

Five die in Dargai mishap
F.P. Report

DARGAI: At least five people, including women and children were killed after a car fell into a canal near Muhajir Camp Khattako Shah in Malakand district, police informed on Thursday. The accident initially resulted in serious injuries to three women, two others, who were shifted to THQ Dargai by the rescue teams. However, doctors at the hospital pronounced all the victims as dead.



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Pakistan hails US stance on TTP threat to global peace

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan has welcomed the United States' acknowledgment of the threat posed by the TTP to world peace and security.

At his weekly news briefing in Islamabad on Thursday, Foreign Office Spokesperson Shafqat Ali Khan stated there is no hiatus in Pakistan-US cooperation on counterterrorism, and it will continue in the future. Regarding the recent imposition of export restrictions by the US against Pakistan's commercial entities, the spokesperson noted that such biased and politically motivated actions are counterproductive to the objectives of global export controls and obstruct the legitimate access to technology for socio-economic development.

When asked about a bill introduced in the US House of Representatives about Pakistan, the spokesperson

mentioned this is an initiative of a single individual legislature. He, however, said Pakistan believes the timing and context of the bill do not align well with the current positive dynamics of Pakistan-US bilateral relations based on mutual respect, understanding and non-interference in each other's affairs.

The spokesperson hoped the US congress will continue its supportive role in strengthening Pakistan-US ties and focus on avenues of mutual collaboration that benefits both the countries. He said Pakistan remains committed to constitutionalism, rule of law, protection of human rights and freedom of expression because it considers democracy as a vehicle for progress and prosperity.

Shafqat Ali Khan voiced concerns over the scores of raids conducted by Indian authorities on residences belonging to members of All Parties Hurriyat

Conference in illegally occupied Jammu and Kashmir. He said the intent of these raids is to crush dissent and intimidate the local people. He urged the Indian authorities to stop these oppressive measures and respect the fundamental rights and freedom of Kashmiri people including their right to self-determination.

The spokesperson welcomed the recently agreed upon limited ceasefire between Russia and Ukraine which prohibits attacks on energy infrastructure and ensures safe navigation in the Black Sea. He appreciated the active engagement of the US administration and its leadership in securing the agreement between Russia and Ukraine. He said we remain optimistic that the new momentum generated by these initial steps will eventually lead to comprehensive and permanent ceasefire.

US confirms ongoing Taliban talks — voices concern over media curbs in Pakistan

Jalil Afridi

WASHINGTON D.C: In response to questions submitted by The Frontier Post, the US State Department has acknowledged ongoing dialogue with the Taliban and reiterated its stance on freedom of expression in Pakistan.

When asked whether any deal had been reached with the Taliban regarding the former Bagram Air Base, the State Department clarified that the United States continues to meet with Taliban representatives in Doha and elsewhere as needed. "The United States meets regularly with

Taliban representatives in Doha and on an as-needed basis when it is in our interests," a State Department spokesperson stated. However, the department declined to reveal details of these discussions, noting, "As a matter of course, we do not divulge the content of those conversations."

Regarding freedom of expression in Pakistan, the US expressed concern over recent developments. In response to a question about the banning of a specific entity in Pakistan, the State Department emphasized its broader commitment to civil liberties. "We

are concerned by any restrictions on the freedoms of expression and association, as well as restrictions on the press," the spokesperson said. The US reaffirmed its support for "freedom of expression, media freedom, and Internet freedom," and stated that it consistently raises these issues with Pakistani authorities.

These comments reflect Washington's careful diplomatic engagement in both Afghanistan and Pakistan, balancing national security interests with its advocacy for democratic principles and human rights.

Focus on to empower youth with modern tech

Saqib Mushtaq

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Thursday reaffirmed his commitment to equip the country's youth with advanced technological skills, emphasizing the importance of their role in driving the nation's development and prosperity. He assured that all necessary resources will be allocated to provide the best training opportunities, enabling young people to become productive contributors to the society.

Addressing a launching ceremony of PM Digital Youth Hub, the prime minister said that as a Chief Minister Punjab, he disbursed 400,000 laptops among the students who were high achievers in their schools and colleges. "This was the vision for which he worked hard," he remarked. The prime minister emphasized that youth of Pakistan was a challenge as well as a great opportunity. "If we provide training of Information Technology and Artificial Intelligence (AI) led modern technology, they can contribute a lot for the development and prosperity of Pakistan."

He said if the youth were provided with right opportunity, they could play positive role in making the country one of the leading economy of the world. Expressing his resolve to provide the best training to the youth, he said the government will ensure all possible resources for their training by cutting down other expenditures.

"Youth are the biggest assets of Pakistan, and we can serve this great asset by equipping them with the best state-of-the-art technologies." Referring to the recent staff level agreement with International Monetary Fund (IMF), the prime minister said through IMF programme, the country had achieved stability, but this should be kept in mind that this was the loan 'which we have to get rid of'. He hoped that this might be the last programme. The prime minister asked the youth to work hard as they could play role in this regard.

He highlighted that during last three weeks, the national exchequer received Rs 34 billion due to the government's efforts to speed up the tax cases pending in the tri-



bunals for several years. Chairman Prime Minister Youth Programme Rana Mashood Ahmed Khan on the occasion said that the government was opening up new opportunities to empower youth of the country.

He said through PM Digital Hub, the youth would take benefit in various sectors including sports, tourism, sports, IT, green economy and others. United Nations International Children Emergency Fund (UNICEF) Officer In-charge Sharmela Rasool said this was a platform of opportunity and hope. She said this programme was aimed at making the youth stronger and a productive people of the country.

Chairman Semiconductor Group Naveed Sherwani said private sector and public sector should put full energy in provision of training to the youth to enable them playing role for the development of the country. UN Resident Coordinator Muhammad Yahya said the Digital Youth Hub was prepared to make youth capable of exploring their capabilities. This is the start of journey of development and prosperity for Pakistan, he added.

IMF allows Pakistan to cut electricity tariff

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has allowed the Pakistan government to reduce the electricity tariff by Rs1 per unit.

The relief will be provided as part of the basic tariff for electricity units while the amount for it will be arranged from the revenue generated through the levy on captive power plants. A levy has been imposed on the use of gas by captive power plants. The government is also working on a relief package for electricity consumers, and it would be announced after getting approval from the global lender.

The move comes days after the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and Pakistani authorities reached a staff-level agreement on the first review under Pakistan's Extended Fund Facility (EFF) and on a new arrangement under the Resilience and Sustainability Facility (RSF).

An IMF team, led by Nathan Porter, held discussions during a February 24 to March 14, 2025 mission visit to Karachi and Islamabad, and virtually thereafter, for the first review of Pakistan's economic programme supported by the Extended Fund Facility (EFF) and on a new arrangement under the IMF's Resilience and Sustainability Facility (RSF).

The IMF team reached a staff-level agreement (SLA) with the Pakistani authorities on the first review of the 37-month Extended Arrangement under the Extended Fund Facility (EFF), and on a new 28-month arrangement under the IMF's RSF with total access of around \$1.3 billion (SDR 1 billion). The staff-level agreement is subject to approval of the IMF's Executive Board. Upon approval, Pakistan will have access to about US\$1.0 billion (SDR 760 million) under the EFF, bringing total disbursements under the programme to about US\$2.0 billion.

PM to address youth, ulema convention today

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: A dignified ceremony of "Rab e Zuljalal ka Ehsaan - Pakistan" and National Youth and Ulama Convention under Ministry of Information and Broadcasting will be held on Friday at Jinnah Convention Center, Islamabad.

The event is organized in connection with Juma tul Wida, especially 27th night of Ramazanul Mubarak. Pakistan was created on Layla-tul-Qadr, Juma tul Wida during Ramazanul Mubarak 1366 Hijri, August 14, 1947. Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif will attend the event as the chief guest and also address the youth.

He will highlight the role of youth in the progress of Pakistan, government's reform measures for youth and the future strategy. He will express his views on the basic ideology for the creation of Pakistan and on the country's importance in terms of its geography, defence and economy. He will highlight the fact that Pakistan came into being as an Islamic ideological state on 27 Ramazanul Mubarak (Shab-e-Qadr) and it was based on the principle of "Pakistan ka matlab kia La ilaha illallah".

Pakistan has a unique status at the international level as it is the only Islamic nuclear power in the world. Pakistan's armed forces are not only the strongest military power in the Islamic world but also, in terms of professional capability, the best army in the world. The National Youth Convention will encourage youth to play an important role in national progress.



QUETTA: Security personnel inspecting the site of blast near police van.

Three dead, 17 injured in blast near police mobile

F.P. Report

QUETTA: Three people were killed while 16 others sustained injuries in a blast at Quetta's Double Road on Thursday. The rescue officials said that blast occurred near the police van.

The injured were being shifted to the nearby hospital. Several police officials also got injured in the blast, according to sources. The law enforcement agencies also reached the spot and started investigation. Shahid Rind, the spokesperson of Balochistan government condemned the blast and prayed for the speedy recovery of injured.

According to Police Surgeon Dr Ayesha Faiz, three people lost their lives in the attack, while multiple injured individuals remain in critical condition. Dr Abdul Hadi, the Medical Superintendent (MS) of Sandeman Hospital, confirmed that four victims are in critical condition.

Meanwhile, Dr Arbab Kamran, the Managing Director of the Trauma Centre, said that emergency medical aid is being provided to all the injured. Following the explosion, authorities declared an emergency at Sandeman Hospital, summoning all doctors and medical staff on an urgent basis. The area has been cordoned off, and security forces have launched an investigation into the attack.

President Asif Ali Zardari strongly condemned the blast and expressed deep sorrow and regret over the loss of precious lives in the terrorist attack. The president said such heinous acts during the holy month of Ramadan reflect the nefarious designs of terrorists. He prayed for the elevation of the ranks of the deceased and commiserated with the bereaved families. The president also prayed for the swift recovery of the injured.

Hamas spokesman killed in Israeli strike on Gaza

GAZA (AP): Hamas said an Israeli air strike killed one of its official spokesmen in Gaza on Thursday, the latest high-ranking operative targeted since Israel resumed its bombardment. The group said in a statement it mourned the loss of Abdul Latif Al-Qanou who was killed in what it called a "direct" strike on a tent he was in, in the Jabalia area of northern Gaza. A fragile ceasefire that brought weeks of relative calm to Gaza ended on March 18 with Israel resuming its bombing campaign across the territory.

According to the health ministry in Gaza, at least 855 people have been killed since. Qanou is the latest Hamas official to be killed in recent Israeli strikes. Israel's military said last week it had killed the head of Hamas's internal security agency, Rashid Jahjouh, in an air strike.

Days earlier, Hamas had named the head of its government in the Gaza Strip, Essam Al-Dalis, and interior ministry head Mahmud Abu Watfa, among a list of officials it said were killed in strikes. The Israeli military confirmed it had killed Dalis, a member of Hamas's political bureau who became the head of its administration in Gaza in June 2021. Hamas has also confirmed the deaths of Salah Al-Bardawil and Yasser Harb, both members of its political bureau. "The occupation's targeting of the movement's leaders and spokespersons will not break our will," Hamas said Thursday.

UN agency says has 'two weeks' left of food supplies in Gaza: The UN's World Food Programme warned Thursday it had only two weeks' worth of food left in Gaza, where "hundreds of thousands of people" are at risk of severe hunger and malnutrition. "WFP has approximately 5,700 tons of food stocks left in Gaza — enough to support WFP operations for a maximum of two weeks," the Rome-based agency said in a statement.

Israel resumed military operations in

Shandana Gulzar granted bail
F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The Peshawar High Court granted protective bail to PTI MNA Shandana Gulzar Khan while seeking details of all the cases against her, on Thursday. PHC's divisional bench comprising of Justice Sahibzada Abdullah and Justice Aurangzeb heard the petition. PHC stopped arrest Shandana Gulzar in any case till April 15 and ordered relevant authorities for submission of record.

5 killed in Gwadar passenger bus attack

F.P. Report

GWADAR: At least five people were gunned down, and one other was injured after being offloaded from a Karachi-bound bus on the Coastal Highway in Gwadar. The Deputy Commissioner Gwadar also confirmed that the incident occurred at the Kalmat area of the Coastal Highway where gunmen opened fire on passengers, killing at least five people. The victims who came under the attack were traveling from Gwadar to Karachi when the attack took place. According to media reports, the militants set up a blockade on the highway, identified non-local passengers, and carried out the brutal attack. Two passenger buses were also set on fire, and a search operation was also conducted in the area. The identities of the victims are being verified, but one of the deceased is believed to be from Multan. This incident is the latest in a series of attacks in Balochistan, where militants have targeted security forces, foreigners, and non-locals. The region has seen a surge in violence in recent weeks, with several incidents of armed attacks and road blockades reported.

Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif also strongly condemned the blast in Industrial Area, Barkat Market Quetta and expressed his sorrow over the death of three people in the blast.

In a statement here, the prime minister prayed for the highest ranks of the deceased and patience for their bereaved families. The Prime Minister directed to provide the best medical facilities to the injured. He also directed to immediately investigate the incident, identify those responsible and bring them to justice.

The elements spreading violence in Balochistan were the enemies of the development of Balochistan, he said, adding, "We will never allow the evil intentions of the terrorists to succeed and will continue the war against the scourge of terrorism until it is completely eradicated from the country."

Taking to X, Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi also condemned the explosion and expressed sorrow over the deaths. "We equally share in the grief of the families of the deceased," Naqvi said. He said: "The forces of

the enemy are targeting Balochistan. We will thwart this heinous conspiracy meant to create instability."

Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Faisal Karim Kundi, on Thursday condemned the bomb blast near a police mobile on Double Road in Quetta. Expressing deep sorrow over the loss of three lives in the explosion, the Governor extended heartfelt condolences to the affected families.

He assured them that their grief is shared, and prayed for the elevation of the deceased's ranks. Governor Kundi also wished for the swift recovery of those injured in the blast. Meanwhile, Governor Faisal Karim Kundi, has condemned the terrorist attack in the Kalmat area, where militants identified passengers in bus and opening fire.

Expressing deep sorrow and regret over the loss of six innocent lives in the shooting, the Governor said that targeting and killing innocent people is an inhumane crime. He prayed for the elevation of the deceased's ranks and offered heartfelt condolences to the bereaved families, wishing them patience and strength in their time of grief.

Court issues notice to FIA on journalist's plea

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: A district and sessions court in Islamabad on Thursday served a notice to the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) on senior journalist Waheed Murad's plea seeking the annulment of the judicial magistrate's physical remand order.

At the outset of Thursday's hearing, Advocate Imaan Mazari, his counsel, pleaded with the court to declare the judicial magistrate's order null and void and send his client to jail on judicial remand.

At this, the judge remarked that she should knock doors of the high court against the magistrate's order. Mazari argued that there was precedent that the sessions court heard appeals against the magistrate's order.

Meanwhile, the court issued a notice to the FIA and sought the agency's reply in this regard by today morning. During the previous hearing, the prosecution argued that Murad had shared a post related to a banned organisation in Balochistan and that further investigation was required regarding his social media accounts. They also requested the recovery of his mobile phone. The FIA has registered a case against him under the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA).

LHC orders PHC to present health sector issues before CM

LAHORE (APP): The Lahore High Court (LHC) directed the Punjab Healthcare Commission (PHC) on Thursday to present key issues facing the health sector to Punjab Chief Minister, highlighting the need for urgent reforms.

The court instructed the PHC chief executive officer to meet the chief minister and propose solutions to the sector's challenges. Additionally, the court ordered for enforcement of laws regulating laboratory test fees.

Justice Sajid Mehmood Sethi issued these instruction while hearing a petition, filed by the Judicial Activism Panel, seeking directives to ensure provision of medicines in government hospitals.

During the proceedings, the court stressed immediate activation of the Punjab Healthcare Commission's Board, stating that strengthening the commission was essential for reforming the health department. The court remarked that political governments benefit from improvements in the health sector, as such measures enhance public approval. He also highlighted the need to remove bureaucratic hurdles obstructing progress.

However, expressing concern over the deteriorating condition of Jinnah Hospital, the court noted the lack of a parking facility at the major healthcare institution. PHC Chief Executive Dr Saqib Aziz informed the court that the government was actively working to improve the healthcare sector. "Comprehensive reports have been prepared for improvement of Jinnah and Services hospitals," he stated.

However, Young Doctors Association Secretary Dr Salman Kazmi stated that the situation had worsened due to failure to implement these reports. "A law was enacted to regulate medical test fees, but it is not being enforced," he submitted.

At this stage, petitioner's counsel Muhammad Azhar Siddique alleged that healthcare funds were not being utilised effectively.

In response, the court warned against politicising the matter. "The court will not interfere in matters that fall under the government's jurisdiction," it remarked.

Following the hearing, the court sought a fresh report from all relevant parties on implementation of its directives. Additionally, it ordered that biometric attendance be made mandatory for senior doctors to ensure accountability in government hospitals.

Pakistan, US discuss counter-terrorism efforts mutual cooperation



ISLAMABAD (INP): US Political Counselor Zach Harkenrider, and Federal Secretary for Interior Khurram Agha. During the meeting, Ambassador Baker strongly condemned the Jaafar Express attack and other recent terrorist incidents, expressing condolences to the families of the victims. She reaffirmed US support for Pakistan's fight against terrorism and emphasized the need for global collaboration to address this challenge.

The discussion also included plans to hold a Counter-Terrorism Dialogue in June and strategies for strengthening bilateral cooperation. Minister Mohsin Naqvi stated that Pakistan is taking decisive action against terrorists and developing a comprehensive counter-terrorism policy. He also acknowledged the United States' appreciation of Pakistan's efforts in combating terrorism.

Additionally, the meeting addressed the issue of undocumented Pakistanis in the US, with Naqvi assuring full cooperation for their repatriation. It was also announced that the Pak-US Caucus meeting will be held in New York on April 30 to further enhance strategic ties between the two nations.

Ambassador Baker also praised the ongoing development projects in Islamabad, recognizing Pakistan's commitment to economic and infrastructure progress.

This high-level engagement highlights the deepening strategic partnership between Pakistan and the US, particularly in security and counter-terrorism efforts.

Pakistan's Maritime seize record haul of Narcotics in joint operation

F.P. Report

KARACHI: In a remarkable demonstration of inter-agency cooperation, the Pakistan Navy, Pakistan Maritime Security Agency (PMSA), Joint Maritime Information and Coordination Center (JMICC) and Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF) successfully executed a Joint Maritime Interdiction Operation (JMIO) in the Arabian Sea.

The operation, conducted under the Sea Front Task Force (SFTF), in which a Joint Intelligence Based Operation (JIBO) led to the interception of a stateless vessel carrying a significant quantity of narcotics. This Joint Maritime Interdiction Operation has netted over 1,000 KG of Narcotics; intended for distribution in the international market.

The successful seizure was made possible through timely intelligence sharing and coordinated efforts between the Pakistan Navy, PMSA, JMICC and ANF, culminating in a successful JIBO. The confiscated narcotics have an estimated value of PKR 2.3 billion in the international market.

The seized drugs have been handed over to the ANF for further investigation and legal proceedings. This operation underscores the steadfast commitment of Pakistan's Maritime Forces to counter illicit activities, safeguard national waters and ensure regional stability.

Hindu community delegation meets Arora

LAHORE (APP): Provincial Minister for Minority Affairs Ramesh Singh Arora met a delegation from the Bahawalpur Minority Wing of the Hindu community at his camp office to discuss concerns, including the recent disrespect towards the Guru Granth Sahib in Sindh.

The delegation condemned the incident, calling it a conspiracy and demanded immediate action and investigation. Minister Arora assured them that a high-level inquiry committee had been formed to address the issue and hold those responsible accountable.

The delegation also raised other concerns, such as the water crisis in Cholistan and the poor condition of the cremation ground (Shamshan Ghat) near Fort Derawar Singh, where over 400 Hindu households face significant challenges due to poverty.

The minister promised to include these issues in the Annual Development Programme (ADP) for swift resolution and reaffirmed the government's commitment to safeguarding the rights and welfare of minority communities. He also assured efforts would be made to improve the cremation ground and resolve the water scarcity issue by collaborating with relevant authorities. The delegation included Chander Kumar, Amir Lal, Maharaja Parvez Sindhu, Lala Akmal Lal Phir, Chander Babu, Bhuri Aram and Bahu Ram.

Karachi administration's campaign against profiteers continues

KARACHI (APP): The Karachi administration's campaign against profiteers continues on Thursday.

In the campaign against profiteering, all authorized officials and specially appointed magistrates are actively monitoring prices in the field and taking action against profiteers to enforce official prices.

Deputy commissioners have deemed the strategy of selling goods at official prices a success, with positive results seen in controlling prices. On the 26th of Ramadan, officials supervised the sale of goods at 181 locations, ensuring that prices were kept in check.

This initiative is part of a broader effort to make essential items available to the public at official prices as per directive of the Commissioner Karachi Syed Hassan Naqvi.

According to the report on the 26th day of Ramadan, 87 profiteers were fined Rs 514,000, and 4 shopkeepers were arrested. Over the course of 26 days, officers took action against 4,259 profiteers, sealed 157 shops, and arrested 154 shopkeepers.

During the 26 days of the holy month of Ramadan, officers ensured the sale of food items at official prices on 3,851 locations by supervising sales by themselves. The Commissioner applauded the efforts of the officers and directed them to continue the campaign with the same vigor. He directed the officers to keep supervising the sale at official prices.

According to the Karachi Commissioner's office report, prices have been checked at over 29,349 shops so far.

Commissioner Syed Hassan Naqvi directed Deputy Commissioners to continue the campaign against profiteers with vigor. He directed them to control prices, provide relief to citizens, and ensure official price lists are prominently displayed.

District-wise fines imposed on profiteers include: South District (Rs. 167,000 on the 26th of Ramadan, with Rs. 1.27 crore imposed over 26 days), East District (Rs. 49,000 on the 26th of Ramadan, with Rs. 1.06 crore imposed over 26 days), and other districts, including West, Central, Malir, Korangi, and Kemari, also saw fines imposed.

Minister Shafay urges ulema to promote tolerance, unity

LAHORE (APP): Provincial Minister for Auqaf and Religious Affairs Chaudhry Shafay Hussain met with Chairman of the Central Ruet-e-Hilal Committee Maulana Abdul Khabir Azad at his office on Thursday to discuss key religious and social issues.

The meeting focused on the role of ulema (religious scholars) in promoting patience, tolerance, and brotherhood, as well as addressing the ongoing law and order challenges in the country.

Chaudhry Shafay said that Pakistan continues to face security threats and terrorism, and tackling these challenges requires collective efforts. He praised the sacrifices made by the Pakistan Army, security forces, and all segments of society in the fight against terrorism. He reiterated that Islam is a religion of peace, with no room for terrorism, and stressed the importance of unity in overcoming the enemies of humanity.

"The entire nation must stand together to defeat those who seek to disrupt peace. Religious scholars have a crucial role in fostering harmony and tolerance," he stated.

The minister also highlighted that renovation and beautification projects for mosques and shrines across Punjab are progressing rapidly. He assured that the affairs of the Auqaf and Religious Affairs Department would be improved through consultation with religious scholars and spiritual leaders.

Meanwhile, Maulana Abdul Khabir Azad praised former Prime Minister Chaudhry Shujaat Hussain's contributions to national development, acknowledging his long-standing efforts in promoting tolerance.

75 traffic wardens promoted

LAHORE (APP): Seventy-five traffic wardens have been promoted to the post of senior warden. According to IGP Punjab official sources, a promotion board meeting was held under the chairmanship of Additional IGP Punjab. Additional IGP Traffic Mirza Faran Baig also attended the meeting.

DIG Establishment-I Suleman Sultan Rana was also present. Forty-four wardens from Lahore were among those promoted to the next rank, nine were from Faisalabad, four from Rawalpindi, eight from Gujranwala, and 10 were from Multan. According to sources, cases of more than 136 officers were considered for promotion to the next rank. Meanwhile, IGP Punjab congratulated the promoted officers.

LDA seals 39 properties

LAHORE (APP): The Lahore Development Authority (LDA) intensified its crackdown on illegal commercial buildings and sealed 39 properties on Thursday. The teams conducted operations in various areas of the city including Shadman, Gulberg, New Garden Town, Samanabad, Railway Station Colony and areas surrounding UBD Canal.

The LDA teams demolished unauthorized structures, including an illegal construction on Plot No. 135N in Samanabad and an unlawful extension at a private store on Canal Road. Additionally, the teams demolished illegal constructions at Plot No 11 in Railway Station Colony and removed under-construction illegal shops along the Indigo Canal Fort Canal Road.

CM chairs meeting to review Z A Bhutto death anniversary arrangements

KARACHI (APP): Sindh Chief Minister (CM) Syed Murad Ali Shah presiding over a meeting to discuss the preparations for the 46th death anniversary of Prime Minister Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, which will be observed on April 4 at Garhi Khuda Bux, directed the administration to ensure comprehensive security measures, effective traffic management and appropriate entry and exit points to the mausoleum.

The meeting held at CM House was attended by President PPP Sindh Nisar Khuhro, provincial ministers - Nasir Shah, Saeed Ghani, Haji Ali Hassan Zardari, MPA Nida Khuhro, Chief Secretary Asif Hyder Shah, IG Police Ghulam Nabi Memon, Secretary Energy Musadiq Khan, Secretary Local Govt Khalid Hyder Shah, Secretary to CM Rahim Shaikh, Secretary Works Mohammad Ali Khoso, Special Secretary Home Saeed Shaikh. Through video link, Senior Minister Sharjeel Memon, PPP MPAs Jameel Soomro, Sohail Siyal, Commissioner aur DIG Larkano, DIG and others.

