

12 Pak fishermen reach home

LAHORE (INP): Pakistani fishermen, who were released earlier from Indian jail, have reached home via Wagah border crossing on Thursday. The 12 fishermen were handed over to Pakistan by Indian authorities at the Wagah border in Lahore. The released fishermen belong to Sindh and Azad Kashmir. India's maritime security forces had taken them into custody for allegedly violating their territorial waters.

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Court acquits all accused

MULTAN (Agencies): A local court in Multan has dismissed the case and acquitted all the accused in a clash outside Election Commission (ECP) office yesterday. The local court reserved its verdict in a case related to the clash outside the ECP office in Multan. The judicial magistrate dismissed the case and acquitted all the accused nominated in the First Information Report (FIR).

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Pakistan finally ‘reaches deal’ with IMF

ISLAMABAD (Agencies): Pakistan and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) have reached an agreement after 10 days of "tough" parleys, unlocking over a \$1 billion loan tranche under Extended Fund Facility (EFF) that had been suspended for the last five months, sources said Thursday.

The sources, familiar with the development, said that a meeting took place between Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and the IMF delegation, where the mission informed the premier about the agreement. The prime minister, who interacted with the Fund officials in Islamabad via video link from Lahore, approved the agreement, the sources added.

The development comes

hours after Finance Minister Ishaq Dar had announced that talks with the IMF were "on track" and the government would share "good news" on the matter on Thursday. The IMF's loan is critical for the country's \$350 billion economy as the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP)-held foreign exchange reserves have fallen to \$2.91 billion — enough to provide an import cover of 0.58 months.

Originally signed by former prime minister Imran Khan in 2019, the \$6 billion bailout package repeatedly stalled after his government reneged on subsidy agreements and failed on its tax collection commitments outlined in the deal amid a yawning budget deficit. The incumbent coalition government resumed the pro-

gramme, and in August, it received around \$1.17 billion under the seventh and eighth reviews of the Extended Fund Facility (EFF).

But the programme hit a bump in the road again in September — when the ninth review was due — after the authorities failed to live up to their promises with the lender and introduced a host of fiscal measures in contravention to the conditions agreed.

Finally, as the forex reserves continued to deplete to dangerously low levels, the government, having no choice but to take the plunge, agreed to the bitter IMF prescription to avoid the pains of default that would have created a Sri Lanka-like situation in the inflation-battered country.

Govt to undertake drive to help Turkiye: PM F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif Thursday said the government had decided to expand the ongoing rescue and relief efforts for Turkiye into a countrywide campaign. In tweets on social media platform Twitter, he said, "We will enlist the support of the business community, religious scholars and educational institutions. Pakistan will continue to stand by Turkiye in this difficult hour."

The prime minister said, "Just spoke to all chief ministers and requested them to take ownership of national relief campaign for earthquake-hit people in Turkiye." "This is the worst earthquake in a century. As one nation living in two states, we will continue to stand by our Turkish brothers and sisters," he added.

79 papers filed for by-election on 8 NA seats F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Seventy-nine (79) nomination papers have been filed in first-phase of by-election on 8 vacant National Assembly constituencies from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

The seats were declared vacant due to the resignations of the PTI legislators. According to statistics shared by the Provincial Election Commission (PEC) here on Thursday morning, the highest 13 number of nomination papers have been filed for by-election in NA-38 D.I. Khan-I. Potential candidates from the constituency include Ali Amin Gandapur, Faisal Amin Gandapur, Ahmad Kundi and Dawar Khan Kundi.

A total of 9 nomination papers have been filed for by-election on NA-4 Swat-III while seven nomination papers including former legislators, Omar Ayub Khan and Babar Nawaz have been filed for NA-18 Haripur. On NA-18 Swabi, a total of 11 candidates including former Speaker National Assembly, Asad Qaiser and his brother Aqibullah Khan have filed nomination while 7 nomination papers were filed for NA-32 Kohat.

On NA-25 Nowshera-I, a total of nine candidates including Pervez Khattak, Khan Pervez Khan, Mohammad Ismail Khattak and Ikhtiar Wali while 12 nominations including Imran Khattak and Khaleeq-ur-Rehman have filed nominations for NA-26 Nowshera-II. On 43-Khyber-I as many as 40 candidates including Shah Jee Gul Afridi, Noor-ul-Haq Qadri and Bilawal Afridi have filed nomination papers.

Quake-hit Turkish, Syrian people PM forms committee to streamline relief activities

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Thursday formed a high-level committee to streamline the relief activities the quake-hit people of Turkiye and Syria. The prime minister, who chaired a meeting to review the relief activities, said the committee would ensure supply of relief goods to Turkiye and Syria on priority basis.

The relief goods would be dispatched through land, aerial and sea routes. To be headed by Planning Minister Ahsan Iqbal, the committee would comprise Railways Minister Khawaja Saad Rafiq, Information Minister Marriyum Aurangzeb, Education Minister Rana Tanveer Hussain, Religious Affairs Minister Mufti Abdul Shakoor, NDMA chairman, Pakistan's ambassadors in Turkiye and Syria, and Special Assistant to the PM Tariq Fatemi.

The prime minister ordered to hold fund-raising campaign at schools, colleges and universities. He also appealed to the philanthropists, industrialists and business community to take part in the fund-raising for the distressed people of Turkiye and Syria.

He urged the people of Pakistan to donate relief goods at the collection centers of the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA). He also instructed the NDMA to enhance its coordination with the provincial governments to speed up the relief activities. The prime minister said Pakistan stood by its close friend Turkiye in the hour of distress. He said Turkiye extended support to the people of Pakistan after floods in 2010 and 2022.

Prime Minister Shehbaz also instructed the authorities concerned to arrange blankets, warm clothes, baby food and tents while ensuring the quality of the relief goods being



ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif chairing a meeting to review Pakistan's contributions in rescue and relief activities in the post-earthquake situation in Turkiye and Syria.

sent to Turkiye and Syria. The prime minister said that despite limited resources, Pakistan would leave no stone unturned in supporting their Turkish brethren.

He said Pakistan established an air corridor to supply relief goods and a convoy of trucks would soon leave for Turkiye and Syria. The meeting was told that a team along with the equipment for a 30-bed mobile hospital was already serving in Turkiye while another mobile hospital was being dispatched along with staff and equipment.

The prime minister appreciated the services of Information Minister Marriyum Aurangzeb, her team as well as the Pakistani media to highlight the sufferings of the Turkish brethren among the people of Pakistan. Besides, he also lauded the role of Pakistan Air Force, Pakistan International Airlines and NDMA in the relief operation.

Moreover, rescue and Pakistan Army teams were engaged in relief operations in Turkiye. Pakistan's ambassador in Turkiye apprised the meeting of the statistics of destruction caused by the earthquake in

Turkiye. The prime minister appreciated the ambassador's performance and directed him to play his role to strengthen contacts between the institutions of Pakistan and Turkiye.

It was told that besides relief goods, rescue teams had reached Turkiye and Syria and taking part in the relief operations. Besides, the PIA was also ensuring regular flights from Islamabad and Lahore to Turkiye for supply of relief goods. The truckloads of relief goods would also leave for Turkiye and Syria within few days. It was told that a countrywide campaign was also being run for support to the quake victims. The relief amounts can be deposited in the account No. G-12166 of relief fund established by the prime minister.

The relief goods can be donated to the NDMA's 13 collection centers established across the country. The collection centers would be set up at the district level. Federal ministers Ishaq Dar, Ahsan Iqbal, Marriyum Aurangzeb, Khawaja Saad Rafiq, SAPM Tariq Fatemi, NDMA chairman, Pakistan's ambassadors to Turkiye and Syria and senior officers attended the meeting.

Apex court observes country reeling from political instability

ISLAMABAD (Agencies): Chief Justice of Pakistan (CJP) Umar Ata Bandial on Thursday said the "solution of all issues of the country is only possible through the people's decision" as he heard PTI Chairman Imran Khan's petition against the August 2022 amendments to the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) ordinance.

A three-member Supreme Court bench — comprising CJP Bandial, Justice Syed Mansoor Ali Shah and Justice Ijazul Ahsan — resumed hearing Imran's plea, which claims the new NAB laws are a "violation of fundamental rights". At the outset of the hearing on Thursday, discussing the general elections, Justice Bandial said: "The solution of all issues of the country is only possible through the people's decision. Eight months have passed since the incumbent government came to power."

He referred to a prior ruling of the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) saying: "The ECP had stated in the speaker ruling case that they would be ready to conduct elections in November 2022." The CJP asserted: "The current parliament has been systematically kept incomplete. The legislation taking place in the current parliament is also becoming controversial [as a result]."

After hearing the arguments, the three-member bench adjourned the next hearing till 11am on Feb 10 (today). Arguing that Imran did not

have the right to lodge the petition, the federal government's lawyer, Mahkdoon Ali Khan, said: "The court should remain cautious about Article 184(3) of the Constitution. "If the court suspends legislation over any petition under Article 184(3), the standard will drop. The authority of Article 184(3) exists in public matters."

CJP Bandial responded: "The realities of the present case are different. The chief of the country's biggest political party has challenged the NAB amendments. "There is intense political tension and crisis in the country. The PTI first applied the strategy of leaving parliament. Then, it was not known why they decided to return to parliament. The petitioner Imran Khan is no ordinary citizen. Even after leaving the government, he has enjoyed enormous public support."

CJP Bandial stated that the judiciary did not want to meddle in the legislative either and that it had not taken notice itself but a petition had been filed. He highlighted that the court had ruled its decision once before as well. "Only one prime minister has come in Pakistan's history who was considered very honest. One honest prime minister's government was ended through 58 (2b), Article 58 (2b) was a draconian law. The court had said in 1993 that the government was [sent packing] in the wrong manner but only elections should be conducted now," the CJP said.

He added: "The PTI chief is not in the assembly and legislation like the NAB amendment is now becoming controversial." Justice Bandial asserted that it was not about Imran's right to challenge the verdict, and he dismissed the same objection raised by the federal government's lawyer. Meanwhile, the government's lawyer said: "The court has to determine what is the standard of cases regarding fundamental rights. Can anyone challenge legislation based on assumptions?"

Replying to this, the CJP reiterated that Imran was no ordinary man but "the chief of a huge political party of the country and was a former prime minister". Justice Bandial added: "His party decided to resign from the parliament due to political conflicts. His party then changed its mind and now they want to return. But they are not a part of parliament right now. But parliament is there. Remarkable that corruption existed in the country since the "first day", he recalled how an "extremely sincere prime minister's government was ousted under Article 58(2b)".

The CJP highlighted that the judiciary of that time recognised the ouster as wrong but still allowed the elections to be held, facing "great criticism on its decision". Justice Bandial reiterated that the Chief Election Commissioner Sikandar Sultan Raja had assured him in November last year that the electoral body was "ready to hold elections any time".

IHC defers hearing of PTI chief's alleged daughter case

ISLAMABAD (Agencies): The Islamabad High Court (IHC) has adjourned the hearing of a petition seeking former prime minister and PTI Chairman Imran Khan's disqualification in his alleged daughter's case till March 1. A three-member bench of the IHC heard the case while Imran's counsel had requested for the adjournment of the hearing.

Speaking on the occasion, the petitioner's lawyer said that he had filed an application for submitting additional documents in the

case. The court allowed to make these documents part of the record. Salman Akram Raja, counsel for the PTI chairman, also sought time from the court for the submission of documents. He prayed to the court to hear arguments in support of maintainability of the petition on the next hearing. The petitioner's lawyer argued that even now when the former prime minister was not the MNA, the petition against him was still maintainable. "After all, he is the political party head," he said, and added,

"Imran's reply should be in writing and should be on merit."

Addressing the petitioner's counsel, the CJ remarked he knew why Imran was not submitting his reply in the case. Other two judges on the three-member bench, headed by IHC Chief Justice (CJ) Justice Amir Farooq, were Justice Mohsin Akhtar Kiani and Justice Arbab Muhammad Tahir. Imran is facing the allegation of not disclosing his alleged daughter in his nomination papers.

Earthquake death toll crosses 19,000 in Turkiye-Syria

ISTANBUL (Agencies): The death toll from the Turkiye-Syria earthquakes has climbed above 19,000 as rescuers race to save survivors trapped under debris in freezing weather. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said the death toll in his country from Monday's deadly earthquake had now reached 16,170, bringing the total fatalities in Turkiye and Syria to 19,362, The Guardian reported on Thursday.

State officials in Syria said earlier on Thursday that death-toll at government controlled areas stood at 1262, while 1930 had been reported dead at rebel held areas. Experts have said the toll of both dead and injured is expected to continue to rise sharply in the coming days. The Syrian Civil Defence group continued search operations through the night in rebel-held parts of Syria as the rescue effort crossed the 72-hour mark that disaster experts consider the most likely period to save lives.

"We are racing against time. Every minute counts," tweeted the opposition group, who are also known as the White Helmets. The group said hundreds of people remain trapped in the rubble in the town of Jandires in the province of Aleppo. Access to Twitter in Turkey has been restored, the Netblocks internet observatory has said. "The restoration comes after

authorities held meeting with Twitter to 'remind Twitter of its obligations on content takedowns and disinformation,'" Netblocks said.

The Turkish president has admitted to problems with his government's initial response to the devastating earthquakes in southern Turkey, amid anger from those left destitute and frustrated over the slow arrival of rescue teams, Al Jazeera reported. "Of course, there are shortcomings," Erdogan said during a visit to the city of Kahramanmaraş, one of the hardest hit spots. "The conditions are clear to see. It's not possible to be ready for a disaster like this."

Temperatures in the quake-stricken Turkish city of Gaziantep plunged to minus five degrees Celsius (23 degrees Fahrenheit) early on Thursday but thousands of families spent the night in cars and makeshift tents, too afraid to return to their homes — or banned from doing so. Parents walked the streets of the city carrying children in blankets because it was warmer than sitting in a tent. "When we sit down, it is painful, and I fear for anyone who is trapped under the rubble in this," said Melek Halici, who had wrapped her two-year-old daughter in a blanket as they watched rescuers working late into the night. "Eventually, we will have to go to the tent but I don't want to," she told the



AFP news agency. "I can't bear the cold but nor can I think about going back to our apartment."

Reuters has this heartbreaking story from Turkey's Hatay, where the agency's photographer Umit Bektaş witnessed rescuers trying to pull Abdulalim Muaini out from the rubble of his home. Abdulalim's legs were trapped under a large slab of concrete but he was conscious and able to talk to his rescuers. Close beside him lay his wife, Esra. But the rescue had come too late for her. The magnitude 7.8 and 7.6 earthquakes that struck Turkey and

Damascus as well as those held by rebels. Monday's massive earthquake flattened entire sections of major cities in Turkiye and Syria, killing more than 17,100 people, injuring thousands more and leaving many more without shelter in the winter cold.

The situation is of particular concern in Syria, which has been ravaged by more than a decade of civil war and where at least 3,162 people have been killed in the quake. "We need to do everything to make sure that there are no impediments whatsoever to the life-saving support that is needed in Syria," Pedersen said. Damascus has been hit by more than a decade of economic sanctions, and there have been calls for them to be temporarily lifted to facilitate the arrival of aid.

Others meanwhile highlight that sanctions are not designed to impede aid. When asked about this, Pedersen said he had been "discussing the issue, in particular with representatives from the United States and from the European Union". "They assure me that they will do whatever they can to make sure that there are no impediments to assistance coming to Syria to help in this operation," he said.

The rebel-held areas of Syria near Turkey's border are in a particularly dire situation since they cannot receive aid from government-held parts of Syria without Damascus's authorisation.

At the same time, the sole border crossing used to shuttle life-saving aid from Turkey into conflict-ravaged Syria has seen its operations disrupted by the deadly earthquake. A first aid convoy managed to cross there Thursday, and Pedersen voiced confidence that "there will be obviously more assistance coming".

"Our immediate asks are two: access and resources. We need life-saving aid. It's desperately needed by civilians, wherever they are, irrespective of borders and boundaries," he said. "We need it urgently, through the fastest, most direct and most effective routes," he said. Humanitarian aid in rebel-held areas usually arrives through Turkiye via a cross-border mechanism created in 2014 by a UN Security Council resolution.

But it is contested by Damascus and its ally Moscow, and under pressure, the number of crossing points has been reduced over time to just one from four. Asked whether it would be possible to open more border crossings to get aid through, Pedersen told AFP that "the Turks are in the process of opening more crossings". But "those are not border crossings that have been approved by the UN, via the Security Council, so that means that it is difficult for the UN to use them", he said. Pedersen suggested though that countries might be able to do so.



GCU confers life-time achievement award

LAHORE (APP): The Government College University (GCU) Lahore on Thursday conferred lifetime achievement award on its distinguished alumni Dr. Khurshid Rizvi for outstanding achievements in his field during a solemn ceremony, here on Thursday.

Vice Chancellor Prof. Dr. Asghar Zaidi presented the Lifetime Achievement Award to Prof. Rizvi at the University's Meeting Rooms. Dr. Rizvi is a renowned scholar of oriental languages and is considered to be one of the top Urdu poets, researchers, and literary figures in Pakistan. He is well-versed in Arabic, Persian, Urdu, English, and Punjabi, making him a multifaceted talent in the world of language and literature. In 2008, the government of Pakistan recognized Dr. Rizvi's literary services by awarding him with the Sitara-e-Imtiaz, one of the highest civilian honors in the country. Rizvi has authored and edited books in many languages on a range of subjects including seven poetry collections to date.

The award is one of the highest honours given by GCU to its alumni who have made outstanding contributions in their field. Professor Dr. Rizvi was announced as one of the ten recipients of the award during the university's 20th Convocation in November but was unable to attend due to a trip abroad.

LWMC taking special measures against birds strike

LAHORE (APP): The Lahore Waste Management Company (LWMC) has taken special measures against bird strikes near Airport tunnel area.

According to LWMC sources here on Thursday, measures had been taken on the directions of Commissioner and Deputy Commissioner Lahore.

LWMC had deployed more than 25 workers and 06 dedicated vehicles at Bahar Shah Road, Zarar Shaheed Road and Harbanspura Road in 03 shift to ensure timely lifting of waste. Deputy CEO LWMC Fahad Mehmood said that LWMC was lifting more than 20 tons of waste from these areas on a daily basis. The major factor behind these bird strikes was the increasing littering on roads. With the growing population, the amount of waste on the streets had also increased, he added.

He said birds were attracted to the roads in search of food and often collide with planes. The enforcement wing of LWMC was also active in this regard, and inspected more than 1000 points during last week in Aziz Bhatti Town. LWMC enforcement wing also issued 207 challans of worth Rs 4,109,000 followed by issuing 441 notices against illegal dumping of waste. He further said that 05 vehicles had also been seized over illegal dumping and added that waste on roads must be disposed of properly to prevent littering in the future. LWMC Community mobilization wing had organized awareness camp in different areas on proper disposal of waste. He said that the relevant industry should also act proactively in implementing bird deterrent measures to reduce the risk of bird strikes.

PPL Chemical Synthesis Laboratory

KARACHI (APP): Vice Chancellor University of Karachi Professor Dr. Khalid Mahmood Iraqi here on Thursday inaugurated the Chemical Synthesis Laboratory of Pakistan Petroleum Limited (PPL) at the Department of Chemical Engineering, University of Karachi (KU).

KU VC Professor Dr. Khalid Iraqi while addressing the inaugural ceremony mentioned that a strong connection among the government, industries and academia was very essential for the country's growth and development. He referred it as the triangle of success for the society and said the third world countries, particularly Pakistan needs the progress in this triangle in the right direction to achieve all the targets of the nation's development.

Governor visits Turkiye Consulate for condolence

LAHORE (APP): Governor Punjab Muhammad Balighur Rehman on Thursday visited Turkiye Consulate General to Lahore and expressed condolences over the loss of life and property in Turkiye in the wake of devastating earthquake during a meeting with the Consul General Emir Ozbay here.

Governor Punjab Muhammad Balighur Rehman said people of Pakistan are saddened to see the colossal loss of life and property and misery of people, especially children, as a result of the natural calamity in Turkiye. He said Pakistan stands with its Turkish brothers and sisters in this hour of sorrow and trial, adding that our prayers are with the earthquake victims. The Turkiye Consul General Emir Ozbay thanked Governor Punjab for visiting Turkish Consulate to express solidarity with the victims of the earthquake in Turkiye. Punjab Governor Muhammad Balighur Rehman also recorded his comments in the condolence book on this occasion.

Bishop of Lahore Diocese calls on governor Punjab: Newly appointed Bishop of Lahore Diocese Revd. Nadeem Kamran called on Governor Punjab Muhammad Balighur Rehman at the Governor's House, here on Thursday.

The 10th Bishop of Lahore Diocese of

the Church of Pakistan was led by Bishop Emeritus of Lahore the Rt Revd. Dr. Alexander John Malik in a delegation including the Rt Revd Irfan Jamil.

Speaking on the occasion, Punjab Governor Muhammad Balighur Rehman said the heinous acts of desecration of the Holy Quran in Sweden and Holland hurt the religious sentiments of the Muslim Ummah. He said the Church of Pakistan's condemnation of the desecration of the Holy Quran in Sweden and Holland and raising its voice against Islamophobia is commendable. He said hurting someone's religious sentiments is an unacceptable act.

The Governor Punjab said tolerance and understanding other's point of view is very important for coexistence in the society. He congratulated Bishop Nadeem Kamran on his appointment as Bishop of Lahore and expressed his best wishes. The Governor Punjab expressed the hope that the new Bishop of Lahore Revd. Nadeem Kamran will contribute to the promotion of inter-faith harmony and peaceful coexistence. In Church of Pakistan Lahore Diocese, the Enthronement service of the Bishop of Lahore was held on 18th January 2023 at Lahore Cathedral in which Rev. Nadeem Kamran was enthroned as the tenth Bishop of Lahore Diocese.

Sindh govt to establish relief camps for collecting donations

F.P. Report

KARACHI: Provincial minister for Information Sharjeel Inam Memon has said that on the instructions of Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah, relief camps are being established across the province to collect relief items for victims of Turkiye and Syria earthquake.

He said that camps will start functioning in every district headquarter of Sindh from Friday. In a statement, The provincial minister has appealed to the people of Sindh to donate warm clothes, blankets and daily use items in these camps with generosity. He said that the

public should deposit cash donations in the relief fund established by the Prime Minister of Pakistan, while the relief items should be donated in the relief camps established by the Sindh government in each district headquarter.

The Minister said that special prayers will be also offered for the earthquake victims in juma prayers throughout the province. He said that it is our responsibility to help the people of Turkiye and Syria in their difficult times. He added that Sindh government and Pakistan People's Party are standing with the earthquake victims of Turkiye and Syria in this difficult time.

Qadir for harmony through social media

LAHORE (APP): Caretaker Education Minister Punjab Mansoor Qadir has said that social media platforms should discuss issues which promote harmony and brotherhood in the society.

Addressing the closing ceremony of the two-day AMCAP-PU International Conference on "Revisiting Relationship between Journalism and Society in the Digital Age for Common Good" at Faisal Auditorium Punjab University here on Thursday, he said journalists, academicians and young students should play their role in promoting positive use of digital media to end hatred and discrimination in society.

The conference was organized by

Punjab University's Department of Journalism Studies and Institute of Education and Research (IER). PU VC Prof. Niaz Ahmed Akhtar, Dean Faculty of Information and Media Studies Prof. Dr. Khalid Mehmood, Chairperson Department of Journalism Prof. Dr. Bushra Hameedur Rehman, Chairperson Department of Public Relations and Advertising Prof. Dr. Abida Ashraf, Director Institute of Education and Research Dr. Abdul Qayyum Chaudhry, faculty members, students, researchers and experts from Russia, Nigeria, Czech Republic, Sweden, Indonesia and Pakistan participated.

Minister opens urs celebrations at Syed Sakhi Sauf shrine

LAHORE (APP): Caretaker Provincial Minister for Aqaf and Religious Affairs, Zakat and Ushar Barrister Azfer Ali Nasir visited the shrine of Hazrat Syed Sakhi Sauf located in the Walled City here and inaugurated the urs celebrations, here on Thursday. He laid wreath at the grave of spiritual figure and recited Fateha. The caretaker minister also reviewed the restoration work of the historic Mughal-era Wazir Khan Masjid. Secretary and

Chief Administrator of Aqaf and Religious Affairs Dr. Tahir Raza Bukhari and Walled City officials gave a briefing about the restoration work.

Azfer Ali Nasir promised that the historic mosque, a masterpiece of Mughal architecture, would be restored. He directed that the renovation work at Wazir Khan Masjid should be completed within the given time-frame. He reviewed the security of the 'Darbar' and the mosque.



LAHORE: Former Mayor of Rawalpindi, Sardar Naseem Khan calls on Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif.

Commander Karachi briefs media about PIMEC

KARACHI (APP): Commander Karachi Rear Admiral Mian Zakirullah Jan along with Additional Secretary Ministry of Maritime Affairs (MoMA) Asad Rafi Chandna on Thursday briefed the media about the two-day Pakistan International Maritime Exhibition and Conference (PIMEC) to be commenced from Friday (tomorrow) at Karachi Expo Center.

133 exhibitors including 21 international firms and 112 local firms/ international organizations are participating in the exhibition. In addition, 37 international delegations from 17 countries including Bahrain, KSA, Qatar, Oman, Turkiye, UK, Italy, Germany, Portugal, USA, Colombia, Sri Lanka Malaysia, Gambia, Guinea Bissau, Mauritius, Madagascar, Seychelles and Kazakhstan will also attend the event. Another highlight of the event is active participation of Sindh and Balochistan Governments which have established exclusive pavilions aimed at



promoting investment in the maritime sector. The PIMEC will include maritime exhibition, business to business (B2B) and business to Government (B2G) meetings, signing of MoUs and media interactions. The main objectives of PIMEC are to highlight Pakistan's potential for blue economy, provide opportunities to maritime industry both in public and private sectors to display products at one forum. This will also provide a platform for interaction with international maritime industry for joint ventures, transfer of technology

and research to provide importance to Pakistan's Maritime and Defence industries.

