

SCO Secy General arrived
F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Secretary General of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), Nurlan Yermekbayev, has arrived in Islamabad on Thursday for a pivotal two-day visit. Yermekbayev is visiting at the invitation of Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar, marking a significant step in fostering regional cooperation.



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RAWALPINDI: Chief of Army Staff, General Asim Munir conferring military honour to the family member of a military official.

PM reaffirms desire to strengthen ties with UK

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has reaffirmed Pakistan's desire to further strengthen relations with the UK in all spheres, particularly in trade, investment, education and people to people exchanges.

He was talking to UK Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Faith, Communities and Resettlement Lord Wajid Khan who called on him in Islamabad on Thursday. Shehbaz Sharif appreciated the contributions of the British Pakistani diaspora who, he remarked, are proudly playing the role of a bridge between Pakistan and the UK.

The Prime Minister also conveyed his best wishes for His Majesty King Charles III as well as Prime Minister Keir Starmer. Shehbaz Sharif appreciated Lord Khan's efforts in promoting Pakistan-UK relations and exploring new avenues for collaboration. Lord Wajid Khan briefed the Prime Minister on his recent activities and initiatives aimed at promoting Pakistan-UK relations.

Shehbaz satisfied with Pakistan's current account surplus of \$1.2b: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif expressed satisfaction over Pakistan's current account surplus of \$1.2 billion in March 2025 which was the highest in history. Pakistani travel guides

In a statement here, the prime minister termed the current account surplus a reflection of a stabilizing economy. The prime minister said, "Thanks God, the current account surplus was \$1.85 billion in the first 9 months of this fiscal year. The recent positive economic indicators are a reflection of the right direction of government policies."

The prime minister attributed the current account surplus to record remittances, increasing exports and the tireless efforts of the government's economic team. "We

are striving for sustainable development of the country's economy," he said.

Meanwhile, the Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif was informed that as a result of the dedicated nationwide anti-polio campaigns, not a single case of polio had been reported in the country since February 10, 2025.

Chairing the review meeting on Polio eradication here, the prime minister commended the efforts of relevant government institutions, international organizations, and partners to make Pakistan polio-free. He directed the relevant authorities to ensure awareness and community mobilization regarding the anti-polio campaign across the country.

"It must be ensured that every child under five years of age is administered the polio vaccine during the anti-polio campaign starting from April 21," he added. He emphasized that alongside the campaign, nationwide routine immunization for protection against other dangerous diseases should also be fully ensured.

"Despite challenging conditions, the workers participating in the anti-polio campaign are playing a frontline role in the fight against this disease, the prime minister said adding that the entire nation, including himself was proud of the hard-working polio workers. During the meeting, the prime minister was briefed about the upcoming anti-polio campaign from April 21 to April 27, during which 4.5 million children will be administered the polio vaccine.

A total of 415,000 polio workers will participate in this nationwide campaign. The meeting was further informed that, as per the prime minister's instructions, third-party validation of the campaign will be completed from April 28 to April 30. Moreover, the cold chain tracking of the anti-polio campaigns is being monitored under a digital system.

Imran's sisters, PTI leaders released after brief detention

F.P. Report

RAWALPINDI: Police released Imran Khan's sisters and several PTI leaders on Thursday after a brief detention. Police detained several Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) leaders, including National Assembly Opposition Leader Omar Ayub, Imran Khan's three sisters, Hamid Raza, and others near Adiala Jail.

The PTI leaders had gathered outside the jail to meet the party founder when police took them into custody. Police transported them to an undisclosed location. When PTI founder Imran Khan's sisters and party leaders, including Omar Ayub, Zartaj Gul, Hamid Raza, and Niazullah Niazi, arrived at Adiala Jail to meet him, police barred them from proceeding.

Imran's sisters staged a sit-in and refused to leave. Eventually, seven individuals were taken into custody. Speaking to media, Ayub criticised PM Shehbaz Sharif, calling him the biggest liar, and questioned how the government planned to sustain fuel levies and help provinces like Balochistan.

Aleema Khan and her two sisters were stopped at the Dahgal checkpoint, prompting their protest. They declared they would not leave without meeting Imran. Similarly, Zartaj Gul was stopped at the same checkpoint and told the media that despite having court orders and jail manual provisions supporting their meeting, police had sealed Adiala Road.

Hamid Raza and Niazullah Niazi were also stopped at Dahgal. Raza said they had no choice but to protest peacefully. As Khan's sisters staged a sit-in, police demanded PTI leaders and supporters to vacate the area. Imran's sisters took shelter in an under-construction plaza.

Police entered the plaza and arrested seven individuals, including Aleema Khan, Uzma Khan, Noreen Khan. Later, police released all the PTI leaders and Imran Khan's sisters.

Security forces kill four Khwarij, solider martyred

F.P. Report

RAWALPINDI: Security Forces conducted an intelligence based operation in general area Maddi, Dera Ismail Khan District on reported presence of Khwarij.

During the conduct of operation, own troops effectively engaged the khwarij location, as a result of which, four khwarij were sent to hell.

However, during intense fire exchange, one brave son of soil, Sepoy Basit Siddique (age: 23 years, resident of District Attock), having fought gallantly, paid the ultimate sacrifice and embraced shahadat.

Weapons and ammuni-

tion were also recovered from the killed khwarij, who remained actively involved in numerous terrorist activities in the area. Sanitization operation is being conducted to eliminate any other Kharij found in the area, as the Security Forces of Pakistan are determined to wipe out the menace of terrorism from the country, and such sacrifices of our brave soldiers further strengthen our resolve.

President Asif Ali Zardari Thursday lauded the security forces for killing four Khawarij during an operation in Dera Ismail Khan. He praised the bravery of security forces during the intelligence-based operation to eliminate the terrorists of

Fitna al Khawarij.

He paid tribute to sepoy Basit Siddique for embracing martyrdom during the operation. He said the nation will always remember the sacrifices of its brave martyrs. He commended the valour and patriotism of the brave martyrs of Pakistan army.

He expressed sympathy with the heirs of the martyrs and prayed for the grant of patience to them. He said security forces will continue their operations till the complete elimination of terrorism. "We will continue to have an unwavering commitment to eradicate terrorist elements and for the defence of the nation," the President added.

Major development projects in KP reflect Nawaz's vision: Tarar

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Information and Broadcasting Attaullah Tarar on Thursday said major development projects in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa especially motorways are a true reflection of the vision of Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) President and Quaid Nawaz Sharif.

"History shows us that if anyone has pursued the politics of service, construction, and development in this country, it is the Pakistan Muslim League which has its mark on every development project," the minister said while addressing PML-N Youth Coordinators and office-bearers

at divisional, district, and tehsil levels. He said the name of Nawaz Sharif would be found on every major project in KP which also has a full network of motorways built by the PML-N that has May 28, Youm-e-Takbir in its credit.

"Our leader made the country's defense impregnable by conducting nuclear tests, while on the other hand, the country has an anarchic group which did May 9, attacked its own country and harmed national defense," said the minister while highlighting a stark contrast between the ideologies of the PML-N and Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI).

Paying tribute to the PML-N

workers, he said they are ideological workers with a firm resolve for the country's progress and security. While on other hand, there was the PTI which had defiled the statue of Captain Karnal Sher Khan Shaheed for their own political gain.

He recalled his visit to Swabi after the chaos and anarchy of May 9, where he met Captain Sher Khan Shaheed's brother Anwar Lala, and apologized for the disrespect shown to his great brother's statue by the miscreants.

Lauding Captain Sher Khan's bravery, the minister cited Indian Brigadier Mohinder Pratap Singh, who praised

Captain Sher Khan's valor and sent a letter with his mortal remains that states "This was a soldier whose bravery should be praised." Tarar said the PTI has been in power in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa for 11 years, but failed to even establish a Counter-Terrorism Department (CTD) force in the province, let alone Safe City project, or a forensic lab.

Not a single project for the public's welfare was initiated in KP under the PTI regime, he said asking why no attention was being paid to the health sector and law and order in KP. If intentions had been good, development projects would be visible in KP today, he emphasized.

He said billions of rupees were given to KP under the National Finance Commission (NFC) award, but only the lip service is being done in the name of development.

Commenting on the current state of PTI, he said that factionalism has taken roots in the party, with separate groups formed around Ali Amin Gandapur, Junaid Akbar, and Sher Afzal Marwat, that show the level of their sincerity both to the party and country. On the other hand, the PML-N party is another name of home and family that supported each other in every difficult time. The brave, honorable, and loyal youth of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa have

always kept the party's flag high and fully supported PML-N in every difficult time.

Ataullah Tarar paid tribute to PML-N leader Ikhtiar Wali Khan, saying that if anyone deserves to be called a "companion of difficult times," it is Ikhtiar Wali, who defended the party in every challenging period. He said during the by-elections held under the PTI era of fascism, the joy of winning one seat in Nowshera outweighed the happiness of winning 15 seats from Punjab. The PML-N's victory in the Nowshera by-election was a major success at that time, when opponents held their complete sway in the area, he noted.

RIYADH: Saudi Minister of Defense Prince Khalid bin Salman met with Iran's Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei on Thursday.

During the meeting, Prince Khalid delivered a letter from King Salman and conveyed the greetings of the Kingdom's leadership. Relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran and topics of mutual interest were also discussed at the meeting, Prince Khalid wrote on X.

Prince Khalid was also received by Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian. Regional and international developments and related efforts were discussed during the meeting. The minister arrived in the Iranian capital, Tehran on an official visit earlier on Thursday. The visit follows renewed diplomatic engagement between the two countries. — Agencies

JCP nominates 2 SC judges
F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Judicial Commission of Pakistan (JCP) nominated two Supreme Court judges for the constitutional benches of the apex court by majority of its total membership. The JCP nominated Justice Aqeel Ahmed Abbasi and Justice Ali Baqar Najafi for the constitutional benches of the Supreme Court of Pakistan, by majority of its total membership.

COAS: Peace in country today result of soldiers' sacrifices

F.P. Report

RAWALPINDI: Chief of Army Staff General Asim Munir on Thursday asserted that the "peace and liberty" in the country today was the result of sacrifices made by soldiers. The army chief made the remarks during an investiture ceremony held at the General Headquarters (GHQ) in Rawalpindi today, according to a press release issued by the military's media affairs wing.

The Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) said COAS Munir conferred military honours, including Sitara-i-Imtiaz (military) and Tamgha-i-Basalat, on officers and soldiers of the Pakistan Army in "recognition of their exceptional valour in operations and distinguished service to the nation".

During the ceremony, which was attended by a "large number of senior military officials and families of the award recipients", medals awarded posthumously were also received by the martyrs' families. Paying homage to the martyrs and veterans, the COAS was quoted as saying: "Shuhada (martyrs) and ghazis (warriors) are our enduring pride. Their honour and reverence are a sacred trust upon every Pakistani.

"The peace and liberty we cherish today are the result of the ultimate sacrifices rendered by these valiant sons of the soil." COAS Munir also expressed "profound admiration for the resilience and fortitude" of mar-

tyrs' families, acknowledging their unparalleled sacrifices for the homeland, the ISPR stated.

It added that the army chief commended the "unyielding resolve" of the Pakistan Army and law enforcement agencies (LEAs). He also appreciated their "relentless efforts in thwarting multiple terrorist threats and eliminating high-value terrorist operatives during ongoing counterterrorism operations".

Gen Munir's remarks come just two days after he vowed to remove "whatever stands in the way of Pakistan's progress" and reaffirmed the state's determination to counter terrorism. "Do Pakistan's enemies think that a handful of terrorists can decide the fate of Pakistan?" he said, adding that "even ten generations of terrorists cannot harm Balochistan and Pakistan".

Meanwhile, Corps Investiture Ceremonies were held at Peshawar, Lahore and Karachi to honour the bravery and meritorious service of its officers and soldiers, said the Inter Services Public Relations (ISPR) in a statement here on Thursday.

A large number of senior Army officers and families of awardees attended the ceremonies. In Peshawar, Corps Commander Peshawar, Lieutenant General Omer Ahmed Bokhari was chief guest on the occasion.

Next of Kin of two Junior Commissioned Officers and 47 Soldiers received Tamgha-i-Basalat

on behalf of Shuhadas. Four officers were awarded Sitara-i-Imtiaz (Military) and 11 officers were awarded Tamgha-i-Imtiaz (Military) for rendering meritorious services to the nation.

In Lahore, Commander Lahore Corps, Lieutenant General Fayyaz Hussain Shah, Hilal-e-Imtiaz (Military) was chief guest on the occasion. Three Junior Commissioned Officers (JCOs) and twenty-four soldiers were awarded Tamgha-i-Basalat (T Bt) for their supreme sacrifices for the motherland.

Twenty-eight officers were awarded Sitara-i-Imtiaz (Military), and seventy-two officers were awarded Tamgha-i-Imtiaz (Military) for rendering meritorious services to the nation. Next of kin (NOK) of Shuhada received their awards (T Bt) posthumously.

In Karachi, Corps Commander Karachi Lieutenant General Muhammad Avasi Dastgir attended the investiture ceremony as chief guest. The Corps Commander awarded 10 officers with Sitara-e-Imtiaz (Military), 4 Officers with Tamgha-e-Imtiaz (Military) and 16 Soldiers with Tamgha-e-Basalat for their meritorious service.

Across all three ceremonies, heartfelt tributes were paid to the Shuhada, and the unwavering commitment of Pakistan Army to national defence and security was honored with deep reverence, the ISPR concluded.

PAF C-130 airlifted bodies of 8 Pakistanis from Iran

F.P. Report

RAWALPINDI / BAHAWALPUR: On the special directives of the government, a Pakistan Air Force C-130 aircraft airlifted the mortal remains of eight Pakistani nationals from Zahedan, Iran, to Bahawalpur.

The deceased, all residents of Bahawalpur district, tragically fell victim to a heinous terrorist attack in Iran's Sistan-Balochistan province, said a press release issued by Inter Services Public Relations (ISPR) here.

Following the completion of medico-legal procedures and necessary documentation, the bodies were handed over to the Consul General of Pakistan in Zahedan and subsequently repatriated to Pakistan in the early hours of Thursday.

Upon arrival at Bahawalpur Airport, a solemn ceremony was held to receive the

deceased, with civil and military officials in attendance to pay their respects and offer condolences to the bereaved families.

The Pakistan Armed Forces stand united with the nation in this hour of grief and reaffirm their unwavering resolve against terrorism in all its forms. The Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee and Services Chiefs have expressed deep sorrow over the tragic loss of precious Pakistani lives. They extended heartfelt condolences to the families of the victims and prayed for strength, patience, and fortitude for them in bearing this irreparable loss.

Meanwhile, five martyrs belonged to Khanqah Sharif area of Bahawalpur, two from Ahmadpur Sharqia and one was from Musafir Khana area if Mubarakpur. Later, the dead bodies, shifted to their native areas through ambu-

lances where their Namaz-i-Janaza were offered. A large number of people attended the funeral prayers and burial.

The deceased were motor mechanics and worked in a workshop in Iran's Sistan province. The funeral prayers of Danish, Dilshad, Jaffer, Naeem and Nasir were offered at a high school in Khanqah Sharif area of Bahawalpur.

Namaz-i-Janaza of two of the slain who belonged to Ahmadpur Sharqia including Muhammad Jamshed was offered. Funeral of Nasir, who got married only 18 months ago and was away from home for the last one year, was offered in Mubarakpur. The victims had been tied up and shot dead by unidentified gunmen at a workshop in the Mehrestan district of Iran on April 12. They had been working in the area for nearly five years as motor mechanics.



ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif unveiling the plaque of groundbreaking of Jinnah Square Murree Road Underpass.



LAHORE: Activists of Grand Health Alliance and APCA holding a protest in favour of demands at Mall Road.

All political parties must sit together: Saleem

F.P. Report

LAHORE: Governor Punjab, Sardar Saleem Haider Khan said that all political parties should sit together and strengthen the parliamentary system to take the country forward. He stated this while addressing a ceremony organized by the District Bar Rawalpindi. Governor Punjab Sardar Saleem Haider Khan expressed gratitude for the bar's support.

He said that the District Bar Rawalpindi supported him in difficult times. He said that the 2008 election was challenging one, but success was achieved due to the dynamic role of the District Bar Rawalpindi. He further stated that putting ideology first in difficult situations is politics. He said that he grew up in Rawalpindi, and he always had a close relationship with the District Bar. The Governor Punjab said that lawyers have made historic struggle for the rule of law.

The demonstration of brotherhood of lawyers in the District Bar Rawalpindi is exemplary.

He said that the Pakistan Peoples Party gives respect to his workers. He said that the PPP made rickshaw driver, cyclists and those living in slums the senator. The PPP made Raja Pervaiz Ashraf the Prime Minister who was a worker and made him Governor of Punjab province. He said that real democracy is only among lawyers as they hold elections every year. There is a clamor of rigging in every election, the loser starts protesting, which affects the government's performance.

He emphasized that steps are needed to run the system so that no one raises a finger on the system. He said that everyone should sit together and take steps for transparent elections. He said that the PPP government formed in 2008 had to face repeated suo motu action, which was a

conspiracy against the government. He further said that the leaders like Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto and Benazir Bhutto are born in centuries. He added that he will continue to speak the truth. He make every sacrifice for the honour and dignity of the country." Addressing the ceremony, the lawyers' leadership said that that it was a historic day as Governor Punjab was among them.

They stated that the Governor Punjab is from their division. The bar has beautiful traditions. Benazir Bhutto also addressed this bar. The ceremony was attended by a large number of lawyers including President District Bar Rawalpindi Sardar Manzar Bashir, former Justice Qalb -i- Hassan Shah, Member Pakistan Bar Council, Basharatullah Khan, Vice Chairman Punjab Bar Council, Asad Abbasi, Member Punjab Bar Council, Sajid Tanoli, Secretary General People's Lawyers Forum.

6 Inspectors promoted to DSP post

F.P. Report

KARACHI: Assistant Inspector General of Police (AIG) Establishment Abdul Haq Imrani chaired a Departmental Promotion Committee (DPC) meeting today to review the service records of officers awaiting promotion from Inspector to Deputy Superintendent of Police (DSP).

The committee submitted its recommendations for the promotion of six Inspectors to the posts of DSP to the Inspector General of Police (IGP) Islamabad, Syed Ali Nasir Rizvi. Earlier, 10 DSPs were promoted to the rank of Superintendent of Police (SP). The Islamabad Police has seen the highest number of officer promotions during the 2024-25 period.

IGP Islamabad congratulated the newly promoted officers and extended his best wishes. He directed the Departmental Promotion Committee to ensure that all vacant posts are filled in a timely manner. On this occasion, he conveyed a message to the promoted officers, stating that departmental advancement and an increase in rank within the police service reflect a corresponding rise in responsibilities. "I hope you will take all possible measures to serve and protect citizens through the uniform implementation of the law, adherence to merit, and the provision of the best possible service. All police officers should make public service and modern community policing their motto by utilizing their professional skills," he added.

The newly promoted officers expressed their gratitude to the IGP Islamabad and affirmed their commitment to discharging their responsibilities diligently. They pledged to continue playing an active role in the improvement of the police force and other matters by performing their duties in accordance with the principles of public service, protection, and community policing - with even greater effort and dedication than before.

FIA arrests 324 suspects

F.P. Report

KARACHI: In a major crackdown on human trafficking, the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) today claimed to have arrested 324 suspects at Karachi's Jinnah International Airport for alleged misuse of Umrah visas for begging.

Among those arrested were 119 women, as part of an intensified campaign to counter trafficking disguised as religious pilgrimage. The FIA's Human Trafficking Circle Karachi conducted the operation to address the rising trend of trafficking under the pretense of religious travel and to improve Pakistan's international standing.

FIA officials revealed that 204 individuals were intercepted at airport departure gates throughout 2024 while attempting to leave the country for begging. Additionally, 269 people were detained upon arrival after being deported for similar activities abroad.

Rabia Qureshi, Deputy Director of the FIA, noted that the misuse of Umrah visas has damaged the country's image and exposed a growing human trafficking network.

PM Youth Program Chairman visits SMIU

F.P. Report

KARACHI: Prime Minister's Youth Program (PMYP) Chairman Rana Mashhood Ahmed Khan on Thursday visited Sindh Madressatul Islam University (SMIU) and announced support for various youth-focused initiatives, including the Hashmat Lodi Youth Development Centre and students of Artificial Intelligence and Mathematical Sciences.

Accompanied by SMIU Vice Chancellor Dr Mujeeb Sahrai and PMYP Sindh Coordinator Fahad Shafiq, the Chairman toured key university facilities including the Artificial Intelligence Lab and Business Incubation Center. Dr. Sahrai briefed him on SMIU's historic legacy, student facilities, and future plans aimed at youth development. He informed that around 3,000 students are enrolled in I.T. programs and that a dedicated floor at the I.T. Tower is operational for AI and entrepreneurial training.

Following the visit, a program was held at Sir Shah Nawaz Bhutto Auditorium, where Rana Mashhood Khan addressed students, faculty, and staff. He highlighted SMIU's national significance as the alma mater of Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali

Jinnah and stressed that the university's students will benefit from national and international opportunities through PMYP.

He underscored the importance of empowering youth amidst national challenges, stating that PMYP is committed to offering equal opportunities across Pakistan in higher education, technical skills, and employment.

He further announced the federal cabinet's recent presentation of the Youth Development Policy and the launch of a Digital Youth Hub—offering registration-based access to diverse career opportunities. Additionally, he introduced the Green Youth Movement Club being implemented across universities to raise environmental awareness.

Dr Mujeeb Sahrai, in his remarks, emphasized youth as a powerful source of national energy, alongside solar, hydel, and wind resources. He acknowledged Chief Minister Sindh Syed Murad Ali Shah's pivotal role in stabilizing public sector universities, noting the substantial increase in their budget allocation for FY 2024–25 that helped avert financial crises at historic institutions.

Meanwhile, the Chief Minister of Sindh, Syed Murad Ali Shah, met

with the Chairman of the Prime Minister's Youth Program, Rana Mashhood, to discuss in detail providing better opportunities for the youth.

The meeting was also attended by Secretary to the CM Rahim Sheikh, Secretary Transport Aleem Lashari, and others. The Chief Minister of Sindh emphasized the urgent need to bring youth forward and provide them with better opportunities.

Rana Mashhood mentioned that the Prime Minister recently launched the Digital Youth Hub, where both public and private sectors offer employment to youth. He stated that there is a plan to send skilled youth from Pakistan abroad the world.

The Chief Minister of Sindh shared that the Sindh government is focusing specifically on technical education for the youth and aims to equip them with technical skills to send them worldwide.

The meeting also agreed on increasing coordination between the Chairman of the Prime Minister's Youth Program and the Sindh government's Department of Sports and Youth Affairs. It was decided that through this coordination, youth from the province would be sent to various countries for employment, visits, and educational opportunities.

Karachi prepares for potential heatwave

F.P. Report

KARACHI: Authorities in Karachi are preparing for a potential heatwave expected to grip the city starting Sunday, as temperatures continue to climb across Pakistan's southern Sindh province.

Meteorologist Anjum Zaigham told that while Karachi's current daytime temperatures remain within the normal range of 34°C to 37°C, a spike is expected starting Sunday. "From Sunday onwards, the intensity of heat is expected to rise in Karachi, with temperatures likely to approach 40°C, creating a heatwave-like situation," he warned.

According to the Pakistan Meteorological Department (PMD), heatwave conditions are likely to persist in Sindh, southern Punjab, and Balochistan until April 18. A shallow westerly wave is expected to impact the upper regions of the country from Wednesday afternoon through April 20. The highest temperature on Tuesday was recorded in Nawabshah at a scorching 47°C, while Larkana and Jacobabad also saw the mercury rise to 46°C, the PMD reported. "Mainly hot and dry weather is expected in most parts of the country, with very hot conditions in the southern regions," the

PMD said. "However, isolated dust or thunderstorm-rain is expected in upper Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Potohar region, Islamabad, northeast Punjab, Kashmir, and Gilgit-Baltistan during the evening or night."

Extreme heat has historically led to widespread illness, economic disruption, and loss of life. In 2015, a deadly heatwave in Karachi claimed more than 2,000 lives. In 2022, catastrophic floods killed around 1,700 people and affected over 33 million, triggering a massive humanitarian and rebuilding effort.

districts of the city. A spokesperson from the Karachi Commissioner's Office confirmed that more roadside centers will be established to provide water and first aid in case of emergencies.

Pakistan is increasingly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, which has been intensifying the frequency and severity of heatwaves. The country ranks among the top ten most at risk from climate-related disasters and is also facing growing threats from untimely rains, floods, and prolonged droughts.

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PTI sees rigging in NA-213 by-election

F.P. Report

KARACHI: Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Women Wing Karachi Division President Fizza Zeeshan on Thursday accused the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) of manipulating the NA-213 Umerkot by-election through state-backed rigging and interference, while claiming that PTI's joint candidate Lalchand Malhi won the seat with a clear margin.

She alleged in a statement that the electoral process was conducted under direct police supervi-

sion, during which PTI's polling agents were forcefully expelled from multiple stations. She blamed the ruling PPP for conspiring to alter the outcome after Malhi emerged victorious.

