

**Ex-AG Malik Qayyum dies**  
**F.P. Report**

LAHORE: Former judge and ex-attorney general of Pakistan Malik Mohammad Qayyum passed away in Lahore on Friday. Qayyum had remained the Lahore High Court justice and also worked as attorney general of Pakistan. The retired justice was the brother of MNA Pervaiz Malik and uncle of PML-N MNA Ali Pervaiz Malik.

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# Shehbaz says Turkish quake a wake-up call

PM says world should come up to victims

ADIYAMAN (APP): Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Friday said the earthquake in Turkiye was a wake-up call to the international community which should come up to the rescue of the quake-hit nation. The prime minister, in an interview with the Turkish TRT television channel during his visit to the quake-ravaged areas, said the international community, including the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation and the United Nations, should support the Turkish people.

"This is my message to the world, including the OIC and the United Nations. This is not politics. Today is question of survival," he remarked. He said the earthquake had killed thousands of people, besides causing colossal losses of property. The prime minister said no doubt Turkiye would do all possible for the rehabilitation of the quake-hit people but no amount of resources could bring the loved ones back.

Prime Minister Shehbaz said he was there to convey condolences over the destruction caused by the earthquake as Pakistan and Turkiye were "two souls and one heart". Earlier in an interaction with the media, the prime minister said considering the needs of the quake-ravaged Turkish people, Pakistan would now focus on the provision of winterised and fireproof tents to Turkiye.

He said Pakistan had been supplying blankets, food-stuff, and other relief goods. However, after his discussion with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, his government had changed its

## Pakistan to extend maximum support to Turkiye: Premier

ADIYAMAN (APP): Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Friday said Pakistan would continue to provide maximum assistance to the Turkiye in its post-earthquake rehabilitation and reconstruction phases. The prime minister expressed these views as he handed over the relief goods mainly the winterized tents to the Turkish officials, during his visit to Adiyaman city of Turkiye.

A special aircraft of the Pakistan Air Force transported relief goods to Adiyaman city, the most-affected area in southeast Turkiye that suffered heavy damage from the earthquake of February 6. The prime minister interacted with the victims of the earthquake who lost their families and conveyed to them sympathies on behalf of the Pakistani nation. Shehbaz Sharif on the occasion assured the Turkish government and the affected people that Pakistan would extend every possible cooperation to the brotherly country to cope with the devastation. He termed Turkiye as the friend and brotherly country of Pakistan and hoped that the country would overcome the challenging times with resilience.

Appreciating the resilience of the Turkish nation, the prime minister said that with "traditional Turkish spirit of overcoming all obstacles and defeating all challenges, the Turkish nation will emerge out of this natural calamity stronger than ever." Turkiye will always find Pakistan by its side, he assured. Later, the prime minister visited various parts of Adiyaman city and interacted with Pakistani search and rescue teams who were carrying out search and rescue operations in the area. He praised their dedication and professionalism and stressed that Pakistan would continue playing an active part in rescue, relief and rehabilitation efforts. The ceremony was followed by a detailed briefing by the Turkish Disaster Relief Authority, AFAD on the ongoing rescue and relief activities.

strategy to focus on the supply of winter tents. He said after his return to Pakistan, he would hold a meeting with the tent manufacturers of Pakistan and devise a plan to ensure the speedy manufacturing of tents to provide temporary shelter to the Turkish brethren.

Prime Minister Shehbaz said he had assigned the task to the National Disaster Management Authority chairman and assured that the tents would be dispatched by land, air

as well as sea routes. He said the people of Pakistan and Turkiye enjoyed a historical relationship marking Islamic brotherhood and recalled the unprecedented Turkish support to Pakistan after it was hit by an earthquake. He said being a Muslim brotherly nation, Pakistan was obliged to support its Turkish brothers and sisters and expressed the hope that both Pakistan and Turkiye would jointly cope with the pervading challenge.

## President invites CEC for meeting on elections

ISLAMABAD (PPI): President Dr Arif Alvi has invited Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Sikandar Sultan Raja for an urgent meeting to consult on the date or dates of the general elections. The President, in a letter addressed to the Chief Election Commissioner, has asked the CEC to come for a meeting on Monday in his office for consultation in terms of Section 57(1) of Elections Act, 2017.

The Election Act, 2017 provides that the President shall announce the date or dates of the general elections after consultation with the Election Commission of Pakistan. Dr Arif Alvi said since his letter on 08th of this month, some substantial developments like the Judgment of the Lahore High Court and recent observations of the Supreme Court had taken place.

He expressed displeasure over the apathy and inaction on part of the Commission that didn't respond to his earlier letter as yet. The President said he waited anxiously that the Commission would realize its constitutional duties to proceed and act accordingly, but he was extremely dismayed by ECP's poignant approach on this important matter.

## SC reinstates Dogar as Lahore CCPO

ISLAMABAD (Agencies): A three-member bench of the Supreme Court Friday suspended the order to transfer former Lahore Capital City Police Officer (CCPO) Ghulam Mehmood Dogar and reinstated him as the Lahore CCPO.

The bench led by Justice Ijaz-ul-Ahsan passed the order after hearing Dogar's case. The incumbent caretaker Punjab chief minister appointed Bilal Siddique Kamyana as the Lahore CCPO while transferring Dogar. Senior police officer Kamyana is praised by the PML-N but dreaded by the PTI for crushing its long march to Islamabad in May last year.

Referring to the order for Dogar's transfer, the top court said that the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) had given verbal approval to a verbal request. "The power to order transfers belongs to the election commission, not the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC)," the bench said, adding that the ECP did not delegate its powers in writing to the CEC. "Who called the CEC and requested the transfer?", a member of the bench Justice Muneeb Akhtar questioned during the proceedings.

He further observed saying the individual should have been told to be patient as the ECP will make the decision on the application. Expressing dismay over the situation, Justice Muneeb further questioned how the CEC himself was making decisions on behalf of the entire electoral body. However, the apex court rejected the ECP's request for more time to submit records on transfer postings. It is pertinent to mention here that the federal government had suspended Capital City Police Officer (CCPO) Lahore Ghulam Mahmood Dogar, a day after Governor House came under attack.

"The clock is ticking, tick, tick, tick," Justice Muneeb remarked. "Ninety days are about to expire and the election commission is asking for more time," he added, referring to the dissolution of the Punjab Assembly as the Constitution stipulates holding elections within 90 days after a dissolution of an assembly. During the hearing, Justice Ijaz-ul-Ahsan noted that it is the commission's job to conduct transparent elections and "they are even asking for more time for that". Meanwhile, the Islamabad High Court Bar Association's (IHCBA) request to issue an order on the petition for elections in Punjab was also rejected.

## Marriyum meets quake women victims

ADIYAMAN (APP): Minister for Information and Broadcasting Marriyum Aurangzeb on Friday met the earthquake-affected women in Adiyaman, Turkiye.

The minister on the occasion hugged the victims and expressed her profound grief over the loss of life and property in the earthquake, a press release said. She expressed solidarity with the government and the people of Turkiye on behalf of the government and the people of Pakistan. "The Government of Pakistan stands with its Turkish brothers and sisters in this hour of difficulty," she remarked. Marriyum Aurangzeb said Pakistan would provide all possible help for the rehabilitation of the earthquake victims.



ISTANBUL: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif consoling a young survivor Burhan, rescued by Pakistan Army Urban Search and Rescue Team, in Adiyaman.

# Three terrorists killed in Karachi police chief office building attack

KARACHI (Agencies): Law enforcement agencies (LEAs) Friday night cleared the five-story office of the city's police chief after nearly a four-hour operation — days after a deadly attack in Peshawar's Police Lines. At least three militants blew themselves, while two were gunned down in the shootout, officials confirmed, as they swept the office situated on the main artery of Sharea Faisal.

Three people — including two police officers — also lost their lives, and 18 people — including Rangers personnel — were injured, officials confirmed to media. The attack began at 7:10pm, while police and Rangers personnel cleared the five-storey building in phases, finally sweeping the entire office by around 10:48pm. Police snipers took up positions near the station and all lights in the area were switched off.

A police officer, who did not want to be named, told media that the attackers entered the office wearing police uniforms — a tactic similar to the Peshawar mosque suicide attack that claimed the lives of more than 80 people. Police officials said that armed suspects — whose total numbers are unknown at the moment — fired several rounds at the head office — located adjacent to the Sadar Police Station.

Police sealed off traffic on the main thoroughfare through Karachi and heavy contingents of security forces, including Rangers and Pakistan Army's Special Service Group commandos, had arrived at the scene. Talking to media, Interior Minister Rana Sanaullah said that commandos of police and Rangers had arrived at the site to deal with the terrorists.

He said that the federal government is in touch with the Sindh Police and "all assistance will be provided." Sanaullah mentioned that he had spoken to the chief secretary and IG Sindh, who confirmed that the police saw "six to seven terrorists" entering the building.

Responding to a question, he said the general security threat exists following the terror attack in Peshawar. "All the institutions are fully alert across the country," he added. The security czar stressed the need for taking further steps to counter the fresh wave of terrorism.

"The police have said that the terrorists threw a grenade after parking the vehicle, and used that as a cover for entering the building," he revealed. Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari and Pakistan Peoples Party Chairman (PPP) — whose party is in power in the province — condemned the attack.

"Condemn the terrorist attack on Karachi police. Sindh police have bravely faced and crushed terrorism before," he stated, taking to his official Twitter handle. The minister shared fears about more such attacks with hopes that the heinous acts won't deter the country.

"We have full faith they will do so again, such cowardly attacks will not deter us. #IstandwithKarachiPolice," Bilawal wrote. Sindh Chief Minister Murad Ali Shah took notice of the attack on the office of the additional inspector-general, instructing several DIGs to send police force to the site. "The attack on the Karachi police office is not acceptable under any circumstances," he said, demanding an initial report from the concerned officer immediately.

The chief minister mentioned that he is personally monitoring the situation and has directed officials concerned to arrest the suspects involved. Sindh Governor Kamran Tessori expressed concern over the attack and sought a report from Inspector-General of Police Ghulam Nabi Memon. He directed officials to take "strong action" against the terrorists. "Terrorists should be strictly dealt with. The attack is an extremely significant cause for concern," he stated.

Meanwhile, Sindh Information Minister Sharjeel Memon insisted on defeating terrorists. "Terrorists will be taught a lesson for challenging the government's writ. They have attacked while hiding and the attack will prove costly for them," the minister said. In view of the terrorists' attack, the Karachi Traffic Police blocked both sides of Sharea Faisal from Avari Hotel to Nursery.

In a bid to avoid inconvenience to commuters, the traffic coming from Avari Hotel's side is being diverted to Teen Talwar and Cantonment Railway Station. While the traffic coming from the Nursery area is being diverted to Korangi Road. Traffic arriving from Korangi Road is being diverted to Hino Chowrangi from Defence Mor (intersection of Sunset Boulevard and Korangi Road).

In a statement, Islamabad IG Akbar Nasir Khan confirmed that security is on high alert in the federal capital, and all officers have been instructed to stay in their respective areas. "Checking at entry and exit points and inside the city has been increased," he said, adding that officials have been directed to keep all important buildings and Red Zone on high alert.

# Senators urge govt to implement austerity steps

ISLAMABAD (APP): The opposition senators on Friday proposed the government to fully implement austerity measures and cut its expenditures to steer the country out of the economic crisis.

Taking part in the debate on the supplementary finance bill in the Senate, they opined that the government would have to take some bold decisions in a bid to put the national economy on the road to progress and prosperity. Leader of the Opposition in the Senate Dr Shahzad Waseem expressed the apprehension that the measures proposed in the bill would further hike inflation in the country. The government should better adopt austerity measures to cope with burgeoning inflation and ailing economic conditions, besides reforming the tax collection department.

The Federal Board of Revenue had sought approval for the purchase of 155 luxury vehicles, he regretted. Dr Shahzad Waseem urged the government to continue the programmes initiated by the previous regime for the less privileged segments of society. He proposed fresh elections to get the country out of the prevailing economic crisis.

Jamaat-e-Islami's Senator Mushtaq Ahmad Khan said there had been some tough conditions, which had been okayed by the International Monetary fund (IMF). The new steps would cause problems, particularly for the poor masses, which needed to be reviewed, he added. Currently, there was already high inflation in the country and the supplementary bill would further to the people's problems, Senator Mushtaq said.

He called for reducing the number of Federal Cabinet members to 27, in addition to curtailing their perks, privileges, and protocol to ensure austerity in an effective manner. He also called for a full review of the bureaucratic set-up in order to avoid extra financial burden on the exchequer. He pointed out that approximately 200,000 vehicles were being used and maintained by the government departments, which eventually burdened the national kitty.

National Party's Senator Muhammad Tahir Bizinjo stressed that all political parties should be united on one platform for devising a comprehensive economic policy. Curtailing the cabinet's size and taking austerity measures were a must for a stable Pakistan, he added. Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf's Senator Mohsin Aziz said as per budgetary documents, Rs 170 billion taxes proposed in the supplementary bill would be collected in four months, while its net effect would be Rs 510 billion by the end of the fiscal year.

He urged the government to take the Upper House of Parliament on board about the IMF agreements so that they could present their suggestions accordingly. Some 1.5 million people had been rendered jobless due to the economic crisis, he added. Pakistan Muslim League-Quaid's Senator Kamil Ali Agha claimed that said it was not a budget to impose Rs 170 billion rather it would cost Rs 600 billion in nine months due to the hike in transportation charges.

He said the increase in the sales tax rate would directly affect poor people because it would be levied on the daily-use items. Awami National Party's Senator Hidayatullah Khan disapproved the supplementary budget, saying it would further increase the financial burden on poor people. He proposed the government to reduce the size of the Federal Cabinet to 30. He also asked the government to control the expenses of local government administrators keeping in view their lavish lifestyles, including fringe benefits with cozy residences being availed by them.

PTI's Senator Walid Iqbal also proposed a cut in the number of cabinet members. Independent Senator Hidayat Ullah highlighted the issues pertaining to Federal Administered Tribal Areas and said there must be a shadow government to chalk out a financial plan for the future as the general elections were a bit close. He opined that all political parties should unitedly work out a strategy to meet the economic challenges.

## FM calls on German counterpart

MUNICH (APP): Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari had a meeting with his German counterpart Annalena Baerbock here on Friday.

During the meeting held here on the sidelines of the Munich Security Conference-2023 being held in Germany from February 16 to 20, the two Foreign Ministers agreed to strengthen bilateral cooperation in the areas of energy, trade, skilled manpower, food security and climate change.

Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari on this occasion also thanked Germany for their timely and full support for the flood affected people in Pakistan.

During the meeting held here on the sidelines of the Munich Security Conference-2023 being held in Germany from February 16 to 20, the two Foreign Ministers agreed to expand bilateral cooperation including in the area of economy. Meanwhile, the Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari had a meeting with his Kuwaiti counterpart Sheikh Salem Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah here on Friday.

The two sides also exchanged views about celebrations to commemorate 60th anniversary of the diplomatic relations between Pakistan and Kuwait.



KARACHI: Police personnel take position behind a vehicle near site of an attack on a police compound.

# F-9 rape case: Victim's counsel demands inquiry

ISLAMABAD (Agencies): A day after Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) Police claimed that two youngsters killed during a police 'encounter' at D-12 Sector police picket were involved in the F-9 park rape incident Human Right activists have termed the suspects were killed in fake encounter.

Addressing a press conference in Islamabad on Friday Advocate Imaan Zainab Mazari-Hazir who is also counsel for the rape victims and rights activist Dr Farzana Bari demanded an inquiry into the suspects' killing.

Imaan, alleged that the two suspects were gunned down by Islamabad police in a "fake encounter", terming the incident to be an "extrajudicial killing". The brazen attack in a park in the capital shocked the nation and renewed questions over the safety of women in the country. On Thursday, however, Islamabad police claimed that two youngsters killed during a police 'encounter'

at D-12 police picket were involved in the rape incident. Police also said that both the suspects were wanted for other crimes while one of the suspects was an absconder in a murder case.

Imaan informed the media persons that her client had identified the suspects on February 15 (Wednesday). She said that police had called the victim at around 4:30pm on Wednesday to the Crime Investigation Agency's (CIA) police station in I-9 to identify the suspects. Mazari-Hazir added that the victim had identified the suspects before her lawyers reached the police station at 4:55pm. "I can say with 100 percent surety that the two suspects who were arrested were in police custody on Feb 15 in the CIA's police station in I-9," the counsel added.

Meanwhile, Bari expressed shock at the way the victim's identity was revealed. She further alleged that the victim's medical tests were not

properly conducted. "I was raising these issues with the police but they stopped calling me after two meetings."





# CM for providing soft loans for housing to low income

LAHORE (APP): A meeting was held under the chair of the caretaker Chief Minister Punjab Mohsin Naqvi to review matters related to the Chief Minister's Low-Cost Housing Scheme project, and an order was given to reconstitute the board of Punjab Housing and Town Planning Agency (PHATA) as soon as possible.

The CM directed to make it easier for people with low incomes to get housing loans and called for a workable plan for issuing housing loans to people with low incomes. The procedure of issuing small housing loans for PHATA and other schemes was assessed and the issue of giving easy loans, worth 800 million rupees, for building houses through Akhuwat Islamic Microfinance was also discussed.

The CM noted that owning a home was a necessary right of every human being. Interest-free loans will be given, in partnership with Akhuwat, to build houses in less than 5-marla areas. Economic activities will also increase by giving easy loans to low-income stratum to build their houses, he maintained and welcomed the hundred percent recovery of 200 million worth of interest-free loans through Akhuwat Islamic Microfinance.

Chairman Akhuwat Dr Amjad Saqib, secretary housing, DG

PHATA and others attended the meeting.

**CM condoles Justice (r) Malik Qayyum death:** Caretaker Chief Minister Punjab Mohsin Naqvi has expressed grief and sorrow over the death of Justice (r) Malik Qayyum, elder brother of the Provincial Minister for Specialized Healthcare and Medical Education Professor Dr Javed Akram.

The chief minister extended his sincere condolences to Dr Javed Akram and other grieving family members in his message. He expressed his profound sorrow and prayed to Allah Almighty to provide the bereaved family with the strength to bear their loss with composure, while also asking for the departed soul to rest in peace.

**Caretaker CM reviews health sector reforms:** Caretaker Chief Minister Punjab Mohsin Naqvi chaired a meeting at his office to review progress on health sector reforms for providing quality health facilities to the people. The availability of insulin, essential medicines and disposable supplies to government hospitals was also reviewed in detail.

The CM formed a committee to resolve the shortage of insulin and other essential medicines.

Provincial Minister Specialized Healthcare & Medical Education

Dr Javed Akram, Provincial Minister Primary & Secondary Healthcare Dr Jamal Nasir, secretary finance, secretary specialized healthcare & medical education, secretary primary & secondary healthcare, special secretary (procurement), DG (drug control) and others are included in the committee.

The committee has been tasked with proposing solutions to ensure the availability of insulin and other essential medications in government hospitals. Additionally, they will liaise with the federal government and relevant departments to formulate a comprehensive plan aimed at addressing this issue in the near future.

Mohsin Naqvi emphasized the importance of timely completion of spadework to ensure the uninterrupted availability of insulin and essential medicines in government hospitals. He also urged the committee members to develop an effective plan to address the emerging needs of the health sector.

Provincial Ministers Dr Javed Akram, Dr Jamal Nasir, chief secretary, chairman P&D, health secretaries, secretaries of C&W and finance departments, CEO IDAP, DG Health Services Punjab and others attended the meeting.



LAHORE: Health workers marking a home during anti polio campaign.

## Shazia Marri attended GRASP matching grant cheque distribution ceremony

E.P. Report

KARACHI: Federal Minister for Poverty Alleviation & Social Safety and Chairperson Benazir Income Support Programme - Ma'am Shazia Marri attended Growth for Rural Advancement and Sustainable Progress (GRASP)- matching grant cheque distribution ceremony, at Movenpick Hotel Karachi.

Federal Minister, Mrs. Shazia Marri stated how Pakistan Poverty Alleviation Fund (PPAF) distributed matching grants worth RS 269 million amongst 128 beneficiaries to promote agri-business in Sindh. The initiative is aimed at contributing to the overall economic development of the province by supporting small and medium enterprises from 6 district of the province, namely: Hyderabad, Khairpur, Sajawal, Tando Muhammad Khan, Tharparkar and Maitiari. The Matching Grants were distributed under Growth for Rural Advancement and Sustainable progress which is a European Union (EU) funded project implemented by International Trade Centre (ITC) in collaboration with Pakistan Poverty Alleviation Fund (PPAF) and Food & Agriculture Organization (FAO).

Federal Minister Mrs. Shazia Marri, during her speech stated that she is grateful to EU and ITC for investing in Pakistan's agricultural sector to improve the business environment and strengthen agricultural value chains in the targeted districts. "This initiative has improved access to finance for agricultural



based small and medium enterprises and boost the trend of entrepreneurship in the communities belonging to remote areas. Five Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have been worked upon through this project. First no poverty. Second zero hunger. Third gender equality. Fourth work and economic growth and fifth Climate change. This project in one way or the other contributed in fulfilling these five SDGs. Women especially should be motivated and encouraged to participate in the work force. Likewise, financial and digital literacy is need of the hour for masses", said the Federal Minister.

Federal Minister and Chairperson BISP Shazia Marri while addressing the media mentioned that different organisations should work hand in hand to help

people affected by the floods in Pakistan.

"Inaction is no longer an option. Pakistan's people, and the economic system that has to drive the quality and pace of recovery from a flood that destroyed 33 million lives has sustained a huge exogenous shock. We are not big emitters rather quite the opposite. Long-term climate financing instruments are needed to plug severe capacity deficits in the developing countries. What has happened in Pakistan will certainly not only stay in Pakistan, we are seeing climate change impacts crossing borders," said the Federal Minister. Concluding the address, the Federal Minister thanked all the international agencies for their work in Pakistan and distributed cheques among the winners.

## US sponsors Pakistani entrepreneurs through Startup Connect Programme

KARACHI (APP): The United States Consul General Karachi Nicole Theriot Friday highlighted the valuable contributions of the US-Pakistani diaspora, who are a key partner in the humanitarian, social, and commercial sectors in Pakistan.

At a US-Pakistani diaspora conference here, the Consul General Theriot highlighted the longstanding US-Pakistan partnership to advance Pakistan's economic growth and emphasized continued opportunities for future partnership.

While addressing the need for strengthening

climate resilience in the country, CG Theriot said, "We are one team working toward the same goal, and the United States is committed to helping the US-Pakistani diaspora and local investors find opportunities and work with Pakistan through the Green Alliance framework to strengthen climate resilience, pursue energy transformation, and foster economic growth."

This conference continued the momentum built at a January 25 conference in Islamabad where USAID signed a five-year memorandum of under-

standing with the Organization of Pakistani Entrepreneurs of North America (OPEN) to accelerate investments by Silicon Valley entrepreneurs in Pakistan's technology sector.

At that conference, OPEN Silicon Valley also launched their flagship Startup Connect program for Pakistani entrepreneurs in terms of coaching, mentoring, venture capital, and accessing markets.

CG Theriot said, "The conference was an opportunity to highlight some of the contributions and investments already made by the Pakistani diaspora,

facilitate collaborations between Pakistani diaspora entities, and develop a road map for collective action to address the current economic, humanitarian, and social challenges in Pakistan."

The conference was sponsored by USAID, through its Project Finance Advisory Network Project, in close coordination with the US-Pakistani diaspora entity OPEN, Silicon Valley.

Attendees discussed the fundamental challenges and opportunities in Pakistan's technology sector and the path forward.

## No progress sans stability, says Ashrafi

ISLAMABAD (APP): Prime Minister's Special Representative for Interfaith Harmony and Middle East Hafiz Muhammad Tahir Mehmood Ashrafi informed that Pakistan Ulama Council announced to mark the 33rd foundation day of the PUC from February 18 to 28 across the country, the Council was established in 1990. Ashrafi, who is the PUC chairman, said a number of programmes including conventions and seminars would be part of ten-day celebrations and in March, Paigham-e-Islam Conference would also be held. He said the PUC was member of various national and international organizations and played its vibrant role for inter-sect and inter-faith harmony on the globe. Ashrafi said the PUC had set some targets to achieve in the year 2023 and 2024.

## 'Pakistani dramas should be aired in Saudi Arabia'

KARACHI (NNI): Chairperson ACT and former chairperson UPA, Atiqah Odho has recently returned from a successful trip to Saudi Arabia where she performed Umrah and also met with people representing Saudi Media Industry.

In a Meet and Greet event held in her honour in Jeddah, organized by Nausheen Waseem, General Entertainment Authority Advisor, Odho expressed the dire need for Pakistan to make dramas and films that are culturally acceptable and can be dubbed in Arabic language to run on indigenous channels in Saudi Arabia. Speaking on the occasion in front of a large audience of Pakistanis living in Jeddah, and media, Odho said, "I feel times have changed and we can no longer restrict our content to just the Pakistani diaspora around the world.

Internationally, content is being dubbed in different languages and viewed the world over, whether on television channels or through on-line platforms.



