

Earthquake hits country
F.P. Report
ISLAMABAD: Parts of Pakistan were hit with 5.6-magnitude earthquake on early Thursday morning. As per details, the earthquake tremors were felt in parts of Punjab, KP. The quake's epicentre was located in the Hindu Kush region of Afghanistan, at a depth of 69 kilometers. Despite the moderate magnitude, the tremors were widely felt across the northern and central parts of Pakistan.

Dismantling Tehran’s nuclear capabilities

US renew pressure on Iran

Julil Afridi

WASHINGTON: Department Spokesperson Tammy Bruce delivered a wide-ranging press briefing Tuesday at the US State Department, emphasizing the Trump administration’s foreign policy priorities, dramatic cuts to international aid programs, and renewed pressure on Iran to dismantle its nuclear capabilities.

Opening with strong remarks against antisemitism, Bruce affirmed US solidarity with Jewish communities globally. “The United States stands with you,” she said, pledging continued efforts to combat rising hate.

A centerpiece of the briefing was the administration’s decision to cancel 139 State Department grants, totaling \$214 million, under the directive of Secretary of State Marco Rubio. Bruce cited two examples of defunded programs: “Building the Migrant Domestic Worker-Led Movement” in Lebanon and “Get the Trolls Out!” in the United Kingdom. “We are cleaning up the mess the previous administration left,” she said, reinforcing a sharp pivot toward the “America First” agenda.

On trade policy, Bruce hailed President Trump’s tariff strategy as a reset of decades of “unfair trade arrangements.” Defending recent aggressive actions, she declared that Trump is the only leader capable of undoing what she described as the “global left’s” economic burden on the United States.

Iran featured prominently in the briefing, with Bruce backing Ambassador Steven Witkoff’s statement that any deal with Iran must be a “Trump deal.” The administration insists Iran must “stop and eliminate its nuclear enrichment and weaponization program.” Despite past ambiguity about permitting a civilian nuclear program, Bruce reiterated that Iran “cannot have a nuclear weapon or an enrichment program.”

Regarding funding for multilateral



organizations, Bruce denied claims that the US is withdrawing from NATO or the United Nations. She reaffirmed Washington’s commitment to NATO but emphasized the need for allies to boost their defense spending. “This is about making NATO stronger,” she said, rejecting concerns of total defunding as “fear-mongering.”

On Middle East issues, Bruce addressed the Palestinian Authority’s alleged outreach to resume US aid by ending the “pay-for-slay” program. Without confirming diplomatic correspondence, Bruce stressed that foreign aid “is not a carrot or a stick” but should align with American values and security.

She also condemned the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) in Sudan for ongoing violence, calling for humanitarian corridors and respect for international law. While she did not reaffirm the previous administration’s genocide designation, Bruce emphasized the urgency of peace talks after two years of conflict. The State Department also confirmed President Bukele of El Salvador’s visit and praised bilateral cooperation on law and order, including the deportation of MS-13 members. As the Trump administration navigates turbulent global affairs, Bruce’s assertive tone reinforced a clear message: America’s foreign policy is being recalibrated—with US strength and accountability as its foundation.

Akhtar Mengal ends Mastung sit-in

F.P. Report

QUETTA: Balochistan National Party (BNP) chief Sardar Akhtar Jan Mengal announced the end of the sit-in at Lakpass during a press conference held in Mastung. While the sit-in has concluded, he made it clear that the protest movement will continue across the province.

Calling the Lakpass incident one that has deeply impacted all of Balochistan, Mengal criticized the government’s heavy-handed response. “On March 28, the authorities blocked the Lakpass route from both sides, restricting people’s movement. All institutions erected barriers to stop our protest,” he stated. He further questioned the democratic credentials of the government, asking, “Is it a

people’s government when all routes are forcibly closed?”

Sardar Akhtar Mengal shared that several delegations visited the protest site and expressed their helplessness. “We called an All Parties Conference (APC), offered our suggestions, and yet nothing meaningful was done,” he added.

Condemning the extrajudicial arrests of women, he announced a long march in response. “This movement will not stop here. Our struggle is for justice,” Mengal declared. He thanked the elders and supporters who stood with them throughout the 20-day protest under harsh conditions, saying, “Despite the dangers and isolation, the people’s participation remained unwavering.” Referring to the broader

political environment, Mengal stated, “The intelligence agencies that help form governments with 47 seats never want the issues of Balochistan to be resolved. Our youth are being torn apart, and no good can be expected from such a system.” He accused the state of plundering Balochistan’s resources, likening it to a “witch devouring everything in sight.”

Mengal concluded by warning that if the government continues to deny space for democratic protests, the resistance will adopt other forms. “We protested peacefully in the past. If they won’t allow that, then our movement will take another shape.” He also announced that protest rallies will now be held across Balochistan in the coming days.

Fazl threatens to launch protest movement

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (JUI) chief Maulana Fazlur Rehman on Wednesday rejected the proposed Mines and Minerals Bill being introduced in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Addressing a press conference in Peshawar, the JUI-F chief said that it is a unilateral attempt by the

federal government to seize the control of provincial resources. “We’ll take to the streets if our demands are not met by the federal government,” said the veteran politician. He said that the government shouldn’t introduce the bill that is against the constitution of Pakistan.

“The JUI-F will not accept such legislation,” Maulana threatened. He

said that the government has lost its writ in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. “The government must also correct its own mistakes. The rulers are in deep slumber. It is time to wake them up,” he said.

Addressing the issue of Afghan refugees, Fazlur Rehman urged that a proper and mutually agreed schedule should be established for their repatriation.

Israel proposes 45-day truce in Gaza

JERUSALEM/CAIRO (Reuters): Israel has proposed a 45-day truce in Gaza to allow hostage releases and potentially begin indirect talks to end the war, while Hamas, which has already rejected one of its conditions - that it lay down its arms, says it is studying the plan.

According to a copy obtained by Reuters, Hamas — In the first week — would release 10 living hostages in exchange for 120 Palestinian prisoners serving life sentences and more than 1,000 Palestinians detained since Oct 7, 2023. Israeli forces would withdraw to positions they held in Gaza prior to the breakdown of the original ceasefire agree-

ment on March 18 and Palestinians would be allowed the cross the Netzarim corridor area that separates northern and southern Gaza.

Distribution of humanitarian aid would resume and work on rebuilding infrastructure would start. Talks would begin with Egyptian and Qatari mediators and the United States on a permanent end to the war. Subsequently, Hamas would provide proof of life of the remaining living hostages and deceased hostages would be released. Israeli troops will remain in the buffer zones they have created in Gaza even after settlement to end the war, Defense Minister Israel Katz said on Wednesday, as efforts to revive a ceasefire agreement faltered.

Since resuming their operation last month, Israeli forces have carved out a broad “security zone” extending deep into Gaza and squeezing more than 2 million Palestinians into ever smaller areas in the south and along the coastline. “Unlike in the past, the IDF is not evacuating areas that have been cleared and seized,” Katz said in a statement following a meeting with military commanders, adding that “tens of percent” of Gaza had been added to the zone.

“The IDF will remain in the security zones as a buffer between the enemy and the communities in any temporary or permanent situ-

ation in Gaza — as in Lebanon and Syria.” In southern Gaza alone, Israeli forces have seized about 20 percent of the enclave’s territory, taking control of the border city of Rafah and pushing inland up to the so-called “Morag corridor” that runs from the eastern edge of Gaza to the Mediterranean Sea between Rafah and the city of Khan Younis.

It already held a wide corridor across the central Netzarim area and has extended a buffer zone all around the border hundreds of meters inland, including the Shejaia area just to the east of Gaza City in the north. Israel says its forces have killed hundreds of Hamas fighters, including many senior commanders of the Palestinian militant group, but the operation has alarmed the United Nations and European countries.

More than 400,000 Palestinians have been displaced since hostilities resumed on March 18 after two months of relative calm, according to the UN humanitarian agency OCHA and Israeli air strikes and bombardments have killed at least 1,630 people. Medical charity MSF said Gaza had become a “mass grave” with humanitarian groups struggling to provide aid. “We are witnessing in real time the destruction and forced displacement of the entire population in Gaza,” Amande Bazerolle, MSF’s emergency coordinator in

Gaza said in a statement.

Katz said Israel, which has blocked the delivery of aid supplies into the territory, was creating infrastructure to allow distribution through civilian companies at a later date. But he said the blockade on aid would remain in place. He said Israel would push forward with a plan to allow Gazans who wished to leave the enclave to do so, although it remains unclear which countries would be willing to accept large numbers of Palestinians.

The comments from Katz, repeating Israel’s demand on Hamas to disarm, underscore how far away the two sides remain from any ceasefire agreement, despite efforts by Egyptian mediators to revive efforts to reach a deal. Hamas has repeatedly described calls to disarm as a red line it will not cross and has said Israeli troops must withdraw from Gaza under any permanent ceasefire.

“Any truce lacking real guarantees for halting the war, achieving full withdrawal, lifting the blockade, and beginning reconstruction will be a political trap,” Hamas said in a statement on Wednesday. Two Israeli officials said this week that there had been no progress in the talks despite media reports of a possible truce to allow the exchange of some of the 59 hostages still held in Gaza for Palestinian prisoners.

Israeli officials have said the increased military pressure will force Hamas to release the hostages but the government has faced large demonstrations by Israeli protesters demanding a deal to stop the fighting and get them back. Israel launched its campaign in Gaza in response to the October 2023 attack by Hamas on southern Israel that killed 1,200 people and saw 251 taken hostage, according to Israeli tallies.

The offensive has killed at least 51,000 Palestinians, according to local health authorities, and devastated the coastal enclave, forcing most of the population to move multiple times and reducing broad areas to rubble. On Wednesday, Palestinian medical authorities said an airstrike killed 10 people, including Fatema Hassouna, a well-known writer and photographer who had documented the war. A strike on another house further north killed three, they said. The Hamas-run health ministry in Gaza said Israel’s suspension of the entry of fuel, medical, and food supplies since early March had begun to obstruct the work of the few remaining working hospitals, with medical supplies drying up. “Hundreds of patients and wounded individuals are deprived of essential medications, and their suffering is worsening due to the closure of border crossings,” the ministry said.

The Frontier Post

Rubio headed to Paris

WASHINGTON (AFP): US Secretary of State Marco Rubio is headed Wednesday to Paris for talks on ending the war in Ukraine, his office said. The State Department said in a communique that Rubio is traveling with US envoy Steve Witkoff for talks with European officials on advancing President Donald Trump’s goal of ending the war triggered by the Russian invasion of its pro-Western neighbor in 2022.

Afghan CG urges refugees to return to their homeland

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Afghanistan’s Consul General Hafiz Mohibullah Shakir on Wednesday acknowledged Pakistan’s four-decade-long support for Afghan refugees but stressed that the time has come for their return to their homeland.

Addressing a press conference at the Afghan Consulate, Shakir drew a historic parallel, saying, “Pakistan treated our refugees with the same spirit of brotherhood shown by the Ansar to the Muhajireen in Islam’s early days.” He noted that Afghan children studied alongside Pakistani students and enjoyed complete freedom of movement during their stay.

The envoy revealed that Taliban Supreme Leader Mawlawi Haibatullah Akhunnzada has assured that Afghanistan is now peaceful and ready to welcome its citizens back. “The Supreme Leader himself confirmed that the era of conflict has ended,” he said.

He said that Torkham border crossing has been fully prepared to facilitate returning families and a special commission will oversee the rehabilitation process. Returnees will initially stay in temporary camps before being relocated. He said that land allocations planned in Kunar and Nangarhar provinces and job opportunities in agriculture and business sectors to be provided.

A 16-member high-level Afghan delegation, led by Commerce Minister Nooruddin Azizi, is arriving in Islamabad for talks. The agenda includes finalizing the repatriation process and enhancing bilateral trade relations between the two neighboring countries. “Pakistan will always remain our brotherly nation,” the Consul General concluded, “but now we must rebuild our own country with the same determination our people showed during difficult times.”

IHC orders recovery of four missing brothers

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Islamabad High Court (IHC) has ordered police to recover the four missing Afghan brothers within two weeks. Justice Muhammad Asif told the Islamabad police officials that he had already given enough time to law enforcers and that the court wanted results.

He called petitioner Gull Seema, the mother of the four missing persons, to the dock and spoke to her in Pashto. He later translated the communication for all. He quoted the hapless woman as having said she had been visiting court since August 2024 and she should be clearly informed if her sons had died.

The Islamabad DIG sought more time from court for the recovery of the missing brothers. When the petitioner’s counsel pointed out that the case had been lingering for eight months, the judge asked police why the IGP didn’t appear in court despite notice.



ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif awarding shields to team of Prime Minister’s initiative of sending 1000 agriculture graduates for training to China.

PM vows agri revolution to ensure sustainable economic growth

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Wednesday reaffirmed the government’s commitment to transforming Pakistan’s agriculture sector, calling it essential for achieving sustainable economic growth.

He emphasized that strengthening the agricultural backbone of the country would help ensure food security, boost exports, and improve livelihoods for millions of farmers. Speaking at a ceremony held here in connection with the PM’s initiative for capacity building of 1000 agriculture graduates in China, the prime minister highlighted the urgent need to revive and modernize the country’s agricultural research institutions.

“We must focus on meaningful farming practices, digitalized crop management, and the development of climate-resilient seeds,” the prime minister said. Under the initiative, 300 selected graduates are being sent to China for a 3-month training program during the first phase. In the second phase, 400 graduates will undergo a 6-month training program, followed by the remaining 300 graduates who will participate in a 3-month training program in the final phase.

PM Shehbaz Sharif congratulated the 300 young graduates who were going to fly to China for training in agriculture techniques and equip themselves with knowledge. He hoped that upon their return back to Pakistan, they will contribute towards

agricultural economy. Recalling his last visit to China, the prime minister said when he visited the Chinese universities, he was much inspired by the research work in various fields of agriculture sector. “I decide then to send 1000 young Pakistani agri graduates to benefit from this great experience.”

He regretted that the first two efforts of sending graduates to China failed due to the fact that the selection process was not up to the mark. He wanted to select youthful talent who were the hopes of the nation. “In the first and second efforts, the overwhelming majority of the selected graduates were the government officials who were overage,” he said adding that he ordered to develop an online portal for receiving applications to ensure that the selection process completed in transparent way. “Now I am happy to see that the whole process is being completed transparently and purely on merit,” he added. He said graduates from all over Pakistan including those from AJK and Gilgit Baltistan were included in the process while the quota of Balochistan was increased by 10%.

The prime minister emphasized that China was Pakistan’s one of the most sincere friend who always stood with Pakistan in difficult days. Without support from China, he said Pakistan’s recent programme with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) was not possible. He advised the graduates to work hard during their course of training in China and bring

the modern techniques and experiences to boost per acre yield of crops especially cotton and other cash crops.

The prime minister said that the government was planning to provide subsidized loans to the farmers to start their entrepreneurship aimed at promoting value addition of various fruits and vegetables. Minister for National Food Security and Research Rana Tanveer Hussain said that under the leadership of Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, the government was making efforts to increase productivity in the agriculture and livestock sectors.

He highlighted that the government was spending over Rs 3 billion to provide young agricultural graduates with firsthand knowledge and experience from China. He expressed hope that these graduates will apply their skills and knowledge effectively upon returning home.

Ambassador of China to Pakistan Jiang Zaidong said he was much inspired by the Pakistan government’s performance in last one year during which the country’s macroeconomic indicators had improved significantly. He said the Chinese government stood ready to cooperate with Pakistan in promoting bilateral relations especially in agriculture sector. He emphasized that President Xi always attached great importance to their relationship with the neighboring countries.

(Continued on Back Page)

Heavy downpour causes flash floods

F.P. Report

LANDI KOTAL: A heavy downpour and devastating hailstorm hit Landi Kotal in Khyber caused flash flood which lead to submergence of hundreds of homes and swept away vehicles, on Wednesday.

The heavy downpour led to overflowing streams and rivers, inundating roads and damaging vehicles. The hailstorm shattered windows of several vehicles, adding to the destruction. Travelers heading to Afghanistan were also severely affected by the stormy winds and rains.

The roads were flooded due to overflowing streams and rivers, disrupting traffic. The travelers, including those heading to Afghanistan, faced significant disruptions due to the storm. However, no casualties have been reported.

The storm highlights the vulnerability of the region to extreme weather events and the need for effective disaster management and infrastructure to mitigate the impact of such incidents.

Meanwhile, An unusual and intense hailstorm, followed by rain-thunderstorm, hit parts of Islamabad on

Tuesday afternoon, damaging various vehicles and disrupting routine movement.

Large hailstones, some reportedly the size of golf balls, struck with force around 4:30 pm, cracking windshields and compelling motorcyclists to seek immediate shelter under overpasses and bridges. Commuters described the intensity of hailstorm as unexpected and unlike anything they had previously experienced in the federal capital.

“I’ve lived in Islamabad all my life, but it was the first time I saw such massive hailstones,” said Rizwan Ahmed, a resident of G-8. “They were literally the size of golf balls. I was driving near Constitution Avenue when the storm hit, and within seconds, my windshield cracked. It felt like someone was throwing rocks from above,” he said.

Tariq Khan, who was riding a motorcycle with her younger brother near Aabpara, said, “We had no chance to react. We quickly rushed under a nearby bridge to save ourselves. The hailstones were so huge, I was genuinely surprised. A single hit could’ve caused serious injury.”

According to the Pakistan Meteorological Department (PMD), a westerly weather system was expected to enter the upper parts of the country on April 16 and remain active until April 20. The PMD had forecast rain, wind, thunderstorms, and isolated hailstorms in areas including Islamabad, Rawalpindi, Attock, Chakwal, Talagang, and several parts of northern Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

The department had also warned that wind-dust storms, hail, and lightning could damage loose structures, vehicles, electric poles, and solar panels, and advised relevant departments to remain alert. The public was advised to avoid unnecessary travel during stormy weather. Farmers were also urged to plan wheat harvesting accordingly to avoid losses.

In addition, there is a possibility of landslides in vulnerable hilly areas of Murree, Galliat, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Gilgit-Baltistan, and Kashmir during the active period of this system. The authorities are monitoring the situation, and further rain while hail activity is expected in the coming days.



LHC CJ calls for ending strike culture among lawyer community

LAHORE (APP): Lahore High Court (LHC) Chief Justice Ms. Aalia Neelam has stressed the need to preserve judicial dignity and discourage the prevalent strike culture among lawyers.

She expressed these views in a meeting with representatives from various district and tehsil bar associations. The meeting, held on Wednesday at the LHC, focused on fostering a more efficient and respectful judicial environment while addressing the economic concerns of legal practitioners.

Chief Justice Aalia Neelam articulated that frequent strikes and court boycotts not only disrupt the justice delivery system but also adversely affect lawyers, particularly those who rely on daily court proceedings for their livelihood. "When courts remain closed, litigants are left without recourse, and the most vulnerable members of the legal profession suffer the most," she stated. She urged the legal community to seek alternative methods for resolving disputes, emphasizing that strikes should not be the default response to grievances.

Highlighting the interdependent

relationship between the bench and the bar, the chief justice remarked, "The respect and dignity of the court are inextricably linked to the respect and dignity of lawyers. A collaborative and respectful environment is essential for upholding the rule of law and ensuring public trust in the judiciary." She called for mutual understanding and cooperation to strengthen the judicial process.

On the topic of grievances against judicial officers, the chief justice advised that complaints should be formally submitted in writing to ensure proper investigation and resolution. "Transparency and accountability are cornerstones of our judiciary, and we are dedicated to addressing all concerns through due process," she affirmed.

The meeting also included updates on infrastructure developments aimed at modernising the judicial system. Chief Justice Aalia Neelam announced the upcoming construction of a state-of-the-art Judicial Tower in Lahore, equipped with advanced facilities to enhance court efficiency.

She confirmed that the project is being completed in close coordination with the government and is part of a broader initiative to build modern judicial complexes across Punjab.

The bar leaders raised several concerns, including procedural and administrative challenges, faced by lawyers. In response, the chief justice assured them that resolving those issues was a top priority for the Lahore High Court. "We will leverage all available resources to address matters within our jurisdiction and will engage with the government on broader policy reforms," she said.

The chief justice also congratulated the newly-elected office-bearers of various bar associations, expressing optimism about their role in advancing the legal profession and the justice system. The meeting was attended by prominent legal figures, including the Registrar of the Lahore High Court, Amjad Iqbal Ranjha, as well as representatives from the Supreme Court Bar Association, the Lahore Bar Association, and several district and tehsil bar associations.



ISLAMABAD: A view of broken car glass due to hailstorm during downpour in capital city. —INP Photo

Governor House doors opened for Overseas Pakistanis: Tessori

ISLAMABAD (PPI) Governor of Sindh, Kamran Khan Tessori, attended the first Overseas Pakistani Convention as the chief guest and made a major announcement. He has opened the doors of the Governor House for overseas Pakistanis and invited them to be guests at the Governor House.

The Governor of Sindh encouraged overseas Pakistanis to visit the Governor House before returning to see the transformed Pakistan. He mentioned that 50,000 children have been provided free IT education without using government resources, and rations have been distributed to over 1 million people.

The Governor reported that more than 5.6 million citizens have been granted access to the Governor House, and the Bell of Hope is being used to resolve public issues.

Punjab police internship programme students visit PSCA

LAHORE (APP): As part of the Punjab Police Internship Programme, students from the volunteers in police initiative visited the Punjab Safe Cities Authority (PSCA) for an educational study tour.

The visit aimed to familiarise students with the Authority's advanced policing systems and the use of modern technology in law enforcement.

The delegation received in-depth briefings on various PSCA operations, including Women Safety, Child Protection, the Intelligent Traffic Management System and the Emergency Response System. The students were introduced to several innovative features such as the Women Safety App, Panic Button, and Live Chat services designed to provide rapid assistance to women facing harassment or other emergencies.

PPP's Hyderabad public meeting preparations in full swing

F.P. Report

HYDERABAD: Preparations are underway at full pace for Pakistan Peoples Party's (PPP) major public gathering scheduled for April 18 at Hyderabad's Hattari Bypass. Sindh Senior Minister and Minister for Information, Transport and Mass Transit Sharjeel Inam Memon conducted a detailed inspection of the arrangements at the venue this evening.

Accompanied by Hyderabad SSP Adeel Chandio, Deputy Commissioner Zainul Abideen Memon, and other relevant officials, Senior Minister Sharjeel Inam Memon thoroughly reviewed all preparatory measures for the political event.

Officials briefed the senior minister Sharjeel Inam Memon on security arrangements, traffic management, route planning and other logistical matters. After personally inspecting all arrangements, Sharjeel Inam Memon issued strict instructions that no negligence would be tolerated during the public gathering.

During the site visit, the senior Minister Sharjeel Inam Memon was updated about progress in preparations. Satisfied with the arrangements, he directed that all necessary facilities must be provided to ensure no inconvenience to attendees. PPP Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari is scheduled to address this major public meeting on April 18. Political circles



are attaching significant importance to the event, with expectations of thousands of party workers and

supporters attending. The district administration has issued directives to ensure complete

arrangements for security, traffic control and other facilities to guarantee the Jalsa success.

Over 11,000 motorcycles seized in week-long traffic violation blitz

F.P. Report

KARACHI: A total of 11,276 motorcycles were seized within a week during the Sindh government's crackdown on traffic violations.

Sindh Senior Minister Sharjeel Inam Memon stated that 831 actions have been taken against fancy number plates, tinted windows, and other illegal modifications, while 223 heavy and light transport vehicles (HTVs and LTVs) have been seized.

Sindh Senior Minister and Provincial Minister for Information, Transport, and Mass Transit, Sharjeel Inam Memon, stated that the cancellation of registration for 25 vehicles has been recommended, while the registration of 174 vehicles has been temporarily suspended and conditionally

released through MVIs under specific conditions. He said that the crackdown on traffic violations will continue without discrimination, and all relevant institutions are actively playing their role in the process.

Sharjeel Inam Memon said that actions will continue to ensure public safety, uphold the rule of law, and maintain order in the city, with no concessions for those who violate the law. He said that all resources are being utilized to improve the traffic system and provide a safe environment for citizens. Vehicles operating without fitness certificates pose a threat to public safety. Therefore, all citizens should respect the law and ensure their vehicles are on the road with complete documentation, including valid fitness certificates and registration.

PIMEC 2025 aims to elevate the blue economy



F.P. Report

KARACHI: Pakistan International Maritime Expo & Conference (PIMEC) a biennially held flagship event of Pakistan for demonstrating latest technology of national and international maritime industry.

The exhibition will serve as one of the international gathering of entrepreneurs, R&D specialists, financial experts and top level policy makers to boost cooperation, share knowledge and support ventures in the maritime field.

The Second Edition of PIMEC-2025 is scheduled from 3rd - 6th November 2025 at Karachi Expo Centre (KEC). To commence the preparations for this strategically important event, Steering Committee

Meeting was arranged by Pakistan Navy on 16th April 2025 at Headquarters Commander Karachi, Pakistan Navy under auspices of Vice Admiral Muhammad Faisal Abbasi , HI (M) (Commander Karachi).

It was attended by senior representatives from Federal Ministries, various departments of Government of Sindh, Pakistan Navy, Law Enforcement Agencies (LEAs) and Badar Expo Solutions, the Co-organizer of PIMEC. The meeting was aimed at bringing all stakeholders at one page for holding this major event of Pakistan at par with international standards.

In his opening address, Vice Admiral Muhammad Faisal Abbasi , HI (M)

(Commander Karachi) expressed his gratitude and hoped that with zeal & zest, meticulous planning and cooperation from all the stakeholders, PIMEC-2025 will prove to boon our national economy and help raise our international stature.

