

**Ilham to arrive on 26th**  
**F.P. Report**  
ISLAMABAD: The President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev is scheduled to undertake an official visit to Pakistan on April 26-27, 2025. The visit is being seen as a significant step in further strengthening bilateral relations between the two brotherly countries. This high-level engagement comes as a follow-up to Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's recent visit to Azerbaijan.

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**Two terrorists killed**  
**F.P. Report**  
RAWALPINDI: Security forces conducted an intelligence based operation in general area Buleda, Kech District, on reported presence of terrorists. During the conduct of operation, own troops effectively engaged the terrorists' location and after an intense fire exchange, two terrorists were sent to hell. The killed terrorists remained actively involved in numerous terrorist activities.

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# No one to be allowed to disrupt peace in Balochistan

## Military's top brass reaffirms commitment to crush facilitators of hostile forces



**F.P. Report**

RAWALPINDI: Chief of Army Staff (COAS), General Syed Asim Munir, NI (M), chaired the 268th Corps Commanders' Conference (CCC) at the General Headquarters (GHQ). Forum offered Fatiha and paid profound tribute to the supreme sacrifices of Shuhada of the Armed Forces, Law Enforcement Agencies and the citizens who have laid their lives for peace and stability in the country.

The forum received a comprehensive briefing on the prevailing geo-strategic environment, emerging national security challenges, and Pakistan's strategic response to evolving threats. Undertaking a meticulous assessment of regional and internal security dynamics, the forum reaffirmed its resolve to eradicate terrorism in all its forms and manifestations regardless of the cost.

It reiterated Pakistan's unwavering commitment to bringing the full force of the state against facilitators and abettors acting on the behest of hostile elements seeking

to destabilize the country.

The forum reaffirmed that, "No one will be allowed to disrupt peace in Balochistan and nefarious designs of foreign-sponsored proxies including social disruptive elements and their so-called political supporters advancing their narrow political interests at the cost of stability and prosperity of Balochistan will be decisively thwarted with the unwavering support of the people of Balochistan, InshaAllah. The real face of all foreign and domestic elements, the nexus between them and their endeavours to induce chaos and thrive on it stand fully exposed and will be dealt without impunity."

Emphasizing the swift and effective implementation of Vision Azme-e-Istehkam under the ambit of National Action Plan (NAP), the forum underscored the imperative of a whole-of-the-nation approach. The state apparatus and institutions will resolutely implement the law within the confines of the Constitution and no leniency and infirmity will be shown. COAS lauded the initiation of District

Coordination Committees across Pakistan and stressed the necessity of sustained, coordinated efforts in alignment with governmental directives to expedite the implementation of NAP, ensuring seamless inter-institutional collaboration.

COAS reiterated that "Pakistan Army will extend full support to the government and law enforcement agencies (LEAs) in enforcing stringent legal measures against illicit economic activities, which are intrinsically linked to the financing of terrorism. There is no space for terrorists and their facilitators in Pakistan".

Expressing deep concern over the persistent and egregious human rights violations in the Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJK) and the Indian Army's unprovoked ceasefire violations along the Line of Control (LoC), the forum underscored "Pakistan's deep and unwavering support to the just cause of the people of Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir and the need of sustained diplomatic engagement to highlight ongoing human rights abuses and violations on the global stage."

The forum expressed complete solidarity with the people of Palestine and condemned serious human rights violations and war crimes being perpetrated in Gaza. Forum also reiterated unequivocal diplomatic, political and moral support to the people of Palestine. In the end, COAS directed field commanders to uphold the highest standards of operational readiness and professional excellence, ensuring rigorous training to maintain peak combat preparedness.

## SBP injects over Rs 2.94tr in market

**F.P. Report**

KARACHI: The State Bank of Pakistan (SBP), Friday, injected Rs 2,943.4 billion in the market through reverse repo purchase and Shariah Compliant Mudarabah based Open Market Operations (OMO).

The SBP conducted the Open Market Operation, Reverse Repo Purchase (Injection) for 7-day tenor on April 04, 2025 and accepted an amount of Rs 2,386.9 billion against 22 bids while another Rs 556.5 billion were injected through Shariah Compliant Mudarabah based OMO.

The central bank received 22 bids for 7-day tenor cumulatively offering Rs 2,386.9 billion at the rate of return ranging between 12.07 to 12.15 percent. The SBP accepted the entire amount offered through all the 22 quotes for the 7-day tenor at 12.07% rate of return.

Meanwhile, SBP also conducted Shariah Compliant Mudarabah based Open Market Operation for the 7-day tenor. The central bank received 10 bids offering an amount of Rs 556.5 billion at the rate of return ranging between 12.09 to 12.15 %.

The SBP accepted the entire amount offered through 10 quotes at the 12.09% rate of return.

## IMF team arrives

**F.P. Report**

ISLAMABAD: An IMF (International Monetary Fund) delegation has arrived in Pakistan to review the budget proposals for the next fiscal year. According to the Ministry of Finance insiders, the delegation will meet with finance ministry officials to prepare budget proposals.

"The delegation will negotiate with Pakistani authorities on tax revenue measures, control over expenditures, and developmental spending," the sources said. They IMF will also set targets for the implementation of agricultural tax collection methods by the provinces, they added.

Additionally, the implementation of pension scheme will be finalized, and external financing for debt payments and development programmes will also be concluded, they continued. According to sources, after reviewing the progress on commitments, a decision will be made regarding the next tranche of the loan under EFF (Extended Fund Facility).

# Bilawal calls for national unity

## — warns against exploitation of Balochistan crisis

**F.P. Report**

LARKANA: Pakistan People's Party (PPP) Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari on Friday warned against attempts to exploit the situation in Balochistan and vowed to counter any threats to the federation.

He made these remarks while addressing a gathering on the 46th death anniversary of former Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto in Garhi Khuda Bakhsh. "The wave of terrorism from Balochistan to Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is at its peak. Addressing internal weaknesses is part of our agenda, and we are committed to eliminating the sense of deprivation," Bilawal said, urging the nation to stand united against those who spill the blood of innocent people.

Bilawal added that terrorists attempt to radicalize Baloch women into becoming suicide bombers. "They hide behind religion and nationalism, but the truth is, terrorists have neither a religion nor a nation. They sell their faith to global powers," he remarked.

The PPP chairman said



President Asif Ali Zardari had ensured justice for his father through a presidential reference, leading to the Supreme Court's declaration of Bhutto's innocence after five decades. He commended PPP workers for their unwavering commitment, highlighting the party's role in restoring the Constitution and launching welfare initiatives, including the Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP).

Bilawal also highlighted the Sindh government's progress in healthcare, noting that the province now offers world-class medical

facilities from Karachi to Sukkur, attracting patients from across Pakistan. He announced plans to grant land ownership to two million families and generate one million jobs, reinforcing the PPP's commitment to people-centric governance.

The PPP chairman further lauded the provincial government's efforts in curbing inflation and emphasized the importance of development models similar to Tharparkar's, advocating for collaborative projects involving all provinces to ensure balanced economic growth.

# KP won't expel Afghan refugees 'forcefully': CM

**F.P. Report**

ISLAMABAD: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur on Friday announced that no Afghan refugee would be deported "forcefully" from the northwestern region of the country.

Addressing a press conference in Islamabad, the KP CM said: "No Afghan refugee will be expelled by force from KP. We are against such kind of forcible deportation of Afghan refugees."

During his interaction with journalists on Friday, CM Gandapur said: "We have cultural and historical traditions regarding Afghan refugees," adding that those refugees who wish to leave voluntarily would be provided with resources to facilitate their return with respect.

Responding to a question, the chief minister said that the only way forward



with Afghanistan is through negotiations. Raising questions over the intentions of the Centre, the KP CM said that they were still waiting for the for the federal government to approve the terms of reference (TOR) to initiate talks with the interim Afghanistan government led by the Afghan Taliban.

CM Gandapur said that stability in the region was

linked with peace in Afghanistan. He said that PTI had the solution to the menace of terrorism being faced by the country. Responding to the incumbent government's allegations about the resettlement of terrorists and the resurgence of militancy in the country, the CM termed the statements from the treasury benches "extremely irresponsible".

# PM lauds success of Ramazan Package

**F.P. Report**

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Friday, appreciating the effective and transparent implementation of the Ramazan Relief Package 2025, directed the authorities concerned to emulate this model in future government schemes.

The prime minister, chairing a meeting to review the implementation of the Package, lauded the performance of the government's core team and supporting institutions. He said that under the Package, a first-ever digital wallet was introduced, and funds were delivered to the beneficiaries transparently and smoothly.

The prime minister said that the Package was introduced countrywide including Gilgit-Baltistan and Azad Jammu and Kashmir, and also appreciated the State Bank of Pakistan, Benazir Income Support Programme, Pakistan Telecommunication Authority, National Database and Registration Authority, and other supporting institutions for ensuring transparency in the process.

He told the participants of the meeting that complaints received during the execution of the Package would be considered for future planning. During the briefing on the Package's implementation, it was told that 79% of the funds had been delivered to the beneficiaries. A total of 2,224 employees were deployed, and urgent steps were taken to resolve a total of 1,273 complaints received.

It was told that banks and other partnering institutions made 6.2 million robocalls, 178,700 outbound calls, and sent 6.1 million SMS messages to raise awareness about the facility. Besides, the National Telecom Corporation's call center handled 126,839 outbound and 158,551 inbound calls to guide people about the Package. Besides, 1.9 million digital payments were made, and 951,191 digital wallets were used, which was an important step towards the realisation of the Digital Nation Pakistan vision.

The participants were told that

## Bhutto as 'champion' of democratic values: Shehbaz

**F.P. Report**

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Friday paid tribute to former Prime Minister Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto on his 46th death anniversary, remembering him as a champion of democratic values in Pakistan. The prime minister, in a statement, said that the services of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto in promoting democracy and democratic values in Pakistan would always be remembered. He said that under Bhutto's leadership, Pakistan adopted the unanimous Constitution of 1973 who also played a key role in the unity of the Muslim Ummah.

Meanwhile, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Friday contacted President Asif Ali Zardari via telephone and inquired after his health. The prime minister extended his best wishes for the president and prayed for his early recovery, saying that prayers of the entire nation were with President Asif Ali Zardari.

823,653 women and 2,541 persons-with-disabilities also used digital wallets to receive funds. Moreover, a comprehensive awareness campaign on the Ramadan Package was conducted through electronic, print, and social media.

The meeting was attended by federal ministers Ahsan Iqbal, Rana Tanveer Hussain, Ahmad Khan Cheema, Attaullah Tarar, and Shaza Fatima Khawaja, Special Assistant to PM Haroon Akhtar, State Bank Governor Jameel Ahmad, relevant government officials, and representatives from relevant private companies.

**Shehbaz visits Myanmar embassy, conveys condolences over loss of lives in earthquake:** Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif visited the Embassy of Myanmar here and signed the condolence book, opened by the embassy in the wake of the devastating earthquake that struck the country on March 28, 2025.

The prime minister was warmly received by the Ambassador of Myanmar Wunna Han, who thanked the prime minister for his visit and also for the relief goods provided by Pakistan for those affected by the earthquake in Myanmar. The prime minister conveyed deepest condolences on behalf of the government and people of Pakistan to the government and people of Myanmar on the

tragic loss of precious lives and widespread destruction caused by the earthquake.

He also emphasized that in this hour of grief, Pakistan stood with Myanmar in a spirit of friendship and compassion. He admired the courage and resilience of the people of Myanmar in the face of adversity and expressed solidarity for their swift recovery and rebuilding in the days to come. The Myanmar envoy, while appreciating the prime minister's gracious gesture, conveyed best wishes for him and the people of Pakistan, from the Myanmar leadership.

The Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif expressed satisfaction as the Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX) surged 1800 points in a single day, reaching a historic milestone, with the KSE-100 index crossing all time high mark of 120,000 point.

In a statement issued by the PM Office, the prime minister said that positive direction of the business in Pakistan Stock Exchange reflected growing investor confidence on the government policies. "The government has announced a significant decrease in the power tariffs which will not only give a massive relief to the domestic consumers but also it will be a welcoming sign for the business community and the industrial sector," the prime minister remarked.

# China hits back at Trump tariffs with 34% tax on US goods, export curbs

BANGKOK (AP): Countries and industries were scrambling Friday to respond as President Donald Trump's latest tariffs hikes upend global trade and world markets. China responded to the 34% tariffs imposed by the US on imports from China by announcing it will impose a 34% tariff on imports of all US products beginning April 10.

Taiwan's president promised to provide support to industries most vulnerable to the 32% tariffs Trump ordered in his "Liberation Day" reciprocal tariffs announcement. Vietnam said its deputy prime minister would visit the US for talks on trade. Some, like the head of the EU's European Commission, have vowed to fight back while promising to

improve the rules book for free trade. Others said they were hoping to negotiate with the Trump administration for relief.

As with earlier countermoves to US trade penalties, Beijing hit back with targeted action, as well as its universal 34% tariff on all products from the US. The Commerce Ministry in Beijing said it will impose more export controls on rare earths, which are materials used in high-tech products such as computer chips and electric vehicle batteries. Included in the list was samarium and its compounds, which are used in aerospace manufacturing and the defense sector. Another element called gadolinium is used in MRI scans.

China's customs administration said it had suspended imports of chicken from two US suppliers, Mountaire Farms of Delaware and Coastal Processing. It said Chinese customs had repeatedly detected furazolidone, a drug banned in China, in shipments from those companies. Additionally, the Chinese government said it has added 27 firms to lists of companies subject to trade sanctions or export controls.

For good measure, China also filed a lawsuit with the World Trade Organization, saying the US tariffs were "a typical unilateral bullying practice that endangers the stability of the global economic and trade order." India

was hit by a 26% tariff rate, lower than the 34% for Chinese exports and 46% for Vietnam. Its Commerce Ministry said that it was "studying the opportunities that may arise due to this new development in US trade policy." It said talks were underway on a trade agreement, including "deepening supply chain integration."

The U.S. was New Delhi's biggest trading partner in 2024 with two-way trade estimated at \$129 billion, according to US data. They have set an ambitious target of more than doubling their bilateral trade to \$500 billion by 2030. Most pharmaceuticals and other medicines, important Indian exports to the US, are exempt from the reciprocal tar-

iffs. However, diamonds and other gems, another major export industry, are subject to the higher duties.

Business groups said they viewed the challenge as a chance to improve India's competitiveness. "At a time when global trade dynamics are shifting rapidly, Indian exporters must be equipped with the right policies, strategies, and support to compete effectively," S.C. Ralkan, head of the Federation of Indian Export Organizations, said in a statement. Most US trading partners have emphasized they hope negotiations can help resolve trade friction with Washington. Japanese Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba said he was prepared to fly to Washington, in a last-

ditch effort to forestall the 24% tariffs Trump ordered for exports from the biggest Asian US ally.

"The global trading system has serious deficiencies," the president of the EU's European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, said Thursday while on a visit to Uzbekistan. But she chided Trump, saying that "reaching for tariffs as your first and last tool will not fix it. This is why from the onset we have always been ready to negotiate with the United States." In Italy, Premier Giorgia Meloni told state TV she believes the 20% US tariffs on exports from Europe were wrong, but "it is not the catastrophe that some are making it out to be."



# Punjab’s 1st govt cancer hospital to gain legal status as separate entity

LAHORE (APP): The Nawaz Sharif Institute of Cancer Treatment and Research, Punjab’s first government-run cancer hospital, is set to acquire legal status as a separate entity, as the draft of its governing legislation has been finalised.

The draft of the Nawaz Sharif Cancer Treatment and Research Act 2025 reveals that the hospital will be managed by a 13-member board of governors, with oversight from the Punjab chief minister. Dr Kiran Khurshid, the director general (M&E) of the project, informed APP

on Friday that the hospital would offer three payment options for cancer treatment: free, shared, and full payment.

The hospital will feature key leadership positions, including chairman, dean, hospital administrator, hospital director, director of nursing, and director of finance. Importantly, staff at the Nawaz Sharif Cancer Hospital will not be classified as government employees, and the hospital will have the authority to directly collect donations to support its operations.

Dr Kiran said that the

increasing number of cancer patients in the province prompted the Punjab government to establish this state-of-the-art facility in Valencia Town, designed to meet all the needs of cancer treatment and recovery.

In October 2024, Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif laid the foundation for the hospital, which will be the largest public-sector cancer treatment centre in Pakistan. It will provide free treatment for level 3 and level 4 cancer patients. The chief minister has set a 12-month timeline for com-

pleting the first phase of the hospital, which will also include the establishment of the country’s first public-sector bone-marrow transplant centre.

This project is seen as a critical development, addressing the urgent need for comprehensive cancer care under one roof. The hospital will be built on a 333-kanal plot of land in the southwest of Lahore, on Pine Avenue Road. Its strategic location, with direct access from major highways, makes it highly accessible for patients traveling from across the province and beyond.



LAHORE: A large number of people gather at Mela Baharan 2025, organized by the Punjab Govt in collaboration with the Pakistan Institute of Fashion Design (PIFD) and the Walled City of Lahore Authority (WCLA).

# Blind murder case solved by Peshawar Police

E.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Under the guidance of SP Cantt Division, Aitzaz Arif, and the supervision of DSP Peshtakhara Circle, Muhammad Ashfaq Khan, a major operation was carried out by SHO Tattara Police, Cadet Qamar Shehzad, investigation officers, and the Women’s Police Unit, which led to the resolution of the blind murder case of a young resident of Buner.

The accused were exposed within a week. It was revealed that the victim’s fiancée was involved in the murder. She had planned the murder with her accomplice, Zahid, and had plotted to eliminate the victim, Abrar, by luring him into a trap. On March

27, one week ago, the accused shot and killed the victim within Tattara Police jurisdiction.

During the investigation, the police interrogated the victim’s relatives, family members, other acquaintances, and his fiancée. Given the contradictory statements made by the fiancée, further interrogation was carried out, which led to the revelation of the truth.

The fiancée confessed to conspiring with Zahid, who carried out the murder of her fiancé, Abrar. Zahid was arrested by the police, and the weapon used in the crime, along with the vehicle involved in the murder, was seized. The female accomplice was transferred to the Women’s Police Station for further investi-

gation. The investigation of the suspects continues.

According to the details, on March 27, the complainant, Mahabbat Khan, son of Abdul Hamid, had reported the murder of his nephew, Abrar, to the Tattara Police, naming unknown suspects. A case was registered, and a thorough investigation was initiated from all angles.

SP Cantt Division, Aitzaz Arif, took strict notice of the blind murder and formed a special team consisting of DSP Peshtakhara Circle, Muhammad Ashfaq Khan, SHO Tattara Police, Cadet Qamar Shehzad, and investigation officers to trace the suspects and arrest them.

The special team carried out a comprehensive investigation, based on scientific

and technical methods, and questioned several suspicious individuals. In order to uncover the truth and arrest the involved suspects, the team included the victim’s family members, relatives, and fiancée in the investigation. The special team, along with the Women’s Police Unit, interrogated the fiancée, Ms. (S) Bibi, daughter of Mahabbat Khan. She confessed that she had planned the murder of her fiancé, Abrar, with Zahid, who executed the killing. Zahid, son of Rameez, was arrested, and the weapon used in the murder and the vehicle were seized by the police. The female accomplice was transferred to the Women’s Police Station for further questioning, and investigations are ongoing.

## Police nab four suspected robbers

KARACHI (PPI): Karachi police apprehended four alleged robbers in three separate encounters, successfully recovering weapons and stolen goods.

The Karachi Police Spokesperson stated that the operations, conducted in Shah Latif Town and New Karachi, resulted in the injury of all suspects, leading to their subsequent hospitalization.

In Shah Latif Town’s Sector 21/C, a shootout ended with the arrest of Zahoor Ahmed, whose possession included a pistol, rounds, a mobile phone, cash, and a motorcycle.

Meanwhile, in New Karachi’s Sector 11A, Sheraz was captured, though his accomplice managed to escape. Police retrieved a pistol, mobile phones, and a motorcycle from the scene.

Further, in Quaidabad, officers detained Bilal and Arshad Ali, each found with a pistol and stolen items. Police are continuing their investigations to trace any further connections and accomplices linked to these incidents, aiming to clamp down on crime in the city.

# MQM-P leaders, led by Farooq Sattar, call on Sindh Governor

KARACHI (PPI): Members of the National Assembly from Muttahida Qaumi Movement Pakistan (MQM-P), led by senior party leader Dr Farooq Sattar, today engaged in discussions with Governor Sindh Kamran Khan Tessori to address key welfare initiatives and the national political and economic landscape.

The delegation, which included MNAs Arshad

Vohra and Farhan Chishti, was joined by prominent businessman Arshad Wali and other entrepreneurs. The meeting revolved around the progress of welfare initiatives under the Governor’s Initiatives.

Dr Sattar emphasized the importance of collaboration between political leaders and the business community to drive economic development. Governor Tessori high-

lighted the efforts being made to uplift the welfare projects aimed at improving the lives of citizens.

The dialogue also delved into the broader political and economic situation, with participants exchanging views on strategies to tackle ongoing challenges. The meeting concluded with a mutual commitment to continue working together for the betterment of the region.

# Announcement of protests against new canals in Sindh

KARACHI (PPI): The President of Pakistan Muslim Functional Sindh and Chief Coordinator of GDA, Syed Sadruddin Shah Rashdi, has announced the protest demonstrations against the construction of six new canals from the Indus River.

These protests will be held on April 5th from Sakrand to Hyderabad, and on April 6th in Karachi, with a demonstration also planned at the Karachi Press Club.

In a press release issued here today, Syed

Sadruddin Shah Rashdi instructed the workers of the Functional League to actively participate in the protests. He stated that they will neither allow more canals to be built on the Indus River nor let the Pakistan People’s Party government remain in power. He emphasized that no province should suffer drought to facilitate the development of another province.

Addressing the participants of Eid Milan party at Functional League House in Karachi, Mr Rashdi appealed to the

people of Karachi to join the ongoing protest to save the Indus River. He asserted that the people of Sindh know how to protect their interests and will fight for the survival of the Indus River.

The event was also attended by GDA Sindh’s General Secretary Dr. Safdar Abbasi and other leaders. Criticism was directed at the policies of the People’s Party, with claims that the Zardari League has approved the extraction of canals from the Indus River.

Functional League

Sindh’s Secretary General Sardar Abdul Rahim addressed the event, urging the people of Karachi to support their cause to save the Indus River. He warned that if the Indus River dries up, the people of Karachi will suffer for every drop of water.

Speakers at the event suggested that if the People’s Party is truly committed to Sindh, it should announce its separation from the federal government. Maulana Manzar-ul-Haq Thanvi and other speakers also addressed the gathering.

## Motorcyclist killed in road mishap

KARACHI (APP): A young motorcyclist was killed in a road accident that occurred near Steel Mill More area of Karachi, tv channels quoting Rescue sources reported on Friday.

According to details, a rashly driven trailer hit the two-wheeler passing through Steel Mill More area. As a result, ill-fated young man died on the spot. The trailer’s driver managed to escape from the scene. The Rescue team rushed to the site and shifted the body to hospital. Police team also reached the spot and started search for the driver of the heavy vehicle.

## Mela Baharan begins

LAHORE (APP): The much-anticipated ‘Mela Baharan 2025’ started on Friday with a spectacular inauguration here at Delhi Gate.

A three-day cultural celebration in the heart of Lahore’s Walled City was organized in collaboration with the Punjab government, Gobi’s Paint, Pakistan Institute of Fashion Design (PIFD), Akhuwat, Communal Hub, Allied Bank and the Walled City of Lahore Authority (WCLA). The festival aimed at reviving the city’s rich heritage through music, arts, crafts and cultural performances. The grand opening ceremony saw an impressive turnout of families, tourists and cultural enthusiasts eager to witness the vibrant festivities.

The highlight of the day was the Shahi Guzargah Mosam-e-Bahar Parade, a majestic procession from Delhi Gate to Masjid Wazir Khan Chowk, capturing the true essence of Lahore’s glorious past. Speaking at the inauguration WCLA Director General Kamran Lashari said, “Mela Baharan is more than just a festival, it is a tribute to Lahore’s timeless traditions and an effort to engage the community in preserving our cultural legacy.”

# LHC urges government to declare water emergency

LAHORE (APP): The Lahore High Court (LHC) on Friday urged the Punjab government to declare a water emergency in response to the worsening water crisis.

Justice Shahid Karim made the observation while hearing a set of petitions filed by Haroon Farooq and others against the ineffective measures to control smog.

At the start of proceedings, a member of the Judicial Water and Environment Commission informed the court that the Parks and Horticulture Authority (PHA) must take immediate steps to prevent water wastage. He also stressed the need to develop a timetable for tube wells

operating in urban areas.

The court expressed concern over the water shortage and emphasized the urgency of taking serious and practical steps to address water wastage and scarcity. It instructed that final notices be issued to large housing societies regarding water misuse and warned that if individuals are seen washing vehicles with hoses in these societies, the respective society offices should be sealed.

The court further directed that water recycling plants be installed in all buildings. It noted that Lahore’s water table had been declining rapidly, but efforts by the court and relevant institutions had

helped stabilize it. “We must not let this hard work go to waste,” Justice Karim remarked.

Highlighting the impact of climate change, the court observed that seasonal shifts are finally being noticed and emphasized the crucial role of the monsoon in preventing droughts. It ordered the Director General of the Provincial Disaster Management Authority (PDMA) to issue official notices to departments and institutions, warning them against water wastage. Any violators, the court said, should be reported immediately.

Subsequently, the court adjourned further proceedings until next Friday.

# Strict action to be taken against property tax defaulters

LAHORE (APP): In order to ensure that property tax recovery targets are met, the authorities have decided to take strict action against property tax defaulters.

Excise Department sources told APP on Friday.