## PAKISTAN AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH COUNCIL SITUATIONS VACANT

Pakistan Agricultural Research Council (PARC), an apex research organization in the agriculture sector invites applications from well qualified, highly talented and self motivated Pakistani nationals for appointment against the following posts. Required qualification/experience for these posts and quota are indicated on PARC official website ([www.parc.gov.pk](http://www.parc.gov.pk)):

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Oil & Gas Development Company Limited (OGDCL) the largest Exploration & Production listed Company of Pakistan invites Sealed Bids from eligible firms/persons licensed by the Pakistan Engineering Council in the relevant category of following work(s) duly registered with Federal/ Provincial Income Tax & Sales Tax Departments and who are on Active Taxpayers List of the Federal Board of Revenue, as per Public Procurement Regulatory Authority (PPRA) Rule:

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|------|---------------------|---|--------------------|---------------|---------------------------|---|---------------------|---------------------|
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- The Master Set of Tender Document containing Annexure(s), SOR/TOR, detailed terms & conditions, Tender Notice and procedure for submission of bids are available on OGDCL website for the interested bidders which can be viewed and downloaded from [www.ogdcl.com](http://www.ogdcl.com) under the title bar of Tenders/Tenders Download without any cost.
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## NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARING

**ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT (EIA) REPORT OF REHABILITATION AND REMODELING OF MANKIAL ROAD, DISTRICT SWAT**

All stakeholders, interested / affected persons & the General Public are notified that the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has admitted the application for the grant of approval for the "Rehabilitation and Remodeling of Mankial Road, District Swat"

All stakeholders, interested / Affected Persons & the General Public are invited to submit their written comments in favor or against the grant of Environmental approval of the said project, to Director General, EPA, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Peshawar within a period of fifteen (15) days from the date of this publication / advertisement.

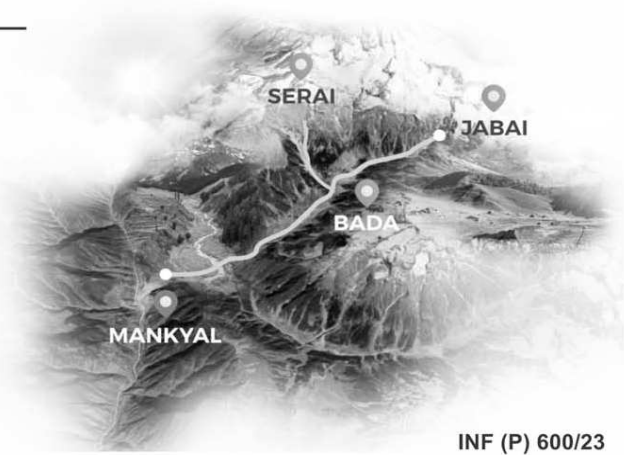
The detailed documents of Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Report of the project are available at the following locations for view of Stakeholders and General Public.

- Office of the Director General, EPA, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, 3rd Floor, SDU Building, Khyber Road, Peshawar Cantt.
- At EPA Regional Directorate, Swat.
- Office of the Project Director, KITE PMU-C&W Department, Peshawar, House No. 08 BC, Park Road, University Town, Peshawar.
- At KITE Infrastructure Engineer Office, Mankial, District Swat.
- Website of C&W Department ([website: www.cwd.gkp.pk](http://www.cwd.gkp.pk))

A public hearing will be conducted at Mankial main Bazaar, Swat at **11:00 a.m. on 09 March 2023**. All stakeholders, interested / affected persons & the General Public are invited to attend the hearing.

**Project Director**  
PMU-C&W Department, Peshawar,  
House No. 08 BC, Park Road,  
University Town, Peshawar.  
**Tel: + 92(91) 9224344 - 9224345**

**Director General**  
Environmental Protection  
Agency (EPA) Khyber  
Pakhtunkhwa, 3rd Floor,  
SDU Building, Khyber  
Road, Peshawar Cantt.  
**Tel: +92(91) 9210263 - 9210148**  
**Fax: 92(91) 9210280**



INF (P) 600/23



# Labor, taxation departments to be upgraded: Minister

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Minister for Labour, Excise, Taxation and Narcotics Control Haji Manzoor Khan Afridi has said that all possible measures will be taken to provide facilities to the people of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and the business community here by making the process of vehicle registration in Excise Department more easy and convenient. The suggestion to make the registration of vehicles up to 3000 cc free will be considered in the meeting at the departmental level very soon. He said that further reforms are in the pipeline, these reforms will not only benefit the people of the province but will also contribute significantly to the provincial exchequer. He expressed these views while meeting the representative delegations of the Car Dealers Association Peshawar and the Communal School Teachers Association of the merged districts in his

office at Peshawar. The representative delegation of Car Dealers Association Peshawar included President Baht Mir Jan Durrani, Chairman Haji Abid Khalil, General Secretary Sadiq Shah and all sector presidents, while the Communal School Teacher Association from the merged districts included President Sadiq Ahmed and others.

The presidents of both the delegations congratulated the Caretaker Minister Haji Manzoor Afridi on assuming the charge of Caretaker Minister and dressed him in a traditional tribal turban. On this occasion, both the delegations also informed the chair about their problems and issues.

During the meeting, the Caretaker Minister thanked both the delegations and said that the development, prosperity and welfare of the people and the provision of best and easy services to the common man are among our top priorities. He said that we can promote our province on the

path of development only with the support of the public. He said that for the awareness of the people, the Excise Department is going to organize awareness seminars very soon in collaboration with various stakeholders, from which all these public-friendly initiatives will not only make the people aware, but will also benefit them at large.

He further said that our effort is to strengthen the relationship between the Excise Department of Punjab and the Excise Department of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa so that all unresolved issues can be resolved mutually and this cooperation can be more stable and sustainable. On the occasion, Caretaker Minister Haji Manzoor Afridi, while assuring the resolution of the problems of the Communal School Teacher Association of the merged tribal districts, said that he will try to solve all the unresolved problems of the Communal School Teacher Association of the merged tribal districts.

## Hamdard Nonehal Assembly holds meeting

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The monthly meeting of Hamdard Nonehal Assembly was held here Friday in Archives Hall Peshawar with renowned educationist, Muhammad Haleem Shirazi in the chair.

The session was attended by large number of students, teachers and civil society members. The session was addressed by students from leading educational institutions including Govt. Girls Lady Griffith High School, Government Comprehensive Girls High School, Warsak Model School and Forward Girls High School who expressed their views about significance of education and impacts of religion on social and moral values.

Speaking on the occasion, Chief Guest highlighted the flaws of existing education system and reasons behind degradation of moral values in the society. He urged parents and students to play their role for improvement of education and educational institutions.

## Reforms vital to end injustices: ATP

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Amun Taraqqi Party (ATP) chairman Muhammad Faiyaz Shah has stressed constitutional and legal reforms are imperative to end growing social and economic injustice in the country. Shah while responding to various queries of people belonging from different walks of life during an online open forum here on Friday viewed the people have become frustrated with the present political system, saying the deepening economic and social injustice would force people to rebel.

He said parliament, which has the prime duty to make legislation for public welfare and the country's best interest, deliberately made a rubber stamp. Whenever they (politicians) want to call sessions of the parliament or adjourn it for personal gains, they have never made legislation in the best interests of the poor masses, he added. Faiyaz said people were faced with greater hardships in police stations and courts as justice wasn't delivered to them on a fast-track basis.

He called for reforms to ensure speedy trial cases and provision of justice and facilities to people at their doorsteps. The ATP chief said they have already given a holistic reforms agenda, if it is implemented, definitely change will come in the country. Commenting on prevailing political chaos, Shah said people are the ultimate victims in the country's political battles. He added the politician power grab has polarized society and left its shambles.

He continued to say that Pakistan has been made a banana republic. The party chief stressed stakeholders should play their due role to defuse the growing political tension and economic uncertainty. He observed society and economic injustice are at peak. He said political polarization is behind the present economic chaos. Faiyaz criticized the incumbent government for elevating misery of the poor masses.



PESHAWAR: Governor KP Haji Ghulam Ali inaugurating 2nd Peshawar Property Expo.

# Hybrid model of digital & physical healthcare to met challenges

Khaqan Sikander

**N**ATURE is full of cues for those with keen eyes. Ignore a disease long enough and it'll soon deteriorate to the point whereby you may even end up on the surgeon's steel table. Take Pakistan's economy as an example, when you don't take the right measures at the right time i.e. measures that move us to an export lead economy (produce domestically - consume domestically - export the excess) instead of an import lead one, you will soon find yourself, as we do, on the surgeon's hint: IMF table.

Our country faces a plethora of challenges in many sectors and healthcare is no different. A sparse network of 'quality' medical facilities, medical professionals, rising poverty, booming population, heightening costs of healthcare services add to the long list of similar issues.

But set aside dark facts such as, more than 29.5% of Pakistan's population is living below the poverty line, having limited or no access at all to quality primary care facilities. Or that for every 1,200 patients, only 1 doctor is available, 1 out of 3 pregnant women doesn't consult a doctor and 1 out of every 5 children does not reach the age of 5 in Pakistan.

Set them aside and take a look instead at this following fact. Most healthcare providers (insurance companies, hospitals, clinics, doctors, pharmacies, diagnostic labs etc. etc.) do well when disease runs rampant. Why? you ask. The answer is simple.

Everyone makes their money when you get sick, no one makes it by keeping you healthy. And that, to me, is the biggest of all challenges that plagues this country's healthcare industry. Think about it, think of the best facility that money can buy in this country, the most top-notch doctor that you have waited months for a single gaze from, have they ever called you a week after the consultation to ask you one simple question, 'how are you feeling today? Are you feeling any better?' I bet not.

But the providers are not the only ones to blame here, we the patients are equally at fault which brings to the elephant in the room, i.e., our reactive approach to healthcare (hint: the path to the surgeon's table). You can ignore your health all you want but you are playing perfectly in the hands of the problem. Aside from all the pain that comes from intervening late, by the time you end up seeking a resolution, when it comes to your pocket, the feeling at the end of it all, is much like that of what one feels at the end of a robbery. But yet we all go on, stuck in a trap of our own creation.

Our healthcare was in dire need of a transformation. A DigiPhysi healthcare model can help. Yes, you read it right, Digi-Physi. A hybrid model of Digital & Physical healthcare that is proactive in nature is the answer. Covid-19 was a warning. In the wake of the pandemic, the new normal pushed our healthcare system to adopt digital technologies and embrace various innovations. It stimulated a change which is here to stay.

But tools are plenty, it is the behavioral beast of reactive care that still looms large.

Most people will not buy into 'speak to a doctor whenever you want' promise over some app or even the phone unless they are stuck with no other option, like the pandemic days. If you take out the human element of healthcare, the efficacy of any model goes down drastically. Therefore, the model needs to be hybrid (physical touch points on top of digital ones) & proactive whereby the provider needs to make a genuine effort in forming a relationship with the patient, a relationship that is based on trust.

So what does digital healthcare entail? Well it all starts with data. Health data can be used to stratify patients into healthy, acute and chronic categories. Once profiling is done, patients can be put into personalized disease management plans where the target is to reduce, over time, the disease burden and consequently save costs.

In conclusion, the healthcare provider's financial incentive must be tied to keeping you healthy, and not just treating you when you get sick. It is high time, our healthcare organizations adapt and upgrade their traditional operations to the advanced digital ecosystem and create a hybrid model of a care delivery system. This will result in higher patient satisfaction, a better quality of care, easy access to healthcare services, lower healthcare costs, and ultimately an improved quality of the healthcare system.

# City Police arrest 49 deadly accused of street-crimes

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Capital City Police Peshawar have arrested 49 deadly accused of street-crimes including women during a crackdown against criminals.

In a statement issued here on Friday, Chief Capital City Police Officer (CCPO), Mohammad Ijaz Khan, the Capital City Police has adopted a new strategy against street criminals and other anti-social elements and have made breakthrough in this regard.



PESHAWAR: Employees of PESCO holding a protest for acceptance of their demands.

Hayatabad, University Town, Gulbahar and adjacent areas.

Similarly, a gang of women, which was involved in burglaries, has also been busted. Beside, a cash amount of Rs.4.6 million, 87 stolen mobile phone sets, 7 stolen motorcycles, three stolen motorcars, 5 total gold, computer system and laptop, arms and ammunition have also been recovered from them.

# Cold and dry weather to prevail

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The Provincial Meteorological Center Peshawar on Friday predicted that cold and dry weather is expected in most districts of the province, while very cold and partly cloudy weather in upper districts.

Isolated light rain and drizzle with light snowfall over the hills is likely to occur over Chitral, Dir, Kalam and Swat and Kohistan. During the last 24 hours cold and dry weather occurred over most districts of the province, while very cold in upper districts and hilly areas. The maximum and minimum temperatures recorded in centigrade at different stations of the KP were Peshawar City 25/11, Chitral 16/04, Timergara 22/05, Dir 21/03, Mirkhani 16/00, Kalam 11/-05, Droshe 13/01, Saidu Sharif 23/05, Pattan 20/11, Malam Jabba 11/01, Takht Bhai 25/08, Kakul 22/07, Balakot 25/08, Parachinar 21/04, Bannu 30/08, Cherat 16/06, D.I. Khan 30/11.

# Five more modern modular OTs inaugurated at LRH

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: LRH spokesman Muhammad Asim said another 15 operation theatres are also in final phase. He further said the OTs have been opened for treatment of heart patients. He said the modular operation theatres were of international standards where cardiac

surgeries have already been started. Also, the new OTs are bioclad and hepa filter, which have almost zero chances of infection, the new technology used in the OTs to minimize infection during surgeries.

He added that only few hospitals in the country have these kind of operation theatres. The LRH board of

governors and chairman Nousherwan Khan Burki had directed the hospital director Dr Muhammad Abrar Khan, medical director Dr Hamid Shehzad and their team to ensure timely completion of the ORs. "LRH management will also complete work on the other 15 OTs soon," Asim said.

# Melting glaciers need urgent consideration to ensure ecological balance

PESHAWAR (APP): Besides being home to the world 2nd highest mountain K2, Pakistan was a unique country where over 7,253 glaciers were providing fresh water supplies to millions of people for irrigation, drinking and industrial purposes.

Mostly located in Himalaya, Hindukash and Karkoram regions of Gilgit Baltistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, these glaciers were a distinctive source of freshwater for agriculture, irrigation, drinking and industrial supplies to people, agriculturists, farmers and industrialists living in those regions and downstream of Pakistan.

Besides 2,253 mighty, medium and small glaciers, including Baltoro (63km), Biafo (67km), Batura (57km) found in Gilgit Baltistan, the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Upper Chitral district was blessed with around 500 glaciers especially at Trichmir mountains ranges providing freshwater to downward districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Punjab and Sindh provinces through rivers Swat,

Panjokra, Kabul and Indus throughout the year. "Pakistan contains more glaciers than any other parts of earth outside of the polar region. Our irrigation network has largely depended on these glaciers that continuously recharge our irrigated system in all provinces," said Tauheedul Haq, former Conservator of Forests KP while talking to APP on Friday.

Due to rapid population growth, he said Pakistan was heading towards a situation of water shortage and by corollary, a threat of food insecurity due to fast melting of glaciers owing to climate change and global warming issues. The National Water Policy 2018 has revealed that per capita surface water availability has declined from 5,260 cubic meters per year in 1951 to around 1,000 cubic meters in 2016 and this quantity was likely to further drop to about 860 cubic meters by 2025, marking our transition from a "water stressed" to a "water scarce" country.

According to the policy, the minimum water requirement to avoid food

and health implications of water scarcity was 1,000 cubic meters per capita per year and the situation underlined the need for rapid development and management of the country's water resources especially completion of construction of dams of Mohmand and Diamir Bhasha on a war footing basis to conserve the precious commodities for future generation. Tauheed said the changing and unpredictable precipitation patterns may cause serious consequences, including flash floods in the north of Pakistan as we have seen last year's flooding and increasingly prolonged droughts in the southern parts of the country.

With glaciers retreat, he said more glacial lakes would form like that of Atabad lake in Gilgit Baltistan besides increasing the risk of Glacial Lake Outburst Floods (GLOF). "The weather conditions have changed as hot weather was being witnessed even in March and April that was not so decades before in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa due to lack of rains and

snowfalls," he said. Besides construction of new dams, he said there was a need to focus on plantation to increase chances of rains and snowfalls. "Pakistan's average annual rainfall was ranging between 400mm to 1000mm while snowfall ranged about 60 inch that could be increased by bring more areas under forestry cover especially in high alpine and glaciers zones."

He said that the early start of summer season and subsequently heat waves lead to fast melting of glaciers, resulting in flooding and waste of fresh water. Tauheed said forestry cover in the country was around five percent, which was low compared to 25percent international standard and bringing mountainous areas under afforestation through farm forestry and enclosures would help minimize melting of glaciers in northern Pakistan. KP Forest Department's spokesman told APP on Friday that trees afforestation in glaciers zones was being started through enclosures and farms forestry techniques to slow

glaciers melting during summer.

He said 78.93 million saplings would be planted with help of government departments, NGOs, farmers, general public and forest enclosures in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa during spring season. At least 27.460 million saplings would be sown in Kohat, Peshawar, Hangu, Bannu, DI Khan, Karak, Tank and Lakki Marwat, 30,190 million in Haripur, Abbottabad, Manshera, Batagram, Kohistan and 21.28 million in Swat, Malakand, Dir Upper, Dir Lower, Chitral, Shangla and Buner districts. Besides 77,569,444 forest plants, he said 783,693 ornamental and native species would be distributed among people. As many as 56,277 million plants would be sown through farm forestry and 42,402 million seedlings through farmers besides provision of 2.117 million plants to Gilgit Baltistan.

In addition to raising 1.1308 million plants under urban-peri plantation, he said that 3.075 million plants would be sown through village devel-

opmental committees, 5,429 million defense forces, 2,123 million educational and religious institutions, government departments and 1260 acres through doubling and sowing. He said that 654.27 million saplings including 353.14 million through 6081 enclosures, 121.39 million through plantation, 150.76 million through farm forestry and the general public etc were planted under the 10 billion trees project up-to December 31 last year.

The former conservator said that Pakistan was badly affected by climate change and global warming as evidenced by last year's devastating flooding that caused over USD 40bn economic losses to the country despite the fact that it had no role in greenhouse gasses emissions. He said Pakistan's efforts to combat climate change and massive afforestations have been globally appreciated and expressed the hope that COP 27 UN fund would soon be operationalized with a major share to the climate change-vulnerable Pakistan.





## In brief

### Locals kill two leopard cubs

TIRAH (APP): The locals in Tirah valley of Khyber district killed two cubs of the common leopards in mountains the other day. Wildlife official said on Friday that locals spotted the leopard cubs in the mountains and killed both of them. At least six leopards have so far been killed in Tirah valley during the current year, the official said. He said the leopards living in the remote mountains of Tirah valley sometimes descend to residential areas to find food where they were being killed by the local people. The official further said that lack of awareness regarding wildlife importance and protection, precious animals were being killed time and again. He said these leopards were declared as protected species, however the local people, unaware of its importance in the ecological system, kill these animals in fear of being attacked. Such incidents, he said, have put the survival of this species in danger. However, he said after receiving information, the police and Wildlife Department initiated a prompt action and arrested one of the accused for killing the leopard cubs.

### Command and Control Center F.P. Report

CHITRAL: District Police Officer Lower Chitral Nasir Mehmood inaugurated the Police Command and Control Center. Establishment of Command and Control System is an innovative initiative of District Police Officer Lower Chitral whereby 90 x Cameras from public have been integrated with the system. The object of the initiative is to provide 24/7 surveillance to business centers, sensitive installations, entry / exit points, to maintain law & order situation and prevention of crime. What makes the system stand out it is joint initiative of Chitral public & Police on self help basis. The system covers area of Chitral city.

Drosh, Garamchasha and Ayun. Currently Bumburate Valley has been surveyed for installation of Cameras for remote monitoring. The Command & Control System has 15 helpline and wireless control connectivity with Police control and FC Control for effective response mechanism. I would like to thank all the stakeholders wholeheartedly who cooperated and supported the district Police for successful implementation of the system in the best public interest. It is expected that implementation of the command and control system will go a long way in maintenance of peace and tranquility in the district.

### Two shot dead at Khairpur

KHAIRPUR NATHAN SHAH (INP): Two people died and several others got hurt critically Friday during a trade of fire between two groups in Khairpur Nathan Shah during a local fair. Reportedly, a clash erupted between two groups during Darga Jaril Shah Gilani fair in Khairpur Nathan Shah. The opponents opened fire on each other. As a result, two people died and many others sustained injuries. According to police, the wounded were shifted to a local hospital but they left unattended over there and kept groaning with pain as doctors were not available in the medical facility. Police said three severely injured people were referred to Larkana Hospital. When the firing started during the fair, a stampede broke out. Police said many passersby also fell prey to the crossfire.

# Early completion of uplift project directed

Shafi Ullah

MINGORA: Presided by Minister for Communications & Works (C&W) Muhammad Ali Shah, a review meeting on development projects was held at the Commissioner's Office Conference Room Saidur Sharif.

Secretary to Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa for C&W Syed Imtiaz Hussain Shah, MD Pakhtunkhwa Highway Authority (PKHA) Engineer Ahmad Nabi Sultan, Chief Engineer North Engineer Muhammad Tariq, Chief Engineer Mega Projects Engineer Shahab Khan, other officers of C&W Department and PKHA

participated in the meeting. C&W and PKHA officials gave a detailed briefing to the meeting on the progress and issues on the ongoing projects.

The meeting was given a scheme-by-scheme briefing regarding progress on ongoing and new projects. While presiding over the meeting, Caretaker Minister Muhammad Ali Shah, keeping in mind the financial difficulties of the province, directed to prioritize projects and asked officials to prepare a list and give priority to the ongoing projects especially the projects near completion. Caretaker Minister Muhammad Ali Shah said that projects

near completion should be completed soon and financial resources should be allocated in this context.

"Progress in health projects, especially the construction of hospitals should be speed up," he said. During the review, he emphasized taking all the steps keeping in mind the merit and transparency of the work without any pressure.

The provincial caretaker minister also reviewed the proposed and new projects during the meeting. He directed to prepare a list of all such projects and arrange a separate action plan for them by removing them from the priority list.

# Official blamed for taking bribe by Clerks Association

F.P. Report

HAFIZABAD: All Pakistan Clerks Association Hafizabad demanded the Chief Executive Officer Education Hafizabad to transfer Assistant Director Education (Development) Hafizabad Malik Sajid who is allegedly involved in receiving bribe from orphan children, promotions of class four employees and recently appointed class four employees in education department Hafizabad as well as embezzlement of government funds.

A joint meeting of All Pakistan Clerks Association Hafizabad was held under Chairmanship of Nasrullah Hanjra and Muhammad Nasir Amin while more than 42 representatives of clerks attended the meeting.

The meeting was passed unanimously resolution for transferring of Malik Sajid immediately who is involved in receiving bribe of huge amount from orphan children of deceased government employees who was appointed under rule 17-A of services rules of government of the Punjab on merit, promotion of class four employees as junior clerks and recently appointed class four employees despite qualifying for jobs on merit.

The resolution said that the said officer Malik Sajid drawn huge amount of CC Grant of first two quarters this current fiscal year office of the District Education Authority Hafizabad but not a single item for office use is available in the office due to his corruption while he is interfering in all branches of the office in lust of receiving illegal befits.

It is also stated in the resolution that the said officer has defamed the education department as well as other officials and he is being considered a symbol of corruption in the district.

The resolution said that if the Chief Executive Officer Education Hafizabad does not transfer to Malik Sajid, the APCA would be staged protesting sit-in in from of the office.

The sources also told that Malik Sajid was right-hand of former Chief Executive Officer Education Hafizabad Javed Iqbal Babar and was dealing his financial matters including drawing of more than Rs. 70,00,000/- CC Grant of CEO Office for the financial year of 2021-22.



GHALANAI: Activists f JUI-F holding a rally to condemn the terrorist attack on Police Lines mosque. — F.P. photo

# Drug traffickers held in Lakki Marwat

F.P. Report

LAKKI MARWAT: Police have arrested three drug traffickers during separate actions in parts of Lakki Marwat on Friday, claimed an official. He said that local police launched a crackdown on narcotics sellers on the instructions of district police officer Ziauddin Ahmed following reports about selling of drugs in the area.

"A party of Shaheed Haibat Ali Khan police station captured a drug trafficker identified as Hanifullah and seized two kg hashish from him during a checking of vehicles on Tank Road near Darra Pezu", he maintained. He said that the arrested suspect was shifted to the police station and a case was registered against him under relevant sections of Control Narcotics Substance Act (CNSA).

"Another police party raided a narcotics den in Tajazai area in the limits of Ghaznikhel police station and apprehended a drug peddler identified as Gul Shah Alam", he claimed, adding that the cops recovered 1510 gram hashish from his possession and registered a case under relevant sections of law. Separately, a party of Lakki Marwat police station captured a suspect Inamullah near Zangikhel village and seized 2300 gram hashish and a motorcycle from

him", he added.

**Digitized edition of record of rights become operative:** The digitized edition of record of rights has become operative for twenty 21 estates of Lakki Marwat district, said an official on Friday. He said that the digitized land record had been prepared on the directives of the provincial government under the supervision of local deputy commissioner Fazal Akbar.

After operationalization of digitized record, the preparation of manual mutations for revenue estates including Badnikhel, Abakhel-II, Mastikhel, Abdulkhel, Maidanwala, Zangikhel, Chuharkhel, Abbasa, Kaichi Kamar and Chowkijan Shumali has been prohibited", he maintained. He said that the preparation of manual mutations in other revenue estates including Mahal Mashkana, Paharkhel Thal-II, Bakhmal Ahmadzai, Adamzai, Kakkakhel, Langerkhel, Pacca, Haramatala, Takhtikhel, Atashi Michenkkel and Sarkati Michenkkel would be banned.

The official said that on the special instructions of Deputy Commissioner Fazal Akbar, the land record of Nar Muhammad revenue estate in Naurang tehsil was made online to provide ease and facilitation to citizens especially

farmers and land owners. He said that the online availability of records would enable farmers and landowners to get fard, mutation, land registration and correction in land record facilities with a single click at the service delivery centre. He said that the land record of other revenue stated would also be made available online soon.

## Notorious dacoit arrested

THATTA (PPI): A notorious dacoit Bachayo Mallah was arrested in injured condition while his accomplices fled during a police encounter near Thatta, police said Friday.

