the video was shared without her consent. The incident has cast a shadow over UK-Israel relations, raising concerns over diplomatic trust and protocol.

Following this diplomatic controversy and in light of the UK’s support of the Arab reconstruction plan, London is looking to expand its strategic alliances with



He also stressed the importance of bio-gas and electric vehicle (EV) projects in collaboration with Japan, reinforcing the two countries' commitment to technological innovation and clean energy solutions.

"Pakistan and Japan can explore new industrial opportunities together," said Haroon Akhtar. The discussions mark another step towards deepening Pakistan-Japan industrial relations, ensuring mutual growth and technological advancement in the region.

contrast, China dominates as the world's largest furniture producer and exporter, with furniture and parts exports reaching \$67.884 billion in 2024.

Shahbaz highlighted the potential for growth through collaboration. "In China, there are numerous opportunities for every kind of business, including furniture. Pakistan lacks advanced technology and machinery, but we have cheap labor and abundant wood resources. Here, we can learn new ways to improve our modernization and meet international standards in the furniture industry," he said.

He also noted the potential for Chinese investment in Pakistan. "We welcome Chinese machinery manufacturers to invest in Pakistan, teach us how to use advanced equipment, and improve our production processes. This collaboration could be a game-changer for Pakistan's furniture sector," he concluded.

top-tier property solutions.” Graana Property Festival 2025 promises an unmatched experience, featuring high-value property investments, expert-led discussions, and exclusive project unveilings. With Agency21 joining forces with Graana.com, attendees can look forward to a real estate event that sets new benchmarks for the industry.

build a national consensus on the necessity of Kalabagh Dam, saying that misinformation and political disagreements should not stand in the way of Pakistan's progress.

Addressing the issue of transboundary water challenges, they stressed the importance of ensuring fair water-sharing agreements with neighboring countries and strengthening diplomatic efforts under the Indus Waters Treaty to secure Pakistan's water rights.

Mian Abuzar Shad and Shahid Nazir Chaudhry urged the government and all stakeholders to act immediately, stating that Pakistan cannot afford further delays in water infrastructure projects. They emphasized that without Kalabagh Dam and the Cholistan Canal, the country's economic and agricultural stability will be severely compromised.

al \$30 billion, significantly improving the country's economic situation.

Dr. Shabbaz Ali Malik while addressing the gathering, stated that Africa could become an important trade partner for Pakistan. With rapid growth in African markets, Pakistan has a great potential to boost exports. He also mentioned the importance of attracting investment from African countries and initiating joint trade projects, which would be highly beneficial for Pakistan. The event was attended by local traders, doctors and prominent political and social figures from Tando Adam.

Amin Mengal reaffirmed that Punjab government is commitment to the safety and comfort of Chinese nationals, stating that China is Pakistan's longstanding strategic partner, and 'it is our utmost priority to provide a secure and hospitable environment for our Chinese friends.'

These amendments will not only strengthen security but also foster a more business-friendly ecosystem in our industrial zones.

PCJCCI Secretary General Salahuddin Hanif welcomed this initiative, and hoped that these measures will encourage further Chinese investment and reinforce the trust between the two nations.

The Government of Punjab remains dedicated to ensuring a robust security framework for foreign investors and professionals, underscoring its commitment to Pakistan's economic growth and international partnerships.

[illegible]

I lost my original passport #FZ1228071 in the name of Muhammad Salman Aamir S/o Alamzeb Aamir R/o 7 B Park road University Town Peshawar. If someone found please contact 03464455666

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**In brief****Bangladesh to tour Pakistan in May**

L A H O R E (Monitoring Desk): Bangladesh's cricket team will visit Pakistan in May for a white-ball series, featuring three T20Is and three ODIs. The series will take place after the conclusion of PSL Season 10. Last year, Bangladesh also toured Pakistan for a two-match Test series. Both Pakistan and Bangladesh cricket boards have mutually agreed to hold the series in May 2025.

**Two more matches decided in KHA hockey c'ship**

KARACHI (APP): Two more matches were decided in the KHA Ramadan Inter Club Hockey Championship at Olympian Hanif Khan & Dr Junaaid Ali Shah Sports Complex Gulshan Iqbal organized by the Karachi Hockey Association. In the second match of the tournament won by Dolphin Hockey club against Tiger Hockey Club by 5-0. Winning team scorers were Talha Furqan 1 (6th minute), Muzammil Hussain 1 (10th minute), Rashid Ali 1 (12th minute), Junaid Rasool 1 (22nd minute) and Muneeb Qamar 1 (28th minute). In the third match of the tournament Hanif Khan Hockey Club beat TNT Hockey Club by 9 - 0. Goal Scorers for winners were Imran 3 (3rd, 5th and 34th mints), Abdul Wahab 2 (14th and 23rd minutes), Iftikhar 1 (24th minute), Asim 1 (36th minute), Arsalan Khalid 1 (38th minute Penalty Corner) and Adyan (39th minute).

**England opposed to Saudi-backed T20 league**

M E L B O U R N E (Reuters): England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) chief executive Richard Gould said they would not support a proposed global Twenty20 league bankrolled by Saudi Arabia as there was not enough room in the calendar for it. A Sydney Morning Herald report on Saturday said the event would be backed by the sports arm of Saudi Arabia's sovereign wealth fund and feature eight teams playing in four different locations. "With the busy international calendar, a host of established franchise leagues around the world, and existing concerns about player workloads, there is no scope or demand for such an idea," Gould told the same newspaper. "It's not something that we would support." The ECB is keen to protect its own 100-ball format league, The Hundred, having raised \$1.27 billion last month after selling franchise stakes to private investors. The Indian Premier League remains the benchmark in franchise cricket, while Australia, Pakistan, West Indies, South Africa and the United Arab Emirates also have their own T20 leagues. The Australian Cricketers Association has backed the proposed league saying it was mandated to "pursue initiatives that benefit our members". "The ACA's early interest in exploring this concept is motivated by a desire to develop and normalise best-practice collective bargaining and an international gender-equity pay model for male and female cricketers," the player's union was quoted as saying in the report.

## Big-hitting New Zealand crush Pakistan by five wickets for 2-0 lead

DUNEDIN (AFP) : New Zealand's openers went on a six-hitting blitz on Tuesday to thrash Pakistan by five wickets and go 2-0 up in their Twenty20 series.

The home side reached 137-5 with 11 balls to spare in Dunedin to take control of the five-match series after Pakistan posted 135-9 off 15 overs in a rain-reduced second match.

New Zealand's highlight was a ferocious opening stand between Tim Seifert and Finn Allen in which seven of the first eight scoring shots were sixes.

Remarkably, Seifert played out a maiden off Shaheen Shah Afridi's opening over before Allen cleared the small University Oval boundary

three times in the second over, bowled by Mohammad Ali.

Seifert then smashed 26 off Afridi's second over, including four sixes.

Seifert, who top-scored with 44 in the nine-wicket win in Christchurch on Sunday, departed on 45 off 22 balls. Allen fell soon afterwards for 38 off 16, with the openers hammering five sixes each.

Four New Zealand wickets fell in the space of four overs midway through the chase before Mitch Hay's unbeaten 21 made the outcome safe.

Earlier, captain Salman Agha top-scored with 46 off 28 balls, launching a recovery after Pakistan were sent in and lost open-

er Hasan Nawaz without scoring for the second time in the series.

They were 19-2 in the fourth over before the skipper embarked on a knock that featured four fours and three sixes. Shadab Khan was aggressive in the middle order with 26 off 14 balls and Afridi was not-out 22 off 14.

Four New Zealand bowlers took two wickets, including seamer Ben Sears and all-rounder Jimmy Neesham, who were both recalled, in place of Tim Robinson and Kyle Jamieson.

New Zealand can wrap up the series if victorious in game three in Auckland on Friday.



DUNEDIN: Tim Seifert bashed a 22-ball 45 before falling.

## PSL's trophy 'Luminara' to be unveiled in Lodhran

**F.P. Report**

LODHRAN: The historic 10th edition trophy of HBL Pakistan Super League (PSL), "Luminara," will be unveiled in Lodhran tomorrow.

The trophy will be displayed at Amina Girls School and Tareen Cricket Academy for the unveiling ceremony.

Today, at the trophy reveal event in Multan, Multan Sultans' owner Ali Tareen was also present.

Crafted from solid silver sheets, the PSL trophy features an intricate arrangement of stones, meticulously placed using advanced machining techniques. Weighing 10 kilograms, it is adorned with 22,850 sparkling zircon stones, symbolizing the talent, passion, energy, and fierce competition of PSL.

