

Shutter down strike
KARACHI (NNI): Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP) has given a call for observing a countrywide shutter down strike on February 27 (tomorrow) against the sky-rocketing inflation. TLP chief Saad Rizvi said in a statement that a nationwide shutter down strike will be observed across the country today. Rizvi claimed that the nation will support the TLP's strike call from all corners of the country including Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK).

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Four bodies found in Lodhran
LODHRAN (INP): As many as four mutilated bodies were found in a house located in Lodhran's Gulshan-e-Madina Town. As per police officials, the local residents informed police after a foul smell in the area. The police reached the spot and recovered four marred bodies. The deceased bodies belonged to the same family including a mother, a daughter and two sons.

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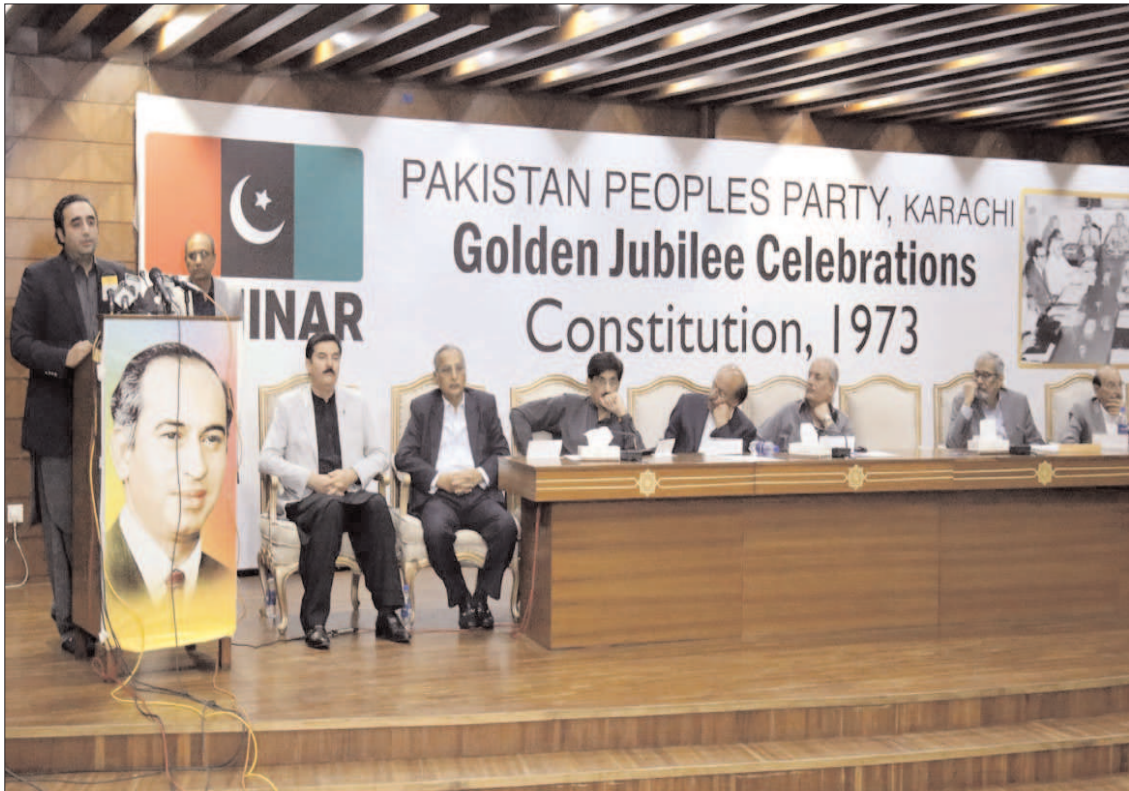
PM forms committee to ensure implementation of austerity policy

ISLAMABAD (NNI): Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Sunday constituted a seven-member committee of ministers to ensure the implementation of the austerity policy. A notification was also issued in this connection. The committee includes Minister for Finance and Revenue Ishaq Dar, Minister for Education Rana Tanveer Hussain, Minister for Information and Technology and Telecommunication, Syed Ameen ul Haque, Minister for Law and Justice Azam Nazeer Tarrar, Minister for National Food Security and Research Tariq Bashir Cheema, PM's advisor on Kashmir Affairs and Gilgit Baltistan Qamar Zaman Kaira and Minister of State for Power Division Hashim Notezai. The committee would review the implementation of the decisions taken during the

federal cabinet meeting of February 22, the notification read. The committee will meet after every two months to review progress made on the policy devised to cut down expenditures in view of fragile economic situation of the country. Earlier on Wednesday, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, had unveiled a massive austerity drive at the Federal Government level to slash expenditures while eyeing an ambitious plan to save 200 billion rupees annually. The government under its austerity plan has announced working hours in offices from 7:30 in the morning to cut expenses and conserve electricity. The federal cabinet's all members have opted to work voluntarily without salaries and other official perks to save 200 billion rupees in a year under the

prime minister's austerity plan. The government has also announced to return back luxury vehicles given to all cabinet members. The cabinet has also banned its members stay in five-star hotels during their overseas visits. It is worth mentioning here that the Prime Minister had issued direction to his Cabinet for reducing non-developmental expenses to minimize burden on the national exchequer. **PM summons report from CDA over Bhara Kahu bypass incident:** Taking the notice of Bhara Kahu flyover incident, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has summoned a report from Capital Development Authority (CDA) Chairman. The prime minister has directed the authorities to take stern action against those found negligent. In a message, Mr Sharif expressed condolence with

the bereaved families of the labourers. He also prayed for the early recovery of the injured persons in the incident. At least two labourers were killed while three others were injured when shuttering of an under-construction Bhara Kahu bypass flyover collapsed early Saturday morning, causing panic among passers-by of the locality. Rescue teams rushed to the incident site and pulled three labourers out of rubble while efforts to save the remaining two were going on. According to rescue officials, heavy construction material was being pitched on it when the portion caved in. The 5.6 km-long Bhara Kahu bypass (including a 1km flyover) starts from Murree Road at Malpur and culminates on Murree Road near the Jugi bus stop from where the flyover begins till the end of the local bazaar towards Murree.



KARACHI: Chairman Pakistan Peoples Party and Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari Speaks at a seminar organized to celebrate the 1973 Constitution at the auditorium of Sindh Assembly.

