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WHO calls for international support to fund relief aid in Gaza after ceasefire deal

Amid reports that Israel’s security cabinet has given the green light to a ceasefire deal with Hamas, the UN World Health Organization (WHO) expressed cautious optimism on Friday over the potentially major boost to aid relief in the devastated enclave.

“The target is to get between 500 and 600 trucks in per day over the coming weeks,” said Dr Rik Peeperkorn, WHO representative in the occupied Palestinian territories (OPT).

This would represent “a huge increase” from the 40 to 50 lorries reaching Gaza in recent months and be similar to the level of aid reaching Gaza before war erupted on 7 October 2023, drastically reducing relief deliveries.

Speaking from Jerusalem, the WHO medic described the ceasefire announcement as “a sign of hope” but warned that the challenge is massive and daunting, because of chronic and severe shortages of food, fuel and medical supplies.

Plans are in place for deliveries to begin on Sunday, the veteran humanitarian said, adding: “We have ordered temporary prefabricated clinics and hospitals which we will integrate into the existing facilities. . .integrating existing health facilities as part of that, to expand some needed bed capacity, address urgent health needs and health service delivery.”

Humanitarians have repeatedly warned that the crisis in Gaza for civilians has reached catastrophic levels.

More than 46,000 people have been killed, according to the authorities and more 110,000 have been injured – often with life-changing injuries – since the conflict began in October 2023.

Disease is spreading and the risk of famine remains high – needs that it is critical to address, Dr Peeperkorn said, especially when more than 12,000 patients – a third of them children – still await evacuation for specialized care.

But the pace of evacuations has been painfully slow. Of 1,200 requests submitted between November and December 2024, only 29 were approved, a rate of just 2.4 per cent, according to WHO.

The WHO and other agencies have stressed the immediate need to provide food, water and medical supplies, but also fuel and spare parts for hospital generators.

Gaza’s healthcare system has been shattered, with only half of its 36 hospitals currently operational. Critical health infrastructure continues to be targeted, according to the UN health agency, which pointed to 664 healthcare attacks since October that have caused deaths among civilians and medical workers, also damaging vital health facilities. Despite the dire conditions, WHO aims to implement an ambitious 60-day emergency health response plan, once a ceasefire kicks in.

This includes scaling up existing health efforts, setting up temporary medical clinics and restoring essential healthcare services. Efforts will also focus on combating malnutrition, bolstering disease surveillance and providing medical supplies to areas that have been difficult to access until now.

Will Gaza change the luck of the region?

The Gaza war has nearly ended, and it is time to cease the exchanges about it. Much has been said, whether truth or lies... So, what is your excuse for a word already spoken?

Perhaps Gaza, with all the horrors its people endured, may change the luck of Palestinians and the region. It is imperative to support the afflicted land so we can overcome this stage. Such support acts as a catalyst for a better future, enabling a new phase to begin after the repercussions and developments caused by Gaza and those yet to come.

The Gaza war achieved the unexpected: the collapse of a regional system and the emergence of a different geopolitical reality. Without it, Syria, Lebanon, and the region might have continued under authorities that incite further chaos and wars for another decade.

The longest and harshest wars of conflict with Israel have ended, and it is time to provide humanitarian support and assistance to two million people.

One of Gaza’s lessons is that no issue can be left unaddressed, leaving others to handle it. There can be no peace for Israel without peace for its neighbors. Signing a partial peace agreement is insufficient, as it leads to partial wars.

Even the best and fairest peace agreement cannot succeed without being marketed against the prevailing cultural and media hostility.

The Gaza war may have ended, though some sporadic gunfire and clashes are expected to cease soon.

Gaza can first serve as a gateway to peace among Palestinians themselves, leading to an agreement on a central authority and ending the rift between Gaza and Ramallah that has persisted since 2007. It could be the entry point to initiating the two-state solution, a project Saudi Arabia pledged to work on, while Israel vowed to prevent. Every peace project begins with rejection and ends with reconciliation and handshakes.

What happened in October 2023 might be similar to the October 1973 War. That victory was limited – Egypt regained 20 kilometers beyond the Suez Canal in the war but, through the Camp David Accords, reclaimed all of Sinai, an area three times the size of Israel itself.

The Gaza war has altered the region, eliminating much of Hezbollah’s power

and leadership, leading to the downfall of Bashar Assad’s regime, and ending Iran’s dream of expansion and dominance over the eastern Arab world. We now face a new and genuine opportunity for regional peace initiatives and an end to major threats and wars.

