

**JUI leader shot dead**  
**F.P. Report**

TURBAT: A Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (JUI) leader was murdered in a targeted attack in the Malikabad area of Turbat d. He was identified as Mufti Shahmeer, a member of JUI-F. Armed motorcyclists opened fire at him as he was leaving the mosque after offering Tarawih prayers. Mufti Shahmeer sustained serious gunshot wounds and was immediately rushed to the hospital, where he later succumbed to his injuries.



ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif in a group photo with participants during International Women's Day ceremony.

## China extends \$2b loan repayment by Pakistan

**F.P. Report**

ISLAMABAD: China has once again extended financial relief to Pakistan by extending the repayment period of a \$2 billion loan to Pakistan by one year.

It emerged lately that China has agreed to delay the loan repayment to provide stability to Pakistan's economic stability which was earlier scheduled for March 24.

This extension will help Pakistan maintain its foreign exchange reserves and strengthen financial stability," the statement noted. Over the years, China has been a reliable partner of Pakistan on the economic and time and again, has come to the rescue of Pakistan's financial conundrum.

This time the decision of China has more value: It comes at a time when Pakistan is grappling with economic challenges including balance of payment crisis. Also, the country is also in talks with mul-

tilateral lenders for any financial assistance. Sources privy to the development noted that the deferment would reduce the pressure of immediate payment because the focus of the government, at first, is to bring stability to the economy.

Meanwhile, the cash-strapped country is seeking a fresh loan tranche from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), with the Washington-based lender's team currently in Pakistan for negotiations. Islamabad secured the \$7 billion Extended Fund Facility (EFF) last summer to help claw its way out of an economic crisis.

The programme has played a key role in stabilising Pakistan's economy and the government has said the country is on course for a long-term recovery. Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb told Reuters that Pakistan was "well positioned" for

the first review of its \$7 billion IMF bailout programme.

Pakistan was able to build some trust with the IMF by completing a short-term nine-month programme last year. Previous loan programs in Pakistan ended prematurely or saw delays after the government at the time faltered on meeting key conditions.

Moreover, the government is negotiating a \$1.25 trillion (\$4.47 billion) loan with commercial banks to reduce its bulging energy sector debt, the power minister and banking association said. Plugging unresolved debt across the sector is a top priority under an ongoing \$7 billion IMF bailout, which has helped Pakistan dig its way out of an economic crisis.

"The loan will be repaid over a period of 5 to 7 years," Power Minister Awaiz Leghari told Reuters, adding that the term sheets are yet to be signed.

## 3 khwarij killed during IBO in Tank

**F.P. Report**

RAWALPINDI: At least three khwarij were killed during an IBO in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) said on Saturday.

"On March 8, 2025, security forces conducted an intelligence-based operation in Tank district on the reported presence of Khwarij. During the conduct of operation, own troops effectively engaged the khwarij location, as a result of which, three khwarij were killed", the ISPR said.

Weapons and ammunition were also recovered from the killed khwarij, who remained actively involved in numerous terrorist activities against the Security Forces as well as innocent civilians.

Sanitization operation is being conducted to eliminate any other Kharij found in the area as the security forces of Pakistan are determined to wipe out the menace of terrorism from the country.

President Asif Ali Zardari lauded the security forces for carrying out an operation against Khawarij in district Tank. He appreciated the security forces for eliminating three Khawarij during the operation. He said operations against terrorists would continue till the complete eradication of the menace of terrorism. He said the whole nation stood with the security forces in the war against terrorism.

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Saturday appreciated the security forces for carrying out a successful operation against Fitna-al-Khawarij (terrorists) in district Tank.

The prime minister paid tribute to the security forces for killing three terrorists during the operation. He said the entire nation was standing with security forces in war against terrorism. Shehbaz Sharif said: "We are fully determined to completely root out terrorism from the country."

## France, Italy back Arab plan for Gaza

ROME (Reuters): The foreign ministers of France, Germany, Italy and Britain said on Saturday they supported an Arab-backed plan for the reconstruction of Gaza that would cost \$53 billion and avoid displacing Palestinians from the enclave.

"The plan shows a realistic path to the reconstruction of Gaza and promises – if implemented – swift and sustainable improvement of the catastrophic living conditions for the Palestinians living in Gaza," the ministers said in a joint statement.

The plan, which was drawn up by Egypt and adopted by Arab leaders earlier this month, has been rejected by US President Donald Trump.

More than 50 freed Israeli hostages urged Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to fully implement the Gaza ceasefire deal and secure the release of those still held in the Palestinian territory. "We who have experienced the inferno know that a return to war is life-threatening for those still left behind," a group of 56 freed hostages said in a letter posted on the social media platform Instagram on Friday evening.

## Saif: PML-N govt plunges country into darkness

**F.P. Report**

PESHAWAR: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Advisor for Information and Public Relations, Barrister Dr. Saif, has stated that ever since the publication of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's annual performance report, the opposition has been in distress. He remarked that the so-called "fake government" is in a state of panic following the release of the province's performance report.

In a statement issued from his office, Barrister Dr. Saif said that opponents are making baseless criticisms of the performance report in an attempt to console themselves, but their efforts are futile.

He further stated that governments that have stolen the public mandate have nothing to show for their governance, which is why they are attacking

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's performance report. Barrister Dr. Saif criticized the Sharif family, claiming that they are using public tax money to display their pictures in newspapers.

He added that if the Sharif family had any real achievements, they would not have needed to come into power through Form 47. The Information Advisor emphasized that Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) has formed the government in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa for a third consecutive term based on its excellent performance. In contrast, due to their poor governance, Nawaz Sharif and Maryam Nawaz lost their seats.

He asserted that if Form 47 had not been used, the father-daughter duo would have been back in London by now. Barrister Dr. Saif also highlighted that Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's

Sehat Card health initiative has become a source of discomfort for the opposition. He urged opponents to focus on real public welfare projects instead of relying on advertising campaigns. He stated that true performance speaks for itself and does not require extravagant advertisements.

He expressed hope that other provinces would also introduce similar health initiatives.

He concluded by saying that the public cannot be deceived by advertisements alone; people make their decisions based on real progress. The Sharif family has done nothing but plunder the country, which is why they suffered a humiliating defeat in the February 8 elections. However, through Form 47, a fake government has been imposed once again, plunging the country into darkness.

## OIC endorse alternative to Trump's Gaza plan

JEDDAH: The Organization of Islamic Cooperation on Friday endorsed an Arab League counter-proposal to US President Donald Trump's controversial plan to take over Gaza and displace its residents, two ministers have said.

The decision by the 57-member grouping came at an emergency meeting in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, three days after the Arab League ratified the plan at a summit in Cairo. The Egyptian-crafted alternative to Trump's widely condemned takeover proposes to rebuild the Gaza Strip under the future administration of the Palestinian Authority.

"The emergency ministerial meeting of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation adopted the Egyptian plan, which has now become an Arab-Islamic plan," Egyptian Foreign Minister Badr Abdelatty said, in comments echoed by his Sudanese counterpart. "It is certainly a very positive thing," Abdelatty said. Trump triggered global outrage by suggesting the US "take over" Gaza and turn it into the "Riviera of the

Middle East," while forcing its Palestinian inhabitants to relocate to Egypt or Jordan.

Cameroonian Foreign Minister Lejeune Mbella, chairman of the Council of Foreign Ministers, said the meeting was called in light of "new developments in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, including calls for the displacement of Palestinians." He urged the full implementation of the agreement with a view to reaching a final solution to the conflict via a "concerted and multilateral approach."

Mbella stressed, however, that "this approach can only be applicable and relevant within the framework of the two-state solution, with Israel and Palestine living side by side within internationally recognized borders, thus ensuring comprehensive peace in the Middle East." Mamadou Tangara, the foreign minister of Gambia — the current Chair of the Islamic Summit — slammed plans to displace Palestinians from the Gaza Strip as "provocative, brutal and inhumane," and also uncalled for considering

that positive steps are being looked into to end the Palestinian-Israeli conflict following the recently reached ceasefire agreement.

"Now is the time for the international community to exert more concerted efforts to establish a comprehensive and lasting ceasefire that will lead to the full withdrawal of Israel from the occupied Palestinian territories, reiterating that the two-state solution is a prerequisite for stability and peace in the Middle East," he said. Tangara expressed deep concern over the recent passage of laws by the Israeli parliament banning the work of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA), which is in complete contravention of the UN Charter and international law.

OIC Secretary General Houssein Ibrahim Taha affirmed his support for the reconstruction plan for the Gaza Strip, while adhering to the right of the Palestinian people to remain in their land. — Arab News

# The Frontier Post

**Quake jolts Balochistan**  
**F.P. Report**

ZHOB: An earthquake measuring 4.8 on the Richter scale jolted Zhob and its adjoining areas in Balochistan on Saturday. People came out of their homes in panic and started reciting verses from the Holy Quran. No loss of life and property was reported from any part of Zhob. According to the NSMC, the epicenter of the earthquake was located 135 kilometres south-east of Zhob at depth of 10 kilometres.

## PM pledges mission of gender equality

**Saqib Mushtaq**

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Saturday reaffirming his commitment to gender equality said women's empowerment could only be achieved by providing them an equal access to education, skill development and employment opportunities.

"It's our mission and an unwavering commitment to ensure emancipation of the country's female population," he said in his address here at an event of International Women's Day, marked globally on 8th March to celebrate the achievements of women and to make a call for their rights.

Prominent women from diverse fields including cabinet members, legislators, entrepreneurs and activists joined the event at the Prime Minister's House, which was organized by Ministry of Human Rights and the National Commission on the Status of Women (NCSW) in collaboration with United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). The prime minister, on the occasion, launched the capital's first-ever Gender Parity Report prepared by NCSW and UNFPA, which identifies challenges and recommends solutions in key areas such as education, health, governance, political representation and justice.

PM Sharif said his government would collaborate with provinces for a collective action to promote women's integration in programmes contributing to national economy. He announced to establish a Working Women's Endowment Fund in a bid to support working women and help them compete with the contemporary challenges.

He termed the PM's Women Empowerment Package a "revolutionary step in eliminating discrimination against women" in areas of employment and for making special provisions to provide them facilities at par with men. "Our fifty percent

## Shehbaz decides to integrate women associated with cottage industries, small businesses into SME sector

**F.P. Report**

LAHORE: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif has announced a major initiative to integrate women associated with cottage industries and small businesses into the Small and Medium Enterprise (SME) sector. The announcement was made on International Women's Day during a review meeting on ongoing reforms under the Small and Medium Enterprise Development Authority (SMEDA), held on Saturday. Speaking at the meeting, the Prime Minister emphasized the need for women's economic empowerment and directed authorities to provide essential capital and facilities on a priority basis to businesswomen in the cottage industry.

He also instructed measures to offer low-cost loans to women under the Youth Loan Scheme, enabling them to expand their businesses. Stressing the importance of supporting educated and skilled women, especially in rural and remote areas, he urged for initiatives that help them achieve financial independence through entrepreneurship. The Prime Minister ordered the establishment of facilitation centers and training institutes to support women engaged in small-scale businesses and ensure their easy access to these resources. To strengthen this initiative, he announced the formation of a special committee tasked with developing a comprehensive plan for empowering women through business opportunities. The committee will soon present its recommendations to the Prime Minister.

women population can be turned into a productive workforce if given a level-playing field," he said.

To facilitate working women, he highlighted that daycare centres were set up across public and private departments in Islamabad, with a plan to further expand the scope of facilities. The prime minister regretted that a large number of highly-qualified women in the country quit professional careers in their struggle to balance work and families, resulting in a huge loss of skilled human resource.

"My message to the educated [women] segment is to come forward and join hospitals, banks and other professions of their expertise in order to positively contribute towards a stronger economy," he said. PM Sharif paid tribute to the country's women champions, who played a prominent role in shaping the landscape of female empowerment.

In this regard, he particularly named the leading women of Pakistan Movement Fatima Jinnah and Begum Ra'ana Liaquat Ali Khan, Benazir Bhutto as the first woman prime minister of Pakistan and the Muslim world, Begum Nusrat Bhutto and Begum Kulsum Nawaz as icons of resistance against dictatorship, social workers Bilquis Edhi and Dr Ruth Pfau, lawyer Asma Jahangir, country's youngest IT expert Arfa Karim, former National Assembly Speaker Dr Fehmida Mirza, first woman Chief Minister of Punjab Maryam Nawaz, first woman chief justice of Lahore High Court Justice Aalia Neelum and first female judge of Supreme Court Justice Ayesha Malik. "These 'daughters of the nation' are a remarkable symbol of women empowerment who made their mark in their respective fields," he said.

## PTI's disintegration is Karma: Tarar

**F.P. Report**

GHAKKHAR: Federal Minister for Information, Broadcasting, National Heritage and Culture Attaullah Tarar on Saturday said that the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) has reaped what it has sown into society over the years that is nothing less than chaos, hatred, and division.

"The PTI sowed discord among families and friends and incited hatred among the people, but today their own party has split into ten factions," said the minister while addressing a public gathering in Gujranwala after inaugurating development schemes. "Today, Bushra Bibi, Aleema Khan, Uzma Khan, Ali Amin Gandapur, Sher Afzal Marwat and Junaid Akbar have their own groups within the party," he added.

Those who divided the nation have now seen their own party shattered into pieces, he said while calling out the PTI for pursuing politics with ill intentions, driven by greed for power and wealth. He said that politics is about service, while those who engaged in politics of hatred, division, plundering and corruption are

now becoming irrelevant. "No one even mentions their names anymore," he added.

"I have always said that we have May 28 in our credit when the country's defense was made impregnable, while they are the ones who did May 9," he said, highlighting a stark difference between the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) and PTI. "This is a major difference between you and us, and it will remain forever," he emphasized.

He said the PTI's founder brought a bad name to the country by committing embezzlement of 190 million pounds. The scandal was reported by international media, stating that Pakistan's former prime minister had stolen 190 million pounds from the nation. "This is tit for tat, as he conspired against a patriotic leader, Nawaz Sharif, who is the founder of modern Pakistan, laid a network of motorways, and ended the electricity crisis," he said, adding that today his brother Shehbaz Sharif is taking Pakistan to new heights, and his daughter Maryam Nawaz has brought a revolution of development and prosperity in Punjab.



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ISLAMABAD: Activates of Aurat Foundation participates in International Women's Day rally outside NPC. —INP Photo

## Talpur champions women's empowerment with groundbreaking housing initiatives

KARACHI (APP): The Central President of the Pakistan Peoples Party Women's Wing and Member of the Sindh Assembly Faryal Talpur has extended heartfelt congratulations to the women across Pakistan and the world on the occasion of International Women's Day.

Highlighting the crucial role of women in societal progress and prosperity, Talpur stated, "Women are not just the backbone of families but also of society." She emphasized that women have proven their unwavering dedication as caretakers, professionals, and leaders through their relentless hard work.

"The perseverance, compassion, and unshakable commitment of women are the pillars upon which strong nations are built," she remarked. She reiterated that the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) has always championed women's rights and remains committed to their empowerment. "The vision of

Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto regarding women's rights continues to guide us," she affirmed.

Faryal Talpur recalled that both Shaheed leaders envisioned a Pakistan where women stand shoulder to shoulder with men in all spheres of life. "The PPP remains steadfast in its mission to break barriers and secure women's rightful place in every sector," she said.

She further stated that under the leadership of President Asif Ali Zardari and PPP Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, the PPP is committed to realizing the vision of its martyred leaders. "President Asif Ali Zardari and Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari are actively working towards a society where gender equality is not just an aspiration but a reality," she added.

Referring to key initiatives such as the Benazir Income Support Program and housing schemes for

homeless women, Faryal Talpur described them as revolutionary steps towards women's empowerment. On this significant day, she delivered a special message to Pakistani women, saying, "Your strength, resilience, and struggle are the true essence of nation-building."

Encouraging collective efforts for a just and prosperous Pakistan, she urged, "Let us all follow in the footsteps of Madar-e-Millat Fatima Jinnah, Shaheed Benazir Bhutto, and Madar-e-Jamhooriat Begum Bhutto. Together, we must overcome challenges and break down barriers."

She concluded by calling upon all members of society to reaffirm their commitment to eliminating discrimination, ensuring equal opportunities, and creating a safe environment for women. "The journey toward a better Pakistan is far from over. Let us pledge today to work together for an inclusive and equitable society," she stated.

## Donors contribute Rs. 330 million at Shaukat Khanum dinner

**F.P. Report**

LAHORE: The Shaukat Khanum Memorial Trust (SKMT) hosted an iftar dinner on Friday to honour its donors and supporters as part of its ongoing Zakat campaign. The event saw enthusiastic participation from a large number of attendees, who collectively pledged Rs. 330 million to the cause, surpassing last year's fundraising record.

The evening featured a presentation by Dr. Faisal Sultan, Chief Executive Officer of Shaukat Khanum Memorial Cancer Hospital and Research Centre (SKMCH&RC), remarks from long-standing donor Mr. Ahmed Qureshi, and a soulful naat recitation by a cancer survivor.

In his address, Dr. Sultan said, "Over the past thirty years, the unwavering support of our generous donors has enabled us to provide free treatment to over 75% of our patients, guided by our core principles of quality and equality." He shared the inspiring story of a supporter whose son required a bone marrow transplant. After accessing this service abroad, the supporter championed the establishment of bone marrow trans-



plantation services at SKMCH&RC in 2006. "This spirit embodies Shaukat Khanum, where every rupee counts," Dr. Sultan added. "Since 1994, we have spent Rs. 107 billion on treating deserving cancer patients.

We take every step to ensure Zakat utilization complies with Islamic injunctions, and our Shariah compliance certification reaffirms that our processes align with Islamic principles," He also announced

the expansion of a new 44-bed acute medical unit at SKMCH&RC in Lahore.

Mr. Ahmed Qureshi, a donor since 2009, praised the organisation, stating, "Shaukat Khanum Memorial Trust is a blessing not only for patients but also for donors, who can trust its transparency."

Mrs. Aleema Khanum, Member of the SKMT Board of Governors, reflected on the pivotal role students played in raising awareness and funds to initiate the construction of Pakistan's first SKMCH&RC.

In closing, Dr. Sultan expressed gratitude to all supporters, saying, "Every rupee counts because little drops of water make the mighty ocean. For 2025, our budget is Rs. 38 billion, and we urge you to remember our cancer patients when giving Zakat this Ramadan. We are ready to fight cancer, but we cannot win this fight without your Zakat and donations!"

## Educated, empowered women guarantee of prosperous Punjab: CM

LAHORE (APP): Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif has said that educated and empowered women are the guarantee of a bright and prosperous Punjab.

In her message on International Women's Day being celebrated on Saturday, the CM emphasised the importance of women's empowerment, equality, and protection. She highlighted the steps taken by the Punjab government to ensure women's rights and their active participation in all spheres of life.

CM Maryam Nawaz paid glowing tribute to every daughter, sister, and mother, stating, "A woman is not just an individual; she is the architect of generations." She emphasized that Islam granted unparalleled respect and rights to women, and the Holy Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) set an eternal example of honoring daughters.

The CM stressed the necessity of providing equal opportunities for women in education, employment, and development. She highlighted the appointment of women officers across various divisions and districts in Punjab as a testament to women's empowerment. Women in

the police and other departments are performing exceptionally well with dedication and hard work.

She said, "Women and children are my 'red line.' This is my vision." She reiterated that there is no room for discrimination or injustice against women. To ensure women's safety and empowerment, her government has established virtual police stations, launched the Women Help Line and Pink Button Project, and built hostels for working women under the Safe City Authority. Additionally, the E-Bikes Scheme was introduced to facilitate women's mobility, with plans to distribute more bikes in the future, she added.

In the realm of education and economic empowerment, 60 percent of scholarships under the Hunarmand Scholarship Program were awarded to female students on merit, she informed. Female students are also being equipped with modern technology through the Laptop Scheme, and 18 Women Development Centers have been established in public universities, she asserted. To support working women, 307 daycare centers are benefiting 9,541 families, and 16 working women hostels have been set

up across Punjab, she mentioned.

The CM said that social and economic programs such as the Punjab Dhee Rani Program are organizing mass weddings for underprivileged girls, while financial assistance is being provided to deserving minority women through the Minority Card. Rural women in South Punjab are being empowered through the Livestock Program, and women entrepreneurs are being encouraged through easy business finance and card schemes. The Apni Chhat Apna Ghar Scheme offers interest-free loans for women to build their own homes.

She said in sports and recreation, the Pink Games initiative is providing sports opportunities for women. Maryam Nawaz vowed to create a Punjab where every woman is respected, protected, and provided with opportunities. She said, "I am building a Punjab where there is no place for prejudice or malice against women." The CM said "My daughters, my sisters! Your safety, dignity, and prosperity are the top priorities of my government. I stand with you at every step—I am your protector and your strength."

### Crackdown against unhealthy food continues

LAHORE (APP): Punjab Food Authority continues its crackdown against those endangering public health.

On directives of DG Food Authority Asim Javed, food safety teams conducted raids on Multan Road and Sundar Estate, seizing and disposing off 1,500 kg of fungus-infested pickles and 470 kg of unsafe food colors and flavors.

During the operation, production at a ghee and oil unit was halted, while a fine of Rs. 200,000 was imposed on a pickle production unit. The PFA DG said that the ghee sample failed quality tests due to high acid content, leading to the unit's closure. Violations of previous warnings were observed including poor hygiene conditions, use of expired loose colors, pest infestations, lack of records and food items stored directly on the floor.

DG Asim Javed emphasized that strict action will be taken against those deceiving the public in the name of food products. He urged food business operators to comply with prescribed regulations and called on the public to report such violations to Punjab Food Authority helpline 1223.

## 50,000 children taking modern IT courses for free: Tessori

KARACHI (PPI): The opportunities for employment in the city of lights, Karachi, will also increase. My team and I are working tirelessly to create more job opportunities.

According to a statement by the Governor House today, this was stated by the Governor of Sindh while addressing the participants of Itihaad Ramzan. The governor said that Allah listens to prayers during the blessed month of Ramadan, so everyone should pray especially for the development and prosperity of the country and nation.

Tessori mentioned that today, 50,000 children are taking modern IT courses for free at the Governor House, and ration bags are being distributed among the needy, while laptops are also being given to the youth. He said that new ministers have taken an oath, and may Allah grant them the ability to serve the public.

Earlier, in a draw at the Governor House, Bina Zafar won an Umrah ticket. She was overwhelmed with

emotion upon receiving the ticket and said that her great wish had been fulfilled today. On this occasion, the Governor of Sindh assured Bina Zafar that he would personally arrange Umrah tickets, visas, and accommodation for her two children as well. In the draw for a 120-yard plot, Javed Iqbal's name was drawn. Javed Iqbal said that he lives in a rented house, and today Allah has answered his prayers. He expressed his gratitude to the Governor.

According to FIA officials, the arrested individuals were identified as Mudassir Ali and Zeeshan Khokhar.

The arrested outlaw Mudassir Ali was trying to fly to Italy on flight QR-621, while Zeeshan Khokhar was en route to

South Africa on flight EK-625.

During immigration clearance, both passengers were found suspicious. Upon verification, their passports were found to have counterfeit visa for their respective destinations.