The name "Luminara" symbolizes light, derived from the Latin word "Luminara," meaning "torch," while "Luminis" translates to "light."

The 10th edition of HBL PSL is set to take place from April 11 to



May 18 across four cities: Karachi, Lahore, Multan, and Rawalpindi.

Tomorrow, the PSL 10 trophy will be taken to Tareen Cricket Academy and Amina Girls School in Lodhran for its unveiling.

Earlier today, the tro-

phy was also taken to SOS Children's Village in Multan, where Ali Tareen was present. The children at SOS Children's Village had the opportunity to see the PSL trophy up close, taking pictures and selfies with both the trophy.

## People wait for defeat to criticise Pakistan team, avers Haris Rauf

KARACHI (Monitoring Desk): Pakistan fast bowler Haris Rauf said on Tuesday that the people were kept on waiting for defeat to criticise the Pakistan national cricket team.

Addressing a press conference following the Pakistan's defeat against New Zealand, Rauf stated, "The criticism becomes a matter of routine."

He rallied behind the fringe players, saying, "There is a dire need to provide complete opportunities to young cricketers."

Rauf vowed to learn from the mistakes after the Green Shirts got drubbed at the hands of New Zealand in the first two T20Is under the leadership of newly appointed captain Salman Ali Agha, who had just started off his T20I career.

The fast bowler claimed, 'One day our team will become the best again.'

Earlier, nine Pakistan players will practice at the Lahore City Cricket Association (LCCA) for the upcoming New Zealand ODI series.

According to details, Pakistan ODI captain Mohammad Rizwan, Babar Azam, Abdullah Shafique, Faheem Ashraf, Imamul Haq, Mohammad Wasim Jr, Naseem Shah, Akif Javed, and Tayyab Tahir will leave for New Zealand early in the morning on March 23. The Green Shirts will take on New Zealand in the white-ball series against the three-match ODI series, starting from March 29 to April 5.

Earlier, a dominant New Zealand side cruised to a five-wicket victory over Pakistan in a rain-shortened second T20I at the University Oval on Tuesday, extending their lead to 2-0 in the five-match series. The match was reduced to 15 overs per side due to persistent rain, but that did little to deter the hosts as they comfortably chased down Pakistan's 136-run target with 11 balls to spare.

## Djokovic player union launches legal blitz against governing bodies

PARIS (AFP): A tennis union co-founded by Novak Djokovic on Tuesday announced a series of legal actions aimed at the sport's governing bodies, alleging "anticompetitive restraints and abusive practices".

The Professional Tennis Players' Association (PTPA) said it was suing the Association of Tennis Professionals (ATP), Women's Tennis Association (WTA), International Tennis Federation (ITF), and International Tennis Integrity Agency (ITIA) in a series of actions in the United States, United Kingdom and the European Union.

The PTPA was set up by Djokovic and Canadian Vasek Pospisil in 2020. Some 20 players were named as part of at least one of the actions.

"The lawsuits expose systemic abuse, anti-competitive practices, and a blatant disregard for player welfare that have per-

sisted for decades," said the PTPA statement. "The ATP, WTA, ITF, and ITIA operate as a cartel by implementing a number of draconian, interlocking anticompetitive restraints and abusive practices."

"Tennis is broken," said Ahmad Nassar, Executive Director of the PTPA. "Behind the glamorous veneer that the defendants promote, players are trapped in an unfair system that exploits their talent, suppresses their earnings, and jeopardises their health and safety."

The statement listed alleged abuses they are targeting. It said the defendants "colluded", "fixing prize money and suppressing player earnings" forcing "an unsustainable schedule" and exploiting players financially.

The bodies show a "disregard for players" by making them "compete in 100-degree (Fahrenheit) heat, endure matches that ended at 3 AM, and play with dif-

ferent and injury-inducing tennis balls". The PTPA also cited image right ownership, sponsorship restrictions and the "draconian system of ranking points".

The statement also complained that tennis violates player "privacy rights".

"Players are subjected to invasive searches of personal devices, random middle-of-the-night drug tests, and interrogations without legal representation," it said. In addition to Djokovic and Pospisil, the seven-member PTPA executive council also includes players, Hubert Hurkacz, Ons Jabeur, Bethanie Mattek-Sands, Taylor Townsend and Sai Sai Zheng.

Australian Nick Kyrgios, France's Varvara Gracheva and American Reilly Opelka have joined the PTPA's case in the United States, while Frenchman Corentin Moutet and Japan's Taro Daniel have joined the case in the United Kingdom.

## BWF Level 1 coaching course launched in KP

**F.P. Report**

PESHAWAR: The Badminton World Federation (BWF) launched Level 1 Coaching Course for the first time in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa on Tuesday.

The inauguration ceremony was held at the Directorate General of Sports, Peshawar, where the Provincial Minister for Sports and Youth Affairs, Syed Fakhar Jehan, officially commenced the course.

The event was attended by Director General of Sports, Abdul Nasir Khan, and President of the Pakistan Badminton Federation, Wajid Ali Chaudhry, among other dignitaries.

This coaching program has been organized under the patronage of Provincial Sports Minister Syed Fakhar Jihan, in collaboration with the Directorate General of Sports Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and the Provincial Badminton Association.

International expert Sembenthan Sivaperumal from Badminton Asia, Malaysia, will be conducting the course, equip-

ping Pakistani coaches with modern badminton coaching techniques.

A total of 15 participants from across the country have been selected for this prestigious training, including top professionals from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Punjab, Pakistan Army, Pakistan Railways, Islamabad, and Pakistan WAPDA.

During his speech at the inaugural ceremony, Provincial Sports Minister Syed Fakhar Jihan expressed his gratitude to the visiting Badminton Asia official from Malaysia and the President of the Pakistan Badminton Federation for facilitating this course in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

He emphasized that this initiative will help local coaches enhance their skills with advanced training methodologies, ultimately benefiting badminton players in the province.

The minister further stated that the provincial government is committed to the promotion of all sports and is taking significant steps to support their development across the region.

## World No. 1 Sinner to play in Hamburg after doping ban ends

MUNICH (AFP): World number one Jannik Sinner will play the ATP tournament in Hamburg from May 18-24 after his doping ban ends in the build-up to the French Open, organisers confirmed Tuesday.

"For the first time in his career, Jannik Sinner will compete at the 2025 Hamburg Open," tournament organisers confirmed on social media.

The 23-year-old agreed to a three-month ban in February after admitting "partial responsibility" for team mistakes which led to him twice testing positive for traces of the banned anabolic steroid clostebol in March 2024.

The reigning US Open and Australian Open champion's suspension ends on May 4, allowing him to return in time for the French Open, the second Grand Slam event of the year.

The clay-court tournament in Hamburg will be Sinner's second event after his return as he will also compete on home soil at the Italian Open in Rome from May 7-18.

Sinner reached the French Open semi-finals last year. This year's tournament is scheduled to run from May 25 until June 8.

## Haider Ali eyes return in PSL 10

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistani batter Haider Ali has expressed optimism about his potential return to the 10th edition of Pakistan Super League (PSL).

The tournament is slated to take place from April 11 to May 18, with matches being held in four cities including Karachi, Lahore, Multan, and Rawalpindi.

Ali, who represents Islamabad United got injured during the Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) and was ruled out of the BPL Qualifier-2 in 2025. Ali, who made his first-class debut in September 2019, said his team has all the capability

to excel in the PSL. "We have talented players who can take the team to victory. Our players have the talent and ability to excel in the tournament," he told APP.

Ali, said he has recovered and will be going to the National Cricket Academy for rehabilitation and training. "I'm working hard and hope to return to the Pakistan Super League this year," he said. He also expressed his gratitude to fans for their support during his injury and vowed to repay them with strong performances in the upcoming PSL season.

Ali, who was named in Pakistan's squad for the

2019 ACC Emerging Teams Asia Cup in Bangladesh in November 2019, emphasized the importance of adapting to different game situations.

"Playing in leagues is different from playing international cricket. A player's performance depends on the game situation, and sometimes even the best players can have off days,"

It may be mentioned that Ali, made his T20I debut for Pakistan, against England, in September 2020 and scored 54 runs in his debut T20I match, becoming the first cricketer for Pakistan to score a fifty on a T20I debut.

