

NA likely to meet on 5th F.P. Report
ISLAMABAD: National Assembly likely to meet on May 5 to discuss India's aggression following Pahalgalam incident. India has accused Pakistan of the Pahalgalam attack without evidence, which Islamabad has denied with facts and proof. A high-level consultative meeting was held at Parliament House under the chairmanship of the Defence Minister, with the participation of ministers.

Any Indian aggression to be responded

F.P. Report
RAWALPINDI: Chief of Army Staff (COAS), General Syed Asim Munir, NI (M), presided over a Special Corps Commanders' Conference (CCC) at General Headquarters (GHQ) on Friday. The Forum conducted a comprehensive review of the prevailing geo-strategic environment, with particular emphasis on the current Pakistan-India standoff and the broader regional security calculus. The Forum reaffirmed the unflinching resolve of the Pakistan Armed Forces to uphold the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the country against any aggression or misadventure. The COAS lauded the unwavering professionalism, steadfast morale, and operational preparedness of the Armed Forces, standing in unity with the people of Pakistan to defend the homeland at all costs. He underscored the critical importance of heightened vigilance and proactive readiness across all fronts. The Forum expressed grave concern over the intensification of Indian

atrocities in Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJK), particularly in the aftermath of the recent Pahalgalam incident, as well as the continued targeting of innocent civilians along the Line of Control (LoC) by Indian occupation forces. It was reiterated that such inhumane and unprovoked acts serve only to escalate regional tensions and will be met with a resolute and proportionate response. The Forum noted, with serious concern, India's consistent pattern of exploitation of crises to achieve political and military objectives. They have been following a predictable template - whereby internal governance failures are externalised. These incidents have often coincided with unilateral moves by India to alter the status quo, as seen in 2019 when India similarly exploited the Pulwama incident to unilaterally alter the status quo of Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu & Kashmir, through revocation of Article 370. In the latest instance, the Pahalgalam episode appears to be part of a delib-

erate strategy to divert Pakistan's focus away from the western front, as well as ongoing national efforts for economic revival; the two fronts where Pakistan is decisively and sustainably gaining grounds. Such diversionary tactics aimed at providing operational breathing space to Indian terror proxies will never succeed. In the same vein, the Forum expressed serious concern that India is now exploiting the Pahalgalam incident to undermine the longstanding Indus Waters Treaty, seeking to usurp Pakistan's legitimate and inalienable water rights. This constitutes a dangerous attempt to weaponize water, threatening the livelihood and sustenance of over 240 million Pakistanis and escalating strategic instability in South Asia. The Forum also voiced deep alarm over credible evidence of direct Indian military and intelligence involvement in orchestrating terrorist activities inside Pakistan. These state-sponsored actions are in blatant violation of international norms which are



universally unacceptable. While reaffirming Pakistan's abiding commitment to peace, stability, and prosperity, the Forum made clear that any attempt to impose war will be responded to, surely and decisively and aspirations of people of Pakistan shall be respected at all costs, InshaAllah. The Forum reiterated that Pakistan's path to peace and development will not be deterred by terrorism, coercion, or aggression - whether directly or through proxies. Deliberate destabilization efforts by the Indian government will be confronted and defeated with resolve and clarity. The Forum concluded with the COAS expressing complete confidence in the operational readiness, deterrence posture, and morale of all formations and strategic forces to defend the nation across the entire threat spectrum.

Pakistan's desire to peace, stability in region: Shehbaz

F.P. Report
ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Friday reiterated Pakistan's desire for sustainable peace and stability in South Asia. He was talking to Hamad Obaid Ibrahim Salem Al-Zaabi, Ambassador of the United Arab Emirates (UAE), who called on him here at the Prime Minister House today. During the meeting, the prime minister conveyed his warm wishes to Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al-Nahyan, President of the UAE and thanked the UAE for its unwavering support to Pakistan, which bore testament to the historic, deep-rooted, fraternal ties between the two countries. The prime minister shared Pakistan's perspective on recent developments in South Asia since the Pahalgalam incident. He said Pakistan condemned terrorism in all its forms and manifestations, as it had itself been one of the biggest victims of terrorism. Citing the enormous sacrifices in terms of 90,000 casualties and over USD 152 billion in economic losses over the years, the prime minister said the country was dealing with the menace of terrorism emanating from its western front. India's recent actions and its aggressive posture was distracting Pakistan from its counter-terrorism efforts. PM Shehbaz Sharif categorically rejected the baseless accusations leveled by India in its desperate attempts to link Pakistan to the Pahalgalam incident, without any evidence. He said Pakistan had nothing to do with this and emphasized that he had offered to have a credible, transparent and neutral international investigation into the incident. He shared that Pakistan was reaching out to other friendly countries to present its position on the current crisis. While emphasizing that his government was focused on consolidating the hard-earned economic gains of the past fifteen months, which had been made possible by the support of friendly countries including the UAE,



the prime minister said Pakistan would never take such an action that could imperil regional peace and security. In this regard, the prime minister urged brotherly countries, including the UAE to impress upon India to de-escalate and defuse tensions. He reaffirmed Pakistan's desire for peace and stability in South Asia. The UAE Ambassador thanked the Prime Minister for sharing Pakistan's position and said that the UAE would work closely with Pakistan for maintaining regional peace and security. Meanwhile, the Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif urged Saudi Arabia and other brotherly countries to impress upon India to de-escalate and defuse tensions in South Asia, reaffirming Pakistan's commitment to maintain peace and stability in the region. He was talking to the ambassador of Saudi Arabia to Pakistan Nawaf bin Saeed Al-Maliki who called on him here at the PM House. While sharing Pakistan's stance on the recent situation in South Asia following Pahalgalam incident, the prime minister said that Pakistan condemns terrorism in all its forms and manifestations. "It had rendered great sacrifices in its counter-terrorism efforts over the years. This was done not only to protect Pakistan but the entire world," the prime minister said. He outrightly rejected baseless Indian accusations linking Pakistan to

the Pahalgalam incident without any evidence and reiterated his call for a transparent and neutral international investigation into the incident. Emphasizing the government's complete focus on consolidating the hard-earned economic gains of the past 15 months, with the support of friendly countries including Saudi Arabia, the prime minister said it was inconceivable for Pakistan to act in an irresponsible manner to jeopardize its achievements and derail the country from the path of economic progress. During the meeting, the prime minister conveyed his warm wishes to The Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud as well as to the Crown Prince & Prime Minister, Prince Mohammad bin Salman bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud. He thanked the Saudi leadership and people for always standing in solidarity with Pakistan through thick and thin. The Saudi ambassador thanked the prime minister for sharing his views on this important issue and said that Saudi Arabia wanted to work with Pakistan for peace and security in the region. **Premier shares developments in South Asia with Kuwait Ambassador since Pahalgalam incident:** Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif took the Kuwait Ambassador into confidence on Pakistan's perspective with regard to recent developments in South Asia since Pahalgalam incident.

India facing HR violations under Modi's rule: Saif

F.P. Report
PESHAWAR: Adviser to the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa chief minister on information, Barrister Muhammad Ali Saif, has accused Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi of using false flag operations as a pretext to impose authoritarian rule in India. In a statement, Barrister Saif claimed that the Modi government has clamped down on freedom of expression and press freedom while violating democratic norms. He said India, under Modi, has witnessed a record surge in human rights violations and suppression of dissent. He further alleged that the Indian leadership is now openly embracing fascist tendencies, using false flag operations as justification. "In defending these actions, Modi has crossed into full-blown fascism," Saif remarked. The adviser also said the Modi government is putting regional peace at risk in pursuit of the RSS ideology, pushing the subcontinent toward greater instability. Referring to the recent failed false flag attempt, Saif said the Indian prime minister has grown increasingly desperate. He concluded by stressing the need for national unity in Pakistan, calling for the release of the PTI founder and all political prisoners to strengthen democratic institutions and political stability.

4 terrorists killed IBO

F.P. Report
WANA: At least four suspected militants were killed during an intelligence-based operation conducted by security forces in the Kaloti area of Tehsil Birmal, South Waziristan, officials confirmed.

According to security sources, the operation was launched following credible intelligence regarding the presence of operatives from the banned militant group (TTG) inside a residential compound. As forces surrounded the location, the militants opened fire, prompting a fierce exchange of gunfire that lasted several hours. Four militants were killed during the operation, while two security personnel sustained minor injuries. The area was later cleared in a follow-up sweep to ensure no remaining threats. Officials said a cache of weapons and ammunition was recovered from the compound. "The operation reflects our unwavering resolve to eliminate anti-state elements," a security spokesperson said, reaffirming the commitment to continued action against militant networks in the region. Eyewitnesses in Kaloti reported that sporadic gunfire echoed across the area throughout the day. Helicopters were deployed for aerial surveillance, and residents in nearby areas remained confined to their homes as the situation unfolded.

US vice president hopes Kashmir attack won't spark wider conflict

WASHINGTON (Reuters): US Vice President JD Vance said Washington hoped Pakistan would cooperate with India to hunt down Pakistan-based militants, and that India's response to the recent Islamist militant attack in Kashmir does not lead to a broader regional conflict. "Our hope here is that India responds to this terrorist attack in a way that doesn't lead to a broader regional conflict," Vance said in an interview on Fox News' "Special Report with Bret Baier" show. "And we hope, frankly, that Pakistan, to the extent that they're responsible, cooperates with India to make sure that the terrorists sometimes operating in their territory are hunted down and dealt with," Vance added. Vance's comments are the closest the US government has come since the April 22 attack — in which 26 people were killed — to potentially linking Pakistan to extremism in India. Top US leaders, including President Donald Trump, have condemned the attack, calling it "terror" and "unconscionable," while expressing support for India without directly blaming Pakistan. India is an important US partner as Washington aims to counter China's rising influence. Pakistan remains Washington's ally even as its importance diminished after the 2021 US withdrawal from neighboring Afghanistan. In recent days, Washington urged

US urges responsible resolution between India and Pakistan

Jalil Afridi
WASHINGTON DC: The United States is urging both India and Pakistan to pursue a "responsible resolution" to ensure long-term peace and regional stability in South Asia, following high-level diplomatic outreach amid escalating tensions. During a press briefing at the US State Department, Spokesperson Tammy Bruce confirmed that Secretary of State Marco Rubio recently spoke with Indian External Affairs Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar and Pakistani Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif. The conversations come in the wake of a recent terrorist incident in Indian-administered Kashmir that has heightened regional unease. "As the President articulated to Prime Minister Modi last week, the United States stands strong with India against terrorism," Bruce said, adding, "Prime Minister Modi has our full support." She emphasized that the US remains in close communication with both governments "at multiple levels." When asked whether US calls for de-escalation were being taken seriously by both sides, Bruce responded that the US government is in "constant communication" and is actively encouraging restraint and diplomatic engagement. "We are asking for a responsible resolution from both parties," she said, declining to provide further specifics.

India and Pakistan to work with each other to de-escalate tensions and arrive at a "responsible solution." India has blamed Pakistan for the attack. Islamabad denies responsibility and is calling for a neutral probe. The US State Department has said it was in touch with the nuclear-armed Asian neighbors at multiple levels and Secretary of State Marco Rubio held calls on Wednesday with Indian Foreign Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar and Pakistani Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif. Hindu nationalist Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi vowed to punish those responsible and Jaishankar has told Rubio that the perpetrators should be brought to justice. Pakistan says military action by India was imminent. Muslim-majority Kashmir is claimed in full by both Hindu-majority India and Islamic Pakistan, with each controlling only part of it and having fought wars over it. After the attack, India suspended a treaty regulating water-sharing, and both countries closed airspace to each other's airlines. They also exchanged fire across their border.

Zardari, Bilawal vow to promote free, responsible press

F.P. Report
ISLAMABAD: On World Press Freedom Day, we reaffirm our commitment to upholding and promoting a free and responsible press in Pakistan. Today, we also honour the sacrifices made by those who have lost their lives in pursuit of truth, especially reporting in conflict zones like Gaza and Palestine. Their courage and dedication continue to inspire us. Article 19 of the Constitution of Pakistan guarantees the right to freedom of speech and a free press, subject to certain restrictions. The media is indispensable for promoting dialogue, highlighting issues of social, economic and environmental significance, uncovering corruption and advocating for the marginalised. We have taken a number of steps for the protection and welfare of journalists, but more needs to be done by providing them a safe, secure, and enabling environment. A culture where journalists feel secure to perform their duties without fear and harassment is the need of the time. I urge the media to uphold the highest standards of journalism, accuracy, and professionalism. The responsibility of the Media has become onerous in view of the environment of fake news, disinformation, and sensationalism undermining public trust. Moreover, the media has a critical role in raising awareness of citizens' rights and responsibilities, socio-economic issues, promoting civic education, and encouraging informed public participation in the democratic process. The press should serve as a bridge between the people and public institu-

tions, and give voice to the voiceless. On this day, let us renew our resolve to protect and promote press freedom as an essential element of our democracy. I hope the government would continue working to protect press freedoms and ensure journalists' safety, dignity, and independence. I am also hopeful that our media will continue to play its role in educating and informing our nation on issues of national and global significance. Meanwhile, Chairman Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) Bilawal Bhutto Zardari has paid rich tribute to journalists, editors, photographers, and media workers across Pakistan and around the world on the occasion of World Press Freedom Day, reaffirming his party's unwavering commitment to freedom of the press, protection of journalists, and the people's fundamental right to truth and information. In a statement issued by the Media Cell Bilawal House, Chairman PPP said that World Press Freedom Day serves as a poignant reminder that journalism is not merely a profession—it is a public service, a shield against tyranny, and a lifeline for any democratic society. "In every unjust silence, in every muffled truth, freedom itself is wounded," he added. Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari pointed out that the unanimously passed Constitution of 1973, which guarantees the freedom of speech, expression, and the press, was a historic gift from Quaid-e-Awam Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, the country's first elected Prime Minister. He also recalled the enduring legacy of Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto, who stood

as a resolute defender of press freedom even under the darkest days of dictatorship. He added that President Asif Ali Zardari, despite being the target of one of the most venomous media trials in Pakistan's history, has always championed the cause of media liberalization. "The PPP's legacy is clear—we have endured censorship, imprisonment, and even martyrdom, but we have never bowed before those who sought to silence us. A strong, independent press is not the enemy of the state; it is the voice of the people," he said. Calling upon the federal and provincial governments, Chairman PPP urged immediate and concrete steps to ensure the safety and protection of journalists. This includes robust legal safeguards, prosecution of crimes against media professionals, and an end to arbitrary censorship and economic coercion. He lauded the PPP-led Sindh Government for taking a pioneering step by passing the Sindh Protection of Journalists and Other Media Practitioners Act, 2021, and establishing the Commission for the Protection of Journalists and Other Media Practitioners under this law. Bilawal saluted the courage of media professionals who risk their lives to uncover and report the truth. He also stressed that in today's digital age, the scope of press freedom must expand to include protection against online harassment, misinformation, and algorithmic bias. "The modern press isn't limited to print and television—it includes bloggers, vloggers, and citizen journalists. We must ensure that the principles of freedom and responsibility extend to all platforms."

FO rejects Indian media's false claims

F.P. Report
ISLAMABAD: The Foreign Office (FO) of Pakistan on Friday rejected claims made by Indian media that the country had closed the Wagah border to Pakistani citizens returning from India, amid escalating tensions between the two nations. The statement came in response to an Indian media reports alleging that Pakistan had "refused" to open the Wagah border, leaving several Pakistani nationals stranded in the area between the Attari and Wagah checkpoints. "Many patients with fragile health had to return to Pakistan without completing their treatment. Furthermore, there are reports of families being split and children being separated from one of their parents," the Foreign Office said in its statement. The ministry clarified that the family of the two girls. He said arrangements were being made to begin their treatment in Pakistan at the government's expense. **Pakistan raises alarm over humanitarian issues as India revokes visas:** Pakistan has voiced serious concerns over the humanitarian consequences fol-

lowing India's decision to revoke visas of Pakistani citizens. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs highlighted the plight of many Pakistanis, including patients in delicate health conditions, who have been compelled to return home before completing their medical treatments. The Ministry's spokesperson addressed media inquiries about the status of the Wagah border crossing for Pakistanis heading back from India. Reports indicate troubling scenarios, such as families being separated, with some children left without one of their parents. The spokesperson verified that the last official date for crossing the Wagah-Attari border was set for April 30, 2025. Despite this, media reports have surfaced, indicating that some Pakistani nationals remain stranded at Attari on the Indian side. Pakistan remains prepared to facilitate the return of its citizens if Indian authorities allow them to cross the border, the spokesperson conveyed. Furthermore, it was reassured that the Wagah border will continue to be accessible for Pakistani citizens in the future.



Governor urges UAE consulate in Peshawar, highlights business ties

F.P. Report

KARACHI: Governor KPK Faisal Karim Kundi was warmly received by UAE Counsel General H.E. Bakheet Ateeq Al Romaithi at UAE Consulate in Karachi on May 02 2025.

Governor KPK Faisal Karim Kundi praised the continued support of UAE and termed it second home for Pakistanis. He also mentioned that there was a significant number of Pashtuns who are working in UAE, therefore he urged UAE Consulate General to open a Consulate in

Peshawar as well.

The Governor also mentioned about Pakistan Mines and Minerals Conference in Islamabad, aimed at investment in the sector, and urged the UAE business community to explore the minerals sector of KPK. The Governor was toured to different sections of the Consulate where he inaugurated Business Visa Section of the Consulate.

The Governor was informed by UAE CG H.E. Bakheet Ateeq Al Romaithi that the business section will provide

opportunities of mutual investments, will create ease of doing business and will be helpful in strengthening the business relations between the two countries. Moreover, Pakistani citizens are now eligible for getting five years visa program that will further strengthen bilateral ties between the two brotherly countries, he added.

The Counsel General of the UAE acknowledged the role of Pakistan in the development of UAE and pledged for continued support to the Pakistan.



KARACHI: Governor KPK Faisal Karim Kundi was warmly received by UAE Counsel General H.E. Bakheet Ateeq Al Romaithi at UAE Consulate.

Policy reform a key to ensure protection Child Rights

F.P. Report

KARACHI: A high-level consultation, organised by the National Commission for Human Rights (NCHR) with support from UNICEF, brought together key stakeholders to address critical challenges in implementing child rights protections in Pakistan. The dialogue highlighted the urgent need for robust policy and institutional reforms to protect the fundamental rights of children, as per Pakistan's Constitution and international obligations.

The consultation brought together representatives from child rights civil society organizations (CSOs), the Social Welfare Department, Child Protection Centre, Prison authorities, and other relevant state departments to develop collaborative approaches to address key child rights issues in Pakistan.

The event featured a comprehensive presentation by NCHR on its mandate, functions, and the role it can play in furthering child rights in Pakistan. NCHR also presented a summary of its alternative report submitted to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) on Pakistan's compliance with the Convention on the Rights of the Child, focusing on juvenile justice, child marriages, and child labour.

Statistics shared at the event revealed alarming figures: 96% of juveniles in Adiala Jail are under trial without conviction, 90% of juveniles lack legal aid, and 57.8% of children are without birth registration. Regarding child marriages, 18.3% of girls are married before 18, with UNICEF estimating over 19 million child brides nationwide. Child labour affects over 12 million children across Pakistan, with 13.4% of children aged 5-14 in Punjab engaged in labour activities. Speaking on this occasion, Chairperson NCHR Rabiya Javeri Agha said, "At NCHR, we are committed to protecting the rights of children through a multi-faceted approach that includes judicial interventions, legal monitoring, policy advocacy, and knowledge production. Our goal is to ensure that every child in Pakistan has the right to safety, dignity, and justice. This requires harmonization of laws and significant investment in protective systems at all levels of governance."

DIG Prisons Sindh, Sheeba Shah, who oversees all juvenile prisons across the province, emphasized, "The juvenile justice system requires urgent reforms. Children in conflict with the law need rehabilitation and support, not punishment. We must focus on implementation of the

Juvenile Justice System Act 2018 in its true spirit to ensure that children's rights are protected at every stage of the legal process."

Participants during the consultation identified several systemic challenges, including insufficient coordination between departments responsible for child welfare. The non-issuance of birth certificates was identified as a factor that perpetuates problems faced by juveniles and women.

On child labour, participants expressed concerns that laws should not criminalize poverty and warned against blanket approaches that could cause more harm than good. They emphasized the need for comprehensive social care for children and noted that keeping children in educational settings significantly reduced child labour rates.

The dialogue also explored the implementation gaps in the Juvenile Justice System Act (JJSA) 2018, which despite its comprehensive protections, remains inadequately implemented. NCHR shared its achievements in conducting landmark inquiries into juvenile facilities, developing monitoring mechanisms, and advocating for the implementation of the JJSA, including the notification of rules and establishment of rehabilitation centres.

Minister announces 333 medical seats for Balochistan, FATA

ISLAMABAD (PPI): In a major step toward promoting equitable access to medical education, Federal Minister for National Health Services Syed Mustafa Kamal on Friday announced the allocation of 333 additional medical and dental college seats for students from Balochistan and the former FATA region for the academic year 2024-25.

The announcement was made during a press conference at the Pakistan Medical and Dental Council (PM&DC) head office, where the minister underscored the government's commitment to addressing longstanding regional disparities in the healthcare education sector.

The additional seats, approved following recommendations of the Senate Standing Committee on National Health Services, will be granted over and above the existing quota for

Higher Education Commission (HEC) scholars from the two underserved regions. The measure aims to uplift students from socio-economically marginalized areas by improving their access to professional medical education.

"This decision is not just about increasing numbers; it is about building a more inclusive and resilient healthcare system that truly represents the strength and diversity of Pakistan," Kamal stated. He added that the initiative forms part of the broader agenda of national integration and inclusive development.

The minister thanked Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif for his personal involvement in the matter and acknowledged the support of the PM&DC President and members, who facilitated swift approval of the policy. He noted that a formal notification of the

seat allocation has already been issued.

Public sector medical and dental colleges in Balochistan and FATA have been advised to apply for seat enhancement in accordance with PM&DC regulations, ensuring that capacity building is aligned with quality standards. Provincial governments have also been urged to expedite the allocation process for the new seats.

To ensure accountability and fairness, the PM&DC will closely monitor the implementation, with a focus on transparency and merit-based selection. Framing the move as both educational reform and a nation-building effort, Kamal concluded, "This initiative is a testimony to what can be achieved when leadership, policy, and purpose align for the greater national interest."

Tessori advises India to avoid provocation

KARACHI (PPI) Sindh Governor Kamran Khan Tessori said on Friday that the only path to sustainable peace in the region is through dialogue, and that tension is not in anyone's interest. He expressed full confidence in the capabilities of Pakistan's armed forces and appealed to the international community to take notice of India's war frenzy.

He stated that Pakistan is a peaceful country and India should avoid provocation. He warned the international community not to push South Asia towards instability. Tessori mentioned that Pakistan's armed forces possess the full capability to protect the motherland and that any aggression will be met with a strong response. The Governor emphasized that dialogue is the best path to establishing peace.

Police check over 4.3m records

LAHORE (APP): Lahore Police conducted a large-scale crackdown on criminal elements with the help of advanced technology, checking the records of over 4.3 million individuals through the "Hotel Eye" and "Travel Eye" software systems in the past three months.

A statement issued by a spokesman, during these checks, 816 alleged criminals involved in various cases were also arrested. The spokesman shared that the police also inspected 879 hotels, 1,460 hostels and 177 factories using the "Smart Eye" application.

Capital City Police Officer Bilal Siddique Kamyana said that the noose was being tightened around wanted criminals through the use of modern technology. He directed that hotels' management must be made responsible for entering guest data into the "Hotel Eye" application. The CCPO added that the movement of wanted criminals should be closely monitored through the "Travel Eye" application. Bilal Siddique warned that legal action will be taken against those failing to register data in police software systems.

He directed field officers to inspect hotels, lodges and bus terminals, adding that social media be closely monitored to identify and apprehend the lawbreakers. The use of advanced technology was essential for a peaceful society, CCPO concluded.



LAHORE: Federal Minister for Railways Muhammad Hanif Abbasi's surprise visit to Lahore Railway Station announces strict actions on cleanliness and employee absenteeism. —APP Photo

Sharjeel stresses press freedom, highlights efforts for journalist protection

F.P. Report

KARACHI: Sindh Senior Minister Sharjeel Inam Memon stated that freedom of expression and independent journalism are essential pillars of democracy.

The Pakistan Peoples Party has consistently advocated for freedom of expression and the preservation of democratic values. Under the leadership of Bilawal Bhutto Zardari and President Asif Ali Zardari, the Sindh government has taken several concrete measures to uphold the rights of journalists.

In his message on the occasion of World Press Freedom Day, Sindh Senior Minister and Provincial Minister for Information, Transport, and Mass Transit Sharjeel Inam Memon stated that Sindh is the first province to formally enact legislation for the protection of journalists.

The establishment of the Sindh Information Commission marks a significant milestone in ensuring the public's right to access information. Through the Journalist Welfare Fund, the Sindh government has made it possible to extend financial assistance to deserving journalists and their families.

He said that the government pays tribute to all journalists who sacrificed their lives in the pursuit of truth and justice. The Sindh government has always championed the cause of freedom of expression, and

this struggle will continue that we envision a Pakistan work freely, securely, and unwaveringly. He added where every journalist can with dignity.