## Two passengers caught for traveling with fake documents

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02	Deputy Director ORIC (Office of Research, Innovation and Commercialization) (EG-03)	(01)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Must have Graduation / Master or an equivalent qualification (16 years of education) in the field of Business Education / Management Science from an HEC-recognized university / institution, with at least 03-05 years of relevant experience in a Public / Private sector organization of good repute recognized by HEC.</li><li>Proven track record of expertise in Design and implement research, innovation, and entrepreneurship, integrating research into curricula. Prepare formal agreements, and foster strategic partnerships to enhance educational and research opportunities.</li><li>Ability to coordinate with and liaise effectively with industry stakeholders and academic institutions to enhance training and education.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Contract (03) Years (extendable)</li><li>Merit-01</li><li>Lump Sum Pay Package shall be offered as Rs. 249,588 per month with 05% annual increment (Negotiable as per policy)</li></ul>	Maximum 40 Years (including all age relaxations)
03	Deputy Director Academics (EG-03)	(02)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Must have Graduation / Master or an equivalent qualification (16 years of education) in the field of Business Education / Management Science from an HEC-recognized university / institution, with at least 03-05 years of relevant experience in a Public / Private sector organization of good repute recognized by HEC.</li><li>Demonstrated expertise in integrating IT systems into academic processes, improving efficiency and workflows. Strong drafting, with fast typing and proficiency in MS Word, Excel, and PowerPoint for accurate documents and presentations.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Contract (03) Years (extendable)</li><li>Merit-02</li><li>Lump Sum Pay Package shall be offered as Rs. 249,588 per month with 05% annual increment (Negotiable as per policy)</li></ul>	Maximum 40 Years (including all age relaxations)

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# PPP committed to rights of women, says Governor

PESHAWAR (APP): The Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Faisal Karim Kundi, on Saturday emphasized the crucial role of women in the development and prosperity of any society. In his message on International Women's Day, he reiterated that the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) has always been at the forefront of protecting women's rights and dignity. He highlighted that the vision of Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto was to provide equal opportunities

to women so they could excel in all fields, adding Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari is actively working to fulfill this mission. Kundi said that as Governor, he has prioritized women's empowerment and youth engagement, aligning with the vision of Shaheed Benazir Bhutto. He further remarked that Benazir Bhutto, as Pakistan's first female Prime Minister, set a precedent for women and introduced numerous reforms for their

welfare during her tenure. He said that the PPP has consistently taken practical steps to safeguard women's rights, promote gender equality, and empower them. A notable example of such efforts is the Benazir Income Support Program, he added. Governor Faisal Karim Kundi praised Asifa Bhutto Zardari's efforts for women's empowerment and social welfare. He acknowledged her dedication to continuing Benazir Bhutto's vision for

gender equality in Pakistan. Governor Kundi stressed the need for more effective initiatives for women's development and welfare in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa to ensure equal opportunities in all sectors. He reaffirmed that the Governor House Peshawar will continue its efforts to protect women's rights, striving to create a society where women can confidently utilize their talents and contribute to the country's progress.



PESHAWAR: Commissioner Peshawar Division Riaz Khan Mehsud chairing a meeting about removing of encroachments from Board Bazaar.

## China Window, Consultreat sign MoU

PESHAWAR (APP): In celebration of International Women's Day, China Window and local organization Consultreat signed a Memorandum of Understanding to collaborate on organizing regular events for women's empowerment. The signing ceremony took place at China Window here Saturday and attended by former Vice Chancellor of Benazir Bhutto Women University and member of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Public Service Commission, Prof. Dr. Razia Sultana, renowned artist Jahanzeb Malik (Tamgha-e-Imtiaz), and Chairman of Pakistan Development Foundation, Muhammad Bilal Sethi. Speaking on the occasion, Director of China

Window, Naz Parveen, highlighted that over 42,000 women, including students, have visited the cultural center, demonstrating a growing interest in learning about Chinese culture. She emphasized that China Window and Consultreat will work together to organize events that encourage and empower women while promoting Pakistan-China friendship. Consultreat's Director, Shehrbano, termed the MoU an important milestone, stating that women, like men, are eager to learn about China and its global influence. She stressed the need to educate women about international political developments and the evolving dynamics between global

powers. Shehrbano further stated that both organizations would collaborate in the fields of culture, education, and professional development for women and students, while also actively promoting Chinese culture in Peshawar. Prof. Dr. Razia Sultana remarked that International Women's Day serves as a reminder to prioritize women's rights, education, health, and equal opportunities. She called for practical measures to improve women's economic, social, and political status. She also praised the efforts of China Window in fostering women's empowerment, strengthening cultural exchange, and enhancing Pakistan-China relations.

### Mehsud presided meeting

PESHAWAR (APP): The Commissioner Peshawar Division, Riaz Khan Mehsud has decided permanent removal of encroachment from Board Bazar and warned strict against those involved violating directives issued by district administration. He was chairing a meeting to remove encroachments from Board Bazar and to clear road for smooth flow of traffic. The meeting was also attended by AC Town, Director West Metropolitan Corporation and concerned officials of police and Peshawar Development Authority. Commissioner said that strict action would be taken against shopkeepers who have permitted pushcart owners to stand in front of their shops. He said that shopkeepers would be arrested and their shops would be sealed. He said that district administration would take all the necessary measures to clear Board Bazar from encroachments and to ensure smooth flow of traffic and pedestrian movement on Board Bazar. Commissioner said that fences would be installed alongside railway track ad traffic personnel and staff of district administration would be deputed to prevent encroachment.

## Pak-Afghan conflict: Traders urged to play role in peaceful solutions

### F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Sarhad Chamber of Commerce and Industry president Fazal Moqeem Khan urged Pak-Afghan traders to play a role in a peaceful solution of the ongoing conflict to restore mutual trade between the two neighbouring countries. The SCCI chief said owing to the closure of the border for many days, traders on both sides of the border had incurred financial loss, worth billions of dollars. He asserted business should be separated from politics to ensure trade growth.

The chamber president urged both Islamabad and Kabul to sort out a peaceful solution to all issues by holding table talks to immediately restore bilateral trade. Moqeem was speaking during an online conference/webinar jointly organised by SCCI and Pak-Afghan Joint Chambers of Commerce and Industry (PAJCCI) on border trade closure and other traders issues. Conference attended by PAJCCI Pakistan Chapter vice president and members of the SCCI executive committee Ziaul Haq

Sarhadi, Khyber Chamber Group Leader Syed Jawad Hussain Kazmi, PAJCCI Coordinator Imtiaz Ali, Director Farooq Ahmad, former president SCCI Faiz Muhammad Faizi, PAJCCI Pakistan Chapter president Junaid Makda, former president PAJCCI Pakistan chapter Qazi Zahid, and others. PAJCCI vice president and acting chairman of Afghanistan Chamber of Commerce and Investment Younas Mohmand, elders/trader leaders Haji Gul Arab, Haji Dr Mukhlas Ahmad participated in an online conference from the Afghanistan side.

During the last 17 to 18 days closure of the Torkham border, 6000 goods trucks, especially perishable like fruit, vegetables, juices, meat and other food items stranded on both sides of the border, owing to which Pak-Afghan traders inflicted approximately monetary loss up to \$10 billion, the meeting was told. Participants of the meeting urged Pakistan and Afghanistan governments and relevant authorities to resolve the issue through negotiation. Speakers stated business

and trade was carried between Pakistan and Afghanistan for the last several decades and called for joint initiatives to enhance the Pak-Afghan mutual trade volume. In the conference, a proposal was given for holding a joint flag march to the border, on which the Sarhad Chamber of Commerce and Industry said it will take decision about this proposal after consultation with leaders and officials. In his key-note speech, Moqeem urged Pak-Afghan traders to come forward and play a role in a peaceful solution of the ongoing conflict because it has brought highly negative impacts of mutual trade between the two countries. None of the trade borders in Pakistan has not been closed on political grounds but Torkham, Ghulam Khan and Kharlachi trade routes frequently remained closed for months on petty issues, which adversely hurt the bilateral trade, SCCI chief remarked.

Ziaul Haq Sarhadi also spoke on the occasion and stressed the need for early resolution of Pak-Afghan conflict to restore mutual trade. PAJCCI Pakistan

chapter official said Pakistan and Afghanistan, which are close neighbour countries, and both Islamabad and Kabul should take joint measures to ease difficulties of traders and facilitate them under a comprehensive mechanism. Before the closure of the Torkham border, an infrastructure development Cess on export from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa was imposed which has forced traders to shift nearly 4000 to 5000 goods containers from KP to Chaman border, Quetta that not only badly affected export but also rendered customs clearing agents jobless. With efforts of SCCI, the KP government had slashed Cess on export at 1 percent from 2 percent but the notification regarding the reduction was yet not included in the system that has created difficulties for traders and urged the provincial government to put 1 percent cut on cess into the system to ease traders difficulties. Earlier, SCCI and PAJCCI Pakistan Chapter hailed the efforts of ACCI chairman Younas Mohmad for highlighting border closure issues and promotion of Pak-Afghan mutual trade.

## Economic growth rate: Muzzammil expresses concerned

### F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Advisor to the Chief Minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa on Finance and Interprovincial Coordination Muzzammil Aslam has expressed concerns about Pakistan's economic growth rate and the "Uraan Pakistan Program". According to Aslam, the government expects the growth rate to be 3.1% this year, falling short of the 4% target. He also anticipates disappointing performance from key sectors like agriculture and industry, while growth will be driven by

services and non-conventional sectors such as livestock, small-scale manufacturing, and construction. Aslam said that the federal government also expects a 4.5 percent growth rate in the next fiscal year. He questioned the government's projection of 9% growth rate for the next 22 years wondering if the "Uraan Pakistan Program" was just a fairy tale. He emphasized that Pakistan's economy is struggling with recession and low demand, leading to increased poverty and unemployment.

## Female burglary gang busted

PESHAWAR (APP): A special team of Agha Mir Jani Police Station in collaboration with the Ladies Police and investigative officers on Saturday busted a female gang involved in house burglaries in various areas under the jurisdiction of Agha Mir Jani Shah and Rehman Baba police stations. Acting on the special directives of senior officials, SP City Division Khalid Khan instructed DSP Yakatoot Circle Ziaullah Khan to oversee an operation led by SHO Agha Mir Jani Shah, Ejaz Khan and a special police team to track down the culprits involved in robberies in houses.

The police team successfully tracked and arrested a four-member women gang, residents of Chingharabad, who were involved in various incidents of burglary and looting valuable items, including gold jewelry and cash. During interrogation, the women confessed to their crimes. The operation resulted in the recovery of stolen property worth Rs 300,000, 2.5 tolas of gold, and 40 tolas of silver. The suspects have been transferred to the Women Police Station for further interrogation, where more revelations are expected.

PESHAWAR (APP): A research scholar from the College of Veterinary Sciences, University of Agriculture Peshawar, Qudrat Ullah, has suggested the use of Hydroxamic Acid (HA) as a substitute for antibiotics in poultry growth promotion. The recommendation is particularly significant in context of antimicrobial resistance (AMR), a growing global health threat where bacteria, viruses, fungi and parasites become resistant to antimicrobial medicines, making infections harder to treat and increasing the risk of disease spread, severe illness and death.

The suggestion was made by Qudrat Ullah while defending his Ph.D dissertation titled "Ameliorative effects of hydroxamic acid (HA) in broilers infected with E. coli". The research for doctorate was completed under the supervision of Dr. Farhan Anwar Khan, Associate

Professor, College of Veterinary Sciences, University of Agriculture, Peshawar (UAP). Hydroxamic acid (HA), a natural compound found in maize roots, has shown promise as a phyto-genic antimicrobial agent, he claimed. The public seminar was attended by expert panel, faculty members, University officials and distinguished guests including Prof. Dr. Murad Ali Khan (Principal CVS), Prof. Dr. Syed Muhammad Sohail (Chairman Department of LM, AB&G), Dr. Hamayun Khan (DASAR, UAP), respected teachers, and postgraduate scholars.

In his presentation, Dr. Qudrat Ullah said the Primary goal of research was to create a non-antibiotics growth promoters to help Pakistani farmers sustaining animal health and production. As recent restriction on the use of antibiotics has raised challenges for the sustainable animal health,

growth performance and ultimately production. Livestock products (meat, milk, and eggs) are contributing enormously to the human food chain with the increasing population round the globe. Although this study was conducted using poultry birds; however the useful outcomes of pre-biotics (HA) are applicable in other livestock species. In this study we successfully extracted HA from local maize varieties that exhibited in-vitro and in-vivo antibacterial activity against E. coli in experimentally infected birds, he told participants. Additionally, HA supplementation reduced oxidative stress and inflammation in birds and improved broiler health, feed intake, weight gain, and feed conversion ratio, he continued.

Dr. Qudrat Ullah said poultry birds are playing a major role in hosting various enteric pathogens, particularly human pathogens that includes E. coli, Salmonella, Campylobacter etc. The indiscriminate use of synthetic antibiotics has led to the development of antibiotic-resistant bacteria, posing a threat to human and animal health. Despite various efforts to control gut pathogens, especially zoonotic pathogens, in food animals including poultry enteric illness remains high; threatening animal health and production as well as public health. Therefore, there was a dire of developing non-antibiotics growth promoter with efficacy for sustainable animal's production in order to control antibiotic-resistant pathogens in poultry birds and ultimately contribute to food safety and public health. In conclusion, Dr. Qudrat Ullah suggests that farmers can use HA extracted from maize for the control of infectious (bacterial) diseases in poultry birds, which will be useful and safe alternative to antibiotics.

## Hydroxamic acid use suggested as substitute to antibiotic in growth promotion of poultry

# Intl Women's Day: KP women make significant contributions to national development amid socio-cultural challenges

PESHAWAR (APP): Busy like a honeybee in tailoring of women suits, Jamila Bibi (59), a seamstress of Pabbi, Nowshera district with scattered unstitched clothes, scissor and spools around her sewing machine is working against the clock to meet the placed orders of the customers ahead of Eidul Fitr celebrations. Unaware of International Women's Day being observed in world including Pakistan here on Saturday, Jamila Bibi, who inherited the pain-sticking tailoring profession from her mother, was seen busy in measurement of ladies and children suits with measuring tape before its cutting to help her family in meeting the household expenses in the wake of high inflation and price-hike in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Enjoying 'Sohani Dharti' national song playing in the background at her room's window by the radio, the motivated lady tailor told APP that she had entered the pain-sticking profession after untimely

death of her mother few years ago and had been associated with it for the last 30 years. "I learnt the art from my mother, who started sewing clothes for brides, children and relatives during occasions of marriages, engagements, Eid and birthday parties from a very young age," Jamila, wearing eyes' glasses, told APP with a smiling face. Feeling proud of her family's profession, she said, "presently I prefer to work on fancy suits of brides due to high profit margin as compare to normal stitching of ladies suits," she said, adding she stitches three suits a day and in case of no electricity load-shedding, she could easily sew about six to eight suits per day. "Presently, I am charging Rs500 for a normal suit and Rs1,000 for a designers' suits against the prevailing market rate of Rs1,200 for normal and Rs2,000 designers suits," she said, adding the cost of stitching material have increased manifold in the

wake of high inflation and price-hike in KP. Jamila said she was very happy in carrying forward the legacy of her mother as due to this profession she managed to educate her brothers from University of Peshawar, arranged their marriages and was now planning to expand her business to Peshawar. Apart from the government jobs, a woman can also prove her abilities in private profession and by starting her own business, which she said is more lucrative than the low paid jobs in public sector. She complained that the eight to 10 hours power loadshedding in her home town were hindering her work and because of that the tailors' community also faces economic losses, adding that she could earn more if the issue gets resolved. Jamila said, "Pakistan had given us everything and now is the time that we can return for its progress and economic prosperity," Like Jamila, hundreds of thousands of women of

Pakistan were playing a key role in the country's development. This year theme for International Women Day is "empower every woman: equality, progress, inclusion," emphasises the importance of universal rights and opportunities, ensuring that every woman and girl can contribute to a more equitable future. The most inspirational women that made Pakistani nation proud including great political leader and sister of father of the nation, Mohtarma Fitama Jinnah, political stalwart, Begum Rana Liaquat Ali Khan, first women prime minister of the muslim world Benazir Bhutto Shaheed, first youngest Nobel Peace Award winner 2014, Malala Yousafzai, labour right activist and recipient of Clinton global citizen award 2015, Syeda Ghulam Fatima, first lady pilot officer Shaheed Marium Mukhtar, first female goodwill ambassador by the United Nations entity for gender equality and empowerment of

women, Muniba Mazari, first Pakistani to win two Oscar awards Sharmeen Obaid-Chinoy besides first CM Woman in Punjab Maryam Nawaz and many others were shined in the country and world's horizons making our head high. Najam Sahar, Director, Zamung Kor (our own house") government Khyber Pakhtunkhwa was also among one of hundreds of thousands of talented working women of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, who was successfully supervising the project started to create an equitable and conducive environment to the disenfranchised, destitute and vulnerable children. Taking to APP, she said under Zamong Kor model school system, different facilities including free education, accommodation and sports were being provided to disenfranchised and poor children of the province. "Zamung Kor school was established in July 2016 with the capacity to hold about 1000 students with facilities of free

books, uniform, bags and stationeries besides quality faculty and psychologists services." Besides legislation for protection against harassment of women at workplace, enforcement of women's properties rights and establishment of women empowerment cell, the KP commission on the status of women (KPCWS) was formed to examine the policies, programs, implementation and other measures taken by the government for their development and ensuring gender equality. Similarly, eight women shelter homes/darul aman, 235 industrial training centres, women hostels and a girls cadet college in Mardan were set up besides launching first-ever KP women empowerment policy to protect rights of women and ensure their active participation in decision-making and development of Pakistan. The federal government, under Benazir Income Support Program (BISP) was providing the much

needed assistance to each deserving registered woman under Benazir Kafalat Program (BKP), thus benefiting about millions of poor families. BISP's Naushonuma (growth) and education kafalat program were launched to counter stunting in women and children besides providing quality education to poor students irrespective of gender discrimination. Under the Prime Minister's youth business and agriculture loans schemes, the federal government has already announced interest free loan upto Rs5 lac, above Rs 0.5 million up to Rs 1.5 million on five percent markup in second category and above Rs 1.5 million upto Rs 7.5 million in seven percent markup rate in third category for financial and economic empowerment of youth including girls and women. Thd spokesman of KP Information Commission said that his has ensured the equal participation of women imperative for a

transparent and good governance system and provision of speedy information to them when and whenever required. "The commission focuses on women's active participation in its upcoming working plans of awareness on right to information law in the province and quick disposal of information upon request under the law for resolution of their issues," he reiterated. Meanwhile, the international women's day was being observed with great enthusiasm in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa amid seminars, talk shows, debate competition in education institutions and schools. Rallies were being held in different districts where speakers highlighted achievements and problems of women. The speakers highlighted the role of Pakistani women in the country's development process on this occasion and demanded an increase in government and professional colleges quota for their education and employment.





## In brief

### Man abducted for ransom rescued F.P. Report

GHOTKI: Police after a shootout with suspected robbers managed to rescue a man abducted for ransom in Rawanthi police jurisdiction. According to police, robbers a few weeks ago had kidnapped a man from Kashmore for ransom. On a tip-off, police launched a rescue operation in Ubauro of Ghotki district and after a stiff resistance from the outlaws managed to rescue the man. The outlaws fled leaving their abductee in their hideout. Police were raiding to arrest the fleeing robbers. In Manghopir police jurisdiction of Karachi, a labourer was kidnapped and his abductors demanded Rs60 million ransom for his release. Police have registered a case and handed it over to the Anti-Violent Crime Cell police for further investigation. Sindh Interior Minister Zia-ul-Hasan Lanjar, taking notice of the incident, sought details from police high-ups and directed for ensuring the recovery of the hostage.

### Empowering women imperative F.P. Report

MUZAFFARABAD: On International Women's Day, President of Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK), Barrister Sultan Mahmood Chaudhry, to emphasized the essential role of women in society, referring to them as the architects of the community, the pillars of homes, and crucial contributors to the future. President Chaudhry in a statement issued from his office highlighted the significant roles women play from classrooms to boardrooms, on sports fields to front lines, shaping the nation's bright future. He underscored that Islam places great importance on the respect and rights of women. Empowering women is imperative for the progress and prosperity of any society, Chaudhry emphasized, pointing to the need to focus on women's education, health, and economic independence for the advancement of individuals and future generations. In his message, the AJK President further articulated that societal development is unattainable without equal rights for women. He called for a collective effort to create a safe environment for women, enabling them to stand alongside men and contribute effectively to national and social progress, ultimately fostering a better nation.

### No uplift sans women's inclusion F.P. Report

QUETTA: Women are the main pillars of any society that cannot be ignored, women have an important role in the development of society and no society can develop without women's participation. The rights that Islam has given to women cannot be imagined in the West. These views were expressed by Senator Samina Mumtaz Zahri, chairperson of the Standing Committee on Human Rights while addressing a event held on the occasion of International Women's Day. She said that women and women are the most important part of society. Providing opportunities for the welfare and development of half of Pakistan's population vigorous work is being done. Women's welfare and development is essential for better development of society. Under the SHE program launched on women's health in collaboration with China, Balochistan has made significant progress and is doing more work.



**HYDERABAD:** A worker woman joints bangles with the help of cylinder gas at her home to earn for livelihood.

## Underprivileged men provided with fruit carts

F.P. Report

LOWER DIR: A total of 20 deserving people from different areas of the Lower Dir district were provided with free auto-rickshaws, loaders, fruit carts and food carts to support impoverished and disabled individuals. The initiative was aimed to offer initial assistance to underprivileged families, enabling them to start small businesses and achieve financial independence.

The Helping Hands for Relief and Development (HHRD), an international non-profit organization dedicated to humanitarian aid, disaster relief, and development programs, organized a function in this regard at Shamshi Khan area of Talash as part of its rehabilitation program for flood-affected individuals. The event was attended by community elders, special persons and underprivileged individuals, as well as officials from the welfare organization.

Speaking at the occasion, HHRD's Operational Director Sajid Ali Chandhar, Emergency Relief Program Manager Jodat Kamran, KP Regional Manager Muhammad Bilal, former Tehsil Nazim Riaz Muhammad Advocate, and others emphasized the need for collective efforts by all societal stakeholders for the rehabilitation of marginalized communities. They stated that the financial assistance provided to 20 deserving individuals for small businesses is part of this mission, made possible through the generous contributions of the Muslim community in the United States.

The speakers further highlighted that the local center offers free physiotherapy services for disabled individuals and supports 300 orphaned and special-needs children. Additionally, a handicraft center has been established for women, while specialized courses are being conducted at a beautician training center. The speakers urged philanthropists and government institutions to play their role in assisting and rehabilitating individuals with special needs, ensuring their integration into mainstream society.

**Iftar dinner:** A friendly cricket match was organized between the Jandol Press Club and Dir Scouts 182 Wing, followed by a special Iftar gathering. In an exciting and closely contested match, the Dir Scouts team secured victory by just one run. Batting first, the Dir Scouts set a target of 69 runs, while the Press Club team fell just short, managing 68 runs.

During the closing ceremony, Colonel Majid expressed gratitude to Jandol Press Club for its support and emphasized the importance of continuing such healthy activities for youth engagement.

## PTI two workers released

F.P. Report

BUNER: Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) two workers obtained bails on humanitarian grounds, the workers identified as Sher Muhammad Khan of almost 85 years and a 13 year juvenile Syed Akbar Khan, released from Attock Jail.

The PTI Buner and PTI PK 25 leaders and activists have taken them to homes in a caravan of motorcades. They were arrested at Attock while on way back from the PTI protest rally in Islamabad. However, rest of their 14 colleagues are waiting court verdict on their bail petitions.

The Buner district senior vice president Insaf welfare wing Abdul Aziz on the instructions of PTI Central Chairman MNA from Buner Barrister Gohar Khan, is in constant contact with the legal team and the captives and claimed possibly release rest of the PTI Buner Jailed workers soon.

