

Trader deprived of Rs 3.8m
F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: In a broad daylight robbery in densely populated Hashnagri area, armed motorcyclists snatched Rs 3.8 million from a trader and injured him on resistance. Police said, the incident occurred near Govt School No. 2 in the jurisdiction of Shaheed Gulfat Hussain Police Station. The victim, identified as Zulfiqar was targeted by unidentified assailants who opened fire while robbing him of his cash.



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ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif chairing a meeting of steering committee of Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority.

Planners, facilitators to be brought to justice

COAS briefed on ongoing operations, overall security situation of Bannu

F.P. Report

BANNU: Chief of Army Staff (COAS) General Syed Asim Munir, NI (M), visited Bannu on Thursday, following the foiled terrorist attack on Bannu Cantonment by Khwarij on 4 March 2025.

During the visit, the COAS was briefed on ongoing operations and the overall security situation of the area. He also visited Combined Military Hospital (CMH) Bannu to inquire about the health and well-being of the injured soldiers, acknowledging their resilience and unwavering dedication. The COAS commended the high morale and steadfast resolve of the troops, reaffirming that Pakistan Army would continue to serve as a bulwark against terrorism to ensure the security and stability of the state.

The COAS expressed profound condolences to the families of innocent civilians who lost their lives in this heinous and cowardly terrorist incident. He also assured that while the perpetrators of the incident were neutralized instantly by the valiant soldiers, however, the planners and facilitators of the dastardly attack would also be brought to justice soon, wherever they may be.

He underscored that the barbaric targeting of civil-



ians including children, women and the elderly exposed the true intentions of Khwarij as enemies of Islam. Emphasizing the pivotal role of the local community, he reiterated that national unity is imperative in the fight against terrorism and assured that the Armed Forces would spare no effort in ensuring the safety and security of the people of Pakistan.

While addressing the troops, the COAS lauded their heroic actions, recognizing their swift and decisive response in neutralizing the attackers and thwarting their nefarious designs. He further stated that the fight against Khwarij and their facilitators, acting on the behest of hostile elements, would continue until its logical conclusion.

The COAS highlighted that terrorist groups, including Fitna Al-Khawarij, continued to operate from Afghan soil against Pakistan. He underscored that the use of foreign weapons and equipment in recent terrorist attacks was clear evidence that Afghanistan remained a safe haven for such elements.

He reaffirmed that no entity would be allowed to disrupt Pakistan's peace and stability. Earlier upon his arrival, the COAS was received by Corps Commander Peshawar.

where recovered from their possession, they added. The terrorists confessed to planning a major terrorist operation in Pakistan during investigations, they said and added it was another evidence of terrorists' infiltration into Pakistan from Afghanistan.

According to sources, in recent past, the involvement of Afghan nationals in terrorist incidents in Pakistan gradually increased. Terrorist organizations have been receiving full support, facilitation and

patronage from the Afghan Taliban, they continued.

Meanwhile, an arrested terrorist identified himself as Isamuddin son of Gulshad, an Afghan national. He told investigators that he, along with three others, entered Pakistan three days ago and went to Pishin. According to security sources, the locals played an important role in the arrest of the terrorists. The arrested terrorists were shifted to an undisclosed location for further interrogation.

ment, while the reduction for other parts of the country is based on the January 2025 adjustment. Unaffordable tariffs have stirred social unrest and shuttered industries in the \$350 billion economy, which has contracted twice in recent years as inflation hit record highs. This FCA reduction applies to most categories, except for lifeline consumers, domestic consumers using up to 300 units, electric vehicle charging stations, prepaid customers, and agricultural connections.

Nepra also confirmed that the adjustment will be effective for domestic users with Time of Use (ToU) metres, regardless of their consumption levels. The FCA revises electricity tariffs based on fuel cost fluctuations. Lower

fuel prices reduce bills, while higher costs raise them. Nepra has also directed Discos to comply with court orders on the FCA implementation.

In recent years, Pakistan has been forced to increase its electricity tariffs under an International Monetary Fund (IMF) deal as part of efforts to reduce unsustainable public debt in the power and gas sectors. According to the lender, liquidity conditions in the power sector were acute, with a buildup of arrears and frequent power outages.

The arrears — a form of public debt that builds up due to subsidies and unpaid bills — were a major issue in the negotiations between the IMF and Islamabad before a deal was reached.

PTI stages walkout from Senate

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Senate session, chaired by Deputy Chairman Syedal Khan Nasir, witnessed a walkout by PTI members in protest against the arrest of Senator Aon Abbas Buppi.

Deputy Chairman Nasir stated that Aon Abbas Buppi holds the same respect in the House as any other member, and the Senate will not operate under any pressure — it will function according to the law.

Law Minister and Senator Azam Nazeer Tarar explained that the case against Aon Abbas Buppi falls under wildlife laws, making it a provincial matter. He assured that they would speak to the provincial government for the Senator's case. The deputy chairman directed the law minister to present a detailed report on the matter by the end of the day, stressing the need for smooth House proceedings. He urged both opposition and government members to coordinate and share their suggestions. A heated exchange also took place between Senator Manzoor Kakar and the Deputy Chairman. Due to a lack of quorum, the Senate session was adjourned until 11:30am on Saturday.

Meanwhile, the Senate was informed that the number of centers for the treatment of HIV has increased from forty-nine to ninety-four over the past four years.

Responding to a Calling Attention Notice, Law Minister Azam Nazeer Tarar stated that these centers are providing free screening and treatment. The Law Minister also mentioned that awareness campaigns are being organized to effectively combat the disease.

The Senate passed The Special Technology Zones Authority Amendment Bill, 2025. It was moved by Law Minister Azam Nazeer Tarar. The chair also referred the Civil Courts Amendment Bill 2025 and Pakistan Coast Guards Amendment Bill, 2025 to the standing committees concerned. At the outset of the session, the House offered fateha for those martyred in recent acts of terrorism in the country. The House has been adjourned to meet again on Saturday at eleven thirty am.

LHC Judge Aziz Ch steps down

F.P. Report

LAHORE: A judge of the Lahore High Court Chaudhry Abdul Aziz - known as an expert to decide cases relating to criminal administration of justice Thursday tendered resignation from his post saying due to personal reasons he is stepping down from the position.

Before his appointment as judge of the Lahore High Court (LHC) on November 26, 2016, he remained one of the best criminal practicing lawyers in Islamabad as most of the litigants use to approach him for representation before the trial and superior courts court in criminal cases for remedy. His retirement at the age of 62 from judgeship has been cited September 8, 2033.

The Frontier Post

ECP rejects candidate's plea
F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) has rejected the JUI-F candidate's plea challenging the repolling in PB-45. The ECP delivered its verdict regarding the Balochistan Assembly constituency PB-45 Quetta-VIII, turning down the JUI-F candidate's request to annul the election results and the repolling process.

Govt working to promote small, medium enterprises

PM approves National Youth Employment Plan

Saqib Mushtaq

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif Thursday said the government was working on a priority basis for promotion of small and medium enterprises. He was chairing the Steering Committee meeting of Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority (SMEDA).

On the direction of the prime minister, micro-enterprises had been made part of the SME sector and in this regard, a comprehensive policy was being formulated. He directed that new skilled manpower should be hired from the market for SMEDA. The prime minister said while adopting a transparent process, a workforce of international standard should be hired in SMEDA and their salaries should be according to the market rates. Professional labour training for the SME sector was very important, he added.

The prime minister noted that the role of SMEDA for the progress of rural economy was very crucial and a strategy should be formed for the grant of interest-free loans by SMEDA to the rural population including women. He ordered that all professional training institutes at the federal level should be merged into one institution.

The meeting was briefed about the ongoing reforms in SMEDA. It was told that on the instruction of the prime minister the representation of private sector was being increased in SMEDA board. A strategy was being put in place to equip the workforce in SMEDA with new skills and modern technology.

A plan was being prepared to make the portfolio of SMEDA more effective and wide-ranging. On the instruction of the prime minister, the Ministry of Commerce and SMEDA

were working together to identify companies related to exports. A well planned performance management framework was being structured in SMEDA. On the direction of the prime minister, SMEDA organized 28 seminars and training programmes in which 953 persons participated.

It was informed that a financial literacy programme was being started for the SME sector for which the induction of experts was completed. An export assistance programme was being started to increase exports of the SME sector. A legal framework was being prepared for sub-contracting of the SME sector for which the process of hiring would be started soon.

Federal Minister for Economic Affairs Ahad Khan Cheema, Federal Minister for Industry and Production Rana Tanvir Hussain, Special Assistant to Prime Minister Haroon Akhtar, Chairman PM Youth Programme Rana Mashhood Ahmed Khan and high level officials attended the meeting. Members National Assembly Syeda Nousheen Iftikhar and Mohsin Shahnawaz Ranjha attended the meeting through video link.

Meanwhile, the Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif chaired the review meeting on the National Youth Employment Plan and approved the plan to provide youth with training programs according to market and industry skills and demand.

The meeting was briefed on the action plan to provide training and employment opportunities through various institutions in the next 4 years, whereas the Prime Minister had decided to personally chair the monthly review meeting and would personally monitor the implementation of the plan, the Prime Minister's

Office news release said.

Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif said that the talented youth of Pakistan were the most valuable asset of the country, whereas the government was empowering and employing the youth by providing them with vocational training and necessary skills. The prime minister added that the government was taking steps to promote the export of manpower by providing international quality training to Pakistani youth.

During the review meeting, the prime minister had directed to maintain continuous liaison with local industries for training youth in various sectors and to meticulously consider the demand of international organizations for manpower. The Prime Minister has also directed to establish comprehensive database regarding the skills required in local industries. The meeting was informed that in the next 4 years, 2.4 million to 6 million youth annually would be assisted to gain employment opportunities by providing them vocational training and skills. The meeting was informed that the market, industries and international manpower consumption were being kept in mind to provide skills and vocational training to the youth.

The meeting was informed that the Digital Youth Hub was in the final stages and would be launched this month. The Prime Minister appreciated the efforts of all the relevant ministries and institutions working on the plan. Federal Ministers Ahad Khan Cheema, Shaza Fatima Khawaja, Chairman Prime Minister Youth Program Rana Mashhood Ahmed Khan, Chairman Higher Education Commission Dr. Mukhtar Ahmed and relevant senior officials attended the meeting.

KP govt launches solarization of houses project

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government has practically launched its flagship project "Solarization of Houses" aimed at providing free and subsidized solar energy solutions to households across the province. Chief Minister Ali Amin Khan Gandapur formally inaugurated the initiative at a special ceremony held at the Chief Minister's House in Peshawar on Thursday.

The event was attended by provincial cabinet members, members of the provincial assembly, government officials, and media representatives. Under the first phase of the project, 32,500 households will receive free solar units, including solar panels, batteries, fans, lights, and other necessary equipment. The selection process was conducted through an electronic balloting system, following an overwhelming response of over 2.5 million online applications.

Overall, the project aims to provide solar systems to 130,000 households, including 30,000 homes in the merged districts. Out of these, 65,000 households will receive solar units free of cost, while another 65,000 households will have access to solar systems at half the price, with the option of easy installment payments.

The total estimated cost of the project is Rs. 20 billion, and it will be implemented in two phases-65,000 households in the first phase and the remaining 65,000 in the second phase.

Speaking at the ceremony, Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur empha-

sized that the initiative was launched to tackle the country's electricity crisis and prolonged load shedding, providing much-needed relief to underprivileged communities.

"In line with the vision of our founding chairman, we are committed to providing relief and essential services to the people", he remarked adding that a welfare state must ensure access to basic necessities for its most deserving citizens. He remarked that the provision of solar units is being conducted through a transparent, electronic balloting system, with priority given to widows, transgender individuals, and other vulnerable groups, and added that each district is receiving its share based on population proportion, ensuring fair distribution across the province. He also stressed that the selection process has been kept free from political or external influence, ensuring transparency and merit-based allocation.

"With over 2.5 million applications, this overwhelming response reflects public trust in our system, and we thank the people for their confidence in us", Ali Amin Gandapur stated adding that the KP government is leading in governance and will continue to do so in future as well. He concluded that the initiative is meant not only to provide uninterrupted electricity to deserving households but also reduce burden on the national power grid.

Meanwhile, the Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Ali Amin Khan Gandapur, chaired a meeting to

review the status of traffic issues and proposed road infrastructure projects aimed at resolving congestion in the provincial metropolises.

During the meeting, discussions focused on improving traffic flow on key arteries, including University Road, Ring Road, and Hayatabad, along with ensuring efficient entry and exit points from Peshawar city. Several key decisions were made to address these challenges effectively. These include the construction of underpasses, removal of bottlenecks on University Road, completion of the remaining portion of Ring Road, and the initiation of a detailed feasibility study for improved road management and alternate traffic solutions.

Furthermore, the meeting also approved a feasibility study for linking the Industrial Estate at Hayatabad with the Northern Bypass to enhance industrial connectivity and facilitate smooth transportation. The meeting was attended by Advisor to CM on Information, the Special Assistant to CM on Communication and Works, Chief Secretary, Additional Chief Secretary, Planning and Development, relevant administrative secretaries, and officials of the Peshawar Development Authority.

Chief Minister Ali Amin Khan Gandapur emphasized the government's commitment to improving urban mobility and directed concerned departments to expedite the planning, mobilize all financial resources and planning options with in 90 days period for the benefit of the citizens of Peshawar.

Pakistan rebukes Indian remarks on Jammu and Kashmir

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan has strongly rejected the remarks made by the Indian External Affairs Minister, Subrahmanyam Jaishankar, on Jammu and Kashmir during an event at the Chatham House in London.

At his weekly media briefing in Islamabad on Thursday, Foreign Office Spokesperson Shafqat Ali Khan said the remarks misrepresent the ground realities and contravene the international law. He said Jammu and Kashmir is an internationally-recognized disputed territory. The relevant UN Security Council resolutions clearly stipulate that the final status of the Jammu and Kashmir is to be determined through a free and impartial plebiscite under the UN auspices. He said India's prevarication cannot change this reality.

The Spokesperson said we also wish to underscore that any electoral exercise, pursuant to Indian Constitution, cannot serve as a substitute to grant of right to self-determination. Similarly, the decades-old grievances of the Kashmiri people cannot be meaningfully addressed through economic activity down the barrel of a gun.

Shafqat Ali Khan said instead of making baseless claims about Azad Jammu and Kashmir, India should vacate the large territories of Jammu and Kashmir, under its occupation for last seventy-seven years. He emphasized that New Delhi must realize that a peaceful settlement of the Jammu and Kashmir dispute, in accordance with the relevant UN Security Council resolutions and wishes of the Kashmiri people, is imperative for a lasting peace in South Asia.

Replying to a question, the Spokesperson said Pakistan has been witnessing an alarming increase in provocative statements from different Indian leaders asserting unwarranted claims on Azad Jammu and Kashmir. He said, however, historical facts, legal principles, moral considerations and ground realities refute all these factitious claims. He said the Indian leaders would be wise to help implement the United Nations resolutions on Kashmir instead of harboring delusions of grandeur.

Answering yet another question about recent arrest of Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP) top tier operational commander Shareefullah and his handing over to the United States, the Spokesperson said the intelligence cooperation between Pakistan and the United States is long standing.



KARACHI: People buying food items from vendors for Iftari.

Police arrest drug dealer disguised

F.P. Report

LAHORE: Lahore police have arrested a drug dealer disguised as a woman in burqa. According to the police, the suspect, identified as Atta-ur-Rehman, was apprehended during a routine patrol in Sufiya Abad in Nishtar Colony. Authorities recovered 10 kilograms of narcotics from the suspect, and a case has been registered against him.

During interrogation, the suspect confessed to supplying drugs from Peshawar to Lahore. The vehicle used in the drug trafficking operation has also been seized by the police. Earlier, Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF) while conducting a raid managed to arrest a female drug dealer and seized six kg drugs, said an ANF Headquarters spokesman. He informed that ANF successfully conducting operations across the country against drug pushers to make educational institutions drug-free.

A female accused involved in supplying drugs to the students in educational institutions was arrested red-handed. The arrested drug dealer was involved in supplying drugs to a well-known educational institution in Islamabad. The spokesman informed that acting on a tip-off, a raid was conducted and the accused was arrested with drugs near an educational institution. During the search of the arrested accused, 4.8 kg hashish and 1.2 kg opium were recovered, he said.

3 criminals arrested in encounter

F.P. Report

KARACHI: Two criminals were arrested in injured condition while another was arrested without injury in an operation by the Anti-Street Crime Cell and a police in the Keamari area of Karachi, police said today.

According to a police report, there was an exchange of gunfire between Pak Colony police and robbers. During this encounter, local residents also came out. Two pistols, four mobile phones, and a motorcycle were recovered from the possession of the suspects. The injured criminals were shifted to a hospital, while the uninjured accused was transferred to the relevant police station.

The injured accused have been identified as Nawaz and Nizam Hussain, while the uninjured suspect is known as Sultan. According to initial reports, these suspects are involved in hijacking cargo containers and trucks. The police have started further investigation.

12 people killed in road mishaps

F.P. Report

LAHORE: At least 12 people were killed and 1,520 injured in 1,313 road accidents in Punjab during the last 24 hours. As many as 666 people with serious injuries were shifted to different hospitals, while 854 with minor injuries were treated at the incident site by the rescue medical teams.

The data analysis showed that 841 drivers, 75 underage drivers, 212 pedestrians, and 479 passengers were among the victims of road traffic crashes. The statistics showed that 274 accidents were reported in Lahore, which affected 335 people, placing the provincial capital at top of the list, followed by Faisalabad with 110 accidents and 126 victims, and at third Multan with 81 accidents and 87 victims.

10 students injured

F.P. Report

NOWSHERA: A school bus overturned on Nowshera Road, leaving 10 students injured on Thursday. The injured students were immediately shifted to the hospital for medical treatment.

Police said the accident occurred near Muhajir Bazaar on Cherat Cement Factory Road in Tehsil Pabbi.

Sindh launches Bachat bazaars to combat inflation

F.P. Report

KARACHI: To alleviate the impact of inflation, the Sindh government has set up Bachat Bazaars across the province during the holy month of Ramadan. Senior Minister of Sindh and Provincial Minister for Information, Transport, and Mass Transit, Sharjeel Inam Memon, stated that this initiative by the Sindh government is part of its people-friendly policy. The goal of this initiative is to provide basic necessities at affordable prices and shield the middle and low-income classes from the effects of inflation.

He stated that providing relief to the people is the top priority of the Sindh government, and the establishment of Bachat Bazaars is a step in this direction to ease the burden of inflation. These markets will offer daily essentials at lower prices to help alleviate the hardships of the common man.

Senior Minister Sharjeel Inam Memon further stated that the Sindh government has taken comprehensive measures to ensure transparency and effective administrative supervision of these markets. Government officers have been deployed at each mar-

ket to monitor prices and promptly prevent any profiteering, hoarding, or mismanagement.

He clarified that profiteering and mismanagement will not be tolerated under any circumstances, and strict action will be taken against those who violate the rules. Senior Minister Sharjeel Inam Memon said that the thrift markets are being continuously monitored to ensure price stability and the quality of goods. He urged the public to take full advantage of these markets and report any complaints directly to the concerned officers.

Punjab govt to outsource rural health centres

F.P. Report

LAHORE: The Punjab government on Thursday decided in principle to outsource the rural health centres in the province. Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz presided over a meeting in which important decisions were taken regarding the health sector. The chief minister was briefed on the health sector reforms.

The meeting informed that the patient ratio had increased three times in the rural centres, which were being administered by the young doctors. As many as 225 RHC have been revamped. It was further revealed that the rural centres would be turned into first referral centres. The CM was briefed that revamp of 766

out of 1,047 rural centres was also completed, out of which 396 had been handed over to the health department.

A staggering Rs6.7 billion worth of medicines had been provided to the OPDs in Punjab, the participants learnt. "Maryam Nawaz Community Health Inspector Programme had received 12,671 applications. As many as 6,900 patients had been registered while 2,625 patients had been treated under the Chief Minister Children Heart Surgery Programme. "As many as 8,000 patients had gone through their dialysis under the Chief Minister Dialysis Programme while 7.2 million people had benefited from the Clinic on Wheels," the meeting added.

During the meeting, the CM directed the construction and expansion of link roads for Murree's Samli General Hospital, ordered the activation of Jinnah Hospital PIC II by Sept 30, and instructed the operationalisation of the outpatient department (OPD) at Nawaz Sharif Institute in Sargodha by June. She also mandated the timely activation of the Nawaz Sharif Cancer Hospital Lahore.

The meeting reviewed a proposal to establish medical cities at the divisional level for the treatment of various diseases. It was agreed to establish burn units, cardiac centres, and children's wards at the district level. Additionally, the proposal to set up a mega medical city along Lahore's Ring Road is being considered.

PPP delegation calls on Punjab Governor

F.P. Report

LAHORE: General Secretary Central Punjab, Hassan Murtaza and a delegation of People's Party South Punjab led by Chief Coordinator PPP South Punjab, Abdul Qadir Shaheen called on Governor Punjab Sardar Saleem Haider Khan at Governor House Lahore. The delegation apprised him of the lack of public facilities in the education and health sectors in

South Punjab and the problems of unannounced load shedding of gas and electricity during the month of Ramadan. The delegation also invited the Governor Punjab to visit all the districts of South Punjab.

Speaking on the occasion, Governor Punjab Sardar Saleem Haider Khan said that the provision of basic amenities to the people, good governance and solving their problems were his priorities.

He said that the Pakistan People's Party has always talked about the rights of the poor and deprived classes.

The Governor Punjab said that practical steps are needed to be taken to provide basic facilities including education and health to the people in the remote and backward areas of the province. He said that party workers are our strength and the doors of the Governor House are open for them.

FIA likely to arrest Armaghan over money laundering charges

F.P. Report

KARACHI: The Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) has initiated an investigation into alleged money laundering activities of Armaghan, a key suspect in Mustafa alleged murder and kidnapping case.

It reports in media that FIA team conducted a search operation at Armaghan's residence, seizing digital devices, documents, and other evidence. The agency has also obtained records of Armaghan's online accounts, including his financial transactions, communication records, copies of his identification documents, bank records, and other relevant documents..

Sources revealed that the FIA team has already conducted an informal meeting with Armaghan and plans to formally arrest him soon. Once Armaghan is taken into custody, the FIA will begin a thorough investigation into his alleged crimes. The FIA sources revealed that a copy of arm license against Kamran Asghar Qureshi's name, and a dairy

of his online dealings with Armaghan was also recovered from the house.

Meanwhile, in a significant development in the Mustafa Amir murder case, two witnesses who worked at the residence of the accused, Armaghan, came forward with shocking revelations. The witnesses, Ghulam Mustafa and Zohaib, identified the accused in court and provided detailed accounts of the events surrounding the murder.

According to Ghulam Mustafa, on January 1, he was called at the bungalow at 3 pm and found 30-40 people present. He claimed that food was being ordered online, and they were not allowed to leave the premises. The witness said that when work was done, the boss would call us, and the gate of the house would be opened remotely.

Ghulam Mustafa said that on January 6, a boy arrived at 9 pm and went upstairs, followed by sounds of gunfire and scuffling. The accused, Armaghan, allegedly asked them to clean up the blood and assured them

that everything was fine. It is worth mentioning here that Mustafa Aamir went missing on January 6 and a kidnapping case was registered. The police then arrested main suspect, Armaghan, from the Defence area of Karachi.

A co-accused Shiraz revealed crucial details to police during the investigation. He told the police that prime suspect Armaghan lured Mustafa Amir to his house, where he subjected him to brutal torture using iron rods for three hours. "After rendering Mustafa Amir unconscious, Armaghan allegedly taped his mouth shut," Shiraz said and added that then the victim was drove to Hub.