ESSI EMPLOYEE SOCIAL SECURITY INSTITUTION (LABOUR DEPARTMENT) GOVERNMENT OF KHYBER PAKHTUNKHWA INVITATION FOR BIDS

- In compliance with the KPRA decision vide letter No. KP-PPRA/GRR/Appeal/272 of 2024/710 dated 18-04-2025, the Vice Commissioner ESSI/Project Director invites Scaled Bids on the basis of **"Single Stage-two Envelope Procedure"** in accordance with KPRA Procurement Rules 2014, under National Competitive Bidding from Manufacturers and/or Importers for Medical Equipment, Medical Furniture, instruments etc.
- Bidding shall be conducted through **Single Stage Two Envelopes Bidding Procedure**. Each envelope shall contain Technical and Financial bid separately clearly marked is bold & legible letters
- Interested Manufacturers and/or Importers and/or Authorized Dealers of various items interested to enter is this bidding competition must obtain an application form Rs.2000/- along with complete set of bidding documents from the office of the undersigned during office hours on any working day till **19 May 2015 11:00 Am**.
- Pre-bid meetings with the interested bidders will be held from **9th May 2025**, in accordance with the schedule mentioned in the Bid Solicitation Documents. The bidders shall thoroughly study the Bid Solicitation Documents before the Pre-Bid meeting and come up with their queries/suggestions to the forum for clarification/understanding and the same shall be submitted in written before the Pre-Bid meeting. In case of non-submission of hard copy on or before the pre-bid meeting day, the queries/suggestions shall not be considered/entertained.
- Interested Bidders must submit sealed bids to the office of the undersigned ESSI Head Office Small Industrial Estate near City Hospital Kohat road Peshawar on or before 11:10 AM sharp, on **19 May 2025**, which will be open on the same day at 11:30 AM in the presence of those bidders or their representatives, who choose to attend the process. Bid submitted after 11:00 AM shall not be entertained
- Financial bid must be accompanied with irrevocable Bid Security in favor of "Vies Commissioner ESSI" which shall be from bank account of the prospective bidder. Technical bids must be accompanied with a photocopy of the bid security (not showing the amount) or an Affidavit on Judicial Stamp paper to the effect that bid security as per Bid data Sheet is attached in the financial bid
- Bidders are required to offer the most competitive rate of their items, as negotiations discounts on quoted rates are not allowed under the rules
- The undersigned reserves the right to inject any or all the bids as per provisions contained in Rule 47 of KPRA Rules 2014

Project-director/Vice Commissioner

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa ESSI

INF(P) 1704/25



PAF BASE, KOHAT TENDER NOTICE

Sealed tenders / bids are invited from the firms / contractors for renting out PAF Land "Tank Airfield located at D I Khan Road, Distt Tank" for agriculture purpose. Tenders / bids should be submitted to office of Officer Incharge Personnel Squadron, PAF Base, Kohat on or before **19 May, 2025** at 1000 Hrs. The Tenders will be opened on the same day at 1200 hrs. Applications / Bids received after due date will not be entertained. Undersigned reserves the rights to accept / reject any tender on technical grounds.

Officer Incharge, Personnel Squadron
PAF Base, Kohat
Ph: 0922-9260095 Ext: 5031
Mobile. 0323-9452311



KHYBER MEDICAL UNIVERSITY Committed to Excellence in Academics & Research RE-TENDER NOTICE

Khyber Medical University, Peshawar invites sealed tenders for the KMU Hospital from Manufacturers / Importers / Authorized Dealers duly registered with KPRA, Sales Tax, Income Tax (and listed as Active Taxpayers with FBR)

S#	Description of Items
1	Supply, Installation, Testing, and Commissioning of Elevator at KMU Hospital

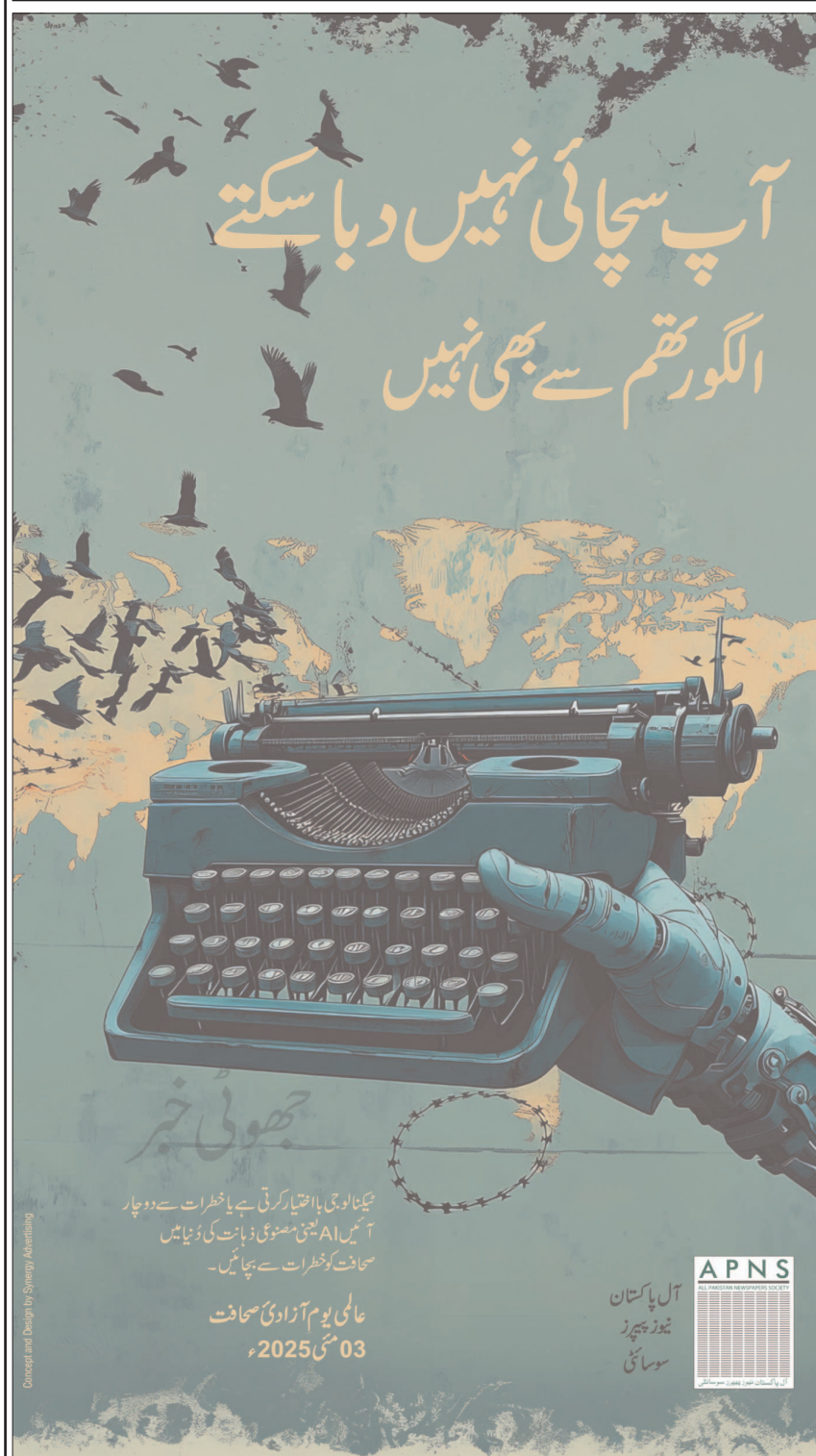
NOTE:

- Standard Bidding Documents containing bidding procedure, terms & conditions, and other details may be obtained from office of the Director (P&D), KMU after payment of Rs.2000/- (Non-Refundable) in BoK Account No 2009228667 during office hours by submitting a written request on company/firm letter head from **03-5-2025 to 21-05-2025**.
- Pre bid meeting will be held on **12-05-2025 at 10:30 AM**.
- The method of selection would be Single Stage – Two Envelope.
- The Bids/Technical Proposals shall be submitted on or before **21/05/2025 till 10:30 AM** and will be opened on the same day at 11:00 AM in the KMU Committee Room by the KMU Purchase Committee in presence of the bidders or their authorized representatives.

**CHAIRMAN PURCHASE COMMITTEE
KHYBER MEDICAL UNIVERSITY**
KMU Road, Phase 5, Hayatabad, Peshawar.
Web site: www.kmu.edu.pk
Ph: 092-91-9217703

Adv # 41/2025

KMU Media





PESHAWAR: Commissioner Peshawar Riaz Mehsud chairing meeting of the Divisional Intelligence Coordination Committee.

Pakhtunkhwa Radio airs talk show on religious harmony, peace

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: In a significant step toward promoting religious harmony and curbing religious intolerance in society, Pakhtunkhwa Radio Peshawar, under the special instructions of Station Director Haroon Khan Daudzai, broadcasted a special talk show on the theme of "Religious Harmony and Peace." The program was produced as part of the National Action

Plan, aiming to strengthen interfaith tolerance, brotherhood, and peaceful coexistence across communities.

The talk show featured participants from various religious backgrounds, who spoke on the values of harmony, tolerance, and social unity from the perspectives of their respective faiths. Notable guests included Baba Ji Gural Singh from the Sikh community, Avinash Das representing the Hindu faith,

Shehla Kamran from the Christian community, and Advocate Ameenullah representing the Muslim community.

All speakers emphasized that every religion teaches peace, love, and humanity, and that in a multicultural society like Pakistan, religious tolerance is more essential than ever. The program was hosted by senior broadcaster Hidayatullah Gul, while Station Director Haroon Khan Daudzai

oversaw the overall production.

The show was produced by Neelam Zahir. This initiative by Pakhtunkhwa Radio Peshawar received widespread appreciation from listeners, who lauded it as an effective and positive step toward strengthening societal harmony. The program played a pivotal role in promoting dialogue, mutual understanding, and respect among followers of different faiths.

WWB clarifies new report 2056 flats were made as quarantine center in 2020

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The Workers Welfare Board (WWB) Khyber Pakhtunkhwa authorities have clarified media reports regarding the Regi Lalma Labour Colony in Peshawar and said that during the COVID-19 pandemic, the district administration declared the 2056 Family Flats at Regi Lalma, Peshawar as a quarantine center in the year 2020 as a result, the flats could not be allotted to industrial workers during that period.

"The construction of these 2,056 family flats

was completed in 2021, but they remain vacant to date" they said and added that the WWB in its 98th meeting held in 2022, recommended that the flats be allocated to industrial workers on a rental basis under the Workers Welfare Fund Ordinance 1971 and Allotment Regulations 2002, if all legal requirements are met.

They maintained that during the 99th board meeting of the WWB in 2023, it was confirmed that the provincial allotment committee could continue allocating the flats on a rental basis until final

directives are received from the WWF Islamabad, saying that despite challenges, the board initiated the allocation process and submitted its recommendations to the allotment committee on May 7, 2024 and It was decided to invite applications through a public advertisement.

"The advertisement was published in leading newspapers on May 21, 2024, and so far, 609 applications from workers affiliated with 51 industrial units have been received while letters were also sent to the Directorate of Labor and the Employees' Social

Security Institution to provide data on registered workers in Peshawar district, which has since been obtained" they informed.

They further said that delays in the allotment process occurred due to the unavailability of electricity in the colony.

They authorities have assured that electricity will be restored within 15 days.

"According to the Allotment Regulations 2002 (amended 2023), the first phase of allocations will prioritize active industrial units under a quota-based formula" they further said.

Pharma Alumni first ever cabinet took oath

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The first oath-taking ceremony of the elected members of the Pharma Alumni of the Department of Pharmacy, University of Peshawar, was held at the Pivotal Hall. The ceremony was attended by esteemed guests, including Professor Muhammad Naeem Qazi, Vice Chancellor of the University of Peshawar, and Dr. Obaid Ullah Malik, CEO of the Drug Regulatory Authority of Pakistan (DRAP).

The ceremony witnessed the oath-taking of the newly elected cabinet members of the Pharma Alumni, led by Professor Fazal Nasir, Chairman of the Department of Pharmacy and Patron-in-

Chief of the Pharma Alumni.

The newly elected cabinet members include president Tariq Ahmad, Aftab Ullah General Secretary, Yahya Khan Joint Secretary, Yousaf Khan Finance Secretary, Haroon Ahmad Khan Vice President Male, Rabiha Khan Durrani Vice

President Female, Muhammad Jalat Shah Event Management Secretary, Faheem Khan Overseas Male Representative, and Asiya Abbasi Overseas Female Representative.

The newly elected cabinet members pledged to work with loyalty and dedication to their profession

and strive for its advancement. They also committed to working for the welfare of both graduated and current pharmacy students and contributing to the development and betterment of the Department of Pharmacy at the University of Peshawar.

The Vice Chancellor of the University of Peshawar and the CEO of DRAP congratulated the newly elected cabinet members and assured them of their support and collaboration in their future endeavors. The oath-taking ceremony marked a significant milestone for the Pharma Alumni of the University of Peshawar, as it set the stage for the newly elected cabinet to work towards the betterment of the profession and the department.



KP Police praised for swift recovery of snatched car

PESHAWAR (APP): The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) Police have earned widespread praise for their quick response in recovering a snatched car belonging to a member of the transgender community in Peshawar.

The vehicle was successfully retrieved within hours of the incident, showcasing the police's efficiency and commitment to protecting all citizens, including marginalized groups.

To acknowledge and appreciate prompt response and action by Police team, the transgender community visited Charsadda City Police

station and cut a cake for officials.

According to details, Katrina Khan, a transgender rights activist and head of Rehabilitation, Education, Skill Development, Training, and Awareness (REST) organization, was deprived of her car allegedly by Fazil Shah in Charsadda district.

Soon after the incident, Katrina approached police through calling 15 Emergency Police and also visited City Police Station Charsadda.

Upon receiving complaint, Deputy Superintendent of Police Charsadda Zardad Khan

initiated prompt action and through efforts by Additional SHO, Sadiq Khan within few hours the snatched car was recovered.

According to Katrina there was also an amount of Rs. 1.5 million in the car along with original registration.

Katrina along with few community members visited Charsadda Police Station and thanked DSP Zardad Khan and ASHO, Sadiq Khan for their cooperation and early recovery of the car.

Speaking on the occasion, ASHO Sadiq Khan informed that the snatcher has also been arrested

an is under interrogation.

In response to a question about handing over of car and other valuables to Katrina, Sadiq Khan said the action for recovery of car has been taken after filing of the FIR and the stolen goods would be handed over to her through court.

Katrina on this occasion, expressed her heartfelt thanks to Police team for recovery of her stolen car and valuable goods.

This prompt action highlights the KP Police's dedication to justice and reinforces the importance of equal protection under the law, she remarked.

Retiring with honour Khan Gul Jadoon celebrated for dedicated public service

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Officers and employees who resolve public issues and serve the community during their official tenure continue to live in people's hearts even after retirement. They do not miss their official positions because their legacy resides in public affection. These sentiments were expressed by Chairman of the Provincial Assembly's Standing Committee on Health and Member of the Provincial Assembly, Mushtaq Ahmed Ghani, while addressing a special ceremony at Abbottabad Press Club held in honor of the retiring Assistant from the Regional Information Office Abbottabad Khan Gul Khan Jadoon.

This was the first-of-its-kind and unique ceremony at the Abbottabad Press Club, attended by individuals from all walks of life, senior government officials, representatives of various public, semi-public, and private organizations, and a large number of journalists.

While addressing the event, Mushtaq Ahmed Ghani praised Khan Gul Khan for being an outstanding, well-organized, and professional official. He stated that officers and officials who avoid chasing positions of power and stay close to the public, sincerely working to resolve their problems, are remembered and respected upon retirement just like Khan Gul Jadoon.

On this occasion, President of Abbottabad Press Club, Sardar Naveed Alam, remarked that the Department of Information and Public Relations is like a second home to the journalist community. He said Khan Gul Khan served not only the journalist community with sincerity but also rendered valuable services to the region.

The President and General Secretary of Abbottabad Union of Journalists also appreciated the services of the retiring Assistant, Khan Gul Khan, expressing hope that he would continue to serve his department, the journalist community, and the region with the same enthusiasm.

In his address, Khan Gul Khan Jadoon thanked the journalist community and

KPRA collects Rs41.9 bn in ten months

PESHAWAR (APP): Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Revenue Authority (KPRA) has collected Rs41.9 billion in the last ten months of fiscal year 2024-25, marking a 40% increase compared to the same period last year.

This surge reflects a substantial rise of Rs12 billion over the Rs29.9 billion collected during July-April 2023-24.

According to figures released by the KPRA's media wing on Friday, the authority generated Rs32.4 billion through the Sales Tax on Services and Rs9.51 billion via the

Infrastructure Development Cess (IDC).

In the corresponding period last year, collections stood at Rs25.5 billion and Rs4.38 billion respectively, reflecting a 27% growth in Sales Tax on Services and a remarkable 117% surge in IDC revenue.

KPRA Director General Fouzia Iqbal lauded the performance of her team, crediting the impressive growth to their dedication and strategic planning.

"With the same level of commitment and our strategic approach, I am confident we will surpass this year's target with good

margins," she said.

She also expressed her gratitude to taxpayers for their trust, confidence, and cooperation, which have played a crucial role in KPRA's achievements. Additionally, she acknowledged the support and guidance of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur and Advisor to the CM on Finance Muzzammil Aslam, emphasizing that their leadership has been instrumental in implementing effective strategies and driving KPRA toward its goals.

Hult Prize 2025 National Competition begins at KMU

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The prestigious national-level competitions of the globally renowned Hult Prize 2025 have officially commenced at Khyber Medical University (KMU), Peshawar. This major event brings together over 300 students from 80 teams representing universities across Pakistan. At the conclusion of the competitions, six top-performing teams will be selected to represent Pakistan at the international Hult Prize Global Finals. In the global competition the winning team will have to receive One Million USD prize.

The opening ceremony featured keynote addresses by Dr. Zohaib Khan, Director ORIC at KMU, and Dr. Fazal Subhan, National Director of Hult Prize Pakistan. Both speakers elaborated on the goals, rules, and transformative impact of the Hult Prize on

youth entrepreneurship and social innovation.

Dr. Zohaib Khan remarked "Competitions like the Hult Prize not only provide our youth with a platform to showcase their talents but also inspire them to develop innovative and sustainable solutions to real-world socio-economic challenges." He further stated that hosting this mega event is a matter of pride for both Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and especially KMU and emphasized that the national event serves as a powerful motivational force for Pakistani youth—offering them an opportunity to project their creativity on an international platform.

Dr. Fazal Subhan, in his address, said "The Hult Prize offers a unique platform for students worldwide to solve pressing social issues through entrepreneurial ideas, contributing to a better world. We are confident that Pakistani

students will prove their excellence on the global stage."

He noted that teams from over 100 countries participate in the Hult Prize competitions each year. These competitions play a vital role in promoting social entrepreneurship, aiming to address major global challenges such as education, poverty, healthcare, environment, and economic inequality through actionable and scalable solutions.

Dr. Fazal Subhan also expressed his gratitude to Prof. Dr. Zia ul Haq, Vice Chancellor KMU, Dr. Zohaib Khan, and especially Waseem ul Haq, Head of the KMU Incubation Center, for their outstanding hospitality and excellent event arrangements. He expressed hope that the collaboration between KMU and the Hult Prize will continue with the same energy and commitment in the future.



India's manufactured crisis: RAW's role exposed

Aiman Khattak

IN the aftermath of the April 24 attack in Pahalgam, Indian occupied Kashmir, a predictable pattern unfolded. Within minutes, Indian authorities pointed fingers at Pakistan, alleging that the assault bore the hallmarks of a cross-border terror plot. The FIR was registered in 10 minutes, despite the region's difficult terrain and the logistical challenges that follow any such incident. Indian media and R&AW backed social media handles, were quick to broadcast claims of Pakistani Intelligence agencies involvement.

But this isn't new. Pakistan has become the default scapegoat for vio-

lent incidents in India, without any evidence. But something about this episode felt unusually orchestrated - the haste, the uniformity of messaging, the sheer readiness of the narrative. That feeling was vindicated when confidential documents, originating from India's intelligence agency R&AW, surfaced online. What they revealed was unsettling, even for a region long used to statecraft and subterfuge.

According to these leaked files, the Pahalgam attack was not the work of militants but a false flag operation; carefully planned and deliberately executed by Indian Intelligence Agency R&AW. The details, point to a campaign of deception: forged call records, staged eyewitnesses, pre-recorded

narratives, and even synthetic videos, all designed to create a false trail linking the attack to Pakistan's intelligence services.

Why go to such lengths? The documents suggest the motive was geopolitical: to isolate Pakistan diplomatically, reignite global suspicions about its counterterrorism commitments, and create justification for India's expanding military footprint in IIOJK under the Global Counter Terrorism Compact. There was also an international dimension i.e the timing of the attack coincided with U.S. Vice President JD Vance's high-profile visit to India. The idea was to exploit global attention and build sympathy in Western capitals.

These revelations point to a deeply cynical strate-

gy. The attack was staged in a tourist-heavy area, selected to guarantee outrage. Media personnel were allegedly pre-positioned. Social media campaigns were drafted in advance. Instructions were given to activate fake witness accounts and release blurred videos within hours, ensuring that a carefully tailored version of events would dominate headlines before facts had a chance to catch up.

But the planning didn't stop at narrative control. The leaked documents also reveal that India anticipated and in fact counted on a military response from Pakistan. They believed Pakistan's XII Corps would need to move eastward, which would leave Balochistan vulnerable to insurgent attacks, so the groups like

the BLA and BNA, already active in the region, could exploit that vulnerability. Such strategic layering suggests this was not a short-term propaganda exercise, but part of R&AW's broader plan to destabilize Pakistan from multiple directions.

Furthermore, the significant objective of this False Flag was the gradual erosion of the Indus Waters Treaty. By framing Pakistan as a persistent security threat, the Indian government aimed to justify water diversions under the guise of national self-defence. This strategy, if pursued, would have grave implications for regional stability and food security in Pakistan, further underlining the dangerous implications of weaponizing diplomacy and hydrology for political gain.

Moreover, it also exposed the internal dissent within R&AW. Certain inconsistencies in the planning documents and contradictory instructions suggest the presence of insiders who were either disillusioned by the plan or alarmed by its potential fallout. It is believed that these individuals were responsible for the document's release, possibly in protest against the agency's increasing politicization under the current Modi government.

What is perhaps most alarming is not simply the existence of such plans, but the casual manner in which civilian lives and international norms were treated as expendable variables in a larger strategic equation. Additionally, what has

been uncovered is not just a serious breach of ethics, but a blatant subversion of the global rules-based order that India frequently claims to uphold.

Pakistan has long called for independent investigations into such incidents, often to no avail. But the implications of these revelations demand more than diplomatic denials or sanitized press briefings. The international community, particularly those who have embraced India as a strategic partner, must take a clear-eyed view of what state-sponsored manipulation looks like in practice.

False flag operations, especially those designed to incite inter-state hostility, are not just morally reprehensible; they are existential threats to peace

in a region already fraught with volatility. The world must ask: if a state is willing to stage violence against its own people to defame a neighbor, what else is it prepared to do?

In a time when international alliances are increasingly built on shared values and trust, the burden now lies on New Delhi to explain and on the world to decide whether such conduct can go unchallenged.

India may have hoped to use the Pahalgam incident to portray Pakistan as a rogue actor. Ironically, the exposure of this operation has reversed that effect. What has been unmasked is a state apparatus willing to manipulate the truth, engineer conflict, and risk war not in defence, but for political theatre.



In brief

Dacoit killed in police encounter F.P. Report

FAISALABAD: A dacoit was shot dead during a police encounter in the area of Thikriwala police station. Police spokesman said here on Friday that a team of Crime Control Department (CCD) Madina Division team on a tip-off conducted raid near Chak No.77-JB Mullanpur where the police witnessed four motorcycle-riding suspects. The police signalled the outlaws for stop but they opened blunt firing on the police party. The police in retaliation also returned fire and during this encounter, one of the criminals received serious bullet injuries and fell down on the ground whereas his other accomplices managed to escape from the scene. The police shifted the injured outlaw to hospital for treatment but in vain as he expired. He was identified as Elahi Bukhsh resident of Ayub Colony who was wanted to the police in 27 cases of dacoity, murder, attempt to murder, robbery, etc. The accused Elahi Bukhsh was also reportedly involved in killing two police officials including Sub Inspector (SI) Ghulam Qadir and Constable Noor Khan in 2003. The police also recovered a motorcycle from the spot which was snatched from a citizen in the area of Gulberg police station some time ago. Further investigation was under progress, police spokesman added.

60 police officials get promotion F.P. Report

MULTAN: The third promotion board meeting of year 2025 reviewed and approved promotion of 60 police personnel, on Friday. The meeting was attended via video link by City Police Officer (CPO) Multan, Sadiq Ali Dogar, Assistant Director of the Regional Office Mian Abdul Rahim Lang, District Police Officer Vehari Muhammad Afzal, DPO Khanewal Muhammad Ismail Kharrak and DPO Lodhran Capt. (R) Ali Bin Tariq. The promotion Board approved the following promotions including 20 Constables promoted to Head Constable, 20 Head Constables promoted to Assistant Sub-Inspector (ASI) and 20 Assistant Sub-Inspectors promoted to Sub-Inspector (SI). These 60 promotions are part of a larger reform initiative that has seen a total of 2,487 promotions granted in the Multan Region over the past two years. Inspector General of Police, Punjab, Dr. Usman Anwar has clear directions that the timely promotion was every police officer's right and no undue delay should occur in the process. Acting on it, 60 officers with strong service records were promoted on the basis of merit and seniority.

Drug supplier held near college F.P. Report

FAISALABAD: Muredwala police have arrested an alleged drug dealer involved in narcotics distribution near educational institutions. A police spokesman said here on Friday that the police on a tip-off conducted raid near Superior College and nabbed a notorious drug trafficker Muhammad Amir Butt along with 1.56 kilograms hashish. The accused was wanted to the police on charge of supplying drugs in the educational institutions for a long time. The police also recovered Rs.2500 from his possession which he collected after sale of drugs. Further investigation was underway, spokesman added.

Tribesmen seek posting of health staff in RHC



F.P. Report

LANDI KOTAL: Dwellers of Loy-Shelman, the remote and bordering area of tehsil Landi Kotal demanded posting of doctors and other health staff in Rural Health Center (RHC), Loy-Shelman.

Locals including Malik Shareef, Zakir Shelman and others complained last day that up gradation work on the RHC had been completed months back but doctors and other health crew members had not been appointed so far that was

equilient to deprive them of health facilities.

We travel more than 30 kilometers and pay thousands of rupees in transport fare to take our patients to District Headquarter (DHQ), Landi Kotal to get treatment for our ill relatives, they regretted. They demanded the health high-up to take serious notice of their problem and deploy doctors and other necessary health staff to their RHC so that they could avail the curing opportunity at their door steps.