According to a report, SHO Jhirk Police Station Nek Muhammad Khoso during patrolling with cops had and encounter with bandits near Goth Raju. In the crossfire, a bandit, Bachayo Mallah was injured and arrested with an unlicensed pistol along with a motorcycle while his other accomplices managed to flee. During the preliminary investigation, it was found that the arrested dacoit was involved in several crimes in Hyderabad, Jamshoro, Badin and Dadu districts.

# Preservation of centuries-old wooden mosque in Jandol sought

Haleem Asad

LOWER DIR: The Mian Kalay Jandol elders have demanded the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government and high ups of the Auqaf and Religious affairs' department to declare the Mian Kalay Jandol wooden Loi Masjid (large mosque) as a national heritage and take measures for its preservation. Talking to this reporter during a visit to the mosque, the area elder Bakht Rawan, 80 said the Loi Masjid was built some 206 years ago during the reign of Ghazi Umra Khan (also known as the Afghan Napoleon).

He said that the wooden and historical mosque was hidden from the government and visitors because Mian Kalay in Jandol was no more famous. He said that Mian Kalay, once like the famous Qissa Khwani bazaar in Peshawar, was famous for trade as caravans from Afghanistan, Russia, China and India stayed here and exchanged their goods. The elder said that Mian Kalay at that time was a trade center and had great importance in the region.

The Jandol area of Lower Dir has witnessed many rise and fall because it was ruled by various dynasties but Ghazi Umra Khan (1860-1904) made it a modal state on the basis of his wisdom, love and strength.

The elders said the prayers' hall was first built by Mansoor Ahmad Jan, one of the Sahibzadagan elders of Jandol some 206 years ago while the verandah was made some 175 years ago during the rule of Ghazi Umra Khan. The mosque has been built of fine wood imported from Afghanistan and other border areas of the then Dir State. It presents a wonderful look as fine wood has been used in walls, pillars, beams, doors, windows, ceiling and cupboards with different designs. The wooden pillars and ceiling have been decorated with designs of Mughal-era Islamic architecture that holds a fascination for visitors.

"It is a Jamia Masjid and more than 1000 worshippers come to offer Friday prayer here," said the mosque's imam, adding that a local mosque committee had been tasked to look after its affairs. Another elder said that skilled craftsmen and carpenters were brought from Peshawar at that time who were paid Rs 2.50 as wage per day. A local journalist Noor Zaman said the mosque was a unique piece of hard work. "It is a wonderful construction and today's engineers are also stunned when they watch it," he remarked. He said that due to the increase in population, the space of the mosque became less and the prayers' hall was re-built in a modern architectural style to expand it. He said the verandah was left in its old original condition for the sake of its historical importance. "The mosque can be better preserved if the Auqaf department takes care of it and



declares it a national heritage," he added.

**Dir residents demand cancellation of deputy commissioner's transfer from the district:** The Lower Dir civil society, political parties, representatives of local government and lawyers on Friday held separate protest rallies against the transfer of deputy commissioner Muhammad Zubair Khan Niazi. The protesters carrying placards inscribed with slogans for the DC transfer's cancellation, gathered outside the Timergara press club and chanted slogans in favour of Mr Niazi. They were demanding immediate cancellation of the DC transfer.

Addressing the protesters former provincial minister Mahmood Zeb Khan, Balambat tehsil chairman Asim Shuiab, Khall tehsil chairman Ashfaq ur Rahim, Malik Ali Bakht, advocate Shah Faisal, Malik Farooq Iqbal, Malik Aslam Pervez, Malik Sajjad Yousafzai and others said the district had got for the first time a hardworking and devoted officer. He said that DC Muhammad Zubair Khan Niazi had established complete writ of the government. The speakers said the official through local jirgas had resolved decades' old land property disputes in different areas of the district and had vacated the state lands from the grabbers. They said that in a massive reshuffle the DC was transferred to the Bajaur district but it was an injustice with the people of Lower Dir. The protesters demanded the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa caretaker chief minister Azam Khan, chief secretary and Governor Ghulam Ali to take notice of the issue and cancel the DC transfer in the best public interest. They also warned to observe a complete shutter down and wheel jam strike if their demand was not accepted.

**Creatin fo new division:** The district bar association Timergara on Friday demanded the creation of a new administrative division consist-

ing of Bajaur, Lower Dir, Upper Dir, Lower Chitral and Upper Chitral districts with its headquarter at Timergara. The demand was made during a general body meeting of the association with its president Muhammad Tariq in the chair. Most of the speakers spoke on the issue and said the existing Malakand division consisted of 10 districts with a total population of over nine million.

They said the Mardan division has 4 million populations, Kohat has 4 million while Malakand division was the largest of all. They said the total population of the Bajaur, Dir and Chitral according to the 2017 census report was 39,21,093 that was equal to Mardan and Kohat. Through a unanimously passed resolution the body demanded the KP government should take all necessary steps for the formation of a new division comprising the districts of Bajaur, Lower Dir, Upper Dir, Lower Chitral and Upper Chitral.

**PDM policies flayed:** The Jamaat-i-Islami district general secretary Engineer Yaqub ur Rehman on Friday condemned the Pakistan Democratic Movement's government at the center for its failure to control the price hike and devaluation of Pakistani currency. Talking to local journalists at Timergara he said that both the PDM and PTI had ruined the country due to their incompetence, inability and corruption. He said the PDM should openly admit its inability and announce fresh general elections in the country.

The JI activist said the prices of essential commodities had gone beyond the common man's purchasing power and they were unable to feed their families. He said the continuous increase in inflation raised fingers on the ability of the government's financial team. He asked the masses to reject both the PDM and PTI in the upcoming general elections as they were not sincere to the nation.

## Secy inspect work at Malakand-III project

F.P. Report

MALAKAND: To enhance the power generating capacity of 81 Megawatt Malakand-III Power Complex and improve its operational system, the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government has initiated overhauling work on the power house.

In this regard Secretary Power and Energy Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Nisar Ahmad Khan and Chief Executive PEDO, Engineer Naeem Khan visited Malakand-III Power Complex the other day and inspected the pace of ongoing work. Both inspected the forebay, chain stock and power channels of the project and expressed satisfaction on pace and quality of the work.

Chief Executive PEDO, Naeem Khan on the occasion told the officers that due to the silting of stones, soil and sand in the dam during last year's flood, the power generation capacity of Malakand-III project was affected. He hoped that the ongoing overhauling would enhance the power generation capacity of the power house to a satisfactory level.

The Secretary Power and Energy appreciated the efforts of PEDO Chief Executive Naeem Khan and his staff for their efforts in the execution of the overhauling project. He said Malakand-III Power Complex was an asset of the county that was earning over Rs2 billion for the province annually.

Since its establishment in 2008, the Secretary Power and Energy said it was the first time that overhauling of this important project was being carried out. He hoped that after completion of the overhauling its power generation capacity would be upgraded.

# Prominent educationist retired from service

Hafiz Aziz-ur-Rehman

HAFIZABAD: Prominent educationist Syed Sajid Ali Shah retired after serving as a teacher for a long time. According to the details, Headmaster Government Elementary School Kot Nawan, Syed Sajid Ali Shah retired from his teaching duties on completion of his tenure. Special ceremonies were held in this regard. The first function was organized under the auspices of Headmaster Association Elementary Schools which was presided over by District Education Officer (Elementary) Sajid Kashif and paid tribute to the teaching services of Syed Sajid Ali Shah.

The second event was held at Government Elementary School Kot Nawan (Hafizabad), in which school teachers and students as well as senior teachers of Government High School No. 1 participated. In-charge Bazim-i-Adab Government High School No. 1 Hafizabad Sajid Hussain Kabeeri, representing his institution and paid his respects and presented the shield to Syed Sajid. Ali Shah.

It is pertinent to mention that Syed Sajid Ali Shah served 21 years of his teaching services in Government High School No. 1 Hafizabad and prepared students for national level Urdu, English speech and essay writing competitions. In the 2008 competitions, Government High School No.1 created history with 35 positions across Punjab. A large number of his students are serving the nation in various walks of life.

**DC visits under construction buildings of District Headquarter Hospital:** Deputy Commissioner Umar Farooq Warraich visited under construction buildings of District Headquarter Hospital, University of Hafizabad and Kot Sarwar Motorway Interchange to



Gujranwala dual carpeted Road and other ongoing development projects in the district to review pace of work on the projects which would be completed with the cost of more than Ra.26 billion, on Wednesday.

Deputy Director Development Hafizabad Mubashar-ul-Hassan and other officials gave briefing about the development projects. DC was informed that construction work on the building of state of the art 400 beds DHQ Hospital will be completed at a cost of Rs. 10 billion whereas building of University of Hafizabad will be completed with the cost of Rs. 6 billion.

He apprised that construction work on the project of dual carpet road from Kot Sarwar Motorway Interchange to Gujranwala with the cost of Rs.10 billion was in full swings. During the inspection of under construction of bridges on canals on Gujranwala and other projects, he directed the constructor and officers concerned to not only expedite construction work but also ensure quality material while execution of the people welfare projects. DC warned that there was no room for use substandard material in ongoing projects and unjustified delay in completion of projects would not be tolerated at all.

Meanwhile, District Administration Hafizabad dispatched relief items to Punjab Management Authority for earthquake victims of Turkiye and Syria, on Wednesday.

ADCR Imtiaz Ali Baig told on the occasion that 500

blankets, 80 quilts and other warm clothes are included in relief items while Rs. 600000/= cash was also deposited in Prime Minister Relief Fund. Meanwhile, Municipal Committees Hafizabad and Pindi Bhattian also setup Relief Camps in the middle of cities for collecting relief items. Education, health and higher education departments were also collecting relief goods for earthquake affected people of Turkiye and Syria.

Moreover, officers of district administration Hafizabad are raiding different government's offices and institutions for improving performance and services deliveries to the people.

In this connection, AC Hafizabad Munawar Hussain visited Trauma Centre Hafizabad surprisingly and reviewed availabilities of medicines and other treatment facilities being provided to patients in the centre. He took feedback from patients regarding services of doctors and paramedical staff.

**Candidates submitted nomination papers:** Returning Officer Constituency NA-87 Hafizabad Waseem Ali Khan said that 9 candidates submitted their nomination papers for contesting bye-elections.

He said that scrutiny of nomination papers would continues till 18, February and objection against nomination papers could be submitted to the office of the Returning Officer while all departments would also be submit their reports against defaulter candidates.





Turkey-Syria death toll passes 41,000 as UN appeals for quake aid

ISTANBUL (AFP): The death toll from the earthquake that has devastated parts of Turkey and Syria exceeded 41,000 on Friday as the United Nations appealed for \$1 billion to address a growing humanitarian crisis.

Eleven days after the quake -- now one of the 10 deadliest in the past 100 years -- Turkish rescuers pulled a 17-year-old girl and a woman in her 20s out of the rubble. "She looked to be in good health. She opened and closed her eyes," coal miner Ali Akdogan said after participating in the rescue of Aleyna Olmez in Kahramanmaraş, a city near the quake's epicentre.

But hopes of finding survivors have largely faded. Many in the affected zones are facing a dire emergency as they try to pick up the pieces in freezing conditions, without food, water and toilets -- raising the spectre of further disaster from diseases. "The needs are enormous, people are suffering and there's no time to lose," said UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres in a statement, calling for funds to help the victims.

He said the contributions would provide humanitarian relief for three months to 5.2 million people. The money would "allow aid organizations to rapidly scale up vital support," including in the areas of food security, protection, education, water and shelter, he added. "I urge the international community to step up and fully fund this critical effort in response to one of the biggest natural disasters of our times."

Officials and medics said 38,044 people had died in Turkey and 3,688 in Syria from the February 6 tremor, bringing the confirmed total to 41,732. The quake -- in one of the world's most active earthquake zones -- hit populated areas as many were asleep in houses that had not been built to resist such powerful ground vibrations. Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has pushed back hard against accusations that his government floundered in its response to the

country's deadliest natural disaster of modern times. For every miraculous tale of survival, there are stories of dashed hopes of saving loved ones who slowly died in the rubble.

Hasan Irmak saw five family members -- including his six-year-old daughter Belinda -- buried under his flattened house in the Syrian border region town of Samandag. "She was alive for two days," the 57-year-old said of his daughter. "I was talking to her in the ruins. Then she lost all her energy. On the third day, she was dead. Help arrived on the fourth."

Turkey has suspended rescue operations in some regions, and the government in war-torn Syria has done the same in areas under its control. The Red Cross more than tripled its emergency funding appeal to over \$700 million. The situation in rebel-held northwest Syria is particularly dire, with aid slow to arrive in the region ravaged by years of conflict.

"There is no electricity, no water, no sanitation," Abdelrahman Haji Ahmed told AFP in Jindayris on the Turkish border, his ruined former home behind him. "The lives of all the families are tragic." Meanwhile, the United Nations launched a \$1 billion appeal to help 5.2 million survivors of the most devastating earthquake in Turkey's modern history, two days after starting a \$397 million appeal to help nearly 5 million Syrians across the border in the rebel-held northwest.

UN spokesman Stephane Dujarric was peppered with questions about why the appeal for Turkey is targeted at only 5.2 million people when according to the UN and the government more than 15 million people were affected. He also was asked why the appeal for Turkey is 2½ times larger than the one for Syria to help almost the same number of people. He said the Turkish appeal "was designed in very close cooperation with the government of Turkey, which is leading the relief efforts."

"This is the number they came up



with for the focus on people who need the most humanitarian aid, most quickly, and where the UN can be most effective," Dujarric said. He said Turkey has "a very efficient search and rescue and humanitarian system." As for the disparity in the amount of the appeals, he said, part of the reason is that "there is already a well-established humanitarian community which has been working in Syria," and before the quake there was a \$4.8 billion humanitarian appeal for Syria for 2023. "So there's already a humanitarian pot of money that exists for Syria, which did not exist for Turkey," he said.

Both appeals are for emergency funds for the next three months, and will be followed by fresh appeals for longer-term help. UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres announced the \$1 billion appeal for Turkey saying the money will allow aid groups to rapidly scale up support for gov-

ernment-led relief efforts, including providing food, protection, education, water and shelter to survivors of the magnitude 7.8 quake on Feb. 6 that devastated southern Turkey and northwestern Syria. "The needs are enormous, people are suffering and there's no time to lose," Guterres said. "I urge the international community to step up and fully fund this critical effort in response to one of the biggest natural disasters of our times."

He said that "Turkey is home to the largest number of refugees in the world and has shown enormous generosity to its Syrian neighbors for years," so it is time for the world to support the Turkish people. More than 1.74 million refugees live in the 11 Turkish provinces affected by the earthquakes, according to the UN refugee agency. UN humanitarian chief Martin Griffiths, who visited both quake-ravaged countries last

week, said: "The people of Turkey have experienced unspeakable heartache."

The earthquake struck at the peak of winter, leaving hundreds of thousands of people, including small children and the elderly, without access to shelter, food, water, heaters and medical care in freezing temperatures. Griffiths' office said some 47,000 buildings have been destroyed or damaged. "We must stand with them in their darkest hour and ensure they receive the support they need," Griffiths said. The United Nations has been criticized for the slow response in getting aid and heavy equipment into Syria's rebel-held northwest since the earthquake struck 10 days ago.

Following a visit to Damascus by Griffiths, Guterres announced that Syrian leader Bashar Assad had agreed to open two additional crossing points from Turkey to the northwest - at Bab Al-Salam and Al Ra'ee -

for an initial period of three months. The UN had only been allowed to deliver aid to the northwest Idlib area through a single crossing at Bab Al-Hawa, at Syrian ally Russia's insistence. Dujarric, the UN spokesman, said 22 trucks with food and other aid crossed through Bab Al-Hawa and two trucks with tents crossed through Bab Al-Salam. No convoys had yet entered the northwest from Al Ra'ee.

"As of Feb. 14, according to the latest information we received, 8,900 buildings have been completely or partially destroyed in the northwest of Syria, leaving 11,000 people homeless," Dujarric said. Shelter is the top immediate need in Syria, with food, cash assistance and supplies to cope with the winter weather also priorities, he said. Global humanitarian needs were already 25% higher this year than last year before the earthquake, and Dujarric said the UN is worried about the growing number of people who need help.

"Our humanitarian system is stretched to the limit," he said. Many people needing aid are in areas beset by conflict and the impact of climate change, Dujarric said. For the UN, he said, it's frustrating that "so many of these issues could be addressed beforehand" but dealing with "the consequences of ignoring climate change, of not putting enough effort into peace, into reconciliation, into social cohesion ... lands on the UN's doorstep." Dujarric said the UN is working as fast as it can within international law and the UN Charter, "which sometimes forces the UN as opposed to other relief agencies to take into consideration and have to respect the political context." "And if I were on the receiving end of aid I would feel nothing is coming quickly enough," he said. "That being said, we hope that member states find the solidarity and generosity that is needed also from the public and private sector" to help earthquake survivors and millions of others in need, Dujarric said.

UN draft resolution demands halt to Israeli settlements

UNITED NATIONS (AP): A Palestinian-backed UN resolution that could be put to a vote in the Security Council early next week would demand an immediate halt to all Israeli settlement activities, condemn Israeli attempts to annex settlements and outposts, "and call for their immediate reversal."

In Washington, the State Department said it believed the resolution as drafted was "unhelpful," but declined to say if it would veto the document or try to water it down to avoid a contentious vote.

Council diplomats, speaking on condition of anonymity because talks were private, said the US was seeking to replace the resolution, which would be legally binding, with a weaker presidential statement. The push for a vote on the draft resolution, a copy of which was obtained by The Associated Press, comes as Israel's new right-wing government has reaffirmed its commitment to construct new settlements in the West Bank and expand its authority in the lands that the Palestinians seek for a future state. Israel captured the West Bank, along with east Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip, in the 1967 Mideast war. The United Nations and most of the international community consider Israeli settlements illegal and an obstacle to ending the decades-old Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Some

700,000 Israeli settlers live in the West Bank and Israeli-annexed east Jerusalem.

Ultranationalists who oppose Palestinian statehood comprise a majority of Israel's new government, which has declared settlement construction a top priority. Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich has vowed to "normalize" life in the West Bank, erasing the differences between living in a settlement and within Israel's internationally recognized border, and effectively annexing West Bank territory. The draft resolution, circulated by the United Arab Emirates, the Arab representative on the council, would reaffirm the Security Council's "unwavering commitment" to a two-state solution with Israel and Palestine living side-by-side in peace as democratic states. It would also reaffirm the UN Charter's provision against acquiring territory by force and reaffirm that any such acquisition is illegal.

Top diplomats from the United States, United Kingdom, France, Germany and Italy condemned Israel's plans to build 10,000 new homes in existing settlements in the West Bank and retroactively legalize nine outposts. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's Cabinet announced the measure, following a surge in violence in Jerusalem. US deputy State Department spokesman Vedant Patel

told reporters in Washington: "The introduction of this resolution is unhelpful in supporting the conditions necessary to advance negotiations for a two-state solution." Patel added that Israel's recent decision to expand settlements and legalize previously illegal settlement outposts was also "unhelpful."

Secretary of State Antony Blinken made that point directly to Netanyahu and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas during a visit to Israel and the West Bank earlier this month. US officials have said. In December 2016, the Security Council demanded that Israel "immediately and completely cease all settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem." It stressed that halting settlement activities "is essential for salvaging the two-state solution." That resolution also condemned "all measures aimed at altering the demographic composition, character and status of the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967."

The council resolution was adopted after then US President Barack Obama's administration abstained, a reversal of the United States' longstanding practice of protecting its close ally Israel from action at the United Nations, including by vetoing Arab-supported resolutions. The draft resolution before the council now is much shorter than the 2016 resolution, though it reiterates the key points and much of what the US and Europeans have said. In addition to its demands on settlements, the draft calls for "upholding unchanged the historic status quo at the holy sites in Jerusalem in word and in practice."

It further calls on Israel and the Palestinians to respect international humanitarian law and their previous agreements and to "observe calm and restraint, and to refrain from provocative actions, incitement, inflammatory rhetoric and hate speech." The resolution's supporters want a vote, ahead of the anniversary of Russia's Feb. 24, 2022, invasion of Ukraine, which is being marked by three days of high-level activities at the UN starting. Perhaps complicating the matter for the US, the Security Council resolution was introduced and is supported by the United Arab Emirates, an Arab partner of the United States that has also normalized relations with Israel, even as it has taken a tepid stance on opposing Russia's attack on Ukraine.

The US will be looking to the UAE and other council members sympathetic to the Palestinians to vote in favor of a UN General Assembly resolution later in the week condemning Russia for invading Ukraine and calling for a cessation of hostilities and the immediate withdrawal of all Russian forces.

Stop Russia now to prevent a wider conflict, Estonia warns

TALLINN (AP): With Russia's invasion of Ukraine nearing the one-year mark, a top Estonian defense leader warned that if Vladimir Putin is not stopped now, he could entangle the region in a larger conflict, perhaps one with even greater security implications for the US.

That's because Russia has shown it will keep trying to retake territories that were once part of the Soviet Union and, so far, economic sanctions and its significant military losses in Ukraine have not changed Putin's larger goals, said Kristjan Mäe, the head of the Estonian Ministry of Defense's NATO and EU department, as US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin visited the Baltic nation. Estonia, which borders Russia, was forcefully incorporated into the Soviet Union during World War II and gained its independence only with the Soviet collapse in 1991. It joined NATO and the European Union in 2004.

"If we do not solve this war at this moment, where it is, first of all, there's going to be a bigger war," Mäe said. And a larger war could have a significant impact on the United States' larger security concerns with China, he said. "If Europe is tied down with this war, then the European support, allied support politically, militarily to Indo-Pacific area is going to be limited as well, it's going to be hampered," he said. "So the primary focus, the short term focus should be defeating Russia where it is. This is the time. It's not just the spring, but in general, this is the time to do this."

The US and allies have been pressing to get tanks and ammunition into Kyiv this spring to help Ukraine seize what is considered a critical moment in the war. Austin's visit to Estonia was also to offer reassurance. US forces have been in constant rotation in Estonia since the invasion began as part of a commitment to defend NATO's eastern flank. At a news conference in Tallinn, Austin was asked how Estonia could be sure it would have America's protection if Russia presses through.

In response, Austin recalled his pre-invasion pledge to the Estonian defense minister: "I told him that if Russia invaded Ukraine, we would deploy forces to Estonia the next day. And we did. We were the first to be here. And we meant every word we said, and we'll live up to our commitments going forward," Austin said. The pledges of military support both to the eastern flank and to Kyiv come as Ukraine is girding for what is expected to be an intense ground battle in the east and south to try to take back some of the territory seized by Russia, even as Russia amasses hundreds of thousands of troops inside Ukraine for the spring fight.

Security experts warn of foreign cyber threat to voting

WASHINGTON (AP): Top state election and cybersecurity officials warned about threats posed by Russia and other foreign adversaries ahead of the 2024 elections, noting that America's decentralized system of thousands of local voting jurisdictions creates a particularly vulnerable. Russia and Iran have meddled in previous elections, including attempts to tap into internet-connected electronic voter databases. Distracted by war and protests, neither country appeared to disrupt last year's midterm elections, but security officials said they expect US foes to be more active as the next presidential election season draws near. The first primaries are less than a year away.

Jen Easterly, director of the federal Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency, referenced Russia's attack on Ukraine and the US-led effort to supply weapons and other aid to the besieged country as a possible motivator. She said the agency was "very concerned about potential retaliation from Russia of our critical infrastructure." She also mentioned China as a possible source of election interference, especially as the relationship between the two countries has deteriorated, mostly recently over the suspected spy balloon that floated across the country before being shot down by a US fighter jet.

"We've not seen anything here, but I'd like to

end that with the word - yet," said Easterly, speaking during the annual gathering of the National Association of Secretaries of State. Of particular concern is the decentralized nature of America's election system. There are some 10,000 local voting jurisdictions throughout the US, including counties and townships, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures.

Not all of those have funding for new equipment, proper staffing or updated training of election workers. Easterly said it was a priority of her agency to get money and expertise to what she termed "target-rich, cyber-poor" entities. Meagan Wolfe, administrator of the Wisconsin Elections Commission, said her state has about 1,850 local officials running elections, which makes it difficult to disburse federal money in a way that is effective over the long term. Wisconsin is a perennial swing state, where four of the past six presidential races have been decided by less than a percentage point and election conspiracies have found fertile ground since the 2020 election.

"A lot of times if you don't see anything bad happen in the cybersecurity space, it's kind of forgotten about," said Wolfe, who also is president of the National Association of State Election Directors. "People don't remember that this is a real and imminent threat, and so getting

those local jurisdictions, their governing bodies, to really buy into this concept and to support sustainable solutions for local election jurisdictions continues to be a real challenge, as well." Several secretaries of state called for additional federal funding for local election offices, which not only must prepare for cybersecurity threats but also have had to deal with harassment and threats since 2020.

Arizona Secretary of State Adrian Fontes noted that election workers and even voters in his state's most populous county, Maricopa, have been targets of harassment and intimidation. Stephen Spaulding, policy director for the US Senate Committee on Rules & Administration, said the committee's chairwoman, Democratic Sen. Amy Klobuchar, is trying to obtain more election funding after an attempt late last year fizzled. Congress allocated \$75 million in election security grants to states, but that was far short of what many state and local officials had requested.

"More than \$75 million from last year's omnibus is clearly needed in our view," Spaulding said. "We have repeatedly heard about how sustainable funding ensures our elections continue to run smoothly, facilitate predictability and planning, and we're striving to work on a bipartisan basis to get that done."