At least 4 killed, 12 injured in Barkhan blast

QUETTA (APP): At least four people were killed and 12 sustained injuries in an explosion that ripped through the Rakhni market in Barkhan district of Balochistan, police said on Sunday. Deputy Commissioner Barkhan Abdullah Khoso, while confirming the incident, said the explosion occurred when an improvised explosive device (IED), fitted on a motorcycle parked at the market, exploded with a big bang. Soon after the incident, local administration reached at the site and cordoned off the area. According to the police, the bomb blast took place in front of a hotel in Rakhni Bazar when there was a crowd gathered for shopping. The area shook with the intensity of the explosion, while the sound of the explosion echoed throughout the city. The injured ones and the bodies of martyrs were shifted to the hospital. Nearby shops, motorcycles and carriages have also been damaged by the blast. "As a result of the explosion, three people died on the spot while the fourth died later," the local administration said. More than 12 people, including two girls, are injured in the incident. Five of the injured are in critical condition and have been sent to Dera Ghazi Khan for further treatment. "According to preliminary investigation, the bomb was installed in a motorcycle, which was apparently detonated by remote control," DC said, adding that "evidence is being collected from the crime scene and further probe is underway".



President, PM condemn Barkhan blast: President Dr Arif Alvi and Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif on Sunday condemned the blast in Barkhan, Balochistan province which resulted in the loss of precious lives. The president and the prime minister expressed their deep grief over the loss of lives and expressed condolences to the bereaved families. They also prayed for the high ranks of the departed souls and for the early recovery of the injured. President Secretariat and PM Office media wings said in their separate press releases. The prime minister summoned a report from the chief minister and inspector general of police over the incident. The president also stressed on expediting efforts to completely eliminate terrorists. The prime minister said that terrorists could not escape the punishment and those shedding innocent blood would be made an example. The prime minister also directed for the provision of

the best medical treatment to the injured. The local media quoting the police officials said that the explosion apparently took place when an improvised explosive device (IED), planted on a motorcycle, exploded in Rakhni Bazaar. However, they were carrying out further investigation. **NA speaker, deputy speaker condemn blasts in Barkhan, Khuzdar:** National Assembly Speaker Raja Pervaiz Ashraf and Deputy Speaker Zahid Akram Durani on Sunday strongly condemned the bomb blasts in district Barkan and district Khuzdar in Balochistan. They said that such cowardly attacks would not diminish the nation's resolve to eliminate terrorism and extremism from the soil of the country. They also said that such elements would never be allowed to deviate Pakistan from the path of progress and development. They said that sacrifices rendered by personnel of security forces and by common people would remain alive and would steer the country out of this menace. In their separate messages, NA Speaker and Deputy Speaker prayed that those who lost their lives may have eternal peace and solace in the hereafter. They also prayed for the grant of peace and patience to bereaved families and early recovery of injured individuals. **Zardari condemns terrorist attack in Barkhan:** President Pakistan Peoples Party Parliamentarians, Asif Ali Zardari has strongly condemned the terror attack in Rakhni Bazar, Barkhan in Balochistan killing and injuring innocent citizens. In a statement issued by the PPP Media Office here Sunday, he said that the elements involved in such attacks cannot and should not be forgiven. "The federal and provincial governments should bring these culprits to book," he added. Asif Zardari prayed to Almighty Allah to grant eternal peace to the departed souls and speedy recovery for the injured. He also expressed his profound condolences to the families of the innocent victims of the attack.

Bilawal suggests amending NAB law to cover judiciary also

KARACHI (NNI): Lamenting the alleged double standards of the higher judiciary, Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari on Sunday announced that he will introduce an amendment to the National Accountability Ordinance to bring the institution under its purview. The minister said there was corruption in every institution, including judiciary and executive. "We are following a 'holy cow' system, where laws are separate laws for the common man and those holy cows. The PPP opposes such a system," Bilawal said while addressing an event at the Sindh Assembly to mark golden jubilee of the 1973 Constitution. The PPP chairman further said: "We will not tolerate a dual justice system. You can re-write the Constitution to save your 'favorite', but to send Benazir Bhutto's government home, just an editorial is enough." It is difficult for parties like the PPP to defend such practices, he declared. Bilawal criticized that it's not possible that if a prime minister belongs to Larkana, he will be hanged. "We are waiting for justice for the people's leader. On the contrary, if the prime minister from Zaman Park hurts his leg, the court waits for a week. The judges are making a mockery of themselves," he asserted. The PPP, the minister said,

has been saying from day one that the NAB was created for political engineering. "I wonder what the judges are trying to look for in the NAB law amendment. If they want to disband NAB, go ahead, we are not interested in it," he declared. He further stressed that there are no sacred cows, and there should be an equal system of justice. "There should be one law for the common man as well as a judge," he insisted. Bilawal further remarked that the people meant to provide justice are fighting among themselves. "How will they ensure justice? What hope will the public have if such institutions fight among themselves?" He further claimed there are reports that one judge is unable to talk to another. In such situations, he maintained, non-democratic forces will have a field day. "We are going through political, economic and constitutional crises and the common man has to bear the burden of the current problems." The minister was of the view that if politicians keep fighting with each other, it will cause more damage. "How will we tackle inflation and hunger if we keep fighting among ourselves?" Bilawal reminded the gathering that terrorism is rampant once again, and terrorists are also benefiting from the internal conflicts.

From terrorism to floods, the solution to all the problems still lies in the Constitution. If implementation of the constitution starts, the country can get out of its problems, he added. Earlier, the PPP leader said the Sindh Assembly was the first to pass a resolution in favor of Pakistan. He added the Constitution provided basic rights to each citizen. "Ever since the Constitution was made, it has been constantly attacked. Some forces cannot tolerate that the provinces and people get their rights," the foreign minister stated. He added the Constitution was violated during the Gen Zia era, while Gen Musharraf also attacked the Constitution. The damage from these attacks is still being felt, he claimed. Bilawal remarked that a prime minister was brought in whose parliament was not interested in the people and their issues. However, that PM was removed through a vote of no-confidence. He claimed the conspiracy to bring in this prime minister was against the Constitution. "Imran Khan has divided politics and every institution, as well as the judiciary, media and establishment. He may have gone, but that mentality still prevails," the minister commented. He wondered how long the country will suffer from the damage inflicted over the last three years.

PTI's "Jail Bharo" movement totally flopped: Rana Sanaullah

FAISALABAD (APP): Interior Minister Rana Sanaullah on Sunday said that "Jail Bharo" movement of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) had totally flopped and even the PTI leaders and workers were trying to disassociate themselves from the drive. Talking to the media at the residence of local PML-N leader Kashif Nawaz Randhawa, he said that politics of PTI was full of blunders. He said that Imran Khan did not take any single laudable step during his political career and wasted the time of people. "Imran Khan claimed to organize million march followed by another gimmicks which all proved in vain" he said adding the ultimate objective

of Imran was to create political and economic instability in the country. He created unnecessary problems during his tenure of almost four years in power and now continuing the same for his lust for power. He said that all the dramas staged by Imran Khan had been flopped and people would reject him in the coming general elections. To a question, he said the government had arrested approximately 125 PTI leaders and workers on their own request and detained them for a period of 30 days in different prisons. To another question, he said: "We fully believe in the sanctity of state institutions but after the audio

leak of Pervaiz Elahi it is necessary to clarify the situation. We will not blame anyone till the finding of leaked audio has been released." About attack on Imran Khan, he said that investigation revealed that it was not an organized attack and the attacker was alone. To another question, he said that various surveys revealed that PML-N was leading political party of Punjab. About issuance of party tickets, he said that parliamentary board of the party would decide to award tickets to the candidates. Earlier, Rana Sanaullah condoled with Kashif Nawaz Randhawa over the demise of his mother.