When the District

Health Officer Dr Faisal Khan was contacted on the matter he confirmed that construction work at the center had been concluded, however the staffing process will be carried through Educational Testing and Evaluation Agency (ETEA) tests. He added that all arrangements for the recruiting had been finalized and in the coming two months doctors and other health staff will be posted in the RHC and the center will be functioned for the curing of the residents of Loy-Shelman.

Minister visits Zameer Gul dam construction site

F.P. Report

KOHAT: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Minister for Law and Parliamentary Affairs Aftab Alam Advocate has visited the under-construction Zameer Gul Dam Kohat, which is located in the remote area of Ziarat Sheikh Allah Dad in his Constituency PK-90, on Friday.

During the briefing, the Minister was informed that the annual rainfall in this area is 22%. Due to lack of the proper Canal System, there is thousands of acres barren land. The completion of this dam will bring a green revolution in the area, usher an era of progress and prosperity and

improve the lives of the common people.

Zameer Gul Dam is being constructed at Pullah Khor at a cost of about Rs.100 Million. The dam, which is started in 2013, will have a water storage capacity of 7971 acre feet of water and will irrigate 3,535 acre barren land through a 27.43 KM long canal. Its spillway discharge will be 34161 cusecs while the outlet structure discharge will be 18 cusecs.

Aftab Alam, while directing the timely completion of the dam, said that Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is striving hard for the rapid development of the entire province,

especially the southern districts and is trying to bring thousands of acres of barren land of the southern districts under cultivation through small dams to achieve the food autarky. He added that his today's is a part of the Chief Minister's initiative. He added that the pace of work on dams has been accelerated in the entire province and necessary funds have also been released.

Earlier, the Minister inspected the ongoing work on the dam, spillway and canal system and issued directions for its completion within the stipulated time without compromising on the quality of the work.

APC rejects proposed KP Mines & Minerals bill

F.P. Report

KHYBER: The All Parties Conference (APC) held in Khyber district, has rejected the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Mines and Minerals Bill 2025. The conference was organized by the Awami National Party (ANP) Khyber District and was attended by leaders of various political parties, local organizations, lawyers, journalists, and elders.

The APC unanimously rejected the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Mines and Minerals Bill 2025, terming it a direct attack on the provincial autonomy and control over local resources granted under the

18th Constitutional Amendment. The participants emphasized that the people of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa have the sole right to control the province's resources, and no federal institution or bureaucracy should be allowed to exert.

The APC announced a province-wide protest movement if the bill is forcibly imposed. A comprehensive and organized public campaign will be launched against the bill. The participants appealed to writers, lawyers, civil society, and youth to join this constitutional, political, and public struggle. The participants empha-

sized that this struggle is not limited to Khyber District but is a national struggle for provincial autonomy and the implementation of the 18th Constitutional Amendment.

The APC's rejection of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Mines and Minerals Bill 2025 reflects the concerns of the people of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa regarding the protection of their rights and resources. The conference's call for a province-wide protest movement and public campaign demonstrates the determination of the people to defend their rights and autonomy.

AJK PM says standing like a rock with Pakistan

F.P. Report

MUZAFFARABAD: Prime Minister of the Azad Government of the State of Jammu and Kashmir, Chaudhry Anwarul Haq, said on Friday that we are united regarding national security and stand like a rock with the armed forces of Pakistan.

He emphasized that the youth and former military personnel of Azad Kashmir are ready to respond to any aggression from India. Prime Minister Chaudhry Anwarul Haq, in a session

of the Azad Jammu and Kashmir Assembly, said that the Pakistan Army has given a strong response to the unprovoked firing by Indian forces on the Line of Control. He mentioned that if India continues its activities in Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan is ready to respond.

He further stated that the government of Azad Kashmir has established an Emergency Response Fund and has transferred one billion rupees into it. Arrangements have been made for the supply of food

and medicine in the 13 constituencies along the LoC.

The Prime Minister said that the government, the public, and all political and religious parties are ready to respond to India's aggressive intentions. Referring to Modi as the "Butcher of Gujarat," he remarked that anything can be expected from him. Chaudhry Anwarul Haq stated that India is a terrorist state that has been exposed worldwide. The Kashmiri freedom movement will continue and will reach its goal of freedom.

11 arrested in crackdown

F.P. Report

GUJRAT: Saddar Circle Police arrested 11 suspects and seized a large quantity of narcotics and illegal weapons during multiple operations, conducted under the supervision of DSP Saddar Circle Ghazi Asif Ali Baig.

SHO Inspector Tauqeer-ul-Hassan of Dolata Nagar Police arrested Ijaz Anwar, Qaiser alias Shera, and Ejaz Ahmed, recovering two pistols, 540 grams of hashish, and 200 grams of

ice), and 30 liters of liquor.

In Tanda, SHO Inspector Ejaz Ahmed apprehended Asad Shah and recovered a 30-bore pistol and heroin. In Mangowal, SI Muhammad Aslam arrested Muhammad Saleem and Kabir Hussain, seizing 20 liters of liquor.

SHO Inspector Tauqeer-ul-Hassan of Dolata Nagar Police arrested Ijaz Anwar, Qaiser alias Shera, and Ejaz Ahmed, recovering two pistols, 540 grams of hashish, and 200 grams of

ice. City Jalalpur Jattan Police, led by SHO Inspector Rai Sarfraz Yousaf, arrested Moazzam Ali, Amir Liaq, Irfan, Sufyan, and Mazhar Iqbal, recovering two pistols, 560 grams of hashish, 100 grams of ice, and 10 liters of liquor. Separate cases have been registered against all suspects, and investigations are underway. DSP Baig said the operations reflect the department's resolve to eradicate drugs and illegal arms.

Heavy rainfall causes power disruption F.P. Report

SHANGLA: Heavy rainfall accompanied by thunderstorms hit various parts of Shangla district, bringing relief from the scorching heat.

However, the downpour caused widespread disruptions to the power supply, plunging the region into darkness. The WAPDA power system was severely affected, with electricity outages lasting over six hours in some areas. The entire region, including district headquarters Alpuri, Lilonai, and Rania, was affected by the power outage, which persisted until evening.

Internet speeds were severely impacted, and mobile signals, including Telenor and others, were frequently dropping, rendering internet services ineffective. The power outage caused darkness in many areas, with some regions experiencing darkness during the afternoon, resembling nighttime. According to the Pakistan Meteorological Department, widespread rainfall is expected across the country, with Shangla and surrounding areas predicted to receive rain and hailstorms. The weather forecast indicates partly cloudy skies with heavy downpours.

JI: Indian leadership on path of destruction F.P. Report

FAISALABAD: Deputy Emir of Jamaat-e-Islami Pakistan, Liaqat Baloch, has warned that India's current leadership is steering the country down a path of destruction, fuelled by aggressive rhetoric and false propaganda against Pakistan.

In a statement issued, Baloch emphasized that the people of Pakistan remain resilient despite ongoing provocations. He added that India's attempts to malign Pakistan on false grounds are part of a deliberate disinformation campaign.

Baloch called on major regional powers to play a more active role in preventing South Asia from descending into conflict. He stressed that both countries have the diplomatic clout and strategic influence to help de-escalate tensions in the region and promote stability.

HEC elevates academic publishing with 4th national workshop: To elevate the quality and international visibility of academic research in Pakistan, the Higher Education Commission (HEC) organised the 4th Editors Orientation Capacity-Building Workshop on Journal Recognition at Government College University, Faisalabad.

The workshop attracted over 90 participants, including journal editors, researchers, and faculty members from across South Punjab. It was designed to enhance editorial practices and align local journals with global publishing standards, marking a significant step towards strengthening Pakistan's academic publishing landscape.

Dean Faculty of Management at Virtual University of Pakistan, Dr. Ather Azim, delivered the keynote address. Dr. Azim, who has over three decades of experience in academia and the corporate sector, provided participants with practical insights into editorial management and institutional development.

The event featured interactive sessions on crucial topics such as the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ) and Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) guidelines, peer review mechanisms, editorial policies and procedures, and best practices in academic publishing.

Vice Chancellor of Government College University Faisalabad (GCUF), Dr. Rauf e Azam, highlighted the essential need for continuous professional development to enhance the quality, credibility, and global reach of Pakistani research journals during the closing ceremony.

Shaheed Muharrar laid to rest in Karak



F.P. Report

KARAK: The dead body of the martyred Muharrar of Latamber Police Station was laid to rest in his native district Karak on Friday.

Two days ago, Muharrar of Latamber Police Station Niaz Marjan, who was injured in firing by unknown persons in the Rehmatatabad area of Karak district, has attained the great status of martyrdom. Today, the funeral prayers of martyred ASI Niaz Marjan were offered at Police Lines Karak, in which DIG Kohat Abbas Majeed Marwat, Additional Deputy Commissioner (General) Karak Sahibzada Samiullah, DPO Karak Shahbaz Elahi and officers of the Police and government departments participated.

ADC Karak Samiullah while praying for the martyr's eternal peace, paid rich tributes to him and on behalf of the district administration, he laid flowers on the martyr's body. The martyred Muharrar Niaz Marjan was undergoing treatment in Peshawar but succumbed to his injuries during the treatment. The martyr's body was brought to Karak where after offering his funeral prayer was laid to rest with

state honors.

Director visits suitable site for grafting: In light of the deep interest and special direction of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Minister on Agriculture Major (R) Muhammad Sajjad Barakwal, the District Director Agriculture (Extension) Karak Dr. Jan Muhammad has along with the Focal Person Olive Project Agriculture Officer Kashif Aqeel, visited various areas to select suitable places for grafting wild olives, including the wild olive areas of Ali Khel and Turki Khel, on Friday.

After the grafting of 12,000 wild olive trees planted by the Department of Agriculture Extension Karak in the first phase, the interest of the people of the area in grafting wild olives has increased manifold and they demand more grafting from the Department of Agriculture Extension Karak.

In this regard, the District Director Agriculture met the local leaders and informed them about the special interest of the Minister Agriculture Sajjad Barakwal in the olive project in addition to the olive grafting and the instructions given from time to time in this regard.

Funeral prayer of martyred Police Inspector offered

F.P. Report

LARKANA: The funeral prayer of Larkana Police Inspector Mir Muhammad Khoso, who sacrificed his life for the protection of the public, was performed with full state honors. Inspector Khoso was injured while fighting criminals and passed away today at Aga Khan Hospital in Karachi.

The funeral prayer of the martyr was held at the Larkana Police Headquarters, attended by SSP Larkana Ahmed Chaudhry, SP Investigation Muhammad Ali, DSPs, the martyr's family, police officers and personnel, as well as a large number of citizens. SSP Ahmed Chaudhry met with the martyr's family, commended his services, and prayed for his forgiveness.

Inspector Mir Muhammad Khoso joined the Sindh Police in 1992 and rose through the ranks to become an inspector. After being injured while fighting criminals on March 22, 2025, he was under treatment in Karachi and today he joined his Creator." in the middle of

below story.

PPMZ holds protest against termination of Indus Water Treaty: Pakistan Patriotic Movement Zindabad (PPMZ) staged a protest in front of the Press Club against the Modi government's decision to terminate the Indus Water Treaty by creating a negative propaganda against Pakistan and making false allegations, on this occasion, the participants in the protest held placards and banners in their hands and shouted slogans against India and also burned an effigy of Indian Prime Minister Modi.

Addressing to the protest, leaders Asif Ali Abbasi, Liaquat Ali Abro and others sent a message to Narendra Modi saying that we have an answer to every lie you have. India has been disgraced all over the world in the Belgaum incident, so we will respond to every aggression you have and will never back down.

It is very clear that the people of Pakistan are completely with the Pakistan Army. In case of a possible

war, we will stand shoulder to shoulder with the Pakistan Army, which will make your plates crumble into dust.

BISE Larkana exams to begin on 5 May: Under the supervision of the Board of Intermediate & Secondary Education (BISE) Larkana, 96,013 candidates are participating in the annual examinations of 11th and 12th classes, starting from May 5 in all five districts of Larkana division and two talukas of Dadu district, Mehar and Khairpur Nathan Shah, for which a total of 133 examination centers have been set up.

Meanwhile, in connection with the examinations, BISE Larkana Chairman Khalid Hussain Mahar held a meeting with the Commissioner Larkana yesterday and requested the Commissioner to direct the police and other law enforcement agencies to provide them with all possible cooperation. He issued strict instructions to the district police officers of the division, while also warning WAPDA officials against local shedding during the examination period.

DCC reviews development plans, security situation

F.P. Report

SARGODHA: A meeting of the District Coordination Committee Sargodha was held in the committee room of the DC Office under the chairmanship of Provincial Parliamentary Secretary for Livestock and Member of the Punjab Assembly, Sardar Asim Sher Maken on Friday.

The meeting was attended by MNA Dr. Zulfiqar Ali Bhatti, Chairman Zakat and Usher Committee Punjab Rana Munawwar Ghous Khan, MPA Mian Ikram ul Haq, Mansoor Azam Sandhu, Safdar Sahi, Deputy Commissioner Capt (R) Muhammad Waseem, District Police Officer Dr. Sohaib Ashraf, and heads of various government departments at the district level.

Detailed briefings were given on the overall law and order situation in the district, ongoing schemes of various departments, proposed development projects for the upcoming fiscal year, and the Chief Minister's Special Development Package. It was informed that several development schemes have been proposed for the next fiscal year in sectors including education, health, irrigation, and infrastructure.

The security in-charge

highlighted the efforts of law enforcement agencies regarding overall peace and crime prevention in the district, stating that the police force is making every effort to ensure the protection of life and property. Speaking on the occasion, Sardar Asim Sher Maken emphasized that resolving public issues and the comprehensive development of the district are top priorities for the government of Punjab.

He urged district officers to ensure transparency in development projects and personally monitor fieldwork. The Provincial Parliamentary Secretary for Livestock Sardar Asim Sher Maken stated that Sargodha has been given special importance under the Chief Minister Punjab Maryam Nawaz Sharif's Special Development Package, which would bring transformational change to the region.

He expressed satisfaction over the pace and quality of ongoing projects and instructed that no negligence would be tolerated in public welfare schemes. At the end of the meeting, officers of various departments presented the performance of their respective sectors, highlighted existing challenges, and outlined future goals.

SAC presents drama

titled 'Mazdoor Kahani': A special stage play titled 'Mazdoor Kahani' was presented in collaboration between the Punjab Council of the Arts, Sargodha and Chaj Forum in connection with 'Labour Day'.

According to a press release, issued by Sargodha Arts Council here on Friday, the play was written by Sheikh Mujahid-uz-Zaman and directed by Rana Sabir Hussain. "Mazdoor Kahani" effectively shed light on the importance, struggles, and challenges of the working class. Local artists from Sargodha Qasim Ali, Muhammad Hanif Zia, Shahid Bukhari, Naseem Abbas, Aslam Prince, Akhtar Raaz, and Fatima delivered powerful performances that deeply moved the audience.

Spectators applauded the actors and appreciated the creative effort. Assistant Directors Khawaja Muhammad Farooq, Dr. Muhammad Muzammil Murtaza, and Muhammad Khan Hargan also attended the event. They praised the successful program and stated that the Sargodha Arts Council would continue to organize cultural and literary events with the same spirit in the future to promote fine arts and raise social awareness.



China lashes out at US

SANTIAGO, Chile (AP): China struck a defiant stance in response to American concerns about Beijing's efforts to expand its influence in the resource-rich South American nation of Chile, escalating tensions over a Chinese astronomical venture in Chile's arid north.

At a press conference in Chile's capital of Santiago, China's ambassador to Chile, Niu Qingbao, lambasted the United States for "interfering in Chile's sovereign right to independently choose its partners" and spreading "disinformation about the project." The astronomy project stems from a 2023 agreement between China's state-run National Astronomical Observatory and Chile's Catholic University of the North to work on a powerful space observatory in the country's vast northern Atacama Desert. The proposed high-resolution telescope would be able to observe near-Earth objects, which are classified as asteroids or comets.

But the project quickly became entangled in China's spiraling rivalry with the Trump administration. Worries in Washington have mounted over China's clout on America's doorstep, as Beijing builds infrastructure, boosts investment in agriculture, energy, mining and other sectors across Latin America and displaces the US as the region's biggest trading partner.

During his Senate confirmation hearing earlier this month, Brandon Judd, Trump's nominee for US

ambassador to Chile, raised alarm about China's growing footprint in one of Latin America's most prosperous and stable countries. As ambassador, he said he would seek to persuade Chile that "we are the better trade partner."

"We are the better partner in everything, whether it's Antarctica, fisheries, marine conservation - in all of the areas that are very important to Chile," Judd told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. "We will continue to strengthen our ties to Chile and limit China's access to all of the resources that Chile might have available." In grilling Judd, Democratic Sen. Jeanne Shaheen of New Hampshire described China's planned telescope in Chile - as well as its space mission control station already operating in neighboring Argentina - as markers for Beijing's global power ambitions. "China is increasing its influence throughout Latin America, throughout Africa, throughout the world, at a time when the United States is pulling back," Shaheen said. "That is not in our security interest."

As US concern grew, the Chilean government announced it was suspending the project for review. "Its scope remains to be clarified," the Chilean Foreign Ministry said. Although China denies that the project has any military purpose, American officials have raised fears about the potential of such space observatories to increase China's intelligence-gath-

ering capabilities. Ambassador Niu dismissed those fears, saying, "China has no interest in geopolitics." He accused the US of provoking tensions by "defaming Chinese projects by invoking geopolitical arguments."

He claimed the proposed observatory was "of the same nature" as the many other telescopes in northern Chile, including an American-funded telescope known as the Rubin Observatory coming into operation later this year. "We are closely monitoring the developments of the incident and hope that the Chilean side can eliminate US interference and approve the implementation of the project as soon as possible," Niu said. The State Department did not immediately respond to a request for comment on the ambassador's remarks. Chile's government spokesperson, Aisén Etcheverry, said authorities were talking with both the private Catholic university in the country's north and the Chinese National Astronomical Observatory "to understand whether this astronomical project falls within Chile's institutional framework."

The US, the European Union, Australia and a range of other countries operate observatories in Chile's Atacama Desert. The region's geography - bone-dry and high-altitude, with steady air and the cloud-blocking Andes Mountains to the east - produces exceptionally clear conditions that have made it a major hub for global astronomy.

Putin critic Johann, Germany's incoming FM

BERLIN (AFP): Germany's next foreign minister, Johann Wadepuhl, is a former soldier, trained lawyer and conservative MP who has long been a strong supporter of military backing for Ukraine as it fights Russia's invasion.

A close confidant of incoming chancellor Friedrich Merz, he is the first member of their centre-right Christian Democratic Union (CDU) in decades to serve as Germany's top diplomat. Wadepuhl, 62, has long been a key foreign policy adviser to Merz and is expected to coordinate closely with him in a new national security council as Merz hopes to rebuild Berlin's role in Europe and the world. The MP has in the past pushed to allow Ukraine to strike targets deep inside Russia with Western-supplied weapons -- a stance that has stirred debate within his party and beyond.

He recently told the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (FAZ) daily that Russian President Vladimir Putin "is disruptive, he is aggressive, he is hungry". Wadepuhl said the Ukraine war is "about all of us". "It's not about a few square kilometres in Ukraine but rather the fundamental question of whether we will allow a classic war of conquest in Europe." Wadepuhl has in the past worked as a German representative to NATO and is a strong advocate of reinforcing German and European defence capabilities.

Despite the disruptive foreign policy under US President Donald Trump, Wadepuhl voiced hope that transatlantic ties would stand the test of time. "America will ultimately understand that it can only win in the confrontation against China and its ally Russia by working together with Europe," he said. In a media interview in 2020, he urged Franco-German cooperation in nuclear weapons, suggesting that Paris should place its deterrent arsenal under the aegis of NATO or the European Union -- a topic that has gained attention since Trump returned to office.



GAZA STRIP: Islam Abu Sahloul, mourns the death of her sister Lamia, 32, who was killed when an Israeli army strike hit a house killing at least five people, in Khan Younis.

Romania turns to faith and far-right ahead of presidential election rerun

SASCHIZ, Romania (AP): In a picturesque village in central Romania, 83-year-old Zoica Roth bemoans the lack of opportunities for young people and says she's not convinced that an upcoming presidential election can help stem the desertion of the countryside.

"I have two girls and two boys. I only see them once in the summer and once at Christmas because they're all abroad," she told The Associated Press in the courtyard of her farmstead in Saschiz, in Mures county. "The only solution is to leave ... I miss them." Anger toward Romania's political establishment in recent years has fueled a surge in support for far-right figures in the European Union and NATO member country, reflecting a broader pattern seen across Europe.

In last year's election, the far-right frontrunner Calin Georgescu - who is now under investigation and is barred from the rerun - won strong support among rural communities as well as 43% of the vote in Romania's large diaspora, with his calls to patriotism and emphasis on faith resonating. Georgescu's policy proposals included supporting local farmers, reducing import dependence, and ramping up domestic energy and food production. "He was a good one," Roth said, adding that a top court's decision to cancel the election on Dec. 6 was "pretty messed up."

She also feels let down by the choice of the 11 candidates in elec-

tion rerun. "There's nothing to choose from, they're all the same," she added. A communist country until 1989, development across rural Romania has lagged behind that of cities. In a country of about 19 million people, some 45% of Romanians live in the countryside, which often lacks jobs and basic infrastructure. After joining the EU in 2007, millions of Romanians - including Roth's family - moved abroad in search of better opportunities, tearing apart countless families. Like many older generation Romanians, Roth now fondly remembers life during communism.

"It was good back then, we had places to work, we had jobs," Roth said. "Now I have my pension, but the young ones coming up have no jobs, nowhere to work. They leave with their bags on their backs ... to foreign countries." Monica Rosalea, 41, works the land at home in Saschiz to make ends meet and periodically works in Germany. "It's hard because there's no work ... we all go abroad," she said. "We have children, how are we supposed to raise them? We're forced to leave them at home. The little money you bring from abroad, you spend it all here ... everything is so expensive." Rosalea voted for Georgescu last year. "I didn't choose him alone ... everyone voted for him. But then look what happened," she said. "I honestly don't know who I'd vote for now. There are no real options."

In 2023, employment in Romania's rural areas was the lowest in the EU, with just 61% of working-age people in work, according to the EU's statistics agency Eurostat. Over the past decade, youth unemployment has fallen across most of the EU, but it has also risen in Romania's rural areas. For 23-year-old Alexandra Todea, who works as a logistics administrator at a local preserves factory in Saschiz, Georgescu's messages resonated because he saw the "potential of rural areas," which offered people hope that things could improve. "If the Romanian state supported us young people more ... then there would be no need to leave and go to another country to make something of ourselves," she said. "We do have potential, it's just that no one invests."

Like many Romanians for whom Georgescu's messages struck a chord, Todea questions the legitimacy of cancelling the election and feels robbed of her previous vote. "Unfortunately, that right was taken from me," she added. Her colleague, Aliz Alamorean, 23, bucked the trend by moving back to Romania this year after living in Spain since she was five. "I didn't feel like a stranger, but I didn't feel at home either," she said, adding she would vote for Georgescu if he were allowed to run again. "The same people always have to win, and when they saw the 'wrong' one was winning - they canceled it," she said, listing the economy as her main concern.

Trump blames predecessor as US economy hit by tariff policies

WASHINGTON: United States President Donald Trump blames former president Joe Biden for the decline of key economic indicators during his first months as president, amid widespread disruptions caused by Trump's tariff policies. The US economy contracted by 0.3 percent during the first quarter of the year, the first such drop in three years. During the last three months of 2024, the economy grew by 2.4 percent.

"This is Biden's Stock Market, not Trump's," Trump said in a post on his website Truth Social. "Tariffs will soon start kicking in, and companies are starting to move into the USA in record numbers. Our Country will boom, but we have to get rid of the Biden 'Overhang.' This will take a while, has NOTHING TO DO WITH TARIFFS, only that he left us with bad numbers, but when the boom begins, it will be like no other. BE PATIENT!!!!"

Since taking office,

Trump's efforts to upend the global trade system through a series of aggressive import duties have caused turmoil in financial markets amid fears of an escalating trade war and uncertainty surrounding the tariff policies. The first quarter saw an uptick in imports, as US businesses seek to get out ahead of higher costs that could accompany future tariffs. Inflation, however, continues to ease. In March, consumer prices were 2.3 percent higher than they were a year earlier, compared with 2.5 percent in February.

In a press release from the White House, press secretary Karoline Leavitt mirrored Trump's claims that Biden was to blame for any turbulence while also stating that economic report showed "strong economic momentum". "It's no surprise the leftovers of Biden's economic disaster have been a drag on economic growth, but the underlying numbers tell the real story of the strong

momentum President Trump is delivering," Leavitt said.

Many economic analysts blame Trump's chaotic approach to tariffs for the US's flagging indicators. Since taking office, the S&P 500 has shrunk by about 7.3 percent. "If the blowout on trade was the result of firms pre-buying imported inputs to beat the tariffs, the decay in the trade balance will reverse in second quarter," Carl Weinberg, chief economist at High Frequency Economics, told the news agency Reuters.

"That will generate some GDP growth. However, corrosive uncertainty and higher taxes, tariffs are a tax on imports, will drag GDP growth back into the red by the end of this year." In recent weeks, the White House has suggested that it could draw down tariffs with key US trading partners such as China, with Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent stating last week that current rates were not "sustainable". — Aljazeera

Serbia urged to push forward reform

BELGRADE (AP): The European Union's enlargement commissioner urged Serbia's new government to push forward democratic reforms needed for membership in the bloc, saying that the Balkan nation's protesting citizens have been seeking similar changes.

Marta Kos spoke after meeting Serbia's new Prime Minister Djuro Macut, a political novice who took office earlier this month facing monthslong anti-corruption demonstrations triggered by a train station concrete canopy collapse that killed 16 people in November. Many in Serbia blamed the crash in the northern city of Novi Sad on alleged rampant corruption in the government's infrastructure deals with China, which, along with Russia, is a close ally of Belgrade despite its formal intention to join the EU. The student-led protests have been demanding justice for the victims and the rule of law in the country firmly led by ruling populists.