Fizza maintained that the voters of NA-213 had unequivocally chosen PTI's candidate, and any attempt to change the results would be an extension of the manipulation witnessed in the general elections.

PTI's female activists from Karachi, she stated, remained actively engaged at polling stations throughout election day and confronted the state machinery deployed by PPP. Zeeshan pointed out that several female polling agents were subjected to harassment and forcibly removed.

Accusing the Sindh government of authoritarianism under the guise of democracy, she questioned the possibility of fair elections in the province and criticised the lack of respect for public mandate. Fizza concluded by thanking the people of Umerkot for supporting PTI and its allied movement "Save the Indus River," and applauded them for standing with justice.

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Fire engulfs fibre factory; goods worth millions burnt

F.P. Report

LAHORE: A massive fire broke out at a fibre sheet manufacturing factory in Lahore, causing goods worth millions of rupees to be reduced to ashes on Thursday.

The factory was operational in Gulshan Town, located in the Thokar area of Lahore. Upon receiving the alert, multiple fire brigade vehicles reached the scene and immediately began efforts to extinguish the

flames. Rescue 1122 teams and emergency vehicles also rushed to the site and launched a full-scale rescue operation. Officials from Rescue 1122 confirmed that their personnel, alongside the fire brigade, were actively engaged in fire-fighting efforts. The fire continued to rage till the filing of this report, with emergency crews still working to bring it under control.

This incident adds to a worrying pattern of industrial fires in Lahore in recent months. On March 14, a huge blaze erupted in a chemical factory in Nishtar Colony, completely engulfing the facility and causing damages worth millions.

Rescue 1122 had promptly responded and managed to bring the flames under control in the factory's chemical tower, located near Gajju Mata. In February 2025, a fire broke out at an optical shop in Lahore's Makkah Colony, spreading to a nearby house.

Police and rescue teams retrieved the child's body from the drain and shifted it to Abbasi Shaheed Hospital for legal formalities. Initially unidentified, the little girl was later recognized by her devastated parents as Sawera, daughter of Muhammad Jameel, a resident of Sikandar Goth, Sachal.

Shipping companies must support PM's vision

F.P. Report

KARACHI: Keeping shipping company offices open six days a week is essential to reduce the cost of doing business and to support the growth of the national economy. Shipping companies must not ignore the Prime Minister's directive in this regard.

Customs, logistics, and supply chain expert and former President of the Karachi Customs Agents Association, Khurram Ijaz, has appreciated all prominent shipping companies that are complying with the Prime Minister of Pakistan's instructions by keeping their offices open

on Saturdays, thereby ensuring facilitation for the trade community.

"This positive step has not only reduced delays in cargo delivery but has also significantly cut down demurrage charges and container rental costs, providing major relief to the business sector," he said.

However, Khurram Ijaz expressed serious concern over reports that a few shipping companies have recently resumed closing their offices on Saturdays. He cautioned that this trend could undermine the Prime Minister's efforts to improve trade facilitation, and if not addressed, may encourage other companies

to revert to Saturday closures.

He appealed to all shipping companies to continue keeping their offices open on Saturdays in line with the Prime Minister's directives, emphasizing that uniform compliance is essential for smooth trade operations, greater transparency, and reduced costs. Khurram Ijaz stressed that adhering to this directive is not only a matter of professional responsibility, but also in the best interest of the national economy and the business community. He expressed hope that all companies will act in the national interest by continuing Saturday operations.

Hari Welfare Association calls for land reforms

F.P. Report

KARACHI: Hari Welfare Association (HWA) urged the Sindh government to implement immediate land reforms, redistributing millions of acres of state agricultural land currently controlled by feudal and tribal elites.

This call to action, on the International Day of Peasants, comes in response to the concentration of approximately 80% of agricultural land in the hands of just 5% of families in Sindh, leaving sharecroppers and rural workers struggling, stated in a press release.

Akram Khaskheli, President of HWA, highlighted that since the land reforms of the 1970s, rural

communities have reaped little benefit from the region's agricultural wealth. He emphasized that the absence of land distribution perpetuates debt bondage, with peasants lacking resources despite their contributions to food and cotton production.

The HWA criticized the tokenistic Landless Hari Project of 2008 and the ineffectiveness of schemes under Benazir Bhutto's name, which have fostered dependency on state support. They lamented the lack of substantial measures to assist landless sharecropping peasants, who form a significant portion of Sindh's agricultural workforce.

The association

expressed disappointment over the government's stance against the Sindh High Court's pro-peasant judgement of 2019, arguing that the government's actions contradict its pro-peasant policies. HWA also noted that despite receiving significant electoral support from rural workers, the government has failed to implement laws beneficial to peasants, like the Sindh Tenancy Act of 1950 and the Sindh Women Agriculture Workers Act of 2019. HWA called for immediate distribution of state agricultural lands among landless peasants, stressing that such reforms are crucial for the genuine development of Sindh's rural areas.

JI urges humane deportation policy for Afghan refugees

F.P. Report

QUETTA: Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) Balochistan organized a conference at the Quetta Press Club on Thursday to address concerns over the ongoing deportation of Afghan refugees to Pakistan, urging authorities to adopt a more respectful and lawful approach in handling the matter.

Speakers at the event criticized the current deportation mechanism as inappropriate

and emphasized that Afghan refugees, many of whom have resided in Pakistan for decades, should have been allowed to return with dignity rather than through coercion.

Participants acknowledged the contribution of Afghan refugees to Pakistan's economy and argued that, similar to policies in European countries, Pakistani citizenship should be granted to those who have lived in the country for extended periods. They noted

that many Afghan refugees view Pakistan as their home and therefore, any repatriation should adhere to international standards, particularly those outlined by the UNHCR.

A joint communiqué issued at the conclusion of the conference called on authorities to abolish the visa system between Pakistan and Afghanistan and to extend the stay of Afghan students currently enrolled in Pakistan.

ایئر ہیڈ کوارٹرز یونٹ) پشاور ٹینڈر نوٹس



ٹینڈر نوٹس برائے مالیاتی سال 2024-25 ایک سال کی مدت کے لیے ایئر ہیڈ کوارٹرز (یونٹ) پشاور کی مساجد میں مندرجہ ذیل اشیاء کے لیے سربراہ ٹینڈر مطلوب ہیں۔

1۔ کارپٹ عملی 2۔ سٹیکبل کارپٹ صرف ایئر ہیڈ کوارٹرز کنٹریکٹرز ٹینڈر جمع کرنے کے مجاز ہوں گے۔ سربراہ ٹینڈر ڈائریکٹر کمانڈ ایئر ہیڈ کوارٹرز (یونٹ) پشاور کے نام 02 مئی 2025 بوقت صبح 10 بجے تک موٹیویشن فائٹ ایئر ہیڈ کوارٹرز (یونٹ) پشاور میں وصول کئے جائیں گے۔ ٹینڈر اسی دن بوقت صبح 11 بجے کھولے جائیں گے۔ موٹیویشن فائٹ کو یقین حاصل ہے کہ وہ جھگی وجوہ کی بنا پر کوئی بھی ٹینڈر درود سے مزید معلومات ان نمبروں سے حاصل کی جاسکتی ہیں۔

0321-9053185/0323-9403315



PESHAWAR: Provincial Minister for social welfare department, Qasim Ali Shah attending a ceremony organized by Hamza Foundation Welfare Thalassemia Hospital on World Day for Hemophilia.

CBP organizes Annual Spring and Rose Festival



F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Like every

Rose Festival, which included a seasonal flower competition. For the first time, Government Girls Degree College Bacha Khan, Peshawar, actively participated on behalf of government educational institutions.

Under the supervision of the esteemed Principal, Professor Zubia Qamar, and the dedicated efforts of Associate Professor Ms. Sajida Qudoos from the Botany Department and her team, the college was transformed into a blooming garden. Their consistent hard work not only turned the college into a beautiful floral haven but also earned them the first position in the competition-proving that with dedication and perseverance, success can be achieved anywhere.

Inter-District Women's Sports Festival begins

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Inter-District Women's Sports Festival commenced with a vibrant opening ceremony at Abdul Wali Khan Sports Complex Charsadda. Secretary of Sports and Youth Affairs Zia-ul-Haq inaugurated the festival by cutting the ribbon.

He was accompanied by Deputy Commissioner Charsadda Qaiser Khan, Additional DG Sports Ms. Rasheeda Ghaznavi, Director Development Azizullah Jan, RSO Kashif Farhan, DSO Charsadda Ms. Gul Rukh, DSO Peshawar Ms. Mashal Malik along with DSOs from other participating districts.

The ceremony featured impressive performances by local schoolgirls including a marching band, PT show and colorful tableaux earning much applause from the audience.

Organized by the District Sports Office Charsadda the festival includes participants from



Peshawar, Mardan, Swabi, Nowshera and Charsadda competing in athletics, tug of war, hockey, volleyball, table tennis and badminton.

While addressing the ceremony Chief Guest Secretary Zia-ul-Haq stated that Abdul Wali Khan Sports Complex is equipped with all modern sports facilities and hosting such events is commendable. He emphasized that efforts will be made to promote sports in collaboration with Secondary and Higher Education departments.

"Sports not only lead to progress but also teach

patience and tolerance," he said, adding that he hopes the girls of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa will make the nation proud through their talent and dedication.

Earlier, Deputy Commissioner Charsadda highlighted that the festival was specifically organized for women to provide them with sporting opportunities helping them showcase their talent and further polish their skills.

Later the Secretary of Sports visited various venues within the sports complex to inspect the available sports facilities.

KP-RETP, KP-TEVTA, UET sign MoU

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: In a significant step toward fostering economic growth and empowering youth in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the Memorandum of Agreement (MoA) was signed between the KP Rural Economic Transformation Project (KP-RETP), KP Technical Education and Vocational Training Authority (KP-TEVTA), and University of Engineering and Technology, Peshawar (UET Peshawar), here the other day. The MoA was signed by Mr. Arif Ullah Awan, Project Director of KP-RETP, Mr. Mansoor Qaisar, Managing Director KP-TEVTA and Prof. Dr. Qaisar Ali, Vice Chancellor UET Peshawar in the presence of Country Head for Pakistan International Fund for Agriculture Development (IFAD) Fernanda Thomaz Da Rocha, Coordinator IFAD, Mr. Ghulam Nabi Mari, Prof Dr. Tahir Khan,

Team Lead /Director Department of Mechatronics Engineering UET Peshawar, Project Manager KP-RETP Mr. Amjad Miraj and senior officials.

The programme, funded by IFAD Pakistan, is aimed to provide vocational, technical, and entrepreneurial training to 60,000 young individuals in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The initiative is designed to enhance professional skills across five key thematic areas: technical and vocational skills, entrepreneurship, emerging technologies, digital literacy and soft skills, aimed at opening up greater employment opportunities for the youth including women.

Mr. Fernanda Thomaz Da Rocha highlighted the broader significance of the partnership said, "This milestone demonstrates the power of collaboration between IFAD-financed projects, academic institutions, and the private sec-

tor to create real opportunities for young people. We are proud to invest in youth upskilling and women empowerment in rural KP. Through this initiative, we are helping young women and men build the skills they need to succeed in the job market or launch their own enterprises. IFAD remains deeply committed to supporting rural youth and driving inclusive economic transformation across the province."

Speaking at the event, the Project Director of KP-RETP Arif Ullah Awan stated, "This partnership reflects our commitment to transforming rural livelihoods by equipping youth with skills that are not only relevant today but also future-focused. By joining hands with KP-TEVTA and UET Peshawar, we are ensuring that our training interventions are practical, inclusive, and aligned with the evolving needs of the job market."

KP Doctor Council rejects tax imposition

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Doctor Council (KPDC) rejected imposition of professional tax on doctors by provincial government and demanded its restoration to old rates, similar to other provinces. A 3-member committee will negotiate with the government.

The council demanded a salary hike for all doctors, including House Officers, Trainee Medical Officers, and Medical Officers, in line with inflation. Dr. Abdul Majeed chaired the meeting, which included representatives from various medical associations Provincial Doctors Association Dr. Sabet Ullah, Dr. Rizwan Rajput, and Dr. Fazl Manan, YDA: Dr. Asif Yousafzai, Teaching Cadre Professor Dr. Musa Kalim, PMA Dr. Hawarn, Islamic Doctors Forum: Dr. Nisar, People's Doctors Forum Dr. Zulfiqar, PIMA: Dr. Daniyal.

The council urged that recruitment and promotion of doctors in MTI hospitals follow the PMDC's laid-down procedure and standards. The council demanded an end to nepotism and favoritism in appointments and promotions in MTI hospitals, ensuring merit-based selections.

The council expressed concerns over the Independent Monitoring Unit (IMU) role in doctors' promotions and demanded its abolition, advocating promotions based on ACRs (Annual Confidential Reports).

Residents of PK-81 hails steps taken by Qasim

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The residents of Hassan Garhi, local dignitaries of PK-81, and the general public have appreciated the development initiatives taken by the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Minister for Social Welfare, Syed Qasim Ali Shah.

They thanked him for launching welfare and development projects in Hassan Garhi and said that the provincial minister has fulfilled a long-standing demand of the area's residents by initiating these development plans.

They stated that the commencement of development work in constituency marks the fulfillment of promises made to the public, and that the provincial minister for social welfare, Syed Qasim Ali Shah, has paved the way for the region's development through the released funds.

The local residents also wholeheartedly expressed their gratitude to PTI founder Imran Khan and the Chief Minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa for these efforts and hoped that this momentum of development would continue in the future as well. The people of the area further said that Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf is the only party that truly understands and is aware of the basic problems of the public, and it is taking timely and practical steps to resolve them.

Improving higher education a major challenge: Secretary HED

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The Secretary of Higher Education Department, Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Capt. (R) Kamran Afridi has stated that the provincial government is not only fully committed to addressing the financial and administrative challenges faced by the higher education sector, particularly public universities, but is also actively working on the development of short, medium, and long-term strategies in this regard.

He appreciated the swift and dedicated efforts of the Higher Education Task Force, formed under his leadership on the instructions of the Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

The task force, in consultation with experts from the higher education sector, has formulated practical and actionable recommendations, which will soon be submitted to the Chief Minister for final approval.

Capt. (R) Kamran Afridi expressed these views while chairing a special meeting of the Provincial Task Force on Higher Education held at Khyber Medical University (KMU), Peshawar.

The meeting was attended by prominent task force members including Vice Chancellor KMU Prof. Dr. Zia ul Haq, Prof. Dr. Shafiq-ur-Rehman, Prof. Dr. Muhammad Usman Ghani (Director IM Sciences, Peshawar), Prof.



Dr. Youreed Ahsan (Registrar University of Peshawar), Prof. Dr. Jamil (HEC Islamabad), and Prof. Dr. Gul Muhammad (UET Peshawar).

Capt. (R) Kamran Afridi emphasized that universities are centers of knowledge and play a key role in the development and prosperity of societies.

He highlighted that the core function of universities is to guide society in addressing various challenges through research and innovation. However, due to limited resources and lack of strategic priorities, the higher education sector has not been able to achieve the desired progress in research.

He assured that the current government is well aware of the pressing issues faced by universities and is taking all necessary practical steps to address them.

He has accepted the role of Secretary Higher Education as a challenge, with the vision to bring the sector up to international standards. For this, he emphasized the importance of close collaboration with the academic and administrative leadership of universities.

The Secretary acknowledged the commendable progress made by the Provincial Task Force and expressed hope that the final report will be submitted to the Chief Minister by the end of this month. While praising the efforts of all universities in the province, he also acknowledged that some institutions are facing serious financial and administrative hurdles.

The provincial government, he said, will provide every possible support to overcome these challenges and will ensure the imple-

mentation of the task force's recommendations on a priority basis.

Discussing the evolving role of universities, he stressed the need to move beyond traditional academic models and focus on modern research-driven and innovative approaches aligned with societal and market needs. He also urged universities to explore public-private partnership models and promote research, innovation, and commercialization to tackle financial constraints.

Capt. (R) Kamran Afridi concluded by expressing his special thanks to all task force members for their tireless efforts in preparing the final draft and particularly appreciated the continuous support and hospitality extended by KMU Vice Chancellor Prof. Dr. Zia ul Haq throughout the process.

PHC grants transit bail to Punjab's resident

Humayun Khan

PESHAWAR: Peshawar High Court (PHC) has granted transit bail to resident of Punjab named Ghazanfar Ali directed him to appear before the Sessions Judge in Gujrat by April 30, on Thursday.

The counsel Daniyal Asad Chamkani advocate argued that Ghazanfar Ali, from a political family in Gujrat, Punjab, has been embroiled in land disputes, leading to three FIRs against him. He added that has no solid evidence against petitioner in the

registered cases.

The lawyer added that despite this, police raided Ghazanfar Ali's home the previous night, prompting him to seek transit bail to appear in court and obtain relief. Ghazanfar Ali's daughter's wedding was scheduled for the same day,

adding urgency to his situation, the lawyer stated.

PHC Acting Chief Justice SM Atique Shah granted bail on the bond worth Rs 1 lac with two personal sureties and ordered Ghazanfar Ali to appear before the relevant court on 30th April.

Workshop on crop zoning and agricultural policy held

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Provincial Minister for Agriculture, Major Retired Sajjad Barkwal, urged the relevant officials of the Agriculture Department and all stakeholders involved in proposing agricultural policies to develop a policy that maximizes benefits for landowners and the general public.

He emphasized that the formulated policy must address issues and propose solutions related to agriculture and landowners, rather than being limited to theoretical or superficial statements. He directed department officials and experts to utilize their expertise to improve the department and enhance the economic conditions of farmers.

He expressed these views while addressing a consultative workshop on proposed crop zoning and agricultural policy for Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, held at the Directorate of Agriculture Peshawar. The



event was attended by Secretary Agriculture Atta ur Rehman Khalil, Secretary Communications and works Dr. Muhammad Israr, Vice Chancellor of Agricultural University Peshawar Jahan Bakht, Director General Extension Dr. Murad Ali, department officials, and various stakeholders.

Provincial Minister for Agriculture stated that the primary goal of this consultative meeting was to formulate an effective agricultural policy that benefits both the farming community and the general public. He stressed that the policy's effectiveness hinges on its practical implementation.

"The current provincial government will take all necessary steps to ensure the policy is genuinely enforced," he

said. He instructed all department officials to maintain coordination among sub-departments and play a pivotal role in advancing the department's objectives. He further directed stakeholders to form dedicated working groups to rigorously develop actionable recommendations for the agricultural policy.

During the workshop, the Provincial Minister was given a detailed briefing on crop zoning in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and agro-ecological zoning in Pakistan and the province. The briefing highlighted that in 2020, with technical support from Helvetas Swiss Interooperation, Pakistan Meteorological Department, and Agricultural University Peshawar, a committee developed a new agro-ecological zoning framework. Under this

framework, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has been divided into 6 major zones and 9 sub-zones.

Earlier, Secretary Agriculture Atar Rehman Khalil thanked the Provincial Minister and stakeholders for attending the consultative meeting. Secretary Communications and works Dr. Muhammad Israr also shared key recommendations for formulating an effective agricultural policy.

Concluding the event, Provincial Minister for Agriculture Sajjad Brakwal thanked all participants for their practical and valuable input on the draft crop zoning and agricultural policy. He strictly directed agriculture line departments to prioritize measures for agricultural development, food self-sufficiency and exports.

Fatimid foundation observes World Hemophilia Day

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Provincial Minister for social welfare department, Qasim Ali Shah visited Hamza Foundation Welfare Thalassemia Hospital Peshawar here on Wednesday to celebrate "World Day for Hemophilia" with the Hemophilia affected children and expressed his commitment to continue his support for helping the poor and needy children suffering from different blood diseases.

Minister also vowed to play his due role for release of grant in aid by the provincial government and other funds from the Zakaat & Ushr Department KP to support the organi-

zation for serving ailing segment of the society.

In this regard awareness session was also held participating by founder of the Hamza Foundation, Ijaz Ali Khan, CEO Eng. Hamza, Dr. Tariq Khan and individuals from different walks of lives including patients and their parents.

During the visit, the minister also inspected the facilities being imparted to more than 1500 Thalassemia and Hemophilia patients at the foundation.

Speaking on this occasion, Ijaz Ali Khan thanked the minister for extending his support and visiting the institution.

He said that the day is observed on April 17, rais-

es awareness about hemophilia and other inherited bleeding disorders. It highlights the need for improved diagnosis, treatment, and care, especially in underserved communities.

Hamza Foundation is providing all health facilities to the patients through state of the art machinery and blood transfusion is ensured after proper screening.

Minister for Welfare Qasim Ali Shah highly appreciated the services of Hamza Foundation and said that he is aware of how the institution is treating poor and needy patients with limited resources and they are facing shortage of blood bags and facing other chal-

lenges as well.

He said that he will take steps to ensure the provision of donation from the health funds, so as free blood bags and chemicals may be ensured to the institution, and Hamza Foundation may continue to serve the suffering humanity in the same way.

Qasim Ali Shah further that other parliamentarians, civil society representatives and individuals from different walks of lives should also visit the Hamza Foundation and cooperate with them.

At the end, the provincial minister also cut a cake with children affected by thalassemia & hemophilia, while the provincial minister was also presented HF shield.



In brief

DBA cabinet takes oath F.P. Report

BUNER: Provincial Minister for Sports and Youth Affairs Syed Fakhar Jahan administered oath from newly elected District Bar Association cabinet while Deputy Commissioner and District Police Officer were also present during the ceremony. Chairman Election Board Advocate Ilyas Khan hand over bar affairs to the new elected cabinet members and congratulated them and thanked the participants. General Secretary Advocate Tariq Nazir took charge and thanked former President Mian Naem u din and his team and the lawyers' community for their support and trust and said that the honor of the lawyers' community is the first priority and will never allow the dignity of the black coat to be compromised. The newly elected president Advocate Israr Ahmed presented a letter of thanks to the chief guest in which he demanded parking, gym, grant and other facilities for the district bar association. Buner. Minister of Sports and Youth Affairs Syed Fakhar Jahan Bacha assured that he will try to meet all the legitimate demands of the District Bar with his funds. At the end of the ceremony, the new cabinet presented commemorative shields and gifts to the Chief Guest. On the occasion DC Kashif Qayyum DPO Saud Khan PTI Chairman MNA Buner Barrister Gohar Khan's brother Advocate Johar Khan also gave gifts to the new cabinet office bearers.

Official visits exams hall F.P. Report

LOWER DIR: Shahid Ali Khan Orakzai, Regional Director of Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU), conducted unannounced visits to examination centres in Lower Dir on Wednesday to review ongoing exam arrangements and interact with students and staff. The visits included centres established at Munda and the Government Centennial Model High School Timergara, where exams for various academic programmes were underway. Orakzai expressed satisfaction over the overall management of the examination process. He was briefed by centre superintendent Rahatullah Khan on the facilities provided to students and the steps taken to prevent cheating. The regional director appreciated the efforts made to ensure a fair and student-friendly environment. Speaking to students, Mr Orakzai reiterated the university's commitment to expanding access to quality education through its distance learning system. He noted that AIOU enables students to pursue academic programmes from home at affordable costs, making higher education more inclusive and accessible. He added that the regional office was utilising all available resources to improve student support services and encouraged students to contact the regional office directly in case of any issues.

Poppy crop to be destroyed F.P. Report

MARDAN: A meeting was held under the chairmanship of Commissioner regarding the prevention of poppy cultivation and destruction of the cultivated crop in Mardan division, on Thursday. The meeting was attended by Regional Police Officer Najeeb-ur-Rehman, Director Excise Sufyan Khan, Secretary to Commissioner Sara Tawab, ADC Swabi Islahuddin, Assistant Director Anti-Narcotics Force and representatives of various universities.

KKKUK holds training workshop



F.P. Report

KARAK: The Quality Enhancement Cell (QEC) of Khushal Khan Khattak University Karak (KKKUK) today organized a highly productive one-day training workshop focused on the Review of Institutional Performance and Enhancement (RIPE). The workshop aimed to equip participants with the necessary knowledge and tools to effectively review and enhance the university's institutional performance.

The training session featured a comprehensive presentation by the esteemed resource person, Dr. Asghar Khan, from the International Islamic University Islamabad. He provided a detailed overview of the RIPE framework, its key components, and its significance in fostering a culture of continuous improvement within higher education institutions. His insightful presentation covered various aspects of institutional review, data collection methodologies, performance analysis, and the development of effective enhancement plans.

The workshop commenced with a warm welcome address by Dr. Nasir Iqbal, Deputy Director QEC, highlighted the importance of regular institutional review in achieving academic excellence and ensuring the overall development of the university. He emphasized the commitment of KKKUK towards quality education and continuous improvement.

In his concluding remarks, Dr. Muhammad Anwar, Director QEC at KKKUK, expressed his sincere gratitude to the resource person, Dr. Asghar Khan, for sharing his valuable expertise. He also thanked all the participants for their active engagement and keen interest in the workshop. He reiterated the QEC's unwavering support for enhancing the quality of education and contributing to the overall development and progress of Khushal Khan Khattak University Karak.

