

Ruet body to meet today
F.P. Report
ISLAMABAD: The Central Ruet-e-Hilal Committee will meet in Islamabad today (Sunday) for sighting of Shawwal 1446 Hijri Moon. Chairman of the Committee Moulana Muhammad Abdul Khabeer Azad will preside over the meeting. The Zonal Ruet-e-Hilal Committees will also meet separately at their respective headquarters for sighting of the Eidul Fitr Moon.

Crescent moon sighted Saudi Arabia to celebrate Eidul Fitr today

RIYADH: Saudi Arabia announced on Saturday that the moon for Shawwal had been sighted, and Eid ul Fitr will be celebrated today (Saturday), Arab media reported.

According to media reports, the moon-sighting committee convened after Maghrib prayers and verified the sighting of the new moon, marking the end of Ramadan after 29 days of fasting. An official statement from the Royal Court confirmed that today, Saturday, is the last day of Ramadan, and today, Sunday, will be celebrated as Eid ul Fitr across the Kingdom.

Meanwhile, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) has also announced that Sunday, March 30, 2025, will be the first day of Eid ul Fitr. Muslims celebrate Eid ul Fitr as the completion of the fasting month of Ramadan, the ninth month in the Islamic calendar.

Similarly, other Middle Eastern countries, including Kuwait, Qatar, and Iran, have also announced sighting of the Shawwal moon and would celebrate Eid today. Meanwhile, a number of countries officially announced that Eid ul Fitr will fall on Monday, March 31, 2025, as the Shawwal crescent moon was not sighted on Saturday evening.

Oman has officially announced that the Shawwal moon was not sighted, and Eid ul Fitr will be celebrated on Monday, March 31. Authorities in Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Brunei, and Australia confirmed the date based on astronomical data and local moon sighting efforts.

In Bangladesh, the National Moon Sighting Committee stated that the crescent moon was not sighted, making Sunday the 30th day of Ramadan. Indonesia also declared Monday as the first day of Eid after failing to observe the Shawwal crescent.

India, where today marks the 28th of Ramadan, expects the moon to be visible on Sunday, thereby celebrating Eid on Monday. Malaysia's International Astronomy Centre (IAC) confirmed that the crescent will be visible to the naked eye on Sunday, placing Eid on March 31.

Brunei followed suit, with the IAC also confirming that the moon will be visible there on Sunday. The Australian Fatwa Council declared Eid Al-Fitr on March 31 as well, noting that the Shawwal moon will be born after sunset on Saturday in both eastern and western parts of the country. — Agencies

Suicide attacker strikes near BNP-M rally in Mastung

F.P. Report
MASTUNG: Sardar Akhtar Mengal and other workers of his faction of the Balochistan National Party (BNP-M) remained unhurt on Saturday after a suicide bomber blew himself up near the party's rally at Mastung.

As reports of a blast near the BNP-M's rally emerged at around 1pm, Mengal said on X that he was "safe with all party workers". In a statement, Balochistan government spokesperson Shahid Rind said the same: "According to reports, there has been no loss of life. Sardar Akhtar Mengal and the entire BNP-M leadership is safe."

The spokesperson noted that the BNP-M's sit-in was underway near the site of the "alleged suicide blast" and that the public would soon be informed about the results of an inquiry into the incident. The official assured the party that the safety of the rally's participants, Mengal and other leaders was the provincial government's responsibility.

Rind said the Balochistan government was in contact with the party's leadership since last night. According to him, a delegation of the BNP-M also met with the local administration on Friday night, after which it was agreed that a government delegation would meet with Mengal. The government called on Mengal, his party and the public to cooperate with it and "help in improving the situation through talks".

Mastung Assistant Commissioner (AC) Akram Harifal told media that Levies personnel stationed at Luck Pass spotted a suspicious individual and attempted to stop him, but he tried to flee. The Levies officials pursued him, and as a result, the suicide bomber blew himself up. No other loss of life occurred, AC Harifal added. He stated that security arrangements near the rally site had been intensified, with additional Levies personnel deployed. However, addressing supporters at Mastung later, Mengal claimed that four participants from the rally were injured in the blast. "We have no threat from any group. If we have any threat, it is from the state," the BNP-M leader alleged. The BNP-M president asserted that the government wanted to worsen the situation, but his protest would "continue peacefully".

Responding to the government's offer of talks, Mengal reiterated his demand for BYC leaders and supporters to be freed: "Our answer is that the middle way is the release of women." "Release the arrested women, and we will return. I am ready to give my arrest in return for the release of women," he added.

He further alleged that the media was being "told to not even look towards" the rally, let alone cover it. Mengal said a suspicious person was seen by party workers as its rally was about to begin, adding that he ran away after being spotted.

Bilawal reviews development projects

F.P. Report
LARKANA: A meeting was held in Larkana chaired by Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari to reviewed development projects in the district on Saturday.

Deputy Commissioner (DC) Larkana, Sherjeel Noor Channa, briefed Bilawal Bhutto Zardari on the progress of development works in the district. The meeting was attended by Commissioner Tahir Sangi, Mayor Anwar Luhur, as well as Nisar Khuhr, Jameel Soomro, Sohail Sial, Nazeer Baghio, Adil Anar, Khurshed Junejo, Ijaz Laghari, and Khair Mohammad Sheikh.

DC Larkana informed Bilawal Bhutto Zardari that 32 kilometers of roads connecting villages to Larkana city have been constructed. The DC Larkana briefed him that 17 small bridges have been built over various canals, and 20 schools in NA-194 have been solarized.

The DC Larkana reported that 12 health centers destroyed by floods have been fully reconstructed, as shared during the briefing to him. The DC informed Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari that the Wagan Road leading to the Indus Highway has been converted into a two-way road.

The construction of the city's main highway, Hyat Mohammad Khan Sherpao Road, from SSP Chowk to Chandka Bridge, has been completed, as briefed to Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari. Road construction and repair work is underway at 27 locations across the city, according to the briefing given to Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari by the DC Larkana.

Kurram tribes reach peace pact

F.P. Report

PARACHINAR: Amid the government's efforts to ease tensions in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Kurram District, an eight-month peace agreement was reached between two warring tribes of the region on Saturday.

Jirga member Haji Kamal confirmed the development, saying that the agreement was finalised in the presence of Kurram Deputy Commissioner Ashfaq Ahmed along with other officials.

Sources told media that elders from both sides, district administration officials, and other key stakeholders participated in the negotiations to reach the settlement. Speaking on the occasion, Deputy Commissioner Ashfaq Ahmed said the truce has brought double joy for the residents ahead of Eidul Fitr.

Meanwhile, jirga member Haji Asghar said that a plan is being formulated to reopen the roads, which have remained blocked due to ongoing tensions. Kurram, a district of more than 600,000 residents near Pakistan's border with Afghanistan, has long been a hotspot for sectarian violence. But recent months have seen escalating tensions, with clashes since July to date leaving over 200 people dead.

The recent clashes exacerbated a humanitarian crisis in the district, with medicine and oxygen supplies running critically low due to the prolonged closure of the main highway linking Parachinar to Peshawar. Reports suggest that over 100 children may have died from a severe shortage of medicine, though Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government spokesperson Barrister Saif has denied these claims.

A grand peace jirga was convened at Kohat Fort to mediate talks between the warring tribes of the violence-hit district. After days-long negotiations, the two warring tribes in January 2025 signed a peace agreement containing 14 points aimed at establishing peace in the area. However, the hard-won agreement suffered a major setback when Assistant Commissioner Saeed Manan, who was mediating to halt fresh clashes between warring sides in Kurram, was injured along with two others in a firing incident in February.

'Zardari has not approve any canal plan'

F.P. Report

KARACHI: Sindh's Chief Minister Murad Ali Shah said on Saturday that President Asif Ali Zardari has not approved any canal project in a meeting.

"President was told about briefing on irrigation and additional land cultivation but the wrong minutes of the meeting issued," Sindh's chief minister said in a press conference. Referring to the meeting chaired by President Zardari, Murad Ali Shah said that the meeting minutes were wrongly used to suggest presidential approval of the canal projects.



ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Kashmir Affairs, Gilgit Baltistan, States and Frontier, Amir Muqam called on Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif.

World Bank approves \$300m loan for Pakistan

F.P. Report
ISLAMABAD: The World Bank approved a \$300 million loan for Pakistan, earmarked for the Punjab Clean Air Programme. According to the World Bank's statement, the funds will be utilised to combat air pollution in Punjab.

The World Bank's Country Director stated that the initiative aims to enhance public health by improving air quality. The Punjab Clean Air Programme is designed to mitigate smog, marking a significant step towards improving the well-being of millions.

Cleaner air is expected to reduce respiratory and cardiovascular diseases. He further noted that the project is part of the World Bank's new Country Partnership Framework and is expected to benefit 13 million residents of the Lahore Division.

In a statement, the WB stated that the PCAP will support the Punjab government's Smog Mitigation Action Plan (SMAP) in tackling the pressing issue of smog and air pollution with the launch of several comprehensive initiatives aimed at improving air quality and public health across the province particularly in key sectors such as transport, agriculture, industry, energy, and municipal services.

WB Country Director for Pakistan Najy Benhassine said: "The Punjab Clean Air Program supports the province's Smog Mitigation Action Plan and is a landmark initiative to significantly improve air quality and enhance the health and well-being of millions of residents." He said, "Cleaner air will reduce the incidence of respiratory and cardiovascular diseases and contribute to a healthier, more livable environment".

Benhassine added that PCAP aligns with the new WB Country Partnership Framework (CPF) and aims to reduce PM2.5 levels by 35% over the next decade, significantly decreasing the incidence of respiratory illnesses and other pollution-related health issues for the 13 million residents of Lahore division.

The program focuses on the continuation of strengthening air quality management (AQM) infrastructure, enhancing regulatory and institutional capacity, targeted sectoral abatement measures and promoting public awareness, he added. Giving details, the WB official said that key interventions include the investment of 5000 super seeders to reduce the main issue of the excessive seasonal fog -crop residue burning, the introduction of 600 electric buses to foster a modal shift to public transport, the expansion of regulatory-grade air quality monitoring stations across Punjab, and the enhancement of fuel quality testing through the establishment of two new fuel testing laboratories.

Recognising the importance of public participation in achieving cleaner air, he said the program promotes behavioral change and active citizen engagement, utilising air quality monitoring data and emissions inventories to educate stakeholders about air pollution sources, health impacts, and reduction measures. He further said that special attention would be given to vulnerable populations through targeted messaging and advisories, including schools and hospitals.

The PCAP's climate co-benefit of reducing PM 2.5 includes a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions (GHGs), he added. The estimated reduction in GHGs for the program is 35.6 million metric tons of carbon dioxide over the next 12 years, significantly benefiting the environment and contributing to climate change mitigation.

The program will also develop an integrated pollutant and GHG emissions inventory system to provide a comprehensive approach to tracking and managing emissions data, Benhassine added. Task Team Leader for the Project Shyam Srinivasan said: "The Punjab Clean Air Program will significantly benefit farmers by improving access to advanced technologies for better crop management, create job opportunities in the e-bus and depot sectors, and support vehicle owners in renewing aging vehicles." "Additionally, it will enhance the skills and knowledge of government officials through training and capacity building, ultimately contributing to a healthier and more sustainable environment," he added.

PM greets Amir of Qatar on Eid

F.P. Report

LAHORE: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif on Saturday held a telephonic call with the Amir of the State of Qatar His Highness Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani and conveyed his warm greetings and best wishes and the brotherly people of Qatar on Eid ul Fitr.

His Highness the Amir warmly reciprocated the Prime Minister's Eid greetings and conveyed his best wishes for the people of Pakistan. While fondly recalling his visit to Doha last October, the Prime Minister conveyed his deep appreciation to the Amir as well as Her Excellency Sheikhha Al Mayassa, for hosting the Manzar cultural exhibition, which was inaugurated in his presence.

The Prime Minister proposed the idea of having a similar exhibition hosted in Lahore, which the Amir very graciously accepted. The two leaders also reaffirmed their common desire to further strengthen the close brotherly relations in the trade and investment. To carry forward discussions on investment, it was agreed that a delegation from Qatar shall visit Pakistan immediately after Eid.

The regional situation was also discussed and the Prime Minister expressed his deep appreciation for Qatar's diplomatic role in peace efforts, particularly in Gaza. The Prime Minister also renewed his invitation to the Amir to undertake an official visit to Pakistan at his earliest convenience.

Meanwhile, the Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif held a telephone conversation with the President of Tajikistan, H.E. Mr. Emomali Rahmon, to extend his heartfelt Eid-ul-Fitr greetings to the President and the people of Tajikistan.

During the call, both leaders expressed satisfaction over the steady growth in bilateral relations between Pakistan and Tajikistan. They acknowledged the positive trajectory of mutual cooperation, which has gained further momentum following Prime Minister Sharif's visit to Dushanbe in July last year.

Saif: President to respond positively to CM's letter

F.P. Report
PESHAWAR: Advisor to the Chief Minister on Information, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Barrister Dr. Saif, has expressed hope that President Asif Ali Zardari will respond positively to Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur's letter.

He emphasized that if the federal government is truly serious about addressing the law and order situation, it should convene the NFC meeting at the earliest. He stated that restoring peace and security requires concrete actions.

In his statement, Barrister Dr. Saif said that terrorism cannot be eradicated through the malicious press conferences of certain ministers. He stressed that the development of tribal districts would contribute significantly to peace and stability across the country.

He further stated that, on one hand, the federal government holds Khyber Pakhtunkhwa responsible for terrorism, while on the other, it withholds essential funds. He condemned the unconstitutional withholding of funds by the federal government, asserting that it is leading to a rise in terrorism in the merged districts. He emphasized that since these districts are now part of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the province should receive its rightful share of funds.

Barrister Dr. Saif highlighted that Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is better equipped than the federal government to utilize these funds effectively for the development of the merged districts.

Trump says Greenland takeover needed for 'world peace'

WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump says the United States needs to take over Greenland for "world peace," as he doubled down on his ambitions to annex the strategically placed, resource-rich Danish territory.

"We are not talking about peace for the United States. We are talking about world peace. We are talking about international security," Trump told reporters at the White House. Vice President JD Vance, his wife and other senior US officials visited an American military base in Greenland on Friday in a trip that was scaled back after an uproar among Greenlanders and Danes who were irked that the original itinerary was planned without consulting them.

Soon after arriving, Vance briefly addressed US troops stationed at the base as he and his wife sat down to lunch with them, saying that he's "really interested in Arctic security" and that if the US did not take the lead in the region powers like China and Russia would.

"Our argument is not with the people of Greenland, who I think are incredible and have an incredible opportunity here. Our argument really is with the leadership of Denmark, which has underinvested in Greenland and has underinvested in its security architecture," said Vance, who was also scheduled to receive briefings from military officials. "That simply must change. It is the policy of the United States that that will change."

The revised trip to the semi-autonomous Danish territory comes as relations between the US and the Nordic country have soured after Trump repeatedly suggested that the United States should, in some form, control the mineral-rich territory controlled by Denmark – a traditional US ally and NATO member. Friday's one-day visit to the US Space Force outpost at Pituffik, on the northwest coast of Greenland, removed the risk of potentially violating diplomatic custom by sending a delegation to

another country without an official invitation. It also reduced the likelihood of Vance and his wife crossing paths with residents angered by Trump's announcements.

His delegation included the national security adviser, Mike Waltz, and Energy Secretary Chris Wright, as well as second lady Usha Vance. Al Jazeera correspondent Rory Challands says that Vance's message was meant to coax residents of the island away from Denmark by suggesting that a partnership with the US would have more to offer.

"I think what Vance was trying to do was very clear. His strategy was obvious: he's trying to drive a wedge between Greenland and Denmark," Challands reported from Nuuk, Greenland. "He was very, very critical of the Danes, basically saying that they had neglected the security of Greenland."

Before Vance's arrival, four of the five parties elected to Greenland's parliament earlier this month signed

an agreement to form a new, broad-based coalition government. The parties banded together in the face of Trump's designs on the territory. "It is a time when we as a population are under pressure," the prime minister-designate, Jens-Frederik Nielsen, said before the accord was signed to applause and cheers in the capital, Nuuk.

He added that "we must stick together. Together we are strongest." Greenland broadcaster KNR reported. In a post on Instagram, Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen congratulated Nielsen and his incoming government, and said that "I look forward to close cooperation in an unnecessarily conflict-filled time."

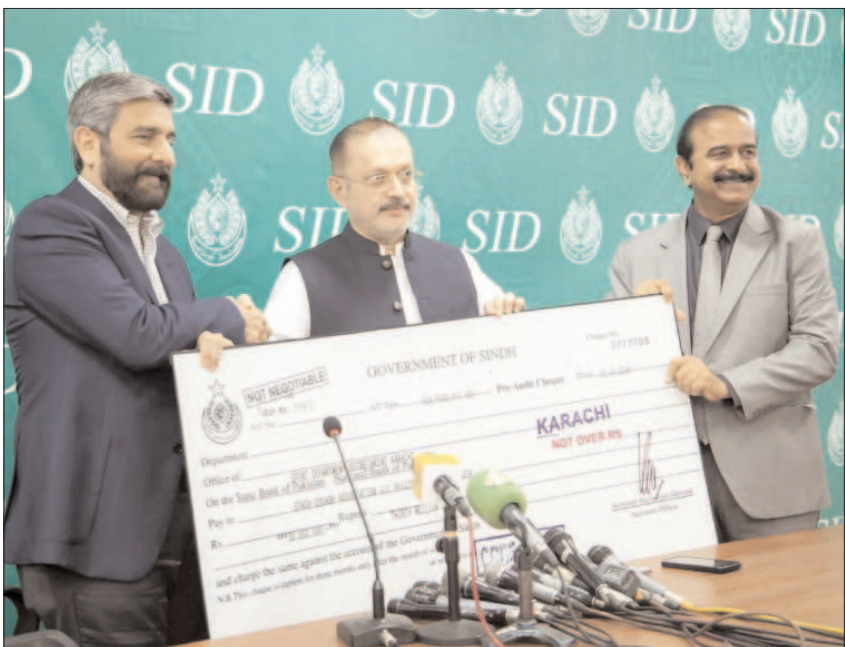
Frederiksen said on Tuesday that the US visit, which was originally set for three days, created "unacceptable pressure". She has said that Denmark wants to work with the US on defense and security, but Greenland belongs to the Greenlanders. Initially, Usha Vance had announced a solo trip to

the Avannaata Qimussersu dogsled race in Sisimiut. Her husband then subsequently said he would join her on that trip, only to change that itinerary again – after protests from Greenland and Denmark – to a one-day visit by the couple to the military post only. Nonetheless, in an interview on Wednesday, Trump repeated his desire for US control of Greenland. Asked if the people there were "eager" to become US citizens, Trump said he didn't know "but I think we have to do it, and we have to convince them."

Inhabitants of Nuuk, which is about 1,500km (930 miles) south of Pituffik, voiced concern about Vance's visit and the US interest in their island. Cora Hoy, 22, said Vance was "welcome if he wants to see it, but of course, Greenland is not for sale." She added that "it's not normal around here" with all the attention Greenland is getting. "I feel now every day is about [Trump] and I just want to get away from it."

"It's all a bit crazy. Of course, the population here is a bit shook up," said 30-year-old Inuk Kristensen. "My opinion is the same as everyone's: Of course, you don't do things this way. You don't just come here and say that you want to buy the place." As the nautical gateway to the Arctic and North Atlantic approaches to North America, Greenland has broader strategic value as both China and Russia seek access to its waterways and natural resources.

During his first term, Trump floated the idea of buying the world's largest island, even as Denmark insisted it was not for sale. The people of Greenland also have firmly rejected Trump's plans. Vance has several times criticised longstanding European allies for relying on military support from the United States, openly antagonising partners in ways that have generated concerns about the reliability of the US. — Aljazeera



Sharjeel champions sports development with Rs. 30 million boost for Squash

F.P. Report

KARACHI: Sindh Senior Minister Sharjeel Inam Memon handed over a cheque of Rs. 30 million on behalf of the Sindh government to Adnan Asad, an official of Sindh Squash Champion.

Addressing a press conference on the occasion, alongside Secretary Sports Abdul Aleem Lashari and Sindh Squash Champion official Adnan Asad, Sindh Senior Minister and Provincial Minister for Information, Transport, and Mass Transit, Sharjeel Inam Memon, stated that the Sindh government is taking all possible steps to promote sports.

He added that the organization of the Under-23 Squash Championship will attract players from around the world to Karachi, which will not only contribute to the development of sports but also enhance Pakistan's positive image on a global scale.

He stated that players from 35 countries are participating in the event, including female players from 22 countries. The

championship will be broadcast live in 80 countries, showcasing the ideal environment of Pakistan, particularly Karachi.

Sharjeel Inam Memon further stated that the Sindh government will continue to support sports and is taking practical steps to promote sports tourism. He added that the Sindh government has allocated Rs. 30 million for this event to ensure it meets international standards.

He stated that a few days ago, PPP Chairman Bilawal Bhutto launched the "iwork4sindh.com" portal, the only platform in Pakistan providing access to both public and private sector job opportunities. So far, 1.4 million people have accessed the portal, with 36,833 applications submitted for over 2,000 jobs.

Sharjeel Inam Memon stated that after COVID-19, the concept of "work from home" was also introduced, along with other services such as food delivery. He added that the CVs of skilled individuals will be available

on the portal, enabling private companies to access talented professionals.

He further stated that the Sindh government is striving to provide sports facilities to millions of young people across the province. Promoting a sport like squash will not only raise awareness among the youth but also strengthen Pakistan's international relations.

Expressing gratitude for the Sindh government's support, Adnan Asad stated that hosting the Under-23 World Squash Championship in Pakistan is a historic opportunity. He also urged private companies to collaborate in supporting financially disadvantaged players by helping them acquire necessary sports equipment.

Sharjeel Inam Memon stated that the winner of the championship will receive a prize of \$60,000. He emphasized that Pakistan is a peaceful country and invited international players to visit and experience its welcoming atmosphere firsthand.

Additional IG Karachi reviews Eid security arrangements

KARACHI (PPI): Additional IG Karachi Javed Alam Odho visited various locations in Clifton to review the security arrangements for Eid.

During this visit, he inspected Gulf Shopping Mall, Cliff Shopping Mall, Metro Shopping Mall, and police reporting camps.

The police chief issued orders to intensify patrolling and snap checking to prevent street crimes. He directed ensuring fool-proof security. Necessary instructions were also given to improve traffic flow and parking arrangements.

SSP South, SP Clifton, SP Traffic, and other officers were also present during this visit. The police chief met with representatives of the business community who appreciated the police's security measures and presented him with a bouquet and an Ajrak.

Karachi Police is committed to the safety of citizens and appeals to the public to promptly report any suspicious activity to the 15 helpline.

Health minister vows to improve public hospitals

LAHORE (APP): Punjab Health Minister Khawaja Salman Rafique has reaffirmed the government's commitment to enhancing the condition of government hospitals, ensuring better healthcare facilities for people.

Presiding over a meeting at the University of Health Sciences on Saturday, the minister reviewed key healthcare initiatives, including the referral system in hospitals, capacity building of doctors, and clinical audit measures.

He emphasized that providing quality healthcare services to remote areas remains a top priority for the government.

"We are striving to provide better health facilities at the doorstep of people in remote areas," he stated. Highlighting the significance of clinical audits in improving patient care, the minister said that under the leadership of Chief Minister Punjab Maryam Nawaz Sharif, historic reforms and projects are being introduced in the health sector.

He further announced that Asia's largest Nawaz Sharif Institute of Cancer Treatment and Research is being established in Lahore, alongside state-of-the-art Nawaz Sharif Institutes of Cardiology in Sargodha, which will significantly enhance specialized medical treatment in the region.

along with the commencement of cleaning operations in the city's 268 graveyards. As part of the 'chand raat operation', 197 major commercial markets would undergo a 'zero waste' clean-up, and mechanical street sweeping would be carried out along Lahore's 930 kilometers of roadways.

Additionally, water sprinkling would be carried out on roads surrounding Mosques, Eidgahs, and graveyard to ensure a dust-free environment.

LWMC would also prioritize the cleaning of over 45 large 'Iftar' setups during the month of Ramadan to maintain a hygienic environment. In line with these efforts, CEO LWMC Babar Sahib Din has issued strict instructions to monitor and address complaints related to solid waste every 30 minutes, while complaints from commercial markets would be resolved within a 10-minute timeframe.

Sindh Governor calls for Solidarity with Palestinians

KARACHI (PPI): Sindh Governor Kamran Khan Tessori welcomed attendees at the 27th Itihad Ramzan Iftar Dinner at the Governor House, emphasizing the significance of the 27th night of Ramadan. He highlighted the day as a reminder of Pakistan's creation, attributing it to the sacrifices made by elders, and stressed the importance of expressing gratitude to Allah for this blessing. April 10, 2023. Governor Tessori highlighted his unwavering commitment to public service, ensuring that the Governor House remains accessible to all citizens without discrimination.

CM orders crackdown against overcharging transport owners

LAHORE (APP): Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif has ordered a strict crackdown against transport owners for overcharging passengers during Eid-ul-Fitr.

The CM directed authorities to take immediate legal action against violators and ensure that fixed fares are strictly implemented across all districts. She instructed Deputy Commissioners to carry out strict monitoring

of bus terminals and ensure that passengers are not charged more than the approved rates. She emphasized that bus terminals must prominently display official fare lists so that travelers are well aware of the correct fares.

In addition to fare regulation, the CM ordered that bus stands be kept clean and that passenger waiting areas be properly maintained. She instructed authorities to ensure adequate seating arrangements

and the installation of fans at bus terminals to improve passenger comfort.

CM Maryam Nawaz directed the Transport Department and other relevant authorities to be present in the field and conduct regular inspections of bus stands. She stressed that officials must take swift action against transporters engaging in overcharging or other violations.

CM Maryam Nawaz

made it clear that no transporter will be allowed to exploit poor passengers traveling home for Eid. She emphasized that fare lists must be prominently displayed at every bus stand, and any violations should result in immediate legal action against the offenders.

The CM said that the government is committed to providing relief to the public and ensuring a smooth and affordable travel experience for Eid travelers.