This was decided under the instructions of Secretary Excise who instructed the officials to meet their targets before new financial year. The Excise officials were also warned to meet their targets, or face departmental action.

Sources said that DG Excise Omar Sher Chatha, in a recent meeting, ordered strict action in the

last two months of the financial year, adding the DG Excise the target of more than Rs. 42 billion has been achieved across Punjab including Lahore. So far, in the current financial year, Rs. 9 billion more has been collected compared to the previous financial year. They further said in a meeting tough decisions had been taken to achieve the target of estimated target of more than Rs. 56 billion.

The sources, while replying to a query said that DG Excise has succeeded in collecting motor tax, that has reached close to 100 per cent, adding orders were

given to arrest major defaulters to improve property tax.

Inspectors and ETOs who do not achieve the recovery target will be removed from their posts.

Meanwhile, last month, 77 thousand properties worth Rs. 3 billion of defaulters were sealed and more than Rs. 1 billion had been recovered so far.

DG Excise Omar Sher Chatha said that dozens of cases had been registered against those who de-sealed the sealed properties themselves, and the directors themselves have been present in the field for two months for recovery.

# Punjab launches online system for prisoner sentence records, pardons

LAHORE (APP): The Punjab Home Department has introduced a modern online system to provide up-to-date information on prisoners’ sentence reductions and pardons.

This system will allow the families of prisoners across the province to easily check the release date of their loved ones via a simple SMS.

The initiative was officially launched by Punjab Home Secretary Noor-ul-Amin Mengal during a ceremony held at the Home Department here on Friday. The new system allows citizens to obtain detailed information about the prisoner’s pardon history and release date by sending a message to 8070 with the text PMIS

(Space) (Prisoner’s Computer Number). In response, the department will send back a message containing details of the prisoner’s last two pardons and the expected release date. This service is available at a standard charge of just five rupees per message.

According to a spokesperson for the Home Department, there are several ways through which prisoners can receive sentence reductions or pardons, including government-announced pardons, educational achievements, acquiring technical skills, and good behavior. All pardon details are now incorporated into the prisoner’s record immediately, ensuring that no prisoner serves an addi-

tional minute beyond their lawful sentence.

Secretary Noor-ul-Amin Mengal, in his address at the launch ceremony, highlighted that this online system would eliminate any difficulties prisoners or their families might face in obtaining pardon records.

He added that the system ensures complete transparency, and all data related to sentence reductions and releases is now available online. This has been designed to ensure that no prisoner remains incarcerated beyond their allotted sentence.

Furthermore, Mengal emphasized that strict regulations have been issued to ensure the timely updating of pardon records. The Directorate of Monitoring

within the Home Department has been instructed to conduct surprise visits to prisons and ensure the full implementation of the Punjab Chief Minister’s Prison Reforms Agenda. He also made it clear that any violation of these rules would result in strict actions.

The inauguration ceremony was attended by several key officials, including Special Secretary Fazal-ur-Rehman, Additional Secretary Prisons Asim Raza, Chairman Punjab Charity Commission Col. Shehzad Amir, Additional Secretary of Judicial Imran Ranjha, Additional Secretary of Foreign National Security Uzma Saleem and others.

# DeraJat inaugural ceremony arrangements finalized

E.P. Report

DERA ISMAIL KHAN: Arrangements for the grand opening ceremony of the DeraJat Festival have been completed. The event will take place today, Saturday, at the Ratta Kulachi Stadium in Dera Ismail Khan, starting at 3:00 PM.

The festival will showcase a blend of culture, sports, traditional music and recreational activities. The ceremony will feature a parade, cattle show, PT, fireworks, livestock march

and a march-past.

The inauguration of DeraJat will also mark the commencement of the “Mela Espan” festival. According to the Sports Department, approximately 2,500 high-quality horses have been brought to Dera Ismail Khan for the Mela Espan.

On Friday, Provincial Minister for Sports and Youth Affairs, Syed Fakhar Jihan, along with MNA Faisal Amin Gandapur, City Mayor Dera Ismail Khan Umar Amin Gandapur and MPA

Usman Betani, visited the Ratta Kulachi Sports Complex to review the arrangements.

The provincial minister and other parliamentarians inspected the arrangements for the opening ceremony at the stadium.

While speaking on the occasion, Provincial Minister Syed Fakhar Jihan expressed, “We invite sports enthusiasts from all over the country to participate in Dera Jat. This event is a step towards promoting our positive identity.” He fur-

ther added, “DeraJat is an essential event that aims to preserve and promote our traditions, culture, and history.”

The minister highlighted the provincial government’s efforts to keep national and traditional sports, culture, and history alive. On this occasion, Director General of Sports, Abdul Nasir Khan, Regional Sports Officer, Razi Ullah Betani, and other officials briefed the minister on the preparations and activities for the inaugural ceremony.



# DG Health Services clarifies misinformation regarding court verdict on MCC Procurement

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Director General Health Services Dr Muhammad Saleem being Chairman of the Medicine Coordination Cell has strongly condemned the misleading portrayal of the Peshawar High Court's decision circulating on social media and in some sections of the media. He clarified that reports claiming the cancellation of the entire Medicine Coordination Cell (MCC) procurement process for the fiscal year 2024-25 are false and baseless.

Dr Muhammad Saleem stated that out of 1,400 items advertised for procurement, only 15 items awarded to M/S Frontier Dextrose Limited (Respondent No. 6) have been ordered for re-tendering by the honorable court. These specific items were already under a stay order

since November 19, 2024, and no supplies have been made to any health facility during this period.

He further emphasized that the procurement process has been carried out with complete transparency, in accordance with advertised tender documents, approved standards (BSDs), pharmaceutical quality requirements, and relevant laws including the Drug Act 1976, DRAP Act 2012, and the KP Public Procurement Regulatory Authority (KP-PPRA) rules.

Dr Saleem explained that the misinterpretation of the court order is misleading. The court has not ordered the cancellation of the entire MCC procurement; instead, it has only directed re-tendering of items awarded to one company. The spread of misinformation on social media suggesting otherwise is contrary to facts.

The procurement process was conducted under strict oversight by designated committees comprising around 70 professionals including medical experts, administrative heads, and regulatory officials. Every stage of procurement followed rigorous quality assurance measures aligned with national and international standards.

He highlighted that the Department of Health contracts only with manufacturers or importers who qualify under applicable laws. Companies that fail to meet legal and technical criteria are disqualified. Even after awarding the contracts, each batch of medicine is subject to laboratory testing before it is used in any health facility. Any medicine found substandard is dealt with strictly under the Drug Act and DRAP regulations.

For FY 2024-25, the

procurement process began with the advertisement of 1,400 essential medicine items to meet the healthcare needs of KP's population. This was done with the goal of acquiring quality medicines from reputable companies at competitive prices. Throughout the process, full opportunity was provided to aggrieved bidders to present their cases before the procurement authorities and KP-PPRA to ensure transparency and adherence to rules.

Dr Saleem also pointed out that the petition in question was filed by a resident of District Swabi who had no direct connection with the tender process, nor is he enlisted as a manufacturer, importer, or drug distributor with DRAP or the Drug Control Authority in KP. His objection pertained to only two products awarded to M/S Frontier Dextrose

Limited, which were also flagged by Punjab's procurement authority. The court, in its decision, has only ordered the re-tendering of those specific products.

It is important to note that M/S Frontier Dextrose Limited was awarded only 15 out of 1,400 items under the 2024-25 tender. These items have remained under a stay order since November 2024, and no supply has been made to any public health facility to date.

The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Health Department remains committed to transparency, regulatory compliance, and maintaining the highest standards in medicine procurement. All decisions are being made within the legal and regulatory framework to ensure uninterrupted and quality healthcare services to the people of the province.

# Natural disasters and divine will

Muhammad Mohsin Iqbal

A few days ago, a powerful 7.7 magnitude earthquake struck Myanmar on March 28, 2025, with its epicenter near Mandalay. This catastrophic event caused significant casualties, injuries, and destruction in Myanmar, Thailand, and surrounding areas. The devastation was so severe that it seemed as if doomsday had arrived. People from all walks of life, irrespective of their religion, were left helpless, struggling to save themselves. In such dire moments, the reality of human frailty became evident. The fear of death was visible on every face, and in that fear, the recognition of an absolute, undeniable truth emerged; that Almighty Allah alone is the Supreme Power.

The earthquake caused massive devastation, claiming over 2,700 lives in Myanmar, with thousands injured and missing. Hospitals were overwhelmed, treating patients outdoors. In Thailand, at least 22 died, mostly from a collapsed Bangkok high-rise, with 76 still missing. The quake also damaged homes in China's Yunnan and Sichuan provinces and over 300 apartments in Vietnam's Ho Chi Minh City, though major casualties were avoided. Infrastructure losses are severe, with over 10,000 buildings, including hospitals and bridges, destroyed in Myanmar. Roads, power lines, and communication networks were crippled, hindering rescue efforts, while Thailand's older, pre-2007 buildings proved highly vulnerable. Over 236 aftershocks, including a 6.7 magnitude tremor, have triggered further collapses.

The Quran repeatedly reminds mankind that all natural calamities, whether earthquakes, storms, or plagues, occur by the will of Allah. He controls the heavens and the earth, and nothing happens without His command. In Surah Al-Zalzalah (99:1-2), Allah says: "When the earth is shaken with its [final] earthquake, and the earth discharges its burdens." This verse signifies that the power to move the very foundation of the earth rests solely with the Creator. No technological advancement, military might, or worldly authority can prevent His decree from unfolding.

Throughout history, mighty empires have risen and fallen, yet none could escape the will of Allah. Nations that considered themselves invincible have crumbled into dust. The Quran warns in Surah Al-An'am (6:65): "Say, 'He is the [one] able to send upon you affliction from above you or from beneath your feet or to confuse you [so you become] sects and make you taste the violence of one another.'" This verse reminds us that Allah's punishment can come in various forms, whether through natural disasters or human conflicts, and that none can defy His judgment.

The belief that any country, nation, or individual possesses ultimate power is nothing but a delusion. In Surah Al-Mulk (67:16-17), Allah questions: "Do you feel secure that He who [holds authority] in the heaven would not cause the earth to swallow you and suddenly it would sway? Or do you feel secure that He who [holds authority] in the heaven would not send against you a storm of stones? Then you would know how [severe] was My warning." These verses make it clear that no worldly power can withstand the punishment of Allah when it descends.

The hadiths of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) further reinforce this reality. He said: "The strongest believer is the one who puts his trust in Allah and recognizes that everything happens by His will." (Sahih Muslim) True strength lies not in worldly possessions or military might, but in submission to the Almighty.

Oppression and tyranny, no matter how dominant they appear, are short-lived in the grand scheme of Allah's justice. The Quran reassures in Surah Ash-Shura (42:42-43): "Indeed, the way [of blame] is only against those who wrong the people and tyrannize upon the earth without right. Those will have a painful punishment. And whoever is patient and forgives - indeed, that is of the matters [requiring] determination." This serves as a reminder that those who wield their power unjustly will face divine retribution, while those who remain steadfast in faith will be rewarded.

Many throughout history have attempted to challenge divine authority, believing themselves to be invincible. Pharaoh, who declared himself a god, was drowned along with his army. Nimrod, who defied Prophet Ibrahim (peace be upon him), was destroyed by the smallest of Allah's creations-a mosquito. These examples testify that arrogance and defiance against Allah always lead to downfall.

The recent earthquake is yet another sign of Allah's supremacy. It is a warning for humanity to reflect, repent, and recognize that no individual or nation holds absolute control. Power and authority belong to Allah alone. He grants it to whom He wills and takes it away when He wills. In Surah Aal-e-Imran (3:26), Allah states: "Say, 'O Allah, Owner of Sovereignty, You give sovereignty to whom You will and You take sovereignty away from whom You will. You honor whom You will and You humble whom You will. In Your hand is [all] good. Indeed, You are over all things competent.'"

Thus, no one should live under the illusion that they are immune to Allah's decree. The true superpower is not a country or an individual but the Creator of the heavens and the earth. He alone governs life and death, prosperity and hardship, and none can stand before Him when His command is issued. The recent calamity is a reminder for all of humanity to turn towards Him, seek His mercy, and acknowledge His ultimate authority over all creation.

# Kundi expresses grief over loss of lives in DI Khan

PESHAWAR (APP): Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Governor Faisal Karim Kundi on Friday expressed deep sorrow over the tragic loss of lives in two separate incidents in Dera Ismail Khan.

groups in the Ramak area of Paharpur Tehsil. The Governor condemned the violence and extended heartfelt condolences to the bereaved families.

Kundi expressed profound grief over the heartbreaking loss and offered prayers for the departed souls. He extended sympathy to the grieving families and prayed for the elevation of the deceased souls and patience for the families. The Governor also wished a speedy recovery for those injured in the incidents.

In the first incident, three women lost their lives due to an exchange of gunfire between two rival

In the second incident near Abdul Khel on the DI Khan CPEC Motorway, two children were killed in a road accident. Governor

# Rich tributes paid to ZAB on his 46th death anniversary

PESHAWAR (APP): Glowing tributes were paid to former Prime Minister and founder of the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP), Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, on his 46th death anniversary observed with great respect by the PPP workers in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) on Friday.

acknowledged his ability to unite people across the political spectrum, particularly in the development of the 1973 constitution.

Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, a charismatic and influential politician of Pakistan, faced the gallows 46 years ago on April 4, 1979 with great courage and steadfastness.

His extensive reforms, including those in land, labour, industry, education, healthcare, and legal sectors, brought significant benefits to millions of Pakistanis.

He chose to sacrifice his life rather than compromise on the rights of the people, the supremacy of the constitution, and democracy.

Senior academician Professor Dr Ejaz Khan emphasized that Bhutto's vision extended beyond just economic reform. His dedication to improving public services and uplifting the marginalized was central to his leadership.

"Death was meaningless for Z.A. Bhutto, who gave Pakistan its 1973 constitution and devoted his entire life to serving the people," said PPP leader Nighat Orakzai while talking to APP.

"He introduced groundbreaking reforms in health and education, ensuring quality services for the people," he added.

She added that Zulfikar Ali Bhutto had never bowed to dictatorial forces and refused to beg for mercy for a crime he did not commit.

He said Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, born into privilege and educated at Christ Church College, Oxford, initially pursued law.

He assured that the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government would continue to support all athletes and young people, encouraging them to achieve success on the global stage and bring glory to Pakistan.

After returning to Pakistan, he transitioned from law practice to politics and won the hearts of millions with his pro-poor policies. Despite the pro-U.S. stance of General Ayub Khan's government, Bhutto forged stronger ties with China and ultimately founded the PPP after resigning from his position as foreign minister.

On Friday, Sanaullah met with the Minister for Sports, Sayed Fakhar Jehan, who presented him with the reward cheque and appreciated his expertise and triumphs in cycling.

After Bhutto's untimely death, his legacy continued through his wife, Begum Nusrat Bhutto, and his daughter, Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto Shaheed, both of whom carried the torch for democracy in Pakistan.

It is worth mentioning that Sanaullah earned the gold medal in the National Track Cycling Championship, held in Lahore in December 2024, showcasing exceptional performance and bringing pride to his province.

Benazir Bhutto Shaheed, following in her father's footsteps, became the first woman Prime Minister in the Muslim world. Both ZAB and BB Shaheed were deeply connected to KP, the province they considered their second home, and they held a special place in the hearts of Pashtuns. Nighat Orakzai recalled how Benazir Bhutto Shaheed was warmly welcomed by hundreds of thousands of PPP supporters in Peshawar on December 1, 2007. During her visit, Benazir Bhutto appealed for support in turning the restive region into a peaceful zone.

ZAB's most significant legacy, according to Dr Hilali, was his initiation of Pakistan's nuclear program, which strengthened the nation's defense and ensured its security in the face of external threats. The experts commended Z.A. Bhutto for his role as a statesman, reformer, and master of dialogue and

The PPP leader lamented that the martyrdom of both Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and Benazir Bhutto Shaheed was part of a broader plan to hinder Pakistan's progress.

# Frontier Mine Owners Association concerned over proposed Minerals Act



F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The Frontier Mine Owners Association has expressed serious concerns over the proposed Minerals Act and accused SIFC officials of preparing a controversial act by ignoring the recommendations of stakeholders. According to the associa-

tion, during various meetings, SIFC officials assured them that their recommendations would be included in the act, but when the final draft of the proposed act was sent to the provincial assembly, their suggestions were completely disregarded.

The association made

several requests for a meeting with the Chief Minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, but received no response.

Furthermore, the Chief Minister recently met with representatives of a so-called minerals association, which is a small organization, while the

Frontier Mine Owners Association, with thousands of members, has been registered since 1986.

The association reminded the Chief Minister that it was the Frontier Mine Owners Association that had protested against the provincial government's increase in royalty rates, and after a meeting with the Chief Minister, the rates were reduced.

The association has demanded that the Chief Minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa immediately grant a meeting with the Frontier Mine Owners Association delegation and ensure the consultation of stakeholders before the approval of the proposed act.

The association warned that if their concerns are not addressed, they reserve the right to halt operations across the province, march towards Peshawar with trucks loaded with minerals, and stage a sit-in.

# PHC cancels tender obtained by blacklisted pharmaceutical company

Humayun Khan

PESHAWAR: The Peshawar High Court has canceled a tender awarded to Frontier Distributions, a pharmaceutical company blacklisted for supplying substandard and counterfeit medicines, for providing life-saving medicines to government hospitals in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, on Friday.

The court's decision,

written by Justice Syed Arshad Ali, stated that the company's inclusion in the tender process raised serious questions about transparency and accountability in the procurement process.

The court observed that the Health Department had removed a crucial clause from the tender document that barred blacklisted companies from participating in the bidding process.

The petitioner, Waqar Ahmed, had challenged the tender, arguing that the company was blacklisted in Punjab for supplying substandard medicines and should not be allowed to participate in the bidding process in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

fairness, and excluding blacklisted companies from participating in the bidding process.

The decision also noted that the Health Department's decision to allow a blacklisted company to participate in the tender was a serious lapse and raised questions about the department's commitment to transparency and accountability.

# Celebrating Eid under shadow of guns

PESHAWAR (APP): Valiant sons of the soil stood guard to protect our geographical and ideological boundaries when while the nation was enjoying Eid-ul-Fitr.

Deployed at restive Pak-Afghan border along Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Line of Control (LoC) in Azad Kashmir and parts of Balochistan came together to celebrate Eid with unwavering dedication.

Their unmatched valor spoke highly of their courage and commitment as they could fall prey to any ambush or inadvertent fire from notorious hide-outs of terrorists and saboteurs.

The celebrations of defenders, though humble at deployment posts, served as a testament to their resilience, determination and unwavering gallantry to protect motherland from internal and external threats.

When we were celebrating Eid by embracing dear ones, their lone source of exchanging pleasantries was a phone call and voice message or video call on WhatsApp on this festive occasion.

"I may not be with my family today on this joyous occasion of Eid, but I feel their prayers and immense love despite being far away from home," said Jibran Khan, an FC Subedar deployed at Parachinar

Kurram, near Pak-Afghan border.

"For us, Eid is even more than being to be with our loved ones when we are sacrificing at borders to ensure peace and dignity for our country and protecting our motherland," he said.

Jibran Khan, whose late father, Subedar @ Misri Khan, had also served in Pakistan Army, recalled the golden advices of his father and said, "Pakistan has given us respect, honor and identity and we are ready to offer every sacrifice for its defense. My father had always prayed for martyrdom and he was too ready to lay down his life for my beloved country.

For these soldiers, Eid is not just a celebration but a deep connected to a noble cause of defending Pakistan.

"Eid gives us hope and strength. It reminds us of the lessons of brotherhood and unity every day," said Jibran Khan.

From special Eid prayers to sharing meals and meeting with fellow soldiers, the Pakistani soldiers and FC troops get together to strengthen bonds of friendship.

To express love with the defenders of Pakistan, the students of Peshawar have prepared special Eid greeting cards and dispatched for those performing duties at borders and restive

regions.

These Eid cards were delivered to the soldiers deployed on forward locations.

The participation of top commanders of Pakistan Army with troops on Eid days had doubled the happiness of officers and jawans of armed forces. Pakistani travel guides.

On Eid day, General Syed Asim Munir, Chief of Army Staff visited Wana in South Waziristan and Chehkan in Dera Ismail Khan and he spent Eid day with officers and troops employed on the Western Border.

According to ISPR, the COAS had extended warm Eid-ul-Fitr greetings to troops, lauding their unwavering dedication and exemplary service to the nation.

"Your commitment and resilience not only secure our homeland but also exemplify your profound love for Pakistan," he had stated.

The COAS also appreciated performance of the Armed Forces and LEAs and their unflinching courage and commitment against the menace of terrorism.

Acknowledging the formations' tireless efforts, the COAS attributed their achievements to the sacrifices of our martyrs and those who are committed to

a revered cause of peace and stability.

Security experts said the presence of COAS and his interaction with troops on Eid day has not only bolstered their morale but also encouraged them to fight all threats to our security.

Entire nation also extended facilitations to our brave soldiers on Eid-ul-Fitr with prayers for their security and success.

As the history of sacrifices by our officers and jawans is matchless, we cannot help paying homage to legends like Captain Muhammad Sarwar Shaheed (NH), Major Aziz Bhatti Shaheed (NH), Major Shahbir Sharif (NH), Major Tufail Shaheed (NH), Rashid Minhas (NH), Kargil hero Captain Karnal Sher Khan Shaheed (NH) and thousands others who laid down their lives for the motherland without hesitating for a wink of an eye.

"Eid Mubarak to all our valiant troops defending our frontiers in these challenging times," said Manzoorul Haq, former ambassador. "The untiring efforts of our Armed Forces have significantly reduced terrorism in KP."

"Since, you stand guard at frontiers, the citizens celebrate Eid with peace," he said. "Your sacrifices do not go unnoticed; you are the pride of our nation."





## In brief

### Man sets himself ablaze F.P. Report

WAZIRABAD: A disheartened man received serious burn wounds as he set himself on fire after a domestic dispute with his wife in Wazirabad. Police sources said that the incident occurred in Mansoorwali area of Wazirabad. Police sources further said that a brawl took place between husband and wife after which the husband who was later identified as Sajid and was 40-year-old set himself on fire by throwing petrol on himself. Soon after the incident, local police reached the site and shifted Sajid to a local hospital in critical condition. Hospital sources said that sixty percent of the victim's body was completely burnt. Police started investigation after collecting all the evidences from crime scene. Further investigation was underway.

### Eight illegal oil units sealed F.P. Report

MUZAFFARGARH: A crackdown was carried out against illegal oil processing units in Layyah district, following the directives of Deputy Commissioner (DC) Ameer Baidar. The operation, led by Civil Defence Officer Muhammad Taqueer, resulted in the sealing of eight unlawful oil units operating in the areas of Mouza Samtia Nasheeb and Gadara Chowk. The officer appealed to the public to cooperate with the Civil Defence Department by reporting any suspicious or unauthorized oil refining activities in their localities. Meanwhile, in Jatoi, two youngsters were abducted at gunpoint due to a lingering dispute over a legal case. According to police sources, Abdul Majeed reported police that his son Samiullah and his nephew Hafiz Muhammad Adnan were on their way to offer prayers when four armed men — Muhammad Bilal, Muhammad Abu Bakar, Muhammad Yousaf and Muhammad Nasir — intercepted them and forcibly abducted them. The victims were allegedly taken to a secluded location, physically assaulted and locked in a room by the suspects. Taking action on the complaint, Jatoi Police launched an immediate operation, successfully rescuing the abducted youths and arresting all four kidnappers. A case has been registered under Section 365 of the Pakistan Penal Code on the complaint of Abdul Majeed.

### Two criminal gangs busted F.P. Report

BURAWALA: A Model Town Police team, led by SHO Rana Mehtab Alam, has apprehended six members of two criminal gangs. The police traced 15 cases and recovered eight stolen motorcycles and Rs. 935,000 in cash. In the first operation, the police arrested two members of a motorcycle thieves gang, identified as Waqil alias Wakilo and Sultan. During the investigation, the suspects were found linked to eight cases of motorcycle theft, and the police recovered eight stolen motorcycles worth Rs. 793,000. In the second operation, four members of a robbers gang — Sajid, Amjad, Yas-een, and Saleem -- were arrested. The suspects were involved in seven cases of robbery, and the police recovered a stolen motorcycle and cash amounting to Rs. 142,000.

# Death anniversary of ZAB observed

## F.P. Report

HYDERABAD: The 46th death anniversary of former Prime Minister and founder of Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto was observed on Friday. In this connection, Pakistan Peoples Party has organized ceremonies across the country to pay tribute to the former Prime Minister. Quran Khawani and fateha khawani were held across the country for departed soul of Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. The Sindh government has declared a public holiday. Meanwhile, President Asif Ali Zardari paying tribute to former Prime Minister and Pakistan Peoples Party founder late Zulfikar Ali Bhutto for his services, struggles, and sacrifices, vowed to carry forward his mission of making Pakistan a developed, sovereign, and people-friendly country.

The president, in his

message on the 46th death anniversary of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto to be observed on Friday (April 4), reiterated his resolve to take every possible step to protect Pakistan's sovereignty, democracy, and the people's rights. Remembering him as a great statesman, a courageous leader, and the true representative of the people, the president said that the late Bhutto set Pakistan on the path of development, sovereignty, and public welfare.

"Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto gave the nation its first unanimous constitution, laid the foundation of Pakistan's nuclear program, and gave the country's foreign policy an independent and sovereign identity," President Zardari remarked. He said that under Bhutto's leadership, Pakistan hosted the Islamic Summit Conference, paving the way for the unity of the Muslim Ummah.