At the outset of the meeting, Chief Minister Murad Shah paid tribute to Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, describing him as one of the greatest leaders of the Muslim world. He noted that Bhutto's martyrdom was a significant tragedy and highlighted that his contributions to Pakistan's democracy, foreign policy, and economic reforms are unmatched.

"The Pakistan People's Party (PPP) government will ensure that the 46th death anniversary of Shaheed Bhutto is commemorated in a grand and dignified manner," Shah stated. The PPP Members of the Provincial Assembly (MPAs) and the divisional administration from Larkana briefed the chief minister via video link about the preparations for the upcoming gathering. Murad Shah issued directives to ensure the event runs smoothly, with a particular emphasis on public convenience and security.

The CM instructed officials to make special parking arrangements to avoid congestion and to establish separate entry and exit routes for easier movement. He also stressed the need for adequate provisions of drinking water, restrooms, and other essential facilities for attendees.

Murad Ali Shah also reviewed the security arrangements for the event, directing authorities to implement strict security measures to maintain order and ensure the safety of all participants. "Traffic management on all roads leading to Garhi Khuda Bux must be well-planned," he added.

"The public gathering at Garhi Khuda Bux is extremely significant, and we must ensure that all arrangements, including security, traffic management, and public facilities, are well-coordinated," he emphasized. He instructed provincial ministers to visit the Mazar and review the arrangements shortly after Eid.

CM Murad Ali Shah reaffirmed the PPP's commitment to honouring Bhutto's legacy, stating that Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's vision continues to inspire the nation. The 46th death anniversary will serve as an opportunity for the party and the people to remember his sacrifices and contributions. The meeting concluded with a pledge to ensure that the commemoration of Bhutto's martyrdom on April 4 was well-organized and respectful.

Annual inter-school Quran recitation competition held

LAHORE (APP): The Unique Group of Institutions (UGIs) organised its annual inter-school Quran recitation competition at the Dr. Nisar Ahmed Rana Auditorium, where students from over 80 campuses actively participated.

The event was presided over by Chairman Unique Group Professor Abdul Manan Khurram, while renowned Seerat scholar Dr Tariq Sharifzada attended the event as the chief guest.

Speaking on the occasion, Chairman Professor Abdul Manan Khurram emphasised that the primary objective of organising Quran recitation competitions was to instill divine values and promote spiritual happiness among students. He highlighted that true success for the youth lies in reading, understanding, and practising the teachings of Holy Quran. He further added that following the noble example of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) is the key to attaining closeness to Allah. He also stressed that the blessed month of Ramadan teaches patience and tolerance, enabling believers to remain steadfast in their faith.

Addressing the participants, Dr Tariq Sharifzada noted that Ramadan fosters a spirit of tolerance and harmony. He added that holding Quran recitation competitions during this holy month helps nurture a deep love for the Quran among students and encourages them to strengthen their relationship with the Book of Allah.

The competition was held in three categories. In the junior category, Hareem Zahra (Unique Samanabad Campus) secured the first position, Dua Zahid (Unique Manawan Campus) won second place, and Areeb (Unique Shadbagh Campus) secured third place.

In the middle category, Khalid Walid (Unique Rizwan Garden Campus) clinched first position, Muhammad Omar (Unique Mehran Block Campus) stood second, and Isha Junaid (Unique Bahria Town Campus) secured third.

In the senior category, Hafiz Aryan (Unique Ghalib Market Campus) secured the first position, Hanzla Tariq (Unique GTR Campus) second, and Muhammad Sareb (Unique 32B Campus) third.

The event was attended by a large number of students, teachers, and dignitaries, including Vice Chairman of Unique Group Afif Ashraf Siddiqui, Professor Amjad Ali Khan, Director Unique Group Professor Waseem Anwar Chaudhry, and Additional Director Muhammad Abdullah.

542 wheelie-doers arrested

LAHORE (APP): The Lahore Police have arrested 542 individuals for one-wheeling and other related offences in various operations this year, registering 460 cases in total.

This was stated by Lahore Police spokesman in a statement issued today. CCPO Lahore Bilal Siddique Kamyana emphasized the implementation of a zero-tolerance policy against racing and one-wheeling, urging strict action against violators. He mentioned that special checkpoints had been set up to curb these activities and that special police squads had been formed to maintain law and order.

Furthermore, CCPO Lahore instructed action against mechanics involved in altering motorcycles. He urged citizens to respect the law and avoid engaging in any illegal or unethical activities.



LAHORE: A sweeping off the fallen leaves at capital Mall Road. —APP Photo

Products made by inmates displayed in exhibition

LAHORE (APP): Home Secretary Punjab Noorul Amin Mengal on Thursday visited the Central Jail Lahore and assessed the exhibition of products made by inmates in jails across Punjab. The products on display were part of the jail industry, which includes a variety of goods produced by the prisoners.

During the visit, the secretary was accompanied by IG Prison Mian Farooq Nazir, Additional Secretary Prison Asim Raza, DIG Lahore Region Naveed Rauf and Jail Superintendent Ijaz Asghar.

**BOARD OF INTERMEDIATE AND SECONDARY EDUCATION PESHAWAR**

تصحیح
Corrigendum

بجواب اشتہار غلطی آسامیاں، بورڈ آف انٹرمیڈیٹ اینڈ سیکنڈری ایجوکیشن، پشاور شائع شدہ اخبارات تاریخ 23 مارچ 2025ء کے بارے میں درج ذیل وضاحت کی جاتی ہے:

سیریل نمبر 36۲۰ (جو تیز ریکارڈ نظر، نائب قاعدہ گروہ میں اور سوپر) کی غلطی آسامیاں کیلئے خیر بخوشنوا کی بجائے صرف پشاور بورڈ کے دائرہ اختیار کے علاقوں کے ذمہ دار رکھے والے امیدواروں کی آن لائن درخواستیں قابل قبول ہوں گی۔

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رشد و نمو کے

Muqam re-inaugurates Jaffar Express from Peshawar Railway Station

PESHAWAR (APP): Federal Minister for States and Frontier Regions, Gilgit Baltistan and Kashmir Affairs, Engr Amir Muqam here Thursday morning re-inaugurated Jaffar Express at Peshawar Railway Station.

Talking to media, Engr Amir Muqam said that re-inauguration of the Jaffar Express after the attack at Bolan has passed a clear and powerful message that the entire nation, Govt and security forces were all united for Pakistan.

He said that nefarious designs of the terrorists would be frustrated with unity.

Engr Amir Muqam said

Pakistan was our country and no one would be allowed to repeated Jaffar Express's like attack again. He said Govt policy about repatriation of an undocumented and illegal afgans are clear and necessary action are being taken in line with this national policy.

He said that the boycott of National Security's meeting showed irrational approach of the PTI leadership.

Engr Amir Muqam said that KP Govt was receiving its NFC share regularly from Federal Government, however the conditions of Govt hospitals and schools in KP are very pathetic.

He claimed that KP was deprived of development by the PTI during its 12 years rule while thousands of poor and deserving people were overlooked in the CM KP Ramadan package.

Engr Amir Muqam claimed that favouritism and like and disliked in CM KP Ramadan package have deprived many deserving poor and underprivileged.

On the other hands, he said that relief package under the Prime Minister's Ramadan package was distributed transparently among the poor in the country including Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Engr Amir Muqam said

that PTI politics revolved around agitation and protest in a bid to provide relief to its Founder leader.

Earlier, Engr Amir Muqam was earlier briefed by the Railways authorities by security to trains. Later, Engr Amir Muqam saw off the passengers.

The passengers expressed jubilation after re-inauguration of Jaffar Express and thanked Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif, Federal Minister for Railways Hanif Abbasi, Federal Minister Engr Amir Muqam and entire Railways Authorities.



PESHAWAR: Federal Minister for States and Frontier Regions, Gilgit Baltistan and Kashmir Affairs, Engr Amir Muqam inaugurating Jaffar Express at Peshawar Railway Station.

KP govt providing maximum relief to masses in Ramazan: Qasim

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Minister for Social Welfare, Syed Qasim Ali Shah, has stated that the provincial government is providing maximum relief to the public during the blessed month of Ramadan. He mentioned that a total of 934,954 applications have been received for the Ramadan Package 2025, out of which 660,743 people have already been provided with financial assistance.

He expressed these views while addressing a ceremony in his constituency. The provincial minister further said that the current government has proven its commitment to the welfare of the people, and Chief Minister Ali Amin Khan Gandapur has provided the largest relief package in the history of the province during Ramadan, which is a testament to his effective strategy and dedication to public service.

Syed Qasim Ali Shah also highlighted that the government has taken solid measures to control inflation and regulate the prices of essential commodities to ensure affordability for the people.



PESHAWAR: A Doctorate of Philosophy (Ph.D) scholar Muhammad Shafiq Khalil defended his thesis in education with titled of "Instructional Role of Teachers in Affective development of Students at Secondary School Level" from Qurtuba University Peshawar. The scholar Dr. Muhammad Shafiq completed his Ph. D in Education under the supervision of Assistant Professor Dr. Muhammad Ayaz, at Qurtuba University Peshawar. The scholar attributed his successful to the hard work of teachers and prayers of parents as well as support from family and friends.

Consultation session held to reform KP Child Labour Policy

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Department of Labour, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in collaboration with UNICEF organized a one-day consultation session to suggest proposals and review KP Child Labor Policy here on Thursday.

The event was attended by various line departments including P&DD, Education, Health, Agriculture, Industries, Social Welfare and KP Child Protection Cell, UNHCR and academia.

Addressing the session, Director Labor, Irfanullah Khan elaborated the need to review and reform existing KP Child Labour Policy 2018. He acknowledged technical support from UNICEF and said that joint efforts enabled us to launch the findings and recommendations of KP Child Labour Survey that was co-financed by KP Government and UNICEF.

Child Protection Specialist UNICEF, Sohail Ahmad updated participants about KP Child Labour Policy review process and objectives of broader consultation with all relevant stakeholders. He encouraged all stakeholders to review the policy keeping in view of contributing factors and roots causes of child labour.

He emphasized review of child labour definition in the existing legal framework and making it more inclusive and encompassing so that parameters of the policy should cover socio-cultural and institutional factors as well.

Chief Field Office UNICEF, Radoslaw Rzehak assured continued commitment to Labour Ministry for critical assistance to ensure introducing a progressive and transformative child labour policy in KP. He also emphasized that policy reforms should be based on ground realities and stakeholders should agree to test an intervention model in few select districts to enrich the policy, legislative and institutional reforms including increased public expenditures needed to ensure the gradual eradication of the child labour in KP.

Labour Minister KP, Fazal Shakoor Khan appreciated contributions of stakeholders to reform KP Child Labour Policy and extended his gratitude to UNICEF for its continued technical assistance.



PESHAWAR: PRCS Khyber Pakhtunkhwa receives 30 tons of humanitarian aid for Kurram district from Russian Ministry of Emergency Situations. Russian government provides this aid on request of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Governor Faisal Karim Kundi.

Russia provides over 30 tons of humanitarian aid to Kurram

PESHAWAR (APP): At the request of Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Faisal Karim Kundi, Russia has delivered over 30 tons of humanitarian aid to Kurram District ahead of Eid al-Fitr.

The aid, including food, medicine, clothing, and other essential supplies, was sent via a special flight from Russia's Ministry of Emergency Situations, with the assistance of the Russian Embassy in Pakistan.

The humanitarian supplies were formally handed over to the Pakistan Red Crescent Society (PRCS) in a ceremony held in Islamabad on Thursday.

During the event, the Deputy Chairman of the Red Crescent Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Farzand Ali Wazir, along with his team, and the Secretary General of the National Headquarters of PRCS Muhammad Obaidullah, received the aid on behalf of the organization.

Governor Faisal Karim Kundi, who also serves as the President of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa chapter of the Pakistan Red Crescent, expressed profound gratitude for Russia's swift and generous response to his appeal.

He emphasized that Kurram is currently experiencing a severe crisis, and this aid provides a lifeline to those in urgent need. "I deeply appreciate the Russian government for standing by us during these critical times," he stated.

During the event, Russian Ambassador to Pakistan, Albert P. Khorev, highlighted the significance of humanitarian cooperation in strengthening Pakistan-Russia relations.

He assured that Russia is always ready to assist the people of Pakistan, particularly during times of greatest need.

"Humanitarian aid is a crucial part of our partnership," he added.

The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Red Crescent Chapter will prioritize distributing the aid to the communities in Kurram most affected by instability.

Governor Faisal Karim Kundi reiterated his commitment to advocating for continued humanitarian assistance and ensuring that the aid reaches those who need it most.

Representatives from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, including spokesperson Shafqat Ali Khan, were also present at the ceremony.

Meena Khan applauds pro-poor initiatives of KP govt

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Minister for Higher Education, Archives, and Libraries, Meena Khan Afridi, has lauded the government's successful Ramadan Package 2025, calling it a remarkable initiative for the welfare of underprivileged communities.

In a statement issued on Wednesday, Meena Khan Afridi praised the initiative and stated that the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government's Ramadan Package 2025 is a tremendous effort to support the needy during the holy month. More than one million deserving individuals are being provided with Rs. 10,000 at their doorstep, ensuring relief reaches those who need it the most.

He further added that over 0.5 million beneficiaries have already received their financial assistance through a dignified and transparent mechanism reinforcing the provincial government's commitment to social welfare.

Highlighting the government's support system for the underprivileged, Afridi emphasized that Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's shelter homes (Panahgahs) are fully operational, offering food and accommodation to the poor and travelers.

"At present, the largest and most blessed Ramadan relief package in Pakistan is nearing successful completion," Afridi stated, adding that the initiative is a reflection of the vision of PTI's founding chairman, Imran Khan, and the pro-poor policies of Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur.

He concluded by reaffirming the government's commitment to uplifting marginalised communities and ensuring that relief measures continue to support those in need with dignity and respect.

PHC suspends female Office Assistant to AWKUM main campus

Humayun Khan

PESHAWAR: A divisional bench of Peshawar High Court (PHC) comprising Justice Naem Anwar and Justice Qazi Jawad has suspended the transfer of a female office assistant from the Abdul Wali Khan University Mardan (AWKUM) Pabbi campus to the Mardan main campus and sought a response from the university administration, on Thursday.

The writ petition filed by Kulsoom Bibi while Danyal Asad Chamkani advocate argued that the petitioner was appointed as an office assistant at AWKUM in 2012 and was later transferred to the Pabbi campus, where she has been performing her duties.

However, after the death of her husband in 2016, Kulsoom Bibi's responsibilities increased, and she had to take care of her two school-going children. Additionally, she has been suffering from various illnesses and has undergone three surgeries, and is also a diabetic patient who uses insulin.

The petitioner informed the court that she had accepted the transfer to the Pabbi campus because her marriage was in Pabbi, but now she is facing numerous problems due to her transfer to the Mardan main campus. She stated that there is no one else to take care of her children, who are attending school, and requested the court to declare her transfer null and void.

PHC divisional suspended Kulsoom Bibi's transfer to the AWKUM main campus and sought a response from the university administration.

Motorway police formulates plan to prevent fare-hike

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: National Highways and Motorway Police have devised a strategy to prevent public transporters from overcharging passengers during Eid al-Fitr.

To achieve this, special checking points will be established at toll plazas to monitor the fare lists of public transport traveling from Peshawar to other cities.

SSP Nizakat Ali Bangash and DSP Beat One Zaheeruddin Babar visited the Motorway Toll Plaza in Peshawar to review the overall security arrangements.

They were accompanied by Motorway Police officers, including Inspector Jameel-ur-Rehman, Inspector Yasser Afridi, SI Abdullah Aleem, SI Shahbaz Aziz, and SI Waseem Abbas. SSP Nizakat Ali stated that strict action will be taken against those who overcharge passengers during Eid al-Fitr.

He announced that the Motorway Police's campaign will continue beyond Eid to provide complete relief to passengers from illegal fares.

He appealed to citizens to immediately report any transporters who overcharge, so that timely action can be taken against them.

SSP Nizakat Ali emphasized that transport owners must ensure that they adhere to the prescribed fares. He assured that all possible measures are being taken to prevent the public from facing additional financial burdens during Eid.

He warned that no one will be allowed to exploit the public, and those who overcharge will face fines and legal action.

On the occasion, Motorway Police officers also broke their fast with police personnel.

SSP Nizakat Ali said that he was present with the personnel to boost their morale during the holy month of Ramzan.



PESHAWAR: Chairman Pastor Hanook Hashmat Assemblies of God Church and AGAPE Trust organized a two-day Iftar event to promote interfaith harmony.



In brief

Seven of family slain in Quetta F.P. Report

QUETTA: A property dispute claims lives of seven members three of them children of a family. According to police, the incident took place at Doran Khan village of Sohabat Khan district. The assailants fled after killing the seven members of a family and setting their house on fire. A land dispute is stated to be the reason for the gruesome murders. Having being informed, a police team reached the crime scene and started investigation. A manhunt was launched for the fleeing attackers. Police said they had stepped up security in the area. The killing of seven people left the area people shocking and they demanded the police higher-ups arrest the culprits and bring them to justice at the earliest.

Abbasi rules out talks with terrorists F.P. Report

QUETTA: Federal Minister for Railways Hanif Abbasi has emphatically rejected any negotiations with terrorists, underscoring a firm stance against terrorism both domestically and internationally. During a press conference in Quetta, Abbasi affirmed the government's commitment to pursuing and neutralizing terrorist threats relentlessly. In a significant move to bolster railway security, Abbasi revealed plans to recruit 500 new personnel for the Railway Police. This initiative is part of a broader strategy to enhance safety measures on the nation's rail network, with a particular focus on Balochistan, where 70% of the new recruits will be stationed. The Minister further announced that the Jaffar Express will commence its journey to Peshawar from today, with stringent security protocols in place to ensure passenger safety. Abbasi highlighted that these efforts are crucial in maintaining the integrity and safety of Pakistan's railways amidst ongoing security challenges.

Woman tortured, suffers broken legs F.P. Report

MATIARI: A horrific incident of violence against a woman was reported in the Matiari district of Sindh where a woman was subjected to brutal torture by her relatives. According to police, the woman named Hassana was brutally tortured by some people who accused her of aiding their daughter's elopement in Ghulam Muhammad Unar village of Matiari. The family members of the girl who allegedly eloped bound Hassana with ropes and severely injured her, breaking both of her legs. The suspects who were apparently more than four also trimmed her hairs. After learning about the situation, the police stepped in and took Hassana to a hospital so she could receive medical attention. Hassana denied any role in the alleged elopement and said that their daughter had married on her own initiative a few days before.

Insulin available F.P. Report

TOBA TEK SINGH: Medical Superintendent Tehsil Headquarters Hospital Kamalia. Dr. Adeel Arif said that providing facilities to the patients who come to the hospital and those who are admitted is my top priority. Because patients come to the hospital from far away for treatment, it is my responsibility to provide facilities to the patients, on Thursday. Dr. Adeel Arif said that insulin is being continuously provided to diabetic patients, besides, medicine is also being given to hepatitis patients.

Admn plans steps for conduction of SSC examination in Dir



F.P. Report

LOWER DIR: The Lower Dir administration on Wednesday finalized measures to ensure transparency and prevent cheating in the annual matriculation exams starting on April 8. A meeting, chaired by Deputy Commissioner Muhammad Arif Khan in Timergara the other day, was attended by officials from the District Education Department, Education Monitoring Authority (EMA), police, and Special Branch.

The deputy commissioner relayed directives from the Chief Secretary of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, stressing the need for a fair examination process and eliminating cheating.

To ensure compliance, district education officers, assistant commissioners,

and additional assistant commissioners will conduct surprise inspections of exam halls. The EMA and Special Branch will oversee exam centers, while CCTV cameras will be installed to deter malpractice. Grade 18 officers and above will be assigned as monitors for accountability. Shops near exam centers will be inspected, and those found distributing cheating materials will face legal action. The use of mobile phones, electronic devices, digital watches, Bluetooth gadgets, and exam-related notes inside examination halls will be strictly prohibited.

Meanwhile, District Education Officer (Male) Inayatullah Khan stated that a recent meeting chaired by Chief Secretary Shahab Ali Shah in Peshawar, attended by senior officials from eight educational boards of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, resulted in the decision to abolish exam halls in private institutions. Private school students will now take their 9th and 10th-grade board exams in government school exam halls. This decision will be implemented from April 8.

However, the move has raised concerns among private school owners, who have urged the government to reconsider. They argued that essential materials had already been dispatched to designated centers, making it difficult to manage the issue. The Lower Dir administration has assured that arrangements will be made for a smooth transition, ensuring fairness and transparency in the examination process.

Admn commits to ensure fair & transparent exam

F.P. Report

SHANGLA: Deputy Commissioner (DC) ordered that all necessary measures will be taken to prevent cheating and ensure the smooth conduct of the upcoming annual matriculation examinations. He urged all stakeholders to take appropriate steps to strictly implement government directives.

He made these remarks while presiding over a meeting in his office regarding the annual examinations, attended by heads of relevant departments. Later, he also addressed the District Steering Committee for Education. The meeting was attended by officials from the Education Department (both male and female district education officers), the

police, the treasury, the Communication and Works Department (C&W), and the Education Monitoring Authority.

Chairing the examination-related committee meeting, DC Muhammad Fawad Khan issued directives to all departments, stressing that every possible step should be taken to curb cheating and ensure peaceful examinations. He also announced that the district administration would soon enforce Section 144 to prevent any irregularities. He stated that cheating is a major menace that is leading the younger generation toward decline and destruction.

It is a significant barrier to progress, preventing genuine talent from emerging. He assured that this time, solid measures will be

taken to resolve the issue effectively.

DC Muhammad Fawad Khan highlighted that with the commencement of the new academic year, it is imperative to ensure the regular attendance of teachers and staff.

He directed that unnecessary leaves should be discouraged, and strict legal action should be taken against absentee staff without prior permission. He further instructed that educational institutions should take steps to improve the quality of education and that administrative staff should increase their visits to schools.

He stressed that educational backwardness is the root cause of a nation's decline, and efforts must be made to uplift Shingla in the field of education.

Exam cheating material seized from book shops

F.P. Report

LANDI KOTAL: District administrator, Khyber seized exam cheating materials from a number of book-sellers in Landi Kotal Bazaar last day to ensure transparent conduct of the Secondary School Certificate (SSC) exam to be scheduled in next month.

Under the Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Awami Agenda, a team led by Assistant Commissioner, Landi Kotal Adnan Mumtaz flanked by Tehsildar Temour Afridi and others officials took the action on the eve of metric exam, according to a statement.

They examined the bookshops and checked their stationeries and other materials, the statement said. During the search various



kinds of pocket guides were seized to be utilized in the coming 9th and 10th exams, official informed.

The administration directed owners of books and stationery not to sell cheating materials to students. As per the statement those found guilty of it would be dealt as per law.

Speaking on the occasion

AC Adnan Mumtaz said that on the strict direction of CM Khyber Pakhtunkhwa operation had been launched against the sellers of the exam cheating material. He urged the parents to join hands with them to discourage booty mafia and to make certain transparent conduct of matric exams.

BISE Mardan cancels exam halls at private schools

F.P. Report

MARDAN: Board of Intermediate and Secondary Education (BISE) Mardan has issued a notification to shift the examination centers of matriculation established in all private schools to government colleges and schools, on Thursday.

It may be recalled that the Chief Secretary Khyber Pakhtunkhwa had issued instructions for various measures to make the matriculation examinations starting from April 8 free from cheating and the use of other illegal means, in light of which a meeting was held the other day

under the chairmanship of Commissioner Mardan Division Nisar Ahmed. The meeting was attended by the Deputy Commissioners of Mardan and Swabi, as well as the Chairman of the Board and officers of the Education Department.

Commissioner Mardan directed various measures to be taken under the supervision of administrative officers to strictly implement the orders of the Chief Secretary regarding making the examination system free from all kinds of corruption and cheating. He directed the Chairman Board to complete the transfer of examination centers established in all

private schools to government schools and colleges within two days.

Accordingly, the Chairman Board issued a formal notification in this regard and the halls established in private schools were shifted to various government colleges and schools. Administrative officers will impose a ban on copying materials like pocket notes etc. and seize such materials from the markets. Bringing mobile phones or any such electronic gadgets into the examination halls and photocopying machines and printers in the premises of the examination centers will be strictly prohibited.

Unknown terrorists gun downs policeman F.P. Report

WANA: The escalating wave of violence against law enforcement in South Waziristan has claimed yet another life, as Constable Imran Khan was brutally murdered by unknown armed assailants. His funeral prayer was held at Police Lines Wana, attended by senior police officials who paid their respects to the fallen officer.

The tragic incident happened when Imran Khan was traveling from Azam Warsak to his village, Bomai. He was forcibly removed from his vehicle and shot dead in cold blood. So far, no group has come forward to claim responsibility for the killing.

This marks the second targeted attack on police personnel in Lower Waziristan during the holy month of Ramadan. Just a few days ago, two police officers were gunned down by armed men in Dubkot village.

The recent surge in terrorist attacks has put law enforcement officers at significant risk in South Waziristan, where they have increasingly become prime targets. Several police personnel have been assassinated in recent months, highlighting the growing security challenges in the region.

Grand Qaumi Jirga held F.P. Report

BUNER: District administration and police organized a Grand Qaumi Jirga after Iftar in which local elders, and distinguished citizens from various schools of thought were present.