The car was stopped near a mountain, approximately two kilometers from Dareji. Shiraz revealed that Armaghan poured petrol on Mustafa and set him ablaze after checking if he was still alive. "When the car's trunk was opened, Mustafa Amir was still alive, and then Armaghan poured petrol on car and set it ablaze with a lighter," revealed the accused.

Two citizens secure ploats at Governor House draw

F.P. Report

KARACHI: Sindh Governor Kamran Khan Tessori led chants of "Long Live Pakistan Armed Forces" during a Ramadan iftar/dinner event at the Governor House, recognizing their vital role in national security.

According to a Sindh Governor House statement today, Tessori emphasized the global acknowledgment of Pakistan's efforts against terrorism, highlighting US President Donald Trump's praise for Pakistan's military and establishment.

He expressed gratitude to the armed forces, attributing the nation's peace and security to their efforts. Tessori also condemned terrorism, stating that those involved in such acts during Ramadan do not represent true Muslims.

The event saw participation from students of Dow, Hamdard, Ziauddin, and Baqai Universities, who were welcomed warmly by the governor. The evening concluded with a draw, awarding two 120-square-yard plots to Muhammad Ayaz from Sohrah Goth and Nadia Iqbal from Allahwala Town. Both expressed his joy over winning the plot.

11 flights called off at Airport

F.P. Report

KARACHI: Eleven flights departing from Karachi Airport have been cancelled due to technical and operational reasons.

According to flight schedule, Karachi to Islamabad SereneAir flight ER-504 has been cancelled while Karachi to Islamabad FlyJinnah flight 9P-672 has also been suspended. Moreover, Karachi to Lahore AirSial flight PF-145 has been called off while Karachi to Islamabad AirSial flight PF-123 and PF-125 have also been cancelled.

Similarly, Karachi to Islamabad AirBlue flight 208 has been cancelled and Karachi to Quetta FlyJinnah flight 9P-851 has also been suspended. Further, Karachi to Lahore FlyJinnah flight 9P-840 has been cancelled while Karachi to Lahore AirBlue flight 402 was also cancelled.

Vice Chairman FRWO optimistic as IMF team visits Pakistan

F.P. Report

LAHORE: Kashif Imran Bhatti, Vice Chairman of the Ferozpur Road Industrial Welfare Organisation (FRWO) has expressed optimism ahead of the International Monetary Fund's (IMF) two-week visit to Pakistan. The visit, which will continue until March 15, 2025, includes discussions on fiscal reforms and a \$1 billion climate financing package aimed at supporting the country's environmental and economic goals.

Bhatti hopes that this visit will yield favorable results for Pakistan's struggling construction and real estate sectors, which he believes are essential for the country's economic recovery.

He stressed the importance of finalizing the expected fiscal package during the IMF discussions, which would offer much-needed support to these key industries.

The IMF's ongoing consultations with Pakistan are viewed as critical not only for fiscal stability but also



for addressing the nation's environmental challenges and advancing climate resilience.

KMC ready to pay Rs550m in dues to 610 pensioners

F.P. Report

KARACHI: Karachi Mayor Barrister Murtaza Wahab has revealed that significant measures are underway to address financial liabilities and enhance city operations. The Karachi Metropolitan Corporation (KMC) is set to pay Rs550 million in dues to 610 pensioners as part of its strategy to clear outstanding liabilities totaling Rs13 billion for retired employees.

According to a statement by KMC today, these announcements were made during a ceremony for distributing pension and arrears checks. Mayor Wahab highlighted that the funds for these payments

have been generated from KMC's own revenue, noting an increase from Rs80 million to Rs250 million. He expressed gratitude to the leadership and Sindh government for their support, emphasizing the commitment to tackle pension payment challenges responsibly.

At the event, Wahab stressed the continuation of the anti-encroachment operation in the city and announced the transition of KMC's four major hospitals to solar energy. Additionally, he outlined a plan to spend Rs20 million in each union council within the current financial year.

In addressing the issue of unauthorized road dig-

ging by Sui Southern Gas Company, the mayor expressed strong reservations and confirmed that letters had been sent to relevant authorities. He also highlighted ongoing projects to address water shortages, including laying a new canal from Hub Dam and initiating water recycling projects.

Mayor Wahab underscored the need for action against legal violations in Karachi and the end of favoritism to enhance institutional efficiency. During the ceremony, checks were distributed to officers and employees by various city officials, marking a significant step in addressing financial challenges faced by KMC.

Shopkeeper thwarts robbery in Quetta

F.P. Report

QUETTA: A daring encounter unfolded in Killi Nasaran area of the metropolis, where a shopkeeper thwarted a robbery attempt by gunning down two dacoits on Thursday.

The shopkeeper, while defending his mobile and stationery shop, also sustained injuries during the exchange of gunfire. According to police, the incident occurred when two armed dacoits stormed the shop with the intention of looting at gunpoint. In a swift act of self-defense, the shopkeeper opened fire, instantly killing one dacoit and injuring the other, who attempted to flee. The wounded culprit managed to

reach Sandeman Provincial Hospital Quetta for medical assistance but succumbed to his injuries shortly after.

One of the deceased dacoits has been identified as Noor Ahmed from Spiny Road. The identity of the second dacoit remains unknown at this time. The shopkeeper is reported to be in stable condition and is receiving treatment at Sandeman Provincial Hospital Quetta. Authorities from the concerned police station have initiated further investigations into the case.

Two of family killed during dacoity: In a harrowing incident that has left the community in shock, two family members were killed during a dacoity attempt in the Khanpur area

of Jaffarabad, Balochistan, on Thursday. One individual was also injured during the attack.

According to police, the incident took place in the precincts of Police Station Cattle Farm, where unidentified armed dacoits attempted to intercept a vehicle. The victims, reportedly an uncle and nephew, were shot dead when they resisted. The injured individual was promptly taken to District Headquarters Hospital Dera Allah Yar for medical treatment.

In the aftermath, family members and relatives of the deceased blocked the Khanpur bridge, demanding justice and immediate action from authorities to capture those responsible.

GOVERNMENT OF KHYBER PAKHTUNKHWA
PUBLIC HEALTH ENGINEERING DEPARTMENT

NOTICE INVITING
TECHNICAL & FINANCIAL PROPOSALS
E-BIDDING

Public Health Engineering Division Kurram intends to Invite Technical and Financial proposals from the PHE Department Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Pre-Qualified firms on single stage two envelopes system based for supply, Installation, testing and commissioning of the solar based Pumping Machinery to be Installed In the water supply Schemes under the following AIPs:

ADP #	Name of Scheme
188	200103-Construction & Rehabilitation of Existing DWSS In Tribal Districts (AIP)
1	Solarization of DWSS Sher Mat Khan Korona Sehra Kalay Shakardara
2	Solarization of DWSS Gardiawad Khazeeana
189	200104-Rehabilitation & Revitalization of Existing DWSS In Tribal Districts (AIP)
1	Solarization of DWSS Alkausar Yateem Khana & Surrounding Areas Kurram
191	210601-F/S and Construction/Rehabilitation & Solarization of DWSS In Newly Merged Districts
1	Solarization of Dwss Amal Kol Lk
2	Solarization of Dwss Lalami
3	Solarization of Sayed Colony Commerce college
4	Solarization of DWSS Mehmood Colony Ladi Kot

Schemes details, Technical Specification and the design parameters of solar based pumping machinery for the water supply schemes are given in the bidding documents. Bidders may obtain bidding documents and further Information from the office of the Executive Engineer PHE Division Kurram on any working day before the closing date.

01. Technical Design should be based on technical aspects, hydraulic parameters of the scheme provided in the technical documents and rates should be quoted accordingly In the financial bid.

02. Tender form/BOQ can be downloaded after publication In newspaper from Public Health Engineering website (www.pheedpk.gov.pk) only by the pre-Qualified firms/contractors.

03. The contractors quoting their bids up to 10% below Engineer Estimate shall submit bid security 2% only of Engineer Estimate. The contractor quoting their rate more than 10% below & up to 20 % below of Engineer Estimate shall submit along with their bids 8% additional security of Engineer Estimated cost In addition to 2% bid security. If the bid is not accompanied with required amount of additional security, then bid will be considered non-responsive and 2% bid security shall be forfeited in favor of Government and 2nd lowest bidder and so on will be considered accordingly.

04. The contractors quoting bid more than 20% below shall submit an additional security on Engineer Estimated cost equal to the differential amount Engineer Estimate and submitted bid (Differential amount: i.e., If a contractor quote 25 % below then he will submit 25% additional security of Engineer Estimate In addition to 2% bid security) along with detail rate analysis.

05. In case of more than 20% below bids, If the bid is not accompanied by detail rate analysis and/or required additional security the bid shall considered non responsive and all other securities with such non responsive bid shall be forfeited in favour of Government and 2nd lowest bidder and so on will be considered accordingly. In case detail rate analysis submitted with bids Is In view of procuring entity not convincing then Head of procuring entity may declare such bid non -responsive without any forfeiture of bid securities and record reason thereof.

06. Both (Technical + Financial) i.e., financial bid and technical bid separately sealed In envelopes should be submitted through Registered Mall/Couriers service to the office of the Executive Engineer PHE Division Kurram up to 12:00 pm on or before 27-03-2025 Technical Bid will be opened at 12:00 pm on the same day by the bid's evaluation/procurement committee In the office of the undersigned In the presence of bidders or their representative opted to attend. Date of financial bids will be intimated accordingly.

07. Bidders may obtain bidding documents at a fee of Rs: 3000/- as per Govt: Rules payable through demand draft or pay order (Non-Refundable) In the name of Executive Engineer PHE Division Kurram.

08. Firms/Contractor must be registered with KPRA (Active Tax Payer)

09. The tender forms and BOQs must be signed by the original-qualified contractors / Firms.

10. All other Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa blotting/tendering rules will be applicable.

EXECUTIVE ENGINEER

PUBLIC HEALTH ENGINEERING DIVISION DISTRICT KURRAM
Ph # 0926-313253, Email: xenphedkurram@gmail.com

INF(P) 947/25

Meeting focuses on internship opportunities for students

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: A high-level meeting was held on Thursday in the committee room of the Higher Education Department (HED), chaired by the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Minister for Higher Education, Meena Khan Afridi.

The meeting focused on maximizing internship opportunities for students currently enrolled in various BS programs at government colleges and recent graduates.

Senior officials, including the Special Secretary for Higher Education, Additional Secretaries, Director Colleges, and concerned officers from the higher

education and youth affairs departments, attended the meeting.

Additional Director Colleges HED gave a detailed briefing on various initiatives aimed at providing internship opportunities to students.

In the briefing it was said that discussion has been conducted with industrialists, government institutions, and non-governmental organizations in Peshawar, Mardan, and Hazara regarding creation of most internships opportunities for college students.

Furthermore it was also said that positive response was received from these sectors, and similar visits to other districts are ongoing to

expand this initiative across the province.

The provincial minister appreciated the efforts of the HED for creating internship opportunities and directed concerned officials to ensure that mandatory internships are implemented in accordance with the Higher Education Commission's policy.

He also instructed that a memorandum of understanding be signed between the Higher Education and Youth Affairs Departments to facilitate internship opportunities for students from both merged tribal districts and settled areas.

Similarly, he also emphasized the need to create internship opportu-

nities in disciplines such as Artificial Intelligence and emerging technologies and for this purpose, he directed the Higher Education and Youth Affairs Departments to collaborate with the University of Engineering and Technology (UET).

The meeting also discussed other key aspects related to internship opportunities.

The provincial minister said that providing internships to students during their studies and after graduation would not only offer them financial benefits but also equip them with valuable skills, adding that these skills would significantly help them in their professional careers.



PESHAWAR: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Minister for Higher Education, Meena Khan Afridi chairing a high level meeting.

Saif emphasizes importance of wheelchairs in physical rehab

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Barrister Dr. Muhammad Ali Saif, Advisor to the Chief Minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa for Information and Public Relations, emphasized the importance of wheelchairs in the physical rehabilitation of persons with disabilities and stressed the need for their local manufacturing at the national level.

He praised the Paraplegic Centre's wheelchair manufacturing unit, located in the Hayatabad Industrial Estate, which is the only facility in the country producing customized wheelchairs tailored to the age, condition, and physique of disabled individuals. He stated that this initiative is not only a milestone for the Paraplegic Centre but also a matter of pride for the

provincial government.

Speaking as the Chief Guest at the Wheelchair Day event at Paraplegic Centre Peshawar, Barrister Dr Saif reaffirmed the provincial government's commitment to supporting this initiative in every possible way. He stated, "A wheelchair is not a symbol of disability but of independence." He reiterated the government's determination to enhance its efforts in addressing the challenges faced by persons with disabilities, emphasizing that it is the government's responsibility to prioritize their needs, especially in areas requiring humanitarian intervention.

Barrister Saif appreciated the local production of customized wheelchairs and commended Dr. Syed Muhammad Ilyas, CEO of the

Paraplegic Centre, for his dedication to this cause. He recognized the Paraplegic Centre's exemplary services in the rehabilitation of persons with disabilities and prayed for divine rewards for the institution's contributions.

Speaking on the occasion, Dr. Syed Muhammad Ilyas highlighted the weak healthcare infrastructure in Pakistan, stating that the country has historically focused primarily on curative medicine, neglecting the other four pillars of medicine, especially rehabilitation medicine. He stressed the need to integrate rehabilitation services into the national healthcare system to improve overall healthcare standards.

Dr. Ilyas further shared that, according to global standards, at least 1% of

the world's population requires wheelchairs. In Pakistan, this translates to approximately 2.35 million individuals, with 350,000 in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa alone requiring customized wheelchair manufacturing. He called for both provincial and federal government support in strengthening the Paraplegic Centre's production unit to meet this demand.

On this occasion, Barrister Dr Saif presented shields to the personnel who demonstrated outstanding performance in wheelchair production and promotion. Upon his arrival at the Paraplegic Centre, a Saudi patient, Abdullah, who is undergoing treatment at the facility, greeted the chief guest with a bouquet as a gesture of appreciation.

Drug-free Peshawar Campaign 2000 individuals provided free treatment: Qasim

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Minister for Social Welfare, Syed Qasim Ali Shah, has stated that under the leadership of Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur, the current government has launched the "Drug-Free Peshawar Phase Three" campaign.

As part of this initiative, 2,000 individuals are being provided free treat-

ment, and concrete measures will be taken to curb drug addiction.

He expressed these views during a surprise visit to the Khwaja Yunus Social Welfare Organization Center.

The provincial minister conducted a detailed review of the center, met with the staff and drug-addicted individuals, and inquired about the treatment facilities and rehabil-

itation measures provided by the government.

On this occasion, the minister stated that making Peshawar drug-free is the mission of the current government, and all necessary steps will be taken to achieve these goals, as this project holds great significance for the people and residents of Peshawar.

He further said that the provincial government is demonstrating remarkable

and outstanding performance in every sector. Under the guidance of our leader, Imran Khan, vigorous efforts are being made to ensure the development and prosperity of the public.

He added that through the "Drug-Free Peshawar" campaign, practical efforts are being made to reintegrate marginalized individuals back into the mainstream society.

Ramazan: The month of patience, compassion

PESHAWAR (APP): Ramazan, the 9th holy month of Islamic Calendar teaches Muslims to practice self-discipline, sacrifice and empathy by helping the underprivileged besides encouraging actions of generosity and compulsory charity for socioeconomic empowerment of poor people.

Famous for countless blessings, Ramazan is the holy month in which Muslims from across the world show exceptional endurance, patience and empathy besides seeking forgiveness and mercy keeping them modest and disciplined in life.

From dawn to dusk, Ramazan's 30-day fasts abstain Muslims from all kinds of sinful actions, negative behaviors, and smoking. It teaches immense virtues and tolerance besides helping the needy, vulnerable and oppressed segments of society.

"In Islam, patience means to endure or persevere in the face of any difficulty or hardship for Allah only. It requires us to tolerate any trial realizing that whatever we are going through is according to Allah's divine will, and He is the One to take us out from all difficult circumstances and challenging situations," said Muhammad Tayyab Qureshi, Chief Khateeb of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa while talking to APP.

He said Allah Almighty has repeated the word, 'Sabr' (patience) almost 75 times in the Holy Quran which indicates its significance for humanity. The Holy Quran says, "O you who believe! seek help in patience and As-Salat (the prayer). Truly! Allah is with As-Saabireen (the patience

ones).

"As devoted servants of Allah Almighty, we have an obligation to be grateful when we earn Allah's bounties. Similarly, we should deal with all calamities and difficult situations with forbearance, self-control and humbleness," he added.

"The Holy Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) had also laid great emphasis on mercy, kindness and sympathies with the needy and poor people besides persons with different abilities during Ramazan and declared that the rewards of enduring patience in hard times are manifold in this world and in the hereafter.

KP Chief Khateeb said, "Never a believer is stricken with a discomfort, illness, grief or mental worry but Allah Almighty will expiate his sins on the account of immense patience and compassion during Ramazan."

He said a believer, who socializes with people and tolerates their mistakes with sympathy and gentleness would have greater rewards than the other believers, who do not do so. In another Hadith on the reward of fasting, the Holy Prophet (PBUH) said, "Whosoever fasts during Ramazan with faith and seeking his reward from Allah will have his past sins forgiven."

The first Ashra of Ramazan is seeking mercy of Allah, the middle one for forgiveness and the last one to get liberation from the hellfire.

"In Ramazan, there was a night of Laylatul Qadar (the Night of Power) and according to the Holy Prophet (PBUH), every Muslim who prays on

Laylatul Qadar with faith and sincerity, all his/her past sins would be forgiven.

Eminent psychiatrist, Prof. Dr Khalid Mufti who also served as Principal of Khyber Medical College Peshawar said that research studies had shown that Ramazan has immense medical and psychological benefits for a 'Roazadar' (fasting persons) including tolerance, compassion and empathy which last for the rest of the year.

He said Ramazan helps Muslims to overcome their anxiety, depression and hypertension, besides getting rid of worldly desires.

Dr Khalid said impatience, anger and rash behaviors can adversely affect an individual's social life and physical well-being while compassion and tolerance increase the self-esteem of people and leads to better outcomes in one's life.

Abdul Ghafoor, former Director Sheikh Zayad Islamic Centre Peshawar said that Ramazan was the month when people could earn maximum virtues by contributing generously to the poor and deserving persons. "Ramazan promotes interfaith harmony and national cohesion besides cementing bonds of brotherhoods, fraternity and friendship among Muslims and minorities by bringing them closer through Iftar parties," he added.

Shahid Khan alias Lala, who was holding Iftar Dastarkhwan at historic Qissa Khawani bazaar especially for fasting Muslims and poor and deserving minorities community said that he was holding this noble prac-

tice for the last 12-year that gives him inner peace and satisfaction.

"The Iftar Dastarkhwan where minorities were also served would continue till Chand Raat," he said.

Jatinder Singh, Chairman KP chapter of the National Peace Council for Interfaith Harmony told APP that all prophets and founders of all religions had promoted peace, forgiveness, patience, love and tolerance through their universal teachings, actions and deeds.

"Without winning hearts and minds, we can't come closer to each other and develop a society whose inhabitants enjoy equal rights and respect for each other's beliefs," he said.

He said big Iftar parties were planned by the Sikh community members for their Muslim brothers during holy month besides distribution of edible packages among fasting people.

"Arranging iftar parties and Ramazan camps for Muslims are not a new practice for them. Our forefathers did the same thing to express warmth, love and friendship to our Muslims brothers of Peshawar during Ramazan," he added.

He said the establishment of a common study centre at Peshawar for followers of all religions where they could interact and understand each other's beliefs and organize iftar parties to bring people of all faith closer.

The experts said that people should give charity to those in need besides reputable charity organizations with clean accounts and service records.

KP-BOIT launches China Desk to facilitate Chinese investors

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Board of Investment and Trade (KP-BOIT) is the premier agency responsible for promoting investment, trade, and economic development in the province. KP-BOIT works closely with local and international stakeholders to create a business-friendly environment and drive sustainable growth.

Under the advisory & visionary leadership and directives of the Honourable Chief Minister, who also serves as the Chairman of the board, the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Board of Investment and

Trade (KP-BOIT) is pleased to announce the establishment of the China Desk, a dedicated initiative aimed at streamlining processes for investment opportunities and strengthening economic ties between Chinese investors and the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

The China Desk will serve as a one-stop platform for Chinese investors, providing them with comprehensive support, including investment facilitation, regulatory framework guidance, tailored market insights, showcasing sector specific opportunities and building bridges between Chinese investors and local stakeholders. This initiative

underscores KP-BOIT's commitment to creating a conducive environment for foreign investment and promoting KP as a prime destination hub for business and trade.

The formal inauguration of the China Desk will take place soon, with the esteemed presence of high officials from both China and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The event will mark a significant milestone in the growing partnership between China and KP, further solidifying the province's role in the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and other bilateral initiatives.

The Vice Chairman KP-BOIT, Mr. Hassan Masood

Kunwar stated that; "The China Desk is a testament to our unwavering commitment to attracting foreign investment and fostering economic growth. The launch of the China desk aligns with the broader vision of the Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa to position the province as a hub for trade and investment under the framework of CPEC (Hattar & Prioritized Rashakai SEZs).

We are confident that this initiative will not only enhance collaboration with Chinese investors but also create job opportunities and drive sustainable development in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa."

Ramazan Package distributes among PwDs at PCP

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Ramazan food packages were distributed among deserving persons with disabilities (PwDs) at Paraplegic Center Peshawar (PCP) under the initiative of Friends of Paraplegics (FoP), a welfare body of PwDs. This charitable effort, done with the support of the Zakat Foundation of America, was launched on the special request of the PCP's CEO Dr. Syed Muhammad Ilyas.

As part of the program, Friends of Paraplegics officials are distributing ration packages worth Rs 3.5 million to the most deserving PwDs in Peshawar, merged districts, and other remote and underprivileged areas of the province. These packages contain cooking oil, flour, sugar, lentils, salt and spices, ensuring that fasting PwDs families have access to basic food necessities and can fully experience the blessings of Ramazan.

A simple yet impressive ceremony was held on the lush lawns of the Paraplegic Center, where Dr. Syed Muhammad Ilyas personally handed over food packages to the beneficiaries. The event was attended by FoP Chairman Sanaullah, General Secretary Engr Irfanullah, Director of Rehabilitation Dr Amir Zeb, Director Finance Asad

Iqbal, Senior Physiotherapist Gohar Rehman, Manager IT Nauman Tariq, Social Welfare Officer Adnan Ashraf Afridi, Admin Officer M Sabir and several other officials and volunteers, all united in their commitment to serving humanity.

Speaking at the occasion, Dr Ilyas Syed encouraged PwDs to believe in their potential and strive towards self-reliance life style. Drawing parallels with the resilience of overseas Pakistanis who, through sheer hard work, have not only made a name for themselves but have also established institutions like the Zakat Foundation America (ZFA), he urged the recipients to tap into their innate abilities and work towards becoming active, contributing members of society. He stressed that while assistance in times of need is essential, true empowerment lies in moving beyond dependence and working towards self-sufficiency, so

that those in need today can become the ones extending a helping hand tomorrow. With unwavering determination and perseverance, he expressed confidence that these PwDs would one day be in a position to give charity themselves, fostering a society built on dignity and mutual support. He further stated that food packages worth Rs 700,000 had been distributed among 50 deserving families in Peshawar, Charsadda, and Khyber, while the distribution of Rs 3.5 million worth of food packages was ongoing for other PwDs. He maintained that FoP was committed to continuing the Ramazan Ration Program across various districts and appealed to philanthropists and welfare organizations to step forward and contribute, ensuring that maximum poor PwDs and their families benefit from this noble initiative.