OFFICE OF THE DISTRICT HEALTH OFFICER, PESHAWAR ABSENT NOTICE

Whereas, You, Mr. Muhammad Imran S/O Shah Nawaz Khan PHC Technician (MP/EPI) BPS-12 RHC Putwar Peshawar are charged under Govt: Servants E&D Rules 2011, on account of the following acts of omission as maintained in Rule-9 of the said rules:

- That you have applied for 730 days Extra Ordinary Leave without pay with effect from 16/08/2022 which was regretted by the competent authority (DGHS) vide his letter No. 1627/AE.VI dated 5/12/2022 and served upon you by coordinator EPI and Medical Officer Incharge RHC Putwar Peshawar vide this office endst: No.4085/90/DHO dated 8/2/2023, but you left the station and remained wilful absent from your duty with effect from 16/08/2022.
- That you have also not returned the government property i.e. motor cycle and EPI Android Mobile cell allotted to you for official duty.
- That you were directed to resume your duty vide this office letter No. 20991/DHO dated 17/12/2024 and registered remainder letter No. 354/DHO dated 7/1/2025 at your home address, but you neither resume your duty nor replied the explanation.
- That after adopting all possible ways served upon you and you failed to response, your services were suspended vide this office letter No. 1928-35/DHO dated 24/01/2025m sent at your home address through registry and constituted an inquiry committee under Para No. 6 and Para No.10 (a) of E&D Rules 2011 respectively.
- That the enquiry committee called you for personnel hearing at your home address and also visited your residence, but you failed to appear before the inquiry committee. The staff of facility also stated that left the duty station with effect from 16/8/2022, hence you were charge sheeted served upon your home address through registry vide letter No.4056-64/DHO dated 24/2/2025, but no response till date.
- And whereas, I being the competent authority, after examining your service record reached the proportional conclusion that you are a prima-facie guilty of the charge of misconduct and decide that conducting of another inquiry in your case is not necessary in terms of Rules-5 (b)(ii) & rule 7 of Govt: Servants (E&D) Rules 2011.
- Now therefor, you Mr. Muhammad Imran S/O Shah Nawaz Khan PHC Technician (MP/EPI) BPS-12 RHC Putwar Peshawar are hereby called upon to show cause in writing within 15 days of the publication in press of this Notice as to why one or more penalties including major penalty of **Removal from Service**: as prescribed under Rule-4(b)(iii) of Govt: Servants (E&D) Rules 2011, may not be imposed upon you, failing which ex-parte action will be taken against you under ED Rules 2011.
- You are also called upon to convey in writing, if you would like to be heard in person.

**District Health Officer,
Peshawar**

INF(P)1407/25

CM announces Rs 15 billion relief package for wheat farmers

LAHORE (APP): Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif has announced a landmark relief package worth Rs 15 billion for wheat farmers, an unprecedented initiative in the history of the province.

The historic package aims to directly benefit 550,000 wheat farmers across Punjab under the newly established Wheat Support Fund, with Electronic Warehouse Receipt (EWR) system for up to four months. Under this system, farmers storing wheat will receive electronic receipts that can be present-

den on the agricultural community, announced a complete exemption from irrigation and fixed taxes for wheat farmers during the current year.

To protect wheat stocks from climate-related risks and market volatility, the package includes free storage facilities under the Electronic Warehouse Receipt (EWR) system for up to four months. Under this system, farmers storing wheat will receive electronic receipts that can be present-

ed to banks within 24 hours to secure loans of up to 70 percent of the total value of their stored produce.

As part of the package, the Punjab government has also committed to paying the markup on loans up to Rs 100 billion secured by flour mills and green license holders for wheat procurement from the Bank of Punjab. The provincial cabinet will be approached for immediate approval to make wheat procurement mandatory for these stakeholders.

OFFICE OF THE DISTRICT & SESSIONS JUDGE PESHAWAR

TENDER NOTICE

Tender is invited from well-reputed, registered firms for supply of following item for official use in this Sessions Division.

SR#	ITEMS DESCRIPTION	SPECIFICATION
1.	Stationary	Detailed particulars of required items are available in Bid/Solicitation Document which can be obtained from this Office during office hours before closing date.

- Last date for submission of Tender is 06/05/2025.
- Tenders should reach this office till 06/05/2025 at 10:00 AM which will be opened on the same day at 11:00 AM in presence of the Representative of firms.
- Solicitation documents can be availed from this office during working hours till closing date, on submission of Rs.1,000/-, by the prospective bidder in person or through an authorized representative in writing. In case the request is made through courier, it shall accompany a bank draft in favor of the undersigned including the cost of return delivery.
- The Procuring Entity may reject any or all bids/proposals at any time prior to the acceptance of a bid/proposal. The procuring entity shall upon request communicate to any contractor or consultant, who submitted a bid/proposal, the ground(s) for rejection of bids/proposals.

(Note: Tender is valid till 30/06/2025)

**DISTRICT & SESSIONS JUDGE,
PESHAWAR**

INF (P)1400/25

از دفتر تحصیل میڈیکل اینڈ منسٹرینس ہی

نیلامی بیگانہ بار

اشہار برائے نیلام عام ذرائع تحصیل میڈیکل اینڈ منسٹرینس ہی برائے سال 2025-26 بڑے مزید E-Auction بنگالہ عہدہ بدلت دہیں ترقی غیر متعلقہ ایڈمز اسٹارٹر A0IILCB/1-11/2022 مور 28/03/2025 تحصیل میڈیکل اینڈ منسٹرینس ہی دیہی میں عہدہ کد بڑے E-Auction برائے ایک سال 2025-26 از 30 جون 2025 تا 30 اگست 2026 کرنا چاہتی ہیں۔ خواہش مند حضرات افرم سال 2025-26 کے لئے لوکل کسٹل بڑے مزید غیر متعلقہ ایڈمز کے ساتھ متعلقہ کسٹل میں باقاعدہ رجسٹرڈ ہو کر کسٹل بورڈ کے ویب سائٹ <http://eauction.icpk.gov.pk> پر مور 05 مئی 2025 آخری تک 07 مئی 2025، 12 بجے تک آن لائن میں حصہ لے سکتے ہیں۔

شیدل نیلامی

نمبر شمار	نام عہدہ	عہدہ	میدان عہدہ	زیر عہدہ	نیلامی کی تاریخ
1	لوکل سوزی ڈائنمکس اور نیچر ڈائنامکس چٹا سٹس	لوکل سوزی ڈائنمکس اور نیچر ڈائنامکس چٹا سٹس	برائے عہدہ سال از	86000/-	06-05 اور 07 مئی 2025
2	لوکل سوزی ڈائنمکس اور نیچر ڈائنامکس چٹا سٹس	لوکل سوزی ڈائنمکس اور نیچر ڈائنامکس چٹا سٹس	ایضاً	270000/-	ایضاً
3	روزنامہ سرورسز میں نیچر ڈائنامکس چٹا سٹس	روزنامہ سرورسز میں نیچر ڈائنامکس چٹا سٹس	ایضاً	420000/-	ایضاً
4	منڈی مال موٹیوٹی میں نیچر ڈائنامکس چٹا سٹس	منڈی مال موٹیوٹی میں نیچر ڈائنامکس چٹا سٹس	ایضاً	200000/-	ایضاً
5	لوکل سوزی ڈائنمکس اور نیچر ڈائنامکس چٹا سٹس	لوکل سوزی ڈائنمکس اور نیچر ڈائنامکس چٹا سٹس	ایضاً	70000/-	ایضاً
6	لوکل سوزی ڈائنمکس اور نیچر ڈائنامکس چٹا سٹس	لوکل سوزی ڈائنمکس اور نیچر ڈائنامکس چٹا سٹس	ایضاً	62500/-	ایضاً
7	لوکل سوزی ڈائنمکس اور نیچر ڈائنامکس چٹا سٹس	لوکل سوزی ڈائنمکس اور نیچر ڈائنامکس چٹا سٹس	ایضاً	25000/-	ایضاً
8	لوکل سوزی ڈائنمکس اور نیچر ڈائنامکس چٹا سٹس	لوکل سوزی ڈائنمکس اور نیچر ڈائنامکس چٹا سٹس	ایضاً	19500/-	ایضاً
9	پبلک لیٹرینز اینڈ پائپرز	پبلک لیٹرینز اینڈ پائپرز	ایضاً	38500/-	ایضاً
10	پبلک لیٹرینز اینڈ پائپرز	پبلک لیٹرینز اینڈ پائپرز	ایضاً	45000/-	ایضاً
11	منڈی مال موٹیوٹی میں نیچر ڈائنامکس چٹا سٹس	منڈی مال موٹیوٹی میں نیچر ڈائنامکس چٹا سٹس	ایضاً	45500/-	ایضاً
12	تہہ بازار میں نیچر ڈائنامکس چٹا سٹس	تہہ بازار میں نیچر ڈائنامکس چٹا سٹس	ایضاً	43000/-	ایضاً
13	منڈی مال موٹیوٹی میں نیچر ڈائنامکس چٹا سٹس	منڈی مال موٹیوٹی میں نیچر ڈائنامکس چٹا سٹس	ایضاً	54000/-	ایضاً
14	لوکل سوزی ڈائنمکس اور نیچر ڈائنامکس چٹا سٹس	لوکل سوزی ڈائنمکس اور نیچر ڈائنامکس چٹا سٹس	ایضاً	33000/-	ایضاً
15	سائبر پائپرز	سائبر پائپرز	ایضاً	24500/-	ایضاً
16	سائبر پائپرز میں نیچر ڈائنامکس چٹا سٹس	سائبر پائپرز میں نیچر ڈائنامکس چٹا سٹس	ایضاً	115000/-	ایضاً
17	موسیقی ترقیاتی کمیٹی (ایسٹ کیسٹ) اور نیچر ڈائنامکس چٹا سٹس	موسیقی ترقیاتی کمیٹی (ایسٹ کیسٹ) اور نیچر ڈائنامکس چٹا سٹس	ایضاً	150000/-	ایضاً
18	ٹاکس اوڈیٹ میں نیچر ڈائنامکس چٹا سٹس	ٹاکس اوڈیٹ میں نیچر ڈائنامکس چٹا سٹس	ایضاً	600000/-	ایضاً
19	انٹرنیٹ (پری منڈی)	انٹرنیٹ (پری منڈی)	ایضاً	78000/-	ایضاً
20	کمزروٹی میں نیچر ڈائنامکس چٹا سٹس	کمزروٹی میں نیچر ڈائنامکس چٹا سٹس	ایضاً	100000/-	ایضاً
21	لوکل پائپرز میں نیچر ڈائنامکس چٹا سٹس	لوکل پائپرز میں نیچر ڈائنامکس چٹا سٹس	ایضاً	10000/-	ایضاً

شاہد اکو درج ذیل ہیں۔

1. مندرجہ بالا عہدہ برائے ایک سال کیلئے نیلام کیے جائیں گے۔ 2. ہر بولی دہندہ کے لئے لازمی ہوگا کہ مقررہ تاریخوں سے قبل ہر نیلامی کے لئے ایک الگ ذریعہ منظم کیا جائے گا۔ 3. تحصیل میڈیکل اینڈ منسٹرینس ہی کے لئے ایک الگ ذریعہ منظم کیا جائے گا۔ 4. ویب سائٹ پر دی گئی کسٹل ڈیٹا سے متعلق تصدیق حاصل کی جائے گی۔ 5. مقررہ تاریخوں سے قبل ہر بولی دہندہ کے لئے ایک الگ ذریعہ منظم کیا جائے گا۔ 6. مقررہ تاریخوں سے قبل ہر بولی دہندہ کے لئے ایک الگ ذریعہ منظم کیا جائے گا۔ 7. مقررہ تاریخوں سے قبل ہر بولی دہندہ کے لئے ایک الگ ذریعہ منظم کیا جائے گا۔ 8. مقررہ تاریخوں سے قبل ہر بولی دہندہ کے لئے ایک الگ ذریعہ منظم کیا جائے گا۔ 9. مقررہ تاریخوں سے قبل ہر بولی دہندہ کے لئے ایک الگ ذریعہ منظم کیا جائے گا۔ 10. مقررہ تاریخوں سے قبل ہر بولی دہندہ کے لئے ایک الگ ذریعہ منظم کیا جائے گا۔ 11. مقررہ تاریخوں سے قبل ہر بولی دہندہ کے لئے ایک الگ ذریعہ منظم کیا جائے گا۔ 12. مقررہ تاریخوں سے قبل ہر بولی دہندہ کے لئے ایک الگ ذریعہ منظم کیا جائے گا۔ 13. مقررہ تاریخوں سے قبل ہر بولی دہندہ کے لئے ایک الگ ذریعہ منظم کیا جائے گا۔ 14. مقررہ تاریخوں سے قبل ہر بولی دہندہ کے لئے ایک الگ ذریعہ منظم کیا جائے گا۔ 15. مقررہ تاریخوں سے قبل ہر بولی دہندہ کے لئے ایک الگ ذریعہ منظم کیا جائے گا۔ 16. مقررہ تاریخوں سے قبل ہر بولی دہندہ کے لئے ایک الگ ذریعہ منظم کیا جائے گا۔ 17. مقررہ تاریخوں سے قبل ہر بولی دہندہ کے لئے ایک الگ ذریعہ منظم کیا جائے گا۔ 18. مقررہ تاریخوں سے قبل ہر بولی دہندہ کے لئے ایک الگ ذریعہ منظم کیا جائے گا۔ 19. مقررہ تاریخوں سے قبل ہر بولی دہندہ کے لئے ایک الگ ذریعہ منظم کیا جائے گا۔ 20. مقررہ تاریخوں سے قبل ہر بولی دہندہ کے لئے ایک الگ ذریعہ منظم کیا جائے گا۔ 21. مقررہ تاریخوں سے قبل ہر بولی دہندہ کے لئے ایک الگ ذریعہ منظم کیا جائے گا۔

INF(P)1415/25

بھگت: تحصیل میڈیکل اینڈ منسٹرینس ہی

المشترکہ: تحصیل میڈیکل اینڈ منسٹرینس ہی



PESHAWAR: Chief Secretary Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Shahab Ali Shah, chairing the 2nd Meeting of the Commissioners and Deputy Commissioners via video link.

Muzzammil expresses concern over growth rate, petroleum levies

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Advisor to the KP Chief Minister on Finance and Inter-Provincial Coordination Muzzammil Aslam has issued a statement regarding the federal government's economic decisions, expressing serious concerns over wheat pricing, the national economic growth rate, and petroleum levies.

He stated that the recent reduction of Rs. 100 per 40 kg in the wheat support price has inflicted a loss of Rs. 75 billion on farmers across the country, with Punjab's farmers bearing Rs. 50 billion of that loss. He emphasized that based on current market rates, farmers are suffering a loss of Rs. 1200 per 40 kg, which translates into a stag-

gering Rs. 600 billion loss for Punjab and Rs. 300 billion for the rest of the country totaling approximately 3.2 billion dollars in losses.

He warned that if this situation continues, the country will be forced to import wheat, and the same amount of money lost domestically will be paid to foreign farmers through imports.

Muzzammil Aslam further highlighted that Pakistan's economic growth rate this year is projected to remain between 2.5% to 3.0 percent, falling short of the 4 percent target. He noted that industrial output for the first eight months of the fiscal year has declined by 1.9 percent, and in March alone, the decline reached 5.9 percent. He pointed out that the country's agriculture sector

is going through one of its worst periods in history, even in the absence of any natural calamities.

Criticizing the federal government's fiscal policies, Aslam said that increasing the petroleum levy from Rs. 30 to Rs. 70 per liter, with plans for further levies, is a deliberate move to keep petrol prices high — a step he labeled as anti-public. He also revealed that preparations are underway to raise gas prices further, and efforts are being made to impose new taxes on fertilizer in the upcoming budget. He strongly criticized the federal government for neglecting the rights of farmers and said that running the country through Form-47 is unacceptable.

On the subject of the NFC Award and the CRBC

Left Canal Project, Aslam accused the federal government of treating Khyber Pakhtunkhwa with outright discrimination. He stressed that the issues faced by the merged districts (former FATA) are being completely ignored.

The continued delay in the new NFC Award and the denial of merged districts' allocated funds are clear examples of this bias. He noted that the CRBC Left Canal Phase one, a vital project from the 1990s, is being sidelined.

He concluded by stating that the CRBC Left canal is a lifeline for the food security of both Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Pakistan, and its approval is the responsibility of the National Economic Council, where all federating units are represented.

Emphasizing public-centric governance CS chairs 2nd meeting of commissioners, deputy commissioners

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Chief Secretary Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Shahab Ali Shah, chaired the 2nd Meeting of the Commissioners and Deputy Commissioners via video link, with a strong emphasis on responsive governance, performance-driven public service, and enhanced citizen engagement across the province.

While addressing the Deputy Commissioners, the Chief Secretary underscored their pivotal role in governance, describing them as the "face of the state and the government." He noted that the relevance, strength, and public perception of the Deputy Commissioners are directly tied to their performance in the field, which also significantly influ-

ences their professional growth and career trajectory.

"Your performance should speak for you," he added, encouraging them to leave behind a legacy of exemplary public service.

The Chief Secretary emphasized continuous community engagement as a cornerstone of effective administration. He instructed Deputy Commissioners to give priority to public-facing initiatives such as Jirgas, Khuli Kacheris, and field visits, terming them essential for community confidence-building, dispelling misconceptions, and ensuring timely resolution of local issues.

Highlighting ongoing efforts for good governance, the Chief Secretary referenced key provincial initiatives such as the "Ekhtiyar Awam Ka" por-

tal and the 99-Points Awami Agenda, aimed at facilitating citizen-centric service delivery and administrative efficiency. During the meeting, the performance of Deputy Commissioners was reviewed against established governance indicators.

The Chief Secretary appreciated notable achievements in certain districts while also identifying areas requiring substantial improvement. As part of the proceedings, Deputy Commissioners presented innovative district-level proposals in line with earlier directions to adopt localized and practical governance solutions.

Addressing revenue-related matters, the Chief Secretary took strong notice of pendency in revenue cases and directed all Deputy Commissioners to

ensure the disposal of pending cases within 70 days. He further instructed that all directives issued by the Board of Revenue be implemented in letter and spirit.

On the issue of education sector improvement, the Chief Secretary issued clear instructions for Deputy Commissioners to ensure strict monitoring around examination centers to curb external support for cheating. He noted that recent measures taken in this regard have been widely appreciated by the public and must be sustained to uphold merit and educational integrity.

Recognizing the need for environmental and civic responsibility, the forum also decided to launch a week-long special cleanliness drive across the province starting this Monday.

KPPRA's introduces E-PADS to ensure transparency

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: In line with the directives of the Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and the Chief Secretary, the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Public Procurement Regulatory Authority (KPPRA) has introduced the E-Pak Acquisition and Disposal System (E-PADS) to ensure transparency and efficiency in public procurement processes across the province.

To support the implementation of this system, KPPRA, in collaboration with the World Bank-funded KP-SPEED (Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Spending Effectively for Enhanced Development) program, organized a training workshop for government officials in Abbottabad. Officers from various departments participated in the session.

The workshop aimed to familiarize participants with the KPPRA Act, pro-

cedure rules, and procurement rules, while also providing practical training on the use of the new E-PADS software. The Director of KPPRA Amanullah Khan briefed attendees on the software's features and the broader benefits of adopting an e-procurement framework.

Speaking at the inaugural session, Amanullah Khan noted that the software has been rolled out across the province and is designed to meet all regula-

tory requirements. He added that KPPRA is conducting similar workshops across districts to build capacity and ensure smooth adoption of the system.

Participants welcomed the initiative and highlighted that the new system will simplify procurement processes and enhance accountability. They also recommended organizing more training sessions at the district level to facilitate broader awareness and implementation.

Aqib for timely completion of development projects

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Minister for Irrigation Aqib Ullah Khan has said that priority will be given to collective projects related to the Annual Development Program, while effective steps are also being taken for the timely completion of ongoing development projects. He expressed these views while presiding over a meeting on the ongoing and proposed projects of the Annual Development Program 26_2025 managed by the

Irrigation Department at the Civil Secretariat, Peshawar yesterday.

The meeting was attended by the Secretary Irrigation Department, Chief Engineers South and North, and other relevant officers. On this occasion, Provincial Minister for Irrigation Aqib Ullah Khan was briefed about the details of the ongoing and proposed projects of the Annual Development Program 26_2025.

Discussions were held regarding ongoing and proposed projects in Irrigation Circles Bannu,

Dera Ismail Khan, Mardan, Hazara, Swat, Swabi and the merged districts. On this occasion, Provincial Minister Aqib Ullah Khan said that steps will be taken to resolve the issues. He stressed on not compromising on the quality of construction. Aqib Ullah Khan issued instructions to the authorities to resolve all issues in a timely manner. He also issued orders to convene a meeting of all the executive engineers to identify important projects while submitting a final report to him.

Faheem Shah appointed SHO at UoP Campus



F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Faheem Shah has been appointed as the Station House Officer (SHO) of the Campus Police Station at Peshawar University.

According to notification Faheem Shah has previously served in various police stations, earning praise for his commendable performance. He is recognized for his professionalism, effective crime-fighting strategies, and prompt resolution of public grievances.

His appointment as SHO of the Campus Police Station comes in recognition of his outstanding service record. Police officials express confidence that he will perform his new duties with dedication and efficiency.

Speaker KP Assembly visits Peshawar Institute of Cardiology

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The Speaker of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly, Babar Saleem Swati, visited the Peshawar Institute of Cardiology (PIC-MTI) to inquire about the health of a close relative undergoing treatment at the facility.

During his presence at the hospital, the PIC administration arranged a tour for the Speaker, showcasing various departments and briefed him on the quality of services and medical facilities being provided.

He was received by Prof. Dr. Shakar Ahmad Shah, Chief Executive Officer of PIC, and Qazi Saad, Hospital Director. The Speaker appreciated the state-of-the-art infrastructure, professional staff, and high standards of patient care at the hospital.

PM's welfare package sparks jubilation among overseas Pakistanis

PESHAWAR (APP): The Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif's newly announced welfare package for overseas Pakistanis has sparked widespread jubilation among expatriates across the globe, who have hailed the initiative as historic and transformative.

The comprehensive package, unveiled on Monday last, includes an array of incentives designed to address long standing legal and bureaucratic hurdles faced by overseas Pakistanis while encouraging them to invest in development of their homeland.

Haji Ehsanullah Khan, a prominent expatriate residing in Dubai, told APP on Tuesday that the PM's package had "won hearts and minds" of millions of Pakistanis living abroad. "This is the first time an elected Prime Minister has introduced such a holistic and thoughtful workable plan that directly impacts our lives. It will not only protect our rights but also promote investment and connectivity with Pakistan," he said.

The Prime Minister's package features wide-ranging reforms, including dedicated special courts for expatriates established in Islamabad on pilot phase, with plans to expand to all provinces to ensure speedy resolution of legal cases involving overseas Pakistanis.

Similarly under digital legal reforms, e-recording and e-filing systems would now enable overseas Pakistanis to submit evidence and attend court proceedings via video link, reducing the need to travel back home.

A 5% quota allocated for children of overseas Pakistanis in all chartered universities and federal capital degree-awarding institutes, with a notable 15% quota in medical colleges that was widely hailed by overseas Pakistani of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and erstwhile Fata.

The National Vocational and Technical Training Commission (NAVTC) will offer 5,000 skill development courses for children of expatriates, equipping them with modern technical skills.

Electrician Mushtaq Khan, an overseas Pakistani based in Saudi Arabia, also welcomed the package, particularly praising the age relaxation in government job applications— five years for men and seven years for women — saying it would "open new opportunities for overseas citizens to serve the country."

While appreciating the establishment of facilitation offices by the Boards of Revenue in Punjab and Balochistan, he expressed the hope that the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Sindh governments would follow suit and provide relief to them. "Reforms like digital sale deed registration are essential to protect our investments and resolve property issues amicably," he noted.

University of Peshawar's ex professor Dr. Zilakat Malik emphasized the economic potential of the PM's package, highlighting that the nearly 10 million-strong overseas Pakistani community could play a pivotal role in sectors like IT, agriculture, SMEs, construction industries, textile, transport,

and AI.

"In March alone, overseas Pakistanis sent home \$4.1 billion. With the implementation of this package, annual remittances could exceed \$38 billion," he predicted.

Ikhtair Wali Khan, the Prime Minister's Coordinator for Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Affairs and Information, said that Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif had "truly recognized the sacrifices and contributions of the overseas Pakistanis." He lauded the revival of the Green Channel at airports, originally initiated by then PM Mian Muhammad Nawaz Sharif, saying it would ease travel procedures and customs processing for returning expatriates.

He also announced that overseas Pakistanis making significant contributions through remittances would be recognized with civil awards every year on August 14, as tracked by the State Bank of Pakistan.

Ikhtair Wali pointed to significant investment opportunities linked to CPEC (China-Pakistan Economic Corridor) and highlighted the recent electricity price relief of over 7% per unit reduction for domestic and industrial users as another sign of the government's commitment to economic revival.

The experts and stakeholders agreed that the success of this historic relief package hinges on its effective implementation. They are hopeful that overseas Pakistanis will rise to the occasion and become active partners in the country's development journey.

Professional capabilities must for progress of any department: Aftab

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Minister for Law, Human Rights, and Parliamentary Affairs, Advocate Aftab Alam has stated that progress of any department depends on the professional capabilities and services of its employees.

Therefore, Employees' Service Rules should be effective, clear, and aligned with contemporary requirements. These rules not only define the principles for recruitment, promotion, training, and transfers of employees but also lay the foundation for a system based on trans-

parency, accountability, and merit.

In today's era, where technology, governance, and public expectations are rapidly evolving, it is essential to update service rules periodically to ensure the department is equipped with a dynamic, competent, and responsible workforce. Such rules, which provide rewards for performance, corrections for shortcomings, and opportunities for professional growth, make an institution effective, accountable, and suitable for public service.

He expressed these views while presiding over a meeting held at the Civil

Secretariat Peshawar regarding the Employees' Service Rules of the Provincial Ombudsman. The meeting was attended by Secretary Law Department Saeed Ahmad Turk, senior legal advisor of the Law Department Raees Ahmad, Deputy Legislation Officer Imran Khan, and other concerned officials.

A detailed briefing was given on Section 8 of the Provincial Ombudsman Employees' Service Rules, which pertains to the regulations for staff appointments in the Provincial Ombudsman's office.

The meeting proposed including the Director

General of the Provincial Ombudsman as a member of the Selection and Promotion Board, along with the Secretary Ombudsman and Section Officer Admin.

A suggestion was also made to consider the applicant's age up to the last date for submitting applications for any post.

Proposals were also presented to allocate quotas for persons with disabilities, minority communities, women, and transgender individuals. Various opinions were shared regarding the requirements for character certificates for appointments to any position.