Abhinandan's payment of MIG 21 for Pakistani cup of tea completes four years

ISLAMABAD (NNI): Four years ago, Indian Airforce Wing Commander Abhinandan Varthaman was arrested in Pakistan after the crash of India's prized MIG-21 during Operation Swift Retort on 27th February 2019. India will always remember 27th February as "Surprise Day" from amongst all the Pak-India wars. Pakistan's armed forces destroyed India's morale and confidence in their military. On the night of 26th February 2019, Indian forces did a failed attack in Balakot in the dark. As a reply, our political and military leadership formulated an integrated strategy and strongly retaliated in

the light of the day at the place of their own choice. The Operation Swift Retort started at 9am in the morning on 27th February and PAF Shaheens attacked six target bases of the Indian Army in IIOJK not damaging any lives but giving a retaliatory message to the enemy. The Indian Airforce was startled when the six targets were hit. The Indian Air Defense destroyed their own MI-17 Helicopter killing at least six of their army men. Two of their fighter jets came following the Pakistani jets but were not able to return. The dogfight occurred in the airspace of

Samahni valley in Bhimber in which our beloved fighter pilot Hassan Siddiqui targeted an Indian SU-30 in his JF-17. The debris from the SU-30 fell on the line of control but Wing Commander Nauman destroyed a MIG-21 whose pilot Abhinandan was arrested. MIG-21 was a prized possession of the Indian Airforce which was crumbled by the PAF. Pakistan released Abhinandan as a gesture of goodwill and gave him back to India proving that Pakistan is a nation of peace. Even after this, India is still engaging plots like Pulwama to impose aggression on Pakistan.

Israelis, Palestinians pledge to curb violence

AMMAN (Reuters): Israel committed to stop authorisation of any settler outposts in the occupied West Bank for six months during a meeting on Sunday with Palestinian officials in Jordan when the sides pledged to de-escalate surging violence. In a joint statement at the end of a meeting in the city Aqaba, Israel and Palestinian officials said they would work closely to prevent "further violence" and "reaffirmed the necessity of committing to de-escalation on the ground". Host nation Jordan, along with Egypt and the United States, considered "these understandings as major progress towards re-establishing and deepening

relations between the two sides," the statement said. The meeting was held as anxiety mounts of escalation in the run-up to the holy Muslim month of Ramadan that begins in late March. Palestinian factions, including the Hamas group, which governs the Gaza Strip, condemned the West Bank-based Palestinian Authority for taking part in the meeting. The meeting brought together top Israeli and Palestinian security chiefs for the first time in many years, officials said, and aimed to restore calm in Israel, the Israeli-occupied West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Israel and the

Palestinian Authority "confirmed their joint readiness and commitment to immediately work to end unilateral measures for a period of 3-6 months," the statement said. "This includes an Israeli commitment to stop discussion of any new settlement units for four months and to stop authorisation of any outposts for six months," the statement said. The participants also agreed to meet again in Sharm el-Sheikh in Egypt in March. "The participants stressed the importance of the Aqaba meeting, the first of its kind in years," the statement said. "They agreed to continue meeting under this formula, maintain positive momen-

tum and expand this agreement towards wider political process leading to a just and lasting peace." U.S. President Joe Biden's Middle East adviser Brett McGurk is attending, along with Jordanian and Egyptian officials. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's return to power at the head of one of the most right-wing coalitions in Israeli history has added to Arab concerns about escalation. Israel on Feb. 12 granted retroactive authorization to nine Jewish settler outposts in the occupied West Bank and announced mass-construction of new homes within established settlements.

LHC Bar President Ishtiaq Khan meets PTI Chief

LAHORE (NNI): Lahore High Court (LHC) Bar Association's newly appointed President Ishtiaq Ahmad Khan on Sunday met the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Chief Imran Khan. Imran Khan congratulated Ishtiaq Ahmad Khan

and other members on winning the elections, leaders of the Insaf Lawyer's Forum were also present there. Mr Ishtiaq backed Imran Khan's vision for the supremacy of the law and constitution. In the meeting, the

president of the Bar Association condemned Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) and Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N)'s attacks and pressurizing the judiciary. He also expressed grave concern regarding the disrespect of basic

human rights and political revenge by PDM. He added, "Acting against the constitution and attacking the judiciary promoted unlawfulness in the country, the lawyer's community will not compromise on the safety of the constitution, and freedom of judiciary."



Sindh Governor, Ethiopian Consul General discuss bilateral ties

KARACHI (PPI): The honorary Consul General of Ethiopia called on Sindh Governor Kamran Khan Tessori in Karachi on Sunday. The issues of Ethiopian Airlines, mutual interest, investment and promotion of trade came under discussion during their meeting.

The Governor said bilateral relationship between Pak-Ethiopia is on an upward trajectory. The honorary Consul General of Ethiopia said the promotion of mutual trade is fruitful for both the countries.

Karachi witnesses animals' kidnapping for ransom

KARACHI (INP): A wave of animals' kidnapping for ransom has hit the city, complained dairy farmers affected from the novel crime. A gang of unidentified criminals involved in the offence, said to be operating across Cattle Colony area, Dairy and cattle farmers have alleged that the animals of seven dairy farmers were snatched on the gunpoint in last two months. The gang released kidnapped animals after the owners coughed up ransom money. The vehicles carrying livestock being regularly snatched at the link road on gunpoint, dairy farmers complained.

A case of vehicle snatching has been registered two days' ago at the Steel Town police station. "The vehicle carrying livestock was snatched by six armed men on gunpoint", the FIR read.

IRSA releases 98,900 cusecs water

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Indus River System Authority (IRSA) on Sunday released 98,900 cusecs of water from various rim stations with an inflow of 56,800 cusecs.

According to the data released by IRSA, the water level in River Indus at Tarbela Dam was 1462.67 feet and was 64.67 feet higher than its dead level of 1,398 feet. Water inflow in the dam was recorded as 15,000 cusecs while outflow as 50,000 cusecs.

The water level in River Jhelum at Mangla Dam was 1113.25 feet, 63.25 feet higher than its dead level of 1,050 feet. The inflow and outflow of water were recorded as 17,900 cusecs and 25,000 cusecs respectively. The release of water at Kalabagh, Taunsa, Guddu and Sukkur was recorded as 57,000, 42,500, 30,400 and 6,400 cusecs respectively.