In parallel, the PIMEC's conference part i.e. International Maritime Conference-2023 spearheaded by National Institute of Maritime Affairs, has also been organized on the theme 'Embracing Blue Economy - Challenges and Opportunities for Developing Countries'. The IMC, thematically distributed under 4 Sessions, will cover 27 papers by national and international

speakers of repute.

The PIMEC is being conducted in tandem with Multinational Exercise AMAN-23 which will provide an opportunity to over 122 delegates from 50 participating navies to witness this event. This will also increase opportunities for local exhibitors to interact with international attendees of visiting Navies from across the globe. Maritime sector is the heart of global trade and economy, existing value of global ocean economy is about US \$1.5 Tn per year which is expected to be doubled in size by the year 2030. It can therefore be construed that prosperity of a nation and economic growth are to a greater extent facilitated by the maritime sector.

Pakistan Navy therefore, in coordination with MoMA, took initiative of bringing national and international maritime stakeholders to enhance maritime awareness and bring to fore the largely untapped maritime sector of Pakistan.

GOVERNMENT OF PAKISTAN PAKISTAN PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT

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INVITATION OF BIDS

(SINGLE STAGE TWO ENVELOPES)

Sealed tender/bids on the basis of "Single Stage Two envelopes Procedure" are hereby invited for execution of the following works from eligible contractors/firms duly enlisted/register with Pakistan Engineering Council (PEC) in relevant specialization technical category and financial limit Category C-5 & above is required on percentage rates basis on Pak. PWD Schedule of Rates 2022, who process valid renewal with PEC, having renewal upto 30/06/2023.

S #	Title of Work	NIT Amount	Earnest Money	Tender Cost
DISTRICT TORGHAR				
1	Construction of PCC Roads at Surband Basal Khail District Torgar.	Rs.36,740,359/-	4% of bid amount	Rs. 5000/-
2	Construction of PCC Roads at Shaloon Basal Khail District Torgar.	Rs. 36,790,073/-	4% of bid amount	Rs. 5000/-
3	Construction of PCC Roads at Mada Khail District Torgar	Rs.36,706,384/-	4% of bid amount	Rs. 5000/-
4	Construction of PCC & Improvement Roads at Legra Mada Khail District Torgar.	Rs. 36,790,647/-	4% of bid amount	Rs. 5000/-
5	Construction of PCC Roads at Gharai Mada Khail District Torgar.	Rs. 36,766,158/-	4% of bid amount	Rs. 5000/-

Terms and Condition for Bidding

- The constructors/firms/companies who will receive bidding documents are required to submit their bid in two separate sealed envelopes, i.e., one envelop containing technical information / data and documents of the contractor/firm required for post qualification, clearly marked as "Technical Bid", while the second envelop containing bid price clearly marked as "Financial Bid".
- The application must be accompanied with bid security in shape of CDR/deposit at call from any Scheduled Bank of Pakistan, in favour of Executive Engineer, Central Civil Division-II, Pak.PWD, Peshawar, clearly mentioning the name of firm, whereas the difference of the tendered amount must be accompanied with Financial Bid with its sealed envelop.
- Bidders may purchase the Bidding Documents from the office of Executive Engineer, Central Civil Division-II, Pak. PWD Peshawar at cost of Rs. 5,000/- (Non refundable upto 27/02/2023 during office hours.
- Envelopes of Technical Bid & Financial Bid shall be submitted in the office of the Executive Engineer, Central Civil Division-II, Pak. PWD Shami Road Peshawar on 28/02/2023 by 12.30 PM. The envelope containing Technical Bid shall be opened on same day at 03.00 P.M in the presence of Bidders representatives who opt to be present, Bids received after the prescribed date and time shall not be accepted.
- Bidders will be Technically Qualified on the basis of information provided with the Bids as per the criteria prescribed in the Bidding Documents. Once a Technical Bid received and opened in this office, no addition/subtraction/alteration of any sort of document will be acceptable.
- Pay Order/Demand draft will not be acceptable.
- All CDR once received will be credit into the Government Account and will be re-funded through Government Cheque.
- No tender will be entertained without bid security @ 4% of the bid amount if not found will be declared as non responsive.
- Every firm/contractor must provide the affidavit on stamp paper regarding the non litigation with the department.
- Under Rule 33(1) of PPRA Rules 2004, the under signed reserves the right to accept/reject any or all bids/ proposals at any time prior to acceptance of a bid or proposal.
- The documents provided by the bidders will be verified and in case found ambiguous/fake one, the firm will face immediate/appropriate penal action as per rules and law.
- METHOD OF PROCUREMENT**
 - As per PPRA rule 36(b), open competitive Bidding with "Single Stage Two Envelop" Procedure- One envelop containing Technical Proposal and the other Financial Proposal and both sealed in separate envelopes.
 - After conducting evaluation of Technical Bids, qualified firms shall be informed accordingly for opening of their Financial Bids whereas bids of unqualified firms shall be returned unopened.
 - Non-compliance of Instructions to bidders in the Tender Documents will lead to disqualification/non-responsiveness of the bid/firm.

Nazir Ahmad, Executive Engineer

Central Civil Division No.II,

Pakistan Public Works Department Shami Road Peshawar

PID(P)# 055/2023

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Oil & Gas Development Company Limited (OGDCL) invites sealed bids from reputed firms/bidders registered with Government of Pakistan for SERVICE given below, as per Public Procurement Regulatory Authority (PPRA) Rule:

S. #	Tender Enquiry No.	Description	Bid Security (Rupees)	Bidding System	Schedule Time for Completion of Project	Bid Submission Date & Time	Bid Opening Date & Time
1	C&ESS/FT/2023/09	Supply of Drilling and Utility Water for PDEW at Wali Well #02, District Lakki Marwat, KPK Province	460,000/-	Single Stage One Envelope	As per TOR	01.03.2023 At 1130 Hrs	01.03.2023 At 1200 Hrs

- The Master Set of Tender Document containing Annexure(s), SOR/TOR, detailed terms and conditions, procedure for submission of bids, bid security, bid validity, evaluation criteria, clarification/ rejection of bids, performance guarantee etc. are available on OGDCL website for the interested bidders which can be viewed and downloaded from www.ogdcl.com under the title bar of Tenders under head of Goods/Services without any cost.
- The bids, prepared in accordance with the instructions in the bidding documents, must reach at the following address on or before the date and time mentioned above and the same will be opened as per the schedule mentioned above.
- This advertisement is also available on PPRA website at www.ppra.org.pk and OGDCL website at www.ogdcl.com.

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PTI govt responsible for destruction: Muqam



F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: President PML-N KPK, Amir Muqam Thursday said that the ten-year government of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf was responsible for the destruction of the province. The Khyber Pukhtunkhwa province was on the track of development and the prolonged PTI government brought it to the brink of destruction, he said while addressing the PML-N Worker's Convention here.

Ameer Muqam further said that Hazara division was the stronghold of the Muslim League and would remain a hub in future as well. We are proud of the people of the region because they know the difference between good and bad, nobody can separate the people of Hazara from Nawaz Sharif, he expressed.

Amir Muqam said that Imran Khan deceived the people of this province for

ten years. The provincial government of KP did not serve the masses and played the role of the personal slave of Imran Khan, he added.

President PML-N provincial chapter stated that Imran Khan spread the seeds of hatred in people's hearts, they have presented the wrong work as right, and every government institution, including universities, schools, colleges, and hospitals were ruined

by political interference. He said that billions of rupees were received in the name of the commission, Imran Khan always used the name of Nawaz Sharif to hide all of his failures and thefts during the last ten years and misled the people. Now the nation knows about the reality of Imran Khan and his deeds, he added.

He said that in the upcoming general election, Pakistan Muslim League

(Nawaz) will make a clean sweep in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

The convention was attended by PML-N KP General Secretary Murtaza Javed Abbasi, former Federal Minister Sardar Muhammad Yousuf and Youth Wing President Sardar Aurangzeb Nalotha, who also addressed the convention. A large number of PML-N workers from all districts of Hazara Division participated.

Caretaker minister briefed about facilities

PESHAWAR (APP): Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Minister for Prisons, Shafiqullah Khan Thursday visited Central Jail Prisons and discussed administrative and operational matters.

During visit, the caretaker minister was briefed about facilities being provided to inmates in jail.

The minister was told that library has also been established for prisoners besides arrangements to impart them various technical skills. He was told that steps have also been taken to give religious education to prisoners of central jail Peshawar.

Caretaker minister was briefed that Peshawar prison is the only jail where arrangements have been made for holding online court proceedings for inmates through video link.

Prisons minister also visited various sections of prison and expressed satisfaction over steps being taken for facilitation of prisoners. He also directed jail administration to educate and improve capacity of prisoners enabling them to become useful part of society after their release.



PESHAWAR: Deputy Organizer Insaf Lawyers Forum Pakistan Muhammad Moazam Butt Advocate addressing a press conference. — F.P. photo

Meeting discusses water supply schemes of southern districts

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Minister for Planning, Development and Public Health Engineering Hamid Shah chaired a meeting regarding mega water supply schemes and sanitation in southern districts. The meeting was attended by chief engineers and concerned circle S.E and other officials.

In the meeting, the Provincial caretaker Minister was informed in detail about the mega water supply schemes and sanitation projects in the southern districts.

Speaking on this occasion, the caretaker provincial minister for planning, development and public

health engineering Hamid Shah said that public money would be spent on public welfare projects with full honesty and best planning.

Public health engineering projects should be made according to the best planning and international standards so that they are effective for a long period of time.

During the briefing, the caretaker provincial minister Hamid Shah was told that work is going on in different districts on 13 mega water supply projects in the southern districts, through which it will be possible to supply clean drinking water to the people of these districts.

Along with this, work is

also going on on seven sanitation projects. During the briefing, the progress made on the projects so far was also discussed.

The caretaker provincial minister Hamid Shah while talking during the briefing said that the use of sub standard material will not be tolerated while there is no space for corrupt elements in the department.

On this occasion, he directed the concerned S.E. to carefully review every PC-I in future and approve them keeping in mind the public interest.

He also appreciated the work of the Public Health Engineering Department and assured all kinds of cooperation.

Enhancement of overall quality of affiliated institutes top priority

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The Khyber Medical University (KMU) is giving special importance to improving the quality of medical and allied health sciences education in its constituent as well as affiliated institutions.

These views were expressed by Vice-Chancellor KMU Prof. Dr. Zia Ul Haq while addressing a high-level meeting of the heads of affiliated institutions organized by the quality enhancement cell in the senate hall of the university.

Registrar Prof. Dr. Muhammad Saleem Gandapur, Director of Quality Enhancement cell Dr. Asia Bukhari and heads of affiliated institutions were also present in large numbers at the occasion.

According to a press release issued here on Thursday, KMU is pursuing a comprehensive agenda of reforms in all matters related to academics, research, examinations, laboratories, and governance of the institutions affiliated with the University in the light of the guidelines of the Higher Education Commission and relevant regulatory bodies.

More than two hundred affiliated institutes of Khyber Medical University (KMU) are part of our existence and rais-

ing their overall quality is our top priority.

Prof. Dr. Zia ul Haq said that the affiliation of a large number of new educational institutions with Khyber Medical University (KMU) during the last two years is a sign of trust in Khyber Medical University (KMU) and enhancing the quality of academics, examinations, governance, and research of these institutions according to international standards is also a major challenge.

He said that the purpose of today's meeting is to establish a quality enhancement cell in all affiliated institutions as well as to provide guidance regarding international standards of quality in all sectors.

Vice-Chancellor Khyber Medical

University (KMU) said that it is our goal to explain the classification procedure of HEC W, Y, and X categories to the affiliated institutions and prepare them practically for achieving these goals.

According to this, every institution will be able to self-rank by checking its performance while in this process the Quality Enhancement Cell of Khyber Medical University (KMU) will provide guidance and supervision.

Prof. Dr. Zia ul Haq said that the affiliated institutions will be made cradles of knowledge and research instead of business institutions and in this regard, Khyber Medical University (KMU) will provide all possible support and patronage. He said that the

common goal of all of us is to prepare the best medical personnel by providing quality medical education in the province, which will result in revolutionary changes in the health delivery system.

In the ceremony, the vice-chancellor and director QEC answered the various questions of the participants and assured them that all possible guidance and practical support will be provided by the University for Best Quality Practices.

In the end, Vice-Chancellor Prof. Dr. Zia ul Haq also awarded Dean Ayub Medical College Abbottabad and Principal NCS System with the Best Performance Certificate for the year 2022 for their excellent academic performance.



PESHAWAR: Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Haji Ghulam Ali talking to a student during his visit to Special Education Complex Hayatabad.

73 bakers arrested for selling under weight roti

PESHAWAR (APP): The District administration Peshawar during a crackdown on profiteers arrested 73 bakers (nanbais) for selling under-weight on Thursday.

The crackdown was launched on complaints regarding cut in the weight of roti by nanbais in various localities of the districts, which prompted him to direct officers of the district administration to take action against such bakers in localities within their jurisdiction.

The officers of district administration carried out operation against profiteering bakers in bazaars of Cantonment, Hayatabad, Faqirabad, Gulbahar, interior city and on Bara Road, Pishtakhara Road, University Road, Charsadda Road, Dalzak Road, Kohat Road and other localities and found that 73 bakers were selling under-weight roti to consumers.

The officers of district administration slammed bakers and arrested them and also sealed most of the tandoors.

Power suspension notified

PESHAWAR (APP): The Peshawar Electric Supply Company (PESCO) on Thursday notified that due to maintenance work power supply will remain suspended from 132 KV Peshawar University Grid Station on 10th, 13th and 17th February from 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. resultant consumers of 11 KV University Campus, Canal Town, Malkandher, Engineering, Regi, Gulabad, Taj Abad, Agriculture, Mera Achini, HMC, Ring Road, Danish Abad, Rahat Abad 1, CMB, Ambela, Building Abdul Razak feeders will face inconvenience.

It said that power supply will also remain suspended from 132 KV Sheikh Muhammadi - Kohat Town Transmission Line on 11th February from 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. resultant consumers of 132 KV KDA Kohat and Hangu grid connected with 11 KV feeders will face inconvenience.

The power supply will remain suspended from 132 KV Nishat Tarbela - Right Bank Transmission Line on 11th February from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. resultant consumers of 132 KV Gadoon and Right Bank grid connected with 11 KV feeders will face inconvenience.

Transfer and posting by caretaker govt: PHC issued notices to Governor, ECP

Humayun Khan

PESHAWAR: Peshawar High Court (PHC) has served notices to Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Chief Secretary, Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) and Advocate General to submit reply within 10 days in writ against transfer and posting of Officers by interim government, on Thursday.

The petition was filed by Naem Ahmad Khattak while Ali Azeem Advocate appeared before PHC divisional bench comprised of Justice Ishtiaq Ibrahim and SM Attique Shah while court inquired from former Advocate General Shumail Ahmad Butt while present at the time of hearing.

However, former AG Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Shumail Butt argued that he doesn't party in the case while added the petition has filed by petitioner along with counsel personally. He added that will approach High Court at proper time if it deems fit for him.

The counsel for petitioner argued that interim government had transferred several officers beyond its jurisdiction because caretaker government should to assist ECP to ensure holding free and fair elections.

The PHC's divisional comprising of Justice Ishtiaq Ibrahim and Justice SM Attique Shah issued notices to Governor, Chief Secretary and Advocate General Khyber Pakhtunkhwa to submit reply and adjourned further hearing till 21st February.

Ministers terms setup of CDCs commendable

PESHAWAR (APP): Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Caretaker Minister for Relief, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Department, Director General PDMA, DG Rescue 1122, Director Civil Defense and other relevant officers also participated in the meeting.

On this occasion, the caretaker provincial minister was informed about the ongoing and completed projects under the management of the department, as well as the goals and functions of Provincial Disaster Management Authority, Rescue 1122, Civil Defense and Provincial Emergency Operation Center.

The Caretaker Provincial Minister was informed that for fiscal year 2022-23, the department is taking steps to complete 38 projects at a

total cost of Rs 4 billion. It was further informed that cheques worth Rs 32 billion have been given so far to the owners of demolished houses under the Citizen Losses Compensation Program in the merged districts while another Rs 47 billion is required in this regard.

Addressing the meeting, Caretaker Minister for Relief, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Department, Taj Muhammad Afridi issued instructions to the authorities to speed up the steps for timely completion of all ongoing projects.

He also emphasized to take good measures and work together in the better interest of the people through the Department of Relief, Rehabilitation and Resettlement.

Spring Festival celebrated



F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: China's Spring Festival & Lantern Festival 2023 celebrations at Rashakai Special Economic Zone (RSEZ) Khyber Pakhtunkhwa-Pakistan on Thursday.

Cake cutting on the occasion was graced by (L-R) Pakistan China Friendship Association's Secretary General Syed Ali Nawaz Gilani, Project Manager RSEZ Mr. He Bing, China Road & Bridge Corporation's Ms. Zheng

Fang Sophia, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Economic Zones Development & Management Company (KPEZDMC)'s Chief Operating Officer Mr. Anwar and KPEDZMC's Chief Executive Officer Mr. Javed Khattak.

Corrective steps undertaken to eliminate excess use of quota

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: In the wake of FATA/PATA-merger with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the government extended the benefit of exemption from collection of Income Tax on imports of raw material to the manufacturing units located in these areas.

To ensure that the raw material being imported by these units is used solely for in-house consumption to produce finished goods,

Federal Board of Revenue (FBR), among others, introduced the scheme of quota allocation of raw material on the basis of installed production capacity of the manufacturing units, according to a press release issued here on Thursday.

The task of quota determination was jointly assigned to Regional Tax Office (RTO), Peshawar and DG Input Output Quotient Organization (IOCO).

For this purpose teams were constituted from time to time to determine production capacity of the units and allot a quota of raw material on its basis to them.

However, on revisiting the quota-related record, it was observed that due to tricks of the manufacturing units excess quota was availed by these units.

To arrest this trend, at the direction of Chief Commissioner RTO, Peshawar, Aqeel Ahmed

Siddiqui, Shaukat Hayat Commissioner Corporate Zone and his able team identified main factors responsible for the misuse of quota and took corrective measures accordingly.

As a result of these efforts (Steel, ghee, textile, plastic etc.), to the extent of 143322 MT with approximate market value of Rs.11659.4 (million) and revenue implications of Rs. 2219.62 (million), has been disallowed so far since November, 2022.



In brief

Rasm-e-Qul to be observe today F.P. Report

PABBI: The Rasm-e-Qul of Shahzad Gul to observe today (on Friday) at Hujra of Late Mir Ahmad Khan in Pabbi city. The deceased was father of president All Pakistan Tanker Association Nasir, Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz leader Hassan Khan, Siraj Khan, Asif Shahzad, Kamran Shahzad and Imran Shahzad. The deceased was brother of late Mir Rehman, Sher Alam and Zulfiqar.

BPC new cabinet administer oath F.P. Report

BARIKOT: Caretaker Minister for Communication and Works (C&W) Muhammad Ali Shah administered oath from newly elected cabinet of Barikot press club, on Thursday. Caretaker Minister claimed that problems facing by journalists should be resolve on priority basis. He added that in this regard concrete step should be initiated with consultation with all stakeholders. The newly elected cabinet assured that journalists from Swat should be prioritize every welfare project for media personnel. The journalists committed to fulfill their responsibilities in larger interest of state and public.

Winter package distributed F.P. Report

WANA: The winter package has been distributed among needy tribesmen in collaboration of Pak Army and Tribal Youth Association (TYA), on Thursday. TYA president Murtaza Mehsud said that Pak Army has provided one truck items to the association for needy people. The package was handed over by Brigadier Qasim to TYA president. During the distribution of winter package tribal elders along with Station House Officer Sarogha Niaz were present. The tribesmen paid thanks to Corps Commander Peshawar Lieutenant Hassam Azhar Hayat for provision winter package.

Rain, snowfall continue in Dir F.P. Report

LOWER DIR: The hill tops in both Lower and Upper Dir again were a white blanket when it again began to rain and snow here on Thursday morning. The continuous rain and snowfall in both the districts dropped the temperature and the residents were forced to remain indoors. In Upper Dir snowfall was also recorded even in the Dir bazaar and Sheringal University. About 10 inch snowfall was recorded near the Lowari tunnel, however; traffic to Chitral district has not been suspended. The Upper Dir administration and PDMA have asked the locals to avoid unnecessary travelling to hill tops. The tourists have also been directed to use car chains during their visit to snowy areas. In Lower Dir, snowfall on Laram Top, Shahi top, Sheen Ghar, Kalpani Top in Maidan and Lajbok Dara was recorded while it rained in all parts of the district. The recent spell lowered the temperature again and the majority of the local population was confined to homes. Meanwhile, a youth identified as Awais Ahmad 23, a resident of Kotkay was injured when a car hit a roadside electricity pole on the Jandol road here on Thursday, residents and Rescue officials said. They said the electricity pole and transmission line fell down on the road due to which the power supply and traffic remained disrupted for hours.

Dir journalists return home from 7-day trip to South Punjab



Haleem Asad

LOWER DIR: The Lower Dir journalists on Thursday reached homes on completion of their seven-day recreational and educational trip to South Punjab. The district press club Timergara has arranged the trip. The journalists led by the press club president Ismail Anjum visited the Paradise City in Nowshera, historical places like Yadgar e Pakistan, Badshahi Qilla, Mughal Emperor Jahangir Tomb, Punjab Public Library Lahore, Safari Zoo and Jamaat-i-Islami center Mansora in Lahore.

The group spent three days in Lahore and left for Gurdwara Darbar Sahib Kartarpur where the founder of Sikhism, Guru Nanak had settled for his last 18 years and died there on Sep 22, 1539. The group also met with some of the Indian male and female pilgrims and exchanged their views with them. Most of the Indian pilgrims were

found grateful to the government of Pakistan.

A day later the Lower Dir journalists including Haleem Asad, Nawab Badshah, Haroon ur Rashid, Malik Zia ur Rahim, Malik Akbar Saeed, Abdullah Madani, Hanifullah, Muhabat Shah, Ali Shah, Syed Anwarud Din, Habib Khattak, Syed Arshadullah, Kabir Rughani, Imranullah Siddique and Sher Muhammad then left for Multan where the journalists visited different shrines and met with the project director of the Garrison Public Library Multan Brig. Arshad Mehmood who also belongs to the Talash area of Lower Dir. Brig Arshad warmly welcomed the visiting group and hosted a dinner in their honour. The Library director Muhammad Amir briefed the journalists about the different sections and said that more than 80,000 printed and 200,000 digital books were available for readers. The library also

has a special section for children with visual and lingual impairment.

After staying for two days in Multan, the group left for Faisalabad where they stayed at the famous Ghanta Ghar Chowk. The group enjoyed the visit and remained engaged in shopping for the whole day. Talking about the trip, the group leader Ismail Anjum said that it was their fifth such tour to different areas of Pakistan. He said the Timergara press club arranged one trip in winter and one in summer since 2017 that was a great opportunity for the club members. Mr Anjum said that each trip added to the treasury of their knowledge. About the tour Abdullah Madani, one of the group members said that it was his first experience and he would never miss such an opportunity in future. The group took keen interest in getting knowledge about the historical backgrounds of the cities they visited.

Police fails to trace robbers

F.P. Report

MARDAN: Police officials failed to trace out the alleged robbers who had stolen gold ornaments, cash and some other valuable items from house of local journalist about three months back.

The journalist identified as Imran Younas had also served as general secretary of Mardan Press Club in 2021-22. Talking to media he told that some unknown robbers had stolen gold ornaments 3.5 tolas, two LCDs, two laptops, CCTV cameras DVR and cash amount Rs.20000 from his home when he along with his other family members went to his relatives residing in Peshawar for some days about three months back.

On their return, he told that they found to know that their home located on Bagh-e-Irum road was robbed by some unidentified robbers. Imran Younas told that he filed an application in the relevant City Police Station for registration of First Information Report (FIR) as he knew about the robbery incident.

After submitting of

application, he lamented firstly; the officials of city police station were using delay tactics to register FIR of their robbery incident; however, they registered the FIR when he complained to Regional Police Officer Muhammad Ali Khan during his visit to Mardan Press Club. He deplored that police had yet to recover their stolen gold, cash and other valuable items as well as to trace out and arrest the real perpetrators of robbery incident. He also alleged that the police were not making cooperation with them, adding, that they were only making false claims just for their satisfaction to make recovery and arrest in the robbery incident.

He demanded of the Inspector general of police Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa Moazzam Jah Ansari and Regional police officer (RPO) Mardan Mohammad Ali Khan to take effective and strict action in their robbery incident, otherwise, the Mardan based journalists would be forced to decide to boycott coverage of all police programs and activities.

DPO directs crackdown against drugs

F.P. Report

BAHAWALPUR: Police operations against anti-social elements continued, 35 accused were arrested in the last 2 days, 01 kilo of hashish, 387 liters of country liquor and 25 liters of alcohol were seized from those possessing drugs and illegal weapons. Export, cases filed.

According to the details, in the light of the orders of the Inspector General of Police Punjab, Additional Inspector General of Police South Punjab, as per the instructions of DP Osyed Muhammad Abbas, operations against the anti-social elements of Bahawalpur Police are going on. Sadr Hasilpur, Derawar, Suma Satta, City Yazman, Sadr Yazman, Musafar Khana, Nowshera, Jaid and Civil Lines Police arrested 10 suspects while conducting operations against the liquor sellers, from whose possession 387 liters of country liquor and 25 liters of alcohol and 03 active furnaces were recovered.