The president also laud-

ed Shaheed Bhutto's empowerment of workers, farmers, and the underprivileged by granting them their due rights. Besides, the country achieved significant progress in the fields of education, industry, and defense, consequent to the efforts of Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, he added.

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Friday paid tribute to former Prime Minister Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto on his 46th death anniversary, remembering him as a champion of democratic values in Pakistan. The prime minister, in a statement, said that the services of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto in promoting democracy and democratic values in Pakistan would always be remembered. He said that under Bhutto's leadership, Pakistan adopted the unanimous Constitution of 1973 who also played a key role in the unity of the Muslim Ummah.

## Eid cleanliness operation completed

## F.P. Report

D I KHAN: The Water and Sanitation Services Company D I Khan (WSSC-DIK) successfully completed its cleanliness operations during Eidul Fitr.

According to the spokesperson of WSSC, a special cleaning campaign was launched across the city on the occasion of Eid on the instructions of the Chief Executive Officer Dr. Mohsin Habib and Chairman board of Directors Naimat Ullah Khan. The waste disposal operation started from Chand Raat and continued till 3rd day of Eid. On Chand Raat, additional staff were deployed in markets, main highways and

streets to provide a clean environment to the citizens. Cleaning of the main markets, circular road, town hall and other busy places was completed.

The Management and Sanitation staff were on duty during Eid holidays, 500 sanitation workers participated in the sanitation operation, while 50 vehicles were deployed. 300 Complaints were received during Eid which were immediately resolved.

Cleaning was carried out twice on the three days of Eid, morning and evening, in which more than 500 workers participated. Garbage was collected from the city during Eid and shifted to the dumping site.

A special cleaning campaign was launched around

mosques, Eid gahs and recreational places. The WSSC helpline remained active 24 hours a day, where citizens were registered their complaints related to cleanliness. More than 300 complaints were received during Eid, out of which 95% were resolved immediately. Awareness of cleanliness was raised among the public through announcements on social media and in mosques. Senior officers visited various Neighborhood Councils and reviewed the cleanliness arrangements. They appreciated the performance of the staff and also appealed to the citizens to take special care of cleanliness and throw garbage at the designated places.

## DDAC chairman for redressal of grievances

## F.P. Report

KOHAT: Member of the Provincial Assembly from PK-91 of Kohat district, Daud Afridi Advocate has assured that all the collective problems of Sumari area will be resolved on priority basis and no political affiliation or personal likes or dislikes will be taken into consideration in this regard.

He gave this assurance while taking to the elders of Sumari area. The overall

issues of public interest of the area were discussed in detail in the meeting. Daud Afridi listened to their problems patiently and issued orders to the authorities concerned for its early redressal. He declared that no negligence or laxity will be tolerated in resolving public problems.

Daud Afridi, on this occasion said that several more projects are under consideration for the development and prosperity of the area for which approval

of funds will be sought from the provincial government very soon. He further said that it is his mission to ensure the provision of basic facilities to the people at their doorsteps and he is making every effort to achieve this important goal.

The elders present at the meeting appreciated the efforts of MPA Daud Afridi for development of the area and expressed the hope that most of the basic problems of the area will be resolved during his tenure.

## Revenue Awami Khidmat ceremony held

## F.P. Report

TOBA TEK SINGH: Deputy Commissioner Toba Tek Singh held "Revenue Awami Khidmat" Services in which Additional Deputy Commissioner General (ADCG), Assistant Commissioner and Revenue officers and staff participated.

In Revenue Awami Khidmat Services, matters related to accuracy of records, issuance of individuals, issuance of transfers, registry, income cer-

tificate, inspection record, issuance of domicile and other revenue related matters were heard.

The petitioners pointed out various issues in Revenue Awami Khidmat services, on which the Deputy Commissioner completed the action and issued instructions to report to the concerned officers and staff for immediate resolution of the problems of the Citizens.

On this Occasion, the Deputy Commissioner said that the problems of the

public related to revenue are being resolved immediately. Revenue Awami Khidmat Kachehri have been organized in all four tehsils of the district. In this regard, district administration officers are present under one roof for the redressal of the public, which aims to provide relief to the citizens on their applications. Moreover, revenue Kachehri were also organized under the auspices of Assistant Commissioners in Tehsil Kamalia, Pirmahal and Gojra.

## Zulfikar Bhutto 46th death anniversary observed

## F.P. Report

KARAK: The 46th death anniversary of Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto was observed at the Pakistan Peoples Party office in Emberi Kali area of district Karak, on Friday.

Provincial leader and former Senate candidate Sajid Pervaz and others while addressing said that the leader of the people, Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, was a great leader not only of Pakistan but also of the entire Muslim Ummah. He said that Shaheed Bhutto always spoke about the rights of the poor, laborers and farmers and provided them with practical facilities.

He gave the nation a unified constitution and

laid the foundation for making Pakistan a nuclear power. He further said that even today the love of Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto is alive in the hearts of the people, and this love can never end. He said that we will continue the mission of Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, God willing, and the Pakistan Peoples Party will always fight for the rights of the people. While paying tribute to Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, he said that we need to adopt his thoughts and mission so that a prosperous and independent Pakistan can be achieved.

Meanwhile, five people were injured in firing and traffic accidents at different places across the district. According to the details,

five people were injured in firing and traffic accidents at different places across the district. The first incident was reported that a person was injured in firing in Sabirabad Tatrikhal.

### Two children drown in river F.P. Report

BHAIRA: A 20-year-old girls and nine-year-old boy drowned in River Jhelum at two different locations near Bhaira. According to details, a 20-year-old girl drowned in Chak Mubarik area of Bhaira while a nine-year-old boy drowned when he was bathing in the river in Goundpur area.



KARAK: DDAC Chairman, Khurshid Khattak inaugurating Hematology Analyzer Machine at Women and Children Hospital.

## Hematology Analyzer Machine installed F.P. Report

KARAK: Chairman of the District Development Advisory Committee (DDAC) Karak, Khurshid Khattak along-with the Chairman CSR Mian Akhlaq, formally inaugurated the Hematology Analyzer Machine at Women and Children's Hospital Karak in a simple but impressive ceremony.

A large number of people associated with the medical profession, elders of the area and local party leadership and workers were also present on the occasion. The installation of the said machine will not only enable to conduct large scale tests at the same time but also save huge money spent on chemicals for the tests.

Chairman DDAC Karak, while appreciating the performance of Medical Superintendent of Women and Children's Hospital Karak, Dr. Majid, said that due to his personal interest and efforts, the hospital is improving day by day and InshaAllah, this hospital will soon be among the best hospitals in Karak district.

Khurshid Khattak said that he believes in uniform development of all sectors and all-out effort were being made to provide maximum relief to the people in every sector as per his commitment.

## PTSA announces protest on 9th F.P. Report

LARKANA: The Primary School Teachers Association (PTSA) has announced a strong protest against the construction of more canals on the Indus River on April 9, last day in Larkana.

Provincial President of the Primary School Teachers Association (PTSA) Sindh, Haji Shafi Mohammad Sathio, Sikandar Ali Jatoi while talking to the media together said that the Indus River is the only means of living and sustaining the existence of the Sindh nation. We announce from the farm that on April 9, we will protest against the construction of more canals on the Indus River and in this regard, we request the conscious people of Sindh to participate in the protest and show a loyal nation to keep the survival of Sindh safe.

The work of the projects of new canals on the river is going on rapidly, the people of Sindh have united and ended every conspiracy against Sindh, so it is still necessary that they will ever allow this evil conspiracy to succeed. Do it so that the Islamic countries force the government's to stop the effort to build more canals on the Indus River.

## Five arrested F.P. Report

FAISALABAD: The district police on Friday claimed to arrest dacoit gang and nabbed its five active members and recovered motorcycles and other items from their possession.

Police on a tip-off conducted conducts raids and arrested five dacoits of a gang including ring leader Adil, his accomplices Rana Umar Hayat, Hasnain, Amir and Nadeem who were wanted to various cases of dacoity, robbery, etc.

## 1250 personnel incorporated into police

## F.P. Report

WANA: In a significant move towards institutional reform, approximately 1,200 to 1,250 police personnel, including Sub-Inspectors, Assistant Inspectors, Head Constables, and Constables, have been formally integrated into the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Police Force from South Waziristan Lower.

Many of these personnel, especially Sub-Inspectors who had long served as Station House Officers (SHOs) in the district, reportedly lacked formal policing experience and were unfamiliar with standard law enforcement practices.

To address these shortcomings, District Police Officer (DPO) initiated a reshuffling of ranks, transferring several SHOs to Dera Ismail Khan for further exposure and training. This strategic move was

intended to introduce better-qualified officers in key positions and promote a culture of professionalism and accountability within the force.

However, sources within the department have confirmed that some of the transferred SHOs have since launched a smear campaign against DPO Bahadur via social media platforms — a move seen as a serious breach of police discipline and an attempt to undermine the reform process.

According to local police officials, these individuals had long been a source of frustration within the department. Their influence and actions, they allege, contributed to inefficiency and corruption. In one recent incident, customs authorities seized a non-custom-paid vehicle from a constable named Zabihullah, allegedly connected to the same group of

former SHOs. Disturbingly, these individuals are now reportedly pressuring the DPO to intervene in the release of the vehicle — a demand viewed as both unethical and illegal.

In a strong show of support, the remaining police personnel in South Waziristan Lower have voiced their confidence in DPO Asif Bahadur, describing him as an honest, competent, and reform-driven officer. They credit him with taking much-needed steps to cleanse the department of corrupt elements and reaffirmed their commitment to resist any attempts to pressure or blackmail him.

"The ongoing negative propaganda is nothing more than a calculated effort to derail reform and protect vested interests," a senior officer stated. "But we stand united with DPO Asif Bahadur and will not allow these efforts to succeed."

## 6,408 patients obtained medical assistance in Eid

## F.P. Report

MARDAN: Mardan Medical Complex and Benazir Children hospital provided medical facilities to 6,408 patients during Eidul Fitr holidays. The hospital administration had devised an effective strategy to ensure provision of immediate and standard medical facilities to the patients, keeping all wards and departments, including the accident and emergency department, fully functional.

According to the hospital's Eid performance report, 5,241 patients were provided medical facilities at Mardan Medical

Complex, including 354 traffic accident victims, three gunshot wounded, 13 burn victims, and 3,068 patients with other complaints. Additionally, 441 patients were admitted to various departments for further treatment and diagnosis.

The hospital also conducted 4,047 laboratory tests, and 42 babies were born during the three-day Eid holidays. Moreover, 28 major surgeries and 77 minor surgeries and procedures were performed on wounded patients. The hospital also conducted X-rays, CT scans, and ultrasounds for 1,650 patients,

and 76 dialysis sessions were held for kidney patients.

Benazir Bhutto Children Hospital provided medical facilities to 1,167 children during the Eid holidays. The hospital spokesperson said that special duties of doctors, nurses, paramedics, and other medical and administrative staff were assigned to provide immediate medical aid to the people during Eid holidays. The hospital administration appreciated the staff members for performing their duties diligently during the Eid holidays.

## Rescue 1122 receives more than 50% fake calls

## F.P. Report

BUNER: Rescue 1122 Buner in its March 2025 performance report has revealed that out of a total 10,216 calls, 5,860 non-essential calls have been made as against 4,140 essential calls, resulting in wasteful use of time and resources, and has appealed to the public to make calls in case of emergency and avoid making unnecessary calls.

The report further states that Rescue 1122 Buner

provided services to the public in a total of 361 different accidents including 142 medical, 49 road traffic accidents, 06 bullet injuries, 07 fire and 12 recovery incidents. In these incidents or accidents, 216 people were affected in which 175 people were transferred to the hospital after giving first aid on the spot. In total 145 different accidents were provided to the public Health Referral Ambulance Services and hospitals.

According to the spokesman Muhammad

Sohail, on the orders of Director General Dr. Ayaz Muhammad, Regional Director North Arshad Iqbal and under the leadership of District Emergency Officer Engineer Kashif Khan Yousafzai, Rescue 1122 Buner is ready for all possible services to the people 24 hours day night. He has reiterated his commitment to improve performance and appealed to the public to support Rescue 1122 during emergencies and avoid fake and unnecessary calls.

## Coal miner succumbs to injures in Shangla

## F.P. Report

SHANGLA: A coal mine worker from Shangla, Izzat Gul son of Mani Gul, aged 30, tragically passed away in an Islamabad hospital after succumbing to injuries sustained in a coal mine accident.

The incident occurred a week ago at the Akhruwal coal mine in Dara Adam Khel, where a toxic gas explosion left him severely burned. Despite rescue efforts and intensive care, he could not recover from his injuries and breathed his last on Wednesday morning.

His body was brought

back to his native village, Mian Kale Pir Abad, where he was laid to rest amidst hundreds of tearful mourners.

**Eid festivities marred by reckless driving:** The joyous occasion of Eid turned grim in Shangla due to a series of reckless traffic incidents involving young motorcyclists. Crowded roads and tourist hotspots, including Yakhtrangay and Shangla Top, became scenes of traffic law violations as underage riders' overloaded motorbikes with three to four passengers.

In Shahpur, three young motorcyclists collided with a car, leaving them

severely injured. They were rushed to Karora Civil Hospital and later transferred to Saidu Sharif Hospital, where two were discharged after initial treatment, while one remains in critical condition.

In Puran, another high-speed motorbike accident claimed the life of a young rider. Local residents have demanded strict action against violators to prevent such tragedies in the future. Community leaders have urged parents to monitor their children and discourage them from engaging in unsafe practices to protect young lives.





# EU plans countermeasures to new US tariffs

BRUSSELS (Reuters): European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen described US President Donald Trump's universal tariffs as a major blow to the world economy and said the European Union was prepared to respond with countermeasures if talks with Washington failed.

Von der Leyen said the EU was already finalising a first package of tariffs on up to 26 billion euros (\$28.4 billion) of US goods for mid-April in response to US steel and aluminium tariffs that took effect on March 12. "And we're now preparing for further countermeasures to protect our interests and our businesses if negotiations fail," von der Leyen said in a statement she read out in the Uzbek city of Samarkand, ahead of an EU-Central Asia partnership summit.

Trump unveiled a 10% minimum tariff on most goods imported to the United States, with a higher 20% rate for the European Union. Von der Leyen did not provide details of future EU measures. A French government spokesperson said further measures on a broader range of goods and services would come into force at the end of April. Nothing is yet decided, she added, but services, notably digital services, are likely to be a focus.

Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni said the EU would strive for a deal with the United States to avoid a trade war, but did not rule out an "adequate" European

response. The nature of that response is likely to be a topic for EU trade ministers when they meet in Luxembourg. In a war of tariffs on goods, Brussels has less to hit than Washington, as US goods imports into the EU totalled 334 billion euros (\$365.6 billion) in 2024, against 532 billion euros of EU exports to the United States.

The EU would also be reluctant to target US oil and gas exports, which make up nearly a quarter of its US imports, and the 10% share for pharmaceuticals. Ignacio Garcia Bercero, a fellow of think-tank Bruegel and the EU's former chief negotiator for a planned EU-US trade deal, said the EU needed smarter, more targeted retaliation that maximised the political impact in the United States. He said the EU might use much broader counter-measures that could limit US companies' access to EU public procurement tenders or to EU services markets from financials to tech.

The Trump administration's inclusion of EU taxation and regulation in its "reciprocal tariff" calculations could amount to coercion, Garcia Bercero said. Washington said the EU's effective tariff was 39%, with Trump criticising EU value-added tax and public health rules that exclude US poultry from its market. The EU says VAT is not a tariff and is similar to the US sales tax. The World Trade Organization says the

EU's average tariff rate is 5.0%, while the Commission says the average tariff on goods traded between the EU and the US is about 1% for both sides.

The EU rate for cars at 10% is above the US duty of 2.5%, but the United States imposes 25% duty on imported pick-up trucks, the largest segment of the US auto market. The European Central Bank has estimated that a blanket US tariff of 25% on European imports would lower euro zone growth by 0.3 percentage points in the first year. EU counter-tariffs on the US would raise this to half a percentage point. A February report by consultants Frontier Economics estimated a 20% blanket tariff would hit EU goods exports by \$209 billion, with a slight pick-up for services exports.

The EU also faces 25% US tariffs on steel and aluminium tariffs, on cars and on car parts within a month, with pharmaceuticals possibly to come. French President Emmanuel Macron will host representatives of business sectors that will be hit by the new tariffs, which apply. Von der Leyen said she deeply regretted the US move and warned of "immense consequences" for the global economy. She said she agreed with Trump that others had taken unfair advantage of global trade rules and was ready to support efforts to reform them. "It is not too late to address concerns through negotiations," she said.

## France or UK should engage with Russia over Ukraine

HELSINKI (Reuters): France or Britain should take the lead in engaging with Russia about Ukraine as part of European efforts to support Kyiv, Finland's president Alexander Stubb said. European countries who joined a "coalition of the willing" to back Ukraine agreed at a meeting last week that at least one of their leaders should engage with Russia at some stage, Stubb told reporters in Helsinki.

"My personal preference would be that our representatives of the Coalition of the Willing would be doing that. In other words France or the United Kingdom," he said. Finland is part of the European coalition that has vowed to continue supporting Ukraine's army, in response to European concern that the US no longer represents a bulwark of support for Ukraine's three-year-old fight against Russian invasion. Stubb said any effort to approach Russia should be closely coordinated. Finland, which shares a 1,300-km (800-mile) border with Russia, has been a staunch supporter of Ukraine and joined the NATO military alliance in 2023 in response to Russia's 2022 invasion. Moscow at the time cast the move as a dangerous and historic mistake. The Kremlin said earlier this week that President Vladimir Putin was open to the idea of restoring relations between Finland and Russia, which it accused Helsinki of reducing to "nearly zero" by joining NATO.

## Putin envoy sees positive dynamic in US-Russia ties

MOSCOW (Reuters): Russian President Vladimir Putin's investment envoy Kirill Dmitriev said that he saw a "positive dynamic" in relations between Moscow and Washington, though more meetings were needed to sort out differences.

Dmitriev, speaking to both Russian and US media outlets after talks with officials from President Donald Trump's administration, also said he saw prospects for the beginning of a solution to the more than three-year-old war in Ukraine. He said his talks in Washington had touched on matters as wide-ranging as rare metals production, cooperation in the Arctic and even crewed flight to Mars. He said work was proceeding on restoring direct air links.

Dmitriev's visit to Washington follows US-Russian talks in Saudi Arabia and agreement on US-brokered ceasefires against energy targets and allowing problem-free navigation in the Black Sea. "Without doubt, we note a positive dynamic in our relations," Russian news agencies quoted him as telling journalists in Washington. "A series of meetings will still be needed for us to resolve all our differences. But the main thing we see a positive, creative attitude." "We see absolutely clearly that the president's administration is intent on solving questions, unlike President (Joe) Biden. They conduct themselves with great respect, ask a lot of questions, find compromises," he said.

Dmitriev told DNN that with the Trump administration, he saw prospects for diplomatic solution to the Ukraine war. "I think (with) the Trump administration, we are now in realm of thinking about what is possible, what can really work, and how we can find a long-term solution," Dmitriev said. "I think (a) long-term solution is what is needed, because we are also thinking about global security, how to make sure that Russian security concerns are taken into account." He said progress had been helped by the talks in Saudi Arabia and by the work of US envoy Steve Witkoff.

Witkoff, a Trump envoy who has taken the lead on the administration's contacts with the Kremlin, invited Dmitriev to the United States last week, US officials said.



MOSCOW: Niger Foreign Minister Bakary Yaou Sangare, Mali's Foreign Minister Abdoulaye Diop, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and Burkina Faso Foreign Minister Karamoko Jean Marie Traore attendNG a joint news conference following a meeting of Russian foreign Minister with foreign Ministers of the Confederation of Sahel States.

# Senator flays Pentagon leaders on troop level plan in Europe

WASHINGTON (AP): The chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee criticized Pentagon "mid-level" leadership for what he said was a misguided plan to reduce the number of US troops based in Europe. The Defense Department, however, has not made public any proposal to cut force levels there.

"There are some who believe now is the time to reduce drastically our military footprint in Europe," Sen. Roger Wicker, R-Miss., said at a hearing with US European Command and US Africa Command military leadership. "I'm troubled at those deeply misguided and dangerous views held by some mid-level bureaucrats within the Defense Department." His criticism and sharp questions about any potential reduction in US support to NATO and Ukraine were a running theme throughout the hearing by both Republicans and Democrats.

The Pentagon hasn't made any such plans public, but President Donald Trump and Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth have both made it clear they want NATO to do more to defend its own region and that the US is turning to focus more on China and America's own southern border. The US also has dropped its leadership role in the broad effort to coordinate military support for Ukraine and hence the helm to the British. Both steps have worried allies, who fear the US is stepping away from its long-held commitment to Europe and NATO.

It was not immediately clear what "mid-level bureaucrats" Wicker was talking about. But he warned that

"they've been working to pursue a US retreat from Europe and they've often been doing so without coordinating with the secretary of defense." The number of US troops in Europe increased by about 20,000 under Democratic President Joe Biden in response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. They helped with training, logistics of weapons shipments and, in general, reassured allies on NATO's eastern flank that the United States would defend them.

There have been roughly 100,000 troops there since, including the Navy's 6th Fleet, as well as nuclear warheads. US firepower ensures that NATO's ability to deter Russia is credible. NATO allies have expressed concern about any reduction of American troops or support in the region.

Secretary of State Marco Rubio is in Brussels this week seeking to reassure NATO allies about the American commitment to the alliance under Trump. That military reassurance had been almost immediately put into question by Hegseth, who used his first visit to NATO and the Ukraine Defense Contact Group in February to tell allies that the US would be reassessing troop levels with an eye toward focusing more on China.

Hegseth told allies he was there "to directly and unambiguously express that stark strategic realities prevent the United States of America from being primarily focused on the security of Europe." Trump has tried to broker a peace deal between Russia and Ukraine, but so far that effort has faltered. Under questioning from senators, Army Gen. Christopher Cavoli,

commander of US European Command and the supreme allied commander Europe, said a potential plan by the Trump administration to relinquish the allied commander position to another nation could create problems for control over the US nuclear weapons and the tens of thousands of American troops based and deployed across the continent.

A US general has long held the post of allied commander, a position that oversees all NATO military plans and decisions. And the US is often the largest troop contributor to NATO operations. Similarly, the Pentagon has not made public any proposal to step back from the position. "I think that would bring some challenges in terms of nuclear command and control. It would put us in a position where, in an Article Five situation, we could have for the first time since the First World War large numbers of American troops under non-US command," Cavoli said, referring to NATO's Article Five collective defense pledge in which an attack against one allied nation is considered an attack against all.

"I think those are things that would have to be considered carefully," Cavoli said, calling any plan to give up the leadership role "problematic." He also noted that NATO allies are investing in their militaries "at a rate we haven't seen since the end of the Cold War. A 40% increase in spending since February of 2022." He said the presence of US troops in Europe has been essential to NATO's transformation and modernization efforts and is also critical to America's national defense.

# Rubio tries to reassure wary allies of US commitment to NATO

BRUSSELS (AP): US Secretary of State Marco Rubio and the Trump administration's new envoy to NATO are seeking to reassure wary members of the US commitment to the alliance.

Rubio decried "hysteria and hyperbole" in the media about US President Donald Trump's intentions, despite persistent signals from Washington that NATO as it has existed for 75 years may no longer be relevant. Rubio and newly confirmed US ambassador to NATO Matt Whitaker are in Brussels for a meeting of alliance foreign ministers at which many are hoping Rubio will shed light on US security plans in Europe.

"The United States is as active in NATO as it has ever been," Rubio told reporters as he greeted NATO Secretary-General Mark Rutte before the meeting began. "And some of this hysteria and hyperbole that I see in the global media and some domestic media in the United States about NATO is unwarranted." "President Trump's made clear he supports NATO," Rubio said. "We're going to remain in NATO." "We want NATO to be

stronger, we want NATO to be more visible and the only way NATO can get stronger, more visible is if our partners, the nation states that comprise this important alliance, have more capability," he said. Whitaker said in a statement that "under President Trump's leadership, NATO will be stronger and more effective than ever before, and I believe that a robust NATO can continue to serve as a bedrock of peace and prosperity." But he added: "NATO's vitality rests on every ally doing their fair share."

Despite those words, European allies and Canada are deeply concerned by Trump's readiness to draw clues to Russian President Vladimir Putin, who sees NATO as a threat as the US tries to broker a ceasefire in Ukraine, as well as his rhetorical attacks and insults against allies like Canada and Denmark. Rubio and Danish Foreign Affairs Minister Lars Løkke Rasmussen met on the sidelines of the meeting. They didn't respond to a shouted question about Greenland, a semi-autonomous territory in the Kingdom of Denmark which Trump has his eye

on, but they smiled and shook hands in front of US and Danish flags.

Trump's imposition of new global tariffs, which will affect allies, have also added to the uncertainty and unease. French Foreign Minister Jean-Noël Barrot warned that NATO's unity is "being tested by the decisions taken and announced by President Trump."

Asked about concerns among European allies about a possible US troop drawdown and the importance of getting clear messages from the Trump administration, Rutte said: "These issues are not new. There are no plans for them to all of a sudden draw down their presence here in Europe." Indeed, the Trump administration hasn't made its NATO allies aware any plans that it might have. But several European countries are convinced that US troops and equipment will be withdrawn, and they want to find out from Rubio how many and when so they can fill any security gaps. "We need to preempt a rapid retreat, but we've had nothing precise from the US yet," a senior NATO diplomat said before the meeting, briefing reporters on his country's expectations on condition that he not be named.