All eyes are on Iran, which remains in shock from the significant events it has endured and continues to face. What it built over forty years and acquired through force – land, influence, and proxies – evaporated last year. Today, Iran finds itself in a stage of reassessment, reflected in candid discussions in its media and likely deeper debates in closed chambers about its next steps. Iran has two paths: the first is to adapt to the new reality by pursuing peace and cooperating with Arab states to support Palestinians in their peace project. Such involvement would bolster the Palestinian cause and help its people achieve their aspirations without the need for bloodshed, destruction, and wasted billions.

The second path is to rebuild its military capabilities and ignite wars across

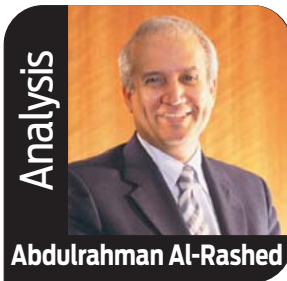
the region to regain Syria, Lebanon, and Gaza. This scenario would be costly, and Tehran would struggle to find support from its people, who are already burdened by economic sanctions that President-elect Donald Trump and his incoming administration promise to intensify. The survival of the regime itself could be at risk.

Given the new situation, we must think realistically. This year has begun on a positive note: Lebanon has a new system, Syria has a different leadership, Hamas is set to become part of a unified Palestinian Authority, and there are signs that Iraq is seeking to rein in militias, if not eliminate them.

These changes have come at a high cost, as seen in Gaza, Lebanon, and Syria over two bloody decades. But will this lead to a harvest based on ending unrest, chaos, and occupation while achieving regional consensus?

Before the Gaza war, such a scenario seemed impossible. Today, it is not impossible at all.

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Cartoon by Amjad Rasmi. (Courtesy of Asharq Al-Awsat)

Beggary: Desperate pleas for alms agitate city’s residents

Fakhar-e-Alam

As the dawn of the New Year 2025 emerged in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, a troubling sight in the form of an influx of beggars resurfaced in Peshawar with begging bowls everywhere.

The streets, bazaars, and public spaces in most parts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa especially in Peshawar are once again dominated by professional and nonprofessional beggars, who are gripping the attention of passersby with outstretched hands and desperate pleas for alms and charity.

The beggars ranging from elderly and sick to young children, swarmed around the busiest areas in hopes of securing a living by exploiting the goodwill of the city’s residents.

In Peshawar, the most well-known areas including Qissa Khwani Bazaar, Hashtnagri, Gantagar, Firdus, Nothia, Tehkal, Gulbahar, Faqirabad, Karimpura, Saddar, and beyond – beggars are a common sight, positioned strategically near shopping malls, mosques, road signals, bus terminals, and traffic intersections.

These key points are often teeming with people, making them ideal spots for beggars to appeal to the generosity of the city’s shoppers, travellers, and commuters.

With each passing day, the number of beggars, including families with children and elderly people suffering from debilitating conditions, appears to grow in KP due to unemployment, poverty, and social marginalization.

“I started begging after the death of my father Shamas Khan, who died due to lung cancer,” said Mustafa Khan, a professional beggar at Hashtnagri bazaar.

“I was left with no other option but to start begging to repay the huge amount

borrowed by my mother for treatment of my father who left me at a very young age,” Mustafa told APP with sobbing eyes.

He said the unchecked beggars in Peshawar had made it difficult for people to complete shopping for their children ahead of the end of winter vacations. He urged the government to take instant action against beggars in the city so that people could do their shopping easily.

Asif Yousafzai, Advocate Supreme Court said that beggary has been declared illegal under West Pakistan Loitering Ordinance 1958, adding that unfortunately this law had not been fully implemented in KP, resulting in a substantial increase in the number of beggars, especially children and women at Peshawar.

“In Pakistan, begging is unlawful under the said Ordinance 1958, under which beggars or parents of children begging can be jailed for up to three years,” he said, adding the central and provincial laws such as Control of Narcotics Substance Act 1997, West Pakistan Vagrancy Ordinance 1959, Pakistan Employment of Children Act 1991, KP Child Protection and Welfare Act (KPCPWA) 2010 and KP Orphanage Supervision and Control Act 1976 had been promulgated to check drug addiction and streets begging but the dream of begging free KP was yet to be materialized.

Similarly, Asif Yousafzai said that KPCPWA was enacted in 2010 to protect the rights of women and children, but it has not been fully implemented fully, resulting in an increase in the number of beggars.

The senior lawyer said the role of the Child Welfare Commission (CWC) was very important to protect child beggars, urging the KP Government to impose a ban on child beggars on the pattern of Sindh province and direct the social welfare department to pick child beggars from markets, roads, traffic signals, streets and rehabilitate them at their welfare centers.