Unveiling of PSL season 10 trophy at AVT Khyber Network Peshawar

AVT Khyber Network and Peshawar Zalmi sign MoU



Sajjad Muhammad Khan

PESHAWAR: The HBL PSL Season 10 trophy was brought to AVT Khyber Channels Peshawar Center for unveiling previous day. The event was attended by Peshawar Zalmi COO Abbas Laikzada, PCB's Usman, and other officials. The Kewan Raja, Executive Director

(drums) and rubab added to the celebration, compelling attendees to dance and further enhance the unveiling event's enjoyment.

During the event, an MoU (Memorandum of Understanding) was signed between AVT Khyber Network and Peshawar Zalmi. The agreement was formally signed by

AVT Khyber Network, the beloved voice of the Pashtuns, has always promoted the cultural values and prestige of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and would continue to do so. Similarly, they would extend full support to Peshawar Zalmi as a media partner throughout PSL. At the end of the event, Kewan Raja



Strategic & Communication at AVT Khyber Network, along with Kamran Jan, Station Manager Peshawar Center and Project Head of AVAMP, warmly welcomed the Peshawar Zalmi and PCB delegation, presenting them with floral bouquets.

Faizan Ahmed, General Manager Marketing AVT Khyber Network, and Zakir Rehman, Director North, were also present with their teams.

At the entrance of the Peshawar Center office, a replica of the Khyber Gate was set up, displaying the slogan of unity between Peshawar Zalmi and AVT Khyber Network, reading "One Journey, One Destination." The entire office was beautifully decorated with lights, lanterns, and banners, creating a festive atmosphere.

Guests were treated to a lavish Iftar dinner in a scenic setting, with Kewan Hamid Raja appreciating Kamran Jan's efforts as Project Head of AVAMP for making the event successful.

After Iftar, the trophy unveiling ceremony was held at Mukhtar Bhai Studio. A musical program was also arranged for the guests, featuring renowned Pashto singer Akbar, who mesmerized the audience with his voice. The traditional beats of dhol

Kewan Hamid Raja and Peshawar Zalmi COO Abbas Laikzada, followed by the exchange of documents.

Speaking on the occasion, Kewan



Hamid Raja stated that during the Pakistan Super League (PSL), Khyber Network would serve as the media partner and supporter of Peshawar Zalmi. He emphasized that

honored the guests by presenting them with Chitrali caps, shields, and souvenirs.

Kamran Jan appreciated the collaboration between Peshawar Zalmi and AVT Khyber Network, stating that hosting the PSL trophy unveiling in Peshawar at AVT Khyber Channels was a moment of pride. He added that this initiative had brought immense joy to the AVT Khyber administration and its millions of viewers, for which they were grateful to PCB. Kamran Jan also announced that AVAMP would continue playing an active role in promoting such activities in the future.

The event concluded on a high note, leaving everyone in high spirits and excitement for the upcoming PSL matches. The PSL 10 trophy unveiling at AVT Khyber Peshawar was not just a celebration of cricket; it was a testament to the unity, culture, and passion that the people of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa have for sports.

As PSL 10 progresses, this partnership between AVT Khyber and Peshawar Zalmi will undoubtedly play a pivotal role in bringing fans closer to the game, celebrating victories, and showcasing the true essence of Pakistani cricket.



Ongoing projects to generate 50MW power, gas, RDF: Mayor

KARACHI (PPI): In a significant move towards improving Karachi's waste management and cleanliness, Mayor Barrister Murtaza Wahab today announced that new machinery and equipment are being deployed in District Central.

Addressing an event organized by the Sindh Solid Waste Management Board in the city, he emphasized that 14,000 tons of garbage are collected daily in Karachi. The mayor highlighted that these enhancements aim to boost workforce efficiency significantly.

During his address, Wahab criticized

previous administrations, noting that encroachments had exacerbated the city's challenges. He revealed ongoing projects to generate 50 megawatts of electricity, gas, and RDF from waste, showcasing efforts to manage the 14,000 tons of garbage produced daily.

While the Sindh Solid Waste Management Board handles 10,000 tons, other organizations manage the remaining 4,000 tons.

He announced the provision of 2,300 dustbins with a capacity of 240 liters, 250 dustbins of 0.8 cubic meters, and 100 mini tippers to improve cleanliness in District

Central. Wahab pointed out that a single political party controlled this district from 1988 to 2024, resulting in stagnation, and highlighted the historic achievement of the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) securing the mayoralty.

Wahab assured PPP Chairman Bilawal Bhutto's commitment to resolving Karachi's issues, stating that their manifesto offers solutions. He stressed that work is ongoing without discrimination across districts like Korangi, Malir, and Keamari, with visible improvements in waste collection and a new project to make sewer covers from waste.

SUIT ADVERTISEMENT

In the Court of Miss Ambareen Navid Judge Banking Court-1 Peshawar Federal Judicial Complex, Phase-7 Hayatabad Peshawar
Case No: 29/1 of 2025 Date of hearing: 06-05-2025. Suit for the Recovery of Rs.1,246,841/- ZTBL (Zarai Taraqati Bank Ltd.) Vs: Mst: Khalida Begum through Manager Charsadda branch. Notice Versus:-Mst: Khalida Begum w/o Muhammad Ayaz R/o: Mohallah Gul abad, Sardaryab, Tehsil and District Charsadda. Where as the plaintiff bank has instituted a suit for the recovery of Rs.1,246,841/- Against you under section 10 (2) of the Financial Institution (Recovery of Finance) Ordinance 2001, you are hereby summoned to obtain leave of the court to appear and defend the suit within 30 days after receipt/ publication of the notice in the newspaper. Failing which an ex-parte decree shall be passed in favour of the plaintiff Bank with costs. Issue today on 22-03-2025 under my signature and seal of the Court.

Registrar, Banking Court-1 Peshawar

SUIT ADVERTISEMENT

In the Court of Miss Ambareen Navid Judge Banking Court-1 Peshawar Federal Judicial Complex, Phase-7 Hayatabad Peshawar
Case No: 27/1 of 2025 Date of hearing: 30-04-2025. Suit for the Recovery of Rs.291,319.00 HBL Consumer Collection Deptt: Qissa khwani Bazaar Branch, Peshawar. vs. Abdul Azeem. Notice Versus:- Abdul Azeem son of Zunika Khel R/o: Garhi Haji Khan Ali Mera, Umar Payan District Peshawar. Subsequent Add:- Thall Scout Qilla District Hangu. Where as the plaintiff bank has instituted a suit for the recovery of Rs.291,319.00 Against you under section 10 (2) of the Financial Institution (Recovery of Finance) Ordinance 2001, you are hereby summoned to obtain leave of the court to appear and defend the suit within 30 days after receipt/ publication of the notice in the newspaper. Failing which an ex-parte decree shall be passed in favour of the plaintiff Bank with costs. Issue today on 20-03-2025 under my signature and seal of the Court.

Registrar, Banking Court-1 Peshawar

SUIT ADVERTISEMENT

In the Court of Syed Zamarrud Shah Judge Banking Court-11 Peshawar Federal Judicial Complex, Phase-7 Hayatabad Peshawar
Case No: 27/1 of 2025 Date of hearing: 29-04-2025. Suit for the Recovery of Rs.489913/31 Bank Alfalah Sadar Road Branch Peshawar Vs. Saad. Notice Versus:- Saad Salman S/o Said Nabi R/o House No.68 street No.2 Sector L-3, Phase3, Near Yousafzai Market Hayatabad Peshawar. Office Address: BioID Technologies, UNHCR, opposite Azakhel Police Station Nowshera. Where as the plaintiff bank has instituted a suit for the recovery of Rs.489913/31 Against you under section 10 (2) of the Financial Institution (Recovery of Finance) Ordinance 2001, you are hereby summoned to obtain leave of the court to appear and defend the suit within 30 days after receipt/ publication of the notice in the newspaper. Failing which an ex-parte decree shall be passed in favour of the plaintiff Bank with costs. Issue today on 19-03-2025 under my signature and seal of the Court.

Registrar, Banking Court-11 Peshawar

Capital Police finalizes Eid security plan

— 3500 personnel to perform duty

PESHAWAR (APP): The Capital City Police Peshawar has finalized a special security plan to maintain law and order during Eid-ul-Fitr. Under this plan, 3,500 police officers and personnel will be deployed across the city to ensure public safety.

All police leaves have been canceled, and patrolling by rider squads and mobile units has been increased, said an official release issued here on Saturday.

Security at all entry and

exit points of the city has been tightened, with additional personnel stationed in key markets and on major roads.

To monitor suspicious individuals, plainclothes officers have also been deployed.

Sensitive locations and government buildings are receiving heightened security, including the deployment of female police officers and mounted police in busy market areas.

According to the security plan, security has been

placed on high alert at Eid prayer grounds, sensitive mosques, major markets, and entry points of the city.

Enhanced patrolling by armored police vehicles, the Special Combat Unit, the Bomb Disposal Unit (BDU), and sniffer dog teams will also be in place. BDU teams will conduct sweeps at key Eid prayer sites before prayers commence.

CCPO Peshawar Qasim Ali Khan and SSP Operations Masood Ahmed have instructed divisional SPs to take strict action

against aerial firing on Chand Raat, emphasizing cooperation with local religious scholars and community leaders to raise awareness against the practice.

They have also issued directives to ensure strict implementation of the security plan across all divisions.

During Eid holidays, security will remain on high alert at recreational spots, important offices, markets, bus stands, and all city entry and exit points to maintain peace and order.



PESHAWAR: Government officials monitoring transport terminals to ensure compliance with official fare rates.

Armal secures first position in annual exams

F.P Report

PESHAWAR: Armal Khan, a bright student of The Smart School Saddar Campus, has secured the first position in Grade Four with outstanding marks.

Armal credited her remarkable success to the unwavering support of her teachers and the steadfast prayers of her parents. “Their dedication and belief in me have been the foundation of my achievements,” she shared.

She expressed her determination to continue working hard and achieve even greater success in the future. Armal’s journey to the top has been marked by her passion for learning.

Her teachers have praised her inquisitive nature and commitment to excellence, noting that she consistently goes above and beyond in her studies.



Crackdown against price gouging

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: On the special directives of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Minister for Food, Zahir Shah Toru, a large-scale crackdown has been launched across Khyber Pakhtunkhwa to curb artificial inflation and price hike.

With the arrival of Eid-ul-Fitr following the holy month of Ramadan, the Food Department team of Peshawar has intensified its operations against profiteers and violators of official price lists.

Under the supervision of Rationing Controller Peshawar Tauseef Iqbal, Assistant Food Controllers Shahid Ali Khan and Kamal Ahmed, along with Food Inspectors, conducted raids on butcher shops, grocery stores, vegetable vendors, and bakeries in Peshawar.

During the operation, a well-known mega mart on Ring Road, along with several other shopkeepers, was found violating the government-issued price list. Notices have been issued, and legal proceedings have been initiated against the violators.

Speaking on the occasion, Rationing Controller Peshawar, Tauseef Iqbal, emphasized that artificial inflation and violations of official price regulations will not be tolerated under any circumstances.

He reiterated that strict legal action will be taken against those found guilty. He also appealed to the public to report instances of overcharging by shopkeepers to the relevant authorities.

“We are committed to provide maximum relief to the public, and every possible measure is being taken to ensure fair pricing,” he added.

reprieve does not apply to those convicted of terrorism, murder, kidnapping, or other serious crimes. The sentence reduction is only applicable to prisoners convicted of minor offenses.

This news comes as Pakistan prepares to celebrate Eid al-Fitr, marking the end of Ramadan, on March 30 or 31, depending on the sighting of the moon.

Earlier, President Asif Ali Zardari granted a special 180-day sentence reduction for prisoners on the occasion of Pakistan Day and Eidul Fitr 2025

under Article 45 of the Constitution.

According to the details, the special remission of 90 days is for all convicts except those convicted of murder, espionage, robbery, dacoity, abduction, anti-state acts, rape and terrorist activities.

Those convicted of financial crimes, causing damage to the national treasury, or sentenced under the Foreigners Act 1946 and the Narcotics Control Act 2022 will also be excluded from the benefit.

The sentence reduction will apply to male prisoners above 65 years of age and female prisoners above 60 years of age who have completed at least one-third of their sentence.

Women incarcerated with their children and juvenile offenders under 18 years of age who have served one-third of their sentence will also qualify for the relief.

Govt announces remission for prisoners on Eidul Fitr

Illegal extraction of gold from Indus river: Commissioner Peshawar for taking strict action

PESHAWAR (APP): Commissioner Peshawar Division, Riaz Mehsud has decided to take strict action against illegal extraction of placer gold from river bed at Nizampur area in Nowshera district.

The decision has been taken by Commissioner Peshawar while chairing a high level meeting wherein it was also decided that persons involved in illegal shifting of mineral resources in the area would face strict legal action.

The operation against gold extraction would be jointly carried out by district administration, Police,

Mining and Environment departments.

During the meeting, Commissioner Riaz Mehsud also constituted a committee under his own supervision to ensure implementation of the decision. He also issued directives for submission of progress report over the decision to him on weekly basis.

The meeting decided in principle that lease holder gold extractors would be provided full legal cover while those who are indulged in the practice illegally would be dealt with iron hands.

It was also decided to set up temporary check posts till April 15 at three different locations near Indus river in Nowshera.

Speaking on the occasion, Commissioner Peshawar Division, Riaz Mehsud said the policy of KP government of prohibiting illegal extraction of placer gold from river bed and shifting of mineral resources to other districts would be implement in letter and spirit.

He also directed Deputy Commissioner Nowshera to issue arms licences to lease holding gold miners for safety purpose.

Mayor urges citizens to avoid aerial firing

PESHAWAR (APP): Mayor of Peshawar, Haji Zubair Ali on Saturday urged the public to refrain from aerial firing on Chand Raat, emphasizing that it is a dangerous and condemnable act.

He warned that what seems like a moment of celebration can turn into tragedy, as innocent lives are lost due to stray bullets, turning Eid festivities into sorrow.

He called on local government representatives to run awareness campaigns in their respective areas to prevent aerial firing and educate the public on its dangers.

The mayor also made a heartfelt appeal to all residents of Peshawar to avoid aerial firing on Eid-ul-Fitr and encourage others to do the same to ensure a safe and joyous celebration for everyone.



PESHAWAR: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Food Department team officials taking action against profiteers and violators of official price lists.

AKSSA welcomes joint examination halls

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: All Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Senior Staff Association (AKSSA) welcomed Chief Secretary’s decision for cancellation of examination halls from private schools, on Saturday.

In this regard, AKSSA issued notification stated that Chief Secretary Khyber Pakhtunkhwa directions for joint examination halls for private and government schools will ensure transparency.

Board of Intermediate and Secondary Education Kohat Chairman Imtiaz Ayub and Controller Examination Malak Maqsood started preparation in this regard. AKSSA General Secretary Muhammad Shahjahan Daudzai stated that joint examination halls will

ensure transparency and equality among students.

Meanwhile, Peshawar High Court has denied stay orders against joint examination halls which is largely celebrated by public.

In nutshell, the joint examination halls will end monopoly of private Schools in BISE exams and marks competition among students which has certain critical thinking ability.

Int’l Day of Landless People celebrated

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: For the past several years, Pakistan Kissan Mazdoor Tehreek (PKMT), in collaboration with other peasant and anti-imperialist movements, the Roots for Equity, Asian Peasant Coalition (APC), Sovereignty (PCFS), Pesticide Action Network Asia Pacific (PAN AP), and the International League of Peoples’ Struggle (ILPS), has been celebrating March 29th as the International Day of Landless People.

The aim of commemorating this day is to highlight the struggles of small and landless peasants for food sovereignty and genuine agrarian reforms worldwide. It also includes exposing the oppression, coercion, and exploitation by multinational corporations and the imperialist countries representing them, as well as the governments of Third World countries.

Currently, the world, especially Pakistan, is in the grip of a severe economic and environmental crisis. Millions of people, especially the working class, are suffering from extreme poverty, unemployment, and hunger. Even in such a dire condition, imperialist countries, especially the United States continue to worsen the situation through institutions such as the IMF, World Bank, and WTO.

At the same time, they are pushing the situation further downwards. Simultaneously, they are engaged in environmental destruction, looting, and occupying land, water, oceans, forests, minerals, and other natural resources through war and militarization. The Zionist Israel’s genocide of Palestinian people and occupation of Palestinian land at the behest of the US is one such example.

The people of Pakistan, particularly rural communities, are victims of these

conditions. In Mansehra and other districts, local populations are being denied access to forests. In Peshawar, land is being taken from local communities under the guise of development projects. In the name of “Green Initiatives,” thousands of acres of land in Punjab and Sindh have been allocated for corporate agriculture. The path has already been paved for multinational corporations to take over the dairy and livestock sector, which includes banning open and fresh milk and promoting companies’ packaged milk. Additionally, genetically modified seeds are being promoted, which guarantee huge profits for seed giant companies. Similarly, huge corporations like PepsiCo have been given thousands of acres of land to produce potatoes, displacing small and landless farmers who are now forced to work as low-wage laborers. The potato seed on this land is owned by the corporation itself.

The digitalization of the food system, exemplified by the “Kissan Card”, represents a dangerous shift toward free market policies, allowing not only agrochemical corporations but also to financial and IT corporations to take over agriculture production.

The increase in sugarcane production is a serious concern since it has pushed landless peasants into the throes of severe hunger and poverty. It also been used for agro-fuel production as a false solution to climate change.

Due to the cultivation of sugarcane, important food crops like wheat are being greatly affected.

The profit driven motives of corporations and imperialist agents are fully supported by the feudal class of the country.

The people, already struggling for survival, and now the ruling elite has announced the construction of six new canals from the

Indus River. The province of Sindh, especially Lower Sindh, is already a victim of un-just water distribution; the construction of the newly announced canal will further aggravate the situation, leading to large-scale protests against it.

Another grim development for the people suffering from hunger and landlessness is the federal government’s decision to abolish the minimum support price of wheat for 2024-2025 under the IMF conditionality.

This policy will be devastating for small and landless farmers. Many farmers argue that even the previous year’s support prices set by the government were insufficient to cover their cost of production, but now handing over the price determination to the free market will break their backs.

Turning a blind eye to these extremely negative impacts on millions of farmers is another ruthless policy.

It is evident that the government is implementing neo-liberal policies instead of protecting the interests of farmers, especially small and landless farmers, agricultural workers, fisherfolk, rural women, youth, and children. This has resulted in mass destruction of the working class.

PKMT remains firmly committed to fight for the rights of small and landless peasants and the working class. We will continue the struggle for food sovereignty, advocating for just and equitable distribution of land while ensuring the right to save and plant local and indigenous seeds, rejecting corporate control in food and agriculture. We stand in solidarity with the working class and will expose feudal, capitalist, and corporate land grab while promoting systems that empower local communities to control and manage land, forests, mountains, seas, and other natural resources.

RTA takes action against overcharging

PESHAWAR (APP): On the directives of Commissioner Division and Chairman of the Regional Transport Authority (RTA), Riaz Khan Mahsud, authorities have launched a crackdown against overcharging passengers ahead of Eid-ul-Fitr.

The RTA Peshawar and the Provincial Transport Authority (PTA) Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, along with the district administration, are actively monitoring transport terminals to ensure compliance with the official fare rates.

As people travel from Peshawar to celebrate Eid with their families, transport staff are deployed at bus terminals to oversee the availability of vehicles and enforce the government-mandated fare list. Under the supervision of Secretary RTA Peshawar, Abrar Ahmad Wazir, teams are stationed at all major bus stands, including General Bus Stands on GT Road, Kohat Road, Charsadda Road, and Peshawar Bus Terminal.

KP Assembly session summoned

PESHAWAR (INP): On the advice of KP Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur, Acting Governor Babar Saleem Swati has convened a session of the provincial assembly under Article 109(a) of the Constitution of Pakistan (1973). The session is scheduled to take place on Friday, April 4, at 2:00 p.m.

Ahmad Azizi

The United States has reportedly paid millions of dollars to secure the release of 66-year-old American citizen George Glezman, who was held in Taliban custody for two years. However, the fate of more than ten other American citizens, including Mahmood Habibi, remains uncertain. Former US special envoy Zalmay Khalilzad, the chief negotiator of the deal, has once again misled the US government, as the Taliban gained significant leverage without making substantial concessions in return. The release of one American has not resolved the broader issue of Taliban detentions, raising concerns about the effectiveness of US negotiations.

While the US insists that Habibi is being held by the Taliban, the group has never acknowledged his presence in Afghanistan, denying any involvement in his case. In September last year, former CIA intelligence officer Sarah Adams revealed that Habibi was reportedly handed over to al-Qaeda by the Taliban

and now faces imminent execution. Despite these alarming reports, there has been no clear progress in securing his freedom.

The Taliban’s refusal to confirm his whereabouts further complicates diplomatic efforts, leaving his family in anguish and the US government in a difficult position.

Once again, the US has spent millions of dollars with little meaningful achievement. The Taliban continue to exploit hostage negotiations for financial and political gain while avoiding accountability for their actions. This pattern of concessions without firm demands for reciprocity only strengthens the Taliban’s position. The US must take a stronger stance, applying greater pressure rather than rewarding the Taliban’s tactics. Without a more forceful approach, the lives of Habibi and other American detainees remain in jeopardy.

State Department spokesperson Tammy Bruce acknowledged that the Trump administration remains “deeply concerned” about the well-being of the remaining

American hostages.

Mahmood Habibi, an American citizen, was taken from his vehicle near his home in Kabul on August 10, 2022, along with his driver, according to the FBI.

Habibi’s brother, Ahmad Shah Habibi, expressed gratitude for the efforts of special envoy Adam Boehler and former envoy Zalmay Khalilzad, stating in a letter that they “confronted the Taliban about their refusal to admit they are holding my brother.” However, he called on the US government to take a stronger stance, emphasizing that the issue cannot be brushed aside with token diplomatic exchanges.

The shadow of the Doha agreement

Zalmay Khalilzad’s presence during the negotiations for Glezman’s release has not gone unnoticed. The former envoy remains a deeply controversial figure, blamed by both Afghans and Americans for his role in the 2020 Doha Agreement, which facilitated the US withdrawal and ultimately led to the Taliban’s return to power.

Many argue that

Khalilzad’s negotiations were short-sighted and failed to account for the Taliban’s duplicity, leading to devastating consequences for Afghanistan and its people. His involvement in the latest hostage release has reignited concerns that he continues to push policies that prioritize short-term diplomatic wins over long-term security interests.

Can the US afford to trust the Taliban?

As the Trump administration navigates this complex diplomatic landscape, one thing remains clear: trusting the Taliban has never proven to be a viable strategy. The group continues to harbor terrorist organizations, violate international obligations, and detain American citizens without accountability.

Rather than rewarding the Taliban with financial incentives or political recognition, the US must exert stronger pressure—both diplomatically and economically—to secure the release of all American hostages and ensure that Afghanistan does not once again become a breeding ground for terrorism.



In brief

Drug a serious threat for youth F.P. Report

THATTA: Amidst a grim hope for a bright future, a lack of awareness has led the youth in Var, Ghorbari, and Ghullamullah areas of Thatta district to become addicted to contraband substances, including Ice-drug, hashish, and opium. From students to laborers, none are spared from this growing curse. Students are reportedly involved in consuming Ice-drug and other contraband substances. Ali Nawaz, a teacher at Government High School Var, stated that during a routine morning assembly, a few students disclosed to him that their colleagues were indulging in ugly habits, including drug consumption. He further mentioned that a couple of students had left school after getting addicted to drug consumption. The teacher appeared reluctant to disclose the names of the students. Noted physician Dr. Sajid Sheikh revealed that he had received young patients with complaints of rapid heartbeat, high blood pressure, anxiety, and sweating. Upon interrogation, it emerged that all of them were drug addicts, aged between 18 and 30. He further noted that the habit of drug consumption would lead to multiple health complications among youth. Corroborating Dr. Sheikh's statement, another medical practitioner said that extensive consumption of drugs and other banned substances was a major reason behind mental disorders among youth. Members of civil society have criticized police authorities for failing to prevent drug peddling in the district, particularly in remote areas. Qasir Chandio, a social activist, stated that the concerned authorities had failed miserably to create mass awareness among youth and their parents regarding this escalating issue. Advocate Shahid Nazir Memon said that the police, instead of arresting drug dealers, arrest consumers, which bears no fruit for society. He emphasized the need for an effective policy to prevent drug consumption.

Squads against overcharging F.P. Report

MULTAN: Commissioner Amir Kareem Khan said that a crack-down against transporters involved in overcharging and overloading was ongoing and special squads started functioning to check the malpractice and save commuters from inconvenience ahead of Eidul Fitr. A control room was set up at general bus stand and various squads were formed to check the violators, commissioner said. He said that secretary RTA would personally visit the city to check illegalities to provide relief to the people. He ordered displaying fare list prominently at all bus stations and general bus stand and provision of quality food items and clean drinking water there. He warned that transporters found violating the orders would face registration of cases with heavy fines.

Driver dies F.P. Report

BUREWALA: A man died in road accident on Chichawatni Road here on Friday. The Rescue 1122 said a bus traveling from Burewala to Sheikh Fazil crashed into a truck loaded with timber that was parked on the roadside. As a result, the truck driver died on spot. He was identified as Muhammad Faraz (45). Rescue teams shifted the body to THQ Hospital Burewala. Meanwhile, police reached the site and initiated investigations.

Wheelchairs distributed among special persons

F.P. Report

MARDAN: In a ceremony for the distribution of wheelchairs to special individuals at the Sports Board Mardan, Mian Kashif, CEO of Worldwide Cable, emphasized that special persons need real assistance, not just sympathy. He stated that World Wide Cable aims to ensure that no special individual in Pakistan is left without a wheelchair if needed.

He expressed his commitment to bring positive change in the lives of special individuals and said that protecting their rights and well-being is a shared responsibility of society. The ceremony also featured speeches from CEO of Wheelchair Team Dream, Noreel Abbas, and President of the Autonomous Organization

for Special Persons, Sajad Ahmad. He emphasized the importance of integrating special individuals into society so that they can fully benefit from their rights.

The event was attended by Aqeela Sumbal Women's Chamber of Commerce, who specially appreciated the initiative. At the end of the ceremony, an Iftar meal was organized for 150 special individuals.

Police arrests two alleged culprits in injured condition: A suspicious motor car driver opened firing at the police. The police team immediately retaliated, while the brave people of the area also came out of their homes and stood by the police upon hearing the sound of firing.