## ANP leader dead in road mishap

F.P. Report

SHANGLA: Awami National Party (ANP) Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Deputy General Secretary and a former candidate for the Provincial Assembly Mutawakkil Khan, tragically passed away in a car accident. His driver, Sajid Khan, sustained injuries in the incident.

According to details, Mutawakkil Khan Advocate was traveling on a link road in the Sanghrail area of his constituency when the road's edge gave way, causing the vehicle to plunge into a deep ravine. The accident occurred as he was returning from a visit to the residence of local party leader Shams-ur-Rabi, who had recently returned from Umrh.

The vehicle met with the accident shortly after their departure. Local residents rushed to the scene and rescued both Mutawakkil Khan and his driver. Unfortunately, Mutawakkil Khan succumbed to his injuries on the spot. His body was taken to Karora for necessary medical procedures, while his driver was shifted to Alpuri Hospital in critical condition, where he is currently undergoing treatment.

# Tribesmen, business community demands redressal of tension

F.P. Report

LANDI KOTAL: Pertaining prevailed tension at Pak-Afghan sharing border, Torkham, a peace walk was carried out in Landi Kotal Bazaar on Saturday. Scores of people from different walks of life including political leaders, members of the Torkham clearing agents' union, laborers and local traders participated in the march.

Addressing on the occasion those led the walk were Aftab Shinwari, tehsil Chairman Shah Khalid, Pakistan People Party district leader Shah Rehman and others said that for the last one and half weeks, the Pak-Afghan authorities had suspended the Torkham crossing over minor dispute that had multiplied miseries of the common men on both sides of the border.

Fight cannot be a solution to any dispute there-



fore both the neighboring should resolve the border issue through dialog, they opined. They maintained that the present uncertain situation, developed at the border, not only inflicted a negative impact on the economy of the both countries but also suffered hundreds of thousands daily wagers, passengers including patients and transporters on both sides of the crossing.

The participants demanded of the Pak-Afghan high up to have mercy on their citizens, resume the border immediately for general crossing and seek solution of certain

border matters via table talk. They were holding banner and placards inscribed with pro-border reopening statements and chanted slogans in favor of their demands marched from Bacha Khan Chawk, Landi Kotal Bazaar till Landi Kotal-Torkham bypass road and dispersed peacefully.

It is to be stated here that the Torkham border has remained closed for the fifteenth day over a dispute, broke out between Pakistan and Afghanistan border security forces over building of forces post by the later one in the prohibited location.

## Sindh's water crisis deepens: Deltaic region faces drought

F.P. Report

THATTA: "I have asked my children and wife to be prepared to leave, as I am thinking of moving to a safer place. There are no longer adequate livelihood opportunities here," says Waryam Malah, a fisherman who lives along the embankment of the Indus River in Thatta. Recalling his father's words, he said that the Indus River was home to thousands of fish species around three decades ago, but today the riverbed is filled with sand.

Amidst vigorous agitation and resentment across Sindh against the controversial six-channel scheme on the Indus River, the deltaic and coastal areas are on the verge of drought.

Locals recall those glorious days when the deltaic region of Sindh was fertile and was a source of livelihood for tens of thousands of people living along the coastline. The abruptly changing weather patterns, extraordinary surge in the temperatures, inadequate supply of water at the Kotri downstream among others are the core causes behind degradation of the Indus Delta and advancement of sea.

Rabdinio Parhiyar resident of village Sindhi Dal said that thousands of acres of agricultural land had been rendered infertile following untimely supply of water in the tail-end areas of Sindh mainly Sujawal, Thatta and Badin moreover Sea had encroached upon

four million acres of land along the coastline.

While sharing his insight on the nagging issue of water scarcity in the wake of six canals schemes noted agronomist Obhayo Khan Khushik said that water scarcity would reach its tether in coming days in the coastal areas as the water flows at the Kotri Barrage had reached an all-time low.

He further disclosed that once the deltaic region of Sindh was stretched to 12000 Sq Ft kilometers that had now shrunk to 1000 Sq Ft kilometers, the areas had squeezed up to 92 percent. Syed Jalal Shah a political activist of STP revealed that the people of Sindh had been deprived of their due share of water.

## DC inspects Nigehban Ramazan assistance drive

F.P. Report

HAFIZABAD: Deputy Commissioner, Hafizabad visited Vaneki Tarar, Ramke Chatha, and Kallianwala villages and different areas of the city to review distribution of financial assistance Nigehban Ramazan Package of the Chief Minister Punjab Maryam Nawaz Sharif, cleanliness standard, provision of cheaper essential commodities at Ramazab Sahulat Bazaar and availability of medicines and other treatment facilities in the hospital.

While visiting different banks, retailers shops, union councils offices Vaneki Tarar, Ramke Chatha, Kallianwala to check distribution of Rs.10,000/- each family under Nigehban Ramazan Package among women. He said that any kind of deduction would not be made while giving Rs. 10000 per family and directed the beneficiaries to inform the district administration. He warned the retailers and other agents to refrain from imposing cut on financial assistance being provided to women, otherwise, punitive action would be taken against those retailers and agents who found

involved in deducting sum.

**Enrolment drive continues:** Chief Executive Officer Education Hafizabad Muhammad Akram Ashraf said that children enrolment campaign is in full swing in the district to ensure hundred percent enrolment of children in the schools while uniform banks are setup at school level to provide free of cost uniform to children of poor and less resources people.

He expressed these views while addressing a function held at Government Girls Elementary School, Pindi Bowray, to create awareness among society about enrolment of children up to 4-year-old. DEO (W) Nadan Sofia Jabain, DDEO (W) Madam Sadaf Khanam, School Head Javaria Imtiaz also addressed the function.

CEO also said that free of cost books were also being given to students in government schools and all possible measures were also being taken to make government school to centers of quality education whereas qualified and dedicated teachers were serving the nation and social workers and civil society must be played their pivotal role to create awareness among parents about impor-

tance of education sot that enrolment campaign could be made successful and result oriented. Muhammad Akram Ashraf also planted a sapling in the lawn of school in connection with tree plantain campaign.

**Nayab secure Gold Medal in Chemistry:** Muhammad Nayab Ahmad, a brilliant student from Hafizabad, has won a gold medal after securing first position in the MPhil Chemistry Department of Punjab University Lahore. He was awarded the gold medal by Punjab University Pro Vice Chancellor Khalid Mahmood.

Muhammad Nayab Ahmad is the grandson of the famous religious figure and a Commission Agents of Fruit and Vegetable Market of Hafizabad, Haji Muhammad Bashir Ahmed Khaliqi, and the nephew of former General Secretary of the Press Club, Hafiz Muhammad Aziz-ur-Rehman. He has previously brought glory to the district by securing first position in the matriculation examination at Government High School No.1 Hafizabad and first position in the research poster competition at the Punjab University.

## Cop alleges Larkana Jail Supdt for bribery

Allah Dad Chandio

LARKANA: A constable of Central prison Larkana reached the Press Club and protested against the alleged injustices and abuses of the Jail Superintendent and Munshi.

While protesting on this occasion, Central Jail Constable Matloob Ahmed Tunio said that I am working as a constable while a

few days ago (February 27) I had applied for transfer from Larkana to Mirpurkhas, while the Superintendent of Central prison Larkana Ghulam Murtaza Pathan and the appointed Munshi Naimat Khuhawar colluded with each other and asked me for a bribe of two lakhs of rupees, later I gave one lakh rupees in cash to Neemat Khuhawar, but the

evil Clerk is asking me for more bribe money, but I am poor, even after that he is harassing and disturbing me for various reasons.

Appealing to the higher authorities that an inquiry should conducted against the Superintendent and Munshi Naimat Khuhawar of Central Prison Larkana and justice should be provided to me by taking actions against them.

## Two arrested for alleged cut in Ramazan financial aid

F.P. Report

TOBA TEK SINGH: On the directives of Punjab Chief Minister, strict measures are in place to ensure transparency in the Ramazan Relief Package.

Deputy Commissioner Toba Tek Singh Muhammad Naem Sandhu took actions against unauthorized deductions, leading to the arrest of two retailers in Kamalia, with FIRs registered. AC Kamalia Iqra Nasir supervised the operation.

DC Sandhu emphasized that no malpractice will be tolerated and violators will face strict legal action. The district administration is closely monitoring retailers to ensure full delivery of relief. Citizens are urged to report any corruption for immediate action.

Health Centers and School inspected: In line with Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif's vision to provide quality healthcare services, the district administration

remains actively engaged in improving facilities. On the directives of Deputy Commissioner Muhammad Naem Sandhu, Additional Deputy Commissioner (General) Zeeshan Labbha Masih visited Basic Health Unit (BHU) Chak No. 393 JB and Rural Health Center (RHC) 394 JB to inspect available healthcare services. During the visit, ADCG Zeeshan Labbha Masih reviewed the staff attendance, cleanliness and overall hospital management.

# Sialkot: The export powerhouse of Pakistan left stranded without public transport

Muhammad Umair Khan

**N**ESTLED in the northeastern part of Punjab, Pakistan, Sialkot stands as a testament to resilience, innovation, and economic prowess. Known globally as the "City of Craftsmen," Sialkot is one of Pakistan's most industrious cities, contributing significantly to the country's exports. From world-class sports goods to surgical instruments, Sialkot's industries have put Pakistan on the global map. Yet, amidst its economic success, the city faces a glaring paradox: the absence of a functional public transport system.

This deficiency not only hampers the daily lives of its residents but also poses a challenge to its industrial growth. Sialkot is a city that punches above its

weight. With a population of around 3 million, it contributes billions of dollars to Pakistan's economy annually. The city is home to over 35,000 small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), which specialize in producing goods that are exported to over 150 countries. Sialkot International Airport, the first privately owned airport in Pakistan, is proof of the city's entrepreneurial spirit. It facilitates the export of goods directly to international markets, bypassing the need for larger airports in cities like Lahore or Karachi.

The city is particularly renowned for its sports goods industry, producing nearly 70% of the world's hand-stitched footballs. Additionally, Sialkot is a leading manufacturer of surgical instruments, musical instruments, and leather goods. The success of these industries has

earned Sialkot a reputation as a city of hardworking, skilled artisans and businessmen. Despite its economic achievements, Sialkot struggles with a critical infrastructural gap: the lack of a reliable public transport system. For a city that thrives on the movement of goods and people, this absence is both ironic and debilitating. The majority of Sialkot's workforce relies on private vehicles, rickshaws, or informal modes of transport to commute to and from work. This not only increases traffic congestion but also raises the cost of living for residents who must bear the expense of private transportation.

The absence of a public transport system also disproportionately affects low-income workers, many of whom are employed in the city's bustling industrial zones. Without afford-

able and efficient transportation options, these workers face long, exhausting commutes, often on overcrowded and unsafe vehicles. This not only impacts their productivity but also their quality of life. The lack of public transport in Sialkot has far-reaching consequences for its industries. Efficient transportation is the lifeblood of any industrial hub, ensuring the smooth movement of workers, raw materials, and finished goods. In Sialkot, the absence of a structured transport system leads to delays, increased costs, and logistical challenges. For instance, workers arriving late due to transportation issues can disrupt production schedules, while the high cost of private transport eats into the disposable income of employees, potentially affecting their morale and productivity.

Moreover, the city's reputation as a global exporter could be further enhanced if it addressed this critical infrastructure gap. A reliable public transport system would not only improve the quality of life for residents but also make Sialkot more attractive to foreign investors and businesses looking to set up operations in the region. The need for a public transport system in Sialkot is undeniable. While the city's industrialists and entrepreneurs have shown remarkable ingenuity in building a thriving export economy, the government must step in to address this pressing issue.

A well-planned public transport network, including buses, trams, or even a metro system, could transform Sialkot into a more livable and sustainable city. Such a system would not

only benefit the local population but also bolster the city's industrial output. By reducing traffic congestion, lowering transportation costs, and improving accessibility, a public transport network could unlock Sialkot's full potential as a global economic hub.

Sialkot's story is one of triumph and tenacity. From producing world-class goods to building a self-sustaining airport, the city has proven that it can achieve greatness against all odds. However, the absence of a public transport system remains a glaring omission in its otherwise impressive narrative. For Sialkot to continue its upward trajectory, it is imperative that this issue be addressed with urgency and foresight. After all, a city that moves its people efficiently is a city that moves forward.





GAZA STRIP: Tamer Hassan al-Shafai, 37, eating an iftar meal, with his family in their destroyed house amid the rubble of buildings in Beit Lahiya.

## Gabon junta chief declares bid for presidency

GABON (BBC): Gabon's military leader Gen Brice Oligui Nguema has announced his intention to run for president in next month's election. Nguema seized power in 2023 in a coup that ended the long-standing rule of the Bongo family. He then pledged to hand over power to civilians.

The country has however since passed a new constitution and electoral code that critics argue were designed to favour a bid for the presidency by the junta leader. Nguema told the Gabonese people that he had decided to run in the 12 April election "after careful reflection and in response to your many appeals". Addressing supporters during a heavy downpour in the capital, Libreville, he declared his readiness to change the fortunes of the oil-rich country.

"I am a builder and I need your courage, your

strength, to build this country," the the coup leader, who had just turned 50, said. The announcement followed months of speculation about his intentions to officially occupy the country's top seat. Nguema told the military in a meeting that he was aware of their desire to see him run in the election and urged them to vote. He told the defence forces he had heard their calls. "I listened to you and, believe me, I understood you," adding, "I will get back to you within the next few days".

There has been speculation that Nguema had left the army, as a requirement to run for the presidency - but that has since been urging the military leader to abandon his military uniform temporarily while running for election. The page, Infos CTRI Officiel,

said that he would have to permanently leave the military if he won the election. "If he's not elected, he will return to the barracks," it said. The Nguema-led junta is credited for ending 55 years of the Bongo dynasty. Ali Bongo had ruled for 14 years before he was toppled. He took office after the death of his father, Omar Bongo, who had been president for 41 years.

Last month, the president of neighbouring Equatorial Guinea, Obiang Nguema Mbasogo, encouraged the Gabonese people to support Nguema for a better future for their country. Some opposition and civil society groups in Gabon have however been urging the military leader to honour his word and leave power to civilians after the transition. Despite Gabon's oil wealth and vast forests, one third of its 2.4 million people live below the poverty line, according to the UN.

## Migrants rescued

TUNIS (BBC): Thirty-two migrants attempting to cross the Mediterranean have been rescued by an NGO ship after spending several days stranded on an oil platform off the coast of Tunisia.

"Women, men and children" were shipwrecked with no food or water, according to Mediterranean, a migrant rescue charity. One person on the platform had died, the charity said.

NGO Sea Watch said it had managed to rescue all 32 people from the gas platform, and that they were being looked after aboard the Aurora ship. However, the Aurora's final destination was unclear as no country nearby had yet assigned the ship a port of safety, Sea Watch said.

It added that no European country had intervened "despite the imminent emergency" and the fact that the people were stranded in international waters on the border of the Tunisian and Maltese search and rescue (SAR) zones. NGO monitoring aircraft Seabird reportedly spotted an empty rubber dinghy near the platform on 1 March. The shipwrecked people then managed to contact Alarm Phone - an emergency hotline for migrants in trouble at sea.

In the call, they said they had been without food for days and that their condition was critical. They also reported the death of one person, Sea Watch said. In a video apparently filmed by one of the people on the platform and shared by NGOs on social media, a young man in a white t-shirt could be heard saying that he and the others were "suffering from hunger and dying of cold".

Speaking in Tigrinya - a language spoken in Ethiopia and Eritrea - the man said they left Libya five days ago and that the dinghy they were travelling on capsized. "Those who made it here and didn't die at sea are dying of hunger and exhaustion, if in the few hours nobody does anything we will obviously die... We have only little chance [to survive]," he said. Behind him were several people apparently shivering from the cold as the waves crashed against the oil platform's pillars.

The Office of Special Counsel is responsible for guarding the federal workforce from illegal personnel actions, such as retaliation for whistleblowing. It investigates whistleblower claims of reprisal, can pursue disciplinary action against employees who punish whistleblowers and provides a channel for employees to disclose government wrongdoing. Dellinger was appointed by Democratic President Joe Biden and confirmed by the Senate to a five-year term in 2024. The independent agency is separate from Justice Department special counsels like Jack Smith, who are appointed by the attorney general for specific investigations.

Dellinger's lawyers say allowing the president to fire the special counsel without cause would have a chilling effect on the important duties of the office to protect whistleblowers from retaliation. Dellinger has also been working in recent days to challenge Trump's firing of thousands of probationary workers, but his sudden removal throws those efforts into doubt. Dellinger didn't immediately respond to a request for comment. He's likely to appeal to the US Supreme Court.

Dellinger sued Trump last month, saying he was illegally fired because special counsels can be fired by the president "only for inefficiency, neglect of duty, or malfeasance in office." US District Judge Amy Berman Jackson, who was nominated to the bench by Democratic President Barack Obama, quickly reinstated Dellinger in the job while he pursued his case. Jackson ruled that Dellinger's firing was

unlawful and ordered that he remain in his post. But the appeals court lifted Jackson's order blocking his removal, allowing the Trump administration to replace him while the judges weigh the legal arguments.

## Appeals court allows removal of watchdog agency head

WASHINGTON (AP): An appeals court in Washington removed the head of a federal watchdog agency in the latest twist in a legal fight over Republican President Donald Trump's authority to fire the special counsel.

A three-judge panel on the US Court of Appeals for the D.C. Circuit sided with the Trump administration in allowing the immediate removal of Hampton Dellinger from the Office of Special Counsel while arguments continue over the legality of Dellinger's firing. The case has become a flashpoint in the debate over how much power the president should have to replace the leaders of independent agencies as he moves to radically reshape and shrink the federal government. The Trump administration has argued that the law protecting the special counsel from removal is unconstitutional and unfairly prevents the president from rightfully installing his preferred agency head.

## Europe 'at turning point in history'

PARIS (BBC): EU leaders are gathering in Brussels for a special council on defence, as France's President Emmanuel Macron warned that the continent was at a "turning point of history".

As well as rearmament, leaders are expected to discuss how the body can further support Kyiv in the face of US President Donald Trump's announcement that he would suspend aid to Ukraine. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky is invited to the summit. Nerves have grown increasingly frayed across Europe since Trump and Zelensky's showdown at the White House last week, and the rhetoric around the summit leaves no doubt about the importance EU officials are ascribing to it.

Three years on since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the Trump administration's overtures to Russian President Vladimir Putin have left many in Europe concerned the continent would not be able to rely on US support for its security. Washington's decision to pause intelligence sharing with Ukraine did nothing to allay those worries. In a sign of the depth of concern, President Macron said France was open to discussing extending the protection offered by its nuclear arsenal to its European partners, during an address to the nation.

That followed a call from Friedrich Merz, likely to be Germany's next chancellor, to discuss increased nuclear sharing. Europe was facing a "clear and present danger on a scale that none of us have seen in our adult lifetime", European Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen said, while European Council President António Costa said this was a "defining moment for Ukraine and European security".

In a letter to European leaders, von der Leyen also said the continent had

to "meet the moment" and "unleash our industrial and productive power and direct it to the goal of security". Von der Leyen announced an unprecedented defence package - dubbed ReArm Europe - and said that Europe was ready to "massively" boost its defence spending "with the speed and the ambition that is needed".

Von der Leyen said the three proposals outlined in the ReArm Europe plan would both support Ukraine and "address the long-term need to take much more responsibility" for European security - likely referring to the fact many Europeans feel the continent can no longer automatically rely on the US to come to its aid. The European Investment Bank would also be allowed to finance military projects. According to von der Leyen, the plan could free up a total of 800bn (\$860bn; £670bn) in defence expenditure.

Many European leaders have signalled their support for swift, decisive action in regards to the continent's security. Donald Tusk, Poland's prime minister, said the Commission's plan represented "a fundamental shift", while Lithuanian President Gitanas Nausėda said that the summit would give Europe the opportunity to show "whether it's just a debate club or whether we can make decisions". But dissent from certain European leaders sympathetic to Moscow is expected.

Earlier this week, Slovakian Prime Minister Robert Fico said the EU's "peace through strength" approach was "unrealistic". And in a letter to Costa, Hungary's Viktor Orbán demanded that Ukraine not be mentioned in any written conclusions following the summit. Orbán - who has repeatedly attempted to block EU aid to Ukraine and has praised Trump for "standing bravely for peace" - said

there was now a "strategic divide... between the majority of Europe and the USA".

"One side insists on prolonging the war in Ukraine, while the other seeks an end to the conflict," he added. Yet Orbán left the door open for a "greater probability for cooperation" with other leaders over issues of common security and defence. While crisis summit is taking place in Brussels, UK Defence Secretary John Healey will be in Washington for discussions with his counterpart Pete Hegseth on the US decision to pause intelligence sharing with Ukraine.

Their bilateral meeting will focus on a possible peace plan while efforts continue to bridge a transatlantic rift over Kyiv's future security. Perhaps in a final bid to try and achieve unity ahead of the summit, Emmanuel Macron - who has positioned himself at the centre of the EU's efforts to bridge the gap between Kyiv and Washington - invited Orbán to have dinner in Paris. The two leaders met immediately after the French president gave a sombre address to the nation in which he said that France and Europe needed to be ready if the US was no longer by their side.

"We have to be united and determined to protect ourselves," Macron said. He added that the future of Europe could not be tied to Washington or Moscow, and said that while he "wanted to believe that the US will stay by our side, we have to be ready for this not to be the case". The French president plans to hold a meeting of European army chiefs in Paris next week. Macron said that "decisive steps" would be taken in Brussels, leaving European countries "more ready to defend and protect themselves". "The moment calls for unprecedented decisions," he concluded.

## Marines and soldiers discharged for refusing COVID-19 vaccine

WASHINGTON (AP): Roughly 650 Marines and Army soldiers who were forced out of the military for refusing to get the COVID-19 vaccine have so far expressed interest in returning to the force under an executive order from President Donald Trump, officials said this week.

The number represents about 8% of the roughly 8,200 troops who had been discharged. The total, officials say, confirms military leaders' early view that many troops have moved on with their lives. They have been allowed to rejoin since 2023, and Trump's offer of providing back pay may be a factor in spurring a bit more interest now. The Army and Marine Corps have been sending out emails, texts and phone calls to service members discharged for refusing a pandemic-era order to get the vaccine. The Navy and the Air Force are planning to begin their efforts to contact service members, but are waiting for additional guidance. The totals would likely increase once their formal notices go out.

Officials stressed that the numbers are very preliminary because troops have only expressed interest in reen-

listing and haven't actually taken steps to formally do so. They will have to go through the enlistment procedure again, pass all required legal and moral standards and physical fitness requirements, and agree to reenlist for at least two years. Trump has argued that the vaccine mandate wrongly pushed troops out and suggested that many would return. In an executive order signed a week after he took office, Trump said that the mandate cost the military "some of our best people" and he vowed to "rehire every patriot who was fired from the military with ... backpay."

Under Trump's directive, those who were discharged for refusing the vaccine can rejoin and get back pay. Those who voluntarily left to avoid the vaccine also can rejoin, but they must swear that they left the service for that reason and they will not receive back pay. Two years ago, the military services sent out notices to all troops discharged for refusing the vaccine, advising them they could return to the military. Just 113 reenlisted.