Nowshera police station Jadidi and Kotwali police arrested 02 suspects and recovered 01 kg hashish from their possession while conducting operations against drug dealers.

US CG for people-to-people ties between two countries

Saqib Mushtaq

BAHAWALPUR: United States Consul General to Lahore William K. Makaneole emphasized the importance of the US-Pakistan partnership for expanding people-to-people ties between the two countries. "Our countries have been partners for over 75 years. Our two nations have substantial shared interests and values, something reflected in our partnership and the many kinds of cooperation that support it," noted Consul General Makaneole.

The Consul General praised the efforts of the local business community at a lunch reception hosted by the Bahawalpur Chamber of Commerce of Industries. He said, "The US government has worked to develop trade and investment ties, encourage innovation, entrepreneurship, and support women's economic empowerment." He further underscored the strong bilateral economic relationship during meetings and tours of the Asia Ghee Mill and Ashraf Sugar Mills. Mr. Makaneole said, "The United States continues to be Pakistan's top export destination and Punjab is a center for trade between our two countries. US direct investment in Pakistan increased by 50 percent and is now the highest it has been in over a decade." These are significant numbers and there is room for further growth. He hailed the efforts of the manufacturers and noted, "Both our countries and the whole region will gain from expanded bilateral trade and investment."

While in Bahawalpur, the Consul General visited the Black Buck Sanctuary and toured the Conservation Breeding Centre. He was impressed with the initiatives of the Punjab Wildlife Forest and Fisheries Department and discussed US efforts



to counter climate change through the Green Alliance with diverse partners in Pakistan. The US-Pakistan Green Alliance is a framework to address shared challenges relating to agriculture, energy, water, and other environmental issues. The Green Alliance strengthens climate resilience and fosters inclusive economic growth.

Consul General Makaneole's participation in the Cholistan Jeep Rally was a highlight of his visit. The Consul General inaugurated the two main categories -- prepared (modified cars) and stock (original factory build). He thanked the Tourism Development Corporation of Punjab for inviting him to witness Pakistan's biggest motor sports event and noted, "Economic development, including

through tourism, is one of the top priorities of the US Mission in Pakistan and we look forward to future partnerships for contributing to the economic development of local communities."

Makaneole also witnessed the rich history and cultural heritage of the district of Bahawalpur during a visit to the Noor Mahal and Derawar Fort. The United States has a broad, deep, and long-term partnership with the people of Punjab Province spanning the education, economic, health, and rule of law sectors and beyond. The US Mission looks forward to deepening and expanding these relationships over the coming years. Which will promote a more stable, secure, and prosperous future for both nations.

MOL Pakistan holds Sports Gala for girls

F.P. Report

KOHAT: MOL Pakistan Oil and Gas Company B.V. in partnership with the Joint Venture consortium of Tal Block and in collaboration with the district administration of Kohat held a Community Sports Gala for girls in District Kohat, said a press release issued here on Thursday.

More than 200 girl students from various schools and colleges of the adjoining areas attended the event held at the Kohat District Sports Complex. Girls actively participated in various team games and sports such as badminton, volleyball and table tennis etc.

Ms Reena Shaheed Sohorwerdi, Additional Deputy Commissioner (F&P) District Kohat was the chief guest at the event. Beside, Deputy Commissioner (DC) Kohat, Furqan Ashraf and Assistant Commissioner (AC) Lachi Ms. Khola Sajid Khan Afridi, District Sport Officer (DSO), District Kohat and all members of District and School Administrations also witnessed the sports activities.

While talking to the audience the chief guest

said that he is extremely thankful to MOL Pakistan for its support towards promoting healthy activities for the youth, especially girls of this area,". She also said that the district administration was committed to supporting and encouraging youth, girls in particular, to play team and individual sports.

In his message Ali Murtaza Abbas, MOL Group Regional Vice President for Middle East, Africa, and Pakistan said that the company operates in some of the most rural and remotest parts of the country, where they promote sports and games as a means of cultural conservation and to promote the spirit of sports, inclusivity, and a healthy lifestyle in our local communities. However, due to very limited sport facilities and equipment, recreational activities and sports are not always available and accessible. Therefore, at the request of our local communities, especially youth, MOL Pakistan regularly sponsors and organizes community sports galas through our corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives." At the end the chief guest distributed trophies and prizes

among the winners and the runner ups. The girls thanked the company for its support to women and girls, and promoting their inclusion and empowerment in the area.

Three die in accident

F.P. Report

MINGORA: Three persons including driver died in an accident when a car plunged into a deep ditch on Thursday in Sarbanda, Matta tehsil of Swat. According to the private media report, the incident occurred when a pick-up van carrying grass, fell down into a deep trench due to brake failure.

As a result, three people died in the incident. Police and rescue officials reached the spot immediately after being informed. According to police sources, in the accident, 22-year-old Abdul Samad son of Pai Muhammad died on the spot, while the driver, 22-year-old Muhammad Salim son of Muhammad Saeed and Attaullah son of Ghulam Muhammad were seriously injured, who later died on the way to the hospital.

College students hold protest in Bara

F.P. Report

BARA: A protest demonstration of students of Government College, Kohi Sher Haider Bara against shortage of facilities in their educational institution was held here in front of the local press club on Thursday.

Scores of learners carried placards inscribed with sayings in favor of their demands and chanted slogans against the officials of the education department, members parliament and other concerned officials. Speaking on the occasion, Moqebullah who led the rally said that since long they had been facing a shortage of basic facilities including lack of computer science and science subjects' laboratories, net, electricity, sports goods, transport etc.

It was ironic that for the last four years the institution functioned without Principal they added and said they initiated numbers of agitation for supply of facilities but to in avail. They blamed that the posted professors and teaching staff were constantly absent from their duties and the students themselves learned their lessons in the classrooms.

Wafaqi Mohtasib's Institution: Promoting good governance

Abdul Majeed Niazi

THE sanctity and inviolability of human rights is the essential feature of the concept of ombudsman-ship and the means to achieving the ultimate goal of good governance. Maladministration and bad governance are two sides of the same coin.

Both breed in an environment of favouritism, discrimination, corruption and exploitation where human rights is the first casualty. Maladministration grows in the absence of human rights while the continued violation of human rights further erodes the system of accountability and dispensation of justice. The role of ombudsman institutions, therefore, is fundamental to breaking this vicious circle and establishing the rule of law and good governance in any society.

Pakistan is among the few pioneering countries in South Asia that have successfully introduced the Ombudsman's institution to ensure dispensation of inexpensive and expeditious administrative justice to promote good governance. It was on 24th January 1983, that the Office of Wafaqi Mohtasib (Ombudsman) was established with the explicit objectives to diagnose, investigate, rectify and redress any injustice done to a person through maladministration by the federal government agencies. In this long journey of four decades, the institution has followed a positive trajectory alongside taking steps to

enhance its efficiency and efficacy. It has, over the years, fine tuned its complaints handling mechanism comprising investigation of complaints, appraisal, review and implementation of recommendations of the Wafaqi Mohtasib. It is now fully capable of resolving complaints of maladministration in large numbers, reaching out to the complainants and holding public hearings (KhuliKatcheries) at their door steps, informal resolution of disputes, inspection of various federal government agencies to improve their service delivery and undertaking studies to ascertain the root causes of maladministration and recommending measures to rectify the same.

Today, in addition to the Wafaqi Mohtasib's Head office at Islamabad, 17 regional offices and two complaint collection centers at Wana (South Waziristan) and Sadda (District Kurram) are discharging their statutory functions. During the period January to December 2022, incidence of complaints rose from 110,405 to the highest ever number of 164,174 (49% increase) and disposal reached an all-time high of 157,770 as compared to the figure of 106,823 of the year 2021 (47.7% increase). Under the Informal Resolution of Disputes (IRD) project which was launched in April last year, 1114 cases have been resolved while 266 are under process. This Office has completed 28 studies/reports which are at various stages of implementation. These

include, working of Central Directorate of National Savings, Government Procurement System, disbursement of pensions and jail reforms particularly, the living conditions of women and children in jails. The most recent study reports relate to controlling the population growth and addressing the plight of street children in Islamabad Capital Territory.

The Outreach Complaint Resolution (OCR) system, where, the designated officers visit various districts to redress grievances at the doorsteps of the complainants, has been further strengthened by organizing KhuliKatcheries in remote areas. This provides general public an opportunity to raise their grievances in the presence of representatives of agencies closer to their homes and get immediate relief. Under the Integrated Complaint Resolution System (ICR), the Wafaqi Mohtasib's Secretariat (WMS) has developed interface with 181 government agencies whereby any complaint which remains unresolved with the agency beyond 30 days, is automatically transferred to the Federal Ombudsman's Complaint Management Information System (CMIS) for further processing and disposal.

The online complaints rose from 25,820 in the year 2021 to 51,112 in 2022 showing 97% increase; and the ICR complaints registered enormous increase from 46,829 to 91,496 (95.4% increase) whereas the

number of ICR cases transferred to WMS from the interface of other agencies also increased from 16,103 to 18,107 in the same period. This means that the agencies concerned resolved 73,389 complaints, at their own, through their respective complaint management systems which not only reflects the efficacy of the ICR system but also an improvement in service delivery of the agencies concerned.

Grievance Commissioner's office for Overseas Pakistanis in the WMS offers an institutional framework for addressing individual complaints and systemic issues faced by Overseas Pakistanis. One Window Facilitation Desks (OWFD) established on the direction of Wafaqi Mohtasib at all international airports of the country to facilitate Overseas Pakistanis and their families travelling to or from Pakistan have been functioning well. In addition, Focal Persons have been appointed in Pakistan Missions abroad to personally hear and resolve problems faced by the Pakistani diaspora. It is encouraging to note that as against 58,990 complaints of Overseas Pakistanis resolved in 2021, a total of 137,647 complaints were disposed of in 2022 showing (133% increase). Out of these, 118,290 complaints were resolved/queries answered at OWFDs as against 45,037 in 2021.

Today, ombudsmanship is an essential feature of every modern democratic society. The structure, scope and powers of ombudsman,

however, vary from one society to another and is directly related to the larger social, political and legal system operating in that country. The legal framework of the Federal Ombudsman's institution in Pakistan provides the necessary support in performing its statutory functions in an effective and efficient manner. This includes provisions allowing ombudsman to undertake any investigation of his own motion into any allegation and to stay operation of the impugned order/decision for a period not exceeding 60 days. Likewise, Wafaqi Mohtasib enjoys same powers, mutatis mutandis, as the Supreme Court to punish for contempt. Similarly, no court or authority has jurisdiction to question the validity of any action taken under the President's Order No.1 of 1983 or grant any injunction or stay in relation to any proceedings pending before the Ombudsman.

The concept of ombudsmanship has been replicated into other areas of governance as well. Currently, 14 ombudsman institutions dealing with matters relating to banking, insurances, taxation and protection against harassment of women at workplace are successfully functioning in the country.

Pakistan has also played a pivotal role in promoting ombudsmanship in Asia and the Muslim world. Encouraged by its experience and interaction with International Ombudsman Institute (IOI) in different capacities, Pakistan hosted the first

Asian Ombudsman Conference at Islamabad establishing the Asian Ombudsman Association (AOA) in April 1996. The Asian Ombudsman Association is a major non-political, independent, democratic and professional body of international character representing more than two thirds of the world population. Wafaqi Mohtasib is the current President of the AOA and its Secretariat is housed in the Wafaqi Mohtasib Secretariat. The ombudsman fraternity witnessed another important development when Pakistan took the initiative of promoting ombudsmanship in the Muslim World from the platform of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). The OIC Ombudsman Association (OICOA) was formed in 2014.

Federal Ombudsman's institution is fundamentally the poor man's court. There is no requirement to hire services of an advocate nor the complainants have to face lengthy legal processes as the cases are disposed of within the prescribed limit of sixty days. Over 1.9 million households have so far benefited from its services which offer groundswell of support for its operations. Providing prompt relief to those facing administrative excesses, discrimination, exploitation, negligence and inefficiency at the hands of the government agencies or its employees is central to the concept of ombudsmanship and the means to achieving the ultimate goal of good governance.



Aid to quake-hit Syria slowed by sanctions, war's divisions

BEIRUT (AP): Even before Monday's devastating earthquake, getting aid to all parts of war-battered Syria was fraught with daunting political and logistical challenges. Those hurdles have only multiplied in the wake of the disaster that has killed thousands in Turkey and Syria and brought down thousands of buildings.

Damage to roads and other infrastructure in southern Turkey has stalled aid from reaching northern Syria, an area already devastated by 12 years of conflict. Meanwhile, the government of Bashar Assad in Damascus is still a pariah in much of the international community, sanctioned by the US and European countries, which are reluctant to route aid directly through the government. American and EU officials have made clear the quake won't change that.

Emergency workers say delays could cost lives, as local rescue crews struggle to pull families and children from the rubble and find housing for survivors amid brutal winter weather. A key issue complicating the dispersal of aid is "the war and the way the aid response is split between rebel areas and Damascus," said Aron Lund, a fellow with New York-based think tank Century International who researches Syria. While the majority of Syria is under the control of the government in Damascus, most of the north is controlled by different - and sometimes conflicting - groups. The northwest is divided between land de facto controlled by Turkey and by Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, a rebel group with ties to al-Qaida. Syria's northeast is mostly held by US-backed Kurdish-led groups.

Foreign aid for years has been brought into northwestern Idlib province by way of Turkey, because of the difficulty of going by way of Damascus. But the area of southern Turkey traditionally used as a staging area has itself been heavily damaged by the earthquake. Aid delivery into northwestern Syria was "temporarily disrupted", a United Nations

spokesperson told The Associated Press, due to infrastructure damage and difficulty with road access. In particular, damage to the Hatay airport and the road to the border crossing used for aid, Bab al-Hawa, was delaying shipments, said Emma Beals, a nonresident fellow at the Washington-based Middle East Institute.

"There is also the fact that there are enormous needs in Turkey itself," she said. One cause for hold-ups is that the UN mandate for delivering aid to the territory only allows it to enter through Bab al-Hawa crossing, Beals said. Also, international search teams may be reluctant to enter earthquake-affected areas controlled by HTS, which is designated as a terrorist organization by the US.

The group's "presence limits the kinds of aid many donors are prepared to supply to the area," she said. The government in Damascus and its allies in Russia have seized the moment to renew their push for aid to the north to be routed through Damascus. Countries opposed to Assad do not trust the Syrian authorities to effectively deliver aid to opposition areas and worry it would be diverted to benefit people and institutions linked to the government. Natasha Hall, a senior fellow at the Washington-based Center for Strategic and International Studies, said sending aid via Damascus to the north is not viable in practice, especially at a time of urgent need.

"It is extremely logistically and administratively difficult to get the approvals (from Damascus)," she said. Coordination of aid is also hampered "because the government of Syria doesn't recognize the non-governmental organizations working in northwest Syria." At a press conference in Damascus, Syrian Arab Red Crescent head Khaled Hboubati said his group is "ready to deliver relief aid to all regions of Syria, including areas not under government control." He called for the European Union to lift its sanctions on Syria in light of the massive



destruction caused by the earthquake. Aid convoys and rescuers from several countries, notably key ally Russia, as well as the United Arab Emirates, Iraq, Iran, and Algeria, have landed in airports in government-held Syria.

Still, the sanctions exacerbate the "difficult humanitarian situation," Hboubati said. "There is no fuel even to send (aid and rescue) convoys, and this is because of the blockade and sanctions," he said. So far, the US and its allies have resisted attempts at creating a political opening by way of the disaster response. US State Department spokesman Ned Price told reporters that it would be "ironic, if not even counterproductive, for us to reach out to a government that has brutalized its people over the course of a dozen years now." Price said the US would continue to provide aid through "humanitarian partners on the ground."

Similarly, a spokesperson for the United Kingdom's Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office said the "sanctions regime was put in place in response to human rights violations and other abuses by the regime and their cronies." A US State Department spokesperson said

humanitarian assistance in government-held areas go through partner organizations instead of the government.

"Our partners in regime-controlled areas directly deliver assistance to beneficiaries without control or direction from the Assad regime," they told AP. "This is to ensure that our assistance is not diverted by malign actors or the Assad regime and reaches the intended beneficiaries." One of the main groups supported by the United States and Britain is a civil defense organization in opposition-held areas known as the White Helmets; USAID Administrator Samantha Power spoke with the group's head and "discussed how USAID can provide the most urgently needed assistance in response to the earthquake," her office said in a statement. The European Union has provided aid in all parts of Syria through UN and NGO partners and is trying to increase funding for humanitarian support, said European Commission spokesperson Balazs Ujvari. He said the Syrian government has not yet formally requested Europe send rescue and medical workers.

In theory, aid operations in govern-

ment areas should not be blocked by sanctions, since both the US and EU have exemptions for humanitarian aid. But the reality on the ground is sometimes different. For example, Lund said, banks might block transfers to pay suppliers or local workers for aid organizations for fear of running afoul of sanctions, despite the exemptions. Also, US sanctions and to some extent EU ones try to prevent rebuilding of damaged infrastructure and property in government-held areas in the absence of a political solution, which could hamper post-earthquake recovery, Lund said.

Meanwhile, in both parts of Syria, local emergency workers say only limited aid is reaching them. "There are promises that aid will get to us but nothing has gotten here yet," said the White Helmets' head Raed Saleh. Meanwhile, a leading United Nations official called for the facilitation of aid access to rebel-held areas in Syria's northwest, warning that relief stocks will soon be depleted. Rebel-held areas near Turkey's border -- hard hit by the 7.8 magnitude earthquake that struck -- cannot receive aid from government-held parts of Syria without Damascus's authorisation.

"Put politics aside and let us do our humanitarian work," the UN's resident Syria coordinator El-Mostafa Benlamlh said in an interview with AFP, warning: "We can't afford to wait and negotiate. By the time we negotiate, it's done, it's finished." Earthquake devastated entire sections of major cities in Turkey and Syria, killing more than 11,700 people, injuring thousands more and leaving many more without shelter in the winter cold. In Syria alone, at least 2,662 people have been killed, according to the government and rescuers in rebel-held areas.

Speaking to AFP from Damascus, Benlamlh said the destruction in government-held provinces "is huge". "But we know also that the destruction in the northwest is huge and we need

to get there to assess," he said. "We still have to negotiate and we still have to get access to, for example, the northwest area, it's not easy." No fresh deliveries have been sent to the region from within Syria in about three weeks, according to the UN official.

The UN has some stocks in the area -- enough to feed 100,000 people for one week, he said. "Once it's depleted, we need to replenish and this is my call," he said. "We need the support of all interested parties to facilitate access, be it to the northwest of Syria or to the rest of Syria because there also, they are suffering." The UN said the sole border crossing used to shuttle life-saving aid from Turkey into conflict-ravaged Syria has seen its operations disrupted. But the UN's regional humanitarian coordinator for Syria said that he hoped aid delivery could resume as soon as the next day.

"Luckily today we are hearing that the road is opening, we do have a possibility hopefully to access the border," Muhannad Hadi said, adding that the UN was working with Turkish authorities. "We are hoping that tomorrow we will be able to deliver something and cross the border," he told a news conference, noting that trucks were ready to leave if necessary. But he cautioned that there was some uncertainty about the road on the Syrian side, citing information that was "hard to verify." Since 2011, Syria's war has killed nearly half a million people and forced around half of the country's prewar population from their homes, with many seeking refuge in Turkey. Even before Monday's earthquake, the majority of the population was in need of humanitarian assistance. The latest disaster has only piled on more misery. "This is a crisis over a crisis," Benlamlh said. "There is not enough equipment for the search and rescue, there is not enough medical equipment, there is not enough medicine."

Putin likely approved MH17 missile supply, investigators say

MOSCOW (AFP): International investigators said there were "strong indications" that Russian President Vladimir Putin personally approved the supply of the missile that shot down Malaysia Airlines flight MH17 over Ukraine in 2014. But the team said they were halting their probe into the disaster since there was not enough evidence to prosecute more suspects and Putin has immunity as head of state in any case.

All 298 people on board were killed when a Russian-made missile slammed into the plane travelling from Amsterdam to Kuala Lumpur, sending it crashing to earth in separatist-held eastern Ukraine. "There are strong indications that a decision was made at presidential level, by President Putin, to supply... the Buk TELAR" missile system, Dutch prosecutor Digna van Boetzel said. "Although we speak of strong indications, the high bar of complete and conclusive evidence is not reached," she told a news conference in The Hague. The announcement comes less than three months after a Dutch court convicted two Russians and a Ukrainian in absentia over the downing of MH17.

Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte said the deci-

sion was a "bitter disappointment" but that "we will continue to call the Russian Federation to account". Russia has denied any involvement in the downing of MH17. It slammed last year's court verdict convicting the three men as "scandalous" and politically motivated. But the chain of command was clear, said the Joint Investigation Team into the crash of MH17, which comprised the Netherlands, Malaysia, Australia, Belgium and Ukraine. Russian officials even postponed a decision to send weapons to Ukrainian separatists because Putin was at a D-Day commemoration in France in June 2014, they said.

They played an intercepted telephone call from an adviser saying the delay was "because there is only one who makes a decision... the person who is currently at a summit in France". Putin himself could also be heard speaking about a "military component" in another call with a separatist leader from the Lugansk region. Other officials such as Russian Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu did not have the necessary decision-making power and "this was ultimately the president's decision", they said. However, with a lack of cooperation

from Moscow and a dearth of witnesses willing to come forward, the case has now ground to a halt. "All leads have now been exhausted, the investigation is therefore being suspended," van Boetzel said.

Putin himself was untouchable -- for now at least. "The president of the Russian Federation enjoys, at the very least, immunity under international law in view of his position as head of state," added the Dutch prosecutor. The victims of the disaster -- which triggered international outrage and sanctions against Russia -- came from 10 countries, including 196 Dutch, 43 Malaysians and 38 Australian residents. Families of the victims said they were disappointed by the decision to halt the investigation. "We had hoped for more -- but we didn't count on it," said MH17 foundation chairman Piet Ploeg, who lost his brother, sister-in-law and nephew on MH17.

Investigators said they felt they had achieved more than they thought possible in 2014. "Would we have liked to come further? Of course, yes," said Andy Kraag, head of the Dutch National Criminal Investigation Department, adding that "the answer remains in Russia". Australian Foreign

Minister Penny Wong and Attorney-General Mark Dreyfus on Thursday said Russia had repeatedly tried to thwart the investigation, making it "impossible" to collect proof. "Russia's illegal and immoral invasion of Ukraine and its lack of cooperation with the investigation have rendered ongoing investigative efforts and the collection of evidence impossible at this time," they said in a joint statement. They added that Australia would "hold Russia to account for its role in the downing of the civilian aircraft".

The MH17 probe has not closed and will keep its hotlines and website open, officials added. The evidence it has gathered could also be used by other tribunals including the International Criminal Court, or the European Court of Human Rights, which has ruled that most complaints lodged by the Netherlands against Russia are admissible. The three men convicted last year -- Russians Igor Girkin and Sergei Dubinsky and Ukrainian Leonid Kharchenko -- remain at large and are unlikely to ever serve their life sentences. Girkin has since become a high-profile critic of Russia's military policy in Ukraine, criticising earlier retreats by Moscow's troops.

2 US Army veterans win citizenship

WASHINGTON (Agencies): After fighting in Afghanistan, former United States Army soldier Mauricio Hernandez Mata returned home with post-traumatic stress, which he says eventually led to trouble with the law. He was then deported to Mexico, a country he had not lived in since he was a boy. But, he and another deported veteran were sworn in as US citizens at a special naturalisation ceremony in San Diego, California.

The two veterans were among 65 people who have been allowed back into the US over the past year as part of a growing effort by President Joe Biden's administration to make amends with immigrants who served in the US military only to wind up deported. The Immigrant Military Members and Veterans Initiative seeks to address the hundreds of US military veterans affected by what immigration advocates and others consider an unfair punishment. Many are still struggling to find legal help to return to the US, according to the American Civil Liberties Union. "After my deportation, yeah, I never thought this day would come," said the 41-year-old Hernandez, dressed in a black suit and tie after being presented with his US citizenship certificate. "It's definitely been a long road. I'm glad that we were given a second chance, as anybody that is either American-born or fought for America should have."

Leonel Contreras, 63, who joined the US Army at the age of 17 and served for a year in 1976, also was sworn in at the ceremony. "I feel very blessed," said Contreras, who was allowed back into the US about four months ago. "I feel very happy to be back on American soil." Both men spent the past decade living in the border city of Tijuana. Contreras was whisked away by US immigration authorities - who walked into the barbershop where he worked in National City, south of San Diego - placed into immigration detention and deported. His life changed forever. He continued to work in Tijuana as a barber and found work at call centres because of his English, helping to answer questions from customers of US companies. But it was not easy.

During that time, his two sons grew up, and he now is a grandfather. With US citizenship now in hand, Contreras said he is not looking back. "I just want to go to all the places I've dreamed of seeing, like the Grand Canyon and possibly Mount Rushmore," he said. Hernandez said his deportation came after unspecified "irreverent actions and mistakes I made due to my PTSD".

'Anti-Turkish protests have increased attack threat'

STOCKHOLM (AP): The Swedish domestic security agency warned that the threat of attacks in the Scandinavian country has increased in the weeks since a far-right activist burned a Quran outside the Turkish Embassy in Stockholm. The agency noted that international reactions to the events outside the embassy last month "have been extensive" and "the assessment is that the security situation has deteriorated."