On this occasion, the FoP Chairman Engr Sanaullah paid tribute to Dr Syed Muhammad Ilyas, acknowl-

edging his dedication to serving humanity despite his busy professional commitments. He emphasized that the Ramazan Ration Program is a key part of their annual welfare efforts, with this year's goal set at providing food packages to 1,000 deserving PwDs. So far, he revealed, 250 families have already received assistance, and the process continues in other districts. He also shared that distribution in Karak, Bannu and other southern districts will be overseen by FoP General Secretary Engr Irfanullah, while he himself will lead the efforts in Lower Dir and Upper Dir alongside other FoP officials. Announcing future plans, he expressed the FoP's commitment to expanding the program to more underprivileged areas nationwide and exploring partnerships with more international NGOs to enhance its reach. The event concluded with a heartfelt collective prayer for the progress and prosperity of the nation.



Federal govt confers Excellence Award to ex-senior bureaucrat

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Handout Peshawar 6th March, 2025: The federal government has awarded the National Excellence Engineering Services (NEES) Award to Engineer Naeem Khan, a retired PBS-21 ex senior bureaucrat from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, for his valuable services in the water and power sectors.

Meanwhile, in a special ceremony organized by the Institute of Engineers Pakistan (IEP) on the occasion of World Engineers Day, Federal Minister for Planning Anis Iqbal presented Engineer Naeem Khan with a gold medal as an award for his valuable services in the fields of engineering.

On this occasion, Chief Minister Sindh Syed Murad

Ali Shah and other important personalities from across the country attended the ceremony and paid tribute to Naeem Khan for his valuable services.

It should be noted that Engr. Naeem Khan has served in many important government positions, including former Secretary Irrigation Department, former Secretary Energy and Power Department, former

Secretary Agriculture, former Chief Executive Officer and Founding Head of WSSP, former Chief Executive Officer Pakhtunkhwa Energy Development Organization (PEDO), and has led several projects of World Bank. He also delivered his services as a member of the Pakistan Engineering Council (PEC), both think tanks on water and power.



In brief

Safety of public property directed F.P. Report

MARDAN: Commissioner Mardan has urged the revenue officers and officials to perform their duties honestly. Revenue officials are the custodians of the property of the government and common people, so they should perform their duties with full responsibility. He was addressing the Revenue Durbar held at the Commissioner's office, on Thursday. On this occasion AC Development Ijaz Khan Jadoon, AC Revenue Mohammad Dawood Khan besides all the Tehsildars SDCs in-charge of Mardan district and Patwaris and a large number of people were also present. Commissioner Mardan took cognizance of the grievances and problems of the people individually and issued orders to solve these problems after consulting the officials present on the spot. Most of the problems were related to errors in revenue records and inheritance issues. Nisar Ahmad directed the tehsildars and other revenue officials to secure the government lands in their respective jurisdictions and ensure timely identification of illegal occupations and take them into government custody. He directed the revenue authorities to deal with the people who come to Patwar Khanas and other offices regarding their problems and not to harass anyone, otherwise strict disciplinary action would be taken against the responsible officers and officials in case of complaint.

Azam takes oath as FS press club F.P. Report

HAFIZABAD: Prominent journalist Muhammad Azam Gondal elected Finance Secretary Press Club Hafizabad. He took oath of his office, Chairman Press Club Chaudhary Javed Asad took oath from Muhammad Azam Gondal in the meeting of Press Club. Former chairman press club Imtiaz Ahmad Taj, ex-president Zafar Iqbal Butt, Mazhar Warriach, Syed Zaheer Abbas Shah and other members press club attended the meeting. Muhammad Azam Gondal determined to perform his duties with dedication and passion of serving the journalists community as well as to ensure follow constitution of the Press Club.

DC pays surprise visit to bazaars F.P. Report

KARAK: Taking immediate notice of the illegal profiteering and hoarding on public complaints, the Deputy Commissioner Karak Shakeel Ahmed Jan has under the Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Program "Awami Agenda", himself made a surprise visit to the Takht-e-Nusrati Bazaar along-with the Assistant Commissioner and Tehsil Municipal Officer and reviewed the prices of food items. During the visit, he issued strict instructions to the shopkeepers to display the price list and take care of cleanliness. He also took notice of the cleanliness of the Bazar and gave necessary instructions to the Tehsil Municipal Officer on the spot. Deputy Commissioner Karak declared, providing immediate relief to the poor people is the top priority of the government and will not allow anyone to violating the law. He warned that the district administration will not refrain from any action against those who do not display the price list and those who making illegal profits and hoarding.



SHANGLA: Nobel laureate Malala Yousafzai taking keen interest in placards during her visit to girl's school. — F.P. photo

Minister directs facilities of farmers

F.P. Report

QUETTA: Provincial Minister Mir Ali Hassan Zehri chaired performance meeting of the Agriculture and Cooperative Department Balochistan in Quetta. The meeting was attended by senior officers, including Secretary Agriculture.

On the occasion, the provincial minister was informed by the Secretary of Agriculture about the performance and problems facing the institution. Provincial Minister Mir Ali Hassan Zehri while addressing the meeting said that Balochistan has huge opportunities and improvement of agriculture and will soon bring about agricultural revolution in the province.

The provincial minister directed the officers to improve their performance in every case. No lack will

be tolerated in solving the problems facing agriculturists and farmers. He said that immediate and effective steps should be taken to provide facilities and timely information to the farmers because the province will develop when the farmer is mentally satisfied and prosperous.

Mir Ali Hassan Zehri said that the agriculture sector is the most important and backbone in the economy of Pakistan and is 24 % of the domestic economy, while in terms of Balochistan, the agriculture sector is low, while better strategies and modern technology and research are strengthened by the this sector in province.

The provincial minister said that important and lasting projects will be implemented in Balochistan to promote the agriculture sector and bring Balochistan to the agricul-

tural sector of the country, which is underway for which preparations are underway. He further said at the review meeting that the market committees should be kept active at all costs and all the officers should be dedicated to their duty honesty and public service as the farmers will be able to settle their fields with good guidance by the department.

The provincial minister said that the agriculture and revolutionary reforms in the agriculture sector can promote the agriculture sector and we will welcome better proposals in this regard. Mir Ali Hassan Zehri added that effective and modern reforms will be made in every sector associated with agriculture to build the agriculture sector in Balochistan on modern lines so that the role of this sector in the country's economy can be improved.

Admn holds youth kuli katchery F.P. Report

KOHAT: The district administration Kohat has under the Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Program "Awami Agenda", held the 3rd consecutive "Youth Kuli Katchery" in the last 4 months at the Deputy Commissioner Camp Office on Thursday. Deputy Commissioner Kohat Abdul Akram presided over the Katchery.

The Youth Katchery beside the officers of the district administration, police and line departments, was also attended by the youth. The participants openly presented the overall problems of the youth and society in which most of the issues were related to youth affairs, sports, cleanliness, social welfare, education, health, electricity, gas and communication sectors.

Deputy Commissioner Kohat while presenting the report of the last 2 Youth Katcheries, told that a total of 25 issues/demands were raised in it, out of which 24 have been resolved while remaining one is under the process. The participants expressed satisfaction on the results of the previous 2 Katcheries.

Deputy Commissioner Kohat, while assuring solution to all the problems faced by the youth on priority basis, said that the Kuli Katcheries will not be for show but productive and results oriented adding that the results of all the Katcheries that have been held so far are encouraging. He said that we are not disappointed with our future because our young are well aware and very talented. DC Kohat directed the authorities concerned to organize maximum events to keep the youth away from the menace of drugs and other social evils. The participants thanked the district administration for organizing the 3rd consecutive Youth Katchery to solve the problems of the youth.

3 laborers killed in road mishap

F.P. Report

KOHIKSTAN: A tragic road accident occurred on the Karakoram Highway near Chuchang, Kohistan, resulting in the deaths of three laborers. The victims were employed by a Chinese company and were returning home after work when their vehicle lost control and plunged into the Indus River.

According to details, the accident occurred when a vehicle carrying three laborers, all employees of a Chinese company, skidded off the Karakoram Highway near Chuchang and fell into the Indus River. All three laborers died on the spot.

The police identified the

victims as Attullah, resident of Goshalai Jalkot, Muhammad Ayaz, resident of Sewo Dasu Kohistan, and Zahoor Hussain, resident of Sewo Dasu Kohistan. The bodies of the deceased laborers were retrieved from the riverbank and shifted to the District Headquarters Hospital in Dasu, Kohistan, before being sent to their native areas for burial.

Ramzan package distributed: The welfare organization "Navey Jovond Leloni" distributed Ramadan packages to over 230 orphans, widows, disabled individuals, deserving families, and 35 white-collar workers.

The organization has been providing aid to the

needy, including orphans, the poor, and white-collar workers, for the past two years. The organization comprises young individuals and social and welfare personalities from the area, who have been lauded for their efforts.

Under its aid program, the organization not only distributes packages during Ramadan but also works to provide dignified employment opportunities for the poor, which is a commendable initiative. There is a dire need for such organizations in different areas of Shangla, which can provide assistance to the poor, needy, and deserving individuals, creating awareness among the public to help those in need.

First ever eye transplant operated successfully

F.P. Report

LARKANA: First ever eye transplant successfully operated of two female patients named Waziran Khatun and Mai Saddoran Khatun, on Thursday.

On this occasion, the Head of Ophthalmology Department, Dr. Shabir Ahmed Bhutto, speaking to the media said that 3 months ago, the representatives of the social organization Vision Phar Education Foundation Pakistan met with the Vice Chancellor of Benazir Bhutto Medical University in Larkana, Prof. Dr. Nusrat Shah, in which they had poor, poor and deserving patients suffering from eye diseases in the ophthalmology department.

He further said that a few days ago, two eye patients were operated on, while another two patients will be operated on in the next few days. They will be able to regain their eye-

sight and this first-ever corneal transplant operation in the history of Larkana will be a major milestone in the field of medicine. On the other hand, Chandka Medical College Larkana Principal Dr. Zamir Ahmad Soomro and Vice Principal Dr. Gulzar Ahmed Sheikh visited the eye department and got complete information about eye surgery.

Two dacoits killed in police encounter: Two dacoits were killed while their four accomplices managed to escape reportedly in a police encounter in Larkana. Police said that cops found themselves face-to-face with dacoits at Naudero bypass, which led to an exchange of fire between them. Consequently, police further said, two dacoits, who were identified as Wajid Jalbani and Saddam Jalbani, were killed.

The Force also claimed to have recovered sophis-

cated weapons from them. Elaborating further, police said the slain dacoits were also involved in the killings of a Hindu trader in Larkana Sanjay Kumar and another Hindu trader in Naudero Santosh Kumar.

Police in Khairpur have claimed to have arrested two dacoits besides recovering two pistols, a cellphone and a motorcycle from them in an encounter. According to SSP Tauheed Rehman Memon, the encounter took place while the police personnel were busy checking on the National Highway.

"The cops signaled two motorcyclists to stop near the Army Stop. But both of them opened fire at them and tried to flee," the SSP said, adding, "The cops chased them and managed to arrest them." Memon informed that the arrested dacoits had been identified as Saeed and Khair Muhammad.

Sindh irrigation deptt issues water shortage and drought alert

F.P. Report

HYDERABAD: Sindh's irrigation department has issued a circular over an imminent threat of water shortage and drought in Karachi and other parts of Sindh. "The water reservoirs have dropped to a dangerous level owing to lesser level of rainfall during the ongoing Rabi season," the letter read.

The water level has dropped to only 0.102-million-acre-feet in Tarbela and 0.226 MAF at Mangla reservoir. "The water in Tarbela and Mangla dams apprehended to come to dead point in four to five days," according to the letter.

"This water shortage, if continues, the scarcity could reach to over 50% in the beginning of Kharif season of crops", the irrigation department apprehends. Sindh Irrigation Department has emphasized for planning for a

just distribution of available water.

"The impacts of drought emerging in Karachi, Hyderabad, Mirpur Khas, Thatta and Badin districts. While Dadu, Sukkur, Ghotki, Khairpur, Naushehro Feroz, Larkana, Jacobabad and Tharparkar districts also being affected," according to the official letter. The Pakistan Meteorological Department (PMD) recently issued a drought alert for various districts of Sindh, including Karachi, due to scarce rainfall.

According to the PMD, the current season has seen a 52% decrease in rainfall in Sindh, raising concerns about drought. The PMD has predicted that the dry spell is likely to persist until February and March, exacerbating drought conditions. Districts such as

Naushahro Feroze, Sukkur, Benazirabad, and Jamshoro are particularly at risk.

To mitigate the effects of drought, the PMD directed deputy commissioners in Karachi to take alternative arrangements, while district administrations in Khairpur and Tharparkar have been instructed to take precautionary measures. Earlier, the PMD had warned of an emerging drought conditions in the country after scarce rainfall.

Met Office stated that drought conditions emerging in country as Pakistan received below normal rainfall (-40%) from 01st September 2024 to 15th Jan 2025 period across the country. Recent rainfall spell in the country did not produce significant rain in plain areas of the country aggravating the drought conditions.

Generation Z: Navigating the digital paradox in a fast-paced world

Baseer Ali Rahman Khan

THE cohort born between 1997 and 2012 is commonly referred to as "Generation Z." Shaped by rapid technological advancements and a digitally interconnected world, this generation exhibits unique characteristics, preferences, and challenges. To fully comprehend their experiences, it is essential to examine the historical progression of generational identities and the obstacles they have faced.

The Evolution of Generational Identities: The practice of categorizing generations has long been used to analyse societal trends and historical shifts. Notably, Gertrude Stein, a distinguished 20th-century poet, introduced the term "The Lost Generation" to describe individuals born between 1883 and 1900. This generation endured immense hardships due to World War I, facing psychological trauma, economic downturns, and a pervasive sense of disillusionment. Many artists and intellectuals of this era grappled with existential despair, questioning the meaning of life and societal values.

The tradition of naming generations continued throughout the 20th century. The "Greatest Generation" (1901–1927) emerged from the devastation of

World War II, demonstrating resilience and commitment to rebuilding a fractured world. Their determination fuelled industrial progress despite the psychological burdens of the Cold War.

Following them, the "Silent Generation" (1928–1945) was characterized by discipline, conformity, and loyalty, shaped by the aftermath of war and economic instability. While they valued social order, their strict upbringing often restricted creative expression, posing challenges in adapting to rapid industrialization and technological evolution. The post-war economic boom led to a sharp rise in birth rates, giving rise to the "Baby Boomer" generation (1946–1964). Raised during a time of economic prosperity, Baby Boomers prioritized career success, often at the expense of work-life balance. However, they encountered difficulties in adapting to technological shifts and financial concerns in their later years.

"Generation X" (1965–1980) emerged with a reputation for independence and pragmatism. Growing up amidst economic turbulence and high divorce rates, they developed strong decision-making skills. The economic downturn of the 1990s, however, created significant career and financial hurdles for them.

The subsequent "Millennial" generation (1981–1996) navigated the transition from the 20th to the 21st century, witnessing the digital revolution and globalization. While they valued higher education and multitasking, their inclination for instant gratification led to struggles with patience and resilience in the face of economic instability and technological change.

Now, we arrive at "Generation Z"—a generation immersed in a fully digital world from birth. They are proficient in smartphone technology, social media, and online education. With a strong inclination toward entrepreneurship and technological innovation, they seek independence from traditional employment structures. However, their immediate access to vast information influences their decision-making, fostering both rapid adaptability and notable challenges.

The Challenges Faced by Generation Z: Despite the advantages of digital connectivity, Generation Z grapples with profound psychological and social difficulties. These challenges are explored in detail below:

1. Declining Attention Span The constant exposure to short-form digital content on platforms like YouTube Shorts, TikTok, and Instagram Reels has significantly reduced Generation

Z's attention span. While they excel in multitasking, they struggle with deep focus, making sustained intellectual engagement increasingly difficult.

2. Impatience and Instant Gratification

Growing up in a world where services and information are instantly accessible has diminished their patience. Whether ordering food, making purchases, or seeking solutions, they expect immediate results. This impatience extends to their professional and personal lives, affecting long-term goal setting and resilience.

3. Sleep Deprivation Prolonged screen exposure, particularly at night, disrupts melatonin production, leading to sleep deprivation. Many members of Generation Z, engaged in freelance work or habitual screen use, suffer from insomnia, which negatively impacts cognitive function and overall health.

4. Weakening Social Skills Reliance on digital communication has reduced face-to-face interactions, leading to difficulties in emotional intelligence and real-world social engagement. Many in this generation struggle with meaningful conversations, resulting in social detachment and weaker interpersonal relationships.

5. Decreased Physical Activity

The increasing preference for digital entertainment over outdoor activities has led to reduced physical fitness. Compared to previous generations, Generation Z participates less in sports and exercise, contributing to rising obesity rates and cardiovascular health concerns.

6. Rising Psychological Distress

The curated nature of social media often fosters unrealistic comparisons, leading to feelings of inadequacy, anxiety, and depression. Studies indicate a direct correlation between excessive social media use and declining mental health among young individuals. Research from Queensland highlights a troubling increase in self-harm among 10- to 14-year-old girls, while psychologist Jonathan Haidt, in his book *The Anxious Generation*, emphasizes the role of social media in exacerbating adolescent anxiety.

Strategies for Overcoming These Challenges: To navigate these difficulties, Generation Z can adopt practical strategies for healthier digital habits and overall well-being:

1. Digital Detox

Setting intentional limits on social media usage and incorporating regular digital breaks can improve concentration and mental clarity.

2. Notification Control

Disabling non-essential notifications and keeping devices at a distance can reduce distractions and enhance productivity.

3. Strengthening Real-Life Connections

Prioritizing in-person interactions with family and friends fosters genuine emotional support and reduces social isolation.

4. Curating Positive Content

Actively engaging with informative and uplifting content helps shape a more constructive online experience, mitigating the negative psychological effects of social media.

6. Prioritizing Mental and Physical Health

Incorporating mindfulness practices, regular exercise, and reading into daily routines can counteract the adverse effects of excessive screen time and promote overall well-being.

Conclusion

While Generation Z benefits from unprecedented technological advancements, they face unique challenges that demand conscious effort and adaptive strategies. By cultivating self-awareness, fostering real-world connections, and engaging in healthy digital practices, they can harness the advantages of their era while safeguarding their mental and emotional well-being.

The writer is a public servant at Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.



JAKARTA: Rescue teams evacuate people whose homes have been flooded in Pasar Minggu district in Indonesia.

Georgia House passes school safety bill after school shooting

ATLANTA (AP): Georgia House members voted 159-13 for a school safety bill that supporters say is aimed at preventing a school shooting like the one in September that killed two teachers and two students at Apalachee High School.

But some lawmakers remain uneasy about its proposed creation of a statewide student database of disciplinary, mental health and law enforcement information to evaluate students who might commit violence. And although the House also passed a bill to give a tax incentive to people who pay for gun storage devices or training, Democrats say the Republican-majority General Assembly isn't doing enough to control guns.

Republican House Speaker Jon Burns of Newton gave House Bill 268 a strong push, making the unusual move of stepping down from the dais to give a speech supporting the measure. "I believe this legislation will usher a new culture in our school systems, where we run towards our children facing struggles with mental health," Burns said, saying the bill aims to reach troubled children before they turn to violence.

The measure now heads to the Senate, which has thus far taken a less comprehensive approach than the House's 64-page bill. One Senate measure that has advanced out of committee calls for more limited information sharing but would also make adult prosecution the default

for more crimes where children aged 13 to 16 are charged. Besides the database, the House bill also mandates quicker transfers of records when a student enters a new school, creates at least one new position to help coordinate mental health treatment for students in each of Georgia's 180 school districts, requires police agencies to report any time a student has threatened harm to someone at school and sets up an anonymous reporting system statewide.

The push to share information is driven by the belief among many that the Barrow County school system didn't have a full sense of the warning signs displayed by the 14-year-old accused in the shooting. Officials have said creating the database will require more legal work to make sure federal privacy laws regarding health data and educational records are obeyed. But opponents say they fear the data will create a blacklist that may treat racial or religious minorities unfairly. "There isn't nearly enough on mental health and there's too much on surveillance and overcriminalization and the invasion of privacy of our students and their families," said Rep. Gabriel Sanchez, a Smyrna Democrat.

The bill calls for each school system to set up a behavioral threat management team that's meant to intervene when school officials learn that students have threatened violence. The state would develop guidelines for how school districts should assess

threats, with the team focusing on credible threats. Those teams could turn to the database for more information about a student under scrutiny. Students who threatened violence would be removed from in-person classes while school officials decide on a response. House Education Committee Chairman Chris Erwin, a Homer Republican, said the bill would prevent violence. "Save a life today, vote for this bill," Erwin urged House members. The measure also includes suicide and violence prevention classes for older students, calls for an assessment once a student is absent for a certain number of days.

House Democrats supported House Bill 79, which would provide tax incentives for people who buy gun safes or gun locks or get gun training. But Democrats said that's not enough even as the bill passed 165-8, moving on to the Senate. They want a law that would require adults to lock up their guns when children are present. Officials say Colin Gray, the father of Apalachee High's accused shooter Colt Gray, bought his son an assault-style rifle and gave him easy access, even though Colin Gray knew or should have known that his son was a danger to others. "Nothing should haunt us more in this chamber than a missed opportunity and nothing should shame us more than failing to learn from our mistakes," said Rep. Michelle Au, a Johns Creek Democrat.

Kim's sister threatens a response to a US carrier's deployment in S Korea

SEOUL (AP): The powerful sister of North Korean leader Kim Jong Un threatened to launch high-profile provocations in response to the arrival of a US aircraft carrier in South Korea and other US military activities, which she slammed as "confrontation hysteria of the US and its stooges."

The warning by Kim Yo Jong implies North Korea will likely ramp up weapons testing activities and maintain its confrontational posture against the US, though President Donald Trump has said he would reach out to Kim Jong Un to revive diplomacy. In a statement carried by state media, Kim Yo Jong accused the US of clearly showing "its most hostile and confrontational will" to North Korea with the deployments of the USS Carl Vinson and other powerful US military

assets and US-South Korean military drills this year.

"The DPRK is also planning to carefully examine the option for increasing the actions threatening the security of the enemy at the strategic level to cope with the fact that the deployment of US strategic assets in the Korean Peninsula has become a vicious habit and adversely affects the security of the DPRK," she said, using the acronym of North Korea's official name, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. Her statement suggests North Korea may test-launch powerful missiles designed to strike the mainland US or American military bases in the region, observers say.

South Korea's Defense Ministry warned later it's ready to repel any provocations by North Korea based

on a solid military alliance with the US. A ministry statement called Kim Yo Jong's warning "sophistry" meant to justify her country's nuclear development and future provocations. The USS Carl Vinson and its strike group arrived in South Korea, the latest temporary deployment of a US strategic asset aimed at displaying the firmness of the U.S.-South Korean military alliance in the face of North Korean threats and boosting interoperability of the allies' combined assets. The US carrier's arrival came four days after North Korea conducted cruise missile tests, its fourth missile launch event this year.

North Korea views arrivals of such powerful US military assets in South Korea as major security threats and often responds with missile tests. North Korea hasn't directly

responded to Trump's overture but alleged US-led hostilities against North Korea have intensified since the start of Trump's second term in January. Experts say Kim Jong Un won't likely embrace Trump's outreach anytime soon as he is now focusing on his support of Russia's war against Ukraine with supply of weapons and troops. They say Kim could consider returning to diplomacy with Trump when he thinks he cannot maintain his country's current booming cooperation with Russia. Kim and Trump met three times from 2018-19 during Trump's first term to discuss the future of North Korea's nuclear program. Their high-stakes diplomacy eventually collapsed due to wrangling over US-led economic sanctions on North Korea.