47,762 Coronavirus cases reported

RAWALPINDI (APP): As many as 47,762 Coronavirus-positive cases had been recorded, while 1,777 had lost their battle for life since the pandemic in the district. Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of District Health Authority, Dr Ansar Ishaq, told APP that among people who died from this fatal disease, 1,341 were Rawalpindi residents, while 436 belonged outside districts.

PML-N is ever-ready for elections: Atta

LAHORE (NNI): Senior Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz leader Atta Tarar said on Sunday that the PML-N was not afraid of the elections and the party was fully prepared to take part in the polls anytime.

Mr Tarar said Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf Chairman Imran Khan was affecting the moral standards of the youth and PTI was using the delaying tactics.

Addressing a press conference at Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PMLN) Secretariat in Model Town here, he said that a man, who had admitted to give bribe to a PTI leader for getting employment on forged documents, was sitting next Imran Khan during his press conference on Saturday. The PTI leader, who had allegedly received the bribe money, was also sitting there.

Atta Tarar said that Imran Khan had also defended Farah Gogi, who was allegedly involved in mega corruption during the PTI government in Punjab.

Tarar said the PTI chief was using delaying tactics in Toshakhana, Tyrian White and foreign funding cases against him, and openly protecting people around him who were facing corruption charges. He said that the PML-N believed in supremacy of law and upholding of the Constitution. He said that the PTI leadership should face charges in the courts as nobody was above the law.

He said the PML-N leadership always presented themselves for accountability whereas Nawaz Sharif was disqualified for just having an aqama. Replying to a question, he said that the PML-N was ever ready to go into elections as party Chief Organiser Maryam Nawaz was already running a public campaign; however, the party had submitted a written application for formation of a full court of the Supreme Court to hear suo motu proceedings regarding delay in Punjab and KP elections.

Prime Minister launches BOP Freelancer Segment and Credit Card at PMYB&ALS Event

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister of Pakistan, Mian Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif, has launched the BOP Freelancer Segment and Credit Card at a ceremony for cheque distribution among the beneficiaries of the Prime Minister's Youth Business and Agriculture Loan Scheme (PMYB&ALS).

The event was part of on-going 'Week of Youth' celebrations. Mr. Zafar Masud (President and CEO - BOP) and other senior officials of BOP were also present at the occasion. The Bank of Punjab (BOP), one of the leading financial institutions of Pakistan, through this proposition, aims to improve financial access of freelancer community by addressing their transactional, lending and payment related needs. Additionally, this initiative will also enhance the country's potential of attracting foreign exchange.

Addressing the ceremony, Mr. Zafar Masud (President and CEO -BOP) said, "There are around 3 million freelancers in Pakistan. Freelancers contributed \$400m out of the total information and communi-

cation technologies export remittances of \$2.616 billion recorded by the country during FY 2022, while their potential is worth billions of dollars. Through our freelancer segment & credit card initiative, we aim to unlock this potential and help the economy. Freelancers and IT professionals can open Freelancer Digital Accounts in both PKR and USD, which can help bring foreign remittances through official channels and can support enhanced credit and debit limits of up to USD 5,000 per month & USD 30,000 per annum. In addition, IT professionals and companies are now allowed to retain 35% of their export proceeds in such special foreign currency accounts, in an aim to bring and retain foreign exchange earnings." Furthermore, freelancers can get BOP PSEB co-branded Debit & Credit cards. These cards give access to exciting tech-related discounts at our alliance partners and boast features customized for this segment, such as better transaction limits. We're thankful to our partners MasterCard and Pakistan Software Export Board (PSEB) for their tireless efforts in making this possible."

Essarani attends Jashan-i-Baharan Event at SOS Village Jamshoro

E.P Report

KARACHI: Sindh Minorities Affairs Minister Giyan Chand Essarani has said that the issue of land allotment of SOS Village Jamshoro would be resolved and construction of the road leading to the institution will be started soon.

The provincial minister held out this assurance to management committee of SOS Village Jamshoro while addressing Jashan-i-Baharan event as a chief guest at the institution on Sunday. He added that chief minister Sindh has directed him to attend the event. The minister assured that all the issues of the institution will be resolved on priority and he would submit a written report pertaining to the issues of institution to the Chief Minister of Sindh. He remarked that Pakistan People's Party has always supported such institutions. He added that he has been apprised that minority children were also residing in the institution. The minister said that scholarships will be given to children belonging to minorities by the Minorities Affairs Department. The Provincial Minister also offered to the SOS Village Committee to decide on the scheme for the construction of a temple or church for the minority children so that can perform their religious obligations according to their faith. He said that the scheme of temple/church would be completed in six months. Mr. Essarani also suggest-

ed to establish sos villages in other districts of Sindh as well. 'I felt peace of mind by coming to this institution. I have never seen such an institution in my 27 years of political journey. I should have come to this institution earlier,' he added. He said that he feels proud that there is such an excellent institute in my home district Jamshoro.

He said that children are being imparted best education and training in the institution. 'I have seen more courage, talent and confidence in these children here than the children of private schools,' he praised. He said that children are our future. Children are vulnerable segment of society, they need better guidance and training, and protection which they are getting in sos village. The provincial minister also acknowledged the contributions of philanthropists and saluted them for supporting the sos villages. On this occasion, the provincial minister gave Rs. 500000 for SOS Village children. The children presented wonderful performance and tableaux in the event.

Earlier, the provincial minister visited different blocks of SOS Village, reviewed the facilities and met with the children. Chairman SOS Village Jamshoro Dost Muhammad Baloch, member SOS Village Committee Dr. Pradeep Kumar, Yaseen Marri and Madam Tehmina gave a briefing to the Provincial Minister. The provincial minister also planted a sapling in the institution.



KARACHI: Sindh Minorities Affairs Minister Giyan Chand Essarani visit as a chief guest at the SOS Village Jamshoro.

Zia Mohyeddin had the power to captivate his audience with his voice and words: Murad

KARACHI (PPI): Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah has said that someone, as celebrated as Zia Mohyeddin, needs no introduction but he was a man with feathers galore in his hat: an actor, orator, director, author, and broadcaster who ruled over his own career for more than six decades.

This he said while speaking at 'Tribute Evening Farewell to the Legend Zia Mohyeddin' program organized by NAPA at NAPA Auditorium on Sunday evening.

Mr. Mohyeddin, despite proficiently enjoying various disciplines, let theatre be his lifelong passion. He studied theatre at London's Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts (RADA), the CM said and added that the thespian marked his debut in Lawrence of Arabia in 1961, which along with 'Behold the Pale Horse' (1964)

and 'Bombay Talkie' (1970) became Zia Mohyeddin's most memorable performances amongst many others.