"Sweden is judged to be in greater focus than before for violent Islamism globally," the security service, which is known by the Swedish acronym SAPO, said. The security agency, however, did not change Sweden's terror threat level, which already stood at three on a five-point scale. Its statement came at time of tensions with mostly Muslim Turkey over the applications of Sweden and

Finland to become NATO members. Turkey is angry that Sweden has allowed anti-Turkish protests to take place, and particularly that it did not prevent an anti-Islam activist from burning the Quran, the Muslim holy book. The Turkish government also claims Sweden is not doing enough to counter Kurdish activists that it considers terrorists.

Unless its demands are met, Turkey has said it won't approve Sweden's NATO application, which requires ratification by all of the military alliance's 30 members. Police in Stockholm said they had turned down an application for permission to burn the Quran during a new protest, saying that "such a gathering is judged to be capable of causing serious disturbances to national security." Police said the decision was made in consultation with SAPO. The police did-

n't say when the protest had been scheduled for or who had sought permission - which is needed in Sweden. Swedish broadcaster SVT said it was to have been staged outside the Turkish Embassy on Thursday. The US Embassy in Stockholm issued a warning of "possible retaliatory attacks by terrorists in the wake of recent Quran-burning incidents in Europe."

In its security assessment, SAPO also cited a disinformation campaign that claims Swedish social service agencies kidnap Muslim children. Last week, Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson said the government would post guards inside social services offices and earmark more funds to the Swedish Psychological Defense Agency, which was established to counter misinformation. He didn't say how much money would be given to the agency."

US forces returning to Philippines to counter China threats

SUBIC BAY, Philippines (AP): Once-secret ammunition bunkers and barracks lay abandoned, empty and overrun by weeds - vestiges of American firepower in what used to be the United States' largest overseas naval base at Subic Bay in the northern Philippines. But that may change in the near future. The US has been taking steps to rebuild its military might in the Philippines more than 30 years after the closure of its large bases in the country and reinforcing an arc of military alliances in Asia in a starkly different post-Cold War era when the perceived new regional threat is an increasingly belligerent China.

On Feb. 2, the longtime allies announced that rotating batches of American forces would be granted access to four more Philippine military camps aside from five other local bases, where US-funded constructions have picked up pace to build barracks, warehouses and other buildings to accommodate a yet-unspecified but expectedly considerable number of visiting troops under a 2014 defense pact. Manila-based political scientist Andrea

Chloe Wong said the location of the Philippine camps would give the US military the presence it would need to be a "strong deterrent against Chinese aggression" in the South China Sea, where China, the Philippines and four other governments have had increasingly tense territorial rifts - as well as a potential Chinese invasion of Taiwan, which Beijing views as its own territory to be brought under Chinese control, by force if necessary. Around the former US Navy base in Subic, now a bustling commercial freeport and tourism destination northwest of Manila, news of the Philippine government's decision to allow an expanded American military presence rekindled memories of an era when thousands of US sailors pumped money, life and hope into the neighboring city of Olongapo.

"Olongapo was like Las Vegas then," Filipino businessman AJ Saliba told The Associated Press in an interview in his foreign currency exchange and music shop along what used to be Olongapo's garish red-light strip. "Noisy as early as noon with neon lights

turned on and the Americans roaming around. Women were everywhere. Jeepney drivers, tricycles, restaurants, bars, hotels - everybody was making money - so if they will return, my God, you know, that'll be the best news," he said. US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said during his visit in Manila last week that Washington was not trying to reestablish permanent bases, but that the agreement to broaden its military presence under the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement was "a big deal."

Visiting American military personnel could engage the Philippine military in larger joint combat-readiness trainings, provide help in responding rapidly to disasters and press efforts to help modernize Manila's armed forces, Austin and his Philippine counterpart Carlito Galvez Jr. said. "This is part of our effort to modernize our alliance, and these efforts are especially important as the People's Republic of China continues to advance its illegitimate claims in the West Philippine Sea," Austin said at a news conference in Manila. Chinese

Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning said the US military's strengthening in the region was escalating tensions and risking peace and stability.

"Regional countries need to remain vigilant and avoid being coerced or used by the US," Mao told reporters Feb. 2 at a briefing in Beijing. Austin and Galvez did not reveal the four new locations where the Americans would be granted access and allowed to preposition weapons and other equipment. The Philippine defense chief said local officials, where the Americans would stay, had to be consulted. In November, then-Armed Forces of the Philippines Chief of Staff Lt. Gen. Bartolome Bacarro disclosed that the sites included the strategic Subic Bay, where the Navy base was once a boon to the local economy. But two senior Philippine officials told the AP that Subic, where a Philippine navy camp is located, was not among the current list of sites where Washington has sought access for its forces, although they suggested that could change as talks were continuing.

Merkel receives UNESCO peace prize

YAMOUSSOUKRO, Ivory Coast (AP): Former German Chancellor Angela Merkel received a UNESCO peace prize for her decision to welcome more than 1.2 million migrants to Germany despite resistance at home and among European partners. Organizers said that Merkel showed political courage when Germany welcomed refugees in 2015-2016 who had fled conflicts in Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan and Eritrea.

Nobel Peace Prize winner Denis Mukwege, president of the jury awarding the prize, praised Merkel for having opened the gates of Germany "at the same time many other countries were overcome with fear." "You showed public opinion and decision-makers that we have not only to

defend our own rights, but those of others in times of crisis, that each society needs more than ever to respect and protect human rights without any form of discrimination," he said. "We commend your humanity, your spirit of solidarity and your keen sense of ethics and your inspiring leadership," he added. In accepting the award, Merkel spoke of current refugee crises, particularly the war in Ukraine.

"We had thought that the time of war in Europe had passed," Merkel said. "But since the 24th of February of last year, which is when Russia's vicious aggression on Ukraine took place, we have come to the sad conclusion that that's not the case. This has shaken Europe to its roots." The 68-year-old center-right

politician, who led Germany for 16 years, has kept a relatively low profile since handing over to successor Olaf Scholz in December 2021. Among a few other appearances, the one-time physicist accepted an award from the UN refugee agency and gave a speech honoring the former head of a national scientific academy in which she mentioned gut flora and antibiotic resistance. Her political memoirs are due to be published in 2024. The Félix Houphouët-Boigny Peace Prize awarded to Merkel is named for Ivory Coast's first president after independence from France in 1960. The award was presented to Merkel in Yamoussoukro, Ivory Coast's capital and the hometown of the late Houphouët-Boigny.

Uganda blocks operations of UN rights office in the country

KAMPALA, Uganda (AP): Ugandan authorities say they will not renew the mandate of the United Nations human rights office in the East African country, effectively blocking the group's operations at a time of heightened concerns over rights abuses. In a Feb. 3 notice to the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights in Uganda's capital Kampala, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs asserted that local authorities have "the capacity to monitor the promotion and protection of human rights throughout the country."

From now on Uganda's government will deal directly with the Geneva headquarters of the UN rights office, stated the letter that has been seen by The Associated Press. Ugandan officials confirmed the letter is authentic. Nicholas Opiyo, a prominent rights attorney in Uganda, described the decision as "unfortunate," saying in a Twitter post that he hoped it was just a misunderstanding that could be resolved. The UN rights office in Kampala has been operational since

2006. In recent years its offices have been the scene of some protests by activists and others trying to highlight rights violations allegedly perpetrated by Ugandan state agents. Allegations have included torture and disappearances.

In one violent incident after Uganda's presidential polls in 2021, police roughed up journalists who had gone to the office to cover an opposition party's efforts to present a petition alleging abuses by security forces.

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Kabul growing diplomatic alienation

ACCORDING to the media, following Saudi Arabia's decision to evacuate its diplomats to Islamabad, Turkey, and the United Arab Emirates have decided to move out their staff and reduce diplomatic activities in Afghanistan due to heightened security risks. The Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan is continuously facing growing diplomatic isolation over the past months, as a majority of world nations had either shut down their embassies or reduced their presence in the Afghan capital to a minimum level. Since the Taliban takeover of Kabul in August 2021, only 13 foreign missions were operational in the capital including Iran, Pakistan, India, China, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, UAE, Turkey, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan. These numbers have now further contracted after Saudi Arabia relocated its diplomats to Islamabad, while Turkey and UAE reduced their presence amid serious security concerns.

Surprisingly, a meek situation has emerged in violence-hit Afghanistan that friendly nations who had been supporting the Afghan interim government in the past to help revitalize peace and stability in the conflict-ridden nation, have now given up their support and expressed their desperation over the policies of the Afghan incumbent rulers. In fact, poor governance and security threats had always existed in Afghanistan, yet the political clumsiness, tough and unreconciled policies of the interim authorities regarding women's right to get an education, work, travel, and appear in public places, had attracted massive criticism from across the world including global humanitarian organizations, donors and partner nations equally from friends and foes. Meanwhile, recurrent IS-K-sponsored terror incidents and attacks on the Pakistani and Russian Embassies raised concerns in foreign nations regarding the security of their diplomats in Afghanistan. Apparently, this is a wake-up call for Afghanistan's de facto authorities as foreign nations already have little liaison with the interim government and the closure of important foreign missions in Kabul will not only increase diplomatic and economic isolation but is likely to be followed by other nations in the coming days.

There had been a wide-ranging fear in the global community regarding the current political, economic, and law and order situations in Afghanistan along with future projections that sees no visible sign of an improvement in the days ahead. At the same time, a renewed insurgency in the Northern area and a heightened wave of terrorism further reduced the scope of political and economic stability in the country. Although, the interim Afghan government faces a scarcity of resources and institutional incapacity yet the regime is utterly myriad by egoism and a lack of co-existence and sharing behavior. According to a UN report, about two third of the Afghan population faces a severe risk of famine and needs urgent economic assistance, while the governance issues are adding to the public woes persistently. The poor masses are at the mercy of the rulers and humanitarian organizations to compete with famine, environmental challenges, and diseases amid freezing winter in the country.

Although friendly nations intend to integrate Afghanistan into the global community of nations through all possible diplomatic, economic, and political support yet the rulers have to take practical measures to help integrate their nation into world affairs through the preservation of human and women's rights, inclusiveness and disassociation from terrorist outfits. A better future awaits the Afghan nation however the Afghan authorities have to deliver on their commitments, so the dawn of peace and prosperity arises in the war-torn nation.

Maritime security and AMAN 2023

PAKISTAN Navy is gearing up for the eighth edition of the multi-national maritime exercise, AMAN-2023 in the Indian Ocean region and the Arabian Sea from 10-14 February 2023. According to the official press release of the Pakistan Navy, more than 50 Navies with modern Naval ships, aircraft, Special Ops Forces/EOD, Marines, and observers from across the world will participate in the activity. As said, the exercise would include seminars, operational discussions, and demonstrations at Karachi harbor followed by the sea phase, which would comprise of tactical maneuvers and sea-based exercises related to maritime security such as anti-piracy and counter-terrorism, search and rescue, gunnery firings, and air defense missions.

Pakistan Navy has always remained at the forefront during times of natural calamities and foreign aggression despite its small size and nominal resources with respect to vast areas of responsibility and multidimensional challenges. Pakistan's Naval fleet is committed to protecting the Sea boundaries of Pakistan, ensuring the Security of Sea lines of Communication, protecting Pakistan's exclusive economic zone (EEZ), Counter-Piracy operations within the area of responsibility, Curb drug, and human trafficking, along with endeavors for to comprehend a dream for a blue economy within its jurisdiction. Meanwhile, the construction of Gwadar Deep Seaport and China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) also bring about new challenges and opportunities for the Pakistan Navy, which was the sole guarantor for the security of crucial global energy routes in and around Pakistan's territorial waters.

Pakistan has a staunch enemy on its Eastern border while the ongoing rivalry between the United States and China in the Indo-Pacific region along with an all-time high tension between Iran and western allies in the Strait of Hormuz and the Gulf of Oman has created great challenges for Pakistan Navy, which is effectively tackling all challenges despite meager resources and reduced manpower. Pakistan Navy has always maintained a kinetic operational preparedness through periodic Naval exercises, firepower drills, and bilateral and multilateral exercises along with frequent tours of its warships to friendly nations for training and experience-sharing purposes to fully stand up to the newest challenges in the maritime domain. Although Pakistan has no offensive designs against any nation, however its ground, air, and Sea forces are ever ready to thwart any miscalculated action of any foreign aggressor. With such a war manifesto, the nation is fully supporting Pakistan Navy, which is endeavoring hard to nullify all ill designs to ensure AMAN (Peace) in Pakistan's territorial waters at all costs.

Catastrophe in Turkiye, Syria causes deep heartache

I am writing this article full of sorrow and despair, after waking up to the catastrophic news of the massive earthquakes that struck my country and its neighborhood. In the early morning on Monday, a major earthquake with a magnitude of 7.8 hit southern Turkiye and northwest Syria just before sunrise and another 7.5-magnitude quake struck in the early afternoon.

Turkiye is facing an immense challenge, as the devastating earthquakes are among the deadliest in the recent history of the country, with thousands killed, while those who survived are struggling to hold on to hope in the freezing weather conditions. Natural disasters strike people at unexpected moments and not only cause huge pain and misery, but also leave permanent marks in the memories of people who survive them. The latest earthquakes triggered the collective trauma caused by the 1999 earthquake in north-western Turkiye, which left 17,000 dead and destroyed thousands of buildings.

On Aug. 17, 1999, at 3:02 a.m., I was caught in that catastrophic quake on the fifth floor of an apartment building in Bursa, a city very close to the epicenter. As a child who had never heard the word "earthquake" before in her life, I could not give meaning to what was happening. I was terrified by the panic all around, anxiously waiting for my parents, who left

me at my uncle's house that night. For days, like everyone else, we could not get inside our homes, so we slept either in our cars or outside of our buildings. Those were the days we never wished to remember

greater grief, not only for Turkish people but also many times that common Syrians, giving both nations a sense of shared fate. These two nations are

Sinem Cengiz

ical costs of the catastrophe. History has shown us many times that common struggles as a result of natural disasters such as earthquakes can bind many

and devastating. Syrians have been suffering from 11 years of continuous war and now they are left without even temporary homes. Their situation is described by the International Rescue Committee as "a crisis

people questioned institutions they had never questioned before and asked for the necessary changes to avoid the disaster being repeated. At the time, the authorities vowed to implement changes to the country's building practices, institute new construction rules and ensure mandatory earthquake insurance for all buildings.

Although experts say it is too early to predict the losses at this stage, the initial reports indicate that the latest earthquakes are sadly going to reveal a worse picture than the 1999 earthquake. This heartbreaking disaster has shown us that there is something seriously wrong with the ways in which the country approaches or prepares itself for earthquakes. For years, experts have been calling for a cohesive strategy to prevent a catastrophe, warning that the rules are not being followed strictly enough. But their calls fell on deaf ears. This has increased the pain people are feeling and is fueling their anger. The horrific number of people who have lost their lives is expected to increase, very sadly, while injuries, both mental and physical, are likely to remain for decades. My heart goes out to the people of Turkiye and Syria and all others affected by these horrific earthquakes. May the necessary lessons be drawn from this disaster to avoid such devastation being repeated in the future.

Arab News

As a child who had never heard the word "earthquake" before in her life, I could not give meaning to what was happening. I was terrified by the panic all around, anxiously waiting for my parents, who left me at my uncle's house that night. For days, like everyone else, we could not get inside our homes, so we slept either in our cars or outside of our buildings. Those were the days we never wished to remember again. The scenes of floating dust, collapsed buildings and human desperation seen in the aftermath of Monday's earthquakes touched me deeply; but the stories of children who died or were rescued hit me even harder. They took me back to the terrible memories of 24 years ago. Aug. 17, 1999, was a date of devastation for Turkiye that caused great personal and material loss. However, Feb. 6, 2023, caused even greater grief, not only for Turkish people but also Syrians, giving both nations a sense of shared fate.

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battling to respond to this historic earthquake, although the full scale of the catastrophe will not be known anytime soon. Rescue teams from overseas are already being deployed in the affected cities of Turkiye, with considerable international support both material and moral. It is vital that this support continues in the coming weeks as the country strives to overcome both the material and psycholog-

wounds. Sympathetic and supportive messages from across the region have created a sense of solidarity at this much-needed time. This brought to mind Leo Tolstoy's famous words: "If you feel pain, you're alive. If you feel other people's pain, you're a human being."

One needs not only feel for the Turkish people, but also for the Syrians too. The situation across the border in Syria is also dire

within multiple crises." Natural disasters are always a test for nations, but do countries draw lessons from these disasters? No place in this world is immune from disasters, whether earthquakes, floods or tornadoes. Turkiye is among the world's most seismically active countries and it is at high risk of traumatic events, both natural and human-made. After the 1999 earthquake, Turkish

Paris summit: Can Lebanon finally be protected from the region's conflicts?

FRANCE, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Egypt and the US - the five countries represented at Monday's Paris meeting on Lebanon - have more complicated relations between them and with Iran than the problem they are trying to solve. The menu includes the war in Ukraine, relations with Russia and the global energy and food situation, as well as their internal politics and regional relations - no less than a global order in transition. By the time analysts dissect the geopolitics involved in the meeting, Lebanon's problems may seem simple in comparison.

The question is why does Lebanon always need such international interventions and has it helped bring sustainable solutions to the country's problems? While we hold our breath awaiting the results of the Paris summit, we do so with some apprehension. Let me explain the background and past experiences. It is not for nothing that Lebanon was called "the merchant republic." In the days of the Ottoman Empire, a Levantine merchant - a middleman between East and West - needed Western protection to operate via a delicate

balancing act between local, regional and international players.

Consider late 18th-century Acre under its redoubtable governor Ahmad Pasha Al-Jazzar (The Butcher), the man who defeated Napoleon. His main adviser, Moallem Haim Farhi, was missing an eye and an ear, which he lost when Al-Jazzar had one of his temper tantrums. A merchant like Antoine Catafago, who had a near-monopoly over the cotton trade in the port of Acre, would hold several European honorary consular titles that sent a message to the tyrant that this person enjoyed protection: "If you mess with him, you are also messing with us." This was also based on the old system of capitulations, whereby the Ottoman Empire allowed foreign powers to protect certain individuals and minorities. In a similar fashion, cosmopolitan Levantine trading cities like Alexandria, Smyrna and Beirut were said to be ruled by European consuls, with Lebanon conceived as the sole inheritor and last remnant of that system. This is why the whole world seems to have a say in the election of a president in Lebanon, which is what happened in Paris this week.

Nadim Shehadi

Under such a system, 20th-century Beirut attracted the merchant families of the whole region, as well as the intellectual elites who were ousted by the nationalist regimes that emerged in Turkey, Palestine, Egypt, Syria and Iraq. This system, which brought prosperity, was also precariously dependent on the sustainability of foreign, mainly Western, protection. The international system still has some elements of this kind of protection. We have a living example of it with the Ukraine war. Had the message been clearer, perhaps Russia would have thought twice before invading the country. Moscow is probably betting that the Western protection of Volodymyr Zelensky will not persist forever. In the recent past, Saddam Hussein interpreted the hesitancy of an American envoy as a green light to invade Kuwait, while there are certainly some Taiwanese who are losing sleep over the sustainability of the American protection from Chinese ambitions.

There are several precedents to the Paris meeting and they have produced mixed results. In 1861, following a bloody civil war, European powers inter-

vened to create a semi-autonomous Mount Lebanon, ruled by a council that represented all the elements of its society. This produced what historians call "the long peace," which only ended when the protectors got busy with the First World War. The arrangement thus collapsed amid the changing world order. In the 1940s, Lebanese elites felt the fading power of the old empires and sought the protection of the new rising power that was the US, which intervened to defend the country against the tsunami of Nasserism that was engulfing the region. This was followed by a treaty between Lebanon and Egypt that gave it some neutrality in the conflicts of the region. Thus, Lebanon had a combination of regional and international protection similar to what is happening today.

Optimists have expectations that the Paris meeting will restore Lebanon's protection, this time from Iran's control of the country through Hezbollah. But there are three precedents of internationally sponsored agreements on Lebanon that did not end well, even though they were reached with the best

of intentions. First is the Cairo Agreement of 1969, which was a compromise that allowed the Palestine Liberation Organization to establish a state within a state. It ended in civil war, Syria's intervention under an Arab League umbrella, an Israeli invasion in 1982, and a multinational force of American and European troops restoring peace. This force was later ousted by Iran and Syria-sponsored terrorist attacks on American and French embassies and barracks.

Secondly, the Taif Agreement of 1989 was a regionally and internationally sponsored compromise that unintentionally helped establish Syrian control after the protectors got waylaid by the first Gulf War, disrupting the parameters under which the agreement was reached. This ended when Syria was expelled by the Cedar Revolution following the assassination of Rafik Hariri in 2005. Finally, the Doha Agreement of 2008 - accompanied by rigorous American and French protection through the UN's Special Tribunal for Lebanon - was a compromise that led to Hezbollah taking the state hostage when the US and EU turned a blind eye while they negotiated the nuclear deal with Iran. In 2010, King Abdullah

of Saudi Arabia arrived in Beirut with President Bashar Assad of Syria and they brokered a compromise with Saad Hariri that later turned sour amid the Syrian revolution and Iran's intervention in Yemen. All this eventually led to Hezbollah's takeover and the total collapse of Lebanon's economy and its state institutions and the gradual disintegration of society.

What we have now is deja vu, with the same regional and international actors meeting in Paris, mainly to protect Lebanon from the Iranian influence that is also a threat to themselves and has ramifications that include the war in Ukraine, relations with Russia and China, and transatlantic relations between the US and Europe.

The Paris meeting took place at a time of internal deadlock in Lebanon, with a vacuum of power and a paralysis of state institutions. There is no president, no functioning parliament and only a caretaker government. Another external intervention could help, but one wonders once again if such protection is sustainable and if it can help Lebanon extract itself from the impact of regional conflicts in the long run.

The spy balloon saga says far more about Biden's political weakness than China's strength

THE gigantic spy balloon that flew from China to the US lies punctured, shot down by an F-22 jet. Similarly in tatters is any optimism that Beijing and Washington might be able to salvage their relationship - and the alarming high stakes of global economic and geopolitical turmoil will be shared by the rest of the world, if their febrile bilateral tie is to unravel.

The incident left Chinese diplomats red-faced and US politicians fuming, and has led to a war of words across the Pacific, reports of previous sightings of Chinese balloons above US soil and the postponing of a highly anticipated visit to China by the US secretary of state, Antony Blinken.

The inflammatory response from both sides makes clear just how bad the relationship between the two nations has become. After all, as the US defence department has admitted, such balloons sent from China have actually appeared many times

over the US in the past, without the breakdown in relations we're seeing now. After five decades of rapprochement between the world's two largest economies, China's global influence has now grown to an extent that Washington feels increasingly unable to tolerate. Beijing was, in fact, hoping to strengthen its ties with the US - after a chaotic exit from Covid lockdown and a strained relationship with the west in 2022, a diplomatic reset with the US and the EU would appear necessary if China is to tackle its domestic economic woes. China has traditionally relied on its relationships with the EU and the US to support innovation and growth - so a perceived isolation from the west is not an attractive option given President Xi's hopes of economic recovery after China abandoned its much criticised zero-Covid policy.

However, this is easier said than done. There was little trust and warmth between the US and China even before the appearance

of the balloon. The face-to-face meeting in November 2022 between Joe Biden and Xi Jinping was an attempt to prevent bilateral relations from going into freefall, but the balloon incident has inflamed tensions in both countries. In Beijing, several hawkish opinion leaders proclaimed on Chinese social media that the US is in permanent decline and Washington would do whatever it could to contain China's rise - hence China should take the opportunity to fight back with an iron fist.

Across the Pacific, Republicans have been busy establishing a new committee focused on competition between the US and China and the newly sworn-in Congress speaker, Kevin McCarthy, intends to follow in the footsteps of his predecessor in visiting Taiwan. Such a move will surely ruffle feathers in Beijing. The Biden administration cannot afford to look weak on China in the eyes of Republicans, nor

Yu Jie

can it, in this toxic political atmosphere, allow foreign forces entering its skies - a clear infringement of its airspace and potentially international law - to go unchallenged, as Biden set out in his State of the Union address. The benefits of many fundamental elements of the US-China relationship, such as trade and investment, have been rapidly diminishing as a result of Chinese companies' increasing commercial competitiveness and generous subsidies from Beijing. In military and technology terms, the two countries have become ultra-competitive, rather than needing to work together.

Two successive US administrations have waged a tech war against Beijing, believing that the US must have a technology monopoly in China despite its vastly different culture and political system. Innovation and technological prowess are at the core of Xi's third term - a vision that assumes precarious bilateral rela-

tions with the US are here to stay. Accelerated domestic innovation is intended to reshape China's industrial production and supply chains, which for now remain exposed to risks from overseas suppliers and vulnerable to shifting geopolitical trends. The relationship between the countries has transitioned from the cooperation and relative stability of the early 2000s into one characterised by volatility and competition. Until Xi was faced with China's post-pandemic economic challenge, the two countries simply hadn't needed each other like they once did.

Meanwhile, other grievances have been mounting - from disputes over the truth of certain events, to blame over perceived wrongdoings, such as the origins of the Covid virus. Covid travel restrictions, Russia's war on Ukraine and a lack of frequent face-to-face meetings between the two leaders have likely worsened matters. It would be naive to assume that even before the balloon saga,

Beijing and Washington could have eased tensions simply by a face-to-face meeting or a short visit by Blinken. However, Xi's desire to create a stable external environment to allow for domestic economic development still offers an opportunity for diplomatic reconciliation with the US and the EU. Many existing beneficiaries of calmer bilateral ties, including major American business groups, are still eager to see relations take a positive turn. However, Biden might have little political space to allow diplomacy under pressure from a Republican-majority Congress, and may end up escalating the matter further. The balloon saga is a sharp reminder that without effective communication, suspicion and tension can escalate quickly. It might be a cliché to call for calm and skilled diplomacy between Biden and Xi's respective teams, but given the high stakes, neither Beijing nor Washington should become victims of a drifting balloon.