In Washington, the chairman of the US Senate Armed Services Committee criticized "mid-level" leadership at the Pentagon for what he branded as a misguided plan to "reduce drastically" the number of US troops based in Europe. The US Defense Department hasn't made public any such proposal. "They've been working to pursue a US retreat from Europe and they've often been doing so without coordinating with the secretary of defense," US Sen. Roger Wicker, a Mississippi Republican, said at a hearing with US European Command and US Africa Command military leadership. It wasn't immediately clear what "mid-level bureaucrats" Wicker was talking about. NATO's secretary-general is in a bind. European allies and Canada have tasked him with keeping the United States firmly in NATO. Around 100,000 US troops are stationed in Europe along with the Navy's 6th Fleet and nuclear warheads. US firepower ensures that NATO's ability to deter Russia is credible.

# Russia hosts top diplomats from Sahel countries for talks

MOSCOW (AP): Russia discussed ways to boost military ties with the Sahel countries, promising to train their troops and supply weapons as it seeks to expand its clout in the junta-led West African countries that have expelled French forces.

Russia's Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said after the talks with his counterparts from Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger that Moscow stands ready to help strengthen their military and security forces. "I emphasized Moscow's readiness to help expand the potential of the united armed forces of Sahel, strengthen the combat

capability of the three countries' militaries and train their troops and law enforcement personnel," Lavrov said, adding that Russia could also provide military equipment. Russia's top diplomat also accused Ukraine of destabilizing the region, declaring, without offering any evidence, that it "openly supports terrorist groups in this part of Africa while its western sponsors turn a blind eye on it." Mali's Foreign Minister Abdoulaye Diop echoed Lavrov's comments, stating that his country views Ukraine as a "terrorist state."

"We have common views on fighting insecurity and

terrorism in our region, which is supported by foreign state sponsors and regional actors," he said. "It includes Ukraine at your doorstep here, which we consider simply a terrorist state." Mali's government cut diplomatic ties with Ukraine last year over allegations that Kyiv aided an attack by armed groups in northern Mali in July, in which dozens of Russian mercenaries and Malian soldiers were killed by jihadists and rebels, in what some observers described as one of the largest losses for the Russian contractors in years. A spokesperson for Ukrainian military intelligence said at the time that armed groups in Mali had received information from Kyiv to launch the attack. Ukraine's Foreign Ministry argued, however, that Mali had cut ties without a thorough review of the situation and without providing evidence of the country's involvement in the attack.

Ties between Sahel countries and the West have become increasingly strained. Following military coups in Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger in recent years, the ruling juntas have expelled French and U.S. forces, and turned to Russian military contractors for security assistance.

# Judge says US govt may have 'acted in bad faith'

WASHINGTON (AP): A federal judge said that the Trump administration may have "acted in bad faith" by trying to rush Venezuelan migrants out of the country before a court could block their deportations to El Salvador.

US District Judge James "Jeb" Boasberg in Washington pressed a Justice Department lawyer to explain the government's actions in a high-stakes court hearing to determine whether the administration ignored his orders to turn around planes that were carrying deportees to El Salvador. The judge said he could issue a ruling as soon as next week on whether there are grounds to find anyone in contempt of court for defying the court order.

The case has become a flashpoint in a battle between the judiciary and the Trump administration amid mounting White House frustrations over court orders blocking key parts of the president's sweeping agenda. Trump has called for the judge's impeachment, while the Justice Department has argued the judge is overstepping his authority. Boasberg ordered the administration last month not to deport anyone in its custody under the Alien Enemies Act, a 1798

wartime law Trump invoked over what he claimed was an invasion by the Venezuelan gang Tren de Aragua. The judge also ordered that any planes with Venezuelan immigrants that were already in the air be returned to the United States. That did not happen.

Boasberg, who was appointed to the federal bench by Democratic President Barack Obama, said it appeared the administration had tried to get the deportees out of the country as quickly as possible before a court could step in. He told a Justice Department lawyer he suspects the government may have "acted in bad faith throughout that day." "If you really believed anything you did that day could survive a court challenge, I cannot believe you would have operated the way you did," Boasberg said.

The Justice Department has said the administration didn't violate the judge's order, arguing it didn't apply to planes that had already left US airspace by the time his command came down. The Justice Department has noted that the judge's written order said nothing about flights that had already left the US and that the judge had no power to compel the presi-

dent to return the planes anyway. The Trump administration has refused to answer the judge's questions about when the planes landed and who was on board, contending they are considered "state secrets." Deputy Assistant Attorney General Drew Ensign told the judge that details about the flights could be diplomatically sensitive, since the migrants were being sent to a third country that had agreed with the US to hold them in their prison. Ensign also repeatedly said he didn't know any "operational details" of those March 15 deportation flights.

"I had no knowledge from my client that was the case," Ensign replied when asked if he knew during the court hearing that day that planes were already in the air or were about to take off. The Trump administration is urging the Supreme Court for permission to resume deportations of Venezuelan migrants to El Salvador under the rarely used Alien Enemies Act. The Justice Department says federal courts shouldn't interfere with sensitive diplomatic negotiations. It also claimed that migrants should make their case in a federal court in Texas, where they are being detained.

# Spain unveils \$15.7b plan to soften blow from US tariffs

MADRID (Reuters): Spain was one of the few major economies to offer up a concrete solution to help weather the impact of new US tariffs, offering its companies a financial package of loans and direct aid worth 14.1 billion euros (\$15.66 billion).

The tariffs announced by US President Donald Trump have rattled markets and drew condemnation from world leaders facing an abrupt end of an era of trade liberalisation that has shaped the global order for decades. Spain, which like other European Union members was hit by US tariffs of 20% imposed on imports from the bloc, is the world's top exporter of olive oil and sells important quantities of auto parts, steel and chemicals to the United States.

Sanchez described Trump's actions as "terrible news for the world", "unintelligent" and "a return to 19th-century protectionism". "This tariff attack by the US administration makes no distinction between friends and

enemies, it doesn't discriminate based on ideology or trade balance; it's against everyone and everything," he said. Sanchez also stressed Europe's need to find new trading partners elsewhere. He is set to visit Vietnam and China next month, attempting to forge closer economic ties with the Asian countries. Direct and soft loans Spain's aid package - which still needs to be approved by a fragmented parliament - will include 7.4 billion euros in new financing, and the rest will come from existing instruments such as soft loans, Sanchez said. He said that 5 billion euros of EU recovery funds would be repurposed to help industries hurt by the tariff shock - such as auto suppliers - reorient their productive capabilities towards other high-demand sectors. The government will also contribute with 2 billion euros' worth of credit insurance and export risk coverage. Rafael Pico, head of the Spanish Association of Olive Oil

Exporters Asoliva, welcomed the measures and said the aid would help the industry invest in improving production processes and finding new markets.

But he also called on the government to negotiate a reduction in the 20% tariff to align with competitors from other countries that were handed a lower rate. Spain exports 180,000 tonnes of olive oil directly to the US while another 180,000 tonnes are sold to Germany, Italy, Belgium and Britain before being packaged for export to the US, Pico said.

"We'll see how effective (the measures) are, but they don't solve the problem of tariffs in a market that is irreplaceable for us," he said. The aid package from the Spanish government will serve as a stop-gap so that the most exposed companies are not forced to shut down but it will not offset the loss of US market share, said Antonio Gonzalez, an economist at the Economists Against the Crisis think tank.



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Rehmat Shah Afridi (Late)

Founder

Bilal Shah Afridi

Chief Executive

Jalil Afridi

Managing Editor

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Peshawar Office: 0300- 9009001

Peshawar Fax: 091-5703687, Post Box No. 573

E-mail: fppeshawar@thefrontierpost.com

Lahore Office: 0335-4026284

Email: fplahore@thefrontierpost.com

Islamabad Office: 0321-5066253

Email: mahmoodafridi@thefrontierpost.com

Karachi Office: 021-32213411, 0300-8340907

Email: fpkarachi@thefrontierpost.com

\*USA and Canada Toll Free Number 1-800-5905747

# Trump needs to realize

THE Trump administration is sending mixed messages to America's enemies - appeasing Russian aggression in Europe, while working to deter China in the Indo-Pacific. Trump showed his personal hostility toward Ukraine and its president, Volodymyr Zelensky, in his first term when he withheld much-needed weapons systems unless Zelensky provided damaging information on the Biden family. Then, during his 2024 campaign, he promised to end Russia's war there quickly, which could only be done by putting pressure on Ukraine, almost totally dependent on the US for weapons, intelligence and moral and diplomatic support. Since his reelection, Trump has been doing precisely that, as was painfully demonstrated by his and JD Vance's entrapment and berating of Zelensky in their infamous Oval Office meeting.

The clearly premeditated ambush of the Ukrainian president was the most shameful public display of American bullying of an ally the world has ever seen. Even Hitler allowed Chamberlain a more dignified humiliation - but then Chamberlain, unlike Zelensky, was already prepared to capitulate. Trump's adulation of Vladimir Putin, one of many strongmen he admires and seeks to emulate, and his siding with Russia's position against Ukraine, was recently echoed by Trump's chief negotiator, Steve Witkoff, during a visit to Moscow. He asserted that the Ukrainian people subjected to Russian domination in conquered parts of Ukraine "want to be under Russian rule." "The question is," he said, "will the world acknowledge that those are Russian territories?"

In contrast, the Trump administration is sending a message of resolve to China regarding America's security commitments in the Indo-Pacific. Last week, Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth visited the Philippines, a US treaty ally, where he declared the US commitment to its security is "ironclad." Hegseth called China "aggressive and coercive" and pledged that the US will ensure "robust, ready and credible deterrence" across the Taiwan Strait.

Former President Biden repeatedly used the "ironclad terminology with Ukraine and NATO, despite the fact that his oft-expressed fear of World War III greatly inhibited his willingness to provide Ukraine with the military support it needed to defeat Russia's aggression. The resulting stalemate was seized upon by Trump, though he has never expressed concern for the thousands of Ukrainian civilians captured, raped, tortured and murdered by the occupying Russian forces in their rampant war crimes. Trump and his national security team err in addressing the security challenges from Russia, China, North Korea and Iran as separate and distinct issues. The China-Russia joint statement of a "no limits strategic partnership" specifically pledges reciprocal support for Russia's position on Ukraine and China's on Taiwan. When China overtly moves against Taiwan, it will surely expect payback from Putin for Xi's economic lifeline on Ukraine. Distracting American attention in one direction enables a move by another of the declared adversaries. The cumulative result is the erosion of the overall Western position and a deepening of its security predicament. Trump can escape the geopolitical trap by reversing or substantially modifying his unstinting support for Putin while declaring an unequivocal commitment to defend Taiwan - without the administration dilution that followed each of Biden's statements on the issue. A 180-degree turn on Ukraine would put both Putin and Jinping Xi off-balance, and potentially freeze any further aggressive moves by either.

## French turmoil

THE decision to bar Marine Le Pen from running for public office for five years is nothing short of seismic for French politics. With her far-right National Rally (RN) gaining ground over recent years, Ms Le Pen's absence from the 2027 presidential race reshapes the political landscape in ways that are both predictable and unpredictable. While legal consequences must apply to all politicians equally, the broader implications of this ruling raise pressing questions about democracy, political strategy, and the future of France's right-wing populism. Ms Le Pen's conviction for misappropriating European funds and her subsequent sentencing, including a prison term and financial penalties, reinforce the principle that no politician is above the law.

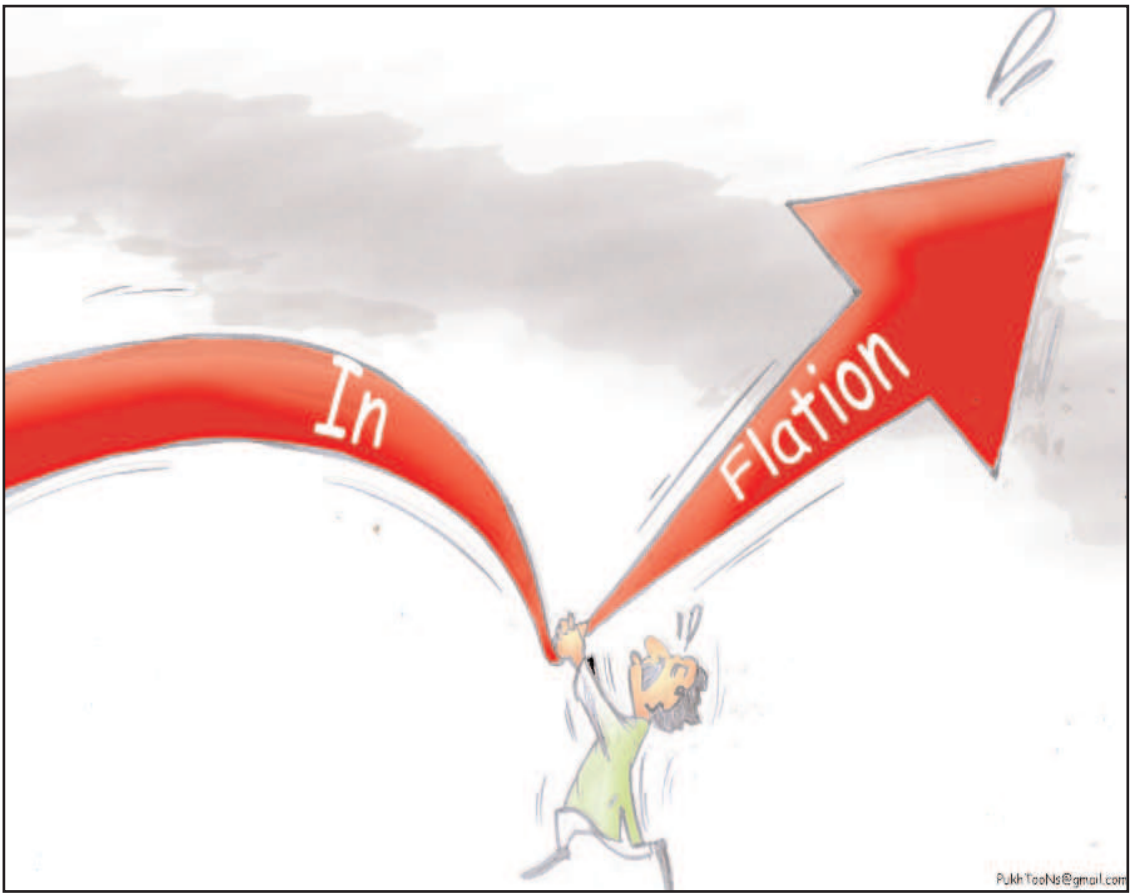
At the heart of the case was a system of using European Parliament funds to pay staff who worked primarily for RN, an act deemed as fraud by the courts. The ruling sends a strong message about accountability, particularly in an era when public trust in institutions is fragile. However, the immediacy of her disqualification - despite the possibility of appeal - introduces concerns about judicial influence over political processes, especially since past cases involving French politicians allowed more time before a ban took effect. The most immediate consequence of this ruling is the leadership vacuum within RN. Ms Le Pen was widely seen as the far-right's strongest candidate for 2027, with polls suggesting she could have mounted a formidable challenge to centrist governance. Now, her party must either rally behind a successor, most likely Jordan Bardella, or risk losing momentum.

Mr Bardella, as RN's president, has positioned himself as a charismatic and competent figure, but whether he can command the same level of personal loyalty and electoral success remains uncertain. The ruling may force RN to accelerate its transition into a broader populist movement rather than relying on the Le Pen family brand. But this decision doesn't only affect the far right. French democracy itself now faces an intense debate on whether judicial rulings should have the power to reshape elections. Figures from both the left and the right, including Mr Jean-Luc Mélenchon and Mr Laurent Wauquiez, have expressed unease about a judge's decision effectively removing a popular politician from electoral contention.

Their concerns tap into a larger question: should the electorate alone have the power to remove leaders, or is judicial oversight necessary to safeguard democracy from corruption? Ms Le Pen and her supporters will undoubtedly frame this as a political persecution, fuelling anti-establishment sentiment. When populist rhetoric thrives on narratives of victimhood and elite suppression, this ruling could backfire. Rather than diminishing RN's influence, it might galvanise its base, reinforcing the belief that the system is rigged against them. If the party can effectively channel this grievance into electoral gains in the legislative elections, the French political establishment may find itself facing an even stronger far-right movement.

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# Perilous and chaotic, Trump's 'liberation day' endangers world's broken economy

Martin Kettle

IT would be "liberation day" in the US, the White House announced. Well, we shall see. Yet even if one puts the noise and nastiness that accompany a Donald Trump announcement to one side - in this case tonight's pronouncement that there will be an executive order announcing "reciprocal tariffs on countries throughout the world", a 10% tariff on the UK and 20% on the EU - the significance of the theatre is hard to miss.

Whether they presage the US's liberation, or instead the disintegration of the global trading order, Trump's tariffs add up to an attempt to transform a badly broken economic model. And that is something that affects us all.

Trump's announcement was awash with insult and rambling nonsense. The rest of the world had looted, raped and pillaged, had scavenged and ransacked America - shocking claims if they had come from any other US president, yet water off a duck's back today. But the hard core was there all the same: tariffs on the whole of the rest of the world. The shutters were up.

This threatened trade war will appear to supporters - of whom there were rather fewer this week in some important US electoral contests - exactly like the Maga big bazooka he promised in his inaugural speech in January. "Instead of taxing our citizens to enrich other countries, we will tariff and tax foreign countries to enrich our citizens," he said back then. The new tariffs turn those words into realities.

Even to Trump's opponents, though, the tariffs should be seen as the most important piece of evidence so far that he has American workers on his agenda. Where Joe Biden tried major tax, borrow and spend programmes to combat post-Covid economic precarity, Trump is deploying tariffs, ostensibly to the same purpose. There has been speculation that this will be merely tactical, to be quickly lifted or adjusted. Right now, that looks a long way off. For Trump, tariffs are not so much a negotiating tactic as a policy, a new revenue stream

and a "made in the USA" commitment.

Before the announcement, markets and foreign governments were jittery. But the uncertainties have not disappeared. Listening to Keir Starmer continue to advocate a "calm pragmatic

Longer still, maybe, before US car workers or farmers feel truly confident about paying down their debts and spending again. It makes perfect sense, therefore, to emphasise the uncertainties that Trump has just unleashed.

approach" does not disguise the fact that he knows, as we do, that Trump's approach is the exact reverse. We are in a trade war now, whether we like it or not, and Trump, as the leader of the strongest economy in the world, likes it a lot because he thinks the US will win.

Things may not look so benign, however, when the rubber hits the road. It is inevitable that enthusiasm will be dulled - either among the public or in markets - when the inevitable price hikes are passed on to consumers, when inflation and the cost of mortgages begin to rise, when real wages remain flat, or when investment stalls and the US economy starts to experience a Trump slump.

All this, though, is speculation about the future, and a lot of it is for the fairly long-term future at that. It takes time for the real economic effects to be felt from a tariff wall of the kind Trump is planning. It is true that the tariffs have to be charged immediately, and that retaliatory tariffs are likely to kick in fast too. Nevertheless it will be months, if not years, before many US companies or sectors have the confidence and the cash to invest in the way "fortress America" supporters hope. Longer still, maybe, before US car workers or farmers feel truly confident about paying down their debts and spending again.

It makes perfect sense, therefore, to emphasise the uncertainties that Trump has just unleashed. All the

more so because of the man himself, as well as the policy. It is hard not to feel, yet again, that part of what drove Trump's decision was the sheer thrill he gets from his power. He glories in the way the world hangs on his every move, as the world

must when its largest economy is controlled by a grudge-bearing manchild with guns who governs by decree.

Yet step back a little and it is also apparent that Trump is acting more logically than that. He is acting, albeit in a wilful and perverse manner, because the international economic model has been broken. He is responding to something real, namely a global recession that stems most immediately from the combined impact of the banking crisis of 2008-9 and the Covid pandemic of 2020. This was not something fake or imagined. Nor was it - or is it still - something felt in the US alone, but elsewhere, certainly including Europe and Britain.

The common root of today's economic burden was the overload of debt and credit that caused the banking crash of 2008. That crash was principally confronted by spending massive amounts of public money on quantitative easing. But, just as before the crash, this was money based on credit more than on production or goods. This triggered attempts to square the circle - tax cuts in the US, austerity in Britain, pension cuts in France - which in turn provoked so-called populist responses, such as Trump's election win in 2016, Brexit in the UK, the gilets jaunes in France. But before any of these national responses could resolve, Covid arrived, causing recessions all round, stock-market collapses and a rise in infla-

tion. Faced with these continuing problems, Trump's response takes the form of tariffs. It is very uncertain whether they will work, even for the US itself. They may also trigger recessions, and the resultant tax and spend policy dilemmas elsewhere, in places such as the EU, Britain, Canada and Japan. In addition, they are likely to widen the gulf between the US and its postwar allies. While Trump talks of liberation, Germany's new chancellor, Friedrich Merz, talks of "independence from the USA".

In his tariffs, Trump is clutching at straws. He may divert the US's tariff income into orthodox neoliberal tax cuts for corporations and the rich, like him. But his approach can also be seen as an illustration of the limited strategic options that today's democratic political leaders have at their command when faced with economic recession or, worse, depression.

In a recent article in the London Review of Books, Perry Anderson has drawn an illuminating historical contrast with the post-depression 1930s. In the early 1930s, he writes, governments also followed economic orthodoxy with disastrous consequences. Back then, their failure forced the public works programmes of the New Deal (and of the Nazis) and then, after emerging from the abyss of war, the postwar establishment of Keynesianism. John Maynard Keynes himself, it is worth noting, was no dogmatic free-trader and was sometimes an advocate of tariffs. In the 2020s, governments face a comparable dilemma. They, too, have been constrained by an economic orthodoxy that is increasingly difficult to sustain. They, too, have occasionally been forced into interventionist measures such as the Covid furlough scheme.

But beyond that? Trump is no New Dealer; he is the New Deal's sworn enemy. At least he sees the need to do things differently. But his tariffs are the opposite to the new paradigm of political economy that the democratic capitalist world so obviously and urgently craves.

The Guardian

# Do the Saudis really want peace in Ukraine?

Saahil Menon

US President Donald Trump's campaign pledge to end the Russo-Ukrainian war within 24 hours of assuming office has fallen flat. As well as failing to extract a single concession from Moscow and hinting at premature sanctions relief, Trump's selection of Saudi Arabia as a neutral venue for peace talks goes to show how gifting his long-time Middle Eastern patron bragging rights takes precedence over actually saving lives.

Granted, there were few options for where negotiating teams could convene, as most senior Russian officials are barred from entering the EU. Furthermore, fence-sitting middle powers like India, Kazakhstan and Indonesia had no real appetite to spearhead mediation efforts. Riyadh's recent decision to plow \$600 billion into the US economy during Trump's second presidential term almost certainly also had a bearing on the Saudis being offered a seat at the table.

That said, Saudi Arabia's self-serving agenda means both warring parties are not necessarily any closer to a blanket cessation of hostilities today than before its intervention. Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman (MBS) is keen to demonstrate that he has come of age as a statesman in the eyes of the international community. The limited agreement Russia and Ukraine struck in Riyadh last week to halt attacks on each other's energy infrastructure and ensure freedom of navigation across the Black Sea bodes well for the Saudi ruler, drowning out negative press coverage of his past follies. These include locking up Saudi oligarchs accused of corruption, shaking them down for billions of petrodollars at the very same Ritz-Carlton that hosted the latest round of deliberations.

Despite spending more than \$100 million on American lobbyists since 2016, Saudi Arabia is still struggling to rehabilitate its image and attract foreign direct investment as part of MBS' lofty Vision 2030 strategy to diversify away from fossil fuels. Being associated with an outwardly virtuous, albeit deeply flawed, Washington-led initiative to restore normalcy in Eastern Europe not only depicts the Saudi regime as a responsible actor but places it as a frontrunner to mediate potential rapprochement between the United States and Iran should Trump pursue diplomacy instead of cowboy tactics toward Tehran.

Nonetheless, the House of Saud is far from an impartial arbiter. After all, it is inconceivable that an ultra-conservative family dictatorship with a poor human rights record can relate to an attritional battle being fought in the name of defending democracy, much less sympathize with the Ukrainians as victims of unprovoked aggression. Whether it be conflating peaceful activists with terrorists, using troll farms to advance their malign interests abroad, or overseeing transnational repression and extrajudicial killings, the extent to which MBS' governance style mirrors that of President Vladimir Putin should give Kyiv pause.

Worse yet, the two like-minded autocrats happen to be equally staunch proponents of the principle that might makes right. Just as Russia's war was intended to last a matter of days, Saudi Arabia's adventurism in neighboring Yemen at MBS' behest was predicated on a similar miscalculation that its weaker neighbor would crumble, until the Iranian-backed Houthi rebels stalemated the conflict by targeting Aramco's facilities with cruise missiles.

As the world's biggest crude producers and exporters, Riyadh and Moscow actively collude within OPEC+ to artificially jack up oil prices whenever their books need balancing. According to the International Monetary Fund, Saudi Arabia cannot break even unless Brent crude hovers at around \$96 per barrel. Given the ballooning budget deficit they are running to bankroll futuristic mega-projects such as NEOM and Qiddiya - not to mention the 2034 FIFA World Cup - a Ukraine peace deal that would ultimately result in cheaper commodity prices is at odds with the Saudi leadership's near-term interests.

Their feigned altruism does, however, risk backfiring once Arab society starts to question why MBS has attached greater importance to the Russo-Ukrainian war than resolving the dire situation in Gaza. Saudi Arabia has been a major beneficiary of the 2022 full-scale invasion of Ukraine. The Kingdom managed to facilitate multiple high-profile prisoner swaps and thereby gloss over events like a sharp rise in beheadings last year and jailing its citizens for offensive social media posts - which would have otherwise garnered more attention in Western media.