Canada to deploy navy vessels to Haiti as violence worsens

SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico (AP): Canada will send navy vessels to Haiti for intelligence-gathering as part of efforts to quell worsening gang violence in the Caribbean nation, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau announced. Trudeau made the announcement in the Bahamas at an annual meeting of Caribbean leaders where a key topic has been Haiti's surge in killings, rapes and kidnappings blamed on gangs emboldened since the July 2021 assassination of President Jovenel Moïse.

Haitian Prime Minister Ariel Henry, also at the meeting, has pleaded for a full-fledged international military intervention to stem the mayhem. His country requested help from the UN Security Council in October, and has suggested the US and Canada lead a force. No such intervention has come together, and neither country has offered to take the lead. Canada's move to send ships,

announced at the meeting of leaders of the 15-member Caricom trade bloc, comes shortly after the return of one of its surveillance planes on a similar mission to collect intelligence for Haitian police.

"Right now, Haiti is confronted with unrelenting gang violence, political turmoil and corruption," Trudeau said. "Now is the moment to come together to confront the severity of this situation." Trudeau said Canada and Haiti's neighbors need to work on long-lasting solutions to restore order and security, allow for essential aid to flow and create the conditions for free and fair elections.

He also unveiled sanctions on two additional Haitians: former interim president Jocelerme Privert and ex-political aide Salim Succar. Neither could be immediately reached for comment. They join 15 others already banned from making any economic dealings in Canada amid alleged ties to gangs. Also, the US

State Department announced it had placed visa restrictions on five more Haitians and seven family members that it did not identify, saying only that they have been fomenting violence, corruption, and instability. A total of 44 people have faced US restrictions since October. Meanwhile, the Canadian leader said his government would give an additional \$12.3 million in humanitarian assistance and \$10 million to support the International Office on Migration, to protect Haitian women and children along Haiti's border with the Dominican Republic. The neighboring country has deported tens of thousands of Haitian migrants and those of Haitian ancestry in the past year.

"The toll of human suffering in Haiti weighs heavily on me," Trudeau said. Trudeau met behind closed doors with Henry, who told reporters that he urgently wants Haiti to hold elections despite the worsening insecurity. The number of

reported killings in Haiti last year increased by 35% to 2,183 victims, while the number of reported kidnappings more than doubled to 1,359 victims, according to the UN.

A report last month from the UN Integrated Office in Haiti noted that "gang-related violence reached levels not seen in decades," and that tens of thousands of people have been displaced by the warring gangs. Canada, the US and other countries already have provided military equipment and other resources, along with training, to Haiti's National Police, which only has 9,700 active-duty officers for a country of more than 11 million people. Gangs control an estimated 60% of the capital of Port-au-Prince. Trudeau also pledged \$1.8 million to fight illegal drug trafficking and strengthen border and maritime security across the Caribbean.

Canada to deploy navy vessels to Haiti as violence worsens.

S Korea, US to hold simulated drill on North use of nukes

SEOUL (AP): South Korea and United States militaries will hold a tabletop exercise at the Pentagon next week to hone their joint response to a potential use of nuclear weapons by North Korea, Seoul officials said Friday. The one-day computer simulation set comes as the two countries push to strengthen their 70-year alliance in the face of North Korea's increasingly aggressive nuclear doctrine.

The exercise is meant to focus on measures against North Korean nuclear threats and discuss how to boost a US extended deterrence - America's ability to use its full capabilities, including nuclear, to deter attacks on its allies. South Korea's Defense Ministry said in a statement. It said the exercise would set up possible scenarios where North Korea uses nuclear weapons, explore how to cope with them militarily and formulate crisis man-

agement plans. Worries about North Korea's nuclear program deepened in South Korea after the North conducted a record number of missile tests in 2022 and adopted a law that authorizes the pre-emptive use of nuclear weapons. Many of the missiles tested were nuclear-capable weapons that place South Korea within striking distance.

In response to the intensifying North Korean threats, South Korea and US militaries have expanded their joint drills and stepped up pressure on the North to abandon its nuclear program.

In January, Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said that the US would also increase its deployment of advanced weapons such as fighter jets and bombers to the Korean Peninsula. During their annual meeting in November, Austin and South Korean Defense Minister Lee Jong-Sup

also agreed to conduct tabletop exercises annually and further strengthen the alliance's information sharing, joint planning and execution. Austin reiterated a warning that any nuclear attack against the US or its allies would result in the end of North Korean leader Kim Jong Un's regime. North Korea has previously slammed military drills between its rivals as an invasion rehearsal and responded with its own weapons tests, and could make an angry response to next week's South Korea-US tabletop exercise.

Some experts say North Korea has used some of the South Korea-US drills as a chance to test and perfect its weapons systems. They say North Korea would eventually aim to use its enlarged nuclear arsenal to win international recognition as a legitimate nuclear state and win sanctions relief and other concessions.



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# Pakistan’s prospective on IAEA’s tour

**RECENTLY, Foreign Office, Spokesperson rejected the speculations surrounding International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Chief Rafael Mariano Grossi’s Visit to Pakistan. While commenting on the rumors regarding the Director General IAEA's tour to the country, Mumtaz Zahra Baloch told the media that IAEA Chief has paid a two-day visit to Pakistan, interacted with the top political leadership, toured several institutions, and attended events. According to her, Pakistan and the IAEA have long cooperation in the peaceful uses of nuclear energy, including power generation, agriculture, health, nuclear medicines, high-yield crops, and drought reduction. The Spokesperson categorically rejected the notion that the government was working to strike any deal on Pakistan's nuclear program and assets that could compromise the nation's security at this crucial phase of the country's history.**

Pakistan's 227 million-strong nation and the world's seventh nuclear state with a highly capable and well-equipped military, fell a victim to chronic economic fragility and financial depletion because of failed policies of its administrators. Presently, the precarious economic situation is the biggest challenge to the South Asian nation, severely undermining Pakistan's economic growth, public life, and social development goals, along with putting the worst effects on national security and territorial sovereignty. The recent super floods, global energy crisis, and economic mismanagement of the rulers had increased an imminent risk of an economic collapse for the sole nuclear power in the Muslim world.

Currently, anti-Islam and anti-Pakistan powers are in efforts to permanently dismantle Pakistan's nuclear teeth through monetary blackmail and exploitation of its economic weakness, while the International Monetary Fund (IMF) has unimaginable expertise in dealing with such issues and implementing plans for the western powers. In fact, the IAEA had played the role of a western vanguard in scrapping Iraqi and Lybean Nuclear programs. After working in Iran for years, now it is spearheading an advance toward Pakistan. Although Foreign Office Spokesperson did not confirm rumors regarding the very purpose of Grossi's visit, however, Pakistani leaders and bureaucracy never took the nation into confidence regarding most sensitive issues of the country.

Pakistani leaders had betrayed the nation multiple times in history and protected their personal interests and politics instead of securing national dominion and unity. Currently, the nation is facing multiple challenges to its survival including economic instability, resurrecting terrorism, foreign conspiracies along with a persistent political upheaval created by its own leaders. Earlier they stripped the public of basic necessities and now chewed over trading their ego with the foreign merchants. The leaders must be aware of the fact, that nation had endured limitless felonies of its leaders in the past but it will never compromise on its security assurances in the face of a cruel enemy any time future.

**ONE year into the Ukraine conflict, hostilities show no obvious sign of ending any time soon. However, the issue of postwar reconstruction is climbing up the political ladder in the West, including in multi-lateral institutions like the G7. In part, this is because the international stakes in the nation's rebuilding are so big that failure could have profound consequences not just for Ukraine, but also for the broader region and the wider West to boot.**

This core reconstruction issue was the focal point at this week's ReBuild Ukraine expo in Poland. It will also be a discussion item on Friday, Saturday and Sunday at the world's premier military affairs conference, the Munich Security Summit, where G7 foreign ministers will be meeting on Saturday. Morevoer, President Volodymyr Zelensky last week held an online investment summit with some

200 large corporations, investors and financial companies. They discussed the creation of a platform to attract private capital to rebuild Ukraine and large investment projects including in green energy, IT and agricultural technologies.

Ukraine estimates Russia has caused at least \$1 trillion of damage in the last 12 months, separate from the costs associated with the territory invaded in 2014. In early December, the World Bank also estimated the cost of Ukraine's postwar reconstruction was upwards of 600 billion (\$642 billion). Although the war rages on, European decision-makers are now thinking more intently about the medium to long-term future of Ukraine. At last week's EU summit, for instance, there was a discussion on investing frozen Russian assets in Ukraine's reconstruction. About \$300 billion of Russian reserves held in international banks have been frozen since the invasion of Ukraine. The

EU's latest proposal would be to invest the frozen assets and use the profits for reconstruction.

This scheme has strong support from key Eastern European states, including Poland, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia. And EU leaders ultimately agreed to work "toward the use of Russia's frozen and immobilized assets to support Ukraine's reconstruction and for the purpose of reparation, in accordance with international law." Beyond the question of money, however, is the EU's political strategy toward Ukraine. This is linked to the bloc's future enlargement. The European integration process began in the 1950s with six founding members and the community has steadily expanded, Brexit aside, ever since, including the accession in 2004 of 10 new member countries from formerly communist Central and Eastern Europe. The revival of the EU

enlargement process in 2022 highlighted how much is changing in Europe as a result of Russia's invasion. In recent years, the enlargement process for Turkey and the Western Balkan countries has been much more challenging than was the case for the Central and Eastern European countries prior to 2004. With the process stalling for years, the rejuvenation of the enlargement agenda has been driven by Russia's invasion. While there is much energy behind Ukraine's bid, in particular, EU enlargement is a lengthy process and French President Emmanuel Macron has warned it could take several decades for Kyiv to become a full member.

While the EU's enlargement process may appear unrelated to Ukraine's rebuilding, the two are actually closely linked in the eyes of many stakeholders. This is because the EU

accession process is widely expected to occur in parallel with reconstruction. In part, this is because of the acknowledgment of the need for wider political and institutional change in Ukraine following criticism prior to the war, including regarding corruption. Ukraine last year released a National Recovery Plan that laid out the country's initial road map for not only rebuilding but also transforming itself. The plan covers nearly every aspect of Ukraine's economy and infrastructure, and it may be at the center of future reconstruction efforts.

The plan's objectives are threefold: economic, social and environmental resilience; quick solutions for recovery of the economic, social and environmental sectors; and a modernization and growth plan that will ensure expedited sustainable economic growth and the well-being of the people. It is divided into three phases, covering immediate needs through

2023, medium-term needs into 2025, and longer-term needs for a modernization phase from 2026 to 2032. The first stage of this plan is therefore ongoing, including via local authorities cleaning up and restoring key facilities that have been destroyed.

A later stage, which may begin immediately after the end of mass hostilities, will be focused more on recovery, including restoring water supplies and providing housing. It will only be after that stage that there can be a more full-fledged renewal of Ukrainian infrastructure and transport systems, which will be the costliest, longest stage. So, while the war may yet last for a significant period, there is much thinking and preparation already underway about the reconstruction agenda. Ukraine's immediate-term future is still about survival and, until large-scale fighting ends, much of the massive reconstruction process will remain on ice.

## Moldova isn’t on the front page, but it could be in Putin’s crosshairs

Cristian Gherasim

**A**T least every other week, Ana Golea takes the 620-mile round-trip journey back to her home city of Chisinau - the capital of Moldova - to visit her parents. Fearful for their well-being, the 34-year-old marketing specialist has been doing this ever since Russia launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine. At that point Moldova, which borders Ukraine and Romania, was quickly thought by some to be Russian President Vladimir Putin's next target.

The trips she makes from the Romanian capital of Bucharest, where Ana has been living for the past decade, to Moldova, have only gotten more frequent since power blackouts and energy shortages hit the small country of 2.6 million people. As Russia's war on Ukraine approaches its one-year mark, Ana not only worries about her parents as they face winter, but also feels anxious over where the next errant missile from the neighboring battlefield might fall.

Last month, Moldovan President Maia Sandu said border police had found missile debris near the village of Larga in Moldova's north. It was not the first such incident - Moldovan police also found missile debris in December - and it left many to wonder what will happen if the next time luck runs out and a stray rocket hits closer to home. "Moldova has never been in this situation before," Ana told me. "A never-ending string of hardships hit this country in a manner no one could predict: a war next door, the energy shortage and now rockets falling near our homes."

The country has reason to be anxious: Last month, the head of its Security Service warned there is a "very high" risk that Russia will launch a new offensive in Moldova's east in 2023.

Last Friday, a Russian cruise missile crossed over Moldovan territory, the country's defense ministry said and Ukraine's military confirmed. (Ukraine's top general said another missile crossed over Romania.) Soon after, Moldova's government resigned, its outgoing Prime Minister citing multiple crises brought by Russian pressure. On Monday, Moldovan President Maia Sandu warned of a Russian plot to destabilize her country. (Last year, Russia denied having designs on Moldova, following a series of attacks in Moldova's pro-Russian separatist region of Transnistria.) Given wider concern in Europe that Putin's war could spill beyond Ukraine, countries besides Moldova have reason to worry, too.

Moldova sits to Ukraine's south, relatively close to Russia's front lines along Ukraine's southern, Black Sea coast. Importantly, it separates southern Ukraine from NATO and EU-member Romania, to the west. Last year, as Russian forces advanced westward toward the Ukrainian port city of Odesa - just 35 miles from Moldova's eastern tip - Moldovan experts sounded the alarm. Capturing Odesa would give Putin's army a land corridor from Russia-occupied Ukraine to Moldova, in particular to a pro-Russian separatist region in the Moldova's east. Fortunately Odesa was spared and the Russian advance is now bogged down in Eastern Ukraine. But the question is, for how long?

In the small country of Moldova, concerns about Putin's ambition center on an even smaller strip of territory. As Ukraine was after Russia's incursion in 2014, Moldova has been stuck in a "frozen" conflict since the 1990s, with pro-Russia separatists governing the

breakaway eastern-Moldovan region of Transnistria. Seizing Odesa could have allowed Russia's army to connect with that territory where some 1,500 Russian troops are stationed-turning the tiny sliver of land into a new Donbas, this time much closer to the doorstep of NATO and the EU.

Now, there is fear that Russia could launch a new effort to reach Moldova, and there's reason to worry about other countries being dragged into the war, if Moscow does. NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg has warned that Russia is trying to "freeze" the war before a spring assault, which many fear might bring Russian forces once again near Odesa. Besides the obvious reason of not wanting to let any independent state fall prey to Russia, thereby setting a precedent, Moldova carries a significant strategic importance. It acts like a buffer zone between NATO and Russia. Any invasion of Moldova - with its western leading government, pro-European aspirations and recently gained EU-candidate status - could bring Putin into direct collision with NATO.

Making that a bit clearer, during the NATO foreign ministers meeting in Bucharest in November last year, officials of member countries offered assurances of support to Moldova without saying what that would mean, exactly, the Associated Press reported. NATO members reportedly offered to help with security and defense training in the face of Russian pressure. For this scenario not to happen, Moldova needs outside help and constant military support to keep it from being perceived by Russia as an easy target. The country, one of the poorest in Europe, has almost entirely

outdated military equipment according to Moldova's defense minister.

Europe has another reason to care: Without Moldova, Europe would have a bigger refugee problem. Since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine last February, more than 765,000 people have crossed from Ukraine into Moldova, and the small country is hosting more than 108,000 recorded refugees, according to the UN. During a visit to Chisinau earlier this spring, UN Secretary General António Guterres talked about the fragile position Moldova is in, noting that "Moldova is by far the country that has received the most refugees, as proportion of its own population." He mentioned that the country finds itself on the "front line of preservation, peace and stability in the world." But what does that mean, exactly?

Firstly, Moldova took substantial pressure off Europe's shoulders in dealing with refugees. Out of more than 8 million Ukrainian refugees spread out throughout Europe and beyond, 108,000 may not seem like much, but the burden is substantial for a small country, and it alleviates pressure on others in the region. Secondly, since Ukrainian refugees have been largely allowed to move freely in Europe, those who did choose to stay in Moldova are usually those having a harder time integrating anywhere else. Moldova's culture does share a lot of similarities with Ukraine. If Moldova refused or was unable to take in so many refugees, the rest of Europe would have to integrate them.

It goes without saying that for one of the poorest countries in Europe, sheltering so many refugees likely won't be sustainable

for a long period of time without assistance. Russia, meanwhile, may hope Moldova will crack under this influx of refugees, this helping to further destabilize Eastern Europe. Moldova's woes have to do with internal factors as well. The country's corruption and oligarchic system are decades-long issues that the current pro-EU government has struggled to curb. Moldova's judicial shortcomings have been also highlighted in a recent Council of Europe report, with its judiciary system coming again under scrutiny following a disputed contest for the top job of chief prosecutor.

Moldova is also losing its people. According to World Bank statistics, Moldova has lost more than 12% of its population since 1991, as it has been hit hard by the demographic decline seen throughout many parts of post-communist Europe. All pales in comparison with Moldova's current energy problem. The country's dependency on both Russia and Ukraine for energy puts it in probably the most difficult spot it has ever been in since declaring independence from the Soviet Union in August 1991.

Gazprom has slashed its gas exports to Moldova and Ukraine has halted energy exports altogether due to Russian missile attacks. In November, Russian attacks on Ukraine caused power blackouts in half of Moldova. As a result of all this, Moldova is left with only the 10% of electricity that it manages to produce by itself. There's a light at the end of the tunnel, in that EU member states, especially neighboring Romania, agreed to provide as much as 90% of Moldova's energy needs. Another sign of hope is that Moldova has proven very astute at fighting propaganda, helping thus lessen the sway Russian backed

politicians and businessmen have on its institutions. In December, Moldova suspended six television channels airing Russian misinformation. More importantly, Moldova is fighting propaganda through an overhaul of its cyber defense system with assistance from the EU.

Though Moldova is unlikely to become part of the EU anytime soon, the country's European-leaning objectives and desire to tear itself away from Russian influence have brought security guarantees and Western aid like never before. Moldovan President Maia Sandu, plain spoken and charismatic, is leading a charm offensive; Sandu has met with Western leaders and gave an inspiring commencement speech at Harvard, helping to bring attention to Moldova's plight. She knows that there would be nothing worse for Moldova than to be forgotten and ignored on the world stage.

In that way, as in many others, Moldova offers a parallel to Ukraine's position, in miniature. But in every crisis there is opportunity. Moldova can emerge a stronger player in world affairs. It has the strategic position and the regional know-how to do that. But three things need to happen: International support, both militarily and economic, is crucial; Moldova needs to fight extreme poverty and corruption as the pro-EU government said it will do, and the world needs to pay more attention. Not doing so, ignoring an important piece of the puzzle in Eastern Europe, would bring us closer to all-out war. Ana Golea hopes that things will improve, that her parents will be safe, that her country can avoid being dragged into conflict, but she acknowledges that for that to happen, Moldova desperately needs outside help and assistance to face this flurry of challenges.

CNN

## Sturgeon leaves her party and movement in a state of uncertainty

Jamie Maxwell

**S**HORTLY before being elected leader of the Scottish National Party (SNP) in late 2014, Nicola Sturgeon embarked on a rock star-style tour of Scotland, appearing in front of packed audiences around the country, usually illuminated on stage by a row of blazing lights. On Wednesday morning, in the more sedate Georgian surroundings of Bute House, the Scottish first minister's official residence in Edinburgh, Sturgeon announced her decision to resign as leader of the SNP and head of Scotland's semi-autonomous government at Holyrood.

The contrast between those two moments - one brash and celebratory, the other somber and unexpected - is stark. For the past eight years, Sturgeon's political fortunes have been fused with those of her party and her movement. Her departure signals a deep generational shift within Scottish nationalism - a shift from which the campaign for independence may struggle to recover. The early stages of Sturgeon's tenure were explosively suc-

cessful. Scots rejected the SNP's raison d'être of Scottish self-government in a September 2014 referendum, but support for leaving the UK nonetheless rose to a historic high of 45 percent. After that, the SNP made a series of rapid political advances, crushing its traditionally dominant rival, Scottish Labour, in the UK general election in 2015 before winning successive devolved elections in 2016 and 2021.

Scotland's enthusiasm for independence deepened as the compound crises of Brexit and COVID-19 chipped away at the credibility of British political elites. In response, Sturgeon positioned herself as an anti-populist liberal and ultra-competent administrator of Scotland's devolved institutions. When Westminster cut UK welfare spending, Sturgeon set up an alternative Scottish social security system. When Conservative ministers in London rallied against immigrants and the EU, Sturgeon presented Scotland as a safe space for asylum seekers and bolstered Scotland's ties to Brussels.

Yet even at the height of

Sturgeon's popularity - her approval rating hit 72 percent during the COVID-19 pandemic - a culture of inertia was beginning to spread within the SNP. Despite commanding a clear legislative majority inside the Scottish Parliament, the party demurred from radical social reform, and Sturgeon increasingly surrounded herself with an army of private sector consultants. Questions were raised, too, about the way in which Sturgeon and her husband, the SNP's chief executive, Peter Murrell, micro-managed every aspect of the party's internal operations, often at the expense of its democratic structures. Last year it emerged that Murrell had given the SNP an interest-free loan of more than 100,000 pounds (\$120,000), ostensibly to assist with "cash flow" issues. The loan is now subject to a police investigation. Simmering internal tensions broke out into the open in 2019 and 2020 when Alex Salmond, Sturgeon's predecessor as SNP leader, faced multiple accusations of sexual assault dating back to his

time as first minister. Salmond was acquitted of all charges in court but went on to launch a conservative breakaway party, Alba, which has since relentlessly attacked Sturgeon from the right, particularly over her efforts to update Scotland's gender recognition laws.

The sense that Sturgeon was losing her grip on the Scottish political landscape intensified last year when the UK Supreme Court delivered a landmark ruling on independence. Holyrood, the court said, did not have the constitutional authority to stage a second referendum on Scotland's constitutional future - the SNP's central political goal since Brexit. Instead, Scotland would have to secure Westminster's permission before any such vote could be held, the judges said. The ruling blocked Scotland's last legitimate exit route out of the UK and, for Sturgeon, marked a personal denouement. She was the primary advocate of the SNP's "de-risking" strategy, the idea that by stripping away the most disruptive elements of Scottish nationalism,

Scotland could secede from the union seamlessly, with minimal political fuss and maximum international support. That idea now lies in ruins alongside Sturgeon's plan to use the next UK general election as a "de facto" independence vote. These overlapping setbacks and controversies have steadily eroded the SNP's once iron-clad lead in polls. A survey of Scottish public opinion published this month showed that 40 percent of Scottish voters already wanted Sturgeon to resign.

Dissatisfaction over the Scottish government's handling of devolved policy matters, including health transport, and education, has been rising for some time. Meanwhile, support for independence recently sank to a long-term low of 37 percent. During her Bute House press conference, Sturgeon cited the "brutality" of modern politics as the core factor in her decision to abandon the Scottish political stage. And she has been operating under a visible shadow of personal exhaustion for the past two or three years. There was certainly more than a hint of

Jacinda Arden in her emotional resignation speech on Wednesday.

But for Scotland's independence movement, the significance of her departure cannot be overstated. Sturgeon was a uniquely gifted political communicator whose instinctive cautiousness mirrored the conservative sensibilities of Scottish voters at large. She knew that Scotland had to be lulled into independence, rather than launched towards it. That she ended up arguing for a divisive and unpopular "de facto" referendum policy illustrates how badly miscued her political antenna had become after nearly 10 years as first minister. She leaves the SNP in a state of uncertainty. It has been in power at Holyrood since 2007. It is beset by public sector strikes and a cost of living crisis. She has no obvious successor, and the party now faces a potentially bruising leadership battle. Worse yet, the nationalist dream of independence remains vividly unfulfilled. As Sturgeon readies her exit, the bright lights of 2014 feel like a lifetime ago.

Aljazeera



# Issa Amro Hebron attack: Israel only acts on IDF violence when caught red-handed

Ray Hanania

UNLESS Western journalists are willing to travel to the West Bank to cover Israel's conflict with the Palestinians, they never seem to understand the depravity of its atrocities against civilians. This week, Lawrence Wright, the Pulitzer Prize-winning staff writer for the prestigious New Yorker magazine and the author of several books, witnessed an atrocity that barely gained any coverage in the mainstream news media. Wright was interviewing Palestinian peace activist Issa Amro in Hebron on Monday, when Israeli soldiers surrounded Amro and one choked him, pushed him to the ground and beat him. Another soldier intervened and prevented more violence and greater injury.

Had Wright not been there to witness it - the writer acknowledged in a series of posts on Twitter, including a video of the incident - Amro might not have survived. Wright even went so far as to state that the Israel Defense Forces "misrepresented what led to this. The soldier initiated the encounter, Amro did not curse him only asked to call his commander. Nothing to justify the violent assault that followed." Amro posted his own statement regarding the IDF assault, saying: "I was detained and beaten violently by an Israeli soldier in Hebron. I was showing the famous American writer Lawrence Wright the Israeli

occupation and apartheid in my home town."

The soldier who attacked the nonviolent Amro was suspended and ordered detained for 10 days - an unusual response that was probably more down to the fact a high-profile journalist witnessed the assault than Israel's desire to treat all violence the same. The IDF characterized the confrontation in the lamest possible way, saying: "The investigation found that a violent confrontation erupted between a Palestinian and an IDF soldier in Hebron, during which the soldier beat the Palestinian." The statement did not condemn the soldier and implied that the "violent confrontation" was mutual. The soldiers insisted, but Wright denied, that Amro had been screaming at the guilty soldier, provoking him.