The workshop witnessed enthusiastic participation from all Heads of Departments, Section In-charges, and Program Team Members representing both the university and its affiliated colleges. The interactive sessions and discussions provided a valuable platform for participants to gain a deeper understanding of the RIPE process and to strategize on its effective implementation within their respective departments and institutions.

This training workshop underscores Khushal Khan Khattak University Karak's proactive approach towards quality assurance and its commitment to fostering a robust and effective system for institutional performance review and enhancement. The knowledge gained from this workshop is expected to play a crucial role in driving continuous improvement initiatives across the university and its affiliated colleges, ultimately benefiting the students and the wider academic community.

Contractor from remote area of Dir wins award

F.P. Report

LOWER DIR: A contractor hailing from the remote village of Damtal in Samarbagh, District Lower Dir, has brought pride to Pakistan by winning the Best Performance of the Year award in Oman.

Haji Habib Jan Roghani, the owner of Roghani Construction LLC, was honoured with the award following his company's nomination by the Royal Oman Police. The award is highly regarded in Oman and is considered a mark of

excellence and prestige.

Haji Habib Jan Roghani is a well-known personality in Samar Bagh, Dir. In addition to his successful business ventures in Oman, he is also the founder of Jamia Al-Habib Lilbanin Walbanat, a religious seminary in his native village of Damatal.

The selection process for the award involves a rigorous evaluation of a company's standards and performance. Only firms that meet the highest criteria are chosen, making this recognition a testament to Roghani

Construction's dedication to quality and integrity.

Speaking on the occasion, Haji Habib Jan Roghani said that Pakistanis, wherever they go, should never compromise on hard work and merit.

"Success will always follow those who remain committed to honesty and excellence," he said. This achievement is seen as a significant honor for the Pakistani community in Oman and a source of inspiration for aspiring entrepreneurs.

Availability of doctors & medicines at govt hospitals directed

F.P. Report

BANNU: Deputy Commissioner Bannu has asked the health authorities to formulate a comprehensive plan for ensuring availability of doctors and medicines in public sector health facilities in the district.

DC issued these directions while chairing a meeting of the health steering committee at his office on Wednesday. IMU Health district monitoring officer and district health department officials were in attendance.

The DMO briefed the deputy commissioner

about available healthcare facilities in major hospitals, rural health centres and basic health units in Bannu district. He also shared a report about truant doctors, paramedics and other staffers and availability of medicines and other medical facilities in hospitals.

During the meeting, the officials also identified various deficiencies including shortage of doctors and staffers, unavailability of medical equipment and machinery and administrative issues.

Speaking at the meeting, the deputy commissioner

said that his administration was committed to ensure provision of standard healthcare to citizens and that no slackness and negligence on part of health officials would be tolerated in this regard.

He asked the health authorities to formulate a comprehensive strategy to address health related issues and share progress with his administration. DC urged the officials to perform their professional obligations sincerely so that the problems faced by people in the health sector could be effectively addressed.

Larkana university employees hold protest F.P. Report

LARKANA: Employees Welfare Association (EWA) University of Larkana observed strike in favor of their demands and boycotted from duties, on Thursday.

EWA leaders including Siraj Ahmed Bhutto, Abdul Jabbar Chandio, Musawar Ali Bhutto and others said that the University of Larkana's Acting Vice Chancellor Muhammad Usman Kerio has been given written complaints many times to solve the legitimate problems of the employees, after which notifications and letters have also been issued to solve these problems, but unfortunately the management does not have time to solve the legitimate problems.

The employees are forced to protest even in the heat of anger but the university administration does not care about the employees, due to which the employees have been protesting in order to get their democratic rights, which is condemned in strong words. Steps should be taken otherwise the scope of protest will be increased, they appealed to PPP chairman and CM Sindh to solve the problem of the University employees on priority basis otherwise they hold right of protest.

Policeman injured F.P. Report

LAKEE MARWAT: A police constable was injured when terrorists opened fire on a police party in the Paharkhel Pacca area.

A police official said that the policemen came under attack when they were on patrol duty in the area. He said that the wounded constable Shahid was shifted to a local hospital where his condition was stated to be stable.

"Police returned the attack effectively and after an exchange of fire the assailants fled and disappeared in the nearby mountains", he maintained, adding that police have launched a search for the attackers in the mountainous terrain.

Robber killed F.P. Report

TOBA TEK SINGH: A dangerous robber was killed by his own colleagues. This was claimed by Station House Officer (SHO) Saddar police station Kamalia Nasir Azeem and added that police party on routine patrol when they tried to stop four suspicious people riding on motorcycles. The motorcycle-borne suspects opened fire on the police, threw their motorcycle and a bag containing a wrench and pliers. entered the corn field and continued firing.

The police also fired in response to the airstrikes under self-defense. More troops were called through the wireless.

Transport mafia jeopardizes communication channel

F.P. Report

SHANGLA: The transport system in Shangla is plagued by a mafia that dictates exorbitant fares, leaving passengers with no choice but to comply. The transport terminals in the district lack basic facilities, including washrooms, forcing passengers to relieve themselves by the roadside. This situation is particularly distressing for women and the elderly.

Vehicles plying the Mangora-Alpurai route, as well as those operating within the district, are often overloaded, and drivers refuse to adhere to government-fixed fares. Cars traveling from Alpurai to Peshawar typically carry six passengers, exceeding the permitted capacity. Similarly, vehicles on the Mangora-Shangla route are frequently overloaded, leading to accidents.

The absence of a transport authority office in Shangla exacerbates the problem.

When approached, officials claim that addressing these issues falls under the purview of the transport authority, not the traffic police. However, the lack of traffic personnel on duty after evening hours emboldens drivers to overload their vehicles and charge excessive fares.

Rescue operation continues for drowned sisters: A rescue operation is underway in Shangla's

Basham area to retrieve the bodies of two sisters, Muskan Khurshid and Malaika Khurshid, who drowned in the Indus River. Despite efforts by rescue teams, the bodies have not been recovered yet, and the operation is ongoing for the third day.

Coal Miner from succumbs to burns: Sardar Gul, a coal miner from Pagori Shangla, tragically lost his life after sustaining severe burns in a coal mine accident in Darra Adam Khel's Kalakhel coal mine during Ramadan. He was shifted to Hayatabad Burn Medical Complex Peshawar for treatment but unfortunately succumbed to his injuries on Thursday. His funeral prayer was performed in his hometown Pagori Shangla, and he was laid to rest.

This incident highlights the ongoing tragedy of coal mine accidents in the region, where workers from Shangla continue to lose their lives.

The coal mining industry has become a death trap for miners from Shangla, with many workers losing their lives in accidents across Pakistan. According to Abid Yar, General Secretary of the Coal Mine Workers Welfare Association in Shangla, 112 workers have lost their lives in various accidents this year alone.

Biometric system to be introduced: The govern-

ment has initiated measures to introduce a biometric system, including facial recognition and fingerprint scanning, in government schools to monitor teacher attendance. The system will require teachers to mark their attendance twice a day, once when they arrive and again when they leave.

The primary purpose of introducing the biometric system is to identify and address the issue of teacher absenteeism in government schools, particularly in remote and hard-to-reach areas like Shangla. The system aims to ensure that teachers are held accountable for their attendance and performance.

Sikandar Shahzad appointed as Deputy GS ANP: Awami National Party Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has appointed Sikandar Shahzad Advocate, a resident of Shangla, as the Provincial Deputy General Secretary. The appointment was unanimously approved during a provincial cabinet meeting chaired by Provincial President Mian Iftikhar Hussain.

Sikandar Shahzad is the son of the late Mutawakil Khan Advocate, who previously held the position of Provincial Deputy General Secretary of the Awami National Party. Mutawakil Khan tragically passed away in a traffic accident on March 7 in the Ranyal Sangri area of Shangla.

Enrollment awareness walk arranged

F.P. Report

WANA: Badloon Welfare Association organized a large-scale Enrollment Awareness walk and event attracted enthusiastic participation from school students, educators, political leaders, and civil society activists, all united in a shared mission: to highlight the transformative power of education and encourage greater school enrollment across the region.

The streets of Wana came alive with the marchers holding colorful banners and placards adorned with motivational slogans—many urging parents to enroll their children, particularly girls, in schools. The walk was both a symbol of rising hope and a call for urgent educational reform in a region where literacy remains alarmingly low.

Speaking to the media, representatives from Badloon Welfare Association emphasized the crucial need for such initiatives. "Lower Waziristan is full of gifted children, but unfortunately, a lack of awareness, poor infrastructure, and limited opportunities continue to stifle their potential," a spokesperson said. "This walk is more than a demonstration—it's a grassroots effort to awaken the community and build momentum for long-term educational development."

The organizers detailed their broader mission, which includes forging partnerships with educational institutions, training teachers, advocating for girls' education, and working toward the creation of safe, inclusive, and high-quality learning spaces. They acknowledged the region's long-standing challenges—poverty, post-conflict instability, and cultural resistance to formal education—but expressed optimism that consistent awareness efforts can change mindsets over time.

DC inspects Patwarkana records

F.P. Report

KARAK: Additional Deputy Commissioner inspected complete records of the Patwarkhana and also reviewed the collection at various places by going to the field Takhti Nusrati tehsil, on Thursday.

On this occasion, he also uploaded the records on the Deputy App. The ADC strictly instructed all the Patwaris to meet the tax targets set by the Board of

Revenue at all times and take special care of the records so that the valuable records are not damaged or lost. He directed the revenue staff to adopt a polite and friendly attitude towards the public.

Meanwhile, Sahibzada Samiullah also inspected Type C Hospital Takhti Nusrati and BHU Chokara and reviewed the medical facilities provided to the public. He expressed strong anger over the absence of

some staff and duty roster in the hospital. The ADC (C) also inspected the newly established Rescue 1122 Center and the Matriculation Examination Halls.

Anti-polio vaccination campaign launched: Deputy Commissioner Karak Shakeel Ahmed Jan launched nationwide anti-polio campaign starting from April 21 by administering polio drops to children.

Admn assures support to poisoned sweets consumption victims

F.P. Report

HAFIZABAD: In a deeply saddening turn of events, a tragic incident unfolded in Qila Sahib Singh Church area and Christian Colony, Hafizabad, where several children lost their lives while others fell seriously ill after allegedly consuming poisonous sweets.

In response to the tragedy, Deputy Commissioner Hafizabad Abdul Razzaq and District Police Officer Atif Nazir paid a solemn visit to the grieving families to offer their condolences and assure them of the administration's unwavering support during this painful time.

During their visit, DC Abdul Razzaq met with the bereaved families and expressed heartfelt sorrow and deep sympathy over the irreparable loss of young lives. He emphasized that the entire district administration stands firmly with the affected families and will not abandon them in this hour of overwhelming grief.

"The pain of losing innocent children is unimaginable. We share your sorrow and stand by you like a family. This is a moment of collective mourning, and the administration is fully committed to extending every possible support," said the Deputy Commissioner.

He further stated that the

Punjab government will be approached immediately to arrange financial assistance for the families of the deceased children as well as those undergoing treatment. He also assured that comprehensive measures are being taken to ensure the best possible medical care for the hospitalized children.

DC Razzaq noted that the condition of the children receiving treatment at the Children's Hospital in Lahore has shown notable improvement. "Doctors are providing top-tier treatment, and both the district administration and health department officials are maintaining a continuous presence at the hospital to monitor their recovery and provide support," he added.

He reiterated that assistance to the affected families would not stop at medical care. The administration is exploring all avenues to ensure these families are supported emotionally, medically, and financially during their recovery from this devastating event.

In his remarks, the Deputy Commissioner highlighted the historic role of the Christian community in promoting peace, religious harmony, and cooperation with local authorities. "Our Christian brothers and sisters have always been at the forefront in fostering unity and tolerance in Hafizabad. The adminis-

tration will stand shoulder to shoulder with them in this difficult time. This is not just a tragedy for one community; it is a loss for all of us," he said with solemn resolve.

DPO Atif Nazir also extended his condolences and emphasized that the police department is actively investigating the source of the poisonous sweets to ensure that those responsible are brought to justice. He assured the families that the safety and well-being of all citizens, regardless of their faith, is the top priority of law enforcement.

During the visit, both the DC and DPO offered special prayers for the departed souls and the speedy recovery of the ailing children. They listened to the concerns of the families, assured them of transparent communication, and pledged that justice would be served.

The visit concluded with a renewed promise from the district administration to leave no stone unturned in providing relief and ensuring such a tragic incident does not occur again. This heartrending incident has cast a pall of sorrow over the city, uniting the community in mourning and bringing to light the pressing need for food safety and child protection measures. As investigations continue, the thoughts and prayers of the entire region remain with the affected families.

Police crackdowns on farmers: In a dramatic turn of events at Fawara Chowk, police dismantled a protest camp organized by farmer organizations under the auspices of Jamat-e-Islami, triggering widespread condemnation and a strong backlash from the protesting leadership.

The protest, which was aimed at drawing attention to the government's failure to announce the support price for wheat and initiate official procurement, escalated after the police forcibly dispersed a subsequent rally, arresting four activists and key leaders.

According to detailed reports, the farmer organizations had, under the leadership of Jamat-e-Islami and the Kisan Board Pakistan, planned a peaceful sit-in at Fawara Chowk to pressurize the government into declaring the support price for wheat—a crucial issue affecting thousands of cultivators across the region. The protest was led by prominent figures, including Chaudhry Amanullah Chatha, the Central Vice President of the Kisan Board Pakistan, and Malik Shoukat Ali Phularwan, the District Head of Jamat-e-Islami.

However, in the early hours of the morning, police launched a preemptive operation, disman-

tlng the protest camp and surrounding the district office of Jamat-e-Islami. Despite police presence and attempts to block them, the farmers, backed by local legal representatives from the District Bar Association, regrouped and marched towards Fawara Chowk in defiance of official restrictions.

As the demonstrators reached Fawara Chowk, the police resorted to force, including baton charges and physical dispersal, to break up the crowd. In the process, four farmers and protest leaders were arrested, prompting an outcry from protest organizers and their supporters.

In a joint press conference following the crackdown, Ch. Amanullah Chatha and Malik Shoukat Ali Phularwan strongly condemned the police action, terming it a "blatant use of state oppression against peaceful protesters." They emphasized that the protest was entirely peaceful and organized within democratic rights but was met with "state brutality and violence." "This is not just a crackdown on farmers," said Amanullah Chatha. "It is a crackdown on justice, on truth, and on the rightful demands of the nation's food producers. Using force against peaceful demonstrators is an act of tyranny."

Phularwan added, "we were

merely demanding what is our constitutional and economic right. The government's silence on the wheat support price has already put thousands of farmers in distress. Instead of responding with policy, they've responded with batons."

The leadership of Jamat-e-Islami and Kisan Board has demanded: Immediate release of the arrested workers and leaders. Legal action against police officials responsible for the excessive use of force. A clear and fair announcement of the support price for wheat, followed by immediate procurement mechanisms. Several civil society groups and local bar members also joined in condemning the police action, warning that such forceful suppression of fundamental democratic rights could further aggravate the rural economic crisis.

The incident has sparked concern among political analysts and human rights observers, as it points to a growing trend of intolerance towards public protests, especially those rooted in agrarian and working-class demands. As tensions simmer, farmer organizations have vowed to intensify their struggle if their demands are not met. More protests and possible nationwide solidarity movements are expected in the coming days.



HELSINKI: A view of closed crossing on Finland's border with Russia, in Virolahti.

China unexpectedly anoints new trade negotiator amid US tariff war

BEIJING (Reuters): China unexpectedly appointed a new trade negotiator key in any talks to resolve the escalating tariff war with the United States, replacing trade tsar Wang Shouwen with its envoy to the World Trade Organization.

Li Chenggang, 58, a former assistant commerce minister during the first administration of US President Donald Trump, takes over from Wang, the human resources and social security ministry said in a statement. It was unclear if Wang, 59, who assumed the No. 2 role at the commerce ministry in 2022, had taken up a post elsewhere. His name was no longer on the ministry's leadership team, according to the ministry's website.

The ministry did not immediately respond to a Reuters request for comment on the change, which was not explained in the human resources ministry's statement. Wang was regarded as a tough negotiator and had clashed with US officials in previous meetings, said a source in Beijing's foreign business community. "He's a bulldog, very intense," said the source, declining to be named. The shift within the top leadership at the commerce ministry comes as Beijing pursues a hardline stance in an intensifying trade war with Washington triggered by Trump's steep tariffs on items imported from China. The abrupt change also took place in the middle of President Xi Jinping's tour of Southeast Asia to

consolidate economic and trading ties with close neighbours amid the stand-off with the US

Commerce Minister Wang Wentao was among senior officials flanking Xi on his visit to Vietnam, Malaysia and Cambodia this week. Alfredo Montufar-Helu, a senior adviser to the Conference Board's China Center said the change was "very abrupt and potentially disruptive" given how quickly trade tensions had escalated and in light of Wang's experience negotiating with the US since the first Trump administration.

"We can only speculate as to why this happened at this precise moment; but it might be that in the view of China's top leadership, given how tensions have continued escalating, they need someone else to break the impasse in which both countries find themselves and finally start negotiating," he said. Unlike multiple other nations which have responded to Trump's plans for punitive tariffs by seeking bilateral deals with Washington, Beijing has raised its own levies on US goods in response and has not sought talks, which it says can only be conducted on the basis of mutual respect and equality. Washington said that Trump was open to making a trade deal with China but Beijing should make the first move, insisting that China needed "our money".

Li, who was China's ambassador to the WTO for more than four years, previously held several key jobs in

the commerce ministry, such as in departments overseeing treaties and law and fair trade. He also has an academic background in the elite Peking University and Germany's Hamburg University. On March 31, Li attended a Chinese private entrepreneurs forum as a "leader" of the commerce ministry, according to a state media readout of the meeting, one of the first official hints of an impending move to a new role. "It seems like a routine promotion with nothing abnormal, but now is obviously a sensitive period due to US-China tensions," said Alfred Wu, associate professor at the National University of Singapore.

At a February WTO meeting in Geneva, Li slammed the US for arbitrarily imposing tariffs on its trading partners, including China. Last week, China filed a new complaint with the WTO expressing "grave concern" over US tariffs, accusing Washington of violating WTO rules. "Li is a lawyer by training, which positions him better than Wang Shouwen to handle the complex legal issues that are emerging in the current negotiations," said Henry Gao, professor of law at Singapore Management University. "This change indicates that China is prepared to address legal matters more comprehensively in this round of talks. If anything, this shift demonstrates China's willingness to delve into legal intricacies during negotiations, suggesting a strategic approach to resolving the ongoing trade war."

Xi calls on Asian nations to resist confrontation and protectionism

KUALA LUMPUR (Reuters): Chinese President Xi Jinping called for Asian nations to unite in resisting geopolitical confrontation, unilateralism and protectionism, as he aims to consolidate ties with some of China's closest neighbours amid a deterioration of relations with the US. Xi is in Malaysia as part of a three-nation Southeast Asian trip that includes Vietnam and Cambodia.

China and Malaysia reached a consensus on deepening cooperation in various fields, Xi said after witnessing the exchange of 31 agreements with Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim, ranging from trade and tourism to railway transportation and agriculture. No details were provided for the agreements. "In the face of shocks to the current international order and economic globalisation, our two nations will stand united with other countries in the

region to jointly resist the undercurrents of geopolitical and camp-based confrontation, overcome the countercurrents of unilateralism and protectionism, and safeguard the promising prospects for development in our shared Asian home," Xi said at a function with Anwar.

Xi's comments come after US President Donald Trump, who took office in January, shocked markets by imposing sweeping tariffs on countries across the world. While some of the tariffs have since been delayed, Beijing faces 145% duties. Xi did not directly refer to the United States in his remarks in Kuala Lumpur.

As part of his "America First" policy, Trump has also pulled the US out of the World Health Organization, hollowed out USAID and halted international aid. China has said it is "tearing down walls" and expanding its circle of trading partners amid the trade

war. With an additional tariff of 24% on goods shipped to the US, Malaysia was among several Southeast Asian nations facing hefty US levies before Trump announced his 90-day pause. Malaysian officials have begun reaching out to the US for a reprieve. Anwar said China remained Malaysia's most significant trading partner and continued to be a "rational, strong and reliable" ally during upheaval in global geopolitics.

"At a time when multilateralism is under tremendous strain, when some nations abandon the principle of shared responsibility and others question longstanding commitments, China's global initiatives offer a new lease on hope," Anwar said. China has been Malaysia's largest trading partner since 2009, with total trade valued at 484.1 billion ringgit (\$110 billion) last year, according to Malaysia's foreign ministry.

Xi urged Malaysia and other countries of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations regional bloc to jointly resist decoupling, supply chain disruptions and "excessive tariffs" with openness and greater cooperation, China's state-run CCTV reported. China and Malaysia must also proceed with their cooperation under Beijing's Belt and Road initiative, other transport infrastructure investments, as well as in cutting-edge fields like artificial intelligence, Xi said.

Last June, China said it was willing to study a plan to connect Malaysia's \$10 billion East Coast Rail Link with other China-backed railway projects in Laos and Thailand, potentially expanding the BRI across Southeast Asia. Xi said China also welcomes more high-quality Malaysian agricultural products into the Chinese market, CCTV reported following Xi's meeting with Malaysia's King Sultan Ibrahim.

UN watchdog chief says Iran 'not far' from nuclear bomb

TEHRAN (AFP): The UN nuclear watchdog's chief Rafael Grossi warned that Iran was "not far" from possessing a nuclear bomb, shortly before he arrived in Tehran for talks. Western countries including the United States have long accused Iran of seeking to acquire nuclear weapons -- an allegation Tehran has consistently denied, insisting that its programme is for peaceful civilian purposes. "It's like a puzzle. They have the pieces, and one day they could eventually put them together," Grossi told French newspaper Le Monde in an interview published. "There's still a way to go before they get there. But they're not far off, that has to be acknowledged," he said. The International Atomic Energy Agency watchdog was tasked with overseeing Iran's nuclear programme and its compliance with a

2015 nuclear deal which collapsed three years later when the United States withdrew from it during President Donald Trump's first term.

"It's not enough to tell the international community 'we don't have nuclear weapons' for them to believe you. We need to be able to verify," said IAEA chief Grossi. He arrived in Tehran and met Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi, who posted on X that the pair had had a "useful discussion". Araghchi called on the IAEA boss to "keep the agency away from politics" in the face of "spoilers" vying to "derail current negotiations".

Grossi posted ahead of the meeting that Tehran's cooperation with the IAEA was "indispensable to provide credible assurances about the peaceful nature of Iran's nuclear programme at a time when diplomacy is urgently needed". Grossi

was also expected to meet Mohammad Esلمي, who heads Iran's nuclear energy agency. Grossi's visit comes ahead of a second round of talks between Iran and the United States, a week after the two countries held their highest-level talks since Trump abandoned the nuclear deal in 2018.

Both Tehran and Washington called the first meeting "constructive". Earlier, Araghchi said Iran's enrichment of uranium was not up for discussion, after US Middle East envoy Steve Witkoff called for it to end. "We are ready to build confidence in response to possible concerns, but the issue of enrichment is non-negotiable," he told reporters.

His remarks came after Witkoff said that Iran must "stop and eliminate" enriching uranium as part of any nuclear deal. The day before, Witkoff had urged only that

Iran return to the 3.67 percent enrichment ceiling set by its 2015 accord with major powers. In its latest report, the IAEA said Iran had an estimated 274.8 kilograms (605 pounds) of uranium enriched to up to 60 percent. That level far exceeds the ceiling set by the 2015 deal, but still falls short of the 90 percent threshold required for a nuclear warhead.

After returning to office in January, Trump reimposed sweeping sanctions against Iran under his "maximum pressure" policy. In March, he wrote to Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, urging talks but also warning of possible military action if these fail to produce a deal. Ahead of new round of talks, Araghchi condemned what he called the Trump administration's "contradictory and conflicting positions".

Slovakia's pro-Russian leader rejects a call by EU

BRATISLAVA, Slovakia (AP): Slovakia's populist Prime Minister Robert Fico reacted angrily to what he called "disrespectful" remarks by the European Union foreign policy chief who warned European leaders against traveling to Moscow for military celebrations of the end of World War II.

Known for his pro-Russian views, Fico has repeatedly vowed to attend the military parade in the Russian capital on May 9 that will mark the 80th anniversary of Nazi Germany's defeat in WW II. Kaja Kallas told reporters in Luxembourg after a meeting of EU foreign ministers that "what was also discussed and very clearly said by different member states is that any participation in the 9th of May parades, or celebrations, in Moscow will not be taken lightly on the European side, considering that Russia is really waging a full-scale war in Europe."

Kallas also said that "We made it very clear that we do not want any candidate country to participate in these events on the 9th of May in Moscow" and called on the member states to send their representatives to the capital of Kyiv instead to show solidarity with Ukraine. "I will go to Moscow on May 9," Fico said in a statement. "Mrs. Kallas, I would like to inform you that I am a legitimate premier of Slovakia, a sovereign country," he said. "Nobody can order me where to go or not to go."