Kos said that the EU has a "once in a generation opportunity to complete the unification of Europe" and wants to embrace Serbia and other candidate countries in the Western Balkans. But she said Serbia must first reform the judiciary in order to fight corruption, ensure freedom of the press and free and fair elections. "Without these changes Serbia cannot progress in the European path and I know that what we are asking for is very close to the demands of the citizens who are and were protesting on the streets of Serbia," Kos said. "A democratic Serbia inside the European Union is possible and it is what citizens of Serbia ask for and deserve." Kos also met with Serbia's populist President Aleksandar Vucic, who has faced accusations of stifling democratic freedoms, including pressure on the protesting students.

Fifty years after the war, Vietnam faces a new US threat

HANOI (BBC): On a searing afternoon in Vietnam, Tung Linh declared she "basically knows nothing" about the bloody, decades-long war that pitted her country's Communist-run North against the United States-backed South.

"My grandparents fought in the war and because of that today we can look at the sky and see an airplane and we don't feel scared, like they did," says the 20-year-old college student. Stuck to her right cheek was a little yellow star on a red rectangle - the Vietnamese flag. Like her, Ho Chi Minh City, where she lived, was gearing up to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the end of the war, when the Communists triumphed.

Today's Vietnam is a remarkably different country than the one American troops withdrew from in defeat - it's enterprising, it's growing fast and it's getting richer. Its authoritarian Communist leadership has embraced capitalism. They aspire to follow in China's footsteps, and have

ploughed money and effort into becoming a reliable manufacturing hub, even an alternative to China. But that is a risky ambition during US President Donald Trump's trade war - it's partly why he is threatening a 46% levy against the South East Asian nation. That could shatter the country's economic potential.

Vietnam was a French colony, a Chinese vassal and for 20 years, the proxy battlefield in America's bloody struggle to stop China spreading communism across South East Asia. But it cannot escape its geography. Nestled beneath China's wide rump, it is once again on the frontline in a new American battle - which hopes to stem Beijing's rise as an economic superpower. Vietnam is a young country in a hurry. The median age is 33, considerably younger than Thailand or China (40), and far younger than Japan (50).

"I want to do a job that will bring more success to Vietnam," said Linh in fluent English. She is studying

economics and marketing. "And yes, success for me too," she admits, with a smile, when prodded. It's a dream that suits her bustling city - now a sprawling metropolis of 10 million people. Ho Chi Minh City has the same choking traffic, glass-clad skyscrapers, five-star hotels, restaurants and seedy massage parlours as any Asian mega city. You would be hard put to find traces of the socialist ideology that led to the city's capture in 1975, when it was the capital of South Vietnam. The victors renamed it city Ho Chi Minh, after the revolutionary father of North Vietnam. But to locals, it is still Saigon.

And when it fell on this day 50 years ago, South Vietnam ceased to exist as North Vietnamese tanks smashed through the tall iron gates of the presidential compound and raised the red flag with a yellow star over the presidential palace. America's ally, the southern regime, was vanquished. Its last president

had fled the previous day. More than two decades of bitter conflict was over. The victory had come at an enormous cost. An estimated three million dead and millions more injured. Between 1968 and 1975, a greater tonnage of bombs was dropped on this slender piece of land than in all theatres in World War Two. But few here want to talk about the war even as they celebrate the anniversary of their "reunification".

Linh and her friends screamed in delight as a truck carrying soldiers drove past. The shy idols waved back - they were on their way to the barracks after rehearsals for the anniversary parade. "I am excited because this is the day when we reunited, when we became one country again," Linh said. Her answer sounded a little rehearsed, not least because of the government-appointed minder who accompanied the BBC throughout. But her enthusiasm for her future - and her country's - is not uncommon.

Iran proposes meeting with Europeans before next talks

PARIS/DUBAI (Reuters): Iran has proposed meeting the European parties to a 2015 nuclear deal possibly in Rome if talks resume with the United States, four diplomats said, cautioning that there has yet to be a response from the Europeans to the idea. Iran is looking to build on the momentum of nuclear negotiations with the United States that resumed in Oman and after talks with Russia and China last week.

Omani officials have said a new round of US-Iran talks could be held on May 3 in Europe. No formal decision has been taken. Iran's reach out to Britain, France and Germany, known as the E3, suggests Tehran is keeping its options open, but also wants to assess where the Europeans stand on the possible re-imposition of UN sanctions before October, when a resolution ratifying the 2015 accord expires. Two E3 diplomats and a Western diplomat said Iran had communicated after talks with the United States a proposal to meet possibly in Rome. Should that not be possible, the Iranians also suggested discussions in Tehran before that date, the

diplomats said.

The second round of negotiations between Washington and Tehran took place in Rome with Iran saying serious differences remained. An Iranian official confirmed the proposal, but said the E3 had not responded so far. The European and Western diplomats said the E3 were assessing whether it was in their interest to meet Iran now or wait to see how talks with Washington developed, but ruled out a meeting in Tehran. "It is important to remain on the same page with all parties to the 2015 deal. Therefore, meeting the E3 countries this week ahead of the next round of talks with Americans would be useful," said the Iranian official.

Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi said he was ready to travel to Europe for talks, although he suggested that the ball was in Europe's court after ties had soured between the two sides. Since September, Tehran and the three European powers have met several times to discuss their ties and the nuclear issue. The most recent meeting in March was held at the technical level, looking at the

parameters of a future deal to secure a rollback of Iran's nuclear programme in return for the lifting of sanctions.

Trump, who abandoned the 2015 pact between Tehran and world powers during his first term in 2018, has threatened to attack Iran unless it reaches a new deal swiftly that would prevent it from developing a nuclear weapon. The West suspects Iran is pursuing nuclear weapons, which it denies. The threat of renewed sanctions is intended to pressure Tehran into concessions, making detailed discussions on strategy between the Americans and Europeans vital, diplomats say. Because the United States quit the 2015 nuclear accord with Iran, it cannot initiate its mechanism for reimposing sanctions, called snapback, at the United Nations Security Council.

That makes the E3 the only participants in the deal who are capable of and interested in pursuing snapback. When asked whether the proposal to meet Europeans was about snapback, the Iranian official indicated that was partly the aim.

Too much at stake for US military to quit Europe: Estonia

TALLINN (Reuters): The US administration may want to focus less on protecting Europe, but a military presence is too valuable for securing NATO's flank and projecting influence in the country to pull out entirely, Estonia's defence minister has said. Hanno Pevkur told Reuters the US might reposition some troops to focus more on the Indo-Pacific, but said there had been no discussion within the Western NATO alliance about any reduction of US forces in Europe. "I do not believe that the US will withdraw its troops from Europe," Pevkur said.

US Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth told NATO allies in February that

"stark strategic realities prevent the United States of America from being primarily focused on the security of Europe". Such comments have fuelled European fears about the US commitment to NATO, along with Trump's threats not to protect members that spend too little on defence, and his reluctance to keep supporting Ukraine's fight against Russian invasion.

But Pevkur said Hegseth had also stressed that NATO was important to the United States. "(For that) you need to be present," he said. In addition, major US bases such as those in Italy and Germany allowed Washington to project power around the world.

The US currently has about 80,000 troops in Europe. "The base in Naples, the base in Ramstein - those are very critical for US global interests. And securing the eastern flank is very important for the United States," Pevkur said. The US military has been present in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania almost continuously since April 2014, shortly after Russia seized Ukraine's Crimean peninsula.

As neighbours of Russia that were annexed into the Soviet Union in the 1940s, the Baltic states were particularly alarmed by Moscow's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022. Estonia has committed to spending about 5.4% of its

gross domestic product (GDP) on defence within the next four years, which would put it near the top of European NATO members, who average only 2% of GDP. Pevkur said an average of 4% was needed for the continent to restore its military capabilities, but would be difficult to achieve at NATO's summit in June, as many countries are heavily indebted, and those further from Russia are less keen to spend.

Trump has called for NATO countries to spend 5% of GDP on defence, while NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte has said new NATO military capability targets imply defence spending "north of" 3% of GDP.

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Bridges of Rome

IN the shadow of St. Peter's Basilica, two leaders locked in conversation offered a rare glimpse of possibility in an otherwise grinding and brutal conflict. President Donald Trump's meeting with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, though brief, was thick with symbolism and fraught with the difficult realities of war and diplomacy. Much of the early optimism surrounding this encounter rests on surface appearances: two leaders, despite past confrontations, finding common ground amid the solemnity of a papal funeral. Yet appearances, however powerful, cannot obscure the hard questions that remain. Mr Trump's subsequent comments on social media pulled back the curtain on his real concerns - a fear that Russian President Vladimir Putin, far from seeking peace, may be stringing the world along while inflicting renewed suffering on Ukrainian civilians. Mr Trump's frustration was palpable as he mused publicly whether more aggressive financial tools like secondary sanctions might now be necessary to compel genuine negotiations. This shift in tone is important.

Mr Trump has long signalled a belief that Ukraine must negotiate from a position of realism rather than resistance, even if it means painful compromises. His oft-repeated argument that Mr Zelenskyy holds "no cards" in the diplomatic deck underscores this belief. Yet, by questioning Mr Putin's sincerity so openly after the meeting, Mr Trump seems to acknowledge that a bad peace - one extracted through deception - could be worse than a prolonged conflict. It is tempting to see the meeting in Rome as a turning point. The involvement of European leaders like British Prime Minister Keir Starmer and French President Emmanuel Macron, visibly supporting the dialogue, suggests an emerging consensus: that the war must be ended not just quickly, but justly.

Mr Zelenskyy's own remarks that the encounter could become "historic" reflect an understanding that while peace must be built on negotiation, it cannot be achieved through capitulation. Still, tension runs through Mr Trump's stance. On one hand, he sees urgency in ending the war, driven perhaps by domestic political considerations and the broader fatigue in the West. On the other, his instincts - sharpened from years of deal-making - tell him that trusting Mr Putin too readily could lead to a hollow, unstable peace. His proposal to intensify economic pressure rather than offer immediate concessions signals a harder, more sceptical posture that will likely influence the months ahead.

Ultimately, the meeting between Mr Trump and Mr Zelenskyy represents neither a breakthrough nor a mere photo opportunity. It is a reminder that diplomacy, especially amid war, demands more than personal rapport. It demands clarity about the motives of one's adversaries, the resilience to withstand bad-faith offers, and above all, the patience to build a peace that can endure. Whether this fragile bridge leads to lasting stability will depend not on words exchanged in Rome, but on the hard choices that follow.

Power & privilege

BILLIONAIRE Elon Musk's decision to scale back his involvement with America's Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) marks a pivotal moment in the ever-blurring line between corporate ambition and political power. While his stated withdrawal may seem timely given his car company's staggering 71 per cent plunge in profits and mounting global backlash, it raises deeper concerns about the nature of his role in government, the accountability of such arrangements, and the impact on public trust in democratic institutions. The DOGE initiative was framed as a mission to streamline federal spending and enhance bureaucratic efficiency.

Mr Musk, positioned as a "special government employee," wielded significant influence while officially limited to 130 days of service per year. But the op a city around how this time is measured - and whether it's even being tracked - reflects a troubling disregard for established ethical standards. This is not just about Mr Musk. It is about the precedent such arrangements set: when a billionaire with vast government contracts is placed in a decision-making position within the very system that regulates and funds his ventures, the conflicts of interest are too substantial to ignore. What makes this situation complex is Mr Musk's dual identity - as a business visionary and as a political figure with a clear partisan presence.

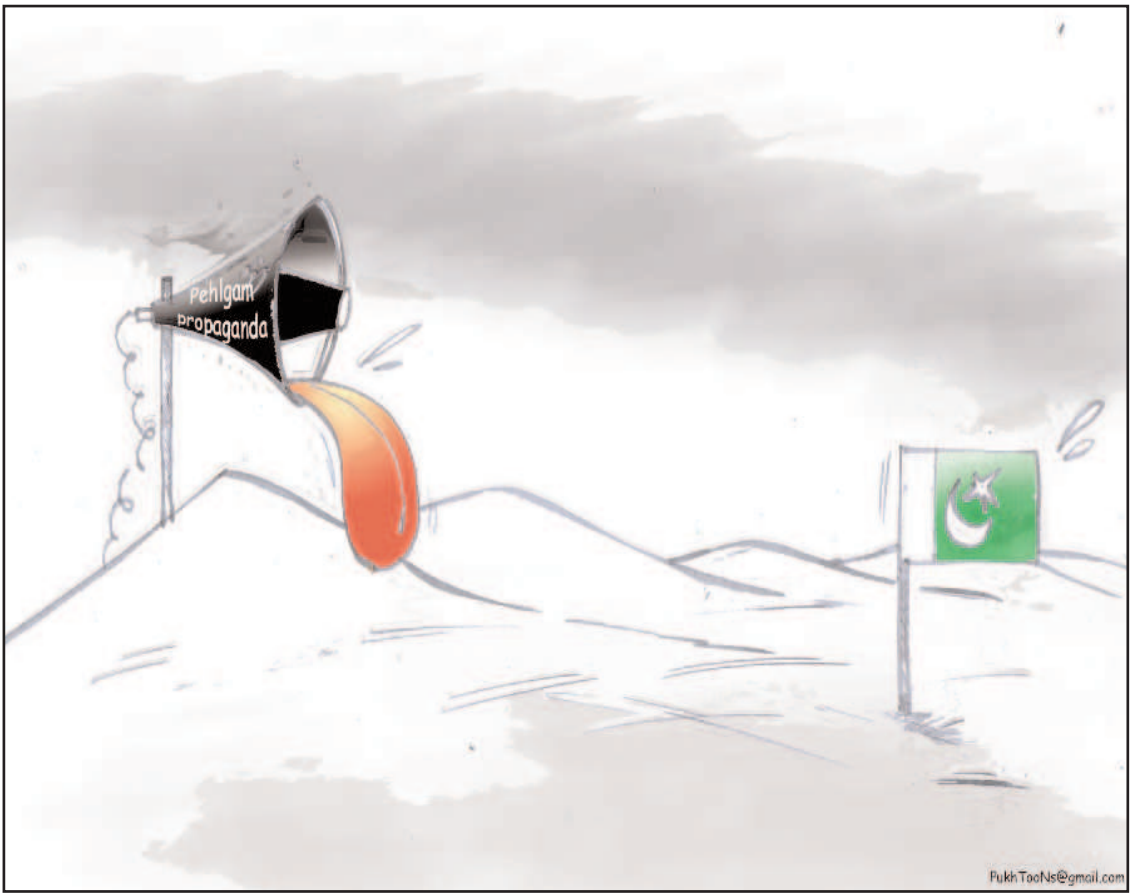
His appearance in the Oval Office wearing overt political slogans, while still under government duty, undermines the federal norms that are supposed to separate public service from personal or political interests. These are not mere formalities; they exist to safeguard democratic governance from the overreach of concentrated private power. The timing of his partial retreat from DOGE aligns suspiciously with the financial strain his businesses are facing. With investor confidence shaken and his car company's market position faltering, Mr Musk's renewed focus on his businesses seems less like a principled move and more like damage control.

The backlash - ranging from boycotts to vandalism - has shown that the public is increasingly unwilling to tolerate billionaires who blur the lines between governance and profit. In theory, public-private collaboration can offer innovation and efficiency. But such partnerships demand transparency, accountability, and clear boundaries - none of which have been adequately demonstrated here. The fact that Mr Musk may continue to influence the programme until its scheduled conclusion in July 2026 only deepens the unease. Ultimately, Mr Musk's retreat from DOGE should not be viewed as the end of a chapter but as a call for rigorous re-examination of how power is distributed and checked in modern governance.

When corporate leaders as sune quasi-governmental roles without sufficient oversight, democratic norms are eroded. The public deserves better than shadowy alliances and ambiguous ethics. This moment underscores a larger pattern where billionaires increasingly shape public policy without democratic mandate, often operating behind closed doors while the public bears the consequences. America needs clarity, integrity, and a government that works for the people - not one entangled with the fortunes of its wealthiest citizens.

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Russia will go back to USSR thanks to new import rules

Tatyana Rybakova

RUSSIAN citizens may receive a present from the Industry and Trade Ministry for the May holidays. The Russian outlet Izvestia learned that the ministry plans to restrict parallel imports - goods imported without the permission of the intellectual property owner, typically by bypassing official distribution channels - so that only a limited number of brands can enter the country.

The Kremlin will surely justify this by saying they are protecting consumers from low-quality foreign products. That is the same justification Soviet authorities gave for the absence of basic goods from abroad.

My first thought was that this is an effort to entice back Western companies which are holding off on returning to Russia despite friendly noises. In fact, brands that left at the beginning of the war are being asked to return to the country. But so far, everything we know has come from Russian sources. Russian manufacturers and their lobbyists are loudly arguing that companies that pulled out of the country in 2022 should not be welcomed back - let them pay and repent.

President Vladimir Putin instructed the government to determine by May 15 how foreign companies that left Russia can buy back their assets, many of which have been sold off. The domestic manufacturing lobby appears to have taken the upper hand. The document seen by Izvestia orders the creation of a list of "fugitives," while returnees will have to buy back their own assets in a way that takes into account the interests of the current owners. Doubtlessly, it will be very difficult - if impossible - to satisfy the demands of anyone who got foreign assets cheaply, or even for free, at the beginning of the war. Officials claim that these changes will be carried out in the interest of Russian manufacturers and consumers. Domestic producers will not even need to produce anything similar, or even superior to, foreign analogs. It will be enough just to declare their ambitions and they will be able to keep foreign competitors out.

If you doubt that, take a look at the drug market,

where import substitution has been taking place for a long time. Patients complain that domestic analogs are less effective and produce more side effects. But that does not stop pharma-

bring them back from foreign business trips. The most shrewd ones got acquaintances at customs and were lucky enough to import Italian jeans and German tape recorders.

But why bother citizens with the problem of choice, especially since there was little difference between the two factories? Of course, people liked to argue about the superiority of the suits from the Bolshevichka factory versus the factory named after Clara Zetkin. But most of them were content to buy from underground workshops. Only the elite had access to real brands through distributors (oh, what legends there were about the fifth floor of GUM) or could bring them back from foreign business trips. The most shrewd ones got acquaintances at customs and were lucky enough to import Italian jeans and German tape recorders.

ceutical companies from being among the largest firms in Russia. Their business model is simple: just buy generic drugs from India and stamp them with a Russian brand.

One only has to look back at the USSR. to see how this will go. According to state media of the time, the late Soviet Union also had everything! They produced radios, cassette recorders and televisions themselves and were terribly proud of doing so. They even produced jeans and sneakers! Sure, there were only one or two brands to pick from. But why bother citizens with the problem of choice, especially since there was little difference between the two factories? Of course, people liked to argue about the superiority of the suits from the Bolshevichka factory versus the factory named after Clara Zetkin. But most of them were content to buy from underground workshops.

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Soviet schoolchildren who corresponded with "friends from socialist countries" in droves also got in on the act. Polish peers were especially popular: they often sent gum in their letters.

So get ready: we will have to lose a lot of the imports that are still coming into Russia one way or another today. iPhones, for example, will be allowed to be imported for the time being following scandals affecting Russian tablets and other devices. But you can live without Nike sneakers. When it comes to white goods like refrigerators, the Italian Ariston seems to be the only company to have decided to return to Russia. In addition, Russian citizens have halved their spending on Chinese and nominally domestic cars, hoping in vain for foreign cars to return. Will restricting parallel imports in this way help develop domestic manufacturing? Hardly. The Just Clothes company, which tried to fill the gap left by Uniqlo, is closing all its stores and leaving the market after three years. Although it faced no com-

petitors on the Russian market, the business failed because even when you dominate the market, you need to have qualified staff and automated lines to remain viable. The days of garment factories in Japan, China and even Vietnam and Bangladesh being filled with workers on poverty wages are becoming a thing of the past as they are being replaced with robots. Only a few humans are needed to handle the goods and make sure the automated production lines run smoothly.

It is impossible to find people in Russia who are willing to work for 10 hours a day for such low wages. When it comes to modern equipment, there is neither the money, the opportunity (thanks to sanctions), nor the desire to procure it. But there is one key difference compared to the Soviet days. This time you will hardly have to be satisfied with shoes from the Skorokhod factory because domestic production will consist of components bought from China and assembled in Russia. If you do not believe me, look at the Moskvich car factory. Many companies will not even bother with that amount of effort. A quarter of domestic shoemakers do little but glue the sole onto otherwise finished sneakers. That way, they do little to spoil the original product, although the sole will fall off eventually. Not that they are buying from China for quality. They are just trying to keep the costs down.

Secondly, this time, you will not have to search public toilets for black market speculators. New services will spring up instead, able to deliver the goods with a tap on a screen. Many of those channels already exist through social networks and online marketplaces. They will have everything covered: customs, tax authorities, and law enforcers. Furthermore, companies that are bigger and more powerful will probably even get themselves an exemption from the Industry and Trade Ministry's list. The result of this will be that everything becomes more expensive. What choice remains will be limited by the new importers' taste and ideas of beauty. But that is a small price to pay to support domestic manufacturing, right?

The Moscow Times

History has a lesson for Trump

Nic Robertson

MANKIND'S achievements over the millennia have been bountiful. Their evolutionary fruits - from the harnessing of fire, to vaccines, to the art of diplomacy - were never low hanging; they were imagined before they were ever grasped. But once held, they became indispensable. Until now that is, as 100 days into his presidency US President Donald Trump seems determined to throw this painful learning to the wind, risking a world forced into reverse.

A torrent of tariffs, unleashed against the better judgement of experts, yet exalted by Trump's acolytes as the work of a deal-making genius are a case in point. So too is his willingness to throw allies to the wind, by threatening to grab Greenland, Canada even Panama by force if necessary. Whatever one's view of the policies themselves, Trump's total upending of the global status quo has sown fear and uncertainty among America's friends, exacerbated market volatility and normalized economic aggression. It's a formula that over the centuries has rarely served the world well.

The president's apparent over-arching ethos - might is right, and mine is greatest - is now demolishing geopolitical norms at speed. It is Ukraine that should give in to Russia, which "has all the cards," Trump says. Russian President Vladimir Putin's "pretty big concession," his US counterpart adds, is not "taking the whole country." Yet despite three years of "meat-grinding" war, Putin's aim remains as contrary to international law as it was when he launched his unprovoked, full-scale invasion.

It is clear then why Trump struggles to do what all his allies find easy: to blame Putin for defying the rules-based world order in a brutal campaign to swallow his smaller neighbor. The US president often even blames Ukraine's President Zelenskyy for the war in which at least 42,000 Ukrainian civilians have been killed or injured, according to the United Nations, saying "he should never have started it." The implication - that the weak should capitulate to the strong - is an upending of millennia of evolution, culminating in the post-World War II, US-inspired rules-based international order that led to an unprecedented eight decades of relative global peace, prosperity and unimaginable scientific innovation. Trump, as British Prime Minister Keir Starmer has commented, has broken the mold. "Old assumptions can no longer be taken for granted, the world as we knew it is gone," he said.

The president's world view was nurtured by his property-developing, landlord father Fred Trump. Poor tenants unable to pay their rent claimed they were evicted; not an uncommon practice at the time, or since, but one that advantages the powerful over the weak. The parallels are not hard to spot: the world's most powerful man still relies on bravado and bullying to get what he wants. Today everyone is in his firing line. America has been "taken advantage of by virtually every country in the world," Trump inaccurately claims, "we're no longer going to be the country that's ripped off by every country in the world."

But here's the rub. Such is Trump's braggadocio, no one he trusts appears brave enough to challenge him. Only when global markets

soured, and his Petri dish economic experiment turned putrid, did he backslide on the threat to impose immediate tariffs on both friends and foes of the US, and even then, it may not be enough to avoid economic pain. China seems ready to wait out his trade-defying tariffs, having been preparing for this moment since Trump's first term.

Now, it seems, he must learn a costly lesson for himself that economic evolution had already taught the experts. And while Trump's defiant pose after the July 2024 assassination attempt in Butler, Pennsylvania, was enough to convince Putin that he was "a courageous man," the US president is already backing down on some of his tariff bravado, chastened by his loyalists who found their voices as bond markets tanked.

In the view of both Putin and Trump, it is the tough who set the rules, and the man in both their crosshairs, Ukraine's President Zelenskyy, got this message Wednesday, "the man with 'no cards to play' should now, finally, GET IT DONE," as Trump wrote on his social media platform.?

Trump has since criticized Putin, questioning whether the Russian leader is interested in peace and suggesting "he's just tapping me along." The world Trump and Putin seem to crave is one of spheres of influence run from islands of power, where diplomacy is a time-consuming irrelevance replaced by imperial decrees.

It would be a reset harking back to a darker time, essentially overturning the rules-based order. In the aftermath of great empires, regional warlords allied, feuded and fought each other for centuries before nations emerged, and largely did the same. By the 19th century diplomats like Klemens von Metternich, the Chancellor of the Austrian Empire, spent entire careers attempting to balance Europe's feuding powers. He famously said, "when France sneezes, the rest of Europe catches cold."

Today it is Trump spreading a chill. The Manhattan real estate developer has said he is going to "get" Greenland "for national security reasons." Greenland and its Danish patron, a NATO ally that is no match militarily for the USA, say no. Canada's prime minister says the same about Trump's plans to make his northern neighbor the USA's 51st state, insisting "it will never happen." Mark Carney, a former central banker already battling Trump's aggressive trade tariffs, knows the threat is real, telling voters ahead of Monday's election in which his Liberal Party won a stunning fourth consecutive victory "the Americans want our resources, our water, our land, our country."

Trump's world view is clear: he speaks as though he can reach out and take these things, and clearly believes he is working from an island of power, isolated from the negative consequences of his assumed conquests. But no man, nor nation, is an Island. Trump's weakness is not just that he might buy Putin's lie that he can conquer all Ukraine, or be outfoxed by Xi on tariffs, but that the rest of the world increasingly sees through his mantle of self-belief. The costs of this muscle-power politics will be revealed more slowly than the near-instantaneous economic market pain to his trade tariffs. But it still marks a return to an era of dog eat dog. History has shown how that turns out.