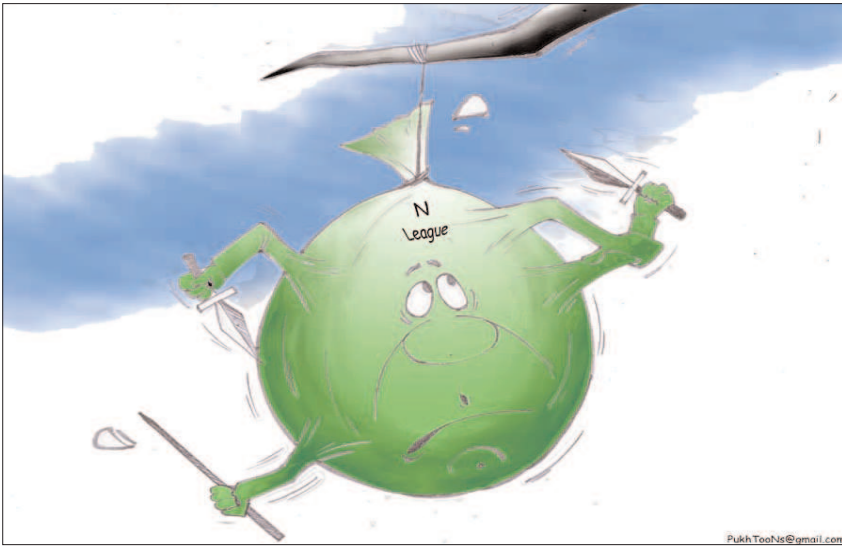
It is Israeli practice to downplay any violence by its soldiers or armed settlers, except when they are caught red-handed and excuses and propaganda are not enough to block criticism. The IDF suggested that Amro provoked the violence, since he was told by the soldier not to proceed any further with his tour of Hebron, which is home to some of the worst of Israel's settler fanatics. Wright continued on Twitter: "I can't stop thinking how dehumanizing the occupation is on the young soldiers charged with enforcing it."

I have been to Hebron, the city where an Israeli-American doctor dressed in Israeli military uniform walked into the Ibrahimi Mosque on Feb. 25, 1994, and shot dead 29 Muslims and wounded 125 others while they prayed. I went to Hebron in 1995 as a part of a fact-finding mission for the Palestinian American Congress to evaluate Israeli violence against civilians. What I found was that the armed settlers were being protected by IDF soldiers and that many of the soldiers sympathized with the settlers who occupied Palestinian homes. Hebron was divided in half so that the Israeli settlers could control the heart of the city and the area around the mosque, allowing Goldstein to enter and massacre the innocent civilians as they prayed. Israeli settlers tried to attack me and it was only because I waved my American passport that they were stopped. But the soldiers took no action against the screaming settler fanatics.

However, there is a new reality for Palestinians and that is that social media has given them a stronger voice than they have ever had before. They can document, using video footage, the Israeli violence and oppressive brutality that fuels counter-reactions from some Palestinians. The difference, of course, is that the Israelis are heavily armed and the Palestinians are not. More Palestinians have been

killed than Israelis, yet the Israelis and their sympathizers in the Western news media tend to downplay Israeli atrocities while exaggerating Palestinian violence. Amro is a courageous voice for peace. Many Israelis, along with many more Palestinians, support his peaceful efforts. Seeing him being brutalized by Israeli soldiers invokes images of the violence seen on American streets, where armed police violently respond to protests by African Americans. Yet, in America, the police face serious charges when these confrontations result in excessive violence and even death. In Israel, the violence is tempered by propaganda and a sympathetic international media that is reluctant to criticize the so-called Jewish state out of fear they will be labeled antisemitic.

The assault on Amro might be just one incident, but it clearly speaks volumes to the hundreds of other incidents that do not get this kind of "accidental" coverage. Despite the clear-cut nature of the case, the mainstream Western media barely reported the incident. Israel knows that in order for it to continue to enjoy news media sympathy, it must show that it is acting responsibly. But that only seems to happen when the media is present. Tel Aviv imposes heavy restrictions on media coverage in the West Bank and, from its point of view, the Amro incident shows there is good reason for this.



## WHO is putting us all in danger

Matt Ridley

THE World Health Organisation (WHO), the body charged with finding how a virus from central China killed many millions of people and upended the world economy, has dropped the ball. An article appeared in Nature magazine this week, headlined, "WHO abandons plans for crucial second phase of Covid-origins investigation". It quoted one of the WHO's scientists, Maria Van Kerkhove, as saying that "there is no phase two... that plan has changed".

A day later, the WHO insisted it had been misunderstood and would continue investigating. Such confusion is what we have come to expect from this unaccountable, premium-travel-addicted, Geneva-based bureaucracy. In 2020, the WHO took a year to even begin investigating, only then sending a team on a brief trip to Wuhan in early 2021. That ended with a farcical press conference in which, to general incredulity, the WHO seemed to endorse the Chinese regime's view that a lab leak was extremely unlikely and would not be investigated further, while treating the ridiculous possibility that the virus arrived in Wuhan on frozen foods from abroad as entirely reasonable.

The WHO then backtracked and promised a further investigation. Two years on, and we are still waiting for any news from their work. To call this progress sluggish would be an insult to molluscs. If millions of people had died from an industrial or nuclear accident, we would

not spend three years shrugging our shoulders and saying that we may never find out how it happened. The excuse is that Beijing refuses to provide full details of what happened in Wuhan's hospitals or its virology laboratories. Not that the WHO, which often kow-tows to China, will put it that way. "The politics across the world of this really hampered progress on understanding the origins," is as close as Dr van Kerkhove gets.

Of course, we know why this is happening. The Chinese authorities, having failed to find infected animals in the local seafood market, having failed to fool the world with a red herring about pangolins (whose virus was different), and having seen their frozen foods theory ridiculed, are running out of alibis to exculpate the Wuhan Institute of Virology. For years, that laboratory experimented with coronaviruses - an area of much controversy within the scientific community - and has since been reluctant to share its virus database.

This is not the first time, moreover, that the WHO has proved unfit for its mission. In 2014, it initially turned away warnings that Ebola was getting out of control in west Africa, for fear of upsetting national governments. In 2015, it told the world that climate change is the greatest threat to human health in the current century, suggesting that it might be neglecting the day job of preventing pandemics. To this day, it demands bans on vaping, despite evidence that vap-

ing can save lives by reducing smoking. This time, however, the WHO has not merely failed at its job. It's worse than that. By saying it was investigating, then apparently failing, it has prevented others from doing the work. Scientific bodies and governments, including Britain's, when challenged, kept saying, "We're leaving this to the WHO." At least the US Congress, now that Republicans control the House of Representatives, is investigating.

The failure to investigate Covid's origins leaves the world vulnerable to the next pandemic. The two practices I believe are likely to have caused this one - selling farmed wildlife in markets and harvesting bat viruses for laboratory experiments - continue almost unabated, each using the excuse that it might be the other that caused this pandemic. Avian influenza (or bird flu) is now spreading through wild bird flocks in a far more deadly form than before and starting to infect mammals. We don't really know how or why it has happened now, though the suspicion is that it is something to do with intensified chicken farming. Investigations are going on at the WHO but - guess what - slowly.

Meanwhile, rogue regimes must be watching and licking their lips. You mean, they say to themselves, all we would have to do to bring the world economy to its knees is find a highly infectious but not very lethal virus and unleash it in a city, and the WHO won't even bother to investigate properly?

The Telegraph

## Climate crisis is driving anticipatory humanitarian action

THE world is in the midst of the worst food crisis in modern history. As a consequence of geopolitical, economic and climate crises fuels global shortages, a staggering 326 million people in dozens of countries need humanitarian aid, with 222 million facing acute food insecurity and up to 50 million at risk of starving to death. The poorest countries have been hit the hardest by the rise in global food prices caused by the war in Ukraine. And with the looming climate catastrophe threatening to compound the effects of conflict and supply chain disruptions, the humanitarian sector must adopt a more proactive, anticipatory approach to the growing hunger crisis.

Until relatively recently, humanitarian organizations did not pay much attention to climate change. But the proliferation of weather-related humanitarian emergencies has caused the sector to recognize the threat that the climate crisis poses to low-income countries and to the global food system. While the deadly floods and heatwaves that have struck Europe over the last two years have shown that even countries considered to be relatively safe are not immune to extreme weather events, developing countries are much more vulnerable. In 2021, 94 percent of internally displaced people became so as a result of climate-related hazards. Last year's floods in Pakistan, which shocked the world, submerged a third of the country, claimed more than 1,730 lives, affected 33 million people, and caused economic losses estimated at \$16.3 billion.

With climate change caus-

Myriam Cataneda Solares

ing humanitarian crises all over the world, the number of people in need of aid has increased by 40 percent over the past year. In response to the growing need, funding for humanitarian causes has nearly doubled over the past decade, reaching \$31.3 billion in 2021. But while funding has increased, the challenge facing international agencies and nongovernmental organizations today is to maximize the impact of these resources and empower local and national organizations. As matters currently stand, two-thirds of all direct contributions to humanitarian causes go to UN agencies and prominent international organizations like the Red Cross and Red Crescent. While these large institutions play a crucial role, community-based initiatives often have a better grasp of local contexts. The world's largest donors and NGOs seemed to acknowledge this when they launched the Grand Bargain initiative in 2016, committing to provide 25 percent of humanitarian funding to local organizations. But seven years after the agreement was announced, the figure is still less than 2 percent.

So far, the sector's modus operandi has been reactive. Whether it is Haiti, Ethiopia or Pakistan, the methods are the same: a crisis emerges, a humanitarian appeal is launched, funding is raised and assistance is delivered many days (if not months) later. But by relying on climate science, we can anticipate risks and address humanitarian needs before they become emergencies. Anticipatory action, defined as "acting ahead of predicted hazardous events to prevent or reduce acute humanitarian impacts before they fully

unfold," involves forecasting mechanisms and pre-agreed triggers and thresholds for releasing funds in advance. By responding to needs in this way, we can deliver aid more effectively and in a more dignified way. In 2019, for example, the Senegalese government and Start Network each purchased insurance policies against drought, allowing them to receive funding for humanitarian action and coordinate measures to protect at-risk communities.

But anticipatory action also has its limits. As a recent report by Start Network shows, not all crises can be forecasted or modeled. Even so, adopting this approach would allow humanitarian actors and organizations to be proactive, improve efficiency and prevent life-threatening events from developing into large-scale disasters. The global aid system needs rapid reform. While some progress has been made in recent years, much of it has been transactional rather than transformative.

To be sure, the problems we face are complicated and multidimensional, and we cannot disregard the political dimension of humanitarian action. Some may believe that necessity or desperation will force the sector to change for the better, but scaling up anticipatory and locally led action represents a far more promising path. The ongoing climate crisis offers a unique opportunity for evidence-based humanitarian reform. In our data-driven world, there is no reason to wait until disaster strikes. By anticipating risks and planning ahead, we can protect vulnerable communities and make the world a safer place.

Arab News

## An end to the Ukraine war remains a long way off

Dr. Diana Galeeva

THE Ukraine war is approaching its anniversary and the situation complicates daily. Kyiv has accused Russia of bombarding power facilities across Ukraine, while on Monday Ukraine's energy minister insisted that the country's power system was meeting people's "electricity needs." Chechnya's leader Ramzan Kadyrov argued in an interview with the Rossiya-1 channel that Russia could take Kyiv, Kharkiv and Odesa, while Yevgeny Prigozhin, the leader of the Wagner Group, stated that Russian forces are facing resistance as they attempt to capture the Ukrainian city of Bakhmut.

While the rhetoric and actions on the ground (including new waves of missile attacks) have not changed their character, there have been some challenging escalations in the last week, including the possibility of bringing a potential NATO member into the conflict. Last Friday, Moldova's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and European Integration summoned the Russian ambassador to protest that a missile crossed the country's airspace, over the village of Mocra in the Transnistria region. The missile was followed as it made its way over Cosauti in the Soroca District, heading toward Ukraine. This technically only relates to bilateral relations, since Moldova has traditionally taken a neutral stance on NATO membership, but since the start of the Ukraine war its position has shifted, with President Maia Sandu

stating in January that there was "serious discussion" about joining "a larger alliance."

Moldova has already been indirectly impacted by the war, as it has faced severe economic shocks due to its disrupted transport corridors. This is mainly because Moldova is fully dependent on Russian gas. The country is suffering an energy crisis and household energy tariffs are soaring. Exports to Russia of medicines and apples have been disrupted and there has been a drop in remittances due to EU sanctions. The country is also affected by electricity blackouts caused by Russian missile strikes on neighboring Ukraine. At the beginning of the crisis, there were concerns that Moldova would be drawn directly into the conflict; though this remains unlikely, last week's incident has certainly complicated its position. Surely significantly, the day after the missile incident, the pro-Western government of Moldova resigned after 18 months in power, citing political and economic crises due to the Ukraine war. Nonetheless, the prime minister-designate who has stepped into the breach, Dorin Recean, supports strong relations with the West, meaning the course of the country will likely not be changed in terms of its foreign policies. Instead, there are suggestions that further steps may be taken to join NATO or, as a minimum, strengthen military collaborations.

There is, however, one matter

preventing its membership of NATO, which is that the eastern Moldovan region of Transnistria has a large Russian military presence, in addition to a minority Russian population. Any overt approaches to the Western alliance would carry significant risk. Therefore, limited collaborations will most likely be pursued, at least in the immediate term. This is one of several factors in the possible de-escalation of the conflict. While Moldova's position is not generally considered critical in the context of the Ukraine war - with it not formally being a NATO member - Romania's is vital. This NATO member state has denied that Russian missiles flew over its territory last week. The official statement given by Bucharest was that it detected an "aerial target launched from the Black Sea from a ship of the Russian Federation," but "at no point did it intersect with Romania's airspace." This was a denial of Kyiv's claim that two Russian rockets crossed Moldovan and Romanian airspace.

Romania has also been hit by humanitarian, economic and political fallout from the war and it has supported its northern neighbor in various ways. However, its position is both complex and critically important - it is a NATO ally but is juggling several possible outcomes from the progress of the war. Different possible scenarios can impact hugely on the state's future. The second dimension that mitigates against de-

escalation is Volodymyr Zelensky's first visits to Britain and France since the outbreak of war, pressing the Western alliance to offer more weaponry and fighter jets. In France, Emmanuel Macron vowed that Paris would assist in Ukraine's fight, stating that the country is "determined to help Ukraine to victory and the reestablishment of its legitimate rights." Similarly, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz showed strong support by stating he would back Ukraine "financially, with humanitarian aid and with weapons."

In the UK, Prime Minister Rishi Sunak promised that "nothing is off the table" with regards to sending military support to Ukraine. He also stated that, as part of the talks with Zelensky, he was looking at the "supply chain" involved in deploying British fighter jets, suggesting that other states might have to sign off a UK decision to supply them to Kyiv. The overall picture is that Ukraine has support, but material aid will not appear as quickly as it would like - this most likely indicates a prolongation of the conflict. In December, the Kremlin warned of a "long" war after US President Joe Biden offered support to Zelensky during his visit to Washington. The developments of the last week, involving both the dilemmas facing Ukraine's neighbors and Western powers' conditional support, suggest it will be some time before a clearer picture - let alone an end to the hostilities - emerges.

## What did Nicola Sturgeon change in Scotland for women in politics? Everything

Dani Garavelli

PULLING into a service station to listen to Nicola Sturgeon's resignation speech on Wednesday morning, I was hit by a wave of sadness. It wasn't that the first minister's departure was unexpected. Though the precise timing was a shock, she has been visibly flagging for months, and her popularity has been waning even among SNP diehards. "She's lost the room," one loyalist told me recently. When Jacinda Ardern - a politician Sturgeon greatly admires - stepped down as the prime minister of New Zealand with the words: "We give all that we can for as long as we can. And then it's time," I imagined Sturgeon thinking: "That's the way to do it."

Nor am I blind to the chequered nature of the first minister's legacy. It has been disappointing to watch a woman who came to power with such noble aspirations fail to deliver on a succession of pledges, such as closing the educational attainment gap, and become mired in a succession of controversies, such as the ferry fiasco and the "missing" £600,000 of SNP funds.

Yet her speech - and the poise with which she delivered it - brought back all that was good about her leadership: the almost Calvinist sense of duty, the relatability, the humility. These are qualities absent in the five UK prime ministers who have been in office as she attempted to steer her ship through the choppy waters that their greed and populism created. Sturgeon has her own character flaws. Her cau-

tious nature has had a dampening effect on her radicalism, and her reluctance to listen to anyone outside her inner circle led to errors of judgment on the "named person" legislation, which was later found to breach children's right to privacy, and on the gender recognition reform bill, which Rishi Sunak blocked in a historic challenge to Scottish devolution.

Still, if Boris Johnson, Liz Truss or Sunak had possessed a fraction of Sturgeon's integrity, there would have been no Brexit, no support for bankers' bonuses and no hint of tax avoidance. And if they had acknowledged the SNP's overwhelming mandate for a second independence referendum, she would not now be facing criticism for failing to secure one. Furthermore, while Sturgeon's policies may not have been ambitious enough for those on the left of the SNP, Scotland's tax system is the most progressive in the UK, and the Conservatives' welfare reforms are being mitigated by the child payment - £25 per child per week for low-income families.

Sturgeon made enemies on both sides of the constitutional divide. Sometimes it felt like she couldn't win. But the sight of her, eloquent and self-reflective at the podium brought back her finest hour: guiding Scotland through the pandemic. There were mistakes there, too, of course, most notably the release of untested hospital patients into care homes. But her messaging was always clear and direct, and

you never doubted she cared or that she was giving her all.

You could no more imagine Sturgeon socialising while other people mourned alone than you could imagine Johnson stacking chairs at the end of a political meeting (something Sturgeon was wont to do even as first minister). Or resigning gracefully in the interests of his party and his country. Her speech was also a reminder of how she transformed the landscape. When I returned to Scotland from England in 1996, politics and journalism was male-dominated, with female voices pushed to the margins. Sturgeon changed all that, not merely by being a woman at the helm (after all, there have been two female prime ministers during her time in power), but by actively promoting gender equality.

Her government's handling of the initial allegations against Alex Salmond, and the inquiry that followed, almost proved her undoing. But the impulse to change the sexual harassment complaints process came from a place of principle; and she stuck to those principles despite the outpouring of vitriol and misogyny they unleashed. Though Sturgeon insists the fallout from the GRR bill was not the catalyst for her departure, the accusation that she has squandered her right to be considered a feminist must be painful. The timing of her resignation appears to have more to do with the forthcoming conference on "election-based options" designed to force the UK govern-

ment into negotiations on independence. Sturgeon knows her preferred option - turning the general election into a de facto referendum - is divisive. "And I cannot in good conscience ask the party to choose an option based on my judgment, whilst not being convinced that I would be there as leader to see it through," she explained. "Conscience": there's a concept that's been in short supply these last 10 years.

I admire Sturgeon for not clinging too desperately to her dream of personally delivering independence. It must be tough to give up something that has consumed so much of your life - although it may be easier to cede power if you have not desired it for its own sake, but as a means of securing an ideal that transcends your own ego. I admire her, too, for not believing she is indispensable; for having faith in the next generation of SNP politicians. My service station sadness was part ruefulness for what might have been, part fear there was no one else capable of filling her shoes. It's impossible to conceive of any of the touted contenders - Kate Forbes, Keith Brown, Neil Gray - filling stadiums full of selfie-seeking fans. But while Sturgeon's competence was established before she became first minister, her popularity was a product of timing; she rode into town on a post-referendum high. Whoever succeeds her will have to make their own luck, to rethink the party's entire strategy and approach. That may be no bad thing.

The Guardian

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# Food exports decrease 8.24%, imports increase 6.28% in 07 months

ISLAMABAD (APP): Food group exports from the country during first 07 months of current financial year decreased by 8.24 per cent, where as imports swelled 6.29 percent as compared the corresponding period of last year.

Different food commodities worth \$2.708 billion exported, where as food commodities valuing \$5.983 billion imported from July-January, 2022-23 as compared the exports and imports of same period last year, according the data of Pakistan Bureau of Statistics.

The imports of food group into the country during first 07 months of last financial year were recorded at \$5.629 billion, where as food commodities worth 2.951 billion were exported in same period of last financial year.

On year on year basis, food group exports decreased by 18.43 percent in January, 2023 as it was registered at \$384.056 million as compared the exports of \$470.821 million of same month of last year.

On the other hand, food imports into the country during the month of January, 2023 grew by 28.71 percent as it reached to \$1.069 billion as against the imports of \$146.485 million of same month of last year.

During the period from July-January, 2022-23, the exports of meat, meat preparations increased by 18.84 percent as 50,759 metric tons of meat and

## Pakistan exported textile products worth \$10b in 7 months

ISLAMABAD (APP): Textile exports reached to \$10,039.743 million during the first seven months of the current fiscal year (2022-23), Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS) reported Friday.

The textile exports during the period showed a decline of 8.17 per cent as compared to the exports of \$10,933.059 million during the same period of last year (July-January 2021-22).

The textile products that witnessed positive growth during July-January (2022-23) as compared to the corresponding period of last year included raw cotton, the exports of which grew by 134.77 per cent, from \$5.233 million to \$12.286 million. The exports of tents, canvas and tarpaulin also went up by 13.44 per cent, from \$65.339 million to \$74.122 million.

The textile goods that witnessed negative growth meat preparations valuing \$228.121 million exported as compared the exports of 43,765 metric tons worth \$191.957 million of same period last year.

About 13,318 metric tons of tobacco valuing 37,878 million also exported during the period under review as compared the exports of 11,601 metric tons valuing \$32.613 mil-

lion, which was up by 16.14 percent of the exports of same period of last year.

Meanwhile, the exports of all other food items witnessed about 15.14 percent growth in last seven months and recorded at \$567.146 million as compared the exports of \$492.576 million of same period last year. The commodities that observed negative growth in their respective

Exports included rice 15.82 percent, fruits and vegetables 39.78 percent and 0.77 percent, leguminous vegetables decreased by 25.52 percent.

The imports of the food goods that increased during the period under review included wheat 23.47 percent, tea 2.61 percent soyabean 206.30 percent and palm oil imports swelled by 14.84 percent.

\$2,125.698 million; art, silk and synthetic textile by 8.88 percent, from \$262.519 million to \$239.208 million; made-up articles (excluding towels, bedwear) by 11.41 per cent, from \$491.091 million to \$435.050 million while the exports of all other textile materials went down by 3.98 per cent, from \$443.955 million to \$426.276 million.

Meanwhile, on a year-on-year (YoY) basis, the textile goods' exports declined by 14.83 per cent in January 2023 to \$1,321.768 million against exports of \$1,551.890 million in January 2022.

On a month-on-month (MoM) basis the textile goods' exports decreased by 2.53 per cent in January 2022 when compared to the exports of \$2 1,356.061 million in December 2022, according to the PBS data.

Exports included rice 15.82 percent, fruits and vegetables 39.78 percent and 0.77 percent, leguminous vegetables decreased by 25.52 percent.

The imports of the food goods that increased during the period under review included wheat 23.47 percent, tea 2.61 percent soyabean 206.30 percent and palm oil imports swelled by 14.84 percent.

## ICCI and PM Youth Program sign MoU to foster youth entrepreneurship

ISLAMABAD (APP): Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry and Prime Minister Youth Programme Friday signed a memorandum of understanding for promoting youth entrepreneurship.

The MoU signing ceremony was held in the Prime Minister's Office, Ahsan Zafar Bakhtawari, President, Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry and and Deputy Secretary on Youth Affairs Dr. Ali Malik signed the agreement promote youth entrepreneurship in Pakistan.

Special Assistant to the Prime Minister on Youth Affairs, Shaza Fatima Khawaja and others were also present at the ceremony said

a press release.

Speaking on the occasion, Ahsan Zafar Bakhtawari said that this partnership is essential for fostering a culture of entrepreneurship in youth and promoting economic growth in the country.

He said that through this MOU, the two organisations can work together to identify and support talented young individuals with innovative ideas, offering them training, mentorship, access to resources and funding to turn their ideas into successful businesses.

He said that by nurturing the young businessmen and women and providing them with the tools they need to succeed, ICCI and PM's

Youth Programme can help to create jobs, drive innovation, and boost economic development in the country.

Faad Waheed, Senior Vice President ICCI said that youth is over 60 percent of our population and every year, thousands of youngsters are coming out of universities.

He said that it is not possible for the government to provide jobs to all youngsters and the best way to engage them in productive activities is to foster a culture of entrepreneurship in them. He hoped that MoU between ICCI and PM's Youth Program would produce beneficial outcomes for youth.

## Oil prices fall over weak demand signs in US

ANKARA (AA/APP): Oil prices fell further on Friday, as investors fear the Federal Reserve will not stop raising interest rates anytime soon, despite signs of stronger demand in China.

International benchmark Brent crude traded at \$84.17 per barrel at 09.46 a.m. local time (0646 GMT), down 1.14% from the closing price of \$85.14 a barrel in the previous trading session.

At the same time, American benchmark West Texas Intermediate (WTI) traded at \$77.53 per barrel, a 1.22% drop after

the previous session closed at \$78.49 a barrel. Weak demand indicators in the US, the world's largest oil consumer, pushed down prices as investors await the Fed's next interest rate policy.

On Tuesday, data showed that annual US consumer inflation registered at 6.4% in January, slightly easing from 6.5% in December but coming in higher than the market estimate of a 6.2% increase, according to the Labor Department figures released earlier. Also, a larger-than-expected rise in US oil inventories

exerted further downward pressure on prices.

According to data released by the Energy Information Administration (EIA) late Wednesday, US commercial crude oil inventories increased by around 16.3 million barrels to 471.4 million barrels, against the market expectation of an increase of around 321,000 barrels.

However, hopes of a stronger demand in China, the world's largest oil importing country, are limiting further downward movements.

According to the Civil

Aviation Administration of China, more than 39.77 million air passenger trips were handled last month, surging 34.8% year on year, and recovering to 74.5% compared to the same period in 2019.