The exchange of fire continued for about 20 minutes,

after which the police conducted a search operation and arrested two accused in an injured condition. The suspects were identified as Sahil, resident of Bajro Corona, and Shahzad resident of Labor Colony, while recovered two pistols and cartridges were recovered. During interrogation, the arrested suspects also revealed the names of their other accomplices, including Aziz, resident of Matta Katlang, Hassan resident of Hal Gharibabad, and Azan resident of Rashkai, District Nowshera.

Under the supervision of SHO Sadar Irfan Khan, after providing medical assistance to the arrested accused, a case has been registered against them, while raids are being conducted to arrest the absconding accused.

Rally in solidarity with Palestinians held

F.P. Report

ATTOCK: On the call of the Muhafizeen Al-Quds Committee, a large protest rally was held in Attock to express solidarity with the oppressed people of Palestine and Parachinar. The rally began at the central Imambargah Hussainia Kamalpur Syedan and concluded at Kacheri Chowk, passing through various key locations. Participants voiced strong condemnation of Israeli aggression and the ongoing humanitarian crisis in Parachinar.

The rally was led by prominent district leaders and religious, social, and political figures, including Maulana Niaz Bukhari, Syed Waqar Hussain Naqvi, Maulana Khair Ali, Sheikh Ahsan-ud-Din Advocate, Maulana Naya

Ameen Mudabiri, Maulana Asad Alvi, Yasir Naqvi, Syed Hasnain Naqvi, Syed Zamin Naqvi, Syed Iqar Naqvi, Zahid Baig, and Col (R) Sajjad Naqvi.

Speakers condemned decades-long Israeli aggression in Palestine, which has resulted in the killing of hundreds of thousands of innocent Muslims. They lamented that the bombings and shelling continued even during the sacred month of Ramadan. The speakers criticized the international human rights organizations for their silence and accused them of turning a blind eye due to the influence of the United States, which backs the fascist Israeli regime.

In addition, the speakers drew attention to the dire situation in Parachinar, where the local population

has been under siege for over three months. They stated that residents are deprived of daily necessities and medical supplies, while hundreds have been martyred. The speakers expressed deep concern over the government's complete silence, stating that authorities have shut their eyes to this humanitarian tragedy and have yet to issue any official response or take meaningful action.

Syed Waqar Hussain Naqvi emphasized that the entire Muslim Ummah, especially Pakistan, stands in solidarity with the oppressed people of Palestine and Parachinar. He urged that the time has come for the Muslim world to unite—not only to liberate Al-Quds from Israeli occupation but also to raise a powerful voice for justice within their own borders.

Polio vaccination drive from April 21

F.P. Report

BAHAWALPUR: A five-day polio vaccination campaign will begin on April 21, during which more than 824,000 children up to the age of five will be administered drops.

A meeting was held under the chairmanship of Deputy Commissioner Dr. Farhan Farooq to review the arrangements. The Assistant Commissioner Bahawalpur City, Assistant Commissioner Bahawalpur Saddar, CEO Health, District Health Officer Preventive Services, repre-

sentatives of WHO, and officers from relevant departments were present.

The DC said that to successfully complete the anti-polio campaign, all children should be given polio vaccine, and not a single child should be missed. He directed the officers of the health department and relevant departments to effectively monitor the polio teams in the field.

He added that officers of relevant departments should work with better coordination. The DHO Preventive Services said

that during the polio campaign, from April 21st to April 23rd, polio teams will go door-to-door to administer vaccine to children and children who are missed for any reason will be vaccinated under the catch-up activity on April 24 and April 25. He informed that 3276 mobile teams, 195 fixed teams, and 136 transit teams have been formed for the campaign. He also said that 667 area in-charges and 132 Union Council Monitoring Officers will perform their duties during the campaign.

Crossroads of our time: A call for integral ecology, social justice and sustainable transformation

Baseer Ali Rahman Khan

WE happen to be at a critical juncture in human history, one marked by intricate challenges that demand our immediate and undivided attention. The ongoing crisis occasioned by the COVID-19 pandemic has lime-lighted an even more pressing and far-reaching quandary: the confluence of social and environmental upheavals. This moment mandates us all to make a decisive choice—a choice between sustained neglect and genuine transformation. It is a pick between perpetuating systemic injustices and environmental deterioration or actively engaging in a collaborative effort to reshape our shared trajectory for the amelioration of all and sundry around.

Scientific evidence continues to highlight, with increasing precision, the urgent need for decisive action if we are to ward off the most severe and catastrophic consequences of climate change. This is not a matter of speculation or exaggeration, but an undeniable reality backed by rigorous research. If we are to keep even a glimmer of hope in mitigating these approaching catastrophes, we must act with tenacious immediacy. Our conscience commands that we cannot remain indifferent to the suffering of the most vulnerable, nor can we ignore the ever-looming economic disparities and amplifying social injustices

that pervade our world. Moreover, the very fabric of economic systems must be revisited; it will not suffice to define economies merely in terms of production and distribution. Rather, economies must have in its fold considerations of environmental sustainability and human worth, ensuring that economic mechanisms serve as tools of creativity, inclusion, and ethical progress.

This necessary transformation is not an intangible notion but a journey—one that requires both individual and collective commitment. This is not merely a matter of discourse; it is a call to action that demands tangible and urgent measures. No one emerges unscathed from a crisis; history has demonstrated time and again that crises are triggers for transformation. This particular crisis will demand time, persistent effort and unwavering perseverance. It is incumbent upon us to take cumulative steps, persuading skeptics, innovating solutions, and strictly implementing them. The overarching objective is unequivocal: within the coming decade, we must establish a sustainable framework that meets the needs of the present while safeguarding the rights and opportunities of future generations.

In this spirit, I extend a genuine invitation to all individuals, irrespective of faith, ideology, or social standing, to embark upon this journey. Whether as individuals, families, faith communities, associations, businesses or

institutions, each entity has the potential to make a meaningful and substantive contribution. Pope Francis in his encyclical Laudato Si' (an encyclical on environmental issues, climate change, and social justice), articulated the concept of integral ecology, advocating for a holistic response to the dual outrages of our time: the cries of the Earth and the cries of the poor. Integral ecology necessitates a broader perspective on life itself, rooted in the fundamental recognition that all aspects of our world are interwoven. The COVID-19 pandemic has bolstered this reality, underscoring our deep interdependence with one another and with our planet. From this realization emerges the imperative to redefine progress, moving beyond purely economic and technological considerations to incorporate ethical, social, and educational dimensions.

To make this transformation happen, three concrete courses of action are proposed that must serve as guiding principles in our collective pursuit of integral ecology:

1. Education for Environmental Responsibility: First and foremost, there is an urgent need to foster education at all levels that emphasizes environmental oversight and a deep understanding of the inherent connection between environmental crises and human well-being. Education must cater for both scientific data and an ethical framework to cultivate a sense of collective responsibility

toward our mutual habitat. It is encouraging to observe that many young individuals are already demonstrating an awakened ecological and social consciousness, often leading the fight for environmental justice. This growing movement must be nurtured, expanded, and institutionalized.

2. Prioritization of Water and Food Security: Secondly, we must acknowledge that access to clean and drinkable water constitutes a universal human right which is not merely a matter of convenience rather a prerequisite for human survival and the foundation for the exercise of all other rights and responsibilities. In the same strain, ensuring adequate nutrition for all and sundry should be the primary goal of food production and distribution systems. Agricultural practices must uphold sustainability, ensuring that methods of cultivation preclude irreversible harm upon our planet.

3. A Just and Swift Energy Transition: Lastly, the global community must set out on a transition from fossil fuels to sustainable energy sources as an alternative to brace for the future challenges. Scientific projections delineate that we have fewer than 30 years to affect a drastic reduction in greenhouse gas emissions to avoid the worst outcomes of climate change.

This transition must be both expeditious and equitable, considering the welfare of marginalized populations, local commu-

nities, and those employed in the energy sector. This transformation could only be possible through responsible investment. Enterprises must commit to the principles of integral ecology, ensuring that investments align with environmental sustainability and social justice.

Businesses that fail to meet these fundamental ethical and ecological standards must not be extended any financial support, while those demonstrating genuine commitment on their part to sustainability should be supported and incentivized. Legislative frameworks should be revisited and restructured to embed sustainability, equity, and the common good as the pivotal pillars of economic and corporate activity.

Many organizations, both religious and secular, have already assumed the mantle of responsibility in these efforts. However, we must realise that the call to action extends beyond the select groups and institutions—it is a universal mandate that must be embraced by all with responsibility.

Our Earth is not an inexhaustible resource to be exploited without restraint; it is a living entity that must be nurtured, cultivated and protected. To persist in draining its resources with irresponsible abandon is to jeopardize our collective future. The preservation of our planet is not merely an environmental necessity but a fundamental human right.

These three proposals are but

components of a broader, integrated strategy that must be pursued with conviction to establish durable solutions to our current crises. The prevailing economic paradigm is ostensibly unsustainable, necessitating a fundamental reassessment of production and consumption patterns, the culture of disposability, the prevalence of short-term economic gains, the exploitation of marginalized communities, and the profound inequities entrenched within our global systems. Integral ecology demands that we revisit our relationship with nature, fostering an economy that prioritizes human well-being and the protection of our planet over heedless exploitation.

Moreover, the transformation we seek is inherently political in nature. Politics, when exercised as an expression of true charity, serves as an instrument for the common good. Love, if pursued with altruism, transcends personal relationships; it extends into the public sphere, encompassing all the people and the natural world alike. Thus, every individual should embark upon this shared journey of renewal. The urgency of this moment cannot be overstated. Our collective response must be immediate, for the future is not constructed in isolation but forged in solidarity and harmony. Today, not tomorrow, is the time to act.

The writer Public servant at Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.



BAHAWALPUR: A sudden fire erupted in Landa Bazaar in Sadiqabad, prompting the Rescue 1122 team to declare a red code. Rescue 1122 teams from all four tehsils of Rahim Yar Khan District are struggling to extinguish the fire.

Rescue 1122 issues plan for Eid F.P. Report

ABBOTTABAD: Rescue 1122 Abbottabad has issued a comprehensive emergency plan for Eid-ul-Fitr, ensuring uninterrupted emergency services during the festive period. All rescuer leaves have been canceled, and personnel will remain on high alert across the district.

A meeting was convened at the Rescue 1122 district office under the chairmanship of District Emergency Officer Jan Muhammad Afridi, which was attended by senior officials, including the Emergency Officer, Transport Maintenance Inspector, Station House Incharge, and Control Room Incharge.

As per directives from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Rescue 1122 Director General Dr. Ayaz Khan and Regional Director of Operations North Arshad Iqbal, all officers and Station House Incharges have been instructed to stay at their respective stations. Additionally, an on-call duty officer will remain on 24/7 alert to respond to emergencies.

To ensure public safety during Eid prayers, Rescue 1122 teams will be stationed at key locations, including Eidgah Abbottabad, Mandian Missile Chowk, Nathia Gali Jamia Masjid, Nawan Shehar Ilyasi Masjid, and Heveliyaa Ameer Muawiyah Masjid. The rescue teams will coordinate with Abbottabad police to provide emergency assistance if required.

District Emergency Officer Jan Muhammad emphasized that rescue personnel have been strategically deployed across the city to offer round-the-clock services.

Allah Nawaz Khan

ALLAH Almighty has given Muslims two Eids to celebrate. Every Muslim celebrates Eid. People from other nations also with Muslims also celebrate Eid, but Islam has allowed Muslims to celebrate within a certain limit. Eidul Fitr and Eid al-Azha are religious festivals of the Islamic world. We should also celebrate, but if we celebrate by keeping in mind Islamic teachings, we will get more satisfaction and will also gain the pleasure of Allah Almighty.

Every Muslim wears good and best clothes, shoes, etc. according to his ability. The best dishes are cooked in the homes. Eid greetings are given to each other, greetings and hugs often remove the doubts. In many parts of the world, Muslims visit each other's homes on Eid and eating a few bites or sweets from each other's homes increases love. It is a pity that now the series of visits is almost coming to an end, this series should be continued. This tradition is still practiced in some rural areas.

One should celebrate Eid to the extent permitted. According to a hadith, Umm al-Mu'minin Hazrat Aisha Siddiqah (may Allah be pleased with her) says that Hazrat Abu Bakr Siddique (may Allah be pleased with him) came to me while two girls of the Ansar were reciting verses in praise of the bravery that the Ansar showed in the Battle of Ba'ath. She (may Allah be pleased with her) said that they were not singers. Hazrat Abu Bakr Siddique (may Allah be pleased with him) said: Was there a devilish party in the house of the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him)? And this is

about the day of Eid. Hazrat Mohammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: O Abu Bakr! Every nation has a day of joy and this is our day of joy. (Bukhari) This hadith shows that Muslims are not prevented from celebrating Eid within the limits of Sharia, but rather are ordered to celebrate it in a lawful manner. If someone thinks that celebrating is wrong, he should study Islam. Eid should be considered a gift from Allah Almighty. According to a hadith, the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said, "Indeed, every nation has an Eid, and these (Eidul Fitr and Eid al-Adha) are our Eids." (Bukhari)

On the day of Eid, we should take a bath, wear good and best clothes and apply perfume. After praying the Eid prayer, we should also congratulate each other. Islam has also ordered the payment of Fitrana al-Fitr. Fitrana al-Fitr is ordered to be paid before the Eid prayer. According to a hadith, Ibn Umar (may Allah be pleased with him) narrates that the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) ordered that Fitrana al-Fitr be paid before the people set out for the Eid prayer (Muslim). Fitrana al-Fitr has been given special importance. According to a hadith, the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said, "Allah has made it obligatory to pay Fitrana al-Fitr before the Eid prayer because it purifies the fasting person from the mistakes, vulgar and obscene words that he may have committed while fasting." (Ibn Majah) Fitrana al-Fitr is the right of the poor and needy, and by giving this right, they also get the opportunity to celebrate. Apart from Fitrana al-Fitr,

others can also be shared in happiness by helping others. Many people cannot extend their hands due to their white clothes, so their help According to Islamic teachings, it is a very good.

Many poor people are yearning for small joys. If Allah Almighty has given you so much that you can include others, then they should also be included in the joys. Look around your neighbors or neighborhood and help the distressed people. By giving someone a pair of clothes or a pair of shoes, you can double their happiness. In this era of inflation, many families are living a life of helplessness. If you buy them ration or other food and drink, their happiness can also increase. Muslims all over the world try to cook good food on this day. By giving something to the poor in a neighbor or neighborhood, you can earn Allah's pleasure. At least one kilogram of meat should be bought for someone. Sweets and fruits should be given as gifts to the deserving. If someone is rich, then something can be given to him as a gift because giving gifts ends resentment and increases love.

If happiness is celebrated in a legitimate way, it is better, but if happiness is celebrated in a way that causes pain to others or wastes money, such happiness should be avoided. Some people start firing in the air as soon as the Eid moon is sighted. In addition to getting injured, someone can also die from firing in the air. Thus, one should avoid firing in the air. Small children burst explosive firecrackers, and they are not very dangerous, but they can still cause loss of life. When these firecrackers explode, a terrifying sound is heard, which scares patients and small children. Anyway, bursting firecrackers is wasteful.



Violations found in S Korean foreign adoptions program

SEOUL: An investigation by South Korea's Truth and Reconciliation Commission has concluded that the country's government-endorsed foreign adoption programme violated the fundamental human rights of adoptees guaranteed under the constitution and international conventions.

The commission's findings were published following a nearly three-year investigation into complaints filed by 367 of some 140,000 South Korean children who were adopted to six European countries, including Denmark - which called on South Korea to investigate the adoptions back in 2022 - the United States and Australia. The commission found that local adoption agencies colluded with foreign agencies to mass export South Korean children to meet a monthly quota set by foreign demand. Among a plethora of violations, many children were procured for adoption through questionable or outright unscrupulous means.

The report reveals that South Korean agencies were granted extensive authority over children, including full guardianship rights and the ability to consent to foreign adoptions, which led to a lack of oversight and ultimately resulted in large-scale inter-country adoption of children whose identities and family backgrounds were lost, falsified or fabricated. "Throughout this process, numerous legal and policy shortcomings emerged, leading to serious violations of the rights of adoptees, their biological parents - particularly birth mothers - and others involved," the commission's chairperson, Park Sun-young, told a news conference.

"These violations should never have occurred," Park said. "While many adoptees were fortunate to grow up in loving families, others suffered great hardship and trauma due to flawed adop-

tion processes. Even today, many continue to face challenges," she said. Following the devastating 1950-53 Korean War, South Korea became one of the poorest countries in the world and, for economic reasons, "intercountry adoption was actively encouraged as a solution", Park explained. "This 'active' approach, combined with Korea's notorious 'hurry hurry' culture, resulted in poorly developed legal frameworks and rushed administrative procedures," she said. Park highlighted how some foreign adoptive parents were found to be unfit to raise children by authorities in foreign countries, which resulted in years of legal procedures in overseas courts to have them removed as parents of an adopted child. Other serious violations unearthed by the report included adopted children being given false identities. "If a child in the adoption process passed away or was reclaimed by their biological family, agencies would substitute another child's identity to expedite the adoption, severely violating adoptees' rights to their true identities," the report states.

Based on its findings, the commission recommended that the government issue an official apology, arrange remedies for those who were affected, and demanded that the government ratify The Hague's Convention on Protection of Children and Cooperation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption. South Korea's Ministry of Health and Welfare, which handles adoption issues, did not immediately comment on the report and the government has never acknowledged direct responsibility for issues surrounding past foreign adoptions. Some adoptees also criticised the report, saying it did not establish the government's complicity strongly enough and that its recommendations were too weak.

— Aljazeera

Niger coup leader sworn in as president for five years

NIAMEY (BBC): Niger's military ruler has been sworn in as the country's president for a transitional period of five years. Gen Abdourahamane Tchiani has led the country since 2023, after he deposed Niger's elected President, Mohamed Bazoum. Gen Tchiani took the presidential office under a new charter that replaces the West African country's constitution.

He was also promoted to the country's highest military rank of army general, and signed a decree ordering that all political parties be dissolved. During a ceremony in the capital, Niamey, Gen Tchiani said of his new military rank: "I receive this distinction with great humility... I will strive to live up to the trust placed in me." The transition to democratic rule is in line with recommendations that a commission made following national discussions. This five-year time period is "flexible" depending on the country's security status, the new charter says. Niger has been plagued by jihadist attacks for many years - one of the issues junta leaders cited when staging their coup. The military takeover followed a string of others in the region - neighbouring Mali, Guinea and Burkina Faso are also run by juntas. All four countries have severed ties with former colonial power France and forged new alliances with Russia. And all except Guinea, have pulled out of Ecowas, the West African regional bloc.

Sudan army accused of killings

DARFUR (BBC): A Sudanese war monitor has accused the military of killing hundreds of people in an air strike on a market in the country's western Darfur region. The Emergency Lawyers group - which documents abuses by both sides in Sudan's civil war that erupted in April 2023 - said the bombing of Tur'rah market was a "horrific massacre" that had also left hundreds injured.

Videos posted on social media - some by the army's rival the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), a paramilitary group that controls much of Darfur - showed the smoking ruins of market stalls and bodies charred beyond recognition. A military spokesperson denied targeting civilians, saying it only attacked legitimate hostile targets.

Both the Sudanese armed forces and RSF have repeatedly been accused of shelling civilian areas. The RSF has deployed drones in Darfur, but the army has the warplanes - and regularly strikes RSF positions across the region.



GAZA STRIP: A child looking on as people mourn Palestinians killed in Israeli attacks.

A parched Spain has emerged from drought only to face floods

VILANOVA DE SAU, Spain (AP): As Spain choked on stubborn drought last year, a reservoir north of Barcelona emptied, revealing a medieval church. But in the last few weeks, rising waters have again covered the Sant Roma de Sau church as the country's weather took an abrupt turn.

Drought relief came at a price, as flash floods forced hundreds of people to evacuate their homes, closed schools and highways and swept cars away. While it can be difficult to identify climate change as the cause of a single event, scientists say it is making such swings between dryness and downpour ever more extreme. The recent floods took place just months after a deadly deluge in Valencia. Here's a look at the volatile weather that led Spain out of a drought. In the first 18 days of March, Spain received more than double the rainfall it normally gets in the month, according to Spain's national weather agency AEMET. That included in normally arid parts of the country such as the southern Andalusia region where rivers swollen from rainfall prompted authorities to evacuate hundreds of people from their homes.

Madrid got more rain in the first three weeks of March than any month since records began in 1893, said Rubén del Campo, a meteorologist and

spokesperson at AEMET. But weather swings are a fact of life in Spain. "The blessing and curse of the Spanish climate is exactly that," said Daniel Argüeso, a climate scientist at Spain's University of the Balearic Islands. "We have these periods of extended drought that usually end with these kinds of situations. Having said that, the rain we had in March has been quite exceptional." For now, the drought that began in 2023 is over. Reservoirs around the country are around 66% full on average, according to Spain's environment and ecological transition ministry. That's better than they have been in a decade, del Campo said. In Catalonia, the Sau reservoir that supplies water to Barcelona is now about 48% full, compared to less than 5% at the same time last year.

That's good news for Jordi Galabardes and his wife Montse Bufils, who live in the nearby village of San Martín Sescorts, in Catalonia. Last year, they couldn't water their garden due to water restrictions. "In just three weeks, it's filled up a lot, which gives hope that we can recover all this," Galabardes said near the reservoir's edge. How long the country's water reserves remain at healthy levels depends on factors like how much more springtime rain the country gets and just how hot and dry the summer is. But climate scientists pre-

dict that Spain will likely stay free of water restrictions at least through the summer. "We've come out of drought, but it's not that there is a huge excess of water," del Campo said. "Spain is a country where water resources are never abundant."

Climate change is likely making Spain's fluctuations more intense, climate scientists say. Around the world, rising temperatures stoked by climate change are speeding up the hydrological cycle in which water moves between Earth and the atmosphere. That is triggering more extreme weather, such as prolonged droughts and intense rainfall, climate scientists say. A warmer atmosphere can also hold more water, about 7% more for every degree Celsius, scientists say. That means when it does rain, it's more likely to be heavy. "We can now go several months without a drop of rain, and then have a major storm again in the summer," said Jorge Olcina, a geography professor at the University of Alicante in Spain. "In other words, we're losing the regularity of the rains." But attributing a single event like the rainfall this month to climate change remains difficult, in part due to Spain's natural weather extremes, Argüeso said. "The fact that the variability is so large is an obstacle in measuring climate change," he said.

Colombian rebels committed abuses against civilians in disputed region

BOGOTA (AP): A prominent human rights group said that rebel groups in Colombia committed "grave abuses" against civilians as they fight for control of the Catatumbo, a resource-rich region along Colombia's border with Venezuela.

In a 12-page report, Human Rights Watch accused the rebels of executing unarmed farmers and forcibly recruiting dozens of children into their ranks. The group also called on investigations to speed up investigations into homicides in Catatumbo, where at least 78 people were killed in January and February, after a truce ended between rebel groups in the area. "Our research points to widespread abuses against ordinary people," said Juanita Goebertus, Americas director for HRW.

According to the Colombian Human Rights Ombudsman's Office, more than 56,000 people have been displaced from their homes in the Catatumbo region since Jan. 16, when the National Liberation Army, or ELN, launched a violent campaign to strengthen its grip on the area. Human Rights Watch said that in some villages, the rebels dragged people out of their homes and shot those who they accused of being collaborators of a rival group known as the FARC-EMC.

Human Rights Watch interviewed 65 people for its investigation, including judicial officials, aid workers and displaced farmers. "It seems that the ELN is trying to control the border with Venezuela, partly due to the drug trade," said Juan

Pappier, Human Rights Watch deputy director for the Americas. "And for that they've long benefited from the complicity of Venezuelan security forces."

Some people who fled the Catatumbo region told Human Rights Watch that the ELN executed farmers in front of their families. Others accused the FARC-EMC group of running forced labor camps, where local people who were accused of committing crimes were forced to cut sugar cane for more than 12 hours a day. Human Rights Watch urged Colombia's Attorney General's office to increase the number of prosecutors and investigators in the Catatumbo region, and to provide protection for them, so that these crimes can be further investigated.

‘We want to know where they are’

MEXICO CITY: When they got to the deserted ranch, the volunteer searchers found watches and dirty football jerseys, an applied psychology book and a copy of the Bible. There was even a heart-shaped keychain containing a cut-out photo of a young woman. But one set of artefacts was particularly chilling: the sight of hundreds of dust-caked shoes, thought to be discarded by victims who were murdered and incinerated in nearby ovens.

The volunteers had uncovered what appeared to be a mass killing site, with suspected ties to the Cartel Jalisco Nueva Generación (CJNG), a fearsome criminal organisation in Mexico. It was located in Teuchitlán, Jalisco, less than an hour outside the urban centre of Guadalajara - and at a site previously inspected by local authorities. The discovery on March 5 has sent public anger rippling across Mexico, as the country grapples with a crisis of mass disappearances at the hands of criminal groups and government officials.

This month, indignant protesters placed 400 pairs of shoes in Mexico City's Zócalo plaza, right in front of the National Palace. One of the demonstrators - who shared only his first name, Juan Carlos - told Al Jazeera that the sheer size of the mass grave is part of the outrage. For him, it represents years of negligence. "It's not good that this violence we're living through is normalised," Juan Carlos said. "The government has colluded with criminal organisations." Solemn, their faces swollen with tears, some of the protesters had come to the Zócalo because they too had lost loved ones to forced disappearances.

In the mass grave at Teuchitlán,

they saw an echo of their own suffering. They called on the government to act decisively and root out the corruption that has allowed so many deaths to unfold for so long. "We're going through the same problems," another protester, Gustavo Sánchez, told Al Jazeera. "There haven't been advances on anything." Sánchez's son, Abraham Zeidy Hernández, disappeared in the state of Nuevo León in May 2024. He gave a tearful speech at the rally accusing President Claudia Sheinbaum of failing to address the crisis. "We want to know where they are," Sánchez said of the disappeared.

According to the Mexican government's statistics, at least 125,204 people have been declared missing, most of them after 2006, when the country joined the US-sponsored "war on drugs". That ushered in an unprecedented period of militarisation that saw hundreds of thousands of soldiers deployed to the street. The "war on drugs" accelerated the transformation of criminal groups into paramilitary forces that operated in clear view of government officials, even collaborating with them. And it ignited an explosion of human rights abuses linked to state forces and criminals - particularly disappearances. Many experts believe the official number of missing people to be an undercount, with many cases going unreported for fear of retribution. Some even consider the disappearances the largest case of mass abduction in Latin America since the Cold War. "This is all because of the mal gobierno [bad government]," Monica Livier, a member of a citizen advocacy organisation called Va por Todos Mexico, told Al Jazeera.