In mid-February, the Defense Department told the military services

to reach out once again to service members who were forced out or voluntarily left the military because of the COVID-19 vaccine and see if they want to reenlist. This time it came with the financial incentive. The Marine Corps set up a special team and has sent emails and text messages to those who were discharged. Spokesman Jim Edwards said 553 Marines have responded. Of those, 455 expressed some interest in reenlisting or had additional questions about the offer, and 98 said they weren't interested.

Col. Dave Butler, Army spokesman, said that more than half of the approximately 1,900 soldiers discharged have been contacted either by phone or email. And of those, about 200 have expressed interest in returning to the service. "The Army has been working hard to get in contact with all of the folks who were discharged due to COVID since the Executive Order was signed," Butler said. "We're using all mediums, the contact info we have on record, social media - we even have a hotline someone interested could call."

## Opposition arrests spark fears over South Sudan peace deal

JUBA (BBC): Security forces in South Sudan have arrested the oil minister and an army general, who are senior members of the main opposition, sparking concerns that the peace deal that ended the civil war may be under threat.

Gen Gabriel Doup Lam and Puot Kang Chol, high-ranking figures of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement in Opposition (SPLM-IO), are both allies of Vice-President Riek Machar, a rival of President Salva Kiir. Its military

spokesperson Col Lam Gabriel Paul told the BBC that the government had given no reasons for the arrests.

South Sudan is the world's newest nation, after seceding from Sudan in 2011. But just two years later, a civil war erupted after Machar and Kiir fell out. After five years, with 400,000 lives lost, and 2.5 million people forced from their homes, a peace deal was agreed in 2018. But it has been fraught with issues ever since. Despite the arrests and increasing tension, President Kiir

said South Sudan would not go back to war, government spokesperson Michael Makuei told reporters in the capital Juba.

Gen Lam is in charge of the military wing of the opposition party, which is yet to be integrated into the army. He was taken into custody. Chol was taken by security forces in the middle of the night. Machar's house in the capital, Juba, was surrounded by troops from the South Sudanese army overnight before they were later withdrawn.

# Veterans speaking out on Trump admn's plans

NORFOLK, Va. (AP): Stephen Watson served in the Marines for 22 years and receives care through the Department of Veterans Affairs for a traumatic brain injury. He supports President Donald Trump and adviser Elon Musk's cost-cutting program - even if it affects the VA.

"We're no better because we're veterans," said Watson, 68, of Jesup, Georgia. "We all need to take a step back and realize that everybody's gonna have to take a little bit on the chin to get these budget matters under control." Gregg Bafundo served during the first Gulf War and has nerve damage to his feet from carrying loads of weight as a Marine mortarman. He says he may need to turn to the VA for care after being fired as a wilderness ranger and firefighter through the layoffs at the US Forest Service.

"They're going to put guys like me and my fellow Marines that rely on the VA in the ground," said Bafundo, 53, who lives in Tonasket, Washington. The Trump administration's move to end hundreds of VA contracts - initially paused after public outcry - and ongoing layoffs are affecting the nation's veterans, a critical and politically influential constituency. More than 9 million veterans get physical and mental health care from the VA, which is now being examined by Musk's Department of Government

Efficiency.

The VA manages a \$350 billion-plus budget and oversees nearly 200 medical centers and hospitals. Veterans have shown up at town hall-style meetings with Republican lawmakers to voice their anger, and groups like the Veterans of Foreign Wars are mobilizing against cuts. The department is considering a reorganization that could include cutting 80,000 jobs, according to an internal memo obtained by the Associated Press.

Veterans were much likelier to support Trump, a Republican, than Vice President Kamala Harris, a Democrat, in November's presidential election, according to AP VoteCast, a survey of the American electorate conducted in all 50 states. Nearly 6 in 10 voters who are veterans backed Trump, while about 4 in 10 voted for Harris. Joy Ilem, national legislative director for the nonpartisan group Disabled American Veterans, said her group was studying how the ongoing cuts might affect care.

"You could lose trust among the veteran population over some of these things that have happened and the way that they've happened," Ilem warned. "And we do fear damage to the recruitment and retention of hiring the best and brightest to serve veterans." The White House said last week that it wants to slash \$2 billion

worth of VA contracts, which would affect anything from cancer care to the ability to assess toxic exposure. The department quickly paused the cuts following concerns about the impact on critical health services.

VA Secretary Doug Collins told Fox News Channel this week that the effort was focused on "finding deficiencies." "Anything that we're doing is designed and will not cut veterans' health or veterans' benefits that they've earned," he said.

In a statement to The Associated Press, VA press secretary Peter Kasperowicz said the agency "is putting Veterans at the center of everything the department does." "Every dollar we spend on wasteful contracts, non-mission-critical or duplicative activities is one less dollar we can spend on Veterans, and given that choice, we will always side with the Veteran," Kasperowicz wrote. Republicans have pointed out that the VA has rehired employees who were let go during an initial round of layoffs in February, such as those working for a crisis hotline. However, during a subsequent round of layoffs, the VA cut 15 other employees who were in jobs supporting the crisis line, including a trainer for the phone responders, according to congressional staff who are tracking the cuts.

The VA has been plagued for years by allegations of poor medical care

and excessively long wait times. Investigators a decade ago uncovered widespread problems in how VA hospitals were scheduling appointments after allegations that as many as 40 veterans died while awaiting care at the department's Phoenix hospital. A group of employees accused the department of retaliating against potential whistleblowers. President Barack Obama, a Democrat, eventually put into place a program allowing veterans to go outside the VA system to seek medical care. The Choice Program was extended by Trump during his first term. Richard Lamb, who was shot down twice in Vietnam as an Army helicopter crew chief, said the department should be "cut to the bone."

Lamb, 74, said he broke vertebrae each time his helicopter was shot down. Decades passed, he said, before a VA doctor acknowledged he had compression fractures. Lamb later had a private doctor perform surgery on his back after he said the VA wouldn't perform the procedure. "I'd be happy to see VA, not torn down, but cleaned up, cleaned out and recast," said Lamb, who lives in Waco, Texas. "The VA is supposed to be a wonderful thing for veterans. It's not. It sucks." Daniel Ragsdale Combs, a Navy veteran with a traumatic brain injury, strongly disagrees.

Ragsdale Combs, 45, suffered his

injury while running to respond to an order on an aircraft carrier and striking his head above a hatchway. He receives group therapy for mental illness brought on by the injury but says he had heard those sessions might be canceled or reduced due to staffing shortages. "I'm deeply concerned because the VA has been nothing but great to me," said Ragsdale Combs, who lives in Mesa, Arizona. "I'm angry, upset and frustrated." Lucy Wong relies on a team of VA doctors in the Phoenix area to treat her scleroderma, an autoimmune condition that attacks connective tissue. She said she developed the disease as a medical technician in the Navy in the 1980s, working with toxic chemicals and enduring extreme stress.

Driving is difficult. She worries that the VA will cut Uber rides to her medical appointments, among other things. "I ask if Trump is cutting anything back here, and the reply is, 'Not yet,'" Wong said.

Josh Ghering, a former Marine from Parsons, Kansas, who served in Iraq and Afghanistan, said he had to fly to San Antonio for an appointment with a neurologist before he was medically retired for back issues, including herniated discs. He questioned why he couldn't get the same appointment closer to home. "I think they're headed in the right direction," Ghering, 42, said of DOGE. "But

they're going to have to be more thorough with what it is they're doing, to make sure they're not cutting jobs that are needed." The nation's service members have never been a political monolith - and the same holds true for their views on the VA. But the split between two Marines on opposite sides of the country raises a question not just about DOGE but about America's military: Who is expected to sacrifice?

Watson, the former Marine in Georgia, sustained various injuries while serving, including a traumatic brain injury when a cable snapped and a crate fell on him. He said he's willing to accept fewer visits to his VA doctor and forgo other conveniences as a matter of service to the country. "Many veterans who voted for Trump understood this was going to be his policy and are now screaming bloody murder because the axe is going to fall upon the VA," Watson said. "And to me, that's just a little bit self-centered." Bafundo, the Marine in Washington state, pushed back against the idea that all Americans are making a sacrifice when, as he sees it, it's really falling back "on the little guy." America's billionaires won't be shouldering any of the burden, he argued, while Musk, who's the world's richest person, and others pay little, if any, taxes. "If we're going to sacrifice, the wealthy need to sacrifice, too," he said. "And, frankly, they don't."



The Frontier Post

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

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## US could sell out Ukraine

**S**TATESMEN gathered to consider ceding to an aggressor part of an allied country without consulting that country's leaders. The gathering was not the 2025 Riyad summit in Ukraine, but the 1938 Munich meeting to decide the fate of Czechoslovakia. After gaining power, Adolf Hitler had rearmed Germany, occupied the Rhineland and annexed Austria through the Anschluss - clear violations of the Versailles Treaty. Allied acquiescence to these moves emboldened him. During the summer of 1938, he demanded that Czechoslovakia cede the Sudetenland with its large German population to the Reich and threatened to take it by force if necessary.

With Britain and France as its allies, Czechoslovakia refused. Europe teetered on the brink of war. Then at the eleventh hour, Hitler's ally Benito Mussolini, the fascist ruler of Italy, proposed a four-power conference to resolve the issue. Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain of the United Kingdom and Premier Edouard Daladier of France raced to Munich to meet with the two dictators. After just one day of negotiations, they signed the Munich Pact on Sept. 30, accepting Hitler's territorial demands. Czechoslovakia had no say in the matter.

Chamberlain returned to London a hero, declaring to the British people that he had secured "peace for our time." Hitler had already stated that the Sudetenland would be his "last territorial demand" in Europe. From the political wilderness, Winston Churchill told Chamberlain, "You were given the choice between war and dishonor. You chose dishonor, and you will have war." Truer words were never spoken. In March 1939, the Germans seized the rest of Czechoslovakia unopposed, and in September, they invaded Poland. Emboldened by past success, Hitler doubted whether the Allies would oppose him. "Our enemies are ... not men of action, not masters. They are little worms," he told his generals. "I saw them at Munich." Appeasement did not deter Hitler, and it will not deter Putin. Despite the compelling example of Munich, Ukraine could suffer the same fate as Czechoslovakia.

This week, Russian officials met in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia with a US delegation consisting of Secretary of State Marco Rubio, national security adviser Mike Waltz and Middle East envoy Steve Witkoff to discuss ending the war in Ukraine. No Ukrainian or European representatives were invited. The parties agreed to appoint "high-level teams to begin working on a path to ending the conflict in Ukraine as soon as possible." They made no mention of including Ukraine in these talks.

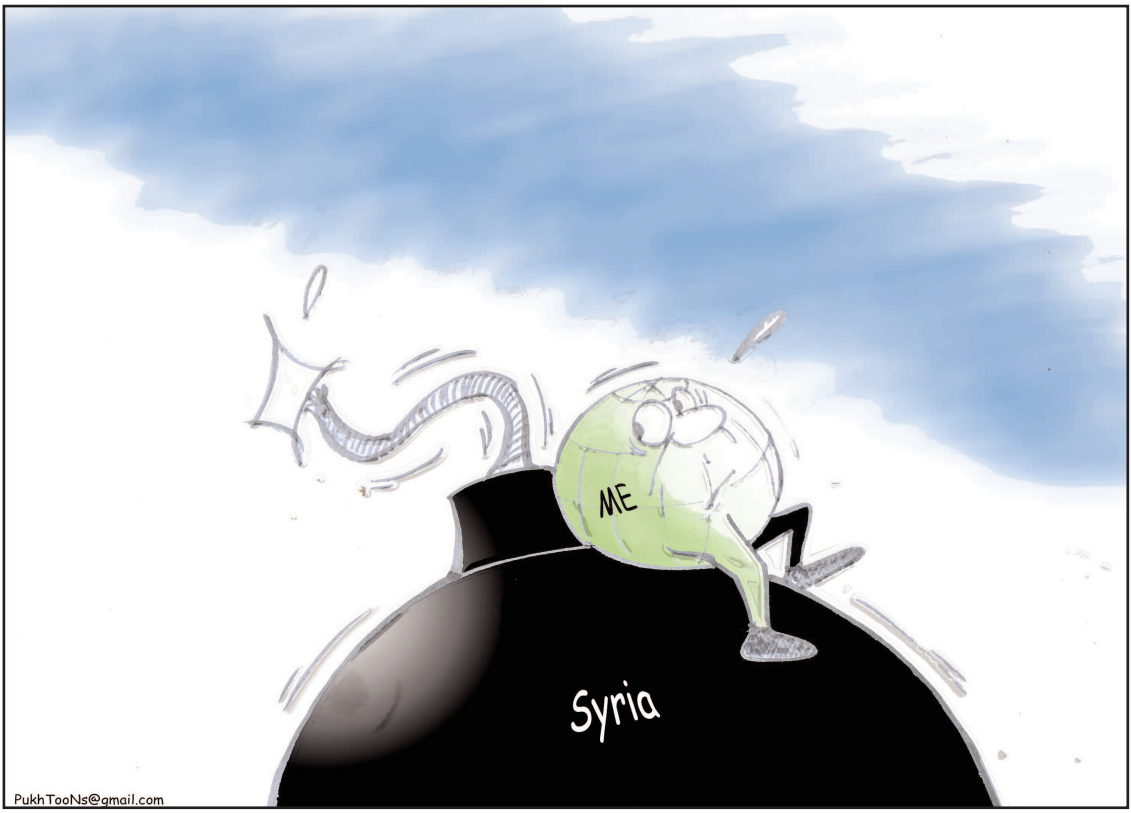
A negotiated settlement with the loss of territory is probably the best outcome Ukraine can expect. But as Zelensky made clear to JD Vance on Friday, no agreement would be accepted without Ukrainian participation. "Europeans needed to be at the negotiating table too," he added. Zelensky is probably reconciled to the loss of territory. Russia will not relinquish the Crimea, which it seized in 2014, and Ukrainian forces have been unable to recapture territory lost after the 2022 invasion. The real issue is "security guarantees," a promise that its allies would enforce an agreement with Russia. Without that, any peace deal would be no more than a temporary ceasefire. With Anglo-French support, Czechoslovakia had a fighting chance, but when its allies abandoned it and gave away the Sudetenland with its mountain fortresses, the country was defenseless.

Zelensky faces a similar threat and has good reason to fear his country may also be abandoned. In his phone conversation with Putin, Trump said NATO membership for Ukraine was "impractical," and Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth followed that with a statement that NATO forces should not be deployed to Ukraine as peacekeepers. Before any discussions began, Putin had scored a significant victory. Trump has ended Russian isolation and made a huge concession on NATO. Zelensky can object to whatever deal the parties reach in Riyadh, but as long as Ukraine depends on US military aid to survive, he may have little choice but to accept it. The administration has already floated a quid pro quo deal: 50 percent US ownership of Ukraine's rare-earth minerals in return for US forces to guarantee any peace agreement. Whether or not the US sends and troops, continued military aid may be contingent on Zelensky accepting this outrageous deal. An agreement reached at Riyad might produce a ceasefire, but it will not bring lasting peace to Eastern Europe.

Putin will be emboldened just as Hitler was after Munich. After rebuilding his forces, he will set his sights on new conquests. The tiny country of Moldova would be an easy target since Russia already has de facto control of its breakaway region of Transnistria. Georgia in the South Caucasus is also vulnerable. Russia controls two secessionist provinces, Abkhazia and South Ossetia. It defeated Georgia in a brief war in 2008. The US and its NATO allies were powerless to intervene. Putin could also strengthen the Kremlin's hold over the Central Asian republics, which some experts believe weakened because of his preoccupation with Ukraine, either by strengthening economic and military ties or through occupation. As with Georgia, the Western alliance would be powerless to stop him. The Baltic Republics and Poland are understandably anxious about whether an emboldened Putin would move against them. They remember Trump's campaign promise that he would tell Russia to "do whatever the hell they want" to European countries that do not meet NATO spending guidelines and his announcement that as president he would not be bound by the organization's collective defense agreement. Vance's offensive speech in Munich last week sent shock waves through Europe, casting doubt on the new administration's commitment to the alliance. French President Emanuel Macron has called for an emergency summit of European countries to discuss security concerns. For the first time since the creation of the alliance in 1949, America's European allies can no longer count on the US to come to their aid. The Paris meeting would do well to heed Zelensky's advice: it is time to create a robust European defense force. Such a force would not only deter Putin but prevent them from being bullied by the US. No matter what they decide in Riyadh, if anything, the American negotiators should remember the lesson of Munich: Appeasement never works. Havrylov said he was dismayed that Ukraine's Western partners had not provided more urgent military and diplomatic support as the Russians close in. "I don't understand it, and I think I'm not the only one," he said.

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## Türkiye-US ties and Trump 2.0

Dr. Adam McConnell

**N**OW that we are more than a month into Donald Trump's second stint as US president, trends that will shape Türkiye-US relations over the coming years are beginning to coalesce. Trump has already shocked governments around the world, but for Türkiye, the most important surprise may be his reorientation of US foreign policy towards Russia and away from Europe.

The stage was set last month, when US Secretary of State Marco Rubio met Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov in the Saudi capital for discussions about Ukraine at the exact same time that Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy met with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Trump had been gushing for weeks about how much money Saudi Crown Prince Muhammed bin Salman will send to the US [1], but President Erdogan provided a new message for observers: Immediately before hosting President Zelenskyy, President Erdogan embarked on a whirlwind tour of key Southeast Asian countries. The trip's most notable image was President Erdogan's holding an umbrella for Indonesian President Prabowo Subianto [2]. Lest anyone think that was just a random act necessitated by the weather, President Erdogan then purposefully repeated the motif with President Zelenskyy, and enabled photographers to photograph the same pose both with and without the umbrella [3].

Since Trump's inauguration, many observers have characterized Rubio's role as the "good cop" or as a "balancer" to Trump's extremism. Rubio, however, made clear that Trump is the "decider" and the State Department, including the secretary of state, would function merely as emissary for Trump's foreign policy preferences [4]. Those who do not "faithfully implement the president's policy" will be ejected from Foggy Bottom [5].

Trump's first administration was not different: when Secretary of State Rex Tillerson did not prove to be a yes-man, Trump replaced him with Mike Pompeo, who was. Trump cycled through four national security advisors, too. Anyone who resisted Trump's instincts—including an arch neo-conservative like John Bolton—was shown the door. So it appears that Rubio's main task for as long as he remains secretary will be cleaning up the messes that Trump, the bull in the china shop of international relations, creates [6].

The Senate Committee on

Foreign Relations, Congress' most influential forum concerning foreign policy, remains a platform for powerful Senate figures' anti-Türkiye rhetoric. Resumption of Republican Senate control made Republican Idaho Senator Jim Risch the committee chairperson once again. With former New Jersey Senator Robert Menendez now in prison, New Hampshire Democrat Jeanne Shaheen inherited the Ranking Member position, the committee's co-chair from the minority party [7].

Though Rubio and Menendez are no longer present, the committee's initial meetings under its new leadership showed that bipartisan anti-Türkiye sentiment remains an ingrained problem. During Rubio's Jan. 15 confirmation hearing, for example, Maryland Democratic Senator Chris Van Hollen expressed support for the umbrella group that includes the Syrian wing of the PKK terror group, known as the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), by repeating the narrative that Americans have been indoctrinated with over the past ten years, that the SDF is America's ally in the fight against Daesh (ISIS).

Van Hollen also referenced the legislation that he and South Carolina Republican Senator Lindsey Graham introduced threatening sanctions against Türkiye if the Syrian National Army (SNA) continues operations against the SDF. Rubio responded by stating specifically that America's interest was in exploring what "opportunities that exist" in Syria for the US, and that even what was stated in the hearing concerning Syria, the SDF, and US interests in Syria should be taken as a warning to President Erdogan [8].

In mid-February, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee held a hearing on Syria [9]. Jeanne Shaheen submitted three external documents as evidence, including a statement from the SDF's leader, arguing that Türkiye should not have control over Northeast Syria. Both witnesses at the hearing were from the Washington Institute for Near East Policy (WINEP) [10]. Michael Singh claimed that Türkiye intended to "seize territory and target Kurdish fighters," again echoing talking points that most US commentators have used for the past decade. The other witness, Dana Stroul, averred that there is "no alternative to the US military and its local partner, the SDF" for defeating Daesh.

After the opening statements, Democratic Senator

from Delaware Chris Coons asked both witnesses whether US forces in northeastern Syria could be withdrawn. Stroul replied that if US forces were withdrawn and the SNA and Türkiye continued operations against the SDF, the SDF would then change its focus away from controlling Daesh, ominously implying that Damascus' or Ankara's involvement would allow Daesh to once again target the US. Risch then expressed his view that withdrawing US soldiers from Syria is something that simply is not on the table and would not happen. Later in the session, Risch would also refer to Türkiye as an "alleged" ally.

Shaheen then asked for comments about Türkiye's potential role in northeastern Syria. Stroul's first comments were purposefully misleading: she referred to a moment in 2014, more than ten years ago, in order to claim that Türkiye's military did not have the capacity to deal with the Daesh issue [11]. The incident that she referred to occurred before Fethullah Gulen's terror cult attempted a coup against the Turkish government in July 2016, and at a point when the Fetullah Terrorist Organization (FETO) still exercised a crippling influence in the Turkish military, especially on the border with Syria. Since July 2016, however, honest observers will attest to how effectively Türkiye's military has operated in uprooting and subduing Daesh in northern Syria.

Stroul continued to assert that Türkiye "does not have the forces" needed to oversee the Daesh prisons in northeastern Syria. That statement is patently inaccurate and leaves one wondering what her real intentions (or sources of information) were. As all of the senators know, Türkiye has NATO's second-largest military, and Türkiye's military forces have a proven anti-terror record in places as diverse as Afghanistan, Syria, and the Horn of Africa. Stroul then made a single positive comment by recognizing Türkiye's concerns about the SDF and its connections to the PKK, terming those concerns "legitimate," but she also worked to maintain the fictional separation between the SDF and the PKK.

Two main themes emerge from both Rubio's confirmation hearing and the committee session on Syria. First, no one on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee questions US support for the SDF, which is an organic branch of the PKK, a US-designated terrorist organization. In the nearly six hours of combined commentary from the ses-

sions described above, not a single word questioning the SDF's actual status was uttered.

Second, when it comes to Türkiye, group thinking still dominates the Washington political dialogue. All of the statements about Türkiye from committee members, whether Democrat or Republican, reflected that attitude. All of the members who mentioned Türkiye did so in a negative manner, casting Türkiye as an obstacle to US interests.

In fact, the WINEP session's characteristics—inaccurate statements received as truth, answers to "softball" questions that were met by the committee chair with comments like "good answer," and a general atmosphere of reinforcing preconceived attitudes—leave the impression of a casual conversation among acquaintances who already know, more-or-less, what will be said. The senators use the forum to make statements clearly aimed at their local voters. The informal comments made during the session, and the facial expressions and body language of aides lining the chamber make clear that the participants know each other. Singh appeared before the committee before and Stroul previously worked for the Senate Foreign Relations Committee as a staff member, so she is personally acquainted with most of the members [12]. The session thus becomes a ritual, carried out for public consumption and decorum.

In the end, as Marco Rubio made clear, the only person who truly matters for foreign policy decisions in the Trump era is Trump himself. And Trump looks to be even more determined to force US institutions to bend to his will.

Subsequently, the Democratic senators also used the WINEP session to express frustration with the Trump administration's activities in his their first weeks. The Republican senators, on the other hand, had all deserted the session well before it ended. The only Republican who stayed until the conclusion was Risch, the committee chair.