Putin extols 'elephant diplomacy' with Myanmar in talks with junta chief

MOSCOW (Reuters): Russia's President Vladimir Putin hailed expanding ties with ally Myanmar at talks with its military junta chief and thanked him for gifting Moscow six elephants. Military analysts have dubbed the present, which coincided with Russia's completing delivery of six fighter jets to Myanmar, as part of "elephant diplomacy" between two governments viewed dimly in Western capitals.

Myanmar has been in turmoil since 2021 when its military ousted the administration of Nobel peace prize winner leader Aung San Suu Kyi, triggering a civil war. "This year we celebrate the 25th anniversary of the signing of the declaration on the foundations of friendship between our countries," Putin told Min Aung Hlaing, Myanmar's prime minister, at a meeting in the Kremlin.

"Relations between our countries are indeed developing steadily," he added, noting bilateral trade rose 40% last year. The two sides signed an agreement on construction of a small-scale nuclear plant in Myanmar. Rosatom, Russia's state nuclear power corporation, said the plant would have a capacity of 100 megawatts with the possibility of trebling that capacity.

Putin also announced that a military unit from Myanmar would take part in the military parade in Moscow on May 9 marking the 80th anniversary of the World War Two victory over Nazi Germany. He said Min Aung Hlaing would also attend. Like China, Russia backs Myanmar's military and is developing cooperation, including between their air forces. "And of course, I cannot but thank you for your

very warm gift: you brought us six elephants last year, and they have already been given to the Moscow Zoo," Putin said.

Min Aung Hlaing, 68, who rarely travels abroad, praised the quality of Russian military hardware his nation receives and said he supported Putin in the Ukraine war where he believed Moscow would soon be victorious. The junta is struggling with internal conflict, an economy in tatters, widespread hunger and a third of the nation's 55 million people in need of aid, according to the UN. Russia was one of the first countries to back the junta after the 2021 coup when it was being condemned around the world for using lethal force against opponents.

Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin said he saw good prospects for expanding cooperation in

areas including agriculture, nuclear energy, transport and infrastructure. "Despite the illegitimate sanctions against Russia and Myanmar, our trade and economic cooperation is developing successfully, and mutual trade is growing," Mishustin said, according to the Interfax news agency. Russian companies plan to invest in Myanmar's special economic zone in Dawei, Mishustin said, without naming firms.

The long-delayed Dawei project on the Andaman Sea is intended to be a major hub for industry, technology and transport. Russia and Myanmar have long been talking about building a small nuclear power plant in Myanmar. The junta plans an election this year, but critics deride that as a sham to keep the generals in power through proxies.

US education secy says she is on final mission to end bureaucracy

WASHINGTON (Reuters): US Education Secretary Linda McMahon said she would lead a "final mission" to end bloat at the government department that President Donald Trump has targeted for closure, and that she aimed to transfer oversight of education to state governments.

"Our job is to respect the will of the American people and the President they elected, who has tasked us with accomplishing the elimination of bureaucratic bloat here at the Department of Education - a momentous final mission - quickly and responsibly," McMahon said in a statement posted on the Department of Education's website. McMahon, who was confirmed by the Senate earlier in the day, said the "overhaul" would profoundly impact staff, budgets and agency operations at the department.

Trump has said he would like to close the Department of Education using an executive order, but acknowledged he would need buy-ins from Congress and teachers' unions to fulfill his campaign pledge to do so. The statement appeared to stop short of calling for the department's closure. Instead, McMahon said she would work with Congress and other federal agencies to determine the "best path forward."

Iran, Turkey summon envoys

DUBAI / ANKARA (Reuters): Iran and Turkey's foreign ministries summoned their envoys after a diplomatic spat over Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan's warning of Tehran against undermining Syria's stability. Fidan last week gave an interview to Qatar's al Jazeera in which he said Iran's foreign policy relying on militias was "dangerous" and needed to change.

"If you are trying to cause anxiety in a third country, other countries can also disturb you by supporting groups in your own country," Turkey's foreign minister added. Iran's foreign ministry summoned Turkey's ambassador over Fidan's comments, state TV reported.

The Iranian foreign ministry published a statement saying that a meeting took place between ambassador Hicabi K'rlang'c and Mahmoud Heydari, the Iran foreign ministry's Director General for the Mediterranean and Eastern Europe. "The common interests of the two countries and the sensitivity of regional conditions require avoiding wrongful comments and unreal analyses that could lead to differences and tensions in our bilateral relations," Heydari said. A day after Iran's move, Turkey summoned Iran's charges d'affaires in Ankara. Iranian officials have been voicing criticism of Turkey more often in public recently, Turkish foreign ministry spokesperson Oncu Keceli said.

"Foreign policy matters should not be used as a tool for domestic politics in any case. In this context, we prefer to convey critical messages to another country directly. We followed this path today," Keceli said, adding that Turkey attaches great value to its relations with Iran. Iran's foreign ministry spokesperson said that Tehran and Ankara disagreed over some issues. "We highly value our bilateral relations with Turkey. Unfortunately, the words repeatedly heard (from Turkey) were highly unconstructive, and it was necessary for Iran to decisively and clearly state its position in that regard," Esmail Baghaei said.

China will work to firmly advance 'reunification' with Taiwan: PM

BEIJING (Reuters): Chinese Premier Li Qiang said on Wednesday China would "firmly advance" the push for "reunification" with Taiwan while opposing external interference, and strive to work with regular Taiwanese to realize the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.

China claims democratically governed Taiwan as its own territory, despite the objection of the government in Taipei, and has ramped up its military pressure against the island in recent years, including holding several rounds of major war games. "We will firmly advance the cause of China's reunification and work with our fellow Chinese in Taiwan to realise the glorious cause of the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation," Li wrote in his annual work report to China's parliament.

In his work report last year, Li reiterated a call for "reunification" with Taiwan, but added emphasis that it wants to "be

firm" in doing so and dropped the descriptor "peaceful", which had been used in previous reports. Beijing has consistently pushed for reunification with Taiwan, and again said it would "resolutely oppose" separatist activities pushing for Taiwan independence. But its appeal to work with "fellow Chinese in Taiwan" to help rejuvenate the Chinese nation wasn't mentioned in the work report last year.

Taiwan President Lai Ching-te says only Taiwan's people can decide their future. He has repeatedly offered talks with China, which has rebuffed him, saying he is a "separatist". China has never renounced the use of force to bring Taiwan under its control. Amid geopolitical tensions between China and the US and as President Donald Trump ratchets up pressure on Beijing including through tariffs, China said it opposed "external interfer-

ence" on the Taiwan issue. It said it was committed to a foreign policy of peace to "oppose hegemonism and power politics, oppose unilateralism and protectionism in all forms."

Taiwan's top China policy-making Mainland Affairs Council was not immediately available to comment. A senior Taiwan official familiar with the government's China policy said Beijing's tone on Taiwan hadn't changed much, signalling Taiwan wasn't at the top of its political agenda which had prioritised the economy and relations with the US.

"They want to reiterate their agenda of the 'big exchange across the strait'," the official said, pointing out the paragraph on Taiwanese people as a sign of possible ramping up of China's tactics to bolster Beijing's reach abroad including co-opting Taiwanese through various exchanges including culture and religion.

'Trump's treatment of Kyiv leader filled him with horror'

WARSAW (AP): Poland's democracy hero Lech Wasa and dozens of other former political prisoners in Poland have written a letter to President Donald Trump, telling him that his treatment of Ukraine's president at the Oval Office last week filled them "with horror and distaste."

Wa'?'sa, who served as president soon after Poland embraced democracy, and the others tell Trump that they found it offensive that he expected Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy to show respect and gratitude for the material assistance the United States has given Ukraine as it defends itself against Russia's invasion. "Gratitude is due to the heroic Ukrainian soldiers who shed blood in defense of the values of the free world. They are the ones who have been dying on the front lines," they say.

The White House has demanded that Zelenskyy show more openness to

potential concessions in order to bring the fighting to an end, but Zelenskyy has been resistant, saying that any deal with Russia is still "very, very far away," while seeking greater security guarantees from Washington. Wa'?'sa posted the letter on Facebook along with a photograph of himself with Trump. It was signed by himself and 38 other former democracy activists who were imprisoned by Poland's Moscow-backed communist regime before 1989. Among the others who signed are Adam Michnik, Bogdan Lis, Seweryn Blumsztajn and W'?'adys'aw Frasy'niuk.

"We were also terrified by the fact that the atmosphere in the Oval Office during this conversation reminded us of the one we remember well from interrogations by the Security Service and from the courtrooms in communist courts," they wrote. "Prosecutors and judges, commissioned by the

omnipotent communist political police, also explained to us that they had all the cards in their hands, and we had none. They demanded that we cease our activities, arguing that thousands of innocent people were suffering because of us. They deprived us of freedom and civil rights because we did not agree to cooperate with the authorities and did not show them gratitude. We are shocked that you treated President Volodymyr Zelenskyy in a similar way," they wrote. Starting in 1980, Wa'?'sa spearheaded Poland's pro-democracy Solidarity movement that nine years later led to the peaceful ouster of communism from Poland and inspired other countries to shed Moscow's domination. In 1983 he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. In 1990-95 he served as democratic Poland's first popularly elected president.

US commitment to alliance 'ironclad'

WASHINGTON (AP): President Donald Trump's pick as NATO ambassador reassured senators at his confirmation hearing that the Trump administration's commitment to the military alliance was "ironclad."

The US commitment has been called into question by Trump's scathing criticism of European allies and his eagerness to build ties with Russian President Vladimir Putin. Matt Whitaker, an acting attorney general in Trump's first term, told senators that a key part of his mission would be to push the 32 NATO allies to meet Trump's demand to increase their own defense spending.

Trump sent chills through the alliance with his comment during the campaign that Russia should "do whatever the hell it wants" to NATO members that don't meet military spending targets. He has played down the threat from Russia and threatened to end US support for Ukraine as it fights off Russia's invasion. In the aftermath of Trump's con-

tentious meeting with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy last week at the White House, European NATO members have been scrambling to assess their defense arrangements, while insisting there is no thought of going it alone without the United States.

Whitaker evaded Democratic senators' prodding for a more detailed discussion of Ukraine in its fight against Russia. Asked if he agreed that Russia started the war by invading Ukraine, Whitaker cited Vice President JD Vance's statement that that was the case. Whitaker, however, spoke positively of NATO. He was asked specifically about the US commitment to the alliance and its bedrock Article 5, by which NATO countries pledge to treat an attack against one as an attack on them all.

"It will be ironclad," he told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. US administrations have long complained about European allies and Canada relying too much on the

United States in NATO. Trump has taken that further, questioning the value to the US of being in the bloc.

NATO leaders say Trump's criticism in his first term, and the Ukraine war, have led to a majority of NATO states meeting the alliance's target of spending at least 2% of their gross domestic product on building up their militaries. Trump recently upped that demand to 5% of GDP. Democratic lawmakers at hearing noted the US spends about 3.4% of its GDP on its military. NATO countries bordering Russia spend the biggest share, including Poland, at 4%. Whitaker framed getting allies to meet Trump's 5% goal as a primary mission for him at NATO. "I have no concern that our European allies and Canada can do more and want to do more," Whitaker said. "I fully expect they will do what's necessary to continue to make NATO the strongest alliance ever in the history of the planet."

Smuggling of 20,000 immigrants: Two suspects arrested

LOS ANGELES (AP): Federal authorities in Los Angeles arrested two alleged leaders of a criminal organization suspected of smuggling 20,000 people from Guatemala to the US and charging each person as much as \$18,000 to get them into the country.

Eduardo Domingo Renoj-Matul, known as

"Turko," and his lieutenant, Cristobal Mejia-Chaj, were taken into custody. They have each pleaded not guilty to multiple charges related to smuggling migrants across the border over five years, the US Attorney's Office said. A federal judge ordered the men, who themselves are in the country illegally, jailed without bond until

their trial in April.

The indictment names Renoj-Matul as the head of one of the largest human smuggling organizations in the US, a vast ring operating for at least a dozen years that primarily transported people to the US from Guatemala. The criminal network was responsible for the deaths of seven immigrants without

legal status - including a 4-year-old child - who were killed in a November 2023 vehicle crash in Oklahoma, prosecutors said.

A driver who's been in custody in Oklahoma since that crash, Jose Paxtor-Oxla, was also charged in the California indictment, according to the court documents.

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Payment for work done can't be stopped: US top court

SURPRISINGLY, the conservatives-dominated Supreme Court had upheld the judgment of Washington-based District Court Judge Amir Ali's order that the US government cannot withhold payments to foreign contractors and workers for work done.

The court in a 5-4 unsigned order asked Judge Ali to consider the feasible time-frame for compliance of payments order. Six of the nine Supreme Court judges are conservatives appointed by Republican presidents, including Chief Justice John Roberts. But in an interesting division, two of them, Chief Justice Roberts and Justice Amy Coney Barrett, went with the three liberal judges. Justice Samuel Alito wrote a dissenting judgment for the four conservative judges, questioning the authority of a district judge to interfere in the decision of the executive.

The liberal majority did not offer any opinion except directing the district judge. Judge Ali had set the deadline of February 26 to disburse \$2 billion owed to foreign agencies.

The majority directed Judge Ali to "clarify what obligations the government must fulfil to ensure compliance with the temporary restraining order, with due regard to the feasibility of any compliance timelines." The Trump government did not question the authority of the district judge but it questioned the short deadline.

Justice Alito has expressed a strong opinion against District Judge Ali's order, questioning his authority and jurisdiction. He wrote: "Does a single district court judge who likely lacks jurisdiction have the unchecked power to compel the government of the United States to pay out (and probably lose forever) 2 billion taxpayer dollars? The answer to that question should be an emphatic 'No', but a majority of this court apparently thinks otherwise. I am stunned."

Acting Solicitor General Sarah Harris said the administration was given too little time to scrutinize the invoices "to ensure legitimacy of all payments".

Harris described Ali's direction as an "impossible order", and said in her filing, "Ordering the United States to pay all pending requests under foreign-aid instruments on a timeline of the district court's choosing – without regard to whether the requests are legitimate, or even due yet – intrudes on the President's broad foreign-affairs powers and upends the systems the Executive Branch has established to disburse aid."

The majority decision of the Supreme Court has shown that President Trump cannot be overenthusiastic in freezing aid money abruptly, and that the courts would defend the rights of aid agencies which have done their work under the aid programme.

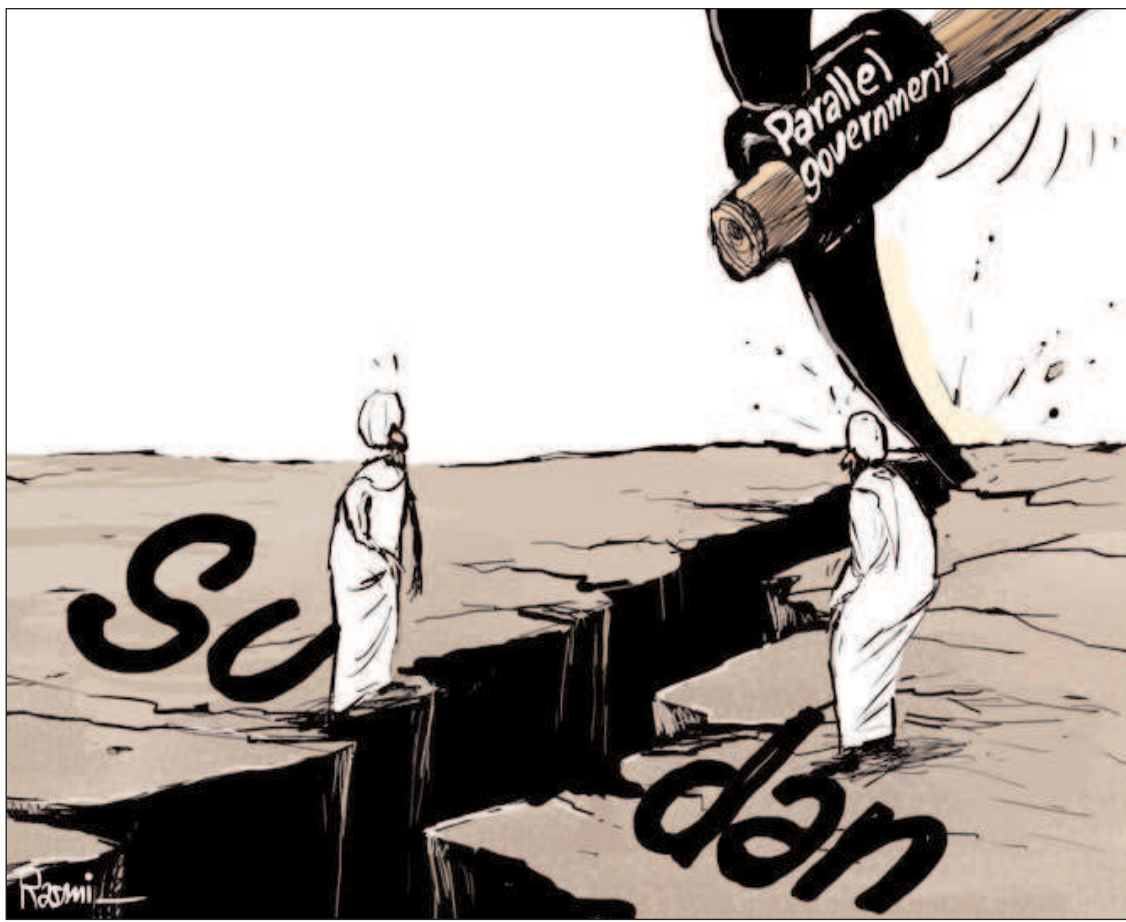
The Supreme Court has not taken any view on the merits of the policy – and this court with its conservative bent of mind is not likely to do so either – but it has shown that it would protect the rights and interests of the aid workers at home and abroad. President Trump and his aides are likely to resent judicial intervention because they want to take decisions as quickly as possible because they feel that they know very clearly in their minds what needs to be done to correct the distortions introduced by the Biden administration.

The judiciary could be seen as putting the brakes on the quick and right decisions that the Executive is taking. But here is where the classical theory of the separation of powers that serves as the framework of the United States' governmental system comes into play, and it becomes the duty of the judiciary to see to it that the framework holds.

There was also the argument put forward by some experts and aid agencies that President Trump cannot freeze funds voted by the Congress for foreign aid. He can only stop future funding and carry the majority in the House of Representatives and the Senate to support his policy. But the court has not commented on the issue because the case that came up before it did not raise any of these issues.

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Why Europe is not taken seriously on the world stage

Khaled Abou Zahr

UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer, French President Emmanuel Macron and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky each visited the White House for discussions with US President Donald Trump last week. European security and the war in Ukraine were at the top of the agenda. While Starmer and Macron's visits were marked with strained smiles, Zelensky's visit was heated. As a Middle Easterner, I cannot help but link them all together.

Whether the cards were badly played or not, the main outcome of these visits has been an increased conversation surrounding putting forward a French-UK nuclear umbrella to protect Europe and to replace the US. This is a European reaction to what they consider to be America's abandonment of the old continent. Trump has set out a clear path to US protection: it can no longer be granted, it will have to be deserved. In short, there will be no free ride. It is blunt and tough, but clear and fair.

It has been entertaining to see Europe's reaction to this new US rule, especially as it has been very similar to its reaction to the UK's Brexit. London and Paris bickered through that bad breakup but are now once again cozying up as if it never happened. And this probably should be the lesson to learn. The overreaction of Europe to Brexit

should not be repeated in the situation between Europe and the US. To misquote a play, Europe should not once again act as a "woman scorned."

It is not a bad thing for Europe to seek to mutualize and strengthen its defense and security. Funnily enough, this is exactly what Trump has been requesting since his first presidency, especially when it comes to military budgets. Beyond the rhetoric, there is a core difference in what losing to Russia would mean for the US and Europe.

Washington sees it the same way as its exit from Afghanistan or any other theater, while Europe sees it as the beginning of its invasion and war. Who is right? And can Europe be protected by the UK and France's nuclear umbrella instead of America's?

France's nuclear arsenal is estimated at about 290 warheads, with approximately 280 operational. Since the time of Charles de Gaulle, it has maintained a "strict sufficiency" policy in terms of its sovereign deterrence. If we go into a little more detail, its capabilities are divided between four Triumphant-class submarines, each capable of carrying 16 ballistic missiles. At least one of these submarines is always on patrol to provide a continuous maritime deterrence. However, the bulk is the 40 nuclear-capable Rafale jets. France is actively modernizing its forces, upgrading submarines while researching a new air-launched missile.

The UK has an estimated 225 warheads, yet it relies solely on a sea-based nuclear deterrent. It has four Vanguard-class submarines that can each carry up to 12 nuclear warheads. Just like France, the UK consistently has at least one submarine at sea. It is also looking to transition to a new class of submarines in the 2030s.

The Lancaster House Treaties, signed in 2010, deepened the military collaboration between the UK and France. They established close defense and security cooperation between the two countries. Nuclear collaboration is a part of these treaties and includes cooperation on nuclear warhead testing and aircraft carriers.

This is undoubtedly the point from which any collaboration could be extended. And while European defense comes to mind, this framework allows Paris and London to maintain their national sovereignty and has not mutualized it.

This joint nuclear deterrence is modest but still credible, even when compared to Russia, which has an arsenal of some 5,580 warheads. It is also close to China's stockpile of about 500, although Beijing's is growing. Even under the UK and France's umbrella, Europe has a much less clear-cut deterrent without the support of America's 5,044 warheads. Yet, with nuclear power, it is more about the will to act than the

numbers that create the deterrence. So, when and how would this capability be used? How clear can they make it to any aggressor that any attack on European soil would lead to strong military action? And how credible would it be to the aggressor?

Any European enemy will look to play on its disunity. It will look to divide. Hence, it will convey messages that powerful countries will be spared from any attack. It will look to minimize the threat of its aggression. It will look to play one country off against the other.

Europe's first test will be to bypass bureaucracy. Indeed, integrating France's nuclear power into a broader European framework would require immense policy shifts and a new legal framework. Moreover, the UK's nuclear weapons are integrated within NATO. This all complicates any unilateral European initiative and is a true test of Europe's resolve. In short, if the will is there, there is a way.

And so, here lies the European dilemma. It has united against the US, or more precisely against Trump. In reality, if Europe believes, as all its leaders now state, that it needs to build up its own defense, then it should have done so before the war in Ukraine reached this stage. This is why Europe is not taken seriously. It is indeed acting like a woman scorned, but unfortunately its wrath is far from "hell hath no fury."

Multilateralism can and must deliver

Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, Cyril Ramaphosa and Pedro Sánchez

THE year 2025 will be pivotal for multilateralism. The challenges before us – rising inequalities, climate change, and the financing gap for sustainable development – are urgent and interconnected. Addressing them requires bold, coordinated action – not a retreat into isolation, unilateral actions, or disruption.

Three major global gatherings offer a unique opportunity to chart a path towards a more just, inclusive and sustainable world: the Fourth International Conference on Financing for Development (FfD4) in Seville (Spain), the 30th Conference of the Parties (COP30) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in Belém (Brazil) and the G20 Summit in Johannesburg (South Africa).

These meetings must not be business as usual: they must deliver real progress.

A multilateral moment we cannot waste. Trust in multilateral institutions is under strain, yet the need for dialogue and global cooperation has never been greater. We must reaffirm that multilateralism, when ambitious and action-oriented, remains the most effective vehicle for addressing shared challenges and advancing common interests.