She accused the government of

failing to take action to stop the killings in Teuchitlán. "The government already knew about it, but they didn't do anything about it." The mass grave in Teuchitlán was discovered by a volunteer "search collective" called the Guerreros Buscadores de Jalisco - the Warrior Searchers of Jalisco. The group is dedicated to finding missing people in the state of Jalisco, on Mexico's Pacific coast. At the start of the month, an anonymous tip arrived through social media, pointing the volunteers to an abandoned ranch: Rancho Izaguirre. The ranch had been reputed to be a training centre for cartel members, and government officials had previously swept the ranch.

As recently as September, members of the Mexican military and National Guard raided the area, arresting 10 suspects and releasing two people imprisoned at the site. A human body was found as well, alongside weapons and ammunition. But the authorities reported no mass graves nor makeshift crematoriums. Six months later, in early March, the volunteers from the Warrior Searchers of Jalisco arrived with only rudimentary tools: pickaxes and shovels. They said there was no crime scene tape, no police to guard the site. So they set up makeshift tents and started digging. Relatively quickly, they found charred bone fragments. Teeth. A metal plate used in surgeries to fix fractured femurs. And three ovens that appeared to be used to dispose of corpses. "We want to make it clear that these are not ordinary ovens, but crematoriums used to incinerate human bodies," the collective wrote on social media.

"This is not a setup, it is not an invention. This is the harsh reality we

have found in Teuchitlán. We want the truth to be known and justice to be done for the victims." Since the March 5 revelation, Mexican media have published a wave of testimonies from those who claim to have survived or escaped Rancho Izaguirre. Many of those who came forward chose to remain anonymous. They identified as impoverished youths from Guadalajara and explained they were lured to the ranch by false promises of work in online advertisements - or simply kidnapped. One young man said the ranch was described as "hitman school". Those who complained, questioned the cartel leader's orders or failed to pass the brutal tests were executed.

Indira Navarro, the head of the Warrior Searchers of Jalisco, said in a radio interview that one survivor dubbed it "a little school of terror". Other documents have emerged suggesting that local authorities may have known about the site but failed to act. On March 12, the advocacy group Mexicans Against Corruption and Impunity published a report showing that National Guard members discovered burned bodies in the same area in August 2019.

It also found that a local police commissioner sent the National Guard a message in March 2020, disclosing an act of attempted bribery. According to the internal document, an anonymous female caller said that National Guard personnel "would be given a sum of money" in exchange "for reducing the intensity of the operations" in the area. Jalisco has the highest official rate of forced disappearances in Mexico. Since the government began collecting statistics on disappearances in the 1950s, more than 15,000 people have been report-

ed missing in the state alone.

In the wake of the recent uproar, the state attorney general, Salvador Gonzalez de los Santos, said heavy machinery had been deployed to the Teuchitlán site but that the area was too big to search in its entirety. That has led the federal government to point the finger at local authorities for not investigating thoroughly enough. "They failed to track down the evidence or identify anything found abandoned at that location," Mexico Attorney General Alejandro Gertz Manero said at a March 19 news conference. "A full examination of the site was not conducted, nor were fingerprints taken."

A day later, on March 20, federal and state authorities organised a tour of the site for journalists, officials and members of the search brigades. More than 12 buses arrived, some carrying social media influencers. But the visit was widely criticised, not least for letting the public access an ongoing crime scene. Family members of the disappeared also questioned why the influencers were reportedly allowed to access the ranch before they were. Some of the influencers later published accounts online denying the existence of crematoriums on the site. President Sheinbaum, meanwhile, has assigned federal prosecutors - led by Gertz Manero - to take up the case.

"The first thing we need to do is investigate, because the images are painful, and the first thing we need to know is what happened there, before anything else," she said. Some critics, however, fear the federal authorities cannot be trusted to helm the investigation. The National Guard, after all, was created in 2019 under former President Andrés Manuel López

Obrador, Sheinbaum's mentor. Still, federal authorities announced progress in their investigation. They confirmed that they had detained a recruiter for the Cartel Jalisco Nueva Generación in a low-income neighbourhood in Mexico City, where he allegedly sought out youths to be brought to the "extermination site".

Two former police officers from a village near Teuchitlán were also arrested in relation to the ranch. But academics and investigative journalists have suggested that the ranch in Teuchitlán is part of a vast archipelago of training centres in the hills to the west of Guadalajara. Nor is the problem limited to one state: On March 12, a separate search brigade said it had discovered another "extermination site", this time in Reynosa, Tamaulipas. At the recent protest at the Zócalo, tensions started to boil over as evening fell. Some demonstrators broke through barricades and brawled with the police holding riot shields in front of the National Palace.

"Mercenaries! Killers!" they shouted towards the palace, the official residence of Mexico's president. Sebastián Arenas, a journalism student from the National Autonomous University of México, explained that many of his fellow protesters saw Teuchitlán as indicative of a federal security strategy that has allowed mass murder. "In the press, it's said that things have changed in Mexico, that there aren't disappearances, or that they're going down, that the judicial reform is going to bring justice," he told Al Jazeera. "But here are the results: a clandestine grave, an extermination camp that looks like Auschwitz." — Aljazeera

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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

Elusive truce

THE recent talks between the United States and Russia in Saudi Arabia signal a shift in diplomatic efforts to find a resolution to the war in Ukraine. The focus on a potential naval ceasefire in the Black Sea reflects an attempt to de-escalate hostilities, but it also raises concerns about the broader implications of such a deal. While Washington presents these negotiations as a step toward ending the conflict, Ukraine and its European allies remain wary of any arrangement that could compromise their long-term security. The absence of Ukrainian representatives from the US-Russia talks further underscores the unease surrounding these discussions. The Trump administration's approach appears to prioritise a phased resolution, starting with a maritime truce. The logic behind this strategy is clear: securing safe passage for ships in the Black Sea could serve as a confidence-building measure that leads to a more comprehensive ceasefire.

However, the exclusion of Ukraine from the initial phase of negotiations raises legitimate questions about whose interests are being served. A naval truce, while beneficial in reducing immediate tensions, does little to address Ukraine's fundamental concerns regarding sovereignty and territorial integrity. If this approach is meant to test the waters for a broader peace agreement, its effectiveness depends on transparency and trust. Without clear assurances that Ukraine's interests will not be side-lined, the risk of diplomatic missteps remains high.

Any perception that Washington is negotiating over Ukraine's future without its full involvement could damage alliances and weaken international support. Russia's insistence on Ukraine withdrawing from the four regions it claims, along with abandoning Nato aspirations, remains a non-starter for Kyiv. Any agreement that concedes these demands would be seen as a capitulation rather than a peace settlement. At the same time, continued fighting on the ground, as seen in the latest attacks on both Ukrainian and Russian positions, highlights the fragility of any diplomatic overtures.

The war is not confined to maritime zones, and efforts to carve out a limited truce while hostilities persist elsewhere may only provide Russia with breathing room rather than serve as a genuine step toward ending the war. The broader context of these negotiations also raises questions about the credibility of US commitments to Ukraine. If the maritime truce is part of a larger strategy to push for territorial concessions, it would confirm the fears of those who see this as an effort to prioritise stability over justice. While ending the war is a crucial goal, any peace deal that undermines Ukraine's sovereignty will have long-term repercussions for European security.

As reports suggest a "positive announcement" may be forthcoming, scepticism remains warranted. Moscow's reluctance to agree to a full ceasefire while continuing attacks on Ukraine's infrastructure suggests that its strategic objectives remain unchanged. The US may believe that incremental diplomacy is the best path forward, but without Ukraine at the centre of negotiations, the risk of a flawed outcome looms large.

Romania's choice

THE unfolding political crisis in Romania reflects a deeper reckoning with the nation's democratic identity. Once hailed as an Eastern European democratic success story, Romania now finds itself teetering on the edge of a dangerous shift. At the heart of this struggle is the rise of far-right populism, amplified by economic frustration, disillusionment with political elites, and external interference that preys on domestic grievances. In many ways, Romania's challenges are not unique.

Across Europe, nationalist movements have gained traction by exploiting fears over sovereignty, economic security, and cultural identity. What sets Romania apart is the intensity of its current political upheaval. The cancellation of its presidential election, following allegations of foreign meddling, has only deepened public mistrust in the political system. For many Romanians, it is not simply a legal or constitutional debate ~ it feels like a betrayal of their democratic aspirations. Voters in rural areas, especially those left behind by economic modernisation, have turned to candidates who offer simplistic solutions to complex problems.

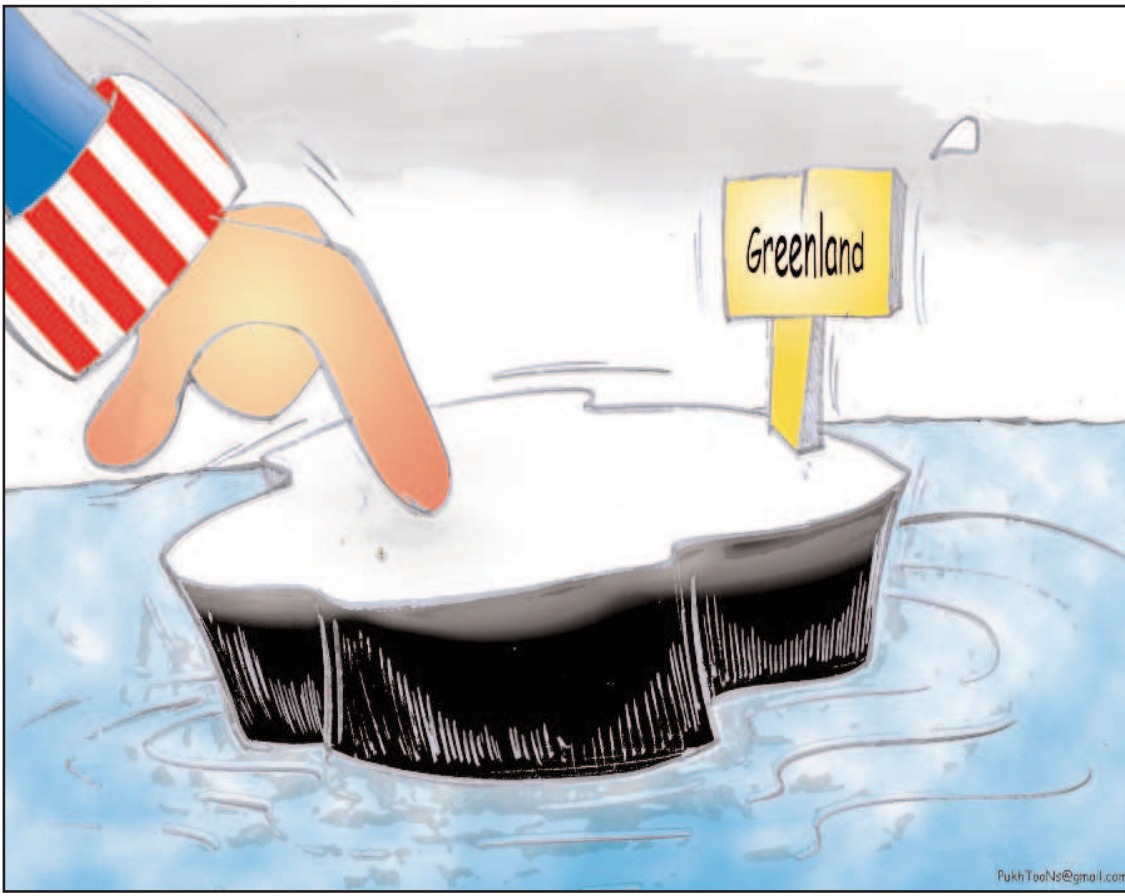
Promises to cut taxes, restore national pride, and reject outside influence resonate in villages where young people leave in search of work and public services crumble. These communities feel forgotten by mainstream politicians, and their support for far-right figures is often less about ideology and more about desperation. However, the danger lies in how easily economic discontent can be manipulated into extremist rhetoric. When political leaders evoke nostalgia for a mythical past or promote exclusionary policies in the name of national renewal, they risk undermining the democratic foundations a country has worked so hard to build. The demonisation of minorities, calls for restrictions on free speech, and attacks on judicial independence are clear warning signs of democratic backsliding. What complicates matters further is the shifting international context. Traditional alliances are no longer as stable or predictable.

External actors, including global powers with authoritarian leanings, find common cause with far-right movements in Europe, including Romania. This convergence of interests creates an environment where misinformation spreads quickly and democratic norms are challenged from within and without. Romania now stands at a crossroads. The country's history offers painful reminders of what can happen when democratic principles are abandoned. Yet its future is not predetermined. Civil society activists, independent institutions, and engaged citizens continue to push back against extremism. Their efforts highlight the resilience that still exists within Romanian democracy.

But this is not a battle that can be left to a few voices. It requires a collective commitment to the difficult work of addressing economic inequality, restoring trust in public institutions, and reaffirming the values of inclusion and pluralism. The stakes are high ~ not just for Romania, but for the broader European project. The defense of democracy here will signal whether Europe can withstand the growing tide of illiberalism or if it will falter at one of its most vulnerable points.

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Azerbaijan-Armenia peace agreement

Cavid Veliyev

ON March 13, the foreign ministers of Azerbaijan and Armenia simultaneously announced that they reached an agreement on the text of the ongoing peace agreement between the two countries, which means that Armenia has accepted the last two demands put forward by Azerbaijan in the context of the draft peace agreement.

Azerbaijan called for changes to two articles of the 17-article text. First, the removal of the EU monitoring mission on the Armenian-Azerbaijani border. Second, the submission of a joint application to the OSCE in order to terminate the mandate of the Minsk Group, which was established to address the long-standing Karabakh issue.

However, reaching an agreement on the peace text does not necessarily mean that it will be signed soon. In fact, a statement from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan clarified that for the peace agreement to be signed, changes need to be made to the Constitution of Armenia, and a joint application must be submitted to terminate the Minsk Group's mandate. Additionally, the ministry emphasized Azerbaijan's readiness to continue bilateral dialogue on these and other issues related to the normalization process between the two countries, indicating that other key aspects of normalization must also be resolved alongside the two primary concerns.

The signing of the peace agreement has long been a subject of discussion among experts and politicians in Azerbaijan. These issues are frequently raised by Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev as well. Key points include the opening of the Zangezur Corridor, preparing the Armenian community for peace, the return of the West Azerbaijanis who were forcibly expelled from Armenia, the disarmament of Armenia's border areas with Azerbaijan, an apology for the massacres and genocide committed by Armenia during the occupation, and the payment of compensation for the occupation.

Although Armenia has stated that it is ready to join Azerbaijan in applying for

the dissolution of the Minsk Group, it maintains that the EU mission will remain on the border until after the peace agreement is signed. However, this does not mean that Azerbaijan's demand has been fully met, as the Azerbaijani side expects concrete steps from Armenia in this regard before the peace agreement can be signed.

While Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan sent messages of peace, between March 16 and 21, the Armenian army violated the ceasefire on the border multiple times. The militarization of Armenia, a country with a history of aggression and where revisionist demands remain on the agenda, poses a threat to regional peace. After the Second Karabakh War, military advisers from France and the US were assigned to the Armenian army, and joint exercises were conducted. Before the 2020 war, Armenia's military budget was \$700 million. However, the Armenian parliament approved a military budget of \$1.708 billion for 2025, a threefold increase since the Second Karabakh War. With national debt amounting to 60% of its GDP, Armenia has allocated 30% of its 2025 budget to military expenditures, making up 6% of the country's GDP. This budget increase was accompanied by the purchase of offensive weapons from countries like France and India.

The ongoing presence of revisionist demands continues to shape Armenia's military strategy. This was evident during the 35th Congress of the Dashnaksutyun (ARF) held on Feb. 25, 2025 in Yerevan, Armenia's capital, where the strategic priorities of the ARF for the coming period were outlined. These priorities included securing international legal and political guarantees, along with other fundamental rights, to ensure the collective return of Karabakh Armenians; promoting national integration around the "liberation" agenda for Karabakh; restoring territorial integrity in line with the spirit of the Declaration of Independence; strengthening the Armenian army,

defense, and security systems; bolstering the organizational strength of the Armenian diaspora; pursuing the international recognition of the so-called Armenian Genocide; and demanding compensation. Although the ARF is not currently in power, the Pashinyan administration's approval for the ARF to hold a congress in Yerevan and the growing influence of the ARF in shaping Armenian society's goals represents a serious threat to regional peace.

On the other hand, the Armenian government continues to deny basic human rights and its responsibilities under international agreements concerning the Zangezur Corridor and the right of return for Western Azerbaijanis.

The Azerbaijani side is nearing completion of the portion of the Zangezur Corridor within its territory. The Kars-Nakhchivan railway line, which forms the Turkish part of the Zangezur Corridor, has already been tendered, and construction is set to begin soon. However, Armenia remains opposed to this issue. In his most recent statements to Turkish press representatives, Pashinyan declared that the Zangezur Corridor agreement is unacceptable from Armenia's perspective.

Meanwhile, Pashinyan's alternative "Crossroads for Peace" project, proposed as a substitute for the Zangezur Corridor, faces a deadlock, as it lacks the support of Azerbaijan and Türkiye.

The persistence of revisionist demands in Armenia, coupled with military escalation, severely hampers the normalization process between the Armenian and Azerbaijani peoples. Historical precedent suggests that unilateral peace efforts have previously led to renewed conflict. During the 70-year Soviet period, while Azerbaijanis sought to normalize relations with Armenians, revisionist factions within Armenia established secret organizations and raised funds to claim Karabakh and Nakhchivan. This contributed to the outbreak of the First Karabakh War. Therefore, the unilateral attempts at normalization

during the Soviet era did not prevent conflict but instead led to a new war. To prevent further conflict and achieve genuine peace in the present, normalization must be a bilateral process. The Armenian government must take responsibility for preparing its people for peace. Perhaps the most crucial aspect of normalization between the two societies is the return of Azerbaijanis expelled from Armenia to their homeland. Between 1987 and 1990, the community of 300,000 West Azerbaijanis, who were forced to leave Armenia, issued a statement outlining that for genuine peace to be achieved, Armenia must fulfill several key tasks. One of these tasks was "creating conditions for West Azerbaijanis to return to their homes in a safe and dignified manner, for the establishment of lasting peace and justice."

However, to date, the Pashinyan administration has consistently rejected these demands and ignored the desires of the 300,000 people seeking to return to their homeland. One of the biggest obstacles to peace remains the current constitution of Armenia. The Pashinyan administration has indicated that a referendum on this issue will likely take place in 2026 or 2027. This suggests that signing the peace agreement before this date is highly unlikely.

To sum up, the Armenian side, which occupied Azerbaijani lands for 30 years and sought to maintain the status quo in the region after the Second Karabakh War, bears responsibility for the accumulation of the issues mentioned above. Having lost all its leverage, Armenian administration now seeks to present itself as the "party that desires peace." However, it was Azerbaijan that agreed upon the peace text. A peace agreement alone will not be sufficient to bring lasting peace to the region, as not all conditions for its signing have been met. For genuine peace to be achieved, it is crucial that the Azerbaijan-Türkiye partnership, which has reshaped the geopolitical landscape of the South Caucasus since 2020, continues, and that Armenia takes concrete steps on the still-contested issues.

Global collapse of moral order: Israel kills Palestinian children

Luigi Daniele

MARK these words: South Africa is likely to win the genocide case at the International Court of Justice (ICJ), but by then, it will be too late to save a single civilian life. The time for robust action is now.

The resumption of the exterminatory Israeli bombardments on Gaza has killed 174 Palestinian children and toddlers in less than 48 hours, according to Defense for Children International. UNICEF has also denounced the killing of more than 130 children in a single day, representing the largest single-day child death toll among Palestinians in years. This may be the deadliest episode in the history of Israeli military actions in Palestine.

Family members of slain Israeli captives, whose names and faces have repeatedly been used to justify further attacks on Palestinians, condemned their government's actions as another betrayal of the hostages, with Yarden Bibas writing "military pressure endangers the hostages while an agreement brings them home", and networks of Israeli families declaring Israeli Premier Benjamin Netanyahu chose Ben-Gvir's return to the government over the return of the hostages from Gaza.

In the midst of this carnage, Israeli ministers declare "a society that tolerates Hamas sympathizers within it has no right to exist," or ask the very population they are destroying to "return the hostages and remove Hamas" unless they want to pay a "far more severe price" of "total devastation."

The ideology of the Israeli leadership is becoming increasingly explicit: It promotes the notion that Palestinians deserve elimination and are responsible for their own destruction. It is a paradigmatically genocidal ideology, typical of all the genocides in history, construing the victim group's existence as undeserved, its survival as an intolerable threat, brutalities against it inherently justified, 'called for', and the forcing of the group into inexistence as a way of restoring the natural order of things as they should have always been. After all, key Israeli ministers declared "there is no such thing as a Palestinian people." Declaring the inexistence of a people equates precisely to posing the premises for its elimination. The honesty of the genocidal narratives of the Israeli executive, coupled with the use of hunger, thirst, diseases as weapons of war, reinforces crucially the validity of South Africa's arguments at the ICJ, and of those states intervening in support of those arguments. As an international lawyer, my guess is that South Africa, even more likely after these renewed atrocities, will win the genocide case at the ICJ.

Despite the all-time record of crimes against children, Western states keep refraining from legal action, even those intervening in other ICJ cases to affirm that, in their interpretation of the

Genocide Convention, the victimization of children, as the most vulnerable and crucial component of victim groups, should bring special weight in ascertaining the existence of genocidal intent. Beyond hypocrisy and racist double standards, Palestinian children are portrayed as less human and less worthy of protection than other children.

The irresponsibility of political leaders of third states indeed continues to kill. Silent when not complicit, incapable of acting for a single sanction, some are even offering safe harbors from ICC arrest warrants to their political and business partners wanted for war crimes and crimes against humanity, violating their own obligations as state parties of the Rome Statute.

In sum, the lawlessness unleashed on Palestinians is indeed infecting the world (dis)order, and it is evident that Netanyahu has all the interest in descending the entire region into a state of permanent war to stay in power. The global instability deriving from the winds of regional and global wars (in which the EU is diving rather than shifting its disastrous strategic approaches) will inevitably increase authoritarian repressions against dissidents, oppositions, and alternative visions in many of the countries revolving around this tragic abyss of history. War and authoritarianism always nurture each other. It is therefore not only in the interests of the survival of Palestinians, but a political necessity against the oligarchic shifts in our own countries to demand robust action now.

Palestinians need a humanitarian intervention of a multilateral coalition to protect civilian lives. This presence alone can tackle an alliance of savage powers devaluing the lives of Palestinians as less than human and extracting profits from their massacres now, while preparing to extract more profits from exterminatory wars globally tomorrow. This would offer an immediate opportunity for world powers genuinely committed to reforming the international order towards a new multilateralism based on sovereign equality, self-determination, and peaceful coexistence to prove that their words are not empty slogans.

In other words, the paradox we face is that even the selfish pursuit of national interests-let alone legal or moral obligations-should be enough to trigger decisive action like the one proposed in this reflection. A multilateral military presence, under UN auspices, to protect Palestinian civilians appears necessary as never before, since none of them will ever be safe under occupation by forces making clear they consider their existence as a people an offense to be redressed by annihilation. Should a coalition of states promote such an action, it would enjoy the support of masses of citizens across the globe, and gain moral leadership in these dark times, marked by the unchecked rise of international criminality.

Shuttering VOA, Fulbright and USAID: America turns off soft power

Nicholas J. Cull

THERE are many indicators that international politics is moving into a new era but few as readily legible as the astonishing reversal in the approach to world affairs practiced by the United States. Since the end of the Cold War, the US has adhered to a view that power in the world requires not only military and economic strength (hard power) but the so-called soft power of attraction that comes from being admired for one's culture and values. Harvard professor Joseph Nye coined the term "soft power" around the end of the Cold War, as the US began to reconsider its long-term global strategy.

Through Nye's lens, American analysts came to understand that their country's Cold War success

flowed not only from its moon landings and hit movies but from such soft power enhancing activities as state-funded scholarships to study at US institutions, state-subsidized internation-

al media to share objective news, and development projects intended to cultivate democracy overseas. During the Cold War, US governments built expo pavilions, promoted appealing commercial culture, fostered respectful bilateral relationships, and showcased an attractive way of life. Post-Cold War governments in the US and elsewhere looked to do the same. As the policies were refined for the post 9/11 era Washington broadened its understanding to tie economic development more closely into its policy framework, naming the hybrid of hard and soft power "Smart Power."

Sometimes the US even corrected its policies to align with international views on matters like race relations. The best example of this was during the former US Presidents Dwight

D. Eisenhower and John F. Kennedy years when the US government understood that the best way to defeat Soviet claims that the US was a racist country was to actually be less racist. But that was the past. It seems these days of soft power theory and practice are gone. In a stunning series of decisions, US President Donald Trump has ordered the suspension of most of the US government's soft power outreach work and closed its mechanisms. Fulbright, Voice of America and other programs have been all-but abandoned. The chief smart power tool of USAID is now just a memory. What does this mean?

The doctrine underpinning the Trump axe is one of "America First" which holds that spending tax payer resources on things like

international development or foreign student scholarships is a waste of funds that could or should be spent at home or used for tax cuts. Secretary of State Marco Rubio says he believes that every element of his foreign policy should contribute to US security. The approach is flawed. It fails to recognize that a positive image in the minds of others is not a luxury on the international stage it is rather an essential element of security. America's generals know this. Admiral Mike Mullen famously remarked that money not spent on diplomacy would need to be spent on ammunition. America's enemies know this. Adversaries underscore the importance of Reputational Security every time they use disinformation, misinformation, or dis-

ruption to undermine the standing of a rival. Soft power tools were just as integral to US security as aircraft carriers or marines. More than that, reputations do not form only when we intend them to. The world will still be learning about and judging the US from its exports, entertainment and policies without exposure to the tools of soft power. The US will still be compared to other states, it has simply reduced its ability to shape that process. If others can offer leadership, can uphold the best international standards at home and abroad and present a credible vision of a better future, they will inherit the leverage which the US once enjoyed. In short, the universe of reputational security and soft power still exists, it is just that the US is no longer the central star in that cosmos and may even be an obsta-

cle.