The purpose of the event was to promote linkages between the local leadership and the people, to understand the problems facing the district, and to commit to joint efforts to solve them. The participants openly expressed their views and offered their suggestions regarding the establishment of law and order in the area, development projects, and public welfare.

Speaking on the occasion, district police officer emphasized the importance of public cooperation in establishing law and order and appealed to the elders to play their role in promoting social harmony. The participants agreed to work together for the solution of the problems and sustainable development of the region.

Police issues performance report Allah Dad Chandio

LARKANA: Police has issued a report on performance for last 70 days at the district Larkana. According to the report, there were 79 encounters between the police and robbers in 22 gang busted in the last two and a half months, in which 3 robbers were killed, while 16 robbers were arrested while injured, while the police conducted operations in different areas of the district.

According to details, 45 criminals were arrested, the police arrested 103 advertised suspects, while the police arrested 341 undercover suspects and registered 40 illegal weapons cases against them while conducting operations in different areas at the Larkana district level. Hand grenade.

Fayyaz assumes charge as DC F.P. Report

SUKKUR: Fayyaz Ahmed Rahujo assumed charge as Deputy Commissioner (DC) Khairpur district on Thursday. After assuming the office, Fayyaz Ahmed Rahujo held an introductory meeting with the heads of various government departments.

He also asked the departments to prepare a comprehensive plan for the uplift of the district. He said that he would take all possible measures to improve the performance of the official departments for the welfare of the public in the area.

Qiraat, Naat competition arranged at KUST



F.P. Report

KOHAT: A grand spiritual ceremony of Husn-e-Qirat-o-Naat Competition arranged by the Deputy Commissioner Kohat Abdul Akram Chitrali under the Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Program "Awami Agenda", was held in the auditorium of Kohat University of Science and Technology (KUST) on Wednesday evening. Commissioner Kohat Division Syed Motasim Billah Shah

attended the blessed and spiritual ceremony as a special guest, while Vice Chancellor KUST Prof. Dr. Muhammad Nasir-ud-Din and other dignitaries also graced the occasion with their participation.

In the said Competitions 52 renowned Quraan and Naat Khawans from the entire district were participated, who won the hearts of the audience with their charming voices. At the end of the ceremony, the winning participants were awarded special prizes. The

1st position holders of Qiraat and Naat were awarded with Rs.20,000, the 2nd with Rs.15,000, and 3rd with Rs.10,000.

The main objective of this event was to keep the youth of Kohat engaged in positive and constructive activities and to highlight their arts and talents. This event not only served as a means of recognizing individual talents but also proved to be an important step in promoting religious and cultural traditions.

Veterinary kits distributed among livestock producers

F.P. Report

ZHOB: The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) distributed veterinary kits among the livestock producers of the 'Farm Field School' under the 'Growth for Rural Advancements and Sustainable Progress (GRASP) project - an European Union-funded project for poverty reduction and sustainable inclusive economic growth in rural areas.

The distribution ceremony was held at the Livestock office here, which was attended by the Divisional Director of Livestock and Dairy Development, Dr Sheikh Tahir Mandokhel, Deputy Director Dr Naseebullah Kakar, Dr Karim Mandokhel, master trainers from FAO Dr Karim Dad Babar, Dr Humayun, Team Leader Taragee Foundation Dawood Khan Kakar, Maria and livestock keepers.

The District Value Chain Facilitator FAO Urooj Asif told journalist Rafiullah Mandokhel that an approach developed by the FAO 'Farm Field School (FFS)' focuses on experiential learning in enhancing productivity, sustainability, and resilience.

"The project emphasizes gender-inclusive development by creating income and employment opportunities, particularly for womenfolk in rural areas," she explained.

According to the Team Leader FAO Zhob Zain ud Din Mardanzai, veterinary kits have been provided to male and female small-scale livestock producers from various union councils of the district, including Meena bazaar, Takei, Garda Babar, Appozai, and Badinza, so that livestock keepers could benefit from these modern equipments for effective breeding and treatment of cattle at their household level.

"FAO is working in the livestock sector on poultry, sheep, and goat breeding, while in agriculture, on olive and grape cultivation in the mentioned above areas. So that farmers and livestock keepers could be made self-sufficient and their production could be enhanced," he expressed hope.

Deputy Director of Livestock and Dairy Development

Naseebullah Kakar, while appreciating the FAO's generous financial support in the livestock and agriculture sectors, said that Zhob is not only a far-off and poor region, but most of the people in the rural parts here rely on livestock and agriculture sectors. Quoting the official statistics, he said there are around four million cattle heads in the district.

The official demanded of the authorities concerned the expansion of the FAO programme to all the union councils of the district and the provision of hands-on trainings to the farmers as well as state-of-the-art equipments to them.

Financed by the European Union, the GRASP project is aimed at reducing poverty and promoting sustainable, inclusive economic growth in rural parts of Balochistan, including Zhob. It focuses on strengthening small and medium-sized enterprises in the livestock and horticulture sectors by improving productivity, enhancing climate resilience, and fostering inclusive development in different districts of Balochistan.

Govt commits for uplift of marginalized segments

F.P. Report

HAFIZABAD: Provincial Minister for Housing, Urban Development and Public Health Engineering, Bilal Yaseen said that present Punjab's government is working for welfare of people and distributing Rs.30 billion among 30 lakh less income families under Ramadan Package across the province while Rs. 10000/= family each is being given at doorstep of the people without any discrimination in respectable manners.

He expressed these views while visiting Ramadan Sahulat Bazar and newly constructed houses under 'Apni chatt, Apna Ghar' Programme in Hafizabad. Deputy Commissioner Abdul Razzaq also accompanied by him. He said that the

Punjab government was taking unmatched steps for providing different facilities of the life at their doorsteps and Federal government was also giving five thousand per family as Ramadan Package to poor people.

The minister said that Ramadan Sahulat Bazar were established to ensure provision of essential commodities to fasting people on cheaper prices then open market and a large number of people were throng to Ramadan Sahulat Bazaars for shopping where fruit, vegetable and other edibles items available in abundance. He appreciated arrangements in the Ramadan Sahulat Bazar made by the district administration Hafizabad.

He said that operation against encroachments, cleanliness work under

Suthra Punjab Programme was underway in Hafizabad, as result of which, beautification of city was emerging. He visited different stalls and checked prices, quality and availability of edibles items. He also took feedback from male and female consumers regarding provision of essential commodities in the Ramadan Sahulat Bazar.

Minister also visited newly constructed homes under Apni Chatt, Apna Ghar Scheme of the Punjab government. He said that more than ten lakh people visited 'Apni Chat, Apna Ghar Portal and five lakh people submitted application for 'Apni Chatt, Apna Ghar' Scheme. He said all people welfare schemes were being completed on merit and transparently.

Hailstorms destroy crops, trees in Upper Dir

F.P. Report

UPPER DIR: Crops and trees have been badly damaged following hailstorms that lashed Shrenal, Ashirai and Dogdara areas of upper Dir during the last 48 hours.

Meanwhile, rain has been continuing in Upper Dir for the last two days while it has been snowing over the mountains, leading to a rise in water level in the River Panjkorra. Drivers have been advised to exercise caution due to the fear of landslides on Dir-Kamrat highway.

Similarly, rain and hailstorms have also been reported from different parts of Khyber district and its adjoining areas. On the other hand, the Met Office forecast more rains, accompanied by strong winds, for upper parts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), Azad Jammu and Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan, while snow over the mountains during the next 24 hours. It predicted heavy rainfall at isolated places in these areas. It further said that showers were also likely at a few places in upper Punjab and lower KP during the aforementioned period.

1429 outlaws arrested F.P. Report

LARKANA: Under the directives of Inspector General of Police (IG) Sindh, Ghulam Nabi Memon, Range Police launched an exceptional crackdown from March 7 to 22, 2025, to arrest absconders and proclaimed offenders.



North Korea sent 3,000 more troops to Russia

SEOUL (AP): North Korea sent around 3,000 additional troops to Russia in January and February in continued support for Russian President Vladimir Putin's war on Ukraine, South Korea's military said in its latest assessment.

The South's Joint Chiefs of Staff said North Korea has also been sending more missiles, artillery equipment and ammunition to help Russia and that North Korea could increase its weapons supplies further depending on the war situation. Russia and Ukraine recently agreed on a limited ceasefire, though both sides have accused each other of violations. The military equipment North Korea has sent to Russia includes a "considerable amount" of short-range ballistic missiles, 170 millimeter self-propelled howitzers and around 220 units of 240 millimeter multiple rocket launchers.

North Korea has sent approximately 11,000 military personnel to fight in the war against Ukraine in its first involvement in a large-scale conflict since the 1950-53 Korean War, and the Joint Chiefs assessed that around 4,000 of them have been killed or injured. South Korea's National Intelligence Service previously attributed the high North Korean casualties to the troops' likely struggles in adapting to drones and other elements of modern warfare. North Korean troops are further disadvantaged by the crude tactics of their Russian commanders, who have sent them into assault campaigns without providing rear-fire support, the spy agency told lawmakers in January.

Still, Ukrainian military and intelligence officials

have assessed that the North Koreans are gaining crucial battlefield experience and have been key to Russia's strategy of overwhelming Ukraine by throwing large numbers of soldiers into the battle for Kursk. The South Korean military report came after North Korean leader Kim Jong Un expressed his unwavering support for Russia's war in Ukraine during a meeting with a top Russian security official, Sergei Shoigu, last week in Pyongyang. State media reports said Kim and Shoigu reaffirmed their commitment to uphold a major mutual defense treaty agreed upon last year.

Kim's military support of Russia has raised concerns that he may receive Russian technology transfers in return, further strengthening the threat posed by his nuclear-armed military. Experts say drones are among the potential areas where North Korea might seek to acquire Russian technology and know-how. North Korean state media said that Kim observed tests of newly developed reconnaissance and attack drones this week and called for their increased production. Kim in recent months has been emphasizing the development of drones, and the tests were the latest display of his country's growing military capabilities.

Photos released by North Korea's official Korean Central News Agency showed Kim observing what appeared to be a large reconnaissance drone roughly resembling Boeing's E-7 Wedgetail airborne warning and control aircraft. Other images showed exploding drones

crashing into military vehicles used as targets. The agency said the test demonstrated the reconnaissance drone's ability to track multiple targets and monitor troop movements on land and at sea, potentially enhancing North Korea's intelligence-gathering operations and ability to neutralize enemy threats. The report said the new exploding drones are designed for various attack missions and feature unspecified artificial intelligence capabilities.

Kim expressed satisfaction with the drones' performance and approved plans to expand production, emphasizing that drones and AI should be "top" priorities in efforts to advance his armed forces and adapt them to modern warfare, KCNA said. The agency said the tests took place as Kim visited a drone technology complex and an electronic warfare research group. Kim previously inspected other demonstrations of drones that explode on impact in November and August last year.

When asked about the new reconnaissance drone, which North Korean state media unveiled for the first time, Lee Sung Joon, spokesperson for South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff, said that the North likely modified an existing aircraft to create an early-warning drone and may have used certain components from Russia. He said North Korea was possibly exaggerating the capabilities of the drone. "As you can see, it looks quite cumbersome and we assess that it's likely vulnerable to interception," Lee said during a briefing, without elaborating further on the assessment.

Russia hands long prison terms to Ukrainian 'Azov' fighters

ROSTOV-ON-DON, Russia (Reuters): A Russian military court handed down long prison sentences to 12 members of Ukraine's Azov regiment, which led the defence of the city of Mariupol in the early months of the war and is designated as a terrorist organisation by Russia.

The defendants, charged with terrorist activity and with violently seizing or retaining power, were sentenced to between 13 and 23 years in prison, Russian state media reported. Independent news outlet Mediazona said 11 other people whom Russia had already returned to Ukraine in prisoner exchanges were also sentenced in absentia. They included nine women who had worked as army cooks.

It said the 12 Azov members, who appeared in court with shaven heads, would appeal the verdicts and that some of them had denied wrongdoing or had said that testimony they had given had been obtained under duress, something Reuters was not able to confirm. Ukraine's human rights ombudsman Dmytro Lubinets accused Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy in Paris. Macron added that anti-tank missiles, surface-to-air missiles, armoured vehicles and drones were part of the new military equipment to be provided to Kyiv. More Mirage fighter jets would also be provided.

The two leaders were speaking ahead of a summit of some 30 leaders aimed at bolstering aid to Ukraine, discussing the limited ceasefires and a future European role to deter Russia from attacks once there is a negotiated deal. "Ukraine gave its agreement to a ceasefire without conditions. We expect the same commitment from Russia," Macron said, adding that it was too early to lift European sanctions on Russia. "I see today that Russia's will is to rewrite and reinterpret what was discussed and agreed by listing new conditions. Far from proving it wants peace, Russia continues each day to strike intensively Ukraine territory."

French President Emmanuel Macron warned Russia was still showing a "desire for war" despite efforts to forge a ceasefire in Ukraine, ahead of a summit aimed at boosting Ukrainian security under a potential truce brokered by the United States. Macron is to welcome European

Zaporizhzhia N-plant to stay in Russian control

MOSCOW (Reuters): Russia's Foreign Ministry said the Zaporizhzhia nuclear plant was a Russian facility and transferring control of it to Ukraine or any other country was impossible. The ministry also said that jointly operating the plant was not admissible as it would be impossible to properly ensure the physical and nuclear safety of the station. It said Zaporizhzhia region, partly controlled by Russian forces, was one of four in Ukraine that had been annexed by Russia by virtue of referendums staged seven months after Moscow's full-scale invasion of its neighbour and a presidential decree had formally made the station Russian property. Western nations have dismissed the referendums as shams.

"The return of the station to Russia's nuclear sector has been a fait accompli for quite some time," the ministry statement said. "Transferring the Zaporizhzhia plant to the control of Ukraine or another country is impossible." Russian forces seized the station early in the invasion and each side has since routinely accused the other of staging attacks that endanger safety at the plant, Europe's largest with six reactors. Although the plant now produces no electricity, the UN's nuclear watchdog has monitors stationed there, as it does at all Ukrainian nuclear power sites. Ukraine demands the return of the station to its jurisdiction and rejects the 2022 annexation of its territory as illegal. US President Donald Trump, during a phone conversation this month with his Ukrainian counterpart Volodymyr Zelenskiy suggested the United States could help run and possibly own Ukraine's nuclear power plants. Zelenskiy said the plants belong to the Ukrainian people. He said he and Trump had discussed potential US investment in the plant.



SEOUL: North Korean leader Kim Jong Un in a black jacket, standing by what appeared to be a large reconnaissance drone at an undisclosed location.

France to provide 2b euros in extra military aid to Ukraine: Macron

PARIS (Reuters): France will provide some 2 billion euros (\$2.15 billion) of extra military aid to Ukraine, President Emmanuel Macron said, accusing Russia of reinterpreting and rewriting recent limited ceasefire deals.

"I can announce today 2 billion euros of extra military support to Ukraine," Macron said alongside Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy in Paris. Macron added that anti-tank missiles, surface-to-air missiles, armoured vehicles and drones were part of the new military equipment to be provided to Kyiv. More Mirage fighter jets would also be provided.

The two leaders were speaking ahead of a summit of some 30 leaders aimed at bolstering aid to Ukraine, discussing the limited ceasefires and a future European role to deter Russia from attacks once there is a negotiated deal. "Ukraine gave its agreement to a ceasefire without conditions. We expect the same commitment from Russia," Macron said, adding that it was too early to lift European sanctions on Russia. "I see today that Russia's will is to rewrite and reinterpret what was discussed and agreed by listing new conditions. Far from proving it wants peace, Russia continues each day to strike intensively Ukraine territory."

French President Emmanuel Macron warned Russia was still showing a "desire for war" despite efforts to forge a ceasefire in Ukraine, ahead of a summit aimed at boosting Ukrainian security under a potential truce brokered by the United States. Macron is to welcome European

leaders alongside Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky to agree on what security guarantees Europe can offer Ukraine should a ceasefire deal be reached. US Secretary of State Marco Rubio said earlier that Washington will examine Russia's requested conditions, but cautioned that a peace deal would take time.

In a sign of the tension ahead, Russia and Ukraine accused each other of derailing an initial deal that could see them halt attacks in the Black Sea and against energy infrastructure. Speaking alongside Zelensky in Paris, Macron said this was a "decisive phase to put an end to the war of aggression" waged by Russia, as the United States reaches out to Moscow in search of a deal. Macron also announced a new French two-billion-euro (\$2.2-billion) military aid package for Ukraine, with Paris ready to rapidly ship existing hardware from its stocks.

He said Russia must accept a 30-day ceasefire offered by Ukraine "without preconditions", accusing Moscow of still showing a "desire for war" and hailing Kyiv for having "taken the risk of peace". Macron accused Russia of making "new conditions" and not responding to the ceasefire offer. "Ukraine has clearly expressed to the United States its agreement to a full and unconditional 30-day ceasefire, even though it is the victim of the aggression," said Macron. "We expect the same commitment from Russia," he added. Speaking during a visit to Jamaica, Rubio said the ceasefire "won't be simple".

"It'll take some time, but at least

we're on that road and we're talking about these things," he said. President Vladimir Putin had ordered a 30-day truce on energy infrastructure targets last week, but Kyiv says Russian strikes on such sites have continued. Zelensky said he was expecting "strong decisions" from the meeting. "Now is definitely not the time to reduce pressure on Russia or weaken our unity for the sake of peace," he said.

In an interview with European public broadcasters, he said Putin's "main aim is to divide and weaken" European unity. "He is trying to hit Europe from within, he has partly succeeded through the position of Hungary... its leaders," which regularly block EU sanctions against Russia, Zelensky said. Once a settlement is agreed, one key element could be sending European forces to ensure Russia does not attack Ukraine again. Zelensky said it was too early to discuss specific roles of future European forces in Ukraine, after a key aide, Igor Zhovkva, told AFP in Paris that Ukraine needed a robust European presence and not just peacekeepers.

The Ukrainian leader said the question now was about "who will be ready" to take part in such missions. "It's too early to say," he said, referring to what role the forces could play. He added: "No one wants to drag any country into a war." He said European contingents would be important for control, and to ensure that Russia does not send in its forces again. Macron stressed that European forces would not be in Ukraine to fight. "It is a pacifist approach," he said.

‘There is no blank check’: Syrian leader told to rein in jihadis

DAMASCUS (Reuters): Syria's President Ahmed al-Sharaa has a lot to prove to win over Western powers. If the first few weeks of his rule are anything to go by, he may be heading in the wrong direction. The West is watching Syria's leaders closely to ensure they rein in the Islamist jihadis who killed hundreds of Alawites, create an inclusive government with effective institutions, maintain order in a country fractured by years of civil war and prevent a resurgence of Islamic State or al Qaeda.

To hammer home the message, three European envoys made clear in a March 11 meeting with Foreign Minister Asaad al-Shibani in Damascus that cracking down on the jihadi fighters was their top priority and that international support for the nascent administration could evaporate unless it took decisive action. The meeting has not previously been reported. "The abuses that have taken place in recent days are truly intolerable, and those responsible must be identified and condemned," said French Foreign Ministry spokesman Christophe Lemoine, when asked about the message delivered in Damascus. "There is no blank check for the new authorities."

Reuters spoke to the three European envoys as well as four regional officials during a trip to Damascus. They all stressed that the authorities must get a grip on security across the country and prevent any repeat killings. "We asked for accountability. The punishment should go on those who committed the massacres. The security forces need to be cleaned up," said one European envoy, who was among the group of officials who delivered the message. Washington has also called on Syria's leaders to hold the perpetrators of the attacks to account. US State Department spokesperson Tammy Bruce said they were monitoring the interim authorities' actions to determine US policy for Syria.

The problem for Sharaa, however, is that his Hayat

Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) group only comprises around 20,000 fighters, according to two assessments by Western governments. That makes him reliant on the tens of thousands of fighters from other groups - including the very hardline jihadist factions he is being asked to combat - and moving against them could plunge Syria back into war, five diplomats and three analysts said. Thousands of Sunni Muslim foreigners, from countries including China, Albania, Russia and Pakistan, joined Syria's rebels early in the civil war to fight against the rule of Bashar al-Assad and the Iran-backed Shi'ite militias who supported him, giving the conflict a sectarian overtone.

One of the reasons Sharaa now depends on a relatively small force of some 20,000 fighters from several disparate groups, including the foreign jihadis, is because he dissolved the national army soon after taking power. While the step was meant to

draw a line under five decades of autocratic Assad family rule, diplomats and analysts said it echoed Washington's decision to disband the Iraqi army after the fall of Saddam Hussein - and could lead to similar chaos. Sharaa's move, along with mass dismissals of public sector workers, has deepened divisions in Syria and left hundreds of thousands without income, potentially pushing trained soldiers into insurgent groups or unemployment, worsening Syria's instability, according to five European and Arab officials. Neither Sharaa's office nor the Syrian foreign ministry responded to requests for comment for this story.

In addition to the challenge of quelling sectarian violence, Sharaa must also contend with a host of foreign powers from the United States to Russia, Israel, Turkey and Iran - all turning Syria's territory into a geopolitical chessboard. Turkey holds the north, backing opposition forces while suppressing Kurdish ambitions.

Trump, Macron and Zelensky lead wave of new ‘mobile phone diplomacy’

PARIS (AFP): When Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky interrupted a press conference he was holding to answer a telephone call from his French counterpart Emmanuel Macron, he opened a window into a new world of geopolitical diplomacy. "Can I call you back in 15 to 20 minutes," Zelensky asked Macron before returning to reporters' questions. He then revealed that he spoke to Macron "once a day".

Mobile phone exchanges between world leaders are "a new diplomacy" that is "more direct and spontaneous" and allows for "more frequent, quicker" contact, a Macron aide told AFP. The French president

speaks to both Zelensky and US President Donald Trump "almost every day", a member of his team said.

The same goes for British Prime Minister Keir Starmer. Mobile phone diplomacy is having knock-on effects, though, sidelining diplomats who are now no longer essential mediums of geopolitical communication. And these mobile phone exchanges have become more frequent since Trump returned to the White House with his unorthodox style of leadership.

Whereas once, telephone contact between two leaders was organised in advance by aides and took place in their presence, these days such contact

can be much less formal. Macron has spoken about how Trump sometimes contacts him "directly" without warning, even forcing him to leave meetings for a quick chat. In the corridors of power at the Elysee Palace in Paris, that is considered a necessary occupational hazard in a bid to exert influence on Trump.

Such designs have become even more pressing for Ukraine and its European allies given the US president's abrupt foreign policy U-turn and softening of its stance towards Russia's Vladimir Putin. Such exchanges are not entirely new however, while their use can also depend on the different

individuals involved. Trump prefers direct contact without intermediaries, whereas his predecessor Joe Biden stuck to classical bureaucracy, an ex-diplomat said. "Things have picked up pace. There has been a change in rhythm which has provoked a change in the nature of relationships," French former ambassador Michel Duclos, now an expert at the Institut Montaigne think tank, told AFP.

In a French sense, that means that foreign policy has been increasingly concentrated in the presidency, Duclos added. Zelensky began direct mobile phone diplomacy as soon as Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022.

NATO chief appeals for unity as Europe builds its armies

WARSAW (AP): NATO Secretary-General Mark Rutte appealed for unity as European nations scale up their armed forces and defense industries after the United States warned that Europe must take care of its own security in future.

Trust between the 32 member countries is at a new low. NATO was formed 76 years ago to provide stability in Europe; a guarantee underwritten by the United States. But the Trump administration says America's security priorities now lie in Asia and on its own borders. "Let me be absolutely clear, this is not the time to go it alone. Not for Europe or North America," Rutte said in a speech in Warsaw. "The global security challenges are too great for any of us to face on our own."

Rutte said that "there is no alternative to NATO" even as some allies worry about the US commitment to the organization's central principle that an attack on one ally must be considered an attack on them all, while Washington demands that European countries stop free-riding on its massive military budget. His warning comes as Europe tries to

wean itself off its security dependence on the United States, just as it reduced its reliance on Russian energy after President Vladimir Putin ordered his troops into Ukraine three years ago, amid a drive to buy more European military equipment.

"Yes, Europe needs to know that Uncle Sam still has our back, but America also needs to know that its NATO allies will step up and play their full part, without restrictions and without capability gaps," Rutte said. "It's only fair. Reassurance is a two-way street." His comments come on the eve of a visit to Greenland by US Vice President JD Vance. President Donald Trump has not ruled out the use of military force to seize control of Greenland, a semi-autonomous territory belonging to NATO and European Union member Denmark and this has deeply unsettled many allies.

Still, Rutte said he is "absolutely confident" about the US commitment to NATO's Article 5 security guarantee. He added that "nothing can replace America's nuclear umbrella, the ultimate guarantor of our security." Britain and France

are also nuclear powers but their arsenals are tiny by comparison. Asked on March 13 whether US forces would defend an ally which came under attack from Russia, Trump said: "We'll make sure it doesn't happen." Trump also said that "you have to keep NATO strong. You have to keep it relevant." Rutte said he believes that when Trump and his NATO counterparts meet for a summit in the Netherlands in June, "we will begin a new chapter for our transatlantic alliance where we build a stronger, fairer and more lethal NATO to face a more dangerous world."

He said that ambitious new spending targets would be set. Twenty-three NATO member countries are estimated to be meeting the current guideline of more than 2% of their gross domestic product on national defense budgets. Rutte has said that the new target would be "well north of 3%." Earlier, at talks with Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk, Rutte warned Russia that the alliance would always stand by Poland or any other member and that its reaction to an attack would be "devastating."