Misinformation and anti-Türkiye sentiment remain entrenched in Washington's foreign policy circles. While Trump's personal relationship with Erdogan may offer an alternative diplomatic channel, it is not enough. Türkiye's policymakers and diplomatic community must take proactive steps to counter these narratives, ensuring that accurate information reaches key decision-makers, particularly in the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

AA

## Shifting European energy landscape

Rauf Mammadov

**E**UROPE has long sought access to Turkmen gas, with every major pipeline initiative—whether the failed Nabucco project or the successful Southern Gas Corridor—ultimately envisioning a route for Turkmenistan's vast reserves to reach European markets. Yet, for decades, Turkmenistan, a country with one of the largest gas reserves in the world, had only one export path to the west: via Russia. The recent agreement between Türkiye and Turkmenistan has altered this dynamic. For the first time, Turkmen gas is set to flow to Europe, albeit in limited volumes.

While Turkmenistan exports approximately 34.09 billion cubic meters (bcm) of natural gas annually to China, the recent agreement with Türkiye involves a comparatively modest volume of 1.5 to 2 bcm per year. However, competition in the Chinese market is intensifying. Russia, having lost its traditional European customers due to geopolitical tensions, is redirecting its natural gas exports toward China. Meanwhile, Turkmenistan has halted its gas exports via Russia. In this context, Türkiye has seized the opportunity to help Turkmenistan diversify its export destinations.

The swap-based transit of Turkmen gas through Iran strategically enhances Türkiye's energy portfolio, which is highly import-dependent. This move reinforces Türkiye's supply security while further diversifying its natural gas sources. This approach holds particular significance as it provides Türkiye with an additional pipeline-based cost-competitive supply that is independent of Russian gas, complementing its existing diversification efforts. With this addition, Türkiye now imports pipeline gas from four different countries—Russia, Azerbaijan, Iran, and Turkmenistan—a statistic that few other nations can match. Even major energy consumers like China, Germany (before the Ukraine war), and Italy rely on three or fewer pipeline suppliers.

Russia (via Blue Stream & TurkStream); Azerbaijan (via TANAP); Iran (via Tabriz-Ankara pipeline); Turkmenistan (via Iran, starting 2025). Türkiye is uniquely positioned to emerge as a pivotal energy trading hub in the Black Sea-Eastern Mediterranean region, leveraging its strategic geography and proactive energy policies. Unlike many landlocked countries in the region, Türkiye enjoys direct access to global maritime trade routes, an advantage it has effectively capitalized on through a robust LNG import strategy, including the deployment of Floating LNG (FLNG) terminals.

Beyond geography, Türkiye serves as the critical bridge between energy-rich nations to the east and the energy-hungry European market. The recent natural gas agreement with Turkmenistan is particularly significant in this context, aligning with the broader shift in Europe's natural gas production landscape. Traditionally concentrated

in Northwestern Europe (the North Sea, the Netherlands, and Norway), production is gradually pivoting toward emerging gas hubs in the Black Sea and the Eastern Mediterranean. From this perspective, Türkiye's ability to facilitate and integrate these new supply routes strengthens its position as a key transit and trading hub.

However, to fully realize this potential, further liberalization of Türkiye's natural gas market remains essential—an area in which the state has been making progress, alongside efforts to expand natural gas storage capacity. Additionally, Türkiye has made significant investments in renewable energy, expanding its wind and solar power infrastructure. The Akkuyu nuclear power plant, set to become operational in the near future, will further diversify Türkiye's energy mix. This will enhance domestic energy security while freeing up more natural gas for export to Europe.

Collectively, these developments underscore Türkiye's growing influence as a regional energy hub, positioning it at the center of an evolving energy landscape. Additional gas volumes help enhance liquidity in Türkiye's natural gas market, potentially moderating domestic prices. However, as natural gas increasingly evolves into a globally traded commodity, domestic pricing is influenced by a broader set of factors, including international market dynamics, geopolitical developments, and fluctuations in supply and demand across key trading hubs. While increased supply enhances market flexibility, external pressures may still shape Türkiye's domestic pricing landscape.

Over the years, Türkiye has actively pursued a multifaceted energy diversification strategy, including securing long-term LNG contracts, deploying Floating LNG (FLNG) terminals along its coastline, and now integrating a new pipeline supply route into its energy matrix. By leveraging Turkmen gas via Iran, Türkiye enhances its negotiating leverage in gas imports, and strengthens its role as a regional energy hub, bridging supply between the Caspian region and European markets.

In the event that sanctions against Russia are lifted and Russian gas exports to Europe resume, the additional volumes supplied through Türkiye and other alternative routes may also serve to enhance Europe's negotiating position. This diversification of supply sources would empower European nations to secure more favorable terms in their gas agreements with Russia, leveraging the increased competition to negotiate better prices.

Although the Turkmenistan-Türkiye gas agreement supplies only modest volumes, its strategic significance lies in strengthening Europe's energy diversification. This development not only strengthens Türkiye's position as a key energy transit hub but also provides European nations with greater leverage in future energy negotiations, particularly if Russian gas supplies are reinstated.

## Kremlin disinformation campaigns

Purity Mwambia & Henry Wilkins

pro-Russian messages circulated on social media, often from influencers known for pushing anti-Western narratives. The Western narratives. X content creators including African Hub, Typical African and RT News India echoed the sentiment, framing the French withdrawal as the end of colonial exploitation, dating back to the French invasion in 1900. All three accounts posted a video of French troops' departure from Chad with identical wording that described it as France's "final humiliation." The Africa Center for Strategic Studies, affiliated with the US Defense Department, notes that Russia is the primary source of disinformation in Africa, with over 80 documented campaigns targeting more than 20 countries. These campaigns leverage paid

African influencers, digital avatars and manipulated media to fuel anti-Western sentiment. "Russian embassies appear to have helped set up a network of ostensibly African grassroots front organizations," the Africa Center said.

These disinformation campaigns "employ paid African influencers, digital avatars, and the circulation of fake and out-of-context videos and photographs. These messages copy-and-paste from and are amplified through multiple channels of Russian state-controlled media, radio, and official communications, creating the repetitive echo chambers in which disinformation narratives become rote," the Africa Center reported. The Africa Digital Democracy Observatory (ADDO) tracks how digital tools

shape public opinion in Africa, noting the influence of prominent pan-Africanist figures such as Kemi Seba and Nathalie Yamb. The US State Department said Seba was closely working with Russian political operatives linked to the now deceased oligarch and Wagner Group leader Yevgeny Prigozhin, seeking to influence elections in Madagascar. Yamb has been involved in Russian-backed activities, including attending the 2019 Russia-Africa summit.

During the 2023 Niger coup, Russian content creators falsely claimed that ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African States) was planning an invasion of Niger, a narrative debunked by ECOWAS leaders. Russia has also expanded its cultural influence in the Sahel, establishing "Russian Houses" across the region. In N'djamena,

Chad's capital, VOA's Henry Wilkins visited one such "Russian House" last month. Unlike Western cultural institutes, these Russian centers are involved in propaganda efforts, with some training journalists to spread anti-Western disinformation, Wilkins reported. The Russian Embassy in Chad and the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs did not respond to VOA requests for comment.

Russia's goal, according to Constantin Gouvy of the Clingendael Institute, is to replace Western powers such as France as the primary partner for the Sahel states using disinformation to destabilize the region. Sambe of the Timbuktu Institute suggests that Russia's actions in Africa are a form of retaliation against NATO, particularly France, for its role in European geopolitics.



# Uncertain fate of second phase of Gaza ceasefire agreement

**AFTER the long-anticipated hostage exchange between Hamas and Israel last week, preparations for the second phase of the ceasefire agreement—finalized on Jan. 15 and enacted on Jan. 19—are underway. According to that agreement, the second phase was scheduled to begin on Feb. 3. However, due to Israeli stalling and the continuous introduction of additional conditions and demands, the first phase was extended, and the second phase was postponed.**

Stalling or breaching agreements has become a tradition for Israel. In the case of the Gaza ceasefire agreement, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu delayed for over a year before accepting an agreement that was initially presented to him at the onset of the Israeli aggression in Gaza. The implementation of the first phase of the ceasefire agreement faced significant challenges, including delays in prisoner exchanges and ongoing tensions in key regions.

Israel delayed the release of Palestinian prisoners, citing Hamas's celebratory handover ceremonies. Critics argue that this was a pretext for stalling commitments. Moreover, reports suggest that Netanyahu may be escalating tensions in other regions, such as Syria, Lebanon, and even the West Bank, where significant military operations have occurred as a strategic distraction or leverage in negotiations. Israel has also maintained a presence in key areas like the Philadelphia Corridor, which triggered tensions with Egypt, and threatened to resume war.

With the first phase now concluded, Israel faces a pivotal decision regarding the next stage of the ceasefire. On Feb. 28, Egypt announced the commencement of negotiations for the next phase of the ceasefire agreement. Accordingly, officials from Israel joined mediators from Qatar and the United States in Cairo for intensive discussions. The ongoing negotiations between Israel and Hamas remain precarious, with the transition to the second phase appearing likely but not guaranteed. This phase is crucial for securing a permanent end to the

war, releasing the remaining hostages, and ensuring the full withdrawal of Israeli forces from Gaza.

Moreover, the ceasefire process is heavily influenced by the roles of guarantor countries—namely the United States, Qatar, and Egypt. These nations are supposed to enforce the three-phase peace plan, though their influence is often challenged by Israel. As a primary mediator, Qatar remains dedicated to establishing a sustain-

able ceasefire and continues to be involved in efforts to that end. Focused on border security and rejecting any mass Palestinian displacement into Sinai, Egypt is also heavily engaged in discussions to initiate the second phase of the agreement, as well as in post-war planning.

Under the Trump administration, one might expect the US to pressure Israel to fulfill its commitments. However, US President Donald Trump's broader Gaza plan, which includes seizing Gaza and proposals for the forced relocation of Palestinians, not only threatens to destabilize the ceasefire agreement but would likely empower Netanyahu and encourage his far-right supporters to continue their aggression against the

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of Israel's Prime Minister Netanyahu, the far-right elements within the Israeli government, and the divisions in Israeli institutions suggest that Israel may prefer a resumption of hostilities or war. The fact that the US administration is applying zero pressure on the Israeli government could further facilitate Israel's return to war.

In early February 2025, Trump introduced a controversial proposal aimed at seizing Gaza and forcing the expulsion of Palestinians from it under the pretext of "redevelopment plans under US control." This initiative has sparked considerable backlash and poses significant risks to ongoing negotiations in the region.

One of the most significant consequences of Trump's proposal is

the erosion of trust among the involved parties. Palestinians and Arab states perceive the plan as an act of ethnic cleansing, which could harden Hamas' stance against any further negotiations. This loss of trust could hinder dialogue, increasing Palestinian resistance and resentment amid perceived aggression and injustice.

Moreover, the proposal presents an opportunity for Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu's far-right allies, who support the ethnic cleansing of Palestinians as a means to avoid commitments to withdraw from occupied territories in Gaza and elsewhere. This alignment with far-right interests could derail the second phase of negotiations, as these factions may leverage the proposal to justify a refusal to make the concessions or compromises essential for peace talks. Such dynamics could further complicate the already fragile negotiations.

The response from key mediators in the region, including Egypt and Qatar, as well as other stakeholders such as Jordan and major actors in the Arab and Muslim world, such as Saudi Arabia and Türkiye, has been overwhelmingly negative. These nations have outright rejected Trump's plan, warning that it threatens regional stability and could lead to the collapse of ongoing negotiations and a resumption of war. Their rejection of the plan indicates a significant diplomatic rift that could hinder efforts to achieve a lasting resolution to the conflict.

Additionally, the fragility of the current ceasefire is at risk due to Prime Minister Netanyahu's belief that war has secured him political gains that no peace agreement could provide. Consequently, he has a vested interest in waging and resuming conflicts and wars in Gaza and the region. He interprets Hamas' commitment to the ceasefire agreement as a sign of weakness. However, Hamas has vowed to respond actively to any attempts at forced relocation or a resumption of hostilities, raising the specter of renewed conflict. Such escalations could not only halt the release of hostages but also plunge the region back into chaos, undermining any progress made thus far.

# A new Muslim and African ban by Trump can and must be prevented

**MORE than a month into US President Donald Trump's second term, his brutal crackdown on immigration and asylum seekers has already harmed countless people. Law enforcement has carried out mass raids across the United States, rounding up people. Tens of thousands have been deported, and the pathway to asylum has been blocked for tens of thousands more.**

In the face of this onslaught, people have mobilised en masse to protect vulnerable groups at the local and national levels. One piece of legislation could make a difference in this struggle: the National Origin-Based Antidiscrimination for Nonimmigrants (NO BAN) Act, introduced to the US Congress on February 6 by Representative Judy Chu and Senator Chris Coons. The bill would create much-needed limitations and accountability for any president intent on categorically banning refugees, asylum seekers, or people of specified faiths or nationalities from entering the US.

Why is this needed today? Because there is growing fear that Trump is setting the stage for a resurrection of the notorious Muslim and African bans of his first term. Eight years ago, as a freshly inaugurated president, Trump issued an executive order to fulfill his campaign promise of enacting a "total and complete shutdown of Muslims entering the United States." Within hours of the decree, thousands of travellers from predominantly Muslim countries were

detained for hours at airports across the nation, as federal agents struggled to decipher who could enter and who would be barred.

Hundreds of families were separated, and Trump subsequently expanded the ban to include Tanzania, Sudan, Myanmar, Eritrea, Kyrgyzstan and Nigeria – dubbed the "African ban". People fleeing war, starvation and other humanitarian disasters were thus cut off from seeking shelter in the US.

Over 40,000 people were denied visas due to the Muslim and African bans, which caused a 94 percent drop in Muslim refugee admissions between January and November 2017.

The traumatic impacts of the Muslim and African bans, currently rescinded, still linger years later: families separated, people deprived of critical medical treatment, travel and visa fee expenses lost, anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim hate.

Among those affected is Maral Tabrizi, who was denied her family's support when she most needed it. When Maral was pregnant in 2018, her parents applied for tourist visas to witness the birth of their first grandchild. Her father's application was held up in administrative processing, and while they waited, the Muslim ban was approved by the Supreme Court, and both parents' visas were refused.

Maral was deprived of her parents' support during pregnancy and postpartum. With a connective tis-

sue disorder making daily tasks incredibly painful, Maral found it impossible to return to work as quickly as she had hoped. She suffered from postpartum depression due to the pain and sadness this caused and was on antidepressants for more than a year. Her parents will also never be able to meet her father-in-law, who died while they were waiting to come visit the US.

Maral was a plaintiff in class-action litigation which sought to force the government to reconsider the visa applications of individuals affected by the bans. Our organisation, Muslim Advocates, co-counsels the case. As a result of the lawsuit, a court ordered the government to provide nearly 25,000 individuals affected by the bans with a fee-waived visa reconsideration process, the implementation of which is ongoing today.

However, President Trump is poised to enact a potentially broader travel ban and his administration might target individuals with legal status for questioning and monitoring simply because they are citizens of banned countries or because his administration considers them "hostile".

This is why since 2019, Muslim Advocates and our partners in the No Muslim Ban Ever coalition have championed Representative Chu's and Senator Coons's NO BAN Act. If passed, this legislation would extend to religion the nondiscrimination provisions under immigration law that already cover race, sex, and nationality. It

would also require that any travel restriction imposed under Immigration and Nationality Act (INA) section 212(f) be based on specific and credible facts, and in a way that narrowly addresses a compelling government interest. It would require the secretaries of the US Department of State and US Homeland Security to provide notice to Congress before any such travel restriction, and a briefing within 48 hours.

Without the limitations of the NO BAN Act, presidents will continue to abuse their power by closing our borders arbitrarily or based on thinly veiled religious or racial hate. Just last year, then-President Joe Biden used the same INA 212(f) authority to shut down the border, in a plausible violation of US immigration law. And Trump invoked 212(f) when he closed the southern border in January. The NO BAN Act constrains such cruelty and presents an alternative to the hate and racism fuelling it.

In a world replete with humanitarian disasters, our decisions today can mean the difference between life and death for untold numbers of people. Back in 2017, the No Muslim Ban Ever coalition formed from the movement that showed up at airports, as people from all walks of life converged to protest the first Muslim ban. Today, lawmakers should also take a bold stance for our country's highest aspirations of religious freedom and refuge from tyrannical leaders and pass the NO BAN Act.

Aljazeera

# There is no such thing as ‘Global South’

**WE are being told that the world is divided between a "Global North" and a "Global South". But what exactly is meant by that? An economic difference? Of the 20 leading global economies, seven are in the South. In the South, some countries are 80 times richer than their neighbours. A climate difference? Climate change affects every country in the world, and especially small island states and the poorest countries. Among the 10 greatest emitters, if we go by CO2 emissions per inhabitant, there are as many in the North as in the South.**

Are we talking about a migration difference? The vast majority of migrations are between countries in the South. A political divide? In both the North and the South, there are those who support collective solutions, and conversely, those who support efforts to withdraw from global affairs. In both the North and the South, there is competition between regional powers. In the North and the South, there are countries that comply with international law and others that flout it. Yes, we are living in a

fragmented world, but is this happening at the line of geographical division between North and South? Certainly not. The UN does not recognize this artificial division either. It focuses on categories of countries that need the most international support. The real line of division is the one that separates those who support the international rules-based order and the rest. The discussion we should be having, at G20 meetings and everywhere else, is not the clash between North and South, but between those who support the law and those who support power by force.

In France, our moral compass is not guided by North or South, but by justice. We do not avert our eyes from any crisis or violation of international law. A country under attack is a country under attack, and an aggressor country is an aggressor country - this distinction does not change based on whether the country is in the North or the South.

That is why France at once condemns violations of international humanitarian law in Gaza and the West Bank, the Oct. 7 terrorist

attacks against Israel, the war of aggression led by Russia against Ukraine, and the atrocities perpetrated by the Sudanese Armed Forces and the RSF (Rapid Support Forces) in Sudan. That is why it is fully committed to maintaining the ceasefire in Lebanon, after working toward its adoption alongside the United States.

That is why it is working to bring an end to the clashes in the Great Lakes region, where M23 continues to violate the sovereignty of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. It is why France is working so that Syrian men and women can live in peace and freedom in a sovereign, peaceful Syria, that is reintegrated in its regional environment. And I have travelled to each of these regions to strongly reassert our beliefs. Because France does not use double standards. And the voice of France, which tirelessly defends equality and law, will continue to be heard, at a time when law is contested, if we strengthen this law. This implies that there is a role for everyone to play in global governance, and therefore, that it must

# Reopening the skies to Russian flights would be a mistake

**THE US is reportedly considering reopening its airspace for direct Russian flights, a move that would throw a lifeline to Putin's war economy and a ticket back to Western luxury for the elites. If Aeroflot, the Kremlin's flagship carrier, regains access to American airspace, the EU would likely be pressured to follow suit, unraveling sanctions across the board.**

That would be a strategic blunder — one that undermines sanctions, rewards aggression, and weakens Western leverage at a moment when Ukraine needs it most. Since 2022, Western sanctions have crippled Russia's aviation industry. Airlines have been barred from purchasing new aircraft, leasing Western jets and even servicing their aging fleets.

The result? Russian carriers are operating stripped-down, cannibalized planes held together with black-market parts. It is a miracle that there has not been a seriously catastrophic accident. Russian and US diplomats held talks in Istanbul on Feb. 28 on restoring regular operations at their embassies, as well as the possible restoration of direct flights between the two countries. The discussions, which lasted over six hours, were held at the US Consul General's residence and came days after US Secretary of State Marco Rubio and Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov met in Saudi Arabia.

The US released its own summary of the Istanbul talks, describing them as "constructive". However, it notably did not reference Russia's appeal to restore direct air travel. Shares in Aeroflot, which was the only Russian airline to operate direct flights to the US before 2022, jumped sharply in price following the news.

Airline industry executives have been quick to react to the new possibility of skies being reopened for Russia. Willie Walsh, the director general of the International Air Transport Association and former British Airways boss, said on Feb. 26 that Western airlines "quickly" be using Russian airspace again if a ceasefire is implemented.

Three years ago, I broke a story for the Irish Independent revealing that the EU had set a strict deadline to terminate all leasing contracts with Russian airlines. This came just days after Europe shut its skies to Russian carriers in response to the full-scale invasion of Ukraine on

Jason Corcoran

Feb. 24, 2022. The report correctly predicted that Moscow would refuse to return the 500 leased aircraft, triggering billions in insurance claims and a legal battle over their fate. Lessors in Dublin, the global base for aviation leasing, sued insurers worldwide for over \$8 billion after most of those planes were seized in Russia and placed on the Kremlin's airline register.

Despite the staggering losses incurred, leasing firms will not hesitate to cut deals with Russian airlines if the skies are reopened. Commerce moves fast and, for the right price, principles tend to disappear. Reopening the skies would be a financial lifeline for Russian airlines — and a relief for ordinary Russians, who have been paying a steep premium to reach Europe via Istanbul and Dubai.

Many, especially those fleeing mobilization, have borne the brunt of soaring airfare costs. Direct flights would make travel cheaper and easier but at the cost of undermining sanctions and giving the Kremlin a win. Is it really worth the trade-off? Russian airlines, once integrated into global aviation, have been largely cut off from international partnerships, codeshares, and Western leasing companies. This isolation has hurt revenue and forced Russia to rely on a shrinking domestic market.

With Western planes inaccessible, Russia has been scrambling to ramp up production of domestic aircraft like the Sukhoi Superjet and the MC-21. However, these planes still rely on Western components, making large-scale production difficult in the face of sanctions. Sanctions were meant to squeeze the Kremlin's war machine. Lifting them now would hand Putin another propaganda victory while doing little to change the lives of ordinary Russians still trapped under his rule.

Trump has made no secret of his admiration for Putin or his disdain for Ukraine. He has repeatedly suggested that Ukraine should "make a deal" and even floated the idea of handing over territory to Russia.

It is easy to see how lifting flight restrictions could become part of a broader push to reset relations with Moscow at Ukraine's expense. The consequences would be immediate. Once the US lifts its airspace ban, the EU would face immense pressure to follow suit.

European airlines, eager to return to the

lucrative Russian market, would lobby hard to reopen routes to Moscow and St Petersburg. That, in turn, would undermine the entire sanctions regime. At the same time, avoiding Russian airspace has already made flights between Europe and Asia significantly longer. Airlines have to fly further south over areas like Turkey, Central Asia, China and Mongolia. British Airways, Finnair, KLM and Lufthansa have had to add one to three hours to journeys as a result.

That means higher fuel costs, longer shifts for pilots and crew and more expensive tickets for passengers. The financial strain on airlines would only increase pressure to roll back restrictions, further eroding Western resolve. If Russian jets are once again flying freely to Western capitals, why not ease other restrictions? Why not let Aeroflot buy new Boeing and Airbus planes? Why not normalize business ties with Russian companies, reconnect Kremlin's banks back to the SWIFT payment system, bring back Visa and Mastercard and unfreeze Russia's \$350 billion in foreign exchange reserves?

This is how economic pressure erodes. Not with a dramatic reversal, but through small, incremental rollbacks that slowly chip away at its effectiveness. Putin would seize on such a move as proof that the West is tired, divided and ready to move on from Ukraine. His war machine would get a financial boost, while Ukraine would be left even more vulnerable. As the Trump administration appears ready to ease sanctions, the West's message to Moscow must be clear: There is no return to normal while Russian troops are occupying and bombing Ukrainian land. Reopening the skies isn't just a bad idea - it's a betrayal of everything the West has fought to defend.