Meanwhile, the post-war order ushered in by Putin has helped Saudi Arabia raise its global stature and shake off its historical reputation as a US protectorate that Trump claimed "would not last two weeks" without Washington's. If anything, thanks to its hedging strategy of "positive neutrality," Riyadh now sits in the driver's seat as Washington seeks to peel it away from BRICS+ and expand the Abraham Accords. At the same time, heightened Russo-Iranian trade and defense cooperation has constrained the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps' ability to train and equip its Houthi surrogates who pose arguably the gravest threat to Saudi Arabia's national security amid a resurgence of Red Sea piracy.

Finally, MBS views wartime Russia as a prospective source of funding for his grand plans to transform the likes of Riyadh and Jeddah into the region's commercial and cultural hubs. He is looking to emulate Dubai's success at attracting Russian tourists and second-home seekers who are no longer welcomed by the West. Beyond replenishing state coffers, the Ukraine conflict has given Saudi Arabia the kind of PR makeover its government spent through the nose on Beltway lobbyists to achieve. It is therefore hard to imagine that the host nation has any genuine desire to see the fighting stop.

# Trump might find himself trapped in Gaza

Giorgio Caffero

THE Gaza ceasefire had been extremely fragile ever since its implementation on Jan. 19. Many analysts doubted that phase two would begin, and the main question was about when, not if, the ceasefire would fall apart. It came as no surprise when Israel completely ended the ceasefire on March 18 and resumed its genocidal war on Gaza, killing roughly 600 [1] Palestinians within the first four days after the truce collapsed.

It is beyond disturbing to think about what will come next for the 2.2 million people in Gaza, especially given that Israeli authorities imposed [2] a blockade on all humanitarian aid on March 2. While briefing the UN Security Council on the day Israel resumed its war, UN Emergency Relief Coordinator Tom Fletcher said [3] "food is rotting and medicines are expiring." The Israelis quickly undid all

humanitarian progress achieved by international actors during the 42-day ceasefire. "Essential survival resources needed are now being rationed," warned [4] Fletcher.

For all the misleading and outright inaccurate reporting in the Western media, it is clear that Hamas wanted phase two to begin, which was supposed to take place on March 1. However, Israel wanted phase one extended and was against moving into phase two. Had the second phase begun, Hamas would have handed over all the remaining Israeli captives. Now, amid this intense warfare, Hamas claims it is considering US Special Envoy to the Middle East Steve Witkoff's "Bridge Proposal," which aims to extend the collapsed ceasefire into next month, beyond Ramadan and Passover, to permit negotiations for a permanent ceasefire to end this war.

It is not difficult to understand why this genocide resumed on March 18. Israeli

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his allies in the government were crystal clear that they did not support the ceasefire and wanted Israeli military operations against Gaza to resume. It was only pressure from the incoming Donald Trump administration during the final days of Joe Biden's presidency that led Tel Aviv to agree to the tenuous ceasefire. Now that the Trump administration removed that pressure on Israel and the American president went all-out with his rhetoric about "hell" in Gaza, Netanyahu received the green light from the White House to continue the genocide.

What US President Donald Trump realistically sought to achieve with his obscene rhetoric about a "clean out" [6] of Gaza and outlandish talk of transforming the war-ravaged enclave into the "Riviera of the Middle East" [7] is a question

for another article. Nonetheless, it is easy to conclude that such language emboldened the most right-wing and aggressive Israeli elements, including those in the government. These extremists have spent decades fantasizing about a second Nakba and establishing a Palestinian state outside Palestine.

Put simply, for Netanyahu and those around him to champion this plan of mass ethnic cleansing and forced displacement of millions of Palestinians into Egypt, Jordan, and perhaps also some Gulf Arab countries, continuing the war on Gaza is a necessary part of this process. After all, human history has shown that people don't volunteer to leave their ancestral homeland but typically only do as a result of massive bloodshed.

The Israeli leadership understands this about the Palestinians and their quest to remain on their land. So

much was on display with the leaflets [8] that Israel's military recently dropped on Gaza, which threatened to make Trump's plan for a "clean out" of Gaza the new reality.

To be sure, Israel's domestic politics and Netanyahu's own legal situation were relevant factors too. By restarting the war on Gaza, Netanyahu was able to secure stability within his own coalition. Now, not only is there no reason for him to fear more cabinet members quitting the coalition, but former Israeli National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir who left in January because of the ceasefire has returned [9] due to the genocide's resumption.

Meanwhile, Netanyahu's testimony in his corruption trial, set for the day that the war on Gaza recommenced, was postponed, [10] highlighting how "security developments" [11] shield him from legal consequences for his alleged [12] breach of trust, bribery, and fraud.

A key question is, where does this all leave Trump? After all, he campaigned on being a "peacemaker" president. While delivering his inaugural address just over two months ago, Trump declared, [13] "We will measure our success not only by the battles we win but also by the wars that we end - and perhaps most importantly, the wars we never get into."

At this point, Trump might find himself trapped in Gaza, preventing him from reducing the US military footprint in the Middle East. Trump is escalating conflicts in the region-from Gaza to Yemen and possibly soon Iran-that could keep the US bogged down in this part of the world, which is the opposite of his promises regarding US foreign policy if elected to a second term. It remains to be seen how Trump's support for Israel's actions in Gaza and his escalation in Yemen-closely tied to Palestine-will impact his standing among his MAGA base.



# Coming in from cold: Collective European intelligence in Trump era

**THE recent cessation pause in US intelligence-sharing with Ukraine has created significant pressure on Ukraine's forces in the Kursk region. The pause also marks a major shift in US-European intelligence cooperation. In the short term, it will make European powers more vulnerable, but it may also create opportunities for developing autonomous European capabilities.**

Since 2014, US intelligence has been pivotal to Ukraine's defense; effectively a pillar in Ukraine's defense structure. US intelligence has underpinned strategic initiatives against Russian aggression through extensive electronic, satellite, and human intelligence streams. The pause-and the potential long-term loss-of this support will reduce Ukraine's effectiveness on the battlefield, highlights the relatively patchy European intelligence coverage that will struggle to step into the American vacuum, and raises important and broad questions about what the future of US-European intelligence cooperation will look like.

The intelligence pause by the US administration introduced some uncertainty into transatlantic intelligence relationships that had not been present since WW2. Whilst the US and European partners have historically maintained robust intelligence exchanges, the recent pause and longer-term disruption in the relationship will create doubts in European partners' minds about the extent to which they share intelligence, and the viability of European-located transatlantic intelligence fusion centers. If the US reduces its intelligence coop-

eration more broadly, the consequences for European security and defense cooperation will be profound: transatlantic security is entirely shared between the US and EU, including in intelligence and command structures. Such a dislocation in intelligence cooperation will introduce a five-year vulnerability to European security, strongly benefiting Russia and China.

European powers possess sophisticated intelligence assets, but they also possess critical gaps in comparison to the US. In signals intelligence (SIGINT), European nations like the UK, France, and Germany are capable players. This can be seen through Britain's RC-135 Rivet Joint missions, France's CERES satellites, and Germany's communication interception operations. These capabilities provide the Alliance essential intelligence but they lack the extensive reach and continuous "real-time" capability of American systems, which operate on a scale several magnitudes greater than their European counterparts. The UK's SIGINT efforts, notably, have traditionally depended heavily on US technology and collaboration, making a comprehensive decoupling in this set of intelligence activities particularly challenging.

Human intelligence (HUMINT) capabilities within Europe-particularly within the UK's M16, France's DGSE, and Germany's BND-are well-formed and have a long history of capable and significant operations in Russia, Ukraine, and third-party countries such as China and Iran. Yet, despite these strengths, Europe's HUMINT networks

Robert Dover

essentially function in a triangulation with large-scale American HUMINT operations. If the Americans withhold access to their HUMINT feed, then Europe's own HUMINT efforts will be diminished and it will take many years and significant resources to scale them up to fill the gap in this kind of intelligence created by American withdrawal.

Satellite imagery and reconnaissance intelligence (IMINT) represent one domain where Europe has demonstrated notable strength, especially through France's sophisticated Helios and CSO satellites, and the satellite radar imaging capabilities of Germany and Italy. However, Europe lacks satellite-based infrared early-warning systems essential for missile detection-a critical capability currently monopolized by the US. Europe's Satellite Centre (SatCen) provides a useful but limited coordinating framework, highlighting both the potential and constraints facing European intelligence integration. Europeans could effectively collaborate to rapidly scale up an alternative to Elon Musk's Starlink system. Starlink has been very useful to Ukraine's defense and the certainty of supply has been questioned since Musk's public argument with the Polish government.

Given the new intelligence realities in Europe, the concept of a Collective European Intelligence Service is as timely and as relevant as conversations around joint military procurement and a form of European armed forces. A collective intelligence agency - if properly funded and with collective political support -

could reduce Europe's dependence on US intelligence and the uncertainties that are currently present.

Developing a Collective European Intelligence Service will be challenging. Significant financial and political commitments will be necessary to close the technological gap, particularly in real-time intelligence analysis and AI-driven data processing capabilities. The larger challenges exist in the political realm, where lengthy histories of mistrust in the political, legal and data-sharing realm would need to be overcome quickly for this collective service to work.

The prospect of success in these endeavors will depend on whether the US effectively withdraws from its commitments to NATO. Coordination of intelligence (and security) without the US or NATO structures as clearing houses and structures demands the sort of European political cohesion and mutual trust, that they have not managed to mount before.

The potential withdrawal of US intelligence cooperation and sharing in Ukraine and Europe, highlights the continent's dependence upon the US, and also the gaps and relatively small size of Europe's intelligence apparatus. To develop European intelligence independence requires a large financial commitment, changes to laws and regulations, political cooperation and trust, and the coordination of European industry and academia. If these challenges are overcome, it could be the US that loses out on the influence it has enjoyed over Europe over the previous eighty years.

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# Left, right and a shrinking centre in today's France

**BIEN accueillir, Bextreme droite. La France est divisée - Welcome, Extreme Right. France is Divided. Yes, that's the portrayal of today's France. Just before the second round of the all-important French presidential election, in a BBC programme, someone sitting in a plaza in a French town was asked whom he would vote for. The man said that he would support Marine Le Pen - the far-right anti-immigrant, Eurosceptic leader, although he had voted for the far-left in the first round of the elections.**

There are reasons to believe that this person is not unique. In a highly heterogeneous and deeply fractured society like today's France, Le Pen's far-right ideology helped her beat Jean-Luc Mélenchon, the veteran far-left leader of the La France Insoumise group, in the first round.

However, Le Pen and Mélenchon had overlapping agendas of opposing the rising cost of living. President Emmanuel Macron's economic liberalism, increasing globalization, the European Union, and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO). Le Pen, thus, reaped the harvest of far-left candidate Mélenchon to some extent in the second round, whom she surpassed with a wafer-thin margin of 1.2 per cent in the first round to seal her place in the second round. In the French presidential elections, of course, the top two candidates of the first-round contest in the second round provided nobody gets a 50 per cent vote share in the first round.

Mélenchon certainly got a hefty 22 per cent vote share in the first round. The last time a hard-left French politician received this kind of support was more than half a century ago, in 1969, when the Communist legend Jacques Duclos polled about 21.3 per cent. There is no denying that French politics and society are becoming extremely bipolar, with the far-right and far-left increasingly gaining momentum. President Macron is playing a balancing act with his centrist politics.

France might have voted to keep the far-right Le Pen of the National Rally out of the Elysée Palace in the just-concluded presidential elections but almost three million votes were added to Le Pen's 2017 tally, indicating how the far-right is menacingly catching up since World War II. And today's France bears a striking resemblance to the electoral landscape of the UK during the Brexit referendum

Atanu Biswas

in 2016 or of the US during Donald Trump's victory in 2016. France today is a country having two electoral blocs characterized by opposing geographic and sociological profiles. Macron knows it well. As the results of the second round of voting came out, declaring his victory in front of the Eiffel Tower, Macron acknowledged that the country is "beset by doubts and divisions" and the French people voted not for his ideas "but to block those of the Far-Right". Yes, for the second time in succession, in the backdrop of a highly fractured society, Macron has, to a great extent, been rewarded for not being Le Pen. In fact, many French voters said they feel arm-twisted into choosing "the lesser of two evils". Still, it is to be noted that the two far-right candidates - Marine Le Pen and the former TV pundit Éric Zemmour - together got more support than

Macron in the first round of the election. With the ominous surge of the far-right in France, from 33.9 per cent in 2017 to 41.45 per cent in 2022 in the second round - and the vote against Muslims, immigrants, the European Union, and globalization, the multiculturalism of France has been dealt a devastating blow. Macron, of course, got huge support from the over-65s and among the 18-24 age group; neither has a significant active presence in the labour market. And amidst the complex social structure of today's France, in the backdrop of the pandemic and Russia's Ukraine attack, France is increasingly behaving like an unhappy democracy with a huge number of abstentions during the vote. In fact, the abstention rate reached a record 28 per cent, or 1.36 crore voters, 2.5 per cent more than in 2017 and the highest since 1969. Around 6.35 per cent of votes cast in the final round were 'blank' and another 2.25 per cent were 'null' (a candidate's name is either crossed out or a ballot is invalidated). Le Monde has argued that, if these ballots were considered, Macron has been elected with 54.7 per cent, not 58.5 per cent, of the votes cast. Macron knows that he "did not manage to contain" the rise of the far-right during his presidency. And he also acted in a rightist way when he adopted tougher approaches to migrants and adopted the widely criticized 'Separatism law'. The Gilets Jaunes (yellow vest) protests in 2018, which were triggered when Macron

increased the diesel tax, were quite spontaneous and a blow to his presidency as well. Well, his second term would be a much more difficult time when he will have to confront a more powerful far-right opposition. Michel Houellebecq is one of France's leading novelists and most provocative writers. Houellebecq's newest novel Anéantir (meaning 'Annihilate', 'Destroy' or 'Obliterate', in English) was published in January this year, just a few months before the all-important presidential elections. Anéantir is written against the backdrop of the fictional 2027 French presidential elections. Far-right leaders such as Marine Le Pen and Éric Zemmour are characters in the novel. So is President Macron, although not named. In fact, in this newest novel, Houellebecq envisages a grim picture of France five years on. In 2026 and 2027, "France [is] in decline" but the bourgeois elites are not doing so badly. However, France shows some signs of revival and is without labour strikes but "the gap between the ruling classes and the populace has reached unprecedented levels." The country nonetheless remains in a state of moral decay, gripped by tensions caused by inequality as well as the slow death of rural communities. Overall, France in 2027 is predicted to be bleak.

In this fictional depiction, in 2027 France, Le Pen has stepped down as leader of the National Rally but far-right candidate Éric Zemmour is still sparking controversy. And after two terms of Macron's presidency, Houellebecq presents a country that is on its knees, with high levels of unemployment and poverty. In his 2015 best-seller Soumission (meaning 'Submission', in English), Houellebecq, of course, predicted a Muslim president to be elected in the 2022 French elections, which never materialised. But there is no denying the inherent message of Soumission, that with the huge influx of African immigrants, France would see a surge in popularity of the far-right leader Le Pen around 2022, which is perfectly matched with present-day French society.

Present-day Europe is flooded with immigrants from Africa and West Asia. Thus, it would be interesting to keep an eye on the continuing developments in the mixed French society, that might dominate the future of Europe as well. And Emmanuel Macron has a daunting task in his second term, indeed.

# Criminal networks are Kremlin's not-so-secret weapon

**THE usage of criminals and wider organized crime groups by Moscow is nothing new. The 2007 cyber attacks against Estonia were organized by proxy groups associated with Putin's administration. The Kremlin's tight bond with the criminal world, far from being a series of isolated incidents, represents a deeply entrenched system of cooperation with multiple benefits for Moscow.**

At its core, this collaboration is born out of mutual necessity. For the Kremlin, criminal networks offer a ready-made infrastructure capable of executing covert operations with a degree of deniability that conventional state agencies can seldom match. These groups, with their financial resources and networks established across Russia and the West, have become indispensable tools for advancing Russian interests abroad. In return, they gain protection and legitimacy from being intertwined with state power - patronage that enables them to thrive despite the risks inherent in their work.

By developing this relationship, the Kremlin blurs the line between statecraft and criminal enterprise. Moscow's reliance on these groups means that criminal actions are, in many cases, state-sanctioned even if they never bear the official stamp of government involvement. A significant perk of this cooperation lies in the financial channels it opens up. Organized criminal organizations are infamous for moving large sums of money across borders and laundering funds. These activities provide the Kremlin with access to so-called black cash that fuels various state operations, especially covert ones. This funding mechanism allows Russia to bypass the conventional financial scrutiny imposed by international bodies and sanctions, thereby

Avesta Afshari Mehr

sustaining its strategic initiatives even under economic pressure.

Not to mention how the operational expertise of these criminal networks has been utilized to support a range of clandestine activities. Beyond cyberattacks and assassinations, their skill set extends to information warfare, smuggling and even manipulating political processes in foreign states. It is difficult for state bureaucracies to act with such efficiency and ruthlessness, particularly in environments where the Kremlin wishes to avoid overt military or diplomatic engagement. For example, in Ukraine, several investigative reports have suggested that criminal elements with alleged ties to Russian intelligence have been involved in orchestrating smear campaigns against pro-Western politicians, creating a climate of fear and uncertainty ahead of key elections. Similarly, local criminal networks in Moldova have been accused of using economic pressure - through illicit money flows and bribery - to launder money and influence political groups favorable to the Kremlin to stifle the country's moves to strengthen ties with the European Union.

In the Baltic states, there have been indications that Russian-linked groups have employed a mix of financial coercion and behind-the-scenes lobbying to sway local politicians, ensuring that governments remain either sympathetic to Moscow's agenda or too divided to counteract it effectively. Thus, by embedding criminal operatives within these operations, Russia not only enhances its capabilities but also insulates itself from direct repercussions. Lithuanian prosecutors linked the May 2024 arson attack on an IKEA store in Vilnius to the GRU. The

attack was allegedly designed to intimidate Lithuania away from supporting Ukraine and involved intermediaries - criminals as opposed to official GRU agents - that provided the necessary cover for such a high-risk operation.

This incident explicitly demonstrates how criminal elements are mobilized for specific, short-term tactical gains. It serves as a stark reminder that while the true power of this alliance lies in its long-term systemic benefits, the occasional high-profile sabotage remains part of the Kremlin's diverse strategies. Ultimately, the relationship between the Kremlin and organized crime is not simply a series of sporadic encounters, but a carefully cultivated, strategic partnership that enhances Russia's operational capabilities on multiple fronts. Through an agreement between state power and criminal enterprise, the Kremlin gains access to a pool of financial, operational and political resources that would be difficult to secure through traditional state mechanisms alone.

This intricate cooperation demonstrates a critical and unsettling aspect of modern geopolitics: the criminal underworld has transformed into an extension of state power. It is a model that allows Russia to maintain a semblance of plausible deniability while engaging in activities that challenge the very foundations of international law and order. As the global community grapples with the ramifications of this alliance, it is clear that it is essential for both policymakers and security experts seeking to counter its influence the understand this relationship. The line between legitimate statecraft and criminal enterprise is becoming more vague, creating challenges that extend well beyond the realm of traditional security concerns.

# Rumeysa Ozturk case: Shattering myth of freedom in US

**THE recent unlawful arrests, arbitrary detentions, and illegal deportations of university students across the United States should prompt those who still consider it a bastion of human rights and democracy to reconsider. The clandestine arrest, cruel and unusual detention and political-based persecutory revocation of student authorization for Rumeysa Ozturk, a Turkish-born Tufts University doctoral student, on Mar. 26, 2025, exposes the myth.**

Ms. Ozturk is a doctoral student in Child Study and Human Development at Tufts University, studying on a Fulbright scholarship. She co-authored an opinion piece published in her university student paper about the campaign to divest from companies with ties to Israel. As she was leaving her residence to go for Iftar dinner three days ago, US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents, wearing masks and black plainclothes, suddenly pounced on her, forcefully confiscated her cell phone, handcuffed her, and abducted her in a van. In complete disregard of the rule of law, Ozturk was stealthily removed from the state of Massachusetts and whisked away to a detention center in Louisiana, contrary to a federal court order prohibiting her removal. No charges have been laid against Ozturk and nothing justifies the gross mistreatment and abuse of basic due process and human rights that she has suffered. Even the attempt by the US Department of Homeland Security

to legitimize ICE's lawlessness by vaguely claiming that Ozturk engaged in "activities supporting Hamas, a foreign terrorist organization that relishes the killing of Americans" is incongruous with the rule of law. Not only is there no charge, but there is no evidence of the above to justify terminating her student visa.

Furthermore, it is loosely based on an autocratic presidential edict that seeks to politically repress and persecute. In Jan. 2025, US President Donald Trump signed an executive order authorizing the removal of foreign students participating in protests against, and criticism of, Israel's genocide of Palestinians, threatening to defund universities for failing to do so. The threat to defund universities and prosecute students is a violation of the First Amendment of the US Constitution, which bars the US government from using threats to defund in order to coerce censorship and silence protest. Moreover, rule by executive decree is not a function of democracy but rather autocracy. Such governance trickles down to institutional breaches of civil rights and liberties, such as freedom of thought, expression, assembly and association, and violations of human rights such as arbitrary arrests, detentions, and cruel and unusual punishment by the state. As a result of the executive order attacking fundamental constitutional and human rights, universities across the US have implemented restrictive speech codes

Amina Sherazee

and policies prohibiting protests in a blatant attack on free speech.

Students across America now face censorship of speech and events, face ludicrous allegations and suffer severe sanctions without due process for engaging in protests that are typical of student activism. Ozturk is just one name on an alarmingly long list of students who speak up for Palestinian human rights, including the high-profile cases of Columbia graduate Mahmoud Khalil, University of Alabama student Alireza Douroudi, Columbia student Yunseo Chung, Georgetown University fellow Badar Khan Suri, Cornell University doctoral candidate Momodou Taal, and Columbia University student Ranjani Srinivasan who are facing deportation after revocation of student visas. These cases represent only the tip of the iceberg. Many more students in America who are peacefully demanding universities to divest from weapons manufacturers and corporate partners associated with the state of Israel are also persecuted but are well within their rights to protest. Their request is supported by countless credible and authoritative human rights reports documenting genocide and crimes against humanity committed by Israel, as well as decisions by top United Nations courts.

Arguably, the arrest of thousands of university students at dozens of American universities protesting against the genocide in Gaza is contrary to the fundamen-

tal principles of the rule of law and respect for human rights required in a democracy. Protection of political dissent from punishment by the state is a core function of the First Amendment in the US Constitution. It is a hallmark of democracy and human rights for students to engage in free expression on domestic and international social and political issues whether in student newspapers, campus demonstrations or encampments. Indeed, it was largely through such actions in the 1970s that the Vietnam War was brought to a halt, and in the 1980s that universities divested from companies, which ultimately toppled apartheid South Africa. US university campuses, once vibrant places for intellectual inquiry, controversial debates, and resistance to unjust government policies, have now become places of censorship, silence, and fear. The arrest of Ozturk bears more resemblance to the actions of Gestapo thugs than to the behavior expected from the so-called "land of the free." But it is not the first time in America: it is reminiscent of the Red Scare in 1917-1920 and McCarthyism in the late 1940s and through the 1950s, where widespread political repression and persecution took place. Those who continue to believe in the myth of American superiority in human rights and democracy are fooling themselves, just like the subjects who praised the naked emperor in the famous fairy tale "The Emperor's New Clothes." The illusion exists only in their imagination and not in reality.

# There is no such thing as an ‘illegal immigrant’

Mehdi Hasan

**ON 29 January, the second Trump administration held its first White House press briefing. "Of the 3,500 arrests Ice has made so far since President Trump came back into office, can you just tell us the numbers?" asked a reporter in the front row. "How many have a criminal record versus those who are just in the country illegally?"**

"All of them," responded the new White House press secretary, Karoline Leavitt, making her debut in the briefing room, "because they illegally broke our nation's laws, and, therefore, they are criminals, as far as this administration goes." She continued: "I know the last administration didn't see it that way, so it's a big culture shift in our nation to view someone who breaks our immigration laws as a criminal. But that's exactly what they are."

Leavitt's answer delighted MAGA media and went viral in conservative circles, with a fire emoji from a Daily Wire reporter, a bulls-eye emoji from the Heritage Foundation, and a mic drop emoji from the Republican Study Committee.

It was also completely, utterly, totally, wrong. Factually inaccurate. A brazen lie. In the eyes of this administration, immigrants who are undocumented are all "illegal immigrants" and these "illegal immigrants", ergo, are all "criminals". But, on so many levels, it's just not true. It's a popular myth pushed by the right that needs urgent debunking.

First, people are not, are never, illegal. It was the Nobel laureate

and former Auschwitz prisoner Elie Wiesel who pointed out how "no human being is 'illegal'" because it is "a contradiction in terms. People can be beautiful or less beautiful, they can be just or unjust, but illegal? How can a human being be illegal?" An act can be illegal; people cannot inherently be illegal. Second, the anti-immigrant right has not only gotten the language wrong but the law wrong, too. Under the US criminal code, as the ACLU has noted: "The act of being present in the United States in violation of the immigration laws is not, standing alone, a crime." Why? Because illegal entry is considered a misdemeanor not a felony, under 8 US Code § 1325, and is subject to civil, and not criminal, penalties. It is the "reentry of removed aliens", under 8 US Code § 1326, that is considered a felony and subject to criminal punishment.

Meanwhile, almost half of undocumented immigrants in the United States did not even enter the country illegally to begin with; many of them are "overstays" who arrived with a legal work, student, or travel visa but failed to leave the US, for a multiplicity of reasons, before their visas expired. The inconvenient truth for the anti-immigrant right is that it is not a crime for immigrants simply to be present in the United States without proper documentation. They are not "illegals". Don't take my word for it. Or the ACLU's. Take the word - the 5-3 majority ruling! - of the supreme court of the United States.