In the messaging battle for Africa, Russia is winning

Thomas Kent

SINCE the very start of its invasion of Ukraine more than three years ago, Russia's government has focused a barrage of propaganda on Africa. Western governments have pushed back, while Ukraine is opening its own embassies across the continent to spread its message.

With all this activity, one would expect that the Ukraine conflict would be the talk of the continent. Not so, however. A recent visit to West and East Africa suggests Russia, Ukraine and the whole East-West conflict still attract only marginal interest among academics, civil society, students and journalists. Rather, the public mood is focused heavily on more local events, particularly government corruption. This helps explain Moscow's approach to the region. In its appeals to young Africans, Russia spends little time justifying its invasion of Ukraine. It devotes far more

effort to positioning itself as an ally of young, restless populations angry at their local governments and at what they see as Western dominance and diktat.

By doing so, the Kremlin has deftly outflanked the West's focus on the lawlessness and brutality of the invasion itself. It has concentrated instead on broader issues that resonate far more with local populations. Western communicators need to revise their strategy accordingly. "A lot of Africans don't know anything about Russia except as an opponent of the West," Morité Camara of Côte d'Ivoire's Institut Afrique-Monde think tank told me. "If people are angry at the West, associating with Russia makes sense since it's the West's enemy."

Western nations have pressed African states to take a strong stance against Russia's invasion. But African media typically publish little news from abroad.

Europe's biggest war in decades gets play mainly when it threatens Africans' food supplies, or when African students suffer racist treatment in the war zone. In my conversations, the international issues cited most often were enduring resentment toward European colonialism; the West's killing of Moammar Gadhafi and the ensuing destruction of Libya; the US-led intervention in Iraq (which included Ukrainian troops); and present-day American support for Israel.

None of this dims the eagerness of many to study in, or move to, Western Europe or the United States. But politically, university students made clear, the West is still seen as a predatory actor with much to atone for, while Russia looks like an alternative power center that might bring a change to the status quo. That represents an opening for Moscow.

Compared to the chaotic state of Western nations, Russia looks to Africans like a stable, reliable power - whatever internal repression the Kremlin may use to keep it that way. Vladimir Putin, whose image is painted on the occasional minibus in Nairobi, comes across as a tough leader who gets things done.

Older Africans remember with gratitude Soviet aid to the continent's national liberation movements during the decades of the Cold War. At the same time, Africa is the world's youngest continent, with an average age of 19, and Russia is skilled at reaching out to the younger cohort as well. Moscow offers scholarships to Russian universities, promotes the Russian Orthodox faith (many young Africans are religious) and aligns itself with populations discontented with the continent's remaining pro-

Western governments.

Russia's tactics are shrewd. Actual Russian development aid to Africa is minimal, concentrating mainly on mining and other deals that help enrich Russian and local elites. But Russia excels at building networks of social media influencers and pseudo-news brands to intensify anti-Western and anti-corruption feelings in Africa's remaining pro-Western nations. This threatens the stability of their governments and intimidates them into remaining at least neutral in the standoff between the West and Moscow.

All this calls into question the West's own messaging to Africa. Western communication has tended to support friendly governments and emphasize the value of US ties. Diplomats say they try to avoid attacking Moscow, worried it would feed an image of great powers squabbling with each other while ignoring Africa's

needs. Perhaps as a result, few Africans know much about racism in Russia, or that political freedom in many African countries far exceeds what Russians enjoy.

These points are certainly worth making. But to be more responsive to African concerns, US outreach also needs to more effectively emphasize fighting corruption. Even if such policies weaken pro-Western regimes now in power, their days may be numbered. If angry young people or the military sweep them away, the West's interests should not be swept away with them. When it comes to Africa, the US must remain committed to fundamental political rights and engage in economic projects that benefit populations as a whole, not just the continent's elites. Doing so would differentiate Washington from Moscow in Africans' minds, and position America as the partner that will benefit Africa the most.

Principles of Potsdam don't apply to Ukraine

Stefan Wolff & Tetyana Malyarenko

AFTER a second consecutive night of deadly Russian air attacks - against the capital Kyiv on April 23 and the eastern Ukrainian city of Pavlohrad on April 24 - a ceasefire in Ukraine seems as unrealistic as ever. With Russian commitment to a deal clearly lacking, the situation is not helped by US president Donald Trump. He can't quite seem to decide who he will ultimately blame if his efforts to agree a ceasefire fall apart. Before the strikes on Kyiv, Trump blamed Ukrainian president, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, for holding up a deal by refusing to recognise Crimea as Russian.

The following day, he chided Vladimir Putin for the attacks, calling them "not necessary, and very bad timing" and imploring Putin to stop. The main stumbling block on the path to a ceasefire is what a final peace agreement might look like and what concessions Kyiv - and its European allies - will accept. Ukraine's and Europe's position on this is unequivocal: no recognition of the illegal Russian annexation. This position is also backed by opinion polls in Ukraine, which indicate only limited support for some, temporary concessions to Russia. The mayor of Kyiv, Vitali Klitschko, also suggested that temporarily giving up territory "can be a solution".

The deal that Trump's envoy Steve Witkoff apparently negotiated over three rounds of talks in Russia was roundly rejected by Ukraine and Britain, France and Germany, who lead the "coalition of the willing" of countries pledging support for Ukraine. This prompted Witkoff and US secretary of state Marco Rubio to pull out of follow-up talks in London on April 24. These ended

with a fairly vacuous statement about a commitment to continuing "close coordination and ... further talks soon". And even this now appears as quite a stretch. Coinciding with Witkoff's fourth trip to see Putin on April 25, European and Ukrainian counter-proposals were released that reject most of the terms offered by Trump or at least defer their negotiation until after a ceasefire is in place.

The impasse is unsurprising. Washington's proposal included a US commitment to recognise Crimea as Russian, a promise that Ukraine would not join Nato and accept Moscow's control of the territories in eastern Ukraine that it currently illegally occupies. It also included lifting all sanctions against Russia. In other words, Ukraine would give up large parts of territory and receive no security guarantees, while Russia is rewarded with reintegration into the global economy. It is the territorial concessions asked of Kyiv which are especially problematic.

Quite apart from the fact that they are in fundamental breach of basic principles of international law - the sovereignty and territorial integrity of states - they are unlikely to provide solid foundations for a durable peace. Much like the idea of Trump's Ukraine envoy, Keith Kellogg, to divide Ukraine like post-1945 Berlin, it betrays a fundamental misunderstanding of what, and who, drives this war. Kellogg later clarified that he was not suggesting a partition of Ukraine, but his proposal would have exactly the same effect as Trump's most recent offer. Both proposals accept the permanent loss to Ukraine of territory that Russia currently controls.

Where they differ is that Kellogg wants to introduce a European-led reassurance force west of the river Dnipro, while leaving the defence of remaining Ukrainian-controlled territory to Kyiv's armed forces. If accepted by Russia - unlikely as this is given Russia's repeated and unequivocal rejection of European peacekeeping troops in Ukraine - it would provide at best a minimal security guarantee for a part of Ukrainian territory. What it would almost inevitably mean, however, is a repeat of the permanent ceasefire violations along the disengagement zone in eastern Ukraine where Russian and Ukrainian forces would continue to face each other.

This is what happened after the illfated Minsk accords of 2014 and 2015, which were meant to settle the conflict after Russia's invasion of Donbas in 2014. A further Russian invasion could be just around the corner once the Kremlin felt that it had sufficiently recovered from the current war. The lack of a credible deterrent is one key difference between the situation in Ukraine as envisaged by Washington and other historical and contemporary parallels, including Korea and Cyprus. Korea was partitioned in 1945 and has been protected by a large US military presence since the Korean war in 1953.

After the Turkish invasion of 1974, Cyprus was divided between Greek and Turkish Cypriots along a partition line secured by an armed UN peacekeeping mission. Trump has ruled out any US troop commitment as part of securing a ceasefire in Ukraine. And the idea of a UN force in Ukraine, briefly floated during the presidency of Petro Poroshenko between 2014 and

2019, never got any traction, and is not likely to be accepted by Putin now. The assumed parallels with the situation in Germany after the second world war are even more tenuous. Not only did Nazi Germany unconditionally surrender in May 1945 but its division into allied zones of occupation was formally and unanimously agreed by the victorious allies in Potsdam in August 1945.

By the time two separate German states of East and West Germany were established in 1949, the western allies had fallen out with Stalin but remained firmly united in Nato and western Europe. So the West German state was firmly protected under the US nuclear umbrella. The agreements made in Potsdam didn't have the same implication of permanence as the US suggestion to formally recognise Crimea as Russian territory. The suggestion was always that the allied forces would pull out of Germany at some stage, and restore the country's sovereignty. Most importantly, the allies did not reward the aggressor in the war or create the conditions for merely a brief interruption for an aggressor's revisionist agenda.

After all, what has driven Putin's war against Ukraine is his conviction that "the collapse of the Soviet Union was the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the century". The Trump administration deludes itself that it is applying the lessons of Potsdam by recognising Russia's territorial conquests in Ukraine and handing them over. Instead it is falling into the trap of the 1938 Munich Agreement. Negotiators in Munich tried, but failed, to avoid the second world war by appeasing and not deterring an insatiable aggressor - a historical lesson that doesn't need repeating.

Canada's election represents a broader trend

Stephen Collinson

Elsewhere in Europe, Trump's "America first" attitude has changed the game for right-wing parties that look to him for inspiration. Anger over tariffs could blunt far-right leader Marine Le Pen's bid to use Trump-style tactics to brand her conviction for embezzlement as election meddling ahead of France's 2027 presidential vote.

Even Brexit architect Nigel Farage, who critics accuse of spending more time at Mar-a-Lago than with his constituency in a faded English seaside town, distanced himself from Trump's Ukraine policy. And in Hungary, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, whose anti-democratic playbook made him a MAGA hero, is increasingly unpopular ahead of elections next year. Populists aren't on the retreat everywhere. Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni, who won office on Trump-style immigration policies, remains popular and is promoting herself as a bridge between her friend in the Oval Office and Europe. She pulled off a consummate balancing act during a Washington visit this

and the West has deep political problems. In fact, voters repeatedly send clear messages that they want change, but their new governments often struggle to deliver. And big political wins can quickly fade under the weight of intractable issues - just ask Starmer. The heat on Carney to deliver is immense.

He must defuse the trade war with Trump, which threatens to cause an economic crisis and destroy millions of Canadian jobs. He must find new markets and revenues for his country now that the US is no longer a reliable partner. And he's under pressure to finally get Canada up to NATO spending minimums. And voters will sooner or later demand progress on other issues - health care, housing, high prices, homelessness, substance abuse and unemployment. And the prime minister doesn't have much room to maneuver.

Voters might have picked him as the best bet to stand up to Trump. But they didn't hand him a wide mandate, saddling him instead with a minority government. He'll need smaller parties to pass leg-

And he's not letting up. "America wants our land, our resources, our water, our country," he warned. "But these are not idle threats. President Trump is trying to break us so that America can own us. That will never, that will never ever happen." His crowd cheered. But his words pose a question that applies not just to Canada but to other foreign democracies. Will an anti-Trump message work as long as the 47th president stays in the White House? It might, since there's no sign Trump will tone down his act. But the world is full of disgruntled electorates and the West has deep political problems. In fact, voters repeatedly send clear messages that they want change, but their new governments often struggle to deliver. And big political wins can quickly fade under the weight of intractable issues - just ask Starmer.

month. More broadly, Trump's sudden political earthquakes are looming over other campaigns. Both South Korea and Japan have key elections this year that will be shaped by the trade wars. Leaders of both US allies are under pressure to do quick deals to mitigate economic damage that could hurt their voters. US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent on Tuesday rejected the idea that Japan's general election in July and South Korea's presidential vote in June will clog up talks on trade deals Trump needs to show his strategy is working.

"I think from our talks that these governments actually want to have the framework of a trade deal done before they go into elections to show that they have successfully negotiated with the United States," Bessent said. "So we are finding that they are actually much more keen to come to the table, get this done, and then go home and campaign on it."

That's one way of looking at it. But trade deals involve painful compromises that can alienate key voting blocs - hardly what politicians need before tough elections. This could also limit the scope of agreements that Trump insists will include spectacular concessions to the US. Carney knows what got him elected.

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islation that could entail tough political choices. This is an inherently unstable situation in which to build trust and a record that could convince voters in a few years to hand him a majority. And while they were stung by defeat, Conservatives weren't wiped out. Their promises to fight crime and lower taxes resonated with some voters, and they may fancy their chances of winning in a few years - perhaps under a new leader like Ontario Premier Doug Ford, who's a populist himself but made the wise choice to confront Trump rather than trying to emulate him.

Carney's Liberals understand they need to demonstrate change. They appeased angry voters by brutally ditching unpopular Prime Minister Justin Trudeau in a desperate Hail Mary to keep power. They picked a non-politician in Carney to lead them. And as soon as he was interim leader, he jettisoned Trudeau's most unpopular positions, including a carbon tax. This removed one of Poilievre's best arguments. But in an era of grumpy voters and leaders struggling to deliver, even big electoral wins don't guarantee success. America, after all, is experiencing its third straight one-term presidency - assuming Trump obeys the Constitution and goes home in January 2029. And after snapping up all the swing states last year, Trump has the worst polling numbers of any president at the 100-day mark in decades.

And politics is never static. Starmer's Labour Party landslide last year will count for nothing on Thursday, when Farage's far-right Reform Party is expected to claim huge wins in local elections that could portend its eclipse of Britain's most successful election machine, the Conservative Party, in the next general election. Is it too soon to predict a populist revival?

CNN

It's not too late for Britain to act and lead Europe in defending Ukraine

David Blair

THE sight of Donald Trump and Volodymyr Zelensky conferring in the majestic calm of St Peter's Basilica offers a reminder that all is not lost in Ukraine. Yes, their encounter came straight after Vladimir Putin's open-armed greeting for Steve Witkoff, the American envoy; true, Mr Trump's seven-point peace plan obviously favours Russia. But the president might yet redeem everything by giving Ukraine the clear American security guarantee that remains the only sure way of ending this war and deterring Putin from coming back for a third invasion.

To maximise this chance, our Government needs to do something difficult and profoundly counter-cultural for many of our diplomats. There is no point fuming over Mr Trump's folly or portraying him as the villain of Ukraine's ordeal, or hoping that a miraculous combination of blandishment and flattery (a state visit) might still win him over. Instead, Britain should use the levers that are in our hands, setting an example that European allies might follow. Now is the moment to lead. That means taking three steps: seize the Russian assets, lower the price cap for Putin's oil, and back the Sanctions Bill now in the US Senate.

Charles de Gaulle once advised a British ambassador to pause every day and consider events "from the point of view of the future historian". In 50 years, historians are going to be astonished that even as Putin was waging the bloodiest European war since 1945, Europe was sitting on about 230 billion (£196 billion) of Russian state assets, lying frozen in dozens of banks. Think what could

be done with that colossal sum, amounting to 140 per cent of Ukraine's GDP. We could give it all to Kyiv, allowing Mr Zelensky to multiply his military spending fivefold. Or we could use 100 billion to capitalise a bank to kick-start Europe's rearmament while still leaving almost enough to triple Ukraine's defence budget.

That money could have what generals call "strategic effect": it might change the course of the war. Best of all, Europe has the power to force Russia to become the first aggressor in history to fund the resistance to its own aggression. Then we could tell every Russian that their own money was buying the shells and bullets killing their own soldiers. So why hasn't it happened? There is a legal basis for pressing ahead, but seizing the assets would still be held to violate property rights, deter investment and damage the reputation of Europe's law-abiding open economies.

These objections, once decisive, have surely been overtaken by the gravity of events. In fact Europe has already crossed the Rubicon and undermined property rights by freezing the assets and using their interest payments to underwrite a \$50 billion loan for Ukraine. But there is still no EU consensus behind full seizure. Our Government should remember that Britain is no longer bound by EU decision-making. At this moment, £25 billion of Russian assets lie frozen in UK institutions. Britain should go ahead and seize them, establishing a precedent for the EU to follow. If that needs emergency legislation, so be it.

Taking £25 billion would not have

strategic effect but it would still fund a 60 per cent increase in Ukraine's defence budget, or allow this year's £3 billion of British military aid to be multiplied eightfold. Our Government should get on and do it and break the deadlock. As we strengthen Ukraine's finances, so we must do more to weaken Russia's. The G7 has imposed a price cap on Russian oil exports, denying insurance or services to any tanker carrying Putin's oil unless it sells its cargo for \$60 a barrel or less. But the market price for oil is now down to around \$66, making the price cap virtually meaningless. The obvious answer would be to lower the limit, but that would require a G7 consensus and America can no longer be relied upon.

Should we stare helplessly at this impasse or try to break it? Britain is the biggest provider of maritime insurance in the G7. We could use that lever to impose our own price cap for Russian oil, say of \$30 per barrel, and once again set a precedent for others to follow. Meanwhile, not every American Republican agrees with Trump on Russia. On April 1, Lindsey Graham, a Republican senator from South Carolina, introduced a Bill in the Senate to impose what he called "bone-breaking sanctions" on Russia, designed to choke Putin's oil exports once and for all by levying a 500 per cent tariff on any country that buys them. That Bill now has the public backing of 55 senators, evenly divided between Republicans and Democrats. The votes are there to get it passed.

Does the British Government have a view? Is our embassy in

Washington lobbying in favour of Senator Graham's sanctions? Is Lord Mandelson, our new ambassador, gliding the corridors of Capitol Hill, using his famous diplomatic skills to promote this measure. If not, why not? Everything I have written challenges the deeply ingrained culture of the Foreign Office. During nearly eight years working there and in Downing Street, I saw how our diplomats are steeped in the belief that Britain can never achieve anything important except in concert with others, preferably America, and if that is impossible then it's usually best to do nothing. Their mantra is: act "in company" or not at all.

The problem with saying "never act alone" is that it becomes "never act first" and then "never lead". Boris Johnson had to overrule the weight of Whitehall opinion when, in January 2022, he sent 2,000 anti-tank missiles to Ukraine just before the full-scale invasion, when no other country was publicly arming Kyiv. By proposing the unilateral use of hard power - supplying missiles - he was challenging a sacred dogma of British diplomacy. But Johnson was vindicated when those weapons helped Ukraine to wreck Russia's invasion plan and defeat Putin's assault on Kyiv. Soon dozens of European countries were following Britain's lead and sending arms. We should learn the lesson: we are not powerless and sometimes it pays to go first. In Mr Trump's new world, waiting for Washington can no longer be a reflex. Today nothing matters more than for the Foreign Office to shake off the outdated attitude that ties our hands. These three steps are within our power. So what are we waiting for?

The Telegraph

Global system shakeup, courtesy Trump

Andrew Sheng

CHAOTIC as it seems, Donald Trump's tariff war and subsequent walk-backs are a deadly serious attempt by his team to address what they perceive as the core issues of the dollar-dominated global monetary system. The key Trump advisers (trade guru Peter Navarro, Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent and Council of Economic Advisers Chairman Stephen Miran) share visceral anger and angst in their speeches or writings. America is victimized by the current system because she has to run large current fiscal and trade deficits from the strengthening dollar, created by allies refusing to pay for America's military protection, whilst trading rivals devalue or cheat to gain market share, weakening America's once mighty manufacturing prowess.

Essentially, the Trump Administration wants to reset the whole dollar-dominated monetary and trading order. Miran's November 2024 User Guide to the Global Trading System, which some label as the "Mar a Lago Accord", is a global shakedown from Pax Americana to Tax Americana - users and holders of US dollars, especially allies will have to pay for protection and use of the dollar infrastructure in either user fees, tax or swaps into securities of longer duration. The key weapons are higher tariffs, sanctions or income or wealth taxes, at the extreme swaps for longer-term securities, freezing or possible seizure of their dollar holdings.

This takes us back to a brutal history lesson in imperial finance. The Roman empire funded itself basically by confiscating enemy or vassal assets or extinguished debt through

seizure, military conquests or shake-downs. The British empire civilized this model to a rule of law "borrowing", offering perpetual Consol bonds to colonies and anyone seeking liquidity and store of value haven in London, and then reinvesting proceeds in the colonies through higher returns from shares in the British East India Company monopoly or private mining, plantation and trading (arms dealers), funded by British banks. In 1717, Isaac Newton as Master of the Mint adopted the sterling gold special standard, which fixed the pound sterling at a gold-silver exchange price that eventually evolved into a gold standard.

The US dollar was initially based on the silver standard, but American gold became plentiful after the 1848 California gold rush. As the two world wars exhausted Europe and bankrupted the British empire, gold and capital fled to the United States, establishing New York as a financial haven and the dollar supplanted the sterling. By 1945, the US emerged as the undisputed winner and dominant power, with the dollar linked to gold at \$35 per ounce. Gold has long been accepted as a good means of payment (coinage) and store of value, but its main defect as a reserve currency standard is limited supply which constrains the ability of governments to print money or borrow money. Gold creates a hard budget constraint independent of politics.

When America began to lose gold reserves in the 1960s due to excessive spending on the Vietnam war, President Nixon abandoned the dollar peg in 1971 and the era of floating exchange rates with the dollar as top reserve standard began. The new sys-

tem gave the United States the ability to relax her fiscal discipline, since the rest of the world wanted to hold dollars as reserve currency. This created an "exorbitant privilege", identified by the Belgian/American economist Robert Triffin as a dilemma in which the more the world demanded US dollars, the greater its fiscal and trade deficits and therefore unsustainable debt. With flexible exchange rates and free flow of capital came the post-1980s era of fiscal and debt profligacy that encourages excessive consumption funded by debt, huge financial speculation rather than productive investments, periodic financial crises, bailed out by central banks' lowering of interest rates that created asset bubbles and subsequent crashes.

Various initiatives to reform the international monetary system were made, such as the Palais Royale Initiative centred around trying to replace the nationally-issued reserve currency (USD) with a multilaterally issued currency, the IMF's Special Drawing Rights, a basket of the key reserve currencies. This proposal would not fly because the US did not want to lose the dollar's special status and the leading nations could not agree on how to cede national currency issuance power to the IMF. What these reformers missed, including myself as a former central banker, was that the natural substitute for a non-national reserve currency is not another artificially designed multilateral standard, but the historical candidate, gold.

Gold is the only money that cannot be printed by governments or mined through cyber machines. If we cannot trust politicians, national gov-

ernments or central bankers to manage our money, then a transparent gold market will be able to price such fiat currencies that will float against each other and against gold. As the United States began to run larger and larger fiscal deficits (currently 7 per cent of GDP), trade deficit (3.1 per cent of GDP) and run up net foreign liabilities to foreigners of \$26 trillion by end 2024, dollar holders were until recently rewarded by outperformance in US financial asset returns. The US stock market is now at historical highs, and the bond market wobbled when the equity market corrected. This is exactly what happens in emerging markets. Global investors are now into "Sell or Hedge America".

The shift out of dollars has already happened as central banks have reduced the share of dollars in their foreign exchange reserves from 71.5 in 2001 to 57.8 per cent in 2024. Central banks have been adding 1,000 tonnes of gold to their reserves for three years running, holding 36,195 tonnes as of January 2025, comprising 19.8 per cent of total reserves at current prices, of which European central banks hold 64.1 per cent of their reserves in gold.

The spectacular rise in gold prices to a peak of \$3434 per ounce this week suggests a fundamental de-dollarization not into other fiat currencies, but into gold. In other words, Trump's financial engineers have tried to use a single weapon - tariffs - to reset the system, inadvertently pushing the system back towards a gold standard. Central banks cannot fight higher gold prices by selling precious reserves or higher interest rates, the last thing heavily indebted governments need. Between financial engineers or gold, in gold I trust.



KARACHI: Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb held a high-impact virtual dialogue with the Overseas Investors Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OICCI).

Fin Min, OICCI align on tax reforms

F.P. Report

KARACHI: Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb held a high-impact virtual dialogue with the Overseas Investors Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OICCI), attended by senior leadership of leading multinational companies operating in Pakistan.

The Minister shared the Government's medium-term economic vision focused on broadening the tax base, raising the tax-to-GDP ratio for long-term fiscal sustainability, and reinforcing macroeconomic stability through structural reforms.

He noted that changes in Pakistan Revenue Automation Limited (PRAL) have already been implemented to enable greater transparency, efficiency, and highlighted the potential for private sector participation in data-driven enforcement going forward. He also shared that the global

investors, during his recent US visit, expressed confidence in Pakistan's pace of turnaround and encouraged the Government to sustain its reform momentum.

Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb reaffirmed the Government's resolve, stating: "We are committed to implementing reforms that will enable a more equitable tax regime, encourage investment, and position Pakistan on a trajectory of inclusive and sustained economic growth."

President OICCI Yousaf Hussain stated: "We fully support the Government's economic direction and its medium-term commitment to building a sustainable and resilient growth model - with a particular emphasis on export expansion, localization of inputs, and structural reforms focused on competitiveness and production efficiency."

Chief Executive and

Secretary General OICCI M. Abdul Aleem added, "We appreciate Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb's recent engagements in Washington and his effective outreach to global stakeholders. These efforts, along with the Government's steady articulation of a medium-term strategy focused on structural reforms, fiscal discipline, and sustainable growth, send a strong and encouraging signal to the business community."

The meeting was also attended by CEOs of OICCI member companies and FBR member Policy and FBR member Customs. The CEOs of OICCI member companies raised specific questions relating to sales tax anomaly on oil refineries and other issues on tax enforcement in Pakistan.

The meeting concluded with a shared commitment to deeper public-private collaboration for sustainable economic growth.

Exports increase by 6.25% during Jul-April

ISLAMABAD (APP): The exports from the country increased by 6.25 percent during the first ten months of the current fiscal year as compared to the corresponding months of last year.

Exports during July-April (2024-25) were recorded at \$26.859 billion against \$25.278 billion during July-April (2023-24), according to Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS) data.

On the other hand, imports into the country went up by 7.37 percent by growing from \$44.900 billion last year to \$48.210 billion during the first ten months of the current year.

Based on the figures, the trade deficit during the period under review was recorded at \$21.351 billion against the deficit of \$19.622 billion last year, showing an increase of 8.81 percent.