KP to play a key role in second phase of CPEC: Tordher

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Special Assistant to the Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa for Industries, Abdul Karim Tordher has stated that the second phase of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) holds critical importance for the development and industrial prosperity of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Speaking at the CPEC seminar organized by China Window at a local hotel in Peshawar on Tuesday, Karim Tordher emphasized that regions directly traversed by the CPEC route deserve priori-

ty and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa must be given special attention in this regard.

"CPEC is not merely an economic initiative; it is a symbol of the deep and enduring friendship between Pakistan and China," he remarked. Karim Tordher praised China Window for organizing the event and for its continued efforts in promoting Pak-China relations.

He noted that the provincial government has taken concrete steps to develop industrial sector and create an investment-friendly environment. He cited the Rashakai Special

Economic Zone as a successful example of such initiatives.

Highlighting the province's potential, Karim Tordher said Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is ideally positioned for investment due to its rich natural resources, skilled workforce and strategic location. He extended invitation to Chinese investors to explore the province, invest here and help generate employment opportunities for its youth.

He further stressed that CPEC has helped China uplift its underdeveloped regions, and in keeping with the spirit of the project, similar focus should be

given to Khyber Pakhtunkhwa for inclusive development and poverty alleviation. "This land is our home and our future," he said. "We are committed to making every possible effort for its economic stability and progress, he added."

During the second day of the seminar, Karim Tordher also distributed souvenirs among participants. The event featured addresses by senior government representatives, renowned experts, and was attended by a large number of business leaders, students, journalists, intellectuals, and professionals from diverse fields.



PESHAWAR: A man is selling kulfi at Ashraf Road. — INP photo



In brief

Sehat Card facility at DHQ hospital soon F.P. Report

KARAK: Chairman District Development Advisory Committee (DDAC) Karak Chairman Khurshid Khattak has disclosed that the free treatment facility on Sehat Card will soon be started in the District Headquarters Hospital, on Wednesday. DDAC chairman said that its formal approval was formally given by Sehat Card CEO Riaz Tanoli in the meeting of the Standing Committee on Finance held in Peshawar recently. Insha-Allah the people of Karak will soon benefit from this facility of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government. He added that Sehat Card is the public welfare-oriented flagship project of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government, from which millions of poor people of the province have benefited so far. He further said that all the credit for this goes to the party leader Imran Khan, who started this project which was unimaginable in the past.

Police arrest accused F.P. Report

ABBOTTABAD: A police encounter took place within the jurisdiction of Havelian Police Station between Abbottabad police and criminal elements. During an exchange of fire, one suspect was injured and subsequently arrested. Narcotics and illegal weapons were recovered from the scene. According to police sources, a day earlier, police had arrested Adil, son of Aurangzeb, a resident of Langra, and recovered 1,902 grams of heroin and 350 grams of crystal meth (ice) from his possession. During interrogation, the suspect revealed that the narcotics belonged to Fawad alias Fahdi, son of Faiz Muhammad, a resident of Sultanpur. Later, Havelian police encountered the suspect Fahdi while patrolling the area. He was accompanied by his accomplice Zeeshan alias Shani, son of Arshad, a resident of Rajaya. During the confrontation, an exchange of gunfire occurred, in which Fahdi was injured and taken into custody. Police recovered 490 grams of crystal meth and a pistol from his possession. A case has been registered, and further investigations are underway.

Uplift projects reviewed F.P. Report

TOBA TEK SINGH: In line with the vision of Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif, developmental projects are progressing rapidly across the district of Toba Tek Singh. In this regard, an important meeting of the District Development Committee (DDC) was held under the chairmanship of Deputy Commissioner Toba Tek Singh. During the session, Deputy Director Development Ahmad Jawad Sardar gave a detailed briefing on 31 schemes related to street pavement (solving) and drainage under the Sustainable Achievement Programme (SAP). Heads of various departments also attended the meeting and discussed issues pertaining to their respective sectors. The Deputy Commissioner approved all 31 SAP-related schemes aimed at improving drainage systems, sanitation, and providing basic civic amenities to the public. Speaking on the occasion, DC Muhammad Naem Sindhu emphasized that, as per the directives of Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif, public welfare projects are being prioritized across the district.

PML-N politically divide Malakand division in two parts

Shafi Ullah

MINGORA: Engr Amir Muqam, Federal Minister for States and Frontier Regions, Gilgit Baltistan and Kashmir Affairs here Wednesday announced that his party decided to politically divide Malakand division into Swat and Dir to deal with the party affairs.

Talking to party workers here, Engr Amir Muqam clarified that the decision was purely related to strengthening PML-N in Malakand division. He also announced to divide Swat district into Upper Swat and Lower Swat politically to strengthen the PML-N.

The names of office bearers for these divisions and two districts of Swat would be announced soon. Engr Amir Muqam said that the decision was taken to strengthen and reorganize the PML-N politically in Malakand.

Engr Amir Muqam said that Malakand was a large division in terms of population as well as area and its division in terms of PML-N affairs would strengthen his party at the gross root level. He said that PML-N was the only party that could take KP out of existing challenges and provide relief to masses. Engr Amir Muqam said that PTI has deceived masses on the name of change and failed to deliver in KP during 12 years of Govt in KP. He said PML-N has all the potential to put KP into a new height of development and economic progress in next four years.

Meanwhile, Federal Minister for States and Frontier Regions, Gilgit Baltistan and Kashmir Affairs, Engr Amir Muqam here Wednesday said that Government's policies was aimed to bring direct foreign investment to the country imperative for cre-

ation of jobs opportunities, foster industrial & agriculture development and prosperity of people.

Addressing a big public gathering at Palai Dargai here after inauguration of the NADRA Office, Engr Amir Muqam said that Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif has announced a historic relief package for overseas Pakistan that would greatly help bringing direct foreign investment in Pakistan.

He said that Pakistan especially Khyber Pakhtunkhwa was blessed with abundance of mines, gemstones, marble, granite and mineral resources and its exploration on scientific line would be used on the country's fast track development. Engr Amir Muqam who is also the provincial President of PML-N KP said that mines and mineral besides gemstones reservoirs have made Pakistan an ideal investment destination and urged the investors to take advantage of the Govt pro-mineral policies.

Through investment, he said that mines and mineral rich areas would be largely benefited besides ensuring employment opportunities for the area's people. He said that the Prime Minister has provided a significant relief to domestic and industrial consumers after reducing the per unit electricity price, benefiting millions. Engr Amir Muqam said that Pakistan's exports achieved significant growth and foreign remittances by overseas Pakistanis increased manifolds.

Amir Muqam said that price hike and policy rate have been significantly reduced and top monetary institutions are praising Shehbaz Sharif Govt's economic and fiscal policies. He said Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif Govt has saved the country from an

imminent economic default and bankruptcy and put the country's economy back on track after his tireless efforts.

On the other hand, he said the agitation of our political opponent was aimed to obtain relief for the PTI founder. He claimed that politics of protest and agitations would serve no purpose rather increase problems of people. He said PTI has failed to deliver in KP despite its third consecutive term and unnecessary experiences in education and health sectors have marred service delivery in KP where problems of masses increased manifolds.

Engr Amir Muqam said that rift has started visible in PTI as its leadership are accusing each other for lust of power having no serious efforts to resolve masses' problems. He said the PML-N has created a network of motorways, constructed Nawaz Sharif Kidney hospital at Swat besides providing gas facilities to Malakand and Swat. Lawari Tunnel was completed by the then Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif while Hazara motorway completed by PML-N Govt has turned Hazara as a hub of tourism. Engr Amir Muqam said that people of KP were fed up with the ill policies of PTI and started joining PML-N for resolution of their problems. He said PML-N was the only party that can address the problems of KP and expressed optimism that his party would form Govt in KP on the basis of its best performance and better service delivery. On this occasion, the people raised full throated slogans in favour of Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif, PML-N Quaid Nawaz Sharif and Engr Amir Muqam.

KUST signs MoU with Fatimid Foundation

Sahibzada Afridi

KOHAT: Kohat University of Science and Technology (KUST) signed Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Fatimid Foundation aimed at fostering mutual cooperation in the fields of medical research, clinical training, and public health promotion.

Under the terms of the agreement, KUST will regularly host blood donation camps and organize awareness seminars focusing on thalassemia and other hematological disorders. Furthermore, students of KUST will gain access to internships, clinical training, and research opportunities at various Fatimid Foundation centers.

The MoU also encompasses collaborative research projects, faculty and student exchange programs, and participation in national and international academic conferences. KUST will extend support to the Fatimid Foundation



in promoting academic and research initiatives, while the Foundation will offer technical assistance and professional guidance to KUST's faculty and students.

Speaking on the occasion, Vice Chancellor KUST, Professor Dr. Muhammad Naseeruddin, described the MoU as a significant step toward impactful collaboration. He noted that this partnership will open new avenues for clinical exposure, research advancement, and professional development for students. "It has always been the vision of Kohat University to align education with practical experience in order to meet the real needs of society," he remarked.

Following the MoU signing, a blood donation camp was held in collaboration with KUST's Department of Medical Laboratory Technology, the Office of Research, Innovation and Commercialization (ORIC), and the Fatimid Foundation. The event witnessed enthusiastic participation from students, who donated blood in large numbers.

Vice Chancellor Dr. Muhammad Naseer u din visited the camp and commended the students' commitment to humanitarian service, stating, "Donating blood is a life-saving act of great virtue. Our students' initiative is praiseworthy and reflects the university's core mission of 'Service to Humanity'.

Chief Secretary, IGP visits Waziristan

F.P. Report

WANA: Chief Secretary Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Shahab Ali Shah and Inspector General of Police Zulfiqar Hameed visited Wana and with elders from the Ahmadzai Wazir, Dotani, and Suleman Khel tribes, who greeted them with traditional honors, including the presentation of ceremonial turbans, on Wednesday.

During the visit, the Chief Secretary inspected several key public institutions including district headquarters hospital Wana, Ummah Children's Academy, and Govt Degree College emphasizing the provincial government's commitment to improving health and education services in the region.

A grand jirga was convened at the Scouts Camp Wana, where local elders, religious scholars, and political leaders came together to engage in dialogue with the visiting dig-

nitaries. The gathering was also attended by top regional officials, including Commissioner Dera Ismail Khan, DIG Dera, DC Waziristan and DPO.

Addressing the jirga Chief Secretary said, "The people of Wana have rendered invaluable sacrifices in the fight for peace. They stood firm in 2007, launching their own offensive to rid the area of militants and protect their homeland from foreign elements. Their resilience and courage restored dignity to this region."

However, he warned that recent years have seen a resurgence of instability. "If internal divisions are not resolved and unified efforts toward peace are not initiated soon, the region could face even greater challenges. But if action is taken now, further bloodshed can be avoided," he stressed.

The chief secretary also promised swift action on pending salary issues for

healthcare workers. "The salaries of staff at Headquarters Hospital Wana will be released within a day or two, and the cases related to delayed payments in Sholam and Toi Khullah hospitals will be resolved soon," he confirmed.

In terms of infrastructure, the Chief Secretary assured that funding for the repair and reconstruction of the critical road linking Tank to Angoor Adda will be resolved imminently. This road serves as a vital artery for both civilian movement and trade.

Speaking on the closure of the Angoor Adda gate — a key trade point along the Pakistan-Afghanistan border — Shah revealed that the government has finalized a comprehensive framework to permanently reopen the crossing for commercial activity. "Trade operations will resume soon, bringing economic relief and opportunities to the region," he stated.



MALAKAND: Engr Amir Muqam, Federal Minister for States and Frontier Regions, Gilgit Baltistan and Kashmir Affairs addressing public gathering.

PA passes resolution to waivers tax on Sialkot Airport F.P. Report

SIALKOT: In a landmark development, the Punjab Assembly has passed a resolution recommending the waiver of the Punjab Revenue Authority (PRA) tax on services at Sialkot International Airport. This significant achievement is the result of the dedicated efforts of Khawaja Mansha Ullah Butt, whose leadership and commitment to the region's development have been exemplary.

This resolution is a vital step forward in providing Sialkot International Airport with a level playing field, aligning it with other Pakistan Civil Aviation Authority (PCAA) airports across the country. The removal of this tax will enhance operational efficiency, promote trade and exports, and spur economic growth in the region.

The people extended deepest gratitude to Khawaja Muhammad Asif for his unwavering support and visionary guidance, and to Khawaja Mansha Ullah Butt for his relentless advocacy on behalf of Sialkot. We also thank all stakeholders who contributed to this successful initiative. This development marks a new era for the airport and the city, ushering in enhanced opportunities and sustainable progress.

QMC achieves ISO certification F.P. Report

NEWSHERA: Qazi Hussain Ahmad Medical Complex Nowshera has been awarded with ISO certification for its exceptional performance and commitment to quality healthcare. The hospital received certification for its outstanding performance and adherence to international quality standards.

The hospital's administration, led by Director Dr. Kamran Hakim Khan, worked tirelessly to meet the international standards, despite facing challenges like limited resources and staff shortage. The ISO team evaluated various departments, including OPD, Emergency, Trauma, Radiology, Pathology, ICU, OT, and pediatric wards.

The ISO team expressed satisfaction and praised the hospital administration's efforts in maintaining high standards. The ISO certificate was handed over to Director Qazi Medical Complex and Medical Director. This achievement reflects the hospital's dedication to providing quality healthcare services to the people of Nowshera and surrounding areas.

Faqir Aipee death anniversary observed F.P. Report

LANDI KOTAL: The famous Pakhtun freedom fighter, Mirzali Khan alias Faqir Aipee was remembered on his 65th death anniversary in Landi Kotal on Wednesday.

In this connection a seminar was organized by the local literary organization at Landi Kotal Press Club that was presided by veteran political worker Hameesh Khan and was attended by scores of writers, political elites and members of civil society.

A local student, Basit Sher presented his research work, highlighting the life and achievements of Faqir Aipee. Addressing on the occasion speakers including, Hameesh Khan, Aftab Shinwari and others highlighted various aspects of Faqir Aipee and paid homage to the national-ist leader.

Police arrest five suspects within 24 hours

F.P. Report

LOWER DIR: The Lal Qila Maidan police claimed to have busted a gang of armed robbers and recovered stolen valuables within 24 hours of a house robbery reported in the Maidan area of Lower Dir district here the other day.

According to police officials, a group of armed men, two of whom were dressed in tracksuits, forcibly entered the house of one Saaz Mohammad in the Pari Kas area in the jurisdiction of Lal Qila police at around 1am on Monday night. The assailants held the family hostage at gunpoint, claiming to be law enforcement personnel conducting an arms recovery operation.

The victim Saaz Mohammad told police that the robbers spoke in Urdu and identified themselves as law enforcers. They assured the residents that they were not interested in taking money and were merely conducting a search for illegal weapons. However, after seizing a Kalashnikov rifle and a pistol with magazines from his room, the intruders locked the entire family in a single room and proceeded to ransack the house.

The suspects looted 14 tolas of gold jewelry, six expensive mobile phones, and Rs257,000 in cash. The total value of the stolen items was estimated at approximately Rs5.45 million. The gang fled the scene following the robbery. The incident spread fear and panic among locals.

Following the incident, The Lal Qila police registered an FIR against

unidentified suspects based on the complaint of the house owner, Saaz Mohammad, under sections 458, 457, 395, 347, 171, 170, 419 of the Pakistan Penal Code, and launched an investigation under the supervision of additional SHO Mehran Khan. Utilizing modern investigative techniques, technological tools, and local informers, the police managed to trace and arrest five members of the six-member gang from various locations on Tuesday.

During initial interrogation, the suspects confessed to their involvement in the robbery. Police recovered several stolen items from their possession, including mobile phones, Rs200,000 in cash, and a pistol. Talking to Dawn, Mehran Khan said that efforts were underway to apprehend the remaining suspect and recover the rest of the stolen goods. He said that police were committed to bringing all those involved to justice. "We have made significant progress and will soon arrest the remaining accused," he said. The official also asked the residents to immediately inform local police in such cases. He said that there was no operation against arms in the area and the residents should be vigilant about such incidents.

Committee reaffirms crackdown on illegal activities in Dir: The District Coordination Committee (DCC) has reaffirmed its commitment to intensify operations against drug trafficking, electricity theft, beggary, non-custom paid vehicles, unregistered warehouses, illegal petrol pumps, unauthorized hous-

ing societies, and unregistered madrasas in the Lower Dir district.

This was decided during a DCC meeting chaired by Commandant Dir Task Force Brigadier Sanaulah, along with Deputy Commissioner Muhammad Arif Khan and District Police Officer Abdus Salam Khalid. The meeting was attended by representatives of all relevant departments and institutions.

The DC briefed the forum on the progress of various directives issued by the provincial government, highlighting steps taken toward their implementation across the district. Commandant Brigadier Sanaulah directed all institutions to maintain close coordination and ensure effective enforcement of the government's directives. He stressed that maintaining law and order and protecting the lives and property of citizens remain the administration's top priority.

Appreciating the collaborative efforts of district departments, Brigadier Sanaulah praised the stakeholders for their commendable performance in several key areas and encouraged continued teamwork to sustain progress.

Meanwhile, DC Arif Khan, along with Assistant Commissioner Zayed Safi, paid a visit to the district bar, wherein the newly elected President Saleem Khan Advocate, warmly welcomed them. The Deputy Commissioner acknowledged the vital role the legal community plays in society, particularly in ensuring access to justice and safeguarding the rights of citizens.

School enrollment drive: Awareness walk held

F.P. Report

MARDAN: As part of the ongoing "School Enrollment Campaign 2025" aimed at promoting education and enrolling every child in school across Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, an awareness walk was organized in Rustam, on Wednesday.

The walk was led by Assistant Sub-Divisional Education Officer (ASDEO) Safdar Abbas. Primary school heads, teachers, PTC members, and students participated in the event. On this occasion, Safdar Abbas said, "Let us all work together to make the school enrollment cam-



paign in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa a success. I appeal to parents to enroll their children in government schools so they can move toward a brighter future."

He further stated that the Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is providing free books to students enrolled in public schools and has also appointed young, qualified, and educated teachers to improve

the quality of education.

ASDEO Abbas emphasized that spreading the light of education to every child is a shared responsibility so that we can build an educated and enlightened society. He added that the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government is committed to improving the education system and ensuring that every child receives the gift of education.

RPO directs security for foreigners

F.P. Report

MARDAN: Regional Police Officer Mardan (RPO) held review meeting on crime and progress report was presented regarding ongoing measures to prevent drugs, and further strategies were also formulated in this regard.

In which special attention was paid to the security of foreign citizens, and instructions were issued to all districts to ensure the safety of foreigners at all costs. In the context of the current situation, emphasis was placed on making intelligence sharing, search operations and security alerts more effective.

In addition, the issues of repair of vehicles used by the police were also reviewed, and it was directed that the repair work be completed as soon as possible so that the operational capacity of the police not affected. A fool-proof security plan was approved for the ongoing

polio campaign to ensure complete safety of polio vaccination staff.

DC praises WSSCM services during Eid: An event organized by the Deputy Commissioner Mardan, in the honor of Water and Sanitation Services Company Mardan (WSSCM) workers for their excellent performance during Eidulfitar. The event aimed to encourage and appreciate the efforts of sanitation and water supply staff.

DC distributed appreciation certificates and shields among sanitation, water supply and management staff. He appreciated the dedication and commitment of WSSCM staff who remained present to monitor and maintain cleanliness in the city during Eidulfitar. He stated that on the first day of Eid ul Fitar, he personally inspected the city's cleanliness and the efforts made by workers

commendable.

MCCI working for uplift of small industries: Provincial General Secretary of the Central Organization of Traders Zahir Shah said that the Mardan Chamber has been working for the welfare and development of small industrialists and traders since its inception.

He expressed these views while addressing a handover ceremony at the Mardan District Nurseries Association, where he was the chief guest and took over oath from the newly elected officials. On this occasion, Nursery Association President Muhammad Farooq Khan, General Secretary Sajjad Khan, Vice Presidents Akram Khan, Himayat, Muhammad Tariq, Rashid, Finance Secretary Asif, Information Secretary Ahmed Ali and others announced their joining the central organization Traders Zahir Shah Group.



Xi's Vietnam trip aiming to 'screw' US, says Trump

WASHINGTON (AFP): China's President Xi Jinping paid tribute to Vietnam's late revolutionary leader Ho Chi Minh, his last day of a trip to Hanoi that President Donald Trump said was aiming to "screw" the United States. Xi is in Vietnam as part of a Southeast Asia tour that will include Malaysia and Cambodia, with Beijing trying to position itself as a stable alternative to Trump as leaders confront US tariffs.

The Chinese leader called on his country and Vietnam to "oppose unilateral bullying and uphold the stability of the global free trade system", according to Beijing's state media. Hours later, Trump told reporters at the White House that their meeting was aimed at hurting the United States. "I don't blame China. I don't blame Vietnam. I don't. I see they're meeting today, and that's wonderful," he said.

"That's a lovely meeting... like trying to figure out, how do we screw the United States of America." China and Vietnam signed 45 cooperation agreements, including on supply chains, artificial intelligence, joint maritime patrols and railway development. Xi said a meeting with Vietnam's top

leader To Lam that their countries were "standing at the turning point of history... and should move forward with joint hands". Lam said after the talks that the two leaders "reached many important and comprehensive common perceptions", according to Vietnam News Agency. On the final day of his visit, Xi laid a red wreath emblazoned with his name and the words "Long live Vietnam's great leader President Ho Chi Minh" at the late leader's mausoleum in central Hanoi.

He is also due to attend the launch of the Vietnam-China Railway Cooperation, which will help manage an \$8-billion rail project -- announced this year -- to link Vietnam's largest northern port city to the border with China. Xi's trip comes almost two weeks after the United States -- the biggest export market for Vietnam, a manufacturing powerhouse, in the first three months of the year -- imposed a 46 percent levy on Vietnamese goods as part of a global tariff blitz. Although the US tariffs on Vietnam and most other countries have been paused, China still faces enormous levies and is seeking to tighten regional trade ties and offset their impact during Xi's first overseas trip of the year. Xi will head to Malaysia and then Cambodia on a tour that "bears major importance" for the broader region, Beijing has said. Xi earlier urged Vietnam and China to "resolutely safeguard the multilateral trading system, stable global industrial and supply chains, and open and cooperative international environment".

He also reiterated Beijing's line that a "trade war and tariff war will produce no winner, and protectionism will lead nowhere" in an article published in Vietnam's major state-run Nhan Dan newspaper. China and Vietnam, both ruled by communist parties, already share a "comprehensive strategic partnership", Hanoi's highest diplomatic status. Vietnam has long pursued a "bamboo diplomacy" approach -- striving to stay on good terms with both China and the United States. The two countries have close economic ties, but Hanoi shares US concerns about Beijing's increasing assertiveness in the contested South China Sea.

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UN concerned about Israeli strikes on civilians in Lebanon

GENEVA (Reuters): The UN human rights office voiced concern about the protection of civilians in Lebanon as Israeli military operations have continued to kill civilians there since a ceasefire in November.

"Israeli military operations in Lebanon continue to kill and injure civilians, and destroy civilian infrastructure, raising concerns regarding the protection of civilians," Thameen Al-Kheetan, spokesperson for the UN Office for the High Commissioner of Human Rights, told reporters in Geneva. At least 71 civilians - including 14 women and nine children - have been killed by Israeli forces in Lebanon since the ceasefire came into effect on 27 November last year, and 92,000 are still displaced, according to OHCHR.

"We are calling for investigations into all allegations of violations... Each and every military action where civilians are killed must be investigated," Al-Kheetan said. The U.N.'s rights office raised concern about recent Israeli military operations hitting civilian infrastructure, including a strike on April 3 which destroyed a newly established medical centre run by the Islamic Health Society in Naqoura.

It also noted that at least five rockets, two mortars and a drone have been launched from Lebanon towards the north of Israel, according to the Israeli army, and that tens of thousands of Israelis remain displaced from the north.

"The ceasefire must hold and any escalation is a risk for stability in general in Lebanon, Israel and the whole region," Al-Kheetan added. Despite the ceasefire, Israeli airstrikes have kept up pressure on Hezbollah, which it accuses of maintaining military infrastructure in the south.

A senior Hezbollah official told Reuters the group is ready to hold talks with the Lebanese president about its weapons if Israel withdraws from south Lebanon and stops its strikes, as calls to disarm Hezbollah gain momentum. The most recent conflict in Lebanon began when Hezbollah opened fire in support of Hamas at the start of the Gaza war in October 2023.



KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysia's Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim shaking hands with China's President Xi Jinping upon his arrival at airport.

White House proposes drastic cuts to State Department

WASHINGTON (AP): The White House's Office of Management and Budget has proposed gutting the State Department's budget by almost 50%, closing a number of overseas diplomatic missions, slashing the number of diplomatic staff, and eliminating funding for nearly all international organizations, including the United Nations, many of its agencies and for NATO headquarters, officials said.

The proposal, which was presented to the State Department last week and is still in a highly preliminary phase, is not expected to pass muster with either the department's leadership or Congress, which will ultimately be asked to vote on the entire federal budget in the coming months.

Officials familiar with the proposal say it must still go through several rounds of review before it even gets to lawmakers, who in the past have amended and even rejected White House budget requests. Though the proposal is preliminary, it gives an indication of the Trump administration's priorities and coincides with massive job and funding cuts across the federal government, from Health and Human Services and the Education Department to the US Agency for International Development. Notes from an internal meeting about the proposal have been circulated in online chat groups among foreign service officers since the weekend but exploded when the State Department was due to present a separate unrelated reorganization plan to the OMB.

One senior US official familiar with the OMB proposal called it

"aggressive" in terms of cost-cutting, but also stressed that it was an early outline that mirrored what OMB chief Russell Vought sought to do in President Donald Trump's first administration when he served in the same job. The official spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss internal administration deliberations. So did two people familiar with the matter who confirmed the proposal, one of whom also said it originated from OMB.

OMB spokesperson Alexandra McCandless said that "no final funding decisions have been made." The National Security Council did not respond to a request for comment on the proposed cuts.

OMB's efforts to severely reduce the State Department's budget during Trump's first term were met with fierce resistance on Capitol Hill and largely failed. However, Trump's second administration has moved swiftly to scale back the federal government, slashing jobs and funding across agencies. It's already dismantled USAID and moved to defund so-called other "soft power" institutions of foreign policy importance like the Voice of America, Radio Free Europe, the Middle East Broadcasting Networks, Radio Free Asia and Radio/TV Marti, which broadcasts to Cuba.