Lifting flight bans would be a colossal mistake, undermining sanctions, emboldening the Kremlin, and leaving Ukraine more isolated than ever at a moment when it needs unwavering support. This is not just about travel. It is about whether the West has the resolve to keep economic pressure on a regime waging war in Europe. The aviation sanctions are working — draining Russia's hard currency reserves, isolating its economy and forcing it to turn to China and India for spare parts. Reopening Western airspace would undo that leverage overnight.

# Putin is weak and desperate for peace

**THERE is a good reason why Russia is suddenly so keen to engage with US President Donald Trump's drive to end the war in Ukraine. The Kremlin is desperate for it to end because, on almost every level, the conflict has been a catastrophic disaster for Vladimir Putin.**

The Kremlin's propaganda machine may be having a field day mocking the Europeans' evident discomfort at the Trump administration's attitude to Washington's erstwhile allies. But this is merely an attempt to distract attention away from the very real pressure it is suffering from its calamitous military intervention in Ukraine.

Russia's state-owned media has seized on the Trump administration's initial overtures to Moscow, making the preposterous assertion earlier this week that Washington now "aligns with our vision", while another state-owned newspaper claimed "Russia could be the beneficiary" of Trump's trade wars. Yet, for all its bravado, the Kremlin is desperately hoping that Trump's return to the White House will ultimately herald the end of a war in Ukraine that has decimated the Russian military and torpedoed the Russian economy.

Con Coughlin

Latest Western estimates put the total number of Russian dead and injured in the Ukraine conflict at 850,000, more than the combined total of US and British forces who died fighting in Europe during the Second World War.

Add to this the ruinous impact the conflict has had on the Russian economy, with interest rates reaching a punitive 21 per cent and the country's wealth fund rapidly running out of cash to finance the war, and it is easy to understand why Putin has leapt at the chance to engage with Trump's peace proposals.

One indication of the Kremlin's eagerness to end the conflict can be seen from its recent offer to broker a peace deal between Iran and the US over Tehran's controversial nuclear programme. Iran's Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, has already dismissed the notion of reopening talks with Trump on the issue as "not rational, intelligent or honourable".

This is simply an indication of how little leverage Moscow can bring to bear in any peace talks on Ukraine. Nor will the mood in the Kremlin have been improved by the belated efforts by European leaders to put their security

requirements in order, with the European Commission outlining plans to raise 800 billion euros to enhance Europe's ability to defend itself. Putin's unprovoked invasion of Ukraine has already persuaded two hitherto neutral European nations – Finland and Sweden – to embrace the Nato fold, thereby greatly enhancing the security of the alliance's northern flank.

And, for a leader whose very raison d'être is to prevent any further Western encroachment of Russian borders, the possibility that European troops – including UK forces – could soon be deployed to Ukraine to deter further acts of Russian aggression must seem like a dagger through the heart.

Putin's desire to prevent such an eventuality was evident from the Kremlin's condemnation of President Emmanuel Macron who, in a televised address on Wednesday, reiterated that France, together with other European allies, is prepared to send troops to Ukraine to safeguard any future peace deal, which the Kremlin denounced as "confrontational". Far from entering any peace talks from a position of strength, the Trump administration must understand that Putin will do so from a position of abject weakness.

The Telegraph





# Power sector suffers Rs158b losses: APBF

## F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The All Pakistan Business Forum (APBF) has said that the power sector has been suffering Rs158 billion losses due to inefficiency and theft despite constant tariff hikes through annual and quarterly adjustments, and fuel cost adjustments, escalating cost of production for the industry.

The APBF President Syed Maaz Mahmood, referring to the data of the Ministry of Energy, observed that distribution companies caused Rs106 billion in losses in the first half of the fiscal year due to inefficiency while more than half of the Rs158 billion losses were caused by just two power distribution companies HESCO and SEPCO.

Syed Maaz Mahmood said that the cumulative losses due to under-recoveries and inefficiency amounted to Rs158 billion. These were partially offset by gains from monthly and quarterly tariff adjustments and prior-year recoveries.

The government collected an additional Rs67 billion from quarterly and

monthly fuel adjustments and another Rs140 billion through other price adjustments, according to the report.

Experts added that HESCO and SEPCO alone contributed Rs82 billion of the Rs158 billion losses, with an increase of Rs28 billion from last year. This clearly means that the government's policies to appoint independent Boards of Directors at State-Owned Enterprises are yielding results, they said.

He said that the circular debt amounted to Rs2.384 trillion by the end of December, according to a report by the Power Division. The report further showed that after injecting Rs20 billion from the budget to reduce the stock of debt, there was a net reduction of Rs9 billion in circular debt compared to the Rs2.393 trillion level recorded in June 2024.

The APBF Chairman Ibrahim Qureshi said that despite an overall marginal reduction in debt levels, there was still a net increase of Rs11 billion in the circular debt flow after adjusting the impacts of price increas-

es and budgetary injections. The International Monetary Fund had allowed an addition of Rs461 billion in the flow, but the Power Division performed much better than that.

Ibrahim Qureshi said that the primary challenge remained the losses caused by power distribution companies due to theft, inefficiency, and under-recovery of bills. These companies also caused Rs52 billion in losses due to under-recoveries, which was Rs97 billion less than the comparative period. The APBF President said that it is good that the government is working to resolve issues in appointing independent Boards of Directors for HESCO and SEPCO to further reduce losses.

Maaz Mahmood suggested that the circular debt actually increased by Rs463bn in the first seven months of the current fiscal year, averaging Rs66bn monthly, compared to Rs408bn in the same period last year. However, after accounting for stock payments worth Rs137bn from June 2023 to January 2024, the net increase in circular

debt was Rs325bn.

The payables to power producers, which stood at Rs1.434tr at the beginning of FY2023, jumped to Rs1.77tr by the end of January 2023 and remained almost unchanged at Rs1.760tr by the end of January 2024 — a minuscule difference of Rs8bn. The stock of permanent debt guaranteed by the government of Pakistan remained unchanged at Rs765bn during the period.

The increase in circular debt can be attributed to poor recoveries by distribution companies, high system losses, pending generation costs, non-payments by K-Electric, and interest charges, despite the government's efforts to recover about Rs116bn from consumers in the previous year.

While the government has been claiming improvements, the IMF has put on record that power sector circular debt at Rs2.6tr has remained broadly flat since October 2023 after some slippage earlier in the fiscal year (due largely to lower-than expected recoveries following the large annual tariff rebasing in July 2023).



LAHORE: Laborers loading sacks of potatoes and onions on delivery vehicles at vegetable market.

## DC visits Ramadan bazaars

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Deputy Commissioner (DC) Islamabad, Irfan Nawaz Memon on Saturday made a surprise visit to the Ramadan Bazaar in Sector G-6 to monitor price controls and product quality.

He engaged directly with shoppers, inspected vendor rate lists, and directed officials to ensure round-the-clock oversight of markets during the holy month. During the visit, Memon spoke to customers about the prices of essential goods and checked the quality of fruits and vegetables at multiple stalls.

He emphasized the need for consistent supply of items and instructed price control magistrates to remain present at markets at all times to address violations. Memon reviewed rate lists displayed at stalls, urging vendors to strictly follow government-set prices. He warned against overcharging and advised citizens to report any shopkeepers violating official rates. "If a seller ignores the price list, inform the administration immediately," he stated.

The DC also directed market teams to ensure uninterrupted stock of daily use items like flour, sugar, and cooking oil, particularly during peak hours. He stressed that magistrates must take swift action against hoarding or artificial shortages.

## Sadia condole death of Iftikhar F.P. Report

KARACHI: Sadia Rashid, president of Hamdard Foundation Pakistan, expressed sorrow over the passing of former Chief of the Pakistan Navy and Speaker of the Hamdard Shura Forum, Admiral (R) Iftikhar Ahmed Sirohi.

In her message, she stated that his demise is a great loss to the nation, as he was a patriotic and dedicated military leader.

She highlighted his close association with Shaheed Hakim Mohammed Said and his deep emotional bond with the esteemed martyr. Recognizing his wisdom and capabilities, Shaheed Hakim Mohammed Said appointed him as the Speaker of Hamdard Shura Rawalpindi after his retirement from the Navy.

## Gold prices dip by Rs1,000/tola

ISLAMABAD (APP): The price of 24 karat per tola gold decreased by Rs1,000 and was sold at Rs306,000 on Saturday against its sale at Rs307,000 on previous trading day, All Pakistan Sarafa Gems and Jewelers Association reported.

The price of 10 grams of 24 karat gold also decreased by Rs858 to Rs262,345 from Rs263,203 whereas that of 10 gram 22 karat went up by Rs787 to Rs240,491 from Rs241,278. The prices of per tola silver decreased by Rs12 to Rs3,388 and that of ten gram went down by Rs10 to Rs2,904.

The price of gold in the international market decreased by \$11 to \$2,910 from \$2,921 whereas the prices of silver in international market declined by \$0.15 to \$32.50, the Association reported.

# Banks' credit to private sector drops to 8.4%-half in 20 years: FRIA

## F.P. Report

LAHORE: The Ferozepur Road Industrial Association (FRIA) Chairman Shahbaz Aslam has observed that banks' credit to the private sector has declined to 8.4 percent in fiscal year of 2024, which is almost half the level seen in 2004. He said that the country's bank deposit and private-sector credit-to-GDP ratios have also remained among the lowest compared to the regional countries.

He appealed the central bank to persuade the commercial banks to diversify their lending beyond the government sector, stressing that no country can achieve sustainable economic growth with low levels of private credit.

FRIA Chairman said that Pakistan's banks allocate around 75 percent of their lending to established sectors, while only 5 percent goes to small and medium enterprises. This imbalance highlights the need for banks to reassess their strategies, he said. With a more stable economy, he hoped that the government's bor-

rowing would be curtailed and the banking sector could look towards increasing credit to the private sector, particularly the SMEs and agriculture sector.

Countering the common argument that government lending has crowded out the private sector, Shahbaz Aslam noted that in some countries, despite equally high or even greater government borrowing from commercial banks, the private sector still holds a significant share of the financial sector's portfolio.

However, he also acknowledged the banking sector's role in expanding bank account coverage, which has risen from 47pc of the adult population in 2018 to 64pc today. The gender gap has also narrowed from 47pc to 34pc. By 2028, the government aims to increase bank account coverage to 75pc of the adult population and reduce the gender gap to 25pc.

Achieving these targets will require the financial sector to enhance its services' depth, breadth, and quality. He suggested leveraging AI, digitisation and finan-

cial innovation to fulfil these goals.

Experts said that the macroeconomic crisis and high interest rates have led banks to generate windfall profits. As highlighted in the reports, 99.8pc of budgetary deficit support to the government comes through the banking sector, allowing banks to enjoy the fruits of high interest rates. With nearly 40pc of the population living in poverty, according to the World Bank, and the middle class feeling the strain, perhaps it's unsurprising that profitable sectors are expected to contribute accordingly.

Quoting the SBP governor he said that our banks need to rethink their current business model, reassess their priorities, and play a more active role in financial intermediation.

Referring to the latest National Financial Inclusion Strategy 2024-2028, he highlighted that the central bank has set a target to increase bank account coverage to 75 percent of the adult population and reduce the gender gap to 25 percent by 2028.

# SBP, SSP collaborate to empower women

MULTAN (APP): The State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) and the Society for Special Persons (SSP) joined hands to celebrate International Women's Day by promoting economic empowerment and financial inclusion for women with disabilities.

The event highlighted the remarkable contributions of differently-abled women, who have overcome challenges to establish successful businesses.

Speaking on the occasion, Javed Iqbal Marth, Chief Manager at SBP, praised the resilience and determination of women with disabilities who have carved a niche for themselves as entrepreneurs.

"Their success stories are a beacon of hope, proving that physical limitations cannot hinder ambition and talent. By supporting them, we break barriers and challenge societal stereotypes," he said.

Miss Zahida, CEO of SSP, expressed gratitude to the SBP for its commitment to empowering women with disabilities. "Financial independence is a crucial step toward true inclusion. We appreciate SBP's efforts in providing opportunities and support to ensure these women can thrive in business and society," she remarked.

This collaboration between SBP and SSP reflects a shared commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion. By fostering financial literacy, entrepreneurship, and skill development, both organizations aim to create a more inclusive society where every individual, regardless of ability, has equal access to economic opportunities.

The event concluded with a pledge to strengthen efforts in facilitating accessible banking services and providing tailored financial solutions for women with disabilities, ensuring their meaningful participation in the economy.

# Global stocks mixed

NEW YORK (AFP/ APP): Global stocks were mixed Friday as President Donald Trump's unpredictable tariff tinkering weighed down sentiment even as Wall Street stocks shot higher following reassuring comments from the head of the Federal Reserve.

After a down day in Europe, US stocks looked poised for another rocky round following mixed employment data.

Briefing.com analyst Patrick O'Hare said investors were reassured by a midday appearance from Fed Chair Jerome Powell, who said the US central bank is in no hurry to shift course on monetary policy.

"When Powell came out with a calm and reassuring tone, it gave the market an excuse to rally," O'Hare said.

All three major US indices finished the day in positive territory.

The broad-based S&P 500 finished at 5,770.20, up 0.6 percent for the day but down 3.1 percent for the week.

Earlier, US jobs data for February showed the country's economy added 151,000 jobs last month, up from January's revised 125,000 figure, but fewer

than analysts estimates as unemployment ticked higher.

Analysts described the report as unspectacular but good enough to suggest the labor market is not weakening precipitously.

But global markets have been unnerved by Trump's gyrations on trade policy.

"US President Trump's bewildering tariff policy is creating heightened uncertainty and investor concern with hedge funds having liquidated global equity positions at the fastest rate on record," noted Axel Rudolph, senior technical analyst at online trading platform IG.

London finished flat, but in Frankfurt the DAX closed 1.8 percent down, and France's CAC 40 lost 1.0 percent.

Trump caused disarray on trading floors after he announced Thursday he would delay tariffs on Canadian and Mexican goods covered under a North American trade agreement until April 2, days after they had taken effect following a previous delay.

The decision came after a similar one-month reprieve for automakers

# PBF SVP highlights SIFC's role in economic stabilization

ISLAMABAD (APP): Senior Vice President of the Pakistan Business Forum (PBF), Anna Munawwar Awan on Saturday that the ongoing efforts of the Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC) playing a pivotal role in stabilizing Pakistan's economy and promoting investment.

Talking to APP, Anna Munawwar Awan said I have every reason to appreciate the strides made by SIFC due to their continuous engagement with the business community, which is a clear indication that they are working closely with all stakeholders," Awan said. "This level of collaboration should be a model for policymakers and institutions that often overlook the vital input from the business sector."

The PBF's SVP also acknowledged the critical contributions of Chief of Army Staff General Asim Munir, whose practical measures to stabilize the national economy have garnered significant attention. His success in curbing the rising dollar rate bringing it down from Rs343 to Rs278 was a critical milestone in restoring public confidence and stabilizing the economy.

"The reduction in the

dollar rate by 21 percent is a significant achievement. We hope to see further progress in this regard," Awan added.

She further says PBF, as an advocacy body for industry, commerce, and economic development, continues to provide valuable recommendations to the relevant forums. Through its advocacy, the PBF has seen notable successes, such as a reduction in the markup rate, with expectations of it reaching single digits soon. They also helped raise concerns regarding Independent Power Producers (IPPs), resulting in the cancellation of several contracts and the reduction of electricity costs.

However, she expressed concern about the lack of involvement of business representatives in policy-making processes. She stressed that to ensure sustainable economic growth, it is essential to address the black economy and halt artificial economic measures like the excessive printing of currency notes.

"As of June 2024, the total volume of currency in circulation in Pakistan stood at Rs9,153 billion. The excessive printing of

money has exacerbated inflation and other economic challenges," she stated. "If the government ceases artificial economic measures and implements a policy to eliminate high-denomination currency notes, it could help curb the black economy worth Rs30 trillion."

PBF Senior Vice President further pointed to the critical issue of under-invoicing of imports from China, which she estimates causes Pakistan a loss of \$6 billion annually. This practice, she believes, needs strict regulatory oversight to optimize national resources.

The agreements recently signed between Pakistan and the UAE are a positive step forward, but Anna stresses the need for Pakistan to secure similar trade agreements with Qatar and other countries to further strengthen its economy. Importantly, she cautioned that trade agreements must be mutually beneficial, avoiding unilateral advantages for other nations.

Turning her attention to state-owned enterprises like Pakistan Steel Mills and Pakistan Railways, she called for structural reforms to address bureaucratic inefficiencies. She noted that these institutions,

which have suffered from inefficiencies over the years, need to be revived to make meaningful contributions to the economy.

She also stressed the importance of energy sector reforms for Pakistan's future economic growth. Reducing energy wastage and investing in renewable energy sources like solar and wind power would help Pakistan reduce its reliance on costly fossil fuels and mitigate the energy crisis. Moreover, privatizing inefficient distribution companies (DISCOs) and addressing line losses would lower electricity costs for both industries and consumers, contributing to economic stability.

"Implementing these reforms is essential to unlocking the full potential of Pakistan's economy. With strategic decisions and a commitment to long-term sustainability, we can significantly enhance the country's economic trajectory," she states.

The Pakistan Business Forum continues its efforts to serve as a catalyst for change, providing solutions and advocating for policies that will ensure the country's long-term economic prosperity.

# Chief Executive of Murree Brewery hosts Iftar dinner

## F.P. Report

RAWALPINDI: Federal Parliamentary Secretary and CEO of Murree Brewery, Ishphanyar M. Bhandara, hosted an Iftar dinner at Golf Club Marquee, bringing together a large number of guests to observe the spirit of Ramadan.

Speaking on the occasion, Ishphanyar Bhandara highlighted the significance of Ramadan as a month of reflection, patience, and generosity.

He emphasized that this sacred month teaches the values of self-discipline, compassion, and caring for others, reinforcing the spir-



it of unity and goodwill among people.

Bhandara extended his best wishes to all attendees and expressed his hope that

the blessings of Ramadan would bring peace, prosperity, and harmony to the nation.

He reaffirmed his commitment to fostering an inclusive environment where all individuals can come together in mutual respect and solidarity.

He reaffirmed his commitment to fostering an inclusive environment where all individuals can come together in mutual respect and solidarity.

# Franchises boosting Saudi economy

JEDDAH (Arab News): : Franchises are proving increasingly vital to Saudi Arabia's economic development, driving employment, government revenue, and cultural transformation in a youthful nation.

Economic experts have told Arab News that the introduction of a law in 2019, followed by expansion of regulations the following year, helped open the Kingdom up to international businesses, as well as strengthened the relationship between franchisors and franchisees.

These moves, together with the economic expansion of Saudi Arabia as part of the Vision 2030 initiative, means the Kingdom now accounts for nearly

half of the \$30 billion franchise market in the Middle East and Africa, according to Yaseen Ghulam, associate professor of economics at Riyadh-based Al-Yamamah University.

He told Arab News there is consensus among researchers and industry observers that franchise businesses are expected to grow by more than 20 percent per annum for the coming five years and beyond.

"This presents an exceptional opportunity for international brands to enter the Kingdom through franchising, given the fact that European and North American consumer markets are struggling due to economic uncertainty,

unemployment, and higher cost of living," Yaseen Ghulam said.

He added that franchise registrations in the Kingdom stood at 1,788 by the end of the third quarter of 2024, up from just 185 three years earlier.

With 1,232 entries, the accommodation and food services sector — which includes lodging facilities, dining establishments, and enterprises associated with tourism — led the registrations, the associate professor said.

He added that the wholesale and retail division came in second with 689, and the transport and storage sector with 257. An important element of this development, he noted, is

more widespread activity, covering almost all major cities, rather than clustered around one particular region or sector.

"With 647 franchise registrations, Riyadh has led the field, followed by Makkah with 363, and the Eastern Province with 225. According to some estimates, over 1,200 brands are available for franchising, and the franchising sector in Saudi Arabia is offering over 10,000 business opportunities."

Ghulam noted that more than 600 international and 380 local franchise brands are present in the Kingdom, according to the Small and Medium Enterprises General Authority, known as Monsha'at.



**In brief****Shoaib has THIS advice for NZ**

K A R A C H I (Monitoring Desk): Former Pakistan pacer Shoaib Akhtar has offered a piece of advice to New Zealand ahead of the

Champions Trophy 2025 final against India. New Zealand will look to lift the coveted trophy after a gap of 25 years when they beat India in the final of the 2000 edition of the tournament. India, who are considered the favourites to win the Champions Trophy 2025 final, have remained unbeaten in the ongoing tournament. While New Zealand were defeated by India in their group-stage game, Mitchell Santner's side is considered the only team that can challenge them in the tournament.

Ahead of the ultimate game, former Pakistan pacer Shoaib Akhtar advised New Zealand to let go of the 'under-dog mindset' and play to their strength. "They must forget they are playing against India and stop seeing themselves as underdogs. Santner has the confidence to win, and I have seen that in him. As the leader, Santner's goal is to secure the trophy," Akhtar said while speaking with a private TV channel.

The former Pakistan pacer called it crucial for New Zealand to contain India captain Rohit Sharma early in the inning. "You need to make the correct decisions at the crucial moments. Rohit Sharma will come out aggressively and look to dominate the spinners, especially Santner. As a captain, Santner must manage his team wisely," Shoaib Akhtar said. While calling India the favourites to win the Champions Trophy 2025 final, the former pacer said that New Zealand can triumph in the game if they 'deliver their best performance on the day.'

**Cavs survive Hornets scare**

LOS ANGELES (AFP): The Cleveland Cavaliers staged a dramatic late rally to stretch their unbeaten streak to 13 games with a nail-biting 118-117 over the lowly Charlotte Hornets in the NBA on Friday. Charlotte, buoyed by a stellar 46-point display from Miles Bridges, looked ready to score a massive upset after opening up a nine-point lead with just over five minutes remaining. But Eastern Conference leaders Cleveland, who this week became the first team to punch their ticket to the postseason, rallied superbly to claw their way back into the game. A sensational Evan Mobley three-pointer tied it for the Cavs at 106-106 with just over two minutes remaining, before Donovan Mitchell put the Cavs into a winning position with six straight free throws. Mitchell led the scoring for Cleveland with 24 points while Darius Garland finished with 20 and Mobley 19 as the Cavs improved to 53-10. Cleveland lead the East by eight games. Bridges almost single-handedly inspired Charlotte to what would have been a remarkable upset. Only two other Hornets players finished with double figures as Charlotte fell to 14-48 to remain one place off the bottom of the table. Cleveland coach Kenny Atkinson said his team's determination to dig out victory augured well for the looming playoff campaign. "Thirteen in a row -- I think yes, we're in a good groove," Atkinson said. "We've had to scratch and claw these last couple of games, which is great for play-off prep -- playing in some tight games and having to execute at the end of the game."

## Salah fires Liverpool 16 points clear, Forest beat Man City

LONDON (AFP): Premier League leaders Liverpool needed two Mohamed Salah penalties to beat bottom-of-the-table Southampton 3-1 on Saturday, while Nottingham Forest took a giant step towards the Champions League with a 1-0 win over Manchester City.

Liverpool stretched their lead at the top to a massive 16 points, despite a sloppy first 45 minutes. Fresh from a smash-and-grab 1-0 Champions League victory over Paris Saint-Germain, Liverpool boss Arne Slot made just three changes.

However, the Dutchman was forced into making three half-time alterations to kickstart the champions-elect. Southampton have taken just nine points from 28 games all season, but stunned Anfield when Will Smallbone fired the visitors in front in first-half stoppage time. Alisson Becker was Liverpool's hero at the Parc des Princes on Wednesday but the Brazilian and Virgil van Dijk got in each other's way to allow Smallbone to roll into an unguarded net.