Habib Afridi, Director Social Welfare Department said that begging was a social problem mostly caused by poverty, unemployment, drug addiction, and social marginalization. He said that an anti-beggary campaign has been started for rehabilitation of beggars, and special children and the empowerment of poor women in the province.

Syed Qasim Ali Shah, KP minister for social welfare said the government was taking steps to eliminate the scourge of begging from society and make beggars a productive part of the community. He said that about Rs. 320 million are allocated for the rehabilitation of 2,000 beggars and drug addicts under Phase III of the Drugs and Beggars Free Peshawar initiative. He said the government has launched special projects to integrate beggars into society as productive members and mentioned that an agreement has been signed with TEVTA to help achieve this key objective.

He said the needy children involved in beggary would be sent to Zamung Kor (own house), adding the action plan against beggary is estimated to cost Rs. 23 million per year. The minister said that authorities were directed to propose necessary amendments in the legal framework to tighten punishments against professional beggars.

The minister said it has been decided to establish a special task force to ensure speedy implementation of an action plan against beggary and drug addiction in the provincial capital and private sector institutions/organizations with expertise in the relevant field were being engaged for speedy rehabilitation of child beggars and drug addicts. He said the KP government has planned to arrange technical and vocational courses for beggars on the pattern of rehabilitated drug addicts to make them useful citizens of society.

HEC-IPFP Program Sets New Standards for Professional Growth

Dr. Muhammad Shahzad Ashfaq

The pursuit of academic success is often intertwined with the quest for professional growth. The Higher Education Commission (HEC) of Pakistan’s Indigenous PhD Fellowship Program (IPFP) stands a beacon of excellence. In this regard HEC sets new standards for nurturing the next generation of scholars. Through its rigorous selection process, comprehensive support on research fellows, the HEC-IPFP program becomes a cornerstone for academic blaze a trail to success in their respective fields.

HEC-IPFP program is designed to provide exceptional scholars with the opportunity to pursue professional career in Pakistan’s leading universities while receiving financial support and mentorship. The program’s selection process is highly competitive, ensuring most promising candidates chosen in this transformative journey. A demonstrated passion for research and a commitment to academic excellence, the HEC-IPFP program sets a high bar for prospective fellows pushing them to strive for greatness in their academic pursuits.

The fellowship program cultivates a culture of respect, professional efficiency and academic rigor that pushing fellows make a meaningful contribution to their fields. HEC-IPFP program equips its fellows with the skills and competencies needed to succeed as academics in a competitive global academic landscape. IPFP program stands as a shining example of how a well- designed fellowship program can set new standards for professional growth and academic success. Offering a supportive environment, rigorous selection process program empowers scholars to reach their full potential and make a lasting impact in their fields. As more scholars benefit from the transformative experience of the HEC-IPFP program, the future of academia in Pakistan looks brighter than ever.

HEC-IPFP program exemplifies the transformative potential of a well-structured fellowship initiative, setting new benchmarks for professional development and academic achievement this holistic approach not only enhances individual capabilities but also fosters

a collaborative learning atmosphere that benefits all members. Moreover, IPFP programs commitment to diversity and inclusion enriches the academic landscape. They attract individuals from varied backgrounds and disciplines, it encourages innovative thinking and diverse perspectives. This multifaceted engagement stimulates critical dialogue among fellows, ultimately leading to groundbreaking ideas that can influence their respective fields significantly.

HEC-IPFP program serves as a paradigm of excellence in fellowship design. Its comprehensive framework not only nurtures personal and professional development but also elevates collective academic standards, making it an invaluable model for future initiatives aiming at fostering talent in academia. HEC emphasizes practical engagement and real-world applications. This distinctive approach not only equips participants with essential skills but also fosters a deeper understanding of the complexities inherent in public policy and governance.

HEC integrates a diverse cohort of professionals, thereby enriching the learning experience through varied perspectives. In contrast, many standard fellowship programs often attract homogenous groups that limit the scope of discourse and innovation. The collaborative environment fostered by HEC-IPFP encourages critical thinking and creativity among its fellows, enhancing their capacity to address multifaceted challenges in their respective fields.

HEC encourages dynamic exchanges of ideas among diverse cohorts. Such interactions not only stimulate intellectual growth but also inspire creative problem-solving approaches. Fellows learn to appreciate different perspectives, empowering them to devise comprehensive strategies that address real-world problems effectively. In an era marked by rapid change and uncertainty, the capacity to think critically and creatively is paramount. The HEC-IPFP not only prepares its fellows for immediate challenges but also instills a lifelong commitment to intellectual curiosity for future leaders in any discipline.

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