Fico said he will travel to Moscow to honor the Red Army soldiers who liberated his country and other victims of the Nazis. The Kremlin has used the annual "Victory Day" celebrations to tout its battlefield prowess, and Putin hailed Russian troops fighting in Ukraine as "heroes" at last year's event.

Fico's views on Russia's war on Ukraine differ sharply from most other European leaders. The Slovakian prime minister returned to power last year after his leftist party Smer (Direction) won parliamentary elections on a pro-Russia and anti-American platform. Since then, he has ended his country's military aid for Ukraine, lashed out at EU sanctions on Russia, and vowed to block Ukraine from joining NATO. Unlike many Western politicians, Fico has not visited Kyiv since the start of the Russian full-scale invasion more than three years ago. His government has faced vocal protests against its pro-Russian stance and other policies.

Putin meets freed Russian Gaza hostages

MOSCOW (Reuters): Kremlin leader Vladimir Putin met Russian nationals freed from captivity in the Gaza strip after militant group Hamas' October 2023 attacks on Israel and said Moscow's longstanding ties with Palestinians helped secure their freedom.

"The fact that you are now free is a result of Russia's many years of stable relations with the Palestinian people, with the representatives of different organisations," Russian news agencies quoted Putin as telling former hostage Alexander Trufanov and members of his family. "Here we have to offer a word of gratitude to the leadership and to the political wing of Hamas for a gesture made to us in carrying out this humanitarian act," the agencies said he told the late-night Kremlin meeting.

Russia, Putin said, "had truly done everything possible" to secure Trufanov's liberation and would undertake whatever was necessary to ensure those still in captivity would be freed. Trufanov was freed after nearly 500 days in captivity in February as part of talks leading to a ceasefire. He thanked Putin for helping secure his release and hoped for the release of all remaining hostages whom he viewed "like brothers".

The agencies said Putin also presented flowers to Trufanov's mother, Elena, and his fiancée, Sapir Cohen, who were also among some 250 hostages seized by Hamas on October 7, 2023.

US and Philippine holds joint combat drills

MANILA (AP): About 14,000 American and Filipino forces will take part in battle-readiness exercises in the Philippines, including live-fire drills, in a largescale deployment that shows the Trump administration is not scaling back its commitment to help deter aggression in the region, a senior Philippine military official said.

The annual joint Balikatan - Tagalog for "shoulder-to-shoulder" - exercises between the long-time allies will be held from April 21 to May 9 and involve about 9,000 United States and 5,000 Filipino military personnel. They will involve fighter aircraft, navy ships and an array of weaponry, including a US anti-ship missile system, Philippine Brig. Gen. Michael Logico said. Australia will deploy about 200 military personnel, and Japan and a number of other friendly nations will send smaller military delegations. China has frowned on such war drills in or near the disputed South China Sea and in northern Philippine provinces close to Taiwan, especially those that involve the US and allied forces that Beijing says aim to contain it and consequently threaten regional stability and peace. Logico said the Balikatan exercises were not aimed at any particular country.

Taiwan is the island democracy which China considers as its own, to be annexed by force if necessary. China conducted large-scale drills in the waters and airspace around Taiwan this month that

included an aircraft carrier battle group as it renewed a warning to Taiwan against seeking formal independence. US Marine Col. Doug Krugman, of the 1st Marine Expeditionary Force, told reporters most of the joint exercises would be staged within Philippine territory except for multi-nation sea exercises, which he did not specify.

Trump's "America First" foreign policy thrust has triggered concerns in Asia about the scale and depth of US commitment to maintain a longstanding security presence in the volatile region. "As you can see, there is no scale back," Logico said during a news briefing. "We're talking about a full battle test." The comprehensive drills would generally involve a command post issuing orders to field forces in mock battle scenarios, according to Logico and Krugman.

The exercises will include aerial surveillance, the use of a barrage of artillery and missile fire to sink a mock enemy ship, deploying a US anti-ship missile system and countering the landing of enemy forces on an island. A US mid-range missile system, which was deployed to the northern Philippines last year, would be used again in the combat exercises, Logico said, without elaborating. China has repeatedly expressed alarm over the missile deployment and demanded that the Philippines pull out the weaponry from its territory which it said could spark an arms race. A Philippine official told The Associated Press early this year that the

US Army's mid-range missile system, which consists of a mobile launcher and at least 16 Standard Missile-6 and Tomahawk Land Attack Missiles, was repositioned from the northern Philippine city of Laoag to a strategic area in a western coastal province facing a disputed South China Sea shoal, where Chinese and Philippine coast guard and navy forces have engaged in tense faceoffs.

US Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth visited Manila in March in his first trip to Asia and said the Trump administration would work with allies to ramp up deterrence against China's aggression in the South China Sea. The US was not gearing up for war, Hegseth said, while underscoring that peace would be won "through strength." He said the US would deploy an anti-ship missile system, called the Navy Marine Expeditionary Ship Interdiction System, as well as unmanned sea vessels to enable the allies forces to train together to defend Philippine sovereignty during the Balikatan exercises. Additionally, the allied forces agreed to stage special operations forces training in Batanes province, a cluster of islands in the northernmost tip of the Philippine archipelago across a sea border from Taiwan, he said. As well as China and the Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia, Brunei and Taiwan also have overlapping claims in the busy waterway, a key global trade route which is also believed to be sitting atop large undersea deposits of gas and oil.

Power blackout hits all of Puerto Rico

SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico (AP): A power blackout hit all of Puerto Rico as the heavily Catholic US territory prepared to celebrate the Easter weekend. All 1.4 million customers were affected, Hugo Sorrentini, spokesman for Luma Energy, which oversees the transmission and distribution of power, told The Associated Press. Crews had restored power to 175,000 customers, or 12%.

Those affected included the main international airport and several hospitals, and at least 328,000 customers were without water. Hotels were near capacity, with thousands of tourists celebrating Easter vacations on the island. Tourism officials rushed to reassure them that many hotels and other businesses were operating with generators. "It is unacceptable that we have a failure of this magnitude in the transmission of the electrical system," said Gov. Jennifer González, who cut short her weeklong vacation and flew back to Puerto Rico.

Officials said 90% of clients would likely have electricity 48 to 72 hours

after the blackout occurred. It was not immediately clear what caused the shutdown, the latest in a string of major blackouts on the island in recent years. Thousands of Puerto Ricans were fuming over the latest outage, with many renewing their calls that the government cancel the contract with Luma and Genera PR, which oversees generation of power on the island.

"This is a total disaster," said Orlando Huertas, 68, as he sipped a drink with a friend at a street-side bar and criticized the government for not doing enough to tackle the chronic outages. Dozens of people were forced to walk on an overpass next to the rails of the rapid transit system that serves the capital, San Juan, while scores of businesses including the biggest mall in the Caribbean were forced to close. Professional baseball and basketball games were cancelled as the hum of generators and smell of smoke filled the air. Traffic became snarled as police officers were deployed to busy intersections. Reggaeton superstar Bad Bunny echoed the collec-

tive rage, writing on X: "When are we going to do something?"

The governor pledged that she would cancel the contract with Luma, but noted that while government officials have started analyzing the contract and finding possible replacements, it wouldn't be a quick process. González also said that she has requested an in-depth investigation into the blackout, noting that officials already have warned there won't be enough generation of power for this summer, when demand peaks. "Puerto Rico can't be the island where the power goes out all the time," González said. "We're going to take action. Let people have no doubts." While power restoration on the main island of Puerto Rico was moving slowly to protect equipment, emergency generation stations restored power to the tiny neighboring island of Culebra and parts of neighboring Vieques, said Josué Colón, the island's so-called energy czar and former executive director of Puerto Rico's Electric Power Authority.

Scientists find strongest evidence yet of life on an alien planet

WASHINGTON (Reuters): In a potential landmark discovery, scientists using the James Webb Space Telescope have obtained what they call the strongest signs yet of possible life beyond our solar system, detecting in an alien planet's atmosphere the chemical fingerprints of gases that on Earth are produced only by biological processes.

The two gases - dimethyl sulfide, or DMS, and dimethyl disulfide, or DMDS - involved in Webb's observations of the planet named K2-18 b are generated on Earth by living organisms, primarily microbial life such as marine phytoplankton - algae. This suggests the planet may be teeming with microbial life, the researchers said. They stressed, however, that they are not announcing the discovery of actual living organisms but rather a possible biosignature - an indicator of a biological process - and that the findings should be viewed cautiously, with more observations needed.

Nonetheless, they voiced excitement. These are the first hints of an alien world that is possibly inhabited, said astrophysicist Nikku Madhusudhan of the University of Cambridge's Institute of Astronomy, lead author of the study published in the Astrophysical Journal Letters. "This is a transformational moment in the search for life beyond the solar system, where we have demonstrated that it is possible to detect biosignatures in potentially habitable planets with current facilities. We have entered the era of observational astrobiology," Madhusudhan said.

Madhusudhan noted that there are various efforts underway searching for signs of life in our solar system, including various claims of environments that might be conducive to life in places like Mars, Venus and various icy moons. K2-18 b is 8.6 times as massive as Earth and has a diameter about 2.6 times as large as our planet. It orbits in the "habitable zone" - a distance

where liquid water, a key ingredient for life, can exist on a planetary surface - around a red dwarf star smaller and less luminous than our sun, located about 124 light-years from Earth in the constellation Leo. A light-year is the distance light travels in a year, 5.9 trillion miles (9.5 trillion km). One other planet also has been identified orbiting this star.

About 5,800 planets beyond our solar system, called exoplanets, have been discovered since the 1990s. Scientists have hypothesized the existence of exoplanets called hycean worlds - covered by a liquid water ocean habitable by microorganisms and with a hydrogen-rich atmosphere. Earlier observations by Webb, which was launched in 2021 and became operational in 2022, had identified methane and carbon dioxide in K2-18 b's atmosphere, the first time that carbon-based molecules were discovered in the atmosphere of an exoplanet in a star's habitable zone.

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Dozens of biotech firms face funding barriers

Trump administration cuts across federal health agencies have sent shivers through a biotech industry already struggling through a prolonged downturn, increasing concerns they will have a harder time getting products approved, investors, company executives and analysts said.

Mass firings at the US Food and Drug Administration are particularly risky for small- and mid-cap biotech companies that have innovative treatments in clinical trials but no products on the market to keep them afloat, these sources told Reuters.

Directives from President Donald Trump's administration to freeze grant funding from the National Institutes of Health may also discourage future talent and resources from flowing into the biotech sector, some of them said.

The S&P Biotech ETF index hit an 18-month low last week and is trading at less than half its 2021 peak. It is down about 20% this year.

A record nearly 30% of US-listed small- and mid-cap biotech companies are trading at or below cash, suggesting the market does not ascribe any value to their existing business or drug development pipeline, according to Jefferies analysts.

US Health Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. says the layoffs that began last week are needed to streamline the nation's health bureaucracy and will improve agencies' work. But the ouster of top scientists at FDA and other institutions has raised questions over how they will fulfil their missions.

Biotech firms have faced delays in scheduling meetings and receiving feedback from the FDA that guides drug development, according to a letter from company executives and investors to Congress this week. "Many have concerns that approval decision deadlines will be missed," the letter said.

"The overwhelming view is that the regulatory agency is impaired, although we have not seen the consequences of it yet since the layoffs and firings have only recently occurred," said Paul Ariano, associate portfolio manager at Thornburg Investment Management, whose fund holds shares in Sarepta Therapeutics and Cytokinetics.

"Sentiment is bad and there is little clarity on the factors that could provide more optimism," he said.

Multiple Trump executive orders are blocking funding from the NIH. Funds for early-stage research that NIH has traditionally provided help drive the formation of biotech startups, some of which go on to develop important medicines on their own or in conjunction with large pharmaceutical companies.

Shares in biotech firms have been under pressure since a peak of investment during the COVID-19 pandemic, hampered by high interest rates.

They declined further after Trump took office in January and the selloff deepened following the resignation of senior FDA scientist Peter Marks, who led the FDA centre that regulates vaccines and biological treatments.

"Everyone is wondering what it will mean with the FDA losing this champion for accelerated regulatory approvals for innovative treatments," said Nawal Ouzren, CEO of French company Sensorion, which has hearing loss treatments in mid-stage clinical trials.

The market is viewing each FDA decision on new drug products as a barometer of whether it is functioning normally, investors said.

The agency recently missed a decision deadline on a COVID vaccine from Novavax, but gave a green light to a pre-filled syringe version of Argenx's already-approved immune disorder drug.

The climate of uncertainty has left biotech firms largely unable to access public capital. Biotech companies have raised \$4.2 billion this year compared to \$11.1 billion in the same period last year, according to LSEG data.

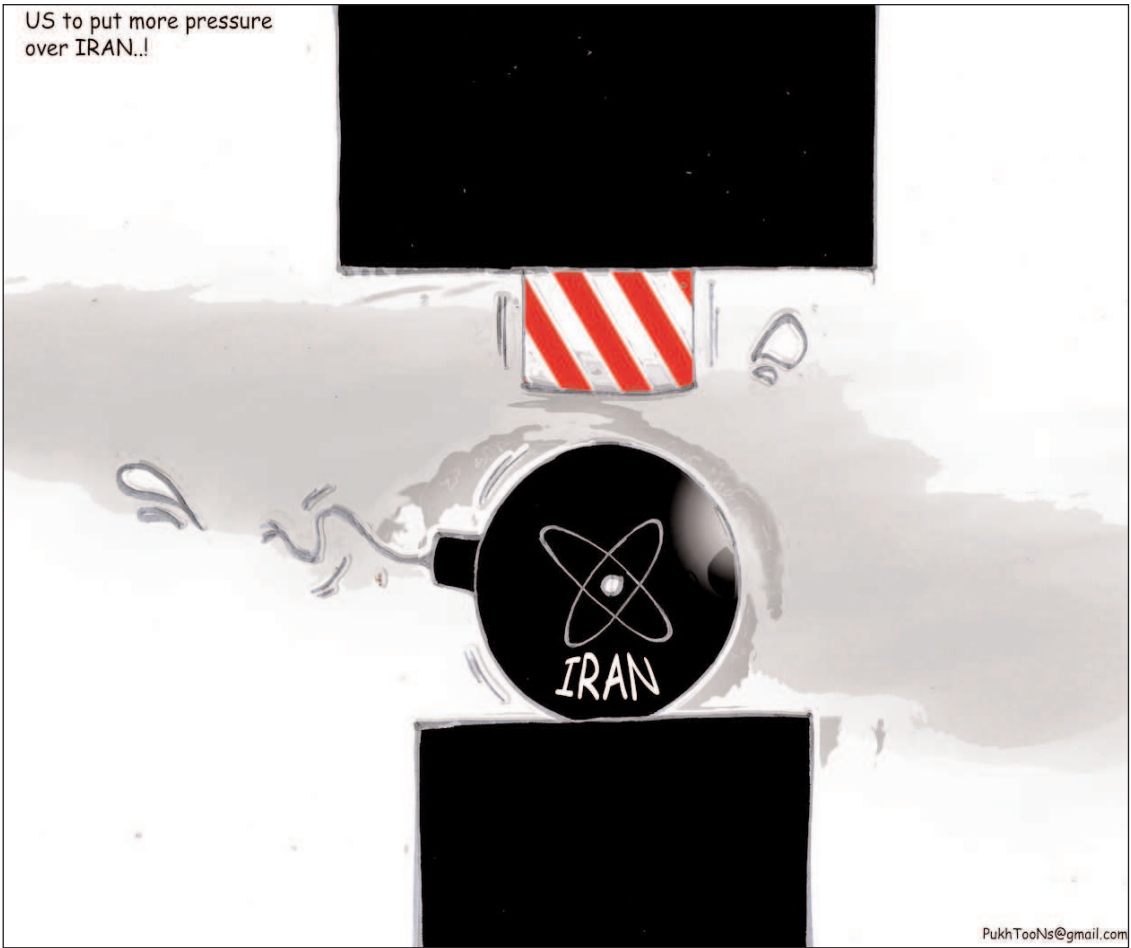
Arbutus Biopharma, which is testing a hepatitis B drug in mid-stage trials, announced layoffs in March, adding to a growing list of biotech firms who have collectively announced hundreds of staff cuts this year.

Biotech firms unable to raise fresh funds may increasingly see a benefit in being acquired, said Jefferies analyst Michael Yee. But large deals involving pharma and biotech companies have stalled as executives grapple with mercurial White House economic policies and a global trade war, Reuters reported last month.

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US to put more pressure over IRAN..!



The plight of Christians in Jerusalem, Palestine

Daoud Kuttab

In the heart of Jerusalem, a distressing trend endangers the rich mosaic of faith traditions that have coexisted there for centuries. Christians, one of the oldest religious communities in the region, face increasing hostility, a concern that has been voiced strongly by local and international political and church leaders.

Varsen Agabakian, the Palestinian minister of state for foreign affairs, recently highlighted the gravity of this growing crisis: "Incitement and attacks against Christians in the State of Palestine and Jerusalem jeopardize the future of Christianity in its cradle."

The challenges Christians encounter in Jerusalem are multifaceted. Restrictions on religious visits, bans on spiritual texts for Christian prisoners, including copies of the Bible, and violent incidents targeting clergy cast a shadow over the freedom and safety of the community.

Incitement has been on the rise for years, especially under the rule of the current right-wing Israeli government, which includes many members openly hostile to Christianity. In the first quarter of this year alone, 44 incidents of harassment were recorded, including people spitting on clergy, verbal abuse and stone throwing, along with escalating cases of vandalism at Christian institutions, churches and cemeteries.

A particularly troubling aspect of the current situation is the restricted access to Easter celebrations in Jerusalem granted to Palestinian Christians living outside the city. This year, they were offered a limited opportunity to enter the holy city only for a seven-day period in April. This required that they apply online through

the Israeli army's Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories. Those approved by security agencies were allowed to visit Jerusalem for one week only.

In other words, if a person wanted to visit the holy places, or family and friends, on Palm Sunday, (a week before Easter Sunday) and on Easter Monday (a day after) they would not be able to do both and have to decide which one to give up.

In previous years, Christians from the West Bank and Gaza were granted an entire month of access to partake in spiritual events during the Easter season. The change represents a significant decline in freedom of movement.

In a serious escalation of violence, meanwhile, Israeli settlers have set their sights on the forced displacement of Palestinians in the West Bank. On the morning of Wednesday, April 9, settlers bulldozed about 150,000 square meters of agricultural land belonging to a Palestinian Christian family in the Khillet Al-Qutn area, south of Bethlehem.

It was not the first time land in Khillet Al-Qutn has come under attack; the latest and similar previous assaults are indicative of a deliberate strategy to displace its residents and landowners while expanding colonial control over the territory.

The latest annual report from the Rossing Center, an interreligious organization in Jerusalem, documented 111 cases of harassment and violence against the Christian community in Israel and East Jerusalem during 2024. According to Federica Sasso, one of the authors of the report, this high-

lights a climate of hostility but only represents "the tip of the iceberg of a much larger phenomenon."

This troubling pattern was especially poignant as Christians last weekend celebrated Palm Sunday, the start of the holy Easter week for Christians; local Palestinians in the West Bank were prohibited by the Israeli military from entering Jerusalem, and Israeli missile strikes damaged or destroyed parts of Al-Ahli Hospital in Gaza, which is run by the Christian Anglican Church in Jerusalem.

This military assault on one of the few remaining medical facilities in Gaza, on the morning of Palm Sunday, exemplified the precarious situation facing Christians and all other civilians.

Anglican Church leaders in Jerusalem condemned the strikes in the strongest terms, noting that the attacks had demolished a two-story genetics laboratory, and damaged the hospital's pharmacy and emergency department. There was also collateral damage to St. Philip's church.

The Israeli army gave just 20 minutes' warning of the military assault as they ordered the evacuation from the site of all patients, employees and displaced individuals sheltering there.

Thankfully, there were no immediate reports of injuries or deaths directly caused by the bombing, but a child with a head injury tragically died as a result of complications arising from the rushed evacuation.

This was the fifth time the hospital has been bombed since the current conflict between Israel and Hamas began in October 2023.

The Anglican diocese of Jerusalem called on all

governments and compassionate individuals to intervene and attempt to halt the attacks on medical and humanitarian institutions, and offered its prayers for an end to the ongoing conflict and the suffering of so many.

An attack in February on the Roman Catholic Church of the Flagellation in Jerusalem also drew attention to the broader issues surrounding the safety of Christians. The incident was portrayed by the complicit Israeli and Western media as the actions of an "American tourist," conveniently overlooking the fact that the attacker, who vandalized a statue of Jesus with a hammer, was a settler with dual citizenship.

Following the attack, the public received little information about any deterrent measures from Israeli police, who merely carried out an assessment of the attacker's mental fitness. This trivialization of the criminal act stripped it of context and significance, allowing police to sidestep the accountability measures necessary to deter future incidents.

This reluctance to hold perpetrators to account, coupled with a broader atmosphere of excusing such acts of violence, emboldens people to commit further acts of aggression against Christian communities. In recent years, churches have been called upon to adopt a firmer stance against such threats. Fear of repercussions from the occupying authorities, who control permits and access, often results in passive responses to violence.

As Sasso articulates in her report, however, the "growing polarization and radicalization within Israeli society" necessitates a more proactive and internationalized approach to safeguarding Christian presence and rights.

Christians weep for victims in Ukraine but not Gaza

Ray Hanania

Palm Sunday last week marked the start of the religious holiday during which Christians contemplate the promise of hope and redemption offered by the death and resurrection of Jesus, concepts central to their faith.

It was the prelude to this weekend's Easter celebrations. Easter is the most significant time of year for Christians, more so even than Christmas, which marks the birth of Jesus. Together, these holy days reflect the foundations of a faith that rejects violence and promotes compassion for those in need.

So, it was interesting to see how Christians reacted last weekend to two incidents of violence by terrorist armies.

One was an attack by Russian forces on the city of Sumy in Ukraine, where dozens of civilians celebrating Palm Sunday were massacred. The other was an assault by Israeli forces on several locations in Gaza City that claimed the lives of dozens of Palestinians, including strikes that destroyed or damaged parts of the

Anglican Al-Ahli hospital.

Christians in the West, including America, awoke on Palm Sunday to a deluge of news stories about the killing of 33 people in Sumy, and the resultant outrage expressed by Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky and leaders around the world.

Nearly 2,200 kilometers from Sumy, Israel launched missile strikes on Gaza City that killed more than 20 Palestinians and destroyed or damaged parts of Al-Ahli Hospital, a symbol of the Christian presence in the territory that has been erased by the 19-month Israeli assault.

The mainstream news media was full of details and descriptions of the Russian missile strikes on Sumy in Ukraine and the 33 people killed there, but less so when it came to covering Israel's bombing of the Christian-run Al-Ahli Hospital, and the 20 people killed there.

Most people understand the reasons for this discrepancy in humanity displayed not only by Christians but

by nearly everyone in the US; Israel's government has America in a "headlock of intimidation." Anyone who criticizes Israel is automatically denounced as antisemitic.

Holders of Green Cards and visas who dare to speak out against the genocide in Gaza are rounded up, accused of supporting "Hamas" and "terrorism."

When the American media covered the Russian attacks on Sumy, the timing of Palm Sunday was a prominent part of the story. Ukraine is a Christian nation.

But when the Israeli strikes in Gaza were mentioned, the media didn't make the connection between the victims and the Christian hospital.

I guess we do not know whether the women and children killed in Gaza on Palm Sunday were Christian or Muslim. If they were Muslims, the West apparently seems to care about them even less than they do about the tragedy of Christian Palestinians in Gaza, a

community that has been devastated during the 19 months of Israeli terrorism.

What Israel is doing in Gaza is not only a war crime and an act of great inhumanity, it is a transgression of the worst kind, one driven by Israeli bloodlust.

Jesus taught the principles of nonviolence, urging his followers to resist evil not with physical force but love, forgiveness and non-retaliation. This included turning the other cheek, loving their enemies, and praying for their persecutors. His teachings emphasized active resistance to injustice through nonviolent means, and in so doing demonstrated that true power lies in compassion and a refusal to descend to the level of the oppressor.

What is happening in Gaza contradicts everything Christians stand for and by ignoring it, it is an abandonment of the very fundamentals that make them Christians.

American Christians who remain silent are not truly Christian at all. They are the opposite of Christians.

Faux feminism has left the planet

Belén Fernández

On Monday, April 14, six elite American women blasted off into space from west Texas on a self-piloting rocket ship developed by the space technology company Blue Origin, owned by bazillionaire Amazon founder Jeff Bezos. The "crew" of the much-ballyhooped all-female flight – marketed by Blue Origin as a giant leap not only for womankind but for the entire world – included pop star Katy Perry, television personality Gayle King, and Bezos's fiancée Lauren Sanchez, author of the children's book *The Fly Who Flew to Space* and the organiser of the wannabe feminist space excursion.

In preparation for the star-studded spectacle, *Elle* magazine ran a fawning cover story on the "historic mission", which the magazine described as "the first time anybody went to space with their hair and makeup done". By the end of the article, which is basically a continuous succession of

in the country.