In 2012, in Arizona v United States, the highest court in the land ruled that "as a general rule, it is not a crime for a removable alien to remain in the United States". Got that? Not. A. Crime.

Third, the anti-immigrant right wants to conflate immigrants, especially of the undocumented variety, with criminals - but the evidence is beyond flimsy. Remember in February when the Trump administration claimed that "Guantánamo Bay will hold the worst of the worst" migrants? When the homeland security secretary, Kristi Noem, insisted that "criminal alien murderers, rapists, child predators and gangsters" were being shipped to Gitmo? It turned out that around one in three of those migrants "had no criminal records". Remember in March when the Trump administration sent nearly 300 immigrants to El Salvador because they were, allegedly, "illegal foreign terrorists" and "bad people" who committed the most "heinous crimes"? Ice officials later admitted in court that "many" of the people packed off to El Salvador had no criminal records. More and more reports suggest the apparent justification for sending these immigrants to a foreign labor camp was their possession not of criminal records but of ... tattoos. On Monday, the Trump administration admitted in a court filing that it had detained a Maryland father with protected legal status and deported him to El Salvador "because of an administrative error". It isn't surprising that this far-right nativist





# PSX turns bearish, loses 146 points



ISLAMABAD (APP): The 100-Index of the Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX) turned around to bearish trend on Friday, losing 146.45 points, a negative change of 0.12 percent, closing at 118,791.66 points as compared to 118,938.11 points on the last trading day.

## FPCCI felicitates govt for reduction of electricity prices

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FPCCI), leadership Atif Ikram Sheikh and SM Tanvir said that the revival of the IPPs agreement has compensated the loss of Rs 350 billion from the government treasury, due to which a reduction in electricity prices for domestic and industrial consumers has been announced.

They felicitated the announcement of a reduction in electricity prices for industrial and domestic consumers by Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Shrif and termed it significant for the country's economy.

The year 2025 is the year of 'take-off' of the Pakistani economy, and intend to take the country's exports to \$ 100 billion in the coming years.

Chairman FPCCI, United Business Group, SM Tanvir expressed these views while addressing the press conference along with President, FPCCI Atif Akram Sheikh, Senior Vice President, Zaki Ejaz, Vice President Quratul-Ain, Chairman FPCCI Capital office, Karim Aziz Malik and Coordinator Capital office Malik Sohail here at FPCCI Capital office Islamabad.

Meanwhile, the President Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FPCCI), Atif Ikram Sheikh lauded Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's announcement of a significant reduction in electricity tariffs, terming it an "Eid gift" for the public and industrialists.

The government has reduced electricity prices by PKR 7.41 per unit. This move is expected to alleviate the financial burden on industries and address their long-standing concerns regarding high energy costs, he said.

President, FPCCI emphasized that the tariff reduction, coupled with the recent decrease in the policy interest rate, will significantly resolve issues faced by industrialists.

He credited the Prime Minister's task force for its effective work in facilitating this decision.

FPCCI Senior Vice President Saqib Fayyaz urged industrialists to capitalize on this development by boosting exports. He mentioned that 2025 will be a year of economic growth for Pakistan.

remained unchanged.

The three top trading companies were Energyco PK with 61,333,939 shares at Rs 8.29 per share, Bank Al-Falah with 43,523,860 shares at Rs74.37 per share and Bank of Punjab 21,774,098 shares at Rs 11.01 per share.

Philip Morris (Pakistan) Limited witnessed a maximum increase of Rs 89.27 per share closing at Rs 981.98 whereas runner-up was Ismail Industries Limited with Rs 52.25 rise in its share price to close at Rs 1,852.50.

Rafhan Maize Products Company Limited witnessed a maximum decrease of Rs 100.00 per share price, closing at Rs 9,000.00, whereas the runner-up was Siemens (Pakistan) Engineering with Rs 66.00 decline in its per share price to Rs 1,517.82.



**HAMBURG, GERMANY:** The Elbtower high rise stands partially complete on Friday in Hamburg, Germany. Construction of the prestige building, designed by David Chipperfield Architects, was halted in 2023 following the bankruptcy of billionaire investor Rene Benko. A new investor, Klaus-Michael Kuehne, is now threatening to cancel his investment, which would leave the city saddled with either the construction completion or the demolition.

## PM Shahbaz wins hearts of business community: Aoun Ali

### F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Aoun Ali Syed, the Regional Vice President of the Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FPCCI), has hailed Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif's announcement of a significant reduction in electricity prices as a positive development.

He attributed this to the combined efforts of the business community, stating that following this announcement, the business sector would increase its production capacity, boost exports, and provide relief to the public.

In his statement, Syed explained that the business community across the country had been demanding a reduction in electricity prices, and FPCCI had led the efforts in this regard. Both the ruling and opposition groups within the Federation stood united in supporting this demand. He especially appreciated the efforts of the ruling party's SM Tanveer and Mian Anjum Nisar, along with the full support of the business community. Syed also expressed gratitude towards the federal government, particularly Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif, for ensuring significant relief to the nation through the power sector.

He emphasized that now the business community should utilize this relief to enhance exports, which would ultimately strengthen the economy and have a positive impact on the public.

He also announced that a conference would be held on May 3 in Nathiagali, where representatives from the business community across the country would come together to discuss practical and beneficial projects and present their recommendations to the government.

Aoun Ali Syed concluded by stating that for the sake of the country's future, the business community must adopt a mindset of development and unity, leaving aside differences, to make the dream of a bright future a reality.

The commodities which recorded an increase in their average prices on year-on-year basis included Ladies Sandal (55.62%), Pulse Moong (27.10%), Powdered Milk (25.74%), Beef (21.10%), Sugar (18.60%), Pulse Gram (17.91%), Vegetable Ghee 1Kg (16.21%), Chicken (15.74%), Vegetable Ghee 2.5Kg (15.66%), Lawn Printed (12.52%), Georgette (10.54%) and Firewood (10.53%).

The commodities which recorded a decrease in their average prices on week-on-week basis included Garlic (6.11%), Bananas (5.34%), Eggs (4.79%), LPG (0.70%), Petrol (0.33%), Wheat Flour (0.20%), Pulse Mash (0.14%), Pulse Moong (0.13%), Pulse Masoor (0.05%) and Powdered Milk (0.01%).

Year-on-year basis, the commodities that witnessed decrease included Onions (67.46%), Wheat

## Kitchen Items' prices up by 0.20pc

ISLAMABAD (APP): The weekly inflation, measured by the Sensitive Price Indicator (SPI), increased by 0.20 percent for the combined consumption groups during the week ended on April 03, the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS) reported on Friday.

According to the PBS data, the SPI for the week under review in the above-mentioned group was recorded at 319.79 points as compared to 319.14 points during the past week.

As compared to the corresponding week of last year, the SPI for the combined consumption group in the week under review witnessed a decrease of 1.99 per cent.

The weekly SPI with the base year 2015-16 =100 covers 17 urban centres and 51 essential items for all expenditure groups.

The SPI for the lowest consumption group of up to Rs 17,732 witnessed an increase of 0.28 per cent and went up to 308.66 points from last week's 307.79 points.

The SPI for consumption groups of Rs 17,732 to 22,888; Rs 22,889-29,517; Rs 29,518-44,175 and above Rs 44,175, went up by 0.27 percent, 0.23 percent, 22 percent and 0.17 percent respectively.

During the week, out of 51 items, prices of 15 (29.41%) items increased, 10 (19.61%) items decreased and 26 (50.98%) items remained stable.

The items, which recorded major increase in their average prices on a week-on-week basis included Chicken (7.17%), Potatoes (6.50%), Onions (5.10%), Lawn Printed (0.71%), Tomatoes (0.66%), Gur (0.63%), Mustard Oil (0.61%), Beef (0.52%), Long Cloth (0.32%), Milk Fresh (0.25%), Firewood & Mutton (0.12%) each and Cigarettes (0.08%).

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## China hits back hard in global trade war with tariffs on US goods

PALM BEACH, Florida/BEIJING/WASHINGTON (Reuters): China announced additional tariffs of 34% on U.S. goods on Friday, striking back at U.S. President Donald Trump and escalating a trade war that has fed fears of a recession and triggered a global stock market rout that showed no sign of slowing on Friday.

In the standoff between the world's two biggest economies, Beijing also announced controls on exports of some rare earths, while Trump doubled down as well, vowing not to change course.

China added 11 U.S. bodies to the "unreliable entity" list, which allows Beijing to take punitive actions against foreign entities, including firms linked to arms sales to democratically governed Taiwan, which China claims as part of its territory.

Other impacted nations like Canada have also readied retaliation in a mounting trade war after Trump raised U.S. tariff barriers to their highest level in more than a century, leading to a plunge in world financial markets.

Investment bank J.P. Morgan said it now sees a 60% chance of the global economy entering recession by year-end, up from 40% previously.

Wall Street fell sharply on Friday morning, after China announced its retaliation tariffs a day after the Trump administration's sweeping levies knocked off \$2.4 trillion from U.S. equities.

Shares of big tech stocks fell, helping to drive the Nasdaq toward a bear market. Companies with big exposure to China and Taiwan for manufacturing their products were hard-hit, with Apple (AAPL.O), opens new tab down 4.7% and Nvidia (NVDA.O), opens new tab down 3.4%.

The Nasdaq showed a 3.69% decline, bringing the index to 20% below its all-time closing high in December.

"This is significant and is unlikely to be over, hence the negative market reactions," said Stephane Ekolo, Market & Equity Strategist, Tradition.

London, "Investors are afraid of a 'tit for tat' trade war situation."

Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell said on Friday that the tariffs were "larger than expected" and elevated the risk of both higher inflation and slower growth.

In prepared remarks at a conference, Powell did not address the swoon in U.S. stocks directly but acknowledged that the same uncertainty engulfing investors and company executives was facing the Fed.

Trump's team has played down the market turbulence as an adjustment that would prove beneficial in the long run. The White House touted stronger-than-expected job data on Friday, after a Labor Department report showed the U.S. economy added far more jobs in March than predicted.

But Trump's sweeping import tariffs could test the labor market's resilience in the months ahead amid sagging business confidence.

"To the many investors coming into the United States and investing massive amounts of money, my policies will never change. This is a great time to get rich, richer than ever before!!!" Trump said in a social media post in all caps.

After Beijing's retaliation, he posted: "China played it wrong, they panicked - the one thing they cannot afford to do!"

Trump on Thursday had said he was open to talking to China and making a deal over TikTok by providing relief for U.S. tariffs on Chinese goods in exchange for Beijing's approval of the sale of the ByteDance-owned short video app.

Speaking to reporters on Air Force One, Trump said it was just an example and did not answer a question on whether plans were underway for him to talk to Chinese President Xi Jinping.

In contrast to the U.S. labor report, Canada's total employment fell and the unemployment rate ticked up in March, data showed on Friday. The country's first monthly decrease in jobs since 2022 was prompted by uncertainty around tariffs, which forced companies to pause hiring and spurred some layoffs.

In Japan, one of United States' top trading partners, Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba said the tariffs had created a "national crisis" as a plunge in banking shares on Friday set Tokyo's stock market on course for its worst week in years.

U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio on Friday disputed any economic crash, telling reporters that markets were reacting to the change and would adjust.

The Nasdaq Composite (.IXIC), opens new tab fell 4.07% to 15,877.69 by 11:36 a.m. ET, shedding 20% from its all-time closing high touched in December. If the index closes below that mark, it would confirm a bear market.

The S&P 500 and the Nasdaq were poised to mark their biggest weekly drop since March 2020, and the Dow was on course for its biggest weekly decline since October 2020.

"Recession risk is a significant concern here. Tariffs could wipe out growth and markets are reflecting that. This bull market picture that we had in front of us is now being completely rewritten," said

Dana D'Auria, co-chief investment officer at Envestnet.

Wall Street's main indexes posted their biggest single-day percentage declines in years on Thursday after Trump imposed a 10% tariff on most imports into the United States and much higher levies on dozens of other countries.

Investors have shunned riskier assets including stocks and commodities in recent weeks on bets that the tariffs will spark an economic slowdown, prompting them to seek safer assets such as government bonds and gold.

Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell on Friday highlighted that Trump's unexpectedly hefty tariffs could trigger higher inflation and slower growth, setting the stage for challenging decisions ahead for the central bank.

Traders continued to anticipate a more accommodative policy from the

## Wall Street rout drags Nasdaq near bear market

WASHINGTON (Reuters): Wall Street fell sharply for a second straight session on Friday, pushing the Nasdaq toward a bear market, after China imposed fresh tariffs on all U.S. goods in response to the Trump administration's sweeping levies, escalating a global trade war.

China's finance ministry said on Friday it would impose additional tariffs of 34% on all U.S. goods from April 10 after U.S. President Donald Trump raised tariff barriers to their highest level in more than a century this week.

The tariff war has sent shockwaves through global financial markets and raised fears of an economic downturn, with investment bank JP Morgan forecasting a 60% chance of the global economy entering a recession by year-end, up from 40% previously.

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U.S. central bank, with money market futures pricing in cumulative rate cuts of 100 basis points by the end of this year, compared with about 75 bps a week earlier.

The Dow Jones Industrial Average (.DJI), opens new tab fell 3.49% to 39,128.86 points, dropping 10% from its record close and on course to confirm a correction. The S&P 500 (.SPX), opens new tab dropped 4.07% to 15,877.69.

U.S.-listings of Chinese companies dived, with JD.com and Alibaba and Baidu shedding over 9% each.

Companies with exposure to China also fell across the board, with mega-caps such as Apple (AAPL.O), opens new tab falling 4.7%.

The CBOE Volatility index (.VIX), opens new tab, known as Wall Street's fear gauge, hit its highest level in eight months at 34.71 points.

U.S. bank stocks (.SPSY), opens new tab dropped further on Friday, with the sector under pressure globally, as investors anticipated more interest rate cuts from central banks and a hit to economic growth from tariffs.

The yield on the benchmark 10-year Treasury notes was down to a six-month low of 3.938%.

A Labor Department report showed the U.S. economy added far more jobs than expected in March, but Trump's sweeping import tariffs could test the labor market's resilience in the months ahead amid sagging business confidence.

Declining issues outnumbered advances by an 8.82-to-1 ratio on the NYSE and a 6.38-to-1 ratio on the Nasdaq.

The S&P 500 posted 10 new 52-week highs and 138 new lows while the Nasdaq Composite recorded 11 new highs and 946 new lows.

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**ISLAMABAD:** A boy selling watermelon on his truck at fruit market. — INP photo





In brief

Rabada leaves IPL team mid-season

NEW DELHI (Agencies): South Africa's Kagiso Rabada has left the Gujarat Titans to return home in the middle of the Indian Premier League (IPL) 2025. The pace bowler missed Gujarat's third game against Royal Challengers Bengaluru on Wednesday after he played the first two matches for the team in the cash-rich tournament. "Kagiso Rabada has returned to South Africa to deal with an important personal matter," Gujarat Titans said in a statement. He was replaced by Arshad Khan, who bagged the prized wicket of star India batter Virat Kohli. Kagiso Rabada, 29, took a wicket each in his two outings at the team's home in the ongoing IPL 2025. Gujarat, led by Shubman Gill, who won a title in their debut season in 2022, have won two and lost one of their three matches in this edition. They currently sit at the fourth spot in the IPL 2025 standings, with four points in three matches. They are set to face Sunrisers Hyderabad on Sunday. The Indian Premier League involves 10 teams packing 70 league matches into eight weeks before the top four battle for supremacy in the play-offs, culminating in the May 25 final in Kolkata.

Cricket Canada monitoring arrest of Kirton

OTTAWA (Agencies): Cricket Canada says it is "actively monitoring" the situation after captain Nicholas Kirton was arrested in the Caribbean. Local reports say the 26-year-old was detained at Barbados Airport on Sunday on potential drugs charges. "We are actively monitoring the situation and closely following developments as they unfold," Cricket Canada said in a statement. "We take this matter seriously and remain steadfast in upholding the highest standards of integrity and accountability within the sport." BBC Sport has contacted Barbados police for comment. Kirton was born in Barbados but is eligible to play for Canada through his mother. He represented West Indies Under-19s before emigrating to Canada, making his international debut in a T20 match against Oman in 2019. The batting all-rounder, who has played 21 one-day internationals and 28 T20Is, was appointed as captain in July 2024. Canada are preparing for the inaugural North American Cup - also featuring Cayman Islands, Bahamas, Bermuda and the United States - which begins in the Cayman Islands on 18 April.

Mbappe among three Real Madrid players fined

LAUSANNE (AFP): Kylian Mbappe was on Friday among three Real Madrid players fined by UEFA for "violating basic rules of decent conduct" during their Champions League last 16, second leg win over Atletico Madrid. France forward Mbappe was fined 30,000 euros (\$33,000), with German defender Antonio Rudiger getting a 40,000-euro fine and midfielder Dani Ceballos 20,000 euros. Brazilian forward Vinicius Junior was not punished after UEFA opened an investigation last week targeting the four players. Mbappe and Rudiger also received a suspended one-match European ban. This will not affect the first leg of the Champions League quarter-final against Arsenal next Tuesday.

# Sana Mir puts onus on senior players to step up at Qualifier

LAHORE (PPI) Former Pakistan captain Sana Mir has called on the nation's senior cricketers to play pivotal roles in the upcoming ICC Women's Cricket World Cup Qualifier, aiming to secure Pakistan's fifth consecutive World Cup appearance since 2009.

Pakistan, vying for one of two available spots in the tournament set to take place in India later this year, faces tough competition on home soil.

Under the leadership of skipper Fatima Sana, the team will be reinforced by the return of key pacer

Diana Baig and the experience of Sidra Amin, Nashra Sundhu, and Aliya Riaz.

Sana Mir highlighted the significance of senior players setting an example for younger teammates. "If you want to set up youngsters to succeed, they have to learn from senior players," she emphasized, acknowledging the roles of Sidra Ameen, Muneeba Ali, and Aliya Riaz in the team's strategy.

The Qualifier kicks off with Pakistan facing Ireland on April 9 at Gaddafi Stadium, fol-

lowed by matches against Scotland, West Indies, Thailand, and Bangladesh. Mir anticipates fierce competition, noting the strengths of the participating teams and the challenging journey ahead for Pakistan.

Pakistan's squad for the Qualifier includes: Fatima Sana (c), Najjha Alvi, Gull Feroza, Sidra Amin, Omaima Sohail, Aliya Riaz, Diana Baig, Sadia Iqbal, Nashra Sundhu, Muneeba Ali, Rameen Shamim, Shawaal Zulfikar, Syeda Aroob Shah, Natalia Parvaiz, and Sidra Nawaz.

# Multan Sultans' Pre-PSL 10 camp begins in Multan

MULTAN (APP): Multan Sultans, the 2021 champions, commenced their preparations for HBL Pakistan Super League 10 with a training camp at the Multan Cricket Stadium from Friday, 4 April, to Monday, 7 April.

Nine players will participate in the four-day camp, while the remaining 11 squad members will join the side in Karachi on Tuesday, 8 April. Among the absentees are the seven foreign players and four local stars -- Muhammad Rizwan, Akif Javed, Tayyab Tahir, and Usman Khan -- who are presently on national duty in New Zealand.

Multan Sultans, who have featured in each of the last four HBL PSL finals, will open their campaign against Karachi Kings at the National Bank Stadium on Saturday, 12 April.

Training session in Multan will be held under lights, starting at 7pm, and will be conducted under the supervision of head

coach Abdul Rehman.

Looking ahead to the camp, Abdul Rehman said: "These four days will be crucial for us to gel as a unit and understand one another, while also utilising the excellent practice and training facilities at our home ground in preparation for HBL PSL 10.

"Among the seven overseas players, Chris Jordan, David Willey, and Johnson Charles were part of our squad last year. Gudakesh Motie, Michael Bracewell and Shai Hope will join us for the first time, while Josh Little returns after missing last season. We look forward to welcoming them in Karachi next week.

"Motie is already familiar with the Multan Cricket Stadium, having performed impressively against Pakistan in two Test matches earlier this year. Bracewell has recently showcased his all-round prowess in white-ball cricket in both Pakistan and New

Zealand. Shai Hope, now appointed captain of the West Indies T20I side, brings leadership and quality to our team.

"Mohammad Rizwan continued to be an outstanding captain and performer for us, while Usman Khan has delivered explosive innings at the top of the order. Tayyab Tahir is a dependable middle-order batter capable of shifting gears and Akif Javed has shown marked improvement with the ball, making him ready to contribute meaningfully in his debut season with Multan Sultans.

"Overall, we have a well-balanced squad. However, to ensure we play to our full potential and make optimal use of our resources, this camp is vital -- even in the absence of half the squad. In fact, this could be a blessing in disguise, allowing our highly qualified coaches more focused time with the available players to prepare them for the challenges ahead.

# England bowler Stone to miss most of India Test series

LONDON (AFP): England fast bowler Olly Stone will miss the majority of a five-match Test series against India after undergoing knee surgery which will rule him out for 14 weeks.

Stone played the last of his five Tests against Sri Lanka in September and had been hoping to push for further honours with Nottinghamshire this year.

But the latest in a long line of fitness issues mean he will be starting a long recovery period of more than three months as the county season gets under way on Friday.

He joins fellow England quicks Mark Wood and Brydon Carse on the sidelines at the start of the domestic campaign.

"England and Nottinghamshire fast bowler Olly Stone has been ruled out of all cricket for 14 weeks following scans and subsequent surgery this week, which confirmed a right knee injury," the England and Wales Cricket Board said in a statement.

"Stone experienced increasing discomfort during Nottinghamshire's pre-season tour of Abu Dhabi last month. Further

scans conducted this week revealed the need for surgery. He will now begin a period of rehabilitation, working closely with the medical teams at both the ECB and Nottinghamshire."

England face Zimbabwe in a one-off Test from May 22 in preparation for the visit on India, with the five-Test series beginning on June 20. Stone could be back in action by the time of the final two Tests but is more likely to return for the London Spirit in the Hundred, which begins on August 5.

# Crashes, fires as Piastrri fastest in chaotic second Japan GP practice

SUZUKA (AFP): Oscar Piastrri went fastest Friday for a McLaren one-two in a chaotic second practice for the Japanese Grand Prix that was red-flagged four times and saw Jack Doohan crash heavily.

Two of the red flags were for trackside grass fires during a badly disrupted afternoon session in which Australia's Piastrri clocked a best lap of 1min 28.114sec.

He pipped teammate and championship leader Lando Norris by 0.049sec in dry but blustery conditions at Suzuka, where home hero Yuki Tsunoda showed promise on his Red Bull debut.

Piastrri and Norris -- who went quickest in first practice -- have won one grand prix each in a dominant start to the season from McLaren.

Piastrri, who won last time out in Shanghai, called it "a bit of an up-and-down day" after being 15th in first practice. "But there's definitely been positives in there," he added. "We've got a few things to tidy up for tomorrow."

Australian rookie Doohan was lucky to walk away unhurt after badly damaging his Alpine in a heavy smash into the barriers.

There was further drama



when Spaniard Fernando Alonso beached his Aston Martin in the gravel and two fires broke out on the grass around the track.

RB's Isack Hadjar was third fastest, 0.404sec behind Piastrri, followed by Ferrari's Lewis Hamilton and RB's Liam Lawson.

Mercedes' George Russell was sixth, followed by Ferrari's Charles Leclerc and Red Bull's four-time world champion Max Verstappen.

His new teammate Tsunoda was a lowly 18th, 2.511sec behind Piastrri, but without completing a representative lap on soft tyres. He was a promising sixth in the morning. The Japanese driver said his closely watched first day in the Red Bull was "OK, but it could have been better".

"We didn't set a lap time

in FP2 due to the number of stops in the session, you could maybe call the session a shambles for everyone," said Tsunoda.

"Overall it is OK and I'm happy to have confidence in the car."

Doohan high-speed crash

A highly eventful second practice was red-flagged about 10 minutes in when the 22-year-old Doohan spun off the track and smashed into the barriers at high speed.

The car was badly damaged, with one wheel flying off upon impact.

Doohan quickly confirmed he was unhurt and climbed out of the cockpit unaided before being helped back to the pits.

"Following precautionary medical checks, we can confirm that Jack is ok.



CHARLESTON: Danielle Collins of United States returns a shot to Jessica Pegula of United States during the Credit One Charleston Open at Credit One Stadium.

## Fans to nominate Hamaray Heroes for HBL PSL X

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) will recognise and award notable and successful personalities nominated by the Pakistan cricket fans as part of its Hamaray Heroes initiative during the HBL PSL X, which is set to run from April 11 to May 18.

The fans can submit their nominations till 3pm on Wednesday, April 9. The final list will be presented to a PCB panel tasked with shortlisting 34 candidates for acknowledgment during the landmark HBL PSL edition, said a press release.

The PCB will present the shortlisted candidates with cash awards during the HBL PSL X matches, while the fans will also get to watch short documentaries on their respective achievements and life stories on all HBL PSL digital handles as well as live broadcast on match days.

Fans can nominate personalities from various walks of life including but not limited to sports (other than cricket), education, healthcare, art, culture, music, social work, social entrepreneurship, and technology, with the PCB using its brand and reach to appreciate these individuals for their contributions and enhancing the image of the country.

Some of the notable personalities who were recognised during HBL PSL 9 Hamaray Heroes initiative included, Ahmad Baig (Golfer), Ahsan Ayyaz (Squash player and philanthropist), Dr Jawaid Qamar (first indigenous Pakistani to earn an MPhil in Cosmology), Dr Mariam Sultana (first woman to earn a PhD in astrophysics in Pakistan), Farah Vohra (Special Olympian), Maham Tariq (Cycling coach), Perniya Zaman Khan (Table Tennis player), Wardah Ghani (co-founder of Strays Home Animal Rescue Foundation).