Additionally, four major airlines in China released sharply higher passenger data for last month.

According to Chinese carriers, passenger flight traffic, measured by revenue passenger kilometers, grew over 40% in January, with Air China leading the pack with a 62% jump.



LAHORE: A laborer selling chips, poppers and crispy items on a handcart at Hall Road.

## 'PM to announce major austerity measures soon'

ISLAMABAD (APP): Minister of State for Finance and Revenue Dr Ayesha Ghous Pasha on Friday said that Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif would announce major austerity measures in all the government institutions to control the fiscal deficit by minimizing the government expenditures.

"The Prime Minister has already formed a Commission to finalize the austerity measures and he himself would announce the recommendation finalized by the Commission," the state minister said while speaking on the floor of the Upper House of the Parliament here.

She said all the cabinet members of the federal government had already voluntarily announced not to get their salaries from the national exchequer.

Ms Pasha said the PDM government was acting

upon the agreement made by the PTI regime with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) only to save the state at the cost of their politics. Referring to the Finance (Supplementary) Bill, 2023 presented by the government in both Houses, she said the government had no option but to take tough decisions as the country's economy was on the verge of default.

"No doubt inflation is high and the people are extremely worried but the point is that this is the time to make structural adjustment because without this we will sink in further darkness", she added.

However, she said that to safeguard the extremely poor segment of the society from the inflationary shocks, the government had decided to raise the allocation for Benazir

Income Support Programme (BISP) by Rs 40 billion to Rs 400 billion. The minister also made it clear that whether the government go with the IMF programme or not, it would have to make structural reforms in key areas of the economy as without it the country's economy would not get stabilized.

The state minister of finance said that the recently increased tariffs in electricity and gas sectors would not apply to the small consumers.

She called upon all political parties and other stakeholders to support the government in this hour of need as the country badly needed tough decisions to bring it out of economic crisis. After her speech the Senate Chairman adjourned the Senate Session to meet again on Monday (February 20, 2023).

## Shipping Activity at Port Qasim

KARACHI (APP): Four ships namely, Irenes Ray, One Altair, Aurelia and Explorer America carrying Containers, Palm oil and Coal, berthed at Qasim International Containers Terminal, Liquid Cargo Terminal and Pakistan International Bulk Terminal respectively on Thursday.

Meanwhile five more ships, Dato Fortune, MSC Iris, Long Beach Express, Alexis and Al-Wajbah scheduled to load/offload Cement, Containers, Wheat and LNG also arrived at outer anchorage of the port during the last 24 hour. A total of 06 ships were engaged at PQA berths during the last 24 hours, out of them 03 ships, Irenes Ray, One Altair and Hafnia Shanghai left the Port on Friday morning.

A Cargo volume of 108,834 tonnes, comprising 77,384 tonnes imports cargo and 31,450 tonnes export cargo, including containerized cargo carried in 2,956 Containers was handled at the port during last 24 hours.

## The Bank of Punjab announced Financial results

### F.P. Report

LAHORE: A meeting of the Board of Directors of The Bank of Punjab (BOP) was held on February 17, 2023. During the meeting, annual Financial Statements of the Bank for the year ended December 31, 2022 were approved by the Board.

The Board, while reviewing financial performance of the Bank, appreciated the efforts of Management for showing remarkable financial results despite very challenging economic conditions and political uncertainty along with once-in-a-lifetime natural disaster, i.e. the super floods of 2022 inflicted losses of USD 30 billion to our fragile economy and to the livelihoods of more than 30 million citizens.

The Board noted with pleasure that despite all the headwind due to global and macroeconomic conditions, Bank has improved in all areas of operations and overall performance has remained well aligned with Bank's strategic business plan. This is being acknowledged by the Market as during the period under review, BOP has been awarded with 11 prestigious domestic and international awards and accreditations during one year which is unprecedented and

exceptional in the industry, including; the Corporate Finance House of the Year 2021 - Fixed Income award from the CFA society of Pakistan, and PBA's Best Bank for Small & Medium Enterprises 2022 award.

During the year 2022, BOP launched a range of product and service offerings, including Credit Card, Digibop Mobile App & Internet Banking, philanthropic employee volunteering program "BOP Madadgar", in addition to BOP Naaz, and BOP@Work. BOP Select was launched to expand BOP's Khaas proposition, and NIFT ePay Services were introduced to increase its Mobile App's use-case scenarios. Other high-profile product launches include the development of the innovative Area Yield Index Insurance, Electronic Warehouse Receipt Financing, and an all-new Card Management System with Euronet. An intuitive Customer Lifecycle Management system was also implemented to enhance the Bank's digital service delivery.

As a result, during the year 2022, Bank's Balance Sheet grew by 24% and reached the level of Rs. 1.48 Trillion. As on December 31, 2022, Bank's deposits stood at the level of Rs.1.23 Trillion showing

a commendable growth of 22%. With prudent management of resources, aggressive business expansion and introduction of new products & services, the Bank has been able to post before tax profit of Rs. 18.51 billion during year 2022. Earnings per Share (EPS) for year 2022 stood at Rs. 3.64 per share.

During the year 2022, Net Interest Margin (NIM) improved to Rs. 30.76 billion as against Rs. 29.88 billion during year 2021. Non-Markup/ Interest Income (excluding gains on securities) increased to Rs. 10.23 billion as against Rs. 6.12 billion showing a substantial increase of 67%. During the year, Bank's NPLs reduced to Rs. 51.56 billion on account of recovery/regularization with net recoveries/reversal of Rs. 0.47 billion during the year.

Investments and Gross Advances were recorded at Rs. 638.26 billion and Rs. 634.38 billion, respectively. Book Value per share (excluding surplus on assets) improved to Rs. 22.65 as against Rs. 21.26 as on December 31, 2021. As on December 31, 2022, Bank's Equity improved to Rs. 65.05 billion as against Rs. 54.83 billion as on December 31, 2021. The bank during the year managed to improve its risk profile despite the

economy being besieged by severe challenges.

In addition, BOP was also able to raise tier 1 capital via TFC issue of Rs. 8.02 billion exhibiting the faith the market has in BOP's financial strength. Bank's CAR and L.R stood at 13.11% and 3.46% respectively as of December 31, 2022.

Keeping in view Bank's Strategic Business Plan envisaging aggressive business growth and further CAPEX commitment in the areas of Information Technology & Digitalization, requiring strong capital base, the Board announced and recommended a Stock Dividend of 10% for Shareholders for the year 2022.

In recognition of Bank's strong financial position, The Pakistan Credit Rating Agency (PACRA) has maintained Bank's long term entity rating at "AA+" with short term rating being already at the highest rank of "A1+". The Bank currently has a countrywide network of 780 online branches, including 140 Taqwa Islamic Banking Branches. Further, the Bank is providing 24/7 banking services to the customers through its vast network of 706 ATMs and other Digital Banking Services.

### COURT NOTICE

In the Court of Qaisar Khan Afridi Additional District Judge II/Azafi Zila Qazi Buner at Daggar: Appeal No.55/13. Institution 9/5/2022 Date of hearing. 10/3/2023. Amrati Shah etc VS Mst. Jamela etc. Notice to no 3.Amerazoren s/o Abdul Ghafor.8/4.Mst Qeshon Bibi 8/5.Norjihan Bibi.8/6.Mst Huma Bibi.8/7.Roqia Bibi d/o Mian Asghar (late). 9/5.Mst Rahem Bibi d/o Mst Talimamnd.10/1.Mst Bakhtia widow. 10/2.Wasem sons of Shah Khan(late).17.Dost Mohamad s/o Mohamad Qalandar.19.Mst Khanbaro widow. 20.Dowlat Khan.21.Sabat Khan.22.Ezzat Khan. 23.Sifat Khan sons of Mohamad Qalandar. 25.Mst Nihar d/o Mohamad Qalandar. 27/5.Jihana Bibi. 27/4.Mehtova Bibi. 27/5.Amrta Bibi. 27/6.Zulekha Bibi. 27/7.Qudsia Bibi daughters of Eshaq Mian.28/3.Nowshad Bacha.28/4.Zarshad Bacha.28/5.Shamshad Bacha.28/6.Mst Bakht Roza d/o Mst Gul Rasheda(late).29/1.Said Bakhtshad Bacha. 29/3.Arshad Bacha sons of Shamdad.31/1.Dishad Bacha.31/2.Hakem Said Bacha.31/3.Liaqat Bacha.31/4.Akhtar Ali Bacha sons of Javed (late).32/2.Imran Bacha.32/3.Iqbal Bacha sons of Nowshad (late).32/6.Suleman Bacha son.32/7.Aysha Bibi. 32/8.Zakia Bibi daughters of Nowshad (late).29/4.Mst Salma Bibi.29/5.Zenat Bibi. 29/6.Jihan Sardara. 29/7.Mst Begum daughters of Shamdar (late).33.Shamsad.34.Zarshad sons.35.Mst Bakht Roza d/o Pemadar. 36.Jihan Sultan widow.37.Mst Mehrez Bibi.38.Nasreen Bibi. 39.Taranum. 40.Ezhar Bibi daughters of Ismail.42. Humayun. 43.Zakir sons of Ismail. 44.Zenat widow. 45.Sajad.46.Aftab.47.Alamzeb sons of Mohamad Wahab.50.Mst Khasiat. 51.Zitron.52.Khudija Minhas. 53.Abdia. 54.Majida. 55.Sema. 56.Maria. 57.Husna. 58.Tahira daughters 59.Mst Miraj widow 60.Mian Husain Shah. 65.Bakhtsher Zada son of Umer Mian. 66.Hijm Bibi.67.Zitron Bibi.68.Bakht Syda Bibi daughters of Umer Mian.69.Shah Hider son. 70.Asma Bibi.71.Nigara Bibi.72.Fatma Bibi daughters of Mst Jabena 73.Mian Alamzeb. 74.Mian Norzeb sons. 75.Nor Saeeda.76.Bakht Said. 77.Bakhtia. 78.Rabia.79.Nazia.80.Maro daughters of Mst Balges. 81.Sultanzada s/o Qambar.82.Mst Khunzadga widow. 83.Khanzada. 94.Lalzada. 95.Nawabzada.96.Mian Norzada sons. 97.Mst Bakht Syed Bibi.98.Nabia Bibi.99.Saeeda Bibi. 100.Shughla Bibi daughters of Sahibzada. 110.Mst Bacha Bibi widow. 111. Yunas. 112.Haron Said.113.Fazal Said. 114.Fazal Wahab sons of Masken. 115.Rasol Said Bacha. 117.Jamahed Bacha. 118.Mian Norsaid sons. 119.Mst Jihanzara Bibi. 120.Bakht Roza Bibi. 121.Sharafat Bibi. 122.Shahen Bibi. 123.Jacha Bibi daughters of Mst Bakht resident of Towsha Cheena. 8/1. Taluzar. 8/3.Mian Gul Nazer sons of Mian Asghar.28/1/1. Said Bakhtshad.28/1/3. Arshad sons of Shamadar. 28/2/1. Rishad. 28/2/2. Hakem Said. 28/2/3. Liaqat. 28/2/4. Akhtar Ali sons of Javed Bacha (late) resident of Towda Cheena teshel Gadezai district Buner. Whereas in the above mentioned case the mentioned defendants can not be served in the ordinary way, it is, therefore, proclaimed that if the said defendants will/shall not appear personally or through duly authorized agent or pleader in the court at 8.30 am dated 10/3/2023 the proceeding will be taken ex- parte. Given under my hand and seal of this Court.



LARKANA: A man is busy making leaf baskets near Nodiro Road.





## In brief

## Registration for marathon

MULTAN (APP): Registration for the marathon, organised by DHA in collaboration with the Sports Department, will begin from February 20. The schedule for the marathon has been released. Director Marketing Col (Retd) Sarfraz Nazar along with District Sports Officer Farooq Latif shared the complete details of the event and said that there would be two categories based on participants' age - under 22 years and above 22 years. The registration process will continue till February 23 at the district sports department. The marathon will be start at 9:00 on February 24, while cash prizes will be awarded to two position holders of both categories, according to a press release issued here.

## Dahani undergoes surgery

LAHORE (INP): Pakistani pacer and Multan Sultans player Shahnawaz Dahani underwent a surgery for his fractured index finger of his bowling arm. The right-arm bowler also shared a tweet from a hospital before the surgery when he requested fans to pray for his recovery as he is going to get his "Pinky finger" operated. "I am very thankful to PCB's Chief Medical Officer Dr Najeeb Soomro for monitoring me, and physically being present with me during this operation & taking best care of me," he wrote. On Wednesday, Multan Sultans replaced injured Shahnawaz Dahani with fast bowler Mohammad Ilyas. He had injured his finger in the opening match of the eighth edition of the Pakistan Super League on Monday. The replacement had been approved by the event technical committee that includes Haroon Rashid (Chair), Usman Wahla (member), Dr Najeeb Soomro (Member, Medical) and Sameer Khosa (Member, Legal).

## Thiem, Diego knocked out

BUENOS AIRES (Agencies): Dominic Thiem and Diego Schwartzman were eliminated from the Argentina Open on Thursday. Thiem, the 2020 US Open champion who is trying to regain his form after falling to 99th in the rankings, lost 6-4, 6-4 to Juan Pablo Varillas. Schwartzman, the local favorite, was beaten by Bernabe Zapata Miralles 6-1, 6-3. Miralles will play another Argentine, Francisco Cerundolo, in the quarterfinals. Cerundolo beat Jaume Munar 6-2, 6-1. Third-seeded Lorenzo Musetti beat Pedro Cachin 6-2, 6-3 and will face Varillas next. In the other quarterfinals Friday, top-seeded and second-ranked Carlos Alcaraz faces Dusan Lajovic and second-seeded Cameron Norrie takes on Tomas Martin Etcheverry.

## England-NZ Test finely poised

MAUNGANUI (Agencies): England's first Test against New Zealand is fascinatingly poised after Tom Blundell's superb century kept the hosts afloat on day two in Mount Maunganui. Responding to England's first-innings 325-9 declared, New Zealand found themselves 83-5 and 182-7, either side of Devon Conway being dismissed for 77. But wicketkeeper Blundell battled to his fourth Test hundred to drag New Zealand to 306 all out, a deficit of only 19, despite Ollie Robinson bowling superbly to claim 4-54.

# Rossouw onslaught helps Multan Sultans beat Peshawar Zalmi

MULTAN (Monitoring Desk): Half centuries from Rilee Rossouw and Mohammad Rizwan helped Multan Sultans cruise past Peshawar Zalmi by 56 runs. Zalmi were punished for sloppiness in the field, while Rossouw, who had an indifferent SA20, is back to the brilliant best he seems to find every year at the PSL. A 36-ball 75, including a 75-run stand in 35 balls with fellow South African David Miller, helped the Sultans amass 210, the highest score in this year's PSL. Zalmi responded brightly for the first half of the chase, especially during an electric partnership between Mohammad Harris and Saim Ayub, but lost wickets in clumps, and in the end fell well short.

Zalmi had won the toss and opted to field, but while they kept Shan Masood relatively quiet in the Powerplay, Rizwan ensured they couldn't build much pressure. When Masood, who struggled for fluency in a scratchy 25-ball 20, got squeezed down leg, Rossouw arrived and with him came immediate impetus. He picked up where he'd left off against Quetta Gladiators 48 hours

ago, and for ten overs between the ninth and the 18th, each one saw at least two boundaries struck.

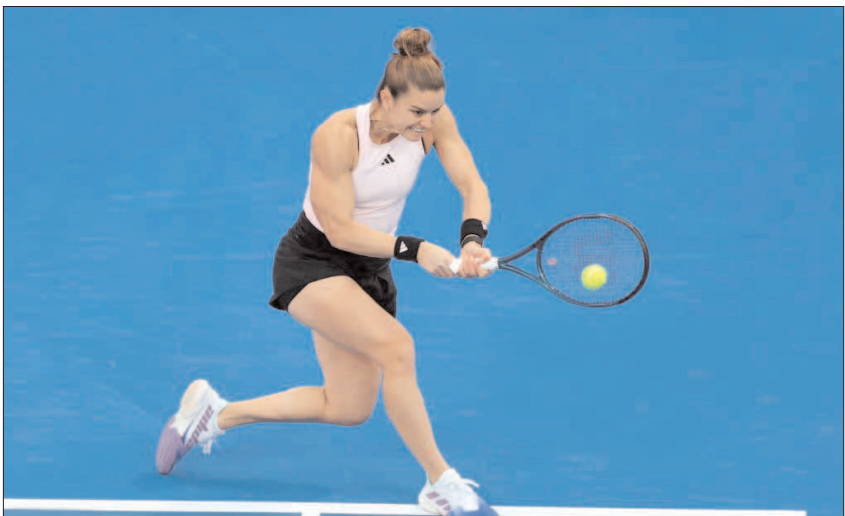
The last 12 overs produced 149 runs, and while Rizwan and Miller were more than capable support acts, Rossouw batted like he needed no help whatsoever. No bowler was spared, even if regular misfields didn't help the Zalmi cause. At the death, the worst aspects of Wahab Riaz were also on display, overstepping twice in the 20th over and conceding 19 runs in the process.

Zalmi have a fair few entertaining hitters flanking Babar Azam, who fell early, with Sultans' golden boy Ihsanullah removing him with his first ball. It cleared the way for an exquisitely fun partnership between two of Pakistan's brightest T20 batting prospects. Harris looked every inch the Imran Nazir regeneration, slogging to all parts to keep up with the asking rate. Ayub feels a bit more classical in his shot making, though equally destructive. While Sultans allowed them pace on the ball, the duo flayed them to all parts, and by the end of the eighth over, they were 20

runs ahead of where the Sultans were at that stage.

But it's difficult to replicate Rossouw's sustained power, and the pivotal moment came in the ninth over. The fielding has been ragged at this year's PSL so far, but a lovely stop and direct hit by Abbas Afridi caught Harris out at the non-striker's end. From thereon, the Sultans never relinquished their dominance. Tom Kohler-Cadmore holed out cheaply, Ayub and Rovman Powell kept hopes alive with a flurry of fours and sixes, but then five wickets in 16 balls killed the game off entirely. The extra runs an enfeebled bowling attack allowed now felt insurmountable all of the sudden, and the last seven wickets fell for 24 runs.

Fittingly, it was Ihsanullah who bookended the wickets column, taking the last wicket just as he had the first. He backed up his magical performance on Wednesday with figures of 3 for 24 to take an early lead in the PSL wicket-takers chart, and helped give the Sultans another win - as well as another healthy net run rate boost.



DOHA: Maria Sakkari of Greece returns the ball to Jessica Pegula of USA during their women's singles semi-final match.

## ITF Pakistan World Junior Tennis C'ships end with exciting final contests

ISLAMABAD (APP): Second seed Cem Atlamis of Turkey and Mikhail Khodorchenko of Russia lifted the Boys Doubles title of ITF Pakistan PPL - Syed Dilawar Abbas World Junior Tennis Championships as they edged passed Keagan Keith Jonathan of Malaysia and Jihwan Kim of Korea in the straight sets 6-3 6-1.

Boys Singles final was played between qualifier Yuan Lu from China and K a m o n p a n y a k o m Thadpong from Thailand. Yuan Lu played excellent game and exhibited high standard of game throughout the match and did not allow his opponent to settle down. He won the final in the straight sets 6-2, 6-4.

The 2nd seed Vlada

Guryleva of Russia and Taira Abildayeva of Kazakhstan annexed the Girls Doubles title when they struggle hard to win their match against Anastassiya Kim Kazakhstan and Jinshu Xia of China 7-5 6-1.

In the first set Kim and Xia played aggressive and took the lead 3-0 by breaking the 1st and 3rd game of Taira and Vlada but after losing the initial games they changed their game plan to reduce the lead and level the 1st set 5-5 games all.

In the 12th game Taira and Valda played excellent game and took the set at 7-5. In the second set they did not allow their opponents to settle down and continue to maintain their winning pace to win the second set and match.

Yerzhan Kistafin, Ambassador of the Republic of Kazakhstan to Pakistan was the chief guest at the prize distribution ceremony, while Senator Nisar A. Memon was the guest of honour.

Following are the results: Boys Singles Final: Yuan Lu (CHN) bt K a m o n p a n y a k o m Thadpong (THA) 6-2, 6-4 Boys Doubles Final: Cem Atlamis (TUR) / Mikhail Khodorchenko (RUS) bt Keagan Jonathan (MAS) / Jihwan Kim (KOR) 6-4, 6-3 Girls Doubles Final: Taira Abildayeva (KAZ) / Vlada Guryleva (RUS) bt Anastassiya Kim (KAZ) / Jinshu Xia (CHN) 7-5, 6-1.

Final of Girls Singles will be played on Saturday 18th February 2023 at 1:30 PM.

## Barcelona fight back to secure thrilling 2-2 draw with Man United

BARCELONA (INP): Barcelona fought back to earn a 2-2 draw with Manchester United in a pulsating Europa League knockout round playoff first leg.

United were the better side for large parts of the game and controlled the tempo but were denied by goalkeeper Marc-Andre ter Stegen who made three outstanding saves in the first half. LaLiga leaders Barcelona struck first, five minutes after the break, when Marcos Alonso scored with a towering header at the far post from a corner.

Marcus Rashford levelled three minutes later following a counter-attack down the right, slotting home a smart low finish between Ter Stegen and the near post. The in-form Rashford also created United's second, sprinting into the box from a short corner and delivering a low cross into a crowded six-yard area where the ball deflected into the goal off defender Jules Kounde.

United players and manager Erik ten Hag complained strongly after what looked like a clear foul by last-man Kounde on Rashford just outside the box, an infringement that should have produced a red card for the French international. Barcelona dug deep to grab the equaliser, however, and mistakes by United's defence gifted the ball on the edge of their box to Raphinha whose cross eluded David de Gea and went into the net.

Barca made a late push for the win and could have scored when an Ansu Fati close range strike was denied and Casemiro's mis-hit clearance came off the crossbar. Barcelona will travel to next week's second leg at Old Trafford with a depleted midfield as Pedri came off in the first half with a leg injury and Gavi will be suspended. In Austria, a late header by midfielder Nicolas Capaldo earned Salzburg a 1-0 win over AS Roma at the Red

Bull Arena.

Jose Mourinho's Roma controlled the game and could have gone in front minutes before halftime through striker Tammy Abraham but his shot from inside the box was saved by goalkeeper Philipp Kohn. The Italians had another chance nine minutes from time when Andrea Belotti's close-range strike crashed against the crossbar.

But Salzburg defender Strahinja Pavlovic set up Capaldo with a lofted pass into the box for the Argentine to nod in the winner in the 88th minute. In Amsterdam, Union Berlin were unfortunate not to beat Ajax Amsterdam away in the goalless first leg of their tie at the Johan Cruyff Arena.

The Bundesliga front-runners had the ball in the home net after 66 minutes when Morten Thorsby fired the ball in from close range, having cleverly deceived two defenders as he chested down a cross from Jerome Roussillon.



MULTAN: Rilee Rossouw and David Miller embrace during thier partnership.

## Pakistan qualify for Tent Pegging WC 2023

I S L A M A B A D (Monitoring Desk): Pakistan Tent Pegging team continued their domination in the recently-concluded Tent Pegging World Cup qualifiers and booked their spot in the mega event, scheduled later this year.

Pakistan, who dominated the opening two days of the qualifiers, dominated the final day of the event as well as the national side claimed the first position and also booked their spot in the second mega event of the sport.

Meanwhile, besides Pakistan, Jordan also qualified for the Tent Pegging World Cup after finishing second in the six-team tournament. According to the details, Jordan finished first in single players, while Pakistan claimed second and third spots.

The host nation, however, won the qualifiers with an overall 527 points in the three-day-long competition. Following Pakistan's world cup qualification, the President Equestrian Federation of Pakistan (ECP) Sultan Mohammad Ali congratulated the national contingent.

"The Pakistani players performed brilliantly throughout the event," said President EFP Sultan Mohammad Ali. "God willing, this time the World Cup will also be ours," he added.

It is pertinent to mention here that Pakistan was given the opportunity to host the Tent Pegging World Cup Qualifiers after India lost the hosting rights of the event last year for letting Indian players play for Nepal's team illegally. Six teams participated in the event which includes hosts Pakistan, Egypt, Libya, Belarus, Iran and Syria.

## India's chief cricket selector resigns

NEW DELHI (AFP): India's chief cricket selector Chetan Sharma resigned Friday, an official told AFP, after a TV network sting caught him gossiping about players and claiming the widespread use of unsanctioned injections to pass fitness tests.

The 57-year-old had accused ex-captain Virat Kohli and former cricket board chief Sourav Ganguly of an ego clash in a candid conversation recorded on a hidden camera and aired by broadcaster Zee News.

Kohli felt he was "bigger than the board" but felt slighted after concluding that Ganguly had forced him out of the white-ball captaincy, Sharma said.

Sharma also claimed that doctors operating outside of the cricket board's oversight regularly gave Indian international players injections to help them pass fitness tests for selection, without giving further details. KL Rahul acrobatics help put India in charge of second Test.

"He has given his resignation and it has been accepted," a Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) official told AFP on condition of anonymity.

The Press Trust of India quoted an unnamed BCCI official who said Sharma's position had "become untenable" after the sting.

"He resigned voluntarily and wasn't asked to resign," PTI reported the official as saying.

## 3rd Jinnah Gold Polo Cup: BN Polo qualify for main final

LAHORE (APP): The BN Polo edged out FG Polo by 7-6 to qualify for the main final of the 3rd Jinnah Gold Polo Cup 2023 sponsored by Al Rehman Developers and Town Planners while Master Paints/Newage Cables beat HN Polo to qualify for the subsidiary final here at the Jinnah Polo Fields on Friday.