## National T20 Cup: Karachi Whites and Multan secure wins

KARACHI (Monitoring Desk): Karachi Whites and Multan emerged victorious in their respective matches in the National T20 Cup on Tuesday, with standout performances from Saud Shakeel and Imam-ul-Haq.

At Gaddafi Stadium, Lahore, Karachi Whites defeated Lahore Blues by 37 runs. Batting first after losing the toss, Karachi Whites posted 171/5 in their 20 overs. Saud Shakeel led the charge with a brilliant 73-run knock, smashing 8 fours and 3 sixes.

In response, Lahore Blues struggled and were bowled out for 134 runs, despite Qasim Akram's 36-run effort. Star batter Babar Azam managed just 22 runs, hitting three boundaries. Arif Yaqoob was the pick of the bowlers, claiming 4 wickets for 23 runs. Saud Shakeel was named Player of the Match for his exceptional performance.

Meanwhile, at LCCA Ground, Lahore, Multan defeated Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) Region by 5 wickets. Batting first after winning the toss, AJK posted 164/8 in 20 overs, with Usman Maroof scoring 40 runs, including 4 sixes and 2 fours. Sharun Siraj and Muhammad Ismail starred with the ball, taking 3 wickets each, conceding 10 and 23 runs, respectively.

In reply, Multan chased down the target in 19 overs, losing 5 wickets. Imam-ul-Haq anchored the innings with a match-winning 79 off 10 fours and 2 sixes\*, guiding his team to victory.

## Messi out injured as Argentina seek to seal WC place

MONTEVIDEO (AFP/APP): Lionel Messi will miss Argentina's World Cup qualifiers this month after suffering a groin strain in Inter Miami's victory over Atlanta at the weekend, his club confirmed on Monday.

Messi was left out of Argentina's squad for the world champions' clash against Uruguay on Friday, which is followed by a showdown with Brazil on March 25. Inter Miami said in a statement that a

scan had revealed Messi suffered a "low-grade injury in the adductor muscle" in the 2-1 win on Sunday. The statement gave no timetable for Messi's return.

"His clinical progress and response to treatment will determine his availability for competition," Inter said. After missing three games for Inter earlier this month, the 37-year-old returned with a goal off the bench in a CONCACAF Champions Cup win. Argentina, the defending World Cup cham-

pions, can ensure qualification for next year's tournament in their next two games. They lead the 10-team South American qualifying group by five points ahead of the game with Uruguay in Montevideo.

The top six teams qualify directly for the World Cup in the United States, Mexico and Canada. The seventh-placed team is currently Bolivia with 13 points. After 12 rounds, Messi is the top scorer in the competition with six goals.

Argentina are also without injured Roma striker Paulo Dybala and River Plate full-back Paulo Montiel.

Brazil will be without 33-year-old Neymar, who has suffered a thigh injury and has had to postpone his return to the national team, who are fifth, seven points behind Argentina.

**Squad:** Goalkeepers: Emiliano Martinez (Aston Villa, ENG), Geronimo Rulli (Marseille, FRA), Walter Benitez (PSV Eindhoven, NED).

Defenders: Nahuel Molina (Atletico Madrid, ESP), Leonardo Balerdi (Marseille, FRA), Cristian Romero (Tottenham, ENG), Nicolas Otamendi (Benfica, POR), Nicolas Tagliafico (Lyon, FRA), Facundo Medina (Lens, FRA), Juan Foyth (Villarreal, ESP), German Pezzella (River Plate),

Midfielders: Leandro Paredes (Roma, ITA), Alexis Mac Allister (Liverpool, ENG), Rodrigo De Paul (Atletico Madrid, ESP), Exequiel Palacios (Bayer

Leverkusen, GER), Maximo Perrone (Como, ITA), Enzo Fernandez (Chelsea, ENG), Giuliano Simeone (Atletico Madrid, ESP), Benjamin Dominguez (Bologne, ITA), Thiago Almada (Lyon, FRA)

Forwards: Lautaro Martinez (Inter Milan, ITA), Julian Alvarez (Atletico Madrid, ESP), Angel Correa (Atletico Madrid, ESP), Nicolas Paz (Como, ITA), Santiago Castro (Bologna, ITA), Nicolas Gonzalez (Juventus, ITA).





## In brief

### IRSA releases 72,139 cusecs water

ISLAMABAD (APP): Indus River System Authority (IRSA) on Tuesday released 72,139 cusecs of water from various rim stations with inflow of 70,397 cusecs. According to the data released by IRSA, the water level in River Indus at Tarbela Dam was 1402.9 feet and was 0.9 feet higher than its dead level of 1402 feet. Water inflow and outflow in the dam were recorded as 18,400 cusecs and 20,000 cusecs, respectively. The water level in River Jhelum at Mangla Dam was 1050 feet, which was at its dead level of 1050 feet. The inflow and outflow of water were recorded as 26,056 cusecs and 26,198 cusecs, respectively. The release of water at Kalabagh, Taunsa, Guddu, and Sukkur was recorded as 14,454, 26,430, 17,984, and 6280 cusecs, respectively. Similarly, from River Kabul, a total of 10,800 cusecs of water were released at Nowshera.

### Police nab 9 criminals

RAWALPINDI (APP): The Rawalpindi Police continued operations against criminal elements and caught nine accused including drug dealers, illegal arms owners, liquor sellers and others. According to the police spokesman, Wah Sadder Police arrested accused Sharif with 1.6 kilograms charas, while the Ratta Amral and Waris Police held accused Taqir and Suleman respectively recovering 700 grams and 580 grams of the contraband item. Similarly, the Civil Lines Police recovered 520 grams charas. Likewise, the Cantt and Gujar Khan Police netted two accused Shahzad and Saeed recovering a 30-bore pistol each from them, while accused Ikram was nabbed by the Bani Police arrested with 5 litres of liquor. Meanwhile, the Sadder Baroni Police arrested two accused Noor-ur-Rehman and Zeeshan for decanting of liquefied petroleum gas.

### 2 killed in rival groups clash

RAWALPINDI (APP): Two persons were killed in a clash between two rival groups in the limits of Gujar Khan Police Station on Tuesday. According to the Rawalpindi Police spokesman, the two groups, who had an old enmity, started firing on one another. Resultantly, Rafiq and Qadeer, belonging to the rival sides, perished. The bodies were shifted to the hospital, while the police cordoned off the crime scene for collecting evidence. According to the initial investigation, the incident was a result of previous enmity. Meanwhile, City Police Officer Syed Khalid Hamdani took notice of the incident and sought a report from Superintendent of Police Sadder Muhammad Nabeel Khokhar directing immediate arrest of the accused.

### 2 bike-lifters gangs busted

RAWALPINDI (APP): The Rawalpindi Police on Tuesday busted two gangs of bike lifters and recovered five stolen motorcycles from their possession. According to the police spokesman, the City Police held three suspects Shahzad Ahmed and Asghar Ali involved in bike lifting in their jurisdiction. Four motorcycles were recovered from them. Likewise, the Pirwaddha Police also nabbed a two-member gang involved in robbery and motorcycle theft. The arrested accused included Rizwanullah and Shahab. Besides Rs 20,000 snatched from citizens, a stolen motorcycle was also recovered from them.



ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Maritime Affairs Muhammad Junaid Anwar Chaudhry meets Ms. Romina Khurshid Alam to discuss maritime and climate initiatives. —APP Photo

## Abbasi urges adoption of modern safety technologies in Railways

ISLAMABAD (APP): Federal Minister for Railways Hanif Abbasi on Tuesday directed railway authorities to adopt modern safety technologies and enhance emergency preparedness to ensure passenger safety at all times.

He chaired a high-level meeting at the Ministry of Railways, attended by key stakeholders, to review Pakistan Railways' operations and discuss future strategies.

During the meeting, the Minister stressed that the safety and security of passengers must remain the top priority in railway operations. He took a detailed briefing on train schedules, passenger services, technical operations, and safety protocols.

Hanif Abbasi emphasized the need to maintain

punctuality in train arrivals and departures and called for collective efforts to ensure efficient and timely services.

He also directed railway officials to strengthen security at railway stations and on board trains to prevent any untoward incidents. Upgrading infrastructure, including tracks, stations, and rolling stock, was also highlighted as a key focus area.

The Minister said that introducing modern, comfortable trains would encourage more people to use Pakistan Railways as their preferred mode of travel.

Hanif Abbasi stressed the importance of customer service, urging staff to be professional, courteous, and helpful when dealing with passengers. He called

for better communication with travelers, ensuring they were informed in advance about train timings, delays, and service interruptions.