Meanwhile, on year-on-year basis, the exports in April 2025 decreased by 8.93 percent to \$2.141 billion from \$2.351 billion in April 2024.

On the other hand, the imports went up by 14.09 percent by increasing from \$4.846 billion to \$5.529 billion, according to PBS data.

SCCI wants reduction in policy rate to strengthen business, economy

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Sarhad Chamber of Commerce and Industry demanded of the government and Governor State Bank of Pakistan to reduce interest rates to single digit to stimulate economic growth and end the stagnation currently gripping the country.

He made this demand while talking to a group of businessmen from various sectors here at the chamber house on Friday.

Moqueem urged the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) to announce a significant

reduction in interest rates in the upcoming monetary policy meeting.

SCCI senior vice president Abdul Jalil Jan, vice president Shehryar Khan, members of the executive committee, secretary general of the chamber Muqtasid Ahsan were present on the occasion.

Moqueem said incumbent coalition government measures for promotion of economic activities, achieving growth targets are highly encouraging, however, it is needed to bring down the interest rate to its lowest level, which is

currently 12 percent.

SCCI quoted official figures, stating that a visible decrease was witnessed in the inflation rate. Despite the fact, the policy has kept at its highest rate.

He demanded a significant cut in the meeting of the State Bank of Pakistan Monetary Policy Committee, which is scheduled on May 05.

The SCCI chief emphasized reduction in the current policy rate under the vision of the Special Investment Facilitation Council is essential in order to achieve targets of economic growth and improve country's exports as per the vision of the Prime Minister of Pakistan.

SCCI chief stressed concrete steps for economic revival, ease of doing business for promotion of industries and trade, provision of soft loans and reduction in policy rate at the optimal level. He said the business community has faced difficulties in the prevailing circumstances. The chamber president urged the government to adopt business-friendly policies and provide relief to the business community.

To support future leadership through scholarships

IBA Karachi join hands with PNSC



F.P. Report

KARACHI: In a significant step toward strengthening access to quality higher education, IBA Karachi has joined hands with Pakistan National Shipping Corporation (PNSC) to support future leaders through scholarship endowment. PNSC has contributed PKR 10 million to IBA for the establishment of a perpetual scholarship endowment.

The cheque handover ceremony was held at Main Campus, IBA Karachi, in which Mr. Sultan A.

Chawla, Chairman, PNSC, presented the contribution to Dr. S Akbar Zaidi, Executive Director, IBA Karachi. This partnership marks the beginning of a long-term collaboration between two institutions committed to building capacity and creating pathways for underserved communities.

Dr. Zaidi expressed deep appreciation for PNSC's generous gesture, noting that the scholarship endowment directly supports IBA's mission of providing need-sensitive opportunities

to students from all corners of Pakistan. Other prominent attendees included Mr. Syed Jarar Haider Kazmi, Executive Director (Finance), PNSC; Capt. Mustafa Kizilbash, Executive Director (Commercial), PNSC; and Mr. Mustafa Bilal Kazi, Covenor CSR, PNSC. IBA Karachi was represented by Ms. Malahat Awan, Director ARC; Mr. Moieid Sultan, Director Finance, and Mr. Irfan Qamar, Director HR.

This endowment will generate sustainable impact by enabling deserving stu-

dents to pursue quality education at IBA for years to come.

About IBA Karachi: IBA Karachi, Pakistan's leading and most prestigious institution of higher education, has nurtured generations of trailblazers, with 20,000+ alumni driving innovation and leading organizations across the globe. Equipped with state-of-the-art infrastructure, modern learning spaces, and cutting-edge facilities, IBA offers a world-class education that empowers students to shape the future. Committed to sustainability, IBA fosters an eco-conscious campus community, continuously reducing its carbon footprint through impactful green initiatives. With a rich legacy and an unwavering pursuit of progress, IBA continues to redefine education, leadership, and responsible innovation.

Court Notice

In the court of Faiza Gul senior civil judge Admin/ Alla illaqa Qazi Swat. Case #.13/1. Institution 23/7/2003. Next Hearing date 06/05/2025. Abdur Rahim etc VS. Irrigation Department etc. Notice to- 2/3) Sultan zeb.2/4) Muhammad Rome sons Bakht Zameen r/o Dher tehsil kabal district Swat. 1/10) Abdul Manan s/o Abdur Razaq r/o kala kaly Fit tehsil kabal district Swat presently Abroad. Whereas the above named defendant cannot be served in ordinary manner it is therefore proclaimed or through dually authorized agent or pleader in the court on 06/05/2025. at 8.00 am. Ex-parte proceeding will be initiated against you.seal of the court.

Court Notice

In the Court of Jawad Bin Dawood Civil Judge II. Alaqi Qazi Buner at Daggar. Suit No 20/1. Institution 27/1/ 2025. Date of hearing /6/5/2025 . Case Title: Mst. Shakhon VS Fazal Rehman etc.Notice to no. 1.Fazal Rehman s/o Lal Zada resident of Kalakhela tehsel Gadezai district Buner. Whereas in the above mentioned case the mentioned defendant can not be served in the ordinary way, it is, therefore, proclaimed that if the said defendant will/shall not appear personally or through dually authorized agent or pleader in the court at 8. am dated 6/5/2025 the proceeding will be taken ex- parte. Given under my hand and seal of this Court.

Court Notice

In the Court of Jawad Bin Dawood Civil Judge II. Alaqi Qazi Buner at Daggar. Suit No 1/12.2. Institution 9/1/ 2025. Date of hearing.19 /5/ 2025. Case Title VS Notice to no.2.Abdul Ahad s/o Abdullah. 5.Kids Amna Bibi. 6.Iqra Bibi. 7.Sidra Bibi. 8.Sada Bibi daughters of Abdullah. 9. Adnan. 10.Kids Irfan. 11 .Usman sons of Abdullah (late). 12.Abdul Hadi s/o Abdul Mustaqm resident of Shalbandal tehsel Gagra district Buner. Whereas in the above mentioned case the mentioned defendant can not be served in the ordinary way, it is, therefore, proclaimed that if the said defendant will/shall not appear personally or through dually authorized agent or pleader in the court at 8. am dated 10/5/2025 the proceeding will be taken ex-parte. Given under my hand and seal of this Court.

PSX witnesses bullish trend, gains 2787.36 points

ISLAMABAD (APP): The 100-Index of the Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX) witnessed bullish trend on Friday, gaining 2787.36 points, a positive change of 2.50 percent, closing at 114,113.94 points as compared to 111,326.58 points on last trading day.

A total of 372,363,708 shares were traded during the day as compared to 490,948,134 shares the previous trading day, whereas the price of shares stood at Rs 23.285 billion against Rs 31.124 billion on the last trading day.

As many as 445 companies transacted their shares in the stock market, 311 of them recorded gains and 63 sustained losses, whereas the share price of 51 companies remained unchanged.

The three top trading companies were Sui South Gas with 29,319,891 shares at Rs 40.25 per share, Cneryvico PK with 27,367,683 shares at Rs 7.11 per share and Bank of Punjab with 20,836,529 shares at Rs 9.69 per share. PIA Holding Company

Limited witnessed a maximum increase of Rs 436.63 per share closing at Rs 4,802.96 whereas runner-up was Hoechst Pakistan Limited with Rs 223.37 rise in its share price to close at Rs 3,173.37.

Unilever Pakistan Foods Limited witnessed a maximum decrease of Rs 461.63 per share price, closing at Rs 23,008.12, whereas the runner-up Pakistan Tobacco Company Limited with Rs 30.05 decline in its per share price to Rs 1,162.34.

Wall Street climbs on tariff optimism

NEW YORK (Reuters): Wall Street's main indexes advanced on Friday, as signs of a de-escalation in the trade war with China and a strong jobs report calmed concerns around the economic toll of tariffs.

Beijing said on Friday it was "evaluating" an offer from Washington to hold talks over U.S. President Donald Trump's 145% tariffs on China.

Further aiding the mood on Friday, data showed nonfarm payrolls increased more than expected in April, with the unemployment rate steady at 4.2%.

"This is good employment data which suggests that the economy remains strong," said Melissa Brown, managing director of investment decision research at Simcorp.

"We could see these numbers go down as the impact of tariffs really starts to make its way through the economy, but it's not there yet."

At 09:44 a.m. ET, the Dow Jones Industrial Average (.DJI), opens new tab rose 450.30 points, or 1.10%, to 41,203.26, the S&P 500 (.SPX), opens new tab gained 59.98 points, or 1.07%, to 5,664.12 and the Nasdaq Composite (.IXIC), opens new tab gained 162.22 points, or 0.92%, to

17,873.64.

All indexes were set for weekly gains. Most chip stocks jumped, sending the broader index (.SOX), opens new tab up 3%. Megacaps also gained, barring Apple (AAPL.O), opens new tab and Amazon.com (AMZN.O), opens new tab

Limiting gains on the information technology sector (.SPLRCT), opens new tab, Apple slipped 4.6% after the iPhone maker trimmed its share buyback program by \$10 billion and CEO Tim Cook told analysts that tariffs could add about \$900 million in costs this quarter.

"Apple claimed the sort of earnings beat that was never likely to win much favor... at a time when its products business is fraught with uncertainty, it's not great that growth on the services side has disappointed," said AJ Bell investment director Russ Mould.

A m a z o n . c o m (AMZN.O), opens new tab was down marginally after it forecast second-quarter operating income below estimates.

Trump's reversal of some tariffs has helped U.S. stock indexes recover from recent losses. The tech-heavy Nasdaq (.IXIC), opens new tab was trading at levels last

seen before April 2, dubbed "Liberation Day", when the president unveiled massive global tariffs.

Despite signs of reprieve on the trade front, the erratic changes in U.S. tariff policies have forced some companies to warn of business impacts or pull earnings forecasts amid worries of higher costs and a hit to economic growth.

Oil giant Chevron (CVX.N), opens new tab was up marginally, while Exxon Mobil (XOM.N), opens new tab slipped after its results.

Block (XYZ.N), opens new tab slumped more than 22% after cutting its profit forecast for 2025 and missing estimates for quarterly earnings.

Airbnb (ABNB.O), opens new tab dipped 2.2% after the vacation rental platform forecast second-quarter revenue largely below Wall Street estimates and signaled softening demand in the U.S.

Videogame maker Take-Two Interactive (TTWO.O), opens new tab fell 7.3% after it delayed the release of "Grand Theft Auto VI" to May 2026.

Advancing issues out-numbered decliners by a 5.73-to-1 ratio on the NYSE and by a 3.78-to-1 ratio on the Nasdaq.

MCB Islamic Bank celebrates excellence at annual awards



F.P. Report

LAHORE: MCB Islamic Bank proudly hosted its Annual Awards 2024 in Lahore, celebrating out-

standing achievements, dedication, and the collective efforts of its top-performing team members from across the country.

The prestigious event was

graced by Mr. Raza Mansha, Chairman of the Board of Directors, as the Chief Guest. In his address, he commended Bank's continued business growth, focus on innovation & digital first approach. The ceremony was hosted by Mr. Zargham Khan Durrani, President and CEO, who was joined by senior members of the leadership team.

Mr. Durrani praised the unwavering commitment and exceptional performance demonstrated by teams throughout the year, highlighting their critical role in the Bank's success.

The Annual Awards 2024 reaffirm MCB Islamic Bank's commitment to recognizing talent, fostering a culture of excellence, and uniting its people under a shared vision for the future.

US labor market shows resilience; risks mounting from trade policy

WASHINGTON (Reuters): U.S. job growth slowed marginally in April and employers continued to hoard workers, but the outlook for the labor market is increasingly darkening as President Donald Trump's protectionist trade policy heightens economic uncertainty.

The Labor Department's closely watched employment report published on Friday, which also showed the unemployment rate held steady at 4.2% last month, helped to assuage fears that the economy was close to recession after gross domestic product contracted in the first quarter amid a tariff-induced flood of imports. Nonetheless, it is too early for the labor market to show the impact of Trump's on-and-off again tariff policy.

Labor market resilience gives the Federal Reserve cover to keep its benchmark overnight interest rate in the 4.25%-4.50% range next week.

"The 'R' word that the labor market is demonstrating in this report is resilience, certainly not

recession," said Olu Sonola, head of U.S. economic research at Fitch Ratings. "For now, we should curb our enthusiasm going forward given the backdrop of trade policies that will likely be a drag on the economy."

Nonfarm payrolls increased by 177,000 jobs last month after rising by a downwardly revised 185,000 in March, the Labor Department's Bureau of Labor Statistics said. Economists polled by Reuters had forecast 130,000 jobs added last month after a previously reported 228,000 advance in March. Estimates ranged from 25,000 to 195,000 jobs added.

The survey of establishments also showed February's payrolls count was revised down by 15,000 jobs to 102,000.

The economy needs to create roughly 100,000 jobs per month to keep up with growth in the working-age population. The household survey from which the unemployment rate is derived showed employ-

ment increased 436,000, absorbing most of the 518,000 people who entered the labor force.

Healthcare continued to dominate job growth, adding 51,000 positions across hospitals and ambulatory services. Transportation and warehousing employment increased by 29,000, mostly warehousing and storage, couriers and messengers as well as air transportation.

Financial activities payrolls rose 14,000, while social assistance employment increased 8,000 and government hiring overall rose 10,000. But federal government employment declined 9,000 and is down 26,000 since January amid the Trump administration's unprecedented and often chaotic campaign spearheaded by tech billionaire Elon Musk's Department of Government Efficiency, or DOGE, to drastically shrink the government.

Despite news headlines of mass firings at government agencies, the decline in federal payrolls has been relatively modest. That is

because fired employees who have been reinstated by court and subsequently put on paid leave are counted as employed. The same applies to those who have accepted buyout offers. Economists expect federal payrolls to drop significantly after September, when severance pay runs out for many.

The dollar fell against a basket of currencies. U.S. Treasury yields rose.

Manufacturing payrolls declined, reflecting the strain from the tariffs. Trump's "Liberation Day" tariff announcement ushered in sweeping duties on most imports from the United States' trade partners, including boosting duties on Chinese goods to 145%, sparking a trade war with Beijing and tightening financial conditions.

Trump later delayed higher reciprocal tariffs for 90 days, which economists said was essentially a pause on the whole economy as it left businesses in a state of paralysis and risked a recession if there was no clarity soon.



In brief

ECB bans transgender women

LONDON (Agencies): Transgender women have been banned from competing in all levels of women's cricket with immediate effect, the England and Wales Cricket Board has announced. In an update to its transgender regulations, the ECB said "only those whose biological sex is female" will be able to participate in women's and girls' cricket. The ECB say transgender women and girls can continue playing in open and mixed cricket categories. The policy change follows a UK Supreme Court ruling on 16 April which said the legal definition of a woman is based on biological sex. "Our regulations for recreational cricket have always aimed at ensuring that cricket remains as inclusive a sport as possible," the ECB said in a statement. "These included measures to manage disparities, irrespective of someone's gender, and safeguard the enjoyment of all players. "However, given the new advice received about the impact of the Supreme Court ruling, we believe the changes announced today are necessary." The ECB added that abuse and discrimination "has no place in our sport" and that it is committed to ensuring cricket is "played in a spirit of respect and inclusivity". The decision follows an announcement from the English Football Association (FA) on Thursday that transgender women will no longer be able to participate in women's football in England from 1 June.

Arsenal fall short in title race

London (AFP): Mikel Arteta says seeing Liverpool win the Premier League has been "painful" after Arsenal fell short in the title race for a third successive season. Liverpool's thumping 5-1 win at home to Tottenham on Sunday put them out of reach of nearest challengers Arsenal with four games to go. It is a huge blow for Arsenal, who have missed out yet again after pushing Manchester City all the way for the past two seasons. Arteta congratulated Liverpool on their triumph, which he said was fully deserved, but he said it hurt "big time". "I understand that (Liverpool) are a team that is being more consistent and they have a lot of ingredients that you need to win it, but it's very painful," he said on Friday. The Spaniard added: "I take the opportunity as well to congratulate Liverpool and what they've done in the manner that they've done, how consistent they've been. "And I think they fully deserve to win it. They were the better team. They had so many attributes. They had consistently their squad available. "And we're going to try again. But up to that moment next season, now we're going to have to finish the season very strong." Arsenal have not won the Premier League since 2004, under Arsene Wenger. The Gunners' title bid has been weakened by a rolling injury crisis, with six first-team players still out. Arteta, who was also without the suspended Thomas Partey for their 1-0 defeat in the Champions League semi-final first leg against Paris Saint-Germain on Tuesday, underlined the scale of the problem. "I was very shocked just before the game against PSG at home because I was walking into the dressing room and suddenly I saw all of them together sitting," he said.

Guardiola to take break from football when he leaves Man City

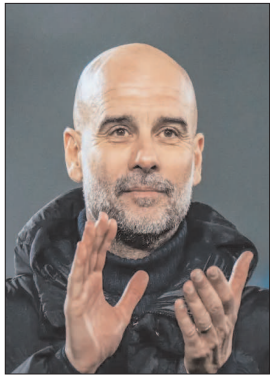
LONDON (AFP): Pep Guardiola says he will take a break from football when he leaves Manchester City but does not know if he will retire from the game.

The 54-year-old signed a two-year contract extension in November keeping him at the Etihad until June 2027, which would be 11 years after he joined the club.

It is by far the longest coaching spell of his career -- he spent four years at Barcelona, for whom he also played, and three in charge of Bayern Munich.

The Catalan has spearheaded an unprecedented period of success for City, leading them to six Premier League titles and delivering a first Champions League crown as part of a treble in 2022/23, but this season has been tough.

"After my contract with City, I'm going to stop. I'm sure," Guardiola told ESPN. "I don't know if I'm going to retire, but I'm going to take a break. How I want to be remembered, I don't know. "All coaches want to win



so we can have a memorable job, but I believe that the fans of Barcelona, Bayern Munich and City had fun watching my teams play. I don't think we should ever live thinking about whether we're going to be remembered.

"When we die, our families cry for two or three days and then that's it -- you're forgotten. In the careers of coaches, there are good and bad ones, the important thing is that the good ones are remembered for longer."

Fourth-placed City, who play Wolves on Friday,

were favourites to wrap up a fifth straight Premier League title this season but suffered a dramatic slump.

With four league games of the season to go they are 21 points behind champions Liverpool and locked in a fight to qualify for the Champions League next season.

Guardiola, whose team are through to a third successive FA Cup final, against Crystal Palace, said it had been a season of "great learning" and he had not expected City's decline to be so steep. "I knew there would be a moment when we would fall, but we fell a lot," he said. "We didn't expect to be so far, but we can't win them all.

"What we did during 10, nine years was exceptional, but now we have to sit down and learn to try to understand what we need to produce in the future." Guardiola said in December that he would not "take another team" after leaving City, though he left open the possibility of becoming a national coach.

Stokes fit to captain England against Zimbabwe



LONDON (AFP): Ben Stokes was given the all-clear to captain England in their one-off Test against Zimbabwe later this month as he was named in a 13-man squad announced Friday.

The 33-year-old all-rounder has been recovering from hamstring surgery after breaking down in New Zealand in December, his second hamstring tear in five months.

Stokes has not featured for county side Durham so far this season but is set to skipper England in the opening Test of their home season, which is a four-day game rather than the standard five, at Trent Bridge from May 22 to 25.

England selector Luke Wright expects Stokes, a lively seamer, to play a full part with both bat and ball against Zimbabwe even though he is not due to play any competitive cricket before the Test.

"All things being equal, he's going to be fine to play a full part," Wright said.

"We might have to restrict him bowling a certain amount of overs just to be careful with him coming back but he will be at full pace.

"He's been non-stop now in the nets getting ready, he's ready and raring to go and excited about

getting stuck in."

Cook debut? Uncapped Essex seamer Sam Cook is also in the squad and could be in line for a Test debut in Nottingham, with pacemen Mark Wood, Brydon Carse, Chris Woakes and Olly Stone all injured.

Express quick Jofra Archer is not yet considered ready for red-ball international cricket.

Cook, 27, has taken 318 first-class wickets at an impressive average of under 20, though doubts have persisted over whether he is quick enough to be effective at Test level.

But Cook, with England greats James Anderson and Stuart Broad retired, and Woakes out of action, could now fill the vacancy in the attack for an accurate swing and seam bowler of lesser pace.

"He is not just a swing bowler, he swings and seams the ball," said Wright. "He gets bounce. He's a highly skilled bowler, yes he's not up there at 85, 86 mph and that's fine but what he has got is incredible skill."

Cook is one of two uncapped players in the squad, together with Jordan Cox, his Essex teammate, who may end up as the reserve batsman.

Batter Jacob Bethell,

who impressed on England's tour of New Zealand, is currently playing in the Indian Premier League.

Nottinghamshire pacer Josh Tongue will hope to make a return to Test action on his home ground, having last featured for England during the 2023 Ashes, and could form part of a pace attack that also includes Gus Atkinson.

Off-spinner Shoaib Bashir has kept his place despite mediocre displays so far this season in the County Championship.

It will be the first Test in England since 2003 for Zimbabwe.

The African nation are bottom of the Test rankings but last week won their first Test in four years, beating Bangladesh by three wickets in Sylhet.

"With anyone, you never underestimate them," said Wright. "For them to beat Bangladesh is a great effort.

"It will be great welcoming them over here, it's been a long time. It's a great opportunity for the guys to get stuck in."

The Trent Bridge match marks the start of a busy home summer for Stokes's men, with England also facing India in a five-Test series before the 2025/26 Ashes in Australia.

Zalmi down United by six wickets

LAHORE (Monitoring Desk): Babar Azam and Maaz Sadaqat hit fifties as Peshawar Zalmi defeated Islamabad United by six wickets in the 22nd match of the Pakistan Super League (PSL) 10 at the Gaddafi Stadium on Friday.

Chasing 144, Zalmi got over the line in 16.4 overs, with six wickets in hand and 20 balls to spare.

The chasing side was off to a shaky start as Mitchell Owen fell on the second ball of the innings after hitting the first for a six.

His opening partner Saim Ayub was quick to follow him as he was dismissed by Ben Dwarshuis after scoring just one run.

With Peshawar Zalmi struggling at 12/2, captain Babar Azam and wicket-keeping batter Mohammad Harris joined forces to stabilise the innings.

However, Harris fell to Riley Meredith in the 6th over after scoring 13 runs,

with the scoreboard showing 38/3 in 5.5 overs.

Maaz Sadaqat then joined Babar Azam, and the two played with caution to put their side in a strong position.

Maaz Sadaqat scored his fifty in his first game for Zalmi in the ongoing PSL 10 and stitched a match-winning 98-run partnership to take the side to 140 in 15.4 overs.

The left-handed batter was dismissed after scoring 55 off 33 balls, with the help of four fours and three sixes.

Babar Azam remained unbeaten on 53 as they chased down the 144-run target over the loss of four wickets.

Earlier, Mohammad Ali bagged three wickets as Peshawar Zalmi restricted Islamabad United to 143 in the 22nd match of the PSL 10.

After opting to bat first, the defending champions



were off to a strong start as Sahibzada Farhan and Kyle Mayers gave them a 58-run opening stand.

Farhan fell to Ahmed Daniyal after scoring 36 off 35 deliveries.

Mayers followed him to the dugout in the very next over after scoring 18 runs as the scoreboard showed 62/2 in 9.1 overs.

Saim Ayub removed Salman Agha on four while Islamabad United captain Shadab Khan made 15 off eight before his dismissal.

Colin Munro's 11-run knock came to an end as he fell victim to Mohammad

Ali in the 14th over as United were reduced to 89/5.

The defending champions continued to lose wickets at intervals as Peshawar Zalmi bowlers kept a tight line and length throughout the innings.

Ben Dwarshuis played a crucial late-inning 33-run knock to help Islamabad United post 143 on the scoreboard.

For the Zalmi, Ali took three wickets while Luke Wood, Alzarri Joseph, Saim Ayub, Hussain Talat and Ahmed Daniyal picked up a wicket each.

PSL X to observe childhood cancer awareness day

ISLAMABAD (APP): The HBL Pakistan Super League, as part of its corporate social responsibility, is once again set to observe Childhood Cancer Awareness Day on May 3.

On this occasion teams, match officials and commentators will be involved in the support of the campaign, said a press release.

HBL PSL Chief Executive Officer Salman Naseer said, "As part of HBL PSL's corporate social responsibility, we are observing Childhood Cancer Awareness on 3 May. This reflects our commitment to using the platform of cricket to help raise awareness around health challenges that affect many lives across the country.

"We are thankful to the teams, players, commentators, fans and media friends for their continued support in promoting these awareness efforts through HBL PSL."

The HBL PSL X will see the Childhood Cancer Awareness Day to be observed during Quetta Gladiators and Islamabad United fixture at the Gaddafi Stadium on Saturday at 8pm.

Match officials and match commentators at the venue will wear gold ribbons, synonymous with Childhood Cancer Awareness campaigns. Gladiators and United players will wear Golden caps as well as gold ribbons.

The stumps in use for the match will also be branded in gold, while three cancer patients will be invited at the ground where they will be presented signed shirts from both sides.

Additionally, Childhood cancer awareness messages would be displayed on the digital screens placed at the stadium to create awareness about the disease aimed at educating the spectators.

Maresca confident Chelsea can close gap to Liverpool

LONDON (AFP): Enzo Maresca believes his Chelsea team can get closer to Liverpool next season as he prepares to welcome the newly crowned Premier League champions to Stamford Bridge on Sunday.

Chelsea were within two points of Liverpool in mid-December, two months after pushing them hard in a 2-1 defeat at Anfield. Liverpool manager Arne Slot said he felt the visitors were the better team that day.

Fifth-placed Chelsea are now 22 points behind the champions but still have their eyes firmly set on a top-five finish, which would secure Champions League qualification.

"I think the gap (to Liverpool) is there, you can see it clearly," said Maresca, whose team have won five of their past eight

league matches.

"My feeling is that we are in the right direction and hopefully this gap can be closed. The difference has been probably that they have been consistent compared to us."

"Also in terms of experience, players that know how to win games, I think they have something more compared to us."