Slot turned to Harvey Elliott, Alexis MacAllister and Andy Robertson at the break, and the changes had the desired effect with two goals in three minutes

before the hour mark.

Darwin Nunez levelled with a sharp near-post finish from Luis Diaz's cross. Nunez was then upended inside the area and Salah converted from the spot. The Egyptian slotted home a second penalty two minutes from time to take his tally for the season to 32 goals.

Second-placed Arsenal have two games in hand on the leaders, the first of which comes away to Manchester United on Sunday. But it appears a matter of when not if Liverpool will clinch just their second league title in 35 years.

City felled at Forest Forest pulled four points clear of City in third thanks to Callum Hudson-Odoi's late winner at the City Ground. The former Chelsea winger fired past Ederson on 83 minutes from Morgan Gibbs-White's pass to spark jubilant scenes of celebration as Forest beat the English champions for the first time since 1997. Two-time European champions, Forest have not experienced the continent's top competition since 1980.

But they are closing in on the Champions League with a top-five finish almost certain to be enough

thanks to the strong performance of English teams in Europe this season.

"We are not here to joke", Hudson-Odoi posted on social media. "Goal, MOTM (man-of-the-match), three points!" City remain fourth and are looking over their shoulders after a ninth league defeat of the season. Pep Guardiola's men are likely to be overtaken by Chelsea, when they host struggling Leicester on Sunday.

Crystal Palace shrugged off the loss of top scorer Jean-Philippe Mateta to a serious ear injury to beat Ipswich 1-0 thanks to Ismaila Sarr's winner.

The Eagles have won nine of their last 11 games in all competitions and climb to 11th. Brighton boosted their own Champions League hopes courtesy of Joao Pedro's 98th-minute penalty to beat Fulham 2-1. Raul Jimenez's spectacular strike opened the scoring for Fulham, but Jean Paul van Hecke levelled before half-time. Pedro's spot-kick lifts the Seagulls to sixth and within one point of City. Aston Villa travel to Brentford and Wolves host Everton on Saturday's later kick-offs.



DUBAI: Kane Williamson tunes up for the Champions Trophy final.

## Santner wants New Zealand to keep 'open mind' for CT final

DUBAI (AFP): New Zealand captain Mitchell Santner said on Saturday mid-match communications and adaptability regarding the pitch in this weekend's Champions Trophy final against India could be key to success.

Sunday's final in Dubai will decide the winner of the eight-nation tournament played in Pakistan and the United Arab Emirates.

India have played all their matches in Dubai after they refused to tour hosts Pakistan due to political tensions and come in the title clash unbeaten in four matches. The pitches have been vastly different in the two countries. Pakistan tracks produced big totals, in contrast to the slow and turning decks of the Dubai stadium.

"I think we have to kind of go in with an open mind of how the pitch will play, and then adjust accordingly," Santner told reporters.

"Get those communications back to the groups, what you think a good score is. Yeah, I think we obviously, it could be a 300 wicket, we don't know I guess yet, but it could also be a 250 kind of winning score."

"So, I think there will be periods throughout this

game on both sides where you're under pressure for a period of time. But if you can kind of withstand that and get through, it might get easier," he added.

The highest total at Dubai in this 50-over tournament was Australia's 264 in the semi-final and India overhauled the score with 11 balls to spare. New Zealand went down to India by 44 runs in the last group meeting at the venue where the Black Caps restricted the opposition to 249 before being dismissed for 205. "We'll learn from that," said Santner. "We know India are probably going to go in with the same team. So, I think we have to be ready and be adaptable for what's coming."

"Third time lucky"

India have played four spinners in their last two matches on a sluggish pitch that has aided slow bowlers. India's Varun Chakravathy returned figures of 5-42 with his mystery spin -- lot of variations -- and remains a potent threat in the final. "He's obviously a world-class bowler we've seen it here and obviously in the IPL and that little bit of mystery," said left-arm spinner Santner.

"But it was the first time

some of the guys have been facing him. I think they'll learn from the other day. If the pitch plays a similar way, it's going to be a challenge along with all three of their other spinners."

The tournament's tangled schedule, with teams flying in and out of the UAE from Pakistan while India have stayed put, has been hugely controversial.

New Zealand beat South Africa in the semi-final in Lahore and flew back to Dubai. "I think it was a bit of a shock," Santner said on the temperature in the two cities. "Jumped up 10 degrees in the last four days for us. But I think, obviously, coming off a semi-final win, the guys are in pretty good spirits."

Fast bowler Matt Henry is racing against time to recover for the final after he landed awkwardly on his right shoulder while fielding in the semi-final. "Matt's going to have a bowl just to see how he is," said Santner. "Yeah and then I guess we'll make a call after that." New Zealand will be looking to win the tournament for the second time, having done so in 2000 when they beat India in the final.



LIVERPOOL: Mohamed Salah of Liverpool celebrates scoring his team's third goal during the Premier League match between Liverpool FC and Southampton FC.

## Brignone dominates giant slalom to close in on WC title

ÅRE (AFP): Federica Brignone won the giant slalom in Are, Sweden, on Saturday, to extend her lead over Lara Gut-Behrami in the race for the overall World Cup crystal globe.

The 34-year-old Italian was fastest in both runs for a combined time of 1min 52.67sec and an emphatic 1.36sec margin over New Zealander Alice Robinson.

Lara Colturi, who skis for Albania, was third at 1.43sec. "I really like Are, it's one of my favourite giants," said Brignone.

"It was a bit slippery so I tried to push all the way to the finish. I made a little mistake and I thought it was over but I gave it my all and in the end it was another fantastic day."

Brignone, who won the giant slalom world title in Saalbach, Austria, last month, claimed her ninth World Cup victory of the season. The Italian, who collected the large crystal globe in 2020, also benefited from a poor showing by her main rival in the overall standings as Gut-Behrami could only finish ninth, 2.52sec behind the winner.

Brignone now leads the Swiss star by 322 points in the overall standings.

The women race a slalom in Are on Sunday. Brignone could clinch the overall title in La Thuile, Italy, next weekend, with a downhill and two super-Gs scheduled. The season then ends with four races in the March 20-27 finals in Sun Valley, Idaho.

Brignone also trimmed Robinson's lead in the giant slalom standings to 20 points with the final giant of the season, to be contested in Sun Valley at the end of March.

"It's a great battle," said Brignone.

"She (Robinson) has been on the podium in every race. She's a fantastic skier. I'm happy to be fighting for this with a great skier."

American star Mikaela Shiffrin, who is battling back from an abdominal puncture but reached a World Cup century of victories last month, skied out early in the first run.

Shiffrin admitted at the beginning of February that she was suffering from "mental trauma and post-traumatic stress" after her crash in Killington at the end of November, but Sunday's slalom may be more to her liking as she aims for a 101st World Cup victory.

## Unfinished business for India in Champions Trophy final, says Gill

DUBAI (AFP): India's Shubman Gill on Saturday said the team will look to win the Champions Trophy final against New Zealand to get over their 2023 ODI World Cup title defeat.

The final on Sunday in Dubai will decide the winner of the eight-nation tournament played in Pakistan and the United Arab Emirates.

"I am quite excited," vice-captain Gill told reporters. "My second ICC event for team India and second final. The last time which we couldn't do, we will try to do it this time."

India went down to Australia in the 50-over World Cup final in November 2023 on home soil in Ahmedabad in a heartbreaking defeat for the team, which had come into the title clash unbeaten.

However, Rohit Sharma's team eased the heartache of fans a few months later when they lifted the 2024 T20 World Cup title -- India's first victory in a major global event since the 2013 Champions Trophy.

Gill, who was not part of the T20 triumph, said the ICC title in Barbados allows the team to go into Sunday's final without any

baggage. "It's also about once you get one title that kind of breaks the jinx and then it gives you the momentum and also you are not desperate about getting the title," said Gill.

"Winning the title in 2024 doesn't mean that we are less hungry, but it kind of gives us more balance that we have won an ICC title and we will try to do our best to win this one."

India come into the title clash unbeaten in four matches after they went past Australia in the semi-final to eye a third Champions Trophy crown. Rohit retirement can wait

India have played all their matches in Dubai after they refused to tour hosts Pakistan due to political tensions. Gill said the importance of a final does come into the equation when they walk out but a champion team knows how to handle pressure.

"The big-match pressure is always there," said Gill.

"This is the reason why we talk about big teams of previous years, including West Indies and Australia. Those teams played their best cricket in knock-outs. Easier said than done, but

good teams play their best cricket under pressure."

Virat Kohli has been in top form as he hit an unbeaten 100 against arch-rivals Pakistan in a group game and hit 84 in another successful chase in the semi-final. Rohit has been slammed for not converting his starts into bigger scores, but his quick cameos have nonetheless allowed the team to build totals.

Gill, who opens with Rohit, said India's batting depth has allowed the top-order to bat freely. "I think this is the best batting lineup that I have been part of," said Gill. "Rohit, Virat, I think all-time one-day greats. Rohit one of the best openers in white-ball and Virat one of the best ODI batsmen ever."

He added: "The depth in our batting makes the work easier for batsmen at the top and you tend to play freely because of the depth." Whilst Indian media continue to speculate on Rohit's retirement, Gill said there has been no talk about it in the dressing room. "The discussion has been around the final," said Gill. "I don't think even Rohit is thinking about it too much."

## Ravi Shastri hints at unexpected change in India XI for CT final

NEW DELHI (Agencies): As India gear up for the much-anticipated Champions Trophy 2025 final against New Zealand in Dubai, the side's former head coach Ravi Shastri has surprisingly suggested that a change in India's playing XI could be on the cards.

While he didn't go into further details on who can potentially sit out, Shastri explained the reason: the pitch conditions, he believes, will play a crucial role in determining the final line-up.

India played with the same XI in the semi-final against Australia that also defeated New Zealand earlier in the competition, with Varun Chakravathy running through the Kiwi batting order in his first match of the tournament. The spinner picked a five-wicket haul, which ensured his place for the knock-out match on Tuesday.

"I won't be surprised if there might be a change for either side depending on the

pitch," Shastri told The ICC Review. "Because the pitch we saw against Australia was the best pitch we've seen in the tournament." Shastri further emphasized that with ample time for pitch preparation, teams might reconsider their strategies.

"So, the groundsman has another five days since the last game to prepare a surface and if it's a 280-300 surface like the last one was, you might just want to think about it. But you won't tinker with the side unless necessary," said Shastri.

Shastri also weighed in on potential Player of the Match candidates, highlighting the impact of all-rounders. "Player of the Match, I would go for an all-rounder," he noted.

"I'll say Axar Patel or Ravindra Jadeja from India. From New Zealand, I think that Glenn Phillips has something up. He might just show flashes of brilliance in the field. He might come and smash a cameo of 40, 50

runs and probably surprise you by taking a wicket or two." Shastri also singled out Virat Kohli, Kane Williamson, and Rachin Ravindra as the players who could have the biggest impact in the final.

"Now (on) current form, Kohli. When these guys get hot and you let them get their first 10 runs, then they're trouble. Whether it's Williamson, whether it's Kohli," he said.

"So, from New Zealand, I would say Williamson. To an extent, Rachin Ravindra, he is a fabulous young player. But these guys when they smell the coffee and you let them, in a final, get to that 10-15, then they're doubly dangerous."

With India heading into the final as slight favourites, Shastri acknowledged New Zealand's potential to spring a surprise. "If there's one team that can beat India, it's New Zealand," he remarked. "So, India start as favourites but only just."

## Pogacar remounts after fall and charges to Strade Bianche win

SIENA (AFP): Slovenia's Tadej Pogacar won the Strade Bianche on Saturday for the third time in his career, after recovering from a fall 50km from the finish.

Pogacar of Team UAE topped the podium by 1min 24sec ahead of Briton Tom Pidcock, with Belgium's Tim Wellens a further 48sec adrift. After victory in the Tuscan one-day race in 2022 and 2024, 26-year-old Pogacar now equals Swiss rider Fabian Cancellara's record of three victories in the Strade Bianche.

"Pretty good race today. The race was super fast. It was a really strong breakaway and our guys did super amazing work in the front," said Pogacar who completed the 213km race

in 5hr 13mins and 58secs.

"We just went fast and it was a really hard race." After falling off his bike at a corner on a descent, Pogacar displayed several cuts to his body with blood notably visible on his left shoulder.

"I enjoyed it until I crossed the finish line. Now I'm in adrenaline wear-off and I start to feel a lot of pain," said the reigning world champion and Tour de France winner. "Not the best way to win a race, but a win is a win. Let's hope it's nothing worse than it looks and all should be fine." "I went too fast I guess. I know this road very well. I rode it already 20 times in my life," added Pogacar, who had been leading at the time of his fall.

"For a moment I didn't know if I was OK. The bike was not working so I had to change the bike. "I was a bit worried because when you crash the body takes a lot from you. But still I had enough to finish it off."

Pogacar saw his rear wheel give way and ended up in a ditch after a spectacular spin. But the three-time Tour de France champion quickly got up and resumed the race, with his jersey and shorts ripped. He then found himself 32 seconds behind Team Q36.5's Pidcock, but after a change of bike, he finally caught up with the 2023 winner 45km from the finish in Siena, after Pidcock had sportingly stopped to wait for him.

"Of course I waited" "When he crashed, of

course, I carried on. I didn't know what was happening, but then he was back on his bike, he was coming back, so of course I waited," said Paris 2024 Olympic mountain bike gold medalist Pidcock.

"He's a competitor, he's a world champion, you respect that, you wait, regardless of whether he's a world champion or not. "You know, he made a mistake. This is not how you take advantage in a race."

Pogacar dropped Pidcock at 18.8km thanks to a lightning-fast acceleration on one of the last difficulties, the Colle Pinzuto. "Of course I wanted to try and win. I think I did a good performance, let's be honest, I came pretty close," said Pidcock.

"But he (Pogacar) was still



too strong in this last attack of his. I'm happy, but at the same time, of course, disappointed." Pogacar will have to put any lingering pain from the fall swiftly behind him as his schedule starts to heat up, with

Milan-San Remo two weeks away on March 22.

Alongside Paris-Roubaix, it is one of the two Monuments that the Slovenian has yet to win and is his main objective at the start of this 2025 season.





## In brief

### NADRA appeals for cancellation of CNICs

ISLAMABAD (APP): Despite the registration of 7 million deaths in union councils, their ID cards have not been canceled in NADRA's records. Whereas canceling the ID cards of deceased individuals with NADRA is a legal requirement.

A deceased person's son, daughter, spouse, or parents can cancel their ID card at any NADRA center free of charge. NADRA is sending SMS notifications to citizens using the available mobile numbers for awareness. Failure to cancel a deceased person's ID card may cause difficulties for their son, daughter, spouse, or parents in processing their own identity documents with NADRA. If the death registration is incorrect, get the record corrected by the relevant union council secretary.

### Drug supplier jailed for 9 years

RAWALPINDI (APP): A court on Saturday sentenced a drug supplier, Jalal Shah for 9 years along with a fine of Rs. 80,000. According to the details, the Wah Cantt Police arrested the criminal in December 2024 after 1 kg and 700 grams of hashish was recovered from him. In view of solid evidence and effective prosecution, the court sentenced the criminal for the imprisonment and financial penalty CPO Syed Khalid Hamdani while appreciating SSP Investigation and legal teams, said that full scaled operations were underway against drug suppliers to eradicate the scourge of drugs.

### Police nab 7 outlaws

RAWALPINDI (APP): The Rawalpindi Police during actions across the district on Saturday held seven outlaws, including illegal arm owners, a liquor supplier and a kite seller. According to the police spokesman, the Sadiqabad Police nabbed two accused Atif and Rameez recovering a 30-bore pistol with ammunition each from them. Similarly, the Ganjmandi and Wah Cantt Police also recovered a 30-bore pistol each from accused Hayatullah and Gulfriz respectively. Likewise, the Morgah Police arrested the accused Hamza with a knife, while the Rawat Police recovered 10 litres of liquor from the accused Shahzeb. Meanwhile, the Waris Khan Police held the accused Noman with 10 kites and strings.

### PAC organized poster exhibition

RAWALPINDI (APP): Punjab Arts Council (PAC) Rawalpindi organized a grand poster exhibition on the occasion of International Women's Day. Naheed Manzoor was the chief guest at the exhibition. Director PAC, Sajjad Hussain, Deputy Director Muhammad Shakoor, and Assistant Director Muhammad Suleman were also present at the exhibition. Various artworks depicting themes such as women's empowerment, education, equal rights, the prevention of violence against women, and their contributions to society were showcased in the exhibition. Renowned and emerging artists paid tribute to the courage, resilience, and sacrifices of women through their creative works. Speaking at the event, Naheed Manzoor emphasized that women are the backbone of any society's progress, and acknowledging their talents is essential for development. She appreciated the efforts of the Punjab Arts Council, stating that such events play a crucial role in encouraging women.



ISLAMABAD: A view of Ramzan Relief Package Sugar stall in sasta Ramzan Bazar G-6 in the Federal Capital. —APP Photo

## Chairman Senate commends women's contributions on International Women's Day

ISLAMABAD (APP): Chairman Senate Syed Yousaf Raza Gilani on Saturday acknowledged and commended the unwavering spirit, extraordinary contributions, resilience, and indomitable courage of women, describing them as the true architects of the nation's progress.

In his message on International Women's Day, he highlighted the diverse roles played by Pakistani women across various fields, stating, "From mustard fields and cotton farms to top corporate boardrooms, from classrooms to the armed forces and law enforcement, and from community and political leadership to groundbreaking innovations in science and technology, Pakistani women continue to break stereotypes, shatter ceilings, redefine norms, and inspire generations in shaping a better future."

As a steadfast advocate for gender equality, Gilani said that a society's

greatness is measured by how it empowers its women.

"Today, we celebrate trailblazers like Mohtarma Fatima Jinnah and all the women who led from the front in our independence movement, whose unwavering resolve shaped our history. We also pay tribute to former Prime Minister Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto, whose legacy of leadership continues to light the path forward," he added.

He stressed that acknowledging women's contributions should go beyond celebration and translate into concrete action. "While Pakistan has made significant strides in women's education, healthcare, and political participation, systemic barriers persist. Gender-based violence, economic disparities, and unequal access to opportunities remain critical challenges. Let me reaffirm my commitment, and that of the Senate, to dis-

mantling these obstacles through progressive legislation, rigorous oversight, and accountability to ensure inclusive policies. The House of Federation stands committed to amplifying efforts to safeguard every woman's right to safety, dignity, and self-determination."

Addressing the women of Pakistan, Gilani said, "To the mothers, daughters, sisters, innovators, educators, and leaders: Your strength is Pakistan's strength. Your dreams are our nation's blueprint.

This Women's Day, "Let us 'Accelerate Action for Gender Equality' and pledge to build a Pakistan where no woman is left unheard, no potential unfulfilled, and no right denied. Empowered women empower nations. Together, let us forge a future where equality is non-negotiable, justice is uncompromised, and every girl's ambition knows no bounds."

## Ministry enhances Hajj facilities, digital services under new policy

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Ministry of Religious Affairs and Interfaith Harmony (MORAIH) continues its efforts to enhance Hajj arrangements and promote interfaith harmony across the nation, ensuring pilgrims can perform their religious duties with ease.

Under the Rules of Business 1973, the ministry coordinates with various organizations in Saudi Arabia and Pakistan to improve Hajj facilities while also working towards fostering mutual respect, peaceful coexistence, and protecting minority rights as outlined in the Constitution. It is also engaged in Islamic studies, organizing seminars, ensuring accurate Quran printing, and facilitating international cooperation on religious matters.

The government has established a Minority Welfare Fund to support marginalized communities, offering financial assistance to those in need and providing funding for the maintenance and repair of religious sites. Scholarships are extended to minority students, while initiatives such as the promotion of Seerat-un-Nabi (Peace Be Upon Him), sectarian harmony, error-free Quran printing, and raising awareness about the sanctity of sacred texts remain a key focus. Additionally, the ministry addresses Ruet-e-Hilal matters and monitors digital platforms, reporting blasphemous, anti-Islamic, and sectarian content.

In 2024, the ministry successfully organized the National Seerat Competition, awarding Rs. 3.5 million in cash prizes. A Seerat-un-Nabi Conference was held on 12th Rabi-ul-Awwal, attended by senior government officials, with the deputy prime minister and chairman Senate presenting awards to winners of the Seerat Book Competition. A nationwide Millaad-un-Nabi celebration featured various activities in educational institutions, and prize-winning articles on economic stability based on the

Holy Prophet's (Peace Be Upon Him) teachings were distributed in libraries.

A significant initiative launched by the ministry includes the establishment of a recycling plant for the proper disposal of damaged Quranic pages. Efforts to promote sectarian harmony were highlighted through the observance of "Tahaffuz-e-Namooos-e-Risalat" and awareness campaigns on health and nutrition. Recommendations for civil awards were put forth for religious scholars and members of minority communities. The ministry also addressed religiously objectionable content via its e-portal, reporting 16,634 links in 2024. Regular meetings of the Ruet-e-Hilal committees were conducted to ensure moon sighting for key religious events. The ministry has been allocated a total budget of Rs. 1.83 billion for the current financial year, with an expenditure of Rs. 582.12 million incurred by December 31, 2024, across all departmental heads and subordinate units, accounting for 32 percent of the total budget.

During Hajj 2024, the ministry provided extensive support to pilgrims, ensuring quality accommodation, catering services, and transportation. Reception offices were established at Jeddah and Madinah airports, along with medical facilities in Makkah, Madinah, and Jeddah, offering 24/7 assistance. Special provisions were made for the elderly, sick, and children, with lost-and-found services in place. Zamzam water bottles were distributed, while low-cost Hajj options and digital solutions, including a mobile app for updates and complaint redressal, were introduced. Under the Government Hajj Scheme, 68,804 pilgrims received training, vaccination, and travel gifts. Compensation and refunds were also processed for families of deceased pilgrims, and 1,200 welfare staff were deployed to facilitate smooth operations.

## Friends of Palestine Director General meets KP Governor

ISLAMABAD (APP): Friends of Palestine Director General Dr. Bilal Al Astal met with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Governor Faisal Karim Kundi at the Governor House in Islamabad. Dr. Bilal Astal, who hails from Khan Yunis, Gaza, and holds a doctorate in Media Studies, emphasized Pakistan's unwavering support for the Palestinian cause during the meeting.

Speaking on the occasion, Dr. Astal acknowledged that all Pakistani political parties have historically backed the Palestinian cause, but he highlighted the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) as having a distinct and exceptional stance. He said the deep connection between Shaheed Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto and Yasser Arafat, whose late Prime Minister

Benazir Bhutto even regarded Arafat as an uncle.

Expressing dissatisfaction with the role of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) in addressing the Palestinian crisis, Dr. Astal pointed out the dire conditions faced by thousands of Palestinian prisoners languishing in prison. He urged Arab nations, particularly Pakistan, to exert pressure on the OIC to take concrete steps toward resolving the issue.

Dr. Astal also raised concerns over reports of 4,000 Indian soldiers allegedly assisting Israel, saying that Israel continues to expand its illegal occupation of Palestinian land. He warned that only 18 percent of historic Palestine remains in Palestinian hands today and called on Muslim nations to

press for the withdrawal of occupying Israeli forces.

Governor Faisal Karim Kundi, in his remarks, condemned the ongoing food shortages and human rights violations in Palestine, calling them deeply distressing. He reaffirmed that the people of Pakistan hold a unified stance on the issues of both Palestine and Kashmir.