He also highlighted Pakistan Railways' economic potential, encouraging officials to explore new revenue streams through private-sector partnerships, improved freight services, and tourism development.

The Minister said that Pakistan Railways could play a vital role in economic growth and social development due to its extensive network and rich history.

Hanif Abbasi called for a renewed commitment from all stakeholders to transform Pakistan Railways into a modern, efficient, and reliable transport system that meets the needs of the people.

### ANF arrests 7 smugglers with 125 kg drugs worth Rs 28m

RAWALPINDI (APP): The Anti-Narcotics Force during five operations in various cities on Tuesday arrested seven drug smugglers, including an Afghan national, recovering over 125 kilograms of drugs worth about Rs 28 million.

According to an ANF spokesman, in the first operation, four accused were held after 3.5 kg of heroin was recovered from their vehicle near Turkish Toll Plaza Sohawa.

In the second operation, the ANF personnel held an Afghan national when 30 kg opium and 6 kg charas were recovered from a Suzuki pickup near Sahianwala Motorway Interchange. Similarly in the third operation, about 1.8 kg of opium was recovered from a vehicle on Pasrur Road near Sialkot, with one suspect taken into custody.

Likewise in another operation near Yaro Chowk, Pishin, an accused was nabbed on the recovery of 12 kg charas from a rickshaw. The ANF recovered 72 kg charas from a vehicle near Jamil Chowk on Ring Road, Peshawar. The spokesman said cases were registered against the arrested suspects under the Narcotics Control Act.

### MNA Malik Abrar meets RPO Alpa

RAWALPINDI (APP): Member of the National Assembly Malik Abrar Ahmed on Tuesday met Regional Police Officer Rawalpindi Babar Sarfraz Alpa, a police spokesman said. During the meeting, MNA Malik Abrar discussed matters related to his constituency and mutual interest, including the steps taken to further improve public service delivery according to the vision of the Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz.

RPO Alpa informed the MNA that the Rawalpindi Police as per the Punjab CM's vision were fighting against criminal elements. The fight against corruption was also underway under an effective strategy, while steps were being taken for the best public service delivery in the Rawalpindi region, he added.

On a daily basis, he said, the regional office was organizing Khuli Kachehris at various places in all districts of the Rawalpindi region to ensure the provision of justice to the public at their doorsteps. The quality of police investigation was being further improved with the use of modern technology, while actions were being taken against criminal elements under an effective strategy, the RPO added.

### Woman murder case PO nabbed

RAWALPINDI (APP): The New Town Police on Tuesday arrested a proclaimed offender wanted in the murder case of a woman. According to the Rawalpindi Police spokesman, the accused Shamoan Liaquat had killed a married woman over a personal grudge in October 2024 and had been absconding since then. The New Town Police registered the case of the incident and used all means.

## Junaid Chaudhry, Romina Khurshid discuss maritime affairs

ISLAMABAD (APP): Federal Minister for Maritime Affairs, Muhammad Junaid Anwar Chaudhry on Tuesday held a meeting with Coordinator to Prime Minister on Climate Change Romina Khurshid Alam at Kohsar Block, Ministry of Maritime Affairs.

Romina Khurshid Alam congratulated Muhammad Junaid Anwar Chaudhry on assuming his new portfolio and expressed confidence in his leadership to advance the maritime sector with sustainable and climate-resilient policies, said a press release.

During the meeting, both dignitaries discussed key areas of collaboration between the Ministry of Maritime Affairs and the Climate Change Division, focusing on environmental sustainability in Pakistan's

maritime sector. They emphasized the importance of green initiatives, coastal ecosystem preservation, and climate adaptation strategies for ports and fisheries.

The minister reaffirmed his commitment for integrating climate-friendly policies into maritime affairs. He highlighted ongoing initiatives such as the promotion of sustainable blue economy practices, mangrove conservation projects, and efforts to reduce marine pollution. He also stressed the need for technological advancements in port operations to minimize carbon emissions.

Romina Khurshid Alam acknowledged the ministry's efforts and assured full cooperation in implementing eco-friendly policies to mitigate the impact of cli-

mate change on Pakistan's coastal regions. She reiterated the government's resolve to enhance climate resilience in all sectors, including maritime affairs, to ensure sustainable economic growth.

Both officials agreed to strengthen inter-ministerial coordination for the development of policies that align with Pakistan's international climate commitments. They also discussed joint initiatives in marine biodiversity conservation, plastic waste reduction in coastal areas, and the promotion of clean energy solutions in port operations.

The meeting concluded with a mutual commitment for advancing climate-resilient maritime policies and fostering sustainable development in Pakistan's coastal and maritime sectors.

## Pakistan, Turkmenistan discuss strengthening energy cooperation

ISLAMABAD (APP): Federal Minister for Petroleum Ali Pervaiz Malik and Turkmenistan's Ambassador to Pakistan, Atadjan Movlamov, on Tuesday discussed ways to strengthen bilateral ties and expand energy cooperation.

During a meeting, the Ambassador congratulated Ali Pervaiz Malik on his recent appointment and expressed confidence in his leadership to steer Pakistan's energy sector towards sustainable development.

According to a press release, the ambassador highlighted the strong and long-standing relations between the two countries, particularly in the energy sector.

Minister Ali Pervaiz Malik said Pakistan and Turkmenistan share a history of cultural and economic cooperation based on mutual respect and a shared vision for regional prosperity.

He also outlined Pakistan's efforts to upgrade its energy infrastructure and attract foreign

investment in the sector. The minister expressed Pakistan's keen interest in exploring new opportunities for collaboration with Turkmenistan, especially in the energy domain.

He also extended his best wishes for the International Conference on International Year of Peace and Trust: Role of Inter-regional Economic Cooperation in Ensuring Sustainable Development, scheduled to be held in Ashgabat tomorrow.

## Iranian envoy visits NBF

ISLAMABAD (APP): As part of efforts to strengthen cultural ties, Dr Mehdi Taheri, Cultural Attaché at the Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran, visited the National Book Foundation's headquarters on Tuesday to discuss potential collaborations.

He was warmly welcomed by Managing Director of NBF Dr Kamran Jahangir who briefed him on the foundation's mandate and its pivotal role in promoting book culture across Pakistan.

During the visit, Dr Kamran Jahangir highlighted that NBF operated 21 book outlets nationwide to

facilitate book access and encourage reading habits.

Secretary of NBF Murad Ali Mohmand provided insights into NBF's diverse publications and the Book Museum, emphasizing its commitment to literary preservation and knowledge dissemination. A key discussion point was the proposal to establish an 'Iran Corner' at NBF Headquarters, dedicated to showcasing Iranian literature and culture.

The mutual translation of Persian and Urdu literary works was also deliberated, recognizing the significance of cultural exchange and strengthening literary ties

between the two nations. Dr Mehdi Taheri expressed his gratitude to Dr Kamran Jahangir for an insightful tour of NBF facilities, including the Indonesian Corner, Bookshop, and Wall of Honour.

Both sides reaffirmed their commitment to collaborating in book publishing, translation, and the dissemination of rich literature in Pakistan and Iran. The visit concluded on a note of mutual appreciation, with both parties looking forward to strengthening literary and cultural relations between Pakistan and Iran through joint initiatives.

## Pakistan's tourism industry set to generate \$4bln revenue

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan's travel and tourism sector is expected to generate over \$4 billion in revenue by 2025, as per the latest research report of Statista on Pakistan's Travel and Tourism industry. The industry is set to grow at an annual rate of 6.75% from 2025 to 2029, potentially reaching a market volume of \$5.53 billion by the end of 2029.

Managing Director of Pakistan Tourism Development Corporation (PTDC) Aftab ur Rehman Rana informed that this growth is being driven by both domestic and international travelers exploring the country's vibrant cultural heritage and natural won-

ders, said a press release on Tuesday.

He informed that the domestic tourism is a major driving force behind the growth of Pakistan's travel sector. More and more Pakistanis are opting to explore their own country, urged by improved infrastructure, higher disposable incomes, and a growing sense of national pride. Additionally, the role of social media and online booking platforms has made planning trips more convenient and accessible.

He also highlighted the macroeconomic factors, such as government initiatives, infrastructure improvements, increase in private sector investment in hotel

industry, better visa facilitation, improved marketing and promotion in international markets and the expansion of international flight routes, which are also contributing to the rise of Pakistan's tourism industry.