The destruction of Voice of America and the other US government-funded broadcasters is an especially counterproductive move. During the first Trump administration the White House was irritated that the stations sometimes included reports critical of the president. The administration failed to understand that successful communication requires credibility and that a broadcaster with journalists who are free to criticize their sponsor is more effective than one whose every word tracks a party line.

It is hard to imagine why a state which has championed democracy and free speech would make a gift of silence to those who wish to control dissent. It appears that the Trump administration still hopes to attract global admiration through its "values and culture" - though not from advocates of free expression, but from authoritarian leaders and oligarchs. Something important has been lost.

Reshaping global discourse

DONALD Trump's presence on the global stage has always been a subject of intense discussion, fascination, and, at times, apprehension. Whether as a businessman, reality TV star, or political leader, he has consistently dominated headlines. Since his entry into politics, he has sparked debates worldwide, with his policies, rhetoric, and leadership style evoking strong reactions from allies and adversaries alike. Many nations, including India, closely follow his actions, attempting to gauge the implications of his policies on global affairs, trade, and diplomacy.

The question that arises is - what is it about Trump that compels the world to scrutinize his every move? Why do his policies, statements, and decisions create such a ripple effect across continents? One of the primary reasons for the global focus on Trump is the sheer power and influence of the United States. As the world's largest economy and a dominant military force, American policies invariably impact global markets, international alliances, and strategic balances. When Trump assumed office, he ushered in an era of unpredictability, breaking away from traditional diplomatic approaches. His "America First" policy redefined international relations, leading to trade wars, economic nationalism, and strained alliances. For countries like India, which had built a steady relationship with the US over decades, these shifts meant continuous recalibration of diplomatic and economic strategies. Another factor contributing to the fear and fascination surrounding Trump is his unfiltered communication style.

Unlike most world leaders who

carefully craft their public statements, Trump often relies on direct and blunt remarks, primarily through social media. His tweets, sometimes impulsive and controversial, have the power to move stock markets, alter diplomatic relations, and create uncertainty in global affairs. World leaders are often left guessing about his next move, making long-term strategic planning difficult. His unpredictable nature leads to volatile situations, such as the abrupt withdrawal from international agreements, diplomatic spat with allies, and aggressive rhetoric against adversaries.

Trump's economic policies also play a significant role in global discussions about him. His aggressive stance on trade, particularly against China, has reshaped global supply chains and forced many nations to reassess their trade dependencies. His decision to impose tariffs on imported goods has disrupted international markets, affecting industries worldwide. India, with its growing trade relationship with the US, had to navigate these changes carefully, balancing its economic interests while maintaining a stable diplomatic relationship. His insistence on renegotiating trade deals, pulling out of multilateral agreements, and prioritizing domestic industries over global cooperation signals a shift that many countries find challenging to adapt to.

Beyond economic concerns, Trump's approach to international alliances and organizations adds to the uncertainty. His skepticism towards institutions like the United Nations, Nato, and the World Health Organization have weakened global cooperation. His deci-

Narayanan Kizhumundayur

sions, such as pulling out of the Paris Climate Accord and the Iran Nuclear Deal, signaled a retreat from global leadership roles traditionally held by the US. This created a vacuum, leaving other nations to fill the gaps or adjust to a world order where American commitments were no longer guaranteed.

For India and other nations that rely on stable international frameworks, these shifts introduce new complexities in diplomatic decision-making. Trump's stance on immigration is another contentious issue that has resonated globally. His strict policies, including travel bans, visa restrictions, and efforts to build a wall along the US-Mexico border, reflect a broader narrative of nationalism and protectionism. These measures have direct consequences for countries with strong migration ties to the US, including India, which sends a significant number of students, professionals, and workers.

The tightening of visa policies, particularly for highly skilled workers under the H-1B program, has created uncertainties for Indian professionals and businesses dependent on access to the American job market. His approach to global conflicts and security matters has also fueled apprehensions.

Unlike his predecessors, Trump often takes a transactional approach to foreign relations, prioritizing immediate gains over longterm strategic alliances. His dealings with North Korea, his fluctuating stance on Russia, and his withdrawal of troops from conflict zones raise questions about global security dynamics. While some have praised his unconventional diplomacy, others fear that

his lack of consistency could lead to destabilization in regions already plagued by conflict.

Another reason Trump has commanded global attention is his ability to reshape political discourse. His rise to power symbolized a shift in global politics, where populism, nationalism, and direct political messaging gained traction. Leaders across the world took note of his campaign strategies, rhetoric, and ability to mobilize mass support despite controversies. In countries like India, where political strategies are constantly evolving, Trump's methods of communication, his outsider image, and his appeal to nationalistic sentiments became subjects of study and discussion.

At the heart of the fear and fascination with Trump lies the unpredictability he brings to governance. World leaders, investors, policymakers, and citizens across nations remain alert to his statements and actions, knowing that they could lead to immediate and far-reaching consequences. His ability to defy traditional political norms, his emphasis on economic nationalism, his aggressive stance on global matters, and his willingness to challenge established institutions make him an unavoidable topic of discussion in every corner of the world. Whether viewed as a disruptor, a reformer, or a leader who upended global politics, Trump's influence remains undeniable. His policies, decisions, and leadership style have forced nations to rethink their strategies, adapt to new global realities, and prepare for unexpected shifts. Even outside of office, his presence continues to shape political debates, ensuring that discussions about him remain at the forefront of international affairs.

What Musk, Trump describe is not South Africa I know and love

Brett Davidson

A S a white South African man now living in the United States, I am acutely aware of the oversized role played by Elon Musk and a few other white men with strong South African ties in the US's lurch towards authoritarianism. These include far-right tech billionaire Peter Thiel, who spent formative years of his childhood in apartheid South Africa; US President Donald Trump's Cape Town-born "AI and crypto tsar" David Sacks; and Joel Pollak, the South African-American conservative political commentator currently serving as the senior editor-at-large of the Breitbart News Network.

While I am no billionaire and have no influence over government policy, these men and I still have quite a bit in common. I was born in apartheid South Africa about the same time as Musk, Pollak and Sacks and benefitted from the system. Like them, I eventually migrated to the US. Like Musk, I went to Veldskool, or "field school" - a week-long camp during high school during which teachers tried to indoctrinate us into Christian nationalism, the whites-only political ideology of the apartheid government. Also like him, I was a nerdy boy who was relentlessly bullied in school.

However, I am also very different from these men - and not just because I do not have billions in the bank or a direct line to the US president. Unlike Musk, I do not support racist pseudoscience. Unlike Musk and the administration these men serve, I question the apartheid-era policies that allowed a small minority - white South Africans - to control a disproportionate amount of land and resources. And most importantly, I take pride in the achievements and progress of post-apartheid South Africa.

In the early 1990s when South Africa was making a transition from apartheid to democracy, I was working as a radio journalist at the country's national broadcaster. I remember the pride and elation felt across the country as South Africans of all races and backgrounds lined up to vote on April 27, 1994, in their first democratic elections. Over the next few years, my colleagues and I were part of the effort to transform the South African Broadcasting Corporation from a government mouthpiece to a genuine public broadcaster.

As South Africans won the fight for democracy, they faced another battle, this time against the AIDS

pandemic. Once again, the country, and its people rose up to the challenge. Millions of South Africans organised and took to the streets to demand and ultimately achieve access to antiretroviral medications. After relentless pressure, the government agreed to commit to treatment. The US government also did the right thing and agreed to generously fund AIDS drug treatment in the country through the US President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR). South Africa has been one of the biggest recipients of PEPFAR aid, receiving \$332.6m in 2024. This aid saved countless South African lives.

Now, no doubt with full support from his billionaire friends nostalgic for the miserable days of apartheid, Trump has cut this funding. The cuts for AIDS treatment came with Trump's recent executive orders halting US aid to South Africa and offering support and refuge to white South Africans he described as "victims of unjust racial discrimination". Later, the Trump administration also decided to expel the South African ambassador to the US, Ebrahim Rasool.

Trump is following Musk's lead in branding post-apartheid South Africa a country riddled with racial discrimination. Musk has previously described his birth nation as having "racist ownership laws" and accused its government of failing to stop what he calls a "genocide" against white farmers.

What Musk and Trump describe is not anything like the country I know and love. My South African husband and I moved to the US in 2010 because I was offered a chance to play a part in supporting public health activists internationally through a job at the Open Society Foundations in New York.

We decided this was too exciting an opportunity to turn down - but moving to the US from South Africa was not an easy decision. We had a very comfortable life, and moving to the US actually meant losing a number of rights and protections we had in South Africa, such as good labour protections, paid family leave and - as a gay couple - the right to marry. (Same-sex marriage would not become legal nationwide in the US for another five years.) South Africans of all races also enjoy the right to abortion and the constitutional rights to health, education and housing - even if these are still far from being a reality in practice.

I became a US citizen in

December 2023. It was a bittersweet time. My father, Malcolm, had died a few days before - and I had to postpone heading home for the memorial until I was able to obtain my new US passport. He was a man of faith - a minister in the Congregational Church - who donated his body to science. A devout Christian who was loving and supportive when I came out as gay and even when I told him I was leaving the church, he deeply admired the anti-Nazi German dissident Dietrich Bonhoeffer and urged my siblings and me to always have the courage of our convictions.

Unlike Musk, Thiel, Sacks and Pollak, I have no nostalgia for apartheid, and if I am to have the courage of my convictions as my father taught me, I feel I must speak out when Musk cynically labels efforts to undo the legacy of segregation "racism" and leads the way in cutting the funding for international health and development assistance (a tiny fraction of the US federal budget) that, according to experts, could result in more than 500,000 deaths in South Africa over the next decade.

I feel compelled to speak out because Musk and his uberwealthy South African-born or -raised friends - people with more money than many of us can fathom - are now directly working with the American president to take everything away from those who have almost nothing. Their model is not the one we should be following. There are far better examples in the past and present. Take Jennifer Davis, who helped forge constructive connections between South Africa and the US based on human rights and justice.

Or the many members of the CHANGE coalition, led by organisations such as Health GAP in the US and the Health Justice Initiative in South Africa, who are right now collaborating to challenge and reverse Trump's aid cuts. Or the millions of people in both countries who are showing up every day to do the work necessary to make the US and South Africa better for all their people, no matter their race, sexuality or bank balance, motivated and inspired by the values of democracy, social justice and Ubuntu - the idea that we are all connected and responsible for one another. Musk and his like-minded friends may now have all the power, but they are just a tiny minority. Justice- and democracy-loving people of South Africa and the US won against their kind before, and I am certain they will do so again.

Alfazeera

Free speech crisis can't be solved by fining universities

Ella Whelan

THE University of Sussex has been fined £585,000 by the higher-education regulator, the Office for Students, for its handling of the resignation of Professor Kathleen Stock. The OFS claims that the university was in breach of "our free speech and academic freedom requirements" and also found fault with "the university's management and governance practices".

Specifically, the OFS criticised the university's Trans and Non-Binary Equality Policy Statement, which it said had created a "chilling effect" for staff and students who felt unable to voice gender-critical opinions. Some are heralding this news as a free-speech victory: a public recognition of the disgraceful treatment of Stock by the university is indeed welcome, as even now many fail to see why the whole debacle was so damning for free speech on campus and personally distressing for her.

This kind of external intervention by a regulator is needed, some argue, and they welcome the new powers the OFS might enjoy following the implementation of the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act. I am not cheering, though, despite being a free-speech absolutist. Sussex was my alma mater, and believe me, the problem with censorious behaviour long predates the Stock affair. The trans issue was just starting to crop up on campus in my second

year; friends of mine were being ostracised from the leffie pools we all swam in for being perplexed with the demand that "trans women were women".

By the end of my time there, Judith Butler may as well have been handing out the handshakes at our graduation ceremony. Among both staff and students there were political biases that were hard to challenge for fear of being stigmatised.

The OFS claim that censorship was a top-down imposition by policies is at best generous, at worst inaccurate - the problem with free speech on campus runs much deeper. It's for this reason that fines and legal wrangling is not the solution for those of us who care about fighting censorship.

Free speech has long been in crisis on campus. You could crack that nut with fines and legislation, court rulings and government finger-wagging. But state supervision of universities is not going to solve the campus censorship crisis, nor is it something true freedom lovers should be comfortable with. Take the response from Sussex University's vice-chancellor Professor Sasha Roseneil, who has managed to turn the ruling into a fight about minority rights. "We will strongly contest these findings and have grave concerns about the implications of its decisions for students and staff, especially those from minoritised groups", she

wrote in an article for Politics Home.

The university's response to the ruling was to argue that it will now be all but "impossible for universities to prevent abuse, harassment or bullying on campuses". Such historic blindness to the issue at hand shows how deep the rot goes when it comes to campus censorship. Things are changing - and not thanks to ministers or regulators. Instead, what has opened up a chink of light for discussion about free speech on campus is individuals sticking their neck on the line.

The trans issue has been the most influential in both escalating and challenging a culture of conformity on campus. Ever since women like Stock, or Jo Phoenix, went public, it has shone a spotlight on the inadequacy of our universities when it comes to defending free expression. Free speech can't be imposed; it has to be the foundation of a university from which everything else follows. We need to win the battle of ideas on campus - that means more students involved in fighting for free speech by holding public discussions and standing up for their peers to disagree with them on contentious issues.

It means staff rediscovering their mettle and refusing to be bullied by administrative bodies waving policy documents. And finally, change will also have to come from outside the campus walls, where the censorious cry of "you can't say that" just doesn't wash anymore.

Britain has just been pushed into the abyss

Allister Heath

THIS must have been the most disingenuous fiscal statement of all time, delivered by one of our worst chancellors. Rachel Reeves's speech was an exercise in make-believe, a painful collection of cliches and distortions, a grotesque attempt at pretending that all is well as the economy careens into the abyss.

The entire premise of her Spring Statement was false. Reeves's conceit was that the world has changed, and that she is responding by embracing dramatic cuts to welfare and the Civil Service as well as pro-growth policies. It is fantasy. There is no plan for change. The country remains on auto-pilot. Reeves is only pretending to have shifted course: her language was radical, but her actions trivial. Spending is still rising, including on welfare, as are taxes and red tape. Her Civil Service reductions are unlikely to materialise. Britain's drift to socialism and middle class pauperisation continues unabated.

Broken Britain is in desperate need of shock therapy, but we were offered only tinkering. Her policy changes were driven by the need to game arbitrary fiscal targets and placate the Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR), rather than any sort of intellectual realisation that her October Budget was a calamity, or that her entire ideological superstructure must be torn down. She remains a Left-wing technocrat, and reality has yet to mug her. Her supposedly massive cuts are equivalent to a fifth of the spending splurge she originally unveiled in October. This is not even close to the austerity the British state so desperately requires, and welfare spend-

ing continues to spiral out of control. Working age health and disability related welfare expenditure is due to rise by £15.4 billion between 2024-25 and 2029-30, an increase that would ordinarily be seen as explosive. Yes, some claimants will be worse off, a point that is being highlighted by the Left, but overall spending on these kinds of benefits is still surging.

This is symptomatic of one of Britain's most disgraceful national failings: the pathologisation of swathes of the country, the pseudo-medicalisation of many who could and should work, the disgraceful trapping of millions into benefit dependency, ruining their life chances and those of their children. Poverty, correctly understood, can only truly be defeated by work and a strengthening of the family and civil society, not by transfers. Tories and Labour alike (with some noble exceptions) have found it too politically tough to tackle the epidemic of worklessness and anomie created by our dysfunctional welfare state: it is still easier to import hundreds of thousands of foreign workers.

Reeves has trimmed some benefits, but only to manipulate the OBR's fiscal forecasts. She has not properly reformed the system from first principles. Spending on working age health and disability welfare benefits will grow by 4.9 per cent per year, higher than the pensioner benefits spending increase of 3.8 per cent. This isn't austerity, or prudence, or an attempt at shifting incentives: it is a desperate scramble to paper over the cracks in an unsustainable system.

The employment rate, down

half a percentage point since 2019, will slump further from 60.5 per cent in the second half of 2024 to 60.2 per cent in 2029. Those with a job will work less: the average working week will drop from 32.0 hours in 2025 to 31.8. Britain's attack of workshyness will become even more virulent after the supply-side of the economy is vandalised again.

The jobs-annihilating Employment Rights Bill wasn't even included in the OBR's calculations. It is a vicious, socialistic assault on private enterprise, and is almost as stupid as Reeves's raid on private schools. Just like the looming increase in national insurance, the Employment Bill will tip many businesses over the edge. Reeves has failed to learn from Labour's limited deregulation of the planning rules, which the OBR scores as boosting the economy: why not unleash the private sector in every other industry?

Extortionate taxation is another reason why productivity growth is so weak. Reeves's increase in the tax burden to a historic high of 37.7 per cent of GDP in 2027-28 is a catastrophe. By reducing the gains from risk-taking, investment, work and private initiative, it will guarantee less of each. Reeves still shows no signs of understanding any of this, even though she has triggered a classic vicious circle: her higher taxes have shrunk the economy's potential, which will soon require another round of levies, and then another.

Reeves's belt-tightening vibes are equally meaningless. Public expenditure overall is rising to 45 per cent of GDP this year. It will

be 0.2 points higher by 2029-30 than Reeves announced in October, partly because the debt interest bill is rising, and 1.6 points higher than the Tories were planning.

Even if the OBR's heroically optimistic growth forecasts materialise, and there are no further shocks, public spending will consume 4.2 percentage points more of our national income by 2029-30 than before the pandemic, entrenching an unacceptable collectivisation of our economy and society. Even such numbers are misleading: they do not include the second phase of defence increases announced by Starmer, worth an extra 0.4 per cent of GDP. This would cost an additional £17.3 billion in 2029-30: where will Reeves find the money?

In the meantime, the Chancellor is guilty of what Joe Hill of Reform calls "everythingism": she shouldn't expect a 0.2 point rise in defence as a proportion of GDP to be enough to turn the UK into a defence-industrial superpower. Boosting the economy and local "regeneration" should be a byproduct of defence spending, not its purpose. Reeves has no clue what real, entrepreneurial, market-driven growth looks like. She hasn't even delivered the bare minimum to prepare for the known unknowns of geopolitics and global economics, including Donald Trump's trade wars. Britain's welfare state continues to live beyond its means. Her restored fiscal head room is a statistical illusion that will not survive contact with reality. Hideous tax rises will almost certainly be necessary, either as early as this winter or next year. The worst is yet to come.

The Telegraph

Trump's show of support for Conor

Justine McCarthy

MIDDLE Ireland feels grievously insulted by the US president. On St Patrick's Day, when the globe traditionally turns green, Donald Trump's official guest at the White House was not the taoiseach bearing a bowl of shamrock, but an unelected stooge recently found by a civil court jury liable for the rape of a woman in a Dublin hotel. Fear and loathing of the mixed martial arts fighter Conor McGregor, who is facing civil trial in the US for alleged sexual assault of another woman in Florida, is one of middle Ireland's most unifying forces.

"We couldn't think of a better guest to have with us on St Patrick's Day," gushed Trump's press secretary Karoline Leavitt on 17 March, rubbing salt in the wound. McGregor was given access to the Pentagon, met the defence secretary, Pete Hegseth, the health secretary, Robert F Kennedy Jr, and the national security adviser, Mike Waltz. In the Oval Office, McGregor and his family posed for photographs with the US president, a man also found liable for sexual assault. Prominent in the photographs was Elon Musk, the world's richest individual and Trump's unelected jobs slasher. McGregor presented Musk with a box of his own brand cigars. Four days later, the Dubliner, self-styled "the notorious", announced he intends to contest the Irish presidential election later this year.

McGregor's declaration got far less attention in his own country than it did internationally. The former fighter is not expected to even make it to the starting line because of a constitutional requirement for candidates to secure nominations from either 20 members of parliament or four entire local authorities. It is exceedingly unlikely he can obtain

the backing to compete in the race to succeed Michael D Higgins, the poet and former anti-war activist who has been the much loved president for the past 14 years.

So far, the centre still holds in Ireland. Last November's election returned the same two centrist parties to government that have dominated since the state's foundation. Yet the centre has its wobbles. On the other side of the Atlantic, the Trumpocracy appears to believe it can shift the tectonic plates by endorsing McGregor.

Middle Ireland is politically middle of the road and is not to be confused with middle-class Ireland because frustration with perceived liberal political-correctness-gone-mad over gender equality, transgender rights and immigration transcends social strata. Despite ranking as one of the world's wealthiest countries, Ireland is in the throes of a protracted homelessness crisis, with rocketing house prices and creaking public infrastructure. Having reinvented itself since the 1990s from grim Catholic orthodoxy into tolerant modernity by passing referendums providing for divorce, same-sex marriage and abortion, there is a sense among some that the change has been too rapid.

This creates a certain appetite for the gospel according to JD Vance, which holds that Europe has retreated from its values by suppressing hateful and misogynistic online commentary, banning protests outside abortion clinics and deciding to "open the floodgates to millions of unwanted immigrants", as the US vice-president told the Munich Security Conference in February.

McGregor does not need to become president to galvanise

Ireland's small but vocal minority on the hard right. He emerged as its figurehead in November 2023 when violent protests erupted in Dublin city centre after two children and their preschool teacher were stabbed on a street. "Ireland, we are at war," he had posted just the day before on Musk's X platform. Riot police have been deployed at anti-immigrant demos.

The Irish government was given no notice of McGregor's White House visit, not even when, in an unexplained departure from normal protocol, taoiseach Micheál Martin's St Patrick's Day visit was brought forward by a week. What really incensed middle Ireland was McGregor's inarticulate untruthfulness when he was invited to meet journalists in the White House press briefing room, claiming an "illegal immigration racket" was "running ravage" in Ireland. Martin said McGregor's assertions were "wrong" and did not reflect the views of the Irish people. The Dublin Rape Crisis Centre said the White House visit was designed to "launder" McGregor's reputation.

McGregor's White House visit has been described as "sinister" but what may be most sinister is the reason he was invited for St Patrick's Day and, previously, for Trump's inauguration in January. The White House is actively courting Europe's far right. A week after making a Nazi-like salute at Trump's inauguration festivities, Musk urged delegates at an election campaign event for Germany's Alternative für Deutschland party not to let immigrants dilute their culture. Italy's rightwing prime minister, Giorgia Meloni, and Hungary's Viktor Orbán

The Guardian



SCCI opposes unilateral decisions and ‘anti-business actions’

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The Sarhad Chamber of Commerce and Industry president Fazal Moqem Khan asserted economic stability cannot come amid government ‘anti-business actions.’

He, however, said the government needs to achieve tax targets and enhance revenue which could only be met through collecting various taxes by the business community.

Moqem in a statement issued here on Saturday said hurting business and trade is tantamount to inflicting loss to the economy.

Therefore, he emphasized that the government should take collective initia-

tives and resolve all issues by making proper consultation and mutual consensus to continue business and trade flourish and protect the interest of the business community as well.

The SCCI chief mentioned that yesterday, an action was taken against Habibi Restaurant, calling it an attempt to discourage investors and the business community and urged them to avoid taking such steps that would damage business and economic activities.

He stressed it is a dire need of the hour that there should understand the current economic conditions and prevailing circumstances.

Moqem emphasized the

need of building consensus from both sides on the issue.

Under the collective approach, government duty is to inform private stakeholders, if any action is below the law, so the business community should take into confidence through positive collaboration, the SCCI chief added.

He continued to say that instead of taking harsh measures, strict implementation, closure of business and economic activities, provide a relocation chance to the business community.

Moqem said any wrong decision has an adverse negative impact on business, trade and economy.

He added that the chamber, business community

and stakeholders should be consulted before taking any such initiatives to prevent from creating any gulf between government, institutions and business community so that they should continue to play a role in economic development through paying various taxes.

The SCCI chief demanded the officials who had given NOC for establishment of Habibi Restaurant 25 years ago, must be brought to justice.

Businessman Forum leader Ghazanfar Bilour demanded of the provincial government to consider the chamber recommendations seriously and provide justice to the affected trader.



LAHORE: Special Assistant to Prime Minister Haroon Akhtar Khan attending Honda Atlas Cars (Pakistan) Limited first-ever vehicle exports ceremony.

PAA high-rise headquarters approved for Islamabad

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Pakistan Airports Authority (PAA) is set to build a Ground + 25 storey state-of-the-art energy-efficient headquarters in Blue Area, Islamabad, enhancing the city’s modern skyline.

In a Design Vetting Committee (DVC) meeting held today at the CDA Secretariat, the Capital Development Authority (CDA) approved the architectural design presented by M/s NESPAK. The meeting, chaired by Member Planning & Design CDA, Dr. Muhammad Khalid Hafiz, was attended by senior PAA officials, including the Director Planning & Development, Additional Director ADP (M&E), and Deputy Director Architecture.

Covering 1,240,990 sqft, the high-rise will feature 06 basements for parking and a central atrium extending from the ground floor to the rooftop.

Its curved architectural design, double-glazed curtain wall, and green courtyards reflect sustainability and innovation, setting a new benchmark for corporate infrastructure.

Kashmir Cooking Oil conducts lucky draw

F.P. Report

LAHORE: The Kashmir Cooking Oil, Pakistan’s leading cooking oil brand, conducted the grand lucky draw of their Shop & Win Ramzan Promo 2025, where the lucky winner Kashif Rasheed drove home with their grand prize a brand-new Hyundai Tucson 2000CC SUV. The thrilling grand draw of one of the biggest consumer promotions of the year took place at Fortress Stadium Carrefour, Lahore.

The Shop & Win Ramzan Promo 2025 has been a booming success, rewarding consumers with over 800 incredible prizes throughout the campaign. Customers who purchased Kashmir Cooking Oil participated in a series of exciting draws, winning Gold, EV bikes, microwaves, food factories, juicer/blenders, premium kitchenware, and elegant dinner sets. The promotion brought joy to households across Pakistan, making the holy month of Ramzan even more special.

Speaking about the event, Muhammad Bilal Iftikhar, Director Sales, United Industries Limited, said: “We are incredibly grateful for the overwhelming response to the Shop & Win Ramzan Promo 2025. It has been our mission to bring joy and rewards to our loyal customers, and this grand draw is the perfect way to celebrate their trust in Kashmir Cooking Oil.”