Ukraine says ties with White House are ‘back on track’

KYIV (Reuters): Relations between Kyiv and Washington are "back on track", the chief of staff to Ukraine's president told Reuters, after a fraught Oval Office encounter last month between the US and Ukrainian leaders.

Andriy Yermak said two rounds of talks on a potential ceasefire, held in Saudi Arabia, had given Kyiv an opportunity to show US officials it is open to work with US President Donald Trump in his bid to end the three-year-old war between Russia and Ukraine. Yermak, chief of staff to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy, said that was in contrast with the Russian negotiating approach, which he said involved attaching conditions to a peace deal.

"I think we have great conversations with the Americans," Yermak said in

an interview at his office in Kyiv. "I think we are back on track." A Feb. 28 meeting in the White House between Zelenskiy and Trump descended into acrimony, with Trump and Vice President JD Vance saying the Ukrainian leader showed disrespect. Since then, Kyiv has launched a drive to salvage relations, starting with a March 19 telephone call between Trump and Zelenskiy which Yermak described as "great."

It's so far unclear if Kyiv's approach will lead to concrete outcomes from the talks that Ukraine is seeking, or alter Trump's desire to build closer ties with Moscow. Describing the talks in Saudi Arabia, where US officials have been trying to broker agreements with Russia and Ukrainian delegations, Yermak said. "We demonstrated we are

very serious, the Americans understood." "Dear American friends, you understand that we are partners. This was our goal." In contrast, he said: "Russia is just playing games." Moscow has said it is committed to achieving peace, and has accused Kyiv of undermining the process by launching attacks on targets in Russia. In Saudi Arabia, the United States reached separate deals with Ukraine and Russia to pause their attacks over the Black Sea and against each other's energy targets, but it was not clear when and how the deals would come into force.

Russia made a Black Sea truce conditional on an easing of sanctions so it can regain access to international export markets for its fertiliser and agricultural products.

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Rehmat Shah Afridi (Late)

Founder

Bilal Shah Afridi

Chief Executive

Jalil Afridi

Managing Editor

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

Peshawar Office: 0300- 9009001

Peshawar Fax: 091-5703687, Post Box No. 573

E-mail: fppeshawar@thefrontierpost.com

Lahore Office: 0335-4026284

Email: fplahore@thefrontierpost.com

Islamabad Office: 0321-5066253

Email: mahmoodafridi@thefrontierpost.com

Karachi Office: 021-32213411, 0300-8340907

Email: fpkarachi@thefrontierpost.com

*USA and Canada Toll Free Number 1-800-5905747

Putin's calculated move with Trump shows Russia's edge

RUSSIAN President Vladimir Putin has always been a master manipulator, and his latest maneuvering with President Trump underscores just how adept he is at bending situations to his advantage. The recent phone call between the two leaders, ostensibly aimed at finding a pathway to peace in Ukraine, ended up showcasing Putin's ability to out-manuever Trump while extracting concessions without giving up anything of substance. From the outset, Putin set the tone by making Trump wait for more than an hour before taking his call. The delay, during which Putin was engaged in a televised conference with Russian business leaders, was no accident. It was a calculated power play, reinforcing his dominance not just over Trump but also for domestic audiences in Russia.

The event echoed a similar humiliation meted out to Steve Witkoff, Trump's special envoy, who was reportedly made to wait eight hours before meeting with Putin in Moscow. These theatrics serve a clear purpose: sending the message that Putin is in control, setting the terms of engagement on his own timeline. Once the conversation did begin, Putin swiftly demonstrated his tactical edge. While Trump and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky had reportedly pushed for a full ceasefire, Putin offered only a limited pause on attacks against Ukrainian energy infrastructure - a far cry from what Trump had likely envisioned. Even this half-measure was framed ambiguously, with the Kremlin stating the pause would apply solely to energy infrastructure, while the White House suggested it encompassed broader infrastructure.

Given Russia's track record of interpreting agreements to suit its interests, there's little doubt that Moscow will stick to its narrow interpretation. More plausibly, Putin crafted the offer himself, knowing it was the least costly concession he could make while keeping Trump engaged. This shrewdly constructed "compromise" allowed Putin to appear cooperative while ensuring Russia retained the ability to continue its broader military operations in Ukraine, where it maintains an upper hand due to Ukrainian manpower shortages and Trump's hesitations on military aid.

Despite mounting casualties and immense economic strain, Russia has remained relentless in its pursuit of territorial gains. Putin's refusal to agree to a comprehensive ceasefire ensures that his forces can maintain their offensive, consolidating positions in eastern Ukraine and continuing to batter Ukrainian cities and infrastructure. This approach has already led to tens of thousands of Ukrainian civilians killed or injured and an estimated half a trillion dollars in damage. Meanwhile, Ukraine has achieved notable successes in striking Russian energy infrastructure, directly threatening one of the Kremlin's key revenue streams for financing the war. Yet, even with these setbacks, Putin remains confident in his long-term position, particularly with Trump's rhetoric signaling a shift in US policy.

What makes this situation even more advantageous for Putin is Trump's apparent willingness to entertain concessions that weaken Ukraine's position. The Kremlin's statement after the call emphasized that progress toward peace would require an end to Western military aid and intelligence support to Ukraine. Trump has already signaled his willingness to slow arms shipments and curtail intelligence sharing - a move that directly aligns with Russian interests. By dangling the possibility of a ceasefire, Putin can keep Trump engaged while extracting further US retreats, knowing that any reduction in Western assistance only strengthens Russia's leverage in the conflict. Trump's approach has already given Putin a series of victories. One, he has opened direct negotiations with Russia without Ukraine's presence, undermining Kyiv's agency in its own war.

Two, he has practically dashed all hopes of the future NATO membership for Ukraine, weakening its long-term security prospects. And three, in blatant defiance of international law, by floating the idea that Ukraine should cede territory to Russia, Putin has changed the whole complexion of the equation. For Putin, these are not minor wins - they are major steps toward achieving his war objectives without having to make significant concessions. His ultimate goal remains unchanged: to reassert Russian dominance over Ukraine, dictate its foreign policy and solidify control over the regions Moscow has illegally annexed.

Even as he extends these negotiations, Putin likely sees an opportunity to buy time, consolidate his gains, and eventually present a "peace" framework that cements Russia's territorial expansions while offering Trump a political win to sell domestically. With Trump in the White House, Putin may find in him a leader willing to further reduce US pressure on Russia, lift sanctions and even restore economic ties - all of which would benefit Moscow while leaving Ukraine in a precarious position.

Meanwhile, as expected, Zelensky's response to the Trump-Putin call has been measured. Zelensky, aware of Trump's unpredictable nature and still reeling from his face-to-face encounter with Trump at the Oval Office, cautiously welcomed the limited ceasefire on energy infrastructure while making it clear that Ukraine's bottom-line demands remain non-negotiable and Kyiv retains the right to determine its own alliances and military partnerships. For Ukraine, any discussion of freezing the conflict along current battle lines is untenable unless Russia reverses its annexations and allows international oversight to ensure compliance with international law. Without such guarantees, any ceasefire risks becoming a de facto recognition of Russia's illegal territorial gains. But the situation seems to be slipping out of hands of Zelensky and he appears to be more weak with each passing day.

Putin's strategic patience continues to pay dividends. By exploiting Trump's transactional approach to diplomacy, he has maneuvered himself into a position where he can dictate the terms of engagement while extracting concessions from the US. If Trump sees his limited agreement with Putin as a diplomatic success, it only reinforces the Kremlin's belief that it can extract even more favorable terms down the line. The reality is that Putin has no genuine interest in peace - at least not on terms that involve returning Ukrainian land or restoring the post-2014 status quo. With Trump now offering him an opening, Putin is seizing the moment, playing the long game, and shaping a narrative that keeps the West divided and Ukraine vulnerable. As the war drags on, the question remains: will the US recognize Putin's manipulation for what it is, or will it allow him to continue dictating the terms of engagement? If history is any indication, the Kremlin is betting on the latter - and so far, it has been right.

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Trump's goal to 'un-unite' Russia, China unlikely to work

Linggong Kong

IS the United States angling for a repeat of the Sino-Russian split? In an Oct. 31 interview with right-wing pundit Tucker Carlson, President Donald Trump argued that the United States under Joe Biden had, in his mind, erroneously pushed China and Russia together. Separating the two powers would be a priority of his administration. "I'm going to have to un-unite them, and I think I can do that, too," Trump said.

Since returning to the White House, Trump has been eager to negotiate with Russia, hoping to quickly bring an end to the war in Ukraine. One interpretation of this Ukraine policy is that it serves what Trump was getting at in his comments to Carlson. Pulling the United States out of the European conflict and repairing ties with Russia, even if it means throwing Ukraine under the bus, can be seen within the context of a shift of America's attention to containing Chinese power.

Indeed, after a recent call with Russian President Vladimir Putin, Trump told Fox News: "As a student of history, which I am -- and I've watched it all -- the first thing you learn is you don't want Russia and China to get together."

The history Trump alludes to is the strategy of the Nixon era, in which the United States sought to align with China as a counterbalance to the Soviet Union, encouraging a split between the two communist entities in the process. Yet, if creating a fissure between Moscow and Beijing is indeed the ultimate aim, Trump's vision is, I believe, both naive and shortsighted. Not only is Russia unlikely to abandon its relationship with China, but many in Beijing view Trump's handling of the Russia-Ukraine war -- and his foreign policy more broadly -- as a projection of weakness, not strength.

Although Russia and China have at various times in the past been adversaries when it suited their interests, today's geopolitical landscape is different from the Cold War era in which the Sino-Soviet split occurred. The two countries, whose relationship has grown steadily close since the fall of the Soviet

Union, have increasingly shared major strategic goals -- chief among them, challenging the Western liberal order led by the United States. Both China and Russia have, in recent years, adopted an increasingly assertive stance in projecting military strength: China in the South China Sea and around Taiwan, and Russia in former Soviet satellite states, including Ukraine.

In response, a unified stance formed by Western governments to counter China and Russia's challenge has merely pushed the two countries closer together. In February 2022, just as Russia was preparing its invasion of Ukraine, Presidents Vladimir Putin and Xi Jinping announced a "friendship without limits" -- in a show of unified intent against the West.

China has since become an indispensable partner for Russia, serving as its top trading partner for both imports and exports. In 2024, bilateral trade between China and Russia reached a record high of \$237 billion, and Russia now relies heavily on China as a key buyer of its oil and gas. This growing economic interdependence gives China considerable leverage over Russia and makes any US attempt to pull Moscow away from Beijing economically unrealistic. That doesn't mean the Russian-Chinese relationship is inviolable; areas of disagreement and divergent policy remain.

Indeed, there are areas that Trump could exploit if he were to succeed in driving a wedge between the two countries. For example, it could serve Russia's interests to support US efforts to contain China and discourage any expansionist tendencies in Beijing -- such as through Moscow's strategic ties with India, which China views with some alarm -- especially given that there are still disputed territories along the Chinese-Russian border. Putin isn't naive. He knows that with Trump in office, the deep-seated Western consensus against Russia -- including a robust, if leaky, economic sanctions regime -- isn't going away anytime soon. In Trump's first term, the US president likewise appeared to be cozying up

to Putin, but there is an argument that he was even tougher on Russia in terms of sanctions than the administrations of Barack Obama or Joe Biden.

So, while Putin would likely gladly accept a Trump-brokered peace deal that sacrifices Ukraine's interests in favor of Russia, that doesn't mean he would be rushing to embrace some kind of broader call to unite against China. Putin will know the extent to which Russia is now reliant economically on China, and subservient to it militarily. In the words of one Russian analyst, Moscow is now a "vassal" or, at best, a junior partner to Beijing. China, for its part, views Trump's peace talks with Russia and Ukraine as a sign of weakness that potentially undermines US hawkishness toward China.

While some members of the US administration are undoubtedly hawkish on China -- Secretary of State Marco Rubio views the country as the "most potent and dangerous" threat to American prosperity -- Trump has been more ambivalent. He may have slapped new tariffs on China as part of a renewed trade war, but he has also mulled a meeting with President Xi Jinping in an apparent overture. Beijing recognizes Trump's transactional mindset, which prioritizes short-term, tangible benefits over more predictable long-term strategic interests requiring sustained investment.

This changes the calculation over whether the United States may be unwilling to bear the high costs of defending Taiwan. Trump, in a deviation from his predecessor, has failed to commit the country to defending Taiwan, the self-governing island claimed by Beijing. Rather, Trump had indicated that if the Chinese government were to launch a military campaign to "reunify" Taiwan, he would opt instead for economic measures like tariffs and sanctions. His apparent openness to trade Ukraine territory for peace now has made some in Taiwan concerned over Washington's commitment to long-established international norms. China has taken another key lesson from Russia's experience in

Ukraine: The US-led economic sanctions regime has serious limits.

Even under sweeping Western sanctions, Russia was able to stay afloat through subterfuge and with support from allies like China and North Korea. Moreover, China remains far more economically intertwined with the West than Russia, and its relatively dominant global economic position means that it has significant leverage to combat any US-led efforts to isolate the country economically. Indeed, as geopolitical tensions have driven the West to gradually decouple from China in recent years, Beijing has adapted to the resulting economic slowdown by prioritizing domestic consumption and making the economy more self-reliant in key sectors.

That in part also reflects China's significant global economic and cultural strength. Coupled with this has been a domestic push to win countries in the Global South around to China's position. Beijing has secured endorsements from 70 countries officially recognizing Taiwan as part of China. As such, Trump's plan to end the Russia-Ukraine war by favoring Russia in the hope of drawing it into an anti-China coalition is, I believe, likely to backfire.

While Russia may itself harbor concerns about China's growing power, the two country's shared strategic goal of challenging the Western-led international order -- and Russia's deep economic dependence on China -- make any US attempt to pull Moscow away from Beijing unrealistic. Moreover, Trump's approach exposes vulnerabilities that China could exploit. His transactional and isolationist foreign policy, along with his encouragement of right-wing parties in Europe, may strain relations with European Union allies and weaken trust in American security commitments.

Beijing, in turn, may view this as a sign of declining US influence, giving China more room to maneuver, noticeably in regard to Taiwan. Rather than increasing the chances of a Sino-Russia split, such a shift could instead divide an already fragile Western coalition.

Playing for time

Pyoatr Kozlov

AS high-level delegations from the US and Russia arrive in Saudi Arabia for the second round of bilateral talks aimed at ending the war in Ukraine, Moscow's envoys will have one goal on their mind: buying time. For the Kremlin, dragging out peace negotiations for as long as possible is imperative for seizing as much Ukrainian territory as it can and getting an upper hand over Kyiv in relations with the US, as Moscow isn't capable of making these battlefield advances quickly, four sources familiar with the Kremlin's thinking told The Moscow Times.

All of these sources spoke on condition of anonymity in order to share details about sensitive diplomatic matters. "Time is currently on our side, and we'll try to make the most of it," a Russian diplomat told The Moscow Times. While President Vladimir Putin said that he agreed in principle to Trump's proposed 30-day ceasefire, he stressed that "nuances" are important for Moscow -- a signal that Russia will insist on its maximalist demands before it agrees to lay down arms.

It is those nuances that Putin's envoys have been tasked with starting to address in detail at the talks in Riyadh on Monday. Ideally, the Kremlin hopes that Washington will either tacitly allow Russia to keep advancing on the battlefield while diplomats negotiate -- or even pressure Kyiv to fully withdraw its troops from Russian-occupied regions, including Kherson and Zaporizhzhia, said a current Russian official. Moscow claims that the Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhzhia and Kherson regions are Russian territory despite not fully controlling any of them.

Moscow is bent on solidifying control over these regions at any cost, as Putin cannot politically afford to abandon them after enshrining their status in the Constitution, a Kremlin-linked official said. "There is no constitutional mechanism for regions to secede. We need all of Zaporizhzhia and Kherson. Either Trump influences them to leave, or we're told: 'Enter into long negotiations and simply use military force to establish control.' That's the worst option for us, because river crossings are always painful operations," the official said. Alternately, Russia could try to seize parts of another Ukrainian region such as Dnipropetrovsk or Sumy and then offer a trade for Kherson and Zaporizhzhia, the official continued.

"We hope to find an option that doesn't involve forcing the Dnipro and storming Kherson [the city is on the right bank; Russian forces control the left]. I really hope it doesn't come to that. That would mean for us thousands of casualties," he said. In terms of military logistics, Russian forces in their current state cannot realistically aim for anything beyond the Sloviansk-Dnipropetrovsk area, he added.

"Physically, this force can't go anywhere further or do anything more," he said. "Reaching Odessa is, of course, impossible. And we don't even need that." Moscow is sending seasoned negotiators for its second meeting with the US in Saudi Arabia. Among them is Senator Grigory Karasin, a former deputy foreign minister who spent 47 years in the Foreign Ministry and for many years handled the

"Ukrainian dossier," including participation in drafting both Minsk agreements, which the Kremlin considered a major success. Sergei Beseda, another Ukraine expert who serves as an advisor to FSB Director Alexander Bortnikov, will also be present at the talks.

For years, Beseda headed the FSB's Fifth Service, which was responsible for intelligence gathering, source recruitment and subversive activities in Ukraine. He played a key role in planning the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. After the invasion failed in its initial goals of capturing Kyiv and decapitating the Ukrainian leadership, Beseda was reportedly placed under house arrest, according to journalists Andrei Soldatov and Irina Borogan. Sunday's talks mark the first time that Beseda will appear at a public official event since then, albeit in a lower-ranking capacity -- suggesting that he was indeed dismissed from the FSB's Fifth Service after the botched invasion.

"These guys know the Ukraine talks inside and out. They've been tasked with nitpicking every comma," a Moscow Times source said. When determining which lands will go to which side, Moscow believes that the exact location of the dividing line is not of critical importance to Washington, two Russian officials told The Moscow Times. "As I understand it, Trump wants a modern, well-armed, pro-Western Ukraine. He can't just give Ukraine up entirely. But where exactly the border is drawn is not that crucial to him," a Moscow Times source said.

As The Moscow Times has previously reported, Russia will try to paint Ukraine as the obstacle to peace in hopes of nabbing concessions from Washington.

Moscow wants these negotiations to be worked out in as much detail as the second Minsk Agreements. Doing so could take a significant amount of time -- as much as several weeks. "Things are unfolding more according to Russia's scenario. Whether this moratorium [on strikes on energy infrastructure and ships in the Black Sea] will happen is still unclear," said Fyodor Lukyanov, editor-in-chief of the Kremlin-friendly journal Russia in Global Affairs. "But even if it's implemented, it won't directly change the situation on the battlefield, where the initiative currently belongs to Russia."

Yet Israeli military expert David Sharp cast doubt on the idea that Russia could realistically capture as much land as it wants without external help before a peace deal is reached. "The Russian army is incapable of quickly and fully occupying the territories of the four annexed Ukrainian regions. For Russians, capturing even a couple of villages is seen as a huge success," Sharp told The Moscow Times. "In order to cross the Dnipro and seize Kherson -- or even take the city of Zaporizhzhia without having to cross the river, as Zaporizhzhia lies on both banks -- something extraordinary would have to happen."

This is an extremely difficult task. Either the Russian army would have to be dramatically strengthened, which cannot happen suddenly or out of nowhere, or there would need to be a complete collapse of Ukraine's defense. Russia is betting on wearing down the enemy over time," Sharp said.

South Korea's political drama is far from over

Karishma Vaswani

SOUTH Korea is grappling with the longest presidential impeachment trial in the country's history. The Constitutional Court was overdue in delivering its verdict on President Yoon Suk Yeol at the time of this writing. If found guilty - as many expect - he will be forced to step down, triggering an election within 60 days. But the scars left on society will take much longer to heal.

The eight judges have presumably been worried about public opinion. Hundreds of thousands of people from rival camps have taken to the streets to protest ahead of the judgment. Schools and subway stations have been closed, with scores of police officers guarding the areas around the court.

The potential for violence in the days ahead is still great. Still, that shouldn't take away from the urgent and necessary reform of the political system to prevent

future abuse of power. Equally important is focusing on foreign policy challenges and North Korea's growing nuclear threat. Neither will be easy.

US President Donald Trump's administration has taken steps that could upend America's alliance system, putting countries like South Korea at risk. He's lashed out at Asian allies and has declined to confirm whether the US would defend Taiwan in the event of a Chinese attack. All of this is pushing countries like Japan and South Korea to think far more seriously about rearmament. The growing threat from North Korea is also prompting debate about when - not if - Seoul should develop nuclear weapons of its own. Yoon's administration at times flirted with the idea of South Korea pursuing its own deterrent. Whatever happens to him, it's unclear how a future government might navigate this geopolitically fraught issue, despite

the strength of domestic support.

These are the issues South Koreans should be focused on. Instead they've been embroiled in yet another crisis, one that is very much the product of their political system.

Imposition of martial law shocked the nation. It was last introduced in 1979 by Prime Minister Choi Kyuhah following the assassination of President Park Chung-hee, who had seized power in a military coup in 1961. Yoon has yet to be formally removed from office, but it's the corrective that South Korean society urgently needs. Public opinion has been leaning toward

impeachment, as Bloomberg Economics notes, with 58% of those surveyed in favor and 37% against. Domestic reform is needed, but it's on the foreign policy front that Yoon's loss may be most keenly felt, notes Edward

Howell, an expert and lecturer on the politics and international relations of North Korea, the Korean Peninsula and East Asia at the University of Oxford. "Yoon strengthened the trilateral relationship between Japan, the US and South Korea in ways that forged new momentum in their ties," he told me. "His departure will throw some of that into disarray. South Koreans need to ask themselves whether it is in their best interests at this juncture to cut ties with these partners when the international picture is so tumultuous."

Yoon's government devoted significant political capital to improving historically fractious relations with Japan, working with the Biden administration to bring the three nations together in a summit. Beijing bristled at what it saw as US hegemony in East Asia - but privately the initiative was

welcomed in capitals across the region. That legacy is now in doubt, although recent trilateral naval exercises show all is not lost on this front. But Washington under Trump is nothing if not unpredictable. US Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth pushed back a visit because of Seoul's political uncertainty. Meanwhile, the US Department of Energy recently designated South Korea as a "sensitive country," a label typically reserved for nations viewed as a threat to national security or nuclear nonproliferation. Nuclear states like India and Russia are on the list, but so are North Korea and Iran. The decision was reportedly made before President Joe Biden left office in January, but Seoul's addition will no doubt complicate a delicate relationship.

The man most likely to be the next president is only compounding the problems. Opposition leader Lee Jae-myung has made positive

noises recently about the Washington-Seoul alliance, saying it should remain the "rock foundation" of national security. But past rhetoric has been less encouraging. He's supported protests against Japan and has talked up building ties with Beijing.

Before South Korea can fix its international picture, it needs to manage this internal turmoil. Power is highly concentrated in the presidency - adopting a parliamentary or semipresidential system could help to distribute it more evenly between the executive and legislative branches and provide a strong check on authoritarian tendencies. Delegating more responsibility to local governments would also reduce the centralization of power. As political systems around the world have shown, democracy is hard work. It requires persistent effort. South Korea's is worth protecting.

The Japan Times

Elon Musk thinks robots are a \$10 trillion business

John Liu

SPINNING bright red handkerchiefs and dancing in step to folk music, more than a dozen human-like robots took to China's biggest stage in January, making a splashy debut at the annual Lunar New Year gala. The remarkable performance, watched by more than a billion people, is a high-profile reminder of how far Chinese humanoid robots have come. Over the past two months, videos of the country's humanoid robots pulling off moves such as bike rides, roundhouse kicks and side flips have blown up the internet, often amplified by state media as a key potential driver of economic growth.

Even though very few of the humanoids are in mass production, competition with Elon Musk's Tesla, one of the acknowledged frontrunners in the field, is heating up. The promise of an "I, Robot" future, where machines handle household chores and serve as caregivers, has drawn nearly every major tech company in both the United States and China to bet on humanoids or robotics. Microsoft, Nvidia and Amazon founder Jeff Bezos have invested in American humanoid maker Figure AI. Meanwhile, Meta is planning major investments in humanoids, according to a Bloomberg report last month.

Musk, whose Optimus humanoid has sparked global interest since its debut in 2022, predicted last month that the project alone could generate more than \$10 trillion in revenue. While it may take another five to 10 years for humanoid robots to make a real societal impact, they could eventually become the next widely adopted consumer electronics, according to Xi Ning, chair professor of robotics and automation at the University of Hong Kong.

"Everybody will need them, like automobiles, like cellphones, and the potential market volume will be huge," he told CNN. Goldman Sachs projected last year that the global humanoid robot market will be worth \$38 billion by 2035. In five years, they estimate that 250,000 humanoid units, mainly for industrial use, will be

shipped, while consumers will be buying about one million units a year in about a decade. Beijing, which is looking to replicate China's success in the electric vehicle (EV) market, wants to be at the forefront of that growth.

It's eager to position the country as a global tech powerhouse and build on the momentum of recent Chinese achievements in the field - such as AI startup DeepSeek's reasoning model that stunned the world in January - especially as the US tightens tech restrictions on Beijing. Despite entering the race later than American rivals including Tesla, Boston Dynamics and Figure AI, experts say Chinese firms are rapidly closing the gap. With their preternatural ability to optimize supply chains and cut costs, Chinese firms are also accelerating the mass production of humanoids. China already dominates the space for industrial robots, deploying more of them every year since 2021 than all other countries combined, according to the International Federation of Robotics, a Germany-based non-governmental organization.