The Governor stressed that the leadership of the Pakistan Peoples Party, including former President Asif Ali Zardari and Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, has always maintained a clear and firm position in support of these causes. He further urged the Muslim Ummah to unite in advocating for the resolution of both the Palestinian and Kashmiri conflicts.

## ICT admin arrests 109 for price violations

ISLAMABAD (APP): Islamabad's district administration has intensified its campaign against overpricing and hoarding during Ramadan, arresting 109 individuals, imposing fines exceeding Rs. 174,000, and registering 10 criminal cases in the sixth day of operations.

The spokesman of ICT administration disclosed details of its sixth-day Ramadan enforcement drive, targeting shops and vendors accused of selling essential goods above government-mandated rates.

A total of 606 inspections were conducted across markets, resulting in fines totaling Rs. 174,000 for violations of the official price list.

Authorities arrested 109 individuals for illegal profiteering, including eight detained after residents filed complaints via the DC Helpline. Ten cases were also registered against businesses accused of exploiting consumers under the guise of inflation.

On the occasion, Deputy Commissioner (DC) Islamabad, Irfan Nawaz Memon emphasized that hoarding and price manipulation would not be tolerated. "Our priority is to ensure relief for citizens during Ramadan. No one will be allowed to exploit the public," he said.

He urged residents to cross-check prices against the official rate list and report discrepancies immediately.

The crackdown extended beyond price controls. Assistant commissioners penalized multiple vendors for using banned plastic bags, part of a broader environmental enforcement effort.

Memon reiterated that the administration's teams are operating round-the-clock to monitor markets and respond to complaints. "We are committed to strict oversight. Citizens must inform us via the helpline if they face overcharging," he added.

Meanwhile, the district administration urged residents to contact the 24/7 DC Helpline (phone number) to report overpricing, hoarding, or plastic bag usage. Officials confirmed all complaints would be investigated promptly.

## ANF recovers over 43 kg drugs; arrests five suspects

RAWALPINDI (APP): Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF) while conducting 8 operations across the country managed to recover over 43 kg drugs worth more than Rs 14.1 million and arrested 5 suspects, said an ANF Headquarters spokesman on Saturday.

He informed that 248 grams heroin was recovered from a parcel sent to the UK through a courier office in Lahore. 45 grams heroin was recovered from a parcel sent to Kuwait through a courier office in Rawalpindi.

30 kg hashish hidden in a vehicle's secret cavities was recovered near Charsadda Interchange in Peshawar and an accused was arrested. 4 kg heroin concealed in a vehicle near M-1 Motorway, Islamabad was recovered and an accused was arrested during the operation.

3.6 kg hashish was recovered from a vehicle intercepted near Iqbal Shaheed Toll Plaza, GT Road, Attock and an accused was rounded up.

1.2 kg opium and 2.4 kg hashish were recovered from the possession of an accused netted near M-1 Motorway Toll Plaza, Islamabad.

In 7th operation, 1.7 kg heroin was recovered from a suspicious parcel at the Lahore Railway Station.

The spokesman informed that in 8th operation, 350 grams weed hidden in a vehicle was recovered in the Winder area of Hub and a suspect was arrested.

Cases have been registered against the arrested suspects under the Narcotics Control Act and further investigations are under process.

## RDA seals over 30 properties on Defence Road

RAWALPINDI (APP): Rawalpindi Development Authority (RDA) launching an anti-encroachment operation here on Saturday removed/demolished encroachments on Defence Road.

The RDA spokesman said that RDA Enforcement Squad conducted grand anti-encroachment operation on the directives of Director General RDA, Kinza Murtaza and removed sheds, ramps, other encroachments and sealed over 30 properties, including structures, shops, and buildings, that were obstructing road access.

The initiative is part of a broader effort to restore order and improve both pedestrian safety and vehicular movement along the road.

The DG said that the operation was conducted according to the vision of Chief Minister Punjab, Maryam Nawaz Sharif, who had issued a zero-tolerance policy on encroachments.

Kinza Murtaza said the removal of these encroachments is essential for ensuring smooth flow of traffic and providing a safer environment for the road users.

Further, the DG outlined that this operation is just the beginning of an ongoing effort to improve Rawalpindi's infrastructure.

Encroachments not only contribute to traffic congestion but also pose significant safety hazards. Such operations are crucial to restore accessible and safe streets for the residents, she added.

In line with the city's urban development strategy, the RDA has planned to conduct similar operations across Rawalpindi.

The operations are aimed at optimizing infrastructure and improving the quality of life for all citizens. The DG RDA urged the citizens to cooperate with the authorities concerned in maintaining encroachment-free zones to ensure that Rawalpindi's streets remain safe, accessible, and congestion-free.

Director Land, Ghazanfar Ali Awan, Building Surveyor, Aamir Mahmood Malik and other RDA staff took part in the operation.

## Gender equality key to Climate action and sustainability: Romina

ISLAMABAD (PPI): Coordinator to the Prime Minister for Climate Change, Romina Khurshid Alam, has emphasized the critical connection between gender equality and environmental sustainability, asserting that empowering women is essential for a sustainable future.

According to a PID statement today, Romina highlighted the significant role women play in driving environmental change, underscoring their importance in achieving green solutions and fostering a more sustainable world. She stated that as the world observes International Women's Day, it is an opportunity to celebrate the achievements, resilience, and determination of women globally. She stressed that women are central to shaping societies and economies, especially in addressing climate change.

"I am proud to reflect on the vital contributions women make in the fight against climate change, both in Pakistan and across the globe," remarked Romina Alam. This year's International Women's Day theme, "Accelerate Action," urges swift progress toward gender equality, focusing on strategies that enhance women's access to education, employment, and leadership roles.

She explained that climate change disproportionately affects women, particularly in vulnerable communities. From extreme weather events such as floods, droughts, and heatwaves to challenges related to food security and access to clean water, women are often on the frontlines of climate change's devastating impacts. However, they are also leading efforts to find solutions, advocate for poli-

cy changes, and transform their communities into more resilient and sustainable environments.

"I take pride in being part of a government that recognizes the role of women in climate action and is committed to empowering them to drive change. Women's leadership in climate resilience and sustainable development is crucial to achieving our climate goals," she added.

Romina highlighted that in Pakistan, women are actively involved in climate adaptation and mitigation efforts. They manage community resources, advocate for gender-sensitive policies, and develop innovative solutions to environmental challenges. She pointed out that rural women are at the forefront of water conservation initiatives, promoting efficient water management practices, and creating alternative, sustainable livelihoods.

"In extreme weather conditions, women play a vital role in ensuring the safety and well-being of their families, particularly children and the elderly," she noted. She stressed the importance of amplifying women's voices in climate discussions, ensuring that their perspectives are integrated into all stages of climate policy, from planning to implementation.

The Government of Pakistan, she said, is committed to incorporating gender-responsive approaches into its climate strategies. This includes prioritizing women's participation in climate governance and expanding access to climate finance for women-led initiatives. Programs like the Women's Empowerment in Climate Change Adaptation Program are equipping women with the skills and resources needed to lead climate action

within their communities.

She added that the Ministry of Climate Change is actively collaborating with international organizations and local partners to ensure women remain at the forefront of climate resilience and sustainability efforts. Recognizing the global contributions of women in climate action, she acknowledged the leadership of Indigenous women in forest conservation and young female activists advocating for climate justice.

Romina emphasized that gender equality is essential to achieving climate justice and called for the elimination of barriers that prevent women's full participation in climate action. She stressed the need to address challenges such as access to education, healthcare, and economic resources, while also ensuring women's safety from violence and discrimination.

On International Women's Day, she urged a renewed commitment to gender equality in climate action, emphasizing that women should be given the tools and support needed to lead sustainable change. "The future of our planet depends on the leadership, innovation, and determination of women. Together, we can build a world where women are not just survivors of climate change but leaders of the climate movement," she concluded.

Romina expressed deep admiration for the women of Pakistan and the world, acknowledging their commitment to climate action. She stated that empowering women in the Global South—through education, access to resources, and leadership roles—can significantly enhance both mitigation and adaptation efforts, fostering stronger, more resilient communities.









QUETTA: Afghan citizens going back to country via Chaman Border.

## Sharjeel: Women role vital for development

### F.P. Report

KARACHI: Sindh's Senior Minister, Sharjeel Inam Memon, has said that we salute all the women who are playing a vital role in the development, stability, and prosperity of society and the country. The leadership of the Pakistan People's Party has always prioritized women's rights and their protection, and the Sindh government is committed to providing equal rights and opportunities to women in accordance with the party's manifesto.

In his special message on International Women's Day, Sindh's Senior Minister and Provincial Minister for Information, Transport, and Mass Transit, Sharjeel Inam Memon, stated that the Sindh government has taken practical steps to empower women in line with the vision of Shaheed

Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto. In this regard, Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari is granting women titles to houses under the world's largest housing scheme SPHF. He further said that Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto had introduced the Lady Health Workers Program to provide basic healthcare facilities to women, which continues to serve millions of women and children today.

Senior Minister Sharjeel Inam Memon stated that President Asif Ali Zardari launched the Benazir Income Support Program to provide financial assistance to millions of needy women.

Similarly, under the historic policy of distributing land to landless farmers, women farmers are also being given land to become economically independent. He emphasized that, for the first time in Pakistan, the

establishment of girls' cadet colleges in Larkana and Shaheed Benazirabad is proof that we are providing equal educational opportunities to women.

He further mentioned that the Pink Bus Service has been launched to allow women to continue their daily activities without fear. Additionally, the Sindh government is introducing a scheme to provide free EV scooters to deserving and hardworking women.

Senior Minister Sharjeel Inam Memon stated that empowering women was Shaheed Benazir Bhutto's vision, and under the leadership of President Asif Ali Zardari and Chairman Bilawal Bhutto, this vision is being carried forward. The Sindh government will continue its efforts to protect women's rights so that they can progress in every field.

## President resolves to advance women's rights

### F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: President Asif Ali Zardari has said that Pakistan was committed to advancing women's rights in line with its constitutional provisions and international commitments. In a message on International Women's Day, celebrated on March 8, he said, "Today, Pakistan joins the world in celebrating International Women's Day to highlight women's resilience and their contributions to shaping societies and driving progress."

This year's theme, "For All Women and Girls: Rights. Equality. Empowerment," reinforced the need for collective action to ensure that every woman and girl had equal access to rights and opportunities, he added. The President said, "Women constitute almost half of our population and empowering them is essential for our national progress. Societies that provide equal rights and opportunities for women are more prosperous, peaceful, and resilient.

When women are given access to education, economic opportunities, and leadership roles, entire communities benefit, he said. Unfortunately, many women still have to face violence, discrimination, and barriers to their full participation in society, he added. He said, "Over the years, we have taken key steps, including the enactment of laws against domestic violence, workplace harassment, and gender-based discrimination. Similarly, specialised courts and helplines for survivors of gender-based violence have strengthened protections. Pakistan has taken steps to increase women's representation in politics, judiciary, law enforcement, and public institutions, besides undertaking economic initiatives to promote financial inclusion, entrepreneurship, and digital literacy for women."

He said, "We should ensure an inclusive and equitable society and take more steps to further improve policies to support women's safety, education, and economic independence. Our businesses and private sector should also provide equal opportunities, fair wages, and safe workplaces for women."

## Pak-BD agree to enhance ties

JEDDAH: Pakistan and Bangladesh have agreed to enhance bilateral cooperation in all areas of mutual interest.

The understanding was reached during a meeting between Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Mohammad Ishaq Dar and Advisor for Foreign Affairs of Bangladesh, Md. Touhid Hossain, on the sidelines of the Extraordinary Session of the OIC Council of Foreign Ministers in Jeddah.

This was their second meeting in less than five months. The meeting took place in a cordial environment, reflecting the fraternal sentiments from both sides. Both the dignitaries expressed satisfaction over the upward trajectory of bilateral relations. They agreed to enhance bilateral cooperation in all areas of mutual interest. The Deputy Prime Minister highlighted the two countries' historical, religious, and cultural linkages. — Agencies

# Gilani ends boycott as PTI's Aon Abbas Bappi produced in Senate

### F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Senate Chairman Yousaf Raza Gilani has ended the self-imposed boycott of the Upper House of the Parliament after his production orders for two lawmakers were partially implemented on Saturday.

At last on the production order of Gilani, PTI Senator Aon Abbas Bappi was taken to the Parliament on Saturday and handed over to the sergeant-at-arms amid tight security. Later, the legislator attended the House proceedings. Following the production of the PTI senator, Gilani, too, ended the boycott of the Senate session.

The Senate chairman had not presided over several sessions of the upper House of the parliament in protest against the non-implementation of his order for production of lawmakers. Later, speaking to the media, the senator thanked the House chairman for issuing his production order. "I was brought to the parliament after an eight-hour journey in a daala," he revealed.

Bappi, however, said he would have been more pleased if PTI Senator Ejaz Chaudhry too had been produced in the House, for whom the Senate chairman had also issued pro-

duction order. The senator then walked up to Gilani's chamber and had a meeting with him.

During the session, the chairman, in his ruling on the non-implementation of the production order for Senator Ejaz Chaudhry, said he wielded his powers to issue the order. "But the senator was not produced in the House," he said, adding, "I refer the matter to the Privileges Committee."

Meanwhile, the Senate unanimously passed a resolution recommending the government takes accelerated measures to ensure and enhance women's economic inclusion.

The resolution moved by Senator Sherry Rehman, on the occasion of International Women's Day, called for designing and building infrastructure that meets the needs of women by improving transport safety, workplace child facilities and access to digital and financial resources to support their economic participation.

The resolution demanded that women should be provided with quality education and training by eliminating barriers to schooling and promoting literacy programs. The resolution stated that women should be involved in sustainable agriculture and food security by equipping them

with technical training and ensuring land rights and access to agriculture financing to enhance their role in climate resilience and food sustainability.

The resolution said it must be ensured that women have the right to make healthy choices and not forced to marry while they are underage. It stressed that women should be helped in making informed decisions about their health by reforming healthcare policies, ensuring access to reproductive health services and prioritizing mental and maternal healthcare. The resolution called for ensuring women's access to legal rights and action against gender-based violence and sexual harassment in the workplace.

It demanded elevating participation of women in sports by increasing investment in female athletes. The house also called upon all stakeholders including the government, civil society organizations and private sector to join hands in the collective pursuit of gender equality and women empowerment. At the outset, newly elected Senator Asad Qasim took oath of office. Chairman Senate Syed Yousaf Raza Gilani administered the oath. The house has now been adjourned to meet again on Tuesday at eleven-thirty am.

## KP approaches Centre to declare Koh e Suleman wildlife conservancy

### F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government has reached out to the federal government to declare the entire Koh-e-Suleiman mountain range as a wildlife conservancy.

On the directives of Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur, the KP Forest and Wildlife Department has written an official letter to the Ministry of Environmental Coordination, emphasizing the need for inter-provincial coordination between Punjab, Balochistan, and KP to protect the region's unique biodiversity.

The official letter highlights the

ecological significance of Koh-e-Suleiman, which is home to rare flora and fauna. It underscores that preserving this biodiversity can not only enhance the global recognition of the region but also help mitigate the adverse effects of climate change while ensuring the well-being of local communities.

The letter further reads that the KP government has already undertaken a number of initiatives for the of the Koh-e-Sulaiman area falling within its territorial boundaries. However, given that the Koh-e-Suleiman range transcends across Balochistan and Punjab, a unified strategy involving

all three provinces is essential for the effective protection of its rare wildlife and plant species.

The letter further states that KP's conservation initiatives will be more effective if Punjab and Balochistan implement similar measures. To achieve this end, the KP government has urged the federal government to approach the provincial governments of Punjab and Balochistan to declare the Koh-e-Suleiman range in their respective jurisdictions as transboundary wildlife conservancy with the aim to effectively manage the wildlife across the entire region.

## China hits back at Canada with fresh agriculture tariffs

BEIJING (Reuters): China announced tariffs on over \$2.6 billion worth of Canadian agricultural and food products on Saturday, retaliating against levies Ottawa introduced in October and opening a new front in a trade war largely driven by US President Donald Trump's tariff threats.

The levies, announced by the commerce ministry and scheduled to take effect on March 20, match the 100% and 25% import duties Canada slapped on China-made electric vehicles and steel and aluminum products just over four months ago. By excluding canola, which is also known as rapeseed, and was one of Canada's top exports to the world's No.1 agricultural importer prior to China investigating it for anti-dumping last year, Beijing may be keeping the door open for trade talks.

But the tariffs also serve as a warning shot, analysts say, with the Trump administration having signalled it could ease 25% import levies the White House is threatening Canada and Mexico with if they apply the same extra 20% duty he has slapped on Chinese goods over fentanyl flows. "Canada's measures seriously violate World Trade

Organization rules, constitute a typical act of protectionism and are discriminatory measures that severely harm China's legitimate rights and interests," the commerce ministry said in a statement.

China will apply a 100% tariff to just over \$1 billion of Canadian rapeseed oil, oil cakes and pea imports, and a 25% duty on \$1.6 billion worth of Canadian aquatic products and pork. "The timing may serve as a warning shot," said Dan Wang, China director at Eurasia Group in Singapore. "By striking now, China reminds Canada of the cost of aligning too closely with American trade policy."

China's delayed response (to Ottawa's October tariffs) likely reflects both capacity constraints and strategic signalling," she added. "The commerce ministry is stretched thin, juggling trade disputes with the US and European Union." "Canada, a lower priority, had to wait its turn." The Canadian embassy in Beijing did not immediately respond to a Reuters request for comment. Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said in August that Ottawa was imposing the levies to

## Syria's Sharaa urges Alawites to surrender

DAMASCUS (AFP): Syria's leader Ahmed Al-Sharaa on Friday urged insurgents from ousted president Bashar Assad's Alawite minority to lay down their arms or face the consequences after the fiercest attacks on the war-torn country's new rulers yet.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported that "311 Alawite civilians were killed in the coastal region... by security forces and allied groups" since the clashes began on Thursday. "You attacked all Syrians and made an unforgivable mistake. The riposte has come, and you have not been able to withstand it," Sharaa warned in a speech broadcast on Telegram by the Syrian presidency.

"Lay down your weapons and surrender before it's too late." More than 300 people have been killed since the clashes erupted on Thursday along the country's western coast, which followed other deadly incidents in the area earlier this week, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said.

Restoring security has been one of the most complex tasks for Syria's new authorities, installed after Islamist-led forces ousted Assad in a lightning offensive in December. In his Friday address Sharaa, who headed the Islamist-led coalition which ousted Assad, also vowed to keep working toward "monopolising weapons in the hands of the state."

"There will be no more unregulated weapons," he pledged. Western powers and Syria's neighbors have emphasized the need for unity in the new Syria, which is seeking funds for reconstructing a nation ravaged by years of war under Assad. "The vast majority of the victims were summarily executed by elements affiliated to the Ministry of Defense and the Interior," both under the Islamist-led authorities' control, the rights group announced.

The Observatory and activists released footage showing dozens of bodies in civilian clothing piled in the yard of a house, with blood stains nearby and women wailing. Other videos appeared to show men in military garb shooting people at close range. AFP could not independently verify the images.

## 14 killed in overnight attacks in Ukraine

KYIV: At least 14 people have been killed in overnight attacks on Ukraine's eastern region. Ukraine's emergency service said on Saturday that Russian forces hit the town of Dobropolissia in the eastern Donetsk region, killing 11 people and wounding 30.

Emergency services added that eight five-storey apartment buildings, an administrative building, and 30 cars were damaged. At least three people were killed and seven injured after a Russian drone attack on a civilian building in Bogodukhiv, Kharkiv, in eastern Ukraine, the governor of Kharkiv, Oleh Synehubov, wrote on Telegram.

In Odesa, a drone attack resulted in several fires, which affected a hangar with agricultural equipment, a service station building, an auto parts store, solar panels held in an open area and a four-storey industrial building.

At the same time, Alexander Drozdenko, governor of the Leningrad region, said on Saturday that a tank at the Kiriishi refinery, one of Russia's largest, was damaged by falling debris after a Ukrainian drone was shot down.

The overnight attacks came as Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said he was working with the United States to "accelerate peace". "We will do a lot of work here in Europe, with the US, and in Saudi Arabia – we are preparing a meeting to accelerate peace and strengthen the foundations of security," he wrote on X on Friday night. "Today, intense work with President Trump's team has been ongoing at various levels – numerous calls. The topic is clear – peace as soon as possible, security as reliable as possible. Ukraine is fully committed to a constructive approach."

On Friday, Trump told

reporters that it was "easier" to deal with Russia to secure an end to the three-year-long war than Ukraine, but he had said earlier that he was "strongly considering" sanctions on Russia due to its attacks. Ukrainian Foreign Minister Andrii Sybiha spoke to his US counterpart, Secretary of State Marco Rubio, before the planned Ukraine-US negotiations in Saudi Arabia.

During the call, Sybiha wrote on X on Friday that the two officials discussed the upcoming meeting and ways to "advance our bilateral cooperation". Zelenskyy is expected to arrive in Saudi Arabia on Monday to talk to Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman.

On Tuesday, Ukrainian officials are expected to hold new talks with their US counterparts in the country following a tense televised dispute between Trump and Zelenskyy at the end of February. — Aljazeera

## Police thwart terrorist attack on check post

### F.P. Report

DERA GHAZI KHAN: Dera Ghazi Khan Police have thwarted another attack by terrorists on Lakhani check-post located at the border between Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) during the current week.

Punjab Police's Directorate of Public Relations (DPR) in a statement said that about 15-20 Khwarij terrorists attacked the border checkpoint of Lakhani at Sehri time. The terrorists in smaller groups attacked the checkpoint from all sides, using rocket-launchers and other heavy weapons.

The Punjab police personnel were already on alert as they traced the terrorists' movement with the help of thermal image cameras. The police force used machine-guns and mortar fire to retaliate. Due to effective and timely response from the Punjab police the terrorists failed to come close to the checkpoint and fled away from the scene.

It is necessary to mention here that Punjab police personnel had foiled an attack of Khwarij terrorists on

Lakhani Check Post earlier in the week. The operation was led by Regional Police Officer (RPO) Dera Ghani Khan Capt @ Sajjad Hassan Khan.

During heavy exchange of firing, a contingent of Quick Response Force (QRF) under the supervision of DPO Dera Ghazi Khan Syed Ali rushed to the spot as back-up strategy. Inspector-General of Police Dr Usman Anwar lauded the courage and bravery showed by Punjab Police personnel, saying the police personnel rendered valuable sacrifices in fight against terrorism.

Prior to this attack, the Punjab police had already foiled 19 attacks by Khwarij terrorists. Dr Usman Anwar vowed that these terrorists will be defeated on every field. Dr Usman Anwar said that latest weapons had already been provided to all police personnel who are deputed at border checkpoints.

He said that due to effective response of Punjab police and monitoring round the clock, terrorists will not succeed in their nefarious designs. Punjab police also launched search

operation in areas along border with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa to trace the terrorists.

Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi lauded the Punjab Police for their swift and professional response in repelling a terrorist attack on the Lakhani border checkpoint in Dera Ghazi Khan.

According to Naqvi, the police officers courageously confronted the Kharijite terrorists, forcing them to retreat and preventing any damage. He commended the entire police team for their valor, stating, "The brave sons of Dera Ghazi Khan police have previously thwarted such attacks with unwavering courage."

He further praised Punjab Police for their highly professional handling of the situation, emphasizing that their prompt action crushed the nefarious designs of the terrorists. "I extend my heartfelt congratulations to the entire police team that foiled the evil plans of these terrorists. We take immense pride in the dedication and bravery of Punjab Police," Naqvi added.