He said, Interest in visiting Pakistan is soaring, with the BBC, CNN and Financial Times all recently naming the region as one of the must visit destinations for 2025. He added that enhanced security measures and improved direct flight connectivity can further help in boosting the confidence of international visitor and making Pakistan a more appealing destination for both domestic and international visitors.

## Rifaat Hussain's legacy to inspire generations of scholars



ISLAMABAD (APP): Eminent speakers at a condolence reference hosted by the Institute of Regional Studies, (IRS) to honour Professor Syed Rifaat Hussain stated that the indelible legacy of the distinguished scholar, academic, diplomat and journalist, who passed away recently will live on to inspire the youth of Pakistan.

Speaking on the occasion, Senator Mushahid Hussain Syed, lauded the diplomatic skills and journalistic prowess of Rifaat Hussain in projecting Pakistan's narrative during challenging times, said a press release.

Amb Jalil Abbas Jilani, former Foreign Minister of Pakistan, highlighted Dr. Hussain's pivotal role in shaping generations of young minds and commended his contribution towards

building NUST and IRS as centres of excellence in his capacity as the Dean and Member BOG respectively.

Highlighting the illustrious academic career and exemplary devotion of the deceased academic, Amb Jauhar Saleem, President IRS, underscored that the nation needed more intellectual icons like Prof. Rifaat Hussain to keep inspiring future generations of students. He also called for celebrating the lives of such self-effacing heroes who serve the cause of nation-building selflessly and honestly.

Amb Ashraf Jehangir Qazi, former Amb to the United States, China and India, lauded Dr. Hussain as an exceptional professor and researcher, who left an indelible intellectual legacy in multiple disciplines.

Amb Zamir Akram, for-

mer permanent representative of Pakistan to the UN, emphasized that Dr. Rifaat Hussain's services to the nation during difficult times would always be remembered. Amb Sohail Mehmood, DG ISSI, noted that he lived a full life, building exceptional academic expertise upon unwavering dedication and integrity.

Prof. Nazir Hussain, former Dean of Social Sciences at QAU, read a condolence letter from the Regional Centre for Strategic Studies (RCSS) Sri Lanka, highlighting Prof. Rifaat's pivotal contribution as Executive Director RCSS.

The memorial was attended by a large number of diplomats, intelligentsia, academics, journalists, researchers, and students keen to pay tribute to an exceptional academic.



ISLAMABAD: Denmark's Ambassador met with Federal Health Minister Mustafa Kamal to discuss bilateral cooperation in the health sector and matters of mutual interest. —APP Photo



Salaries to be paid this week

KABUL (Pajhwok): MoF has scotched rumours that government employees' salaries have been reduced pay norms changed, assuring all public servants of payments as usual. Some news outlets released reports claiming the salaries of government servants had been slashed. The MoF wrote on its X handle on Tuesday: "The lists and rumors circulating in media and on social platforms regarding changes in salary norms for the IE's institutions are entirely baseless."

Afghan team wins medals

SCHLESWIG, Germany (Amu TV): Afghan refugee athletes secured three gold medals and one bronze at a national weightlifting competition held in the northern German city of Schleswig. The tournament featured competitors from various countries, with Afghan refugee lifters making a strong showing. Hoshang Seddiquian won gold in the under-120 kg category, while Omid Khan Habib and Ahmad A'zami each claimed gold in the under-74 kg category.

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

270 km of roads built in Kabul in 3 years

KABUL (TOLOnews): The Kabul Municipality said that over the past three years, more than 270 kilometers of roads have been constructed in various parts of the capital. Nematullah Barakzai, a representative of the Kabul Municipality, also stated that work is currently underway on 82 other road construction projects in Kabul. "In about three years, Kabul Municipality has built approximately 270 kilometers of new roads in Kabul, and our goal is to provide better quality services to our dear citizens," Barakzai said. Meanwhile, some residents of the capital have praised the renovation and reconstruction of roads, considering it an effective step toward progress. Hamid, a resident of Kabul, told TOLOnews: "We are very happy. It is good that roads are being built, and we are hopeful for the country's progress." "In any country where infrastructure is developed,

Hedayatullah meets Chinese ambassador



KABUL (BNA): Mullah Hedayatullah Badri, the Acting Minister of Mines and Petroleum, held a meeting with Zhao Xing the Chinese ambassador to Afghanistan, focusing on enhancing investment opportunities in the country's mineral resources. In a statement released by the ministry, Badri underscored the enduring political and economic ties between China and Afghanistan. He expressed a strong commitment from both nations to bolster these relations and create a more favorable environment for foreign investors in Afghanistan's burgeoning mineral sector. The Chinese ambassador acknowledged the deep and friendly relations shared between the two countries, emphasizing the importance of their partnership. The discussions also

Taliban ban women's voices on Kandahar media

KANDAHAR (Amu TV): The Taliban's Directorate of Information and Culture in Kandahar has issued a new directive banning the broadcast of women's voices on radio stations and mandating the use of honorific titles when referring to the Taliban's supreme leader, according to the Afghanistan Journalists Center (AFJC). The directive, which was reportedly sent in writing to media outlets, outlines four new restrictions for local radio stations in Kandahar. According to the directive, all broadcasts must refer to Taliban leader Hibatullah Akhundzada as "His Excellency, Amir al-Mu'minin, May God Protect Him" and use "Islamic Emirate" when mentioning the Taliban administration. The broadcast of women's voices is strictly prohibited, including in entertainment programs and commercial advertisements, the directive says. It also says that advertising medications, cosmetic products, and health clinics is banned without prior approval from the provincial health directorate. According to the AFJC, there are no local television networks currently operating in Kandahar. The provincial branch of National Television, which was shut down last year following a ban on broadcast images of living beings, has since been converted into a radio station. The province currently has 11 private radio stations, including Sangal, Zama, Waranga, Tabassum, Zewar, Millat Zhagh, Hewad Zhagh, Sama, Taleem al-Quran, Tahseen al-Quran, and Ehsas Zhagh. The AFJC condemned the latest restrictions as a blatant escalation in the Taliban's suppression of independent media, warning that such censorship is severely threatening the survival of local media outlets, many of which are already struggling financially. The organization also urged the Taliban to consider the psychological impact of silencing free expression, warning that their unprecedented crackdown on press freedoms will have serious consequences for Afghanistan's society.

IEA flays Israeli attacks on Gaza: MoFA

KABUL (Ariana News): The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Emirate has strongly condemned Israel's attacks on the Gaza Strip, stating that the resumption of attacks by the "occupying regime" is against international human rights laws and also in conflict with fundamental human values. In a statement, the Ministry once again called on the world, especially influential countries, to declare their strong support for the "oppressed" Palestinian people and take practical and serious measures to end the occupation. "The Islamic Emirate continues to regard the issue of Palestine as a fundamental and common issue within the Islamic Ummah and considers their just struggle and legitimate resistance as a fixed right, offering its support," the statement read. As a result of Israeli airstrikes on the Gaza Strip on Tuesday at least 200 people, including women and children, were killed.

Japan donates \$2.5m million to support Afghanistan

KABUL (Khaama Press): UNICEF has announced that Japan's government has donated \$2.5 million in aid to support vulnerable Afghan children in response to natural disasters. This funding will assist in providing essential services to vulnerable children affected by ongoing crises. This funding, as stated in a UNICEF press release on Monday, March 17, will focus on helping those affected by emergencies, especially children, who are among the most vulnerable populations in Afghanistan. UNICEF emphasized that millions of Afghans, particularly children, lack access to clean drinking water, which has contributed to widespread outbreaks of waterborne diseases such as diarrhea. The aid will also enhance public awareness programs aimed at preventing diseases, improving access to healthcare, and supporting educational efforts around health and hygiene in Afghanistan. Furthermore, the project will focus on providing services to at-risk children and women, especially those vulnerable to exploitation and abuse, addressing critical needs within the community. Japan has previously contributed to similar initiatives, providing healthcare services and other forms of aid aimed at improving the lives of Afghan children and their families. This collaboration between Japan and UNICEF demonstrates a continued international commitment to humanitarian relief in Afghanistan, reinforcing the importance of global partnerships in addressing the crisis.

IEA to UN: Help lift curbs, unfreeze Afghan assets

KABUL (Pajhwok): The caretaker government has called on the UN mission to work strengthen Afghanistan's ties with the world body and other countries. The call comes hard on the heels of the UN Security Council unanimously extending the mandate of the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) for another year. Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (IEA) spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid wrote on his X handle UNAMA should accurately reflect Afghanistan's progress in security, economic and social domains. He said: "We urge UNAMA to focus on strengthening relations between Afghanistan, the UN and other countries and to correctly portray Afghanistan's security, economic and social advancements."