Maresca was asked if he would look to follow the example of Liverpool, who signed experienced pair Virgil van Dijk and Alisson in 2018, underpinning success in the Champions League and Premier League.

"If you want to close the gap with this kind of club, for sure (you need experience)," said the Italian.

"Our team next season will be better in terms of experience, because this

year has been one more year together.

"For sure the ones that are growing like Levi (Colwill) for instance, growing a lot in terms of leadership, next year will be better and better."

Maresca, whose team have one foot in the UEFA Conference League final following a 4-1 first-leg win over Djurgarden, said Chelsea would give the new champions a guard of honour before kick-off on Sunday.

"I don't think we need that to understand how good it is to win the Premier League," he said. "We know that it's something very nice.

"But for sure when you are there, probably in their mind (the players) are thinking 'I would like one day to be there'."

Vine claims Tour de Romandie stage 3 win, Baudin retains lead



COSSONAY (AFP): Australian rider Jay Vine made a solo break to win Friday's third stage of the Tour de Romandie as French rider Alex Baudin retained the overall race leader's yellow jersey.

Vine broke away with one kilometre to go of the 183.1 km circuit around Cossonay.

He crossed the line two seconds ahead of the peloton led by Frenchman Lenny Martinez of Bahrain. Vine's UAE Portuguese teammate Joao Goncalves finished third at the same time.

Olympic champion Remco Evenepoel, in his first stage race since a heavy fall in training in

December, finished seventh on the day and sits ninth in the overall standings, 52sec off Baudin's pace.

The race's penultimate stage on Saturday over 128.4km between Sion and the Thyon 2000 ski resort, and features three category-one climbs, including a summit finish.

Ruud downs Cerundolo to book spot in Madrid Open final



MADRID (AFP): Casper Ruud squeezed into the 25th tour-level final of his career with a 6-4, 7-5 victory over Argentina's Francisco Cerundolo at the Madrid Open on Friday.

The Norwegian saved a whopping 15 of 18 break points faced during the one-hour 54-minute clash to reach a third Masters 1000 final, and first since Monte Carlo last year.

Overcoming early chest discomfort and in the face of a rowdy pro-Argentinian crowd, Ruud was proud of how he handled the adversity to book a final against Jack Draper or Lorenzo Musetti.

"There's a lot of things to deal with as a player. It's a lot of fun, of course, travelling the world and living this life is like a dream, don't get me wrong. But of course you have struggles all along, almost every single week you're dealing with some kind of minor pain or fatigue or stress somehow," said the 26-year-old Ruud.

Ruud had to save four break points before he held serve in the opening game.

At the 2-1 changeover, the Norwegian asked for a medical timeout and told the trainer he felt a sharp pain in his chest while warming up with the medicine ball before the match, and it extended all the way to his back.

Ruud received treatment and took painkillers before stepping back on court.

Unnerved by the interruption, Cerundolo took the next two games, breaking Ruud at love to move ahead 3-2 but the Argentine's lead was short-lived as his opponent struck right back.

Ruud upped the pressure in game 10 with a signature inside-out forehand and snatched the set on the 48-minute mark.

The second set was a see-saw affair that witnessed a combined five breaks of serve from 18 break point opportunities.

During a marathon 13-minute game, Ruud saved seven

break points to hold for 3-2, but not before he had an argument with the chair umpire, over Argentinian fans disrupting him ahead of his serve.

The pivotal moment came in game 12 as Ruud converted a second match point to reach his first Madrid final. "Too good, huh. Good luck," Cerundolo told Ruud at the net.

After dropping to 15 in the world, Ruud is projected to return to the top 10 by virtue of reaching the final.

"I wasn't sure I was going to be able to finish the match, honestly," said the Norwegian.

"I felt something in my rib during warm-up, just towards the end, before going out and I felt it on almost every shot, especially the serve. And luckily I got some quick treatment on it. Of course I'll go and check it out more now. I took a couple of painkillers, which is not ideal but in a situation like this, you have to do that every now and then."



In brief

IRSA releases 154,200 cusecs water

ISLAMABAD (APP): Indus River System Authority (IRSA) on Friday released 154,200 cusecs water from various rim stations with inflow of 192,600 cusecs. According to the data released by IRSA, the water level in River Indus at Tarbela Dam was 1433.61 feet which was 31.61 feet higher than dead level of 1402.00 feet. Water inflow and outflow in the dam was recorded as 76,900 cusecs and 55,000 cusecs respectively. The water level in River Jhelum at Mangla Dam was 1133.70 feet, which was 83.70 feet higher than its dead level of 1,050 feet. The inflow and outflow of water was recorded 48,500 cusecs and 32,000 cusecs respectively. The release of water at Kalabagh, Taunsa, Guddu and Sukkur was recorded as 95,700, 48,100, 39,500 and 9,800 cusecs respectively. Similarly, from River Kabul, a total of 35,400 cusecs of water released at Nowshera and 23,300 cusecs released from River Chenab at Marala.

5 drug suppliers held

RAWALPINDI (APP): The Rawalpindi Police continued the crackdown against drug suppliers and arrested five more accused with more than 6 kilograms of charas on Friday. According to the police spokesman, the New Town Police recovered 2.5 kg charas from accused Tauseef. Likewise, the Taxila Police nabbed three accused Zohaib Akhtar, Tayyab Saeed and Samiullah with 1.26 kg, 1.12 kg and 600 grams of the contraband item respectively. Similarly, the Wah Saddar also netted accused Shaukat recovering 800 grams charas from his possession.

Police hold 13 criminals

RAWALPINDI (APP): The Rawalpindi Police on Friday continued operations against criminal elements and arrested 13 accused, including liquor suppliers, an illegal arm owner, gamblers and a proclaimed offender. According to the police spokesman, the Wah Cantt and Mandra Police nabbed accused Wajahat and Haroon respectively with 10 liters of liquor each. Similarly, the Taxila Police recovered 5 liters of liquor from accused Nadeem, while the Bani Police held the accused Hameed recovering a 30-bore pistol along with ammunition. Likewise, the Sadiqabad Police arrested proclaimed offender Shaukat Zeb, wanted criminal in a cheque dishonour case since 2022. Meanwhile, the Taxila Police also held eight accused for gambling on cards, with stake money of Rs 30,000. Seven mobile phones and playing cards were recovered from the accused including Zameer, Mangal Khan, Jahanzeb, Arif, Qaiser, Mirafsan, Arif and Naqash.

Proclaimed offenders nabbed

RAWALPINDI (APP): The Gujjar Khan Police on Friday arrested two proclaimed offenders involved in separate murder cases of 2023 and a month ago. According to the Rawalpindi Police, the accused Jamil, who had been declared a proclaimed offender, had killed Muhammad Amir along with his accomplices in December 2023 on dispute over marriage proposal. The accused had thrown the victim into a dam with his hands and feet tied and face covered with a cloth. The police had then registered a murder case against unknown suspects.

Pakistan's sovereignty non-negotiable: Sherry Rehman

ISLAMABAD (APP): Former Ambassador & PPP Senator Sherry Rehman Friday issued a stern warning to India, stating that Pakistan will unleash its full fury and deliver a crushing response to any aggression, particularly over the disputed Indus water territory, where Pakistan's sovereignty will not be compromised.

In an exclusive conversation, Sherry Rehman stated, "Pakistan's sovereignty is non-negotiable, and we will not back down on the Indus water issue. Any aggression will be met with

a resolute response".

Sherry Rehman said that India has been threatening Pakistan over the Indus water issue since the beginning and is also engaging in baseless propaganda against Pakistan.

She alleged that Modi's government has a pattern of weaponizing water and leveling accusations against Pakistan. "India's evidence-free allegations against Pakistan are nothing but a desperate attempt to deflect attention," she added.

She further commended America for its balanced stance, showing restraint in

the matter.

The entire nation stands united and will not compromise on Pakistan's sovereignty, she added.

Responding to a query, she stressed that water is a matter of national security for Pakistan, warning that any threat to its water resources would be met with unwavering resolve and unrelenting action.

"Pakistan will not tolerate any hostile intentions and those who dare to threaten its interests will face a robust and resolute response, more potent than ever," she added.

Nation backs Armed Forces amid eastern border tensions

RAWALPINDI (APP): Rawalpindi citizens powerfully displayed their patriotism and unity, and have pledged unwavering support to Pakistan's armed forces amid escalating tensions along the eastern border.

Residents from all walks of life expressed their solidarity to stand "shoulder to shoulder" with the military in the face of any developing situation.

Talking to APP, Amir Saeed conveyed a strong message, declaring his readiness to respond with full force to any aggression from across the border.

"Our soldiers sacrificed

their lives to protect us and today, we stand as one to support them," he said.

Hafiz Zahid, a shopkeeper said, "If India dares to any aggression, the entire nation will rise in defence of our homeland."

Tauqeer Abid offered his services to the armed forces at any border.

"I want to fight the enemy along with valour Pakistani troops", he said.

Even kids are so enthusiastic about showing emotional attachment with the armed forces.

Ali Malik, Muhammad Abdullah, Ammar bin Yasir and Muhammad Haseeb, school going stu-

dents expressed their willingness to serve the Pakistan Army.

"We will join the Pakistan Army and will teach a lesson to the enemies of Pakistan", they said.

Amjad Zeb, Principal of a private college said that his college has arranged a series of lectures for students regarding first aid and blood donation in wake of any emergency situation.

"We salute the Armed Forces for their sacrifices they have laid for the country's defence. Our college students and faculty will remain available for any role at our part", he said.

Japan hosts meeting to enhance Pakistani workforce integration



ISLAMABAD (APP): Japan's Ambassador to Pakistan, Akamatsu Shuichi on Friday hosted the 'Pakistan-Japan Human Resources Stakeholders Meeting' at his residence, bringing together around 70 key stakeholders involved in advancing employment opportunities for Pakistani professionals in Japan.

The event convened high-ranking officials including Minister for Overseas Pakistanis and Human Resource Development Chaudhry Salik Hussain, Minister of State for IT and Telecom Shaza Fatima Khawaja, Minister of State for Overseas Pakistanis Mohammad Awn Saqlain, and senior representatives from both Pakistani and Japanese public and private sector institutions.

Prominent organizations in attendance included Plus W, Proud Partners, Japan-Pakistan Innovation Institute (JPII), Japan Station, the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), and Japan External Trade Organization (JETRO).

The forum focused on increasing the placement of skilled Pakistani labor in Japan across high-demand sectors such as information technology, healthcare, agriculture, construction, and manufacturing. Discussions centered on

building stronger institutional linkages, enhancing worker preparedness, and creating smooth pathways for deployment.

In his opening remarks, Ambassador Akamatsu underscored the growing contribution of Pakistani professionals to Japan's labor market, noting that their success is becoming a vital pillar of bilateral relations.

"The value of Pakistani talent is being increasingly recognized in Japan," said the Ambassador. "We anticipate rising demand for skilled Pakistani professionals, particularly as Japan continues to seek high-quality human resources. This collaboration will not only benefit Japan but also contribute to Pakistan's economy through remittances and skill development."

Highlighting the Osaka-Kansai Expo (April 13 - October 13), Ambassador Akamatsu praised the Pakistan Pavilion — built with pink Himalayan salt — as a major attraction, expressing hope that it would spark further interest among Japanese citizens in Pakistan's culture and potential. He also encouraged more Pakistani visitors to experience Japan's advanced, human-centric technologies.

Minister Chaudhry Salik Hussain welcomed

the deepening cooperation between Pakistan and Japan, commending initiatives such as the partnership between the Overseas Employment Corporation (OEC) and Plus W under the Specified Skilled Workers (SSW) program, which now includes diverse sectors beyond IT.

Minister Shaza Fatima highlighted Pakistan's strong showing at Japan IT Week in April, where 15 Pakistani companies secured contracts exceeding \$600,000. She called for more roadshows to showcase Pakistani tech talent and advocated for a workforce matching platform to better align supply with Japanese demand. She also proposed including IT and telecom sectors in Japan's JDS scholarship program.

Speakers from JICA, JETRO, OEC, Plus W (celebrating its 5th anniversary), and a bilingual Pakistani student currently studying in Japan shared progress on initiatives to enhance workforce collaboration and strengthen people-to-people ties.

The meeting concluded with a shared commitment to deepen long-term collaboration between Pakistan and Japan through human capital development and enhanced cross-border mobility of skilled professionals.



ISLAMABAD: Members of the 18th Youth Parliament Pakistan in collaboration with Pakistan Institute of Legislative Development And Transparency-PILDAT visiting the Senate Museum.

Press Freedom key to promoting democracy: Ayaz

ISLAMABAD (APP): Speaker National Assembly Sarder Ayaz Sadiq has said that freedom of the press is pivotal for the promotion of democratic values.

He said the role of the journalistic community is important in promoting a positive image of the country and fostering an informed society. Ayaz Sadiq also said the Constitution of Pakistan guarantees freedom of expression.

He expressed these views on the eve of World Press Freedom Day, observed every year on 3rd under the auspices of the United Nations. Ayaz Sadiq also appreciated the important role played by journalists in the Press Gallery of

the Parliament, who serve as a bridge between legislative proceedings and the general public.

He highlighted the irreplaceable sacrifices offered by journalists in their quest to bring truth and facts to light. The Speaker said the media plays a fundamental role in shaping an educated, aware and responsible society.

Ayaz Sadiq commended the dedication of journalists who perform their duties in conflict zones, often at great personal risk. He paid rich tribute to journalists serving in Palestine, Indian-Occupied Kashmir, and other war-torn regions, recognizing their courage and professionalism.

Ayaz Sadiq expressed

sadness over the alarming number of journalists who lose their lives each year while fulfilling their professional responsibilities, calling it a matter of grave concern. He said the need for a collective and coordinated strategy to ensure the safety and protection of journalists in the line of duty.

The Speaker reiterated that the Parliament of Pakistan is fully committed to upholding press freedom and is determined to enact effective legislation to safeguard the rights of the journalistic community. He said that the passage of the Right of Access to Information Act, 2017, as a significant step toward ensuring public access to information.

Highlighting the role of

Pakistani media during recent Indian aggressive policies in the region, Ayaz Sadiq praised the journalistic community for demonstrating exceptional professionalism and patriotism. Through fact-based reporting, the media played a key role in revealing the true face of India to the international community.

Deputy Speaker Syed Ghulam Mustafa Shah, has affirmed Parliament's unwavering belief in freedom of expression and its commitment to ensuring that journalists have timely and accurate access to information. He said the National Assembly has consistently pursued legislation aimed at the protection and welfare of journalists.

ICT on alert as rain triggers citywide rescue drive

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Islamabad administration has launched a fast-paced response to tackle flooding, clear roads, and assist residents affected by the weather as the city has entered a high-alert mode to face heavy rain and stormy conditions.

On the instructions of Chairman Capital Development Authority (CDA) and Chief Commissioner Islamabad, Muhammad Ali Randhawa, operations have been intensified throughout the city. These include drainage work, clearing fallen branches, removing debris, and restoring traffic flow disrupted by the rains.

Multiple city departments are working jointly in these efforts. Rescue 1122, Metropolitan Corporation Islamabad (MCI), Islamabad Police, CDA, and district administration officials are actively coordinating field operations. Their teams are working around the clock in key areas that saw water accumulation, traffic congestion, and fallen structures.

The recent rainfall has caused water to pool on roads and in low-lying areas, slowing down traffic and creating mobility challenges for commuters. Drainage systems have been pushed to capacity, prompting emergency teams to use pumps and other machinery to drain the excess water. Field workers have also been clearing blocked manholes and removing waste to improve the water flow.

Large trees and signboards were also affected by the high winds. In several areas, tree branches and boards were seen lying on roads, creating obstacles for traffic and pedestrians. The CDA and MCI teams have focused on removing these obstructions, using cranes and cutting equipment to safely shift broken materials off the streets.

Meanwhile, traffic police are deployed to help regulate vehicle movement where congestion has been reported. With power cuts also affecting some parts of the city during the rains, officials have worked with relevant departments to resume services as quickly as possible. Chairman CDA Muhammad Ali Randhawa has been closely monitoring the situation and has appreciated the role of all involved departments.

Health employees' leaves canceled due to emergency

RAWALPINDI (APP): Punjab health department has announced cancellation of 'all kinds' of leaves of all health professionals.

Through a notification issued by the Secretary Specialized Healthcare & Medical Education Department, Punjab strict directive read "all kinds of leaves for doctors, nurses, and allied health professionals" have been cancelled under its administrative control.

The directive, referenced as NO.E&A(Health)1-454/2019, follows a previous order dated April 28,

2025, and takes immediate effect until further notice.

According to the notification, all earned leaves, extraordinary leaves (EOL), and casual leaves stand canceled. However, certain exemptions have been made including ex-Pakistan leave, Hajj/ Umrah leave, medical leave, maternity leave, study leave, and Iddat leave.

The decision highlighted the urgent need to ensure maximum workforce availability during the recent development after the escalation arose from the eastern border.

Moreover, the order includes all concerned medical professionals presently on leave must report back to their respective departments/ institutions immediately.

Implementing the order, Rawalpindi's health education institutions and hospitals have seen strong response from the medical and paramedical staff.

Sources informed APP that the attendance at allied hospitals including Holy Family Hospital, Benazir Bhutto Hospital and DHQ Hospital has reached the desired strength.

Bangladesh HC celebrates 'Pohela Boishakh' showcasing cultural heritage

ISLAMABAD (APP): The High Commission of Bangladesh in Pakistan hosted a vibrant celebration of Pohela Boishakh, the Bengali New Year, on Thursday evening at the Silk Road Cultural Centre, highlighting the festival's deep historical and agricultural roots.

High Commissioner Md. Iqbal Hussain Khan welcomed guests and shed light on the origins of Pohela Boishakh, tracing its significance back to the Mughal era. "This day holds special historical value, particularly during the reign of Emperor Akbar the Great, who institutionalized the Bengali calendar to help farmers align crop cycles with the seasons," he said.

"The purpose was to provide a clear understanding of the best times for sowing and harvesting specific crops."

The event was attended by a diverse gathering, including members of the diplomatic community, civil society, and cultural figures. Among the distinguished guests was Secretary of Information and Broadcasting, Ambreen Jan, who joined as the chief guest.

Sharing her personal connection to Bangladesh, Jan recalled her six-year posting in Dhaka, where she celebrated Pohela Boishakh at the Pakistani High Commission and wore a traditional Bangladeshi sari for the first time. "It's not just a cultural event, it's a celebra-

tion of life itself," she said.

She lauded the Bangladesh High Commission for organizing the event and emphasized the importance of enhancing bilateral relations through cultural, media, and people-to-people exchanges. "We are committed to deepening cooperation with Bangladesh at every level," she added.

The evening featured a blend of Bengali and Pakistani cultural performances, traditional Bengali cuisine, and vibrant attire. Bangladeshi diaspora donned traditional dress, while live music and folk songs captivated the audience, creating an atmosphere of joy and shared heritage.

FJWU honoured dengue warriors

RAWALPINDI (APP): Fatima Jinnah Women University (FJWU) hosted a Dengue Awareness Seminar and Recognition Ceremony on Friday, with MPA Tahira Mushtaq as the chief guest.

The event celebrated the efforts of student volunteers and health professionals in the fight against dengue. Over 50 students were honoured with appreciation certificates for their dedicated role in dengue prevention campaigns.

"These young warriors have shown remarkable

commitment to create dengue awareness among the community," said MPA Tahira Mushtaq while addressing the ceremony.

She said that their participation reflected the spirit of social responsibility.

The ceremony was attended by prominent health officials including District Health Officer Dr. Ehsan Ghani, Deputy DHOs Jawad Zahid and Zarqa Mir, and Dengue Focal Person Cantt.

Shields were presented to Dr. Nosheen and Professor Azra, Dean of

FJWU, acknowledging their outstanding coordination in student awareness programs.

DHO Dr. Ghani said that dengue prevention requires collective action. "Today's event demonstrates how educational institutions and government can work together for community welfare", he added.

The seminar featured informative sessions on dengue prevention, underlining the importance of community participation in eliminating the endemic.

8 family members injured in cylinder blast
JALALABAD (Pajhwok): Eight members of a family, including women, were injured when a gas cylinder exploded in their house in the Batikot district of eastern Nangarhar province, police said Friday. Nangarhar police spokesman Sayed Tayyeb Hammad told Pajhwok Afghan News that a kitchen gas cylinder exploded in a house in Dagai area yesterday evening. He added that eight members of the family, five men and three women.

7 water supply networks being constructed
BAMYAN (Pajhwok): Construction work has been launched on seven water supply networks in Kohmard district of central Bamyan province at a cost of over 28 million afghanis. Abdul Saboor Farzan Sighani, spokesman for the Bamyan governor, told Pajhwok Afghan News that these projects were being executed in Banq Bala, Kalich, Shapshta, Zir Dara Gili, Karimak and Chartaq Pitab villages of the district with financial support from the World Bank.

Asia is comparable to a living body composed of soil and water. The heart that beats inside the body is Afghanistan. The destruction of Afghanistan would be the destruction of Asia. And in its progress and prosperity lies the well-being of Asia. - Allama Iqbal

Afghanistan's NEPA Warns of Environmental Project Suspensions



KABUL (TOLONews): The head of the National Environmental Protection Agency (NEPA) during a press conference in Kabul expressed concern over the suspension of environmental projects. Matiulhaq Khalis emphasized that Afghanistan must gain membership and participation in international environmental forums. He added that the agency has been invited to the upcoming Kazan Conference. Matiulhaq Khalis, head of NEPA: "We have received an invitation to attend a conference in Russia scheduled for May 22-23, and we are working to participate in it. Following that, a conference titled 'Snow Leopard' will be held in Kyrgyzstan, for which we have also received an invitation and plan to attend. In addition, there will be an international exhibition in Uzbekistan, where we also intend to participate." Khalis added that around 32 to 33 million trees have been planted across the country so far and urged relevant institutions to cooperate further with NEPA in this effort. "About 32 to 33 million trees have been planted across Afghanistan, which is a major achievement for us, but we are not stopping here," he said. Representatives of environmental organizations have also called on NEPA to focus more on climate change efforts, greening the country, tree planting, and their protection. Hayatullah Wahdat, an environmental NGO representative, said: "Thirty percent of our population has left their villages without any formal announcement. In my own village, 50% of families have left, and people don't understand why. They should know it's due to drought." Abdul Rahim Khurram, environmental NGO representative: "This year, we planted 150,000 fruit and non-fruit trees, and if God wills, we aim to double this number." Earlier, Sadr Azam Osmani, deputy minister of agriculture, irrigation, and livestock, announced the planting of 16 million trees this year.

Saffron exports decline despite rising production in Afghanistan



KABUL (TOLONews): The Ministry of Commerce reports that in the past year, 59 tons of saffron worth \$39 million were exported—8 tons less than the previous year. A k h u n d z a d a Abdulsalam Jawad, spokesperson for the Ministry of Industry and Commerce, said: "In 1403 (solar year), Afghanistan exported 59 tons of saffron worth approximately \$39 million to countries including India, Spain, Saudi Arabia, the United States, the United Arab Emirates, France, Australia, Turkey, and others." The Afghanistan Saffron Union also stated that saffron cultivation has increased compared to previous years, and farmers are showing greater interest. Officials from the union have called on the caretaker government to remove export barriers and offer serious support to farmers and traders in this sector. Mohammad Ebrahim Adel, head of the Afghanistan Saffron Union, said: "We are still facing unresolved problems in the export sector and are currently in discussions with the Ministries of Commerce and Agriculture to remove the obstacles hindering saffron exports." Qudratullah Rahmati, a saffron exporter, said: "The main challenges in Afghanistan's saffron exports include banking issues, lack of infrastructure, and inadequate support in saffron marketing, which has led to a 30-40 percent decline in exports." According to the union, if the current trend of cultivation and farmer interest continues, saffron production in 1404 (solar year) may reach approximately 65 tons nationwide.

Torkham administrative complex nears completion

KABUL (TOLONews): Construction of the administrative complex in the temporary returnee camp in Torkham Township, located in Momandara district of Nangarhar province, is nearly 90 percent complete. According to officials, the complex is being built on an area of 2,500 square meters and will contain 67 administrative rooms. Once completed, it will provide essential services for Afghans recently returned from Pakistan and will streamline bureaucratic procedures, reducing multi-day processing to just a few hours. Babar Shah Hanif, head of the administrative complex project, said: "This building consists of 67 rooms and is being constructed on 2,500 square meters of land. It includes all necessary facilities. The project is funded by the National Development Company and is being built under the supervision of the Deputy Administrative Office of the Prime Minister." Mohammad Hashim Maiwandwal, head of the temporary Omari Returnee Camp in Torkham, said: "Twelve of our committee offices will be based in this building, along with representatives of various organizations. We've allocated about 28 to 30 rooms specifically for these organizations."

Fletcher: Donor countries must not abandon Afghanistan



KABUL (Ariana News): Tom Fletcher, the United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, has urged donor countries not to abandon Afghanistan amid the difficult circumstances it is facing. In an exclusive interview with Ariana News, Fletcher stated that humanitarian needs in Afghanistan remain high and stressed that the voices of Afghan women and girls will not go unheard on the UN stage, and their challenges will not be ignored. "As you mentioned, the humanitarian needs in Afghanistan are very significant. More than 20 million people in Afghanistan currently require humanitarian assistance. I wanted to spend nearly a week in Afghanistan to visit Kandahar, Kunduz, and here in Kabul, speak with local communities, and understand how they perceive their extensive humanitarian needs. I also met with our outstanding aid teams working in the field. They tell me that the scale of the needs is as large as ever, because in addition to decades of war, poverty, and inequality, the climate crisis has now added to these problems—especially affecting the most vulnerable," said Fletcher. He added that the U.S. aid cuts have impacted their operations in Afghanistan. Fletcher stated: "My message to donor countries and the international community is very simple: do not retreat. Do not abandon Afghanistan and leave it to face these enormous needs alone. We must be here. We must remain here sustainably, engage in dialogue with local communities, be as effective as possible, and deliver aid with the generosity required by this moment." He further noted that Afghanistan has taken steps toward progress and has achieved the necessary economic development to stand independently without international reliance. "As humanitarian aid workers, our future goal should be to be no longer needed here, because Afghanistan has found its own way, has taken its path toward development, and has achieved the economic progress necessary to stand independently without international support. Our ideal should be that one day Afghanistan does not need us and we can leave," he added. Tom Fletcher also emphasized that, within the framework of the United Nations and with whatever budget they can secure, they will remain in Afghanistan and continue to serve as effectively as possible.