# Mitchell Marsh re-signs for three years with Perth Scorchers in BBL

SYDNEY (Agencies): Mitchell Marsh hopes to be a one-club player in the BBL after re-signing with Perth Scorchers for the next three years.

Australia's T20I captain was out of contract at the end of last season and was not part of Scorchers' ten pre-signed players prior to the player movement window, which led to some speculation as to whether he might be on the move.

But Marsh was given some time by Scorchers to assess what his future looked like after losing his spot in the Test side in January. Australia's chairman of selectors George Bailey did suggest earlier this week that the door was not closed on Marsh's Test career. But Marsh has committed to Scorchers for the next three years and indicated that he expects to be playing much more BBL cricket, after playing just one game for Scorchers in the past three seasons.

"I'm really proud to sign on with the Scorchers, a team that I've played with since I was a kid, and a franchise that has looked after me incredibly well," Marsh said.

"Being a one-club player was a big part of my decision, which was obviously quite an easy decision. I think with the landscape of cricket these days, a lot of us play for a lot of different



teams around the world and the idea of always coming home and playing for the Scorchers and hopefully finishing my career as a one-club player will be something I'm really proud of in years to come.

"A lot of the guys in this team are not only mates on the field but also some of my best friends in life - Joel Paris, who's coming back across, was a groomsmen at my wedding. Playing alongside your best mates is always a special experience.

"I've tuned into every game the last few years and tried to feel part of it all. There's no doubt I'll be around a lot more the next few years and that's something I'm really looking forward to. It's all about contributing, trying to add value to our team, and making sure we get back to playing finals and chasing more silverware."

Marsh, 33, is the only player remaining on Scorchers' list who played

# 'Unique' De Bruyne one of the greats, says Guardiola



MANCHESTER (AFP): Pep Guardiola said Kevin De Bruyne will be remembered as one of the greatest ever players in the Premier League after the Belgian announced he will leave Manchester City at the end of the season.

De Bruyne, 33, has been instrumental to City's rise as the dominant force in English football since joining from Wolfsburg for £55 million (\$72 million) in 2015.

He has won 14 major trophies at the Etihad, including six Premier League titles and the Champions League in 2023.

De Bruyne has scored 106 goals and provided 174 assists in 413 appearances for City.

"He is one of the greatest midfielders ever to play in this country and for this club -- there is no doubt," Guardiola said on

Friday.

"We've won a lot of trophies and he's been involved in every single one."

The City captain's influence has diminished in recent seasons due to injury problems.

He missed five months last season due to a hamstring tear and has started just 21 of City's 47 matches in all competitions this season despite the struggles of Guardiola's side to match the standards they have set over the past decade.

'Consistency'

But Guardiola hailed De Bruyne's consistency and durability during his peak years that allowed City to Hoover up silverware.

"For his consistency, except the last year, year-and-a-half, due to injury problems. The consistency in important games and

for them in the first season of the BBL. He made 77 not out against Sydney Sixers in the first-ever BBL final. Scorchers high performance manager Kade Harvey was pleased that Marsh was set to be available for the next three years.

"Clearly, signing Mitch was a priority given his calibre as a person and player, so we're excited to have him on board for another three seasons," Harvey said. "Mitch has been massive for the fabric of our franchise since its foundation. Not only is he loyal to and passionate about the Scorchers, but Mitch is also the kind of person the rest of the team rallies around."

"He offers leadership, experience and a range of skills on field that will benefit our side enormously, as well as a genuine hunger for success."

Meanwhile in the WBBL, Jess Jonassen has also remained a one-club player after re-signing with Brisbane Heat for two more seasons. Jonassen captained the side to the WBBL final last season and has played 147 matches for Heat, the most of any player. She is coming off an outstanding WPL, where she took 13 wickets for Delhi Capitals, the third most in the tournament, and made two half-centuries to help them reach their third successive final.

not important games, every three days being there all the time," added Guardiola.

"His assists, goals, vision in final third is so difficult to replace.

"Everyone can make actions for assists, (it's) how many years and games that makes him unique."

Other greats of City's success since an Abu Dhabi-backed takeover in 2008 transformed the club's fortunes have already been immortalised.

Statues of Vincent Kompany, David Silva and Sergio Agüero stand outside the Etihad and Guardiola expects De Bruyne to be recognised in the same fashion.

"I would bet a lot of money that it is going to happen, that's for sure," said Guardiola. "He deserves to be in this level."

It remains unclear whether De Bruyne will depart at the end of the Premier League season or will continue to see out his days as a City player at the Club World Cup.

De Bruyne's contract is due to expire at the end of June, while the Club World Cup runs from June 14 until July 13.

"It's a good question I don't know," said Guardiola. "He has to decide, it's a new competition. I hope he can continue to play football in another place, but it depends on risk and contracts for the future."

"The club has to talk to him, and he has to say what he wants to do."





## In brief

### One nabbed for making bogus call on 15

RAWALPINDI (APP): The Rawat Police on Friday arrested an accused for making a bogus call on the Emergency Helpline 15 about his car theft. The Rawalpindi Police spokesman said that accused Tanveer had called 15 in February this year that his car had been stolen. The Rawat Police responded to the call and immediately reached the spot but on investigation found that no incident had occurred. The police, however, could not arrest the accused as he had switched off his mobile phone soon after the call. The police registered a case against him and managed to take him into custody on Friday.

### Flower planting drive underway

RAWALPINDI (APP): The Parks and Horticulture Authority (PHA) is continuously busy in the planting of colorful flowers in the parks and highways of the city. Director General of PHA Rawalpindi Ahmed Hassan Ranjha said on Friday that the green belts of Murree Road, the main highways of Rawalpindi City, had been decorated with colorful flowers and green lush plants. He said flowers planted in various parks and various areas of the city during the Spring season were enhancing the beauty and outlook of the city. The PHA's horticultural work on the green belts of Liaquat Bagh, Sixth Road Flyover, Rehmanabad, and Chandni Chowk was the main focus and attraction of the public, he added.

### Three held with liquor

RAWALPINDI (APP): The Police on Friday continued operations against liquor suppliers and netted three accused with more than 40 litres of liquor. According to the police spokesman, the Pirwadhai Police arrested the accused Arsalan after recovering 24 litres of liquor. Similarly, the Bani Police held two accused Kamran and Hasnain on the recovery of 20 litres of liquor from them.

### Five 'gamblers' arrested

RAWALPINDI (APP): The Wah Saddar Police on Friday caught five accused red-handed while gambling on cards with specific amount at stake. The accused including Zeeshan, Noor Khan, Amir Abdullah, Sohaib and Khurram were playing cards with a total bet amount of Rs 44,150. The police on a tip-off raided the place and arrested the accused. Besides the amount at stake, the police also recovered four mobile phones and playing cards.

### Thirteen outlaws held

ISLAMABAD (APP): Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) Police, Lohi Bher, Banigala, Humak, Sangiani, and Margalla police station teams arrested 10 accused allegedly involved in various criminal activities and recovered 520 grams of ice, 16 liquor bottles, and seven pistols from their possession on Friday. A spokesman told APP that cases have been registered against the accused and further investigations are underway. He said that during a special campaign launched for the arrest of proclaimed offenders and absconders, different police teams also apprehended three criminals. He said that under the special direction of Inspector General of Police (IGP) Syed Ali Nasir Rizvi, Islamabad Police continued its crackdown against criminal elements to ensure public safety. He said the Islamabad Police was fully committed to protecting the lives and property of citizens and will not allow any elements to disrupt peace in the city.

# Gilani, Uzbek counterpart discuss strengthening inter-parliamentary cooperation

ISLAMABAD (APP): A parliamentary delegation led by Chairman Senate, Syed Yousaf Raza Gilani is on an official visit to Tashkent, Uzbekistan, to participate in the 150th Anniversary Assembly of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), scheduled to be held from April 5 to 9.

According to the Uzbek embassy in Islamabad, Senate Chairman Syed Yousaf Raza Gilani met with Chairperson of the Senate of the Oliy Majlis of Uzbekistan, Tanzila Narbayaeva, on Friday.

During the meeting, both sides discussed enhancing inter-parliamentary cooperation, strengthening the legal framework of bilateral relations, and expanding collaboration in mutually beneficial sectors.

They reaffirmed their commitment to fostering strategic partnerships and acknowledged the steady



development of friendly and brotherly ties between the two nations.

Particular emphasis was placed on deepening cooperation in trade, investment, transport, logistics, communications, and information technology.

Both leaders underscored the importance of increasing bilateral trade turnover to \$2 billion and advancing joint projects in pharmaceuticals, agriculture, agricultural machinery, and geology.

The discussion also

covered strengthening inter-parliamentary relations, enhancing cooperation within the Asian Parliamentary Assembly, and activating parliamentary friendship groups.

Both sides agreed to establish joint parliamentary oversight mechanisms to ensure the timely and effective implementation of high-level agreements.

Chairman Senate Gilani and Chairperson Narbayaeva also agreed to develop and implement a Joint Action Plan to enhance cooperation between the upper chambers of both parliaments, aiming to reinforce institutional collaboration and legislative exchanges.

The 150th Anniversary Assembly of the IPU will bring together parliamentary representatives from around the world to deliberate on pressing global issues and legislative cooperation.

# Afnanullah Khan hails govt's electricity tariff slash as a major victory

ISLAMABAD (APP): PMLN Senator Dr. Afnanullah Khan Friday commended the government's landmark move to slash electricity tariffs, a bold step that promises to benefit the nation at large and inject new life into the country's economic landscape.

In a recent television interview, he revealed that the government, led by the Prime Minister aims to wipe out circular debt within a five-year period, thereby fostering robust expansion in the industrial sector.

Senator said this "groundbreaking decision will bring respite to the general public and stimulate economic growth a significant reduction in electricity costs is expected to have a positive ripple

effect on various sectors, providing much-needed relief to consumers and businesses alike.

The government's decision to reduce electricity prices is a bold step that has never been taken before by any government, he said, terming it a "historic step" that will provide relief to the masses.

Responding to a query, Afnanullah clarified that regarding the issue of the canal with the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP), evidence suggests that they were indeed on board with resolving the matter.

Specifically, on July 8, last year, the President had taken steps to address the issue and relevant newspapers had published reports allocating funds for the project.

Afnanullah Khan

emphasized that if the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) does not agree to continue with the canal project, they have the option to raise this issue in relevant committees, the National Assembly and the Senate.

This is because the government is in a coalition partnership and without the PPP's support, progress on the project would be challenging, he added.

Khan stated that the federal government is giving equal importance to all provinces and prioritizing the removal of reservations held by the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP).

This move aims to address the concerns of all provinces equally and promote a more unified approach to governance, he mentioned.

# Bhutto struggled for people's rights and democracy

RAWALPINDI (APP): The 46th death anniversary of Pakistan People's Party's founding chairman and former prime minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto (ZAB) was observed here on Friday with a pledge to continue his mission.

The PPP city Chapter held Quran Khawani at Jinnah Park and Dua was also offered for the departed soul. President PPP city

chapter Kamran Hussain Raja said ZAB devoted his life for the people and democracy. He created awareness among the people about social, civil, economic and political rights among the masses and stabilized the country by uniting the four provinces.

"ZAB wanted to strengthen democracy in the country and accepted gallows during the strug-

gle for the rights of the poor and powerless of society", he said, adding that Bhutto refused to bow before the dictator.

PPP Secretary Information Raja Ali Minhas said that the 1973 constitution, which was passed with consensus of all political parties in parliament at that time, was a monumental achievement of ZAB.

# Ayaz strongly condemns Israeli aggression in Gaza

ISLAMABAD (APP): Speaker National Assembly, Sardar Ayaz Sadiq Friday strongly condemned the recent Israeli aggression in Gaza.

The speaker expressed deep sorrow and concern over the martyrdom of more than 100 innocent Palestinians as a result of the ongoing attacks by Israeli occupying forces.

He said that these attacks are a blatant violation of human rights, international law, and ceasefire agreements. The speaker particularly condemned the targeting of schools and civilian populations, terming such acts as inhumane and a stain on the conscience of

the civilized world.

He expressed grave concern over the silence of the international community, stating that this inaction has effectively emboldened Israel to continue its oppression of unarmed and innocent Palestinians with impunity.

Ayaz Sadiq urged the United Nations to take immediate and concrete steps for a just and lasting resolution to the Palestinian issue, in accordance with relevant UN Security Council resolutions, to ensure sustainable peace in the Middle East.

He reaffirmed that Pakistan, in line with its principled stance, fully

supports the right to Freedom of the Palestinian people and advocates for the establishment of an independent Palestinian state based on pre-1967 borders, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital.

Ayaz emphasized that the Parliament and people of Pakistan will continue to raise the Palestinian cause at all regional, international, and parliamentary forums, standing in unwavering solidarity with the Palestinian people.

He offered prayers for the martyrs and expressed heartfelt condolences to their families while also praying for the swift recovery of the injured.

# Maryam stresses for providing basic amenities to citizens

RAWALPINDI (APP): Provincial Minister Maryam Aurangzeb on Friday emphasized the importance of providing basic amenities to citizens and ensuring they benefit from government policies.

She made these remarks during a meeting focused on development projects and key issues like Eid-ul-Fitr arrangements, reducing electricity rates, and enhancing public services.

The minister emphasized the importance of transparency in the transport system and timely refunds for overcharged fares to the passengers to restore public trust, especially during Eid. She also praised the progress made

under the "Sauthra Punjab" campaign and directed improve the drainage and sanitation system in urban areas.

Federal Parliamentary Secretary Barrister Daniyal Chaudhry highlighted the reduction in electricity tariffs as a significant step to alleviate inflation and promote industrial activities. The reduced tariffs, ranging from Rs. 7.41 to Rs. 7.59 per unit for domestic and industrial consumers, respectively, aim to provide relief to citizens.

"It is a Eid gift to nation", he said while appreciating the decision by the prime minister on electricity rates cut.

Chaudhry emphasized

the government's focus on providing a quality life for every citizen, extending beyond basic infrastructure like roads, hospitals, and electricity. Ongoing projects include skill development programs for youth, loans for small businesses, and modern health facilities. The government's top priority remains ensuring citizens' access to basic amenities, he added.

He said the government's top priority is well-being of its citizens and ensuring they have access to essential services and amenities. The meeting was also attended by Deputy Commissioner Hassan Waqar Cheema, and other senior officials.

# MD orders strengthening of NPF projects for police welfare

ISLAMABAD (APP): Managing Director of the National Police Foundation (NPF), Syed Ali Nasir Rizvi, on Friday chaired a meeting aimed at promoting the welfare of Pakistan police personnel and making the institution more profitable.

A public relations officer told APP that the meeting was attended by Directors, Deputy Directors, and Assistant Directors from various departments of the National Police Foundation. MD NPF Rizvi reviewed the performance of all departments and was briefed on projects initiated for public

convenience and the welfare of police personnel.

He directed all directors to complete ongoing development and welfare projects on a priority basis. On this occasion, he emphasized that all officers should dedicate their efforts towards the welfare of Pakistan police and improving the institution's profitability.

He said the NPF is prepared to provide benefits to police officers, personnel, and citizens in the fields of health, education, and real estate. MD urged all officers to work diligently for the welfare of

the families of police martyrs, injured personnel, and other police officers.

MD Rizvi stated that the foundation is taking comprehensive measures for the welfare of the families of martyrs, injured officers, and serving personnel. He said ongoing projects aimed at providing modern facilities, residential

schemes for police officers, educational institutions for their children, and health-care services are being further activated. He said several new projects are also in the pipeline and will be launched in the near future.



ISLAMABAD: Minister for Housing and Works Mian Riaz Hussain Pirzada chairing meeting to discuss the litigation issues on Constantia Lodge Murree. —APP Photo

# Riaz Hussain chairs meeting to address legal disputes on Constantia Estate

ISLAMABAD (APP): Federal Minister for Housing and Works Mian Riaz Hussain Pirzada Friday chaired a special meeting to discuss the way forward to address the legal disputes on Constantia Estate situated in District Murree.

Federal Minister for Law and Justice Azam Nazeer Tarar, Secretary Housing and Works, Additional Commissioner Rawalpindi and other senior officers attended the meeting.

This meeting was convened on the directions of the Prime Minister of

Pakistan Shehbaz Sharif to make concerted efforts for the early settlement of litigation issues on the state owned property.

Additional Secretary Housing and Works and Additional Commissioner Rawalpindi gave briefings on the property details and occupation status of Constantia Lodge, bearing estate number 43 and 44, situated at Kashmir Point in Murree. It is a high-value evacuate property measuring 4.6-acre.

It was apprised that there were three claimants

of the property with several encroachments. In the past, the lodge remained under the use of the Foreign Office for accommodation of foreign missions and was also leased to the Brazilian embassy but later it was transferred to Pak PWD in 1999.

While briefing on the ongoing litigation, it was informed that there were six ongoing cases in different courts of law and recently Lahore High Court Rawalpindi Bench has remanded the case to C o m m i s s i o n e r

Rawalpindi to decide the matter at the earliest.

It was decided in the meeting that the commissioner would rule on the case after hearing all parties and perusing the revenue records.

Commissioner's ruling would clear the right of all claimants on merit and after that an aggressive action would be taken by initiating criminal proceedings against all those who have been misleading courts and state offices for years through false claims and forged documents.

## SSP Butt reviews mosque security in Capital

ISLAMABAD (APP): Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Investigation Muhammad Usman Tariq Butt, accompanied by SP City, reviewed security arrangements at various mosques across the federal capital on Friday.

An official told APP that the inspection was aimed at evaluating the security deployments and ensuring a strong law enforcement presence around religious sites to protect worshippers, particularly during prayer times.

He said SSP Usman Tariq met officers and personnel posted at different duty points, appreciated their commitment, and issued directives to enhance vigilance and effectiveness in the discharge of their duties.

SSP said special security measures have been implemented at mosques and Imambargahs across Islamabad, with police personnel remaining on high alert to respond to any potential threats.

SSP Butt said all available resources are being utilized to uphold peace and order in the capital, and that no disruptive element would be allowed to threaten the safety and harmony of the citizens.

# CDA Chairman reviews development projects, infrastructure upgrades

ISLAMABAD (APP): Capital Development Authority (CDA) Chairman Muhammad Ali Randhawa chaired a high-level meeting on Friday to assess ongoing development projects in the federal capital. The session focused on road construction, infrastructure maintenance, and beautification efforts to enhance Islamabad's appeal for residents and tourists alike.

Officials, including, DG Environment, Engineering, and Planning, as well as officers from the DMA, attended the meeting.

Discussions centered on speeding up road repairs, expanding major highways, and ensuring sustainable maintenance of green belts, median strips, and interchanges. The chairman stressed the need for eco-friendly landscaping with seasonal flowers to beautify key areas ahead of the summer season.

Chairman Randhawa directed the immediate installation of decorative planters at major intersections and called for innovative landscaping designs to uplift the city's visual appeal. He also emphasized digitizing traffic management systems in coordination with Traffic Police to ease congestion on busy

corridors. Additionally, revenue from digital billboards along highways will be allocated for road maintenance. In a bid to promote research and public engagement, the CDA Model Nursery will be upgraded, and a dedicated mobile app will be launched allowing citizens to purchase plants and seeds at subsidized rates.

Plans to establish a food street and pedestrian tracks in Blue Area were discussed, with input sought from the Chamber of Commerce and local traders. The chairman also ordered immediate upgrades to the Diplomatic Enclave and announced surprise visits to monitor progress on various projects.

Randhawa instructed all relevant wings to strengthen monitoring mechanisms for timely project completion. Joint teams will survey central highways to address challenges, while pending tasks—such as road patchwork, lane markings, and curb stone installations—must be expedited. The meeting concluded with a call for improved inter-departmental coordination to ensure efficient implementation of development initiatives across Islamabad.

## IRSA releases 63,000 cusecs water

ISLAMABAD (APP): Indus River System Authority (IRSA) on Friday released 63,000 cusecs water from various rim stations with inflow of 66,700 cusecs. According to the data released by IRSA, the water level in River Indus at Tarbela Dam was 1410.62 feet which was 8.62 feet higher than dead level of 1402.00 feet. Water inflow and outflow in the dam was recorded as 16,800 cusecs and 20,000 cusecs respectively.

The water level in River Jhelum at Mangla Dam was 1086.70 feet, which was 36.70 feet higher than its dead level of 1,050 feet. The inflow and outflow of water was recorded 21,900 cusecs and 15,000 cusecs respectively. The release of water at Kalabagh, Taunsa, Guddu and Sukkur was recorded as 36,800, 30,300, 16,600 and 6,000 cusecs respectively.

Similarly, from River Kabul, a total of 17,000 cusecs of water released at Nowshera and 7,300 cusecs released from River Chenab at Marala.



### Man arrested for killing wife

TAKHAR (Pajhwok): A man has been arrested for allegedly killing his wife in northern Takhar province, police said on Friday. Police spokesman Qari Zabihullah Hakimi said the murder took place in Yangi Qala district. The detainee allegedly shot and killed his wife with a sniper rifle last night after a verbal dispute in Makhmal Guzar village. Hakimi added the suspect was being investigated.

### 4 killed as vehicle overturns in Jawzjan

SHIBERGHAN (Pajhwok): Four people were killed and five others were wounded when a vehicle they were travelling in overturned in northern Jawzjan province on Friday. Qari Abdul Sattar Halimi, spokesman for the Jawzjan police headquarters, said that a car overturned on the Shiberghan-Mazar-i-Sharif highway in Shisheh Khana village in Faizabad district this morning. The accident left four people dead, including the driver.

## 30 killed in accidents during Eid holidays

KABUL (Pajhwok): At least 30 people lost their lives and another 155 were injured in 80 traffic accidents taking place during Eidul Fitr holidays across the country, traffic police said on Friday.

The Traffic Police General Directorate in a statement said 80 accidents took place nationwide during the four days of Eid al-Fitr.

The deaths and injuries

were recorded on 29th of the holy month of Ramadan till the 3rd day of Eid al-Fitr).

The dead included 19 men, two women and nine children, while the injured included 117 men, eight women and 30 children.

According to the Traffic Police General Directorate, a total of 98 traffic accidents occurred during the four days of Eid al-Fitr last year, resulting in 50 deaths

and 185 injuries.

The department said awareness campaigns this year increased public awareness about traffic rules and strict police security measures during Eid holidays led to a decrease in traffic accidents and fatalities.

The General Directorate of Traffic Police once again urged citizens to strictly follow traffic rules while traveling to prevent fatal accidents.

## Landmines remain deadly threat in Afghanistan: Red Cross



KABUL (Amu tv): On the International Day for Mine Awareness and Assistance in Mine Action, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has warned that Afghanistan remains dangerously contaminated by landmines and unexploded ordnance after more than four decades of conflict.

In a statement, the organization said explosive remnants of war — scattered across large swaths of the country — continue to pose a lethal, often invisible, risk to civilians, particularly families returning to areas once plagued by violence and children who unknowingly encounter the devices while playing.

According to the ICRC, 434 children were killed or injured in 251 incidents involving landmines and other explosive remnants in 2024 alone. Children accounted for more than 76 percent of recorded casualties, though the organization noted the actual number may be higher.

“Landmines and explosive remnants of war not only disrupt daily life and halt economic development, but they also result in devastating tragedies, especially among children,” said Katrina Ritz, head of the ICRC delegation in Afghanistan.

Ritz also warned that recent cuts in humanitarian

aid and demining resources have hindered clearance efforts, putting more lives at risk.

“International and humanitarian support is urgently needed to help communities cope with the devastating legacy of weapon contamination,” she said. April 4 marks the United Nations-designated day to raise awareness about the dangers of landmines and to promote efforts to eliminate them.

Between 2023 and 2024, the ICRC, in partnership with the Afghan Red Crescent Society, trained 100 volunteers to conduct safety education and risk awareness sessions in five regions across the country.

## Prisoners gain skills through vocational training

HERAT (TOLONews): Officials at Herat Prison say that hundreds of inmates are engaged in various vocational and technical training programs within the prison.

Most of these prisoners have started earning income by learning technical skills. The aim of organizing these courses is to provide job opportunities for inmates after their release.

“Three hundred inmates are working in the industrial section. The vocational and technical sections include tailoring, carpet weaving, bead weaving, and mobile phone repair,” said Sayed Ahmad Majmar, the military director of Herat prison.

One of these inmates,

Payman Shah Barakzai, has professionally learned tailoring and is earning income through it.

“I have twelve dependents, and through hard work here, I am covering their expenses,” he said.

The inmates hope that after their release, they can start a new life using the skills they’ve learned, distancing themselves from their past and gaining honorable employment.

“I’m very happy this industrial section has become active. I come here daily, receive training, and have decided to start a business in this field after my release,” said Mohammad Aqil, another trainee inmate.

“I’ve learned a profes-

sion here, and when I get out of prison, I will open a shop for myself. I’ve been in prison for five months and come here daily to learn a skill,” said Gholam Saeed, another inmate trainee.

Sayed Kazem, who also participates in the program, said: “I work and also receive a salary. I plan to continue this profession both inside and outside the prison.”

According to statistics, over 2,700 inmates are held in Herat prison, including nearly 100 children and 350 women.

Vocational training programs are organized in shifts for interested inmates to help facilitate rehabilitation and reintegration into society.

### Significant increase in domestic tourists in Kunar

KUNAR (TOLONews): Local officials in Kunar province said that during the Eid al-Fitr holidays this year, nearly 300,000 domestic tourists visited various parts of the province.

According to the officials, the green areas, pleasant climate, recreational areas, availability of hotels, and basic facilities are the main factors attracting tourists to the region.

“In Kunar, rest areas, hotels, and recreational sites have been built by the private sector for tourists. When tourists come here and visit these beautiful areas, they share their experiences with others. Fortunately, Eid fell in the month of Hamal this year (solar year), which is a very delightful time weather-wise,” stated Munib Shakir Afghan, Head of tourism at the Kunar Department of Information and Culture.