Thus, State Department officials and others have expressed increasing concern about the possibility that the proposed drastic cuts could actually be implemented. Sen. Jeanne Shaheen of New Hampshire, the top Democrat on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, said she was "deeply troubled" by the proposed

cuts. "When America First becomes America Alone, our economy, security and prosperity will suffer as adversaries fill the void the Trump Administration leaves behind," Shaheen said in a statement. "Investments in diplomatic programs that promote peace and stability, and advance American national security interests are commonsense priorities that should be reflected in the State Department's budget request."

According to the notes from the internal State Department meeting, the budget proposal calls for: Halving foreign assistance funding managed by State and the US Agency for International Development, which stood at \$52 billion in 2024. Eliminating more than a quarter of foreign assistance through State and USAID overall, freeze pay through next year, and cut travel and benefits for US foreign service staffers. Eliminating global health funding other than small amounts for HIV, tuberculosis and malaria. Require global health partners to contribute a bigger share. Eliminating funding to the United Nations, a major logistical partner key to many humanitarian efforts around the world, and other major nongovernment organizations, including NATO. Eliminating the main office helping Afghan allies resettle in other countries to escape Taliban rule. Eliminating the government's independent watchdog office looking for waste and inefficiency in US programs in Afghanistan. Cutting a number of refugee and immigration programs, and move them under a new bureau for international humanitarian affairs.

NATO's Rutte says US-led Ukraine peace talks not easy

ODESA (AFP): NATO chief Mark Rutte said that US President Donald Trump's push for a ceasefire and lasting peace in Ukraine was "not easy" and condemned Russia's "terrible pattern" of attacks on Ukrainian civilians.

"These discussions are not easy, not least in the wake of this horrific violence. But we all support President Trump's push for peace," Rutte said of US-led talks during a surprise visit to the port city of Odesa, where he met with Ukrainian leader Volodymyr Zelensky. Rutte's comments contrast with an assessment from Trump's special envoy Steve Witkoff, who said he sees a peace deal "emerging" after talks with Russian leader Vladimir Putin in Russia.

Despite a flurry of diplomacy, there has been little meaningful progress on Trump's main aim of achieving a ceasefire in Ukraine. The Kremlin,

which launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, rejected a US and Ukrainian proposal for an unconditional pause in the fighting last month. Zelensky meanwhile called for the effective preparation of a contingent of foreign troops to deter Russia from attacking Ukraine again, should a peace deal be secured.

"Britain, France and other NATO countries are already actively preparing the ground for a security contingent in Ukraine. It is important that we all be fast enough and efficient in this process," he said. Zelensky also told Rutte that Ukraine urgently needed air defence systems after recent Russian missile strikes killed dozens of civilians. "Absolutely everyone sees how acute Ukraine's need for air defence systems and missiles is. We talked about this a lot today," the Ukrainian leader said. Zelensky's renewed call for more air defence systems

comes after recent Russian attacks killed 35 people in north-eastern Sumy region and 19 -- including nine children -- in his hometown of Kryvyi Rig. The Ukrainian leader earlier said that his country needs 10 more Patriot batteries to defend civilians and infrastructure from Russian attack.

The Ukrainian army meanwhile said it had hit back at a Russian missile unit deployed in the western Kursk region that was responsible for launching attack on Sumy. "Every Russian military unit, subdivision and their servicemen who shell peaceful cities and civilians of Ukraine will be identified and will definitely receive retribution," it said in a statement. Russian officials earlier in the day said an 85-year-old woman had been killed in a large-scale Ukrainian drone attack. Ukraine meanwhile said that overnight its air defence systems had downed 26 Russian drones.

US flies long-range bomber for drill with SK

SEOUL (AP): The United States flew long-range B-1B bombers in a show of force against North Korea, days after the powerful sister of North Korean leader Kim Jong Un vowed to resist a US-led push to eliminate the North's nuclear program.

North Korea often reacts to the US deployment of B-1B bombers and other powerful military assets with missile tests and fiery rhetoric. Flyover of the US bombers could draw an angrier response because it happened when North Korea was marking a key anniversary -- the 113th birthday of state founder Kim Il Sung, the late grandfather of the current leader.

South Korea's Defense Ministry said in a statement that the US bombers participated in a South Korea-US aerial drill meant to strengthen the allies' combined operational capability and demonstrate their deterrence capability against North Korea's advancing nuclear program. The ministry said South Korean F-

35 and F-16 fighter jets and American F-16 fighter jets also took part in the training over the Korean Peninsula. It said South Korea and the US will continue to expand their joint military exercises to respond to North Korean nuclear threats.

It was the second time a US B-1B had participated in a drill with South Korea since President Donald Trump began his second term in January. In February, North Korea's Defense Ministry slammed the B-1B's earlier flyover as proof of intensifying US-led provocations since Trump's inauguration. It pledged to counter the strategic threat of the US with strategic means. Days later, North Korea test-fired cruise missiles in what it called an attempt to show its nuclear counterattack capability.

Trump has repeatedly said he will reach out to Kim Jong Un to revive diplomacy. North Korea hasn't directly responded to Trump's outreach. Kim Yo Jong -- Kim's sister and a

senior official -- derided the US and its Asian allies over what she called their "daydream" of denuclearizing North Korea, insisting that her country will never give up its nuclear weapons program. Her statement came as a response to a recent meeting among the top diplomats of the United States, South Korea and Japan where they reaffirmed their commitment to push for North Korea's denuclearization.

The Kim Il Sung birthday, called "the Day of Sun," is one of the most important holidays in North Korea, where a state-sponsored cult of personality treats key members of the ruling Kim family like gods. The country's main Rodong Sinmun newspaper issued an editorial urging the public to rally behind Kim Jong Un to achieve a national prosperity. In recent days, North Korea has held seminars, performances and other events commemorating the founder's achievements.

Border deployment vehicle accident kills two service members

WASHINGTON (AP): Two service members deployed to the US Southern border were killed and a third is in serious condition after a vehicle accident near Santa Teresa, New Mexico, the military announced. The region where the accident took place is just over the state line and west of Fort Bliss, a major Army installation in West Texas that has played a critical role in dis-

patching military deportation flights and served as a touchpoint for thousands of soldiers and pieces of equipment now deployed along the border.

The troops are deployed there in support of President Donald Trump's executive order to secure the US-Mexico border. A defense official speaking on the condition of anonymity to provide additional details

not yet made public said the accident occurred in a civilian vehicle, but no civilians were harmed in the incident.

The incident did not involve any of the scores of Stryker vehicles the Pentagon has sent down to the border to perform patrols, the official said. The names of the deceased will not be released until the next of kin are notified.

Strong solar storm heads to Earth

NEW YORK (AP): A strong solar storm headed to Earth could produce colorful aurora displays across more US states than usual. The sun earlier this week burped out huge bursts of energy called coronal mass ejections, leading space weather forecasters to issue a geomagnetic storm watch. Northern lights were forecast in Alaska, Washington, Oregon, Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota, Minnesota, Michigan, Wisconsin, Vermont, New Hampshire and Maine. Parts of northern Idaho, Wyoming, Nebraska, Iowa, Illinois, New York and Pennsylvania may also get a view.

The strength of the light show will depend on how Earth's magnetic field interacts with the solar bursts, said Shawn Dahl at NOAA's Space Weather Prediction Center. The sun is at the maximum phase of its 11-year activity cycle, making the light displays more common and widespread. Colorful northern lights have decorated night skies in unexpected places and space weather experts say there are more auroras still to come.

"This is going to kind of continue off and on throughout the year," Dahl said. Last spring, the strongest geomagnetic storm in two decades slammed Earth, producing light displays across the Northern Hemisphere. And last fall, a powerful solar storm dazzled skygazers far from the Arctic Circle when dancing lights appeared in unexpected places including Germany, the United Kingdom, New England and New York City. Aurora displays known as the northern and southern lights are commonly visible near the poles, where charged particles from the sun interact with Earth's atmosphere.

Four students injured in shooting at Dallas high school

DALLAS (AP): A shooting at a Dallas high school wounded four students and drew a heavy police response to the campus, where authorities said they had identified a suspect but had not made an arrest. Three of the students were injured by gunfire and the fourth was injured in their lower body, according to the Dallas Fire-Rescue Department. The department said units were dispatched to Wilmer-Hutchins High School just after 1 p.m. and that the four students, all of whom are male, were taken to hospitals with injuries ranging from serious to life-threatening.

"Quite frankly, this is just becoming way too familiar. And it should not be familiar," said Stephanie Elizalde, superintendent of the Dallas Independent School District, at a news conference. Christina Smith, assistant police chief for the Dallas Independent School District, said at the news conference that the investigation was fluid and she did not have any information on what led to the shooting. Although she said police had identified a suspect, she provided no other details, including whether authorities knew the suspect's whereabouts.

The three who were shot were between the ages of 15 and 18, while the age of a person with a "musculoskeletal injury" was not known, Dallas Fire-Rescue said. School district officials and police gave few details during the news conference held several

hours after the shooting, which drew a large number of police and other law enforcement agents to the roughly 1,000-student campus.

"I know that there are many questions and we're not going to have all of the answers right now because some of the information will be inaccurate," Elizalde said. Authorities said other students and their parents had been safely reunited after the students had evacuated earlier in the day from the campus. Aerial television footage taken above the high school showed multiple police vehicles thronging the complex.

Elizalde said that there would be no school at the high school for the rest of the week but that counselors would be available to

students. Smith said that the gun didn't come into the school during "regular intake time." She said "it was not a failure of our staff, of our protocols, or of the machinery that we have." But she said she could not elaborate on that.

Shauna Williams, who has two students at the campus, said after the shooting that she was now considering homeschooling them. At the same school last April, one student shot another in the leg. "I can't keep going through this as a parent," she told Dallas television station KDFW. "I'm telling you, it's very frightening to think about losing your child, your kids."

Texas Gov. Greg Abbott said in a statement that "our hearts go out to the victims of this senseless act of violence."

Russia says it is not easy to agree Ukraine peace deal with US

MOSCOW (Reuters): Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said that it was not easy to agree with the United States on the key parts of a possible peace deal to end the war in Ukraine and that Russia would never again allow itself to depend economically on the West.

US President Donald Trump, who says he wants to be remembered as a peacemaker, has repeatedly said he wants to end the "bloodbath" of the three-year war in Ukraine, though a deal has yet to be agreed. "It is not easy to agree the key components of a settlement. They are being discussed," Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said in an interview with the Kommersant newspaper when asked if Moscow and Washington

had agreement on some aspects of a possible peace deal.

"We are well aware of what a mutually beneficial deal looks like, which we have never rejected, and what a deal looks like that could lead us into another trap," Lavrov said in the interview published in edition. The Kremlin said that it was too early to expect results from the restoration of more normal relations with Washington. Lavrov said that Russia's position had been set out clearly by President Vladimir Putin in June 2024, when Putin demanded Ukraine must officially drop its NATO ambitions and withdraw its troops from the entirety of the territory of four Ukrainian regions claimed by Russia.

"We're talking about the rights of the people who live on these lands. That is why these lands are dear to us. And we cannot give them up, allowing people to be kicked out of there," Lavrov said. Russia currently controls a little under one fifth of Ukraine, including Crimea, which Russia annexed in 2014, and parts of four other regions. Moscow now claims are part of Russia -- a claim not recognised by most countries.

Lavrov praised Trump's "common sense" and for saying that previous US support of Ukraine's bid to join the NATO military alliance was a major cause of the war in Ukraine. But Russia's political elite, he said, would not countenance any moves that led Russia back towards eco-

nomic, military, technological or agricultural dependence on the West.

The globalisation of the world economy, Lavrov said, had been destroyed by sanctions imposed on Russia, China and Iran by the administration of former US President Joe Biden. Biden, Western European leaders and Ukraine describe Russia's 2022 invasion as an imperial-style land grab, and repeatedly vowed to defeat Russian forces. Putin casts the war in Ukraine as part of a battle with a declining West, which he says humiliated Russia after the Berlin Wall fell in 1989 by enlarging the NATO military alliance and encroaching on what he considers Moscow's sphere of influence.

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Harvard University rejects Trump's diktat

UNITED States President Donald Trump is very clear in his mind that he would brook no opposition. So his demand from the reputed universities of America to abandon principles of free speech and liberal values was not surprising.

When the Department of Education sent a letter to Harvard University demanding that it should weed out students holding leftist views, that it should throw out those students, who protested Israel's war atrocities on civilians in Gaza, terming the protesters as indulging in anti-Semitism, to filter foreign students seeking admission based on their political views, to abandon the criteria of diversity, equity and inclusivity (DEI) in admissions and in appointments of staff, and go by the criterion of merit alone, it was accompanied by the warning that if Harvard refused to adhere to the criteria laid out by the Department of Education, then the \$2.3 billion government funding would be blocked. A similar warning was issued to another reputed private university, Columbia, and the threat of suspending \$400 million government funding, was held. Columbia University complied.

Harvard University's Alan Garber replied, "No government – regardless of which party is in power – should dictate what private universities can teach, whom they can admit and hire, and which areas of study and inquiry they can pursue."

It is the statement of an ideal liberal institution in a democracy, and the United States had been such a democracy. As a matter of fact, Harvard University is not a liberal university. It is quite conservative. But it does not shut out students and faculty with liberal values. The university does not subscribe to the individual opinions but it does not impose censorship. To accuse Harvard of harbouring leftists and communists becomes laughable.

The Trump Administration's intolerant stance is a reminder of the McCarthy Era of the 1950s, when the US Senate harassed communists and suspected communists in every sphere of American life. It was an assertion of dictatorship which lasted for a few years and then ran out of steam. The same fate perhaps awaits Trump's intellectual intolerance. America's reputation as a land of the free is because of its individual freedoms and the institutions of higher education that thrived in the ecological system of free speech.

The Department of Education's Joint Task Force to Combat Anti-Semitism, responded to Garber's letter saying that his stand "reinforces the troubling entitlement mindset that is endemic in our nation's most prestigious universities and colleges – that federal investment does not come with the responsibility to uphold civil rights laws."

There is no proof to suggest that Harvard University or any other 'prestigious' institution had violated the law. The complaint is that the pro-Palestinian protestors criticised the state of Israel. The criticism of Israel is being termed anti-Semitism. If the issue is taken to the Supreme Court, then it would be hard to justify the government's contention. The US government support for Israel is a policy issue and not a matter of constitutional law. And criticism of Israel cannot be equated with anti-Semitism.

It is still an open question whether other top private universities will take a cue from Harvard or follow the example of Columbia. But the clash between the diktat of state and the principle of freedom upheld by Harvard strikes at the root of American democracy. Trump and his hardened Republican followers will have a tough time undermining the foundations of free speech in America.

President Trump and his followers are entirely justified in disagreeing with the stance taken by Harvard University, and to dislike deeply Harvard's adherence to democratic values.

But the Trump Administration would be crossing the red line as it were if were to threaten Harvard or any other university for holding views opposed to that of the government of the day.

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After two years of war in Sudan, the world can no longer plead ignorance

Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus

TWO years ago this week, a conflict erupted in Sudan that few anticipated would escalate so rapidly or persist for so long. What began as a violent power struggle has become one of the worst and most neglected humanitarian crises of our time.

The country has been plunged into a state of devastation marked by mass displacement, hunger, violence and disease.

The numbers are staggering. More than 30 million people need humanitarian aid. At least 15 million people are currently displaced. Some 11.3 million are displaced inside Sudan and 3.9 million people have fled to neighbouring countries, making this the world's largest displacement crisis. More than 20 million people urgently need access to healthcare.

Behind these numbers are millions of individual stories. Parents fearing for the life of their child suffering from severe malnutrition. Families stranded in areas with no food, safe water or medical care. Women, men and children dying because it is too dangerous to go to a health centre. A whole generation of children missing out on routine vaccinations.

When I visited Sudan last September, I met Soueda, a bright nine-year-old girl who fled her hometown and was living in a displacement camp in Port Sudan, where the World Health Organization (WHO) is supporting primary healthcare services. She left everything she knew behind and told me she hadn't been to school

in two years.

In Port Sudan, WHO colleagues spoke with Ashwa and her youngest child, who was being treated for severe acute malnutrition at one of the WHO-supported stabilisation centres operating there. "When my baby stopped taking any food or drink, and stopped moving, with swelling in his arms, I knew his life was in grave danger," she said, while holding her son. "I feared I would lose him until we came to this hospital where he is getting special milk and medicines. He is now able to move, has resumed breastfeeding and can even smile. Without the care at this stabilisation centre, I would have lost him."

Yet, too few of these stories reach the headlines. This silence is dangerous. It breeds indifference and will cost more lives.

The war has left Sudan's health system devastated, especially in hard-to-reach areas. In assessed states, 62 percent of health facilities are partially functional and the remaining 32 percent are not functional, with a lack of clarity from other hard-to-reach areas like the Darfurs and Kordofans. Patients can't access basic treatments due to ongoing fighting and repeated attacks on health facilities and health workers.

Two-thirds of all states in Sudan are experiencing more than three different disease outbreaks, including cholera, measles, malaria, dengue and diphtheria.

Cholera alone has killed at least 1,500 people. Malnutrition is wide-

spread among children, pregnant women and breastfeeding mothers. Famine has been confirmed in five areas and is projected to expand to 17, with tens of thousands of lives at immediate risk.

With our partners, WHO is in Sudan, working to ensure people can access the required care. Despite severely restricted access to people in need and ongoing attacks on healthcare facilities, we deliver life-saving medical supplies, support hospitals and health centres, and run vaccination campaigns.

Since the conflict started, with WHO's support, over one million patients have received treatment in hospitals, health centres and mobile clinics. Some 11.5 million children have been vaccinated against polio and measles, and 12.8 million people have received cholera vaccines. WHO is supporting stabilisation centres, where during the last two years, 75,000 children suffering from severe acute malnutrition with medical complications have received treatment.

WHO's response to this crisis has been made possible by generous contributions from partners like the Central Emergency Response Fund, the Japan International Cooperation Agency, the King Salman Humanitarian Aid and Relief Center, the European Union, France, Germany, Italy, the United States and others.

Yet, continuous support is critical in 2025 for WHO's \$135m response plan, 79 percent of which is unfund-

ed.

WHO is determined to continue supporting Sudan's people but we need access to and protection of civilians, humanitarians and medical personnel. Since the conflict started, WHO has verified 156 attacks on health facilities, ambulances, staff and patients, resulting in 318 deaths and 273 injuries. Health workers and facilities must never be targets. In fact, they are protected under international humanitarian law. But there has been blatant disregard for these obligations.

Sudan's crisis is no longer a national tragedy, it has become a regional threat. The conflict threatens to destabilise neighbouring countries and risks fuelling further displacement, disease and insecurity.

A week after my mission to Sudan, I was in Chad, which is hosting over 750,000 Sudanese. I met families who had walked for days to cross the border in search of safety. Some said their homes had been burned, crops destroyed and animals stolen. They left, and arrived with nothing. When I asked what they needed most, the awful answer I heard again and again was: "Food. We are hungry."

We can't say we don't know what's happening. The facts are clear and the stories are harrowing. What is missing is more action. We need sustained, unhindered humanitarian access to reach those in greatest need, adequate funding to supply life-saving aid, and above all, a high-level commitment to ending the war.

The peril of a president who's never wrong

Andrew Mitrovica

DONALD Trump is holding the world hostage. True to his erratic nature, the US president has toyed with the global trading regimen like a yo-yo.

We are captive, to one degree or another, to Trump's trigger-happy whims that – beyond the costs to balance sheets, jobs, retirement savings, and wallets – have exacted a heavy toll on our weary psyches.

His omnipotence overwhelms, leaving most of us feeling bereft and pining for a moment's reprieve from the incessant chaos. Last week, Trump confirmed, yet again, his talent for self-preservation without a speck of regret for the trauma and uncertainty he has caused.

In the face of disquieting polls, roiling equity markets, a sell-off of US Treasuries, and a brewing backlash within the Republican caucus and among the oligarchs who championed his presidency, Trump took to his social media platform, Truth Social, to announce a sudden reversal of the central aspect of what he considers to be a considered "economic policy" – blanket and hefty tariffs. Reportedly, Trump's allies on Capitol Hill were caught unawares by the president's change of bulldozing course and left wondering what the captor-in-chief would do next.

One by one, the supposed "checks and balances" have, on the shameful whole, capitulated or, worse, enabled Trump's imperious modus operandi. In this broader context, Trump's qualified and likely temporary tariff amnesty is not deemed a "defeat" or a "retreat" by the lord of Mar-a-Lago. It is part of his larger, ever-evolving "master strategy" to resuscitate America's bygone manufacturing prowess.

To his legion of admirers and supporters, Trump is a

mythical, infallible figure who spurns doubt since it is a symptom of weakness.

For Trump, certitude is a virtue. Posing questions and introspection are for sissies, not strongmen who have been tasked with rehabilitating America's waning "greatness". Trump has the answers because he is the answer.

While others may scoff at his evangelical "conversion", I am convinced that after dodging an assassin's bullet, Trump had a transformative epiphany that reshaped his presidency into a messianic mission. In a little-noticed section of his meandering address to a joint session of Congress in early March, Trump gave pointed expression to his belief that he had been saved by divine intervention in order to, in turn, save America.

"I believe my life was saved ... for a very good reason," Trump said. "I was saved by God to make America great again. I believe that." I am loath to disappoint, but this may be the rare occasion when Trump is telling the truth.

Though Trump's latest prescriptions to "make America great again" have gone spectacularly awry, his critics are deluding themselves if they think that the "market mayhem" or a few fretting billionaire-bros will prompt him to abandon his chosen destiny and just cause. Unlike Democrat US President Franklin Delano Roosevelt (FDR), Trump confuses obstinacy with wisdom.

FDR braved calamity – financial collapse, sweeping poverty and despair, and the gathering advance of fascism overseas. He was obliged, to borrow a phrase, to make America great again. During a speech delivered in May 1932, FDR

addressed Americans' anxiety – an unease that mirrors, almost to the letter, the angst felt by many of their descendants nearly a century later in the wake of the current jarring and potentially persistent financial turmoil.

"With these savings has gone, among millions of our fellow citizens, that sense of security to which they have rightly felt they are entitled in a land abundantly endowed with natural resources and with productive facilities to convert them into the necessities of life for all of our population," Roosevelt said. "More calamitous still, there has vanished with the expectation of future security the certainty of today's bread and clothing." FDR's solutions were borne out of experimentation, not dogma.

"The country demands bold, persistent experimentation. It is common sense to take a method and try it: If it fails, admit it frankly and try another. But above all, try something," Roosevelt said. FDR's approach not only meant leveraging the means, resources, and ingenuity of the federal government to revive America, but the willingness of the commander-in-chief to dispense with orthodoxy and the arrogance of strutting firmness.

His legacy was not just the singular length of his revolutionary presidency – it was the good and fruitful sense to admit that failure is inevitable.

The other implicit meaning of FDR's admonition is that even presidents can learn valuable lessons from making mistakes.

The experience and insight derived from "screwing up" can solve other troubles – big and small, near and far – that occur throughout a presidency.

Roosevelt listened. He learned by encouraging dis-

sent. He wanted to be challenged. He knew that the people around him enjoyed expertise that he lacked. He understood that presidents are not all-knowing, that exercising his weighty responsibilities required, on occasion, a measure of humility.

Trump prefers dictates over debate. He demands and values absolute loyalty over discourse and objection. He is driven by instinct and seething grievances, not patience and deliberation.

In any working democracy, serious initiatives are the product of serious scrutiny. Trump is all performance, all the time. He rejects outright the essential qualities that informed Roosevelt's shrewdness: Perspective and pragmatism.

The striking irony is that Trump hopes to mimic FDR by extending, albeit illegally, his presidency into a third term – if his health and popularity hold up.

The predictable consequence? Trump will never admit failure. To do so would involve Trump the invincible acknowledging that he has been or could be wrong.

That, as we know, has not happened and will not happen. To his acolytes, Trump's unwavering certainty is bewitching. His mad careening is celebrated as a calculated tactic. Amid these unsettling and turbulent times, the illusion of a leader who claims to be faultless may be comforting. Still, it remains a mirage.

The price of Trump's signature recalcitrance will surge in the days, weeks and months ahead. Stock markets will gyrate wildly, once sturdy alliances will continue to unravel, public confidence will fray. And through the rocky tumult, Donald Trump will remain sure that he is right. That is what makes America's reckless president so dangerous.

Trump's gratitude to Pakistan: Yet another setback for Imran

Abdul Basit Alvi

IMRAN Khan's most significant confrontation with the US occurred toward the end of his tenure as Prime Minister. In early 2022, as his government faced mounting political opposition and challenges, Khan began accusing the United States of being involved in a conspiracy to remove him from power. In the months leading up to his ousting in April 2022, Khan repeatedly claimed that the US, in coordination with certain factions within Pakistan's political and military leadership, orchestrated a plot to destabilize his government. His central accusation was that the US had engineered a no-confidence motion against him in Pakistan's National Assembly, mainly due to his independent foreign policy stance, which clashed with Washington's interests. Khan argued that the US disapproved of his refusal not to align with the West, particularly regarding his growing ties with China and Russia. He also criticized the US for its negative response to his outspoken opposition to the US-led war in Afghanistan and its broader foreign policy in the region.

Imran Khan further alleged that a letter from the US embassy in Islamabad conveyed the US's dissatisfaction with his government and suggested that his removal would be necessary to improve US-Pakistan relations. This "foreign conspiracy" narrative became a central part of his political messaging as he framed himself as a victim of a covert campaign aimed at undermining his government's sovereignty and legitimacy. The so-called conspiracy theory gained significant traction in Pakistani media, and Khan's supporters viewed his removal as the result of foreign manipulation. The

US-Pakistan relations are shaped by broader structural factors, and leadership changes alone are unlikely to shift this cooperation. Khan faced another setback when US President Donald Trump recently thanked Pakistan for its cooperation in counterterrorism efforts. In his first extensive address to Congress since taking office, Trump expressed gratitude to Pakistan for its role in the arrest of a terrorist involved in the Kabul blast of 2021.

Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif also thanked Trump for recognizing Pakistan's counterterrorism efforts. US National Security Adviser Michael Waltz further praised Pakistan's actions, reaching out to Pakistan's Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar to convey Trump's appreciation. The terrorist in question had been arrested based on intelligence, linked to a terrorist plot executed during the US troop withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2021.

This development was a significant blow to Khan, who had hoped for a supportive tweet from Trump. However, Trump demonstrated restraint by refraining from involving himself in Pakistan's internal matters or pressuring its legal system. This move served as an eye-opener for Khan, underscoring the need for him to face Pakistan's legal system with moral courage and integrity. As a vocal proponent of establishing Riasat-e-Madina, he should understand its fundamental principle that all individuals are equal in Islam, and that the same rules and regulations apply to everyone. He should avoid hypocrisy and practice what he preaches. Any relief or support the PTI leadership seeks will come from Pakistan's institutions and justice system. Imran Khan must recognize this reality and refrain from actions that could harm Pakistan's interests.

Khan's PTI leadership pursued diplomatic outreach, even as Khan continued to criticize Washington's role in his removal from office. Khan highlighted Pakistan's strategic importance to the United States, given its geopolitical location in South Asia and its role in regional security, particularly concerning Afghanistan.

While his efforts to engage with the US were primarily informal and rhetorical at this stage, there was a clear shift in his tone. He acknowledged that Pakistan would need US economic support, especially in securing financial assistance from international institutions like the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, where US influence is significant. Khan's outreach occurred when Pakistan was grappling with economic challenges, such as inflation, a growing fiscal deficit, and dwindling foreign exchange reserves. He recognized that US support could be pivotal in alleviating some of these economic pressures. This pragmatic shift contrasted with his earlier, more confrontational stance on US foreign policy.

Khan's shift in relations with the US seemed to be influenced by personal politics. While he had previously accused the US of interference, his tone changed dramatically after his imprisonment. He and key members of his party began lobbying for US support to secure his release.

PTI leaders like Zulfi Bukhari were active in establishing connections with US officials, meeting with congress members, and urging them to push Pakistan to release Khan. They placed significant hope in President Trump, working hard to align with the Trump administration. However, as previously noted, the policies of countries typically do not change with leadership transitions. US-Pakistan

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United States denied the allegations, with both US officials and diplomats in Pakistan dismissing any involvement in Pakistan's domestic affairs, asserting that Washington had no interest in meddling in Pakistan's internal politics.

For Khan, these allegations served to rally his base, presenting himself as a so-called nationalist leader fighting for Pakistan's independence from foreign control. This narrative fit with his broader campaign centered on so-called "sovereignty" and rejecting foreign-imposed decisions. However, after his removal from office in April 2022, Imran Khan's political trajectory took a dramatic turn. Despite spending much of his tenure as Prime Minister criticizing the US and accusing it of interfering in Pakistan's affairs, his approach to Washington changed sharply after his ouster. Khan's rhetoric regarding the US became more measured, acknowledging the importance of maintaining a pragmatic relationship with Washington. While he continued to assert that the US was part of the plot to remove him, he also recognized that engaging with the US was crucial for Pakistan's political survival and economic future. His post-ouster statements emphasized the need for Pakistan to pursue a balanced foreign policy that would allow for improved relations with the United States.

He emphasized his desire for Pakistan to maintain strong relationships with all major powers, including the United States, while firmly asserting the country's sovereignty and independence. Khan repeatedly stated that he was not inherently anti-American, but rather opposed to any excessive foreign interference in Pakistan's internal affairs. In an effort to restore US support for Pakistan,

relations are shaped by broader structural factors, and leadership changes alone are unlikely to shift this cooperation.

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Mars, the moon, and the forces shaping America’s future space policy

NAVIGATING the difficult terrain of space is NASA’s domain, and the storied agency is no stranger to embracing challenges in the final frontier and beyond. But the Earth-bound challenges it faces now are as formidable as the demands of any of its deep space missions.

With the White House announcing last week a 50 percent cut to the agency’s science budget, Congress putting the Trump administration on notice that it opposes any changes to the “Moon-to-Mars” approach to space exploration, and the increasingly visible influence of SpaceX founder Elon Musk over space policy, NASA is hurtling into an uncertain orbit that shaped as much by politics and great-power competition as it is by propulsion.

The divisions over the future of space exploration priorities surfaced last week when the Senate Commerce Committee convened to consider President Donald Trump’s nominee to lead NASA, Jared Isaacman, a billionaire entrepreneur, commercial astronaut and close associate of Musk.

The splits were not along party lines but within the Republican Party itself. Republican Sen. Ted Cruz, who chairs the committee, is a supporter of Trump’s original vision for space and a key advocate of NASA’s Artemis moon-exploration program, introduced in 2017 by the first Trump administration. Cruz made it clear that the current administration must continue this “moon-to-Mars” stepping-stone strategy, which enjoys bipartisan Congressional support and is codified in law.

The controversy centers on what should be America’s next space milestone in space. Trump, during his first speech to Congress upon returning to power, seemed to adopt Musk’s new approach, favored by Musk, when he announced that the US would “plant the American flag on the planet Mars and even far beyond,” suggesting a reduced focus on the moon. Isaacman told the committee during his confirmation hearing he would “prioritize sending American astronauts to Mars,” echoing Trump.

But when Cruz pressed Isaacman on a different commitment he had made to the senator in his office, the prospective head of NASA said he favored balancing both missions, adding: “We don’t have to make a

binary decision of moon versus Mars.”

Lawmakers, Cruz in particular, remained unconvinced about Isaacman’s strategy, viewing it as a dangerous one at a time of extreme uncertainty for the “final frontier.” The “next space race is already here,” Cruz said, citing rising global competition in space, most notably from China. He warned that abandoning plans to return to the Moon would amount to surrendering a vital strategic domain to

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The divisions over the future of space exploration priorities surfaced last week when the Senate Commerce Committee convened to consider President Donald Trump’s nominee to lead NASA, Jared Isaacman, a billionaire entrepreneur, commercial astronaut and close associate of Musk. The splits were not along party lines but within the Republican Party itself. Republican Sen. Ted Cruz, who chairs the committee, is a supporter of Trump’s original vision for space and a key advocate of NASA’s Artemis moon-exploration program, introduced in 2017 by the first Trump administration. Cruz made it clear that the current administration must continue this “moon-to-Mars” stepping-stone strategy, which enjoys bipartisan Congressional support and is codified in law. The controversy centers on what should be America’s next space milestone in space. Trump, during his first speech to Congress upon returning to power, seemed to adopt Musk’s new approach, favored by Musk, when he announced that the US would “plant the American flag on the planet Mars and even far beyond,” suggesting a reduced focus on the moon. Isaacman told the committee during his confirmation hearing he would “prioritize sending American astronauts to Mars,” echoing Trump. But when Cruz pressed Isaacman on a different commitment he had made to the senator in his office, the prospective head of NASA said he favored balancing both missions, adding: “We don’t have to make a binary decision of moon versus Mars.”

Lawmakers, Cruz in particular, remained unconvinced about Isaacman’s strategy, viewing it as a dangerous one at a time of extreme uncertainty for the “final frontier.” The “next space race is already here,” Cruz said, citing rising global competition in space, most notably from China. He warned that abandoning plans to return to the Moon would amount to surrendering a vital strategic domain to Beijing. “We must stay the course,” Cruz insisted. “An extreme shift in priorities would almost certainly mean a ‘red moon,’ ceding ground to China for generations to come.” Cruz is concerned about a Chinese challenge not only for the moon but also in low Earth orbit. He disagrees with retiring the International Space Station ahead of schedule, as Musk has called for, without first putting in place “the necessary systems” to “support and command American astronauts continually in low Earth orbit. We cannot surrender low Earth orbit to the Chinese or the Russians.” The concern in Congress is that Musk is exerting undue influence over US space policy, and tensions spilled over during the conformation hearing when Isaacman repeatedly dodged questions about whether Musk, who is believed to be behind the nomination, was present in the room when Isaacman was interviewed for the job by Trump. Democratic Sen. Ed Markey told Isaacman after he refused to answer the question for a sixth time: “I am assuming you don’t want to answer directly because Elon Musk was in the room.” The moves by the administration so far, including the closure of NASA’s Office of the Chief Scientist and the elimination of 20 key science positions, including the agency’s senior climate science advisor, are thought to be signs of Musk’s shift of focus in NASA’s work and missions away from science issues.

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Cruz is concerned about a Chinese challenge not only for the moon but also in low Earth orbit. He disagrees with retiring the International Space Station ahead of schedule, as Musk has called for, without first putting in place “the necessary systems” to “support and command American astronauts continually in low Earth orbit. We cannot surrender low Earth orbit to the Chinese or the Russians.”

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science, because of the damaging effect this would have on the long-term objectives of lunar exploration.

“It is not just about getting to the moon, it’s about staying there,” she said.

Democratic Sen. Chris Van Hollen said cutting funding is “not only shortsighted, it’s dangerous,” and raised particular concerns about the effect of the cuts on NASA’s Goddard Space Flight Center in his state, Maryland. Democratic

astronaut had ventured since Apollo 17 in 1972, and carried out the first civilian spacewalk.

For many lawmakers, Isaacman’s ties to Musk and his prioritization of Musk’s Mars agenda remain a concern even though he said he could focus on both the moon and Mars at the same time.

But the wider debate is not only about the Trump administration’s priorities for exploration of space, it is about America’s global leadership in space. The

thought to be signs of Musk’s shift of focus in NASA’s work and missions away from science issues.

Isaacman told the Senate committee that he is “an advocate of science,” citing 50 experiments conducted during his space missions and an offer to fund an extension of the Hubble Apace Telescope’s operational life. He also promised that “NASA will be a force multiplier for science.”

But two days after his hearing, a White House budget proposal cut NASA’s overall funding from \$25 billion to \$20 billion and slashed science spending by nearly 50 percent. The Nancy Grace Roman Space Telescope, scheduled for launch in 2026 and hailed as a key astrophysics mission, is among the casualties. Geophysics and Earth science programs would also be gutted.

The cuts have alarmed the space community, scientists and lawmakers alike. Bhavya Lal, a former NASA associate administrator, warned against the sidelining of

Rep. Zoe Lofgren argued that the cuts could erode America’s technological edge while China accelerated its space program.

Most alarmed of all was the scientific community, which warned that the cuts would erode American leadership in all aspects of science, not only space. The Planetary Society said the proposed reductions in funding “would plunge NASA into a dark age.”

Isaacman, a 42-year-old, high-flying entrepreneur who left school at the age of 16 to start a company in his parent’s basement and later founded a private air force, is an unconventional choice to head NASA. Unlike previous agency administrators, he is not a scientist and has never worked at NASA. He presented this as a strength.

He is no stranger to space, however. In 2021 he commanded Inspiration4, the first all-civilian space flight to orbit Earth. In September 2024 he teamed up with Musk’s SpaceX to lead the private Polaris Dawn mission, which flew farther into space than any

Artemis program was designed as a geopolitical counter to China’s International Lunar Research Station and its ambitions in space. A change in the US strategy for the moon could give China, and others (the research station is a joint project with Russia), uncontested access to lunar resources and the strategic high ground.

The presence at Isaacman’s confirmation hearing of four astronauts who will orbit the moon next year as part of the Artemis program’s next mission was a poignant reminder of what is at stake. NASA, as Cruz put it, is “at a crossroads.”

The direction it takes, and the future of space exploration, including science issues, will depend on what course the next administrator sets.

Isaacman, if confirmed, must prove he can navigate the political gravity that is pulling NASA in opposite directions, even if that means reaching for the stars without Musk charting the celestial course for him.

Iran has a chance to have the Arab Gulf on its side

THE nuclear negotiations with Iran today are different from those of 2015. The talks with the Obama administration were limited to the uranium enrichment reduction in return for removal of sanctions. Today, Palestine is on the table. This creates an opportunity for the Gulf states and Iran to join hands and find a solution for the Palestinian issue.

Mohammed Saleh Sadiqian, an Iran-based expert, published the “negotiations framework” that the Iranian team delivered to US envoy Steve Witkoff on the first day of talks in Muscat. The framework included 10 points. The final point states: “The Palestinian cause has been and will remain the main source of tension in the region unless international and regional parties work to find a solution to the issue of the Palestinian people and end the state of occupation of the occupied Palestinian territories.”

Additionally, the ninth point indicated that peace in the region is not only the responsibility of Iran but also of “all parties concerned with this security, stability and peace in the Middle East.” Iran is expected to suggest to Trump a nuclear-free Middle East, which means that Israel would have to dismantle its nuclear military arsenal.

This is an important development, especially in light of the current turmoil the region is witnessing with Israel’s unhinged behavior. Any pressure on Israel is needed and welcomed by Arab states. Saudi Arabia has held its ground, confirming that there will be no normalization without a Palestinian state. Egypt and Jordan have maintained a firm position against any population transfer. However, Israel does not seem to care and the US is not putting any pressure on Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. On the contrary, as soon as Trump took office, he signed off on a new weapons package to Israel.

It is obvious for all parties in the region that Israel is a threat. It has flattened Gaza and it is slowly destroying the West Bank. It attacked Syria without any “casus belli.” It encroached into Syrian territory, though Syrian President Ahmed Al-Sharaa clearly said he is ready to commit to the 1974 disengagement agreement. Israel is threatening Egypt and asking Cairo to dismantle its military infrastructure in Sinai. Arab states know that if Israel takes down Iran, it will be further buttressed and they will likely face more belligerence. They would probably have to handle

Dr. Dania Koleilat Khatib

another Nakba and its effect will last for generations to come.

In this framework, Iran can be viewed as a potential ally and not a foe. The Gulf states can stand with Iran in this round of negotiations. Actually, today, the Arab attitude is visibly different from 2015. Saudi Arabia’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued a statement welcoming the hosting of talks between the Islamic Republic and the US by Oman. Abdullah bin Zayed Al-Nahyan, the UAE minister of foreign affairs, called his Omani counterpart to discuss the development of the Muscat talks. This is a great opportunity for Iran as it will increase its leverage with the US.

In 2015, the Gulf states were antagonistic to agreement. This was viewed as a stab in the back by the Obama administration, which concluded a deal with the

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Iranians without taking into consideration any of their security concerns. Gulf states, on the other hand, were viewed by the Iranians as an impediment to the deal. Actually, the deal and the Obama administration’s arrogant and dismissive attitude toward the Gulf created turbulence in the region.

However, putting Palestine on the table will not be enough to win over the Gulf states. Iran needs to answer their security needs. This should be mutual. Gulf states should also give assurances to Iran. In the current environment and amid the looming Israeli threat, an Arab-Iranian rapprochement is more probable than ever. There is a general awareness that the different parties need to come together and overcome their mistrust in order to face the Israeli scheme. Iran and

Saudi Arabia have the March 2023 security agreement brokered by the Chinese and can build on further cooperation.

In parallel with the nuclear talks with the US, Iran should launch serious and immediate negotiations with Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states. Two issues should be discussed. The first would be a binding security agreement for the different parties. It should be comprehensive, answering all the security concerns of the Gulf states as well as Iran. It should also be coupled with setting a verification mechanism that will allow the different parties to have trust in their counterparts.

The second pressing issue to be discussed should be how to have a common position on Palestine – a position that transcends joint statements and translates into real pressure on Israel and on its patron the US. Israel has always played

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Loss of idealism is an inescapable truth of growing older

IT is impossible not to wince while watching some clips now circulating on X, boosted personally by Elon Musk. There they are — prominent Democratic politicians, some still in office — speaking with sincerity against bureaucratic bloat, factory job losses, unfair trade deals, and influx of undocumented workers. They all did so with a zeal that is now prompting President Donald Trump’s efficiency czar repost the clips with relish. The urge to wince is not because of what those politicians said back then, but because of how far they have strayed from their convictions since the 1990s and early 2000s.

Two of the clips show Sen. Chuck Schumer, in 1996 and 2010, discussing topics such as government efficiency, trade policies, and the impact of globalization on American workers. His words highlight concerns about job losses due to unfair trade practices and the need for the government to protect domestic industries. A clip of Sen. Bernie Sanders from 2015 shows him dismissing open borders as a right-wing proposal and saying that immigration can make Americans poorer.

To those who do not have

a dog in the American political fight, these clips serve as a reminder of the quiet erosion of idealism that happens with age. Not just in well-known politicians and public personalities, but in ordinary people, too. We start out motivated by ideals — wanting to fight injustice, protect the planet, launch revolutions, change the world. Then the years roll on. Bills come due. Personal lives grow more complicated. The system proves impossible to change, and idealism begins to seem impractical.

What begins as a necessity to survive slowly starts to control the way we think, speak, and act. We make moral concessions, telling ourselves they are temporary. We strike compromises to remain relevant, to preserve friendships, to protect our families and end-of-service benefits, to keep the peace. Until, almost imperceptibly, we are no longer the individuals we once imagined becoming. The old clips of Schumer, Sanders, Hillary Clinton, Nancy Pelosi, and Barack Obama highlight changes in their rhetoric and priorities over time that they can now ignore, but not deny.

Psychologists have studied this phenomenon. A 2009 paper in the Journal of Personality and Social

Psychology found that as people age, their goals shift from exploring possibilities to preserving what they have. This shifting of goal posts is not a sign of failure,

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That is why those resurfaced political clips may have touched a chord even with people who do not care about headlines and partisan jabs. They show not hypocrisy so much as political malleability. Leaders who once sounded like champions of the working class today spout a curious mix of Wall Street caution, social-justice platitudes, and climate alarmism. They have not necessarily sold

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Over time, we forget why we chose the paths we did.

This loss of idealism, however, should not be confused with the changes that in fact help adolescents gain

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The same happens in less visible ways to all of us. A young journalist may begin by wanting to speak truth to power — and end up rewriting press releases under deadline, or slanting reports against people or products or views they dislike. A doctor dreams of serving the poor, then builds a practice that caters for the rich. A college graduate takes up teaching intending to awaken minds, but settles for controlling a classroom and making it through the term.

It is also true that idealism, even when buried under the hurly-burly of life, can persist and make a

comeback. Many people, especially after retirement, rediscover their true calling — volunteering, teaching, mentoring, rediscovering childhood hobbies, penning opinion pieces and essays aimed at enlightening young minds. They find the freedom to act on beliefs and desires that career and family once kept in check.

Developmental psychologists say that older adults often possess greater emotional intelligence and deeper moral nuance. Sometimes their idealism is not lost, just less evident. Idealism does not always burn bright like a flame, but keeps going, as when a high-achieving engineer approaching retirement finds a new purpose in life by devoting his free time to teaching the neighborhood children football or basketball. Unfortunately, these are exceptions, not the rule.

There is no shame in growing older. But there may be regret in growing older without remembering who we were before we started making compromises at every turn. Consider Obama’s clarity of thought during a 2008 Democratic primary debate. “The reason the American people are concerned is because they are seeing their own economic position slip away,” he said. “And often-

times employers are exploiting these undocumented workers ... so, what we have to do is to create a comprehensive solution to the problem.”

Or the remarks of Hillary Clinton from a 2003 interview on a radio show when she was a US senator from New York. Emphasizing the importance of securing the nation’s borders and expressing concern about the economic impact of undocumented workers, she bluntly said: “I think we got to have tough conditions. Tell people to come out of the shadows. If they committed a crime, deport them. No questions asked. They are gone.”

Call them what you will — changing personal opinions or political expediency — these resurfaced clips are awkward for Clinton and Obama, sharply contrasting with their current criticisms of the Trump administration and underscoring an ideological drift that likely contributed to the Democrats’ 2024 defeat. But, more importantly, they are useful for anyone who has watched them as a reminder, however uncomfortable, of the idealist each of us once was — and can still become again if we dare, provided it is for the better, not worse.



PSX witnesses bearish trend, loses 755 points

ISLAMABAD (APP): The 100-Index of the Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX) witnessed a bearish trend on Wednesday, losing 755.40 points, a negative change of 0.65 percent, closing at 116,020.11 points as compared to 116,775.50 points on the last trading day.

A total of 481,813,460 shares were traded during the day as compared to 479,465,114 shares the previous trading day, whereas the price of shares stood at Rs38.536 billion against Rs30.449 billion on the last trading day.

As many as 451 companies transacted their shares in the stock market, 140 of them recorded gains and 260 sustained losses, whereas the share price of 51 companies remained unchanged.

The three top trading companies were Energycico PK with 35,607,758 shares at Rs8.51 per share, B O

Punjab Limited with 25,483,545 shares at Rs 11.11 per share and Fauji Foods limited with 25,268,499 shares at Rs15.91 per share.

Unilever Pakistan Foods Limited witnessed a maximum increase of Rs273.35 per share closing at Rs22,967.97 whereas runner-up was PIA Holding Comapny Limited with Rs148.85 rise in its share price to close at Rs1,753.61.

Hoechst Pakistan Limited witnessed a maximum decrease of Rs45.05 per share price, closing at Rs3,194.95, whereas the runner-up Philip Morris (Pakistan) Limited with Rs43.60 decline in its per share price to Rs1,132.27.

Rupee gains10 paise against US Dollar: The Rupee on Wednesday appreciated by 10 paise against the US Dollar in the interbank trading and

closed at Rs280.46 against the previous day's closing of Rs280.56.

However, according to the Forex Association of Pakistan (FAP), the buying and selling rates of the dollar in the open market stood at Rs280.65 and Rs282.15, respectively.

The price of the Euro increased by 07 paise to close at Rs319.01 against the last day's closing of Rs318.94, according to the State Bank of Pakistan.

The Japanese yen went up by 02 paise and closed at Rs1.97, whereas an increase of Rs1.12 was witnessed in the exchange rate of the British Pound, which was traded at Rs372.35 as compared to the last day's closing of Rs371.23.

The exchange rates of the Emirates Dirham and the Saudi Riyal decreased by 03 paise each to close at Rs76.35 and 74.74 respectively.

Gold prices reach all time high to Rs348,000 per tola: The price of 24 karat per tola gold increased by Rs8,600 and was traded at all time high at Rs348,000 on Wednesday as compared to its sale at Rs339,400 on previous trading day, All Pakistan Sarafa Gems and Jewelers Association reported.

The prices of 10 grams of 24 karat also increased by Rs7,373 to Rs298,353 from Rs290,980 whereas the prices of 10 gram 22 karat gold also went up to Rs273,500 from Rs266,741, respectively.

The prices of per tola silver increased by Rs63 to Rs3,460 and ten gram silver increased by Rs54 to Rs2,966. The price of gold in the international market increased by \$86 to \$3,310 from \$3,224 whereas that of silver also increased by \$0.63 and at \$32.98, the Association reported.



ISLAMABAD: Ambassador of Kuwait Nassar Abdulrahman Almutairi meeting with Federal Minister for Petroleum Ali Pervaiz Malik.

LSMI output decrease 1.90 per cent in 8 months

ISLAMABAD (APP): The output of Large Scale Manufacturing Industries (LSMI) in the country during first eighty months of current financial year (2024-25) decreased by 1.90 percent as compared to the production of the corresponding period of the last year.

According to the summary of Provisional Quantum Index Numbers of Large Scale Manufacturing Industries (QIM) for February 2025, released by the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, the QIM for July-February 2024-25 was estimated at 115.82.

On year on year basis, the LSMI output decreased by 3.51 percent during the month of February 2025 as compared to the same month of the last year, the data revealed.

Meanwhile, the on month on month basis, the production of Large Scale Manufacturing Industries went down by 5.90 percent in February 2025 as compared to the month of January 2024.

The production in July-February 2024-25 as compared to July-February 2023-24 has increased in tobacco, textile, wearing apparel, coke & petroleum products, automobiles and other transport equipment while it decreased in food, chemical products, non metallic mineral products, iron & steel products, electrical equipment, machinery and equipment, and furniture.

Shipping activity at Port Qasim

KARACHI (APP): Shipping activity was reported at the Port Qasim where five ships, SM Kaveri, MSC Positano, MSC Yamuna-VI, Sinar Toraja and Lebrethah carrying Container, LPG and LNG berthed at Qasim International Container Terminal, Engro Vopak Terminal and Engro Elengy Terminal respectively Tuesday.

Meanwhile four more ships, CMA CGM Don Pascuale, Sotka, Al-Soor-II and Maritime Guardian scheduled to load/offload Container, Lentils, Gas oil and Gasoline also arrived at outer anchorage during last 24 hours.

A total of eleven ships were engaged at POA berths during the last 24 hours, out of them containers ship 'SM Kaveri' left the port Wednesday morning, while six more ships, MSC Yamuna-VI, MSC Positano, Fubao, Corona, Victoria Glory and Sinar Toraja were expected to sail.

Cargo volume of 267,997 tonnes, comprising 213,489 tonnes imports cargo and 54,508 export cargo carried in 6,450 Containers (3,683 TEUs Imports & 2,767 TEUs Export) was handled at the port during last 24 hours.

There are 12 ships at Outer Anchorage of Port Qasim, out of them four ships, Ken Star, DM Condor, IVS North Bewick and MSC Robrta-V & two more ships, CMA CGM Verdi and George Washington carrying Soya Bean Seed, Chemicals, Coal and Container were expected to take berths at FAP, EVTL, PIBT and QICT are respectively, while another container ship 'Spil Kartika' is due to expected arrive at outer anchorage today (Thursday).

Haroon Akhtar chairs meeting

ISLAMABAD (APP): Special Assistant to the Prime Minister (SAPM) on Industries and Production Haroon Akhtar Khan on Wednesday chaired a high-level meeting with the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority (SMEDA) regarding a proposed project to convert banana plant waste into textile material.

Haroon Akhtar Khan highlighted that the "Banana in Pakistan's Bio-Economy: Transforming Waste into Textile" project is of great significance for both the textile industry and environmental protection, said a news release.

He emphasized that under the Prime Minister's vision, this project is being

planned to benefit small and medium enterprises (SMEs), especially in Sindh and other provinces.

He pointed out that approximately 35,000 tonnes of banana plant waste is either discarded or burned annually, which not only causes environmental degradation but also leads to health issues. By converting this waste into usable textile products, Pakistan can reduce pollution and promote eco-friendly industrial practices.

Haroon Akhtar Khan issued clear directives for the swift implementation of the project, stressing its potential to provide substantial benefits to the SME sector.