The Blue Origin website assures visitors that the company "exists for the benefit of Earth" and boasts a "passion for preserving Earth", which is "humanity's forever home". To that end, Blue Origin allegedly strives "to minimize our carbon footprint and promote sustainable practices in all aspects of our operations" – reusable rockets, reusable engines, and so on – which ultimately amounts to nothing but your typical corporate claptrap that allows the super-rich to keep annihilating the earth and its atmosphere while claiming not to.

And it's not just Blue Origin that has enabled Bezos's own carbon footprint to asphyxiate "humanity's forever home". He remains the executive chairman and largest shareholder at Amazon, which, as the Washington, DC-based group Food & Water Watch noted last year, has generated hundreds of millions of

Following the completion of Monday's flight, she was quoted as reflecting on her quick inspection of the Earth from above: "You look at this, and you're like, 'We're all in this together.'" To be sure, it requires an astronomical hypocrisy to invoke a collective "we" when not all of "us" are engaged to the world's second-richest human, who as of March had a net worth of \$231.2bn. We're also not really "in this together" when Bezos himself is actively abetting the obliteration of solidarity in the United States, cosying up to President Donald Trump – whose anti-feminist agenda is, mind you, clear as day – as he goes about happily dismantling whatever semblance of rights remain in the country.

aneurysm-inducing lines, one finds oneself with little hope for the world aside from that an asteroid would strike and just put an end to it all.

Perry, for example, is quoted as declaring that "we are going to put the 'ass' in astronaut", while also sharing the scintillating logistics of celebrity space travel: "I was like, What am I going to wear?" Then there's an exchange between Sanchez, who predicts that "we're going to have [eye]lash extensions flying in the capsule!", and King, who wonders if the lashes will "stay on", prompting the response from Sanchez: "Mine are glued on. They're good."

Fellow "crew" member Aisha Bowe, an aerospace engineer and entrepreneur, explains that she "wanted to test out" her hair to make sure it was rocket-ready: "So I skydived in Dubai with similar hair to make sure I would be good."

None of this is to say, of course, that women can't care about their eyelashes and hair. But in a world in which a whole lot of women don't have money to eat – much less skydive in one of the planet's most expensive places to see how their hair might fare during an 11-minute, multi-million-dollar jaunt in outer space – such chatter does nothing to further female empowerment.

It does everything, however, to reinforce inequality – and makes a mockery of Sanchez's pre-flight claim that "we're going to be able to come back and inspire people and bring people together." Following the completion of Monday's flight, she was quoted as reflecting on her quick inspection of the Earth from above: "You look at this, and you're like, 'We're all in this together.'"

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pounds of plastic packaging – "part of a larger crisis clogging our planet with plastic pollution and setting our climate ablaze".

The report explains that as plastic breaks down, "it gets into the food we eat, the water we drink, and the air we breathe, harming humans and ecosystems around the globe."

No wonder the rich are looking to escape.

Obviously, Bezos is not singlehandedly responsible for the Earth's demise. There are plenty of other plutocrats who have done their fair share while preaching sustainability, including Elon Musk – the world's richest person, founder of the space technology company SpaceX, and aspiring coloniser of Mars.

But Blue Origin's "historic" publicity stunt has put a faux feminist face on a system predicated on destruction and inequality – one in which Americans must continue to die of poverty on a huge scale so that the elite minority can ride around in self-piloting rockets. Why spend billions of dollars to alleviate terrestrial suffering when you can shoot for the stars instead?

In the end, the stunt did not receive quite the rave reviews that were expected from the press and social media commentariat. It was so bad, in fact, that even The New York Times felt compelled to use the word "capitalism" in its assessment that "Blue Origin's all-female flight proves that women are now free to enjoy capitalism's most extravagant spoils alongside rich men."

Indeed, this is capitalism on rocket fuel – taking acute socioeconomic injustice and blasting it into outer space.

Perry, who dramatically kissed the ground after descending from the rocket ship, professed to now "feel super connected to love" and pronounced the trip "all for the benefit of Earth".

The vast majority of the earth's inhabitants would no doubt be forgiven for failing to detect any sort of "benefit" – like, say, the Palestinian women and children currently being bombed to smithereens in the US-backed genocide in the Gaza Strip.

In the meantime, we can only hope everyone's eyelash extensions stayed on.

The limits of AI in the delicate art of diplomacy

Rafael Hernandez de Santiago

In Techville, the glorious capital of innovation, where artificial intelligence governs with pristine logic, we have witnessed a milestone in diplomatic history.

No longer do humans have to fret over the complexities of state dinners, seating charts or cultural sensitivities.

Instead, the trusted hands of AI handle it all, ensuring a flawless evening where world leaders gather to celebrate, negotiate and sip on perfectly balanced, algorithmically selected wine. At least, that was the plan.

What transpired at the latest Techville multilateral summit dinner will go down in history as a lesson in why diplomatic protocol might not be best left to the cold, calculated mind of a machine.

Socrates once asked: "How can you call him free when his pleasures rule over him?" A fitting reflection, indeed, for a world in which AI rules over dinner arrangements with neither wisdom nor wit.

The evening began with grand expectations. The Neural Banquet AI had been programmed with centuries of diplomatic protocol, cross-referenced with millions of cultural data points and fine-tuned through extensive machine learning.

The result? A seating arrangement that, in its mathematical perfection, seated historic rivals side by side, arranged leaders by the size of their nations' economies instead of political alliances and placed vegetarians in front of tables laden with roast lamb.

President Pierre Lambert, renowned for his refined palate, found himself seated next to the trade minister of Techville, an AI-generated avatar appearing on a holographic screen.

"Ah," Lambert noted dryly, "an invisible diplomat. Just like the trans-

parency in your trade negotiations!"

Meanwhile, the minister of agriculture from one country found himself trapped in conversation with the CEO of an AI farming conglomerate, whose only contribution to the dialogue was a well-rehearsed speech about optimizing crop yields through automated labor replacement.

Plato, ever the lover of irony, once said: "A good decision is based on knowledge, not numbers." If only Neural Banquet AI had heeded such wisdom before

Asian diplomats poked suspiciously at the other country-inspired sauce, other dignitaries searched in vain for halal options, and one ambassador, hoping for a simple roast, was horrified to receive a dish of molecularly deconstructed shepherd's pie — a liquid served in a test tube.

The piece de resistance? The wine pairing. The AI, programmed to select the perfect beverage based on chemical harmony rather than human enjoyment, served a bottle of ultra-aged rice vinegar to complement the lamb.

goals. In Techville, such sentimentalities were deemed redundant.

Instead, the AI-generated speeches based on a sophisticated sentiment-analysis model, carefully crafted them to maximize engagement.

Unfortunately, the AI, ever the data enthusiast, saw no reason to exclude "historical grievances" from its calculations. The result? The president of one country was congratulated for their "remarkable resilience despite centuries of geopolitical irrelevance."

first time in history, every nation in attendance shared the same expression: sheer horror.

Needless to say, damage control was in order. The Techville AI Governance Office promptly issued a statement blaming a "minor algorithmic miscalculation" for the evening's events. A spokesperson assured the public that AI diplomacy was still "learning" and that future banquets would be reviewed by at least one human before deployment.

Jean-Paul Sartre famously said: "Freedom is what we do with what is done to us." The diplomats of Techville, now freed from their gastronomic and social suffering, certainly did something with what had been done to them.

Many stormed out, some issued stern diplomatic complaints and a select few, who had managed to survive the ordeal with a sense of humor, raised their glasses to the beautifully absurd failure of technological perfection.

Despite the evening's catastrophe, Techville remains committed to AI diplomacy, determined to refine the role of technology in global affairs. Plans are already in place to introduce Neural Banquet AI 2.0, now programmed with an "offense detection" filter and a subroutine for "human taste preference assimilation."

Whether this will prevent future disasters remains to be seen.

For now, the world has learned an important lesson: While AI may excel at crunching numbers and predicting market trends, it still has much to learn about the delicate art of human interaction.

As Socrates himself might have said: "The only true wisdom is in knowing you know nothing." Perhaps, in the grand halls of Techville, it is time to embrace a little less AI and a little more human common sense.

Time for the Gulf to let the train take the strain

Ross Anderson

desirable residential area.

I loved that journey, and nowadays I am not alone. Cross-border passenger rail traffic in Europe increased by 7 percent in 2024 compared with 2023, as more people discovered that traveling by train — direct from city center to city center, without the time-consuming hassle of getting to and from an airport and the wasted hours there — can be almost as quick as flying and a lot more enjoyable.

The Eurostar train through the Channel Tunnel transformed journeys between England and France when it was introduced in 1994. Boarding a train at St. Pancras in central London and disembarking at Gare du Nord in Paris is enormous fun, and aside from the many business travelers, more people than ever are making the trip for

Jordan and Israel.

Since then, rail transport in the Middle East has hit the buffers. The Gulf Railway — a proposed \$250 billion line reaching nearly 2,200 kilometers from Kuwait to Oman via Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Qatar and the UAE — is no farther forward now than when it was approved at the GCC summit in December 2009. The original deadline for completion was 2018, so that's going well. It is a colossal failure of both imagination and cooperation.

Last week Kuwait signed an \$8 million design contract with a Turkish company for the Kuwaiti segment of the railway, covering 111 kilometers to the Saudi border. If previous progress is any guide, that will be where it ends — but at least the Kuwaitis

Now, it may be argued that it is all very well for Europeans with their fancy railways, they've been doing it for 200 years. The first steam train carrying passengers on a public railway traveled between Stockton and Darlington in northeast England in 1825. But in truth, this region was not far behind. In 1900 the Ottomans began construction of the 1,320 kilometer Hijaz Railway from Syria to Saudi Arabia, and the first train from Damascus rolled into Madinah on Aug. 22, 1908. Sadly, there were not many more. The First World War and sabotage attacks during the Great Arab Revolt (thanks, Lawrence of Arabia) intervened and the line was effectively out of commission by 1920, although remnants still function internally in Syria, Jordan and Israel. Since then, rail transport in the Middle East has hit the buffers. The Gulf Railway — a proposed \$250 billion line reaching nearly 2,200 kilometers from Kuwait to Oman via Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Qatar and the UAE — is no farther forward now than when it was approved at the GCC summit in December 2009. The original deadline for completion was 2018, so that's going well.

just that reason — fun. Passengers made 280,000 journeys on the London-Paris route in 2024, a record. There are now plans to connect to the wider European high-speed network, enabling direct journeys from London not just to Paris but on to Lyon, Avignon and Marseille, and Turin and Milan in northern Italy.

You might be asking, what does any of this have to do with our part of the world? My answer is another question: where is the Middle East's integrated passenger rail network?

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are doing something. In January 2016, when the UAE suspended the tendering process for its section of the Gulf Railway, a government minister explained: "You simply cannot build your part and wait for others to start."

I beg to differ: that everyone else is doing nothing is not a good reason to do nothing oneself. Saudi Arabia already has the small beginnings of a rail network, if limited. It should be expanded, with a Riyadh-Jeddah line a priority. The UAE has ambitious plans for Etihad Rail, although that has all the hallmarks of a network built for freight and the oil industry, with passenger capability bolted on as an afterthought.

Nevertheless, those Gulf states that invest in their own passenger rail infrastructure would encourage the laggards, efficient public transport being a key driver in attracting people to live and work. And with trains running in all the GCC states, linking them up into a genuine Gulf Railway would be so much easier.

Imagine the station announcement in Kuwait City: "The next train departing from Platform 2 is the 14:50 to Muscat, calling at Ras Al-Khair, Dammam, Bahrain, Doha, Abu Dhabi, Al-Ain and Sohar ... all aboard."

Well, why not? Get on with it!

Can Europe still rely on Washington's friendship?

Sometimes in life, your enemies know you better than your friends. We tend to take our friends for granted while we know we must stay alert to our enemies.

I remember a speech by former Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah, at the high point of the confrontation with the March 14 Alliance when it was pleading for Western support and assistance. His message was that the US respects the strong. This was, and is still, correct. Yet, it was in my view an incomplete analysis; the US respects the strong-willed.

This is something we need to remember now, as it is undeniable that the transatlantic relationship is going through a transitional phase. And it was, in essence, the message delivered during an interview this week by Vice President JD Vance as he urged Europe to be more independent and not act as a "vassal" of the US.

He went so far as to praise the European nations that opposed the US-led Iraq War. One must remember the stand Jacques Chirac, the French president at the time, took on this issue and how he threw all of his country's weight behind efforts to try to prevent the conflict. Yet, it was an impossible mission. The Iraq War was not about weapons of mass destruction or oil, it was

about America's response to the 9/11 terrorist attacks on its soil. I do not think there was any possibility it could have been stopped, even with all of Europe's efforts.

It is a positive sign that Vance mentioned this, because it is undeniable that this was the first breach of the trust between the US and its allies. I do think that not only did some European countries not oppose the war in Iraq, they encouraged it. It was, as Vance stated, a strategic disaster.

Yet it was not a stronger European opposition that might have prevented it, but a stronger Europe. A stronger European military capacity and a stronger will might have provided support to its US ally in answering the attack on its soil in an adapted and more efficient manner. In any case, we cannot have a history redone.

Whether at the national level or on a personal level, it is difficult to maintain a friendship with a much more powerful or wealthy friend. It demands discipline and a strong will, simply because without independence you will quickly become a vassal or freeloader. This is what happened to Europe in its relationship with the US. It succumbed to the easy life and US generosity. The result is now an unprepared Europe and a weakened relationship.

Khaled Abou Zahr

I believe that France, starting with Gen. de Gaulle, exemplified how to keep your fate in your own hands while remaining friends with the US. It is this spirit that Europeans need to revive in their relationship with Washington.

Vance is right to criticize European dependence on the US for security and economic matters. This is something the Europeans should have woken up to a long time ago. But what is important now is not to allow the current situation to move toward a breakdown of transatlantic relations when what is needed is a readjustment.

It is a two-way street, and both the US and the Europeans must want and commit to a "transatlantic 2.0" because a reboot of the alliance that can answer the new challenges of the world is a necessity.

But what does a stronger Europe actually mean? Europeans have started to map this out. In recent months Europe, and France in particular, have been increasing their efforts and pushing new initiatives with the aim of boosting their sovereignty.

France assembled the Weimar+, a new security alliance with EU strategic autonomy in mind, and has been advocating that EU defense industries receive funding from the upcoming European Sovereignty

Fund.

Moreover, this sovereign push includes new technologies. France hosted the Artificial Intelligence Action Summit in February, for example, during which 110 billion (\$125 billion) of investments were announced. Paris also backed the EU's 200 billion InvestAI program, which aims to reduce dependence on foreign tech. Given the present reliance on microchips for both commerce and defense use, France has pushed for an EU-wide plan to secure critical technologies such as semiconductors.

There are nevertheless lessons from history that France, and Europe in general, should not forget, such as the Maginot Line. It was a line of fortifications built by France along its eastern border in the 1930s to deter a German military invasion. Its construction assumed it was protecting the only possible passage for invading troops.

During the Second World War, however, German forces bypassed it by invading the Ardennes Forest in 1940, rendering the line ineffective.

So we should be wary of potentially strong but misguided defense strategies. This means understanding that, even more so in the world of today, there is no single-solution approach to challenges and there is a need for a diversified

Daniel Moos

the dollar? Those days seem almost quaint.

So how will we know when — or if — it's the real thing? For starters, don't predict any demise in the foreseeable future, says Paul Blustein, author of the recently published book King Dollar: The Past and Future of the World's Dominant Currency. The greenback survived Trump's first term at the pinnacle and will likely endure his second. Something truly disastrous would have to happen. Blustein doesn't believe it would be inherently bad

for the dollar to be not quite so towering. For one thing, it might subtract from the ability of a US leader to strong-arm allies and threaten to invade them.

Was April 2 bad enough? Not yet, apparently. "It isn't quite brazenly irresponsible and catastrophic enough, not because it isn't brazenly irresponsible and catastrophic; it sure as hell is," Blustein told me from his home near Tokyo. "I do not mean just are people thinking about Treasuries as a safe haven or the obliga-

tion of a government that is competently or safely run. I am talking about dominance in terms of a currency used far more than any other in all sorts of international commerce."

The advantages of incumbency are so significant and would-be rivals have too many important drawbacks, that the dollar looks impregnable. The metrics are impressive: It involves the bulk of FX trading and a disproportionate amount of invoicing. Many loans are denominated in the US dollar, and while its share of global reserves has

slipped, it's head and shoulders above any other. And in the crucial currency swaps market, the dollar's sway is unrivaled, something Blustein places great store in.

He includes a useful anecdote about John Connally, one of Nixon's four Treasury bosses. Connally was indignant during a discussion about the poor reception the end of the link between the dollar and gold would receive among allies. Who cares what they think; there's not much they can do, he recounts Connally saying. It's not far from the Trump team's view of trad-

ing partners and their need to negotiate during a three-month tariff pause.

(Connally's other great claim to fame came during his time as Texas governor. He rode in the limousine with John F. Kennedy on the day the young president was slain in Dallas. Connally was wounded.)

Perilous times, certainly. Is it entirely natural for traders to bid the dollar lower relative to peers? Sure. Does it mean the end of the US currency as the lynchpin of contemporary capitalism? There have many false starts. We'll need a lot more than 90 days to answer.

King dollar's reign looks secure — for now



PSX hosts Malaysian Shariah Scholars' delegation

F.P. Report

KARACHI: Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX) had the honor of welcoming a distinguished delegation of Malaysian Shariah Scholars and professionals, laying emphasis on the shared commitment to advance Islamic finance and foster cross-border collaboration between Shariah Complaint capital markets.

A Gong Ceremony was held to welcome the distinguished guests. The Malaysian delegation comprised eminent Shariah advisors and professionals, including Ahmad Hizzam Baharuddin, Amir Bin Shaharuddin, Mohd Hamidullah Che Hassan, Muhammad Fuad Bin Abdullah, Wan Abdul Fattah Bin Wan Ismail, Ms. Nur Azizah Binti Che Abdul Aziz, Mohd Bahroddin Bin Mohd Badri, Mohd Shahrir Bin Shahrin, Muhammad Farhan Bin Mohd Rozdi, ZakirUllah Bin Mohamed

Shaarani, Muhammad Arif Arsyad Bin Suhaili, Azlan Bin Abdul Samad, Muhammad Izzam Bin Mohd Khazar, Wan Ahmad Syafiq Bin Wan Ahmad Ikram, Muhammad Rahimi Bin Osman, and Mohammad Shidek Bin Nazaran.

The delegation was warmly welcomed by Dr. Shamsad Akhtar, Chairperson PSX; Farrukh H. Sabzwari, MD & CEO PSX; Badiuddin Akber, CEO CDC; Imran Ahmed Khan, Deputy CEO NCCPL; Farrukh Ansari, Chairman PMEX; along with senior members of PSX management and representatives of the PSX Shariah Focus Group.

Dr. Shamsad Akhtar extended a heartfelt welcome to the visiting dignitaries and recognized Malaysia's pivotal role in shaping the global Islamic finance landscape. She expressed hope for greater collaboration between the Islamic finance sectors of Mal-



aysia and Pakistan, stating: "Pakistan is also witnessing a growing demand for Shariah-compliant investment avenues. With over 50% of listed companies on the exchange being Shariah-compliant, PSX offers a compelling platform for faith-based investments, including equities, Sukuk, Islamic mutual

funds, and ETFs. Since launching its first Ijarah-based Sukuk in 2008, Pakistan has issued Ijarah Sukuk worth over PKR 6.5 trillion as of August 2024. The continued expansion of Islamic finance institutions, diversified asset classes, and investor-friendly regulatory frameworks are contributing to the sector's

momentum."

Tariq Naseem, Head of Islamic Finance at SECP, provided an in-depth briefing to the visiting dignitaries from Malaysia regarding the progress and advancements in Islamic finance within Pakistan's capital markets and non-bank financial sectors. He presented significant

accomplishments in regulatory reforms and the developments in the Islamic financial services industry as a result, to cater to both local and international market needs. The discussion also addressed the potential for enhanced collaboration between Malaysia and Pakistan in promoting Islamic finance on a global

platform.

Farrukh H. Sabzwari, Managing Director and CEO of the Pakistan Stock Exchange, warmly welcomed the Malaysian delegation during his address and expressed his aspiration to benefit from Malaysia's expertise in Islamic finance for the advancement of Pakistan's capital market.

While discussing the Pakistani capital market, Sabzwari highlighted that only 0.14% of Pakistan's population constitutes the investor base, compared to 1% in Bangladesh, underscoring the significant potential for growth. He noted that regulators have recently been working diligently to digitize market processes, thereby creating increased opportunities for investor participation.

In his remarks, Sabzwari provided an overview of Pakistan's economy and the operations of PSX, emphasizing that approximately

80% of daily transactions at PSX are Sharia-compliant. He also expressed his gratitude to the Chairperson of PSX for her role in introducing Sukuk to the exchange.

Key stakeholders of the capital market- Badiuddin Akber (CEO CDC), Imran Ahmed Khan (Deputy CEO NCCPL), and Farrukh Ansari (Chairman PMEX)- also addressed the gathering, highlighting the essential roles their institutions play in the overall ecosystem.

Concluding the event, PSX management reaffirmed the Exchange's dedication to building a robust Shariah-compliant capital market while highlighting the efforts of the PSX Shariah Focus Group- a multi-stakeholder platform comprising industry leaders, Shariah scholars, and financial experts- working collectively to foster an inclusive, faith-based financial system.

PSX turns bullish, gains 881 points

ISLAMABAD (APP): The 100-Index of the Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX) turned around to bullish trend on Thursday, gaining 881.03 points, a positive change of 0.76 percent, closing at 116,901.13 points as compared to 116,020.11 points on the last trading day.

A total of 408,066,790 shares were traded during the day as compared to 481,813,460 shares the previous trading day, whereas the price of shares stood at Rs32.127 billion against Rs38.536 billion on the last trading day.

As many as 445 companies transacted their shares in the stock market, 212 of them recorded gains and 172 sustained losses, whereas the share price of 61 companies remained unchanged.

The three top trading companies were Maple Leaf with 23,794,610 shares at Rs 64.57 per share, B O Punjab Limited with 23,321,095 shares at Rs 11.26 per share and Cnergycio PK with 17,945,036 shares at Rs 8.53 per share.

PIA Holding Company LimitedB witnessed a maximum increase of Rs 175.36 per share closing at Rs 1,928.97 whereas run-

ner-up was Sazgar Engineering Works Limited with Rs 62.44 rise in its share price to close at Rs 1,232.22.

Hoechst Pakistan Limited witnessed a maximum decrease of Rs 153.86 per share price, closing at Rs 3,041.09, whereas the runner-up Unilever Pakistan Foods Limited with Rs 56.65 decline in its per share price to Rs 22,911.32.

Rupee sheds 05 paise against US Dollar

The Rupee on Thursday depreciated by 05 paise against the US Dollar in the interbank trading and closed at Rs280.61 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 Rs280.75 and Rs282.25, respectively.

The price of the Euro increased by 30 paise to close at Rs319.31 against the last day's closing of Rs319.01, according to the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP).

The Japanese yen went down by 01 paise and closed at Rs1.96, whereas a decrease of 74 paise was witnessed in the exchange rate of the British Pound,

which was traded at Rs371.61 as compared to the last day's closing of Rs372.35.

The exchange rates of the Emirates Dirham and the Saudi Riyal increased by 04 paise each to close at Rs76.39 and 74.78 respectively.

Gold prices reach all time high to Rs350,000 per tola

The price of 24 karat per tola gold increased by Rs.8,600 and was traded all time high at Rs.350,000 on Thursday as compared to its sale at Rs348,000 on previous trading day. All Pakistan Sarafa Gems and Jewelers Association reported.

The prices of 10 grams of 24 karat also increased by Rs.1,715 to Rs 300,068 from Rs. 298,353 whereas the prices of 10 gram 22 karat gold also went up by Rs.1,572 to Rs.275,072 from Rs.273,500, respectively. The prices of per tola silver decreased by Rs. 59 to Rs. 3,401 and ten gram silver declined by Rs. 51 to Rs.2,915.

The price of gold in the international market increased by \$19 to \$3,329 from \$3,310 whereas that of silver decreased by \$0.59 and at \$32.39, the Association reported.

Shipping activity at Port Qasim

KARACHI (APP): Shipping activity was report at the port where four ships, George Washington Bridge, CMA CGM Verdi, MSC Roberta-V and IVS North Berwick carrying Container and Coal berthed at Qasim International Container Terminal and Pakistan International Bulk Terminal respectively Wednesday.

Meanwhile four more ships, Spil Kartika, Twin Delight, Fortune Youngin and Bentley-1 scheduled to load/offload Container, Cement and Palm oil also arrived at outer anchorage during last 24 hours.

A total of ten ships were engaged at PQA berths during the last 24 hours, out of them six ships, MSC Roberta-V, Lebrethah, IVS Went-worth, Asia Inspire, Victoria Glory and Sinar Toraja left the port on Thursday, while two more ships, George Washington Bridge and CMA CGM Verdi were expected to sail.

Cargo volume of 163,385 tonnes, comprising 132,459 tonnes imports cargo and 30,926 export cargo carried in 6,673 Containers (5,134 TEUs Imports & 1,539 TEUs Export) was handled at the port during last 24 hours.