We must build on the successes of multilateral-

ism, in particular the 2030 Agenda and the Paris Agreement.

The FfD4, COP30 and G20 must serve as milestones in a renewed commitment to inclusiveness, sustainable development, and shared prosperity. This will require strong political will, the full participation of all relevant stakeholders, a creative mindset and the ability to understand the constraints and priorities of all economies.

Tackling inequality through a renewed financial architecture

Income inequality is widening—both within and between nations. Many developing countries struggle under unsustainable debt burdens, constrained fiscal space, and barriers to fair access to capital. Basic services such as health or education must compete with growing interest rates.

This is not just a moral failing; it is an economic risk for all. The global financial architecture must be reformed to provide countries in the Global South with greater voice and representation and fairer and more predictable access to resources.

We must advance debt relief initiatives, promote innovative financing mechanisms, and work on identifying and addressing the causes of the high cost of capital faced by most developing coun-

tries. The G20, under the South African presidency, is prioritising these three areas.

At the same time, Seville's FfD4 will be a defining moment to secure commitments for stronger international financial cooperation for sustainable development, including through better taxation of global wealth and negative externalities, the enhancement of domestic resource mobilisation and for a more impactful and effective rechanneling of Special Drawing Rights.

Just transitions towards climate-resilient development

For many developing countries, just climate transitions remain out of reach due to a lack of funds and development constraints. This must change. At COP30 in Belém, a summit hosted in the heart of the Amazon, we must ensure that our climate finance commitments translate into concrete action.

The success of COP30 will depend on whether we can bridge the gap between promises and delivery. Under the UNFCCC, key foundations for COP30 will be the submission of new and ambitious Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) by all parties and the Baku to Belém Roadmap to scale up financing to developing country parties for climate action from all pub-

lic and private sources to at least \$1.3 trillion per year by 2025.

We need to significantly increase climate adaptation finance, leverage private sector investment and ensure that multilateral development banks take a greater role in climate financing. The FfD4 in Seville will complement these efforts by ensuring that climate financing does not come at the cost of development.

An inclusive response to global threats

The world is increasingly fragmented, and this is precisely why we must redouble our efforts to find common ground. Seville, Belém and Johannesburg must serve as beacons of multilateral cooperation, showing that nations can unite around common interests.

In Seville, we will work to mobilise both public and private capital for sustainable development, recognising that financial stability and climate action are inseparable. In Belém, we will stand together to protect our planet. And in Johannesburg, the G20 will reaffirm the importance of inclusive economic growth.

As we look ahead to 2025, we call on all nations, international institutions, the private sector and civil society to rise to this moment. Multilateralism can and must deliver — because the stakes are too high for failure.

— Aljazeera

The silver lining of Trump's harsh policies

Dr. Abdel Aziz Aluwaisheh

THE verbal brawl with Volodymyr Zelensky at the White House last Friday was extreme in the annals of diplomacy. US President Donald Trump and Vice President J.D. Vance took turns excoriating the Ukrainian president, who did not hold back either. The public display was probably unprecedented, but it was revealing about the new administration's foreign policy going forward.

Zelensky appeared shocked by the biting candor, despite many signals that the US had had enough of supporting Ukraine. In the transactional mood of the White House, that support was not paying off. Trump had made it plain that he was not going to continue helping Ukraine without a substantial quid pro quo.

On Tuesday, Trump shed more light on his approach to both domestic and foreign policies. He gave a 100-minute-long speech before Congress, the longest by any president in decades. Political opponents and others have been busy fact-checking his remarks, but regardless of its factual veracity the speech unveiled some aspects of his likely approach in the coming four years.

Like other parts of the world, people in the Gulf have been watching developments in Washington with a mixture of shock, awe and apprehension, but also with hope that this administration will be more decisive and transparent than the previous one. The policies seem to be based on a mixture of mercantilism, transactionalism, realism and Trumpism.

It is strangely refreshing that this administration is prioritizing its own interests and saying so publicly, instead of claiming to uphold some lofty principles. Take the war in Gaza. The Biden administration claimed to be upholding international humanitarian law, but it nevertheless continued to provide Israel with the lethal means to carry out the genocide and total destruction of Gaza. It engaged in protracted, unsuccessful negotiations, which Israel used as cover for intensifying its onslaught. This region being obsessed with conspiracy theories, people thought that the failure of the negotiations was intentional, especially when Trump's team was able to cobble together a deal in just a few days.

Since his inauguration on Jan. 20, President Trump has been true to his campaign promises, even when they are not popular. He took a sledgehammer and eliminated whole departments, cut them drastically or merged them with other agencies. Thousands of undocumented immigrants were rounded up and summarily deported.

It is true that Trump has reversed some long-standing US policies, but in some cases more in style and degree than in essence. Examples include industrial policy, foreign aid, security assistance and Middle East policy.

Addressing Congress on Tuesday, Trump made his case for tariffs, saying friend and foe alike impose tariffs on US exports and arguing for reciprocal tariffs, which he said will kick in on April 2. He wants to impose the same tariffs on imports from foreign countries as those nations impose on US exports. "If you don't make your product in America ... under the Trump administration, you will pay a tariff and in some cases a rather large one," he said. He mentioned the EU, China, Brazil, India, Mexico, South Korea and Canada, which "have used tariffs against us for decades and now it's our turn ... That's reciprocal, back and forth. Whatever they tax us, we will tax them."

While the Trump administration is publicizing its high-tariff policy, the previous administration, without a lot of fanfare, continued to impose the prohibitive tariffs levied by the first Trump administration.

Gulf Cooperation Council aluminum and steel exports to the US were among those heavily taxed. The Biden adminis-

tration adopted an industrial policy in the form of tariffs and subsidies that was at odds with long-standing US opposition to such interventions in the market, essentially picking winners and losers. It justified it on national security grounds.

The 2022 National Security Strategy outlined a number of subsidy schemes, some worth hundreds of billions of dollars, allocated for specific industries it believed would help the US catch up with China. For a long time, the US stood firm against subsidies on principle, but the Biden administration abandoned that position, paving the way for such a Trump-style industrial policy.

From the point of view of some developing countries, this US reversal on industrial policy is welcome, because it allows them to also strengthen their industrial policies through generous subsidies for local producers and high tariffs on imports.

However, this regression to mercantilism and beggar-thy-neighbor policies is posing a threat to the international trading system and is likely to be a drag on growth in the future. For the GCC and other oil and gas-producing regions, that is bad news, because they thrive when the world economy is healthy.

When it comes to foreign aid, there has been a common thread in American politics that exaggerates how much the US gives to poor countries. In total, the US gave \$68 billion in 2023, or about 0.24 percent of its gross domestic product. That rate is much less than the UN-recommended minimum of 0.7 percent of GDP and much less than most other wealthy countries. Much of the aid is security-targeted. For example, Ukraine got 25 percent of all aid. Israel and its neighbors got another 10 percent. In that year, aid declined by more than 10 percent.

The Trump administration is signaling that security assistance will be based on reciprocity. But for the GCC countries, that has always been the case. They have paid full price for all the weapons and help they received, so if the administration were to apply that across the board, it would be welcome. The changes in security assistance and the uncertain security commitment of the US are creating anxieties, while also producing healthy reactions. The UK has decided to increase its defense spending and so have other beneficiaries of US security commitments. Trump is asking NATO partners to increase their defense spending to 5 percent of GDP, but that level is normal in the Gulf.

Perhaps the biggest visible change in US foreign policy is in the Middle East. Trump has proposed deporting the Palestinian population from Gaza, then rebuilding it but never allowing them to return.

This proposal was rejected by almost every country around the world because it would constitute a war crime if done by force. Secretary of State Marco Rubio asked Arab partners to come up with an alternative. This was done at Tuesday's extraordinary Arab summit in Cairo, which adopted a \$53 billion plan to rebuild Gaza. President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi of Egypt hosted the summit. He said at the opening session that he was looking forward to working with the Trump administration to implement the agreed Gaza plan, together with the UN and other international organizations. In other words, Trump's unrealistic idea focused the minds and helped produce a credible plan, and quickly.

What is important is the substance of US policies, whether in the Middle East, on multilateralism or on security commitments, and not the style. The Trump administration's in-your-face style could make it easier for some countries to make decisions, including on security partnerships and arms procurement.

Trump's declared commitment to ending all wars is also to be commended. Peace in Ukraine, Gaza and the West Bank is long overdue.

The blame game over the debacle in Ukraine has started

OVER the past few days, the Russia-Ukraine conflict seems to have reached its culmination – not on the battlefield but in the halls of power. On February 28, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy faced verbal flagellation by United States President Donald Trump and Vice President JD Vance at the White House, which appeared to many staged and scripted.

It all felt like Trump was looking for a pretext to break up with Ukraine. The decision to freeze military aid indeed materialised on March 4 and it was followed by the suspension of intelligence sharing on March 5, which will immediately affect Ukrainian military operations.

Meanwhile, Zelenskyy appeared to stand his ground, while European leaders hurried to hold a summit and express their staunch support for him. They pledged to continue military and financial aid to Ukraine.

It is tempting to ascribe the events of the past few days to the whims of Trump. But what we are seeing is a political show aimed at selling the bitter reality of Ukrainian defeat to a Western public, which for many years was fed the narrative that Russia is weak and could be defeated or weakened to the point of irrelevance.

The reality is that the US-led West has exhausted the available resources and willingness to wage what former British Prime Minister Boris Johnson admitted is a “proxy war” against Russia. What hides behind the rhetoric and theatrics is damage control and a blame game, preparing the public for the inevitable.

Staunch Russia hawks, like EU’s foreign policy chief Kaja Kallas, as well as lobbyists for the military industrial complex, will keep insisting that Russia can still be defeated.

But they’ve been selling this narrative and various magical solutions – like the supplies of F16 fighter planes or long-range missile strikes into Russian territory – for three years now and nothing has changed on the ground.

Ukraine keeps losing men, territory and infrastructure.

It is inconceivable in the present circumstances that Ukraine

could achieve a better deal than the one it rejected in Istanbul – under British and US pressure – in the spring of 2022 or the one it could have attained earlier, under the Minsk agreements. The latter framework, agreed upon in 2015-2016, envisaged that Ukraine would retain sovereignty over the separatist-controlled parts of the Donbas region, which Russia has now formally annexed.

The agreements have served as Kyiv’s benchmark for judging the outcome of the conflict. A former adviser for Zelenskyy’s administration and Ukraine’s main talking head at the start of the war, Oleksiy Arestovych, formulated the Ukrainian view on what would constitute

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Leonid Ragoza

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Zelenskyy, for his part, is striving to demonstrate to the Ukrainian people that he has done his utmost, enduring angry reprimands and outright humiliation, to secure Western support and defend Ukrainian interests.

Last autumn, he presented a maximalist “victory plan” to the Biden administration, knowing all too well it was going to be rejected, because the very idea of Ukraine restoring sovereignty over occupied regions seemed preposterous given the circumstances on the battlefield and because NATO membership was out of question.

What he is doing now is continuing to signal that maximalism from the position of moral superiority, which is

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entirely deserved given Ukraine’s status as a victim of brutal Russian aggression. Zelenskyy keeps demanding “security guarantees” from the West, knowing well that it was the Western reluctance to provide them that resulted in pressure not to sign an agreement with Russia in Istanbul and continue to fight for a better outcome. All of this public posturing of defiance and maximalism is meant for the Ukrainian public. When he does not get what he is demanding, Zelenskyy will be able to declare that Ukraine has been betrayed and there

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culture that prioritises neatly packaged messaging over substance. This political culture has dominated the Western approach to the conflict with Russia since 2014.

The West has brilliantly defeated Moscow (and perhaps to some extent – truth) in the information domain across multiple media platforms serving different audiences. And yet, it is bound to lose in the battlefield to a man who might be brutal and criminal, but who favours substance over form and whose decisions are grounded in reality rather than wishful thinking: Vladimir Putin.

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Why Syria-Jordan relationship is key to regional stability

THE meeting between the Syrian Arab Republic’s new leader, Ahmad Al-Sharaa, and Jordan’s King Abdullah in Amman last week marked a turning point in the evolving relationship between the two nations. With Syria undergoing a transition, the support and cooperation of neighboring Jordan have taken on newfound importance.

Jordan, having long played a significant role in regional diplomacy and security, reaffirmed its commitment to assisting Syria in its recovery and reintegration. The strengthening of this relationship is not only vital for Syria’s reconstruction but also for regional stability, economic growth and security cooperation.

For more than a decade, Amman has navigated the fallout of the Syrian conflict, which has profoundly affected both nations. Jordan, which shares a 375-km border with Syria, has borne the brunt of war-induced challenges, from the mass influx of refugees to increased security threats and disruptions in trade.

King Abdullah’s meeting with Syria’s new leadership signals a renewed willingness to engage with Damascus and support its reintegration into the Arab world. King Abdullah emphasized the need for Syria to restore sovereignty and stability. This endorsement from Jordan carries weight, as it underscores Amman’s broader strategy of supporting regional stability while ensuring that Syria does not become a breeding ground for extremist elements or organized crime.

The resumption of strong bilateral ties is not merely a diplomatic gesture, it also reflects a deeper recognition that Syria’s recovery is in Jordan’s best interest. The two nations are inextricably linked by geography, economy and security concerns, making their cooperation essential to meet both immediate challenges and long-term stability.

One of the most pressing concerns for both countries is border security. Over the past decade, the Syrian-Jordanian border has become a hotspot for arms smuggling, drug trafficking and the movement of extremist groups.

A key issue has been the trafficking of captagon, a powerful amphetamine that has flooded regional markets. Jordanian security forces have intercepted large shipments originating from Syria. Recognizing the urgency of the situation, the two nations in January committed to strengthening border security through intelligence-sharing, joint military patrols and enhanced surveillance.

Beyond countering narcotics, Syria and Jordan

Dr. Majid Rafizadeh

also share concerns about extremist groups attempting to regroup and establish footholds in border regions. Jordan has long been wary of Daesh and other factions exploiting instability in Syria to launch attacks. To address this, the two countries can work on bolstering counterterrorism cooperation, ensuring that militant networks are dismantled before they pose a wider regional threat.

Furthermore, the Syrian conflict severely disrupted economic ties between the two countries, causing billions of dollars in trade losses. Before the war, Jordan served as a crucial transit hub for Syrian goods, while Syrian exports – ranging from textiles to agricultural products – were a staple in Jordanian markets. The war upended these economic flows, forcing businesses on both sides to seek alternative, often less profitable, markets.

Now, as Syria embarks on reconstruction, economic cooperation with Jordan is most likely poised to accelerate. The reopening of border crossings and trade routes will not only benefit Syria’s battered economy but also provide Jordan with new investment and trade opportunities. In other words, by easing trade restrictions and harmonizing customs procedures, both nations stand to regain lost economic momentum.

Infrastructure projects also hold significant potential. Jordan’s well-developed transport network could serve as a vital artery for Syrian goods reaching international markets. Similarly, Syrian labor – once a key component of Jordan’s workforce – could again play a role in Jordan’s construction and agriculture sectors. Increased trade and investment will help both nations recover from the economic stagnation imposed by years of instability.

It is important to note that Syria’s energy infrastructure suffered immense damage during the war, leaving many areas in dire need of electricity and fuel. Jordan, which has developed its energy sector in recent years, could emerge as a key supplier for Syria. Last week’s talks between Amman and Damascus explored the possibility of Jordan supplying Syria with electricity and gas, a move that would provide immediate relief to Syrian households and industries while strengthening economic ties between the two governments.

Beyond energy, reconstruction efforts present another avenue for cooperation. Jordanian companies, particularly in construction and engineering, have the expertise needed for Syria’s rebuilding efforts. Facilitating Jordanian

investment in Syrian infrastructure projects would not only aid Syria’s recovery but also create economic incentives for sustained collaboration.

In addition, Jordan has been one of the main destinations for Syrian refugees, with the country hosting an estimated 1.3 million of them. While Jordan has provided shelter, education and healthcare to these displaced people, the strain on its economy and resources has been immense. The return of Syrian refugees is a sensitive issue, requiring careful coordination between the two governments and the international community.

Ensuring safe and voluntary repatriation is paramount. Many refugees remain hesitant about returning due to concerns about security, economic opportunities and political stability. For this reason, Jordan and Syria can work together to create the conditions that could encourage returnees, including rebuilding housing, providing employment opportunities and ensuring legal protections. International organizations can also play a role in supporting reintegration efforts, ensuring that returning refugees have access to education, healthcare and social services.

Finally, the strengthening of Syrian-Jordanian relations goes beyond bilateral concerns. It has broader implications for Middle Eastern stability, particularly in an era of shifting alliances and regional realignments. Jordan’s engagement with Syria could pave the way for Damascus’ further reintegration into the Arab diplomatic fold, fostering constructive engagement with neighboring countries.

In conclusion, for Jordan, a stable Syria is critical to its long-term security and economic well-being. For Syria, Jordan’s backing offers a bridge to the international community and a pathway to rebuilding its shattered economy and infrastructure. The mutual benefits of cooperation are clear and both nations have compelling reasons to sustain their renewed partnership.

As Syria’s new government seeks to stabilize the country and reestablish its role in the region, Jordan’s support will be indispensable. By working together on security, trade, energy and humanitarian initiatives, Syria and Jordan can not only enhance their own national interests but also contribute to a more stable and prosperous Middle East.

The path ahead will require diplomatic finesse and practical cooperation, but if both nations commit to sustained engagement, their partnership could serve as a model for regional resilience and recovery.

HR violations in Israeli prisons: Enforced disappearance and torture

SINCE its establishment, Israel has been accused of policies aimed at displacing Palestinian communities and altering the demographic landscape of the occupied territories. The occupation has employed lethal tactics against Palestinians including killings, torture, and arrests. Since 1967, over 1 million Palestinians have been prosecuted under Israel’s military court system and subjected to detention.

For decades, Palestinian political prisoners have been used by the Israeli occupation as bargaining chips during negotiations of the so-called “peace process.” They have exercised all forms of brutality and torture against Palestinian prisoners in interrogation and detention centers in an attempt to extract confessions -- whether true or false -- by force, using both psychological and physical methods against them, in a blatant disregard for international law and countless international treaties and laws related to human rights. The current level of abuse, torture, and maltreatment of Palestinian detainees is unprecedented in terms of scale and frequency.

After Oct. 7, 2023, Palestinians saw a severe spike in the occupation’s long-standing violent policies and practices. The crisis extends beyond Gaza. Reports indicate systematic abuses within Israeli prisons and military camps,

amounting to crimes against humanity, as defined under international law. At least 58 Palestinian political prisoners, including 37 people arrested from Gaza, have been murdered and martyred in the occupation’s custody since Oct. 7, 2023, including through torture, lethal beatings, starvation, and severe deprivation of medical treatment. The 58 people killed are only the ones whose identities have been revealed by the occupation. Dozens more have been killed and subject to enforced disappearance in Israeli custody with authorities refusing to reveal their identities. All of this is occurring amid international inaction, with the UN, and international human rights institutions and bodies, proving their inability to protect the Palestinian people and their rights.

Enforced disappearance and mass arrests

It is worth mentioning that Israeli occupation authorities are committing the severe crime of enforced disappearance against thousands of Palestinian detainees who have been arrested from Gaza since the start of the genocide, particularly from the beginning of the ground invasion. Thousands of civilians, including men, women, and children, have been abducted from different parts of the Gaza Strip, as well as thousands more who were working as laborers in the 1948-occupied territories prior to the outbreak of the war.

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damental tool in cementing crimes against Palestinians.

To this day, there is no clear or accurate information about the total number of Palestinians arrested from Gaza, including women and children, nor about the martyrs who were

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where detainees were subject to severe sexual assault, including rape. Other military camps being used to hold detainees from Gaza are the Anatot and Ofer camps, which have also witnessed extreme violations against Palestinian prisoners. In November 2023, when the occupation began releasing laborers from Gaza who had been held in Israel’s military camps, the prisoners’ testimonies began to reveal the level of inhumane and humiliating violations they endured. This included severe beatings, starvation, dehydration, denial of medical treatment, and keeping detainees blindfolded and handcuffed 24/7, causing many of them to need limb removal surgeries.

As time went on and more prisoners were released from Israeli custody, the testimonies only increased in terms of how horrific and shocking the crimes being committed were.

The images of the detainees upon their release serve as a living testimony to the unfathomable violations committed against them.

These revelations continued through several reports and journalistic investigations conducted about the Sde Teiman camp, including the leaking of a video showing soldiers gang-raping a Palestinian detainee.

International responsibility

As the genocide continues, some legal teams and human rights lawyers have



Aurangzeb assures APTMA of support for industrial growth

ISLAMABAD (APP): Federal Minister for Finance and Revenue, Senator Muhammad Aurangzeb here on Thursday reiterated the government's unwavering commitment to resolving critical issues related to taxation, energy, and financing, as part of its efforts to ensure the long-term viability and future growth of Pakistan's industrial sector.

According to press release issued by finance ministry, the minister made this statement during a meeting with the leadership of the All Pakistan Textile Mills Association (APTMA).

The meeting was attended by senior officials, including the Chairman of

the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR), Secretary Commerce Division, and other senior officers from the Finance Division and FBR.

Senator Muhammad Aurangzeb and his team welcomed the APTMA office-bearers and expressed the government's strong commitment to providing all possible support to the textile sector.

He assured the delegation that the government recognizes the critical role of the textile industry in Pakistan's economy and remains dedicated to addressing its concerns.

He emphasized that addressing the core challenges faced by the industry is key to creating a con-

ducive environment for industrial development, fostering economic stability, and supporting the nation's overall growth trajectory.

The Finance Minister assured the APTMA leadership that the government would give a thorough and thoughtful analysis of their recommendations, incorporating viable suggestions into the federal budget.

He reiterated the importance of the consultative process and emphasized that any anomalies in the current framework would be addressed.

He reaffirmed that the government values this consultative approach and would continue to engage

with key sectors to ensure their concerns are addressed effectively in the upcoming budget.

Earlier, the APTMA delegation, led by Chairman Kamran Arshad, provided a detailed presentation on several pressing issues facing the textile sector related to energy, taxation and financing. The presentation also touched on various recommendations and proposals for the long-term viability and growth of the sector.

The APTMA delegation expressed their appreciation for the expedited disbursement of tax refunds and requested further support for the clearance of outstanding dues.

Pakistan Stock Exchange turns bullish, gains 1,459 points

ISLAMABAD (APP): The 100-Index of the Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX) turned around to bullish trend on Thursday, gaining 1,459.42 points, a positive change of 1.30 percent, closing at 113,713.18 points as compared to 112,253.76 points on the last trading day.

A total of 373,093,763 shares were traded during the day as compared to 263,963,740 shares the previous trading day, whereas the price of shares stood at Rs26.249 billion against Rs13.731 billion on the last trading day.

As many as 441 companies transacted their shares in the stock market, 220 of them recorded gains and 142 sustained losses, whereas the share price of 79 companies remained unchanged.

The three top trading companies were Pak International Bulk with

48,305,211 shares at Rs10.06 per share, Fauji Cement with 28,192,754 shares at Rs42.02 per share and WorldCall Telecom with 22,575,994 shares at Rs1.36 per share.

Unilever Pakistan Foods Limited witnessed a maximum increase of Rs167.51 per share closing at Rs23,169.00 whereas runner-up was Pakistan State Oil Company Limited with Rs18.92 rise in its share price to close at Rs344.60.

Nestle Pakistan Limited witnessed a maximum decrease of Rs137.18 per share price, closing at Rs7,362.02, whereas the runner-up was Ismail Industries Limited with Rs8671 decline in its per share price to Rs1,803.69.

Rupee gains 05 paise against dollar

The Rupee on Thursday appreciated by 05 paise against the US Dollar in the interbank trading and

closed at Rs279.81 against the previous day's closing of Rs279.86.