He added that the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) should advocate for the global rights of the Afghan people, including the removal of unnecessary sanctions, the unfreezing of Afghan assets, and the handover of Afghanistan's seat at the UN to the Islamic Emirate. He wrote: "Additionally, they should refrain from creating unnecessary concerns as in the past, avoid using isolated issues to spread propaganda against Afghanistan and not become a tool in the hands of hostile groups."

WHO-supported facilities in Afghanistan risk shutdown by June

KABUL (Ariana News): The World Health Organization (WHO) in Afghanistan is deeply concerned that funding shortages could force the closure of 80 percent of WHO-supported essential health care services across the country. Millions of people, including vulnerable populations such as women, children, the elderly, the displaced and returnees, will be left without access to critical medical care, the organization said in a statement. As of 4 March 2025, 167 health facilities had shut down due to funding shortages, cutting off lifesaving medical care to 1.6 million people across 25 provinces. WHO warned that without urgent intervention,

another 220 facilities could close by June 2025, leaving an additional 1.8 million Afghans without access to primary health care. In the worst affected regions – Northern, Western and Northeastern Afghanistan – more than a third of health care centres have shut down, raising alarms about an imminent humanitarian crisis. "These closures are not just numbers on a report, they represent mothers unable to give birth safely, children missing lifesaving vaccinations, entire communities left without protection from deadly disease outbreaks," said WHO Representative and Head of Mission in Afghanistan Dr Edwin Ceniza Salvador. "The consequences will be measured in lives lost."

Afghanistan is already battling multiple health emergencies, including outbreaks of measles, malaria, dengue, polio and Crimean-Congo haemorrhagic fever. Without functioning health facilities, efforts to control these diseases are severely hindered. Over 16,000 suspected measles cases, including 111 deaths, were reported in the first two months of 2025. With immunization rates at critically low levels (only 51% for the first dose of the measles vaccine and 37% for the second), children are at heightened risk of preventable illness and death. While some donors continue to support

Afghanistan's health sector, funding has been significantly reduced as development aid priorities have shifted. The needs, however, remain immense, and current support is not enough to sustain critical health care services for millions of Afghans, WHO stated. "This is not just about funding. It is a humanitarian emergency that threatens to undo years of progress in strengthening Afghanistan's health system," said Salvador. "Every day that passes without our collective support brings more suffering, more preventable deaths and lasting damage to the country's health care infrastructure."

16 water supply networks under construction in Baghlan

BAGHLAN (TOLOnews): A local organization, with financial support from the World Bank, has launched the construction of 16 water supply networks in Baghlan province, with a total value of nearly \$2 million. This project will be implemented in six districts of the province and is expected to provide clean drinking water to more than 35,000 families. Baghlan was one of the provinces severely affected by devastating floods this solar year. In addition to causing casualties and extensive financial losses, these floods have made access to clean drinking water difficult for residents. "This project will be implemented in six districts, including Doshi, Khenjan, Banu, Pul-e-Hesar, Dahana-e-Ghori, and Andarab, with a total value of \$1.9 million," stated Anzergul Amiri, the provincial director of the supporting organization in Baghlan. Abdul Jabar Sabet, the district governor of



Khenjan, highlighted the residents' struggles: "During rainfall and flooding, the river water becomes contaminated, causing serious problems for the locals. Many residents have fallen ill due to consuming this unsafe water." Some residents of Baghlan say that due to the

lack of access to clean drinking water, their family members have suffered from various illnesses. "We hope this project will be fully implemented so that we can access clean water and be protected from diseases," said Taza Mir, a resident of Baghlan. "The Andarab River is polluted, and we have to

wait for hours for the water to settle before we can use it," said Abdul Nabi, another resident of Baghlan. According to a survey conducted by UNICEF at the end of 2023 in Baghlan, 64% of the province's residents lack access to clean drinking water due to the negative impacts of recent floods.

A poor mom nursing 3 paralysed sons



FEROZKOH (Pajhwok): Mahjabin, hailing from western Ghor province, has devoted 25 years of her life to nursing three paralysed children. Despite her unwavering dedication, she finds herself unable to afford her children's treatment. Living in the Jarfaizabad village of Ferozkoh, the provincial capital, the 42-year-old mother reflects on her life. At the age of 15, she married a man significantly older than her. They have two daughters and five sons. Their first daughter, Zainab, was born healthy and is now married.

However, all her children born after Zainab gradually became quadriplegic. Her second son, Jabbar, is 24 years old. Mahjabin recalls that he was healthy until the age of seven, when his hands and legs became paralysed. Her third son, Juma Gul, 22, though not paralysed, has a short stature that makes him appear much younger than his years. Both her fourth son Sardar, 20, and fifth son Sattar, 16, are suffer from full paralysis of limbs. Her sixth child, a daughter named Khair-ul-Nisa, is 14 years old. Although she showed early signs of paralysis, she began treatment promptly, preventing the condition from progressing further. Khair-ul-Nisa can walk, eat, help her mother with

household chores and even attends school as a sixth grade student. Milad, her youngest and seventh child, is nine years old. Unlike his siblings, Milad is healthy. In Mahjabin's words, he is strong because he was not breastfed. He is described as clever and lively, excelling in school and securing top marks in his class. The painful reality of paralysed sons Mahjabin's three paralysed sons spend their days lying in various corners of the house, waiting for their mother's care. Despite their physical suffering, their eyes radiate love and gratitude towards their mother, who is their primary source of hope and life. Nursing her three paralysed sons and doing house-

hold chores is no easy task. But Mahjabin draws strength from her motherly affection, which motivates her to manage all household responsibilities, without losing sight of her children's needs. At noon, she prepares a simple meal for her family, consisting of "qoruti" (a type of yogurt), two raw onions and water. One by one, she feeds her paralysed sons, ensuring they are attended to before she eats herself. This tender act of devotion reflects the depth of a mother's love and sacrifice. Mahjabin admits the physical challenge of caring for her children has become more difficult over the years. "Every day, I wake up with worry and fear," she says. "When they were small, it was easier for me. But

now that they have grown up and their weight and height have increased, it has become very hard. Sometimes, when I take them to the toilet, I don't have the strength, and I have to drag them all the way." Hope for a better future Despite the overwhelming challenges she faces, Mahjabin's greatest hope is to see her paralysed sons and her daughter, who is currently undergoing treatment, recover. She dreams of a day when they will be able to lead a normal life. Sitting beside her sons, Mahjabin dotes on them with a sense of optimism. She speaks of her children's diagnosis – a nerve block leading to their paralysis. This condition is curable, but the cost of treat-

ment is substantial. Each child's treatment requires more than 100,000 afghanis – a sum far beyond her means. Her husband works as a janitor at the provincial hospital in Ghor, with a meagre monthly salary of 5,000 afghanis. This is barely enough to cover the family's basic needs, let alone pay for the children's treatment. "I often think," she says, "if my children were healthy, they would have homes and cars and would take me on trips. I am not hopeless. God willing, my dreams will come true one day." Mahjabin wants wealthy individuals and the government to fund the treatment of her children and thereby help improve their living conditions so they may one day lead a better life.





GAZA CITY: Men walking carrying the shrouded bodies of young victims who were killed in Israeli bombardment, at the Ahli Arab hospital.

# Death toll from widespread strikes on Gaza rises to 413

## Pakistan strongly condemns Israel's deadly airstrikes

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan strongly condemned Israel's deadly airstrikes on Gaza on Tuesday, killing over 400 innocent Palestinians, mostly women and children. This horrific act of aggression, in the holy month of Ramadan, is a flagrant violation of the ceasefire agreement and marks a dangerous escalation that threatens to destabilize the entire region once again. "We urge the international community to play its role to immediately end the violence and resume diplomatic efforts towards an immediate and lasting peace in Gaza and the Middle East," the foreign office spokesperson said in a press statement.

instead chose refusal and war," White House spokesperson Brian Hughes said. In Gaza, witnesses contacted by Reuters said Israeli tanks shelled areas in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip, forcing many families who had returned to their areas after the ceasefire to leave their homes and head northward to Khan Younis.