Pakistani food exports make strides in Saudi market

ISLAMABAD (PPI): Pakistani food products are gaining recognition in Saudi Arabia due to the efforts of the Special Investment Facilitation Council, with growing demand for snacks and processed foods.

The recent visit of Pakistani food exporters to Saudi Arabia has paved the way for new trade opportunities, resulting in agreements between Pakistani exporters and Saudi companies. This development is expected to stabilize food exports to the Kingdom, marking a significant achievement in bilateral trade relations.

Inaugural ‘Build in Pakistan’ export ceremony:

Honda Atlas Cars marks historic milestone

F.P. Report

LAHORE: Honda Atlas Cars (Pakistan) Limited (HACPL) proudly announced its first-ever vehicle exports during a prestigious ceremony held at its state-of-the-art manufacturing facility. The event, attended by key government officials, esteemed industry stakeholders, media representatives, key members of HACPL and the ATLAS Group of Companies marked a significant milestone in the company’s commitment to high-quality automotive manufacturing and global expansion.

HACPL has successfully dispatched its inaugural batch of 40 Honda CITY 1.2L units to Japan, reinforcing its position as a key player in the international automotive market. This achievement highlights HACPL’s dedication to world-class quality, reliability, and innovation, laying the groundwork for future export ventures across diverse global markets.

The ceremony commenced with the esteemed presence of Haroon Akhtar Khan, Special Assistant to the Prime Minister - Ministry of Industries & Production; Saif Anjum, Federal Secretary - Ministry of Industries & Production; Engr. Khuda

Bukhsh, Chief Executive Officer - Engineering Development Board; Asim Ayaz - General Manager Policy Development Group Engineering Development Board ; Aamir H. Shirazi, Chairman Honda Atlas Cars (Pakistan) Ltd; and Takafumi Koike, President & CEO Honda Atlas Cars (Pakistan) Ltd.

Haroon Akhtar Khan, Special Assistant to the Prime Minister - Ministry of Industries & Production, visited the HACPL plant and praised Honda’s advanced facility, strong compliance, and commitment to quality. He acknowledged Honda’s legacy, contributions to Pakistan’s automotive industry, and efforts in local manufacturing, exports, and industrial growth.

He further appreciated Honda’s export initiative, recognizing it as a positive step aligned with government policy to enhance economic growth. Aamir H. Shirazi, Chairman of Honda Atlas Cars (Pakistan) Ltd., highlighted the government’s efforts to create a business-friendly environment and the automotive sector’s role in economic growth. Whereas, Takafumi Koike, President & CEO of HACPL emphasized Honda’s global legacy, commitment to innovation, and industry-leading tech-

nological advancements.

The event featured a ribbon-cutting ceremony, symbolizing the official commencement of HACPL’s export journey. Dignitaries and executives joined together to celebrate this historic moment, signifying Pakistan’s growing footprint in the international automotive landscape.

Following the ribbon-cutting, a tree plantation activity was held within the facility premises. This initiative underscored HACPL’s commitment to sustainability and environmental responsibility, aligning with Honda’s global vision for a greener future.

The ceremony concluded with a shared vision to boost Pakistan’s exports and economic growth. HACPL’s dedication to quality manufacturing and innovation has enabled this historic export, strengthening Pakistan’s position in the global automotive industry.

This milestone sets a new benchmark for Pakistan’s automotive sector, reaffirming HACPL’s leadership in quality and innovation. As the company continues its journey of excellence, it remains committed to expanding its global footprint and driving economic growth through exports and manufacturing excellence.

Markets, malls overflow with shoppers: Report

ISLAMABAD (APP): As the Islamic holy month draws to a close, the entire nation has turned into a vibrant shopping destination, with individuals thronging markets and malls to buy Eid gifts, clothes, traditional treats and stalls selling colorful bangles and mehndi designs proving to be a major draw for young girls.

According to a report the shopping frenzy has reached its peak, with markets and malls overflowing with shoppers. The report highlighted the efforts of vendors and shopkeepers to cater to the massive demand for Eid essentials, and the joyous atmosphere that pervades the shopping centers.

Citizens are rushing to take advantage of discount Eid offers, with many shops offering huge discounts on clothing, shoes and accessories.

The report added that the vendors and shopkeepers are catering massive demand for Eid essentials and the joyous atmosphere that pervades the shopping centers.

“I have never seen such a huge rush of shoppers before. It is like the whole city is out shopping for Eid!” said a shopper from Lahore city.

“We have been selling Eid clothes and accessories for years, but this year’s demand is unprecedented. We are working round the clock to restock our shelves,” shopkeeper from Lahore’s Liberty Market said.

“I came to the market at 8 am and it was already packed. I managed to get some great deals on clothes and shoes, though!” shopper from Karachi.

“Our stall has been selling traditional sweets and desserts for years. This year, we have had to increase our production to meet the demand,” stall owner from Karachi’s Empress Market.

“I love the festive atmosphere in the markets during Ramadan. It’s a great time to shop for Eid gifts and clothes,” shopper from Islamabad.

“The markets in Peshawar are always bustling during Ramadan, but this year’s shopping frenzy is something else. I’m loving the energy!” shopper from Peshawar added.

“Our shop has been selling traditional Pashto clothing and accessories for years. This Eid, we’re expecting a huge rush of shoppers,” shopkeeper from Peshawar’s Chowk Yadgar mentioned.

“The mehndi artists are doing an amazing job. I got a beautiful design on my hands and feet,” another shopper from Peshawar.

“We are selling a wide range of traditional bangles, including some beautiful handmade designs,” a stall owner from Peshawar’s Khyber Super Market.

Matching Eid bangles top women’s shopping list

ISLAMABAD (APP): With Ramadan nearing its conclusion, market stalls are abuzz with women seeking matching bangles, an integral part of their Eid finery, where shopkeepers display an enticing palette of colours, designs, accompanied by the melodic clinking of glass, metal.

According to a report aired by a private news channel, women flocking to market stalls in pursuit of the ideal matching bangles, a vital accessory for their Eid ensembles, amidst a kaleidoscope of colours, designs, sounds of clinking glass.

The tradition of wearing matching bangles on Eid is an age-old custom, deeply rooted in South Asian culture, report added.

According to sellers it is believed that the sound of clinking bangles brings good luck and prosperity. Women of all ages take great pride in selecting the perfect matching bangles that complement their Eid outfits.

As the demand for matching bangles surges during Ramadan, vendors and shopkeepers stock up on an array of designs, colours and materials to cater to diverse tastes and

preferences, said a shopkeeper in Islamabad.

From traditional glass bangles to modern metal and plastic designs, the options are endless, said a women customer in Rawalpindi.

“We have been selling bangles for generations and every year we see a surge in demand during Ramadan,” said a vendor at a local market.

“Women come from all over to find the perfect matching bangles and we take great pride in helping them make their Eid celebrations even more special,” said a vendor.

Sahiwal Coal Power Plant: Driving progress and national development

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Sahiwal Coal-Fired Power Plant (1320MW), launched in 2017, has played a transformative role in Pakistan’s energy sector, addressing the country’s power shortages and boosting economic stability. As a key CPEC project, it has provided reliable and affordable electricity, revitalized industrial activity, and strengthened Pakistan’s power grid.

Beyond energy production, the plant has significantly contributed to economic growth, generating PKR 125 billion in taxes and duties, creating thousands of job opportunities, and investing in local workforce development. It has also prioritized community

upliftment, with many employees hailing from Sahiwal itself, ensuring inclusive growth.

A notable example is Muhammad Kashif-ACA, who left a career in Lahore to contribute to his hometown’s development through the project. His journey reflects the plant’s broader impact not just providing energy, but transforming lives.

As Pakistan’s energy needs grow, Sahiwal Power Plant remains a pillar of progress, fostering economic stability and driving national development for future generations.

The 1320MW Sahiwal Coal Power Plant is not only a key energy provider

in Pakistan but also a catalyst for socio-economic development. As part of its commitment to sustainability and community support, the plant has established a state-of-the-art training facility to equip local youth with technical skills and enhance employment opportunities.

The facility features 14 modern classrooms, 15 practical training rooms, a fully-equipped computer lab, and a conference hall, providing hands-on experience in welding, electrical work, and power plant operations. With free, high-quality technical training, the center has benefited thousands of young people, many of whom have secured stable

jobs in the energy and industrial sectors.

As a China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) project, the facility also fosters knowledge-sharing between Pakistan and China, organizing workshops, seminars, and technical exchanges. This initiative not only strengthens the local workforce but also sets a model for industries to invest in community development.

Through this program, the Sahiwal Power Plant is not just producing electricity it is powering a brighter future for Sahiwal’s youth, ensuring long-term skill development and economic growth for generations to come.

Successful IMF evaluation and environmental loan welcomed

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Chairman of National Business Group Pakistan, the President of the Pakistan Businessmen and Intellectuals Forum, the President of All Karachi Industrial Alliance, the Chairman of the FPCCI Advisory Board, and the President and former provincial minister, Mian Zahid Hussain, said on Friday that the approval of the first review by the International Monetary Fund is an encouraging development.

He said that this approval is a strong endorsement of the current government’s policies and highlights the unwavering confidence that international institutions place in our economic strategy.

Mian Zahid Hussain said that in addition to the success of the IMF’s first review, the international organization’s review mission has also agreed on a new agreement of \$1.3 billion to address the problems of climate change,

which is encouraging.

Talking to the business community, the veteran business leader said that the Prime Minister has rightly acknowledged the valuable services of the Army Chief in this regard, which are very pleasing.

He added that the IMF has expressed satisfaction with the government’s efforts to improve Pakistan’s economic situation in its statement.

The lender said that a new 28-month agreement had been reached with the Pakistani authorities after the first review of the 37-month agreement and under the international organization’s reform program.

He said that after the staff-level agreement between Pakistan and the IMF, its implementation will begin with the approval of the IMF’s Executive Board.

The business leader said that if both these agreements are approved, Pakistan will get \$2.3 billion in loans.

Mian Zahid Hussain said

that this time, the IMF is not content with just giving loans to improve Pakistan’s economy but is also pressing for reforms to save the country from repeated economic challenges.

He said the government of Pakistan is also cooperating fully with the IMF instead of playing tricks. The economic situation is improving rapidly with the IMF reforms, but the government still has many milestones to cross.

Mian Zahid Hussain said that the government should exercise all possible caution in using resources, and the purpose of expenditures should be constructive. The capital losses should be stopped entirely, and the volume of expenditures made under political compulsions should be kept to a minimum, he demanded.

Mian Zahid Hussain said that for economic development, priority should be given to reducing electricity and gas tariffs, cutting tax rates, improving refund issues, expanding the tax

net, and selling failed government institutions. Electricity and gas theft and bill defaults should be strictly prevented.

Mian Zahid Hussain said that strict technology-based measures are also necessary to eliminate water shortages, build dams, end political chaos, and combat terrorism.

Laws also need to be improved so that Pakistanis invest in their own country instead of other countries, which will increase economic activities, generate employment, and boost revenue.

He said foreign investors will also turn to Pakistan only when things improve. Mian Zahid Hussain further said that some of the IMF reform targets, including the privatization of PIA and Discos, have not yet been met.

He warned that until all such targets are implemented, the country will continue to lose trillions of rupees annually and will have to depend on new loans to run the country.

Global markets slide as fears over US tariffs intensify

NEW YORK (AFP/APP): Stock markets plunged Friday as a closely watched US inflation reading heated up amid intensifying concerns over fallout from President Donald Trump’s incoming wave of tariffs.

Shares in automakers fell further as they brace for 25 percent US tariffs due to kick in next week along with a raft of “reciprocal” surcharges tailored to different countries.

The market mood has soured over fears that Trump’s plans will trigger tit-for-tat measures that would rekindle inflation, which could put the brakes on interest rate cuts and spark a recession.

“Investors remain nervous over the economic repercussions from President Trump’s tariff threats, just days before he unleashes his ‘reciprocal tariffs’” on April 2, said David Morrison, senior market analyst at financial services provider Trade Nation.

In Europe, London just about held the line, closing

barely off in the week’s final session. But Paris, Frankfurt and Milan all slid around one percent.

On Wall Street, all three major indexes closed sharply lower, with the Dow tumbling 1.7 percent, the S&P 500 losing 2.0 percent and Nasdaq diving 2.7 percent.

The slide came after official data showed the Federal Reserve’s preferred inflation measure, the personal consumption expenditures (PCE) price index, remained unchanged last month at 2.5 percent.

But another key figure, core inflation, which strips out volatile food and energy costs, rose more than expected at 2.8 percent in February on an annual basis, up from the month before.

“The (PCE) report isn’t devastating, but given the current economic uncertainty and market volatility, investors were looking for reassurance in this report -- not something to fan the flames,” said Bret Kenwell, US investment analyst at

trading platform eToro.

In Europe, automakers Volkswagen, Renault and Stellantis, whose brands include Jeep, Peugeot and Fiat, fared particularly badly. Shares in General Motors and Ford also slumped on Wall Street.

Tokyo’s stock market sank 1.8 percent as the world’s biggest carmaker Toyota fell, along with Honda, Nissan and Mazda.

Seoul was off 1.9 percent as Hyundai gave up 2.6 percent.

Uncertainty over Trump’s plans and long-term intentions has led investors to rush into safe havens such as gold, which hit a new record high of \$3,085.96 an ounce on Friday.

Governments around the world have pushed back on Trump’s tariffs, and could announce more countermeasures next week.

On Friday, Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney told Trump that Ottawa will implement retaliatory tariffs to protect its workers and economy,

after Washington announces added trade actions on April 2.

Tariff worries also led to falls on stock markets in Hong Kong and Shanghai. Bangkok was in the red when trading was suspended as a powerful earthquake in neighboring Myanmar shook the Thai capital.

Investors also kept tabs on Beijing, where Chinese President Xi Jinping met business leaders, pledging the country’s door would “open wider and wider” but also warning of “severe challenges” to the world trading system.



In brief

Simmons wins stage six at Tour of Catalonia

BARCELONA (AFP): US rider Quinn Simmons edged Pavel Bittner to take the sixth stage of the Tour of Catalonia on Saturday as dangerous winds played havoc on the planned route. Home favourite Juan Ayuso retained his one second lead on Primoz Roglic at the top of the general classification, with Enric Mas a further 20sec back in third. Stage six was on paper the toughest mountain stage of the race but the conditions led organisers to modify the route significantly, with only 25 kilometres of racing permitted. What was supposed to be a 159 kilometre ride from Berga to a summit finish at Queralt turned into a largely flat loop starting and ending in Berga. Visma's Matthew Brennan, who has won two stages this week, pulled out before the start, with his team saying the 19-year-old was being given "some extra rest". The race began neutralised because of the dangerous winds and stayed that way until the final 25 kilometres. General classification times were taken with five kilometres remaining, with UAE Team Emirates-XRG's Ayuso maintaining his slim advantage on 2023 winner Roglic. Lidl-Trek's Simmons made an attack in the final stages and held off Team Picnic-PostNL's Bittner to claim victory. The race finishes Sunday in Barcelona with an 88.2 kilometre ride up to the Olympic stadium on the city's Montjuic hill.

Law appointed Nepal coach

SYDNEY (Reuters): Former Australia batter Stuart Law has been named coach of the Nepal men's team on a two-year contract, the Cricket Association of Nepal (CAN) said on Friday. The 56-year-old replaces Monty Desai, whose two-year stint with the South Asian side ended after CAN decided not to renew his contract. Law, a 1996 Cricket World Cup runner-up with Australia, last coached the United States, guiding them to the Super 8 of the Twenty20 World Cup last year on home soil in their inaugural World Cup appearance. The U.S. announced his departure from his role after just six months in charge. Law has also had spells with the West Indies, Sri Lanka, among others. Nepal face Scotland and the Netherlands in World Cup League 2 in June.

Gout upstaged in 200m

MELBOURNE (AFP): Australian sprinting prodigy Gout Gout was upstaged Saturday by compatriot Lachlan Kennedy in a pulsating men's 200m in Melbourne on Saturday. Kennedy held off a fast-finishing Gout to produce a personal best time of 20.26 seconds in front of a lively 10,000-strong crowd at the Maurie Plant Meet. The 17-year-old Gout, who was born in Australia after his parents migrated from South Sudan, finished second with 20.30 in the biggest race of his fledgling career. The lanky youngster rose to prominence in December when he clocked the quickest time ever by a 16-year-old and then ran the fastest 200m in the world this year with 20.05 this month. "My goal was just to hold him off and I think five more minutes he definitely would have had me," said 21-year-old Kennedy, who won silver in the men's 60m at last week's World Indoor Championships in Nanjing.

Chapman blasts ton as New Zealand win first Pakistan ODI by 73 runs

NAPIER (AFP): Mark Chapman struck a sublime century and Nathan Smith claimed four wickets Saturday as New Zealand eased to a 73-run win over Pakistan in the first one-day international in Napier.

Chapman's career-best 132 formed the foundation of an imposing 344-9 at McLean Park before Pakistan's promising chase capitulated to be all out for 271 in the 45th over. The tourists looked on track at 249-3, at that point needing 96 runs to win, with more than 11 overs remaining.

However, seamer Smith (4-60) helped to spark a late collapse, with the last seven wickets falling for 22 runs. Earlier, the recalled

Babar Azam top-scored for Pakistan with 78 off 83 balls but it was his dismissal that started the rot. Salman Agha struck a defiant 58 off 48 but he was let down by a series of loose shots from lower order teammates as New Zealand moved one-up in the three-match series.

Chapman's 111-ball innings featured 13 fours and four sixes, lifting New Zealand out of early trouble after they were asked to bat and stuttered to 50-3.

The left-hander put on 199 for the fourth wicket with Daryl Mitchell (76 off 84) before the home side's innings was finished off in record-breaking fashion by debut allrounder

Muhammad Abbas.

Pakista-born Abbas struck 52, setting a world record for the fastest half-century on debut when he reached 50 off the 24th ball he faced. Pakistan's seam-heavy attack capitalised on lively bounce but they were punished later.

Left-arm quick Akif Javed claimed 2-55 on his international debut, but the best figures were recorded by part-time seamer Irfan Khan, who took 3-51 off five expensive overs at the death. Both teams feature numerous changes to those who played out a five-match T20 series, won 4-1 by New Zealand. The second match of the series is in Hamilton on Wednesday.

Gul likely to join Bangladesh team as bowling coach



KARACHI (Monitoring Desk): Former Pakistan fast bowler Umar Gul has emerged as one of the leading contenders for the role of Bangladesh men's cricket team's bowling coach.

The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) is reportedly considering replacing current bowling coach Andre Adams, despite his contract running until February 2026.

Reports suggested that Gul and former Australian

pacer Shaun Tait are among the frontrunners for the position should the BCB decide to part ways with Adams.

Both candidates bring extensive coaching experience, with Gul having previously served as Pakistan's bowling coach and also working with Afghanistan's national team.

Tait, too, has been part of Pakistan's coaching setup in the past. The potential change in the

bowling department comes amid broader coaching adjustments within Bangladesh cricket.

The BCB recently extended head coach Phil Simmons' contract until the 2027 ICC Men's Cricket World Cup, signaling a long-term commitment to stability in the team's management.

Simmons expressed his enthusiasm for the extension, stating: "I am delighted to be given the opportunity to work with Bangladesh cricket on a long-term basis. The talent within this team is undeniable, and I believe we have the potential to achieve great things together."

He further added that his experience with the Bangladesh team so far has been "incredibly rewarding," praising the squad's energy, commitment, and ability.

Morgan proposes white-ball captaincy plan

LONDON (Agencies): Eoin Morgan says England could make a "left-field call" with their new white-ball captaincy and create an arrangement where Test skipper Ben Stokes is parachuted in to do the job for major tournaments.

England are looking for a new captain for the men's one-day and T20 sides after Jos Buttler resigned following their early exit in the Champions Trophy.

Morgan, who skipped England to 50-over World Cup glory in 2019, has suggested a scenario where a "lieutenant" of Stokes' holds the reins for the vast majority of bilateral series with the red-ball skipper brought back for World Cups.

England director of men's cricket Rob Key said earlier this month it would be "stupid" not to consider Stokes as a white-ball captain.

Stokes, 33, has been Test captain since 2022 but the all-rounder has not played white-ball cricket for England since the 2023 50-over World Cup.

"I think a bit of a left-field call would be to ask



Ben Stokes to consider the role, not necessarily on a full-time basis," Morgan told Sky Sports, external.

"You would have to create an environment where Ben would slip in and out seamlessly in preparation for big tournaments and then sit on the backburner and focus on Test match cricket until those big tournaments came up.

"Everyone would have to be on the same page about how it might work."

Experienced England batter Joe Root has already ruled out becoming England's next limited-overs captain but Harry Brook is among those under consideration.

Morgan was impressed with the manner in which Brook skipped

England's white-ball side against Australia last summer while Buttler was absent because of injury.

Morgan, who played 225 ODIs and 115 T20 Internationals for England, said the "leadership role didn't seem to weigh" on Brook and he was one of the "options" on the table depending on the "direction they want to take".

"If you highlight something that's in three years, four years, somebody like Harry Brook would do a magnificent job," Morgan, 38, said.

"He had the captaincy at the end of our summer last year against a really strong Australian side and I thought he was impressive."



NAPIER: Muhammad Abbas scored fifty off just 24 balls, the fastest by an ODI debutant.

Russell Domingo replaces Gough as Qalandars head coach



LAHORE (APP): The former South Africa and Bangladesh coach Russel Domingo has been appointed head coach of Lahore Qalandars in Pakistan Super League (PSL) X replacing Darren Gough who made himself unavailable due to 'unavoidable personal commitments'.

A highly experienced coach, Domingo brings a wealth of cricketing expertise, having previously served as head coach of South Africa's national team and Bangladesh's men's team. Known for his tactical acumen and ability to nurture young talent, his appointment aligns perfectly with Lahore Qalandars' vision of build-

ing a strong and competitive squad.

Expressing his enthusiasm, Russell Domingo said: "I am really excited to be part of the Lahore Qalandars for 2025 PSL season. I can't wait to get to work, meet the players and get to know the management and start of preparations for what promises to be an amazingly exciting campaign. We know we will have all the support from our faithful supporters and I look forward to making you all proud in the coming weeks."

Welcoming Russell Domingo to the Qalandars family, Lahore Qalandars' COO, Sameen Rana, expressed his excitement: "We are delighted to have Russell Domingo join us as head coach for PSL 10. His vast experience at the international level, combined with his ability to strategize effectively, makes him an invaluable asset for the Qalandars. We believe his expertise will contribute immensely to our team's success in PSL 10."

PCB postpones PSL X exhibition match in Peshawar

LAHORE (APP): The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) on Saturday made public its decision to postpone the much anticipated PSL X exhibition match between Peshawar Zalmi and Quetta Gladiators at the Arbab Niaz Stadium in Peshawar on April 8. According to a PCB press release, the exhibition match will be rescheduled and the revised date of the match will be announced in due course.

It further said, the PCB remains committed to hosting matches at the international stadium in Peshawar and will continue to provide all support to the provincial government to make the venue operational. HBL PSL X is set to commence on 11 April, featuring 34 matches across four cities – Karachi, Lahore, Multan and Rawalpindi.

The most popular franchise in PSL, Lahore Qalandars, are set to begin their HBL Pakistan Super League 10 campaign with a high-stakes clash against Islamabad United at the Rawalpindi Cricket Stadium on April 11. After securing back-to-back titles in 2022 and 2023, Lahore is determined to reclaim its dominance and chase a historic third PSL trophy.

With a well-balanced

squad, the leadership of Shaheen Shah Afridi, and a passionate fanbase behind them, the Qalandars will be eager to start their season on a winning note. As they embark on another title quest, all eyes will be on how they set the tone for yet another thrilling PSL season. PSL X is due to start on April 11 and Lahore Qalandars will play the opener against Islamabad United.

Djokovic reaches Miami final to close on 100th title

Miami (Agencies): Novak Djokovic cruised past Grigor Dimitrov to reach his first Miami Open final since 2016 and move within one win of his 100th career ATP title.

He will face unseeded Czech player Jakub Mensik in Sunday's final following his shock 7-6 (7-4) 4-6 7-6 (7-4) victory over American Taylor Fritz in Friday's second semi-final.

Bulgaria's Dimitrov broke Djokovic in the opening game, but the Serb, watched by his coach Andy Murray, broke back.

World number five Djokovic, 37, reeled off five straight games to win the first set.

Dimitrov made a shaky start to the second set and the 24-time Grand Slam champion took advantage to go through 6-2 6-3.

"Ever since I won my 99th [title], which was the Olympic Games in Paris, I've been playing with the prospect of winning the special 100 titles," said Djokovic.

"I've been trying to find that necessary and much-needed level of tennis that will put me in a position to fight for a trophy, a big trophy.

"That's what I've been doing this week, to be honest. I've been very happy with the way I prepared for the tournament, the way I've been playing. I haven't dropped a set.

"It's a great opportunity. Let's see what happens in two days."

Things started off well in windy conditions for 14th seed Dimitrov,



33, who won the first game on Djokovic's serve but was unable to capitalise and the classy Serb hit his stride and easily won the first set.

After a fan was ejected after saying something to annoy Dimitrov, the Bulgarian made a slow start to the second set.

Dimitrov, last year's beaten finalist, won three of his service games, but Djokovic was just too good.

The six-time Miami Open champion only made five unforced errors to his opponent's 32.

"There were a couple of tight games in the last part of the match," said Djokovic.

"It was 4-2, 30-30 and he missed a couple of forehands, and then I found some really good serves with new balls in the last game.

"These were tricky conditions. Very swirly. The wind was not consistent, changing a lot. It's not easy to find control of the ball.

"I tried to make him play in these conditions because he's a clean hitter.

I knew he'd struggle if I made him play an extra shot. He struggled with the first serve more than I did."

The fourth seed, at 37 years and 10 months old, is the oldest ATP Masters 1000 finalist ever, having also been the oldest semi-finalist.

Djokovic will face 19-year-old Mensik at the opposite end of his career arc, with the Czech teenager reaching his first final of a Masters event.

The world number 54 lost his only previous final on the ATP Tour in Qatar last year and won through in Miami despite failing to break the serve of third seed Fritz.

His victory was sealed in a flurry of aces, sending down 25 compared with Fritz's 14 as he edged to victory by winning tie-breaks in the first and third sets.

The rising young star put his unexpected victory down to a chance meeting with Argentina footballing great Lionel Messi after the Inter Miami forward had gone into the locker room at the Hard Rock Stadium to congratulate Djokovic on his win.