Compared to humanoids, industrial robots typically feature less advanced technology and perform less sophisticated tasks. They're widely used in industrial settings for manufacturing or transportation. As with EVs, Tesla was one of the few big-name frontrunners for humanoids when Musk introduced the project in 2021 and showcased an Optimus prototype a year later. Since then, Beijing has publicly thrown its weight behind the humanoid robotics industry with increasing funding drives and government support. In a 2023 policy document, China's Ministry of Industry and Information Technology identified the humanoid robotics industry as a "new frontier in technological competition," setting a 2025 target for mass production and secure supply chains for core components. Last month, Chinese leader Xi Jinping chaired a high-profile meeting with the country's top business executives. Among those seated in the front row was Wang Xingxing,

CEO of Unitree, the company behind the viral dancing robots, an indication of Beijing's growing focus on this emerging sector. Aside from Unitree, other major domestic players include Shenzhen-based UBTEch, Chinese EV giant BYD-backed Agibot, Beijing-based Robotera and Shanghai-headquartered Fourier Intelligence, as well as EV maker XPeng. Experts say China still trails the West in certain key technologies, even as it dominates the supply chain. About 56% of the humanoid robot supply chain companies are based in China, according to a Morgan Stanley research report last month.

But China still needs to achieve a breakthrough in "core technologies," such as processor chips, high-precision sensor and robot operating systems, to reduce its reliance on foreign technology, said Zhang Dan, chair professor of intelligent robotics and automation at the Hong Kong Polytechnic University. Artificial intelligence chips underpin humanoids' operating systems, guiding their thinking, perception and motion. Many humanoid developers depend on AI chip giant Nvidia's products. At its annual developer conference last week, the company unveiled a new AI foundation model for humanoid robots. Citing national security concerns, the former Biden administration steadily tightened export restrictions on advanced chips that could power China's military. Beijing has sought to develop its domestic chip supply chain as part of its self-sufficiency drive.

Additionally, European, American and Japanese companies continue to dominate higher-end components such as sensors, as well as motors and screws that power robotic motions with higher precision and stability, according to a Morgan Stanley report last month. To overcome those shortcomings, Chinese suppliers are actively trying to do business with Tesla. Many of them have sent component samples for Tesla's review, according to P.K. Tseng, a senior research manager at TrendForce, a

market analysis firm. "After Chinese supply chain manufacturers supply components to Tesla, they refine them based on testing feedback and then offer the improved versions to domestic manufacturers," he said.

Over time, this creates a cycle of continuous technological advancements, enhancing the quality of the whole domestic humanoid robotics industry, he explained. While technological gaps remain, China has emerged as a price disrupter in the nascent industry. Shenzhen-based Engine AI released its PM01 model late last year for just 88,000 yuan (\$12,175), while Unitree's G1, capable of executing a roundhouse kick, followed at 99,000 yuan (\$13,697).

At an event last year, Musk estimated Tesla's Optimus to be priced between \$20,000 to \$30,000. Lowering prices for humanoids would mark a major step to their eventual commercialization and wider adoption. Beyond startups, established EV players like BYD and XPeng have also ventured into the humanoids space. Experts said years of cutthroat competition and a price war in China have honed their ability to scale production rapidly while driving cost down. Since the manufacturing complexity of humanoid robots shares similarities to those of electric vehicles, particularly in components like sensors and batteries, EV makers have an advantage in this space, according to Brady Helwig, associate director for economy at Special Competitive Studies Project, a US thinktank.

Late last year, XPeng unveiled its humanoid robot, Iron, with plans for mass production by the end of 2025. Around the same time, BYD launched a recruitment drive to develop its own version, having invested in other domestic humanoids makers. As the country's demographic crisis worsens, the Chinese leadership sees humanoid robots as a potential solution to offset the shrinking working force, Helwig said. China's population has shrunk for three consecutive years. "If humanoid robots were able to be scaled and deployed widely across the economy, this is the kind of wild card that could really help alleviate that gap," he said.

A MONG the hundreds of YouTube videos about working in Russia, one in particular stands out. The professionally made clip advertises job opportunities at Ozon, Russia's second-largest online marketplace, to workers from South Asian countries.

Speaking in Hindi, a supervisor at Ozon subcontractor Argument describes the hiring process for the 152,000-square-meter warehouse in Pushkino, a town 30 kilometers north-east of Moscow. The company is ready to provide workers with accommodation, health insurance, work attire, food and Russian classes to pass the test for obtaining a Russian work permit - all free of charge.

The manager, who introduces himself as Mohammed Sagir Sheikh, says the job involves collecting orders in the warehouse and is not complex. The work week lasts six days, and workers can go to Pushkino for their day off. "The most important thing is to complete the daily task from 1,500 to 2,000 [pick-ups]. Your salary depends on how much you have picked," Sheikh says. "So, remember that you have come here to earn money," he adds. As Russia faces historic labor shortages, firms like Ozon are looking further afield for new sources of workers.

In December, Ozon confirmed its plan to employ Indian nationals in its warehouse. A businessman who works with Russian online marketplaces said that Ozon might need tens of thousands of people due to the shortage of labor in Russia. Speaking on condition of anonymity for safety reasons, the businessman said that Russian marketplaces have been rapidly expanding, with the number of warehouses multiplying three or fourfold recently.

He added that Ozon chose Indians because most speak English and have an "easy" attitude. Russia's unemployment rate has fallen to historic lows, shrinking almost twice since February 2022, from 4.3% at the end of 2021 to 2.3% in 2024. "Warehouse staff has always been in short supply in Russia, even in good years. Somehow, this gap was covered, albeit poorly, by migrants in an uncontrolled flow," the anonymous businessman said.

Russia's war on Ukraine and the March 2024 terrorist attack at a concert venue outside Moscow - which led authorities to tighten the screws on migration - only worsened the situation. Today, the lack of people is Russia's biggest problem, which was already affected by the low birth and high death rates, former Central Bank advisor Alexandra Prokopenko said in a recent analysis. Almost half of Russian companies said they struggle to find workers on the market as almost 30% of large Russian companies rely on the foreign workforce. "The problem is very serious," the anonymous businessman said, adding that his own business cannot scale up due to the shortage of workers.

"The Kremlin lacks sufficient human resources to simultaneously continue the war and ensure economic growth, and attracting more migrants is not an option either," Prokopenko wrote. Prokopenko noted that the front line takes over 10,000 people monthly, and the private sector's salaries fail to compete with salaries and bonuses paid out to those who sign military contracts. This month, Economy Minister Maxim Reshetnikov said Russia needs to expand its efforts to attract migrants from countries outside its usual recruitment pool.

A government source recently told the Expert.ru news website that Russia is considering introducing a simplified visa procedure for several countries, including those in the Asia Pacific region. By some estimates, migration from Asia Pacific countries, especially China, India, Vietnam and North Korea, is on the rise. Ninety-five thousand people came to Russia from these countries in 2023, according to state statistics agency Rosstat, compared to 22,981 people in 2022. The Russian labor market is regulated by quotas that the government sets for every region once a year. It also involves posting vacancies on the state job vacancy board before hiring a foreigner, making it challenging to attract tal-

Sascha Roslyakov

ent quickly from abroad. However, some changes might be introduced soon as the Labor Ministry offered to extend the migrant visa quotas 1.5-fold, which should equal almost 235,000 people in 2025. Fahren Arshad graduated from Moscow's Skolkovo Institute of Science and Technology last year. With his Russian visa set to run out in a few months, he decided to find a job to earn some money for travel before returning home to Pakistan. In a YouTube blog, Arshad toured the Ozon facility in Pushkino and described its work conditions.

He interviewed a manager who explained that more people are needed - and that one does not need to speak Russian. Ozon does not hire people directly; instead, it outsources the

2024, locals made up just 10% of new hires at BTK's factory in Saratov. Another Defense Ministry contractor in the Rostov region, Bulava, also hired Indian nationals. A video published in the local paper showed at least a dozen foreign workers working in the factory. State Duma deputy

Yekaterina Stenyakina said she complained to the interior minister about Tajik and Indian nationals after residents complained about the behavior of the factory staff. Bashar, an Indian YouTuber who helps Indians find jobs in Russia, including tailoring jobs with the BTK Group, said that the company now employs several thousand Indian workers.

And it has been doing so for several years. According to experts, the wartime economy has drawn talent away from the

The company does not hide that it hires Indian workers, posting photos from a factory in the Kursk region. One post published on VK said Indian tailors liked playing cricket, characterizing the game as "their true passion." Another showed two Indians being awarded places on the "Honor Board," a popular way in Russia to highlight workers' accomplishments. Last year, local media in the Saratov region reported that Indian workers had come to a BTK factory there, leaving journalists surprised that the company now tries to "bait" workers from South Asia. The governor had to explain that hiring Indian workers was a "temporary measure." In November 2024, locals made up just 10% of new hires at BTK's factory in Saratov. Another Defense Ministry contractor in the Rostov region, Bulava, also hired Indian nationals. A video published in the local paper showed at least a dozen foreign workers working in the factory. State Duma deputy Yekaterina Stenyakina said she complained to the interior minister about Tajik and Indian nationals after residents complained about the behavior of the factory staff. Bashar, an Indian YouTuber who helps Indians find jobs in Russia, including tailoring jobs with the BTK Group, said that the company now employs several thousand Indian workers.

process to subcontractors. Arshad, who worked at Ozon's Pushkino warehouse in the summer of 2024, said a manager told him that Argument, the subcontractor that filmed the ad video, already employed around 70 people from India. "They even came on the same flight. And they come from maybe the same area of India," Arshad said. Although Arshad spoke just a few words of Russian, he didn't need to talk with others. He simply gathered orders, scanned them and placed them in a box on a conveyor belt.

"People come from countries like India. They are in a group of several dozen, and only two or three people know only English. They communicate with the boss and then translate to other guys," Arshad said. "So there is a communication gap, but still enough to make the system run," he added. According to Arshad, Argument employees earn half as much as those who work for other Ozon subcontractors.

"They provide visas to international people but pay less, around 30,000 rubles (\$345) or 35,000 rubles (\$405) per month. My company was not giving any visa sponsorship, and they paid very high, around 70,000 rubles (\$700) or 75,000 rubles (\$868)," Arshad said. BTK Group is a textile company that makes uniforms for the Russian army. Its owner, the businessman Taimuraz Bolloev, has been under EU sanctions since 2024. The company does not hide that it hires Indian workers, posting photos from a factory in the Kursk region. One post published on VK said Indian tailors liked playing cricket, characterizing the game as "their true passion." Another showed two Indians being awarded places on the "Honor Board," a popular way in Russia to highlight workers' accomplishments. Last year, local media in the Saratov region reported that Indian workers had come to a BTK factory there, leaving journalists surprised that the company now tries to "bait" workers from South Asia.

The governor had to explain that hiring Indian workers was a "temporary measure." In November

private sector to the defense industry, forcing businesses to hike salaries to stay competitive. In just the first four months of 2024, salaries in Russia rose by 19% - outpacing the rate of inflation, Prokopenko noted. The anonymous businessman said companies have been forced to incorporate a 20-30% salary indexation annually to prevent employees from leaving.

But some Russian businesses take advantage of migrants from South Asia, Bashar said, requesting that his surname be withheld. Indians facing no work opportunities at home are ready to invest several thousand US dollars to get Russian work visas. They then come to Russia for a few years and are tied to one employer, he explained. Bashar came to Novosibirsk, Russia's third-largest city, to work as a tailor for local clothing brand Prizmoda in 2021. He started a YouTube channel where he documented what living and working in Russia is like. It quickly grew in popularity. Bashar says the biggest problems are salary and difficulties in sending money home, as Russia's financial system is under heavy sanctions. "The salary was a big issue," Bashar said.

"We were only paid a dollar per hour. Initially, the ruble's value was higher, so we negotiated with the company to pay us 30,000 rubles [per month], which was manageable. But later, as the ruble's value dropped, it became a problem." Although the company provided room and board, Bashar said the pay for a 12-hour shift was still unfair. "The salary never increased, even though we protested and went on strikes," he said. It made no sense to work far from family, and he decided to leave Russia. Out of a group of 50 initial hires, less than 20 remained. "Now, I receive around 500-600 contacts regularly, as I shared my number on YouTube. And I try to guide them about work in Russia. More people are traveling to Russia for work, and many of them face fraud and scams," Bashar said. Bashar liked the job and his Russian colleagues, but said he would only return if Russian companies paid better.

Trump's latest trick could make tariffs more palatable

PRESIDENT Donald Trump's tariff ambitions have been a tough sell. They've put investors in a tizzy, sending financial markets spiraling; cost him the support of many members of his own voter base; and angered CEOs. Rather than back down and reverse course entirely just a week before Trump's promised "Liberation Day" on April 2, he's employing a familiar marketing strategy: Prepare Americans for the worst and deliver something that's not quite as tough to swallow.

On Monday, Trump did exactly that. "For the most part, April 2 will be a big day," Trump said, referring to the day he has promised sweeping tariffs against all of America's trading partners. It's a subtle change from insisting that it will be the big day involving not just dollar-for-dollar reciprocal tariffs but also sector-wide tariffs. To investors' glee, Trump even managed to mention doling out carve-outs. "There definitely has to be a marketing component to this, as the logic behind increased tariffs is not obvious," Colin Grabow, associate director at the Cato Institute's Herbert A. Stiefel Center for Trade Policy Studies, told CNN. "My suspicion is that the Trump administration is trying to balance its goals of higher tariffs while not spooking markets too badly."

On Monday, Trump changed the conversation from fears about the economic effects of tariffs to relief that he appeared to be delaying some of those levies. Auto tariffs, he said, will be announced "very shortly." Pharmaceutical tariffs: "At some

point." Semiconductor and lumber tariffs: "Down the road." And on the big, bold reciprocal tariffs, Trump conceded, "I may give a lot of countries breaks." "We might be even nicer than that," Trump added.

As Don Draper, the fictional ad executive in "Mad Men," told a client concerned about public opinion: "If you don't like what's being said, change the conversation." This isn't the first time Trump changed the conversation by presenting a lighter tariff approach compared to prior promises he's made.

For example, days after Trump was reelected he said, "On January 20th, as one of my many first Executive Orders, I will sign all necessary documents to charge Mexico and Canada a 25% Tariff on ALL products coming into the United States, and its ridiculous Open Borders." That didn't happen, however, causing stocks to surge as investors breathed a huge sigh of relief. Then, the date for those tariffs got pushed back not once but twice. The second delay came after they were briefly enacted and then delayed - but only in part. That meant goods from the two countries are now subject to 25% tariffs if they don't comply with the terms of the USMCA free trade treaty that Trump signed during his first term. That bit of fine print has largely gone unnoticed. For China, Trump threatened on the campaign trail to levy tariffs as high as 60% on all Chinese goods coming into the US. As it stands, there's a 20% tariff on Chinese imports and an additional 25% tariff

on steel and aluminum from there.

Mexico, China and Canada are America's top three trading partners, accounting for 41% of the total value of goods the US imported last year, according to Commerce Department data. That's why economists and businesses have been fretting about a full-blown trade war between the three countries that could cause crucial goods to become significantly more expensive to produce. So far, that's largely been avoided. In other words, Trump threatened maximum pain and dialed it back just enough to soothe nerves. Tariffs are still in place - they're just a pill that's now a bit easier to swallow.

It's not a coincidence that Trump is standing firmer on reciprocal tariffs than sector- or country-specific tariffs he's previously floated. Even though he's opened the door to more flexibility, it's highly unlikely he'll postpone "Liberation Day." With reciprocal tariffs, matching countries' import taxes dollar for dollar, he has perhaps the easiest pitch to make for reciprocal tariffs. To use Trump's verbiage: If they charge us, we charge them. Those are easy to understand for most Americans - an issue of fairness that many folks can get behind as opposed to across-the-board punitive tariffs on countries or products.

"We've been ripped off by every country in the world," Trump said Monday in a Cabinet meeting. "Framing tariff hikes as a corrective to abusive practices by US trading partners - essentially giving them a taste of their own medicine - seems much easier to justify than sectoral

tariffs with only nebulous connections to their proposed justification," Grabow said. On top of which, "reciprocal tariffs can be framed as a means to achieve an overall lowering of trade barriers, while the proposed sectoral tariffs cannot," he said. Indeed, India, which has higher tariff rates on US imports compared to what the US taxes its exports, is preparing to lower tariff rates ahead of April 2, Reuters reported Tuesday.

Trump developed a pattern of selling a 10/10 worst-case scenario for tariffs and the impact they could end up having on the economy. But the 6/10 tariffs he tends to end up delivering aren't anything to shrug off just simply because they aren't as bad as they could've been. For example, the 20% tariffs on Chinese goods are still creating a lot of headaches for businesses that source goods from there and could soon translate into higher prices consumers pay.

Consumers aren't tuning out tariffs, though. On Tuesday, the Conference Board reported consumer confidence plunged to the lowest level since January 2021 this month. The group said concerns about tariffs were front and center for consumers, helping drive levels lower. But no matter how bad economic data gets, Trump's not going to slam the brakes on tariffs. "As a self-described 'tariff man' who has long seemed enamored with import duties, we should assume that Trump's desire for higher tariffs is sincere and more than just a negotiating ploy," Grabow said. That said, Trump may still have to work on selling them a bit better.

Elisabeth Buchwald

Can US pry Russia away from China?

Danila Galperovich

WESTERN politicians have repeatedly called on China to limit or cease tacit support for Russia's bloody war against Ukraine. In response, China's leadership insists it is committed to peace and respect for the territorial integrity of other nations. But unlike most United Nations member states, China has never condemned Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, and their military-diplomatic partnership - from joint bomber flights near the US state of Alaska to votes in the UN Security Council - has only helped the Kremlin overcome its international isolation.

While President Donald Trump has said he has good personal relations with both Russian President Vladimir Putin and Chinese President Xi Jinping, there is a consensus among experts in Washington that the China-Russia partnership poses a threat to US interests, and that while Trump's predecessor, Joe Biden, tried to establish a strategic dialogue with China, the Trump team appears to be prioritizing normalized ties with Russia while punishing China over trade. As the White House talks about the possibility of restoring economic cooperation with Russia, some of its officials are hinting at lifting or reducing the sanctions Washington has imposed on Moscow in recent years.

Charles Hecker, an expert on Western-Russian economic ties and risks, and author of the book Zero Sum: The Arc of International Business in Russia, says some Western companies will quickly return to Russia if sanctions are lifted, particularly those involved in

energy, metals and minerals. "There's only so much oil in Norway, and there's only so much oil in Canada; the rest of it is in some countries that have a very high-risk environment," Hecker told VOA's Russian Service. "And so, these kinds of companies are accustomed to business in these sorts of places, and they have the internal structures to help protect them. You know, there are energy companies doing business in Iraq right now. And I don't want to compare Russia and Iraq, but they are high-risk environments."

Still, Hecker cautions, their return to doing business in Russia wouldn't signal an overall US-Russian rapprochement - let alone a fracturing of Sino-Russian relations. "I think it will be very difficult for the West to pull Russia away from China," he said.

"Allowing Western companies back into Russia doesn't necessarily change President Putin's hostility towards the West. President Putin remains antagonistic towards a Western-dominated political and economic system, and he has said over and over again that he wants to create an alternative political and economic environment - an alternative to the West. Part of that alternative includes China," he added. "You have never heard President Putin say anything ideologically against China. And the two are now important energy partners."

US-based FilterLabs analyzes public sentiment in regions where polling is problematic. According to a recently published assessment of

popular attitudes expressed on Russian and Chinese social media networks, Sino-Russian relations are "full of underlying tensions, mistrust, and diverging interests." One of the report's authors, Vasily Gatov, told VOA its research found that "the Chinese and Russian populations are far from happy with this alliance of their authorities."

"China does not perceive Russia as a reliable, safe and equal partner," he said. "Russia annexed the Amur Region from China; Russia adopted a completely colonial policy towards China during the 19th and early 20th centuries. Therefore, in my opinion, it is entirely possible to consider historical frictions as a vulnerability." A media analyst at the University of Southern California's Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism, Gatov also noted that, despite the Kremlin's expectations, China's economic presence inside Russia today remains "several times smaller" than that of either Europe or the US before Russia invaded Ukraine. Thus, while Russian and China have overlapping interests, they are not "marching in lockstep."

"They are very different, they have very different geopolitical focuses, very different political philosophies," he said.

Other experts, however, question the Filterlabs findings, warning that random Russian and Chinese opinions online are of limited value, especially as those casting the insights aren't likely to influence policy. "People who have the time and desire to comment on things on social media do not have much influ-

ence on how state policy is conducted," Alexander Gabuev, director of the Berlin-based Carnegie Russia Eurasia Center, told VOA. "And these people certainly do not have much influence on whether China transfers components for Russia's weapons or takes certain military technologies from it, since the people who comment on this simply do not have real knowledge of what is actually happening." Gabuev added that "the Chinese leadership has reasons to think that they have something to take from Russia in terms of military technology," suggesting that China is extremely interested in gaining Russian experience in countering Western weapons during Russia's war in Ukraine.

One critical question about whether Washington's improved ties with Russia will loosen the Sino-Russian pact, say some analysts, is how Trump perceives China. Ali Wyne, senior research and advocacy advisor on the US and China at the International Crisis Group, describes Trump as an anomaly for US policy. "Widespread bipartisan agreement in Congress and from one administration to the next [is] that China is America's foremost strategic competitor," he said. But "President Trump, in many ways, is the most prominent dissenter from this alleged China consensus." "He doesn't view President Xi [Jinping] in adversarial terms," Wyne said. "He actually calls President Xi a 'dear friend' of his. And he believes that his personal rapport with President Xi will be the decisive dynamic in setting - or resetting - the US-China relationship over the next four years."

VOA



PSX, CSE, DSE sign MoU to establish Exchange Forum

F.P. Report

COLOMBO, SRI LANKA: In a landmark move to strengthen regional capital market cooperation, the Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX), the Dhaka Stock Exchange (DSE). The agreement, signed today in Colombo, aims to establish an exchange forum to facilitate technology development and sharing, human resource sharing, product development, regulatory collaboration, investor protection, and knowledge exchange, fostering a continuing relationship across the three markets.

The signing ceremony was attended by senior leadership from all three exchanges, including Mr. Farrukh H. Sabzwari, Managing Director & CEO

of the Pakistan Stock Exchange; Mr. Rajeeva Bandaranaike, CEO of Colombo Stock Exchange; and Mr. Momin Ul Islam, Chairman Board of Directors Dhaka Stock Exchange PLC (DSE). Also present at the ceremony was Mr. Akif Saeed, Chairman of the Securities and Exchange Commission of Pakistan (SECP) along with other senior officials.

Key Areas of Cooperation Under the MoU:

1. Technology Advancement: Joint initiatives in system development and digital transformation.

2. Human Capital Development: Cross-exchange training programs and knowledge-sharing initiatives.

3. Product Innovation: Collaborative development of new financial instruments.

4. Regulatory Best

Practices: Harmonization of market oversight and investor protection frameworks.

5. Dual Listings: Exploration of cross-border listing opportunities to expand investor access.

6. Commercial Linkages: Facilitation of broker partnerships and institutional connectivity.

Speaking at the ceremony, Mr. Akif Saeed remarked: "This strategic partnership marks a significant step forward in regional market integration. By combining our strengths, these three exchanges can drive innovation, enhance market resilience, and create new opportunities for investors across South Asia."

Mr. Farrukh H. Sabzwari, MD & CEO of PSX, stated: "This agreement represents a transformative chapter in regional capital market cooperation. Through this partnership with our counterparts

in Colombo and Dhaka, we aim to elevate market standards, foster sustainable growth, and deliver greater value to all market participants."

The MoU establishes a formal platform for ongoing dialogue and joint initiatives, with working groups to be formed to implement the cooperation framework. This alliance is expected to:

" Enhance market liquidity and product diversity

" Strengthen regulatory frameworks across the region

" Facilitate cross-border investment flows

" Promote technological innovation in market infrastructure

This initiative will foster deeper regional cooperation among the three South Asian nations while creating new opportunities for investors and market participants across the region.



HYDERABAD: A farmer family busy harvesting wheat crop in their field.

SECP publish draft guidelines for professional Conduct in GMs

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Securities and Exchange Commission of Pakistan (SECP) has published the draft Guidelines for Professional Conduct in General Meetings to invite public comments and feedback.

The guidelines have been issued pursuant to SECP's

commitment to safeguarding shareholders' rights, enhancing corporate governance practices, and upholding market integrity, said a release issued here on Thursday.

These guidelines aim to encourage professionalism and effective communication, ensuring equal opportu-

nities for all shareholders to participate, express their concerns, and vote on important corporate matters in an informed manner during general meetings.

The guidelines focus on facilitating effective general meetings, with emphasis on pre-meeting preparation, respectful discussion, trans-

parent voting, and post-meeting collaboration by all companies, particularly listed companies.

All stakeholders are invited to share their valuable feedback on the draft guidelines, which are available on the SECP's website at <https://tinyurl.com/3dx4zke>.

Millat Tractors unveils MF 375 Special Edition



F.P. Report

MULTAN: Millat Tractors has marked another milestone in the agricultural sector with the grand launch of the MF 375 Special Edition (MF 375-SE) at Ramada Hotel Multan.

The launch event was attended by senior marketing manager Mr. Sajjad Hussain, regional manager

Mr. Awais ul Hassan, heads of commercial banks, and esteemed dealers.