The match between BN Polo and FG Polo was very exciting. At the end of the first two chukker, FG Polo were leading the BN Polo by 5-2. But in the third and fourth chukkers, BN Polo team turned the tables of the match by staging a strong comeback and won the match by a narrow margin of 7-6 and earned a place in the main final.

From BN Polo, Hamza Mawaz Khan emerged as hero of the day as he was the major contributor in the BN Polo's tremendous triumph. He displayed outstanding mallet and pony skills and smashed in five superb goals. He was ably assisted by Tito Ruiz Guinazu, who thrashed in two impressive goals.

From FG Polo, Rual Laplacette though did well

with mallet and polo pony and also hammered five fabulous goals while Mian Abbas Mukhtar converted one goal, yet they couldn't convert more goals to guide their side to a well-deserving victory. The defeat also broke the unbeaten winning streak of FG Polo.

FG Polo started the match in great style by slamming in three back-to-back goals to earn a 3-0 lead. BN Polo then opened their account by successfully converting a 30-yard penalty to reduce the margin to 1-3. Just before the end of the first chukker, FG Polo converted one more to stretch their lead to 4-1. FG Polo scored one more in the beginning of the second chukker to enhance their lead to 5-1.

BN hammered one before the end of the chukker to make it 2-5 and then they dominated the entire third chukker by thrashing two back-to-back goals to further reduce the margin to 4-5. FG Polo though started the fourth and decisive chukker by converting an impressive goal to gain a 6-4 lead, yet it were BN Polo, who stole

the show as they came from behind and fired in three back-to-back goals to win the most entertaining match of the day by a close margin of 7-6.

Manuel Crespo steered Master Paints/Newage Cables to a convincing 10-7 victory over HN Polo in another match of the day. Manuel Crespo, who replaced the ailing Simon Prada, played extremely well for Master Paints/Newage Cables and smashed in superb six goals while Juan Cruz Greguol thrashed in three goals and Farooq Amin Sufi converted one.

From the HN Polo team, which had a two-goal handicap advantage, Raja Mikayil Sami banged in a brace while Raja Jalal Arsalan, Raja Samiullah and Haider Naseem struck one goal apiece.

A large number of spectators, including polo players and their families, were present on the occasion to watch the thrilling matches. Jinna Polo Club President Lt Col Shoaib Aftab (R), Secretary Maj Taimur Ali (R) and others were also present there.

## Adnan Jalil inaugurates 7th National Road Cycling C'ship



F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Caretaker Minister for Industries, Commerce and Technical Education Adnan Jalil during a simple but impressive ceremony at the Northern Bypass Peshawar on Friday afternoon awarded medals to three female cyclists Rajya Shabbir, Rabia Gharib and Bisma Choudhry who won the preliminary round of the 7th four-day National Road Cycling Championship.

He also inaugurated this national championship formally. Apart from a large number of players and fans, Secretary Sports Captain (R) Mushtaq Ahmed, Director General Sports Khalid Khan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Cycling Association President Nisar Ahmed and other championship organizers were also present on this occasion.

This 13.5 km cycling race is being played from February 17 to 20 in different stages wherein sep-

arate categories of men, women, children and students have been kept. Ten teams from across the country and a total of 113 players are participating in the championship.

The caretaker Minister appreciated the efforts of Secretary Sports and others for organizing this unique cycling championship, and assured that the provincial government will continue to encourage sports and other healthy activities at all levels.

He said that along with conventional education, comprehensive plans are being prepared to impart modern technical education and skills to the youth of the province and to develop their creative capabilities.

On this occasion, Adnan Jalil was also given a shield by the organizers for his outstanding services in various fields including promotion of sports activities as well as boosting trade and industry in the province.



## Javed Miandad admitted to hospital

KARACHI (Monitoring Desk): Cricket legend and former Pakistan team captain Javed Miandad has been admitted to a local hospital in Karachi after his health deteriorated.

According to the family sources, he was taken to the medical facility after he "suddenly collapsed". Javed Miandad is a chronic patient of hypertension and sugar.

Born in 1952, Javed played for Pakistan in Tests and One-Day Internationals between 1975 and 1996. Noted for his unique technique and impressive control, Miandad has won accolades and applause from cricket historians as well as contemporaries. Miandad was ranked 44th among the best cricketers of all time by the ESPN Legends of Cricket.

He has served as a captain of the Pakistan team. He is widely known for his historic last ball big six against India in 1986 at Sharjah, when 4 runs were required to win, winning an international game in that fashion for the first time, and for his contribution with the bat in the 1992 ICC World Cup.

After his playing career, Miandad has remained the coach of Pakistan cricket team on various occasions, as well as held key positions in the Pakistan Cricket Board.

He had three coaching stints with the Pakistan national team.

In 2009, Miandad was inducted into the ICC Cricket Hall of Fame.





## In brief

### Police register case

ISLAMABAD (APP): Islamabad police have registered a case against the person keeping the leopard at the house who injured several persons in a housing society. According to the police spokesman, a case of the incident has been registered at Sihala police station against the unknown accused under section 324/289 of the Pakistan Penal Code. The leopard was domesticated by an unknown person and the accused endangered the lives of citizens by keeping dangerous animals. "The search for the accused is going on and legal action will be taken after arresting him soon," he added. It is pertinent to mention here that a wild leopard entered the house at DHA Phase-II. The people of the neighborhood informed the relief organization and wildlife about his existence in the area. Islamabad Wildlife Management Board (IWMB) and Capital Development Authority took more than five hours to capture a leopard that injured several persons and panicked residents. As per initial reports, three people got hurt, including two staff members of IWMB, during the entire episode which resulted in the capture of the wild cat.

### Two bike lifters arrested

RAWALPINDI (APP): Police have arrested two bike lifters and recovered five stolen motorcycles and other items from their possession. According to a police spokesman, a team under the supervision of SHO, Bani Police Station managed to net two bike lifters namely Dilawar, ringleader and Sohob and recovered five stolen motorcycles and other items from their possession. A case has been registered against the accused while further investigation is underway. Superintendent of Police, Rawal said the accomplices and facilitators of the accused would also be sent behind the bars. He said that the operations against the lawbreakers would be accelerated further.

### AIOU to hold Int'l moot

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU) will hold 4th International Conference titled "Early Childhood Development (ECD)" on February 22. The conference being organized under the theme of "Nurturing for Transforming Lives: The Power of Early Childhood Development" and will be participated by National and International ECD experts, practitioners, researchers, policymakers, and teachers for the educational institutions. Speaking about the event the Vice Chancellor, AIOU, Prof. Dr. Nasir Mahmood informed that this AIOU is organizing this conference in collaboration with the Ministry of Planning Development and Special Initiatives, UNICEF, World Health Organization, Pakistan Alliance for Early Childhood, Rupani Foundation, Save the Children, Shifa Foundation, Sightsaver, Aga Khan Foundation, and Aga Khan University. Chief Executive Officer, Pakistan Alliance for Early Childhood, Khadija Khan while briefing the representatives of all partner organizations, said that all the arrangements have been finalized. During the event noted scholars will present papers on Good Health, Adequate Nutrition, Security and Safety, Responsive Care giving, Early Learning and development opportunities, and Early Childhood Development in Emergencies while education experts will highlight the opportunities for healthy development at early age of children.



ISLAMABAD: Chairman Senate, Muhammad Sadiq Sanjrani exchanging views with Saudi Ambassador to Pakistan, Nawaf Bin Said Al-Malki at Parliament House.

## Pirzada urges handing over of children to CPI in presence of lady police

ISLAMABAD (PPI): Federal Minister for Human Rights Mian Riaz Hussain Pirzada, being the patron, chaired the third meeting of Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) Child Protection Advisory Board here in the Ministry of Human Rights, Islamabad on Friday. The objective of the meeting was to discuss the pending issues of the Child Protection Institute (CPI) and Zainab Alert Response and Recovery Agency (ZARRA).

The Advisory Board is mandated, under the Child Protection Act, 2018, to advise the government on matters relating to policy, legislation and implementation of the rights of children at ICT level.

In the meeting, Board unanimously approved to

move for certain amendments in the relevant section/clause of the act to change the composition of the Advisory Board to make it more practical and viable.

The Director General CPI Ms Rabeea Hadi requested the representative of the Inspector General of Police in Islamabad for more coordination and support in tracing of Afghan Children, their reunification and particularly in the rehabilitation of drug addict children those are handed over to CPI by the police.

During the meeting, issues of relocation and construction of customized building of CPI, resource allocation, drafting of supplementary rules, institutionalization of Helpline 1099, Prime Minister

Performance Delivery Unit and ZARRA and recruitment of staff for both CPI and ZARRA also came under the discussion.

Moreover, the board discussed the proposal to move for necessary legislation for the adoption of unclaimed children from the CPI. Riaz Hussain Pirzada urged the Islamabad Police to make sure the availability of lady police while handing over the custody of children to CPI for making this process more protected. The Minister also advised the concerned authorities of CPI and ZARRA to fully utilize the human, tangible and financial resources to make both CPI and ZARRA fully functional and effective for the better safety of children in ICT.

## PTA conducts successful raids against illegal issuance of SIMs

ISLAMABAD (INP): Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) conducted successful raids in multiple locations against illegal issuance of SIM cards and arrested five accused. In Mingora, Swat, a successful raid was conducted by PTA Zonal Office Peshawar in collaboration with FIA Cyber Crime Circle Peshawar against a mobile company franchisee suspected of illegally issuing SIM cards, said a

PTA news release on Friday.

The suspects in the guise of BISP disbursements, used to take biometric information (finger/thumb impressions) of subscribers for issuance of.

Similarly, in Lahore, PTA Zonal Office and Federal Investigation Agency (FIA)'s Cyber Crime Circle Gujranwala conducted raids against three franchisees of a mobile company suspected

of illegally issuing SIM cards in Gujranwala, Pasoor, and Narowal.

During the raids, BVS devices issued by mobile company and a bank for BISP disbursements, and active SIM cards were confiscated. Five suspects were arrested. FIA has started further investigations. PTA had previously filed complaints with FIA based on suspicious issuance of SIMs at sale channels.

## When fantasy meets reality: Hazards of online relationships

ISLAMABAD (APP): Online relationships can range from mild to potentially dangerous as some users are serious about their online connections, building real-life relationships with those they have met online while others treat them as a casual form of entertainment.

Many users share personal information, real-life experiences, and even photos without fully considering the consequences. The internet is a necessary tool in modern times and it is also important for users to approach these relationships with caution for being mindful of only sharing what is necessary and appropriate for the relationship. But at times, online relationships could prove toxic, and harassment can arise when one person becomes obsessive and controlling. The anonymity of the internet can also lead to a false sense of security for the person making the harassment as they may not think their actions will have real-life consequences.

"The dangers of online relationships are real, and they should not be underestimated," warns Clinical Psychologist Ilsa Malik. "From catfishing to addiction, there are numerous hazards that can arise when engaging in online relationships. It is crucial for users to approach these relationships with caution and be aware of the potential consequences."

According to Malik, catfishing is a significant concern in the world of online relationships. When someone creates a fake online identity, it can lead to emotional harm when the true identity is finally revealed. This can cause severe damage to one's mental health and self-esteem.

Online harassment is another serious issue, particularly for women that can come in various forms, including bullying, cyberstalking, and cyberbullying. This type of harassment can have a negative impact on one's mental health and overall well-being.

"Online relationships can also become addictive," says Malik, leading to a neglect of real-life relationships and responsibilities. This can have negative impacts on

mental health, work performance, and overall well-being.

Sharing personal information online can also be risky, as it can be used by others for malicious purposes, including identity theft, financial fraud, and even stalking, he explained.

Doxing is another threat in online relationships that can have a devastating impact on an individual's life. It is the act of collecting and publicly sharing someone's personal information online without their consent including name, address, phone number, and even financial information that leads to harassing, intimidating or threatening the individual, and the consequences can be severe.

"Internet relationships can start out as fun and non-serious, but they can quickly become a matter of concern," warns mental health expert Dr Mahmood Ur Rehman, adding that it was important to approach them with caution and be aware of the potential hazards, such as online harassment, addiction, invasion of privacy, emotional harm, and "even physical harm". "The victim can experience threats, harassment, and even physical harm, and their personal information can be used for malicious purposes, such as identity theft or financial fraud," says Rehman, adding that doxing can happen to anyone from celebrities to everyday people, and the motives behind it can vary.

The experts suggest setting clear boundaries for protection along with clear communication of expectations and boundaries including what is acceptable and what is not acceptable. Experts also emphasize the importance of being cautious about the information shared online, setting clear boundaries with online partners, taking time to build trust before sharing personal information, and being wary of red flags. The internet and online relationships present their own set of hazards, yet they are also a set of essential tools in the interconnected world. It demands a balance between the potential dangers and the many benefits that the internet provides.

### ANF arrests four on recovery of 3 kg narcotics

RAWALPINDI (APP): Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF) Pakistan while conducting four counter-narcotics operations seized over three kg narcotics and arrested four accused, said an ANF Headquarters spokesman here on Friday.

He informed that in an operation at Bacha Khan International Airport, Peshawar recovered 127 grams charras from the possession of two Sharjah-bound passengers, residents of Karak going on flight no. ER-751.

In another operation 70 grams heroin was recovered from a parcel booked for Qatar at Rawalpindi mail office. In third operation conducted near Multan Airport Road, ANF recovered 1.8 kg charras and 104 grams heroin from the possession of an accused resident of Multan.

The spokesman informed that ANF in a raid at Garden Town Karachi managed to recover one kg Ice drug from the possession of two drug traffickers, resident of Karachi. The spokesman said that separate cases have been registered against the accused while further investigations are under process.

### Special checkpoints set up

ISLAMABAD (APP): Islamabad police have set up special checkpoints at various locations and important boulevards to ensure further effective security in the city.

In a statement, police said that effective measures were being taken to maintain law and order and enhance security in the city, in compliance with the special directions of the Inspector General of Police (IGP) Islamabad, Dr Akbar Nasir Khan.

Ambulances, police vehicles, other government vehicles, and police personnel will also be checked at these points.

Government officials and citizens have been appealed to keep their identity cards with them while traveling and cooperate with the police during the checking process.

IGP Islamabad has said that maintaining law and order and protecting the lives and property of citizens were among the top priorities of the Islamabad Police.

## NA body directs authorities to address over billing issue

ISLAMABAD (APP): The National Assembly's Standing Committee on Energy (Power Division) on Friday asked the authorities concerned to pass on directions to all the Electricity Distribution Companies (DISCOs) and the K-Electric to ensure billing as per meter reading.

The committee met under the Chairmanship, MNA Sardar Riaz Mehmood Khan Mazari. The Committee also urged the Ministry to submit a report on how to tackle issue of forced load-shedding on electricity feeders by the respective electricity distribution company, said a press release.

The Committee was apprised that the K-Electric was forcibly shutting down various feeders in Karachi on the pretext on non-recovery of electricity bills. The member of the committee from Karachi contented that the electricity consumers

paying their bills regularly should not suffer on the behest of the electricity kunda Mafia and habitual defiant consumers.

The committee agreed with the member and opined that issue was pervasive besides being grave and the Ministry should look into this and bring a comprehensive report in that regard in next meeting of the committee.

The Secretary Power apprised the committee that it was really a serious issue but the DISCOs had restored to this due to continuous losses, theft and accumulation of huge arrears. He agreed that the law abiding citizens were facing the brunt in that regard. He informed that various options were taken into consideration but dropped due to huge financial cost. He assured the committee for bringing up his Ministry's recommendations in next meeting.

## Administrator takes notice of illegal office orders

ISLAMABAD (PPI): Administrator Karachi Dr. Syed Saifur Rahman, while taking notice of the issuance of office orders by head of KMC run hospitals, medical institutes and other sections for transfer/posting and relieving of officials including doctors and paramedical staff without having any authority or valid reason, directed the Sr. director Medical and Health Services that henceforth such orders will be issued only with the permission of the Authority and through the Department of Human Resource Management.

In this regard, all the heads of departments of Karachi Metropolitan Corporation have been through a circular instructed that necessary measures being taken to manage the available manpower of KMC to perform the normal duties in different departments in a befitting manner. However, it has been noted that some heads of the department are issuing orders for transfer and posting of officers and other staff without any authority for and reason or in a violation of the rules and regulations. Therefore, the Senior Director Medical and

Health Services, KMC, has been directed to ensure avoid transfer and posting of officers and staff apart from the office memorandum issued for medical institution, hospital, department regarding assignment of powers and if there is a need for transfer and deployment of officers and other personnel including doctors or paramedical staff, then the proposal with major reasons for the same should be sent to the Human Resource Management Department for its approval from the competent authorities as per the procedure.

## 27 kite sellers, flyers arrested in special crackdown

RAWALPINDI (APP): Rawalpindi police on the directives of City Police Officer (CPO) Syed Khalid Mehmood Hamdani here on Thursday night continued a special crackdown against kite sellers and flyers and managed to net 27.

According to the police spokesman, all police stations of the cities had been directed to accelerate the ongoing operations against kite-flying ban violators while special teams under the supervision of senior police officers were also conducting raids in different areas. Police teams have recovered thousands of kites and string rolls from the possession of arrested kite sellers and flyers, he said. Superintendent of Police, Potohar Muhammad Waqas Khan said that all available resources were being utilized to deal with kite flying. He said, Police under the supervision of Senior Superintendent of Police, Investigation, Zunaira Azfar on Thursday conducted flag march in Potohar Division to curb kite flying.

SP Potohar Muhammad Waqas Khan, Divisional SDPOs, SHOs, Elite Force, Traffic Police, Dolphin Squad participated in the flag march, he added.

SSP Zunaira Azfar said that the police have conducted a flag march in different areas of Potohar Division to maintain law and order and to warn the kite flyers and those involved in the aerial firing.

The flag march started from SP Potohar Town Office and culminated at starting point after passing through Katcheri Chowk, Chungi Number 22, Bakra Mandi, Dhoke Syedan, Baraf Khana Chowk, Peoples Colony Morr, Akhri Stop, Aadra, Wasim Market, Boher Mosque and Qasae Chowk. The spokesman said that flag marches were being conducted in various areas to make the security plan more effective and added that strict vigilance would be maintained like in previous years to maintain law and order in the city and to curb the dangerous kite flying. The spokesman further informed that divisional superintendents of Police had directed the police teams to accelerate operations against kite sellers and flyers.

He said that strict action in accordance with the law was being taken against the kite-flying ban violators and they would be brought in the court of justice.

## IK is security risk for country's peace, stability: Danyal Ch.

ISLAMABAD (APP): Senior leader Barrister Danyal Chaudhry of Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) on Friday criticised Imran Khan has become a "security risk" for the country as he was playing a dangerous game with its interests.

Talking to a private news channel, he lashed out that PTI's government in its four-year rule was a "threat" to the sovereignty of the country and due to Imran Khan's policies public is suffering an imminent economic crisis.

He warned that the country's independence, sovereignty and honour would be at stake if people like Imran Khan would not be arrested.

Danyal also criticized PTI chief Imran Khan for not appearing in the hearing despite court orders and making excuses.

He also demanded action against the PTI chief instead of dismissing the plea.

Replying to a query, he said that Imran Khan should be arrested for mocking the judiciary, adding, Imran Khan formed many fake cases against his opponents during his premiership but no case could be proved against them.

Imran Niazi's politics is based only on lies which are exposing day by day, he said, adding, Imran Khan should be accountable for diamonds taken as bribe in the foreign funding and Toshakhana cases.



ISLAMABAD: Managing Director Pakistan Bait-ul-Mal, Amir Fida Paracha and Director General NUML, Brig. Syed Nadir Ali exchanging the documents of MoU to support the deserving students of NUML.



22 tankers returned to Iran

KABUL (Agencies): Afghanistan National Standards Authority (ANSA) in Islam Qala port in Herat Province on Thursday turned back 22 tankers carrying low-grade petrol and diesel from Iran. ANSA said on twitter that authorities had ordered the tankers to return to Iran as the fuel failed to meet the required standards. The standards authority recently stepped up efforts to ensure fuel being imported into the country met the minimum standards.

Nabizada's killer arrested

KABUL (KHAAMA PRESS): Kabul police on Friday announced that the killer of Mursal Nabizada, former member of the Parliament of Afghanistan was arrested. Khalid Zadran, the spokesperson of the Kabul police command said on Twitter that the murderer of Mural Nabizada and one of her security guards was arrested, and confessed to the crime. Mursal Nabizada was killed by unknown gunmen in her home in the Arzaan Qemat area in provincial district 12 of Kabul on January 14.

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

Shaheen meets Chinese special envoy for Afghanistan in Qatar



KABUL (TOLONews): The head of the Islamic Emirate's political office in Qatar, Suhail Shaheen, said that he discussed various issues, including the economy, with the Chinese special envoy for Afghanistan, Yue Xiaoyong.

Shaheen told TOLONews that the Chinese envoy would visit Afghanistan in the

near future. "We discussed the empowerment of the relations of Afghanistan with China, trade, and the provision of facilities for Afghan traders, as well as educational scholarship and the solving of Afghan students' problems and also about Chinese investment in Afghanistan and the acceleration of Chinese projects in Afghanistan,"

he said.

Xiaoyong said on Twitter that he also met with Yousef Sultan Laram, director of the Asian Affairs Dept of Qatar's MoF, and Pakistani Amb. to Qatar, Muhemmed Aejaz, and discussed efforts for helping Afghanistan.

"In my mtg today with Mr. Yousef Sultan Laram, Director of Asian Affairs

Department of Qatar's foreign minister, we had fruitful talk on the Afghan situation," he said. "Both agree to keep engaging w/Afghan side & further enhance China-Qatar cooperation for Afghanistan's peace, stability and reconstruction." The political analysts suggested the world engage with the caretaker government of Afghanistan.

"The regional countries including China should increase efforts for engagement with the Islamic Emirate so that a standard government would be formed," said Ahmad Khan Andar, a political analyst.

"Some of the decisions of the Islamic Emirate, especially, regarding the work of women and education of girls and their role in the society, are not acceptable for many Afghans and the international community," said Mohammad Hassan Haqyar, a political analyst. China is among the countries whose embassy is open in Afghanistan.

A diplomat of the Islamic Emirate is also present in China.

Guterres urges attention to education for children in crisis



KABUL (TOLONews): UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said that the dreams of 222 million girls & boys are being crushed by conflicts, displacement & climate chaos.

Two-thirds of those whose education is suffering within protracted crises come from just 10 countries, said Guterres. They are Afghanistan, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Mali, Nigeria, Pakistan, South Sudan, Somalia, South Sudan, and Yemen.

"Today 222 million girls and boys are affected by the horrors of war, disaster and displacement, and over 78 million children don't go to school at all. 78 million," said the UN spokesman Stephane Dujarric.

The United Nations held a two-day conference called Education Cannot Wait (ECW) in Geneva on February 16-17, 2023.

Somaya Faruqi, who attended this conference on behalf of Afghan girls, asked all world leaders to aid Afghanistan and not forget Afghan girls.

"Me, Somaya Faruqi, and millions of Afghan girls have a dream of becoming an engineer, a doctor or a teacher. Exactly 514 days ago my heart was shattered along with the hearts of millions of girls inside Afghanistan," Faruqi said. Meanwhile, female

students asked the Islamic Emirate to finalize its decision about reopening schools and universities for girls as soon as possible.

"We ask the Islamic Emirate to open schools and universities and not to play with the future of Afghan women, and let us have a progressive Afghanistan," said Halima, a student.

"I hope that the current government reviews its decision so that half of the society will get an education," said Suraya Paykan, a women's rights activist.

However, the Islamic Emirate said that it is not against education but wants to address all the issues in accordance with Islamic principles.

"It is obvious that the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan is not against education; rather, it wants that all issues be resolved in accordance with Islamic and national values. Some of the media's claims are untrue," said Suhail Shaheen, the head of the Islamic Emirate's political office in Qatar.

It has been over 500 days since girls above the sixth grade were banned from going to school. The prohibition of female education and employment in non-governmental organizations in only temporary, said Islamic Emirate officials.

'Efforts continue to resume World Bank projects in Afghanistan': MoF

KABUL (TOLONews): The Islamic Emirate's Ministry of Finance said that efforts are being made to resume World Bank projects in Afghanistan following David Malpas, the president of the World Bank, announcing that he will leave his position in June.

The World Bank supports programs in Afghanistan in the areas of health, agriculture, rural development, and other sectors, the ministry said, adding that the bank has begun working on a number of these projects.

"There are some projects whose work has been completed from 90 to 95 percent, and all of them

have been suspended. The Ministry of Finance has been working with all the donors since the Islamic Emirate took office to convince the World Bank to come and begin its unfinished projects," said Ahmad Wali Haqmal, the ministry's spokesperson.

"They should focus on the production and employment sectors through financial support of development projects. The economic status of our people can be improved more effectively," said Abdul Rahman Habib, the Ministry of Economy's spokesperson.

Economists said that the World Bank's support for Afghanistan over the

last 20 years has been crucial and that the bank's new leadership won't have an impact on America's financial goals.

"The World Bank is one of the major sources of funding for large-scale projects and budgets in Afghanistan, and it has previously provided remarkable assistance and such effects across the whole world," said Sayed Masoud, an economist.

"The World Bank has played a major role in Afghanistan's economy, notably during the past 20 years. Also, since David Malpas took over as World Bank president, he has made crucial decisions about various projects in Afghanistan that have been effective for the Afghan economy," said Seyar Qureshi, another economist.

US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen praised Malpas' four years of service at the World Bank and said that the world has benefited from his strong support and vital work to help the people of Afghanistan and low-income countries.

David Malpas, who was nominated in 2019 for a five-year term by President Donald J. Trump, has overseen an organization that lends billions of dollars each year to poor countries grappling with health crises, hunger, conflict and a warming planet.