He also termed it a timely opportunity for Pakistan to engage in global textile and fashion industry partnerships.

He noted that the Prime Minister's "Uraan" initiative is aligned with this project, aiming to revive industries while ensuring environmental sustainability.

Reaffirming his commitment to institutional integrity and performance, Haroon Akhtar Khan declared a zero-tolerance policy towards inefficiency and corruption. "I need results," he said firmly, indicating that any lapse in performance will not be tolerated and strict measures will be taken to ensure accountability and progress.

TPL issued update regarding fire incident

F.P. Report

KARACHI: In continuation of its regular updates shared regarding the fire incident at Korangi Creek, TPL confirms that the fire which erupted on the eve of March 28, 2025, naturally extinguished itself in the early hours of today. This timeline of 2-3 weeks for the fire to extinguish was in line with feedback received from industry experts and as per TPL's internal assessment. However, under the guidance of the Technical Committee and as a precautionary measure, the fire was reignited deliberately this afternoon to ensure that no residual gas remains which could be harmful to the public.

We expect the Technical Committee and/or the rele-

vant local authorities to also provide an update on the situation in due course. As was shared earlier, on April 8, 2025, the Ministry of Energy (Petroleum Division) had constituted a Technical Committee comprising of representatives from PPL, OGDCL and PRL to oversee the assessment and containment efforts of the fire incident at Korangi Creek.

TPL continues to actively facilitate the work of the Technical Committee in every possible way, and remains fully supportive of this proactive and collaborative initiative.

Furthermore, TPL greatly appreciates the continued guidance, support, and proactive stance provided on this matter by the Government of Pakistan,

the Mayor Karachi, the Local Authorities, the District Administration, CBKC, and by industry leaders including PRL and PPL.

TPL confirms that as per its internal policy, it was in full compliance with legal, safety, and operational standards before initiating the test water boring activity and had obtained all necessary No-Objection Certificates (NOCs) from the relevant regulatory bodies. TPL upholds the highest standards of governance, compliance, and responsibility in all its operations and remains committed to ensuring accurate, transparent, and timely dissemination of information to its stakeholders, partners, and the public at large at all times.

SCCI president attends ceremony of State Bank

SIALKOT (APP): Sialkot Chamber of Commerce and Industry (SCCI) President Ikram-ul-Haq attended the ceremony of the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) Financial Literacy Week 2025.

The event, organised under the theme of enhancing financial awareness and inclusion, marked the launch of a nationwide campaign to educate citizens on key financial concepts and responsible banking practices.

The ceremony brought

together representatives from the banking sector, financial institutions, chambers of commerce, academia, and civil society.

In his interaction with the participants, the SCCI president appreciated the SBP's efforts to bridge the financial literacy gap in Pakistan, especially among underserved and marginalised communities. He highlighted the importance of financial education in empowering individuals and SMEs to make

informed economic decisions.

He also expressed the Chamber's willingness to collaborate with the State Bank in rolling out financial literacy initiatives at the local level, particularly targeting youth, women entrepreneurs, and small business owners in Sialkot.

Ikram-ul-Haq reaffirmed Sialkot Chamber's commitment to supporting inclusive economic growth through financial empowerment.

Stocks retreat as US hits Nvidia chip export to China

LONDON (AFP/APP): European and Asian stock markets mostly retreated on Wednesday after the US government imposed restrictions on exports of a key Nvidia chip to China, the latest trade war salvo between the world's biggest economies.

Nvidia late Tuesday notified regulators that it expects a \$5.5 billion hit this quarter owing to a new US licensing requirement on the chip it can legally sell in the Asian country.

The company at the heart of helping to power artificial intelligence said it must obtain licenses to export its H20 chips to China because of concerns

they may be used in supercomputers there.

President Donald Trump's decision over Nvidia is "signalling a tech-led decline for US equities" when Wall Street opens, noted Joshua Mahony, analyst at trading group Scope Markets.

After a relatively peaceful couple of days on markets following last week's tariff-fuelled ructions, investors were once again on the defensive, sending safe haven gold above \$3,300 an ounce for the first time.

Nvidia shares tumbled around six percent in after-market trade, and its Asian suppliers were also hit.

Trump has also kicked

off an investigation that could see tariffs imposed on critical minerals such as rare earths, which are used in a wide range of products including smartphones, wind turbines and electric vehicle motors.

"Nvidia dropped the mic, revealing fresh export curbs on AI gear headed to China," said Stephen Innes at SPI Asset Management.

"Then came the other shoe: Trump ordering a new probe into tariffs on critical minerals. Boom -- just like that, we're back in whiplash mode."

"Welcome to the new normal: one step forward, two tariff probes back," added Innes.

HU celebrates conferment of national award on chancellor

F.P. Report

KARACHI: A series of colourful events were held at Madinat al-Hikmah during which faculty members, staff and students of Hamdard University, Hamdard Intermediate College, Hamdard Public School, and Hamdard Village School commemorated and celebrated conferment of the coveted Hilal-e-Imtiaz upon Madam Sadia Rashid by the government of Pakistan.

Madam Sadia, the president of Hamdard Foundation Pakistan and chancellor of Hamdard University, was decorated with the second highest civil award by President Asif Ali Zardari during an investiture ceremony held in Islamabad on March 23. She was given the award in recognition of her services and contributions in the fields of education and healthcare.

A smartly dressed con-

tingent of students and guards carrying the national flag and the university colours welcomed Madam Sadia Rashid when her car reached the main gate of Madinat al Hikmah. Her vehicle was then led to one of the grassy grounds of the university by a cavalcade of dozens of motorbikes.

Hundreds of students stood in formation in her honour on the grassy field as Vice Chancellor of Hamdard University Prof Dr Syed Shabib-ul-Hasan, Registrar Kaleem A. Ghias, deans of faculties, heads of departments, and principals of two schools and a college greeted her. The national anthem was played as the chancellor alighted from her vehicle.

After a brief ceremony at which national songs were played and brief tributes paid to the madam chancellor, she was driven to the main auditorium at Bait al-Hikmah. Here again hun-

dreds of students lined the spacious halls who clapped wholeheartedly in her honour and presented dozens of bouquets to her.

Madam Sadia Rashid was thus led to her seat in the auditorium with grace and dignity.

In her speech, Prof Malahat Sherwani, the director of Bait al-Hikmah Library, explained why Madam Sadia is seen widely as someone who should be respected and emulated.

Selected students from the two schools of the Hamdard group, intermediate college and the Hamdard University then made speeches in which they described her personality and her contributions.

They said her demeanour and mannerisms exuded grace and poise from the very beginning. But her grit and determination shone through when she was confronted with the task of taking for-

ward Hakim Mohammad Said's legacy in the wake of his martyrdom.

A hallmark of her character, they said, was that she lives by the very principles she seeks to propagate. "If only some of the people around us manage to walk in her footsteps the situation which we find ourselves in will change for the better," said one of the speakers.

Madam Sadia has had a legacy of excellence for which all the institutions falling under the umbrella of Hamdard group are proud, they said. Each student and each staff member looks up to her, just as they did to her father.

A documentary prepared by a university student, entitled "Transforming lives through education and humanity", was also screened on the occasion. The event concluded with a beautiful rendition of "Dua-e-Said".

Ban on plastic bags expanded to all types, sizes and thicknesses

F.P. Report

KARACHI: The Sindh government has announced a complete ban on all types, sizes, and thicknesses of plastic carrier and shopping bags across the entire province. This significant step towards environmental sustainability will take effect 60 days after the cabinet's approval. The ban includes both non-degradable and oxo-degradable plastic bags, amending previous rules that allowed certain types based on thickness and size. This comprehensive ban underscores the Provincial Environment Department's commitment to tackling plastic pollution.

This decisive action followed the approval of a summary of the Environment, Climate Change and

Coastal Development Department, Government of Sindh for the ban by the Chief Minister of Sindh on 26-03-2025, with directions to present it before the Provincial Cabinet, which subsequently granted its approval.

The key element of this action is the complete ban on all types, weights, and sizes of plastic carrier bags or shopping bags throughout the Province. This included both non-degradable and oxo-degradable varieties.

This initiative amended "The Schedule of the Sindh Prohibition of Non-Degradable Plastic Products (Manufacturing, Sale and Usage) Rules 2014". Specifically, the amendment targeted sub-rule (5) of rule 3 and entry No. 1 of the schedule, which previously

allowed for the manufacturing, stockpiling, sale, and usage of oxo-degradable plastic carrier bags or shopping bags meeting certain specifications.

Under the former regulations outlined in entry No. 1 of the schedule, carrier bags or shopping bags could be manufactured if they were of more than 40 microns thickness, weighed a minimum of 6.0 grams, and had a size bigger than 10x14 inches with oxo-degradable properties. However, the approved amendment marked a complete departure from this conditional permission.

This comprehensive ban was set to come into effect sixty days after the date of approval from the cabinet. The Environment Department responsible for this initiative had previously float-

ed the summary for this ban, which received approval from the Honorable Chief Minister before being presented to and approved by the Sindh Cabinet.

Previously, the rules stipulated that no scheduled plastic product should be made in black color, except for garbage sacks, and recycled scheduled plastic products had to be marked as 'recycled plastic, unsafe for contact with food'. This ban on all carrier and shopping bags represented a significant expansion of the existing regulations.

Through this approved ban, the Environment, Climate Change and Coastal Development Department, government of Sindh underscored its commitment to tackling plastic pollution and fostering a cleaner environment for its citizens.

Grand forum held to mobilize business community for single country exhibition

RAWALPINDI (APP): A grand business forum was held at the Rawalpindi Chamber of Commerce and Industry (RCCI) on Wednesday to mobilize the business community for

Pakistan's Single Country Exhibition in Addis Ababa, scheduled for May 15-17, 2025.

The business forum was organized by the Ethiopian Embassy in Islamabad, in collaboration with the Ministry of Commerce, Trade Development Authority of Pakistan (TDAP), and the RCCI, said a press release.

Dr. Jemal Beker, Special Envoy and Ambassador of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, copreside the business forum along with RCCI President Usman Shaukat.

The event was graced by Ambassador Hamid Asghar Khan, Additional Secretary (Africa) at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs as a chief guest, while Nudrat Hussain, Joint Secretary of the Ministry of Commerce, attended as the guest of honor.

The forum witnessed a substantial participation from the business community interested in exploring

business and investment opportunities in Africa, including Ethiopia.

On the occasion, Ambassador Dr. Jemal urged the business community to explore the significant business, trade, and investment opportunities in Ethiopia as well as in Africa.

He highlighted the potential benefits of participating in the Single Country Exhibition in Addis Ababa that coincides with the High-Level Business Forum 'Invest in Ethiopia', aimed at a global audience, which will also be held in Addis Ababa on May 12-13, 2025.

"These two events present an opportunity for the Pakistani business community to participate in significant gatherings that will feature representation not only from their Ethiopian counterparts but also from across the entire African continent -- a continent with a population exceeding 1.4 billion and possess-

ing abundant natural resources," the ambassador remarked.

He also briefed them on the comparative advantages available to the Pakistani business community in Ethiopia, including access to clean, green, and sustainable energy, affordable and skilled labor, Ethiopia's strategic location, its large population, and the growing bilateral relations between Ethiopia and Pakistan.

He also mentioned the Government of FDR Ethiopia's incentives for foreign investors, the ease of doing business, and dedicated industrial parks for sectors such as pharmaceuticals, textiles, and IT, among others in Ethiopia.

On the other hand, the RCCI president encouraged the business community members to participate in the Single Country Exhibition, describing Ethiopia as a large market brimming with opportunities.

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In brief

Seven nations plan to host Commonwealth games

GLASGOW (Agencies): Fears that Glasgow 2026 might be the last-ever Commonwealth Games have been alleviated after seven nations lodged official expressions of interest to host in 2030 or 2034. Scotland's largest city stepped in last year with plans for a scaled-back Games next summer after the Australia state of Victoria withdrew for financial reasons. Those proposed changes to the event - fewer sports, fewer athletes, fewer venues - have lessened the cost and enticed other potential hosts to look at future stagings. Canada, India, Nigeria, plus two others have all publicly confirmed their interest in the centenary Games in 2030, while New Zealand are one of two nations looking at the 2034 edition. In January, the 74 Commonwealth nations were invited to lodge notes of interest and the seven who responded positively - all from Africa, Asia, the Americas, and Oceania - will have the feasibility of their bids examined over the next five months. It is expected that the hosts of the 2030 Games will be finalised in November. Commonwealth Sport chief executive Katie Sadleir said: "We are thrilled with the incredible interest from four of our six regions. 'We cannot understate the hugely-significant role Scotland has played, having the foresight, tenacity and innovative thinking to step forward and host in 2026. 'We are confident that Glasgow's pioneering example will increase the breadth of countries able to host the Games in the decades ahead." Phil Batty, chief executive of Glasgow 2026, said the news shows that next summer's Games will be "a pivotal moment" in the event's history.

Mbappe available for Copa del Rey final

MADRID (Agencies): Real Madrid striker Kylian Mbappe will be available for the Copa del Rey final against Barcelona later this month after receiving a one-match ban for his sending off against Alaves. The France captain was shown a straight red card during Madrid's 1-0 La Liga win on Sunday for a lunge on Alaves midfielder Antonio Blanco. The referee's report stated Mbappe was sent off for violent conduct, which results in a punishment of between one to three matches. A three-match ban would have seen Mbappe miss the Copa del Rey final against their El Clasico rivals on 26 April. But a commission decided on the most lenient punishment of a one-match ban, which was aided by the referee's report that Mbappe was "disputing the ball". "Mbappe: one-match suspension for a violent incident occurring during the game or as a direct consequence of a game-related incident, with additional fines in accordance with Article 52 of the Civil Code," the Spanish Football Federation said in a statement. The one-match ban means Mbappe will miss his club's La Liga fixture at home to Athletic Club Bilbao on Sunday, 20 April. Madrid are second in La Liga, four points behind league leaders Barcelona. Mbappe has scored 33 goals in 49 appearances for Madrid this season. Carlo Ancelotti's side host Arsenal in the Champions League quarter-finals at the Bernabeu on Wednesday night, seeking to overturn a 3-0 defeat in the first leg in London.



RAWALPINDI: David Willey struck early, Islamabad United vs Multan Sultans, PSL 2025.

Zverev joins Shelton in Munich ATP quarters

MUNICH (AFP): German world number three Alexander Zverev is through to the quarter-finals of the ATP event in Munich after cruising to a straight-sets win over Daniel Altmaier on Wednesday.

Zverev, the top seed at a tournament he won in 2017 and 2018, won 6-3, 6-2 to reach his 99th quarter-final on the ATP tour.

"He makes it complicated. He has beaten lots of top players before. He's beaten (Jannik) Sinner, he's beaten me before, so he knows how to make it complicated," said Zverev.

"I'm extremely happy with the win and looking forward to the next match."

Zverev has not made it past the quarters on the Munich clay since last winning the tournament seven years ago. He has also struggled for form since losing the Australian Open final in January.



In six tournaments since losing to Sinner at Melbourne Park, Zverev has been unable to get past the quarter-finals.

A defeat to Matteo Berrettini in his first match at the Monte Carlo Masters last week cost Zverev a shot at the world number one ranking held by Sinner. Zverev then dropped down from second after Carlos Alcaraz won the title in the principality.

The 27-year-old Zverev will face either fellow German Yannick Hanfmann or Tallon

Griekspoor, of the Netherlands, for a place in the semi-finals in Munich.

Zverev joined world number 15 Ben Shelton in the last eight. Shelton beat Botić van de Zandschulp 7-6 (7/1), 6-3 earlier on Wednesday.

Shelton, seeded second, was broken in the opening set by Van de Zandschulp, in the tournament as a lucky loser.

The American fought back with a break of his own before a dominant showing in the tie-break.

The 22-year-old continued his dominance in the second set, winning the match against his 89th-ranked opponent in one hour and 28 minutes.

"I couldn't be happier," Shelton told the crowd. "I love playing in Germany and especially in Munich... there's still a lot to do."

Shelton will face Italian Luciano Darderi in the quarter-finals.

Pakistan hockey camp for Nations Cup kicks off

WAH CANTT (APP): The training camp for the Pakistan Junior Hockey Team, led by head coach Olympian Tahir Zaman and coach Olympian Muhammad Usman, kicks off at Pakistan Ordnance Factories Sports Complex, Wah Cantt, on Wednesday.

The camp was organized in connection to preparations of the Pakistani team for the upcoming FIH Men's Nations Cup. The prestigious international tournament will take place in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, from June 15 to 21, 2025.

Women blind cricket team off to Australia

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan Blind Cricket Council (PBCC) on Wednesday hosted a heartfelt send-off ceremony in Islamabad for the women's blind cricket team.

The team is departing for its inaugural international tour, a historic series against Australia scheduled from April 18 to 26. The ceremony was attended by PBCC officials, enthusiastic supporters and the families of the players.

Addressing the gathering, the Chairman of the PBCC spoke about the team's potential and the significance of this tour. "Today is a landmark day for blind cricket in Pakistan," he said. "Witnessing our women's team embark on their first international tour is a testament to their unwavering spirit and the progress we have made in promoting inclusivity through sports."

He expressed the confidence in the team's capabilities. "These incredible athletes have trained tirelessly, overcoming numerous challenges with grace and determination. I have immense confidence in their ability to perform well in Australia and showcase the talent and passion that exists within Pakistan's blind cricket community," he added.

Sindh Softball team trials on April 20

KARACHI (APP): President of the Sindh Softball Association (SSA), Dr. Farhan Essa, has announced that trials for the Sindh women's softball team for the 35th National Games will be held in Karachi on April 20, at 3:30 PM at the KMC Sports Complex Football Ground, Kashmir Road.

Female athletes interested in participating are requested to report to Faraz Ijaz at the venue on the scheduled date and time.

SSA Secretary Muhammad Zeeshan Merchant has formed a selection committee consisting of Ayesha Leena, Mursaleen Parvez, Faraz Ijaz, Shahid Aftab, and Muhammad Iqbal. The committee will finalize the squad following the trials and subsequent training camp.

Hassan Ali backs Babar Azam amid poor form

KARACHI (Monitoring Desk): Pakistan fast bowler Hassan Ali has thrown his full support behind under-fire former captain Babar Azam, who is currently battling a dip in form and performance.

Speaking at a press conference after his Pakistan Super League (PSL) match, the fast bowler described Babar as Pakistan's "best player" and dismissed criticism of his form, though he acknowledged that the star batter was going through a tough time.

Hassan's remarks came when a journalist referred to one of his past comments about Babar in which he termed the former captain a "King" by saying "King kar lega" which means, the "King will deliver".

"We made Babar the king, and we are also bringing him down," he said,

adding: "If my words 'the king will deliver' hurt anyone, I apologise. But my stance remains [that] Babar is our best player, and he will bounce back."

Umar Akmal offers a piece of advice to Babar amid form woes: Pakistan batter Umar Akmal has offered a piece of advice to Peshawar Zalmi captain Babar Azam amid his struggles in the ongoing Pakistan Super League (PSL) 10.

The former Pakistan captain has been receiving criticism over a dip in his form in recent times.

During the ongoing PSL 10, Babar Azam managed to score just one run in Peshawar Zalmi's first two games, both of which they lost by big margins.

Amid his struggles in the tournament, Umar Akmal has voiced his support for the former Pakistan captain against critics who ques-

tioned his place in the national side. Speaking on his YouTube channel, Akmal, who is the cousin of Babar Azam, strongly defended the star batter, saying that he was the best batter in the country.

"He's going through a tough phase, but he's still Pakistan's best batsman. Remember, he led the team for five years. Form comes and goes, but class stays forever," he said.

Meanwhile, the Pakistan batter advised the Peshawar Zalmi captain to take a break from cricket.

"Babar should meet PCB Chairman Mohsin Naqvi, the chief selector and the captain. He should ask for two months' rest — no cricket, just training and spend time with family. When he returns, he will be refreshed and back in form," Umar Akmal suggested.

Chelsea fans must 'trust' the process despite blip: Maresca



LONDON (AFP): Enzo Maresca insists Chelsea are improving despite an alarming slump in form that has put the Blues at risk of missing out on the Champions League for a third consecutive season.

A disappointing 2-2 draw at home to struggling Ipswich on Sunday meant Chelsea slipped to sixth in the Premier League, with only a place in the top five enough to qualify for Europe's top club competition.

Maresca's team have won just five of their past 16 league games to tumble down the table after a bright start to his reign.

There has been a growing revolt against the

Italian's patient, possession-based style of play among the fans at Stamford Bridge during his first season in charge.

Maresca appeared to suggest supporters influenced the decision of goalkeeper Robert Sanchez to play the ball long from a goal kick, which came before Ipswich's second goal.

Chelsea finished 12th in the 2022/23 campaign and sixth last season, and the manager believes there have been tangible signs of progress.

"I think fans, they have to trust us, they have to trust the team, they have to trust the club, what we are doing now," he said

Wednesday, on the eve of the second leg of the club's UEFA Conference League quarter-final against Legia Warsaw.

"This season we spent almost all our season in the top four. I think it's a big proof that the team is improving and is doing the right things."

"Now, is it enough? For me, no. Because I would like to fight with this club for titles, for the Premier League, for the Champions League."

But at the same time, I think we have to be realistic and see that this team, this season, is improving. It's there in the numbers.

"Now we are not in the top five, so we are not happy. We are going to try to finish there. But it's proof that we are doing the right things."

Maresca could end the season with a trophy, with Chelsea 3-0 up after the first leg of their European tie.

He is expected to make wholesale changes against the Polish side to prioritise Sunday's trip to local rivals Fulham in the Premier League.

O'Sullivan still contender for eighth World C'ship crown



SHEFFIELD (Agencies): Seven-time winner Ronnie O'Sullivan goes into Thursday's World Championship draw as one of the favourites despite having not competed since January or even having confirmed he will play in the tournament.

Four-time world champion Mark Selby and Crucible master of ceremonies and commentator Rob Walker will be in Salford to conduct the first-round draw at 08:45 BST on BBC Radio 5 Live, with it also being streamed on the BBC Sport website and BBC iPlayer.

O'Sullivan, who remains one of the sport's biggest pulls, is seeded fifth and has been installed as one of the leading contenders with the bookmakers.

The 49-year-old has been an ever-present at the Crucible since turning professional in 1992 and would be going for a record eighth world title in the modern era.

However, he has previously said he will give himself "as much time as possible" to decide whether he plays in Sheffield.

O'Sullivan has not featured on the World Snooker Tour (WST) since he with-

drew from his Championship League group - and was so frustrated with his game that he snapped his cue after losing four of his five matches.

"The Rocket" subsequently pulled out of the Masters at Alexandra Palace in London on medical grounds, missed the German Masters in Berlin and apologised to fans after electing not to play at the Welsh Open.

He also withdrew from the World Grand Prix in Hong Kong in March and has not played in anything over a best-of-seven match since his first-round defeat to Barry Hawkins at the UK Championship in November.

Widely regarded as the greatest player of all time, O'Sullivan famously defended his world crown in 2013, after playing just one competitive match that term prior to the showpiece event.

Recent footage of him compiling a maximum 147, seven minutes with a new cue in practice suggests it would also be foolish to discount him as a potential winner this time around.

And he has already reached three semi-finals

earlier this term at the Xi'an Grand Prix, Shanghai Masters and Riyadh Season Snooker Championship.

The World Snooker Championship gets under way at 10:00 BST on Saturday, 19 April, with defending champion and top seed Kyren Wilson in action.

The final takes place over two days starting on Sunday 4 May, with £500,000 for the winner.

BBC Sport has comprehensive live coverage of the championship on BBC One, BBC Two, BBC Four and Red Button, while every match will be shown in full on iPlayer, the BBC Sport website and the BBC Sport app.

Full seedings:

1. Kyren Wilson (Eng)
2. Judd Trump (Eng)
3. John Higgins (Sco)
4. Mark Selby (Eng)
5. Ronnie O'Sullivan (Eng)
6. Mark Williams (Wal)
7. Luca Brecel (Bel)
8. Mark Allen (NI)
9. Neil Robertson (Aus)
10. Ding Junhui (Chi)
11. Barry Hawkins (Eng)
12. Zhang Anda (Chi)
13. Si Jiahui (Chi)
14. Xiao Guodong (Chi)
15. Shaun Murphy (Eng)
16. Jak Jones (Wal)

Gabon striker Boupendza dies after 11th floor fall

LIBREVILLE (AFP): Gabon international striker Aaron Boupendza died on Wednesday at the age of 28 when he fell from the 11th floor of a building in China, according to the national football federation (Fegafoot).

"The Gabonese international died following a fall from the 11th floor of his building in China where he was playing for Zhejiang FC," the federation said in a statement on X.

"Aged 28, Boupendza leaves us with the memory of a great striker who left his mark on the CAN (Africa Cup of Nations) in Cameroon."

In 2022, the Panthers were eliminated in the last 16 of the AFCON by Burkina Faso.

"Fegafoot and the entire Gabonese football



family offer their sincere condolences to his biological family," the federation added.

Gabonese president-elect Brice Oligui Nguema also took to X to add his condolences.

"It is with immense sadness that I learn of the tragic death of Aaron Boupendza, a talented centre-forward who brought honour to Gabonese football," he

posted.

Broadcaster Gabon 24 said that while "the exact circumstances of this tragedy are still unclear" an investigation is underway "to establish the facts".

Born in Moanda, Boupendza joined French side Bordeaux in 2016, spending most of his time on loan at other French clubs.

In 2020 he signed for Turkish side Hatayspor, and was top scorer in the Super Lig in 2020-21 before moving on to Al Arabi, with whom he won the Qatar FA Cup, and Al Shabab in the Saudi Pro League.

Spells in the USA with FC Cincinnati and Romania's Rapid Bucharest followed ahead of his move to China in January.

35 players selected for Sindh Girls Hockey Team

KARACHI (APP): The trials for the Sindh Girls Hockey Team, ahead of the 35th National Games 2025, were successfully held at the Olympian Hanif Khan and Dr. Junaid Ali Shah Hockey Stadium in Karachi. Over 80 female players from across the province participated in the trials, which took place at the KHA Sports Complex in Gulshan-e-Iqbal.