Bank officials present at the event praised Millat Tractors for its revolutionary contributions to Pakistan's agriculture. They highlighted that this new model would be a game-changer in meeting the needs of farmers in South Punjab.

The MF 375 Special Edition boasts exceptional performance, increased power, fuel efficiency, easy maintenance, and robust service tires making it a standout choice for modern farmers.

Millat Tractors encourages farmers to visit their nearest authorized dealer and take advantage of this exclusive offer available for a limited time.

Soneri Bank extends Ramadan blessings to children of Aghosh Alkhidmat

F.P. Report

KARACHI: Soneri Bank, a prominent commercial bank, facilitated Iftar dinners in the last Ashra of Ramadan for children residing at Aghosh Alkhidmat, an orphanage operated under the care of Al Khidmat Foundation.

This initiative aimed to provide nutritious meals and cultivate a sense of community. Alkhidmat Foundation is a non-governmental and non-profit humanitarian organization dedicated to providing social welfare services across Pakistan.

Soneri Bank's support for this Iftar initiative underscores the bank's steadfast commitment to its corporate social responsibility (CSR) objectives, particularly its dedication to uplifting vulnerable communities and fostering a positive societal impact.

As the bank continues to expand its network to encompass 550+ branches, it remains dedicated to implementing impactful initiatives that contribute to social development and community enrichment.

U.S. economy grew 2.4% in 4th quarter

WASHINGTON (AP): The U.S. economy expanded at a healthy annual 2.4% pace the final three months of 2024, supported by a year-end surge in consumer spending, the government said Thursday in a slight upgrade of its previous estimate of fourth-quarter growth. But it's unclear whether the United States can sustain that growth as President Donald Trump wages trade wars, purges the federal workforce and promises mass deportations of immigrants working in the country illegally.

Growth in gross domestic product — the nation's output of goods and services — decelerated from a 3.1% pace in July-September 2024, the Commerce Department said. For all of 2024, the economy — the world's biggest — grew 2.8%, down a tick from 2.9% in 2023.

Consumer spending rose at a 4% pace, up from 3.7% in third-quarter 2023. But business investment fell, led by an 8.7% drop in investment in equipment. A drop in business inventories shaved 0.84 percentage points off fourth-quarter GDP growth. A category within the GDP data that measures the economy's underlying strength rose at a healthy 2.9% annual rate in the fourth quarter, slipping from the government's previous estimate of 3.2% and from 3.4% in the third quarter.

WASHINGTON/TOKYO/BERLIN

(Reuters): Governments from Ottawa to Paris threatened retaliation on Thursday after U.S. President Donald Trump unveiled a 25% tariff on imported vehicles, expanding a global trade war, hammering stocks and testing already strained ties with allies.

The new levies on cars and light trucks will take effect on April 3, the day after Trump plans to announce reciprocal tariffs aimed at the countries he blames for the bulk of the U.S. trade deficit.

The U.S. imported \$474 billion worth of automotive products in 2024, including passenger cars worth \$220 billion. Mexico, Japan, South Korea, Canada and Germany, all close U.S. allies, were the biggest suppliers., opens new tab

The tariffs are a sucker punch for Europe at a time when relations with Washington have plummeted over issues such as the war in Ukraine and the upending of a decades-old transatlantic alliance, with the U.S. as the ultimate guarantor of European security.

European Commission

President Ursula von der Leyen described the move as "bad for businesses, worse for consumers," while Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney called the tariffs a "direct attack" and said retaliatory measures were being considered.

"We will defend our workers, we will defend our companies, we will defend our country, and we will defend it together," Carney told reporters in Ottawa.

With billions of euros wiped from German auto shares on Thursday morning, German Economy Minister Robert Habeck called for a tough stance.

"What counts now is to have a firm response to these tariffs from the EU. It needs to be clear that we will not take this lying down," he said in a statement, adding that the EU needs to seek a negotiated solution.

Underscoring the jitters in Europe's biggest economy, where carmakers are buckling under high costs and tough foreign competition, the head of Germany's car industry association said the tariffs are a "fatal signal" for global trade.

In neighbouring France,

which is hosting a Ukraine summit without the U.S. on Thursday, Finance Minister Eric Lombard called Trump's plan "very bad news" and said the only solution was for the EU to raise its own tariffs.

Britain, which has struggled to grow its economy, was scrambling to secure an exemption but also threatened to review subsidies given to Elon Musk's Tesla (TSLA.O), opens new tab.

The EU said it was preparing a robust response, while trying to avert a tariff war.

"None of this leads to more jobs or better wages. It leads to sluggish sales, costlier credit, and potential layoffs — exactly what a fragile economy doesn't need," said Nigel Green, CEO of global financial advisory deVere Group.

"Tariffs won't drive car-makers home. They'll drive prices up, relationships down, and America's global standing into reverse."

Even as politicians threatened retaliation, Europe's auto industry called for a transatlantic deal to avert a tariff spiral, with suppliers warning of immediate price hikes and dealers fearing the impact

of a drop in demand on employment in car-dependent countries.

Lindsay James, an investment strategist at Quilter, said Europe would be heavily hit, with the U.S. accounting for over a fifth of the EU export market and around 18% of UK auto exports.

"In a sector that is vital for the European economy in particular, accounting for around 7% of GDP and 6% of employment, there will be an obvious blowback on a sector that has already faced considerable headwinds from a painful transition to EVs alongside tighter regulations, in addition to slower replacement cycles from drivers and higher energy costs."

China's foreign ministry said the U.S. approach violates World Trade Organization rules, undermines the multilateral trade system and was "not conducive to solving its own problems."

With shares falling, opens new tab, Japanese Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba said Tokyo will put "all options on the table" and South Korea said it would put in place an emergency response by April.

Tuition fee cap for private medical colleges announced

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Committee on Medical Education Reforms, constituted by the Prime Minister of Pakistan and chaired by the Deputy Prime Minister, has successfully reached a consensus decision today, setting a cap on the tuition fee for private medical and dental colleges at PKR 1.8 million for MBBS and BDS programs. This crucial step marks a significant moment in ensuring the affordability and accessibility of medical education in Pakistan. The key participants of the meeting were Dr. Tariq Bajwa (co-chair), Mr. Mustafa Kamal Federal Minister on NHSR&C, Dr. Mukhtar Ahmad Bharath Minister of State (NHSR&C), Mr. Nadeem Mahbub Federal Secretary M/o NHSR&C, Prof. Dr. Rizwan Taj President PM&DC, Prof. Dr. Masud Gondal Vice President CPSP, Prof. Dr. Muhammad Iqbal VC STMU, Islamabad, Prof. Dr. Mahmud Aurangzeb Dean Khyber Medical College Peshawar, Dr. Riaz Shabaz Junjua General Secretary PAMI, Dr. Ghazanfar Ali Vice President PAMI, Dr. Adil H. Haider Dean AKU, Karachi.

The issue of rising tuition fees in private medical colleges has been a subject of ongoing concern for the public, students, and parents alike. The PM&DC Council has previously addressed these

concerns in its meetings on June 4, 2022, December 10, 2023, and February 23, 2024. A sub-Committee, led by Prof. Dr. Masood Gondal, was formed in response to the Council's decision on February 27, 2025, to resolve the issue of excessive fee hikes. This sub-Committee, after conducting thorough analysis over three meetings, consulted stakeholders, including representatives from private institutions and the Pakistan Association of Medical Institutes (PAMI), to obtain comprehensive feedback on the matter.

After careful evaluation of the financial data and justifications provided by the institutions and based on the recommendations of the sub-Committee, the Committee on Medical Education Reforms determined that the annual tuition fee for private medical and dental colleges should be capped at PKR 1.8 million, with annual increase based on the CPI inflation rate, applicable for a period of five years for MBBS programs and four years for BDS programs. This fee structure will be publicly declared and enforced, ensuring transparency in the tuition fee determination process.

However, institutions that believe their financial needs require a higher fee up to a maximum of PKR 2.5 million will be allowed to submit a detailed financial justification to the PM&DC. The justification must include

a breakdown of the costs driving the need for the higher fee, evidence of additional educational services or facilities offered to students, and a comparison with other institutions adhering to the standard fee structure. It is essential that any fee increases not supported by solid financial reasoning are not accepted. The Committee has emphasized that only justified increases will be entertained to maintain fairness and ensure that education remains affordable.

This landmark decision is a step forward in addressing the long-standing issue of skyrocketing tuition fees, making medical education more accessible to students from all financial backgrounds, particularly those from lower-income families. By making education affordable and transparent, the government's commitment to reforming and standardizing medical education in Pakistan continues to gain momentum.

LOST ALLOTMENT LETTER

An allotment letter issued by bahria town karachi has been lost, the details are as under: Plot No 192, Street 4, 250 sq yards, precinct 21, NDP-3295, ISSUED in the name of Syed Zahir Shah. If found please inform Syed Zahir Shah, house 56, street 1A, Defence Colony Khyber Road, Peshawar cantt. 03008598801

Court Notice

In the court of sidra jalal civil judge-III/Judicial Magistrate II, Matta swat. (Notice Reminder) Case #.53/1.institution 03/05/2024. Hearing date 08/04/2025. Notice to:(1/2) Shahi Duran s/o Najem khan. (6/1) Tahweel khan Husband. (6/2) Qadarmand.(6/3) Dolat Mand sons Mst. Neik Amal.(2) Muhammad Aysal son Tajem khan (9/3) Anwar sher.(9/4) Noor khan sons Ali khan r/o Bedara tehsil matta district Swat. Whereas the above named cannot be served in ordinary manner it is therefore proclaimed or through dually authorized agent or pleader in the court on 08/04/2025. at 8.00 am. Ex-parte proceeding will be initiated against you. Issued today on 27/03/2025 under my signature and seal of the court.

Court Notice

In the court of sidra jalal civil judge/Judicial Magistrate II, Matta swat. Case #. 91/1.6/C.C. Institution Year 022. Next Hearing date 11/04/2025. Akbar Ali VS Mst. Bakht Beland bibi, Notice to Defendant.(3/2) Zakir ullah son Mst. Bacha Akbar bibi w/o Alamgir khan r/o koza Drushkhela tehsil matta district Swat. Whereas the above named cannot be served in ordinary manner it is therefore proclaimed or through dually authorized agent or pleader in the court on 11/04/2025. at 8.00 am. Ex-parte proceeding will be initiated against you. Issued today on 27/03/2025 under my signature and seal of the court.

US weekly jobless claims edge lower



WASHINGTON (Reuters): The number of Americans filing new applications for unemployment benefits slipped last week, while the jobless rate appeared to have held steady in March.

Initial claims for state unemployment benefits fell 1,000 to a seasonally adjusted 224,000 for the week ended March 22, the Labor Department said on Thursday. Economists polled by Reuters had forecast 225,000 claims for the latest week.

The government revised the claims data from 2020 through 2024, in line with the normal practice. New seasonal factors, the model that it uses to strip out seasonal fluctuations from the data, were introduced for 2025.

Seasonal factors for

2020 through 2024 were also revised.

Low layoffs have blunted the impact of a sharp moderation in hiring, keeping the labor market on a solid footing and the economic expansion on track. But President Donald Trump's aggressive trade policy and an ambitious campaign to drastically downsize the federal government through deep spending cuts and mass firings have cast a pall over the economy.

While there has been no significant pick up in filings for unemployment compensation by federal workers, claims in the Washington D.C. metropolitan area, which include parts of neighboring Maryland and Virginia, have risen.

These most likely reflect layoffs of contractors and others who dependent on government funding. Tech billionaire Elon Musk's Department of Government Efficiency, or DOGE, has fired thousands of federal workers, many of whom have been ordered reinstated by courts. Some have been put on administrative leave, which does not allow them to file for benefits.

The number of people receiving benefits after an initial week of aid, a proxy for hiring, decreased 25,000 to a seasonally adjusted 1.856 million during the week ending March 15, the claims report showed.

The so-called continuing claims data was also revised from 2020 through 2024. Seasonal factors were also revised for that period and new ones introduced for 2025.

Continuing claims data covered the week during which the government surveyed households for March's unemployment rate.

With a Conference Board survey on Tuesday showing a mild improvement in consumers' perceptions of the labor market in March, economists expect the unemployment rate to hold steady at 4.1% this month.



In brief

Serena Masters series wraps up successfully

ISLAMABAD (APP): The 3rd edition of the Serena Masters Series on Thursday concluded at the PTF Tennis Complex in Islamabad, showcasing the top eight men's and women's players from across Pakistan. According to the press released issued by Pakistan Tennis Federation (PTF), in the men's singles final, Aqeel Khan clinched the title by defeating Barkatullah 6-3, 6-2. The women's singles saw Ushna Suhail triumph over Sheeza Sajid 6-4, 4-0 (retired). The men's doubles final took an unexpected turn due to bad weather, resulting in a rare joint championship for both teams led by Aisam-ul-Haq Qureshi and Shahzad Khan. Highlighting the tournament's significance, PTF President Aisam-ul-Haq Qureshi personally participated in the doubles category, underlining the event's importance to Pakistani tennis. The tournament is part of Serena Hotels' Sports Diplomacy Initiative, which has already hosted events in Peshawar and Faisalabad before arriving in Islamabad. Syed Fahim Inam, Serena Hotels' Chief Marketing Officer, served as the chief guest, while notable tennis officials and players attended the closing ceremony. "Serena Hotels is playing a crucial role in developing tennis in Pakistan," said PTF President Qureshi, praising the tournament's organization and opportunity for local players. The series continues to provide a critical platform for emerging Pakistani tennis talent, promoting the sport at a national level.

FKF launches match-fixing investigation

NAIROBI (Agencies): The Kenya Football Federation (FKF) has launched an investigation into allegations that goalkeeper Patrick Matasi has been involved in match manipulation. The 37-year-old, who plays for Kenyan Premier League club Kakamega Homeboyz, has won over 30 international caps. His most recent appearance for the Harambee Stars came in October last year, in a qualifier for the 2025 Africa Cup of Nations. An undated video posted online - which the BBC has not been able to verify - appears to show Matasi agreeing a deal to influence the outcome of a league game. "I have spoken to him. He was also shocked at what he was seeing in the video and he told me he doesn't know about match-fixing," Homeboyz owner Cleophas Shimanyula told BBC Sport Africa. The FKF said it would work with world governing body Fifa, the Confederation of African Football and other "relevant authorities" during its investigation. "We reaffirm our zero-tolerance policy on match manipulation and are committed to safeguarding the credibility of our competitions," a statement added. "This investigation will adhere to FKF's anti-match manipulation regulations and Fifa guidelines, ensuring a fair, transparent, and thorough process." "The rights of the player and his club will be respected, and appropriate action will be taken based on the findings," BBC Sport Africa has contacted Matasi for comment. Homeboyz offer support to Matasi Shimanyula backed Matasi, pointing to the fact the veteran has kept three clean sheets in as many games since joining the club a month ago.

Sahibzada hits 148 as Peshawar qualify for final



F A I S A L A B A D (Monitoring Desk): Peshawar Region and Lahore Region Blues booked their places in the Bank Alfalah Presents Inverex Solar Energy National T20 Cup 2024-25 final after winning their respective semi-finals at the Iqbal Stadium, Faisalabad, on Wednesday night. In the first semi-final, Peshawar registered a 56-run victory over Abbottabad, powered by an outstanding knock from Sahibzada Farhan, his 3rd century in the tournament. The right-handed opening batter thumped 148 off 72 balls, including 10 fours and 12 sixes, leading Peshawar to 243-3 in their 20 overs. Farhan, the tournament's leading run-scorer, now has 588 runs in six innings, the most runs scored by a batter in a single edition of the National T20 Cup. Farhan stitched crucial partnerships, including a 116-run opening stand with Waqar Ahmed (34, 27b, 3x4s, 1x6), followed by a 105-run second-wicket partnership with Maaz Sadaqat (31, 17b, 4x4s, 1x6), ensuring a commanding total. No.5 batter Muhammad Amir Barki remained unbeaten for a five-ball 20 hitting two fours and as many sixes. In response, Abbottabad's chase was halted despite a 74-run opening stand between

Shahzaib Khan (53, 43b, 6x4s, 2x6) and Sajjad Ali Hashmi (37, 22b, 6x4s, 1x6). Peshawar's bowlers controlled the game, with Israrullah (2-20), Mohammad Imran Jr (2-22), Iftikhar Ahmed (2-31) and Usman Tariq (2-37) ensuring Abbottabad finished at 187-8 in their 20 overs. In the second semi-final, Lahore Blues edged past Multan by a mere five runs in a close encounter. Blues' opening batter and player of the match Imran Butt starred with an unbeaten 89 off 56 balls, striking 11 fours and 2 sixes, guiding Lahore Blues to 166-4 in their 20 overs. Imran built a 46-run opening stand with Umar Siddiq (29, 20b, 2x4s, 2x6s), ensuring a decent start to the innings. Multan's chase saw Zain Abbas (45, 37b, 2x4s, 3x6s) and Muhammad Shahzad (41, 34b, 3x4s, 2x6s) put together a 59-run third-wicket partnership, but Lahore's eventually got the breakthrough as the former was run out in the 13th over. Despite no.6 batter Waseem Akram Jnr's late surge of unbeaten 42 off 18 balls comprising of three fours and four sixes, Multan agonisingly fell five runs short, finishing at 161-7 in 20 overs. Waseem's two out of four sixes came off the third last and last ball of 20th over when Multan needed 18 off three balls. Nisar Ahmad (4-0-27-2)

was the standout bowler, supported by left-arm spinner Mohammad Rizwan (3-0-28-2). Qasim Akram and Mohammad Salman Mirza dismissed one batter each. Scores in Brief: Semi-Final 1 - Peshawar Region beat Abbottabad Region by 56 runs at Iqbal Stadium, Faisalabad. Peshawar Region 243-3, 20 overs (Sahibzada Farhan 148, Waqar Ahmed 34, Maaz Sadaqat 31, Muhammad Amir Barki 20 not out; Yasir Shah 1-29). Abbottabad Region 187-8, 20 overs (Shahzaib Khan 53, Sajjad Ali 37, Shahab Khan 32 not out; Israrullah 2-20, Mohammad Imran Jr 2-22, Iftikhar Ahmed 2-31, Usman Tariq 2-37). Player of the Match: Sahibzada Farhan (Peshawar Region). Semi-Final 2 - Lahore Region Blues beat Multan Region by five runs at Iqbal Stadium, Faisalabad. Lahore Region Blues 166-4, 20 overs (Imran Butt 89 not out, Umar Siddiq 29, Junaid Ali 20; Muhammad Shahzad 1-8). Multan Region 161-7, 20 overs (Zain Abbas 45, Waseem Akram Jnr 42 not out, Muhammad Shehzad 41; Nisar Ahmad 2-27, Mohammad Rizwan 2-28). Player of the Match: Imran Butt (Lahore Region Blues). Final: Peshawar Region v Lahore Region Blues at Iqbal Stadium Faisalabad; 7.30pm PKT.

James buzzer-beater rescues Lakers to halt losing streak



LOS ANGELES (AFP): LeBron James tipped in a buzzer-beating rebound with 0.1 seconds remaining as the Los Angeles Lakers halted their three-game losing streak with a pulsating 120-119 road victory over the Indiana Pacers on Wednesday. A thrilling duel in Indianapolis saw the Pacers climb out of a 13-point fourth-quarter hole to snatch a 119-118 lead with 42 seconds remaining and leave the Lakers staring down the barrel of a fourth straight defeat. But with the clock ticking down, Luka Donic made one last drive to the basket - only to see his attempted 13-foot floater bounce off the rim. James reacted fastest, leaping to palm the ball into the bucket for the winning score and give the Lakers a precious victory in the race for Western Conference playoff berths. The 40-year-old James - who had failed to score from the field in the opening three quarters - finished with 13 points, 13 rebounds and seven assists.

Lakers coach J.J. Redick saluted the veteran superstar's perseverance in dragging his team over the line despite having an offensive off-night. "It's another great example of where he doesn't necessarily have it going early, and got off to a slow start offensively," Redick said. "But he was so good defensively for us. And then he takes over in the fourth quarter and gets rewarded by the basketball gods because he didn't let go of the rope and didn't stop competing." James said he hadn't been bothered by his low-key offensive performance. "Whatever it takes to help your teammates win," James said. "For me, I can always do other things that still impact the game, even when I'm not scoring. "That's the beauty of my game, I've always built that throughout my whole life - get my guys involved, rebound, defend and then sprinkle in a few points here and there." Donic led the Lakers scoring with 34 points, seven rebounds and seven

assists while Austin Reaves provided offensive support with 24 points along with Rui Hachimura (14pts). The win leaves the Lakers in fourth place in the Western Conference on 44-28. The top six finishers in the standings qualify automatically for the playoffs. In other games, the Los Angeles Clippers battled back from 14 points down to defeat the New York Knicks 126-113 at Madison Square Garden. James Harden scored 29 points including six three-pointers while Kawhi Leonard added 27 to give the Clippers a crucial victory which leaves them on 41-31 and occupying the sixth automatic playoff spot in the West. The Clippers however have little margin for slip-ups in a tightly contested playoff race that looks likely to go down to the wire in the final weeks of the regular season. The Golden State Warriors are in seventh place in the West, also with 41 wins, with the Minnesota Timberwolves in eighth with a 41-32 record.

Injured Latham out of Pakistan ODIs, Bracewell continues as NZ captain

W E L L I N G T O N (Reuters): New Zealand stumper-batsman Tom Latham was ruled out of the one-day series against Pakistan with a hand injury on Thursday leaving Michael Bracewell to continue as the side's captain. With regular white-ball captain Mitchell Santner busy in the Indian Premier League, Bracewell led New Zealand to a 4-1 victory in a T20 series

against Pakistan. Latham was due to lead New Zealand in the three-match ODI series beginning in Napier on Saturday, but he fractured his hand while batting in the nets and will require at least four weeks to recover, the New Zealand Cricket (NZC) said in a statement. Opener Will Young, meanwhile, will miss the last two ODIs to be with his wife as they await the

birth of their first child. "It's obviously disappointing to lose Tom as captain on the eve of the series and we wish him a speedy recovery," New Zealand head coach Gary Stead said. "The side is in safe hands with Michael, who's done a great job through the T20I series." Henry Nicholls will return from a calf strain to replace Latham, while Mitch Hay will keep

wickets. Canterbury batsman Rhys Mariu earned his maiden call-up as a batting cover. "We've had to be flexible this tour with numerous players unavailable for different reasons," Stead said. "What it does do is offer opportunities to other players and it's nice to introduce Rhys into the environment for the first time, as well as welcome back Henry."

Hanif Khan Hockey Club wins thrilling KHA Ramadan Inter-Club Final

KARACHI (APP): The final of the KHA Ramadan Mubarak Inter-Club Hockey Championship took place at the Olympian Hanif Khan and Dr Junaid Ali Shah Sports Complex, Gulshan-e-Iqbal, where Hanif Khan Hockey Club triumphed over Youth Hockey Club in a thrilling match.



Both teams engaged in relentless attacks throughout the game, with the outcome decided by a penalty stroke in the final moments. Asim Khan of Hanif Khan Hockey Club capitalized on the opportunity, securing victory for his team. In a historic first for Karachi's domestic hockey scene, female umpire Kashmala Batool officiated the entire tournament, including the final match. Despite occasional objections from players, Batool

remained composed and professional. She was later joined by international umpire Chaudhry Tanveer Ahmed, who took over officiating in the second half. Kashmala Batool also serves as a referee in football. At the conclusion of the match, Syed Imtiaz Ali Shah, President of the Karachi Hockey

Association, distributed prizes. Among those present were Olympians Hanif Khan, Iftikhar Syed, and Wasim Feroze, along with other prominent figures including KHA Chairman Gulfaraz Khan and Sindh Olympic Association Secretary Ahmed Ali Rajput. The winning trophy was awarded to the

captain of Hanif Khan Hockey Club, while the Youth Hockey Club captain accepted the runner-up trophy. Saad Ali and Abdul Rafay of Youth Hockey Club were named best player and best goalkeeper, respectively. Don Bosco HC and Al-Sagheer Hockey Club shared the Fair Play Trophy.

Bairstow named new Yorkshire red-ball captain



LONDON (Agencies): Jonny Bairstow will captain Yorkshire on their return to Division One of the County Championship. He takes over the role after it was split between Pakistan batter Shan Masood and Jonny Tattersall last summer. Bairstow, 35, who made his first-class debut for Yorkshire back in 2009, will also be first-choice wicket-keeper. While Bairstow will take charge of the red-ball side, Dawid Malan will captain in the T20 Blast. "It's a huge honour to become Yorkshire captain," Bairstow told BBC Sport. "It's something as a young boy you dream about. It's something you want to do, no matter if it's the first few years of your career or the last few years of your career. "To be asked to do that with the

group of boys we've got is a proud moment for me, for the family and I hope it's an exciting time this year for the guys." Bairstow, a veteran of 100 Tests, will lead Yorkshire out for the first time on 4 April away to Hampshire in their first Division One game since 2022. For the first time since 2018, Bairstow is not at the Indian Premier League and can turn his full attention to the county game. He has not played a Test since March 2024 and his last T20 international was in the T20 World Cup last summer. The Bradford-born cricketer, who has made 12 Test centuries and was a World Cup winner in 20-over and 50-over cricket, was a Championship winner with the White Rose in 2014 and 2015. Now his job is to lead from the front as the team tries to re-establish itself in the top flight following promotion last summer. Following in dad's footsteps Bairstow has some captaincy experience with Welsh Fire in The Hundred and he is confident that he has gathered enough experience from playing under many different skip-pers in his long career. On a personal note, he is also following in the footsteps of his late father, David, by captaining Yorkshire. He led his county between 1984 and 1986 with Jonny "proud" to match that achievement. "That was a long while ago, before

I was born," he said. "To replicate that, I'm very proud to do that. "There are not many father-and-sons have done that previously. That's an exciting part to it, but a side bit to everything that happens on the field." Malan at helm in T20 Blast As Bairstow captains the Championship side, Malan will take over when the T20 Blast campaign starts in late May. The 37-year-old, who joined from Middlesex in 2019, signed a white-ball only contract with the Headingley club last year and will bring all his experience of 92 white-ball appearances for England until he retired from international cricket last summer. The left-hander will be tasked with improving Yorkshire's poor record in T20 cricket, which has only seen them reach Finals Day three times. And for new head coach Anthony McGrath, having two such successful internationals driving their club can only be a positive. "Jonny and Dawid are two of our most senior players and both bring unrivalled international experience to the team," he said. "The leadership qualities that they both have will undoubtedly stand us in good stead ahead of both competitions. "To have world-class players in the team, let alone having both as captains, will mean our younger lads will learn a lot this year playing alongside them."