Much of Gaza now lies in ruins after 15 months of fighting, which erupted on October 7, 2023 when thousands of Hamas-led gunmen attacked Israeli communities around the Gaza Strip, killing some 1,200 people, according to Israeli tallies, and abducting 251 hostages into Gaza. The Israeli campaign in response has killed more than 48,000 people, according to Palestinian health authorities, and destroyed much of the housing and infrastructure in the enclave, including the hospital system. The death toll is feared to be much higher due to thousands still missing under the rubble.

After it unleashed the wave of deadly overnight strikes, the Israeli army urged Gazans to evacuate areas near the border. In a post on X, Israeli military spokesman Avichay Adraee issued a warning to residents "specifically in the neighbourhoods of Beit Hanoun, Khirbet Khuza'a, Abasan Al-Kabira and Al-Jadida". "These designated areas are considered dangerous combat zones... For your own safety, you must evacuate immediately to the known shelters in western Gaza City and those in Khan Younis," the post said.

A Hamas official told AFP that the group was "working with mediators to curb the aggression". "Hamas adhered to the ceasefire agreement and implemented it precisely, but the Israeli occupation reneged on its commitment and reversed it by resuming aggression and war," the official told AFP. He added that "Hamas and the resistance factions are in constant session to assess the situation and working with mediators to curb the aggression". So far, Hamas has not responded to the Israeli strikes.

Hamas said Israel had overturned the ceasefire agreement, leaving the

fate of 59 hostages still held in Gaza uncertain. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office accused Hamas of "repeated refusal to release our hostages" and rejecting proposals from US President Donald Trump's Mideast envoy Steve Witkoff. "Israel will, from now on, act against Hamas with increasing military strength," it said in a statement.

Negotiating teams from Israel and Hamas had been in Doha as mediators from Egypt and Qatar sought to bridge the gap between the two sides following the end of an initial phase in the ceasefire, which saw 33 Israeli hostages and five Thais returned by fighter groups in Gaza in exchange for some 2,000 Palestinian prisoners. With the backing of the United States, Israel had been pressing for the return of the remaining 59 hostages still held in Gaza in exchange for a longer-term truce that would have halted fighting until after Ramadan and the Jewish Passover holiday in April.

However, Hamas had been insisting on moving to negotiations for a permanent end to the conflict and a full withdrawal of Israeli forces from Gaza, in accordance with the terms of the original ceasefire agreement. "We demand that the mediators hold Netanyahu and the Zionist occupation fully responsible for violating and overturning the agreement," the group said. Each side has accused the other of failing to respect the terms of the January ceasefire agreement, and there were multiple hiccups during the course of the first phase. But until now, a full return to the fighting had been avoided.

Israel had blocked deliveries of aid from entering Gaza and had threatened on numerous occasions to resume fighting if Hamas did not agree to return the hostages it still holds. The army did not provide details about the strikes carried out in the early hours of Tuesday but Palestinian health authorities and witnesses contacted by Reuters reported damage in numerous areas of Gaza, where hundreds of thousands are living in makeshift shelters or damaged buildings.

## Pakistan Navy ship Aslat visits Maldives

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Navy Ship (PNS) ASLAT visited Maldives during Regional Maritime Security Patrol (RMSP) deployment. Upon arrival at Port Malé, the ship was warmly welcomed by officials of Maldives National Defence Force (MNDP) and Coast Guard.

During the port visit, Commanding Officer of PNS ASLAT called on Chief of Defence Force Major General Ibrahim Hilmy and Commandant Coast Guard Brigadier General Muhammad Saleem. During these interactions, matters of mutual interest were discussed. The Commanding Officer also conveyed warm wishes from Chief of the Naval Staff Admiral Naveed Ashraf to the people of Maldives.

During its stay in



Maldives, Chief of Defence Force, government officials, High Commissioner of Pakistan, diplomats, and ambassadors/representatives from Australia, Bangladesh, China, Japan, Saudi Arabia, Malaysia, Russia, Sri Lanka, United Kingdom, and United States, along with members of local community, visited the ship.

Pakistan Navy ships are regularly deployed on RMSP missions to fulfill international obligations for maritime security, ensure freedom of navigation on the high seas, and

protect global commons. At the conclusion of the port visit, PNS ASLAT conducted a Passage Exercise (PASSEX) with the Maldives Coast Guard Ship SHAHEED ALI. The exercise aimed to strengthen maritime cooperation and enhance interoperability between the two navies. Pakistan and Maldives share friendly relations, which have strengthened over time. The visit of PNS ASLAT to Maldives will further contribute to fostering naval collaboration between the two brotherly nations.

## India asks US to list Sikh group as terrorist organisation

NEW DELHI (Reuters): India has asked the US to list a Sikh separatist group as a terrorist organisation, an Indian government source said on Tuesday, more than a year after the US said it had foiled a plot with Indian links to kill a leader of the group in the US.

Washington went public about the plot in November 2023 and later charged a former Indian spy service officer with directing the plot against Gurbatwant Singh Pannun, a dual US-Canada citizen and the general counsel of Sikhs for Justice (SFJ), in an episode that tested growing India-US friendship. India denied any official connection to the plot, set up a panel to probe Washington's accusations and said in January that the panel had recommended legal action against an unnamed person.

India's request to the US to list SFJ as a terrorist group came during talks between Indian Defence Minister Rajnath

Singh and visiting US national intelligence chief Tulsi Gabbard, said the Indian government source, who declined to be identified as the discussions were confidential. Indian media outlets have also reported the request.

Formed in 2007, SFJ holds referendums to advocate for a separate state for Sikhs called Khalistan in Hindu-majority India. SFJ was labelled an "unlawful association" by India in 2019, citing its support for extremist and secessionist activities, and Pannun was listed as an "individual terrorist" in 2020. India has had a diplomatic dispute with Canada over the June 2023 killing of another Sikh separatist there. SFJ has rejected New Delhi's accusations.

"Who is the terrorist? Is it SFJ, which is peaceful and democratically organizing the Global Khalistan Referendum to liberate Punjab from Indian occupation?" Pannun said in a statement shared with Reuters

on Tuesday, referring to the home state of Sikhs in India. "Or is it (Prime Minister Narendra) Modi's India, which engages in violent transnational repression and hires hitmen to assassinate Khalistan Referendum organizers?" he said. An Indian defence ministry spokesperson declined to comment. A US Embassy spokesperson said they did not have anything to add beyond a statement about the talks between Singh and Gabbard issued by India's defence ministry on Monday, which mentioned deepening security ties but made no mention of SFJ.

Gabbard's team and the Office of the Director of National Intelligence did not immediately respond to emails seeking comment. At a geopolitics conference in New Delhi on Tuesday, Gabbard said that during her trip she'd heard from her Indian counterparts "about the very serious concerns that you have here for your own security interests", without elaborating.

## Bangladesh rebukes US spy chief

DHAKA (AFP): Bangladesh has rebuked Washington's intelligence chief Tulsi Gabbard, saying her comments on religious violence in the South Asian country were unfounded and risked fanning sectarian tensions.

Gabbard arrived this week for a diplomatic trip to India, whose relations with Bangladesh have soured since a student-led uprising overthrew the latter nation's government last year. New Delhi has repeatedly accused Bangladesh of failing to adequately protect its minority Hindu citizens — charges denied by the caretaker administration now in charge.

But Gabbard appeared to give credence to the claims when she was asked about violence in Bangladesh during a Monday interview with Indian broadcaster NDTV. "The long-time unfortunate persecution, killing, and abuse of religious minorities... have been a major area of concern for the US government," she said in response.

She added that the issue, along with Islamist extremism, remained "central focus areas of concern" and said the Trump administration has already raised them with the Bangladeshi government. Bangladesh responded in a statement earlier today that Gabbard's comments were both "misleading" and "damaging" to the country's image and reputation.

"Political leaders and public figures should base their statements, especially on sensitive issues, on actual knowledge and take care not to reinforce harmful stereotypes, fan fears, or potentially stoke sectarian tensions," the statement said. Hindus make up about eight per cent of Bangladesh's 170 million people. In the chaotic days following the August ouster of autocratic ex-premier Sheikh Hasina who was backed by India, there was a string of attacks on Hindus — seen by some as having backed her rule.

Bangladesh has told India that it wants Hasina, who fled to New Delhi after being ousted in August, returned to the country for the "judicial process", the acting head of the country's foreign ministry said in December of last year.

## PM calls for efforts to eliminate Hepatitis C

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Tuesday called for coordinated efforts by federal and provincial governments and all stakeholders to eradicate Hepatitis C from Pakistan, vowing to promote and expand the PM's Hepatitis C Elimination Programme countrywide.