For Palestine, justice is not a question of law

M Muhannad Ayyash

THESE days much of the efforts to dismantle Israel's apartheid and settler colonial systems of domination over the Palestinian people appear to be following a legal approach. Scholars, activists and even policymakers invested in the issue increasingly suggest the path towards Palestinian liberation is through securing a legal opinion officially defining Israel's violent expulsion of Palestinians as apartheid and colonialism.

The recent United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) resolution calling on the International Court of Justice (ICJ) to give an opinion on the legal consequences of Israel's illegal occupation of Palestinian territories is the most recent example of this trend. I wholeheartedly support and encourage all such efforts, and I am pleased that the UNGA passed this important resolution. Though sceptical, I truly hope that the ICJ opinion will reflect the real conditions that Palestinians suffer, and help dispel Israeli propaganda. Yet I do not believe it is productive or wise to confine all efforts towards Palestinian liberation within the frames of human rights and international law. The Palestinian struggle for liberation must be multifaceted and multidimensional. We need to ensure that the legal approach does not become the predominant face of the Palestinian struggle. It is - and should remain - merely one of its facets. After all, the core of the Palestinian struggle has never been and will never be a legal one. It is a struggle of and for justice, not law. There is a critical difference between the two.

The legal approach has several shortcomings which means that, if it is pursued on its own, or posited as

the leading facet of the struggle, it will harm the Palestinian cause. First, the international legal system often fails to properly contextualise state violence as a political matter and treats it as a solely criminal one. As a result, it associates justice only with the punishment of individual perpetrators, leaving complex political structures, logic, and dynamics that are at the root of the problem unanalysed and unaltered. Second, international courts face significant pushback, including questions about the limits of their jurisdiction, whenever they attempt to legally define and issue a verdict on the violence perpetrated by states that belong to the United States' imperial power bloc (of which Israel is a part). Thus, if a court, such as the ICJ or the International Criminal Court (ICC), dares to designate Israel an apartheid state, it will be attacked by Israel's powerful and influential allies. And, perhaps more importantly, the opinion will likely lead not to any meaningful punitive action against Israel by the leaders of the international community, but to a watering down of the meaning of the terms used to define Israel's violent actions.

Beyond these limitations, there is also the fact that the international legal system has been created by imperial powers to protect their hegemony and serve their interests. Indeed, the legal structures that the oppressed and marginalised are told to rely on to deal with imperial and settler colonial violence are themselves a crucial part of the political system that birthed that violence. They actively legitimise, maintain and justify imperial and settler colonial violence, including Israel's against the Palestinians. International law, which is supposed

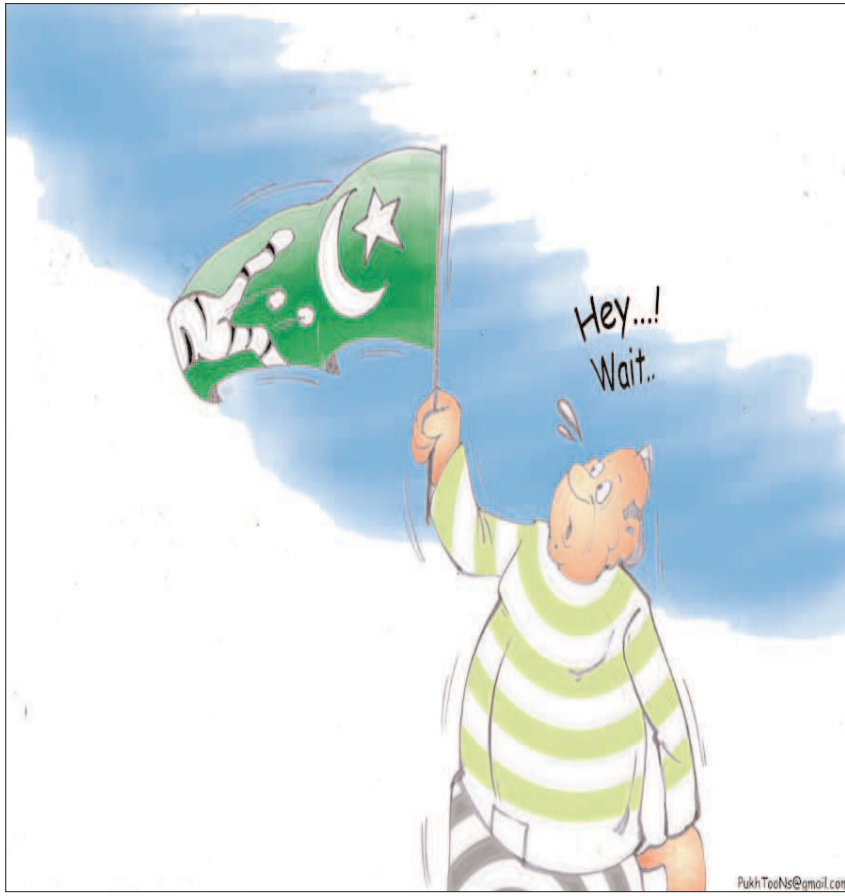
to be a neutral vehicle for justice, is, in fact, a form of violence in and of itself. When I say law is a form of violence, I am not referring to how the settler colonial state uses it to legitimise what its military has achieved through brute force. Rather, I am referring to how the law itself is an outcome and continuation of settler colonial and imperial violence. Violence perpetrated by the powerful validates the law - gives it purpose, legitimacy and potency. Thus the law is designed to stifle, not strengthen, Palestinian resistance. All this does not mean the legal system cannot be utilised by the oppressed to inch towards liberation - it can, and it should. But the violent, colonial origins and nature of the legal structures currently in use mean that we Palestinians should not focus our efforts for liberation and justice solely on the law.

We should remember that the validity of our cause does not depend on legal institutions defining Israel's violence against us as apartheid, settler colonialism, or anything else. The legal institutions tasked with making such determinations are part and parcel of the political order that paved the way for the establishment of the Israeli settler colony. They are integral parts of the system that works to protect Israel and conceal its true nature and the brutality of its aggression and violence. It is unlikely that any court will accurately describe Israel's violence and recommend meaningful corrective and punitive action from the international community anytime soon. But even if we managed to manoeuvre through the difficult political terrain and secure a legal opinion recognising Israel as a settler colonial state practising

apartheid, we would not necessarily achieve justice. Sure, such an outcome would lead to healing at a sociocultural level and add new fire to the Palestinian struggle. It would not, however, deliver the desired results on the political front and lead to systemic change. Instead, the designations of "apartheid" and "settler colony" would likely be co-opted and diluted to save Israel from scrutiny in the same way concepts like "decolonisation", "anti-racism" or "diversity" have been diluted and emptied out in recent years. We should never forget that what we are dealing with is not an inherently neutral legal system that is facing some pressures from powerful actors. What we are dealing with is a legal system that has been designed to legitimise and maintain the very violence that we are trying to define and end.

For the international legal system to become a truly useful tool to further the Palestinian cause, it needs to go through a process of radical decolonisation. We can and should have a separate debate about what that process should look like, and what strategies we should pursue to get there. But as Palestinians, we should never lose sight of what international law really is and the limits of what it can do for us at the moment. As we seek liberation, we should focus not on the legality but on the justness of our cause, as defined and determined by our lived experiences of oppression and aspirations for a free decolonised life. What Israel and its powerful imperial allies fail to understand is that the very violence they inflict on Palestinians is a wellspring of resistance, from which the justness of our struggle is continuously revealed.

Aljazeera



Only one man wants Biden to win second term

ON Tuesday night, in his second State of the Union speech to Congress, Joe Biden delivered an impressive performance. For an hour and 13 minutes, he boasted about the many bills he's signed into law; about how he has "created" 12 million jobs; about reducing the deficit by \$1.77trillion, raising employment to record highs and wrestling back the inflation monster. It was arguably his best speech since he became president - he sounded lucid, energetic, confident, even cocky.

Most of his claims were hocus-pocus, of course. Presidents don't really "create" jobs, at least not outside the public sector, and the US deficit is still astronomically high. But none of that really matters - at least, not in Washington. What counts is the illusion of success. And ever since the mid-term elections in November, when Biden's party kept the Senate and only narrowly lost the House of Representatives, the president and his team have been able to spin the idea that they are winning. Never mind that a majority of Americans continue to think Biden is doing a bad job, that four in 10 feel worse off since he entered the White House, or that 66 per cent say their country is on the "wrong track" - Joe and co feel that, after two difficult years, their political fortunes are turning upwards.

Biden appeared more comfortable than he did in last year's State of the Union, perhaps because he clearly relishes not having a

Freedy Gray

Democratic majority in Congress. As he learned as vice president under Barack Obama, a Republican House is a great excuse for not fixing America. When talking about bringing down drug prices for long-suffering Americans, Biden adroitly turned to the Republican side of the chamber and said "Big Pharma is still going to do very well, I promise" - thus skilfully aligning his opponents with the most rapacious forces in America. Joe's on your side, folks.

Even Donald Trump grudgingly admitted that Biden's speech wasn't bad. "Look, he worked hard tonight," said the 45th president of the 46th, "he ended the evening far stronger than he began. Give him credit for that." But one semi-good speech won't make Americans suddenly feel enthused about their commander-in-chief. Biden brushed over what many voters consider his administration's biggest failing: the migrant crisis on the southern border. According to the immigration control campaigners FAIR, some six million people have illegally crossed into the US since he took office. Team Biden has artfully adapted elements of Trump's economic populism but seems unable to act directly on immigration for fear of offending politically correct shibboleths.

Some commentators expected that Biden would use the State of the Union address to drop his biggest hint yet that he is going to run again. He did not. He did, however, use the

phrase "finish the job" some 12 times. His speech writers were keen to signal that Biden is going nowhere. But is that what most Americans want to hear? The polls suggest not. Even among Democratic voters, a majority would rather someone other than Biden stood for president in 2024. Biden likes to speak vauntingly about the importance of democracy: "With democracy, everything is possible," he told Congress. "Without it, nothing is." Yet Biden's presidency suggests that the American democratic system is not giving voters what they want. Few have ever believed that Biden can be a brilliant president. He won in 2020 not because of who he was but who he wasn't - i.e. the highly divisive and exhausting Donald Trump. Fast forward to 2024, and it seems quite likely that nothing will change and America will face the same unpopular choice at the ballot. People talk about Florida governor Ron DeSantis beating Trump in the primaries, but Trump still commands a substantial and hardcore section of the Republicans' electoral base and will be very difficult to defeat. Biden excites almost nobody, but he's beaten Trump before and at the moment he's doing just about enough to convince voters that he's not an abject failure.

In 2020, the comedian Bo Burnham summed up the mood of many Americans when he sang: "They're really gonna to make me vote for Joe Biden." Put that on repeat next year.

An unexpected outbreak of peace at PMQs

PARLIAMENT on a Wednesday isn't where you'd normally go to feel proud to be British. PMQs has become a sorry spectacle; less towering oratory and more tedious onanism. Today, however, was an exception. It took a short, khaki-clad and what would have been - until recently - an unlikely figure to remind Parliamentarians that on one particular issue, both main parties are united, almost to an MP, and all Britons might justifiably take pride.

Hundreds had thronged into Westminster Hall for the address; MPs, Lords, parliamentary staff, cameramen, hacks and their polar opposites - wooden angels, gazing down from the hammer-beam roof in silent witness. Rishi Sunak and Sir Keir Starmer stood at the front of the crowd, almost blinded by the piercing light from the vast stained glass window opposite. President Zelensky is undoubtedly a master of presentation, with the comic wit's ear for a turn of phrase, even in a foreign language. He praised the British national character and offered up a chiasmus worthy of Churchill or JFK; "In Britain, the King is an Air Force pilot, and in Ukraine every Air Force pilot is a king." He brought a brilliantly light touch

Madeline Grant

even to the most existential of matters; pivoting between thanking Parliament for tea and preemptively thanking them for yet-to-arrive planes.

What a piece of rhetoric this was - all the more so when compared to the non-speak that often prevails in Westminster. Our politicians speak cautiously, to avoid actually saying something. Even the word 'say' looks outdated; MPs more often "intimate" or "indicate", just as they prefer to "deliver" than "do" and favour "challenges" over "problems". Zelensky's cadences thus carried extraordinary weight; we heard rarely-uttered words like "mankind", "bravery", "freedom", "evil". It was forceful, stirring, at times overwhelming - the rhetorical equivalent of being bulldozed by a Challenger tank. Again and again Westminster hall erupted into applause: Theresa May and Liz Truss, neither of whom ever quite managed oratory on a Chamberlainian level, let alone a Churchillian one, clapped rapturously. Boris Johnson, who often tried to imitate Britain's wartime premier and came closer, beamed. He might still resemble the Honey Monster's insalubrious cousin but the former PM's yearned-for Churchillian

moment had apparently arrived. While benign unity reigned at Westminster, Rishi Sunak might still be a little peeved that the ghost of Johnson was so enthusiastically invoked: very clearly Zelensky had not come to bury Boris, but to praise him.

But his main aim - those fighter jets - soon became clear. "Two years ago, I thanked you for delicious English tea", quipped Zelenskyy. "I will be leaving the Parliament today thanking all of you in advance for powerful English planes". At this, Westminster Hall rang out with cheers - enough to suggest that the PM will have a hard time withholding the F-35s. He concluded by handing over a Ukrainian pilot's helmet to a delighted Lindsay Hoyle. In a Parliament so often used to pale imitations of political symbolism, it was quite astonishing to watch a true master of it at work. Over in the Commons Chamber, the wartime visit had triggered an unexpected outbreak of peace. Sunak and Starmer temporarily suspended hostilities at PMQs; vying instead to be the most supportive of Ukraine, the most opposed to the barbarous Putin. Here was a phenomenon rarer than unicorn's breath, a parliamentary entente cordiale, a non-aggression pact. For one day, at least.

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After Brexit, Britain's competitors are running rings around us. Sunak's not even at the races

Rafael Behr

BRITAIN'S future will be shaped by a summit of European leaders this week, but Rishi Sunak, as prime minister of a very sovereign nation, will be absent. It is one of the more subtle degradations of life outside the European Union. Heads of government gather in Brussels to decide things that affect British voters, who are represented by an empty chair. The mechanism is slow and poorly understood. That is why Eurosceptics got away with claiming for decades that "Europe" was something done to Britain by foreigners, when all along it was something that Britain negotiated for itself in partnership with its neighbours.

Brexit is a self-fulfilling prophecy. It turns Brussels into the creature its paranoid antagonists imagined - an engine of decisions that Britain can neither ignore nor change. This week's agenda has an item of particular concern for a country in economic torpor, unsure how to make a living for itself in the 21st century. The question is couched in the arid argot of Brussels summits: "In face of the new geopolitical reality, EU leaders will discuss long-term competitiveness" and "how to harness the full potential of the single market". That means waking up to US moves to corner the market in low-carbon technology. It means cultivating European green businesses and dissuading them from flying to California in pursuit of tax breaks worth hundreds of billions of dollars.

It means drafting an answer to Joe Biden's Inflation Reduction Act, an era-defining law signalling the death of ultraliberal globalisation and covering its grave with subsidised solar panels and windfarms, made in America. This is "the new geopolitical reality" that EU leaders are pondering. The act is Biden's answer to interlocking threats: the climate crisis; Russia as a rogue state; a new cold war with China. Europe faces the same three chal-

lenges. Unilateral US protectionism adds a fourth. There is consensus in the EU that the existing state aid regime - the rules to stop member states skewing the internal market with favours for their national champions - needs changing. The system has already been bent out of shape to work around the pandemic and the need to quit an addiction to Russian gas.

There are differences over how far to go down the road of continent-wide industrial management. The European Council has to balance the views of big and small countries; net budget contributors and recipients; statist France and the pro-market Dutch. The outcome is always complex and incomplete - a fudge in perpetual progress. When Britain was in the EU, those deals only registered in Westminster as demands for money that a prime minister must refuse, laying down "red lines", brandishing a veto. Post-Brexit, they don't register at all. They should. The UK has skin in this game. We, too, have clocked how vulnerable global supply chains are to disruption by pestilence and war. We, too, would like to be a hub for high-skill, high-wage green jobs. If everyone is going to be driving electric vehicles and heating their homes from renewable sources, Britain wants to be in the business of batteries and turbines, or innovating alternatives.

What Britain doesn't want to be is a nation of consumers importing stuff that has been invented and manufactured in China, the US or Europe, because those are the big players who got their act together, and we are a medium-sized laggard that didn't. Sunak knows this is the task. He doesn't have a plan, but he has a plan for making a plan, beginning with a reorganisation of Whitehall. New portfolios have been created by mashing up and re-slicing the old departments for business, international trade, digital, culture, media and sport. There is now

a secretary of state for energy security and net zero (Grant Shapps), one for science, innovation and technology (Michelle Donelan) and one for business and trade (Kemi Badenoch). If progress on climate policy, energy and industrial strategy is measured by volume of relevant cabinet job titles, Britain's commitment has been dialled from two to three - a 50% increase. But that isn't how it works.

The prime minister moves people around to create the illusion of action. He appoints Greg Hands, a former cabinet minister with professional credentials, as party chair. Then, as Hands's deputy, he installs Lee Anderson, an aggressive culture warrior qualified only for crass provocation. That is not the choice of a leader who is serious about making the Tories fit for government. It is a classic symptom of intellectual paralysis in a tired administration. Sunak is fiddling with the laces on shoes Britain has yet to put on for a race that our competitors are already running. There are two separate but related reasons why Sunak cannot catch up. A large part of the Conservative party is allergic to government meddling in the economy on the scale required for a dash to green tech. The impulse for radical economic reinvention has already been spent on a different revolution, Brexit, whose keenest Tory advocates believe the best thing the state can do for enterprise is get out of its way.

There is an interventionist school of Brexit that would use regulatory autonomy for industrial activism. (Boris Johnson counts himself a disciple.) But the dominant strain is a libertarian cult whose fantasy economic policy was one that Liz Truss tried, with disastrous effect, and would happily try again in the belief that its only flaw was poor communication. That leads to the second problem. Truss's fiscal misadventures, on top of Johnson's bombast

and general Brexit turbulence, cost Britain its market premium as a serene, reliable country when bidding for foreign investment. The effort to restore that status leads to a trap. Caution in all things, especially austere budgets, signals a necessary commitment to stability, but at the expense of bold decisions that might get the economy moving again. Fear of spooking markets compels the chancellor, Jeremy Hunt (and his Labour shadow, Rachel Reeves), to prove their financial sobriety by pledging to do no more than tinker at the margins of a stagnant status quo. That is a chill factor felt by a lone-rider economy, exposed on the doorstep of a much bigger, better-insulated continental bloc. The supposed compensation is the sovereignty to act quickly and make our own rules. In theory, that permits agility in fields where there are no established standards or dominant players. But exploiting those industries of the future requires political leadership blessed with strategic foresight, high-quality governing institutions at local and national level, plus the fiscal headroom to place some risky bets.

None of those conditions pertains in Britain. Even if they did, the sheer size of the single European market would exert a gravitational pull. Anyone investing in Britain will want to sell to the continent. Bespoke rules can be written in Whitehall to give indigenous companies a head start, but they'll end up aligned with whatever Brussels does to avoid putting a burden on businesses that trade in both jurisdictions. The drivers of Brexit can keep revving the rhetorical engines of sovereignty in celebration of their imaginary escape from Europe. That won't get Britain out of its economic and strategic dead end. Then, eventually, when the passengers are sick of the point-less din, the choking fumes and going nowhere, the gears can be put into reverse.

The Guardian

US foreign policy reduced to an afterthought

Marwan Bishara

US President Joe Biden's State of the Union address on Tuesday night was quite upbeat. It was long on domestic affairs and short on foreign policy. It skimmed through the challenges posed by Russia and China and skipped the rest of the world altogether. It is a first for a US president to reduce the United States' global role to an afterthought, no less a president who considers himself an authority on foreign policy, or for a commander-in-chief, who has spent so much time, effort and political capital confronting Russia in Ukraine and containing China in Asia. This, therefore, begs the question: Why has Biden chosen to ignore hot spots where America is directly involved?

According to one theory, Americans are not terribly interested in the rest of the world and foreign policy is an unaffordable luxury at a time of economic hardships and culture wars. Even the elites with greater overseas interests realise that costly investment in foreign policy is becoming a hard sell for the public in the absence of direct national security threats. Biden understands that, which is why when he first took office, he vowed to end the "forev-

er wars" and promised a "foreign policy for the middle class" - one that serves Americans at large. But that has proven easier said than done, as Washington has channelled billions of dollars to Ukraine to fight a war that may last years amid warnings from populist Republicans about high inflation, the high cost of living, and high national debt.

Hence the president, who seems keen on pursuing a second term, dialled down the costly global bravado in his speech and instead focused on "made in America" growth and prosperity. His call on Congress to tax billionaires and big corporations and lower the costs of drugs - aligning him with the "progressive left" led by Senator Bernie Sanders - may prove more popular among working and middle-class families than, say, restoring Ukraine's territorial integrity. According to another theory, however, there is not much to celebrate in US foreign policy, which is why the president decided to skip the subject altogether. The two theories are not mutually exclusive. Biden may have embraced Senator Sanders' prescriptions on the economic malaise, but do not expect him to take his approach on foreign policy, no less in the Middle East,

where the US has failed miserably. And disgracefully.

The president rejects Sanders' stance on the Israeli occupation and the racism of its prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu. Worse, he embraces the populist right-wing premier as his best friend, and continues to support his government of fascists and fanatics. But Israel is only one of several failures. There has not been a single foreign policy accomplishment anywhere in the greater Middle East, unless one considers the humiliating and disastrous withdrawal from Afghanistan in favour of the Taliban a success, after 20 years of horrific war. Truth be told, the Biden administration has helped reach ceasefires or maintain stalemates and status quos from Sudan to Syria, through Iraq, Libya, Palestine and Yemen. But that's hardly a good thing; in fact, it's a terrible normalisation of a dreadful situation.

Biden, who promised to put human rights at the centre of his foreign policy, has ignored US clients' human rights violations and has been supporting strongmen who rule with an iron fist, while the region teeters under violent sectarian and authoritarian regimes. Washington cannot in

good conscience claim to confront Russia and China in the name of democracy, human rights and the preservation of sovereignty, while appeasing colonialism and dictatorship in the Middle East or elsewhere. It is hypocritical and it is counterproductive.

Half a century after young Senator Biden first visited the Middle East in 1973, the older President Biden seems to view the region through the same prisms he did back then: Israel, oil, and the Cold War with Moscow. But as one exhausted 19th-century saying goes: history repeats itself, the first time as tragedy, the second time as farce. It is indeed laughable that despite 50 years of costly strategic, diplomatic and military interventions, the US is back to square one, appealing misbehaving regional clients in the name of a global democracy crusade and getting rejected and humiliated in the process. Biden began and ended his State of the Union speech with the lofty idea that America is the land of possibilities. It is a nice and catchy slogan, one that allowed the country to dream big and to reach the moon, literally. America is indeed a mighty nation, but it is not almighty. It must stop its evangelical approach to world affairs as if it is ordained to shape it, police it, and lead it. It is not.



Governor Punjab: Govt to promote barter trade to ease dollar pressure

ISLAMABAD (APP): Governor Punjab Eng Muhammad Baligh Ur Rehman Thursday said that the government was fully encouraging the promotion of barter trade to ease dollar pressure on Pakistan economy.

He was talking to Chairman Kyrgyzstan Trade House and Coordinator to Federal Tax Ombudsman Meher Kashif Younis at a reception hosted in his honour in Lahore by Dr Waqar Ch.

The governor said Pakistan would export bitumen to Kenya and Kenya in return would export tea to Pakistan under barter trade system. He said negotiations in this regard were in final phase by the private sectors of both countries. He said in prevailing finan-

cial crunch, it was one of the way out to meet requirements without involving foreign exchange.

He said Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif in the wake of fragile economy, had categorically directed federal ministries of finance, commerce, export promotion bureau and Trade Development Authority of Pakistan, Federal Board of Revenue and all other relevant departments to encourage the concept of barter trade and facilitate the private sectors on top priority. He hoped economic situation would improve in the days to come as all out endeavours were being made to cope with financial setback in the wake of covid and

catastrophic floods.

He said the barter system was simple with no complexities involved unlike monetary system, natural resources would not be overexploited, power would not be concentrated in some circles, there would not be problems of balance of payments and foreign exchange crisis, or other complex problems. He said a barter transaction was the exchange of goods or services, in exchange for other goods or services.

Bartering benefits companies and countries that see a mutual benefit in exchanging goods and services rather than cash, and it also enables those who are lacking hard currency to obtain goods and services.

Meher Kashif Younis hailing government decision urged private sector to explore countries interested in promoting barter trade which is one of the world's oldest system of trade which he added is reverting to off-set dollar threat on under developing economies.

Prominent among others on the occasion were Mian Talat Mahmood, Chairman Orient, Mian Faiz Bukhsh, CEO IT professionals, Dr Kaiser Rafiq CEO AFOHS Club, Ghulam Mujtaba MD Vital Tea, Muhammad Imran Malik MD BATA Pakistan, Rauf-I-Azam VC Punjab University of Technology, Dr Khalid Javed Rabbani Principal Red Crescent Medical College.



LAHORE: Labourers unloading corn cobs from a delivery truck at vegetable market.

PSX continues with bullish trend, gains 743 points

ISLAMABAD (APP): The 100-index of the Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX) continued with bullish trend on Thursday, gaining 743.27 points, a positive change of 1.78 percent, closing at 42,466.59 points against 41,723.32 points the previous day.