Mr. Shah said that Mr. Zia, the talented and hardworking orator returned to Pakistan in the 1960s, hosting 'The Zia Mohyeddin Show on PTV', in which he introduced a new style of hosting. He added that Mr. Zia also set up the PIA Arts and Dance Academy the following decade which toured the world and performed at the Madison Square Garden and for Queen Elizabeth II.

"While I speak about Mr. Mohyeddin, I -just like everyone present here- am in absolute awe of his achievements," the CM said and added to sum up the accolades he achieved or the life he led in a speech did not even come close to giving justice to his life's work.

Murad Shah said that apart from

being president of NAPA, he authored two books: memoir A Carrot is a Carrot (2008), and The God of My Idolatry, a collection of essays published in 2016. "At NAPA, he trained and taught a generation of Pakistani cinema, theatre, and art and I am sure the proteges of Mr. Mohyeddin will continue to make Pakistan proud," he hoped.

What I loved about him was the way with which he spoke; mesmerizing, the CM said and added Mr. Zia had the power to captivate his audience with his voice and words. "Sitting on those seats, I have experienced that magic as well and I was quite fortunate to have heard him several times," he said and added a teacher to many, and an inspiration to the nation, Mr. Mohyeddin would always live in our hearts and Pakistan would not forget the maestro or his work.

Philanthropists generously donating to educate Sindh children: Balighur Rehman

LAHORE (NNI): The concerned philanthropists and donors of Punjab by generously donating for providing quality schooling to children from the deprived communities in Sindh are playing an important role in strengthening the cause of national unity.

This was stated by Punjab Governor, Muhammad Balighur Rehman while speaking at a fundraiser organized to collect donations from Lahore's business community for the schooling of 10,000 students from the deprived areas of Sindh.

The Punjab Governor said on the occasion that the government always required the support of noble charities for the provision of quality healthcare services and education to the children of destitute communities in faraway and underprivileged areas in the country.

He said that genuine charities were able to serve the downtrodden people only after receiving unwavering philanthropic support from noble donors from the business community.

The Governor held out the assurance that the government would fully support the charitable work by non-governmental organizations to enroll the out-of-school children in the country as the state alone didn't have the resources to fulfill this fundamental obligation as per the constitution.

He suggested that the government education authorities should work in close coordination with the concerned NGOs to ensure quality schooling for every child in the deprived parts of the country.

Speaking as the guest of honour, Punjab Industries Minister, SM Tanveer, said that the concerned philanthropists and business community in Punjab had always acted as a patron for generously donating to lessening the miseries of the down-trodden communities in Sindh.

Tanveer said that like his late father, noted industrialist SM Muneer, the cause to educate children from the deprived areas of the country was very close to his heart as he would do his best to support this noble charitable drive.

APTMA Patron-in-chief, Dr. Gohar Ejaz, said that the presence of a large number of leading businessmen and industrialists at the fundraiser especially those from the textile industry showed well that they stood fully committed to the cause of enrolling every out-of-school child in the country. He said the concerned industrialists irrespective of the prevailing economic crisis and a slowdown in business activities would continue with their philanthropic activities for the uplift of the deprived

communities. He said that unwavering philanthropy was the only noble way for the industrialists to pay back to the country that enabled them to earn name and fame in the business sector. Dr. Ejaz said the concerned community of businessmen and industrialists in Lahore was always available to host more such events to support the drive to educate students from lesser privileged areas of the Sindh. CEO of non-profit Green Crescent Trust (GCT), Zahid Saeed, said that his non-profit had established 160 charitable schools having an enrollment of over 30,000 children from needy families in Sindh.

He said the support his non-profit had received from concerned businessmen in Lahore made him optimistic about enrolling hundreds of thousands of out-of-school children in Sindh under a joint effort by the government and concerned charities.

He said the GCT was well on track to increase the number of its charitable schools in Sindh to 250 with an enrollment of a total of 100,000 students from deprived areas till 2025.

He expressed his gratitude to the business community of Lahore for generously donating to the charitable drive of his non-profit in the education sector.

'PPP resolves issues of masses by following its manifesto'

LAHORE (APP): Pakistan Peoples Party always tried to resolve issues of the masses by following its manifesto of providing "Roti, Kapra aur Makan".

These views were expressed by PPP Central Punjab Acting President Rana Farooq Saeed and other leaders in a joint press statement issue here

on Sunday. They paid tribute to party Chairman and Foreign Minister Bilawal Zardari Bhutto for taking pro-poor step, such as increasing 25 per cent amount under Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP).

They said that former president Asif Ali Zardari laid foundation of the BISP programme and later, the past govern-

ment attempted to gain popularity from the programme by changing its name. They said the credit went to the PPP which had completed several pro-people programmes during its tenures. The PPP leaders said that 25 per cent increase in the BISP programme would be helpful in supporting the most underprivileged class of the society.

5-day International Gastroenterology Conference concludes

LAHORE (APP): The five-day International Gastroenterology Conference, organised by the Pakistan Society of Gastroenterology, concluded at a local hotel, here on Sunday.

On the last day of the conference, the nursing staff and paramedics of the Lahore General Hospital (LGH) were imparted practical training of endoscopy. Professor Ghiyas-un-Nabi Taiyab and Chief Organiser of the Conference Professor Israr-ul-Haq Toor said that only those doctors were considered successful who had well-trained and well-equipped nursing staff as well as

paramedics.

Foreign doctors, gastroenterologists and experts admitted at the conference that the Gastroenterology Department of the LGH was one of the best institutions of its kind where patients were being provided all international standard health facilities of endoscopy, colonoscopy, etc.

Professor Toor said that 127 research papers were read during the conference, whereas 80 lectures were delivered by the participants. He said that more than 3,000 doctors participated in the conference, who were provided with hands-on-training about

endoscopy procedures. He said that sensitisation of timely diagnosing and treatment of various diseases was need of the hour, to be spread more and more in society. He said that not only patients but their attendants were especially responsible to approach hospitals in case of any disease.

The foreign participants in the conference were also provided with an opportunity to visit old historical places of Lahore City. After the tour, foreign doctors termed it the best part of their life to visit Lahore, meet its dwellers, enjoy their hospitality and experience classic traditions of love and respect for the guests.



LAHORE: People selecting old books on a roadside stall at Provincial Capital.



KP Boards Employees Coordination Council rejects exam in marriage halls

PESHAWAR (APP): The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Boards Employees Coordination Council (BECC) has rejected holding of matriculation and intermediate examinations in marriage halls instead of schools.

The Council strongly rejects the suggestions given by some of the Chairmen of the Boards to hold the examination in the marriage hall to facilitate the students. The Council rejects the suggestion and terms it an attempt to earn bad name to the education boards, said the statement issued by the KP BECC here Sunday.