However, according to the Forex Association of Pakistan (FAP), the buying and selling rates of the dollar in the open market stood at Rs280.1 and Rs281.6, respectively.

The price of the Euro increased by Rs3.73 to close at Rs302.07 against the last day's closing of Rs298.34, according to the State Bank of Pakistan.

The Japanese yen went up by 01 paise and closed at Rs1.88, whereas an increase of Rs2.34 was witnessed in the exchange rate of the British Pound, which was traded at Rs361.03 as compared to the last day's closing of Rs358.69.

The exchange rates of the Emirates Dirham and the Saudi Riyal decreased by 02 paise each to close at Rs 76.18 and Rs74.59 respectively.

Gold prices decrease by Rs3,000 per tola

The price of 24 karat per tola gold decreased by Rs3,000 and was sold at Rs304,000 on Thursday against its sale at Rs 307,000 on previous trading day. All Pakistan Sarafa Gems and Jewelers Association reported.

The price of 10 grams of 24 karat gold also decreased by Rs2,571 to Rs260,630 from Rs263,203 whereas that of 10 gram 22 karat went down by Rs2,359 to Rs238,919 from Rs241,278.

The prices of per tola and ten gram silver remained constant at Rs3,369 and Rs2,888 respectively.

The price of gold in the international market decreased by \$28 to \$2,893 from \$2,921 whereas the prices of silver in international market remained constant at \$32.32, the Association reported.



FAISALABAD: People buying various items at subsidized rates from Ramadan Bazaar.

Associations urge SBP to slash interest rate by 5%

KARACHI (PPI): The North Karachi Association of Trade and Industry (NKATI) and the Federal B Area Association of Trade and Industry (FBATI) today jointly urged the State Bank of Pakistan to slash interest rates by 5% in the next monetary policy announcement.

According to a statement by NKATI and FBATI, Faisal Moez Khan, President of NKATI, highlighted that such a reduction would not only bring the real interest rate to sustainable levels but also enhance loan accessibility for businessmen and industrialists.

He pointed out that with the government acknowledging a decrease in the inflation rate, it is imperative for the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) to act decisively in the upcoming meeting. Khan believes that lowering the interest rate will spur new industrial investments and generate employment opportunities for the youth, while also alleviating the burden of the country's domestic debt.

Sheikh Tahseen Ahmed, President of FBATI, emphasized that Pakistan's current policy rate remains the highest in the region. This situation, he noted, exacerbates fiscal imbalances and strains the national budget.

A reduction, as he argued, would stimulate economic activities, enhance growth, and create a more competitive business environment. Ahmed urged the government to prioritize measures that would attract new investments, asserting that a favorable decision by the MPC on March 10 could set the stage for economic revival.

Eurozone retail sales fall in Jan

ISTANBUL (APP): Euro-area retail sales posted an unexpected decline in January compared to a month ago, according to data released Thursday.

The volume of retail trade in the eurozone decreased by 0.3% on a monthly basis in January, following a revised flat reading in December, Eurostat data showed.

The market expectation was for growth of 0.1% month-on-month in January. In the EU, sales also declined by 0.2% in the same month. Sales volumes in the eurozone increased by 0.6% for food, drinks, and tobacco.

Meanwhile, sales fell 0.7% for non-food products (except automotive fuel) and 0.3% for automotive fuel in specialized stores.

On an annual basis, retail sales grew by 1.5% in the euro area and by 1.6% in the EU in January, falling short of the market forecasts.

Among EU members for which data are available, the highest monthly hikes were seen in Slovenia (2.3%), Hungary (2.2%), and the Netherlands (1.6%), while the largest falls were in Slovakia (down 9%), Lithuania (down 4.8%), and the Greek Cypriot Administration (down 2.2%).

The eurozone/euro area, or EA20, represents member states that use the bloc's single currency, the euro, while the EU27 includes all member countries.

SCCI urges for single-digit interest rates to boost trade

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Sarhad Chamber of Commerce and Industry president Fazal Moqeem Khan demanded of the government and State Bank to bring down the interest rates at single digit for economic growth and prosperity.

Fazal Moqeem in a statement issued here on Thursday said according to government statistics, Pakistan's inflation rate has reached a nine-year low, currently sitting at 2.4% in February 2025 and 2.8% in January 2025 despite that the policy rate remains high at 12%, reflecting a significant 1050 basis points premium above core inflation.

He said prices of oil products maintained in the global market, and importantly, power division, and

the government of Pakistan has also recommended bringing down energy prices, which is a clear indication of the drop in the inflation ratio in the country.

SCCI chief stressed concrete steps for economic revival, ease of doing business for promotion of industries and trade, provision of soft loans and reduction in policy rate at the optimal level.

Moqeem noted high energy prices have increased the cost of doing business and industrial production and that Pakistan's exporting products are becoming uncompetitive in the global market, stating that running business and industries at the current interest rate is not only difficult, but made impossible.

He said the business community has faced diffi-

culties in the prevailing circumstances while business and industry growth is stagnant owing to the government's unfriendly policies.

The chamber president called for a drastic cut in policy rate under the vision of the Special Investment Facilitation Council and ground realities to achieve targets of economic growth and improve country's exports as per the vision of the Prime Minister of Pakistan.

Moqeem said industry estimates predict core inflation to remain between 1-3% in the fourth quarter of FY25, driven by declining prices and easing inflationary pressures.

The chamber president urged the government to adopt business-friendly policies and provide relief to the business community.

SECP upholds penalty on VIS Credit rating Company

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Appellate Bench of the Securities and Exchange Commission of Pakistan (SECP) has dismissed the appeal filed by VIS Credit Rating Company Limited.

The Appellate Bench of the SECP has dismissed the appeal filed by VIS Credit Rating Company Limited (formerly JCR-VIS Rating Company Limited) against the penalty imposed for multiple regulatory violations of Credit Rating Companies Regulations, 2016, said a press release issued here on Thursday.

The appeal challenged the SECP's order dated October 16, 2019 passed by Commissioner, SMD under Section 159 of the Securities Act, 2015, which

determined the company's non-compliance with several provisions of the said Regulations.

These violations included issues related to conflict of interest in rating assignments, failure to conduct internal audit review, inadequate risk management policies and framework, absence of indicative rating, and lapses in maintaining regulatory documentation.

After reviewing the arguments of both the parties, the Appellate Bench upheld the SECP's decision, reaffirming the penalty of PKR800,000/- on VIS Credit Rating Company. The Appellate Bench emphasized the importance of strict adherence to regulatory framework to main-

tain transparency and integrity in the credit rating industry.

The Appellate Bench reiterated that a credit rating agency must uphold the highest standards of fairness, efficiency, transparency, and ethics in their operations. The SECP remains committed to enforcing compliance with applicable laws to ensure a fair and efficient financial market.

Since credit rating agencies contribute to market transparency, investor confidence, and financial stability, therefore they are considered as a key component of the financial ecosystem and have strict obligation to exercise due diligence in complying with regulatory requirements.

Asian markets rally on US tariff reprieve

HONG KONG (AFP/APP): Asian stocks climbed on Thursday as investors welcomed US President Donald Trump's auto tariff delay and were expecting China to announce a large stimulus package.

The White House announced Wednesday an exemption on any autos coming through the United States, Canada and Mexico free trade pact, after Trump held talks with the "Big Three" US automakers -- Stellantis, Ford and General Motors.

US automakers have been among the most exposed to Trump's trade policy, which saw 25 percent blanket tariffs imposed on America's neighbours earlier this week -- with a lower rate for Canadian energy.

Wednesday's tariff delay buoyed global markets and lifted the auto sector, with stocks in Shanghai, Tokyo and Seoul also rising Thursday.

Hong Kong's stock exchange was up more than three percent.

"We have little details on what products the pause will cover -- whether this will only apply to finished cars or also automotive parts -- but given the exceptional degree of integration across North America for

this industrial value chain, the decision is hardly surprising," said Maeva Cousin of Bloomberg Economics.

A global bond selloff also spread to Asia on Thursday as geopolitical sways over the past weeks, including Ukraine peace efforts and trade tariffs, drove benchmark yields upwards.

Japanese 10-year yields hit 1.5 percent for the first time in more than a decade while bonds in Australia and New Zealand also saw their yields jump.

The selloff was triggered by a sharp rise in German bund yields after Berlin announced on Wednesday plans to massively boost defence spending.

Chinese stocks were also responding well to Beijing announcing its 2025 growth target of around five percent, at the start of its annual meeting of the National People's Congress (NPC) on Wednesday.

China has vowed to make domestic demand its main economic driver despite facing persistent economic headwinds, and as an escalating trade war with the United States hit exports.

Beijing also announced a rare hike in fiscal funding, allowing its budget deficit

to reach four percent this year.

Investors are hoping a huge fiscal stimulus package is coming.

China's central bank chief said Thursday that the country would further cut interest rates in the coming year to boost the economy.

And another top Chinese economic official said the government has "full confidence" that it can reach its goal of five percent growth this year.

"The commitment to five percent means one thing: more stimulus is coming," said Stephen Innes of SPI Asset Management.

"China isn't leaving anything to chance -- expect a mix of credit easing, fiscal firepower, and the occasional 'suggestion' to state banks to keep the machine humming."

Alibaba was among Hong Kong's top-performing stocks, with shares surging more than seven percent after the Chinese tech giant launched an artificial intelligence model it says can compete with DeepSeek.

Jakarta and Manila were up while Singapore and Wellington rose more modestly, and Sydney, Bangkok and Taipei were slightly down.

Deputy Economic Counselor of US Embassy visits ICCI

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Deputy Economic Counselor of the US Embassy, Robert Newsome, held a productive meeting with Nasir Mansoor Qureshi, President of the Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ICCI) here at the Chamber House to explore new avenues for boosting economic relations between Pakistan and US.

During the meeting, both sides engaged in meaningful discussions on: Enhancing bilateral trade and economic cooperation, strengthening business-to-business linkages to promote direct engagement between companies from

both nations, Identifying and resolving trade barriers to encourage smoother trade flows, said a press release issued here on Thursday.

Nasir Mansoor Qureshi welcomed the visit and appreciated the US Embassy's efforts to foster closer economic ties with Pakistan. He highlighted the immense potential for increasing trade and investment between the two countries, particularly in sectors such as pharmaceutical, technology, agriculture, renewable energy, and textiles.

"We believe Pakistan and the United States have

complementary strengths that can lead to mutually beneficial partnerships. By facilitating greater interactions through the exchange of business delegations between our business communities, we can unlock significant economic opportunities," said Qureshi.

He also emphasized the importance of regular dialogues between the private sectors of both countries to promote joint ventures, technology transfers, and skill development initiatives.

Senior Vice President Abdul Rehman Siddiqui, Vice President Nasir Mehmood Chaudhry, Executive Members Amir

Rahim Qureshi, Irfan Chadurhy, ICCI President's special advisor Naem Siddiqui, former Executive Member Chaudhry Mohammad Ali and Secretary General Ghulam Murtaza also participated in the meeting, paving the way for greater economic cooperation, expand mutual investment and people to people relations between the two countries.

The meeting concluded on a positive note, with both sides expressing their commitment to fostering a stronger Pakistan-US economic partnership, built on trust, shared goals, and sustained engagement.

Traders cash soaring demand for Irani Saudi Khajoor during Ramazan: Report

ISLAMABAD (APP): As the days of Ramazan unfold, the demand for Irani Saudi Khajoor, an exquisite date variety, escalates dramatically in cities across Pakistan where traders from Lahore and Quetta seize the opportunity, enjoying a substantial increase in sales and revenue.

Pak liquid foreign reserves position F.P. Report

KARACHI: The total liquid foreign reserves held by the country stood at US\$ 15,873.8 million as of 28-Feb-2025. The break-up of the foreign reserves position is as under:

Foreign reserves held by the State Bank of Pakistan: US\$ 11,249.5 million

Net foreign reserves held by commercial banks: US\$ 4,624.3 million

Total liquid foreign reserves: US\$ 15,873.8 million

During the week ended on 28-Feb-2025, SBP reserves increased by US\$ 27 million to US\$ 11,249.5 million.



HYDERABAD: Workers busy making wooden boxes at their workplace.



Southee, Philander back Shami's call to revoke ban on usage of saliva on ball

DUBAI (ESPNCricinfo): Mohammed Shami has urged the ICC to rescind the ban on using saliva to shine the ball, in a bid to bring the art of reverse swing back into play.

"We are trying [to get reverse swing], but the usage of saliva on the ball is not allowed," Shami told reporters after India's four-wicket win over Australia in the Champions Trophy semi-final. "We keep appealing that we should be allowed to use saliva so that we can bring reverse swing back into the game and it becomes interesting."

The ban on using saliva to polish the ball was first put into place in May 2020 during the Covid-19 pandemic, as a temporary measure. Then, in September 2022, the ICC made the ban permanent.

Shami has urged the ICC to reconsider their decision now. He has also got the backing of two former international bowlers in Vernon Philander and Tim Southee, who feel reverse swing is definitely missing

in the game, especially on batter-friendly surfaces.

"That was a rule brought around Covid with the virus going around the world, but I think as a bowler, you want to have a slight advantage," Southee said on ESPNCricinfo's Match Day. "We see the game going the way it's going and seeing sides score 362 and more often than not over 300 in this format. I think there needs to be something in the bowlers' favour, and whether that's a little bit of saliva, then yeah, I don't see why they couldn't afford to get that back in."

Philander felt that the use of saliva and reverse swing could have come in handy for South Africa in the Champions Trophy semi-final against New Zealand, particularly in the later half of the innings. New Zealand amassed 362 for 6 in their 50 overs.

"If we look at the state of that ball, I mean towards the back end, it was really scuffed up, and I think had you used the saliva [to polish one side of the ball], the

element of the reverse swing might have come into play," Philander said. "So it certainly does play a part. You can get it to shine up and you use the elements to swing it a little longer."

"I'd like to see that element being brought back into the game because I think it's needed as well. I mean, especially in ODI cricket where we see batters really dominating, especially when you play on surfaces like we've just seen in Pakistan as well where it's really batter friendly."

Southee felt that the use of saliva to polish one side of the ball and induce reverse swing makes even more of a difference in red-ball cricket than in white-ball.

"I think the ball only swings initially for a few overs [in white-ball cricket]. But with the red ball, you are able to bring it back and obviously sweat can be limited at times in various parts of the world, whereas saliva you're able to obvi-

ously have access to it from a number of sources and in all parts of the world," he said. "I think there is an advantage to having saliva on the ball, probably more so in red-ball cricket than white-ball cricket."

Are there any other advantages of using saliva to polish the ball instead of sweat?

"With the South African team, we were always trying to keep the ball as dry as possible," Philander said. "The minute you start erring on the side of sweat, I think you start wetting both sides of the ball. Your hands get sweaty, especially when you play in hot, humid conditions."

"Saliva was definitely the preferred method of shining the ball. In the longer run in the scheme of things, I'd like to see that being brought back. As far as sweat is concerned, I do feel that it's difficult to control the amount of sweat you put on the ball, [especially when] you start sweating obviously heavily."



FONTWELL, ENGLAND : Niall Houlihan riding Le Tiep's Sacre (red cap) clear the last to win The BetGoodwin New UK Bookie Maiden Hurdle at Fontwell Park Racecourse on Thursday.

Stokes considered as England white-ball captain

LONDON (BBC): England would be "stupid" not to consider Ben Stokes as a white-ball captain, says director of men's cricket Rob Key. England are looking for new leaders of the one-day and T20 sides after Jos Buttler resigned following their early exit at the Champions Trophy. Stokes, 33, has been Test captain since 2022 but has not played white-ball cricket for England since the 2023 50-over World Cup. "Nothing is off the

table," said Key. "You look at every single option and think, 'What is the best thing to do?'" Ben Stokes is one of the best captains I've ever seen.

It would be stupid not to look at him. It's just the knock-on effect of what that means. "All-rounder Stokes is currently recovering from a hamstring operation and has been training with a group of England Lions players in Abu Dhabi. Key said Stokes is "flying" and "on track to start the summer

in a full role, bowling and batting". On Saturday, in the aftermath of England's defeat against South Africa in their final match at the Champions Trophy, head coach Brendon McCullum did not rule out having different captains in each of the three formats.

On Thursday at Lord's, Key said England will not rush the decision and have "plenty of options", but he sees a greater alignment between Test and 50-over cricket, when compared to the T20

format. It could be a possibility that Stokes combines the 50-over leadership with the Test side, working alongside a different T20 captain.

"I believe that Test cricket and 50-over cricket are probably closer than T20s, which is the outlier now," said Key. Key also mentioned current white-ball vice-captain Harry Brook and limited-overs specialists Phil Salt and Liam Livingstone, who have both led England in the past year.

Lyon coach Fonseca handed nine-month suspension

PARIS (Reuters): Olympique Lyonnais coach Paulo Fonseca has been suspended for nine months by the French Professional Football League (LFP), following a confrontation with referee Benoit Millot during his team's recent 2-1 Ligue 1 victory over Brest.

The LFP said in a statement on Wednesday that Fonseca will be barred from accessing the bench, the officials' dressing rooms, and participating in any official functions

before, during, or after matches until November 30.

Fonseca was shown a straight red card after a review of a potential penalty for Brest - which the Brittany side were not awarded - for his "intimidating attitude", according to Millot.

"He came at me with an intimidating attitude and I decided to send him off straight away. It got out of hand," Millot told French sports daily L'Equipe.

Fonseca apologised for

his outburst, which ended when Lyon players pushed him away from the referee.

Lyon said they were concerned by the severity and rapid sanction imposed on Fonseca.

They criticised the decision, saying that the manager was not judged solely on his actions, which they described as an emotional reaction without intent to harm the referee.

"In light of a sanction that seems to have been

dictated by the negative context affecting French refereeing, (Lyon) announced that it is studying all possible avenues of appeal," the Ligue 1 club said in a statement.

The French referees' union said last week its members would exercise their right to resign if they or their families were in danger after a match official faced an "outpouring of hatred" following comments made by Olympique de Marseille president Pablo Longoria.

PBCC name women squad for series against Australia

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Pakistan Blind Cricket Council (PBCC) has named a 17-member Pakistan women's squad to embark on their first-ever international tour to Australia, from April 18 to 26.

According to PBCC the historic series will feature five T20 international matches against the Australian women's blind

cricket team in Brisbane, Australia, said a press release.

Earlier talking to APP, Sultan said the team will depart to Australia on April 17. A 21-member contingent, comprising 17 players and four officials,

will travel to Australia for the series. In preparation, the national team will undergo a training camp in Lahore from April 6 to 16,

he said.

Sultan also expressed his gratitude to the Australian High Commission for their continued support of the Pakistan women's blind cricket team over the past six years.

The players selected to represent Pakistan in this tour includes B1 category (Rimsha Shabbir, Shumaila Kiran, Saira,

Bushra Zahoor, Esha Faisal); B2 category (Nimra Rafique, Kiran Rafique, Nusrat Batool, Maryam Khan, Hooria Malik, Rabia Naveed); B3 category (Nisha, Emaan Arshed, Mehreen Ali, Farhat Ghafoor B3, Armeen Tariq, Noor Fatima). The team officials for the tour will be announced in the coming days.

Osaka crashes out of Indian Wells first round

INDIAN WELLS, California (Reuters): Former champion Naomi Osaka was sent packing from Indian Wells after a 6-4 6-4 first-round defeat by Colombia's Camila Osorio on Wednesday.

The Japanese four-time Grand Slam champion never looked comfortable against Osorio's dynamic shotmaking and piled up the unforced errors on a cool evening in the California desert.

After a near flawless first set from Osorio, Osaka fended off a match point at 5-3 in the second to stay alive, much to the delight of the fans.

Nerves appeared to get to Osorio as she attempted to serve out the match in the next game, where she double faulted twice and fell behind 0-40.

She regrouped, however, saving four break points in the game and crushing a forehand winner that caught the line to advance, celebrating with a dance on the court under the lights.

"First, good evening everyone, I'm Camila Osorio," she said with a laugh in an on-court interview.

"It's crazy for me, it's a dream come true. I really wanted to play on this court and was really excited and looking forwards to playing a champion like Naomi, so I can't believe it."

World number 53 Osorio becomes the first



Colombian woman to beat a former world number one. She takes on 22nd seed Clara Tauson of Denmark in the second round.

It was Osaka's first match since withdrawing from the Australian Open third round due to an abdominal strain.

Osaka, who beat Daria Kasatkina in the Indian Wells final in 2018 for her first career title, appeared to struggle with the consistency of her ball tosses and accuracy off both wings.

KVITOVA OUT

Two-time Wimbledon champion Petra Kvitova also made an early exit, losing 4-6 6-3 6-4 to France's Varvara Gracheva.

The loss leaves Kvitova searching for her first win since returning to the tour following the birth of her first child last July. She also lost in the first round in Austin last week in her first tournament following a 16-month absence.

The Czech grabbed the first set as both players struggled to control their serve but Gracheva settled in to level the match before jumping out to a 3-1 lead in the decider.

Kvitova won three straight games to take a 4-3 lead but Gracheva took control from there, dominating the final three games to dispatch the tournament wildcard and set up a meeting with Russian teenager Mirra Andreeva.

Gracheva said she wanted to congratulate Kvitova for juggling the demands of motherhood and being a professional athlete.

"Because she had a child quite recently and I'm so happy that she now has the role of a mother and a tennis player, which is very demanding," she added.

"It's very inspiring for sports, athletes, women - it's just amazing. Petra, my admiration to you - you're the best."

Gracheva's fellow

Frenchwoman Caroline Garcia also advanced to the second round with a 6-3 6-4 win over American Bernarda Pera and will next play defending champion Iga Swiatek.

Belarusian Victoria Azarenka battled past American Clervie Ngounoue 6-4 7-6(7) to get her campaign for a third Indian Wells crown off to a winning start.

On the men's side, Kei Nishikori emerged the victor in a rollercoaster match with Spain's Jaume Munar to advance 6-2 5-7 7-6(3). The Japanese player will face 18th seeded Frenchman Ugo Humbert in the second round.

Britain's Cam Norrie thrashed Italy's Luca Nardi 6-0 6-3 in the evening to set up a second round meeting with Czech 23rd seed Jiri Lehecka.

American qualifier Colton Smith celebrated his 22nd birthday with his first ATP Tour main draw win, beating Flavio Cobolli 3-6 6-2 6-2.

Smith converted seven of his nine break point opportunities and was serenaded with "Happy Birthday" from the fans after downing the Italian.

American Marcos Giron, Russian Roman Safiullin and Tallon Griekspoor of the Netherlands were among the other players who advanced to the second round of the Masters 1000 event.

Neymar returns to Brazil squad after stellar form at Santos

RIO DE JANEIRO (Reuters): Brazil have recalled Santos forward Neymar for this month's World Cup qualifiers against Colombia and Argentina after more than a year, the soccer federation announced on Thursday.

The 33-year-old sustained a knee injury in Brazil's World Cup qualifier against Uruguay in October 2023 and has struggled to get back to his best and secure a spot in the squad.

After a disappointing spell at Saudi Pro League side Al-Hilal, Neymar returned to his boyhood club Santos in January, scoring three goals and providing three assists in seven matches which has caught the eye of Brazil coach Dorival Junior.

Asked how much game time Neymar would be given in the World Cup qualifiers, Dorival told reporters: "It's a situation to be analysed. He's already played 90 minutes in two matches for Santos."

"In some of those games, he was substituted in the final moments. (His minutes in the games) will decide the spell he's going to have now, the way he's going to perform here. We'll analyse how he's doing."