A total of 367,356,809 shares were traded during the day as compared to 297,773,210 shares the previous day, whereas the price of shares stood at Rs13.590 billion against Rs12.072 billion on the last trading day.

As many as 352 companies transacted their shares in the stock market; 243 of them recorded gains and 86 sustained losses, whereas the share price of 23 companies remained unchanged. The three top-trading companies were WorldCall Telecom with 35,163,820 shares at Rs1.34 per share

Hascol Petrol with 25,253,500 shares at Rs6.23 per share, and Oil and Gas Dev. with 18,217,949 shares at Rs105.95 per share.

Nestle Pakistan witnessed a maximum increase of Rs219.99 per share price, closing at Rs5,534.99, whereas the runner-up was Goodluck Ind. with a Rs55.64 rise in its per share price to Rs797.55.

Sapphire Fiber witnessed a maximum decrease of Rs44.00 per share closing at Rs1,056.00; followed by Sapphire Tex with Rs31.73 decline to close at Rs955.00.

Rupee gains Rs2.82 against US dollar

The exchange rate of the Pakistani rupee strengthened by Rs2.82 against the US dollar in the interbank trading on Thursday and closed at Rs270.50 against the previous day's closing

of Rs273.32.

According to the Forex Association of Pakistan (FAP), the buying and selling rates of dollar in the open market were recorded at Rs272 and Rs276 respectively.

The price of the euro depreciated by Rs3.52 and closed at Rs290.41 against the previous day's closing of Rs293.92, according to the State Bank of Pakistan.

The Japanese yen lost two paise to close at Rs2.06, whereas a decrease of Rs3.41 was witnessed in the exchange rate of the British pound, which was traded at Rs327.20 as compared to its last closing of Rs330.61.

The exchange rates of the Emirates dirham and Saudi riyal decreased by 77 paise each to close at Rs73.64 and Rs72.08 respectively.

Gold prices decrease by Rs3,300 to Rs194,700 per tola

The per tola price of 24 karat gold decreased by Rs3,300 on Thursday and was traded at Rs194,700 against sale at Rs198,000 the last trading day.

The price of 10 grams of 24 karat gold also decreased by Rs2,829 to Rs166,924 against Rs169,753, whereas that of 10 grams of 22 karat declined to Rs153,014 from Rs155,607. All Sindh Sarafa Jewellers Association reported.

The price of one tola silver decreased by Rs40 to Rs2130 whereas that of ten gram silver declined by Rs34.29 to Rs1,826.

The price of gold in the international market increased by US\$2 to US\$1882 as compared to its sale at US\$1,980 on the last trading day, the association reported.

S-Paisa digital financial services: Askari Bank joins hands with SCO

E.P. Report

KARACHI: Askari Bank Limited (AKBL) and Special Communications Organization (SCO) have signed an agreement for collaborative effort towards attainment of State Bank of Pakistan's (SBP) vision to promote financial inclusion and broadening access to financial services.

The prime purpose of this strategic alliance with SCO, leading Information and Communication Technology (ICT) services provider, is to complement SBP's vision for Financial Inclusion and expanding the outreach of financial services in Azad Jammu & Kashmir (AJ&K) and Gilgit Baltistan (GB).

SCO will utilize its "S-Paisa Pension Account" facility through its Digital Financial Services platform "S-Paisa" under the national service initiative with the approval of the SBP. The partnership between AKBL and Special Communications Organi-

zation (SCO) aims to readily disburse pension to customers by providing Over-the-Counter (OTC) facility by utilizing AKBL Digital Wallet along with the strong retail network of SCO in AJ&K and GB.

The Agreement was signed by Mr. Khurshid Zafar - Chief Operating Officer AKBL and Colonel Farhan Shahid Khan - Director Commercial Affairs SCO. Mr. Atif R. Bokhari - President & CEO AKBL, Sher Afgan Khanzada - Group Head Branch Banking AKBL, Mr. Zahid Afzal - Group Head Operations AKBL, Mr. Rashid Zaman Khan - Chief Information Officer AKBL, Mr. Omer Afzal - Acting Chief Digital Officer AKBL, Mr. Imran Sher - Project Director Digital Financial Services SCO and other senior officials from both organizations were also present at the ceremony.

Speaking at the occasion, Atif R. Bokhari said, "In line with SBP's Nati-

onal Financial Inclusion Strategy, this convergence of communication technology with AKBL's digital banking wallet will aim to provide widespread accessibility to our financial services. Aligned with our vision for growth, this alliance will further assist us in fulfilling the needs of our esteemed customer base and expanding our footprint."

Colonel Farhan Shahid Khan, while sharing his views said, "We are proud to be partners with AKBL for this initiative of digital transformation of communities. Special Communications Organization (SCO) is already contributing to the Financial Inclusion Strategy of SBP and trying to support process of digitalized and documented economy. With this collaboration, we hope to empower populace to manage their routine financial transactions using the Digital Services platform being extended by SCO and AKBL."

FPCCI for promoting trade ties with Bulgaria

ISLAMABAD (APP): President FPCCI Irfan Iqbal Shaikh on Thursday stressed the need for enhancing bilateral trade and investment relations between Pakistan and Bulgaria as the existing trade volume between the two countries was lower than the existing potential.

Talking to the Ambassador of Bulgaria to Pakistan Irena Gancheva, who visited FPCCI here, Irfan Iqbal said that both the countries were enjoying cordial trade and diplomatic relations, which were based over 57 years and have common views on many international issues.

He said that huge opportunities of cooperation and collaboration in a host of economic sectors were existing, which could mutually benefit the people of both countries. He said that both countries had vast scope for economic cooperation, trade and investment development.

He said that many sectors of national economy including minerals, mining, oil and gas exploration, tourism, agriculture and energy generations and called upon the investors from the Bulgaria to take benefit from these opportunities, which would further cement the existing trade and diplomatic relations.

The FPCCI head urged the need to enhance bilateral cooperation in the field of agriculture as the large livestock potential was existing in the country and it was ranked among the top milk-producing countries, adding that Bulgaria has the world's best expertise in yogurt production and collaboration in the field of agriculture and dairy development would further promote the output of agriculture value added products.

Shipping activity at PQ

KARACHI (APP): Five ships namely, EM Astoria, OOCL Charleston, Chemroad Polaris, Al-Bidda and Star Jeannette carrying Containers, Palm oil, LNG and Canola Seed, berthed at Qasim International Containers Terminal, Liquid Cargo Terminal, Engro Elengy Terminal and Pakistan International Bulk Terminal respectively on Wednesday.

Meanwhile two more ships, Sciocco and Aurelia carrying Gasoline and Palm oil also arrived at outer anchorage of the port during the last 24 hour. A total of 09 ships were engaged at PQA berths during the last 24 hours, out of them 04 ships, EM Astoria, MSC Leo VI, OOCL Charleston and CL Dayang He left the Port on Thursday morning.

A Cargo volume of 98,553 tonnes, comprising 56,410 tonnes imports cargo and 42,143 tonnes export cargo, including containerized cargo carried in 3,160 Containers (681 TEUs Imports and 2,479 TEUs export) was handled at the port during last 24 hours.

There are 09 ships at Outer Anchorage of Port Qasim, out of them, Express Athens, Vitus Bering and Sciocco carrying Containers, Wheat and Gasoline are expected to take berths at QICT, FAP and FOTCO on Thursday.

RAWALPINDI (APP): The Rawalpindi Chamber of Commerce and Industry (RCCI) on Thursday vowed to participate fully in the business delegation flying to the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE) on March 5-10 for exploring trade and investment opportunities.

The leadership of RCCI gave assurance of their full participation during a meeting with Jemal Beker Abdulla, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the FDRE to the Islamic Republic of Pakistan here at the RCCI office.

During the meeting, RCCI President Saqib Rafiq said the business community of Rawalpindi would take part in the business delegation in a big number in order to boost the bilateral trade between the two countries to the next level.

"There is a huge poten-

tial of bilateral trade between the two countries which can be increased by connecting the business community of both countries," he said while pointing out the low volume of trade between Ethiopia and Pakistan.

Ambassador Jemal Beker said the absence of institutional linkages between the two countries was a major reason behind the low volume of bilateral trade. However, concerted efforts were being made in this regard.

He briefed the Rawalpindi businessmen about the trade delegation to Ethiopia which was crucial to bolstering the connectivity between the business communities of both countries. "Our government attaches great importance to Pakistan which has enormous trade, business and investment potential."

The envoy said it was the

right time for Pakistani businessmen to enter the market of Ethiopia which was a gateway to entire Africa that had a total population of around 1.4 billion people. "Visit of the Pakistani business community to Ethiopia will open a new window of trade and investment opportunities for them in diverse sectors of the economy including textile, pharmaceutical, rice, chemicals, steel and cement."

Likewise, he said Pakistan could import coffee, tea, pulses, oilseeds and other agricultural products from Ethiopia.

The ambassador also assured the business community of his full cooperation in facilitating their participation in the trade delegation to Ethiopia which entailed government-to-business meetings, business-to-business meetings, and visits to the industrial and tourist sites.

He said the government of Ethiopia had been offering a lot of concessions for the trade delegations which included subsidized airfare and accommodation, free transportation during their stay at Addis Ababa and others.

Meetings with the top leadership of the Government of Ethiopia with the representatives of trade delegations had also been scheduled to further boost the bilateral relations between the two countries, he added.

The ambassador said Ethiopian Airlines would soon start direct flight operations from Karachi to Addis to increase people-to-people contact between the two countries.

Senior Vice President Muhammad Hamza Sarosh, Vice President Faisal Shahzad, Executive Members and Chamber Members were also present during the meeting.

Italy to further enhance economic ties with Pakistan

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan's Honorary Consul to Milan, Italy Muhammad Sheheryar Khan said on Thursday that the Italian government would soon establish an office of Italian Trade Agency in Pakistan which would enhance trade relations between the two countries.

It was disclosed by him while talking to Chief Executive Officer Pakistan Furniture Council Mian Kashif Ashfaq in Lahore, according to a press release issued here.

He said Italy will further enhance its economic cooperation with Pakistan. Focus is on increasing assistance through develop-

ment projects, he added.

He said that in this regard, the DG Rome-based Italian Agency for Development Cooperation (AICS), Luca Maestri-riperi, accompanied by Italy Ambassador Andreas Ferrarese, held a fruitful meeting with Secretary Economic Affairs Division Dr Kazim Niaz here a couple of days ago and assured Pakistan of Italy's economic assistance.

"Pakistan is a very important country for Italy and Italy will continue to engage with the Pakistan government through our economic cooperation," Sheheryar added and said, the Italian team informed

Dr Niaz that Italy is placing special focus on enhancing people-to-people contacts between the two countries.

For this reason, priority is being given to establishing and developing linkages between universities, government institutions and trade bodies of the two countries. The development projects in various areas would further strengthen and boost the ties, he said.

He said the projects involving Italian assistance include economic transformation initiative in Gilgit-Baltistan, command area development work of Kaitu Weir project, Kurram Tangi dam project, and the establishment of heritage field

schools for preserving cultural heritage.

While acknowledging the role of Italian economic assistance in socio-economic development of Pakistan and its people, investment consular said Pakistan sought the support of Italian Agency for Development Cooperation in development of the tourism sector in Pakistan.

Dr Niaz appreciated the Italian government's pledge in the Resilient Pakistan Conference in Geneva last month and acknowledged Italy's continuous support for economic development of Pakistan, Sheheryar Khan expressed.

Tokyo's Nikkei ends lower

TOKYO (AFP/APP): Tokyo's key Nikkei index ended lower Thursday, with investors taking cues from declines in US shares linked to hawkish comments by Federal Reserve officials.

The benchmark Nikkei 225 index was down 0.08 percent, or 22.11 points, to end at 27,584.35, while the broader Topix index edged

up 0.05 percent, or 1.03 points, to 1,985.00.

The dollar stood at 131.17 yen, against 131.42 yen in New York late Wednesday.

In the United States, markets fell on a raft of hawkish comments from Fed officials that "slowed speculation about the halt of rate hikes", IwaiCosmo Securities said in a note.

New York Fed chief John Williams, for one, said the policy board needed to "attain a sufficiently restrictive stance of policy" and then "maintain that for a few years to make sure we get inflation to two percent" -- the bank's target.

"A chorus of Fed hawks shared the same message: the fight against inflation is not yet won," Stephen

Innes of SPI Asset Management said.

Among major shares in Tokyo, Toyota rose 0.18 percent to 1,901 yen.

Earlier in the trading day, the world's top-selling automaker left its annual forecasts unchanged, saying it expected net profit of 2.36 trillion yen (\$18 billion) in the 12 months to March 2023.

Kaizen Paint launches its premium brand NEO in Pakistan

E.P. Report

LAHORE: Kaizen Paint Middle East (KPME) is a multi-national coatings company operating in five markets in the Middle East North Africa region namely, Saudi Arabia, UAE, Qatar, Pakistan, and Morocco. KPME is currently a market leader in the Architectural, Automotive and Engineering coating segments in selected markets.

Kaizen Paint Pakistan (KPP), which is a subsidiary of KPME, announced the launch of its new range of Architectural coatings under the brand name NEO in Pakistan. NEO is a premium product range

covering the Interior, Exterior, Enamels and Woodcare range produced by KPP with innovative state-of-the-art Japanese technology. On this occasion, Mr. Shahzad A. Khan, CEO KPP expressed his confidence in the Pakistan coatings market by commenting that "this launch of our NEO brand represents our renewed focus and expansion into the premium segment of the Architectural paint market in Pakistan. We are fully conscious of our customers aesthetics who believe in creating inspired living spaces. Therefore, our foremost aim is to inspire our customers through NEO.

We also plan to continue adding relevant brands and products that directly cater to our potential customer base on the back of our existing Kaizen Paint Franchise."

Mr. Imran Khalid, Business Manager for the Architectural segment, added that, "NEO has the potential to create excitement not only for our premium home-consumer segment but also for our esteemed dealers, architects, and builders. We are certain that our customers will be truly delighted not only with the quality of our product but also our comprehensive product range offering."

Markets fall as Fed officials flag rates to go higher for longer

HONG KONG (AFP/APP): Markets mostly fell Thursday on the prospect of US interest rates going higher, and for longer, as officials try to cool the economy and bring decades-high inflation under control.

Months of slowing price rises fuelled hopes the Federal Reserve could soon pause its tightening drive or even cut rates this year, but that optimism was dealt a blow last Friday by data showing the jobs market remains strong.

And key members of the central bank have lined up this week to acknowledge that while there had been progress in the inflation battle, there would be more pain to come before things got easier.

After bank boss Jerome Powell on Tuesday reiterated last week's post-meeting statement that he saw more

hikes in the pipeline, several top officials provided further insight Wednesday.

New York Fed chief John Williams said the policy board needed to "attain a sufficiently restrictive stance of policy" and then "maintain that for a few years to make sure we get inflation to two percent", the bank's inflation target.

Governor Christopher Waller added: "It might be a long fight, with interest rates higher for longer than some are currently expecting."

Meanwhile, Minneapolis boss Neel Kashkari warned there was "not yet much evidence, in my judgment, that the rate hikes that we've done so far are having much effect on the labour market".

"We need to bring the labour market into balance, so that tells me we need to do more."

The comments came after a closely watched US jobs report showed more than half a million new posts were created last month, far more than expected.

With the world's top economy still showing resilience despite almost a year of rate hikes and surging prices, observers said traders' hopes for a rate cut this year were fading.

Some are now predicting they could go as high as six percent, almost one percentage point above what is currently being priced in.

"I don't think the Fed will cut within this year," Jun Bei Liu, at Tribeca Investment Partners, told Bloomberg Television.

"The Fed was behind the curve in terms of putting their interest rate, and they certainly are going to be very slow in cutting the interest rate."



In brief

ITF Jrs Tennis C'ships called off

ISLAMABAD (APP): The matches of the ITF Pakistan Juniors Tennis Championships leg-1 2023 here at PTF-SDA Tennis Complex were called off due to rain on Thursday. A large number of foreign players (boys/girls) from Turkey, Russia, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Thailand, the UK, Malaysia, Romania, Singapore, China, Poland, South Korea, Canada and Pakistan were participating in the event. The matches (Boys/Girls) would now resume in Friday.

Netball C'ship from Saturday

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Inter-Provincial Men and Women Netball Championship would kick off at the Hamidi Hall of the Pakistan Sports Complex from Saturday. According to President, Pakistan Netball Federation (PNF), Mudassar Arain all arrangements for the Championship have been finalised in the Organising Committee meeting held under the chairmanship of Sameen Malik. "A total of seven teams from all over the country, are participating in the Championship, including Punjab, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Sindh, Balochistan, Gilgit-Baltistan, Azad Jammu and Kashmir and Islamabad," he added. He said trophies, medals and certificates would be distributed among the winning teams at the end of the tournament while the manager's meeting would be held on Friday. The Championship is being played under the auspices of the Pakistan Netball Federation in collaboration with Pakistan Sports Board.

2-2 home draw with Leeds United

LONDON (Agencies): Marcus Rashford and Jadon Sancho combined to deny manager-less Leeds a rare Old Trafford victory as Manchester United came back from two goals down to snatch a point from a thrilling Roses clash. The hosts looked finished when Raphael Varane turned Crysencio Summerville's cutback into his own net to put Leeds two ahead after Wilfried Gnonto had given them a first-minute lead. But Rashford halved the deficit when he headed home Diogo Dalot's inviting cross before Sancho, only just back to first-team duties after recovering from physical and mental issues, scored his first Premier League goal since September when he drove home from 10 yards after Luke Shaw's initial shot had been blocked. Varane brought an excellent save out of Illan Meslier as Manchester United hunted a goal to extend their 13-match winning streak on home soil. Anything less than a point would have been extremely harsh on Leeds, who sacked manager Jesse Marsch on Monday, and they also hit the post through Brenden Aaronson in between the home side's two goals. The result moves them a point clear of the relegation zone and above West Ham into 16th, although after this superb contest, the Elland Road rematch in four days' time will be an occasion to relish. Leeds claim a precious point. The general narrative around Elland Road in the wake of Marsch's dismissal has been that the Leeds' hierarchy would use a week that features two games against Manchester United to recruit a replacement before key clashes with relegation rivals Everton and Southampton later this month.

Rizwan admits he 'didn't deserve to play in NZ series'

KARACHI (Cricinfo): The PCB's controversial decision to drop Mohammad Rizwan for Sarfaraz Ahmed for the two-Test series against New Zealand was among the biggest talking points throughout the series. Rizwan, however, said he felt that, on current form, he "didn't deserve to play" for Pakistan at the time.

"You can ask the head coach Saqlain Mushtaq what I told him after the end of the England Test series," Rizwan told Cricket Pakistan in an interview. "I personally thought that since I wasn't able to perform, I didn't deserve to play in the next series."

In his last half dozen Tests, Rizwan had suffered a downturn in his form with the bat, scoring 262 runs in 12 innings without a half-century at an average of 21.83. That was significantly down from his career batting average (38.13), though it was believed his quality behind the stumps gave him enough protection from omission.

But soon after the PCB chairman Ramiz Raja was removed in a dramatic overhaul, changes were felt on the pitch, too. Rizwan was replaced by Sarfaraz, playing his first Test match in over three years. While concerns over his wicketkeeping linger - there were a slew of dropped catches and missed stumpings across both Tests - his form with the bat was not in question. He was the highest run-scorer in the series with 335, scoring three half-centuries and a hundred on the final day of the second Test to ensure Pakistan escaped with a draw. He would go on to be named the Player of the Series.

"I was happy to see Sarfaraz perform because that is what I wanted," Rizwan said. "Sarfaraz has been performing in domestic and deserves his chance now. I asked for his inclusion. Whoever performs best for Pakistan deserves to play."

"Some players said that every player goes through this phase and you can't sit on the bench based on few fail-

ures. But I went to the coach and captain myself and told them that you can drop me because I haven't performed. Two players are witnesses to this conversation."

This wasn't the first time Rizwan's benching raised eyebrows. He was famously left on the bench for much of his time at Karachi Kings, playing just seven times across his last two years with the franchise. Upon moving to Multan Sultans in 2021, he was appointed captain and led the side to their maiden PSL trophy, finishing as the second highest run-scorer in the competition.

Rizwan defended his former franchise's decision. "I was never hurt when I was benched during the PSL in the past. I thought they [Karachi Kings] were honest with the team, and it was the team's requirement at the time to keep me on the bench."

Rizwan remains with Multan, whom he will captain for the third successive season when the PSL gets underway on February 13.

Jadeja bags 5-47 as India dominate Australia in Test opener



session, seemingly moving their side into a decent position.

But Labuschagne was stumped off Jadeja for 49 four overs after lunch and the left-arm spinner then trapped Matt Renshaw lbw for a first-ball duck.

Jadeja, who had not played for India since August because of a knee injury, also bowled Smith through the gate for 37 while recording his 11th Test five-wicket haul.

Talk about the pitch - India have been accused of only watering and rolling certain parts of the wicket to produce a turning surface to suit their spinners - dominated the build-up to the match but, while eight wickets fell to spin, the movement was rarely excessive.

Off-spinner Ravichandran Ashwin took 3-42, including his 450th Test wicket. He reached the landmark in 88 matches, the second fastest behind Sri Lanka spinner Muttiah Muralitharan who took his 450th wicket in his 80th Test.

Australia were poor in their 24 overs with the ball, allowing India to serenely progress to 76-0 before KL Rahul chipped a return catch back to debutant off-spinner Todd Murphy in the penultimate over.

NAGPUR (Agencies): India dominated the opening day of their series against Australia to take control of the first Test in Nagpur.

Spinner Ravindra Jadeja took 5-47 on his return from injury as Australia were dismissed for 177 on a turning pitch soon after tea.

A steady stand of 82 between Marnus Labuschagne and Steve Smith had taken the tourists to 84-2 before a collapse of 8-93 against India's three spinners.

The hosts then moved to 77-1, captain Rohit Sharma ending the day 56 not out.

Australia and India are the top two sides in the rankings and the World

Test Championship standings with India needing a 3-1 victory in the much-anticipated series to guarantee qualification for the showpiece final at The Oval this summer.

Australia, currently top of the standings, need to only draw one of the four Tests to guarantee their place. They are also looking to end India's run of 15 successive series wins at home - a run going back to 2012.

Usman Khawaja and David Warner fell to seamers Mohammed Siraj and Mohammed Shami respectively in the first three overs, with both openers dismissed for one.

Labuschagne and Smith then steadied Australia for the rest of the morning

Olympics 2024

Ukraine should drop threat of boycott - IOC

GENEVA (Agencies): The International Olympic Committee has urged Ukraine to drop threats of boycotting Paris 2024 if Russian and Belarusian athletes compete.

IOC president Thomas Bach has told Ukraine's Olympic Committee that such threats are "extremely regrettable".

Ukraine is hoping to gain international support for a ban on athletes from the two countries over Russia's invasion. The IOC has said it will "explore a pathway" for Russian and Belarusian athletes to compete as neutrals.

Ukraine's sports minister, Vadym Guttsait, who is also president of its Olympic Committee, responded by saying the country could boycott the Paris Games, with several other European nations since also calling for the ban to be upheld.

Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelensky has said allowing Russian athletes to compete at the 2024 Olympics would amount to showing that "terror is somehow acceptable".

In a letter from Bach to Guttsait, which has been seen by the BBC, the IOC president says comments from Ukrainian officials suggesting allowing Russian and Belarusian athletes would promote the war are "defamatory".

Bach added that threatening a boycott is "premature" because the IOC has not discussed the participation of Russian and Belarusian athletes as neutrals in "concrete terms yet".

He also accused Ukraine of "pressuring" international federations, IOC members and future Olympic hosts "in an attempt to publicly influence their decision making", and claims this has been "perceived by the vast majority of them as, at the very least, extremely regrettable".

Bach said Ukrainian athletes have the "unanimous support" of the Olympic movement and that "we all feel the pain and suffering of the Ukrainian people in this cruel war".

After Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, the IOC called on sports federations to exclude athletes, officials and teams from Russia and Belarus from international events but Bach has also said he is conscious of the impact such sanctions have on the athletes.

In his letter, he cited a United Nations resolution that said "any form of discrimination is incompatible with the Olympic movement" and two UN special rapporteurs expressing concerns over a total ban on Russian and Belarusian athletes being discriminatory. Bach said these were reasons for considering their inclusion as neutrals.

Zohra Abdullah wins Kashmir Day KP Junior Squash Championship

PESHAWAR (APP): Top seed Zohra Abdullah clinched the trophy of the Kashmir Day Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Junior Squash title after defeating her strong rivals Manahil Aqeel in the U19 final played here at Qamar Zaman Squash Complex on Thursday.

Asian Games gold medalist Aamir Atlas, Administrator Peshawar sports Complex Deputy Director Syed Jaffar Shah, Director Blue Tone Squash academy, former World Champion Qamar Zaman, Squash Coach Tahir Iqbal, Muhammad Waseem, Chief Referee Munawar Zaman were also present and witnessed the three finals.

In the first final of the U19 Age Group category, Zohra Abdullah defeated Manahil Aqeel in a hotly contested 3-2 battle. Zohra Abdullah, who is also a consistent winner, lost the first two sets by 9-11, 10-12 but she made a strong comeback and marched into victory in three consecutive sets. The score was 12-10, 13-11 and 11-9.

Both Zohra and Manahil

played well and gave each other a tough fight in the marathon five sets battle that lasted for 51 minutes. The final was also witnessed by former World Champion Qamar Zaman along with other guests and appreciated the play of both Zohra and Manahil.