Under the supervision of Olympian Iftikhar Syed, Chairman of the Selection Committee of the Sindh Hockey Association, 35 top-performing players were shortlisted for the training camp. The camp will be conducted at the same venue, with the final team to be announced after its conclusion.

The selected players include six goalkeepers, nine full backs, eight half backs, and 17 forwards. The full list is as follows:

Goalkeepers: Shazma Naseem, Fiza Saleem,

Yusra Mubeen, Musfirah Rashid, Maryam Fayaz, Mehwish

Full Backs: Syeda Ayesha, Shifaat Zehra, Nida Ghouri, Hafsa, Hanna Nadeem, Dua Yaseen, Humera Niaz, Rabiya, Subhana Akhter

Half Backs: Iqra Iqbal, Mehak Yaseen, Rija Moez, Azra Batool, Musfirah Furqan, Gulnaz, Aisha Nadeem, Tehreem Hameed

Forwards: Momal Saqena, Mishal Baloch, Faiza Altaf, Riffat Fatima, Saima Ghulam, Aisha Arif, Mubashira Furqan, Mahnoor, Asiya Mahar, Umna Fatima, Rushda Fatima, Muqaddas Rafiq, Shehrish, Maheen Ali, Huma Amani, Maryam Zahid, Samina Tabassum

Olympian Hanif Khan, Pride of Performance and Honorary Secretary General of the Karachi Hockey Association (KHA), expressed his satisfaction over the strong turnout of young talent and is hopeful that the Sindh

women's team will deliver a commendable performance in the upcoming National Games. He also assured that the players will receive top-notch training and facilities during the camp.

Olympian Iftikhar Syed emphasized that the final squad will be selected after assessing the players' performance in the camp.

Meanwhile, Asma Shah, President of the KHA Women's Wing, lauded the participants, stating that female hockey players from Sindh have great potential and are capable of winning medals at national-level competitions.

The trials were also observed by Sindh Olympic Association (SOA) Monitoring Committee members Ms. Majida Hameed and Ms. Kausar. Coordinators for the event included Khalid Munir, Muzammil Hussain, and Hassan Askari.



In brief

Death anniversary of Babu Baral observed

ISLAMABAD (APP): The 14th death anniversary of renowned comedian and actor of stage, television and film industry, Ayub Akhtar, popularly known as Babu Baral was observed on Wednesday. He was born as Ayub Akhtar in 1964 in Ghakhar Mandi, Gujranwala, Punjab. Babu Baral began his career in 1982 as a stage performer in Gujranwala. His exceptional talent for mimicry and improvisational comedy quickly propelled him to fame. He later moved to Lahore, where he became a central figure in the city's vibrant theatre scene. Over nearly three decades, Baral performed in over a thousand stage plays, including popular productions such as Shartiya Mithay, Bhukay Haatha Bataira, and Kuch Na Kaho. Beyond acting, Babu Baral was also a playwright and director, contributing significantly to Pakistani theatre. His unique ability to mimic legendary singers and his sharp wit earned him widespread acclaim. In recognition of his contributions to the arts, he was honored with the Tamgha-e-Imtiaz and Sitara-e-Imtiaz. He had been suffering from cancer, hepatitis and kidney disease and was being treated at a private hospital. Babu Baral passed away after a prolonged illness at the age of 47 on this day in 2011, at Lahore.

MPA lauds DHQ Hospital performance

RAWALPINDI (APP): Member Provincial Assembly (MPA) Malik Mansoor Afsar has appreciated the professionalism and health services rendered by DHQ Hospitals. During his visit to the hospital, Mansoor visited various wards and examined the healthcare services being provided to the patients. He also met with few patients and inquired from them about the issues, if any they were facing, and directed the hospital management for immediate redressal. MPA Mansoor highlighted that the results of historic health reforms being brought by the CM Maryam Nawaz are being reached at the root level. "The benefits of the exemplary health reforms are now reaching to the common man in the government hospitals", he said. Earlier, upon his arrival at the hospital, Dr. Ikramullah Khan briefed the MP about the performance of the hospital, which was commended by him.

CDA crackdown on bridge encroachments

ISLAMABAD (APP): Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) District Administration and Capital Development Authority (CDA) has launched a coordinated operation against illegal encroachments on Khanna Bridge, resulting in the arrest of five individuals who were obstructing traffic with unauthorized carts. According to a press release issued here on Wednesday, the joint operation targeted individuals illegally occupying public space and impeding traffic flow on the strategic bridge. Authorities swiftly moved to clear the area, removing unauthorized vehicles and carts that were creating congestion and safety hazards. The arrested individuals were blocking the bridge's thoroughfare, violating municipal regulations and causing significant disruption to normal traffic movement, officials said.



ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Interior & Narcotics Control Mohsin Naqvi in a group photo during the Pak GCC Anti-Narcotics Conference. —APP Photo

KP positioned as gateway between central, South Asia: Kundi

ISLAMABAD (APP): Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Faisal Karim Kundi, participated as the chief guest at the opening session of the "Leaders in Islamabad Business Summit 2025" held on Wednesday in Islamabad.

The session was attended by leading economic experts, investors, and members of the business community, including Nutshell Group founder Muhammad Zafar Ahsan. In his keynote address, Governor Kundi welcomed the summit, calling it a significant platform for learning from global leaders and exploring partnerships.

"In a time of global uncertainty, technological advancement, and rapid change, we must move forward with collective wisdom, innovation, and resilience," he said, emphasizing the province's transformation into a center of economic activity. Governor Kundi stressed that economic development is not solely the responsibility of governments or corporate leaders, but a shared journey for all.

He urged stakeholders to turn chal-

lenges into opportunities through collaboration and strategic vision.

Highlighting Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's historical importance, Kundi said that the province has long served as a bridge between Central and South Asia, and continues to offer immense potential in trade, culture, and development. "Peace is the foundation of our prosperity," he said. "With improved security, we are witnessing economic growth. Our province is transitioning from a conflict-affected region to an emerging economic hub." Concluding his address, Governor Kundi invited the international community to invest in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and become partners in its progress. "Let us make KP a shining example where determination, opportunity, and vision come together to create new pathways of development," he said.

Meanwhile, Governor Faisal Karim Kundi, has said that the province holds immense potential for tourism, and the growing interest of

international investors is a clear sign of Pakistan's improving global image. He made these remarks during a dinner hosted in honor of the Malam Jabba International Advisory Board. Expressing optimism, Governor Kundi said such initiatives would pave the way for sustainable development in Pakistan. He praised the visit of the International Advisory Board to Islamabad and highlighted the importance of efforts being made to promote winter sports and skiing resorts in the country.

"These projects are not only instrumental in introducing Pakistan's tourism potential to the world but also play a crucial role in strengthening the local economy and creating employment opportunities for the youth," he added. Governor Kundi emphasized that enhancing facilities like the Malam Jabba Resort reflects a promising future for international tourism in the region, aligning with broader economic and cultural development goals.

Sardar Yousaf, Mashhood discuss technical training in Madaris

ISLAMABAD (APP): Federal Minister for Religious Affairs Sardar Muhammad Yousaf and Chairman of the Prime Minister's Youth Programme Rana Mashhood on Wednesday held an important meeting to discuss the integration of technical education into religious seminaries (madaris) and youth empowerment initiatives across Pakistan.

Rana Mashhood revealed that the government is planning to introduce technical and vocational training programs in madaris to empower students with practical skills. "We aim to provide 1.5 million employment opportunities abroad annually. Students of madaris, owing to their discipline and knowledge of Arabic, have significant potential in Gulf countries," he said.

Highlighting the significance of youth in national development, Rana Mashhood said, "Our provinces have individual youth policies, but we lacked a unified national youth policy.

Now is the time to reflect on the kind of Pakistan we want to leave for future generations." He also announced a nationwide survey to assess the needs and potential of school-going children, seminary students, and youth working in the fields.

Federal Minister Sardar Yousaf emphasized the important role of madaris in Pakistani society. "Our seminaries are doing exemplary work. Students from madaris are second to none in terms of discipline and training," he said adding that during the previous term, a Council of Ulema and Mashaikh comprising over 50 senior religious scholars was established, and now efforts are underway to revive it for guidance on social issues.

Referring to past initiatives, Sardar Yousaf noted, "We worked significantly on the Nizam-e-Salat (prayer timings system) to promote national unity. Once again, we seek the guidance of our religious scholars in final-

izing the National Youth Policy."

Appreciating the inclusion of scholars in the youth policy consultation process, prominent scholar Shabbir Usmani congratulated both Rana Mashhood and Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif. "This is the first time that scholars are being formally consulted in youth-related programs," he remarked.

The meeting also acknowledged the contribution of Chief of Army Staff General Syed Asim Munir, who delivered a powerful speech recently and expressed strong support for the youth program. Sardar Yousaf affirmed that the Ministry of Religious Affairs will play an active role in shaping and implementing the youth program and policy. "We have a close relationship with the seminaries and scholars. Their students display exceptional discipline and the examination systems in these institutions are commendable," he concluded.

Hina urges for strict punishment under Punjab Acid Control Bill

ISLAMABAD (APP): Punjab Women Protection Authority (PWPA) Chairperson Hina Pervaiz Butt praising the Punjab Acid Control Bill 2025, highlighting the importance of strict enforcement and grassroots awareness initiatives to prevent acid violence and empower women.

In an exclusive interview with a private news channel, Chairperson PWPA emphasized the importance of strict enforcement and public awareness in combating acid violence.

"The Punjab Acid Control Bill 2025 is a significant step towards protecting women and vulnerable

groups from acid attacks," she said.

Hina Pervaiz Butt advocated for harsh penalties for perpetrators, stressing that exemplary punishments would serve as a deterrent. She also highlighted the need for widespread public awareness campaigns to educate people about the devastating consequences of acid violence and the importance of reporting such incidents. She highlighted the crucial role of all stakeholders, particularly the media in raising awareness and combating acid violence.

Hina Pervaiz Butt further disclosed that her department is collaborating with hospitals and Police depart-

ments to provide comprehensive support to acid attack survivors.

As part of this initiative, around 36 district-based units are being established to ensure timely medical assistance and rehabilitation services for victims, she said. These units will play a vital role in providing critical care and support to survivors, helping them to rebuild their lives, she added.

Chairperson also highlighted the importance of a toll-free helpline for reporting cases of acid violence. This initiative aims to provide a safe and accessible channel for reporting incidents and seeking help, she added.

Motorway in GB to be game changer: Aleem Khan

ISLAMABAD (APP): Chief Minister Gilgit-Baltistan, Haji Gulbar Khan and Federal Minister for Communications Abdul Aleem Khan held a meeting and discuss key matters, including the construction of highways and roads in Gilgit-Baltistan (GB).

The federal minister emphasized that the proposed Motorway for Mansehra, Kaghan and Naran could be game changer for the area. He highlighted the need for new five-star hotels on tourist destinations such as Gilgit, Skardu which can support the growing tourism, said a press release issued here on Wednesday.

Abdul Aleem Khan stated that the scenic and tourism-rich northern areas of Pakistan hold immense importance and that it is crucial to provide maximum facilities to the

people visiting here. He announced that all highways in Gilgit-Baltistan will be integrated with the Rescue 1122 Emergency Service and if required, helicopter services will also be introduced to further facilitate in emergency response. He reiterated that the promotion of tourism is a major goal and that rapid development of road infrastructure is essential to transform tourist destinations in Gilgit-Baltistan to match the standards of developed countries.

During the meeting, Chief Minister Haji Gulbar Khan expressed his gratitude for the support extended by the Federal Minister for Communications Abdul Aleem Khan in the past year and acknowledged the various initiatives launched by NHA including induction of Motorway Police.

He assured full cooperation from the Provincial Government of Gilgit-Baltistan to the National Highway Authority (NHA).

It was agreed during the meeting that on the directives of the Federal Minister, the Federal Secretary for Communications and the Chairman of the NHA will soon undertake a visit to Gilgit-Baltistan. They will hold meetings with the Provincial Government to resolve outstanding issues and finalize further actions.

Chief Minister also identified several roads within the province that require immediate attention. In response, the Federal Minister instructed the officers of the Ministry of Communications to comprehensively address all matters during their visit by ensuring smooth and effective implementation.

Heavy rain, hail hit ICT admin teams in ground for relief work

ISLAMABAD (APP): A sudden spell of rain and hailstorm lashed Islamabad, prompting immediate response from the district administration.

According to the spokesman of Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) administration, officers and teams were deployed across the city to manage the situation and inspect vulnerable areas.

He said that the Islamabad received heavy rainfall and hailstorm disrupting daily activities in several parts of the capital. Following the weather alert, the district administration sprang into action to deal with the situation.

On the instructions of the Deputy Commissioner Islamabad, all Assistant Commissioners were sent to the field to monitor conditions in low-lying and affected areas. Their visits aimed to assess water accumulation, ensure clearance of blocked roads, and support ongoing drainage efforts.

Teams from the Capital Development Authority

(CDA) and Metropolitan Corporation Islamabad (MCI) accompanied the Assistant Commissioners to assist in relief operations and provide technical support where needed.

According to officials, the administration teams remained active in all sectors, including E-11 and other areas prone to flooding. The teams reviewed the situation on ground and coordinated with civic agencies to drain excess rainwater.

Residents of the capital faced temporary disruptions due to waterlogging on roads and in residential areas. However, the administration reported no major damage or injuries during the storm.

Authorities also directed staff to stay alert for any emergencies and remain available throughout the day. Machinery and equipment were mobilized to clear blocked routes and support public movement.

Officials said that rainwater was being cleared from main roads and resi-

dential areas using pumps and other resources. They assured that the administration would continue to monitor the situation and respond as needed.

The district administration advised the public to avoid unnecessary travel during rain and to report any emergency via helplines.

The rainfall and hailstorm were part of a weather system that affected several parts of the country, including northern regions. Meteorological officials had earlier warned of possible heavy rain in Islamabad and surrounding areas.

The city's civic bodies have been working in coordination with the administration to minimize inconvenience for the residents and to ensure quick restoration of normal conditions.

The district administration stated that all field officers would remain on duty until the weather improves, and that steps were being taken to avoid water accumulation in the coming hours.

IRSA releases 80,400 cusecs water

ISLAMABAD (APP): Indus River System Authority (IRSA) on Wednesday released 80,400 cusecs water from various rim stations with inflow of 118,200 cusecs. According to the data released by IRSA, the water level in River Indus at Tarbela Dam was 1418.68 feet which was 16.68 feet higher than dead level of 1402.00 feet. Water inflow and outflow in the dam was recorded as 35,900 cusecs and 20,000 cusecs respectively.

The water level in River Jhelum at Mangla Dam was 1110:20 feet, which was 60.20 feet higher than its dead level of 1,050 feet. The inflow and outflow of water was recorded 38,900 cusecs and 17,000 cusecs respectively.

The release of water at Kalabagh, Taunsa, Guddu and Sukkur was recorded as 50,700, 34,000, 27,800 and 6,600 cusecs respectively. Similarly, from River Kabul, a total of 28,900 cusecs of water released at Nowshera and 8,000 cusecs released from River Chenab at Marala.

RCB reappears with full force against encroachments

RAWALPINDI (APP): Rawalpindi Cantonment Board (RCB) reappeared on roads with full kinetic force to demolish remaining encroachments from the Saddar area, in sequence with its major anti-encroachment operations to make the Cantt areas cleaner.

During the month of Ramadan, a significant outcome was observed after continued cleansing of bazaars by the RCB.

With heavy machinery along with enforcement teams, a grand operation was conducted in markets adjacent to Saddar, including Kashmir Road, Adamjee Road, Chotta Bazaar, and Railway Road, where illegal structures and encroachments were removed. According to the details, The operation also targeted areas like Hathi Chowk and Gwal Mandi, with Additional CEO, Arshad Khan leading the crackdown.

In a brief talk with APP here on Wednesday, CEO

Syed Ali Irfan Rizvi assured that cases will be registered against those responsible for illegal encroachments. "Stalls set up outside shops and carts parked on roads were also confiscated", he added.

Rizvi emphasized that encroachments in cantonment areas will not be tolerated, and the anti-encroachment drive will continue in phases. During the operation, footpaths and main roads were cleared of obstacles. So far, 11 major markets have been cleared, with over 4,000 illegal encroachments removed across the cantonment in recent drive.

A force of 75 personnel along with heavy machinery participated in the Saddar operation. Rizvi stressed that phased operations will continue; with strict enforcement against future violations. "This crackdown aims to restore order and ensure compliance with cantonment laws", he said.

300 agri graduates depart to China for advanced training

ISLAMABAD (APP): A cohort of around 300 agricultural graduates has left for China on Wednesday to participate in three-month advanced level training on agriculture and livestock technologies. It is the first batch under Prime Minister's Initiative for Capacity Building of 1000 Agricultural Graduates in China, launched by Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif.

The programme envisages to train young Pakistani agricultural graduates at top Chinese institutions having expertise in key areas of agriculture, fisheries and livestock technology. The first cohort of 300 graduates will attend training course at North West Agriculture & Forestry University and Yangling

Vocational and Technical College, which are highly ranked institutions in disciplines of Agriculture, Food Technology and Veterinary Sciences.

Federal Minister for Planning, Development & Reforms Mr. Ahsan Iqbal and senior officials from Federal Ministry for National Food Security and Research and HEC, including Adviser (Scholarships) HEC Muhammad Raza Chohan, attended the departure ceremony held at Islamabad International Airport.

Speaking on the occasion, Federal Minister Ahsan Iqbal congratulated the selected graduates on embarking upon the new academic journey. He underscored Pakistan is among

the top 10 agriculture-producing countries of the world, adding that agriculture is the backbone of development in the country and there is a huge potential for growth of the sector.

"Your selection lies a great responsibility upon your shoulders of exploiting this opportunity, learning the best practices in terms of better farm mechanization and utilization of the latest technology, and implementing them in Pakistan," he underlined, while advising the outbound youth. He said that the training and exposure will equip the graduates with skills, enabling them to play their part in the development of agriculture sector in the country.

Mentioning how China made

rapid progress and pulled its people out of poverty, he said political stability and persistency of policies are the imperatives leading towards a country's progress. He said the Government of Pakistan envisions strengthening of the sector, as Pakistan has to emerge as a net exporter of agriculture products. He advised the trainees to take this opportunity as a mission, play the brand ambassadors of Pakistan in China, and work hard to live up to the confidence resided in them.

The initiative 'Pakistan's Prime Minister's Initiative for Capacity Building of 1,000 Agricultural Graduates in China' is envisioned by the Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz

Sharif during his last year visit to Yangling Agricultural Technology Demonstration Base in Shaanxi province, China. Short term training course is designed to get orientation about the evolution of Chinese agriculture and lessons learned, visits of farm field and sites of private and public sector farms, labs and companies set up in China.

The graduates will also be engaged in hands on practical trainings through workshops in labs and receive class rooms trainings. Training progress of the trainees will also be evaluated and assessed for the acquired skills. HEC, in line with the guidance of Ministry of National Food Security and Research, ensured transparent selection following a

rigorous process. Special emphasis was made on giving opportunity to the agriculture graduates from marginalized and far-flung areas including Balochistan. Expressing their views, the young graduates said that cost of foreign agriculture trainings was expensive which cannot be met without government's patronage. They thanked Prime Minister for prioritizing and investing in capacity building of field, vital to Pakistan's growth.

The enthusiastic Pakistani agriculturalists were eager to learn from the highly qualified Chinese faculty and, upon their return, apply their international exposure and acquired knowledge to tackle the pressing challenges of agriculture and food security.

Children reunited with family

BAGHLAN (BNA): Qari Nasratullah Parsa, the Director of Labor and Social Affairs of Baghlan province, announced that 380 children under the age of 18 were deported from Iran, Pakistan, and Turkey last year and have been successfully reunited with their families. The children were arrested during illegal immigration attempts and, after being unable to cross borders, received care and support from various organizations until their safe return home.

Works begins on township

HELMAND (BNA): Work begun on the development of a new township named "Umari" in Helmand's Garmsir district. The project is part of a broader urban development initiative in the province. According to the Bakhtar News Agency, the project is being developed in accordance with the Ministry of Urban Development and Housing's national plan and is set to be built over 650 jerbis (approximately 130 hectares) of land in the Dahmazang area of Garmsir.

Three industrial parks in Helmand planned

HELMAND (TOLONews): Local officials in Helmand said that three industrial parks are being built in the province to support industrialists. They said that once the construction of these industrial parks is completed, industrial activities in Helmand will also increase. Nazaruddin Ahmadi, the deputy director of industry and commerce in Helmand, told TOLONews: "We have allocated areas in three locations in Helmand for the construction of industrial zones, and soon we will hand them over to investors to strengthen industrial activities." Rahmatullah Nazari, the head of the Chamber of Industry and Mines in Helmand, said: "We have over 150 large manufactur-

ing factories in Helmand that produce various products. There are also smaller factories, but the larger ones are more active." Khaleqdad Shahi, the head of a flour mill factory in Helmand, stated that the factory, which cost 31 million afghani, has recently been built in the industrial parks of Helmand and produces 140 tons of flour every 24 hours. Khaleqdad Shahi said: "This factory has been built with an investment of 31 million afghani and produces 140 tons of domestic wheat flour every 24 hours." Currently, a large number of people are working in the industrial parks of Helmand province. They say that the development of industrial parks and invest-

ment in the province can reduce the unemployment rate. Mohammad Rahim, a resident of Helmand, said: "If such investments are made, our skilled people will be employed, and job opportunities will also be provided for migrants and other people." Mohammad Kargar, a worker in one of the factories in Helmand, said: "If job opportunities are created here for people, no one will go abroad for work; however, more opportunities need to be created for investors within the country." According to local officials, there are currently 150 manufacturing factories operating in the industrial parks of Helmand, most of which are engaged in cotton processing.

2.43m Afghans return home in over 18 months

KABUL (Pajhwok): The International Organisation for Migration (IOM) says it has assisted more than one million Afghan refugees returning from Pakistan and Iran since the rise in Afghan return movements began in September 2023. In a statement, the agency said, between September 2023 and 2025, more than 2.43 million undocumented Afghan migrants had returned from Pakistan and Iran. It added 54 were forcibly repatriated and the IOM provided critical post-arrival humanitarian support to 1,003,563 of the returnees. Meanwhile, returns from Iran remained consistently high in late 2023 and continued into 2024. Iranian authorities have also announced plans to escalate deportations in 2025. "Reaching the one million mark reflects the capacity of both IOM and our partner agencies, as well as our ongoing commitment to supporting Afghans returning to a country where many have little or nothing to come back to," said IOM Afghanistan Chief of Mission, Mihyung Park. "With a new wave of

large-scale returns now underway from Pakistan, needs on the ground are rising rapidly—both at the border and in areas of return that are struggling to absorb large numbers of returnees. As lead of the Border Consortium, IOM said it was ready to strengthen its response and expand operations at key border points to address the sharp increase in arrivals and the heightened vulnerability of returnees - but this can only happen with urgent additional resources to overcome current funding short-falls."

Returning Afghan children being documented at Torkham



JALALABAD (Pajhwok): The Education Department in eastern Nangarhar province has set up a special committee to register children after returning from Pakistan to ensure they continue their education after homecoming. Education Director Mohammad Sharif Halimi said all-out efforts were underway to provide returning children with education. He added the committee, operating at the Torkham crossing in collaboration with a charitable organisation and its professional team, was actively working to support this initiative. The main objective of the special body was to identify and register returnee children, determine their place of residence in Nangarhar and facilitate their enrolment in nearby schools, the official explained. Dilawar Momand, monitoring and evaluation officer at the Education Department, revealed more than 2,000 boys and girls — previously studying in Pakistan — had been regis-

tered in the past week. He explained: "To simplify the enrolment process, students are no longer required to go through lengthy documentation procedures. Instead, their details are recorded at Torkham, verified on-site by representatives of the Refugee Department and assessed by the Education Department before being admitted to different schools." The initiative is supported by the Educational Organisation for Reconstruction and Women of Afgha-

nistan, whose staff voluntarily assist at the border. Officials from the organisation say the initiative is part of their national duty to reach out to returning refugees and promote education among them. Kamran Momand, a local representative of the organisation, said they had set up a tent known as the Help Desk at the Omari Camp in Torkham to register incoming refugees and guide them on how to rejoin the education system. Meanwhile, returnees voiced satisfaction with the establishment of the committee. Ikramullah, a resident of Momand Dara district who recently returned from the neighbouring country, said they were worried about their children's education. But now he is satisfied that their studies would continue uninterrupted. Ikramullah, who studied up to 8th grade in Pakistan, acknowledged the guidance and registration process had helped him quickly resume his education and avoid disruption or delays in his learning.

Tourism in Herat increases by 25% compared from last year

HERAT (TOLONews): The Department of Information and Culture in Herat stated that with the improvement of tourism services, the presence of foreign tourists in the province has increased. According to the officials of this department, the number of foreign tourists in the province has increased by 25% compared to the previous year. The construction of standard hotels, provision of security, guidance for tourists, and the creation of facilities at historical and sightseeing locations are said to be the main reasons for the growing interest of foreign tourists. Wakil Ahmad Zahidmal, head of Afghan Tour in Herat, told TOLONews: "Just as the name of these hotels is international, they also provide international serv-

ices to their guests. In all areas, such as bedrooms, sitting areas, and food, standard services are provided to tourists." Wahid Ahmad Afzali, a manager of one of the hotels, said: "Foreign tourists should come and see that such luxurious hotels have been built in Afghanistan, and we also have warm-hearted, hospitable, and friendly people. I hope that more luxurious buildings will be constructed in the future to attract more tourists." According to the Department of Information and Culture in Herat, many facilities have been provided for the growth of the tourism industry over the past three years. The officials of this department say that in the past year, the number of foreign tourists in Herat

has increased by 25%. Hamidullah Ghiyasi, director of Culture and Arts at the Department of Information and Culture in Herat, told TOLONews: "Security is maintained throughout the country, and the provision of services and facilities for tourists has also been improved, including the standard and international hotels available for them." Some tourists in Herat say that more facilities are needed for them to easily visit all the historical and sightseeing places in the province. Gol Mohammad Achakzai, a resident of Kandahar province, said: "Good hotels and parks should be built. Now, security in Afghanistan is good, and visiting all areas of the country is pleasant, but Herat is the most pleasant."