Neymar has 128 caps and a record 79 goals for his country, surpassing Pele's tally of 77.

He was part of Brazil's gold medal-winning squad at the 2016 Rio Olympic Games and also helped them finish runners-up to Argentina at the 2021 Copa America.

Brazil, who are fifth in the CONMEBOL table with 18 points from 12 games, host Colombia on March 21 and visit Argentina five days later in a match that could see Neymar come up against former Barcelona and Paris St Germain teammate Lionel Messi.

The top six teams qualify directly for the World Cup.

"We're going to prepare in the best possible way to face these opponents," Dorival said.

"I have no doubt that these will be two great games, with teams that are in the top positions in the competition. We have enough quality to go for great results."

"We're very close to a breakthrough, and there's a lot of confidence that this will happen. Everything will happen, we just have to be patient."

BRAZIL SQUAD

Goalkeepers: Alisson (Liverpool), Bento (Al-Nassr), Ederson (Manchester City)

Defenders: Danilo (Flamengo), Guilherme Arana (Atletico Mineiro),

Wesley Franco (Flamengo), Vanderson (Monaco), Gabriel Magalhaes (Arsenal), Marquinhos (PSG), Leo Ortiz (Flamengo), Murillo (Nottingham Forest)

Midfielders: Andre (Wolverhampton Wanderers), Bruno Guimaraes (Newcastle United), Gerson (Flamengo), Matheus Cunha (Wolverhampton Wanderers), Neymar (Santos), Joelinton (Newcastle United)

Forwards: Estevao (Palmeiras), Joao Pedro (Brighton & Hove Albion), Raphinha (Barcelona), Rodrygo (Real Madrid), Savinho (Manchester City), Vinicius Jr (Real Madrid)





In brief

IGP inspects security

ISLAMABAD (APP): Inspector General of Police (IGP), Syed Ali Nasir Rizvi, visited Ramadan Sasta Bazaars on Thursday to review security and traffic arrangements. A police spokesperson told APP that during the visit, Inspector General of Police (IGP) Rizvi assessed the deployment of police personnel and traffic officers, ensuring smooth traffic flow and organized parking. He directed traffic officials to maintain order and facilitate the public effectively. IGP Rizvi also inspected the quality of essential commodities, verifying that items were being sold as per the official rate list. He emphasized that citizens should have access to all necessary facilities at these bazaars without inconvenience. Inspector General of Police (IGP) Rizvi assured that the administration and police officers were conducting daily checks on price lists and product quality to prevent overcharging or substandard goods. "In line with the directives of the Prime Minister of Pakistan, there will be no compromise on security, traffic management, quality, and fair pricing in Ramadan Sasta Bazaars," Inspector General of Police (IGP) Rizvi stated.

Car lifter killed

RAWALPINDI (APP): A car lifter, who along with his two accomplices was feeling in a car stolen from R A Bazaar area, was killed in an encounter with the Chakri Police on Thursday. According to a Rawalpindi Police spokesman, the accused after lifting the car from R A Bazaar fled towards Chakri where the police had set up a roadblock. The accused started firing on seeing the police. In the retaliatory fire accused Tariq was killed while his accomplices escaped while firing leaving behind the stolen car. Weapons were also recovered from dead accused. The dead Tariq was wanted in several car theft cases in the twin cities of Rawalpindi and Islamabad, and Lahore. He along with his accomplices had also opened fire on a police team in the Cantt Police Station limits in 2020, and was arrested in an injured condition. Meanwhile, in another incident, motorcycle-riding suspects fired on a police team in the Cantt area. When the Cantt Police tried to stop the suspicious motorcycle, the suspects started firing on the personnel. One of the accused Adil was injured during the cross firing, and arrested by the police. A motorcycle stolen from Cantt a few days ago was also recovered.

AC conduct inspection

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Assistant Commissioner (AC) Industrial Area on Thursday conducted a surprise inspection at Sector I-8, resulting in the arrest of two individuals for serious violations related to food quality and pricing regulations. During the unannounced check at local super stores, officials discovered multiple infractions including poor food item quality and the deliberate absence of mandatory price lists at distribution (DC) counters. The Assistant Commissioner (AC) issued a stark warning, stating that violators of government tariff regulations would face legal consequences, including potential imprisonment. "Those breaking established rules will be held accountable," he emphasized.

Govt officers 'directed' to declare assets by September

ISLAMABAD (INP): The government officers in Pakistan have been directed to declare their assets by September 2025.

It revealed in media that September deadline has been set for government officials to declare their assets in compliance with the IMF requirements.

IMF delegation is currently in Pakistan for review talks to unlock \$1 billion loan tranche of the ongoing \$7 bln programme.

Sources said the Pakistani authorities will

share a draft regarding asset declaration with the global lender, adding that the government has also decided to launch a digital portal in line with a demand made by the IMF.

Discussions were also held regarding external financing, the operationalization plan for the Tax Policy Unit, inflation comparisons with regional countries, and national accounts, according to the Finance Ministry.

Additionally, the Labor Force Survey, Family

Budget Survey, and Living Standards reports were reviewed in ongoing negotiations.

Key discussions with the IMF delegation also focused on electricity and gas tariffs, circular debt, and other financial matters, sources revealed.

The draft for government officials' asset declarations will be finalized in today's negotiations and subsequently shared with the IMF, the Finance Ministry sources confirmed.

Ministry plants 67.5m trees, creates 0.2m green jobs

ISLAMABAD (APP): Ministry of Climate Change and Environmental Coordination (MoCC&EC) over the past year, had planted 67.5 million trees under the Green Pakistan Programme, creating 200,000 green jobs and secured \$91.5m for climate projects.

According to an official document, available with APP, the climate finance saw remarkable growth in 2024, securing \$8.1 million from the Global Environment Facility (GEF) and \$83.4 million from the GCF for bio-diversity conservation and land degradation efforts.

Similarly, the Green Climate Fund (GCF) backing the Acumen Climate Action Fund and the Recharge Pakistan project, aimed at enhancing climate resilience. In a year marked by robust international engagement, the ministry signed the SCO Environmental Protection Agreement and the Joint Action Plan for the SCO Green Belt Programme, reinforcing its commitment to regional cooperation on sustainable development and climate change mitigation.

Key bilateral climate agreements were also secured with Belarus,

UNICEF, and the International Rescue Committee. The country's leadership in global climate forums was evident through its active participation in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), where it played a pivotal role in various committees.

It further demonstrated its dedication to gender-responsive climate policies by hosting the AFPPD meeting. The ministry reaffirmed its commitment to international climate agreements by achieving a 67.5% reduction in Hydrochlorofluorocarbons (HCFCs) phase-out under the Montreal Protocol and banning pre-blended polyols with HCFC-141b.

Pakistan also submitted its Biennial Transparency Report (BTR) to the UNFCCC and implemented carbon market trading policies under the Paris Agreement.

To align with the Kunming-Montreal Global Bio-diversity Framework, the ministry revised Pakistan's Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN) targets and updated its Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC-2021).

The appointment of a

regular Executive Director at the Global Change Impact Study Centre (GCISC) strengthened research and policy development, while the creation of a Climate Finance Wing ensured efficient allocation of resources for climate action.

In a bid to enhance transparency and accountability, the ministry fully implemented e-office systems and launched the e-Pak Acquisition & Disposal System (EPADS), streamlining procurement processes and improving operational efficiency.

The ministry also implemented a comprehensive media strategy to raise awareness about climate change, organizing seminars, workshops, and dialogues to highlight Pakistan's vulnerabilities and resilience measures.

Collaborations with local and international media for events like World Environment Day and campaigns to reduce plastic use were widely applauded. A bi-monthly newsletter was launched to keep stakeholders informed about climate-related updates and achievements.

On the global stage, Pakistan submitted a statement to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) on climate justice, joined the International Mangrove Center, and launched the Mangrove Sustainability Initiative, further solidifying its stance on environmental protection.

Meanwhile, stakeholders had commended the Ministry of Climate Change for its proactive approach in coordinating national efforts towards sustainable development.



ISLAMABAD: Chief Justice of Pakistan Justice Yahya Afridi in a group photo with District Bar Association of Jhang at Supreme Court of Pakistan.

M-Tag enforcement eases traffic flow: NHA

ISLAMABAD (APP): The National Highways Authority (NHA) latest push for M-Tag enforcement has started yielding significant results, easing traffic congestion on motorways across the country.

Following the imposition of a 25pc additional toll on vehicles without M-Tags, the adoption rate for the electronic toll system has surged from 55pc in January to 65pc in February 2025.

Official data reveals a significant decline in the number of non-M-Tag vehicles, which fell from 45pc in January to 35pc in February. This shift is part of NHA's ongoing push to transition to a fully digital toll collection system, aimed at enhancing the efficiency of travel across the country, according to an NHA spokesperson.

A senior NHA official stated that the M-Tag system has improved traffic flow and reduced congestion at toll plazas. "We're seeing clear progress in modernizing the toll collection process, and it's making a noticeable difference," the official said.

To speed up this transition, the Motorways Police imposed an additional toll charge on vehicles without M-Tags starting February 1, 2025.

The decision followed a notification issued on January 31, which stated that vehicles without an M-Tag or with low balances would have to pay an extra 25% toll charge.

The minimum extra charge is Rs 50.

Dr. Afnan says govt taking concrete steps to curb inflation

ISLAMABAD (APP): Senator Dr. Afnan Ullah Khan on Thursday said that both the federal and Punjab governments are making concerted efforts to curb inflation and protect consumers, particularly during Ramadan.

Speaking in the Senate, he highlighted key government initiatives aimed at providing relief to citizens. He said that Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has announced financial assistance of Rs. 10,000 for four million families during the

holy month, ensuring direct support for those in need.

He commended Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz for launching a Ramadan Relief Package, which includes the establishment of Sahulat Bazaars to regulate prices and prevent profiteering. Authorities are actively monitoring markets to keep prices under control, he added.

Addressing concerns over rising prices, particularly of essential commodities such as fruits, he explained that the surge is

primarily driven by demand and supply dynamics rather than government inefficiencies.

"If a product was priced at Rs. 100 last month and its demand rises while production remains unchanged, the price will naturally increase. This is a simple economic principle—when demand rises and supply remains constant, prices go up," he elaborated.

He reassured that the government is taking all possible measures to stabilize prices and provide relief.

Expert emphasizes need for moderation in eating

ISLAMABAD (APP):

Experts on Thursday underscored the significance of public awareness on healthy eating habits during Ramadan, highlighting the risks associated with traditional and rich special foods, which can lead to an increased risk of lifestyle diseases, such as heart problems, high cholesterol and obesity, if consumed without moderation.

Executive Director of Capital Development Hospital, Naeem Taj in his exclusive conversation with a private news channel emphasized the importance of public awareness campaigns to educate people about healthy eating habits

during Ramadan.

According to health expert, the holy month of Ramadan is an ideal time to adopt healthy eating habits and promote a healthy lifestyle.

He warned that unhealthy eating habits during Ramadan can lead to an increased risk of lifestyle diseases, such as heart problems, high cholesterol and obesity.

Taj also urged the government to launch public awareness campaigns to promote healthy eating habits and prevent lifestyle diseases.

Health expert also recommend eating nutrient-rich foods, such as fruits,

vegetables, whole grains, and lean proteins, during Ramadan to maintain a balanced diet.

Dr also advise individuals to stay hydrated by drinking plenty of water and avoiding sugary drinks.

He emphasized that a balanced diet during Ramadan can help prevent dehydration, digestive problems, and other health issues associated with fasting.

Health expert also stressed the importance of avoiding overeating and consuming high-calorie foods during Ramadan, and instead opting for light and nutritious meals.

ML&C concludes 2nd Health Internship Program-2025

RAWALPINDI (APP): The Military Lands and Cantonments (ML&C) Department has successfully concluded its second internship program, focusing on the healthcare sector.

The initiative, conducted on the directions of Director General ML&C, Maj Gen Irfan Ahmed Malik, HI (M) aimed to integrate fresh perspectives into the system while providing young minds with firsthand exposure to the workings of government institutions.

According to spokesman ML&C, Secretary Ministry of Defence, Lt Gen (R) Muhammad Ali, HI(M)

attended the closing ceremony as the chief guest.

He said that the ML&C Health Internship Program, 2025 stands as a testament to the department's dedication to mentorship, institutional growth, and excellence.

"By opening its doors to aspiring professionals, ML&C is not only strengthening its own system but also shaping the future of Pakistan's governance and public service", he said.

According to the details, during the seven days program, the interns were provided with an immersive, hands-on experience across various healthcare facilities, including AFIRM

(Armed Forces Institute of Rehabilitation Medicine), AFIMH (Armed Forces Institute of Mental Health), AFID (Armed Forces Institute of Dentistry), and AFIP (Armed Forces Institute of Pathology).

The interns also visited dispensaries including the state of art CCMC (Chaklala Cantonment Medical Centre) and the Cantonment General Hospital Rwp (CGH), where they observed medical operations, patient care, and administrative functions in real-time. This direct exposure not only enriched their understanding of the healthcare system

but also allowed them to assess areas of improvement from an outsider's perspective.

A key highlight of the internship was the valuable feedback and recommendations provided by the interns, which will serve as an insightful resource for the department's ongoing enhancement efforts.

The spokesman said that fresh ideas and observations by the interns reflected the multi-generational synthesis that the internship program aims to cultivate—bridging the knowledge of experienced professionals with the innovative thinking of young minds.



ISLAMABAD: Vendors busy in frying traditional food items for iftar during holy fasting month of Ramzan-ul-Mubark at F-6/I Market.

HEC revises Chemistry curricula to align with evolving academic and industry needs

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Higher Education Commission (HEC) has issued revised curricula for Associate, Bachelor, and Master degree programmes in Chemistry, introducing significant updates to enhance academic quality and align education with contemporary industry and research demands.

The revised standards have been developed by the National Curriculum Review Committee (NCRC), comprising senior academics from universities across the country, said a press release on Thursday.

Chaired by Prof. Dr. Muhammad Athar Abbasi from Government College University Lahore, with Mr. Muhammad Ali Baig, Deputy Director at HEC, serving as Secretary, the

committee thoroughly reviewed and restructured the curriculum to ensure its relevance in an increasingly knowledge-driven world. Dr. Amjad Hussain, Director General, Academics Division at HEC, represented HEC and contributed towards the inclusion of emerging technologies in the field, ensuring that the revised curricula reflect the latest advancements in chemistry.

The new framework introduces a minimum of 71 credit hours for the Associate Degree in Chemistry and 137 credit hours for the BS Chemistry programme, ensuring a comprehensive academic foundation for students at both levels.

A key feature of the revised BS Chemistry curriculum is the introduction

of fourteen specializations, allowing students to develop expertise in specific fields of Chemistry. These include Agricultural Chemistry, Analytical Chemistry, Biochemistry, Computational Chemistry, Environmental Chemistry, Forensic Chemistry, Fuel Chemistry, Industrial Chemistry, Inorganic Chemistry, Organic Chemistry, Pharmaceutical Chemistry, Physical Chemistry, Polymer & Materials Chemistry, and Soil Chemistry. Each specialization comprises seven specialized elective courses, with universities having the flexibility to offer advanced courses based on emerging scholarly and industry requirements.

Furthermore, institutions may introduce additional specializations in accor-

dance with their faculty strengths and academic resources while following the prescribed framework set by HEC.

Moreover, to strengthen the practical learning component, the revised BS Chemistry curriculum now mandates a supervised internship and a capstone project, each carrying three credit hours.

This initiative is aimed at ensuring that students gain hands-on experience and develop essential problem-solving and research skills before entering the workforce. However, this requirement does not extend to the Associate Degree programme.

For MS Chemistry, the committee has established a robust academic structure featuring two core courses,

six electives, and a mandatory research thesis. Universities will have the flexibility to offer elective courses based on their faculty expertise and available academic resources.

The updated standards also define key academic benchmarks, including eligibility criteria, programme learning outcomes, model schemes of study, course learning outcomes, and degree award requirements. However, the detailed syllabi and course contents will be determined by individual universities, ensuring adaptability to industry trends while maintaining the foundational integrity of the discipline.

HEC has formally advised all universities to adopt these revised curricula at the earliest to ensure uni-

formity and quality across institutions. The updated standards reflect HEC's commitment to fostering an education system that is academically rigorous, research-driven, and responsive to the evolving needs of the industry and society.

With these revisions, Pakistan's higher education landscape in Chemistry is set to become more dynamic, equipping students with the skills and knowledge necessary to excel in both academia and professional fields.

NCRC included representatives from leading institutions such as Abdul Wali Khan University, Mardan; Bahauddin Zakariya University, Multan; Balochistan University of Information Technology, Engineering & Manag-

ement Sciences, Quetta; COMSATS University Islamabad, Abbottabad Campus; Government Ambala Muslim Graduate College, Sargodha; Government College University, Faisalabad; Government College University, Lahore; International Islamic University, Islamabad; NED University of Engineering & Technology, Karachi; Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad; The University of Azad Jammu & Kashmir, Muzaffarabad; University of Balochistan, Quetta; University of Central Punjab, Lahore; University of Karachi, Karachi; University of Management & Technology, Lahore; University of Peshawar, Peshawar; University of Sindh, Jamshoro; and University of the Punjab, Lahore.

ARCS, IFRC hold meeting

KABUL (BNA): In a meeting held at the central office of ARCS, Sheikh Shahabuddin Delawar, the head of ARCS, convened with Ahmad Sulaiman, the acting head and representative of International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies in Afghanistan. Sheikh Delawar expressed his gratitude for ongoing support and collaboration provided by the IFRC, highlighting the importance of such partnerships in enhancing the humanitarian efforts within Afghanistan.

The Frontier Post

AFGHANISTAN

Ramazan 06, 1446 — Friday, March 07, 2025

Herat enhances educ sector

KABUL (BNA): Efforts to enhance education in Herat province of Afghanistan have progressed, with authorities confirming the reconstruction of 36 schools and madrasas (Islamic institutes) across the province. Molvi Rahmatullah Jaber, head of the Herat Department of Education, told Bakhtar News Agency that the renovations, funded by the Ministry of Education, were completed at a total cost of 22.6 million Afghanis.

Respiratory diseases up 54% in Afghanistan

KABUL (TOLONews): The World Health Organization (WHO) has reported a 54.1% increase in acute respiratory diseases in Afghanistan in January of this year compared to December of last year.

According to WHO's report, more than 206,000 people were infected with these diseases during this period, out of which 506 lost their lives.

Meanwhile, the report states that cases of measles and COVID-19 have decreased during this time.

A section of the WHO report states: "ARI remains

a significant public health challenge, with 206074 new cases and 506 deaths reported in January 2025, an indication of a 54.1% increase from December 2024 and a case fatality rate (CFR) of 0.2%."

Dr. Munir Ahmad Kamal, speaking to TOLONews, stated: "One of the reasons for this disease could be the severe impact of environmental factors. The use of poor-quality fuel leads to various side effects, particularly affecting the respiratory system and increasing the spread of infectious dis-

eases and pneumonia."

Another doctor, Najibullah Qasemi, said: "When stepping outside, people should keep themselves warm, as the air is highly polluted. Additionally, wearing masks, consuming warm fluids, and seeking medical attention promptly in case of respiratory issues can help prevent complications."

Meanwhile, doctors at Indira Gandhi Children's Hospital told TOLONews that 20 to 30 children suffering from respiratory diseases are admitted to the hospital daily.

Minister meets Japanese officials

KABUL (BNA): Mullah Bakht-ur-Rahman Sharafat, the Deputy Minister of Finance and Administration of the Ministry of Public Health, held a productive meeting with Mikio Izawa, the Chargé d'Affaires of the Japanese Embassy in Afghanistan, to discuss the strengthening of bilateral cooperation in the health sector.

During the meeting, which took place in Sharafat's office, the Deputy Minister expressed his gratitude for Japan's ongoing support in enhancing Afghanistan's healthcare system. He emphasized the importance of continued collaboration and the expansion of bilateral relations to further strengthen the health sector in the country.

Izawa echoed the sentiments expressed by Sharafat, highlighting the positive trajectory of bilateral relations between Japan and Afghanistan in the healthcare domain.

He assured that Japan remains committed to providing further assistance and cooperation to bolster the health services in Afghanistan.

Uzbekistan set to open trade center in Afghanistan

KABUL (Ariana News): Uzbekistan is set to open a trade center in the northern city of Mazar-e-Sharif, which will provide Uzbek entrepreneurs with a platform to market their goods in Afghanistan.

According to Trend news agency, the center will cover an area of 220 square meters and will also be used to find new trading partners between Afghan and Uzbek entrepreneurs and expand export opportunities.

The center will house permanent showrooms and warehouses for pharmaceuticals, electrical goods, and construction materials.

Trade turnover between Uzbekistan and Afghanistan reached \$153.7 million in January 2025. This is 231 percent more compared to the same period last year (\$46.3 million in January 2024).

Last week the Uzbek Ministry of Investment, Industry and Trade said Uzbekistan and Afghanistan plan to increase the trade turnover to \$3 billion.

The current state and future prospects of bilateral trade and economic relations were discussed on Saturday during a meeting between Uzbekistan's Minister of Investment, Industry and Trade Laziz Kudratov, and Afghan Trade Minister Nuruddin Azizi, who was visiting the Termez International Trade Center in the Surkhandarya region.

The latest trade house development comes amid concerted efforts by both countries to boost their cross-border trade relations.

30,000 Afghans to perform Hajj in coming year

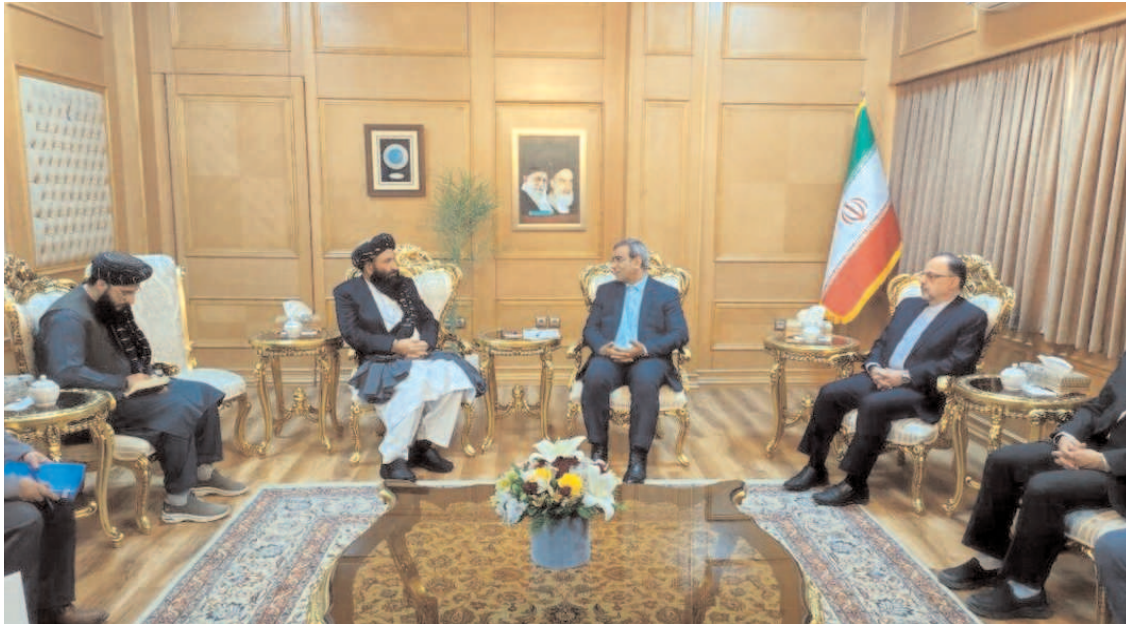
KABUL (Amu TV): The Taliban's Ministry of Hajj and Religious Affairs announced that 30,000 Afghans will travel to Saudi Arabia for the Hajj pilgrimage in the upcoming solar year, which begins on March 21, 2025.