In the U17 category final, Rania Qazi of Abbottabad recorded victory against Hafsa Yousaf of Peshawar in another thrilling match. Rania Qazi played well and despite losing the first set at the hands of Hafsa Yousaf at 10-12, she made a comeback and won three consecutive sets at 11-9, 12-10 and 11-7 by winning the final.

Rania Qazi has forceful smashes but Hafsa Yousaf has good drops and some excellent nick shots which are largely enjoyed by the sitting spectators.

In the U13 category Nimra Rehman from Abbottabad recorded victory against 10-year-old Maleeha Shah in a superb final where in both exhibited some good attacking game. Maleeha won two consecutive sets by

10-12, and 7-11 but on the other hand Nimra Rehman played well and despite losing the first two sets, won three timely sets by 11-9, 12-10 and 11-9. Both Nimra Rehman and Maleeha Shah played well and received thundering applause from the sitting spectators.

Talking to media men, Qamar Zaman said that the aim and objective of the girls Championship was to give the girls of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa better opportunities like the boys. "We have to provide great opportunities because there is enough talent of women as well as men in the province, if their skills are improved, then the day is not far away, the women players of our province will be able to make the name of Pakistan shine all over the world," Qamar Zaman said.

He said the organization of such competitions, women's squash would not only improve, but they also get an opportunity to test their abilities and on the other hand, they can learn a lot by playing against each other.

National Ski and Snowboarding C'ship to be held in Malam Jabba



F.P. Report

SWAT: The National Ski and Snowboarding Championship is being organized in Malam Jabba with the collaboration of security forces.

Athletes from all over Pakistan are participating in the Snow Festival organized on February 10 and 11.

Apart from ski and snowboarding competitions, cultural and food stalls will also be set up in the two-day National Ski and

Snowboarding

Championship. On this occasion, a musical night and spectacular fireworks have also been organized for the tourists.

The National Skiing and Snowboarding Championship is held every year in Malam Jabba in which tourists from all over the world including Pakistan participate.

A large number of domestic and foreign tourists are expected to participate this year as well.

Pakistan down Korea, HK in Asian Jr Squash C'ship

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan outplayed Korea and Hong Kong in the pool matches of the 21st Asian Junior Squash Championship at Chennai, India on Thursday.

On the second day of Pool Matches, the Pakistani team defeated Korea in the morning session by 3-0.

Noor Zaman of Pakistan beat Seo Jin Oh of Korea by 6-11, 11-6, 11-6 and 11-7 in 28 min, Hamza Khan of Pakistan beat Kun Kim 12-10, 7-11, 11-8, 9-11 and 11-6 in 35 min and Ashab Irfan of Pakistan beat Teo Kyung Jung 11-5, 11-3, 11-4 in 18 min.

In the 4th Pool match also, Pakistan defeated Hong Kong by 3-0 in the evening session.

Noor Zaman of Pakistan beat Arthur Law Pak Ki (HKG) 11-8, 11-7, 11-3 in 21 min, Hamza Khan of Pakistan beat Kelvin Lu Chun Yu of Hong Kong 11-7, 11-5, 11-6 in 22 min and Ashab Irfan of Pakistan beat Tam Tse Shing of Hong Kong 11-6, 11-7, 11-6 in 25 min.

HBL PSL 8 trophy unveiled at historic Shalimar Gardens

F.P. Report

LAHORE: National team's motto, artistry, recognition and prestige were conveyed in the brand new HBL Pakistan Super League 8 trophy, which was unveiled today in an eye-catching and memorable ceremony at the historic Shalimar Gardens by the Chair of the PCB Management Committee, Mr Najam Sethi, in the presence of franchise owners, HBL representatives and elite cricketers.

The 24-karat Supernova Trophy, as it will be called, has been made in Pakistan and showcases the country's skilled craftsmanship and the Pakistan Cricket Board's dedication towards supporting local businesses.

The three pillars of the trophy, which are studded with 9,907 sparkling zircon stones, represent the national cricket team's motto: Unity, Passion, and Strength, while the main pillar at the back is further embellished with crystals, representing the dedication and hard work that has gone into ensuring the team's success.

Mr Najam Sethi, Chair of PCB Management Committee: "HBL PSL is very close to my heart and it has always been my commitment and endeavour for it to become bigger, better and stronger each year.

"With this in mind, and to also celebrate the pinnacle PCB event taking place in front of home fans, we decided to design a new trophy that encompasses our spirit as a proud nation and launch it at the Shalimar Gardens, which is a national treasure and a symbol of pride for all of us.

"The Supernova Trophy is a testament to the passion and perseverance of Pakistani people and serves as a source of inspiration for future generations of cricket players. "The creation of this trophy was a true labour of love and, as the league continues to grow in success, the HBL PSL trophy has become a symbol of excellence and achievement, something that players and teams strive to lift and hold aloft in victory each year.

"I have no doubt this prestigious silverware will provide extra incentive and motivation to the players, which, in turn, will get the best out of them to make this year's event most exciting, enthralling and entertaining for all the cricket fans and followers within and outside Pakistan."

Mr Ali Habib, HBL's Chief Marketing and



Communications Officer: "I am honoured to represent HBL at the HBL PSL 8 unveiling of the Supernova Trophy, marking eight years of partnership with the PCB. "The platform is dedicated to cricket, youth development, and talent discovery in Pakistan. The HBL PSL has helped revive international cricket and create a positive image for the country. "HBL believes that a stadium is where the fans are and wishes the teams and the players the best for the HBL PSL 8.

"No matter which team wins, Asal Jeet Tu Pakistan Ki Hai!"

Mr Alamgir Khan Tareen, owner of Multan Sultans: "Finally, the biggest event in Pakistan is around the corner and one can already feel festivity in the air. "Multan Sultans have had an incredible run in the HBL PSL and I have no doubt that our boys will do great in the upcoming edition.

"We, at Multan Sultans, cannot wait to add the Supernova Trophy to our cabinet," Mr Ali Naqvi, owner of Islamabad United: "We are excited to see the launch of season eight of the HBL PSL with the unveiling of this season's trophy.

"This is the first season post-Covid and we are really looking forward to fans getting unrestricted access to stadiums for the first time in four years. This will be the first time Islamabad United plays across four venues. We are excited to experience the crowd in Multan for the first time. This season we have lots of things planned for our home crowd in Rawalpindi as well.

"Islamabad United promises to play its trademark aggressive cricket driven by data and process combined with that innate Pakistani passion.

"All six teams are United for Pakistan. United we win!"

Mr Atif Rana, Chief Executive of Lahore Qalandars: "As the defending champions of HBL PSL, we feel extremely proud to enter the battle grounds one more time with an even more well-built and resourceful team.

"I'm expecting the Home of Qalandars to be filled in support of Lahore Qalandars, just as it has been in every season. We request every Qalandar fan to wear green and support us in each corner of the country. To our devoted and diehard fans, I assure you that the trophy of HBL PSL 8 will yet again, be ours to conquer."

Mr Javed Afridi, Chair of Peshawar Zalmi: "It's great to see the HBL Pakistan Super League trophy unveiling on its eighth edition in Pakistan. I have high hopes from this season as all teams are made up of talented cricketers. I'm looking forward to an exciting and competitive tournament.

"I have faith that my team, Peshawar Zalmi, which will bring out their A-game and entertain all fans with their skills. Let's get ready for another amazing season of cricket!"

Mr Nadeem Omar, owner of Quetta Gladiators: "The trophy unveiling ceremony officially kicks off the festivities of HBL PSL and we are really excited about the season eight. Everyone likes winning but you have to go through transition at some point and taste defeat in the process.

"We keep believing in our processes and I believe this year we will reap the fruits of its labour. Quetta Gladiators are going to be a force to be reckoned with in HBL PSL 8, Inshallah!"

Mr Salman Iqbal, owner of Karachi Kings: "The HBL PSL 2023 season is upon us and I couldn't be more excited! The Karachi Kings team has been working tirelessly to bring you our best performance yet and I have no doubt that we will make our fans proud.

"I want to take this opportunity to thank our amazing fans for your constant support. Your unwavering spirit and love for the Kings inspire us to keep pushing forward.

"As the owner of Karachi Kings, I am honored to be a part of this incredible journey. The energy and passion that our players bring to the field is contagious and I can't wait to see the fireworks.

"Let's make this HBL PSL 2023 season one to remember. Go Kings!"



In brief

ICT admin reviews market upgradation

ISLAMABAD (APP): Deputy Commissioner, Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) administration, Irfan Nawaz Memon on Thursday reviewed the upgradation work of the weekly market, H-9 (Itwar Bazar), and directed the officials to ensure security arrangements. During the visit to Itwar Bazar along with Director, Municipal Administration Directorate (DMA), market committee and other stakeholders, the deputy commissioner directed the officials to maintain cleanliness, check the lighting arrangements for the citizens, and expedite the renovation. He ordered the staff to keep an eye on the rate lists and prices of commodities for providing relief to the citizens. Memon also directed the market committee to act against the trespassers and remove encroachments by the stall holders in the market causing congestion.

Power suspension programme

ISLAMABAD (APP): Islamabad Electric Supply Company (IESCO) on Thursday issued two-day power suspension programme for Friday and Saturday for various areas of its region due to necessary maintenance and routine development work. According to IESCO Spokesman, the power supply would remain suspended on Friday from 09:00 AM to 02:00 PM at different feeders and grid stations including Islamabad Feed Mill, Chatha Hatial, Pind Jhatla, Lab 1 and 2, Reliance Weaving Mill, Bahal and Jarrar Camp. Similarly, the power supply will remain suspended on Saturday from 09:00 AM to 02:00 PM at Islamabad Circle, Islamabad Club-1, Filtration Plant, G-6, G-8/2, Zia Masjid, Khanna Daak, Farash Town, Scheme-2, Madina Market, PTN, Fazal Ghimal, SES, Warid Telecom, Independent 2 and 3, I-10/3, Dargah, Mera Jaffar, T&T, Pindi Point, Bahrain, Kotli Sattian, Balawara, Terit, F-8/3 Feeders, Rawalpindi Cantt Circle, Mall Road, Tipu Road, Chaklala, River Garden, Mehboob Shaheed, Gulistan Colony, Lalkarti, Chontra, Hayal, UC Lakhna, Chongi No. 22, Rawat, Sagari, Lahtrar-1, Doberan, Nara Mator, Hamid Jhang, Kalam, Karnab Kaswal, Nishan Haider, Mahota, Khasala, New Kalam, Old Kalam, HPT-3, Industrial Feeders, Rawalpindi City Circle, Raja Sultan, New Malpur, Kurri Road, Gulzar-e-Quaid Zafarul Haq, Dhok Khaba, Asghar Mall, Gulshanabad, Sarafa Bazar, Jinnah Road, Dhoke Hasu, Mohammadi Chowk, People's Colony, Misrial Road, Ameer Hamza Colony, Nogazi, Saham, Chakra, Range Road, Mohanpura Feeders, Attock Circle, Salar Gah, Boi Gher, Kala Khan, MVHS, B-17, AWC Housing, Shaiya, Munirabad, Rashid Minhas, Shafi Chauhan, Industrial, Shah Dhir, Wasa, Gondal, Tin Mela, Bagh Neelab, Maskinabad, Boliawal, Gharibwal, Kisan, Bahtar, Bhandar, Dharnal, Fateh Jang, Laniwala Feeders, Jhelum Circle, F-7 Kachhari, Sanaullah Shaheed, CMH Jhelum, Kariala, Kohar, F-6 Machine Mohalla, F-9 Chak Daulat, Bong-2, Mangla Cantt, Dina-1, Bakralla, Bhagwal, New Sanghui, Mumtaz Shaheed, Matwa, Jermot, Nai Khanqah, Mal Awan, Chhapar Sharif, Baba Shaheed, Guliyana, Shah Safer, Kangar Thatti Feeders, Chakwal Circle, Bhon, Line Park, Mengam, Kallar Kahar, Islamia Chowk, Dera Muslim, Dhudial Rural.



ISLAMABAD: Minister of State for Poverty Alleviation and Social Safety, Faisal Karim Kundi writes his comments in the visitors' book at the Turkish Embassy.

Hearing of cases against Imran to be conducted on day to day basis; demands Tarar

ISLAMABAD (APP): Special Assistant to the Prime Minister (SAPM) on Interior Attaullah Tarar on Thursday demanded the hearing of cases against Imran Khan on day to day basis and live broadcast of their proceedings so that nation know about his real face. Talking to media persons here, he appealed the relevant courts to ensure hearing of the cases against Imran Khan on day to day basis as the PTI chairman had been using delaying tactics instead of facing them. It is to mention that IHC had to hear a petition on Thursday seeking former prime minister Imran Khan's disqualification for concealing his alleged daughter Tyrian White in his nomination forms submitted to contest the 2018 general election. Tarar said Imran Khan had been using delaying tactics instead of making arguments and resorting to technicalities for the delay. During the trials against PML-N leadership in past, Attaullah Tarar said that the hearing was conducted on day to day basis but Imran Khan had been avoiding to

argue the cases on merit and trying to challenge the jurisdiction of the court.

He said that Imran Khan delayed the foreign funding case with Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) for six years and the same tactics were being used by him in Toshakhana and Tyrian White cases.

The SAPM said that PTI leadership considered itself as 'untouchable' but it would have to be accountable for their deeds. Attaullah Tarar said that an affidavit was submitted in the court declaring the aunt of Tyrian White as her guardian but Imran Khan had now challenged the jurisdiction of the court instead of facing the case about it. In both aspects of this particular case, Attaullah Tarar viewed that Imran Khan would be disqualified because he had concealed facts being a public figure and party leader as information about kids was necessary to be submitted to the ECP before contesting elections. He said that different delaying tactics were being used in this case by chal-

lenging the jurisdiction of the court and non-availability of lawyers. "The next hearing of the case would be held on March 1 and we demand to ensure hearing of the case on day to day basis and its proceeding to be broadcast live," he maintained. To a question about Avenfield reference case, he said that PML-N leadership faced this false case and IHC set aside the conviction of PML-N leader Maryam Nawaz in it. To another question about the announcement of election date in Punjab, he said "I have the opinion as a student of law that Governor gives the data if he dissolves the assembly. But it is a legal issue in case the Assembly is dissolved after 48 hours".

Tarar said that Imran Khan destroyed the economy of the country during his three and half years tenure and rolled back the project of China Pakistan Economic Corridor. He said that the incumbent government came into power to save the country from bankruptcy and it would put the economy on right track.

HEC invites applications from Afghan students for short documentary contest

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Higher Education Commission (HEC) has called for applications for Afghan Short Documentary Contest and invited all enthusiastic Afghan students studying in Pakistan under Allama Muhammad Iqbal Scholarships for Afghan Students to submit a short documentary video sharing their higher education experiences in Pakistan using high-resolution cameras or smart phones. According to official sources from HEC, the theme of the short documentary contest is

"Education Experiences of Afghan Youth studying in Pakistan" As per details of the application process, initially in step one, submit an original idea based documentary no longer than 40 - 60 seconds in duration on the given theme using smart phone or high resolution cameras While in step 2, the jury members will shortlist top 10 Afghan students' entries to showcase and will inform students and their universities' nominated Public Relations Officers (PROs)/ Mass Communication

Department Faculty Members to participate as their Mentors to submit short documentary of 4 - 6 minutes using only high resolution cameras (please refer to technical requirements) on the given theme in English language with subtitles translated into 2 languages (Urdu & Dari). The deadline to submit initial applications is 21-02-2023, while announcement of top 10 shortlisted finalists will be announced on 24-02-2023 and final documentary will be submitted on 10-03-2023.

CDA employees not eligible to get Estate Office's accommodations

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Estate Office Director General on Thursday informed the National Assembly Standing Committee on Housing and Works that the employees of Capital Development Authority (CDA) were not eligible to get residential accommodations from the pool of Estate Office as the civic agency was maintaining its own pool of accommodation for its employees. Briefing the 24th committee of the Lower House of Parliament chaired by Muhammad Junaid Anwar Chaudhary, MNA, the Director General, Estate Office, shared the General Waiting List and the category-wise details of allotments of all houses of Sectors G-9 and G-10 Islamabad. The Director General of the Federal

Government Employees Housing Authority (FGEHA) briefed the Committee on the current status of the different projects and explained the steps taken to resolve all the issues relating to ongoing projects for the timely provision of plots/flats/apartments to the actual allottees. The Director General of Pakistan Public Works (Pak. PWD) briefed the Committee on the current status of utilization of SAP funds for the year 2022-2023. The MD Pakistan Housing Authority (PHA) Foundation and MD National Construction Limited (NCL) Islamabad briefed the working/functioning of PHAF and NCL in detail. The officials also informed the Committee of the progress of ongoing projects in Islamabad, Peshawar, Quetta and

Gilgit-Baltistan. The Committee appreciated the work done by the National Construction Limited (NCL) Islamabad under the supervision of the Secretary of Housing & Works, and unanimously recommended maintaining the independent status of NCL, being a national asset. The meeting was attended by members Ms. Tahira Aurangzeb, Syed Mehmoos, Shah, Salahuddin, Muhammad Abu Bakar, Dr. Zulfaqar Ali Bhatti, Makhdoom Syed Sami-ul-Hassan Gillani, and officers from Ministry of Housing and Works and its attached departments/organizations. The committee decided to proceed with the agenda and unanimously confirmed the minutes of its previous meeting held on 21-12-2022.

Education ministry finalizes names of VCs QAU, IIUI, AIOU

ISLAMABAD (APP): Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training has finalized the names of the Vice Chancellors of Federal Universities. According to the sources, the vice-chancellors include Allama Iqbal Open University, Quaid-e-Azam University and Islamic International Islamic University are to be appointed. The list and summary regarding the appointment of Vice Chancellors was sent to the President for finalisation of names, the sources informed. The summary has been sent with the names of Dr. Fazal Khaliq, Dr. Raheel Qamar and Professor Dr. Niaz for appointment as Vice-Chancellor Quaid-e-Azam University.

Names of Dr. Ziauddin, Dr. Nasir Mehmood and Dr. Mudassar have been sent to President for appointment as Vice Chancellor of Allama Iqbal Open University.

'Election to be held according to constitution'

ISLAMABAD (APP): Advisor to Prime Minister on Kashmir Affairs and Gilgit Baltistan Qamar Zaman Kaira on Thursday said that the general election would be held according to the constitution and law.

Talking to a private news channel, he said the conduct and holding of elections was the primary and essential duty of the ECP, particularly Article 218 (3) to ensure the holding of fair and free elections. He added that the Election Commission would announce the date of holding general election after taking the provincial governments on board, so that the provinces can play their role in the form of security and personnel. He said that the holding of elections on separate days would not only increase the election expenditures twofold but also make the task for law enforcement agencies (LEAs) difficult for providing foolproof security. He also said that conducting by-elections on vacant sets of Punjab and National Assembly on the same day would save money and ensure foolproof security because the police officers and teachers had to perform duties during the polls, adding that the same employees would be performing their duties in the census as well.

NA Body directs to approve IPC's budgetary proposals

ISLAMABAD (APP): The National Assembly Standing Committee on Inter Provincial Coordination (IPC) on Thursday recommended to approve all the budgetary proposals of the Ministry relating to Public Sector Development Program (PSDP) for the next Financial Year 2023-24. The meeting was presided over by its chairman Nawab Sher at Parliament House here, said a press release. The Secretary, ministry of IPC apprised the Committee regarding proposed allocations for 29 Projects (19 ongoing and 10 new) of the ministry amounting to Rs 28,869,291 million out of which Rs 836 million have been allocated for 10 new projects. After having detailed briefing, the Committee recommended to approve

all the budgetary proposals of the ministry relating to Public Sector Development Program (PSDP) for the next Financial Year 2023-24.

The Committee showed its displeasure over non-attendance of Chairman Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB), Chairman Pakistan Football Federation (PFF) and President Pakistan Athletics Federation (PAF), however, deferred the agenda items pertaining to the PCB, PFF and PAF.

The Committee directed that all the Heads of said departments should attend the next meeting to brief the committee.

The Committee also recommended that the matter of demarcation between the provinces should be considered in the presence of all the Chief Secretaries in the Inter Provincial Coordination Committee (IPCC) of the ministry.

Islamabad schools raising funds for Syria Turkey effected people

ISLAMABAD (APP): In the wake of recent earthquake in Turkiye and Syria, Federal Directorate of Education under Federal Ministry of Education and Professional Training has instructed educational institutions to raise funds to help earthquake victims.

The amount will go to the 'Prime Minister's Relief Fund for Earthquake Victims', to generate funds for Turkiye, which was rocked by a 7.8 magnitude earthquake on Monday.

The decision was made in the meeting held on Thursday, chaired by Federal Minister of Education and Professional Training, Rana Tanveer Hussain.

To kick start the campaign, fundraising activity has immediately started in 5 schools including Islamabad College for Girls, F-6/2, Islamabad College for Boys G-6/3, Islamabad Model College for Girls F-7/4, Islamabad Model College for Girls F 10/2 and Islamabad Model College for Boys F - 8/4.

The students and administration set up a donation box to collect donations and teachers and students had awareness and motivational sessions for students to encourage them in taking part in this activity. Schools administration has asked students to contribute to the funds, with as little as Rs. 10. Together they can make the difference in the lives of affected people.

In the next step, this campaign will expand to a greater number of schools, ultimately involving all educational insti-

tutions under FDE in this fundraising campaign. Federal Minister for Education and Professional Training, Rana Tanveer Hussain reassured that they will leave no stone unturned in helping earthquake victims, and this is one of the many initiatives that the ministry is undertaking to contribute toward the relief fund. Pakistan's government has already started dispatching of assistance packages to the victims. He also said that the aid should not stop till the complete recovery of the earthquake-affected people.

Dr. Ghulam Ali Mallah, Secretary IBCC while taking the efforts to the higher level said "we are making efforts for a nonstop relief flow of emergency aid to our brothers and sisters in the earthquake-affected areas of Turkiye and Syria. We have started fund raising campaign in few schools and we will continue expanding the magnitude of this campaign". Dr. Ikram Malik, Director General FDE while visiting these schools appreciated the students and motivated them to take part in these activities. He said together we will make a big difference.

Students have expressed their commitment and determination to lend a helping hand to the Government of Pakistan in helping earthquake affected people in Turkey and Syria, who lost their families, home and livelihoods in the earthquake. This is the high time that we all rise up to help our brethren in need, in every possible way.

Commissioner for action against plazas utilized basements to construct shops

RAWALPINDI (APP): Commissioner Rawalpindi Division Liaquat Ali Chhatta here on Thursday directed the authorities concerned to take strict action in accordance with the law against commercial plazas which had utilized the basements and parking spaces to construct shops and godowns. Talking to a delegation of Anjuman-e-Tajran of Rawalpindi City which met him here, he said all possible facilities would be provided to the traders.

The delegation briefed the Commissioner about issues being confronted and also presented some suggestions. They said the traders would join hands together with the administration in order to provide relief to the public.

The representatives of all the markets of Rawalpindi city under the leadership of Central President Anjuman-e-Tajran City, Sharjeel Mir anticipated in the meeting.

Speaking on the occasion, the Commissioner said solid steps would be taken to provide relief to the business community. Currently, the main problem of the city was encroachment, which was affecting the businesses of the traders, he added. Initially, in consultation with the traders, a big city market would be selected and made a model market removing all encroachments and making it a model commercial area. Traffic congestion which is another big problem of the city would

also be resolved, he said.

The Commissioner said action would be taken against those who had converted the parking spaces and basements of the plazas into shops.

He ordered the authorities to serve notices to the owners of the commercial plazas to designate their basements as car parking facility for customers.

He asked the owners of the commercial plazas to ensure provision of parking facility in the basements of the buildings in order to avoid traffic congestion on roads.

Action would be taken against those who had not allocated parking space in the basement of the plazas as non-availability of proper parking facility always resulted in traffic mess on the main arteries including Murree Road, Raja Bazar, Committee Chowk, Commercial market and other areas. The commissioner further informed the delegation that he would be available in the Municipal Corporation office on every Friday and the representatives of the traders from different markets can visit the MC office to register their complaints. Efforts would be made to address the problems of the traders on the spot, he added. The Commissioner directed the authorities concerned to approve the building plans of the shops within 45 days after completion of all the formalities.



ISLAMABAD: Visitors keenly viewing painting during exhibition on National Women's Day at PNCA.

Four killed in accident

JAWZJAN (Agencies): Local traffic officials of Jawzan said that four people lost their lives in a traffic accident on Balkh-Jawzjan public highway, and three others were injured. The police chief of Fayabad, Mawlawi Kafayatullah Mutawakkul said that a Toyota car carrying 7 passengers collided with a cargo truck, where four people lost their lives and three others were injured. The injured were transferred to the hospitals and their health condition has been reported to good, he said.

The Frontier Post

AFGHANISTAN

Rajab 18, 1444 — Friday, February 10, 2023

Police arrests 24 criminals

KABUL (Agencies): In the eight provinces of the country 24 criminals were arrested by police for different crimes, the Interior Ministry said. According to the Ministry, the police arrested 24 people on charges of robbery, murder, kidnapping, and forging documents from eight provinces of the country. Among the detainees arrested on charges of robbery from Kabul, five people in connection with forgery of documents.

Package of \$40m aid arrives Afghanistan

KABUL (Khaama press): Afghanistan has received another package of \$ 40 million in Humanitarian cash aid, the Central Bank said on Thursday.

The Central Bank of Afghanistan, also known as Da Afghanistan Bank (DAB), stated on its Twitter page that on 8th February, \$ 40 million in humanitarian cash assistance arrived in Afghanistan.

"A cash of 40 million US dollars in humanitarian aid has arrived in Kabul yesterday and has been handed

over to a commercial bank in Kabul," The bank said on its Twitter page.