The annual board exams

are not one-day or three-day like ETEA or NTS, but board exams last from 20 or 25 days to a month and holding the exam in marriage halls instead of schools is not possible, the statement said and added, after the written exams, the practical exams are also conducted for 10-days a week. Hence, hiring the wedding halls for the whole month and arranging chairs and other stationery for the same will incur considerable expenses which will cause a lot of loss to the boards, said the BECC's statement.

Along with this, the objections can be raised

about the security of answer books which are kept in safes in schools that may bring disrepute to the boards. In the eyes of the Council, this is no less than a joke with education and especially with the examinations as well as with the students and their teachers and educational institutions.

The Coordination Council recommends that the examinations should be conducted in the examination centers established in the schools and where there is a deficiency, they should be given an opportunity to rectify the deficiency by the next examination, otherwise the examination halls

of these schools may be closed or will be abolished and the Boards will make adequate arrangements for them to conduct the examinations next year instead of taking in Shadi Halls, it added.

Besides this, the students are also not getting a suitable environment for the exam. There will be bad effects on the mentality of the children after holding the exams in marriage halls. Similarly, there will be issues like security of papers and answer copies with children which also bring disrepute to institutions like boards, the statement said.



PESHAWAR: Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Haji Ghulam Ali giving certificates to Madarsa's students.

IGP pledges to safeguard interests of merged district police force



F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Inspector General Police (IGP) Akhtar Hayat Khan has said that police of merged districts are part of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa police department and being chief of them, he will safeguard the interest of them. He said that promotion opportunities will be provided to the

police force of the ex-tribal region and the best performing police personnel will be posted in other districts.

The views were expressed by the IGP, KP while addressing the Khyber police force darbar held here in Shahkas police, Jamrud last day. He said that service structure of the merged districts police force had been formulated

and opportunities of promotion during their service would be granted to them.

The local police would be persuaded to join certain courses to equip them to participate in professional A1 and B1 exams, he added and said all sources would be utilized to work for the welfare of the police families.

Educational expenses of brilliant children of local

police force who qualify for admission in prestigious institutions would be borne on merit by the department, IGP remarked.

The police chief vowed that best medical treatment would be provided to the police so that they could execute their duties free of anxiety. At the end IGP gave away cash prizes and appreciation certificates to the police officials who performed best in their duties.

Earlier, IGP paid a visit to police line Shahkas, Jamrud where he was received by CCPO Muhammad Ijaz and DPO Saleem Abbas Kulachvi. A smart contingent of police saluted him and he put floral wrath at the monument of martyrs.

He also headed a high level meeting to discuss security and other related issues.

Meanwhile, the police chief visited Jamrud police station and checked the record of it.

Furthermore, he met with the tribal elders who appraised him problems related to the police force.

Passing out parade held F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: A simple yet impressive passing out parade ceremony of Basic Military Training was held at Scouts Training Academy Warsak. Inspector General Frontier Corps North Major General Noor Wai Khan was the chief guest.

A total of 1457 recruits of the 32nd edition passed out after successful completion of the training including a large number of youths belonging to the tribal areas of KP.

The chief guest inspected the parade and awarded shields, trophies and sword of honour to recruits who performed well during training, including a lady recruit from Chitral. During the ceremony the recruits saluted the Chief Guest while marching past.

Minister visits Ladies Club

PESHAWAR (APP): KP Minister of LG, Elections and Rural Development Sawal Nazir Khan Advocate on Sunday visited Ladies Club University of Peshawar. DG Metropolitan Arshad Zubair informed the minister about the work of decoration.

The minister directed DG to restore the gym in the club immediately and arrange an experienced instructor for the gym to train the members.

The minister also directed the establishment of a cafeteria in the ladies club.

On this occasion, around a hundred people got registration in the club.

Robbers storm jewelry shop

PESHAWAR (APP): Armed men stormed a jewelry shop, and took away 25 tolas of gold and Rs 3.3 million cash after holding the shopkeeper at gunpoint, here on Sunday morning.

Police has confirmed the incident that occurred in Bara Tehsil Bazar, district Khyber.

The victim was identified as Rehmat.

The Traders Union has blocked the main Afghan Highway for all kinds of traffic, in a protest. The protesters are demanding the arrest of the culprits, and protection for the business community.

Ghulam Khan, Kharlachi trade routes: Traders hail allowing export trucks

PESHAWAR (APP): Traders community welcomed the government's decision, allowing export trucks through Ghulam Khan and Kharlachi trade routes along with Torkham border, calling it a major step to speed up the process of export and boost up economic and trade activities in the region.

Muhammad Ishaq, president of Sarhad Chamber of Commerce and Industry and Ziaul Haq Sarhadi, Director and Coordinator Pak-Afghan Joint Chambers of Commerce and Industry (PAJCCI) while talking to a group of reporters here on Sunday said apart from the Torkham border, the allowing export trucks by Ghulam Khan and Kharlachi trade routes will not only expedite process of export but it would also create job opportunities and open new era of prosperity and development in the whole region.

They told the media that permission has been granted to export trucks through Ghulam Khan and Kharlachi border points following the directions of Chief Collector Customs Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

Muhammad Saleem.

They added the officials concerned have given a complete assurance for provision of all facilities for promotion of cross-border and transit trade.

They said the decision of the government and customs department was widely appreciated by the business community.

Muhammad Ishaq and Ziaul Haq Sarhadi extended their special gratitude to Chief Collector Customs Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Muhammad Saleem, Chairman FBR Asim Ahmad, Member (Customs) FBR Mukaram Jah Ansari, high-officials of National Logistic Cell, local administration and other relevant departments, authorities for their initiatives of facilitating cross border trade.

The business community expressed hope that relevant departments, authorities will continue their efforts by utilizing all available resources and ensure provision of all facilities for promotion of Pak-Afghan Bilateral and Transit Trade.

Traders also appreciated Customs Collector Appraisal Peshawar Muhammad Ashfaq and other officials concerned for their efforts and initiatives for Pak-Afghan mutual trade, transit trade and onward to Central Asian republics.

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They expressed the hope that the decision would play an important role in bringing speediness in the process of exports.

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City shopkeepers, traders worried over increasing crimes rate

PESHAWAR (APP): The day-by-day increase in robbery incidents in several areas including the inner city has made the citizens worried. According to reports lodged in different Police Stations across the capital city of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Peshawar, the citizens started losing their mobile phones and valuables in broad daylight.

A person who robbed shopkeepers in Sarafa Bazaar was caught by the local people and was handed over to the police. The young man was caught immediately by the local people when reportedly

stole valuable things from the Gems and Jewelry Market. The alleged burglar used to steal in the same market before, the local and eyewitnesses said soon after apprehending him. The shopkeepers and citizens also beat up the thief and then handed him over to the police.