"Meeting this legend, not even a human, it's not happening every day," said Mensik.

"I just chilled with him a bit and shook his hand. And after shaking that hand, I didn't wash it before the match, you know, to bring me some luck, so probably that was the key for me today."

Atletico title hopes evaporate in Liga draw with Espanyol

CORNELLÀ DE LLOBREGAT (AFP): Atletico Madrid's slim Spanish title hopes faded further with a disappointing 1-1 draw at Espanyol on Saturday in La Liga.

Javi Puado earned the Catalan side a point with a penalty after Cesar Azpilicueta put the visitors ahead, leaving the Rojiblancos six points behind league leaders Barcelona despite having played an extra match.

Barcelona host Girona on Sunday in a Catalan derby, while Real Madrid, second and three points ahead of Atletico, welcome Leganes later Saturday.

"Two points escaped, two important ones, I don't

know why this is happening to us," Atletico goalkeeper Jan Oblak told Movistar. "If we don't have consistency we can't fight for the title.

"We don't have it, we're losing points and I think the teams behind us are catching up." After Barca beat Atletico 4-2 in their previous top flight outing, before the international break, Diego Simeone's side knew they could not afford to lose further ground in the title race. Simeone put Julian Alvarez and Rodrigo de Paul on the bench after they featured in midweek for Argentina against Brazil in South American World Cup qualifying.

Uruguay international

Jose Gimenez also began on the bench but he was needed to replace Robin Le Normand midway through the first half after a clash of heads. Espanyol, battling relegation and provisionally 15th, fought gamely against an Atletico side that played within themselves.

Marcos Llorente had a goal disallowed early on for offside but Atletico failed to create further chances until Azpilicueta blasted the visitors ahead from distance. It was his first goal for three years and also his first for Atletico Madrid, but it was worth the wait as he hit a sumptuous volley into the top corner after Antoine Griezmann's cross was cleared to the edge of



the box.

Conor Gallagher came close before the break and Alexander Sorloth dragged a shot wide of the

post as Atletico sought a second. Espanyol had created little danger but found a way back level when Clement Lenglet blatantly

pulled Leandro Cabrera's shirt in the box. Puado rammed the resulting penalty into the top corner past Oblak's outstretched

arm after 71 minutes.

Alvarez, on from the bench, hit the sidenetting as the clock ran down on Atletico's ambitions, with Joan Garcia saving from a Griezmann header at the death.

Eliminated from the Champions League by rivals Real Madrid, Simeone's side's last realistic hope of silverware is in the Copa del Rey, where they face Barcelona in the semi-final second leg on Wednesday. Espanyol are now two points above the relegation zone. "It's a good point against a side fighting for the title... we got a tricky point, a good one, and we're doing well," said goalscorer Puado.



In brief

ITP cracks down on overcharging

ISLAMABAD (APP): Islamabad Traffic Police (ITP) has intensified its crackdown on public transport vehicles overcharging passengers on Saturday. An ITP spokesperson told APP that special squads have been deployed at bus terminals across the federal capital, including Faizabad, Mandi Mor, Karachi Company, and 26 number Chungi bus terminals, to monitor compliance with fare regulations. He said traffic police officers inspected fare lists of vehicles and took action against transporters found charging excessive fares. Multiple transporters were issued challan tickets, and passengers were reimbursed for the extra amount collected. He said strict action will continue against those violating fare rules. Citizens are urged to report overcharging or inappropriate behavior by transporters to the ITP helpline at 1915.

Police nab 12 criminals

RAWALPINDI (APP): The Rawalpindi Police during operations against criminal elements arrested 12 accused including drug peddlers, illegal arms owners and a cattle thief. According to the police spokesman, the Wah Cantt Police nabbed accused Faisal with 1.64 kilograms charas while the Wah Saddar Police recovered 600 grams of the contraband item from accused Khalid. Likewise, the Naseerabad Police arrested accused Abbas with 260 grams of ice and a 30-bore pistol, and Wajahat with a 30-bore pistol. Similarly, the Sadiqabad Police netted two accused Waqar and Usman with a 30-bore pistol each. The Morgah Police also held two accused Ismail and Umar Tariq recovering a 30-bore pistol each from them. The Taxila, Sadar Beruni and Dhamial Police recovered a 30-bore pistol each from accused Ziaullah, Anzar Gul and Junaid. Meanwhile, the Kallar Syedan Police arrested Nazir involved in cattle theft. A stolen cow worth over Rs 250,000 was also recovered from his possession.

Police arrest 2 'blackmailers'

RAWALPINDI (APP): The Rawat Police on Saturday arrested two accused for allegedly blackmailing citizens to get money along with a car from them. The arrested accused were identified as Muhammad Shahid and Zahid, the Rawalpindi Police spokesman said. The accused made a video of three persons including a woman and kept blackmailing them. The victims were present in the Rawat area when the accused forcibly took them with them and made their video. The police recovered an Alto car and Rs 7,000 in cash which the accused had obtained from the victims through blackmailing. The spokesman said efforts were underway to arrest their other accomplices.

Nine held for gambling

RAWALPINDI (APP): The Wah Saddar Police on Saturday held nine gamblers red-handed while playing cards with the bet amount. According to the Rawalpindi Police spokesman, the arrested accused included Sadaf, Shahid, Suleman, Amanullah, Omar, Shuja, Shahid, Omar Farooq and Owais. Besides the amount of Rs 32,100 at stake, six mobile phones and playing cards were recovered from the accused.



ISLAMABAD: People boarding on bus going to their home town to celebrate eid with their loved ones. —INP Photo

Minister commits to transforming waste management practices

ISLAMABAD (APP): Federal Minister for Climate Change and Environmental Coordination, Musadik Masood Malik, urged nationwide action to tackle waste management challenges as Pakistan observes International Day of Zero Waste. This year's theme, "Towards Zero Waste in Fashion and Textiles," highlights the pressing need to curb pollution from the textile sector, a major contributor to Pakistan's economy but also a significant source of waste.

Minister Malik acknowl-

edged the textile industry's role in employment and GDP growth but warned that waste from plastics, electronics, and food remains a critical issue requiring urgent attention.

"Pakistan is implementing robust policies to combat waste," he said, citing the National Hazardous Waste Management Policy (2022) and the Pakistan National Action Roadmap on Plastic Pollution as key steps toward sustainability.

The government is pushing for a shift from a linear to a circular economy, where waste is minimized and resources are reused.

Initiatives promoting eco-friendly fashion, sustainable packaging, and a forthcoming circular economy policy are part of this strategy.

Malik emphasized the need for private sector involvement in adopting sustainable practices and called on civil society to promote responsible consumption.

"Our goal is a future where waste is drastically reduced, resources are preserved, and our environment is protected," he said, aligning efforts with UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 11 and 12).

Iran's Cultural Attaché lauds Islamic artwork

RAWALPINDI (APP): The exhibition of renowned artist Muhammad Azeem Iqbal's Islamic artworks at PAC has concluded. The Iran's Cultural Attaché, Dr. Mehdi Taheri attended the closing ceremony as Chief Guest at the event.

Speaking at the closing ceremony, Dr. Mehdi Taheri said that Muhammad Azeem Iqbal's artworks reflect Islamic civilization and culture. He emphasized that the artist has highlighted the intricacies of Islamic calligraphy with great skill and devotion. He further added that such exhibitions not only promote fine arts but also help introduce the younger generation to Islamic culture and history.

Director PAC, Sajjad Hussain remarked that encouraging talented artists like Muhammad Azeem Iqbal is their responsibility. He stated that the artist's work deeply represents the essence and significance of Islamic art. The Punjab Arts

Council will continue to support such creative and cultural initiatives to promote Islamic heritage. The exhibition featured Muhammad Azeem Iqbal's unique Islamic artworks, showcasing Islamic calligraphy, traditional motifs, and spiritual aesthetics.

A large number of art enthusiasts, teachers, students, and the general public visited the exhibition and appreciated the distinctive style of Islamic art on display.

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Commissioner chairs review meeting

RAWALPINDI (APP): Commissioner Rawalpindi Division Engineer Aamir Khattak here on Saturday chaired a meeting to review the arrangements of Eid-ul-Fitr. He said that the Deputy Commissioners should complete all arrangements in order to ensure security arrangements on this occasion.

He directed that all departments should issue duty rosters and ensure the attendance of the staff deployed. Emergency should be declared in hospitals during Eid days.

Moreover, section 144 to

be imposed on swimming on the banks of rivers and streams. Rescue teams to be deployed on the banks of the river to deal with any emergency.

The mechanical fitness of the swings should give special focus and should not be allowed to operate without a fitness certificate.

Commissioner Rawalpindi Aamir Khattak added that special steps should be taken to maintain traffic flow so that citizens do not face any problems. Cleanliness arrangements should be up to the mark in markets, entertainment

places and mosques.

Cleaning and decoration of the Eidgahs should be ensured. Rawalpindi Waste Management Company should ensure a remarkable and palpable difference regarding cleanliness.

The review meeting held at Commissioner's Office Rawalpindi was attended by Additional Commissioner Coordination Syed Nazrat Ali, Director General Rawalpindi Development Authority Kanzi Murtaza, DGPHA Ahmed Hassan Ranjha and other heads of other government departments.

SSP Shoaib holds open court in Swan Zone

ISLAMABAD (APP): Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Operations Muhammad Shoaib Khan held an open court in Swan Zone on Saturday to address public grievances.

A public relations officer told APP that SP Swan Zone, DSPs, and SHOs participated in the open court, where citizens presented their complaints and concerns. Immediate orders were issued to resolve the issues on the spot.

SSP Shoaib said officers failing to address public grievances in a timely manner would be served show-cause notices, and inquiries would be initiated against them. SSP Shoaib said citizens lauded the initiative, calling it an effective platform to voice their concerns.

SSP Shoaib Khan stated that people should freely report any issues related to police stations without fear.

He said only those officers who work with honesty and dedication will remain in the department, emphasizing that there is no room for corruption or those creating hurdles in resolving public grievances.

District govt active against high meat prices

RAWALPINDI (APP): As Eid is approaching, various meat sellers have reportedly increased the prices in different areas.

The district administration upon receiving the said reports, initiated massive action on Saturday against the violators in all Tehsils, especially in Rawalpindi.

In his talk with APP, Hakim Khan, Assistant Commissioner Saddar informed that during raids in Sagri, Rawat, Rawalpindi Cantt etc., a total of 458 meat shops were inspected in various areas out of which 20 shops were sealed for overcharging.

"We have arrested 35 butchers, registered 2 FIRs and imposed a collective fine of Rs.5,84,500," he said.

Mohsin Naqvi chairs second meeting of the Counter-Terrorism Committee

ISLAMABAD (APP): The second meeting of the Counter-Terrorism Committee was held under the chairmanship of Federal Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi.

The meeting was attended by Minister of State for Interior Talal Chaudhry, Federal Secretary for Interior, DG FIA, DG Passport, National Coordinator NACTA, Chief Commissioner Islamabad, Coordinator National Action Plan, and representatives of security agencies.

Law Minister Punjab Malik Sohaib Ahmed, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Advisor for Information Barrister Muhammad Ali Saif, Sindh Interior Minister Zia-ul-Hassan Lanjar, Interior Ministers of Azad Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan also participated in the meeting. The Home Secretaries and Inspectors General (IGs) of all provinces, including Azad Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan, attended via Zoom.

Federal Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi, while

addressing the meeting, stated that the Prime Minister, Army Chief, and all stakeholders are on the same page in combating terrorism. He emphasized that no decision would be made without consulting the provinces. The meeting reviewed the progress on enhancing the capacity of Counter-Terrorism Departments in provinces.

Federal Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi stated that it is essential to fully activate the Counter-Terrorism Departments at the provincial level for an effective counter-terrorism response, and in this regard, all possible assistance will be provided to Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan in view of their challenges. Federal Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi also emphasized that the Counter-Terrorism Wing of the FIA will be fully activated at the federal level.

The meeting also reviewed progress on the establishment of National and Provincial Intelligence

Fusion and Threat Assessment Centers. The briefing stated that the approval for the establishment of the National Intelligence Fusion and Threat Assessment Centers has been granted, and work is ongoing to set up Provincial Intelligence Fusion and Threat Assessment Centers across all provinces.

Federal Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi highlighted that after the reorganization of the Frontier Constabulary, it is being converted into the National Reserve Police. The meeting also agreed to make explosive materials a federal subject to ensure effective monitoring. Furthermore, it was decided to effectively raise the issue of terrorism with the Afghan government through the Foreign Ministry.

On the occasion, Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi stressed that all institutions must strictly implement the Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for foolproof security of foreign nationals.

DRAP intensifies drive against spurious drugs

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Drug Regulatory Authority of Pakistan (DRAP) has significantly intensified its nationwide efforts to combat the illegal sale, manufacturing, and distribution of spurious and falsified therapeutic goods.

This resolute campaign underscores DRAP's unwavering commitment to safeguarding public health and ensuring the availability of safe and effective medicines and medical devices.

Over the past 15 days, DRAP, collaborating with provincial health authorities, executed successful enforcement actions resulting in substantial seizures, facility sealings, and legal proceedings.

Notably in Lahore, operation apprehended individuals illegally selling Urografin 76% Injection, leading to confiscations and charges for violations including unlicensed sales and overpricing, with ongoing investigations.

DRAP-led team in Lahore intercepted a peddler selling unregistered Lipiodol Ultra Liquid near

Hameed Latif Hospital, subsequently raiding M/s Al-Waali Distributors, recovering illicit articles, sealing the premises, and initiating a formal investigation.

DRAP has also taken decisive action against the illegal manufacturing of unregistered medical devices in Islamabad.

Dr. Drap conducted a surprise inspection at a facility in the Industrial Triangle, Kahuta Road, revealed the unlawful production and storage of plastic urine collection containers without the mandatory Establishment License, a clear violation of the Medical Devices Rules, 2017, and the DRAP Act, 2012. The illegally manufactured devices were seized, and the facility was sealed.

Similarly, an operation at a former pharmaceutical facility, M/s Ambro Pharmaceuticals, in the same area, uncovered the illegal manufacturing and storage of medical devices despite the prior cancellation of its Drug Manufacturing License.

The premises were sealed, and the owner has

been referred for stringent legal action. In a proactive move to protect the pharmaceutical industry and the public, DRAP has issued an urgent alert regarding the presence of falsified Propylene Glycol (PG) in the market. Testing by the Drug Testing Laboratory (DTL), Lahore, confirmed a dangerously high level of toxic Ethylene Glycol (EG) in batch YF01210911.

DRAP reiterates its advisory for rigorous raw material screening. DRAP remains resolutely committed to eradicating spurious and falsified therapeutic goods through rigorous surveillance, intelligence-led enforcement, and stringent regulations.

Public vigilance is vital and citizens have been strongly urged to report any suspicious activity related to potentially counterfeit or substandard medicines and medical devices via DRAP's official channels. This collaborative approach is crucial for ensuring access to safe, effective, and quality therapeutic goods for all citizens.

Country to sizzle in heat during Eid holidays: PMD

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Pakistan Meteorological Department (PMD) Saturday predicts a dry and hot weather spell across Pakistan during the Eid-ul-Fitr holidays and indicates that the country will experience a continuation of the prevailing dry and hot weather conditions.

PMD officials stated that continental air will dominate most regions, leading to dry conditions in Islamabad, Rawalpindi and other parts of the country, private news

channels reported.

The officials also mentioned that the plains are expected to experience hot weather during the holidays, with no rain-bearing system forecasted to bring relief. Islamabad is likely to remain hot and dry over the next 12 hours.

Most districts of Balochistan will experience hot weather, while Punjab is expected to witness strong winds. Sindh will also remain dry, with strong winds in various areas.

In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the upper districts will have partly cloudy skies. Meanwhile, dry weather is predicted for Gilgit-Baltistan and Azad Kashmir, according to the PMD officials.

In addition, the PMD has advised people to avoid strenuous activities during the peak heat hours and to stay indoors as much as possible. The department will continue to monitor the weather situation and provide updates as necessary.



ISLAMABAD: Tailor busy in pico on dupatta at Abpara in the Federal Capital. —APP Photo

Govt committed to promoting interfaith unity: Kohistani

ISLAMABAD (APP): Minister of State for Religious Affairs and Interfaith Harmony, Khel Das Kohistani on Saturday emphasized the importance of interfaith harmony for lasting peace and progress, reiterating the government's commitment to inclusive development.

Speaking at a seminar organized by the International Islamic University Islamabad (IIUI), Kohistani stated, "Interfaith harmony is the need of the hour, and we will move forward with everyone on board."

Highlighting the government's determination to ensure equal rights for all citizens regardless of their faith, Kohistani stressed the significance of addressing the issues faced by minori-

ties in line with Prime Minister's directives. He said practical steps are underway to resolve minority concerns and foster unity across the nation.

The seminar, attended by prominent scholars and religious leaders, including Professor Dr. Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq, Archbishop Rowan Williams, and Christopher Sharaf, focused on promoting interfaith harmony and national solidarity. The participants presented actionable recommendations to strengthen communal bonds and eliminate hatred, extremism, and division.

Kohistani lauded the efforts of the Islamic Research Institute, IIUI for their continued dedication to interfaith dialogue, praising their contributions towards a peaceful and cohesive soci-

ty. He remarked, "Pakistan is a beautiful blend of diverse religions and cultures and has always been a proponent of peace and love."

The minister was congratulated on his inclusion in the federal cabinet, and participants at the event acknowledged the government's ongoing implementation of a special policy to promote interfaith harmony.

A detailed exchange of views on national cohesion and social harmony also took place at the Saiban-e-Pakistan International Seminar, with various experts and scholars deliberating on sustainable solutions. The seminar concluded with a renewed pledge to work at all levels to eliminate hatred and promote peaceful coexistence across the country.

2,400 prisoners freed

KABUL (Pajhwok): Some 2,463 inmate have been released from prisons across Afghanistan and the sentences of another 3,152 commuted on the occasion of Eidul Fitr, the Supreme Court (SC) announced on Saturday. In a statement, the apex court said the releases and sentence remissions were in compliance with the directives of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (IEA) Supreme Leader and orders of Chief Justice Shaikh Abdul Hakim Haqqani.

The Frontier Post

Ramazan 29, 1446 — Sunday, March 30, 2025

4 Chinese held for smuggling

KABUL (Pajhwok): Border Police of Afghanistan said on Saturday that four Chinese nationals have been arrested at Kabul International Airport on charges of attempting to smuggle 678 grams of raw gold. Abdullah Farooqi, a spokesman for the Border Police, told Pajhwok Afghan News that the suspects were detained by security forces while trying to transport the gold from Kabul to China.

Greshk residents call for healthcare services

HELMAND (TOLOnews): Residents of remote areas in the Greshk district of Helmand province say they are facing serious problems due to the lack of healthcare and education services, and that some patients, especially women during childbirth lose their lives. This area is the village of Seydan in Greshk district; a dusty and remote village far from the center, where hundreds of families live. The locals are calling for access to health and education services. "More than 650 families live here, but we have no health clinic. We take our emergency patients either to the center of Greshk or to the Zamboli clinic. We

want a clinic to be built for us," said Abdul Samad, a resident of Greshk district. "We are in dire need of a health center and a school. We have no facilities at all. Help us so that we can have a more peaceful life," Mohammad Masoom, another resident of Greshk district, remarked. "We don't have a school, and our children are deprived of education. We ask you to build a school for us," stated Mohammad Qasim, a resident of this province. "Many of our mothers die during childbirth because there is no health center here, and we are forced to transfer them to the center of Greshk," said

Ahmadullah. Meanwhile, local officials in Helmand say efforts are underway to provide healthcare and education services in remote areas of the province. "The residents of Seydan village in Greshk district are truly deserving. We are working to provide facilities for them so they can be relieved from problems in education and health sectors," said Mohammad Qasim Riyadh, the spokesperson for the governor of Helmand. It is worth mentioning that the Ministry of Public Health had recently announced plans to build 30-bed hospitals in all districts of the country.

70,000 Afghans returned home: IOM

KABUL (Ariana News): The International Organization for Migration (IOM) has reported that 73,364 Afghans returned to their country in the third week of March, while 36,166 others left. The main reason for this increase from neighboring Pakistan and Iran is voluntary return, IOM said. According to the flow monitoring snapshot released by the IOM, compared to the previous week, the inflow movement in the third week of March increased by 2 percent. On the other hand, the outflow movements decreased by 13 percent. The Torkham crossing between Pakistan and Afghanistan was closed on Feb 21, before it reopened on March 22. Meanwhile, the Pakistani government has asked all "illegal foreigners" and Afghan Citizen Card holders to leave the country before March 31, warning they would otherwise be deported from April 1.

Afghanistan exports 160,000t of dried fruit

KABUL (Pajhwok): Afghanistan exported nearly 160,000 tonnes of dried fruit worth over \$474 million in the past one year, the Ministry of Commerce and Industry (MoCI) said on Saturday. In a video clip, ministry spokesman Akhundzada Abdul Salam Jawad, said Afghanistan exported 159,000 tonnes of dried fruit worth \$474 million in 2024. According to Jawad, the exports included raisins, figs, dried apricot, pistachio, almond, pine nut, walnut and other fruits. Jawad added the dried fruits were exported to India, Pakistan, UAE, Russia, China, England, Germany, Canada, Uzbekistan, US and other countries.

36 mining contracts inked

KABUL (Ariana News): The Ministry of Mines and Petroleum says it has signed 36 large and small mining contracts, with a total value of \$1.3 billion over the past year. Officials from the ministry stated that these contracts include 10 large mines, 25 small mines, as well as projects related to cement, salt, marble, and a major gas extraction contract with Uzbekistan, all signed with both domestic and foreign companies. Economic experts have emphasized the importance of increasing investments in the mining sector for the country's economic growth. They have stressed that priority in mining contracts should be given to domestic companies. In the meantime, members of the private sector also stated that if both foreign companies and Afghan investors can partner in the mining sector, this will not only foster investment development in the country but also bring positive changes in capacity building within the mining extraction sector.

Economic Commission okays feasibility studies of 4 dams in different provinces



KABUL (Ariana News): The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister for Economic Affairs on Saturday announced that feasibility studies of dams in four provinces of the country will begin this solar year. The Economic Commission, led by Deputy PM Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, in its recent meeting decided to include the survey and feasibility projects of Grumby Dam in Maidan Wardak, Qara Tiri Dam in Balkh, Shana Nari Dam in Kandahar, and Wuch Nari Dam in Paktia in the budget for the fiscal year 1404.

In the meeting, the issues of construction of the Kandahar bypass highway, construction of Arghistan Dam, 90 km of electricity line from Kabul to Jalalabad, and completion of Sheikh Misri substation in Jalalabad were also discussed, and it was decided that the Ministry of Finance will allocate the revenues obtained from the Ganda Kotai lead and zinc mine in Yakawlang district of

Bamyan province to these projects. The Economic Commission meeting also approved a plan for the private sector's investment in a 40 megawatts solar power generation project in the Hesar Shahi Industrial Park in Nangarhar province. The private sector will invest \$50.69 million in the project.

J.D. Vance calls Taliban ‘worst terrorist organization in the world’

PITUFFIK SPACE BASE, Greenland (Amu TV): US Vice President J.D. Vance on Friday sharply criticized the Taliban, labeling them "one of the worst terrorist organizations in the world," and accused the Biden administration of handing over billions of dollars in military equipment during the chaotic US withdrawal from Afghanistan. Speaking during a visit to US Space Force operations in Greenland, Vance referred to the 2021 withdrawal as a "catastrophic error" that resulted in the deaths of 13 American service members and the loss of an estimated \$80 billion in US military assets. "I remember about four years ago when American

military leadership made a catastrophic error that got 13 innocent Americans killed in Afghanistan and turned over about \$80 billion in military equipment to one of the worst terrorist organizations in the world," Vance said. He also accused American media outlets of having "run cover" for the Biden administration during the withdrawal. This marks the first time a senior official in the Trump administration has explicitly referred to the Taliban as a terrorist group since returning to office in January. President Trump has frequently criticized the withdrawal and emphasized the importance of reclaiming US military assets left

behind in Afghanistan. The topic has reemerged following last week's unexpected visit by a US delegation to Kabul, the first under Taliban rule. The visit coincided with the release of George Glezmman, an American national previously detained by the Taliban. Shortly after his release, the US quietly removed a \$10 million bounty on Sirajuddin Haqqani, the Taliban's powerful interior minister and longtime insurgent commander. Despite these developments, the Trump administration has not publicly outlined a policy toward the Taliban or Afghanistan. However, analysts believe the rhetoric signals growing

frustration within the White House over the legacy of the US withdrawal. "The issue of reclaiming US weapons or retaking Bagram — these are symbolic statements," said Mohammad Umer Daudzai, Afghanistan's former interior minister. "It shows that Mr. Trump is dissatisfied with how things were handled. He likely wants to reshape the US-Afghanistan relationship, but has not yet begun the policy process." Taliban officials, for their part, have expressed cautious optimism about improving relations with Washington, despite the lack of clarity from the Trump administration.

Balkhi: No objection to reopening of US embassy



KABUL (TOLOnews): Abdul Qahar Balkhi, spokesperson for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Emirate, said that the best path forward in US-Afghan relations is diplomatic engagement and addressing shared concerns and interests. This comes amid speculation about a possible deal with the Trump administration regarding leftover US weapons in Afghanistan. In an interview with CBS News, Balkhi responded to remarks by former President Trump, who suggested that Afghanistan's frozen central bank assets could be exchanged for US weapons. Balkhi firmly rejected this, saying the funds belonged to the Afghan people and were unjustly frozen. "Those assets are the assets of the state of Afghanistan and states don't give away their assets to other states. People don't make deals on the assets of the states they make agreements through long, long con-

versations through dialogue and engagement... we had it with the Trump administration previously and we would like to have that dialogue continue in the future," he said. Balkhi emphasized that if normal relations are established, both sides could cooperate on mutual interests. He stated that the Islamic Emirate has no objection to the US reopening its embassy in Kabul, and in turn, wishes to reopen its embassy in Washington and consulate in New York, citing the need for consular services for the Afghan diaspora. "We would like to reopen our embassy in Washington, and we have no objection to the US reopening theirs in Kabul," he said. On the topic of security, Balkhi stressed that Afghanistan poses no threat to other nations and that ISIS has no stronghold in the country. He emphasized continued engagement with the US on security, humanitarian aid, and other areas to ensure that mutual commitments are honored. In response to a question about potential cooperation with the US government on Afghanistan's natural resources, Balkhi said: "Our doors are open to all, we seek to open a new chapter with everyone including the United States of America." When asked about the educational restrictions on women and girls in Afghanistan, Balkhi responded that "It's the sovereign prerogative of states on how they pursue these issues." "It's the sovereign prerogative of states on what laws and rules they decide," he said. Balkhi reiterated the Islamic Emirate's desire to negotiate with the Trump administration on shared interests, including human rights and trade, signaling a willingness to engage with the international community despite criticism over internal policies.