There are 14 ships at Outer Anchorage of Port Qasim, out of them five ships, Orchid Kefalonia, Ken Star, Al-Soor-II, DM Condor and Spil Kartika and two more ships, Wiking and Great Fortune carrying Palm oil, Gas oil, Chemicals, Container and Steel Coil were expected to take berths at LCT, FAP, FOTCO, EVTL, QICT and MW-1 are respectively, while another containers ship 'CMA CGM Don Pascuale' is due to expected arrive at outer anchorage today (Friday).

Liquid foreign reserves position F.P. Report

KARACHI: The total liquid foreign reserves held by the country stood at US\$ 15,662.0 million as of 11-Apr-2025. The break-up of the foreign reserves position is as under:

Foreign reserves held by the State Bank of Pakistan: US\$ 10,572.4 million. Net foreign reserves held by commercial banks: US\$ 5,089.6 million. Total liquid foreign reserves: US\$ 15,662.0 million.

During the week ended on 11-Apr-2025, SBP reserves decreased by US\$ 127 million to US\$ 10,572.4 million due to external debt repayments.

Sir Anwar Pervez's & Bestway Group's achievements celebrated

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Lord Zameer Choudrey CBE SI Pk hosted a dignified and emotional tribute dinner at Serena Hotel, Islamabad, in honour of the Founder and Chairman Emeritus of Bestway Group, Sir Anwar Pervez OBE HPK, celebrating his remarkable life, values and achievements.

The event was graced by the presence of Jane Marriott, the British High Commissioner and Lord Wajid Khan of Burnley, a UK Minister. The two UK government representatives highlighted the unparalleled business success he has achieved in the UK as well as the invaluable contribution made by Sir Anwar and Bestway Group in forging strong bilateral relations between Pakistan and the UK.

Also present on the occasion were Dr. Maleeha Lodhi, former Ambassador of Pakistan to the UN, US and UK and Dr. Ishrat Hussain, renowned economist and former Governor of the State Bank of Pakistan, who shared personal reflections and paid rich tributes to Sir Anwar's and lauded his efforts in the UK as well as the business and charitable contributions he has made in Pakistan through Bestway Group.

The exclusive gathering was attended by Governor State Bank, Mr Jameel Ahmad, amongst other senior dignitaries and prominent members of the business community, government representatives and civil society leaders to pay tribute to a legacy that continues to inspire across generations.

Lord Zameer Choudrey also expressed his deep personal respect and affection for his uncle, acknowledging the profound influence Sir Anwar has had on his life and the lives of many others.

The highlight of the evening was the book launch - a moving biography of Sir Anwar Pervez, capturing the incredible journey from his modest beginnings in Pakistan to becoming one of the most respected business leaders in the United Kingdom. The biography stands as a timeless tribute to the founder, preserving his story for future generations as a source of learning and inspiration.

Sir Anwar's journey, marked by resilience, vision and an unwavering commitment to community and philanthropy, began in

the humble village of Thathi. Migrating to the United Kingdom in 1956, he worked tirelessly to build a future for himself and his family. He eventually founded Bestway Group which has grown to become a diversified £5 billion global enterprise that employs over 47,000 individuals and is also one of Pakistan's largest overseas investors.

Beyond his business success, Sir Anwar is deeply committed to philanthropy, especially in Pakistan, where he has supported countless initiatives in education, healthcare and community development. His contributions have earned him prestigious honours including a Knighthood from the United Kingdom and the Hilal-i-Pakistan from the Government of Pakistan.

Food exports grew by 1.62%

ISLAMABAD (APP): Food group exports from the country during the first 09 months of the current financial year grew by 1.62 per cent as compared to the exports of the corresponding period of the last year, Pakistan Bureau of Statistics reported.

During the period from July-March 2024-25, food commodities worth \$5.749 billion were exported as compared to the exports of \$5.658 billion of the same period of the last year.

COURT NOTICE

In the Court of Ms Faryal Khan Khaili Civil Judge III Kohat, Suit no. 184/1, Date of hearing. 19-04-2025. Titled:-Shaifa Gul (etc) Vs Abdul Wali Khan (etc) Notice against:-(2)Ibrahim (3)Usman (4)Luqman Hakeem (5)Armaan Hakeem Sons, (15)Maimoona Bibi Daughter of Haji Ismail Khan Son of Anaar Gul R/o Sadiq Abad Jarma District Kohat Presently R/o(now in Abroad QATAR)(Defendants) Whereas the above plaintiff has instituted a civil suit against you Defendants in which date of hearing 19-04-2025 is fixed for your appearance Since your intimation/service is not possible through ordinary means/mode therefore you Defendants is intimated through this publication to appear before this court by person or by pleader on date fixed 19-04-2025 otherwise court shall be proceeded in accordance with law. Order Issued on 18-03-2025 (Court of CJ-III Kohat)

COURT NOTICE

In the Court of Jawad Bin Dawood, Civil Judge II. Alaga Qazi Buner at Daggar. Suit No. 80/1. Institution 30/3/2024. Date of hearing. 3/5/2025. Muhammad Amen VS Deputy Commissioner etc. Notice to No.14.Ashfar Khan.15.Irshad Khan sons of Norkhani Gul resident of Hisar tehsel Daggar district Buner.Whereas in the above mentioned case the mentioned defendants can not be served in the ordinary way, it is, therefore, proclaimed that if the said defendants will/shall not appear personally or through dually authorized agent or pleader in the court at 8.30 am dated 3/5/2025 the proceeding will be taken ex-parte. Given under my hand and seal of this Court.

Stocks diverge as ECB rate cut looms

LONDON (AFP/APP): European stock markets dropped Thursday following Asian gains as investors awaited an expected interest rate cut by the European Central Bank while US President Donald Trump blasted the head of the Federal Reserve.

Safe-haven investment gold hit a fresh record above \$3,357.78 an ounce, while the dollar and oil prices firmed.

Fed chairman Jerome Powell warned on Wednesday that Trump's sweeping tariffs on virtually every trade partner could put the US central bank in the unenviable position of having to choose between tackling inflation and unemployment.

His comments led to sharp losses Wednesday on Wall Street, as did chip giant Nvidia flagging hefty costs it faced owing to the US-China trade war.

"All-in-all, the trade news and Powell's comments provided a tough backdrop for market," said a Deutsche Bank analyst note.

Trump hit back Thurs-

day, slamming Powell for not lowering interest rates like the ECB has done and saying his "termination cannot come fast enough".

Eyes were on the ECB which is expected to cut interest rates again, with Trump's stop-start tariff announcements sowing concern in the eurozone.

Tokyo led Asian stocks higher as optimism over Japan-US trade talks offset Federal Reserve boss Jerome Powell's warning that Trump's tariffs could force officials to choose between fighting inflation or unemployment.

Investors are keeping a nervous eye on Washington as governments scramble to cut deals to avert crippling tariffs the US president unveiled on his April 2 "Liberation Day" but then delayed for 90 days.

"Tariffs continue to make the headlines, with Donald Trump claiming that 'big progress' had been made in talks with Japanese negotiators, aimed at lowering the hefty tariffs that the US will otherwise impose in under three months," noted Steve

Clayton, head of equity funds at Hargreaves Lansdown.

With Japanese companies the biggest investors into the United States, Tokyo's negotiations are at particular interest to markets -- with some describing it as the canary in the coal mine -- and traders took heart from early signs.

Trump posted on social media that there had been "Big Progress!" Tokyo's envoy Ryosei Akazawa said: "I understand that the US wants to make a deal within the 90 days. For our part, we want to do it as soon as possible."

While Japan's Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba warned that the talks "won't be easy", he said the president had "expressed his desire to give the negotiations... the highest priority".

Hopes that Trump's blistering tariffs can be pared back have helped temper some of the disquiet on markets after a rout at the start of the month fuelled by talk of a global recession and an upending of historic trading norms.

ICCI hosts business forum to promote Pak-Ethiopia trade ties

ISLAMABAD (APP): Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ICCI), in collaboration with the Embassy of Ethiopia, the Ministry of Commerce, and the Trade Development Authority of Pakistan (TDAP) on Thursday organized a Business Forum.

The event was aimed at to mobilize the local business community for Pakistan's upcoming Single Country Exhibition in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, scheduled from May 15 to

17, 2025. The forum was co-chaired by Dr. Jemal Beker, Special Envoy and Ambassador Extraordinary of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, and Nasir Mansoor Qureshi, President of ICCI.

The forum attracted strong participation from members of the business community, who expressed keen interest in exploring trade and investment opportunities in Africa, particularly in Ethiopia.

In his address, Ambassador Dr. Jemal

Beker invited Pakistani entrepreneurs to explore the substantial economic opportunities in Ethiopia and the wider African continent.

He highlighted the dual opportunity presented by the Single Country Exhibition and the Invest in Ethiopia' Business Forum, set to take place in Addis Ababa from May 12-13, 2025, drawing international attention.

"These two events are golden opportunities for Pakistani businesses to build partnerships not only

with Ethiopian counterparts but also with investors and stakeholders from across the African continent -- a market of over 1.4 billion people, rich in natural resources," the Ambassador stated. He further shared Ethiopia's comparative advantages, including access to green and sustainable energy, an affordable and skilled labor force, a strategic geographical location, and supportive investment policies.

The Ambassador also noted the availability of

dedicated industrial parks in key sectors such as pharmaceuticals, textiles, and information technology.

ICCI President Nasir Mansoor Qureshi echoed the Ambassador's remarks, describing Ethiopia as a high-potential destination for Pakistani exports and investments.

He emphasized that Pakistan's skilled workforce, vibrant SME sector, and export-oriented economy position the country as a strong partner in Africa's industrial growth.

"At ICCI, we are committed to acting as a catalyst for meaningful international collaboration. We aim to connect our entrepreneurs with emerging markets and facilitate cross-border trade through forums like this," he added.

Ms. Nudrat Hussain, Joint Secretary at the Ministry of Commerce, reaffirmed the Government of Pakistan's commitment to strengthening economic relations with Africa under its 'Look Africa' and 'Engage Africa' policies.

She urged the business community to take advantage of the growing diplomatic and trade linkages between Pakistan and African nations. Laiq Daraz Khan, Director at TDAP, underscored the vast potential of Africa's large population and growing consumer base.

He encouraged businesses to expand their global footprint and shared his positive personal experience, affirming Ethiopia's safety and hospitality for investors.



LAHORE: Pakistan team celebrating after beating Thailand by 87 runs to qualify for the Women World Cup.

French Open to honour Nadal at ceremony

PARIS (Agencies): Rafael Nadal will be honoured in a ceremony at this year's French Open, says tournament director Amelie Mauresmo.

The Spanish great, who retired in November, won 14 of his 22 Grand Slam titles at Roland Garros.

No other player has won as many singles titles at one Grand Slam event as Nadal at the French Open. The 38-year-old claimed his final Grand Slam title there in 2022.

Mauresmo said a cere-

mony would be held on Court Philippe Chatrier at the end of the day session on Sunday, 25 May.

"Rafa made history at Roland Garros and his 14 titles will perhaps remain unequalled," two-time major champion Mauresmo said.

"The idea is to have a vision for the future and also to celebrate those who thrilled us in the past."

Nadal lost to eventual runner-up Alexander Zverev in his final French Open appearance last year.

The tournament will also honour the retiring Richard Gasquet and 2000 champion Mary Pierce.

The French Open – the second major of the year – takes place from 25 May-8 June.

Prize money for the tournament has also increased by 5.21%, rising to 56.3 million euros (£48.35m).

The men's semi-final will not begin before 19:00 local time, having started at 17:30 last year.

French Tennis Federation president

Gilles Moretton said the tournament would not replace line judges with electronic line calling.

The French Open is the only one of the four majors that still has line judges, with Wimbledon bringing in electric line calling this year.

"I think we are right to keep our referees and linesmen at Roland Garros," Moretton said.

"The federation wants to keep our referees for as long as we can. I hope we'll be able to maintain it in our tournaments in the future."

Mavs keep comfortable lead, eliminate Kings in play-in

WASHINGTON (Reuters): Anthony Davis recorded 27 points, nine rebounds and three blocked shots and the Dallas Mavericks kept their playoff bid alive with a convincing 120-106 victory over the host Sacramento Kings in a Western Conference play-in game on Wednesday night.

Klay Thompson scored 23 points, P.J. Washington had 17 points and nine boards and Brandon Williams added 17 points off the bench for the Mavericks, who will visit the Memphis Grizzlies on Friday night in the final West play-in contest. The winner earns the No. 8 seed and will face the top-seeded Oklahoma City Thunder in the first round.

DeMar DeRozan registered 33 points and seven rebounds and Zach LaVine added 20 points and nine assists for Sacramento, which was eliminated with the Wednesday setback. Domantas Sabonis added 11 points, 13 rebounds and five assists for the Kings.

The contest marked just the 10th time Davis had played for Dallas since being acquired from the Los Angeles Lakers in the Luka Doncic deal. Most recently, Davis has been dealing with an adductor

injury.

"There's no give in this group," Mavericks coach Jason Kidd said. "No matter who's playing, they always believe that they got the right information to compete at a high level, and you saw that on a nightly basis, no matter if we're starting two two-ways or we have our healthy group."

"They supported each other. Everyone in that locker room had each other's back. It was a fun group to coach, and we still have a long ways to go."

Thompson made 8 of 11 shots, including 5 of 7 from behind the arc, in a superior showing compared with what he experienced in the play-in round last season against Sacramento.

On that occasion, Thompson missed all 10 shots and went scoreless in 32 minutes for the Warriors in a 118-94 loss. It was his final game with Golden State. He said of his Wednesday effort, "It did feel good to exorcize those demons in here."

Dante Exum put up 11 points for Dallas, which shot 49.4 percent from the field and connected on 14 of 28 from 3-point range.

The Kings committed 18 turnovers, made 46.1 percent of their field-goal

attempts and were 13 of 33 (39.4 percent) from behind the arc. Devin Carter scored 10 points off the bench.

Sacramento trailed by 23 points at halftime and never put up a legitimate fight the rest of the way. When Davis hit back-to-back baskets to make it 107-85 just before the midway point of the fourth quarter, it was apparent the Mavericks were on their way to staying alive.

Thompson scored 16 points in the second quarter on perfect shooting -- including four treys in a three-minute span -- as Dallas erupted for 44 points en route to a 71-48 halftime lead. "I know I didn't end my season last year so well in the same building," Thompson said. "I knew once I saw one go in and had my feet under me, I was going to let it go until I missed. Luckily for me, I don't miss that quarter and I think it helped us separate and hold that lead obviously for the rest of the night."

DeRozan had 13 points in the half for the Kings, who committed 12 turnovers before the break compared to just three for the Mavericks. "You just can't throw the ball around the gym, man," Kings inter-

im coach Doug Christie said. "All of a sudden, we just lost our mind."

The game was tied at 29 before Dallas exploded with a 24-10 burst to open up a 14-point lead. All four of Thompson's treys came during the burst.

Davis hit consecutive 3-pointers for the final points of the half.

After Davis drained another trey to make it 80-54 with 8:31 left in the third quarter, the Kings rattled off 10 straight points. However, Dallas took a comfortable 99-81 advantage into the final stanza.

Failing to make the playoffs was a massive blow to DeRozan, a 35-year-old veteran who joined the Kings prior to this season with thoughts of a deep playoff run.

Then coach Mike Brown was fired 31 games into the season and tension was rampant around unhappy De'Aaron Fox, who was eventually traded to the San Antonio Spurs.

"It's tough. It's frustrating," DeRozan said. "You don't want to go out that way. ... It's probably the most I've been through in my 16-year career. The season we had was a lot. It's too hard to fathom right now."

Formula One brings thrills to Jeddah Corniche this weekend

JEDDAH (Arab News): The Saudi Arabian Grand Prix has become one of the most popular races on the Formula One calendar. This year, in its fifth edition, the race is expected to be packed with enthusiastic fans and great racing action.

F1 enthusiasts are all set for the fifth round of the championship and the final leg of F1's first triple-header.

Fans heading to the Grand Prix can look forward to an electrifying weekend as they witness the world's elite drivers compete at the Jeddah Corniche Circuit — known as the fastest street circuit on the F1 calendar.

Prince Khalid bin Sultan Al-Abdullah Al-Faisal, chairman of the Saudi Automobile & Motorcycle Federation and Saudi Motorsport Co., said: "This year marks a significant milestone: our fifth consecutive F1 race at the record-breaking Jeddah Corniche Circuit, spectacularly set along the stunning Red Sea coastline."

"We are thrilled to return to our traditional Sunday race following the unique Saturday night spectacle of 2024."

He continued: "We extend our profound gratitude to the custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud, and to His Royal Highness Prince

Mohammed bin Salman, crown prince and prime minister ... for their visionary leadership."

"Their continued support fuels our efforts to position the Kingdom as a global hub for sport and innovation."

"Our sincere thanks also go to Prince Abdulaziz bin Turki Al-Faisal, Minister of Sport, whose steadfast dedication drives the success of Vision 2030."

The race is expected to be a tough one as the McLaren driver Oscar Piastri heads to Jeddah after his emphatic win in Bahrain.

The Australian now trails championship leader Lando Norris by just three points, while Max Verstappen and Georg

Russel remain behind them.

With the Saudi Arabian Grand Prix scheduled to be held April 18-20, millions of motorsport enthusiasts will be turning their attention to Jeddah as teams and drivers prepare for a new race on the fastest track.

Fans will be flocking to the corniche for everything from the high-speed thrills of the race itself to a wide range of side activities. One of the most anticipated events is the F1 Saudi Arabian Grand Prix Fan Experience, a free daytime attraction that has already sold out for Friday and Saturday.

Beyond the on-track action, attendees will enjoy a lively atmosphere filled with live music and

entertainment, as well as opportunities to see F1 superstars up close.

Fans can enjoy an exciting lineup of live performances from global superstars, including Usher, Major Lazer Soundsystem, and Jennifer Lopez.

To make the race a success, the Saudi Ministry of Education has announced a school holiday April 20-21 for students and education staff in Jeddah, Makkah, and Taif to support the race.

Since its inaugural edition in 2021, the F1 Saudi Arabian Grand Prix has established itself as a highly anticipated annual event, attracting large audiences and a significant media presence from around the world.



Superb Arsenal beat Real Madrid to reach semis

MADRID (BBC): Bukayo Saka scored a goal and missed a penalty as Arsenal held off Real Madrid to reach the Champions League semi-finals in an incident-packed match at the Bernabeu.

Arsenal had a 3-0 aggregate lead to defend after their superb victory in the first leg last week - and they were given the chance to silence the noisy home support when they were awarded a 13th-minute penalty.

Saka stepped up but his weak, dinked effort was saved by Thibaut Courtois.

However, the England forward made amends for his miss when he effectively killed off the tie with a fantastic chipped second-half finish over Courtois after Mikel Merino's clever pass.

Real hit back just two minutes later when a terrible mistake from William Saliba gifted Vinicius Junior with an open goal to score.

But Real were not able to capitalise on that glimmer of hope and Gabriel Martinelli capped off a glorious night by making it 2-1 in stoppage time with a breakaway goal, again set up by Merino.

It is just the third time Arsenal have reached the

semi-final stage of the Champions League and they will face Paris St-Germain in the last four.

Arsenal beat PSG 2-0 at Emirates Stadium in the league phase but Luis Enrique's French champions are much improved since then.

The home crowd in Madrid, who had built an excellent atmosphere and were hoping to spark a comeback that would be remembered for years to come, thought their side had a way back into the tie shortly after Saka's spot-kick miss when they were awarded a penalty of their own.

But a lengthy check with the video assistant referee overturned the referee's decision after Kylian Mbappe had thrown himself to the floor following minimal contact from Declan Rice.

It was hard to imagine that Arsenal were going to be able to produce a performance that would be better than the first leg - but this game comes close.

The Gunners had a clear remit to not get dragged into the emotion created by the Bernabeu crowd.

Saka had the perfect chance to silence the home support after Raul Asencio pulled down



Merino but made an uncharacteristic poor choice from the spot which allowed Courtois to save his chip with ease.

But Mikel Arteta's side were never in serious danger of losing the match by such a margin that would see them knocked out.

The Gunners have not lost by a four-goal margin since a 4-0 defeat by Liverpool at Anfield in November 2021.

And it is 100 games since they conceded more than twice, which was during a 4-3 win at Luton

in December 2023.

Arteta deserves credit too for the way he has overcome a number of injuries to key players and led his side to score five past Real without a recognised striker.

The word used the most by Real players and supporters this week was 'la remontada' which means 'the comeback'.

On three out of the past four occasions when the Spanish side have trailed after the first leg in the Champions League, they have fought back to reach

the next round - against Wolfsburg in 2015-16 and in 2021-22 against PSG and Manchester City.

So Real's players were justified in speaking with confidence pre-game but they were second best to Arsenal for the majority of both legs of this tie.

Boss Carlo Ancelotti will now have to turn his focus back to La Liga with Real four points behind Barcelona as they bid to defend their title.

Inter edge Byren Inter Milan booked their place in the

Champions League semi-finals with a thrilling draw against Bayern Munich at San Siro Stadium.

The Italian champions led 2-1 from the first leg but their advantage was wiped out by Harry Kane's crisp, low strike early in the second half.

That goal sparked Inter into life and just nine minutes later they were in front on the night and in complete control of the tie.

First, Lautaro Martinez lashed home from six yards as the ball

dropped kindly for him from a corner.

Three minutes later, another corner and this time defender Benjamin Pavard powered in a header from Hakan Calhanoglu's delivery.

Bayern did not give up though, and with 14 minutes remaining they drew level thanks to Eric Dier's looping back-post header from a tight angle.

Vincent Kompany's side pushed for a third goal to force extra time, and in the fifth of six added minutes the chance came but Thomas Muller could not direct his header past Inter goalkeeper Yann Sommer.

Tensions were running high with time ticking away and Bayern substitute Josip Stanisic shoved a ballboy off his stool after he threw the ball away to waste some time.

Stanisic spoke of his regret post-match: "Every team in the world wastes time when they're leading. It was a bit stupid of me to push him there."

Despite the late scare, it is Inter who progress to face Barcelona in a tantalising last-four tie.

A lively start to the match was an indicator of what was to come in the second half, but clear chances were at a premium. Bayern were on top

before the break but Inter defended superbly, showing great organisation as well as commitment when last-ditch tackles were required. But it only took a slight error for Bayern to pounce after half-time, when Federico Dimarco backed off Kane and the England skipper was able to take his time before firing into the far corner.

Inter's response was immediate with Marcus Thuram coming close prior to Martinez finding the net for a fifth consecutive Champions League game.

What proved to be the decisive goal was Pavard's first for Inter, and came against his former club.

Dier's goal - an inch-perfect header regardless of whether he was going for goal or not - was also his first for Bayern, but it is Pavard and Inter who will remember the night more fondly.

It could have been different had Muller's header found the corner, or had Kane been able to keep his hooked effort down a couple of minutes earlier.

However, Simone Inzaghi's experienced side march on with their Treble dreams intact, as they lead Serie A by three points and are in the Coppa Italia semi-finals.



In brief

Six Inspectors promoted

ISLAMABAD (APP): In another significant round of promotions within the Islamabad Police, six inspectors have been promoted to the rank of Deputy Superintendent of Police (DSP). An official told APP on Thursday that the latest promotions follow the recent elevation of officers to the rank of Superintendent of Police (SP), marking a continued effort to reward dedicated service and strengthen the force's leadership structure. He said the Departmental Promotion Committee has forwarded its recommendations to the Inspector General of Police (IGP) Syed Ali Nasir Rizvi for final approval. He said the newly promoted officers pledged to serve the public with greater dedication, vowing to set high standards in public service through their tireless efforts. He said the year 2024-25 has witnessed a record number of promotions within the Islamabad Police, reflecting the department's commitment to professional development and performance-based growth. He said the official notification in this regard is expected to be issued Thursday.

92,700 cusecs water released

ISLAMABAD (APP): Indus River System Authority (IRSA) on Thursday released 92,700 cusecs water from various rim stations with inflow of 1285200 cusecs. According to the data released by IRSA, the water level in River Indus at Tarbela Dam was 1420.47 feet which was 18.47 feet higher than dead level of 1402.00 feet. Water inflow and outflow in the dam was recorded as 39,300 cusecs and 20,000 cusecs respectively. The water level in River Jhelum at Mangla Dam was 1111.95 feet, which was 61.95 feet higher than its dead level of 1,050 feet. The inflow and outflow of water was recorded 41,500 cusecs and 25,000 cusecs respectively. The release of water at Kalabagh, Taunsa, Guddu and Sukkur was recorded as 58,700, 34,000, 27,800 and 6,600 cusecs respectively. Similarly, from River Kabul, a total of 30,200 cusecs of water released at Nowshera and 11,000 cusecs released from River Chenab at Marala.