Speaking at a recognition ceremony here, marking the successful completion of the pilot project of the PM's National Hepatitis C Elimination Programme in Gilgit Baltistan, the prime minister emphasized the importance of the initiative in addressing the widespread impact of the disease in the country.

Acknowledging the significant support from the Aga Khan Development Network and the World Health Organization (WHO) in this initiative, he said that the hepatitis unit was initially established at the Pakistan Kidney and Liver Institute (PKLI) and was later expanded to provide 100% free treatment facilities.

The prime minister expressed regret that when the new government took office in 2018, the program was discontinued. However, he said that shortly after assuming the office of Prime Minister, he resumed the program, which was now operational in Punjab under the leadership of Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz. "We see a bright future of Gilgit Baltistan and subsequently other parts of Pakistan," he said expressing the confidence that with the efforts of the incumbent government, Hepatitis C will be completely erased from the country very soon. "This aggressive disease is spreading. This is high time to effectively control this disease," he said. The prime minister told the gathering the federal government was in the process of establishing Jinnah Medical Centre in Islamabad which would prove to John Hopkins Hospital of Pakistan in public healthcare.

Earlier, he distributed shields among the contributors to the pilot project of Gilgit Baltistan including Minister for Health Services Syed Mustafa Kamal,

Minister of State Dr. Malik Mukhtar Ahmad Bharath, Planning Minister Ahsan Iqbal, NADRA Chairman, WHO Representative in Pakistan and others.

Minister for Planning and Development Ahsan Iqbal, speaking on the occasion, highlighted that Pakistan had the highest spread of Hepatitis C, calling it a matter of great concern. He said the success of hepatitis programme manifested the model of public-private partnership and also the coordination between federal and provincial governments.

He said the government was hopeful of eliminating the disease 2029 as the Prime Minister's Hepatitis C elimination program will not only save millions of lives but also contribute to boosting the country's economic productivity. Minister for National Health Syed Mustafa Kamal, lauding the prime minister's vision of eliminating Hepatitis C from the country, assured him of his full support to successfully eliminate the disease from the country by 2030.

Highlighting the significance of preventive healthcare, he said the treatment of 10 million cases was difficult. World Health Organization (WHO) Representative in Pakistan Dr Lou Dapeng said the Organization will continue to stand side by side with Pakistan in supporting its programme to completely eliminate the disease.

He thanked the GB and AJK governments and their health departments for their swift action and excellent leadership in the pilot program. He said that screening of 14000 people across two union councils was a commendable achievement and assured of WHO's technical and operational support. Member Task Force of PM's Hepatitis C Elimination Programme, Dr Saeed Akhtar informed that Rs 68 billion were committed for the programme which will be completed in two phases. Information Minister Attaullah Tarar and Minister of State Dr. Malik Mukhtar Ahmad Bharath were also present on the occasion.

## PM to undertake an official visit to KSA on 19th

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif will undertake an official visit to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia from 19-22 March which is aimed to strengthen the bilateral ties, enhance economic cooperation, and promote investment between the two countries.

The delegation, accompanying the prime minister, will include Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Mohammad Ishaq Dar, along with key federal ministers and senior officials, Foreign Office Spokesperson said in a press release on Tuesday.

During the visit, the prime minister is scheduled to meet Saudi Crown Prince and Prime Minister Mohammed bin Salman. The leaders will discuss and deliberate upon ways to boost trade, enhance partnership in key sectors and facilitate greater economic collaboration.

"Matters of mutual interest and concern, including global and regional developments, particularly the Gaza situation, evolving Middle East dynamics, as well as issues related to the Muslim Ummah, will figure high on the agenda," it was added. The prime minister's visit underscores the deep-rooted historical relations between Pakistan and Saudi Arabia and will pave the way for increased mutual understanding, enhanced cooperation in trade, investment and greater diplomatic coordination on bilateral, regional and global matters.

## Two wanted terrorists killed in IBOs

F.P. Report

BANNU: The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Police continued its streak of successes against terrorists as Counter Terrorism Department (CTD) Bannu killed two terrorists in intelligence-based operations.

Both the terrorists were involved in the attack on Constable Arman Khan and among them was Ibrahim Zarar Group's Deputy Ameer Hakimullah alias Shoaib. CTD Bannu police tracked down the terrorists involved in the attack within a few hours and killed them.

In the timely response of Charsadda police, the most wanted terrorist Javed Khan, son of Muhammad Ikhtiar, resident of Akhundana Noor, Bannu, was also killed. Hand grenade and pistol along with prima card and safety fuse were recovered from the slain terrorists.

The slain terrorist was wanted by the police in several cases of murder, attempted murder and target killing and was present in the area for the purpose of terrorist operations. IGP Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Zulfiqar Hameed praised the excellent performance of the brave cops of CTD Bannu Region, Bannu Police and Charsadda Police. Cash rewards has been announced for the cops who participated in the operations. KP IG said that police cops have made the nation proud. The KP police's continuous successes against terrorists are a living example of efficiency and proactive policing, said IGP KP.

## Balochistan universities shut indefinitely

QUETTA (AFP): The University of Balochistan has been closed for an indefinite period, with all academic activities shifted to virtual learning, the administration announced on Tuesday.

Meanwhile, Sardar Bahadur Khan Women's University had already moved to online classes for female students. Sources said the universities were closed due to security concerns. The Balochistan University of Information Technology (BUIIT) has also called a meeting to assess the situation, according to sources.

Quoting an anonymous provincial government official, the AFP reported that two universities were ordered to close for an "indefinite period" last week, while on Tuesday, a third was instructed to switch to virtual learning. "The decision was made after reviewing the overall security situation," the official said adding, "It was decided to switch to virtual learning until further notice due to security concerns." The decision to reopen the campuses, which will impact thousands of students, will be made after the Eid ul Fitr, just two weeks

away, the official said.

Security across the provincial capital has been heightened, with an increased number of security forces on the streets and additional checkpoints set up throughout the city following the recent surge in separatist violence. The development comes after last week's harrowing attack by the outlawed Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) militants who blew up train tracks and held over 440 passengers hostage in a day-long standoff with security services in a remote mountain pass in the Bolan district.

## Ukraine presses for truce as Trump, Putin hold talks

WASHINGTON: Ukraine has pressed Russia to accept a US proposal for a ceasefire as United States President Donald Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin hold talks on the war.

Kyiv and its European allies demanded that the Russian president fully accept the US-proposed 30-day ceasefire during the call, which began at 10:00 (14:00GMT) on Tuesday, according to a White House official. "We expect the Russian side to unconditionally agree to this proposal," said Ukraine's Foreign Minister Andrii Sybiha ahead of the meeting. "It is time for Russia to show whether it really wants peace."

Trump said on Monday that Washington and Moscow had already discussed "dividing up certain assets" — including territory and power plants — between Ukraine and Russia as part of the ceasefire deal. In the run-up to talks, the Semafor news website published a report that cited two sources saying the Trump

administration was considering recognising Crimea, which Russia annexed from Ukraine in 2014, as Russian territory.

The Kremlin has repeatedly said that Crimea, where Russia's Black Sea Fleet is based and where the pre-annexation population was mostly Russian speakers, is already formally part of Russia. Kyiv has said it wants the Black Sea peninsula — internationally recognised as Ukrainian territory by most countries — back.

Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said on Monday that Putin does not want peace, accusing him of continuing "to drag out this war" in a bid to better the country's military position ahead of any halt in fighting. Putin's spokesperson Dmitry Peskov told reporters on Tuesday that Trump and Putin will discuss the war in Ukraine but added that there are also a "large number of questions" regarding the normalisation of US-Russia relations.

US Secretary of State

Marco Rubio persuaded senior Ukrainian officials during talks in Saudi Arabia to agree to the ceasefire framework. In preparation for the Trump-Putin call, White House special envoy Steve Witkoff met last week with Putin in Moscow to discuss the proposal.

He suggested that US and Russian officials had discussed the fate of the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant in southern Ukraine. The plant, caught in the crossfire since Moscow seized it after invading Ukraine in 2022, is a significant asset, producing nearly a quarter of Ukraine's electricity in the year before the war.

Trump claimed on Monday that Ukrainian forces had "surrounded" Ukrainian troops who took control of 1,300 square kilometres (500 square miles) of Russia's Kursk region last year. Zelenskyy has acknowledged that the Ukrainian forces are facing difficulties there, but refutes Russian claims that they have encircled his troops. — Aljazeera