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Avalanches kill 12 and destroy 50 dwellings in Afghanistan

KABUL (TOLONews): According to local officials, several avalanches have destroyed 50 homes and claimed the lives of at least 12 people in Badakhshan, a province in the northeastern part of Afghanistan.

The incident occurred due to heavy snowfall in the Raghistan and Deraim districts of Badakhshan, a mountainous province bordering Tajikistan and Pakistan, the official added.

Earlier last week, an avalanche hit a vehicle in Badakhshan province, resulting in two fatalities and six injuries.

Most mountain roads have been closed due to heavy snowfall; vehicles have become trapped, and passengers have perished in freezing temperatures.

Badakhshan is one of the country's provinces consistently hit with severe snowfall and a



frigid environment. Most of the districts in the province became blocked throughout the winter, which made it difficult

for humanitarian organizations to provide air and support.

According to the report, the country experienced its

coldest winter in January 2023, which resulted in more than 200 fatalities, 70,000 animal deaths, and numerous injuries.

Germany will resume its Afghan projects for sake of women: German media

KABUL (TOLONews): According to the Süddeutsche Zeitung, citing German authorities, Germany will fund its projects in Afghanistan as Afghan women will benefit from them.

This media outlet said that Germany stopped almost all its projects due to recent restrictions on women in Afghanistan last December.

"Because the Taliban are increasingly restricting women's rights, the German government stopped almost all projects in Afghanistan in

December. Now it wants to send money again so that women and girls are not punished twice," Süddeutsche Zeitung report reads. [machine translated]

The Ministry of Finance said that after August 2021, not only German projects, but more than one hundred development projects from various countries have stopped in Afghanistan.

The spokesperson for the Ministry of Finance, Ahmad Wali Haqmal, urged countries to fund development projects in Afghanistan rather than provide humanitarian help.

"The Ministry of Finance is asking all donors and international organizations to switch from humanitarian help to development aid if they truly want to change the economic status of the Afghan people. Development aid may enhance the financial status of a family for a long time," Haqmal noted.

Economists said that funding for development projects by foreign countries is beneficial for Afghanistan's self-sufficiency. "Investment in domestic production

saves the country from dependence on foreign production and leads the country to self-sufficiency," said Shakir Yaqoobi, an economist. "Development projects might be reconstruction projects or infrastructure that helps in the long run," said Asif Nang, another economist.

Previously, the World Bank said in a report that in the last one and a half years, the work of twenty-nine projects of this bank, worth more than \$4.5 billion, was stopped in Afghanistan.

Memory of two famous historical leaders honored in Kabul

KABUL (TOLONews): The death anniversary of Amir Ali Shir Nawai and Zahiruddin Babur—two famous historic figures—was celebrated by instructors and cultural figures.

The organizers of the celebration ceremony called these figures a positive example of Afghanistan's history.

The 582nd anniversary of Amir Ali Shir Nawai's death, and 540th anniversary of Zahiruddin

Babur's, was celebrated by a cultural organization, where the cultural figures and university instructors also participated.

"During the time of these two prominent men, tens of gardens, schools and seminaries were constructed," said Naqibullah, head of a cultural organization.

"One of the purposes for holding today's ceremony is to inform the new generation about the notions and views of

Amir Ali Shir Nawai and Zahiruddin Babur," said Mohammad Hassan Tolqeen, a journalist.

The ambassador of Uzbekistan in Kabul, Shadmanov Yadgarkhoja Makhmatovich, also participated in the ceremony.

He said that more than 150 Afghan students are studying in language, literacy, and expertise fields. "Today the Afghan youths who are thirsty for knowledge are studying literacy in the Uzbek lan-

guage in Uzbekistan. They have a master's degree and Ph.D. levels," Shadmanov Yadgarkhoja Makhmatovich said.

Earlier, the cultural activists in Iran also celebrated the death anniversaries of Amir Ali Shir Nawai and Zahiruddin Babur. The two famous historic figures have been considered the most intellectual rulers of their time, as they supported cultural, literacy and other educational services.

AIJA calls on IEA to release local journalist

KABUL (TOLONews): Afghan Independent Journalists Association (AIJA) on Thursday called on the Islamic Emirate authorities to immediately release Mohammad Yar Majroh, a local Afghan Journalist.

AIJA has said on Twitter that besides Majroh, at least three other journalists have been arrested by the Taliban members for unknown charges. Taliban intelligence agency detained Mohammad Yar Majroh, a local TOLONews reporter

on Wednesday in southern Kandahar province. The Taliban officials have not yet commented on the detention of the local journalist. Majroh has been a representative of the Afghan Independent Journalists Association in Kandahar.

Previously, the Taliban had arrested several journalists, artists, and civil and social activists in Kandahar, and other provinces of Afghanistan.

On February 14, a group of Taliban members

stopped the Tamaddon TV network's compound in Kabul and harassed the employees of the media organization, according to official sources. The primary assessment of AIJA indicates that the armed members who raided the Tamaddon TV network belonged to the ministry of interior. AIJA reported that the employees were verbally abused, and the Taliban members took with them two vehicles of the agency which had legal licenses.

Since the return of the Taliban to power in August 2021, the group has been accused of violating human rights, media freedom, and free journalism. They have already arrested several local and international journalists from Kabul and other major cities of Afghanistan.

Meanwhile, the caretaker regime has imposed tough restrictions on media outlets and news agencies to avoid publishing articles that are not in line with the policies of the ruling regime.

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Ebad meets with Iranian counterpart, discusses need for cooperation

KABUL (Agenices): Afghanistan's Public Health Minister, Dr. Qalandar Ebad, met with Ain Elahi, Iran's Minister of Public Health during a visit this week to Tehran for talks on strengthening cooperation between the two sides in the health sector.

Among the topics discussed was that of a specialized cancer treatment center in Kabul, the new cardiac hospital in Bamiyan, training of health personnel, and the



treatment of eye diseases, Afghanistan's public health ministry said among other issues.

Thursday. According to a statement issued by the ministry, Iran pledged their cooperation.

The statement noted that work on the new 200-bed cardiac hospital in Bamiyan has been completed and equipment will be delivered to the hospital shortly.

Meanwhile, Ebad invited the Minister of Public Health of the Islamic Republic of Iran to visit Kabul in the near future.



# NA session on Finance Bill, 2023 adjourned sans vote

ISLAMABAD (PPI): National Assembly's session to discuss the Finance (Supplementary) Bill, 2023, generally known as the mini-budget, was adjourned on Friday until Monday at 05:00 pm without a vote.

Speaker Raja Pervaiz Ashraf chaired the session, during which lawmakers criticised the government for increasing the burden on the poor by hiking taxes. The National Assembly, however, held discussion on the Finance Supplementary Bill, 2023. The Bill proposed taxation measures of 170 billion rupees to meet the understanding reached with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for the extend-

ed fund facility.

Participating in the discussion, Qadir Khan Mandokhel suggested that maximum taxes be imposed on luxury properties and vehicles and the burden on the poor people must be reduced.

Salahuddin said the Parliament should be informed as to who is behind the current dire economic situation of the country. He recalled that the IMF agreement was signed by the previous government which then backtracked from it.

Saira Bano said there is strong resentment amongst the people over the rising inflation. She opposed the imposition of taxes on sug-

ary drinks. Afzal Dhandla said the taxes will only affect the lives of poor people. He also voiced concerns over increase in the gas and power tariffs. He said focus should be given to the agriculture sector in order to steer the country out of current quagmire.

He also proposed imposition of ban on import of luxury vehicles saying the public transport system should be strengthened. Agha Rafiullah said all the political parties should sit together to find solution to the country's problems. The House on Friday passed Pir Roshan Institute of Progressive Sciences and Technology Miranshah.

## Counter Terrorism Dept to be re-organized: IGP KP

**Ikram Ullah Khalil**

PESHAWAR: The Inspector General of Police (IGP) Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Akhtar Hayat Khan on Friday said that all the necessary steps would be taken to improve the capabilities of police force with the aim to maintain the peace in the province.

IGP said this during an interaction with a group of senior journalists here at the Central Police Office (CPO). The newly appointed KP Police chief informed that two new police administrative divisions have been created in Peshawar to improve internal discipline, command & control and make monitoring more sustainable.

KP Police chief said that re-organization of Counter Terrorism Department (CTD) is very important for improving the performance of the police force and for this purpose more officers would be deployed in CTD. "We need latest fighting equipments and use of technology to eliminate the menace of militants from the province", IGP said.

He ensured that all the appointments in police force would be done on merit as he believed in transparency and it's the only to improve the force

performance in the better interest of the masses security. Regarding the law and order in Peshawar, IGP informed that provincial capital is facing various challenges and the population of both Gulbahar and Fajirbad has grown manifold.

He said that people from different areas have started residing in the localities, which has further increased challenges relating to law and order. To meet these challenges, he said the creation of Fajirabad as a new division had become need of the hour. The IGP said that a separate division of Fajirabad division with its own Superintendent of Police (SP) would make immediate response, effective command and monitoring possible in case of any incident.

Similarly, he said that Warsak locality is also of high importance relating to law and order in the provincial capital and some recent incidents have links with the elements entered to the city from this area.

He said that with the creation of the new Warsak Division will bring police stations of the bordering areas including Regi Model Town, Nasirbagh, Regi, Mathra and Machni Gate in better position. He said that

giving all police stations of the bordering areas under the command of an Assistant Superintendent of Police (ASP) will bring improvement in the administrative affairs and supervision.

He said that the main objective of the establishment of these police level divisions is the prevention of crimes, running of the police affairs in a better manner and stopping attacks from sensitive localities. Regarding the establishment of new sub-division, the IGP said that due to long distance from Sarband has been separated from Badbher Sub-Division and included with Pishthakhara and now a new sub-division in the name of Pishthakhara with police stations Pishthakhara and Sarband has been established.

IGP added the basic purpose of the process was the reorganization of Peshawar Police and in case of any incident bringing improvement in effective coordination among the senior police officers, quick response, beside building the grip of senior and junior officers on administrative affairs within their areas of jurisdiction and sustainable control on crime control.

## Additional power supply caused blackout on Jan 23

ISLAMABAD (Agencies): An inquiry report relating to power breakdown on January 23 in the country held officials of NTDC, NEPRA, power control management and shift in charge responsible for blackout.

A private television reported Friday saying the inquiry report regarding the power breakdown in Pakistan on January 23 revealed the blackout happened due to the additional supply of power from the South division, holding power control management and shift in-charge responsible behind the occurrence.

The inquiry committee headed by minister of state for petroleum prepared the

report disclosing the reason behind massive blackout. It stated that the fault did not occur due to power shortage, but it happened because additional 600 megawatts (MWs) were added to the system. After adding additional electricity from Sindh to the system, the high-voltage direct current (HVDC) system in Lahore collapsed, the report disclosed.

The report held officers of National Transmission and Dispatch Company (NTDC), National Electric Power Regulatory Authority (NEPRA), Power Control Management and shift in-charge responsible for the incident. Despite the HVDC system in

Lahore tripping around 300 during the past two years, no one paid attention to the problem; said the report.

It added that the committee should conduct an institutional inquiry against the ones responsible for the biggest ever breakdown. Besides this, poor coordination among relevant institutions, lack of unity of command, shortage of experts and old technology had also been termed as one of the reasons for blackout. The report also mentioned the federal government to issue directives to NEPRA for improving coordination among the relevant departments to avoid any such occurrence in the future.

## IHC directs Info Ministry to hold talks with media industry

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Islamabad High Court (IHC) on Friday directed the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting to share the copy of proposed amendments in PEMRA law with the respondents, which is meant to provide a legal forum to address the issues faced by electronic media journalists.

During the course of proceedings, the court was informed that due to financial/budgetary constraints, the ITNE tribunals at provincial offices had not yet been established. At this, the chief justice directed the secretary information to take up the matter with the Ministry of Finance to provide budgetary support.

Chief Justice Aamer Farooq heard the identical cases filed by the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ), Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists (PFUJ), and Islamabad High Court Journalists Association (IHCJA) seeking measures for the protection of jour-

nalists' rights. Secretary Information Shahera Shahid, Secretary Law and Justice Raja Naeem Akbar, Additional Attorney General Munawar Dogal, petitioners' lawyers, and representatives of journalists' bodies appeared before the court.

At the outset of the hearing, the officials of the Information Ministry informed the bench that amendments had been proposed in the PEMRA (Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority) law to protect the rights of journalists. At this point, the court instructed the ministry to share a copy of the proposed amendments with the respondents.

The chief justice remarked that it would be appropriate to expedite the legislative process given the importance of the rights of media workers, as the issue had been pending for a while. The Pakistan Broadcasters Association (PBA) also submitted its application through its lawyer Faisal Saddiqi

Advocate to become a party in the case.

Addressing the lawyer, the chief justice asked as to why the PBA wanted to create a hurdle when the matter was being brought towards the legislation process. The PBA's lawyer responded that they did not deny the exploitation of working journalists. His client was an important party to be affected by the proposed legislation and hence, it was essential that PBA should be part of the case. However, he emphasized that the protection of electronic media workers needed to be addressed through appropriate legislation.

Chief Justice Aamer Farooq remarked at the end that it was necessary to consult all stakeholders of the media industry prior to the legislation because the case had been pending before the court since 2021. The court, however, allowed the PBA to become a party to the case and adjourned the hearing till March 3.

## Weekly inflation jumps to 38.4 per cent

ISLAMABAD (Agencies): Short-term inflation measured by the Sensitive Price Index (SPI) jumped to 38.42 per cent year-on-year (YoY) for the week ending on February 16 driven by high food and fuel prices, data shared by the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS) showed on Friday.

Last week, short-term inflation was recorded at 34.83pc year-on-year. On a week-on-week basis, SPI increased 2.89pc compared to a rise of 0.17pc in the preceding week. This is the highest weekly rise since October 27, according to Arif Habib Limited. The SPI monitors the prices of 51 essential items based on a survey of 50 markets in 17 cities across the country. During the week under review, the prices of 34 items increased and five decreased while 12 remained unchanged.

Pakistan has been in the grips of decades-high inflation in the past few months. In January, annual inflation measured by the Consumer Price Index (CPI) spiked 27.55pc — the highest increase since May 1975. Inflation has been driven in part due to the devastating floods last year that destroyed swathes of agricultural land, leading to a shortage of some food items.

Separately, importers have had trouble getting banks to open letters of credit (LCs) as the country's foreign exchange reserves depleted to a critically low level. This also drove up the prices of essential items, including flour and pulses, in recent weeks.

Inflation is expected to increase further in the coming months as the government implements conditions agreed upon with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for an economic bailout, including a hike in electricity and gas prices. A senior economist with Moody's Analytics said recently that headline inflation could average 33pc in the first half of the current fiscal year before trending lower.

Low-income households could remain under extreme pressure as a result of high inflation on account of being disproportionately exposed to non-discretionary items. "Food prices are high and they can't avoid paying for that, so we're going to see higher poverty rates as well feed through," the economist said.

## 2 Pak Navy Commodores promoted

**F.P. Report**

ISLAMABAD: Two Commodores of Pakistan Navy promoted to the rank of Rear Admiral with immediate effect. Rear Admiral Khyber Zaman is a graduate of Britannia Royal Naval College Dartmouth, UK and was commissioned in Operations Branch of Pakistan Navy in 1994. He is a graduate of PAF Air War College, National Defence University, Islamabad and International College of Defence Studies China. The Flag Officer is a recipient of Sitara-i-Imtiaz (Military).

Rear Admiral Shafquat Hussain Akhtar was commissioned in Operations Branch of Pakistan Navy in 1994. The Flag Officer is a graduate of Pakistan Navy War College, Naval War College, Turkey, National Defence University, Islamabad and International College of Defence Studies China. The Admiral is a recipient of Sitara-i-Imtiaz (Military).

## Security forces kill suicide bomber

WANA (INP): A suicide bomber was killed during an intelligence-based operation by the security forces in the Spinaki area of South Waziristan on Friday.

According to details, the operation was conducted in the KP district after intelligence confirmed the presence of a suicide bomber belonging to the TTP. During an exchange of fire, an alleged suicide bomber namely, Rehman Mehsud Alias Nekro was killed after his vest exploded. The killed terrorist had come to Pakistan from Afghanistan and was involved in various attacks on security officials.



KARACHI: President Dr. Arif Alvi chairing a meeting with the Senate of the Federal Urdu University at Governor House.

## Imran announces 'Jail Bharo' movement from Wednesday

LAHORE (Agencies): Blaming the incumbent coalition government for its "political victimisation" of his party leaders and allies, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Chairman Imran Khan has announced kickstarting the 'Jail Bharo' (court arrest) movement from Wednesday, starting from Lahore.

"We will fill jails, they [authorities] will have no space left to hide," he said while warning the Pakistan Democratic Movement-led (PDM) government during his address to the nation via video link from Lahore's Zaman Park residence on Friday, where he has been residing since being shot in the legs on November 3 last year. In the wake of sedition cases filed against his party leaders including Fawad Chaudhry, Azam Swati and Shahbaz Gill, Imran Khan on February 4 announced 'Jail Bharo Tehreek' and asked PTI workers and supporters to prepare for movement across the country.

"They want to enslave us by threatening to put us in jails," the former prime minister, who was ousted following a vote of no-confidence in April last year, said vowing to fulfil the wish of authorities. Khan claimed that the police entered the homes of PTI workers in Multan and were tasked with such threatening tactics. "If this work is being done by the police, then won't the people hate them?" The interim government is strongly against the PTI, he added.

While referring to the caretaker setup, he said: "The man with a questionable character was brought in. We have a list of 23 people who had inflicted atrocities of which 16 were brought in." The PTI chief also recalled the "torture" inflicted on his party's leaders highlighting the treatment meted out to Swati, Gill and Fawad. "Never in history have such acts been committed against political

opponents," Khan lamented.

The tensions between the incumbent government and the PTI have heightened, with no sign of respite as the elections in two provinces — Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa — near, following the party's decision to dissolve the assemblies. Punjab and KP assemblies were dissolved by the PTI on January 14 and January 18, respectively. Firing fresh broadside at the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP), the PTI chief said: "It is dangerous that the CEC [Chief Election Commissioner] is showing his inability on conducting the election."

Khan's fresh criticism comes hours after President Dr Arif Alvi summoned CEC Sikandar Sultan Raja for an urgent meeting on February 20 (Monday) regarding the announcement of the date for fresh general elections. He said that they dissolved the provincial assemblies of Punjab and KP as per the knowledge that the country's Constitution clarifies that the elections should be held within 90 days of the dissolution of any assembly.

"The caretaker government and the interim chief ministers would be illegal on the 91st day," he added. No disaster could be bigger than that when the judiciary failed to ensure the implementation of the Constitution, he said while hitting out hard at the polls organising authority. "There is no justice where the rule of law collapses," Khan said that they had been claiming that the coalition government did not have the mandate and they cannot run the country.

Blaming the interim government for obstructing the probe against the assassination attack on him in Wazirabad on November 3 last year, the PTI chief said "its job is to only conduct elections". "The interim government first comes and stops the [joint investigation team] JIT and steals records. When an officer goes

to collect the JIT report, it is found that only 11 pages of the report are remaining," he said, adding that the JIT records are being claimed to have gone missing.

The former premier, lambasting the interim setup in Punjab, said that all links were pointing at them and they were worried about being caught. Lashing out at the incumbent rulers over the recently announced mini-budget, Khan asked as if raising prices is a "tough decision."

The government has broken the backbone of people by hiking the prices of all daily-use items, the deposed prime minister added. "[IMF] loans are not the solution to the problems being faced by the country." Taking a jibe at the PDM government, Khan said: "They did not come into power via election but auction. The government does not seem to conduct elections in 90 days. They fear elections."

The ruling alliance wanted to win elections through the rigging, he accused the authorities and at the same time warned that the PTI would not "keep silent over snatching of elections". According to the PTI chief, it seems that institutions are under pressure and the government is running away from elections.

He also vowed that the PTI would not let the government rig the elections, no matter what they do. Turning his guns towards the ruling Pakistan Peoples Party in Sindh, the former prime minister said the PPP has no vote bank in Karachi but it showed achievement in recent elections in the metropolis. Referring to journalist Arshad Sharif's assassination and alleged crackdown against his party's leadership, Khan said that the government wanted to send them behind the bars, hence, they would launch a court arrest campaign across the country.

## PTI MNAs resignations: LHC seeks reply from NA speaker

LAHORE (INP): The Lahore High Court (LHC) on Friday sought replies from National Assembly (NA) Speaker Raja Parvez Ashraf and other respondents in a case pertaining to the acceptance of 43 PTI MNAs' resignations.

Justice Shahid Kareem took up the petition filed by 43 PTI leaders, including Riaz Fatyana, against the NA speaker's move for accepting their resignations without due process. The LHC has directed the NA Speaker Raja Pervaiz Ashraf to submit his reply till March 7 in the case.

In the petition, the PTI leaders accused the NA speaker of accepting resignations to 'politically vic-

timize' the opponents.

They pleaded with the court to nullify the decision of speaker Raja Pervaiz Ashraf and the order of the Election Commission of Pakistan. Earlier, the Lahore High Court (LHC) suspended the Election Commission of Pakistan's notification that de-notified 43 MNAs of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI).

LHC judge Justice Shahid Karim heard the case and restricted the commission from holding by-elections in the 43 constituencies until further orders. On Jan 25, the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) de-notified 43 Pakistan Tehreek-e-

Insaf (PTI) members of the National Assembly (MNAs) following the acceptance of their resignations by NA Speaker Raja Pervaiz Ashraf.

After the announcement of PTI MNAs' return to the National Assembly, the federal government made a move to accept their resignations in an apparent bid to reduce the number of opposition lawmakers. The de-notified PTI MNAs included Riaz Fatyana, Sardar Tariq Hussain, Mohammad Yaqub Sheikh, Murtaza Iqbal, Sardar Mohammad Khan Leghari, Zile Humma, Ruksana Naveed, Ghazala Saifi, Nousheen Hamid, Sobia Kamal Khan and others.

## Protests hit multiple Iran cities for first time

DUBAI (AP): Protesters in Iran marched through the streets of multiple cities overnight in the most widespread demonstration in weeks amid the monthslong unrest that's gripped the Islamic Republic, online videos purported to show Friday. The demonstrations, marking 40 days since Iran executed two men on charges related to the protests, show the continuing anger in the country. The protests, which began over the Sept. 16 death of 22-year-old Mahsa Amini after her arrest by the country's morality police, have since morphed into one of the most serious challenges to Iran's theocracy since the 1979 Islamic Revolution.

Videos showed demonstrations in Iran's capital, Tehran, as well as in the cities of Arak, Isfahan, Izeh in Khuzestan province and Karaj, the group Human Rights Activists in Iran said. The Associated Press could not immediately verify the videos, many of which had been blurred or showed grainy nighttime scenes. In Iran's western Kurdish regions, online videos shared by the

Hengaw Human Rights showed burning roadblocks in Sanandaj, which has seen repeated demonstrations since Amini's death.

Hengaw shared one video that included digitally altered voices shouting: "Death to the Dictator!" That call has been repeatedly heard in the demonstrations, targeting Iran's 83-year-old Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. Other videos purportedly shot in Tehran had similar chants, as well as scenes of heavily protected riot police in the street. Iranian state media did not immediately acknowledge the demonstrations. Since they began, at least 529 people have been killed in demonstrations, according to Human Rights Activists in Iran.

Over 19,700 others have been detained by authorities amid a violent crackdown trying to suppress the dissent. Iran for months has not offered any overall casualty figures, though the government seemed to acknowledge making "tens of thousands" arrests earlier this month.

The demonstrations had

appeared to slow in recent weeks, in part due to the executions and crackdown, though protest cries could still be heard at night in some cities. Forty-day commemorations for the dead are common in Iran and the wider Middle East. But they also can turn into cyclical confrontations between an increasingly disillusioned public and security forces that turn to greater violence to suppress them, as they had in the chaos leading up to Iran's 1979 revolution. Iran's hard-line government has alleged without offering evidence that the demonstrations are a foreign plot, rather than homegrown anger.

The country's rial currency has collapsed to new lows against the US dollar. Iran continues to enrich uranium closer than ever to weapons-grade levels after the collapse of its nuclear deal with world powers and has enough of a stockpile to build "several" atomic bombs if it chooses. Meanwhile, Tehran arms Russia with the bomb-carrying drones Moscow has been using in the war in Ukraine.

## US committed to advance bilateral ties with Pakistan

ISLAMABAD (INP): The United States is committed to advancing its bilateral relationship with Pakistan as a senior State Department official landed in Islamabad for indepth talks with government officials.

In a statement issued by the Foreign Office in Islamabad on Friday, Foreign Secretary Dr Asad Majeed Khan received US Department of State Counselor Derek Chollet at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Thursdays. Welcoming Counselor Chollet, the Foreign Secretary stated that the frequent bilateral visits were a manifestation of the positive trajectory of the Pakistan-US relationship.

The foreign secretary expressed satisfaction on the second Mid-level Defence Dialogue and the upcoming Trade and Investment Framework Agreement (TIFA) Council meeting in Washington DC. He emphasized the importance of sustained cooperation through the institutionalized dialogues in trade and investment, energy, security, climate change and health. He stressed the need to expand cooperation in Agriculture, Education, IT, and Science and Technology.

Counselor Chollet reaffirmed that the United States was committed to advancing the bilateral relationship. He expressed US solidarity and support with Pakistan and its people in recovery from the 2022 floods. The foreign secretary thanked the Counselor for the US support and hoped to remain engaged in the long-term recovery and rehabilitation efforts.

Counselor Chollet was accompanied by Clinton White, Counselor of the United States Agency for International Development, Ambassador Donald Blome and Elizabeth Horst, Principal Assistant Secretary for the Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs at the US Department of State.