Arsenal overcomes Real Madrid to face Lyon in Women's Champions League semifinals

LONDON (AFP): Alessia Russo scored twice and Arsenal staged a remarkable comeback to reach the Women's Champions League semifinals with a 3-0 win over Real Madrid. Mariona Caldentey scored the other as Arsenal grabbed three goals in 13 minutes to overturn the team's 2-0 loss in the first leg of the quarterfinal in the Spanish capital last week. Caldentey, who used to torment Madrid while playing for Barcelona, wheeled away in delight after leveling the tie three minutes after Russo pulled a goal back as Arsenal couldn't have had a better start to the second half. Russo fired Arsenal in front for the first time in the tie with an acrobatic finish in the 59th. It proved to be the winner in the 3-2 victory on aggregate. The England star might have had a hat trick only to be denied by a VAR call for offside, then by Madrid goalkeeper Misa in a one-on-one, then by another offside call. Arsenal needed a save from goalkeeper Daphne van Domselaar in stoppage time to prevent Madrid star Linda Caicedo from send-



ing the match to extra time. Arsenal will face last season's beaten finalist Lyon as they seek to win the trophy for the second time after success in 2007. Lyon advance Kadidiatou Diani scored one goal and set up two more as Lyon outclassed Bayern Munich 4-1 in the second leg of their quarter-final earlier. The French powerhouse needed a wake-up call before reaching the semifinals for the 13th time. Klara Buhl opened the scoring in the 33rd minute

off the far post to claw a goal back for Bayern after losing the first leg 2-0 in Munich. Lyon, the eight-time champion, emerged reinvigorated after the break and went on to wrap up a 6-1 victory on aggregate with Diani scoring and setting up goals for Melchie Dumornay and Tabitha Chawinga, who both scored in Munich last week. Dumornay played in Ada Hegerberg to seal the rout with a flourish by shooting the ball through Bayern goalkeeper Maria-

Luisa "Mala" Grohs ' legs in stoppage time. Bayern will be left to rue defensive blunders for undermining its comeback hopes. The other quarterfinal second legs are scheduled for Thursday, with defending champion Barcelona in a comfortable position after a 4-1 win over Wolfsburg in Germany, and Chelsea needing goals as it host Manchester City after losing the first leg 2-0. Barcelona defeated Lyon in last year's final.



In brief

IRSA releases 59,300 cusecs water

ISLAMABAD (APP): Indus River System Authority (IRSA) on Thursday released 59,300 cusecs water from various rim stations with inflow of 59,600 cusecs. According to the data released by IRSA, River Indus stood at dead level of 1402 feet at Tarbela Dam. Water inflow and outflow in the dam was recorded as 16,400 cusecs and 16,000 cusecs respectively. The water level in River Jhelum at Mangla Dam was 1070.00 feet, which was 20.00 feet higher than its dead level of 1,050 feet. The inflow and outflow of water was recorded as 18,200 cusecs and 18,300 cusecs respectively. The release of water at Kalabagh, Taunsa, Guddu and Sukkur was recorded as 27,000, 18,700, 18,000 and 6,200 cusecs respectively. Similarly, from River Kabul, a total of 14,400 cusecs of water was released at Nowshera and 3,000 cusecs from River Chenab at Marala.

ICT admin cracks down on high prices

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) administration launched city-wide crackdown on price gouging Thursday, targeting vendors who illegally inflate prices and exploit consumers. In a sweeping operation that covered multiple market areas, city officials conducted 344 inspections, resulting in significant enforcement actions. Authorities arrested 75 individuals for illegal pricing practices and imposed fines totaling 118,000 Pakistani rupees. Four shops were immediately sealed for serious pricing violations, sending a clear message to traders about the consequences of overcharging. Officials warned that similar operations would continue to ensure fair pricing across the capital territory.

Taxila Police nab murder accused

RAWALPINDI (APP): The Taxila Police on Thursday held an accused wanted in a murder and attempted murder case. According to the Rawalpindi Police spokesman, the accused Fakhruddin had stabbed Rahimullah to death and injured Ehsanullah a few days ago. He had exchanged hot words with the victims sometime before. The accused went into the hiding after the incident. The Taxila Police registered a case against the accused, and used all means including human intelligence to trace and arrest him.

Police arrest 9 outlaws

RAWALPINDI (APP): The Rawalpindi Police continued operations against outlaws on Thursday and arrested nine accused, including drug dealers, liquor suppliers, a proclaimed offender and Tenancy Act violators. According to the police spokesman, the Taxila Police nabbed accused Jafar Mahmood recovering 1.6 kilograms charas from his possession, and Habibullah with 10 litres of liquor. Likewise, the Civil Lines and Kahuta Police recovered 10 litres and 5 litres of liquor from accused Qaiser and Imran respectively. The Taxila Police also held accused Sajid, wanted in a cheque dishonour case for the last one. Meanwhile, the Bani Police nabbed four accused, including Rizwan, Anjum, Saqib and Abdul Shahzad, during a search operation for the violation of the Tenancy Act.

Pakistan, Netherlands discuss human rights, bilateral cooperation

ISLAMABAD (APP): A delegation led by Mrs. Henny Fokel de Vries, Ambassador of the Netherlands to Pakistan, met with Federal Minister for Law, Justice, and Human Rights, Senator Azam Nazeer Tarar here on Thursday. The discussion focused on legislative measures, policy reforms, and collaborative efforts to promote human rights and strengthen bilateral relations in various sectors. The Ambassador acknowledged Pakistan's efforts in implementing its human rights agenda and commended the government's commitment to constitutional guarantees, including freedom of religion and belief.

The Minister highlighted Pakistan's diverse and inclusive society, where all religious communities are safeguarded under the Constitution. He also apprised the Ambassador of Pakistan's recent legislative advancements, including the introduction of the National Commission for Minorities Bill in the Senate, a statutory body working to safeguard minority rights, promote interfaith harmony, and ensure the full participation of minorities in the nation's development.

The Ambassador also informed the Minister about the upcoming visit of Dutch hockey legend Floris Jan Bovelandier in April, promoting sports diplomacy. She invited the Minister to participate in related activities, recognizing the role of sports in strengthening bilateral ties. Additionally, she proposed a meeting with the Netherlands' Human Rights Ambassador during their visit in May, which the Minister welcomed as an opportunity for further cooperation.

The meeting concluded with both sides reaffirming their commitment to deeper collaboration on shared priorities. The Ambassador appreciated Pakistan's hospitality and reiterated the Netherlands' commitment to advancing mutual interests at the international level.



ISLAMABAD: A delegation led by Henny Fokel de Vries, Ambassador of the Netherlands to Pakistan, meets Federal Minister for Law Senator Azam Nazeer Tarar to discuss human rights initiatives and strengthen bilateral cooperation.

British High Commissioner meets Health Minister

ISLAMABAD (APP): The British High Commissioner to Pakistan, Ms. Jane Marriott, met with Minister for Health Mustafa Kamal on Thursday to discuss ongoing and future collaborations between Pakistan and the United Kingdom in the healthcare sector. They also discussed the need to strengthen health security for future pandemics. High Commissioner Marriott congratulated Minister Kamal on assuming office and expressed her confidence in his experience and leadership to bring significant improvements to Pakistan's healthcare system. Mustafa Kamal thanked the British government for its continued support in various health initiatives like evidence for health, family planning, polio, surveillance and provision of integrated health services specially for mother and child health. He assured

that Pakistan remains committed to further strengthening these programs and appreciated the UK government funding to GAVI, GFATM, Polio and GFF. He highlighted that under the leadership of Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, the government is actively working to enhance healthcare services specially to underserved areas, and the impact of these efforts is already being felt by the public. During the meeting, Minister Kamal outlined his vision for the future of healthcare in Pakistan. He emphasized the role of digital health in enhancing access to health services by using telemedicine, electronic medical record and one patient one id, stating that modern technology will be leveraged to improve healthcare access across the country. He reiterated the government's commitment to

ensuring that doctors and essential medicines are available at people's doorsteps, making healthcare more accessible for all. He also reaffirmed Pakistan's dedication to eradicating polio and announced the launch of a nationwide Hepatitis C elimination program, following the successful completion of a pilot project in Gilgit-Baltistan. Given the alarming number of 11 million Hepatitis C cases in Pakistan, he stressed the need for widespread screening and testing to combat the disease effectively. Another key area of discussion was the development of the nursing sector in Pakistan. Minister Kamal noted that efforts are underway to align nursing education and training with international standards, addressing the country's shortage of 900,000 nurses while also contributing to the global

demand for 2.5 million nurses. He highlighted that strengthening the nursing sector would not only meet local needs but also create opportunities for Pakistani nurses to work internationally, bringing valuable foreign exchange to the country. He also reaffirmed Pakistan's positive role towards finalizing the Pandemic accord which is expected to be endorsed during the World Health Assembly session in May 2025. High Commissioner Jane Marriott endorsed Minister Kamal's vision and reaffirmed the United Kingdom's commitment to supporting Pakistan in achieving its healthcare goals. She praised the Pakistani government's proactive approach under Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's leadership and assured continued collaboration for the advancement of healthcare services in the country.

RWMC committed to providing best cleanliness on Juma-tul-Wida

RAWALPINDI (APP): The Rawalpindi Waste Management Company (RWMC) lined the areas around Masajids with lime powder on the occasion of the 27th night of Ramzan and started a grand cleanliness drive to provide the best hygienic environment to the residents on Juma-tul-Wida. According to an RWMC spokesman, the company deployed additional sanitary workers and officials to ensure cleanliness during the Holy days of the last Ashra of Ramzan. He said areas around masajids, graveyards, and their vicinity had been cleaned, and the waste containers were emptied. In addition, the construction material or debris was also removed from the places of worship and its adjacent areas in all districts of the Rawalpindi division. He urged the residents to cooperate with the RWMC staff and avoid throwing waste and other materials into drains and open sewers.

Traders calls for enhanced security of markets during Eid shopping

RAWALPINDI (APP): As few days are left in Eid ul Fitr, the markets in the Garrison city are buzzing with activity particularly in Saddar. Commercial Market and Trench Bhatta iconic bazaars. The traders have urged the authorities to increase security measures, although they have their own private security guards deployed in front of the shops, but many shop owners don't have this facility so they feel it 'not enough' to combat any law and order situation. In a brief interaction with APP, Sheikh Hafeez, President Traders Association, Saddar said that last few days of shopping before Eid ul Fitr were experiencing massive inflow of people visiting the markets. "This increased business activities needs increased security measures from the district police", he said and are calling on the police department to police personnel to maintain law and order during the remaining days of Ramazan. Hafeez said, "After auctioning of food stalls in the

pedestrian zone, no one knows who are the business executors and who are the business owners of the stall." "Special security pickets should be deployed on entry and exit points of the main markets, specially at night time till the 'Chand Raat', he demanded. The traders are concerned about the flood of customers and consumers in the markets, which has increased the security requirements. They want the police to beef up security to prevent any potential law and order situations from developing. Nasir Abbasi, a shopkeeper in the Computer Market highlighted that the market is equally exposed to potential threats as both ends of the markets are open without police personnel. Amir Saeed, running Computer painters' business said the shopkeepers usually hire private guards to protect the market collectively, however, the private guards are less equipped and trained as compared to those of regular police".

14 illegal arms owners netted

RAWALPINDI (APP): The Rawalpindi Police on Thursday netted some 14 accused for having illegal weapons and ammunition. According to the police spokesman, the Bani Police seized a 30-bore pistol with ammunition from accused Arsalan Iftikhar and 20 rounds of 9 mm pistol from accused Nadeem Abbas. Likewise, the Sadiqabad Police nabbed accused Absar Alam and Basharat Gulzar with a 30-bore pistol each. Similarly, the Westridge and Taxila Police also recovered a 30-bore pistol from accused Habibullah and Ikram respectively. The Wah Cantt Police also held accused Idrees and Muawiya with a 30-bore pistol each and Waris with 10 rounds of 30-bore pistol. Likewise, the Wah Saddar Police also netted two accused Fasih and Umar Farooq, and the Saddar Beruni Police nabbed accused Jamil with a 30-bore pistol each. The Dhamial Police recovered a 30-bore pistol each from accused Kashif and Waqar.

3,500 officers to secure Islamabad during Eid: IG Rizvi

ISLAMABAD (APP): Inspector General of Police (IGP) Syed Ali Nasir Rizvi, chaired a high-level meeting on Thursday, attended by all divisional Deputy Inspectors General (DIGs), Assistant Inspectors General (AIGs), Senior Superintendents of Police (SSPs), and Superintendents of Police (SPs). An official told APP that the DIGs briefed the meeting on security measures and crime prevention strategies across the city. He stated that over 3,500 officers and personnel will be deployed during Chand Raat and the two days of Eid-ul-Fitr to ensure law and order. IG Rizvi emphasized that a robust security plan has been devised to secure markets, public areas, and key locations in the city during Chand Raat.

"Patrolling will be intensified with foot patrols, motorcycles, and vehicles to maintain a vigilant presence," he added. IG Rizvi directed that strict checking will be enforced at entry and exit points of the city. "Public awareness campaigns will be conducted to guide citizens traveling to other cities on securing their homes," he stated. IG Rizvi underscored that security at important buildings and places of worship will remain effective. "Surprise checkpoints will be set up in different areas of the city to enhance monitoring," he noted. IG Rizvi instructed officers to enhance mutual coordination and ensure timely information exchange. "The display of weapons will not be tolerated under any circumstances, and strict action

will be taken against violators," he warned. IG Rizvi ordered all patrolling units, including Dolphin, Ababeel, and Emergency Response Units, to intensify their presence across the city. "The protection of citizens' lives and property remains our top priority," he asserted. IG Rizvi urged officers to maintain strict checks on their subordinates while encouraging and supporting them. "All possible welfare measures will be taken for the police force during Eid," he assured. IG Rizvi reiterated that ensuring security and maintaining peace in Islamabad is the foremost duty of the police. "We are committed to safeguarding the citizens and ensuring a peaceful environment during Eid celebrations," he concluded.

Motorway Police launches campaign against overloading

ISLAMABAD (APP): In an effort to ensure safer travel for the public, the National Highways and Motorway Police (NH&MP) has launched a campaign to control overcharging and overloading in public service vehicles, on the eve of Eidul Fitr. The initiative, directed by Inspector General NH&MP Riffat Mukhtar Raja, aims to raise awareness among drivers about the dangers of violating traffic rules, especially during the Eid period. According to Motorway Police spokesperson, IG Riffat Mukhtar directed patrolling officers to take strict action against public service vehicles which were overcharging and overloading. The passengers will be asked to report any instances of overcharging. If complaints are verified, passengers will be reimbursed immediately. Under the National Highway Safety Ordinance of 2000, any vehicle caught violating these rules could

face a fine of Rs 5000. IG Raja has made it clear that there will be zero tolerance for such violations during the festive period. As part of the campaign, Motorway Police officers were holding briefings at different sections of motorways for passenger vehicle drivers. The officers outlined the consequences of overloading and speeding, emphasizing the importance of adhering to regulations for a safer journey. The drivers were educated on the potential consequences of breaking traffic regulations, with pamphlets distributed to provide further details on the penalties for non-compliance. In addition to these efforts, in a recent meeting, IG Riffat Mukhtar visited the North Region Office to discuss operational strategies with regional officers. The session, led by the Additional IG and DIG Motorway North, focused on several key initiatives to improve traffic management and

commuter safety in the region. The meeting also discussed the introduction of the Passenger and Vehicle Management Information System (PSVMIS) on motorways. This system is designed to monitor traffic flow more effectively and enhance the overall travel experience. Security measures were also strengthened ahead of Eid, with the NH&MP deploying rapid-response patrol teams to assist commuters in case of emergencies. These teams will ensure quick reaction times to incidents on major routes, improving safety during peak travel periods. The meeting also focused on addressing issues of overloading and overcharging in public transport. With the conclusion of Ramadan and the onset of Eid, the NH&MP is set to take firm action against any transport operators who violate regulations related to passenger capacity and fares.

Govt decides to cap private medical colleges' fee

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Committee on Medical Education Reforms on Thursday determined that the annual tuition fee for private medical and dental colleges should be capped at Rs 1.8 million. The committee which was constituted by the Prime Minister of Pakistan and chaired by the Deputy Prime Minister, has successfully reached a consensus decision. After careful evaluation of the financial data and justifications provided by the institutions and based on the recommendations of the sub-committee, the Committee on Medical Education Reforms made this decision, setting a cap on the tuition fee for private MBBS and BDS programs. The committee determined this cap with annual increase based on the CPI inflation rate, applicable for a period of five years for MBBS programs and four years for BDS programs.

This fee structure will be publicly declared and enforced, ensuring transparency in the tuition fee determination process. However, institutions that believe their financial needs require a higher fee up to a maximum of Rs 2.5 million will be allowed to submit a detailed financial justification to the PM&DC. The justification must include a breakdown of the costs driving the need for the higher fee, evidence of additional educational services or facilities offered to students, and a comparison with other institutions adhering to the standard fee structure. It is essential that any fee increases not supported by solid financial reasoning are not accepted. The committee has emphasized that only justified increases will be entertained to maintain fairness and ensure that education remains affordable. This landmark decision is a step forward in addressing the long-standing issue of skyrocketing tuition fees, making medical education more accessible to students from all financial backgrounds, particularly those from lower-income families.

By making education affordable and transparent, the government's commitment to reforming and standardizing medical education in Pakistan continues to gain momentum. The committee extended its profound appreciation to the Deputy Prime Minister for his visionary leadership and unwavering dedication to education reform. His commitment to the cause has been instrumental in driving this important initiative forward. Additionally, the committee acknowledged Federal Minister Mustafa Kamal for his proactive efforts in recognizing the concerns of the public and prioritizing the affordability of education. Acknowledgments were also given to Dr. Mukhtar Ahmad Bharath, Minister for State Health, Nadeem Mahbub, Federal Secretary of the Ministry of National Health Services, Regulations, and Coordination for their invaluable facilitation of the process, and to Prof. Dr. Rizwan Taj, President of Pakistan PM&DC for providing constant oversight and clarity throughout the entire process. The committee also commended the hard work of the sub-committee, under the chairmanship of Prof. Dr. Masood Gondal, whose exhaustive analysis of tuition fees and financial justifications provided by private colleges played a vital role in shaping these recommendations. The committee acknowledged the need for private institutions to maintain financial sustainability while ensuring the delivery of high-quality education. The PM&DC's role remains clear, tuition fees must reflect the true cost of providing quality education while ensuring that

institutions operate sustainably without exploiting students. The committee remains fully committed to ensuring that medical education in Pakistan remains accessible, affordable, and of the highest quality, safeguarding the welfare of both students and the broader healthcare system in the country. This crucial step marks a significant moment in ensuring the affordability and accessibility of medical education in Pakistan. The key participants of the meeting were Dr. Tariq Bajwa (co-chair), Mustafa Kamal Federal Minister for Health, Dr. Mukhtar Ahmad Bharath Minister of State for Health, Nadeem Mahbub Federal Secretary Ministry of Health, Prof. Dr. Rizwan Taj President PM&DC, Prof. Dr. Masud Gondal Vice President CPSP, Prof. Dr. Muhammad Iqbal VC STMU, Islamabad, Prof. Dr. Mahmud Aurangzeb Dean Khyber Medical College

Peshawar, Dr. Riaz Shabaz Junjua General Secretary PAMI, Dr. Ghazanfar Ali Vice President PAMI, Dr. Adil H. Haider Dean AKU, Karachi. The issue of rising tuition fees in private medical colleges has been a subject of ongoing concern for the public, students, and parents alike. The PM&DC Council has previously addressed these concerns in its meetings on June 4, 2022, December 10, 2023, and February 23, 2024. A sub-committee, led by Prof. Dr. Masood Gondal, was formed in response to the Council's decision on February 27, 2025, to resolve the issue of excessive fee hikes. This sub-committee, after conducting thorough analysis over three meetings, consulted stakeholders, including representatives from private institutions and the Pakistan Association of Medical Institutes (PAMI), to obtain comprehensive feedback on the matter.

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Central bank to auction \$15m on Saturday

KABUL (Pajhwok): The central bank is all poised to auction 15 million US dollars on Saturday to keep the afghani stable. In a post on X, Da Afghanistan Bank (DAB) invited eligible lenders and money-exchange services to take part in the auction. The winners will have to settle their accounts by the end of the day, according to DAB, which said partial payments were unacceptable. Partial transactions will not be permissible.

Police motorcycle unit set up in Paktia

GARDEZ (Pajhwok): A 48-member police motorcycle unit has been formed in south-eastern Paktia province to strengthen security, an official announced on Thursday. Police spokesman Munib Zadran said the unit was established to curb criminal activities and provide a rapid response in Gardez, the provincial capital. He added the unit would conduct 24-hour patrols on motor-cycles throughout the city.

IEA chief seeks global respect for Afghan values

KABUL (Pajhwok): In his message ahead of Eid-ul-Fitr, the supreme leader of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (IEA) underlined the need for unity among Afghans, desiring good relations with the world based on brotherhood.



Sheikh Haibatullah Akhundzada urged the world to respect Afghanistan's values and not to hinder the Islamic Emirate's efforts for stability, security and development.

He also highlighted the responsibility of educational institutions to align their curricula with the Shariah and to provide proper education for youth.

Haibatullah Akhundzada asked the people not to heed propaganda from hostile groups that aimed to demoralise them or spread anxiety about poverty and economic challenges.

Zabihullah Mujahid, chief spokesman for the interim government, published the supreme leader's message on his X account.

Haibatullah Akhundzada said: "Afghans have endured many years of conflict. Thank Allah, now we have a good opportunity for unity and harmony. Let us fully seize this opportunity and strengthen our unity, which is the key to our success and dignity."

He added Afghanistan was peaceful, and its people



were living in better security than at any other time.

He explained the IEA had tasked all courts with applying Shariah according to the Hanafi jurisprudence. Based on this, courts are obligated to make decisions in line with Shariah and implement the laws of Allah.

According to him, the Ministry of Vice and Virtue (MoVV), in addition to addressing complaints, is working to prevent all forms of corruption. As a result, the level of immorality has decreased.

The IEA supreme leader identified preventing corruption in society as one of the major objectives of the Islamic system.

He also stated it was the responsibility of all scholars to fully cooperate on correcting the beliefs of youth and preventing immorality.

IEA's decrees, laws and particularly the law of MoVV should be explained to the people and they

should be encouraged to follow them.

The leader reminded educational institutions of their duty to focus on promoting beliefs and practices across all fields. They should align their curricula with Shariah and focus on the proper education of youth.

He added the IEA, besides promoting religious teachings, has worked — and continues to work — to rebuild the country and strengthen the economy according to the Shariah.

He said: "The people should not trust propaganda from malicious groups and intelligence networks trying to demoralise them or spread anxiety about poverty and economic challenges. With the help of Allah, the IEA is doing all in its power to improve your lives." He said the IEA sought strong and positive relations with the Islamic world based on Islamic brotherhood.

He concluded: "We ask all parties to respect the beliefs and values of the Afghan people, refrain from interfering in our internal affairs and not to be an obstacle to our stability, security and progress."

Additionally, in his message, the leader condemned Israeli attacks on Palestinians and urged Islamic countries to support the Palestinian people.

Over 76,000 Afghan families returned since 2023

KABUL (TOLONews): Since the beginning of 2023, more than 76,000 Afghan families have been forcibly returned to the country via the Torkham crossing. Baz Mohammad Abdulrahman, head of the Department of Refugees and Repatriation in Nangarhar, stated that out of this number, 47,231 families have settled in Nangarhar province.

He added: "Through the Torkham crossing, a total of 67,473 families—equivalent to 355,900 individuals—have returned to the country. Of these, 70% have settled in Nangarhar, while the remaining have been resettled in other provinces." Meanwhile, the deported families are calling on the caretaker government and aid agencies to provide permanent housing and employment opportunities.

Jamal Khan, one of the deportees from Pakistan, said: "The Pakistani government put us under a lot of pressure, and in the end, we were forced to migrate back to Afghanistan. May God make this place a means of salvation for us."

Liaquatullah Sapi, another deportee, stated: "I'm very happy to now be living in my own country. I'm finally free from hearing things like: 'Refugee, stand up! Refugee, sit down! Show your refugee card!' Now, my request to the Islamic Emirate and relevant organizations is to provide not just shelter, but also work and livelihood opportunities." According to the Nangarhar Department of Refugees and Repatriation, the deported Afghans living in this province need support in sectors such as agriculture, livestock, vocational training, and small businesses. Efforts are underway, in cooperation with aid agencies, to assist these families.