According to the Da Afghanistan Bank, the amount arrived from donor countries to help the people of Afghanistan.

The figures indicate that more than \$ 1 billion in humanitarian aid has been sent to Afghanistan since the Taliban took power in Afghanistan.

Earlier this week, the Central Bank of Afghanistan announced a foreign exchange auction, selling

approximately \$ 17 million. This is the second time in a week that the central bank has announced an auction to keep the value of Afghani stable against foreign currency.

The humanitarian aid arrives in Kabul while people are facing a freezing winter, shortage of wood for warming, poverty, unemployment and natural hazards in the country. Since 2021, people experiencing one of the worst humanitarian crises in the country.

UN says ISIS threatens to target Chinese embassy

KABUL (Agencies): Islamic State militants have threatened to target Chinese, Indian, and Iranian embassies in Afghanistan in an effort to isolate the Taliban from a handful of countries it counts as diplomatic allies.

The local affiliate of the Islamic State of Syria and Iraq, is attempting to "undermine the relationship between the Taliban and member states in the region," according to United Nations report on the group's activities. The report is expected to be discussed later Thursday at United Nations Security Council in New York.

Rein in chicken prices, Balkh mayor asked

MAZAR-I-SHARIF (Pajhwok): Residents of northern Balkh province complain about a dramatic surge in chicken prices.

They are urging the government to control the rate as one kilogram of chicken meat has shot up to 300afs from 160afs in a short period of time.

Ibrahim, an inhabitant of Mazar-i-Sharif, said he previously bought a kilogram of chicken meat for 150afs, but the rate has now jumped to 280afs.

Milad, another resident of the provincial capital, also complained the poultry price had increased inordinately and the government should control it.

He added: "The price of one kilogram of chicken has spiked to 300 afghanis, beef to 400afs and mutton 450afs. The government should rein in the rates."

Ahmad Shah, a poultry dealer, argued poultry farms had been shut in the province and the government had restricted chicken imports from other provinces. Prices, therefore, had soared, he argued. Two weeks ago, the Balkh Municipality had set the price of one kilogram of chicken at 200afs, a decision that triggered reactions and chicken sellers closed their shops in protest for one week.

Javed Yousafi, a chicken meat seller in Mazar-i-Sharif, said the municipality had set the price without a thorough assessment. He claimed one kilogram of chicken cost sellers 250afs.

Mayor Maulvi Naqibullah Tariq confirmed they had fixed the price of one kilogram of chicken at 200afs, but the decision inflicted losses on sellers.

He said they were working on a strategy enabling people to purchase meat at a reasonable price and preventing losses for sellers. According to him, the meat price will be set at 250 afs.

IEA hails, supports provision of aid by UN

KABUL (Agencies): The Deputy Prime Minister of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan in a meeting with the Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary General of the United Nations in Afghanistan, called the United Nations and aid organizations' mission in Afghanistan vital.

According to a statement released by Arg, Mawlawi Abdul Salam Hanafi, Deputy Prime Minister met with Ramiz Al-Akbarov, the Deputy Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General in Afghanistan.

Al-Akbarov thanked the officials of the Islamic Emirate for the support of humanitarian aid from the United Nations and its affiliated organizations in Afghanistan.



He expressed satisfaction with the creation of better management employees of this organization to carry out activities and provide assistance on behalf of the Islamic Emirate.

For his part, Deputy Prime Minister Hanafi called the UN and aid organizations' mission in the country vital and stressed the continuation of the process of providing aid

to the people. Hanafi stated saying that the Islamic Emirate hails and supports the provision of humanitarian services and aid by United Nations and other aid organizations.

Islamic Emirate's statement on smuggling of currency

KABUL (TOLONews): The Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan issued a statement forbidding the smuggling of currency, gold and precious stones into or out of the country. Bringing currency from other regional countries into Afghanistan is not allowed.

According to the statement, no one has the right to transport across the border more than \$5,000 in cash by air and more than \$500 by land.

"The money, gold, and valuables that they are gained from them would be held or seized according to the decision of the Prime Minister," said Bilal Karimi, the deputy spokesman of the Islamic Emirate.

Meanwhile, some economists praised this decree of the current government and emphasized that more efforts should be made to prevent the smuggling of dollars out of the country.

"I think it's one of the biggest positives since Afghanistan's economy is mostly affected by a lack of capital," said Sayed Masoud, an economist.

"One of the important solutions to preserving

monetary capital against foreign currencies, especially the dollar, is to prevent the smuggling of dollars abroad, which raises the value of the Afghani currency against other currencies and, on the other hand, prevents the lack or decrease of dollars in the Afghan markets," said Mir Shikaib Mir, another economist.

The Union of Money Exchangers of Sarai Shahzada rejected recent claim of smuggling dollars to Afghanistan.

"The government and businesses claim that billions of dollars are being

trafficked into Afghanistan. We totally deny this claim, and this issue is the opposite, the money is being smuggled out of Afghanistan into the neighboring nations," said Abdul Rahman Zirak, the spokesperson of the Union.

According to the statement posted on Mujahid's Twitter account, the punishment is one year in prison for the transfer across the border of one million dollars, one month for the transfer of \$100,000 dollars, and ten days for less than \$100,000 (or equivalent).

Cadets returns to country completing training courses

KABUL (Agencies): Defense Ministry announced return of 20 cadets to the country after completing their military training in India.

In conservative efforts of the Ministry of National Defense and the coordination of the Department of Foreign Relations of that Ministry, 20 cadets who were sent to India for military professional training in the previous administration, returned to the country after completing their training courses, said reports.

These young officers, while praising the efforts of the officials of the Ministry of National Defense for their return, renewed their commitment to serve the people and the country.

Lately, many young offi-



cers who had received academic training abroad returned to the country and were recruited in the Ministry of National Defense.

Foreign Minister meets ambassador of Japan



KABUL (Agencies): The country's Acting Foreign Minister, Mawlawi Amir Khan Mutyaqi, met with Takashi Okada, Ambassador of Japan to

Afghanistan.

According to Foreign Ministry's statement, both sides in a meeting discussed political issues, humanitarian cooperation,

and the current situation in Afghanistan.

The two sides stressed positive measures to create better engagement between Afghanistan and the world.

Hanafi stressed conducting development projects

KABUL (Agencies): The Deputy Prime Minister of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, Mawlawi Abdul Salam Hanafi in a meeting with a group of scholars, officials and Mujahideen of Kunduz, termed conducting development projects important for prosperity of the country.

According to a statement released by Arg, the Deputy Prime Minister Hanafi, met with Mullah Rehmatullah Mohammad, the commander of the 203rd Mansoori Army Corps, Mawlawi Habib ur Rahman Sohaib, the Deputy Governor of

Kunduz, and a group of local officials and Mujahideen of that province.

The commander of Mansoori 203rd Army Corps, reminded of the mujahideen of Kunduz sacrifices a lot during Jihad against foreign invaders and the re-establishment of the Islamic system, adding that now people and the mujahideen of this province support the Islamic system.

He mentioned the problems of the people in the fields of education, religious schools, health and transportation and asked the officials of the Islamic

Emirate to launch development projects in Kunduz province to address the people's problems.

For his part, Deputy PM Hanafi, praised the bravery of the people and Mujahideen of the province during the Jihad time to end the invasions and re-establish the Islamic system in the country.

Hanafi called the implementation of development projects important for the development and prosperity of the country, added that the Islamic Emirate will conduct these projects in all the provinces of the country as soon as possible.

Motorbike bombing shakes Maimana city

MAIMANA CITY (Khaama Press): A motorbike bomb exploded near a mosque in Maimana city, Faryab provinces of Afghanistan, according to local people.

The explosion took place on late Wednesday close to the Imam Abu Hanifa Mosque in Maimana capital city of Faryab in northern Afghanistan that at least six people, including three Taliban members, were injured in the explosion, said local people.

So far, no one has claimed responsibility for the explosion. However, the security situation in Afghanistan has deteriorated over the past couple of months, causing further challenges for the interim government in Kabul.

Since August 2021, armed groups linked to the Islamic State of Khorasan



Province-Afghan branch gained power and carried out bombings, targeting civilian citizens, Taliban officials, ethnic minorities, and foreign nations. Despite the ruling

regime's tremendous efforts, security in Afghanistan is still a major concern. Target killings, explosions, and suicide bombings routinely happen in Kabul and other cities.

Revenue increases from Sher Khan Bandar Port

KUNDUZ (TOLONews): Customs officials at Sher Khan Bandar port in Kunduz province said the revenue from this port has increased 58 percent.

According to the officials, more over 300 million afghani have been earned in the last 15 months.

According to officials, providing facilities for traders and maintaining good international relations is contributing to the Sher Khan Bander revenue increase.

"Providing facilities for traders, coordinating with traders and good relations with Tajikistan are factors contributing to the port's increased revenue," said Ishaq, head of the Sher Khan Bandar port in Kunduz.

Meanwhile, officials of the Commerce and Investment Department said that visas are not issued on time and this is causing challenges.

"Officials didn't pay attention to Sher Khan Bandar port as they do to other ports, and we call on the Islamic Emirate to pay attention to this area," said Abdul Mateen Yusuf Zai, head of the Chamber of the Commerce and Investment in Kunduz.

Kandaharis lament hike in firewood rates and poor-quality gas

KANDAHAR (Pajhwok): The price of firewood has surged in southern Kandahar province this winter, with residents also complaining of low-quality gas supplies.

Mohammad Nabi, a resident of Kandahar City, said he purchased a kilogram of gas for 72afs and per 4.5 kilograms of firewood for 35-45afs.

Unable to buy gas, he

purchased 180 kilograms of firewood for warming up his house and cooking food. He believed the quantity of firewood was inadequate.

Abdul Wali, another inhabitant, grumbled about being caught in the cold wave on the one hand and haunted by unemployment on the other.

Sakhi, a firewood stall owner, recalled he previ-

ously received supplies from Registan. However, the authorities have now restricted such supplies and as a result, he receives firewood from other provinces.

"Traders and other people previously brought firewood from Ghazni, Helmand and Registan at affordable rates. But the caretaker government has now banned firewood supplies from Registan," he

explained

Ahmadullah, a dealer, acknowledged the poor quality of gas. He demanded traders importing poor-quality commodities must address the problem.

Pajhwok approached gas-importing companies for comments, but they declined speaking on the issue.

A fuel control department exists in Kandahar, but it is not working to

check quality and prices.

Mohammad Rahim Bashardost, speaking for the environment protection authority, confirmed the ban on forest felling in Registan.

He acknowledged the import of low-quality fuels was also affecting the environment, and they had shared the issue with the Ministry of Public Health and the governor's office.

1000 families receive cash aid in Herat: UN



HERAT (TOLONews): The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees has helped 1,000 poor families in Herat with cash aid, it reported.

According to the officials of this office, every needy family has received close to 50,000 afghanis.

"For families, we distributed approximately 47,700 afghanis and it's our duty to help our countrymen," said Abdul Ghafor Jalal, financial deputy of the Refugee and

Reparation dept in Herat. Some low-income people come to the Refugee and Repatriation department from districts to receive help and some of them said that due to hunger and economic challenges, they are here for help.

"It's a big help for us and we can use it for three and four months, we haven't any income," said Khan Mohammad, a needy person.

"We don't have food

materials in our house, even bread," said Zainab, a needy person.

Meanwhile, some Herat residents said that hunger and poverty have increased in society and low-income people need more help.

"There are poor people that do not have work and cannot go abroad," said Khoda Dadh.

"We are poor and have nothing and we need more help," said Lal Jan, a person in need.

Imran deprived KP of development, says Maryam Nawaz

F.P. Report

ABBOTTABAD: Chief Organizer and Vice President, Pakistan Muslim League (N), Maryam Nawaz Sharif here Thursday said that Imran Khan had deprived the people of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa of development and failed to deliver in all fronts despite of his party 10 years rule in the province.

Addressing a big workers convention, she said that former PTI government had closed down its own Ehtasab Commission to protect its loot and plunder. She said that Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) project in Peshawar was constructed on huge cost of Rs128 billion, while on the same amount PML-N had constructed 4 metro bus projects.

Instead to make plantations under the billion trees afforestation Project, she claimed that forests were ruthlessly cut in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. She said that Imran Khan had neither completed 350 dams nor honoured his promise of providing jobs to 10 million people, and that unemployment were significantly increased in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa during the tenure of PTI. She accused Imran for using KP Government helicopter, CM and Governor houses for personal politicking.

Maryam Nawaz said that if the anti terrorism funds of Rs 417 billion given to KP government under NFC Award were properly utilized on strengthening of counter terrorism department and police in KP, the brutal incident of police lines mosque blast could not happened. She said that Imran Khan could not escape from law by taking the shelter of plaster on his leg, adding if Nawaz Sharif in capacity of Prime Minister could attend courts by leaving his ailing wife abroad then why not Imran Khan.

She claimed that Imran Khan had to be made accountable for his crimes in cases related to PTI foreign fundings, Toshi Khana and others. Maryam Nawaz said that Farah Gogi was

facilitated to escape through a charter plane while resources of the government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa were used to make the Zaman Park residence of Imran Khan bullet proof. She said that Imran Khan's foreign conspiracy drama had been flopped completely. Maryam Nawaz said that the political opponents had admitted that great injustice was made with Nawaz Sharif after he was ousted from power on the so called Aqama.

She said that Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif was ousted from power under a deep rooted conspiracy to keep Pakistan backward. She said that Nawaz Sharif was punished to give free hands to Imran Khan to reach power corridor, adding today all the actors behind the ouster of Nawaz Sharif and bringing Imran to power were exposed before masses. She claimed that Imran was a mental patient and his designs to politically destabilise Pakistan would not succeed.

Maryam said that Nawaz Sharif had made the country an atomic power, started CPEC, constructed Motorways network including Hazara Motorway, hospitals, roads, energy and other mega development projects. She said Pakistan Muslim League (Nawaz) was the only party that could take the country out of difficult situation and bring it back on development track. Maryam said Imran Khan had plunged the country into loadshedding, price hike and inflation and today the nation was confronted to enormous economic challenges due to Imran's wrong economic policies and agreements with the foreign monetary institutions.

She said there was no dearth of resources in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and PML-N after coming into power would use it for benefits of the masses. "Nawaz Sharif and PML-N is the need of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and it is time for people of KP to vote my party for progress and



development besides resolution of their problems," she said. Maryam said that she was well aware of the Hazara's province demand and two-third majority in the National and KP assemblies were required for PML-N to make legislation. Maryam said that all daily use commodities including flour, ghee, vegetable and food products were available on very low prices during Nawaz Sharif Government while significant increase in prices of the same commodities were witnessed during the tenure of Imran Khan. Maryam Nawaz said that she would visit all divisions and districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and urged party workers, leaders and social media teams to spread the message of Nawaz Sharif to each and every corner of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

She said PTI had disappointed people of KP and pinned high expectations from PML-N. She said Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz after coming into power would start massive development works in every district of KP and would change destiny of people. Federal Ministers Marriyum Aurangzeb, Murtaza Javed Abbasi, PM aide Engr Amir Muqam and others PML-N leaders of KP were present on the occasion. The workers raised full throated slogans in favour of Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, PML-N Quaid Nawaz Sharif and Maryam Nawaz.

ISPR terms speculations over army chief's visit to US 'baseless'

F.P. Report

RAWALPINDI: Speculations surrounding Chief of Army Staff (COAS) General Asim Munir's visit to the United States of America are "baseless", the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) said Thursday. "There have been baseless speculations on social media that COAS is visiting USA," the military's media wing said in a series of tweets, as it put an end to speculations.

The ISPR added that the army chief is on an official visit to the United Kingdom (UK) from 5 to 10 February in connection with the 5th Pakistan-UK Stabilisation Conference. The military's media wing explained that the conference is a bi-annual event for military-to-military cooperation between the two countries, in which senior Pakistani military leadership has been participating since 2016.

The visit is seen as highly important in view of the rising issue of Taliban militancy and the situation in the South Asian region. This is Gen Munir's first visit to the UK after taking over as Pakistan's powerful army chief at the end of November last year. The conference will also focus on the Ukraine war's impact on the EU, the UK, and its consideration for Pakistan. The COAS will visit the headquarters of the British military and address senior military commanders including the UK army chief. According to a source, Gen Munir will also address a security think-tank towards the end of his visit. The ISPR's statement came just hours after the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was asked to comment on the army chief's speculated visit to the United States. "We are not aware of the army chief's trip to the US. ISPR could inform better on this matter," Foreign Office spokesperson Muntaz Zahra Baloch told journalists during her weekly press briefing.

PM directs to achieve Rs30b youth loan target

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Thursday directed the authorities concerned to make all-out efforts to achieve the Rs 30 billion loan target under the Prime Minister Youth Loan Scheme by end of June this year.

The prime minister, who chaired a review meeting on the PM Youth Loan Scheme, instructed to resolve all operational issues regarding the scheme on priority. He said the government was taking remarkable steps for promotion of entrepreneurship and employment among the youth. Besides the provision of easy loans to the youth was also being ensured.

He said the youth were an asset for Pakistan and the country's progress was linked with their welfare. The prime minister also set up a steering committee under him to examine the performance and pace of the youth loan scheme. The finance minister would also be part of the committee.

He said the Pakistani youths had immense potential with high morale and if provided with resources, they could change the country's fate. He said the collaborative work of the public and private sectors was essential to cope with the prevailing challenges. The meeting was told that starting from 2013, around 54,000 youth had been extended loan facility worth Rs 73.55 billion. A portal for the youth loan scheme was also launched on January 24, 2023.

Under the scheme, people from 18 to 45 years of age can get easy loans within 45 days. About 25 percent quota has been allocated for women. The heads of participating banks and micro-financing institutions ensured to achieve the loan targets within the timeframe. The prime minister also formed a committee to address the operational issues regarding the loan scheme. The committee would comprise Minister of State for Finance Ayesha Ghaus Pasha, Special Assistant to the PM Shiza Fatima, federal secretaries for information and poverty alleviation, founder of Akhuwat Foundation, State Bank governor, and presidents of National Rural Support Programme, Bank of Punjab, Habib Bank Limited, Zarai Taraqqiati Bank and Bank Al Falah.



KARACHI: Pakistani fishermen, who were released by the Indian government, are greeted by their family members as they arrived in the Port City.

Court dismisses Sheikh Rashid's second bail plea

ISLAMABAD (Agencies): A local court in Islamabad has turned down a second post-arrest bail petition filed by Awami Muslim League chief Sheikh Rashid after he challenged a judicial magistrate's dismissal of his previous petition for bail.

Additional Sessions Judge Tahir Abbas Sipra announced the verdict reserved earlier and rejected the plea for post-arrest bail. It may be mentioned that Sheikh Rashid, 72, was detained last week from his residence on a complaint filed by the PPP Rawalpindi Division vice-president. He is being tried under several sections related to criminal conspiracy, promoting enmity between different groups, and statements conducing to public mischief.

During the hearing, Rashid's lawyer Raziq read out the first information report filed in the case. "Prior to the FIR, a notice was sent by the police, about which we found out through the media but the IHC suspended that notice,

yet an FIR was registered," he argued. He added that the person who filed the case had asked for an investigation to be conducted about the conspiracy Rashid mentioned.

The lawyer asserted, "The sections registered in the FIR could only be filed by the federal government or a provincial government, not by any citizen." He argued that no such statement was made about "any religious group, ethnic group, or a community" upon which those sections could be applied.

Rashid's counsel said that his client had only mentioned what PTI Chairman Imran Khan had talked about to him. "Imran Khan [also] made the statement [but] no action was taken against him." He requested the court to accept the bail plea saying that only a defamation case could be filed by Zardari.

Rashid's other lawyer, Panjhotra said, "Sheikh Rashid did not target any group. Benazir Bhutto Shaheed had also given a similar statement after

which she was attacked." Prosecutor Adnan then began presenting his arguments. He asserted the IHC had suspended the notice but it had not stopped the police from filing a case. The prosecutor emphasized that both, Zardari and Imran were the heads of their respective parties and making a statement that "Asif Ali Zardari wants to get Imran Khan killed is no small matter". He described Rashid's statement as "extremely inciting", adding that he had "committed no usual crime and its punishment is up to seven years".

Rashid's counsel said, "Imran Khan tweeted there are two people whom Asif Ali Zardari has contacted for getting Imran Khan killed." He asserted that only a defamation case could be registered against Rashid. Judge Sipra then asked the investigation officer (IO) if the police had included in the investigation the person who Rashid held a meeting with and if Imran had been included as well.

Akhtar Hayat posted as IGP KP

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The federal government on Thursday transferred Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Inspector General of Police Moazzam Jah Ansari and replaced him with Akhtar Hayat Gandapur, a Grade-21 officer of Police Service of Pakistan (PSP).

Presently, Akhtar Hayat has been serving as a senior officer in the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA).

According to a notification issued by Establishment Division: "With the approval of the Federal Government, Mr. Akhtar Hayat, a BS-21 Officer of Police Service of Pakistan, presently serving in Federal Investigation Agency (FIA), under Interior Division, is transferred and posted as Provincial Police Officer (PPO), Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, under Section 10 of the Civil Servant Act, 1973, with immediate effect and until further orders".

PHC told: Private medical colleges receiving donations

Humayun Khan

PESHAWAR: Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) informed Peshawar High Court (PHC) the agency found that private medical colleges are grabbing hundreds of thousand rupees in the name of donations from students during inquiry despite receiving fees, on Thursday.

The divisional bench comprising of Chief Justice PHC Justice Qaiser Rashid and Justice Ijaz Anwar while FIA Deputy Director Tahir Khan, Khyber Medical University (KMU) lawyer Abdul Moneen, Barrister Yasin on behalf of students and Pakistan Medical and Dental Council (PDMC) lawyer Sardar Sadat Ali appeared in petitions filed by students and Muhammad Medical College.

FIA's deputy director Tahir Khan informed that as

many as statements of 61 parents and students were conducted in inquiry initiated on the directives of court and found that students allegation against private medical colleges are genuine because four parents had paid Rs5 lakh to Rs1 million in the name of donations.

During hearing Chief Justice Qaiser Rashid remarked that it is very unfortunate that on one hand private medical colleges are receiving high fees from students while on the other hand compelling people for provision of donation. He observed that PDMC should increase surveillance on the colleges because it is competent forum dealing with the issues.

Deputy Director argued that FIA has found that PDMC new administration has withdrawn appeal against reinstatement of college's registration from

Medical Teaching Institution (MTI) Tribunal but the tribunal inquired regarding grounds for restoration of the registration and produced 190 pages report before court.

PMDC counsel Sardar Sadat Ali informed that first suspension was wrong and latterly it was restored because no complainant was appeared and several laws were violated during suspension of the registration of private medical college. He added that new body has initiated inspections of all colleges and identified deficiencies while added that students should approach PDMC for their grievances neither to register complaint with FIA. The divisional comprising of Chief Justice PHC Justice Qaiser Rashid and Justice Ijaz Anwar adjourned further hearing while ordered all respondents to submit report in this regard.

23 Pakistanis evacuated from quake-hit Turkiye: FO

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Foreign Office on Thursday confirmed that 23 Pakistani nationals were evacuated from the quake-hit Turkiye, while no casualties were reported so far. "So far, we have no news of casualty of any Pakistani in Turkiye or Syria," the Foreign Office spokesperson said at a weekly press briefing.

Spokesperson Muntaz Zahra Baloch said the Pakistanis were evacuated from Gaziantep University and accommodated in Adana city. The devastated city of Gaziantep, located about 33km from the epicentre, suffered heavy loss of life and infrastructure during the earthquake. "Sixteen of these evacuated persons will be brought back to Pakistan, while the rest will be shifted to Istanbul city of Turkiye," she said. She said the country's missions in Turkiye and Syria remained in constant touch


with the relevant authorities to provide relief to Pakistanis affected by the earthquake.

In response to a question regarding the outcome of Pakistan's series of meetings with Afghanistan and Iran, she said the multifaceted dialogue with the neighbouring states would lead to positive development. Asked why Pakistan stayed away from the Multilateral Security Dialogue on Afghanistan in Russia's capital Moscow, she said, "We decided not to participate in the Moscow meeting of regional stakeholders." "We will continue to participate in all constructive meetings on Afghanistan," she said.

The spokesperson said Director General of International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Rafael Mariano Grossi will visit Pakistan from February 15-16. "The visit will provide an opportunity

for Pakistan and the IAEA to explore avenues to advance cooperation in peaceful applications of nuclear technology for socio-economic development," she said. Baloch said Foreign Secretary Dr Asad Majeed Khan would visit France to meet his counterpart on February 10 for the 14th Round of Bilateral Political Consultations.

A roadmap for bilateral cooperation between Pakistan and France will also be signed, she said. About the eviction of Kashmiri Muslims from the Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IOJK), she said in some states of India, bulldozers were used to demolish the properties of Muslims to terrorize them. "It is unfortunate that Indian authorities are using land as a weapon to intimidate the people of IOJK," she said.



پاکستانی حکومت اور عوام
اس مشکل گھڑی میں
اپنے ترک بہن بھائیوں کے ساتھ بے

وزیراعظم ریلیف فنڈ برائے متاثرین زلزلہ ترکیہ

G-12166

Account Title:
Prime Minister's Relief Fund for Turkiye Earthquake Victims


IBAN: PK18NBPAA0001004182864740
Bank: National Bank of Pakistan


وزیر اعظم پاکستان کے قائم کردہ
ریلیف فنڈ برائے متاثرین زلزلہ ترکیہ میں دل کھول کر امداد کریں

بشکریہ

آل پاکستان

نیوز پیپرز سوسائٹی





#PMReliefFundForTurkiye

#PakStandsWithTurkiye