The shopkeepers also demanded the government to ensure their security and asked the police to conduct patrolling inside the city areas where most of the incidents of robberies and snatching of valuable things at gun-point are taking place.

One shopkeeper, requesting anonymity, said that they were compelled by robbers on gun point to hand over their everything during early morning when they were opening their shops and closing their businesses during late night. He said that despite having CCTV cameras installed on various points, the thieves did not bother to give them time rather snatching everything they have.

A senior journalist Nadir Khawjah who also lost his motorbike when he went to hospital for admitting his ailing mother in emergency, said that despite of

arresting the accused by the police, he could not get his motorbike back. During the course of time, the police of the concerned Police Station offered him Rs. 25000 as compensation of his stolen motorbike worth Rs. 75000. In the mean time, his ailing mother breathed her last at the hospital. "How, I can accept to get Rs. 25000 of my motorbike of Rs. 75000, he questioned and added, we do nothing but to report to the concerned Police Station of my stolen bike. "Now the case is in the court and I am without my motorbike," he added.

PM loan scheme brings jubilation among KP youth

PESHAWAR (APP): The Prime Minister's loan scheme, a landmark initiative to provide soft loans of Rs30 billion to Pakistani youth for business and agricultural purposes, has brought widespread jubilation among the youth of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Like others, Wisal Khan 28, who was running an electronics workshop at his hometown Pabbi, Nowshera district for the last eight years, was overjoyed on launching of the historic loans programme and providing a golden opportunity to unemployed youth of all provinces to establish their own business and contribute in the country's development process.

With tester and pliers in hands repairing ACs at his two-room workshop with scattered electricity appliances around him, Wisal Khan said, "I was making efforts to open a mega workshop of the electronics at Peshawar for the last six years to increase monthly income to feed my eight-member family but could not do so due to financial constraints."

The program is a great opportunity for youth, who constitutes 64 per cent of the country's population, he said adding that like other

unemployed youth he would apply online for Rs500,000 loan which was being given on zero markup rate. "It will fulfill my dream of setting up a modern workshop in Peshawar to bolster my income," said the overjoyed Wisal.

The Prime Minister's loan scheme finances interest-free loan up to Rs500,000 in the first category followed by above Rs500,000 to Rs1.5 million loans with five percent mark-up and above Rs1.5 million to Rs7.5 million on seven percent mark-up through 15 banks would be provided on easy installment plans.

The programme would facilitate all segments of the society including male, female, special persons and transgender aging from 21 to 45 years with 25 per cent quota specified for women. The youth, who attained the age of 18 could also avail the facility to start his business in IT and E-Commerce related sectors, however, the government servants and non-natives were not eligible.

Ikhtiar Wali Khan, Pakistan Muslim League-N spokesman told APP on Sunday that financial empowerment of youth was the cornerstone of the gov-

ernment policy that would ensure the disbursement of a total Rs30 billion among over 40,000 youth including from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa by June this year on merit.

The PMLN KP spokesman said half of these loans would be provided for youth interested in agriculture while the remaining half to be given for business loans for small and medium enterprises.

In a short span of one month, he said Rs800 million were provided to 3,300 beneficiaries under the landmark initiative, which spoke volume of the present government's strong commitment towards financial empowerment of youth.

"The present loan scheme was the continuation of the historic PM's youth loan scheme launched in 2013 by the then Prime Minister Muhammad Nawaz Sharif under which billions of rupees were given to eligible youth besides vehicles to a large number of unemployed youngsters."

To promote education and research works, he said the federal government would provide 100,000 laptops to top achiever youth on merit, adding that the Nawaz Sharif government's

laptop scheme had greatly helped students to continue their studies during COVID-19 pandemic.

"The last year devastated flood had badly affected my agriculture land and I would definitely apply for the PM's loan scheme for land management and making it cultivable for wheat, rice and maize crops," said Malayar Khan, a 25-year progressive farmer of village Mohib Banda Nowshera while talking to APP.

He said the scheme was enabling hundreds of thousands of unemployed youngsters to setup their own business and contribute to the country's economic and development process. "Tomorrow, I will submit my online application for Rs one million loan, while my other family members and jobless friends were also considering to apply Rs five lakh loan due to zero markup."

Ikhtiar Wali said scores of initiatives were launched for promotion of technical education and empowerment of youth including provision of over 25,000 paid Internships for young engineer, adding the youth graduates of engineering universities of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa would largely benefit from the Prime

Minister's internship program.

He continued that technical education and vocational training to 50,000 youth would be provided and about Rs20 billion scholarships were already awarded to talented and deserving students.

Besides loan programs, he said that youth transformation programs for 20 under-developed districts Pakistan including KP, innovation fund and 75 national top talent scholarships programme besides free laptop schemes would help encourage self-employment among youth instead of seeking public sector jobs.

He said the size of the federal development budget was Rs1 trillion during the Nawaz Sharif Government in 2018 and was reduced to Rs550 billion by the PTI government that badly affected youth and sports projects in the country including KP.

He deplored that despite claiming itself a representative of youth, PTI's government failed to launch any significant project for welfare and financial empowerment of youth during ten-year long rule in KP.

Ikhtiar further said the former PTI government in

KP could also not delivered in sports sector and failed to complete reconstruction works on Arbab Niaz cricket stadium in Peshawar while construction work on Kalam Sports Stadium on 341 kanals could not be started in Swat despite the home district of former Chief Minister Mahmood Khan.

As result of delayed work, the construction cost of Arbab Niaz stadium was swelled to over Rs2 billion and was unlikely to complete on the set deadline i.e. June 2023, he claimed.

According to SMEDA, financial support and technical training in different SMEs business was being provided to the youth under the Prime Minister's youth development program.

As many as Rs500,000 grant was being provided for early start up business to youth for a period of four months to one year with 80 percent share by SMEDA and 20pc by the beneficiary and additional Rs51 lakh grant for one to five years for strengthening of their business.

Likewise, 350 business plans were prepared with facilities of free training and expertises to SMEs for the Prime Minister's youth development programme.

Under the Economic Revitalization Project (ERP) worth USD 20 billion for KP, the youths were provided financial support in purchase of machinery, up-gradation of business, training to staff, and registration of business plans and trademarks etc.

The honey processing and packaging common facility centre (CFC), dyeing, washing and processing units for silk clusters and women business development centres in Mingora Swat were established besides setting up of spinning CFC at Islampur Swat to promote infant industries in Malakand division.

"Work on five projects including two for merged areas worth Rs4087 million were underway for empowerment of youth," Engr Arifullah Shah, senior planning officer, Sports and Youth Affairs Department KP told APP. He said that Rs2301 million were allocated for these projects in budget 2022-23.