Construction of first ground terminal started

BADAKHSHAN (TOLOnews): The Ministry of Transport and Civil Aviation has commenced the construction of the first ground terminal in Fayzabad, the capital of Badakhshan province. According to officials, the project is being built on 10 acres of land with a budget of 60 million afghani. Abdul Salam Haidari, deputy minister of Transport and Civil Aviation, stated that the construction of this terminal will play an effective role in the development of ground transportation and the facilitation of public movement in Badakhshan. "The Wakhan project will also be completed soon, and this terminal will be very beneficial in this area because it will serve the people," he stated. Mohammad Ayub Khalid, the governor of Badakhshan, also emphasized the importance of the terminal's location and said, "This terminal is being constructed alongside the main highway, and the location is suitable because we hope our route to China will open and more terminals will be built here. We are committed, and construction and road-building activities are ongoing." Several residents of Badakhshan welcomed the construction of this terminal, considering it an important step in reducing traffic congestion in the province's center. "This terminal not only helps reduce congestion in the city but also serves as a significant source of income for the people and

the government," said Rasoul Mirzayi, a resident of Badakhshan. "If it is built in this area, it will be very good; congestion will decrease, and job opportunities will be created for drivers," stated Farooq, another resident of Badakhshan. "With the construction of this terminal, people will be spared from confusion and traffic congestion will be reduced. If the Silk Road opens, this will be a golden opportunity for us," stated Safar Mohammad Haidari, the General Director of Badakhshan Terminal. It is worth mentioning that in recent weeks, the Ministry of Transport and Civil Aviation has also launched ground terminal construction projects in several other provinces across the country.

Dried fruit market in Herat booms ahead of Eidul Fitr

HERAT (TOLOnews): As Eid al-Fitr approaches, temporary markets for selling dried fruit have been set up in the city of Herat. However, some citizens say that this year the price of dried fruit has significantly increased compared to last year, forcing them to buy less. "Last year it was cheap, but this year it has become very expensive. For example, something that cost 600 afghani per kilo last year has now reached 800," stated Abdul Rahman, a resident of Herat. "The price of dried fruits has gone up a lot. Last year this same raisin was 120 afghani per kilo, now it's 180," Abdul Nasir, another Herat resident underlined. Meanwhile, Hamidullah, who came to the market to shop, said the excitement in the market is not like previ-



ous years. "This year the market is dull, it seems like people have less money. Last year was better," Hamidullah remarked. Even though only a few days remain until Eid, the presence of people in these markets is limited. Many vendors say the markets are not as lively as in previous years and customer num-

bers have declined. "Unemployment is high. People don't shop like before" Haroon, one of the vendors pointed out. However, some other sellers remain hopeful that the market will improve in the coming days. "Today is slow, but tomorrow it will be busy. People will buy," said Firoz Ahmad, another vendor.

Most of the dried fruits sold in these markets are imported from neighboring countries. Every year, as Eid approaches, the prices of these goods rise. The increase in dried fruit prices on one hand, and the rise in unemployment and poverty on the other, has caused the purchasing power of many families to decline.

Eid Khvancheh, a costly tradition for engaged Herat couples



HERAT CITY (Pajhwok): Eid Khvancheh, a long-standing tradition in eastern Herat province, has high demand this year, but youths complain about their economic problems and lack of jobs. Khvancheh is a decorated

metics, jewelry, and other gifts that are decorated with beautiful flowers. A young man Mohammad Nakian who got engaged five months ago, told Pajhwok Afghan News Eid expenses were heavy and unbearable for families of bride and groom. Although he is unemployed, he has prepared Khvencheh worth 20,000 afghanis for his fiancée, but he says there is need to prevent undesirable cultures in society. He said this culture not only harms grooms, but also forces bride's family to provide Khvancheh, which puts great economic pressure on them.

Syed Raaqeb, another youth and newlywed, explained preparing Eidi was an undesirable social custom that caused problems for most poor and needy families. Raaqeb emphasized that such costs should be reduced and culture must be created and unnecessary customs should be prevented. "Most families do not have the ability to prepare Khvancheh, but due to customs and traditions of society, they are forced to borrow and match it with the other party. In this regard, culture creating should be carried out, which requires mobilization and a public fight against undesirable

customs with excessive spending". On the other hand, Eidi sellers are happy with their busy market ahead of Eid. Hamid, a florist and decorator of Khvancheh, said their business thrived during New Year and Eid nights than at other times of the year. According to Hamid, some people pay exorbitant prices to decorate Eid khvanchas, while the cost of a simple khenchra ranges from 200 to 2,000af. On the other hand, Mir Qais, another florist, told Pajhwok since Ramadan 20th their business has been booming, and more youths visit their shop to buy Eid

Khvancheh. The families of engaged young people bring various Eid gifts, including clothes, sweets, and cosmetics, to groom and bride to decorate and package in colorful boxes. Qais asked families to avoid excessive spending and undesirable cultures so that young people can spend Eid with more joy. Meanwhile, a number of culturists considered these costly customs unacceptable and called for serious measures to reduce these costs. Youths are facing economic challenges due to lack of job opportunities, but undesirable customs

and traditions, especially taking Eidi, Nawrozi, Ifriti, and winter gifts to bride's or groom's house, add to the problems of young engaged couples, Gholam Sakhi Gholami, a culturist whose son has engaged explained. According to Gholami, expensive Eid Khvancheh have caused competition among families in society, which has created an unpleasant custom among people, and family elders should help youths who are engaged in this regard to avoid heavy expenses. Some youths are unable to get married due to high costs and undesirable customs in the province.

But officials of Information and Culture Department emphasize preventing excessive costs and unnecessary expenditures. Hamidullah Ghiasi, head of culture and arts, said there is no problem with giving Eid gifts to bride or groom from a religious perspective, but there is a need to prevent waste and expenses that cause youths to face economic problems. Ghiasi considers one of the reasons behind problems in newlyweds to be undesirable customs and economic problems, and adds all families should refrain from extravagance and promoting undesirable cultures.

Myanmar quake toll passes 1,600 — rescuers dig for survivors

BANGKOK (Reuters): The death toll from a 7.7 magnitude earthquake that hit Myanmar has climbed to 1,600, state-run MRTV said on Saturday as the international aid began to arrive in for relief works.

The rescuers continued search for survivors after a powerful earthquake devastated the Southeast Asian nation amid concerns the number killed would soar. It said 2,376 people were injured and 30 were missing. "Infrastructure such as roads, bridges, and buildings were affected, leading to casualties and injuries among civilians. Search and rescue operations are currently being carried out in the affected areas," the junta said in a statement issued on state media.

The junta leader, General Min Aung Hlaing, had warned on Friday of more deaths and injuries as he invited "any country" to provide help and donations. A Chinese rescue team arrived on Saturday while Russia and the US offered aid in the disaster, which struck at lunchtime on Friday and damaged hundreds of buildings in neighbouring Thailand.

The United States Geological Service's predictive modelling estimated the death toll could exceed 10,000 people in Myanmar, and that losses could be greater than the value of the country's gross domestic product.Susan Hough, a scientist in the USGS's Earthquake Hazards Program, told Reuters it was difficult to predict an earthquake's death toll, for various reasons including timing.When an earthquake strikes during the daytime, as it did in Myanmar, "people are awake, they have their wits about them, they are better able to respond," she said.

Much of the devastation was in Myanmar's second-largest city, Mandalay, close to the epicentre of the quake. In the Thai capital Bangkok, 1,000 km (620 miles) from the epicentre a rescue mission was stepped up on Saturday to find construction workers trapped under the rubble of a collapsed 33-storey tower. A 37-strong team from China landed in Yangon, Myanmar's former capital, early on Saturday, carrying medicine and equipment to detect signs of life with them, the Chinese embassy said in a Facebook post.

Russia said it was sending 120 experienced rescuers as well as doctors and search dogs, state news agency TASS reported. US President Donald Trump said on Friday he had spoken with officials in Myanmar and that his administration would be providing some form of assistance. Hough, who worked in Myanmar on the local seismology network, said the country's mix of modern structures and traditional buildings would also play a role. Traditional buildings "are going to be less potentially deadly than concrete," she said.

Thai authorities said nine people had died and 101 were missing in Bangkok, mostly labourers trapped in the rubble of the collapsed tower. "We will do everything, we will not give up on saving lives, we will use all resources," Bangkok Governor Chadchart Sittipunt said at the site on Saturday, as excavators moved debris and drones scoured the rubble searching for survivors. The Thai capital ground to a halt on Friday and Chadchart said hundreds of people had spent the night in city parks, but he said the situation was improving.

WHO must cut budget by fifth after US pullout

GENEVA (AFP): The World Health Organisation (WHO) has proposed slashing a fifth of its budget following the United States' decision to withdraw, and must now reduce its reach and workforce, its chief said in an internal email seen by AFP on Saturday.

The WHO is facing an income gap of nearly \$600 million in 2025 and has "no choice" but to start making cutbacks, WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said in the message sent on Friday to the UN health agency's staff. Besides triggering the US pullout from the WHO after returning to the White House in January, President Donald Trump decided to freeze virtually all foreign aid, including vast assistance towards boosting health worldwide. The US was by far the WHO's biggest donor. "Dramatic cuts to official development assistance by the United States of America and others are

causing massive disruption to countries, NGOs and United Nations agencies, including WHO," Tedros said in his email. He said that even before Trump triggered the one-year process of withdrawing from the WHO, the organisation was already facing financial constraints, and had begun working on efficiency measures more than nine months ago.

"The United States' announcement, combined with recent reductions in official development assistance by some countries to fund increased defence spending, has made our situation much more acute," said Tedros. "While we have achieved substantial cost savings, the prevailing economic and geopolitical conditions have made resource mobilisation particularly difficult. As a result, we are facing an income gap of almost \$600m this year alone."

Last month, the WHO's executive board reduced the proposed budget for

2026-2027 from \$5.3 billion to \$4.9bn. "Since then, the outlook for development assistance has deteriorated, not only for WHO but for the whole international health ecosystem," said Tedros. "We have, therefore, proposed to member states a further reduced budget of \$4.2bn — a 21 per cent reduction from the original proposed budget."

In the body's last two-year budget cycle, for 2022-23, the US pitched in \$1.3bn, representing 16.3pc of the WHO's then \$7.89bn budget. Most of the US funding was through voluntary contributions for specific earmarked projects, rather than fixed membership fees. "Despite our best efforts, we are now at the point where we have no choice but to reduce the scale of our work and workforce," said Tedros. "This reduction will begin at headquarters, starting with senior leadership, but will affect all levels and regions."

New US strikes against Houthi rebels kill one

DUBAI (AP): Suspected US airstrikes pounded Yemen overnight into Saturday, reportedly killing at least one person as the American military acknowledged earlier bombing a major military site in the heart of Sanaa controlled by the Houthi rebels.

The full extent of the damage and possible casualties wasn't immediately clear. The attacks followed a night of airstrikes early Friday that appeared particularly intense compared to other days in the campaign that began March 15. An Associated Press review has found the new American operation under President Donald Trump appears more extensive than those under former President Joe Biden, as the US moves from solely targeting launch sites to firing

at ranking personnel as well as dropping bombs in cities.

Meanwhile, satellite photos analyzed by the AP show a mysterious airstrip just off Yemen in a key maritime chokepoint now appears ready to accept flights and B-2 bombers within striking distance of the country Saturday. The strikes into Saturday targeted multiple areas in Yemen under the control of the Iranian-backed Houthis, including the capital, Sanaa, and in the governorates of Al-Jawf and Saada, rebel-controlled media reported. The strikes in Saada killed one person and wounded four others, the Houthi-run SABA news agency said.

SABA identified the person killed as a civilian. Houthi fighters and their

allies often aren't in uniform. However, analysts believe the rebels may be undercounting the fatalities given the strikes have been targeting military and intelligence sites run by the rebels. Many of the strikes haven't been fully acknowledged by the Houthis — or the US military — while the rebels also tightly control access on the ground. One strike early Friday, however, has been confirmed by the US military's Central Command, which oversees its Mideast operations. It posted a black-and-white video early Saturday showing an airstrike targeting a site in Yemen. While it didn't identify the location, an AP analysis of the footage's details corresponds to a known strike Friday in Sanaa.

Turkiye opposition calls mass rally in Istanbul

ISTANBUL (AFP): Protesters were to join a mass rally in Istanbul Saturday at the call of Türkiye's main opposition CHP over the jailing of the city's mayor Ekrem Imamoglu, a top figure in the party whose arrest has sparked 10 days of the country's biggest street demonstrations in a decade.

Imamoglu's detention on March 19 has also prompted a repressive government response that has been sharply condemned by rights groups and drawn criticism from abroad. The rally, which begins at 0900 GMT in Maltepe on the Asian side of Istanbul, is the first such CHP-led gathering since Tuesday and comes on the eve of the Eid

Al-Fitr celebration marking the end of Ramadan, which starts Sunday.

Widely seen as the only Turkish politician capable of challenging President Recep Tayyip Erdogan at the ballot box, Imamoglu was elected as the CHP's candidate for the 2028 presidential race on the day he was jailed. "Imamoglu's candidacy for president is the beginning of a journey that will guarantee justice and the nation's sovereignty. Let's go to Maltepe, and start our march to power together!" CHP leader Ozgur Ozel said on X.

The protests over his arrest quickly spread across Türkiye, with vast crowds joining mass nightly rallies outside Istanbul City Hall

called by the CHP, that often degenerated into running battles with riot police. Although the last such rally was Tuesday, student groups have kept up their own protests, most of them masked despite a police crackdown that has seen nearly 2,000 people arrested.

Among them were 20 minors who were arrested between March 22-25, of whom seven remained in custody, the Istanbul Bar Association said Friday. In Istanbul, at least 511 students were detained, many in pre-dawn raids, of whom 275 were jailed, lawyer Ferhat Guzel told AFP, while admitting that the number was "probably much higher."

Pakistan trashes Indian FM's remarks

E.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan has trashed Indian foreign minister's remarks regarding minority issues in the country with Foreign Office spokesperson saying on Saturday that in Pakistan state institutions actively worked to safeguard minorities as a matter of policy.

In stark contrast, incidents targeting minorities in India frequently occurred with the tacit approval or even complicity of elements within the ruling dispensation. Responding to media queries concerning the remarks made by the Indian External Affairs Minister in Lok Sabha and the related discussion on the situation of minorities in Pakistan, the spokesperson, in a statement issued in Islamabad, said, "India is in no position to champion minority rights, as it remains a serial violator of those very rights." The systematic promotion of hatred, discrimination, and violence against minorities in India was well documented.

"From the discriminatory Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) to the bulldozing of homes, from the 2002 Gujarat massacre to the 2020 Delhi pogrom, from the demolition of the Babri Mosque in 1992 to the consecration of a temple on its ruins in 2024, from cow vigilantism and mob lynchings to attacks on mosques and shrines, India's record is marred by egregious and systemic violations of minority rights, particularly those of Muslims," the spokesperson further added.

Rather than feigning concern for minorities elsewhere, the spokesperson said the Indian government would do well to address its own failures. "It must take concrete steps to ensure the safety, protection, and well-being of minorities including Muslims and safeguard their places of worship, cultural heritage, and fundamental rights," it was stressed.

Rival rallies erupt in South Korea

SEOUL: Hundreds of thousands of South Koreans rallied for and against impeached President Yoon Suk Yeol as the country's Constitutional Court weighs whether to dismiss him. On Saturday, main streets through central Seoul were filled with rival protesters, carrying political signs and waving flags despite the cold weather.

Yoon has been suspended from office since the liberal opposition-controlled National Assembly impeached him over his December 3 martial law decree, which plunged the country into political turmoil. The Constitutional Court is deliberating whether to formally dismiss or reinstate him. If he is removed, there will be an election to replace him within two months.

The wait has only emboldened rival camps to hit the streets in greater numbers every weekend. "The people are overwhelmed with fatigue and frustration as ... the ongoing crises remain unresolved," Lee Han-sol, who was protesting for Yoon's dismissal, told the AFP news agency. "The ongoing delays have led to a growing sense of scepticism."

But Yoon supporters, whose members include right-wing YouTubeurs and religious figures, told AFP his impeachment trial is unlawful. "The Constitutional Court won't be able to ignore us. Look at us, there are so many of us here," said Lee Hye-sook, 58.

Yoon, a former prosecutor, was detained in a dawn raid in January on insurrection charges but was released in early March on procedural grounds. He has remained defiant throughout and blamed a "malicious" opposition. A Gallup Korea poll released earlier this month showed 58 percent of respondents supported Yoon's removal.

The Constitutional Court was given 180 days from the time it took on Yoon's impeachment case to issue a ruling, meaning it has until June to decide his fate. It has typically issued rulings within weeks for past presidential impeachment cases, but it has taken longer over Yoon's case, without providing a reason. — Aljazeera



BANGKOK: Rescue workers carrying body of a victim at the site of an under-construction building collapse in Thailand.

Fire continues to rage near Korangi Crossing in Karachi

E.P. Report

KARACHI: The fire at Korangi Creek continues to rage as authorities have temporarily halted firefighting efforts due to extreme heat, fire brigade officials said on Saturday.

The fire brigade officials said that the blaze had erupted during a 1,200-foot deep excavation in the wee hours of Saturday. No casualties have been reported so far and the scale of fire has neither increased nor decreased significantly. Officials admitted facing serious challenges in controlling the blaze and are now working with multiple agencies to devise a new containment strategy. Meanwhile, workers and others near the excavation site have been moved to safety.

Despite nearly 10 hours of firefighting, authorities have yet to determine the exact cause of the fire or the type of gas leaking from the ground. While fire brigade officials confirmed the presence of a gas leak, they were unable to specify its type. However, an expert told media that the leakage could be from a shallow underground gas reserve. The matter will first be investigated by relevant authorities linked to the "zero gas factor," after which the Petroleum Division will conduct a further inquiry.

Meanwhile, the Sui Southern Gas Company (SSGC) issued a statement confirming that no gas pipeline or installation belonging to them was located near the site. Senior technical

staff from the Military Lands Cantonment Karachi Region are also conducting a thorough inspection of the site.

Initially, firefighters attempted to douse the flames with water, but officials said this only intensified the heat. The strategy was later shifted to using soil and sand to smother the fire. More than 10 fire tenders along with multiple water tankers participated in fire extinguishing operation. However, this too has proven ineffective, as the high gas pressure causes the flames to resurface.

Experts warn that without properly identifying the gas and its source, the risk of the fire reigniting remains high. Earlier, Karachi Commissioner Syed Hassan Naqvi and Korangi Deputy Commissioner Masood Bhutto visited the site to review the situation. Speaking to the media, Hassan said that if a permit exists for such deep boring, it will be verified. He also assured that an investigation would be conducted to determine which authority granted permission for such deep boring.

According to a spokesperson for the Cantonment Board, the CEO of Cantonment Korangi has been present at the scene since last night when the incident began, overseeing the firefighting efforts. The inferno, which was previously believed to have erupted out of a gas pipeline after being damaged during underground drilling, has proved extremely difficult to control.

Talking to media, Senior Fire Officer Muhammad Zafar termed the fire "mysterious", saying that it could not be ascertained yet as to which pipeline had been affected. "The fire is mysterious. We still do not know which pipeline this is," he said. Zafar further said that attempts to douse the flames with water were proving ineffective. "We were spraying water on to the flames, but it kept bouncing back," Zafar explained.

Zafar suggested, saying, "The fire is bursting out from a crater that needs to be sealed with soil." Given the scale of the fire, Zafar further recommended, "We may need to use a dumper truck or a helicopter to drop soil over the flames." The Karachi Water and Sewerage Corporation (KWSC) declared an emergency at the Landhi hydrant to ensure an uninterrupted water supply.

"The hydrants in-charge is in constant contact with the fire brigade and rescue teams to maintain the persistent supply of water," a KWSC spokesperson confirmed. Governor Tessori has expressed serious concern over the situation, calling for immediate and effective action. "We must take swift measures to control this fire," he said in a call to the Chief Fire Officer and engineers present on the site. To further boost efforts, the governor assured fire officials that he would coordinate with relevant authorities to arrange a helicopter if needed to drop soil over the flames.

Israeli military admits to shooting at ambulances

GAZA CITY (AFP): Israel's military admitted Saturday it had fired on ambulances in the Gaza Strip after identifying them as "suspicious vehicles," with Hamas condemning it as a "war crime" that killed at least one person.

The incident took place last Sunday in the Tal Al-Sultan neighborhood in the southern city of Rafah, close to the Egyptian border. Israeli troops launched an offensive there on March 20, two days after the army resumed aerial bombardments of Gaza following an almost two-month-long truce.

Israeli troops had "opened fire toward Hamas vehicles and eliminated several Hamas terrorists," the military said in a statement to AFP. "A few minutes afterward, additional vehicles advanced suspiciously toward the troops... The troops responded by firing toward the suspicious vehicles, eliminating a number of Hamas and Islamic Jihad terrorists."

The military did not say if there was fire coming from the vehicles. It added that "after an initial inquiry, it was determined that some of the suspicious vehicles... were ambulances and fire trucks," and condemned "the repeated use" by "terrorist organizations in the Gaza Strip of ambulances for terrorist purposes."

The day after the incident, Gaza's civil defense agency said in a statement that it had not heard from a team of six rescuers from Tal Al-Sulta who had been urgently dispatched to respond to deaths and injuries. On Friday, it reported finding the body of the team leader and the rescue vehicles — an ambulance and a firefighting vehicle — and said a vehicle from the Palestine Red Crescent Society was also "reduced to a pile of scrap metal." Hamas spokesman Basem Naim accused Israel of carrying out

"a deliberate and brutal massacre against Civil Defense and Palestine Red Crescent teams in the city of Rafah." "The targeted killing of rescue workers — who are protected under international humanitarian law — constitutes a flagrant violation of the Geneva Conventions and a war crime," he said.

Tom Fletcher, head of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, said that since March 18, "Israeli airstrikes in densely populated areas have killed hundreds of children and other civilians." "Patients killed in their hospital beds. Ambulances shot at. First responders killed," he said in a statement. "If the basic principles of humanitarian law still count, the international community must act while it can to uphold them." Palestinian groups threatened punishment for "collaborators" furthering Israeli goals after the first substantial protests against the war in Gaza and Hamas' rule.

Hundreds of Palestinians have rallied in recent days in north and central Gaza, some chanting "Hamas out" in a rare show of opposition to the group whose October 2023 raid on Israel triggered a devastating offensive in the enclave. More demonstrations, which Israel's government has applauded, were being planned on Thursday. A statement by the "Factions of the Resistance," an umbrella group including Hamas, threatened punishment for leaders of the "suspicious movement," which Palestinians took to mean the street marches.

"They persist in blaming the resistance and absolving the occupation, ignoring that the Israeli extermination machine operates nonstop," it said. "Therefore, these suspicious individuals are as responsible as the occupation for the bloodshed of our people

and will be treated accordingly."

Hamas officials have said people have the right to protest, but rallies should not be exploited for political ends or to exempt Israel from blame for decades of occupation, conflict, and displacement in Palestinian territories. Some protesters said they took to the streets to voice rejection of continued war, adding that they were exhausted and lacked basics like food and water. "We are not against the resistance. We are against war. Enough wars, we are tired," said a resident of Gaza City's Shejaia neighborhood, which saw protests on Wednesday.

"You can't call people collaborators for speaking up against wars, for wanting to live without bombardment and hunger," he added via a chat app. Videos on Wednesday, whose authenticity Reuters could not verify, showed protests in Shejaia in the north where the rallies began and in the central Gaza areas of Deir Al-Balah, indicating the protests were spreading. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said the rallies showed Israelis' decision to renew the military offensive in Gaza after a ceasefire was working. Hamas police, the group's enforcers, are again off the streets. Israeli Defense Minister Israel Katz urged Gaza residents to keep expressing their discontent. "Learn from the residents of Beit Lahia," he wrote on X, referring to the first protest. "Just as they did, demand the removal of Hamas from Gaza and the immediate release of all Israeli hostages — this is the only way to stop the war." A Palestinian official with a militant group said protests were allowed — but not cooperation with Israel. "Those suspicious figures try to exploit legitimate protests to demand an end to the resistance, which is the same goal as Israel's," he told Reuters via a chat app.

Ukrainian troops fighting in second Russian region

KYIV (Reuters): Just as Ukrainian forces are losing their grip on the pocket of Russia's Kursk region they captured last year, they have staged a little-publicised incursion into the adjacent Belgorod region, according to Russian military bloggers. Several Russian military correspondents said that Ukrainian troops were inside Belgorod and fighting battles with Russian forces there.

Neither Kyiv nor Moscow has confirmed the reports, though Russia's Defence Ministry said 10 days ago its forces had thwarted five Ukrainian attempts to push across the border in Belgorod. Ukraine's military has not

commented on any thrust into Belgorod region, though that could be for operational security reasons.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy, addressing reporters in Kyiv, said Ukrainian forces had taken "certain steps" in Russia outside the Kursk region to ease pressure on Ukrainian troops in the area. Zelenskiy said the action was intended to "reduce the accumulation" of Russian troops and had occurred "a little below the Kursk region." He did not elaborate.

Andrii Kovalenko, an official at Ukraine's National Defence and Security Council, suggested in a March 18 statement that Ukrainian forces

could act in the Belgorod region, "neutralising threats" from Russian forces that might mass near the border. Rybar, a Russian military blog with 1.3 million subscribers, said there had been heavy clashes in a settlement called Popovka and each side was hitting the other with drones. Another Telegram account, Two Majors, said Russian forces were conducting "defensive operations."

"There are constant strikes on concentrations of Ukrainian Armed Forces, but the enemy still has serious offensive potential for this direction and has not abandoned plans for further breakthroughs, including in new areas of the front," it said.