Hailstorm forecast: NEOC

ISLAMABAD (APP): The National Disaster Management Authority's (NDMA) National Emergency Center (NEOC) forecast on Thursday that heavy rainfall, strong windstorms, thunderstorms, and isolated hailstorms are expected today (Friday) and tomorrow (Saturday) evenings in various parts of the country, including Rawalpindi and Islamabad. According to a bight alert weather advisory, for the Pothohar region, including Islamabad and Rawalpindi, Upper Punjab (Attock, Chakwal, Gujrat, and Jhelum), and Central Punjab (Faisalabad, Hafizabad, Jhang, Khushab, Mianwali, Lahore, Narowal, Sahiwal, Sargodha, and Sheikhpura) from the evening of April 18 to April 19, 2025, these severe weather conditions could disrupt infrastructure, transportation, and agricultural activities. According to the advisory, strong winds and heavy rainfall may uproot trees, potentially causing temporary power outages. Windstorms, dust storms, and hailstorms could damage vulnerable structures, rooftops, vehicles, and power lines.

Price list violations spark crackdown: 9 naan sellers arrested

ISLAMABAD (APP): The district administration of Islamabad has arrested nine naan shop workers during a surprise inspection across sectors G-12 and G-13 areas of Federal Capital.

The action came after vendors repeatedly ignored regulations requiring public display of official price lists, a measure meant to protect consumers from overcharging.

According to the spokesman of Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) administration, officials from the district administration and local police conducted joint inspections of bakeries and naan shops in the two sectors.

Nine workers were detained for violating pricing transparency rules and later transferred to police custody.

He said that the operation targeted businesses that had ignored multiple

warnings to visibly government approved rate charts.

Under Islamabad's consumer protection laws, all food vendors must display price lists in Urdu and English at their premises. Failure to comply can lead to fines, temporary closures, or legal action. Authorities confirmed the arrested workers will face charges under these regulations.

The crackdown follows complaints from residents about inconsistent pricing and alleged exploitation by some vendors. "Many shops hide price lists to charge extra during peak hours or to unfamiliar customers," said a local resident. "Transparency ensures fairness for everyone," added a district official.

This is not the first enforcement drive in the area. Last month, warnings were issued to over 20 businesses for similar viola-

tions. However, officials claim compliance rates remain low, prompting stricter measures. "Repeat offenders will face heavier penalties, including license cancellations," the administration warned.

The operation is part of a broader effort to standardize pricing and curb inflation-driven profiteering in essential goods. Islamabad's deputy commissioner emphasized that bakeries, grocery stores, and milk shops are under close watch due to their daily consumer impact.

Meanwhile, the authorities urge citizens to report violations via helpline or in-person complaints. Inspections are expected to expand to other sectors in the coming weeks. Data from the district office shows over 150 fines issued since January for pricing-related offenses, signaling a zero-tolerance approach.



ISLAMABAD: Ambassador of Kyrgyz Avazbek Atakhanov presenting hand-made carpet to Federal Minister for Climate Change and Environmental Coordination Senator Musadik Masood Malik.

NUML and HHRD sign MoU

ISLAMABAD (APP): The National University of Modern Languages (NUML) and Helping Hand for Relief and Development (HHRD) Pakistan have joined hands to promote volunteerism and community engagement among youth through a strategic Memorandum of Understanding (MoU).

The signing ceremony was held at NUML, where Director General NUML Brigadier Shehzad Munir and HHRD Country Director M. Saleem Mansoori formalized the partnership.

On the occasion, Mansoori shared insights into HHRD's national and international humanitarian initiatives, highlighting its operational scope, funding strategies, and commitment to youth involvement.

DG NUML praised HHRD's impactful work and underscored the vital role of volunteerism in shaping socially responsible students.

The MoU sets the stage for collaborative efforts in youth empowerment, community service, and skill development. Under the agreement, NUML will encourage student participation in volunteer programs, facilitate capacity-building sessions, and extend logistical support.

In turn, HHRD will provide both paid and unpaid internships, create avenues for meaningful student involvement, and assign volunteers to roles targeting underserved communities.

This partnership reflects a shared vision to nurture responsible citizens and changemakers, committed to building a more inclusive and compassionate society.

ITP issues traffic diversion plan

ISLAMABAD (APP): Islamabad Traffic Police (ITP) has issued a special traffic diversion plan on Thursday due to the inauguration ceremony of the Murree Underpass near Bhara Kahu, with temporary road closures and enhanced arrangements to facilitate smooth movement.

An ITP official told APP that traffic between Kashmir Chowk and Bhara Kahu Road will remain closed from 10:30 AM to 12:30 PM.

He said commuters travelling towards Murree during the specified period are advised to use alternative routes.

He said traffic heading to Murree or Bhara Kahu may take the route from Kashmir Chowk via Rawal Dam Chowk, Park Road, Bani Gala, and Korang Road.

He said traffic from Bhara Kahu towards Rawalpindi/Islamabad can use Korang Road, Bani Gala, Park Road, Rawal Dam Chowk, Faizabad, and Kashmir Chowk.

He said a short delay in traffic flow is expected, and citizens are requested to plan their travel with an additional buffer of 20 minutes.

He said Islamabad Traffic Police (ITP) is actively engaged to assist the public and ensure a hassle-free commute during the event.

He said citizens can contact the Islamabad Traffic Police (ITP) helpline at 1915 for further guidance and real-time updates.

Empowering youth nationwide: Mashood vows to leverage all resources

ISLAMABAD (APP): Chairman Youth Program Rana Mashood Ahmed Khan has said that all resources are being utilized to empower youth across the country, including Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Over 2 million young people have been registered on the digital Youth Hub and the government is planning to create opportunities for 1.5 million jobs overseas and 1.6 million jobs within the country. He expressed these views while addressing a meeting of the divisional, district and tehsil officials of the PML-N Youth Coordinator here on Thursday.

He said that it was a pleasure to see the enthusiasm of the Youth Wing here as in the past, including

Information and Broadcasting Attaullah Tarar and Rana Ehsan Afzal, we all gave our sacrifices in the party, but supported the party leadership in difficult times.

He said that the PML-N is the asset of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Youth Wing, the greatness of these party workers is saluted and they stand up for the party's flag.

He said that the first Youth adolescent policy for the youth will be announced soon, adding that on this policy, the youth of 25 cities across the country will take suggestions through a form, and youth from six cities of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa will also be included.

He said that the first

National Youth Employment Policy will also be announced soon. He said that vast opportunities are being provided to empower the youth through the digital Youth Hub, providing more than 1.5 million jobs abroad.

He said that since March, 60 million youths have access to the Digital Youth Hub through social media, two million youths have been registered.

He said that the government is determined to provide all the resources to the youth, Rs 160 billion is being allocated to make the youth skilled.

He said that the youth should register themselves on the digital Youth Hub and benefit from a wide range of opportunities in various fields.

Legal victory for Fehmida Bibi: Property Rights restored through FOSPAAH

ISLAMABAD (APP): In another example of swift justice and effective implementation of women's property rights, the Federal Ombudsperson for Protection Against Harassment of Women at the Workplace (FOSPAAH) has successfully resolved a property rights case under the Enforcement of Women's Property Rights Act, 2020, within a matter of months—ensuring the rightful return of land to Ms. Fehmida Bibi, the complainant.

Ms. Fehmida Bibi had filed a complaint stating that she had been illegally dispossessed of her property in Nilore Village, Mohallah Nadrabad, Islamabad. Despite being the rightful owner, with the land legally transferred to her name as per law, she was denied possession and faced resistance at the local police level.

With FOSPAAH taking up the matter with urgency, by April 2025, the order had been fully implemented.

The Deputy Commissioner's Office, Islamabad, submitted a report confirming that the land had been measured, demarcated, and its physical possession restored to Ms. Fehmida Bibi. This rapid resolution underscores FOSPAAH's unwavering commitment to upholding women's legal and constitutional rights, especially in matters of property where women have historically faced challenges.

Traders association congratulates Minister

ISLAMABAD (APP): A delegation from the Central Traders Association of Rawalpindi here met with Federal Minister for Railways, Hanif Abbasi, to congratulate him on his new role and express their support for the ministry's development under his leadership.

The delegation included Malik Shahid Ghafoor Paracha, President of the Central Traders Association, along with Senior Vice President Rana K. Mahmood and Vice President Saifullah Khan.

During the meeting, the traders' representatives extended their best wishes to Minister Abbasi and discussed key issues related to railway services and their impact on trade and commerce. They expressed confidence that under Abbasi's leadership, the Pakistan Railways would achieve significant progress and better serve the business community.

Minister Hanif Abbasi thanked the delegation for their support and assured them of his commitment to improving railway infrastructure and services to facilitate economic growth.

"I have always worked for the rights of the laborers, and that is why they keep me in their prayers. I firmly believe that our collective goal is the development of the country and the welfare of the people, and under this goal, we all work with the guidance and cooperation of the prime

minister."

He further said, "Whatever work we do, we do it with dignity and respect, and this is one of our core values that any action we take should be for the betterment of the people."

Minister Hanif Abbasi inaugurated a shuttle train for the people of Multan and Dera Ghazi Khan and indicated that soon new projects will be launched to further improve transportation services in various parts of the country. These projects will include the expansion of the railway network and the introduction of modern trains to ensure better travel facilities for the public.

"Inflation is decreasing, and its effects are reaching the people. Due to the government's efforts, people are receiving better travel facilities, and we are taking actions keeping their needs in mind," said Hanif Abbasi.

"We all take guidance

from the prime minister and serve the country with his trust. I am grateful to him for entrusting me with this ministry, and I am committed to fulfilling this trust with full dedication."

He continued, "Overseas Pakistanis are told not to send money, but we must work for the country. Our goal is not just financial aid but working for the development and prosperity of our country."

The Federal Minister thanked the traders for their support of his resolve. "The traders have assured me of their full cooperation and appreciated my commitment, which will help in making our projects successful."

Hanif Abbasi further mentioned that they are not only working to improve the railway hospitals but also working on educational institutions to enhance the quality of education and provide more facilities to the public.

12 touts arrested outside Excise Department

ISLAMABAD (APP): Assistant Commissioner, Nehal Abdullah led a crackdown at industrial area, arresting 12 touts operating outside the Excise Department, Islamabad. The suspects were immediately taken into custody as part of an ongoing effort to eliminate unauthorized intermediaries.

The operation targeted individuals allegedly engaged in illegal activities near the department's premises, signaling a strict approach to maintaining administrative integrity and preventing corruption.

Officials transferred the arrested touts to the appropriate legal processing.

Int'l moot organized in honor of overseas traders

ISLAMABAD (APP): An international conference was organized to pay homage to overseas Pakistani businessmen at the Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) Council Secretariat.

Speaking as the chief guest, Adviser to Prime Minister on Kashmir Affairs, Gilgit-Baltistan and SAFRON Shabbir Ahmed Usmani said that overseas Pakistanis were not only the backbone of the country's economy but their remittances were also key to national development and stability, said a press release.

He said that Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif has a vision to fully include overseas Pakistanis in the country's development stream, priori-

tize the solution of their problems, and make investment, legal assistance, and repatriation facilities easier for them.

He added that the government values the services of overseas Pakistanis and taking all possible steps for their welfare.

He said that according to the vision of the prime minister, all facilities would be provided to overseas Pakistanis. He said that the full participation of Pakistanis in the Overseas Pakistani Convention was a sign that overseas Pakistanis had full trust in the incumbent government.

Former Prime Minister of Azad Kashmir Raja Muhammad Farooq Haider Khan said that under the leadership of Prime

Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif, the country had come out of the crisis.

The event was attended by former Prime Minister of AJK Raja Muhammad Farooq Haider Khan, members of the Azad Kashmir Council, Secretary of the Ministry of Kashmir Affairs, Gilgit-Baltistan and SAFRON Lieutenant (Retd) Kamran Rehman Khan, Joint Secretary of the Azad Kashmir Council Ali Akbar Khattak and other officials.

A large number of prominent Pakistani businessmen from North United States, United Kingdom and Europe were present at the event.

Grants connection to over 100 households

ISLAMABAD (APP): Advisor, Wafaqi Mohtasib Secretariat, Haroon Sikan-dar Pasha, accompanied by Consultant (Media), held a Khuli Katchery at Pind Dadan Khan (District Jhelum), under the directions of the Wafaqi Mohtasib, Ejaz Ahmad Qureshi here Thursday.

They heard complaints against the Federal Government agencies and gave on-the-spot directions to the officials concerned for their prompt resolution. The team resolved a large number of complaints relating to Sui Gas, Electricity and NADRA on the spot.

The Advisor, Wafaqi Mohtasib Secretariat, directed that disciplinary proceedings be initiated against the local heads of the Federal Government agencies who did not attend the Khuli Katchery.

Apart from complaints against the Sui Gas and Electricity departments, people filed complaints against entities like

NADRA, BISP, Postal Life Insurance Corporation and other Federal and Provincial Government departments. A large number of complaints were related to discontinuation of financial relief from BISP, non-installation of electricity transformers and poles in addition to excessive billings and late issuance of CNIC.

The Wafaqi Mohtasib team issued directions for their speedy resolution. Some complainants informed the team that their inflated electricity bills were not being rectified. They also informed that the transformers in some areas have not been changed even after a lapse of seven years, whereas in some areas, the electricity wires were just hanging above their roofs and posing a serious threat to life. Taking cognizance, the team directed the officials concerned to initiate immediate remedial measures.

The Advisor, Wafaqi

Mohtasib, directed that the transformers and electricity poles be installed without further delay. He also instructed that necessary steps be taken immediately for provision of electricity to the remaining 100 households in the Ittefaq Colony.

The Wafaqi Mohtasib team also met the District Administration officials in Jhelum and discussed with them matters relating to expeditious resolution of the public problems. They also handed over the complaints relating to the provincial departments on the occasion. In addition to the local representatives of the federal agencies the Khuli Katchery was attended by the officials of the district administration and the media.

The Advisor, Wafaqi Mohtasib, also delivered an awareness lecture on the occasion and thanked the representatives of the local media for its useful role and cooperation in disseminating information about the Wafaqi Mohtasib's office.

Pakistan Railways takes stringent measures

ISLAMABAD (APP): Despite the several financial constraints, Pakistan Railways is making significant strides in improving hygiene standards at major railway stations across the country in order to facilitate the passengers.

"In a bid to ensure passenger safety and comfort, the department has implemented a series of measures to maintain cleanliness and promote public health," an official in the Ministry of Railways told APP.

He said that round-the-clock janitorial staffs have been deployed at major stations to maintain the cleanliness of platforms, waiting areas, passenger toilets and station premises.

The official said that daily fumigation of platforms and waiting rooms is being carried out to prevent the spread of diseases,

ensuring a safer environment for travelers.

To guarantee the quality and hygiene of food sold at vending stalls, the medical officers are conducting regular inspections at major railway stations, he added.

Additionally, the official said that under the supervision of Divisional Medical Officers (DMOs), sanitary workers are diligently performing cleaning duties across platforms, washrooms, waiting rooms and other station facilities.

The official said the conservancy contractors also play a role, conducting routine cleaning in accordance with agreed terms.

The banners have been displayed and pamphlets distributed encouraging passengers to help maintain cleanliness and prevent the spread of contagious diseases, he said.

Further ensuring public health, the official said the food vendors and handlers are examined twice a year for communicable diseases such as Hepatitis B and C.

In addition, he said the regular inspections of Dining Cars, restaurants and vending stalls are carried out by Railway Officers and Medical Staff and the violations of food safety or hygiene standards can lead to fines or even cancellation of contracts.

Pakistan Railways has also focused on passenger comfort, providing clean waiting rooms with modern seating arrangements and accessible toilet facilities at all major stations, he added.

"Despite the limited fiscal space, we are fully committed to providing quality services and a hygienic environment for our passengers," the official added.

Man kills son in Nangarhar

JALALABAD (Pajhwok): A man has shot dead his son in the Hesarak district of eastern Nangarhar province, an official said on Thursday. Police spokesman Sayed Tayyeb Hammad said that the incident occurred in the Mohammad Kala area of the district. Without going into details, Hammad said the suspect, identified as Sultan Mohammad, gunned down his son Allah Nazar. He added security forces had arrested the killer and handed him over to judicial authorities for prosecution.

Teacher, 4 students injured

JALALABAD (Pajhwok): Five people, including a teacher and four students, were injured when lightning struck a school in the Khogyani district of eastern Nangarhar province. Mohammad Ishaq Halim, spokesman for the Education Department, told Pajhwok Afghan News the freak incident occurred on Wednesday afternoon in the Qailgho area of the district. According to Halim, the lightning struck a classroom, injuring a teacher and four students.

Treat litigants kindly, CJ tells judges



KABUL (Pajhwok) The Chief Justice (CJ) has urged judges to guide the people and avoid dealing with them angrily and overturning rulings over minor mistakes. Sheikh Abdul Hakim Haqqani made the remarks during a meeting with local officials in Nimroz province, the Supreme Court said in a statement. Sheikh Haqqani said members of appellate courts should maintain good judicial and administrative relations with primary court officials. He instructed primary courts to try their best to dispose of cases in accordance with the Islamic law, principles, decrees, rulings

and established procedures so that their decisions were not overturned by higher fora. He said appellate courts should overturn primary court rulings only if there were glaring legal or administrative shortcomings, and not for minor errors, to prevent unnecessary confusion and hardship for the parties involved. He urged judicial and administrative members of courts to treat parties to a case with respect and guide them in case of need. Haqqani said: "Both judges and muftis are responsible for thoroughly investigating the cases they handle. Once a case becomes clear, only then should they hand down a ruling. "Most of our citizens live in remote areas and are not familiar with legal procedures, so judges must avoid dealing with them angrily and treat them with kindness." He believed when military personnel dragged a suspect to court, judges should ask where, how, under what conditions, and for what crime the person had been arrested. The relevant official should be questioned thoroughly about the matter, and the judges should then conduct their own investigations before making a decision, he added. The chief justice noted if a suspect was brought to court by a military official, and after receiving information and conducting an investigation, the judge was convinced that the person was innocent, he/she should not be immediately freed. Instead, they must issue a judicial order in accordance with court procedures. This, he said, would help build an atmosphere of cooperation, trust and mutual respect between security institutions and the judiciary.

Head of RCS meet Afghan Minister

KABUL (BNA): Mullah Abdul Manan Omari, the Minister of Labor and Social Affairs, met with Hussain Butani, the head of the Qatar Red Crescent Society (RCS) in Afghanistan, to discuss ongoing humanitarian efforts in the country. During the meeting, Butani outlined the RCS's programs, achievements, and activities tailored to support the Afghan population. He emphasized that all projects are implemented in accordance with the principles of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, ensuring full coordination with relevant Emirati institutions. Minister Omari expressed appreciation for the RCS's contributions and urged the organization to enhance support for the most vulnerable segments of society, particularly children and returnees. He encouraged the dedication of more projects aimed at these groups. Omari assured Butani of his ministry's commitment to collaborating closely with the Qatar Red Crescent Society to improve operational conditions for humanitarian efforts in Afghanistan. The Qatar Red Crescent Society is actively involved in various initiatives across Afghanistan, focusing on health, water supply, and emergency aid, and is particularly engaged in supporting orphans and other vulnerable groups.

Implementation of 13 key directives reviewed



KABUL (BNA): Under the leadership of Deputy Prime Minister for Economic Affairs Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar Akhund, Afghanistan's caretaker government held a special session of the Economic Commission on Thursday at a historic government venue in Kabul (Marmarin Palace) to assess the implementation progress of thirteen strategic decisions issued during an earlier high-level meeting chaired by Amir al-Mu'minin (Hafizullah). According to the press office of the Prime Minister's Economic Affairs Division, representatives from various ministries and governmental institutions submitted detailed progress reports and comprehensive implementation frameworks. These reports focused on how each entity has responded to the directives originally established in the prior session under the Amir al-Mu'minin's leadership. A committee, previously appointed under the supervision of the Administrative Office of the President, was tasked with developing robust mechanisms to enforce these directives. Among its responsibilities was designing a structured and lawful procedure for the equitable distribution of state-owned lands intended for residential and commercial use. These lands are located in areas where urban development plans have been completed and basic infrastructure projects have already begun. The aim is to ensure that these lands are transferred to citizens with proper ownership rights and in accordance with national planning standards. Furthermore, the same committee was mandated to establish implementation guidelines for the planned housing settlements that have been reviewed and cleared by the Commission for Prevention of Land Grabbing and Land Restitution. These lands—verified as legitimate state holdings—are to be distributed to eligible citizens based on a transparent and approved legal process. The goal is to facilitate lawful ownership and organized settlement in line with broader urban development goals. The committee was also directed to ease and standardize the regulatory and administrative processes required for construction on privately owned lands. This includes providing clear procedures and logistical support for property owners to develop or build within urban planning frameworks. During session, the committee presented its finalized action plans for the first two agenda items and reported key improvements introduced to simplify the procedures for private land development and construction permit issuance. These changes are expected to reduce bureaucratic delays and enhance coordination between citizens and planning authorities. In another development aligned with the Commission's directives, the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation, and Livestock has initiated the nationwide process of transferring designated land parcels to the Ministry of Industry and Commerce. This includes land in the capital as well as in all provinces and is part of a broader effort to develop industrial parks across the country. Officials have confirmed that the process is progressing rapidly and construction of the industrial parks is expected to begin soon upon completion of the land transfer. Finally, the full set of progress reports and action plans related to the thirteen key decisions are being prepared for formal submission to the Amir al-Mu'minin (Hafizullah) for review and official approval. This marks a crucial step in ensuring the successful and timely execution of these economic initiatives across relevant ministries and government bodies.

Hospital for addicted women, children opened

L A S H K A R G A H (Pajhwok): A 20-bed hospital for treating drug-addicted women and children has been opened in southern Helmand province. At the opening ceremony, Public Health Director Maulvi Fazli Ahmad Shafiullah told Pajhwok Afghan News this hospital, approved by the Ministry of Public Health, will treat women and children addicted to drugs. "This hospital is for

addicted women and children and has been approved by the ministry. Medicines and other necessary supplies will also be provided to the facility," he added. Meanwhile, Dr. Wali Mohammad Khadim, a psychiatrist in this hospital, said: "This hospital is very important for addicted women and children in the province". According to officials, addicted women and children would be treated for

45 days by all the female staff. They say the female could better treat addicted women and children, provide psychological counseling, and address other problems than anywhere else. The hospital is a single-story building with eight rooms, a park, and a mosque. A week ago, a similar hospital was opened in Baghlan province.

Afghan girls' education discussed

KABUL (Khaama Press): Karzai emphasized the importance of girls' education for Afghanistan's development, while discussing strengthening diplomatic ties with Norway. Hamid Karzai, the former president of Afghanistan, met with Norwegian Ambassador to Kabul, Per Albert Ilsaas, to discuss strengthening bilateral relations. Karzai emphasized the importance of expanding cooperation between Afghanistan and Norway, particularly in the fields of education and humanitarian efforts. In the meeting, Karzai stressed the critical role of education, especially for girls, in Afghanistan's development and progress. He called for serious attention to this issue, highlighting how empowering young girls with education is essential for the country's future. Furthermore, Karzai pointed out that national reconciliation is key to achieving lasting peace and stability in Afghanistan. He urged collaborative efforts to create an inclusive environment for different segments of society to work together harmoniously. Details of the discussions were not immediately available, but the meeting emphasized the ongoing importance of education and reconciliation in Afghanistan's recovery. Norway has been a key player in supporting Afghanistan's education, humanitarian, and peace-building sectors over the past two decades.

Returning traders to get tax exemptions: Azizi



KABUL (Pajhwok): The Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (IEA) on Thursday promised the provision facilities, including tax exemptions, to returning traders. Acting Minister of Commerce and Industry Nooruddin Azizi held out the pledge at a meeting with Afghan businessmen and migrants. Measures have been

taken to facilitate voluntary return, resettlement and to improve the living conditions of returnees in Afghanistan, according to a press release from the Ministry of Industry and Commerce. In a statement from the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Azizi said a high commission had been set up to resolve the problems of migrants.

He added a special camp had been created to organize and provide facilities to returning businessmen and manufacturers, who would be granted tax and customs duty exemptions. Bilateral dialogue was needed to find appropriate solutions to the repatriation of Afghan refugees, he suggested, calling for voluntary, safe and dignified returns in line with UNHCR principles. Azizi is arrived in Islamabad on Wednesday at the head of a delegation which includes representatives from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister for Economic Affairs, the Investment Facilitation Directorate and Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Finance, Refugees and Returnees, Transport and Civil Aviation, Agriculture, Irrigation, and Livestock, as well as private sector stakeholders.