Speaking at a press conference, Noor Mohammad Saqib, Minister of Hajj and religious affairs, said flights for pilgrims will begin next month.

He also stated that the Taliban had requested Saudi authorities to increase Afghanistan's Hajj quota from 30,000 to 45,000.

The ministry has set this year's cost for each pilgrim at 283,090 afghanis (\$3,200), covering accommodations and other services in Saudi Arabia. The total estimated cost of the pilgrimage for Afghan pilgrims is expected to reach 8.27 billion afghanis (\$93 million), Saqib said.

Kabul, Tehran discuss expansion of relations



KABUL (Pajhwok): The Afghan consul general in Mashhad and a senior Iranian official have discussed the expansion of political, economic, trade and cultural ties between Kabul and Tehran.

Consul General Faizanullah Naseri met Gholam Hossein Mozaffari, the

governor of Iran's Khorasan Razavi province, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) said.

A statement from the ministry said both sides stressed the need to boost political, economic, trade, and cultural relations between the two countries.

Representatives from

Iran's Ministry of Foreign Affairs were also present at the meeting.

Meanwhile, Iran's IRIB News Agency confirmed the meeting, at which the Khorasan Razavi governor said Afghanistan's mineral resources and raw materials could significantly boost job creation in both countries.

He added: "Hosting the Afghan people at various times and ensuring lasting security have been key priorities in Iran-Afghanistan relations. Now, our cooperation can pave the way for even stronger ties."

For his part, Naseri emphasised the importance of unity among Muslims.

Agriculture Minister urges effective use of Qosh Tapa Canal land

KABUL (TOLONews): Ataullah Omari, the Acting Minister of Agriculture, Irrigation, and Livestock, has emphasized the effective utilization of land surrounding the Qosh Tapa Canal in a recent meeting.

During this meeting, which was held to present a plan for the proper use of these lands, Omari stated that after the completion of the canal's construction, organized industrial, agricultural, and livestock centers should be

established around it.

Misbahuddin Mustaeen, spokesperson for the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation, and Livestock, said: "In this meeting, Acting Minister Ataullah Omari discussed the importance of the Qosh Tapa Canal project and the preparation of its implementation plan. He emphasized that the surrounding lands should be used efficiently."

Some experts consider the Qosh Tapa Canal project

crucial for the development and mechanization of agriculture as well as Afghanistan's economic growth.

Wasim Safi, head of the Executive Board of the Chamber of Agriculture and Livestock, stated: "Projects like the Qosh Tapa Canal will industrialize our agriculture, which is beneficial for the country."

Abdul Zahoor Madbar, an economic affairs expert, said: "The Qosh Tapa Canal is one of Afghanistan's

key infrastructure projects aimed at water resource management, agricultural expansion, and enhancing food security."

The Ministries of Agriculture, Finance, Energy and Water, and Urban Development and Housing, along with other relevant institutions, are jointly working on land allocation and the establishment of agricultural and industrial complexes around the Qosh Tapa Canal.

Kabul residents struggle with increased power outages

KABUL (TOLONews): Several residents of Kabul have complained about the increased power outages during the holy month of Ramadan.

They say that electricity is available during unnecessary hours, but when they actually need it, they experience blackouts.

Abdullah Qadir, a resident of Kabul, said: "Electricity is cut off from 4 AM to 5 PM, and there is no one to address our concerns."

Saifullah, another Kabul resident, stated: "We have no electricity, neither during Iftar nor Suhoor. People are facing serious difficulties. Our

request to the Islamic Emirate is to put an end to these power outages."

Meanwhile, Da Afghanistan Breshna Sherkat (DABS), the national power company, says that its employees are making every effort to provide electricity to citizens.

Hikmatullah Maiwandi, spokesperson for Breshna, said: "It is winter, and the weather is cold, which increases electricity demand and beyond supply. Additionally, recent rainfall has caused technical issues in some areas, and our teams are working to resolve them."

On the other hand, the former head of Breshna

expressed optimism that connecting the 500-kilovolt power line to the Arghandi power station in Kabul would solve the blackout issues in the capital.

Amanullah Ghalib, former head of Breshna, said: "The only complete solution to this problem is the 500-kilovolt power line."

According to officials, several energy projects are currently underway across the country.

Afghanistan only generates 20% of its electricity from domestic sources, while the remaining energy is imported from Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and Iran.

No official asks what we want, says retired Afghan officials

KABUL (TOLONews): A number of retirees once again gathered in protest in front of Pension Fund Office, demanding their salaries.

They stated that during Ramadan and for over the past two years, they have been struggling with economic challenges and urged the Islamic Emirate to take serious action on this issue.

Sardar Mohammad, a 65-year-old former colonel who now carries plastic water jugs on his shoulders for sale, spoke about his hardships: "Believe me, we have nothing to eat. Some people give charity in disposable containers, and I take that home to my family. That's how we survive day and night."

"We come here while fasting, yet no senior official bothers to ask why we are here and what we want," another retiree, Amarkhil, told TOLONews.

For the past three and a half years, this group has



been advocating in front of the Ministry of Finance to receive their salaries, demanding payment of their dues and relief from economic hardships.

"We only want the salaries deducted from our wages. This is not charity;

it is my rightful salary. Have you ever seen any Islamic or non-Islamic country where a retiree is denied their pension?" said Habibullah, another retiree.

Meanwhile, on the 1st of Jadi this year, the leader of the Islamic Emirate issued

a decree instructing the Supreme Court to find a solution for the pension payments and hold a special court session. However, despite two and a half months passing, no specific timeline has been set for the retirees' payments.

Advocacy group warns of US travel ban on Afghans

WASHINGTON (Amu TV): A group assisting Afghan refugees in resettlement efforts has warned that the United States may impose a travel ban on Afghan nationals and others in the coming weeks.

The organization, AfghanEvac, urged Afghans holding valid US visas and travel documents to enter the country as soon as possible, citing information from sources within the US State Department.

"We are hearing from internal sources at the State Department that a travel ban on Afghan nationals (and others) may be implemented as early as next week," the group wrote on X.

AfghanEvac said it does not yet have full details on the potential restrictions but will share further information as it becomes available.

Shawn VanDiver, the organization's director, stated that Afghan citizens

may not be able to enter the US, even with valid visas, if the restrictions take effect next week.

It remains unclear what legal or policy framework such a ban would follow.

The warning comes amid growing global restrictions on Afghan migrants, as several countries, including Pakistan and Iran, have intensified deportations of undocumented Afghans in recent months.

Nangarhar's date orchard to yield 23 tonnes this year

JALALABAD (Pajhwok): The Canal Department of eastern Nangarhar province says its date orchard is expected to yield up to 23 tonnes of dates this year, marking a significant increase in production.

Last year, approximately 21 tonnes of the orchard's yield was destroyed due to heavy hailstorms and rainfall.

Syed Hamayon Gharibmal, spokesperson for the Canal Department, told Pajhwok Afghan News that date orchards located in the

second block of the Hada Farm cover 32.5 acres of land.

Of this, 20 acres have been producing dates for the past few years.

He added that 2,700 date palm trees have been planted in the 20-acre orchard, with around 20 workers engaged in its maintenance.

According to Gharibmal, an estimated 22 tonnes of dates were expected to be harvested last year, but severe weather conditions resulted in the loss of near-

ly 21 tonnes.

This year, the expected yield is around 23 tonnes, he stated.

Gharibmal also noted that the increasing production has encouraged more local farmers and investors in Nangarhar to establish date orchards on their lands.

Besides this date orchard, the Nangarhar Canal Company also manages extensive citrus and olive groves, which produce thousands of tonnes of fruit annually.

are monitored. But as a woman, I request transparency to ensure these cameras are not misused."

Defence analyst Yousuf Amin Zazai commented: "Security cameras are necessary, but they should not interfere with people's private lives."

Data confidentiality Khalid Zadran assured the public all recorded data was stored securely for only three months and was strictly used for crime prevention purposes.

He explained: "For those concerned about privacy violations, let me assure there is no misuse of these cameras. Our goal is solely to combat crime."

The Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (IEA) claims security has significantly improved in the past three years. However, citizens continue to call for stronger measures to ensure lasting public safety.



PESHAWAR: Chief Minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Ali Amin Gandapur inaugurating Solarization of Houses project.

Bilawal, Kundi discuss law and order situation

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Chairman Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) Bilawal Bhutto Zardari and Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Faisal Karim Kundi met at Zardari House Islamabad on Thursday.

The meeting covered a range of issues including the province's political situation, law and order, the recent attack in Bannu, tensions in Kurram district, agricultural and local development, and other key matters.

Governor Kundi briefed Bilawal on various issues, including the agricultural and local governance convention held at the Governor House, and the rehabilitation efforts for the victims in Kurram district. He also informed the PPP Chairman about the rising terrorist activities in KP, stressing the need for a coordinated and effective strategy to tackle the growing threat.

Kundi emphasized the importance of all institutions working together to ensure peace and provide a safe environment for the people of the province. Bilawal Bhutto expressed deep concern over the escalating terrorist incidents, asserting that the PPP would not allow terrorists to disrupt public peace and security.

He reaffirmed the party's commitment to taking all necessary steps to eliminate terrorism and establish lasting peace in KP. The discussion also focused on the rehabilitation and aid activities for the affected families in Kurram, with Governor Kundi highlighting the active role of the Red Crescent in providing essential medical assistance, food, tents, and other relief supplies.

Kundi commended the organization's efforts and assured that the affected people would not be left alone during this difficult

time. Additionally, Governor Kundi briefed Bilawal on the agricultural and local governance convention at the Governor House, aimed at strengthening the agricultural sector and local systems to better serve the public.

He mentioned that farmers and local representatives were grateful for the platform provided by PPP to address issues with the provincial government. Bilawal Bhutto reiterated the PPP's commitment to the welfare of the people, saying that the party would work closely with the federal government to implement development projects in KP.

The meeting also touched upon the national political landscape and future strategies, with both leaders agreeing that all resources should be utilized to ensure lasting peace, development, and public welfare in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Macron says Russia a threat to Europe

PARIS: French President Emmanuel Macron has said Russian aggression "knows no borders" and is a direct threat to Europe as European Union leaders prepare to hold emergency talks in Brussels in the wake of the Trump administration's stance on transatlantic ties. "Who can believe that this Russia of today will stop at Ukraine?" Macron said in a televised address.

All 27 EU leaders will gather for Thursday's defence summit for the first time since the explosive meeting in the Oval Office between US President Donald Trump and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy last week. Trump has since softened his tone on Zelenskyy after the Ukrainian leader's willingness to sign a controversial mineral deal with the U.S. Zelenskyy's insistence that Washington provide a security guarantee in lieu of the deal invited Trump's wrath.

Washington says Ukraine's entry into the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) — established in 1949 against the Soviet Union threat — is "unrealistic" and has threatened to withdraw American troops from Europe, asking European allies to step up their defence spending. Trump has reached out to Russian President Vladimir Putin without involving his European allies in his push to end the Ukraine war. In his statements, he has blamed Ukraine for the war, which was triggered by Moscow's 2022 invasion of Ukraine.

Washington has since halted military aid as well as intelligence sharing with Ukraine, critical for Kyiv's defence against Russia. The Ukraine policy shift has sent US allies scrambling, with EU leaders openly questioning Washington's reliability as a security partner going forward. They also fear that Kyiv and Europe's interests will be overlooked in any deal to end the biggest conflict on the continent since World War II.

Macron warned that Europe must be prepared to stand alone in the face of Russian aggression. "I want to believe the US will stay by our side," said Macron. "But we have to be ready if that isn't the case." "The future of Europe does not have to be decided in Washington or Moscow," he added.

The French leader added that he plans next week to hold a meeting of army chiefs from European countries willing to send troops to Ukraine after any eventual peace deal with Russia. Macron also said he would discuss with his European partners extending French nuclear deterrence to other countries on the continent, but that the decision and control would continue to remain in the French president's hands.

Other European leaders, including British Prime Minister Keir Starmer, have embraced Zelenskyy and reaffirmed their support for Ukraine at weekend talks in London after the White House blowup. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said during a phone call to journalists that Macron's televised address had been "extremely confrontational" and that it was clear that France wasn't thinking about peace. "One can conclude that France thinks more about war, about continuing the war," Peskov said. Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov echoed Peskov's comments, saying during a press conference in Moscow that Macron's comments about discussing nuclear deterrence with European allies were a "threat" against Russia. — Aljazeera

Trump warns Gaza 'you are dead' if hostages not freed

WASHINGTON (AFP): US President Donald Trump on Wednesday threatened further destruction of Gaza if all remaining hostages are not released, and issued an ultimatum to Hamas leaders to flee.

The United States, meanwhile, confirmed unprecedented indirect talks with Hamas, which it proscribes as a "terrorist" group, focused on American hostages in Gaza. Strongly backing Israel as the ceasefire teeters, Trump said he was "sending Israel everything it needs to finish the job" as his administration expedites billions of dollars in weapons.

"Release all of the hostages now, not later, and immediately return all of the dead bodies of the people you murdered, or it is over for you," he wrote on his Truth Social platform after meeting freed hostages. "This is your last warning! For the leadership, now is the time to leave Gaza, while you still have a chance."

Trump also warned of repercussions for Gaza as a whole, where virtually the entire population has been displaced by Israel's relentless military campaign in response to Hamas's October 7, 2023 attack. "To the People of Gaza: A beautiful Future awaits, but not if you hold Hostages. If you do, you are dead!"

His comments follow Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's warning of "consequences that you cannot imagine" if Hamas does not hand over the remaining hostages seized in the October 7 attack. The first phase of a ceasefire ended over the weekend after six weeks of relative calm that included exchanges of Israeli hostages for Palestinian prisoners held in Israeli jails.

While Israel has said it wants to extend the first phase until mid-April, Hamas has insisted on a transition to the second phase, which should lead to a lasting ceasefire. Israel has ramped up pressure not just with threats but also by halting the flow of goods and supplies into Gaza. "Hamas has indeed suffered a severe blow, but it has not yet been defeated. The mission is not yet accomplished," Israel's new military chief Eyal Zamir warned on Wednesday.

Also on Wednesday, France, Britain, and Germany jointly called the humanitarian situation in Gaza "catastrophic" and urged Israel to ensure the "unhindered" delivery of aid. South Africa said Israel's restriction of aid into Gaza amounted to using starvation as a weapon of war. "We lack drinking water. People are complaining of lack of water in general. We cannot get rid of the waste, which affects the groundwater," Abu Hammam al-Hasanat, a 34-year-old who lives in the Gaza Strip, told AFP.

Trump's hawkish language came after the United States confirmed unprecedented direct talks with Hamas, with the US envoy on hostage affairs, Adam Boehler, dis-

US to revoke legal status for 240,000 Ukrainians

WASHINGTON (Reuters): US President Donald Trump's administration is planning to revoke temporary legal status for some 240,000 Ukrainians who fled the conflict with Russia, a senior Trump official and three sources familiar with the matter said, potentially putting them on a fast-track to deportation. The move, expected as soon as April, would be a stunning reversal of the welcome Ukrainians received under president Joe Biden's administration. The planned rollback of protections for Ukrainians was underway before Trump publicly feuded with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy last week. It is part of a broader Trump administration effort to strip legal status from more than 1.8 million migrants allowed to enter the US under temporary humanitarian parole programs launched under the Biden administration, the sources said. US Department of Homeland Security spokesperson Tricia McLaughlin said the department had no announcements at this time. The White House and Ukrainian embassy did not respond to requests for comment. A Trump executive order issued on January 20 called for DHS to "terminate all categorical parole programs". The administration plans to revoke parole for about 530,000 Cubans, Haitians, Nicaraguans and Venezuelans as soon as this month, the Trump official and one of the sources familiar with the matter said, requesting anonymity to discuss internal deliberations.

'We are not alone': Zelensky thanks Europe at crisis summit

BRUSSELS (AFP): Volodymyr Zelenskyy thanked EU leaders Thursday for standing by Ukraine's side, as the bloc kicked off crisis talks on confronting US President Donald Trump's pivot away from Kyiv and its transatlantic partners. Thursday's summit brings all 27 EU leaders together for the first time since last week's explosive meeting between Trump and Zelenskyy. Since then, Washington has suspended the military aid and intelligence sharing that has helped Kyiv fight off Russia's invasion. "We are very thankful that we are not alone. And these are not just words," the Ukrainian president told reporters as the talks kicked off, standing alongside EU chiefs Ursula von der Leyen and Antonio Costa. With America's long-term commitment to Europe's security now in doubt, the bloc is under pressure to rise to the moment. Already this week, Germany's likely next leader pledged a historical U-turn on defence. "This is a watershed moment for Europe," said von der Leyen, who has laid out a plan aimed at mobilising 800 billion euros to "re-arm Europe" faced with the threat from Russia. "Europe faces a clear and present danger, and therefore Europe has to be able to protect itself," the commission chief told reporters. "It's also watershed moment for Ukraine," she added. "We have to put Ukraine in a position to protect itself and to push for lasting and just peace." Leaders are expected to give a green light Thursday to the commission's defence plans, based largely on freeing states to spend much more -- something the bloc's two economic powerhouses look set to do. In a sombre national address on the summit's eve, France's President Emmanuel Macron called for a defence spending surge to confront a "new era" and said he would discuss extending France's nuclear deterrent to European partners.

cussing American hostages. "Look, dialogue and talking to people around the world to do what's in the best interest of the American people is something that the president" believes is right, White House Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt said. The United States had refused direct contact with the Palestinian militants since banning them as a terrorist organisation in 1997. But Leavitt said that the hostage envoy "has the authority to talk to anyone".

Both the White House and Netanyahu's office confirmed Israel was consulted in advance. Five Americans are believed to remain among the hostages — four have been confirmed dead, and one, Edan

Alexander, is believed to be alive. The attack resulted in the deaths of 1,218 people, most of them civilians, while Israel's military retaliation in Gaza has killed at least 48,440 people, also mostly civilians, according to data from both sides.

Of the 251 captives taken during Hamas's attack, 58 remain in Gaza, including 34 the Israeli military has confirmed are dead. In an interview on Wednesday night, US Secretary of State Marco Rubio urged Hamas to take seriously Trump's threats of retaliation. "He doesn't say these things and not mean it, as folks are finding out around the world. If he says he's going to do something, he'll do it," Rubio said.

PHC issues contempt of court notice to Secy Interior

Humayun Khan

PESHAWAR: The Peshawar High Court (PHC) has issued a notice to the Secretary of Interior and the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) in response to a contempt of court petition filed by Asad Qaiser, the former Speaker of the National Assembly and a central leader of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI).

The case was heard by a two-member bench of the Peshawar High Court, comprising Justice Syed Arshad Ali and Justice Khurshid Iqbal. The counsel Muhammad Asif Babar, informed the court that Asad Qaiser is a member of the National Assembly and had filed a petition for removal of his name from the PNIL (Provisional National Identification List) list, as he intended to perform Umrah.

The lawyer stated that despite the court granting permission for Asad Qaiser to perform Umrah, the government has still not removed his name from the list. This, he argued, is a clear contempt of court.

The court was informed that the Ministry of

Interior had previously stated in court that Asad Qaiser's name was not on the list, but now his name has been included in the list. The bench, after completing the arguments, issued a notice to the Ministry of Interior and the FIA, directing them to respond by 13th March.

Court dispose of PTI three leaders petitions:

The Peshawar High Court has disposed of the petitions filed by Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) leaders, including Sheryar Afridi, Dawar Kundi, and Provincial Minister Aftab Alam, seeking details of cases registered against them.

The court's decision came after the government provided details of the cases registered against them. A two-member bench of the Peshawar High Court, comprising Justice Sahibzada Asadullah and Justice Sabit, heard the petitions.

During the hearing of Sheryar Afridi's petition, his lawyer, Mazhar Ali Akbar Advocate, informed the court that despite the court's permission, Afridi

was not allowed to travel abroad, and a warrant was issued against him in Karachi. Afridi himself informed the court that four days ago, a warrant was issued against him in the Karachi Company Police Station.

Justice Sahibzada Asadullah directed Afridi to file a new petition if any new cases are registered against him. The court also directed the government to provide details of any new cases registered against Afridi.

The court also heard Dawar Kundi's petition, during which the Assistant Attorney General informed the court that three FIRs were registered against Kundi in D.I. Khan, and one FIR was registered in Islamabad. However, NAB and FIA cleared him of any wrongdoing.

Similarly, the court heard Provincial Minister Aftab Alam's petition, during which the Assistant Attorney General informed the court that Alam was cleared of any wrongdoing by NAB and FIA, with no cases registered against him.

Aimal Wali flays govt for neglecting KP citizens safety

F.P. Report

CHARSADDA: Awami National Party (ANP) and Qaumi Watan Party have condemned the killing of innocent people in Bannu blasts and described the terror incident as a big question mark on the performance of the government and defence institutions.

In a statement issued from the party's headquarters in Wali Bagh, Charsadda, ANP president Aimal Wali Khan said the federal and provincial governments' "insensitivity and negligence towards the lives of the KP people" was alarming. He condemned the terror incident in Bannu and said the silence of the mainstream media on the

killings of innocent people was criminal.

He said the people of KP, especially the residents of the southern districts, were forced to live under the shadow of insecurity and violence every day. "No one seems to care about their lives," he regretted. "Unfortunately, Pakhtuns are still divided, and this is the cause of our destruction. As a nation, our silence, apolitical attitude, and ignorance of our rights are pushing us further towards destruction," he warned.

In a statement issued in Peshawar, ANP provincial president Mian Ifikhar Hussain insisted Pakhtuns were paying the price of state's policies with their

own blood. "Pakhtuns' blood is being shed like water even during the holy month of Ramadan. The loss of 12 precious lives in the Bannu incident is extremely regrettable and condemnable," he lamented.

He said the elements involved in such dastardly incidents did not even deserve to be called human beings. "The blood of these 12 martyrs is on the hands of the forces that brought these terrorists back to the country," he said. ANP, he said, had strongly opposed the resettlement of terrorists, but its concerns were ignored, and the consequences of which were being borne by innocent citizens on daily basis.

BD election this year may be difficult due to unrest

DHAKA (Reuters): Bangladesh's interim government has been unable to fully ensure public safety and holding a general election this year will be difficult, the head of a newly launched political party told Reuters. Former prime minister Sheikh Hasina was ousted last August in the wake of mass, sometimes violent, student-led protests. The interim government, headed by Nobel laureate Muhammad Yunus, said this month that elections could be held by the end of 2025 although unrest has continued.

"In the past seven months, we all expected the policing system, law and order to be restored through short-term reforms. It has happened to an extent, but not up to our expectations," said Nahid Islam, the head of Jatiya Nagorik Party or National Citizens' Party (NCP) and former student leader. "In the current law and order situation and policing system, I don't think it is possible to hold a national election," the 26-year-old said in his first interview as NCP head at his government-provided villa in Dhaka.

Islam, who was until recently an adviser in the interim government, is the first politician of significance to cast doubt on Yunus' timeframe for an election. Political analysts believe his youth-led party could significantly reshape national politics, dominated for decades by Hasina's Awami League party and her rival, former prime minister Khaleda Zia's Bangladesh Nationalist Party.

Those parties have demanded early elections, arguing that power should be returned to a democratically elected government. Incidents of unrest include attacks on symbols of Hasina's government and clashes between student groups. There have also been reports of attacks on homes, businesses and temples of Hindus and other minorities in the Muslim-majority nation, though the interim government says those reports are exaggerated.