Irani CG met Governor of Sar-e Pol

SAR-E-POL (BNA): The Consul General of the Islamic Republic of Iran held a productive meeting with Mawlawi Mohammad Zarif Mozafar, the governor of Sar-e Pol province, to explore avenues for enhanced cooperation between Iran and local Afghan authorities. The meeting focused on expanding economic, cultural, and infrastructure ties. Governor Mozafar highlighted the historical connections between the two nations and urged the completion of the Imamzada Yahya ibn Zayd shrine project, which is currently 70% complete but has faced delays. In addition, the governor discussed Iran's involvement in constructing a power dam in the Balkhab district, emphasizing the importance of these projects for regional development. The Iranian Consul General expressed optimism about the growing collaboration, noting that Afghanistan's prosperity would also benefit Iran. He confirmed that work on the shrine project would resume and mentioned that Afghan agricultural products had been successfully showcased in exhibitions across Iran. The Consul General expressed Iran's willingness to collaborate in various sectors, including coal and oil mining, the establishment of pharmaceutical factories, and capacity building for Afghan healthcare professionals. Concluding the visit, both officials toured the Imamzada Yahya ibn Zayd shrine, where the Iranian diplomat reaffirmed Iran's commitment to sustainable development in Sar-e Pol.

MoE simplifies 136 administrative processes

KABUL (Pajhwok): Officials have announced successfully simplifying 136 complex administrative processes within the Ministry of Education (MoE). This follows the prior streamlining of 806 similar processes across various institutions, with the initiative continuing to expand. The Ministry of Education (MoE) and the Administrative Affairs Office (AAO) have formalized an agreement to facilitate the simplification of these processes. The MoE said it is committed to implementing the newly established, simplified procedures effectively. Mufti Sakhaullah Sayed, the Deputy Minister of Education, highlighted the collaboration between the MoE and AAO to ease 136 administrative processes within the ministry. He explained, "This simplification aims to provide standardized services to the public, ensuring that the necessary services are delivered efficiently and any obstacles are eliminated." Maulavi Abdul Khaliq Sadiq, the Deputy Minister for Quality Assurance, stressed the importance of making the ministry's operations more accessible to the public. He noted, "It is mentioned in the Hadith that the leaders of the people are their servants. We must embody this spirit of servitude, not as masters behind closed doors, but as approachable leaders who prioritize the needs of the people. If we fail to serve them effectively, we are not fulfilling our duties."



Maulavi Saifuddin Tayeb, the Deputy Head of the Administrative Affairs Office, emphasized that no

nation could progress unless its administrative processes were simplified. He outlined several benefits of streamlining the processes, including timely service delivery, reduced administrative corruption and paperwork, cost savings, improved transparency, and enhanced accountability. Mufti Farid Ahmad Ghaznawi, the Deputy Head of the Process Simplification Department, explained that the 136 processes simplified within the MoE were particularly complex and involved high

client volumes. A prime example is the teacher transfer process, which previously took 64 days and 207 steps to complete between provinces. It has now been reduced to just six days and 49 steps. The Administrative Affairs Office has simplified a total of 942 processes across 13 ministries and government agencies. This year, they plan to simplify additional complex processes in 25 ministries and institutions after identifying key areas for improvement.

Taxi drivers asked not to abuse ban

KABUL (Pajhwok): Taxi drivers should not abuse the opportunity of the ban on using high-speed personal vehicles as taxis, otherwise they will face legal action, the Traffic Department said on Wednesday. The Traffic Department said recently after the ban on using personal vehicles as taxis, taxi drivers have been abusing this opportunity and committing numerous violations, including stopping in prohibited areas, transporting too many passengers, charging more than the set fare, and ignoring urban order. "Recently, the use of personal high-speed vehicles as taxis has been banned across the country to facilitate taxis. Therefore, owners and drivers of taxis are strongly requested not to abuse this opportunity," the department added. It said many reports have been received that drivers must comply with traffic regulations, otherwise violators will be dealt with seriously and legally. On March 27, the Department had announced that from now on, no one can use personal vehicles as taxis, and drivers who are interested in using their personal vehicles to transport passengers must convert their vehicles into cabs.

Ornamental birds market cools down in Ghazni

GHAZNI CITY (Pajhwok): Ornamental bird traders in southern Ghazni province say the ban on hunting and export and import of birds has negatively affected their business and their sales have reduced due to people's economic problems. For years, some people have been keeping various types of ornamental birds such as parrots, typical pigeons, Myna, caspian snowcock, quails, and others in their homes, guest-houses, shops, and workplaces out of their hobby and interest. Ornamental bird traders explain the Islamic Emirate's ban on hunting, export and import of birds, and the public's declining interest in keeping and raising birds have caused their business to decline. Fawad Ahmad, a shopkeeper at a poultry market, told Pajhwok Afghan News: "The poultry market has deteriorated. The poultry market where we used to gather no longer has the charm as before". He said economic problems of the people had

caused them to abandon their hobby of birding. "The recent poor economic situation of the people has caused businesses to weaken, and our business has also weakened": Ommidullah, another shopkeeper added. Other businessmen cite the government's ban on bird hunting and export and import as other reasons that have damaged the bird market. Lutfullah, 60, a shopkeeper said: "People are poor. If they don't hunt and export them to other countries, the ornamental bird business will definitely decline". "Previously, many birds used to come from Pakistan, India, and Iran. From there, Afghan mountain jays and others would go to Pakistan, Iran, and from there to Germany and other countries, but now this is not allowed". On the other hand, some environmental experts explain the freedom of birds benefits the environment and the beauty of nature.

"Birds are nature itself. Whether we hear their sounds, see their colors, or watch them fly, all of this adds to the beauty of nature and should not be caged": Mohammad Muzamil Ghaznawi an environmental protection expert told Pajhwok. According to Environmental Director Maulvi Ahmadullah Erfan, fearing the extinction of ornamental bird species, the IEA has banned bird hunting in accordance with the guidance of its leadership. In the Ghazni bird market, various types of birds such as canaries, parrots, caspian snowcock, siskins, lovebirds, waterfowl, pheasants, crows, typical pigeons, Myna, and others are found, some of which are priced up to 50,000 afghanis. Although raising and keeping birds is a hobby among people, for many, like the shopkeepers in the aforementioned market in Ghazni, it has become a means of earning a living for their families.

Ministry urges acceleration of projects

KABUL (BNA): In a recent meeting with the Operational Committee on Township Development for Returnees, Sheikh Hamdullah Nomani, Minister of Urban Development and Housing, emphasized the urgent need to accelerate construction efforts aimed at resettling forcibly repatriated Afghans. The minister emphasized the necessity of expediting the work to ensure swift resettlement of returnees. In a meeting with members of the Operational Committee overseeing these housing projects, The session began with Engineer Hafiz Mohammad Yousuf Latif providing an update on the progress and outlining the ongoing programs. He also sought guidance and support on several matters. Minister Nomani underscored the importance of utilizing the capacities of provincial urban development departments and insisted that multiple aspects of the project must advance concurrently. Several provinces were identified where land has already been allocated. The process of transfer, surveying, and master planning has been completed, and the sites are fully prepared for distribution.



KABUL (TOLONews): Some residents of the fourth district of Kabul have complained about the slow progress of the construction of Badam Bagh Road. The residents of this district are urging the Kabul municipality to pay serious attention to the completion of this road. The construction of Badam Bagh Road, which began months ago, has not yet been completed. Sayed Ahmad, a resident of the fourth district, told TOLONews about this road: "If the contract is properly executed, the construction of this road could be finished in a week. We have become frustrated with the dust on this road." Nasir Ahmad, a resident of the fourth district, said: "The construction of this

road is progressing slowly. The local people and drivers are facing problems. I don't know the reason for the delay, but if it continues like this, it won't be completed even in two years." According to some other residents of the area, the poor condition of the road has not only caused problems in their daily lives but also threatens their health. Hafizullah told TOLONews: "Our request of the municipality is that when they give development projects to companies, they should properly monitor the work. This road project has been ongoing for two and a half years, and they haven't even managed to remove the dust from the road."

Amid these complaints, the Kabul municipality reported that the construction of Badam Bagh Road is 50% complete, saying that the main reason for the delay in completing this project is the relocation of electricity poles along the road. Nematullah Barkzi, a representative of the Kabul municipality, told TOLONews: "The development of Badam Bagh Road is one of the key projects of Kabul municipality, and its work has progressed 50%. It was delayed for a short period due to the relocation of electricity poles." According to the Kabul municipality's statistics, there are currently 45 road construction projects underway in Kabul city.

CM reviews implementation status of various programs

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: A high-level meeting held the other day with Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Ali Amin Khan Gandapur in the chair, reviewed the implementation status of various programs under the Ehsaas Umbrella. These programs include Ehsaas Apna Ghar, Ehsaas Nojawan, Ehsaas Hunar, and Ehsaas Rozgar scheme. Concerned provincial cabinet members, senior officials from concerned departments and partner organizations attended the meeting.

On this occasion, the Chief Minister has directed the relevant administrative secretaries to take full ownership of their respective programs and emphasized that special teams be formed at the departmental level to further improve the implementation of these programs. Departments must ensure timely execution and progress of their respective programs as per the stipulated timelines and accelerate the process of loan disbursement under these initiatives. Ali Amin Gandapur said that these are welfare projects of the provincial government and any delay in their implementation will not be tolerated. He directed that the programs be extensively promoted through social media so that maximum people can benefit from them. Furthermore, the Chief Minister directed that all districts of the province be allocated quotas in proportion to their population, and the inclusion of women, persons with disabilities, youth, and the transgender community in these programs be ensured.

During the meeting, the concerned authorities briefed on the progress made so far in implementing the programs. They informed that two different components of the Ehsaas Nojawan Program have been launched. The first phase of the Ehsaas Nojawan Program, with a cost of one billion rupees, is being implemented through the Bank of Khyber. Under this program, a total of 9,976 loan applications have been received, and so far, Rs. 110 million

Solarization of public buildings and private houses reviewed

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The 2nd meeting of the committee constituted to oversee the provincial government's flagship project "Solarization of Public Buildings and Private Houses" was held on Wednesday with Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Ali Amin Khan Gandapur in the chair. The meeting reviewed the progress made so far on this important project. Besides cabinet members Tariq Sadozai and Muzammil Aslam, administrative secretaries of the concerned departments and other officials attended the meeting.

In the meeting, it was decided in principle to carry out the solarization of public buildings through energy services companies, and the relevant authorities were directed to prepare a viable financial model to ensure the sustainable execution of solarization of government buildings project. It is worth mentioning that under this scheme, all public buildings, including offices, universities, colleges, prisons, police stations, hospitals, tube wells, etc., will be converted to solar energy. While briefing the participants, it was informed that approximately 23,000 public buildings have been identified across the province. The provincial government currently pays around 22 billion rupees annually in electricity bills for these buildings, while their solarization is expected to save billions of rupees annually on the account of electricity bills. The meeting was further informed that under the solarization of houses project, a total of 130,000 households across the province will be provided with solar systems, out of which 65,000 deserving households will receive the systems completely free of cost, while the remaining 65,000 will be provided systems at half the price and on easy installments. The Chief Minister directed the relevant authorities to initiate physical work on the project by the 1st of May this year, further directing that all necessary preparations for the solarization of public buildings be completed within two months. He also instructed that a project for the installation of solar street lights in divisional headquarters, to be carried out through energy services companies, be initiated.

have been distributed among 47 youth clusters, while 120 cases are under scrutiny.

The Chief Minister instructed that the process of handling cases under this program be made simple and brief, and stressed that clear progress should be visible within the next week. Authorities further informed that the second component of the Ehsaas Nojawan Program has been launched in collaboration with Akhuwat at a cost of two billion rupees. So far, Rs. 200 million have been disbursed, benefitting 1,390 deserving individuals with interest-free loans from various districts. The process of providing interest-free loans to an additional 2,600 applicants is underway. The Chief

Minister directed that another Rs. 200 million be released immediately for the program.

Similarly, it was informed in the meeting that the Ehsaas Apna Ghar Program has been launched in collaboration with the Bank of Khyber, and the process of receiving applications under this program is ongoing. So far, 14,500 applications have been received from different districts, which are currently under assessment. In addition, an online portal has been launched for receiving applications under the Ehsaas Hunar Program, for which Rs. 200 million have been released. Besides these programs, the Ehsaas Rozgar Scheme is also being launched at a cost of four billion rupees.



PESHAWAR: Afghan refugees discussing situation following Pakistan government plan to repatriate them, at Kababian area.

White House says China faces up to 245pc tariffs

WASHINGTON (AFP/Reuters): The United States announced that China now faces a new tariff of up to 245 per cent due to its retaliatory measures, according to a statement by the White House.

The White House's latest administrative order, revealed late on Tuesday, has launched a national security inquiry into vital resource imports. The order also included explanations for the reciprocal tariffs announced on April 2. "China now faces up to a 245pc tariff on imports to the US as a result of its retaliatory actions," the White House said.

"On day one, President Trump initiated his America First Trade Policy to make America's economy great again," it said. "More than 75 countries have already reached out to discuss new trade deals. As a result, the individualised higher tariffs are currently paused amid these discussions, except for China, which retaliated," it added.

"A few months ago, China banned exports to the US of gallium, germanium, antimony and other key high-tech materials with potential military applications. "Just this week, China suspended exports of six heavy rare earth metals, as well as rare earth magnets, in order to choke off supplies of components central to automakers, aerospace manufacturers, semiconductor companies and military contractors around the world."

The statement did not clarify the exact tariff rate China faces, but it implied that the tariff rate could go up to 245pc. China increased its tariffs on imports of US goods to 125pc last Friday in a tit-for-tat move to Trump, who effectively raised US tariffs on Chinese goods to 145pc while putting a 90-day pause on planned levies for other countries' goods.

China told Washington today to "stop threatening and blackmailing" after US President Donald Trump said it was up to Beijing to come to the negotiating table to discuss ending their trade war. Trump has slapped new tariffs on friend and foe but has reserved his heaviest blows for China.

"If the US really wants to resolve the issue through dialogue and negotiation, it should stop exerting extreme pressure, stop threatening and blackmailing, and talk to China on the basis of equality, respect and mutual benefit," foreign ministry spokesman Lin Jian said.

Russia detains former governor of Kursk region

MOSCOW (AFP): The former governor of Russia's Kursk region and his ex-deputy have been arrested on suspicion of embezzling over \$12 million of funds earmarked for border defenses with Ukraine, authorities said Wednesday.

Alexei Smirnov, 51, and Alexei Dedov, 48, were in charge of the region when Ukrainian troops stormed across the border in August 2024, mounting the biggest ground assault on Russian territory since World War II. The two were detained "as part of a criminal investigation into the embezzlement of budget funds totalling more than one billion rubles (\$12 million)," Russian interior ministry spokeswoman Irina Volk said on Telegram.

The funds were allocated to a local state-backed developer "for the construction of fortifications on the region's border with Ukraine," she added. The defendants were taken into custody on Tuesday and Wednesday, she said, without saying which person was arrested on which date.

Video showed Smirnov being escorted into a glass defendant's box at Moscow's Meshchansky District Court. The court said he would be held in pre-trial detention for at least two months. Smirnov, governor of the region between May to December 2024, had drawn criticism over his response to the incursion, telling residents the situation was under control despite Ukraine breaking into several settlements.

President Vladimir Putin replaced him with pro-Kremlin lawmaker Alexander Khinshtein in December, saying the region needed a new crisis manager after residents voiced anger at the handling of the attack. Kyiv's forces captured hundreds of square kilometers of territory in the assault, but Moscow has since reclaimed most of it back.

Meanwhile, Ukraine's parliament has voted to extend martial law and military mobilisation for another three months, prolonging the wartime measures until at least August 6. Lawmaker Yaroslav Zheleznyak said the extension of martial law passed by a 357-1 vote, while a measure to maintain troop mobilisation was approved 356-1.

Under Ukraine's constitution, elections cannot be held during martial law – a provision that remains in effect despite external calls, including from Russia and the United States, for a timeline on a future vote. Russia's President Vladimir Putin has repeatedly questioned the legitimacy of his Ukrainian counterpart, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, whose five-year term was originally due to end in May last year, and even raised the prospect of a temporary United Nations-backed government to lead Ukraine to elections. Reacting to the martial law extension, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov accused Kyiv of trying to "preserve its unstable structure". In February, US President Donald Trump described Zelenskyy as a "dictator without elections", prompting Ukrainians to rally around their leader and boosting his approval ratings.

As peace talks led by the Trump administration created hopes for a potential ceasefire and eventual elections, some Ukrainian opposition politicians have grown more vocal in their criticism of Zelenskyy. Still, there is broad support for maintaining martial law. Petro Poroshenko, a former president and leader of the country's largest opposition party, said there was no doubt martial law should be prolonged, but accused Zelenskyy of attempting to use the measure to shore up his powers.

PHC adjourns hearing on Gandapur's plea

Humayun Khan

PESHAWAR: A divisional bench of Peshawar High Court (PHC) comprising of Syed Arshad Ali and Justice Dr. Khurshid Iqbal has adjourned the hearing of a petition filed by Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur till 6th May due to lawyer's strike, on Wednesday.

The petition challenges a notice issued by the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) seeking details of Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur assets. The ECP's Special Secretary Law, Arshad Khan and Additional Advocate General Syed Sikandar Hayat Shah appeared in court. However, the Chief Minister's lawyer was absent due to a strike by lawyers.

The petition stated that the ECP had previously issued a similar notice to Ali Amin Gandapur, which was suspended by the court. The Chief Minister's

asset details are already available on the ECP's website, the petition argued.

The special secretary Arshad Khan requested the court to allow the ECP to proceed with the case, assuring that no final order would be passed without the court's permission.

Justice Syed Arshad Ali observed that the petitioner's lawyer was not present, and therefore, no order could be passed. Consequently, the court adjourned the hearing till 6th May.

Pakistani woman challenges Afghan deportation: A Pakistani woman named Reshma has filed a writ petition in the Peshawar High Court (PHC), challenging the government's decision to deport her Afghan husband, Tariq Khan, and the policy for the removal of Afghan refugees.

The counsel Ajmal Khan Mohmand advocate filed writ petition in which federal government, NADRA,

and other relevant authorities were made respondents in the case.

The petition requests the court to direct the authorities to issue a Pakistan Origin Card (POC) to her husband Tariq Khan. The petition argues that deporting the applicant's husband would deprive her children of their father's care and support.

The policy for Afghan refugee removal is being contested for being unconstitutional and lacking a clear procedure, particularly regarding Afghan refugees' businesses and assets in Pakistan.

Pakistan announced a plan to deport foreign nationals without valid visas or those who had overstayed their visa by more than a year in October 2023. This move primarily affects Afghans, with an estimated 3.8 million in Pakistan at the time. Over 813,300 individuals had been repatriated to Afghanistan by January 2025.

Justice Ali Baqar Najafi takes oath as SC judge

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Justice Ali Baqar Najafi, a judge of the Lahore High Court (LHC), took oath as a judge of the Supreme Court here on Wednesday.

He was administered the oath of office by the Chief Justice of Pakistan, Justice Yahya Afridi, in a ceremony held here at the Supreme Court (SC). The ceremony was attended by the judges of the Supreme Court, Attorney General for Pakistan, senior lawyers, Officers of the Federal Judicial Academy, Law Officers and officers of Law and Justice Commission of Pakistan.

Supreme Court's Registrar, Muhammad Salim Khan, conducted the proceedings of the oath taking ceremony. Officers and staff of the Supreme Court were also present on the occasion. Justice Ali Baqar Najafi was recently nominated by the Judicial Commission of Pakistan (JCP) as judge of the Supreme Court.

According to his profile, he was born in Lahore on September 15, 1963. He got a Bachelor of Science degree from Government College, Lahore and later furthered his legal education at Punjab University Law College, graduating with a Bachelor of Laws (LLB) in 1989. Ali Baqar Najafi was enrolled as an Advocate of the High Courts in 1990 and subsequently as an Advocate of the Supreme Court.

KP govt decides to provide free school bags to students

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Advisor to the Chief Minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa on Information & Public Relations, Barrister Dr. Saif, announced today that the provincial government has taken another significant step towards promoting education in the region. A principled decision has been made to provide free school bags to students, in addition to the already approved funding for the provision of free textbooks to students in public schools.

Furthermore, the annual budget for the Parent-Teacher Councils has been increased from Rs. 5 billion to Rs. 7 billion. These deci-

sions aim to reduce the financial burden on low-income families and to strengthen the ongoing school enrollment campaign.

Barrister Dr. Saif emphasized that Chief Minister Ali Amin Khan Gandapur is actively implementing practical measures in line with the vision of Imran Khan to promote education in the province. He also extended a pointed remark towards Maryam Nawaz, suggesting that she consider replicating this initiative in Punjab, stating, "We want the children of Punjab to also prosper and receive quality education. Maryam Nawaz should focus on real reform agendas like CM Ali Amin Khan

Gandapur, rather than making TikTok videos."

He further added that Chief Minister Ali Amin Khan Gandapur is utilizing all available resources to boost the education sector in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, recognizing that education is the key to unlocking development and progress. The government is committed to making this year's enrollment campaign more effective through serious and targeted measures, which are expected to yield long-term positive outcomes. "Children are our future," said Barrister Dr. Saif. "The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government is taking concrete steps to equip them with quality, modern education."



ISLAMABAD: Chief Justice, Justice Yahya Afridi administering oath of office to Justice Ali Baqar Najafi, judge, Lahore High Court as Judge of Supreme Court of Pakistan.

PM vows agri revolution to ensure sustainable economic growth

(Continued from Page 1)

Under China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), he said China had made a direct investment of around US\$35.4 billion, reflecting the strong relationship between the two countries.

Premier for transparency in construction of Islamabad's Jinnah Medical Complex project: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif directed the authorities concerned to ensure transparency in the construction of Jinnah Medical Complex of Islamabad, saying that he would personally monitor all stages of the construction.

The prime minister, chairing a review meeting on the construction of Jinnah Medical Complex, said that the hospital would be equipped with modern medical research facilities and healthcare services to benefit the entire region. He instructed that consultants and contractors for design, supervision, and construction should be hired through international tendering.

During the meeting, the prime minister was briefed about the progress in the construction of the Jinnah Medical Complex and Research Centre. It was informed that

the PC-I of the Jinnah Medical Complex will soon be finalized in consultation with stakeholders. An initial capital of Rs. 3.5 billion has already been transferred to the trust fund established for the project.

It was told that the international-standard hospital, spanning over 600 kanals, will have more than 1,000 beds and nine Centres of Excellence. The meeting was attended by federal ministers Ahsan Iqbal, Azam Nazeer Tarar, Ahmad Khan Cheema, and Syed Mustafa Kamal, Advisor to Prime Minister Syed Tauqeer Shah, MNA from Islamabad Anjum Aqeel, Professor Dr. Saeed Akhtar, and senior officials from relevant institutions.

Govt prioritizing international-standard skills training for workforce: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif said that the government was prioritizing efforts to equip the country's workforce with skills and training aligned with international standards.

He was talking to a seven-member delegation of the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (ACCA) led by its Chief Executive, Helen Brand OBE, which called on him here at the PM House.

Welcoming the delegation, the prime minister said the country was blessed with talented youth and capable manpower.

He noted that the third-party validation to improve transparency and governance was a basic part of every government project. He said that bringing improvements in the government's performance and governance was a top priority of the government.

"Improvement in Pakistan's investment rating by Fitch is a welcoming sign, but we have to make further efforts," the prime minister said, adding that the association could play an important role in imparting new professional skills to improve the competition of Pakistan's manpower at the international level. The government will encourage the ACCA's efforts to enhance the capacity of the government institutions.

The prime minister directed the relevant authorities to increase cooperation with the association and hold discussions for future course of action. During the meeting, the delegation highlighted the important role the ACCA played for the development of Pakistan's economy.

The delegation informed the prime

minister that the ACCA's 13,000 Pakistani members were serving across the world in various sectors, whereas around 40,000 students were in process of receiving the membership of ACCA. The delegation extended its gratitude to the Higher Education Commission (HEC) for granting ACCA members equivalence to a Master's degree.

The delegation also expressed a strong desire to actively support Pakistan's Green Economy Transformation Plan. The delegation stated that the Association was eager to collaborate with the Government of Pakistan on initiatives for a sustainable global future, mitigating the adverse effects of climate change, innovation in the fields of accountancy and audit, outsourcing of services in the corporate sector, and other modern developments. They praised the government team for its achievements in economic development under the leadership of the prime minister. The delegation also showed deep interest in cooperating to enhance revenue collection, increase transparency in the system, and build institutional capacity.

PM directs integration of IT education from Grade 6, boosts nationwide digital training initia-

tives: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif issued directives for formulating an immediate strategy to make Information Technology a mandatory subject from Grade 6 onwards across the country.

The prime minister chaired a high-level review meeting on the matters pertaining to the Ministry of Information Technology and Telecommunication, emphasizing that the promotion of the IT sector and growth in IT-related exports were among the government's top priorities, a Prime Minister's Office news release said. "The inclusion of IT in school curricula is vital to preparing our future generations for the demands of the digital economy," said PM Shehbaz, calling for unified efforts with provincial governments to ensure quality and standardized IT education and training at school, college, and university levels.

The prime minister further instructed the Ministry to initiate IT training programs in underdeveloped regions, particularly in Islamabad, Gilgit-Baltistan, Azad Jammu and Kashmir, and Balochistan. He stressed that the standard of these programs should be high enough to enable trainees to secure competitive

employment both within Pakistan and internationally.

Officials from the Ministry briefed the prime minister in detail about current initiatives and upcoming projects. Under the "School Broadband Connectivity Project," internet infrastructure in Islamabad schools is being upgraded. The meeting was informed that during the fiscal year 2024-2025, the Ministry has already provided high-end IT training to 49,800 individuals and general training to over 600,000 people.

In collaboration with Huawei, skills and vocational training centers are being established at the International Islamic University Islamabad, the National University of Sciences and Technology (NUST), and the COMSATS University Lahore campus. Additionally, Huawei's advanced training programs in Artificial Intelligence, Cloud Computing, Big Data, and Cybersecurity have been integrated into the curricula of the Ghulam Ishaq Khan Institute of Engineering Sciences and Technology (Topi), the University of Engineering and Technology (Taxila), and the Mehran University of Engineering and Technology (Jamshoro).