Meanwhile, some tourists visiting the province have urged the caretaker government to provide more facilities in tourist areas. “Fortunately, Eid came during the spring this year—a time when flowers are blooming, and nature is green. We came with friends to various places and today chose the Goriga area in Dangam district for sightseeing,” said Qiyam Khayam, a tourist.

“We are celebrating Eid in a peaceful environment with family and friends. Dangam district is truly one of the most beautiful areas of Kunar,” said Wahdat Yar Badloon, another tourist.

“In this area, not even a single SIM card works! We wish to spend the night here because it’s so beautiful, but the lack of a telecommunications network worries us about our families,” said Mustafa, another tourist.

According to the Kunar Department of Information and Culture, around 250,000 citizens from across the country visited various parts of the province during last year’s Eid al-Fitr holidays. Local officials emphasize that by expanding tourism infrastructure, it is possible to attract more tourists and strengthen the local economy.

### Afghan National U-17 football team to face Yemen

KABUL (TOLONews): This match will be played by Afghanistan’s U-17 national football players as part of the 2025 AFC U-17 Asian Cup, against their opponent Yemen in Group C of the competition. The game is scheduled for 9:45 PM on Friday Kabul time.

The Afghanistan vs. Yemen match will be broadcast live on TOLO TV’s global network. The Afghan players will face Yemen tonight in Saudi Arabia in their first match of the 2025 AFC U-17 Asian Cup. Previously, the team’s head coach and players had expressed satisfaction with their preparations for the tournament. The 2025 AFC U-17 Asian Cup, featuring teams under the age of 17, officially kicked off yesterday in Saudi Arabia.

compelled. I have two young children who go to school—by God, I currently don’t even have money for their pens and notebooks. I’m planning to take them out of school.”

“During the Republic, we received 60,000 afghani annually, which at least covered some expenses. Now they give 25 or 26 thousand, which is barely anything,” another disabled person told TOLONews.

Several other disabled individuals have asked the Islamic Emirate to increase their benefits. According to statistics from the Ministry of Martyrs and Disabled Affairs, there are 650,000 registered martyrs, disabled individuals, and widows.

## UAE envoy visits Kabul, meets with Taliban officials



KABUL (Amu tv): The United Arab Emirates’ special envoy to Afghanistan met with senior Taliban officials in Kabul during a visit aimed at strengthening bilateral ties and expanding economic cooperation, according to a statement

released by the Taliban’s foreign ministry.

Saif Mohammed Al Ketbi, the U.A.E.’s envoy, held talks with Amir Khan Muttaqi, the Taliban’s acting foreign minister. The two discussed ways to enhance trade and transit relations

between the two countries, the statement said.

Muttaqi reportedly described relations between the Taliban and the U.A.E. as “positive” and emphasized the importance of implementing agreements reached during a recent

Taliban delegation’s visit to the Emirates.

He expressed hope that the agreements would translate into concrete progress in economic cooperation. Al Ketbi, for his part, reaffirmed Abu Dhabi’s commitment to expanding engagement with Kabul. He said the main purpose of his visit was to follow up on the implementation of bilateral agreements reached in earlier meetings between the two foreign ministries.

According to the Taliban statement, Al Ketbi also highlighted the need to streamline trade and transit procedures and expressed the U.A.E.’s readiness to broaden cooperation with Afghanistan. As of Friday, the U.A.E.’s foreign ministry had not issued a public statement regarding the visit.

## Afghanistan’s passport ranks lowest in the world in 2025 index

KABUL (Amu tv): Afghanistan’s passport has been ranked as the weakest in the world for 2025, according to a new report from Nomad Capitalist, a financial and immigration consultancy that evaluates global mobility and citizenship options.

At the top of the list is Ireland, which the firm named the most powerful passport globally this year, citing strong international credibility, favorable tax policies, personal freedoms and the ability to

hold dual citizenship.

The index ranks 199 countries and territories using five weighted criteria: visa-free travel (50 percent), taxation policies (20 percent), global perception (10 percent), dual citizenship options (10 percent), and personal freedom (10 percent). Unlike traditional rankings, which often focus solely on the number of visa-free destinations, this index takes a broader approach to passport strength.

Switzerland, Greece and Portugal followed Ireland in the top four, reflecting a trend in which European countries dominated the highest ranks—taking nine of the top 10 spots.

At the other end of the scale, Afghanistan’s passport was placed last, alongside those of Yemen, Eritrea, Iraq and Pakistan. The report attributes Afghanistan’s low ranking to severe restrictions on civil liberties, the lack of a legal framework for dual

citizenship, and the country’s negative image in international forums.

While Asian countries like Japan and Singapore are often recognized for offering strong travel freedom, they were ranked lower in this index due to strict tax regimes and limited dual citizenship rights.

Nomad Capitalist said the index is designed for individuals seeking second citizenship and looking for countries with more favorable policies for personal and financial freedom.

## UNAMA says land mines remain deadly threat in Afghanistan

KABUL (Amu tv): The United Nations said on Friday that Afghanistan remains one of the most mine-contaminated countries in the world, with explosive remnants of war continuing to pose grave threats to civilians, especially children.

In a statement marking International Mine Awareness Day, the U.N. Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) said that decades of conflict have left behind a deadly legacy of unexploded ordnance, which has killed or injured tens of thousands of people across the country.

“Children are among the most affected,” the mission noted, calling for urgent international support to help clear the country of land mines and other explosive remnants of war. “Afghanistan is in critical need of global assistance,” the statement added.

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) echoed the warning, stating that com-



munities across Afghanistan remain at risk from mines and other explosive hazards even years after the end of active fighting.

“After more than four decades of armed conflict, explosive threats scattered across the country continue to present a silent but deadly risk,” the ICRC said in its statement. “This is especially true for families

returning to their homes after fleeing violence, and for children who unknowingly come into contact with these deadly objects.”

Afghanistan has long been one of the world’s most heavily mined countries, a consequence of successive wars beginning with the Soviet invasion in 1979, followed by civil conflict, Taliban rule, and the 20-year U.S.-led military pres-

ence. Despite ongoing clearance efforts by humanitarian organizations, vast areas remain unsafe.

U.N. officials and international aid groups have urged donor nations to increase funding and technical support for demining operations, warning that without renewed attention, the toll on Afghan civilians will continue to mount.

## Badghis residents plead for clean water as aid cuts deepen crisis

BADGHIS (Amu tv): Residents of Laman district in northwestern Badghis province say they are facing an acute shortage of clean drinking water, and are calling on humanitarian organizations to intervene as their impoverished communities struggle to meet basic needs.

Locals say deteriorating economic conditions have left them unable to afford deep wells, the only viable source of clean water in the

drought-hit region. Without outside support, they warn the water crisis could pose a serious threat to public health, particularly among women and children.

“We do not have the ability to dig deep wells,” said Rasool, a resident of Laman. “We’re not asking the government for money — we just want help to solve our drinking water problem.”

Another resident, Raz Mohammad, said pregnant

women in the community are being forced to walk long distances to fetch water from rivers or makeshift wells. “We have no water. We dug a shallow well near the river just to survive. We ask the aid organizations to help us.”

Water scarcity remains one of the most pressing challenges in rural Afghanistan, where years of drought, conflict, and underinvestment in infrastructure have left millions

without reliable access to clean water. The problem has been compounded by recent cuts to international aid, including a freeze on U.S. assistance under President Donald Trump’s administration.

Humanitarian groups have warned that the reduction in foreign support — including funding for clean water, sanitation, and other critical programs — could have severe and lasting consequences for vulnerable communities across the country.

Aid workers have particularly raised alarm over the impact on women and children, who often bear the brunt of such crises. With limited access to health care and clean water, rural families are increasingly exposed to disease, malnutrition, and displacement.

As Afghanistan’s humanitarian needs grow and international attention wanes, communities like Laman are left to navigate a deepening crisis on their own.

## Ministry distributes 12.5B Afis to families of martyrs, disabled

KABUL (TOLONews): The Ministry of Martyrs and Disabled Affairs has announced that nearly 12.5 billion afghani were distributed last year to the families of martyrs, disabled individuals, and widows.

Faisal Khamosh, spokesperson for the ministry, emphasized that families of martyrs and disabled individuals from both the previous government and the Islamic Emirate are treated equally.

Regarding the distribution of funds, Faisal Khamosh said: “Approximately 12.5 billion afghani were distributed transparently through the banking system.”

However, disabled individuals are calling on the



Islamic Emirate to pay more attention to their rights and economic challenges, as many families of the disabled and martyrs continue to face low incomes and numerous hardships.

Shir Agha, a 45-year-old man sitting by a road

in the capital, told TOLONews that he lost his leg during the civil war. Despite receiving a small pension, he struggles economically.

Shir Agha said: “If someone wasn’t forced, they wouldn’t leave their home and relatives. We are



# Israel expands ground offensive in Gaza City

GAZA (AFP): Israel announced the launch of a new ground offensive in Gaza City on Friday, with rescuers saying military operations had killed at least 30 people across the Palestinian territory since dawn. Israel has pushed since the collapse of a short-lived truce in the war with Hamas to seize territory in Gaza in what it has called a strategy to force the militants to free hostages still in captivity.

Simultaneously, Israel has escalated attacks on Lebanon and Syria, with a strike in the south Lebanese city of Sidon killing a Hamas commander along with his son, who was also a member of the militant group's armed wing. In Gaza City, the Israeli military said ground troops had begun conducting operations in the Shujaiya area "in order to expand the security zone."

Gaza's civil defense agency said that Israeli military operations had killed at least 30 people in the Palestinian territory since dawn. A single Israeli strike on Khan Yunis killed at least 25 people, a medical source at the southern city's Nasser Hospital told AFP. "The situation is very dangerous, and there is death coming at us from every direction," Elena Helles told AFP via text message, adding that she and her family were trapped in her sister's house in Shujaiya.

Defense Minister Israel Katz had said on Wednesday that Israel would bolster its military presence inside the Gaza Strip to "destroy and clear the area of terrorists and terrorist infrastructure." The operation would "seize large areas that will be incorporated into Israeli security zones," he said, without specifying how much territory. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said the army was dividing Gaza and "seizing territory" to force Hamas to free the remaining Israeli hostages seized in the militant group's October 2023 attack on Israel which sparked the Gaza war.

On Thursday, Gaza's civil defense agency said at least 31 people, including children, were killed in an Israeli strike on a school serving as a shelter for displaced Palestinians. Agency spokesman Mahmud Bassal told AFP that women and children were among the dead, while six people

were still unaccounted for in the strike on Dar Al-Arqam School in the Al-Tuffah neighborhood, northeast of Gaza City.

"One of the missing was a pregnant woman who was expecting twins," he said. The Israeli military said it had struck a "Hamas command and control center in the area of Gaza City." It was unclear whether it was the same attack that hit the school.

"It was like Judgment Day. They bombed us with missiles and everything went dark. We started looking for our children and our belongings but everything was gone. We couldn't find our children," sobbed Raghdha Al-Sharafa, who was among the displaced civilians sheltering in the school buildings. The health ministry in Hamas-run Gaza said 1,249 people have been killed in the Palestinian territory since Israel resumed intense bombing on March 18, since the overall death toll since the war began to 50,609.

The Israeli military said Thursday it had struck more than 600 "terror targets" across the Gaza Strip since fighting resumed. Saudi Arabia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs on Thursday condemned Israel's continued military escalation in the occupied Palestinian territories, including strikes on shelters for displaced civilians in Gaza. In a statement, the Kingdom denounced the targeting of the Dar Al-Arqam School in Gaza, where dozens of displaced people were killed, and the destruction of a warehouse operated by the Saudi Center for Culture and Heritage in the Morag area east of Rafah. The facility reportedly contained medical supplies designated for patients and the wounded in Gaza.

The ministry said the absence of effective international accountability mechanisms has enabled Israeli forces to persist in violations of international law and humanitarian principles. It warned that ongoing impunity contributes to the intensification of violence and poses a threat to regional and global stability. Saudi Arabia called on UN Security Council members to take decisive action to end what it described as a tragedy endured by the Palestinian people.

## Modi urges BD leader to avoid rhetoric that mars ties

BANGKOK/NEW DELHI (Reuters): India's prime minister urged Bangladesh's interim leader to avoid rhetoric that marred bilateral relations during their first meeting on Friday since the ouster of Bangladeshi premier Sheikh Hasina, India's foreign ministry said.

Relations between the South Asian neighbours, which were robust under Hasina, have deteriorated since she fled the country last August, in the face of massive student-led protests, and sought shelter in India. Muhammad Yunus, a Nobel Peace Prize winner who took over as the chief adviser of an interim government in Dhaka after Hasina's exit, met Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday on the fringes of the BIM-STEAC summit in Bangkok.

"Prime Minister (Modi) urged [...] that any rhetoric that vitiates the environment is best avoided," India's foreign secretary Vikram Misri told reporters. "(Modi) reiterated India's support for a democratic, stable, peaceful, progressive and inclusive Bangladesh," Misri said, adding that the Indian leader had also stressed New Delhi's desire for "a positive and constructive relationship with Bangladesh based on a spirit of pragmatism".

Bangladesh described the 40-minute exchange between the two leaders as "candid, productive, and constructive". Yunus told Modi that Bangladesh wanted to work with him to set the relationship on the right track for the benefit of both countries, Yunus's press office said in a statement.

Public opinion in Bangladesh has turned against India, in part over its decision to provide sanctuary to Hasina. New Delhi has not responded to Dhaka's request to send her home for trial. The two leaders discussed Bangladesh's request seeking Hasina's extradition, Misri said, without elaborating further.

"She has consistently made false and inflammatory accusations against the interim government of Bangladesh," the statement from Bangladesh quoted Yunus as saying. Yunus requested New Delhi take appropriate measures to restrain Hasina from making incendiary remarks while she remained in India, said the statement, adding that Modi said India did not support any particular party in Bangladesh.

## PM's relief not up to mark: JJ

F.P. Report

KARACHI: Jamaat-i-Islami has welcomed the government's announcement of a reduction in electricity prices, stating that this reduction is insufficient and further cuts are necessary.

In a statement here today, Hafiz Naeem-ur-Rehman, Chief of the Jamaat-i-Islami mentioned the historic sit-in in Rawalpindi-Islamabad, stating that the government was forced to negotiate with the IPPs. The party demanded that the results of the negotiations should benefit the national treasury and lead to further reduced electricity bills.

He said that while Pakistan has a high electricity production capacity, inexpensive energy sources are not being utilized. He demanded that cheap electricity be obtained from hydel, nuclear, solar, and wind energy, and reliance on imported coal be reduced.

Jamaat-i-Islami emir stated that their struggle has brought issues before the nation, and progress has been made, but much more needs to be done. He announced that the JJ would declare the future course of action after consultations in Lahore and continue to advance the movement. He also emphasized the need for further reductions in petrol prices and electricity rates to provide relief to the common man.

He mentioned that the economy will improve when industries operate, and the IT industry is developed. Jamaat-i-Islami raised questions about the performance of the FBR and stated that reforms in the tax system are necessary.



TORKHAM: Afghan family going back to Afghanistan while crossing border.

# Russian missile strike kills 12 in Ukraine leader's home city

KYIV (AFP): A Russian ballistic missile strike on Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky's home city of Kryvyi Rih killed 12 people on Friday, including three children, authorities said.

Oleksandr Vilkul, the head of the city's military administration, said more than 50 people were wounded in the evening attack. "Twelve people were killed in Kryvyi Rih," regional governor Sergiy Lysak said on Telegram. He added later that this included "three children."

"The number of wounded is constantly increasing. This information will come later. A car and garages are on fire," he said. Unverified video on social media taken from a distance showed a plume of smoke rising into the evening sky. Kryvyi Rih, in Ukraine's central Dnipropetrovsk region, is about 60 kilometers (37 miles) from the front line but has regularly been targeted by Russian drones and missiles. A Russian ballistic attack on the city on Wednesday killed at least four people and wounded more than a dozen others.

The strikes come as US President Donald Trump's administration pushes for a speedy end to the more than three-year war, holding talks with both Russia and Ukraine. Moscow has rejected a joint US-Ukrainian proposal for an unconditional and full ceasefire, while Ukraine has accused Russia of dragging out talks with no intention of halting its offensive. Russia has added new conditions for a ceasefire to a litany of existing ones, prompting United States President Donald Trump to threaten new sanctions against Russian oil.

Visiting Russia's newest nuclear submarine, the Arkhangelsk, on March 27, Russian President Vladimir Putin said a temporary administration should be installed in Ukraine to lead the country to elections. Russian officials have been trying to discredit Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy since negotiations began in February, in an apparent effort to undermine Ukraine's position. For example, the Kremlin continued to accuse Ukraine of

breaking a ceasefire on energy infrastructure, which Moscow proposed on March 18 and Kyiv has not agreed to.

Russian and Ukrainian technical teams have failed to nail down what would be protected under the deal. On Tuesday, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said he would give his US counterpart a list of energy facilities struck by Ukraine "so that they can present concrete evidence about what the word of the current Ukrainian authorities is worth, if you can call them authorities at all". A day later, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov admitted Ukraine had not actually agreed to the moratorium. There were many other Russian objections in the ceasefire talks.

Sergey Ryabkov, the Russian deputy foreign minister, told an interviewer on Tuesday that the US-led talks "leave no room for Russia's core demand" to address "the root causes of this conflict" which officials in Moscow have defined as reversing NATO's eastward expansion and the treatment of Russian minorities in Ukraine. Russia also objects to peacekeepers enforcing any ceasefire. Russian ambassador at large Rodion Miroshnik told an academic conference in Armenia on Wednesday that Russia saw any European force in Ukraine as "a blatant occupation of Ukraine by Europe". The European Union has proposed putting a peacekeeping force in place after a peace agreement is signed.

Trump began to show his first signs of impatience with the Russian position on Sunday, telling NBC in a phone call he was "angry and p\*\*\*\*d off" with Putin and that he might place a "25 to 50-point tariff on all [Russian] oil" within the next month and sanction companies that buy it. It was unclear what the relevance of such tariffs would be. Trump's predecessor, Joe Biden, banned all imports of Russian oil to the US in 2022.

Trump's impatience came on the day he played golf with Finnish President Alexander Stubb, who told

him a deadline was necessary to make a ceasefire happen. "April 20 would be a good time for a full ceasefire without any conditions ... because a deadline is needed, because it is Easter and because President Donald Trump will have been in office for three months," Stubb later told reporters. Trump did not adopt Stubb's suggestion, telling reporters on Monday the deadline was "psychological ... If I think they're tapping us along I will not be happy about it," he said on board Air Force One.

Asked if he thought Putin was stalling, he said, "I don't know. I don't think so. I think he wants to make a deal." The Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI) suggested Putin was not likely to reach a quick ceasefire. ODNI's 2025 Annual Threat Assessment on Thursday said Putin "appears resolved and prepared to pay a very high price to prevail in what he sees as a defining time in Russia's strategic competition with the United States, world history, and his personal legacy". Ukraine's Ministry of Defence said Russia increased its assaults along the front line even as it negotiated a ceasefire. Combat clashes numbered 4,270 in March compared with 3,274 in February, it said. Russia was also not relaxing its use of glide bombs – some 10,577 have been used in the first three months of the year. All of last year, 40,000 were used, the ministry said.

Russian forces may have seized the village of Novolyubivka near Lyman on Tuesday. Their long-range aerial attacks also continued unabated throughout the week. Russia launched 172 drones against Ukraine on March 29, of which 94 were shot down and 69 disoriented using electronic jamming. Several drones struck high-rise apartment blocks in Dnipro, setting at least a dozen houses alight. Four people were reported killed and 21 injured. Zelenskyy in his evening address said drones hit houses and a hospital in Kharkiv, injuring 55 people, including five children.

## 180,000 Rohingya eligible to return: Myanmar

DHAKA: Myanmar has confirmed that 180,000 Rohingya refugees living in Bangladesh since fleeing their homeland are eligible to return, the Bangladesh government has said.

Friday's announcement, following talks in Bangkok, offered a possible breakthrough in the long-stalled repatriation process, although many Rohingya refugees say all of them should be allowed to go home. More than a million Rohingya people have been crammed into camps in southeastern Bangladesh, the world's largest refugee settlement. Most fled a brutal crackdown by Myanmar's military in 2017.

About 70,000 Rohingya crossed into Bangladesh last year, many fleeing worsening hunger and violence in Myanmar's Rakhine State. The Bangladeshi government's announcement comes after a meeting between Khalilur Rahman, high representative of Bangladesh's interim government led by Nobel laureate Muhammad Yunus, and Than Swe, Myanmar's deputy prime minister and foreign minister, on the sidelines of the 6th BIM-STEAC Summit in Bangkok.

The 180,000 names were part of a list of 800,000 Rohingya that Bangladesh submitted to Myanmar in six batches between 2018 and 2020. Myanmar has also indicated that final verification of another 70,000 refugees is pending further review of photographs and identity details. The statement said Myanmar had pledged to expedite the verification process for the remaining 550,000 names on the original list. — Agencies

# Matric exam halls petition: PHC reserves verdict

Humayun Khan

PESHAWAR: The Peshawar High Court has reserved its decision on a petition filed against the shifting of examination halls from private schools to government schools for the upcoming matriculation exams, on Friday.

A two-member bench comprising Justice Syed Arshad Ali and Justice Tariq Afridi heard the petition. The controller of examinations for the Peshawar Board and the petitioners' lawyers appeared before the court.

During the hearing, Justice Syed Arshad Ali asked the controller of examinations if all necessary facilities were available at the shifted examination halls and if any school had complained about the facilities. The controller replied that all facilities were available, and no school had complained so far.

The petitioners' lawyer argued that the education department had written a

letter stating that the shifted examination halls lacked necessary facilities. He added that private schools were not conducting the exams themselves, but rather the board was deploying its staff to conduct the exams, which would affect the students.

The controller of examinations countered that all necessary facilities were available at the shifted examination halls, and the distance was not too far. He explained that the board had made efforts to ensure that the distance between the original and shifted examination halls was not more than three kilometers.

Justice Tariq Afridi asked why some students had been shifted to new examination halls while others had not. The controller replied that students had been shifted to nearby government schools. The petitioners' lawyer raised concerns about the security of the students, stating that they would have to travel from the city to the examination halls in Mathra.

The court asked the board's lawyer about the security measures in place, and he replied that all necessary security arrangements had been made. After hearing the arguments, the court reserved its decision.

**Court dismisses Advocate General plea for early hearing in missing persons case:** The Peshawar High Court has dismissed a petition filed by the Advocate General's office seeking an early hearing in the case of four missing persons from the Alkozai family from Hayatabad, on Friday.

PHC Acting Chief Justice S M Atique Shah, observed that there was no urgency in the case, prompting the Advocate General's office to file the petition.

The Additional Advocate General informed the court that the petition was filed because a hearing date had not been set for the case. However, the court dismissed the petition, ruling that there was no justification for an early hearing.

# South Korea's President removed from office

SEOUL (Reuters): South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol was ousted by the Constitutional Court on Friday, which upheld parliament's impeachment motion over his imposition of martial law last year that sparked the country's worst political crisis in decades.

The ruling caps months of political turmoil that have overshadowed efforts to deal with the new administration of US President Donald Trump at a time of slowing growth in Asia's fourth-largest economy. With Yoon's ouster, a presidential election is required to take place within 60 days, according to the country's constitution.

Prime Minister Han Duck-soo will continue to serve as acting president until the new president is inaugurated.

"The Constitutional Court's unanimous ruling has removed a major source of uncertainty," Professor Leif-Eric Easley of Ewha University in Seoul. "And not a moment too soon, given how the next administration in Seoul must navigate North Korea's military threats, China's diplomatic pressure, and Trump's trade tariffs." Acting Chief Justice Moon Hyung-bae said Yoon violated his duty as president with his December 3 martial law declaration, acting

beyond the powers given to him under the constitution and describing his actions as "a serious challenge to democracy".

"(Yoon) committed a grave betrayal of the people's trust who are the sovereign members of the democratic republic," Moon said, adding that Yoon's declaration of martial law created chaos in all areas of society, the economy and foreign policy. Thousands of people at a rally calling for Yoon's ouster, including hundreds who had camped out overnight, erupted into wild cheers on hearing the ruling, chanting "We won!"

Supporters of Yoon who were gathered near his official residence reacted in anger. One protester was arrested for smashing a police bus window, the Yonhap news agency reported.

The South Korean won was largely unfazed by Friday's ruling, remaining at about 1% higher vs dollar at 1,436.6 per dollar by 0249 GMT. The benchmark KOSPI was down 0.7%, also unchanged from the morning as the expected scenario was for the court to uphold the impeachment bill. he court rejected most of Yoon's argument that he declared martial law to sound the alarm over the main opposition party's

abuse of its parliamentary majority, saying there were legally justified avenues to address disagreements.

The martial law decree lacked justification and was also procedurally defective, Moon said. Mobilising the military against parliament to disrupt its functions was a grave violation of Yoon's constitutional duty to safeguard the independence of the three branches of government, he added. Yoon's ruling People Power Party's interim leader Kwon Young-se apologised to the people saying the party humbly accepted the court's ruling and pledged to work with the acting president to stabilise the country.

Acting President Han Duck-soo, speaking after the ruling, said he would do all he could to ensure an orderly and peaceful presidential election. Finance Minister Choi Sang-mok is expected to convene an emergency meeting with the Bank of Korea governor and financial regulators. The 64-year-old Yoon faces a criminal trial on insurrection charges related to the martial law declaration. The embattled leader became the first sitting South Korean president to be arrested on January 15 but was released in March after a court cancelled his arrest warrant.