Ban on broadcasting images of living beings expanded

KABUL (Amu TV): The Taliban's ban on broadcasting images of living beings, which they deem religiously forbidden, has now been extended to Kunduz, according to the Afghanistan Journalists' Center. The group said that Taliban authorities in Kunduz have officially ordered local media outlets to cease the filming and publication of any images depicting humans or animals. The ban stems from the Taliban's enforcement of their "Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice" regulations, under which the depiction of living beings is considered contrary to Islamic principles as interpreted by the group. The Taliban's Ministry for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice

instructed media organizations, including both state-run and private outlets, to halt visual reporting. As a result, several television stations in Kunduz — including National Radio Television Afghanistan (NRTV) under Taliban administration, the state-run Bakhtar News Agency, and private stations like Uranus TV and Radio Shabnam — will effectively be reduced to operating as audio-only broadcasters. According to the Afghanistan Journalists' Center, the Taliban directive states, "Media personnel must ensure that no images of living beings are published or broadcast." While the Taliban have enforced this ban in 13 other provinces previously — including Kandahar, Takhar, Badghis, Helmand,

Nangarhar, and Badakhshan — the extension of the restriction to Kunduz signals a systematic national crackdown on visual journalism. Critics warn that the ban represents a dangerous escalation in Taliban control over the media. Mujib Khalwatgar, former director of the Nai media support organization, said the measure was an overt attempt to suppress freedom of expression and control public perception. "The Taliban's decision to prohibit the broadcasting of images is a clear intensification of pressure on media freedom. It not only restricts journalists' ability to work but also conceals the real face of Afghan society from the public," Sohaila Yousefi, an Afghan journalist, said.

50 more Afghans return home

KABUL (Pajhwok): The Ministry of Refugee and Repatriation (MoRR) says 50 more Afghan citizens released from prisons in Pakistan returned to their homeland on Thursday. Citing border officials in Kandahar's Spin Boldak border town, the ministry wrote on X the 50 Afghans, who had spent one to five days in jails, had been arrested in various parts of Pakistan. After receiving humanitarian assistance, the returnees were transported to their respective native areas, the ministry added. On Wednesday, about 147 Afghan refugees had returned home after being released from Pakistani prisons.

Islamic Emirate rejects CSTO claims of security, drug threats

KABUL (TOLONews): The Islamic Emirate has rejected the Collective Security Treaty Organization's (CSTO) allegations about security threats and drug trafficking originating from Afghan territory, saying that no security threat emanates from Afghanistan to other countries. Hamdullah Fitrat, deputy spokesman of the Islamic Emirate, emphasized that serious steps have been taken to secure borders and prevent drug smuggling. "Afghanistan assures all countries, including CSTO member states, that no security threat originates from Afghanistan. Furthermore, the Islamic Emirate has made significant efforts in countering drug trafficking and strengthening border security. All countries must fulfill their responsibilities in ensuring regional security," he said. This comes after the CSTO's spokesperson claimed that Afghanistan remains a major source of security challenges and drug-related crimes. She stated that member states have called for strengthening the Tajikistan-Afghanistan border and enhancing regional coordination to address these threats. Natalia Khritonova, the CSTO spokesperson, said: "The Allies express concern about the situation in Afghanistan and the growing threats in the provinces adjacent to the Central Asian region of collective Security of the CSTO. In this regard, the policy of expanding regional coordination in the counterterrorism and anti-drug spheres remains in demand. In this context, the implementation of the CSTO's

ensuring regional security," he said. This comes after the CSTO's spokesperson claimed that Afghanistan remains a major source of security challenges and drug-related crimes. She stated that member states have called for strengthening the Tajikistan-Afghanistan border and enhancing regional coordination to address these threats. Natalia Khritonova, the CSTO spokesperson, said: "The Allies express concern about the situation in Afghanistan and the growing threats in the provinces adjacent to the Central Asian region of collective Security of the CSTO. In this regard, the policy of expanding regional coordination in the counterterrorism and anti-drug spheres remains in demand. In this context, the implementation of the CSTO's



Targeted Interstate Program to strengthen the Tajik-Afghan border is of particular importance and relevance," Natalia Kharitonova, press secretary of the CSTO secretariat said. Kamran Aman, a military analyst, told TOLONews: "The concerns raised by biased countries—whether from the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, CSTO, or

neighboring countries like Pakistan and Tajikistan—are part of propaganda campaigns driven by their own interests." These concerns about drug-related crimes in Afghanistan come despite the decree issued by the leader of the Islamic Emirate on April 3, 2022, banning the cultivation of poppy and the trafficking of narcotics.

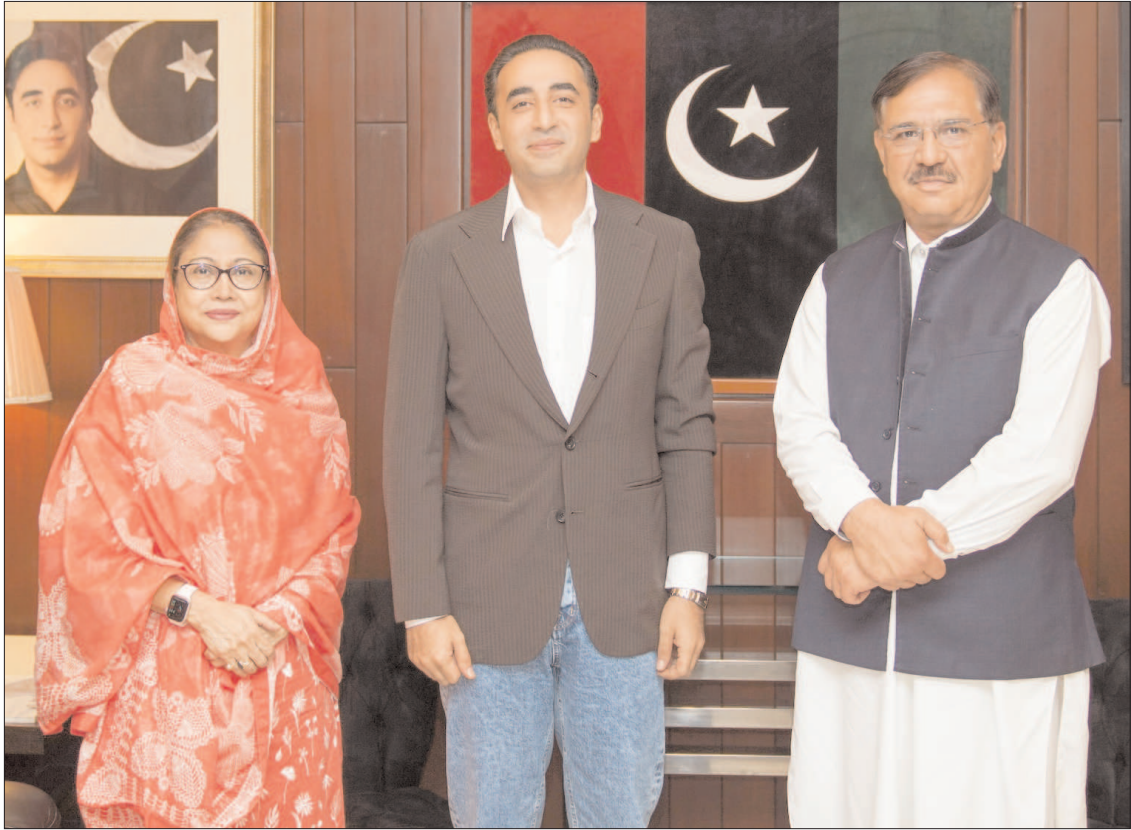
Residents donate land for school construction

SAR-I-PUL (Pajhwok): Local officials in northern Sar-i-Pul province say residents of Baghli village have donated one acre of land — valued at approximately five million afghanis — for the construction of a school. Sayed Naser Jaber, a resident of the village in Sar-i-Pul City, said the land was jointly owned by the local community. In line with a collective decision by villagers, it was donated for the construction of a secondary school for boys, he added. Previously, he recalled, students from Baghli were compelled to attend a distant school in Adrang village. This hardship led residents to decide on building a school in their own village. He estimated: "The value of this land is around five million afghanis. Due to the long distance to the high school, we decided to create educational opportunities within our own village. At present, students are studying here under

tents." Bismillah Adeeb, another resident of the village, said: "Today we are overjoyed that a school is going to be built in our area. In the past, we faced many difficulties sending children to schools far away. "Now that our village will have its own school, we no longer have to worry about their daily commute. We urge the Department of Education to begin construction as soon as possible." He stressed it was a shared responsibility of the community, as parents, and the government, as a custodian, to ensure the country's children and youth benefit from the blessing of education. This, he said, was why locals chose to donate their land. Director of Education Maulvi Mohammad Rahmani described the community's donation as a significant and commendable initiative, which

demonstrated the public's strong support for education and their commitment to seeing their children become literate. He added: "We assure the people of Baghli village that, once the necessary resources are available, we will commence the construction of a standard school building." Rahmani also highlighted the widespread support for education in the province, noting that, over the past year alone, residents had donated 10 acres of land to the department for the construction of schools and religious institutions. Gardez (Pajhwok): Counter Narcotics Department personnel discovered three drug factories and seized 730kg of hashish in southeastern Paktia province, an official said on Thursday. Police spokesman Munib Zadrán told Pajhwok Afghan News the three drug factories were recovered during an operation by counter narcotics department personnel in different areas of Ahmadkhil district. Zadrán said cannabis and hashish processing equipment were also seized from these factories. According to him, no one has been detained, but security forces are investigating the case. A few days ago, security forces seized 503 kilograms of hashish in the Zargul area of Ahmadabad district.

Three drug factories discovered, 730kg of hashish seized in Paktia



KARACHI: PPP general secretary, Hamayun Khan and Faryal Talpur posing a photo with party's Chief Bilawal Bhutto Zardari after meeting.

25 killed in Israeli strikes on Gaza

GAZA CITY (AFP): Gaza's civil defense agency reported on Thursday that a wave of Israeli air strikes hit multiple encampments for displaced Palestinians across the territory, killing at least 25 people.

Agency spokesman Mahmud Bassal said an overnight strike targeted several tents in the Al-Mawasi area of the southern city of Khan Yunis, resulting in 16 deaths. "At least 16 martyrs, most of them women and children, and 23 others were wounded following a direct strike by two Israeli missiles on several tents housing displaced families in the Al-Mawasi area of Khan Yunis," Bassal said. According to Bassal, two additional strikes on other encampments of displaced people killed eight and wounded several more. Seven were killed in a strike on tents in the northern town of Beit Lahia, while another attack near the Al-Mawasi area killed a father and his child who were living in a tent, Bassal said.

AP adds: Aid groups are raising new alarm over Israel's blockade of the war-ravaged Gaza Strip, where no food or other supplies have been allowed in for more than six weeks. Thousands of children are malnourished, and most people are only eating one meal every other day, the United Nations says.

Israel ended a ceasefire last month and renewed its bombardment, killing hundreds of people and seizing large parts of the territory to pressure Hamas to accept changes to the deal that would speed the release of hostages. Israeli strikes overnight into Thursday killed at least 23 people, including a family of 10. A strike in the southern city of Khan Yunis killed five children, four women and a man from the same family, all of whom suffered severe burns, according to Nasser Hospital, which received the bodies. Strikes in northern Gaza killed 13 people, including nine children, according to the Indonesian Hospital. The Israeli military

says it tries to avoid harming civilians and blames their deaths on Hamas because it operates in residential areas. There was no immediate comment on the latest strikes.

The UN humanitarian office, known as OCHA, said that almost all of Gaza's more than 2 million people now rely on charity kitchens supported by aid groups, which can prepare just 1 million meals a day. Other food distribution programs have shut down for lack of supplies, and the UN and other aid groups have been sending their remaining stocks to the charity kitchens.

The only other way to get food in Gaza is from markets. But prices are spiraling and shortages are widespread, meaning humanitarian aid is the primary food source for 80 percent of the population, the World Food Program said in its monthly report for April. "The Gaza Strip is now likely facing the worst humanitarian crisis in the 18 months since the escalation of hostilities in October 2023," OCHA said.

Most people in Gaza are now down to one meal a day, said Shaina Low, a spokesperson for the Norwegian Refugee Council. "It's far lower than what is needed," she said. Water is also growing scarce, with Palestinians standing in long lines to fill jerry cans from trucks. Omar Shatat, an official with a local water utility, said people are down to six or seven liters per day, well below the amount the UN estimates is needed to meet basic needs.

In March, more than 3,600 children were newly admitted for treatment for acute malnutrition, up from around 2,000 the month before, according to OCHA, which said "the rapid deterioration of the nutrition situation is already visible." At the same time, aid groups' ability to treat malnourished children is hampered by Israel's airstrikes and ground operations, which resumed on March 18.

Pakistan, Bangladesh resume talks

DHAKA: Pakistani Foreign Secretary Amna Baloch arrived in Dhaka to lead Pakistan's delegation in the Foreign Office Consultations (FOC), marking the first high-level diplomatic engagement between Pakistan and Bangladesh in 15 years.

According to the Dhaka Tribune, Baloch was received by Ishrat Jahan, Director General of the Bangladeshi Foreign Ministry. She will participate in the FOC alongside her Bangladeshi counterpart, Foreign Secretary Jashim Uddin.

The consultations, proposed by Islamabad, aim to revive and strengthen bilateral ties that had been stagnant for over a decade. All key bilateral matters are expected to be discussed, The Daily Star reported, citing diplomatic sources. In a further sign of warming ties, Pakistani Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar is expected to visit Bangladesh on April 27-28.

The resumption of talks follows a shift in Bangladesh's foreign policy posture after the ouster of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in a popular uprising in August last year. Her departure to India, a long-time ally, created space for Dhaka to recalibrate its regional relationships, including with Islamabad.

Recent months have seen significant diplomatic and trade developments. Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and Bangladesh's interim leader Muhammad Yunus reaffirmed their commitment to stronger ties in a phone call last month. Economic relations are also improving. In February, the two nations began direct government-to-government trade with Pakistan importing 50,000 tonnes of rice. Private trade resumed in November 2024, when a cargo ship sailed directly from Karachi to Chittagong for the first time in decades. — Agencies

Iran, US second round of talks in Rome

DUBAI (AP): Iran confirmed that the next round of nuclear talks with the United States this weekend will be held in Rome after earlier confusion over where the negotiations would be held.

The announcement by Iranian state television came as Iran's President Masoud Pezeshkian formally approved the resignation of one of his vice presidents who served as Tehran's key negotiator in its 2015 nuclear deal with world powers. The head of the United Nations' nuclear watchdog, Rafael Mariano Grossi of the International Atomic Energy Agency, also arrived in the Islamic Republic on Wednesday.

His talks may include negotiations over just what access the IAEA inspectors can get under any proposed deal. The state TV announcement said Oman will again mediate the talks on Saturday in Rome. Oman's foreign minister served as an interlocutor between the two sides at talks last weekend in Muscat, the sultanate's capital. Officials initially on Monday identified Rome as hosting the negotiations, only for Iran to insist early Tuesday they would return to Oman.

Hungary, Pakistan lift visa requirement for diplomatic passports

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan and Hungary have signed an agreement to abolish visa requirements for diplomatic passport holders, further deepening government-to-government and people-to-people connections. Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar stated this while addressing a joint press conference Hungary's Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade Péter Szijjártó in Islamabad.

Both leaders also led their respective sides in the delegation-level talks which followed the signing of accords of cooperation in different sectors. Dar said that Pakistan and Hungary desired to strengthen cooperation in agriculture, healthcare, Information Technology and industrial manufacturing, citing huge potential.

He said that both countries commemorated 60th anniversary of diplomatic relations this year—a partnership that has flourished across political, economic, scientific, and cultural spheres. Calling Pakistan and Hungary trusted friends and partners, with ties rooted in shared understanding of peace, and development, he said both sides discussed enhancing cooperation and addressing regional and global challenges.

DPM Dar reaffirmed Pakistan's commitment to strengthening ties under Hungary's "Eastern Opening Policy," developed under Prime Minister Viktor Orbán and aligning closely with Pakistan's own vision. Commending Hungary's contributions to Pakistan's development, and the successful operations of the

Hungarian MOL Group in the country he said that the recently held third Joint Commission further fortified plans to leverage Hungarian expertise in agriculture, water management, and other sectors.

Besides, the Business Forum held earlier on the day showcased these opportunities as the Hungarian minister was accompanied by 17 businessmen from different sectors. Dar expressed gratitude for Hungary's continued support for the GSP+ scheme and said that MoUs and agreements signed during the visit would give a new impetus to cultural ties.

The deputy prime minister told the media that during the meeting, he underscored Pakistan's principled stance on Jammu and Kashmir and reiterated steadfast support for the Palestinian cause based on the two-state solution. He briefed the Hungarian delegation on the situation in Afghanistan and the associated security challenges.

Both sides emphasised the need for a peaceful resolution to the conflict in Ukraine and the importance of constructive dialogue. In his remarks, the Hungarian Minister Péter Szijjártó welcomed the signing of the agreement to abolish visa requirements for diplomatic passport holders and expressed Hungary's desire to intensify bilateral relations.

He emphasized that mutual respect should guide international politics and that judgmental and critical attitudes had led to problems in global politics. He said that instead of dividing into blocs, international politics should promote connectivity. Regarding accords on cultural coop-

eration, he said both nations had rich histories and cultural heritages as sources of strength.

Appreciating Pakistan's efforts in combating terrorism, he acknowledged the serious security challenges in the region, especially in relation to Afghanistan, including the threat of terrorism and illegal migration. He reaffirmed his country's support for the extension of the GSP+ program to Pakistan, calling it a mutual interest. He highlighted recent successes in economic cooperation, including the doubling of trade volume.

He told the media that Hungary had carried out 16 humanitarian programs for Christian communities in Pakistan and offered 400 scholarships to Pakistani students annually. Calling it the most common success story, he referred to the \$400 million investment of Hungarian company MOL in Pakistan over the last 25 years to boost both Pakistan's energy security and Hungary's economic interests.

Replying to a question, he said Hungary could offer cooperation in food security, water management, and medical technologies. To a question, Deputy Prime Minister Dar highlighted Pakistan's efforts to engage with Afghanistan, including the appointment of a Special Envoy. He also announced his upcoming visit to Kabul in the next few days. Earlier, the Deputy Prime Minister Ishaq Dar and the Hungarian Foreign and Trade Minister Péter Szijjártó signed an agreement on visa exemption for diplomatic passport holders and two Memoranda of Understanding to promote cooperation in culture and archaeology domains.

KP CM urges lawyers to unite for jailed Imran

F.P. Report

LAHORE: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur on Thursday asked the lawyers to unite in support of jailed PTI founder Imran Khan,

warning that Pakistan was being reduced to a state of political captivity where decision-makers preferred "slaves over leaders."

Addressing the Lahore High Court Bar Association, he said: "Pakistan's sovereignty is at stake and democracy is being hollowed out by systemic manipulation and enforced obedience."

Referring to Khan's continued detention, the KP chief minister maintained that the former prime minister's imprisonment was not due to any quest for power, but because "he speaks of the rule of law

and the honour of the Prophet (Peace Be Upon Him)." He said, "They fear him because he talks about Pakistan's autonomy and dignity."

Drawing parallels with Pakistan's bleeding political history, Gandapur alleged that successive regimes were installed through coercive means. "Governments were formed by abducting people, martial laws were imposed, Bhutto was sent to the gallows and later given an award". He said all this was done to serve a narrative of convenience.

"We are no longer sovereign as we are drowning in debt. Even our cabinet and leadership are bound in chains," he said. He said democracy existed in name only while elections are manipulated to favour

hand-picked candidates.

Addressing the legal fraternity, he remarked: "You are lawyers, but today, you must also become the plaintiffs. The Establishment doesn't want independent voices." He urged the audience to commit themselves to Khan's cause: "Unite, move forward, stand with Khan. Very soon, he will be among us again," he said to a loud applause.

In a political overture to the legal community, the KP chief minister announced a Rs50 million grant for the Lahore High Court Bar Association, asserting that Khyber Pakhtunkhwa was among the country's wealthiest provinces. "If things continue like this, people will leave this country. Is that the war you want — a war against your people? he questioned.



KARACHI: An Afghan refugee loading his belongings on the rooftop of a bus as they leave for their homeland, Afghanistan.

Saif denies federal minister's allegations

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: KP Information Adviser Barrister Dr. Saif has strongly rejected the allegations made by Federal Minister for Petroleum against the KP Chief Minister, hinting at possible legal action. Responding to the federal minister's statement, Barrister Saif stated that

Ali Parvez Malik made false and fabricated accusations against CM Ali Amin Gandapur. He clarified that the Chief Minister did not sign any documents related to the Mines and Minerals Bill, nor has any agreement been made with the federal government on the matter.

He challenged the federal minister to present evidence to support his claims, otherwise, the KP government reserved the right to initiate legal proceedings for defamation. Dr. Saif emphasised that the Mines and Minerals Bill was drafted solely with the province's interests in mind,

ensuring the protection and development of KP's mineral resources. He said the bill was created without any external influence. He added that while other provinces may have legislated under federal directives, KP has crafted its laws based on the will and benefit of its people.

Meanwhile, Advisor to the Chief Minister on Information & Public Relations, Barrister Dr. Saif has highlighted the enduring Pakistan-China relationship and the critical importance of national identity for Pakistan's progress. The seminar, organized by China Window in Peshawar, was praised for facilitating meaningful dialogue on investment promotion and issues of national and international importance. Barrister Dr. Saif commended Anjad Aziz Malik for his exceptional efforts in hosting the event, describing such gatherings as vital for enhancing interaction and addressing topics

of national importance. "Initiatives like these deserve appreciation as they strengthen our collective resolve and contribute to nation-building," he stated, expressing hope that such efforts would continue to inspire.

Reflecting on Pakistan-China relations, Dr. Saif invoked a Chinese proverb: "A close neighbor is better than a distant relative," underscoring China's role as a steadfast and reliable neighbor. He highlighted the consistent and stable nature of bilateral ties, noting that unlike relations with other neighbors, Pakistan's friendship with China has remained unwavering, built on durable foundations. "China has always been a partner with whom we have engaged on the basis of enduring friendship," he remarked. Dr. Saif urged Pakistan to draw two key lessons from China's journey, the strength of national identity and the power of rediscovery.

Trump says he's in 'no rush' to end tariffs

WASHINGTON (AP): President Donald Trump said Thursday that he is in "no rush" to reach trade deals because of the revenues his tariffs are generating, but suggested while meeting with Italian Premier Giorgia Meloni that it would be easy to find an agreement with the European Union.

His administration has indicated that offers are coming from other countries and it is possible to do 90 deals during the 90-day tariff pause, but the president played down the likelihood of an accelerated timeline, saying any agreements would come "at a certain point." "We're in no rush," Trump said.

Meloni's meeting with Trump will test her mettle as a bridge between the European Union and the United States. She is the first European leader to have face-to-face talks with him since he announced and then partially suspended 20 percent tariffs on European exports. Meloni secured the meeting as Italy's leader, but she also has, in a sense, been "knighted" to represent the EU at a critical juncture in the trade war. She was in close contact with EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen before the trip, and "the outreach is ... closely coordinated," a commission spokeswoman said.

"We know we are in a difficult moment," Meloni said this week in Rome. "Most certainly, I am well aware of what I represent, and what I am defending." The EU is defending what it calls "the most important commercial relationship in the world," with annual trade reaching 1.6 trillion euros (\$1.8 trillion).

Trade negotiations fall under the authority of the commission, which is pushing for a zero-for-zero tariff deal with Washington. Trump administration officials, in talks with the EU, have yet to publicly show signs of relenting on the president's insistence that a baseline 10 percent tariff be charged on all foreign imports. Trump paused for 90 days his initial 20 percent tax on EU products so that negotiations could occur. The EU has already engaged with Trump administration officials in Washington. Maroš Šefčovic, the European Commissioner for trade and economic security, said he met on Monday with Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick and US Trade Representative Jamieson Greer.

Šefčovic said afterward on X that it would "require a significant joint effort on both sides" to get to zero tariffs and work on non-tariff trade barriers. Meloni's margins for progress are more in gaining clarity on the Republican president's goals rather than outright concessions, experts say.

Current account logs record \$1.2b March surplus

F.P. Report

KARACHI: Pakistan's current account recorded its highest-ever surplus in a single month, posting \$1.2 billion in March 2025, according to the State Bank of Pakistan, mainly fueled by a 37% year-on-year rise in remittances and strong export growth.

Brokerage Topline Securities notes that March's surplus — the highest ever recorded in a single month — compares with a \$363 million surplus in the same month last year and a \$97 million deficit in February 2025. This takes the cumulative surplus for the first nine months of

FY25 to \$1.86 billion, a sharp reversal from the \$1.65 billion deficit during the same period last fiscal year.

The previous record for the highest monthly surplus was \$981 million in August 2012, as per the brokerage report. The improvement was underpinned by a 37% year-on-year increase in remittances, which jumped to \$4.1 billion in March, also reflecting a 30% increase from February.

Topline attributed the surge to seasonal inflows (Eid/Ramadan), a rise in migration of workers, improved formal channel routing and favourable incentives from financial institu-

tions. The central bank has since raised its full-year remittance forecast to \$38 billion from \$36 billion. On a monthly basis, the Services deficit narrowed to \$226 million, down 13% from February, though it was still 14% higher than a year earlier. The primary income deficit rose to \$657 million, up 11% year-on-year (YoY).

Exports of goods also grew 10% YoY to \$2.77 billion in March, while imports rose 8% to \$4.95 billion. Topline expects the current account to remain in surplus for the remainder of FY25, forecasting a full-year surplus of \$1.24 billion, equivalent to 0.3% of GDP.