Islamic Emirate Says UNAMA Report 'Detached From Reality'



KABUL (TOLONews): The Islamic Emirate rejected the latest report by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) concerning the state of human rights in the country. The Ministry for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice labeled the report baseless, stating that the country's laws are implemented based on Islamic principles. Saif al-Salam Khyber, the ministry's spokesperson, said: "This report is not only detached from reality, but it is also a blatant violation of Islamic values and a disrespect to our Sharia. We strongly condemn this move by a foreign entity that dares to challenge Islamic law and interpret Sharia-based rulings—such as the hijab—as a form of women's deprivation." UNAMA stated that women in Afghanistan continue to be denied fundamental rights such as work, education, and independent access to services. In its quarterly report, UNAMA also expressed concern over civilian casualties in border attacks and the increase in corporal punishment cases over the past three months. Stéphane Dujarric, spokesperson for the UN Secretary-General, said: "The mission continued to receive reports that women in Afghanistan are still denied of joining the workforce, accessing services without a male relative and girls are still deprived of their right to education." Women's rights activist Tafsir Siyahpush stated: "Our demand from the Islamic Emirate is that they must listen to our voices because we witness increasing restrictions every day. We also urge the international community to respond to the voices of Afghan women." According to UNAMA's report, from January 1 to March 31, thirteen people—including women, men, and children—were killed in border attacks in Paktika and Nangarhar provinces. Political analyst Abdul Sadiq Hamidzoy said: "UNAMA is a mission mandated by the Security Council to help establish global order. Therefore, it was UNAMA's responsibility to formally refer Pakistan's blatant injustice to the International Court of Justice (ICJ), but they only mentioned it in passing." Previously, Zabihullah Mujahid, spokesperson for the Islamic Emirate, had also stated that the United Nations mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) is attempting to exaggerate negative issues and does not reflect the positive developments.

Online university offers lifeline to thousands of Afghan girls

KABUL (Amu tv): Amid sweeping restrictions on women's education under Taliban rule, a group of former university professors in Afghanistan has launched an all-women online university, offering a rare educational lifeline to thousands of girls barred from attending universities. Now entering its sixth academic semester, the institution, founded in December 2022, boasts more than 17,000 students enrolled across 15 fields of study, with instruction provided by some 700 volunteer professors, its founder told Amu. The university was established on December 22, 2022, by Abdul Farid Salangi, a former academic, as a direct response to the Taliban's order banning female students from higher education. Just days earlier, on December 20, the Taliban's Ministry of Higher Education had ordered universities nationwide to close their doors to women—a ban that remains in effect more than 860 days later. "We believe that without women's active partic-



ipation in political, social, and cultural spheres, we cannot build a dynamic and developed society," Salangi said. "If we aim for a self-sufficient nation, we must include Afghan women as half of society and as an active force." The university has become a sanctuary of learning for thousands of young women, including those like Neda, who described how losing access to education led to emotional despair. "I had to quit my studies with a broken heart and joined the online university," she said. "What I thought

the initiative say the goal is to provide quality education to women for free, in an effort to soften the blow of educational exclusion and enforced confinement at home. "The biggest goal we've achieved is improving the quality of life for women in Afghanistan," said Adela Zamani, deputy director of student affairs. "We've done this without asking for a single penny, giving them access to something invaluable in this time of crisis." The launch and expansion of the university have coincided with the Taliban's continued exclusion of women from national entrance exams, including the 2025 Kankor—now the third year in which girls have been banned from sitting the exam. Yet even as these restrictions remain in place, the Online Women's University continues to grow. For thousands of Afghan girls cut off from traditional education, it stands as a rare source of hope and intellectual refuge in an otherwise bleak academic landscape. Another student, Nargis Mohammadi, said the closure of universities felt like the death of her dreams. "The doors to education were being shut one after another. I thought my future had disappeared," she said. "Then I heard of the Online Women's University—a place without restrictions or discrimination." Despite Afghanistan's economic turmoil and tightening social restrictions, educators behind

Afghanistan-China rail corridor reaches 10,000 containers milestone

KABUL (TOLONews): The Ministry of Public Works announced that 10,000 containers have so far been transported through the Afghanistan-China economic rail corridor. At a ceremony marking the arrival of the 10,000th container into Afghanistan via this route, the deputy minister of railways described the corridor as a cheaper and easier alternative for transporting goods compared to other routes. He also highlighted ongoing efforts to facilitate trade and improve conditions for Afghan businesses involved in importing and exporting goods across the region. Mohammad Ishaq Sahibzada, deputy minister of railways at the Ministry of Public Works: "In the past year, 10,000 containers have arrived in Afghanistan from China. This route is easier, cheaper, and shorter for traders—it ensures safe and low-cost delivery." Meanwhile, the Chinese ambassador to Kabul, citing growing economic and trade ties with Afghanistan, said that China is seeking to cooperate in Afghanistan's economic development. Zhao Xing, Chinese ambassador to Kabul: "This project strengthens Afghanistan's trust in the region, connects the country to regional stability, boosts its industry, and creates job opportunities for the Afghan people. It also puts Afghanistan on



the path toward modernization and increased exports. China is eager to cooperate economically with Afghanistan." A representative from Uzbekistan who also attended the ceremony said: "All the necessary facilities for trade through this route are available for Afghan traders. We believe the transportation capacity will increase, and the volume of Afghan exports and imports through this corridor has already grown." It is worth noting that this four-nation corridor between Afghanistan, China, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan was launched in 2022, following the return of the Islamic Emirate to power in Afghanistan. Since then, container shipments have been transported through the Hairatan Port.

‘Deadly blockade’ leaves Gaza aid work on verge of collapse: UN, Red Cross

GENEVA (AFP): Two months into Israel’s full blockade on aid into Gaza, humanitarian aid workers described Friday horrific scenes of starving, bloodied children and people fighting over water, with aid operations on the “verge of total collapse.”

The United Nations and the Red Cross sounded the alarm at the dire situation in the war-ravaged Palestinian territory, demanding international action. “The humanitarian response in Gaza is on the verge of total collapse,” the International Committee of the Red Cross warned in a statement.

“Without immediate action, Gaza will descend further into chaos that humanitarian efforts will not be able to mitigate,” Israel strictly controls all inflows of international aid vital for the 2.4 million Palestinians in the Gaza Strip. It halted aid deliveries to Gaza on March 2, days before the collapse of a ceasefire that had significantly reduced hostilities after 15 months of war.

Since the start of the blockade, the United Nations has repeatedly warned of the humanitarian catastrophe on the ground, with famine again looming. The UN’s World Food Programme (WFP) said a week ago that it had sent out its “last remaining food stocks” to kitchens. “Food

stocks have now mainly run out,” Olga Cherevko, a spokeswoman for the UN humanitarian agency OCHA, told reporters in Geneva Friday via video link from Gaza City.

“Community kitchens have begun to shut down (and) more people are going hungry,” she said, pointing to reports of children and other very vulnerable people who have died from malnutrition and ... from the lack of food.” “The blockade is deadly.” Water access was also “becoming impossible,” she warned. “In fact, as I speak to you, just downstairs from this building people are fighting for water. There’s a water truck that has just arrived, and people are killing each other over water,” she said.

The situation is so bad, she said that a friend had described to her a few days ago seeing “people burning ... because of the explosions and there was no water to save them.” At the same time, Cherevko lamented that “hospitals report running out of blood units as mass casualties continue to arrive.” “Gaza lies in ruins, Rubble fills the streets... Many nights, blood-curdling screams of the injured pierce the skies following the deafening sound of another explosion.”

She also decried the mass displacement, with nearly the entire

Gaza population being forced to shift multiple times prior to the brief ceasefire. Since the resumption of hostilities, she said “over 420,000 people have been once again forced to flee, many with only the clothes on their backs, shot at along the way, arriving in overcrowded shelters, as tents and other facilities where people search safety, are being bombed.”

Pascal Hundt, the ICRC’s deputy head of operations, also cautioned that “civilians in Gaza are facing an overwhelming daily struggle to survive the dangers of hostilities, cope with relentless displacement, and endure the consequences of being deprived of urgent humanitarian assistance.” The World Health Organization’s emergencies director Mike Ryan said the situation was an “abomination.”

“We are breaking the bodies and the minds of the children of Gaza. We are starving the children of Gaza,” he told reporters on Thursday. Cherevko slammed decision makers who “have watched in silence the endless scenes of bloodied children, of severed limbs, of grieving parents move swiftly across their screens, month, after month, after month.” “How much more blood must be spilled before enough become enough?”



KYIV: A resident of Zaporizhzhia takes his belongings out of a damaged residential building after a drone attack, amid the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

KP CS visits Kurram, address jirga

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Chief Secretary (CS) Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Shahab Ali Shah on Friday highlighted the role of local elders and tribal leader for peace and said that all possible measures are being taken to ensure sustainable peace in District Kurram.

Addressing tribal jirgas in Parachinar and Sadda, the CS acknowledged the difficulties faced by the local population due to past unrest in the region. He emphasized that the government is taking serious steps to address these issues and establish lasting peace. He said the primary purpose of his visit was to assess public problems firsthand and to take coordinated and effective steps for their immediate resolution.

During the visit, the CS also inspected district Headquarters Hospital Parachinar. He was accompanied by Commissioner Kohat Division, Moatasm Billah Shah, Member of National Assembly Engineer Hamid Hussain, and Deputy Commissioner Kurram.

At the hospital, he interacted with patients to inquire about the available healthcare facilities and the behavior of medical staff. Listening to the patients directly, he assured them of immediate redressal of their concerns.

The Medical Superintendent of DHQ Hospital, Dr. Syed Mir Hasan Jan, gave a detailed briefing on the hospital’s performance, existing facilities, challenges and future plans. The CS directed hospital administration to ensure the provision of high-quality medical services and to further improve the system of service delivery.

He also chaired a meeting at the Deputy Commissioner’s Office in Kurram regarding district development schemes and governance. The meeting was attended by Commissioner Kohat Division, secretaries of various departments, Deputy Commissioner Kurram, Additional Deputy Commissioner, and Assistant Commissioners. The participants were briefed in detail about the ongoing development schemes.

Dar briefs Panama counterpart

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Senator Mohammad Ishaq Dar on Friday held a telephonic conversation with the Foreign Minister of Panama Javier Eduardo Martinez-Acha Vasquez.

The deputy prime minister briefed him on the current regional situation, including India’s inflammatory propaganda and its illegal unilateral actions against Pakistan, including holding in abeyance the Indus Waters Treaty in a clear violation of international law, according to a foreign ministry press release.

Foreign Minister Javier Eduardo Martinez-Acha emphasized that both sides should exercise restraint. Being non-permanent members of the United Nations Security Council, the two sides reaffirmed their commitment to international peace and security.

Russia says it will help Taliban fight IS

MOSCOW (Reuters): Russia will help the Taliban authorities in Afghanistan fight against the Afghan branch of Islamic State, Moscow’s special representative for the country was quoted as saying on Friday.

Zamir Kabulov, a former Russian ambassador to Afghanistan, referred to Islamic State Khorasan (ISIS-K) as the “common enemy” of Moscow and Kabul. “We see and appreciate the efforts that the Taliban are making in the fight against the Afghan wing of ISIS,” Kabulov told the RIA state news agency in an interview.

“We will provide our best assistance to the authorities of (Afghanistan) through specialised structures.” No country currently recognises the Taliban government that seized power in August 2021 as US-led forces staged a chaotic withdrawal from Afghanistan after 20 years

of war. But in a step towards recognition, Russia last month formally removed the Taliban from its list of terrorist organisations, to which it had been added in 2003.

Kabulov’s comments underscore the dramatic rapprochement in recent years between Moscow and Kabul, which President Vladimir Putin said last year was now Russia’s “ally” in combating terrorism. Russia has been left reeling from multiple Islamic State (ISIS)-linked attacks, including the shooting of 145 people at a concert hall outside Moscow in March 2024 which was claimed by ISIS. US officials said they had intelligence indicating ISIS-K was responsible.

The Taliban says it is working to wipe out the group’s presence in Afghanistan. Kabulov said Moscow and Kabul were building up ties in multiple

spheres and told RIA that Russia had offered to accredit an Afghan ambassador in Moscow and was waiting for Kabul’s response. He said Moscow’s suspension of the ban on the Taliban “finally removes all obstacles to full cooperation between our countries in various fields”.

“The arrival of the Afghan ambassador in Moscow will put a final end to this issue,” Russia said last month it aims to strengthen trade, business and investment ties with Kabul, leveraging Afghanistan’s strategic position for future energy and infrastructure projects. Kabulov said joint economic projects would be discussed at a Russia-Afghan business forum later this month in the Russian city of Kazan, naming mineral development and gas pipeline projects as possible areas of cooperation.

Iran says US sanctions ‘will not change’ policy

TEHRAN (AFP): Iran said Friday that continued US sanctions on its trade partners will not alter its policy, after President Donald Trump threatened to penalise countries or individuals dealing in Iranian oil.

“The continuation of these illegal behaviours will not change Iran’s logical, legitimate and international law-based positions,” a foreign ministry statement said, condemning what it called “pressure on Iran’s trade and economic partners.” It added that such sanctions have created “deep suspicion and mistrust about the seriousness of America on the path of diplomacy”.

On Thursday, Trump vowed to enforce sanctions and called for a global boycott of “any amount” of Iranian oil or petrochemicals. “All purchases of Iranian Oil, or Petrochemical products, must stop. NOW!” Trump wrote on his Truth Social platform.

“Any Country or person who buys ANY AMOUNT of OIL or PETROCHEMICALS from Iran will be subject to, immediately, Secondary Sanctions,” he added. His remarks came after Iran confirmed the postponement of the next

round of nuclear talks with the United States, which had been expected to be held on Saturday, with mediator Oman citing “logistical reasons”. Oman said the date for a new round “will be announced when mutually agreed”.

Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi, who headed the Iranian delegation in the three rounds of talks held so far, said Iran was ready for a “just and balanced deal”. “There is no change in our determination to secure a negotiated solution,” Araghchi said on X, adding that any deal should guarantee “an end to sanctions.” The talks mark the highest-level contact on Iran’s nuclear programme since Trump abandoned a landmark accord between Tehran and major powers in 2018.

The US president had written to Iran’s supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei in March urging negotiations but warning of potential military action if they failed. Since returning to office in January, Trump has revived his “maximum pressure” policy of sanctions against Iran, with the latest announced on Wednesday and targeting seven companies accused of transporting Iranian-origin petroleum products.

Tensions over Iran’s nuclear programme soared after Washington withdrew from the 2015 deal with major powers which offered Tehran sanctions relief in return for restrictions on its nuclear activities. Iran adhered to the agreement for another year before beginning to roll back its compliance.

Western governments have since accused Tehran of seeking a nuclear weapons capability, an ambition it has consistently denied, insisting that its nuclear programme is for peaceful purposes only. On Monday, French Foreign Minister Jean-Noel Barrot said Iran was “on the verge of acquiring nuclear weapons”. He also warned that UN sanctions against Tehran — lifted under the 2015 nuclear deal — could be reimposed if Iran’s nuclear activities were seen to threaten European security.

Iranian foreign ministry spokesman Esmail Baqaei said the French foreign minister’s remarks were “simply absurd”. “This false statement, coupled with the minister’s open threats to reimpose sanctions, reinforces the suspicion that France’s nagging posture risks evolving into a spoiling role.”

Yemen’s Houthis launch missiles at Israel

SANAA: Yemen’s Houthis have claimed responsibility for launching two missiles towards northern Israel, targeting the Ramat David military airbase and the Tel Aviv area, as the group continues its military pressure in solidarity with Palestinians under Israeli fire.

The Israeli military said on Friday it intercepted the first missile and launched another interceptor at the second, which was also fired from Yemen. Alarms were triggered in several locations, though authorities reported no casualties or damage. The military added that the outcome of the second interception was still under review.

Yahya Saree, spokesperson for the Houthis — also known as Ansar Allah — confirmed the group had carried a “military operation” against a key Israeli military target. Saree said hypersonic

missiles were used and had successfully hit their intended destination.

The Israeli army responded that “interception attempts were made” without providing further details. The Houthi group has repeatedly said its attacks on Israel as well as United States and British ships in the Red Sea and Bab al-Mandeb Strait will only cease if Israel agrees to a permanent Gaza truce. The Houthis did not carry out attacks during the Gaza ceasefire earlier this year until Israel blocked all aid into the besieged enclave in early March and followed that with a full resumption of the war. The attacks come as the US escalates its military operations in Yemen.

On Friday, US Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth extended the USS Harry S. Truman’s deployment in the Middle East for an additional week, ensuring two carrier

strike groups remain operational in the region, a Pentagon official confirmed anonymously to the Associated Press news agency. Since March, the US has launched large-scale attacks not only on infrastructure but increasingly on individuals linked to the Houthi leadership.

Civilian casualties are mounting, with UK-based monitor Airwars estimating between 27 and 55 civilians were killed in March alone, and suggesting April’s toll is even higher. One of the deadliest US strikes in April hit Ras Isa port in Hodeidah, killing at least 80 people and wounding more than 150. On Monday at least 68 people were killed in the overnight strike on detained African migrants, and eight people were killed around the capital, Houthi media reported. — Aljazeera

‘Iran must walk away from all uranium enrichment’

WASHINGTON (Reuters): Iran has to “walk away” from uranium enrichment and long-range missile development and it should allow inspectors of military facilities, US Secretary of State Marco Rubio said on Thursday as a round of nuclear talks was postponed.

Rubio’s comments underscore the major remaining divisions in talks between the countries to resolve the long-running dispute over Iran’s nuclear programme, with US President Donald Trump threatening to bomb Iran if there is no agreement.

“They have to walk away from sponsoring terrorists, they have to walk away from helping the Houthis (in Yemen), they have to walk away from building long-range missiles that have no purpose to exist other than having nuclear weapons, and they have to walk away from enrichment,” Rubio said in a Fox News interview. Iran has repeatedly said it will not give up its missile programme or its uranium enrichment — a process used to make fuel for nuclear power plants but which can also yield material for an atomic warhead.

On Thursday a senior Iranian official told Reuters that the scheduled fourth round of talks due to take place in Rome on Saturday had been postponed and that a new date would be set “depending on the US approach”. Rubio said Iran should import enriched uranium for its nuclear power programme rather than enriching it to any level.

“If you have the ability to enrich at 3.67% it only takes a few weeks to get to 20% then 60% and then the 80 and 90% that you need for a weapon,” he said. Iran has said it has a right to enrich uranium under the terms of the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. It denies wanting to build a nuclear bomb.

Pakistan won’t hesitate to retaliate: Sana

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister’s Adviser on Inter-Provincial Coordination Rana Sanaullah Friday warned that Pakistan will unleash its full might and respond with unyielding resolve if India launches any aggression against its soil.

Talking to media, Rana Sanaullah said, “We are prepared for an unbiased investigation into Phalgama, pending concrete evidence from India.” He criticized India’s policies, stating that the country has consistently engaged in hate-based politics and harbored animosity towards minorities and Muslims. He alleged that India’s actions are driven by a deep-seated bias, resulting in widespread persecution and marginalization of vulnerable communities. He emphasized that such behavior is not only unacceptable but also poses a significant threat to regional stability and global peace.

Activist aid ship hit by drones on way to Gaza

VALLETTA (Reuters): A ship carrying humanitarian aid and activists for Gaza was bombed by drones in international waters off Malta early on Friday, its organizers said, alleging that Israel was to blame. The Israeli foreign ministry did not immediately respond to a request for comment on the allegation by the Freedom Flotilla Coalition, an international non-governmental group.

The Maltese government said the vessel and its crew were secured in the early hours of the morning after a nearby tug assisted with firefighting operations, but the NGO and Swedish activist Greta Thunberg said the ship was still in danger. Thunberg told Reuters she was in Malta and had been supposed to board the ship as part of the Freedom Flotilla’s planned action in support of Gaza, which is under blockade and bombardment by Israel.

The NGO published video footage, filmed in darkness, showing a fire on one of its ships, the Conscience. The footage showed lights in the sky in front of the ship and the sound of explosions could be heard. “Israeli ambassadors must be summoned and answer to violations of international law, including the ongoing blockade (of Gaza) and the bombing of our civilian vessel in international waters,” it said.

The Maltese government

said maritime authorities had received a mayday call shortly after midnight local time from a vessel outside of territorial waters, with 12 crew members and four civilians on board, reporting a fire. It said a nearby tug headed to the scene and launched firefighting operations and a Maltese patrol vessel was dispatched. After several hours, the vessel and its crew were secure, it said, adding that crew had refused to board the tug.

But the Freedom Flotilla said in a statement on its website that the alleged drone strikes had caused “a substantial breach in the hull.” “The drone strike appears to have deliberately targeted the ship’s generator, leaving the crew without power and placing the vessel at great risk of sinking,” it said. A spokeswoman for the group, Caoimhe Butterly, said the attack took place as the ship was preparing for activists to board from another vessel. A transfer at sea had been planned rather than the ship going to harbor, for bureaucratic reasons, she said.

Thunberg said that as far as she knew, the vessel was still at the location where it had been attacked and still in imminent danger. “This attack caused an explosion and major damage to the vessel, which made it impossible to continue the mission,” she said in a Zoom interview. “I was

part of the group who was supposed to board that boat today to continue the voyage toward Gaza, which is one of many attempts to open up a humanitarian corridor and to do our part to keep trying to break Israel’s illegal siege on Gaza,” she said.

Thunberg and the NGO said there were 30 people on board, not 16 as the Maltese government said. The coalition said it had been organizing a non-violent action under a media blackout in order to avoid any potential sabotage. The Gaza war started after Hamas-led fighters killed 1,200 people and took 251 hostages to Gaza in the October 7, 2023 attacks, according to Israeli tallies. Since then, Israel’s offensive on the enclave killed more than 52,000, according to Palestinian health officials.

Since March 2, Israel has completely cut off all supplies to the 2.3 million residents of the enclave, and food stockpiled during a ceasefire at the start of the year has all but run out. Another coalition ship on a similar mission to Gaza in 2010 was stopped and boarded by Israeli troops, and nine activists died. Other ships have similarly been stopped and boarded, without loss of life. Hamas issued a statement about the incident off Malta, accusing Israel of “piracy” and “state terrorism.”

Lebanon warns Hamas not to compromise country’s security

BEIRUT: Lebanon has warned Palestinian militant group Hamas not to conduct operations that compromise the country’s security or sovereignty, Beirut’s Supreme Defense Council said on Friday. The warning by Lebanon’s top military body came weeks after several Lebanese and Palestinians were detained on suspicion of firing rockets from Lebanon into northern Israel.

The council recommended a series of decisions to Lebanon’s Cabinet, including “warning Hamas against using Lebanese territory to carry out any actions that threaten Lebanese national security.” It added that “any act that would violate Lebanon’s sovereignty will be met with the harshest measures.”

The council session on Friday was presided over by President Joseph Aoun for the first time since his election. Brig. Gen. Mohammed Al-Mustafa, the council’s spokesperson, said that “military and security leaders have submitted multiple reports on the situation in several Lebanese areas, particularly concerning the firing of rockets from Lebanon toward the occupied territory, the suspects’ detention, and the issuance of necessary directives ensuring the proper enforcement of judicial procedures against them.”

Military and security bodies arrested several people suspected of launching rockets from Lebanese territory toward the Israeli side on March 22 and 28. The council was told that “the relevant bodies will begin their judicial proceedings next week

against the detainees, as well as anyone deemed involved.”

According to Al-Mustafa, Aoun during the meeting underlined “the importance of boosting security, stability and extending state authority over all Lebanese territory, given its positive implications at various levels, based on the National Accord Document, the oath speech, and the government’s ministerial statement.” Aoun confirmed “the necessity of being firm with anyone attempting to turn Lebanon into a platform to disrupt stability, while emphasizing the importance of the Palestinian cause, and rejecting Lebanon’s involvement in any conflict or its exposure to danger.”

During the meeting, Prime Minister Nawaf Salam stressed “the necessity to hand over illegal weapons, following the National Accord Document and the ministerial statement, and to prevent Hamas or any other faction from undermining Lebanon’s national security and stability.” He said that “the safety of Lebanese territory is above all else,” emphasizing “the Palestinian people’s right to self-determination, under international law and the Arab Peace Initiative.”

A security source revealed to Arab News that this measure comes in the context of the Lebanese army’s demand that Hamas hand over four individuals hiding in the Ain Al-Hilweh Palestinian refugee camp, suspected of involvement in planning rocket launches. They are considered military cadres, whereas the four individuals already detained by the army

are merely executors who set up and launched the rockets.

The source said: “Hamas attempted to dissuade the security agencies from arresting the four cadres through calls made by its leadership to political figures, particularly Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri, an ally of Hezbollah.” However, the response was that the matter is under the jurisdiction of the Lebanese army, and no one would intervene in favor of Hamas against Lebanese interests.

Hisham Debsi, director of the Tatweer Center for Strategic Studies and Human Development and a Palestinian researcher, said: “What Hamas has done has reached an unacceptable level of audacity, especially as the movement linked the handover of its weapons to the Lebanese authorities with Hezbollah handing over its own weapons.” Debsi said that “the process of disarming the Palestinian camps will proceed in phases and in coordination with the Palestinian Authority and the Fatah movement. Here lies the importance of Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas’s upcoming visit to Lebanon on May 21.”

This will be Abbas’s third visit to Lebanon after visits in 2007 and 2009. Standing in front of the Presidential Palace after meeting with former President Michel Suleiman, Abbas had affirmed: “We will implement all that the Lebanese authorities’ requests about handing over Palestinian weapons, which no longer serve the Palestinian cause but rather work against it.” — Arab News