Ghazni welcomes approval of gov't medical faculty

GHAZNI (TOLONews): Following a decree by the leader of the Islamic Emirate, a medical faculty has been officially approved within the structure of Ghazni University.

The university's president, Abdul Wasi Mansour, described the approval of this faculty as a major step forward in higher education and stated that all necessary facilities would be provided.

He said: "The need for a teaching hospital, buildings, classrooms, qualified instructors, and other essential financial resources were all considered, proposed, and approved by the relevant authorities." Several students expressed hope that they can now pursue their education in medicine, noting that due to financial challenges, they could not afford to study in private universities.

Samiullah, a student, said: "Since Ghazni University lacked a medical faculty, students like me who couldn't afford private universities had to choose other fields." Nusratullah, another student, said: "Many students dreamed of studying medicine at Ghazni University, but due to the absence of a medical faculty and financial difficulties, they couldn't attend private institutions."

Meanwhile, residents of Ghazni consider the establishment of the medical faculty as a valuable contribution to the health sector and have urged authorities to expedite its development. Mohibullah, a resident of Ghazni, said: "We request that the process of establishing the medical faculty be accelerated so it can begin operations soon. This would allow specialists and doctors to be trained locally and provide healthcare services to Ghazni and surrounding provinces." Currently, only one private university in Ghazni offers medical education. However, the creation of a government-run medical faculty will open new professional and academic opportunities for a large number of local youth.

DABS signs agreements worth 20.7b afs with private sector

KABUL (Pajhwok): Da Afghanistan Breshna Sherkat (DABS) on Thursday signed ten agreements with the private sector for electricity generation and transmission projects worth 20.7 billion afghanis.

The agreements were signed at the Government Information and Media Center in Kabul between DABS CEO Dr. Abdul Bari Omar and private sector officials in the presence of Deputy Prime Minister for Economic Affairs Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar.

Omar on the occasion said eight out of the ten projects were about electricity generation and two projects were about electricity transmission and construction of substations.

He said under signed agreements, investments will be made in wind, solar and gas power generation in Balkh, Herat, Laghman, Jawzjan, Logar, and Nangarhar provinces, with a production capacity of 228.45 megawatts.

Power transmission projects include the construction of the Eastern Power Station in Kandahar province and the Qalat Power Station in Zabul



province, and the extension of a 110-kilovolt power line from Kajaki to Kandahar.

He added the total investment in was 20.7 billion afghanis, equivalent to \$292.3 million. He said hundreds of people will be employed and work on these projects will be completed within a year.

He added that agreements for other projects in the power sector will also be signed in the near future and the company was trying to utilize available domestic power resources and provide electricity to the people.

According to Omar, Afghanistan has currently 1,000 megawatts of electricity, including imported and locally produced electricity and the implementation of the signed projects will meet 23 percent of the domestic demand.

Acting Minister of Economy Qari Din Mohammad Hanif said

electricity was a basic need of Afghanistan and that the country's economic development relied on electricity.

He said although Afghanistan had abundant resources in the field of electricity generation, it still

imported electricity worth \$280 million annually.

Maulvi Ahmad Jan Bilal, Director General of State-Owned Enterprises, said at the ceremony that the signing of a number of project agreements in the field of electricity generation and transmission was a good step towards self-sufficiency in the electricity sector.

He added that they were trying to take steps in electricity-related works.

He assured investors that they will provide them with all kinds of facilities in the field of electricity generation.

WFP warns of malnutrition crisis among Afghan children



KABUL (TOLONews): The World Food Programme (WFP) has predicted that 3.5 million children in Afghanistan will suffer from malnutrition in 2025.

The UN agency also stated that it needs \$555 million over the next six months to safeguard life-saving food assistance across its programs.

According to WFP data, currently 1.2 million pregnant and breastfeeding mothers in Afghanistan are suffering from malnutrition and urgently need treatment and nutri-

tional support.

Mona Shaikh, head of nutrition for the World Food Programme (WFP) in Afghanistan, said: "In 2025, 3.5 million young children in Afghanistan are expected to be malnourished. This is huge. We haven't seen anything like that in the last four years."

Abdul Qadir, whose two daughters have been suffering from malnutrition for nearly six months, said he has taken them to the hospital several times but cannot afford treatment

due to poverty and unemployment. "Our economic situation is weak. I push a cart for a living. I can't afford to treat my daughters. I ask the government and the Red Cross to help treat them," Abdul Qadir told TOLONews.

Meanwhile, the Ministry of Economy has called for international support for Afghanistan's economy.

Abdul Rahman Habib, spokesperson for the Ministry of Economy, said: "There is a need for joint efforts by internal institutions and continued support from the international community, especially in child nutrition. Supporting the agriculture sector and creating job opportunities can strengthen household economies and help reduce food insecurity."

"It is the responsibility of the international community, especially the World Health Organization, to consider various ways to assist countries with poor economies and ultimately provide support," said Nabi Afghan, an economic analyst.

Earlier, Save the Children had stated that due to reduced foreign aid, it had suspended life-saving programs for children suffering from malnutrition in Afghanistan.

Ghor farmer women: From flooding to greenhouses revival

FEROZKOH (Pajhwok): Some women farmers in western Ghor province have begun effort to restore their flood-affected agricultural lands and gardens in spring.

Last year, hundreds of acres of agricultural land and flourishing gardens were destroyed by floods in the province.

The winter season has ended and spring has arrived and women farmers have risen from these challenges and are working to make their destroyed gardens green and lush once again.

Zainab, 36, a resident of Gul Dara village in Ferozkoh city, said her livelihood has been darkened by flood. She had a greenhouse that earned her 35,000 to 40,000afs annually.

Zainab cultivated vegetables, eggplants, and cucumbers in her greenhouse. She said she would send these products to the market with her son to sell daily.

Daily, she worked for hours in her greenhouse, seeing her hard work pay off. In midst of happy days, floods came and destroyed everything. The greenhouse, once full of vegetables and herbs was buried under mud.

Zeinab explained with eyes full of longing and a hopeful heart: "I had built a very large greenhouse... and I was doing very well; but the floods destroyed my greenhouse."

It is not only Zainab whose greenhouse was



destroyed due to floods, there are other women who faced this problem.

Zobaida another female farmer has similar story. A few years ago, she built a greenhouse with the help of Agriculture Department, and its produce contributed significantly, to her family's expenses, but floods damaged her garden.

Zobaida talked about agriculture training and with concern said: "I was trained by Agriculture Department and I created greenhouse, I earned good income. Now I need chemical fertilizers and improved seeds again, so we could rebuild our lives."

These women farmers are not just thinking about rebuilding greenhouses; they are seeking professional and vocational training in this field. They

want to continue their work in a more specialized and effective manner by receiving government support and aid from various institutions.

They asked officials to organize specialized trainings for them besides providing them with seeds and chemical fertilizers, so they could learn modern agricultural methods.

Abdul Zahir Tawana, an agricultural expert, told Pajhwok Afghan News women farmers should be empowered and supported. "The practical and theoretical training programs for women should be developed. The creation of demonstration plots, small greenhouses and sales markets could help women move up from traditional farming methods to modern production and sales. This could play sig-

nificant role in economic growth of families," Tawana added.

According to him, educated women in agricultural sector are more effective and useful for family economy and society.

Ziaul Haq Joya, press office head at the Agriculture Department, referring to educational programs explained: "We provide agriculture training in cooperation with various institutions to help create jobs, these programs are aimed at empowering women and improving the level of agricultural production."

He considered the role of women in agricultural sector as effective and said women farmers not only help their families' economies, but also contribute to the country's economy.

Afghanistan ships first consignment to Europe via Khaf-Herat railway



HERAT (Ariana News): The press office of the Herat governor has announced the export of Afghanistan's first shipment via the Khaf-Herat railway to Europe.

According to a statement from the office, the shipment includes 200 tons of dried fruits worth \$1.2 million, which were exported to Turkey and Europe through the Khaf-Herat railway in the presence of Islam Jar, the governor of this province, and the Iranian Consul General.

The exported dried fruits in this shipment include pistachios, raisins, almonds, and pine nuts. The statement added that over the past three months, more than 35,000 tons of goods have been transferred via the Khaf-Herat railway.

Afghanistan-Iran-Europe railway corridor activated : The Iranian Embassy in Kabul announced on Thursday that the Afghanistan-Iran-Europe railway corridor has become operational.

In a statement, the embassy said the first export shipment from Afghanistan has started its journey through the Afghanistan-Iran railway corridor to Turkey and Europe.

The corridor was activated with the presence of the Iranian Consul General in Herat and the governor of the province, the statement read. The statement added that the activation of this corridor, with Iran's cooperation, will contribute to the improvement of Afghanistan's economy.

KP Cabinet approves Rs33b supplementary grant for different sectors

E.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Cabinet in its 29th meeting held under the chairmanship of Chief Minister Ali Amin Khan Gandapur approved extra Rs. 33 billion as supplementary budget grant to various sectors by enhancing their sectoral allocations in the Annual Development Program 2024-25 as per distribution proposed by the planning and Development Department.

The extra funds are allocated to high priority & due for completion projects with the aim to boost up the High Impact Projects with the ADP+. This increase was made possible by the stringent measures, financial discipline and the efficient utilization of the allocated budget. The Chief Minister termed this development as an effective strategy vital for the timely completion of the province's key projects.

The meeting was attended by Cabinet members, Chief Secretary, Additional Chief Secretaries, Senior Member Board of Revenue, Administrative Secretaries, and Advocate General Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The cabinet also approved the enhancement of volume of the scheme 'Ehsaas Hunar Program' to Rs.3050 million. Under this scheme, interest fee loans will be provided to the youth having technical and vocational skills for self-employment/entrepreneurships. The Bank of Khyber will serve as Service Provider for the project.

The cabinet further approved the Gazette Notification of Gallies in Abbottabad and Bashkar Garam Chashma in Chitral as Biosphere Reserves under Section 30 of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Wildlife and Biodiversity Act, 2015. These two sites were added to the World Network of Biosphere Reserves on June 14, 2023 by UNESCO. With this recognition, Pakistan now has a total of four internationally acknowledged biosphere reserves, including Lal Suhanra (Punjab) and Ziarat Juniper Forest (Balochistan), contributing to the global network of 758 biosphere reserves.

The two reserves were identified to meet international commitments under the 10 Billion Tree Tsunami program aimed at afforestation, restoration of degraded lands, forests, protection of wildlife and expanding Pakistan's biosphere.

The Chief Minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa termed this development significant and directed the formulation of a comprehensive strategy

for the protection of such sites. Similarly, the cabinet also approved amendments to Rules 10 and 11 of the West Pakistan Notaries Rules, 1965, increasing the fees for appointment, area extension, renewal, and issuance of duplicates. Originally set in 1965 at Rs. 100, Rs. 50, Rs. 25, and Rs. 5, respectively, these fees have now been revised to Rs. 20,000 for appointment, Rs. 10,000 for area extension, Rs. 10,000 for renewal, and Rs. 2,000 for duplicates. Fee with respect to other notarial work under Rule-11 have also been enhanced.

The cabinet also approved a supplementary grant to the tune of Rs.1726.100 million for two ADP schemes to ensure completion of all the 760 earthquake effected units (schools) in the province. The earthquake of 8th October, 2005 had caused large scale destruction of infrastructure including 3700 Educational institutes mostly in four districts of Hazara Division and one district of Malakand Division (Shangla) were badly affected.

Furthermore, a sum of Rs. 14.5 million was approved as a Developmental Support Grant for FATA University, which was functional since 2016 in a portion of Govt. Degree College, Dara Adam Khel where around 1100 students have been enrolled in various disciplines and most of the students belong to remote/ far flung areas. The University's own buildings have been recently completed and the grant will be utilized for the water supply system to resolve the ongoing water crises and procure Mini Bus for students' pick and drop facility. The Chief Minister expressed hope that the completion of the FATA University campus would improve the university's performance resulting in enhancing the number of students.

The cabinet accorded approval to the release of Rs. 500 million to the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Deserving Artists Endowment Fund. The proceeds / income from the Fund under the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Artists Welfare Endowment Fund Act, 2022 is meant to provide financial assistance to deserving artists, cover their health expenses, maintain minimum requirements for their livelihood, ensure their dignity and honour.

The Chief Minister directed the transparent and merit-based distribution of the fund. He further instructed that the fund should be utilized not only for the financial assistance of artists during economic hardships but also to support them in their artistic pursuits. The Cabinet also approved

the release of Rs.5 million to the Higher Education Department as prize money to be distributed among outstanding performers as a reward for their dedication and hard work in different sports activities. This will motivate young athletes and strengthen sports in educational institutions. The Chief Minister appreciated the excellent organization of the Sports Gala. Regarding the polo game, he indicated that polo matches would be held in Peshawar in addition to Shandur.

The cabinet also approved Rs. 1095 million as a special fund for the merged and backward districts. The cabinet approved increase in the travel allowance (T.A) for Family Welfare Assistants (Male & Female) (BPS-07) from Rs. 250 per month to Rs. 3,000 per month. The previous rate had remained unchanged since 1995. The Chief Minister directed the monitoring of Family Welfare Assistants' monthly visits and the assessment of their performance.

The cabinet also approved a compensation of Rs.3 million for the family of the student, who lost his life in a recent incident of firing in Bannu. The cabinet approved forwarding of a joint resolution No.136 adopted by the Provincial Assembly of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa to the Federal Government. The resolution states: "Whereas on November 26, 2024, during a peaceful protest in Islamabad, Islamabad Police unlawfully arrested thousands of PTI workers, leaving hundreds injured. The detained workers were imprisoned in Attock Jail, where they have been subjected to severe oppression, particularly targeting Pashtuns.

Additionally, they are not being provided food as per the jail manual. Therefore, this Assembly recommends that the provincial government strongly urge the federal government to immediately end the injustice and oppression against the detained workers and ensure their prompt release." It also approved forwarding the joint resolution No. 135 adopted by the provincial assembly of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa to the Federal Government, opposing the Federal Government's notification of forming a Steering Committee to oversee the Accelerated Implementation Program (AIP) for the Merged Districts. After a thread bare and intensive open discussion the cabinet finalized and approved with certain amendments the Draft Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Mines and Minerals Bill, 2025 for its placement before the Provincial Assembly.



ISLAMABAD: An illuminated view of Faisal mosque decorated with colourful lights in connection with Shab-e-Qadr.

Saif flays promotions in federal bureaucracy

E.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Barrister Dr. Muhammad Ali Saif, Advisor to the Chief Minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa on Information and Public Relations, has strongly criticized the recent promotions in the federal bureaucracy, alleging a blatant disregard for merit.

He stated that the federal government has promoted incompetent officers while ignoring deserving and qualified officials. According to him, the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) and Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) have violated merit by promoting their favored officers.

Barrister Dr. Saif further claimed that promotions from Grade 19 to Grade 22 have been distributed among unqualified and preferred officers, sidelining senior and capable officials. He alleged that junior and incompetent officers were given precedence over more experienced and deserving candidates.

He asserted that the only criterion for promotion was suppressing Imran Khan and the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI). Officers who supported the government's authoritarian actions against PTI were rewarded with promotions, while those who refused to comply were deliberately overlooked.

Barrister Dr. Saif further stated that, driven by animosity towards Imran Khan, the so-called 'fake government' has brought the bureaucracy to the brink of destruction. He warned that after controlling the judiciary, efforts are now being made to exert influence over the bureaucracy as well.

Pak's foreign reserves stood at \$15.55b

E.P. Report

KARACHI: Pakistan's total liquid foreign exchange reserves stood at US\$ 15.55 billion as of March 21, 2025, according to data released by the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP).

The central bank's reserves were recorded at US\$ 10.61 billion, reflecting a decline of US\$ 540 million over the week due to external debt repayments. Meanwhile, net foreign reserves held by commercial banks stood at US\$ 4.94 billion. The drop in SBP reserves highlights continuing pressure on the country's external account amid ongoing debt obligations.

SC does not sponsor internship program

E.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Supreme Court, in a statement, on Thursday said it has come to the notice of Chief Justice of Pakistan (CJP), Justice Yahya Afridi, that certain quarters have launched Harvard Law School Seasonal internship program, projecting it as being sponsored by the Supreme Court of Pakistan which is not true.

The Supreme Court clarified that it (Supreme Court of Pakistan) does not sponsor any seasonal internship for students of any institution including Harvard Law School. "This is to caution the students to remain careful and should report to the Registrar office of the Supreme Court if anyone come across such malicious program", the statement said.

Six dead in sinking of Egypt tourist submarine

CAIRO (AFP): Six people died on Thursday, two of them minors, when a tourist submarine carrying dozens of Russian visitors sank off Egypt's Red Sea coast near a major resort town. Egyptian state media put the toll at six, while Russian state news agencies quoted General Consul Viktor Voropaev as saying that five people were confirmed dead, two of them minors.

Russia's consulate in the tourist hub of Hurghada earlier said the vessel was carrying "45 tourists, including minors" on an underwater excursion to observe coral reefs when it "crashed 1 kilometer from the shore" at about 10:00 am local time (0800 GMT). "According to initial data, most of those on board were rescued and taken to their hotels and hospitals in Hurghada," the consulate said, adding that diplomats had been dispatched to the pier.

The website of state-owned Akhbar Al-Youm newspaper gave the toll of six dead and said 29 people were rescued, nine of them

wounded. Russian state news agency Ria Novosti, quoting an Egyptian emergency services source, reported the death of "five foreigners and one Egyptian." Local authorities did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

The website of Sindbad Submarines, the vessel's owner according to the Russian consulate, said the vessel could carry 44 passengers to up to 25 meters (27 yards) depth. The Egyptian newspaper reported investigations were underway to determine what caused the accident. Hurghada, a resort about 460 kilometers (280 miles) southeast of the Egyptian capital Cairo, is a major destination for visitors to Egypt, with its airport receiving more than nine million passengers last year, according to state media.

Thursday's forecast in the city was clear, with above average winds reported but optimum visibility underwater. While dozens of tourist boats sail through the coastal area

daily for snorkeling and diving activities, Sindbad Submarines says it deploys the region's "only real" recreational submarine. The vessel has been operational in the area for multiple years, according to a source familiar with the company.

The Red Sea coral reefs and islands off Egypt's eastern coast are major draws, contributing to the country's vital tourism sector which employs two million people and generates more than 10 percent of GDP. The area has been the site of several deadly accidents in recent years.

In November, a dive boat capsized off the coast of Marsa Alam, south of Hurghada, leaving four dead and seven missing. Thirty people were rescued from another sinking boat, while last June two dozen French tourists were safely evacuated before their boat sank in a similar accident. In 2023, three British tourists died after a fire broke out on their yacht, engulfing their vessel in flames.

Police use force to break up protests in Istanbul

ISTANBUL (AP): Police used pepper spray, plastic pellets and water cannon against protesters in Turkey's capital early Thursday, potentially reigniting tensions after two days of relative calm in the country's biggest anti-government protests in over a decade.

The demonstrations began last week following the arrest of Istanbul Mayor

Ekrem Imamoglu, a key rival to President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Imamoglu, jailed on corruption charges many see as politically motivated, is also accused of supporting terrorism. The government insists the judiciary is independent, but critics say the evidence is based on secret witnesses and lacks credibility.

Early Thursday, student demonstrators tried to

march and gathered to read a statement near the gates at Middle East Technical University, pro-opposition broadcaster Halk TV and local media reported. They were met by security forces who deployed pepper spray, water cannon and plastic pellets. A standoff ensued where the students hid behind a barricade of dumpsters until the police charged to detain them.

Israeli drone strikes kill four people in Lebanon

BEIRUT: Lebanon's Ministry of Public Health has said that at least four people have been killed in two separate Israeli strikes in south Lebanon, as Israel claimed it struck Hezbollah operatives.

Thursday's strikes were the latest in a series of deadly attacks in south Lebanon, despite a November ceasefire between Israel and Hezbollah after more than a year of hostilities, including two months of open war. An "Israeli enemy strike on a car in Yohmor al-Shaqef led to the death of three people", said a Health Ministry statement reported by the National News Agency (NNA) on Thursday.

The NNA said an "enemy drone" targeted a vehicle near the town, in a strike that came at the same time as artillery shelling. Elsewhere, the Israeli military said in a statement that "several Hezbollah terrorists were identified transferring weapons in the area of Yohmor in southern Lebanon", adding that the army "struck the terrorists". On Thursday morning, the NNA also reported that "one person was killed and another wounded in the Israeli drone targeting ... of a car in the town [of] Maaroub", also in south Lebanon. Israel has continued to carry out raids in Lebanon since the November 27 ceasefire, striking what it says are Hezbollah military targets that violated the agreement. But most of the victims have been civilians.

Health Ministry said an Israeli attack killed two people in the Yohmor area, as the Israeli military said it struck two Hezbollah operatives. Last weekend saw the most intense escalation since the truce, with Israeli strikes on south Lebanon killing eight people. Israel said those raids were in response to rocket fire, the first to hit its territory since the ceasefire.

No party has claimed responsibility for the rocket fire, which a military source said originated north of the Litani River, between the villages of Kfar Tebnit and Amoun, near the zone covered by the ceasefire deal. Hezbollah, which has been weakened by the war, denied involvement. — Aljazeera

Court acquits XEN, others in embezzlement charges

Humayun Khan

PESHAWAR: The Anti-Corruption Court has acquitted four accused, including former Executive Engineer (XEN) Communication and Works Department (C&W) Shaukat Ullah Shah along with three others in a case of alleged embezzlement and irregularities in a road construction project in Orakzai district.

The Anti-corruption court Judge Asif Rashid authored the verdict which ruled that the prosecution failed to prove the charges against the accused. The court observed that the prosecution's case was weak and it failed to prove the allegations of corruption and irregularities against the accused.

The accused, including Shaukat Ullah Shah, Abdullah, Raj Muhammad, and Malik Feroz, were charged with embezzling over Rs. 1.36 crore in the construction of an 8-kilometer road from Samana Hotel to Ghazgharh area in Orakzai district.

According to the prosecution, the accused were involved in corruption and irregularities in the project, causing a loss of over Rs. 1.36 crore to the national exchequer. The prosecution alleged that the accused had misused their authority and committed corruption in the project.

The court, however, observed that the prosecution failed to provide sufficient evidence to prove the charges against the accused. The court noted

that the prosecution relied heavily on the technical inspection report, but failed to provide any other evidence to support its claims.

The court also observed that Shaukat Ullah Shah was only in charge of the project for a few days and it was unfair to hold him solely responsible for the alleged irregularities. The court noted that other officers, including Ismat Ullah, were also involved in the project, but they were not held accountable.

The court acquitted all the accused, including Shaukat Ullah Shah, Abdullah, Raj Muhammad, and Malik Feroz, of all charges. The court ruled that the prosecution failed to prove the charges against the accused and that the accused were innocent.

S Korea battles wildfires as death toll hits 28

ANDONG (Reuters): Wildfires raging in South Korea doubled in size on Thursday from a day earlier, as authorities called the blazes the country's worst natural fire disaster with at least 28 people killed and historic temples incinerated.

More than 38,000 hectares (93,900 acres) have been charred or were still burning in the largest of the fires that began in the central Uiseong county, making it the biggest single forest fire in South Korea's history. The previous record was 24,000 hectares (59,000 acres) in a March 2000 fire. "We are nationally in a critical situation with numerous casualties because of the unprecedented rapid spread of forest fires," Acting President Han Duck-soo told a government response meeting.

The military has released stocks of aviation fuel to help keep firefighting helicopters flying to douse flames across mountainous regions in the southeast of the country where fires have been burning now for nearly a week. More than 120 helicopters have been deployed in three regions battling the blazes, the safety ministry said. South Korea relies on heli-

copters to fight forest fires because of its mountainous terrain. A helicopter pilot died on Wednesday after crashing while trying to tackle a blaze.

The wildfires that originated in Uiseong have been moving rapidly eastward, spreading almost to the coast, carried by gusty winds and with dry conditions aggravating the situation. The Uiseong fire began spreading quickly on Wednesday, reaching the coastal county of Yeongdeok about 50 km (30 miles) away in just 12 hours, said Won Myung-soo, director of satellite imagery analysis for the national forestry service.

On Thursday evening, it rained briefly in some parts of the affected region. Precipitation of around one millimetre was too little to extinguish the main fire, but will help contain it, officials said. About the same amount of rain is expected for some areas on Friday.

Experts have said the Uiseong fire showed extremely unusual spread in terms of its scale and speed, and that climate change is expected to make wildfires more frequent and deadly

globally. Higher temperatures amplified by human-caused climate change contributed to the existing seasonally dry conditions, "turning dry landscapes into dangerous fire fuel" in the region, the Climate Central group, an independent body made up of scientists and researchers, said in a report. The wildfires have carved a trail of devastation through an area equivalent to about half of Singapore, ravaging everything in their path including historic temples and homes in the mountainous forest regions of North Gyeongsang province. Teams of firefighters are on standby to protect the UNESCO World Heritage sites of Hahoe Village and the Byeongsan Confucian Academy in the city of Andong, if a blaze jumps the stream that flows around them.

The picturesque folk village has traditional Korean houses, many with thatched roofs, while the Confucian academy dates back more than 450 years. The fires have already badly damaged other historic sites, including much of Gounsa Temple in Uiseong, which was built in 681.