Arif said work on two projects for merged areas including establishment of sports complexes and economic uplift of youth costing Rs872 million was in progress while three projects namely youth development package, construction

and rehabilitation of youth properties and financial empowerment of youth and women for settled districts of KP would help harness youth potential for national development.

He said land for Kalam cricket ground in Swat has been purchased with an estimated cost of Rs2.1 billion while 30 percent remaining work on Arbab Niaz Cricket stadium would hopefully be completed this year subject to availability of funds.

Out of 1000 playground project of the former PTI government, he said about 220 were completed while 780 were yet to be ready in the province due to lack of funds. He said sports complexes for Chitral, Lakki Marwat, Karak and Dir Timergara were approved besides approval of sports gymnasia in Haripur, Bannu with allocation of Rs707.608 million to engage youth in healthy activities.

The experts said that Prime Minister's loan scheme would largely benefit the youth of merged tribal districts and technical manpower of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa to establish their business and provides jobs to other in their respective fields.



In brief

Woman raped at gunpoint

JHELUM (INP): A man barged into a house of a married woman and raped her at gunpoint in Jhelum on Sunday. Later the man locked the main gate before fleeing from the spot. Police said that the initial medical report had confirmed rape with the woman, who worked as a maid at people's homes, while there were also marks of torture on her body. The Force further said that a case had been registered against suspect Ashraf, who was a close relative of victim's husband and had a criminal record.

23 criminals arrested

SARGODHA (APP): Police claimed on Sunday to have arrested 23 criminals and recovered narcotics and illegal weapons from their possession. In a crackdown against drug pushers and criminals, the police arrested four proclaimed offenders wanted by police in different cases of dacoity, robbery, theft and other crimes. The police also apprehended four court absconders during the crackdown. The police also arrested eight drug peddlers and recovered 180 litre liquor, two bottles of imported wine, 1.170 kg Hashish and 21 grams Ice. While two illegal weapon holders were arrested with two pistols and rounds. The police also nabbed five gamblers and recovered stake money and other paraphernalia from them. Some of the criminals were identified as Aslam, Ahemd, Imaad, Umar, Furqan, Qurban Ali, Ghulam Rasool, Shakoor, Mehmood, Masood, Majed, Wasim, Waheed, Nadeem, Kamal, Akram and others. Cases have been registered against the accused.

DC visits slaughter house

B A H A W A L P U R (APP): Deputy Commissioner Bahawalpur Zaheer Anwar Jappa on Sunday paid a surprise visit to the slaughterhouse Bahawalpur. He directed that a veterinary doctor should be present and the hygiene of the slaughterhouse should be maintained by timely disposing of the waste of animals. He said that the maintenance work of the building would be completed soon.

Teams formed to take action

MULTAN (APP): City Police Officer (CPO) Mansoor-ul-Haq Rana said that special teams had been formed for a comprehensive crackdown against kite sellers in the city. In a statement issued here on Sunday, the city police officer said that it had been decided to launch a comprehensive crackdown against kite selling and flying adding that special police teams had been formed for the purpose. The teams were conducting operations on a daily basis in which various kite dealers had been arrested so far, besides recovering kites and chemical string rolls from their possession. He said that kite flying was not only a deadly activity but also a crime under which the violators could get three years imprisonment or fined Rs 100,000. He said that the name of violators would be registered in police character certificate, after that they would not be eligible for government jobs and it would also create problems for them if they decided to go abroad. He urged parents to monitor the activities of their children and not allow them to fly kites. He also asked people to not let anybody use their houses for flying kites, otherwise, strict legal action would be taken against them. He urged citizens to inform police through police emergency helpline 15 in case of any kite selling and flying activities in their areas.

Police passing parade out held

Shafiullah

MINGORA: Caretaker Minister for Communications and Works (C&W) Muhammad Ali Shah says that the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa police established peace by sacrificing their lives, I salute the services of the policemen for peace and serving the soil of the country.

"When I got the opportunity to serve Swat as a Nazim, I tried to provide facilities to Swat Police beyond my capacity and was successful. Different proposals have been made to take measures for the provision of land for the expansion of the police training school, construction of a boundary wall,

and work on the expansion of the Mosque, in this context these proposals will be placed before the current government.

In the current situation, it is very important to strengthen the facilities in the Swat Police Training School" said the Caretaker Minister.

He expressed these views in his speech as a chief guest at the police passing out ceremony at the Police Training School Mingora. DIG Training Feroze Shah also participated in the event.

Additional Deputy Commissioner Swat Sohail Ahmed and Director Police Training School Swat Noor Jamal along with police officers and local elders

participated in a large number.

The chief guest, caretaker minister Muhammad Ali Shah inspected the parade and distributed shields among the policemen for the best performance during the training.

The event also saw a display of skill by the passing-out policemen. In his address as Chief Guest, Caretaker Minister Muhammad Ali Shah said that Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Police has become an organized and professional force and is improving with time.

He congratulated the policemen who completed the training and hoped they would perform their duties dutifully.

25 outlaws held; drugs, arms recovered in Tank

TANK (APP): The Tank Police have arrested 25 outlaws including three absconders and recovered 6,995 kilograms of hashish, 1,500-kilogram opium, 345 grams of heroin, two rifles and 25 cartridges from their possession. According to a police spokesman, the police force was determined to clean up Tank city of all crimes.

The police team led by Gul Imam Police Station SHO Rehmat Khan, under the supervision of DSP Rural Alamgir Khan created a blockade at Adda Sher Ali during patrolling on Tank-Pezu road after receiving a tip-off that a huge cache of narcotics was being smuggled in a Suzuki Bolan bearing number (STT-1089).

The police stopped the vehicle and recovered 4.8 kilogram of hashish and 1.2

kilogram of opium from its secret cavities. The person sitting in the front seat managed to escape by taking advantage of the forest cover while the driver of the car was arrested. The arrested accused was identified as Waris Khan, a resident of Kohat. A case was also registered against the accused.

Similarly, Shaheed Mureed Akbar police station SHO Asghar Wazir recovered 250 grams of hashish from accused Ahmed Khan son of Dare Khan resident of SWTD. City police station SHO Samiullah Khan recovered 95 grams of heroin from accused Muhammad Asif son of Ghulam Muhammad resident of Bhakkar, Punjab.

Similarly, In-charge of Luqman Check post, Head Constable Aziz Khan

arrested two accused including Umar Gul, a resident of Nemat Khel and Maqbool, a resident of Tator, and recovered 50 grams of heroin from each of them.

Whereas, a dagger and 50-gram heroin was recovered from an accused Habibullah, a resident of Sheikhanwala.

Apart from this, ASI Musa Khan of Gomal police station recovered one rifle and five cartridges from accused Zainullah, a resident of Gardavi, while ASI Amin Shah of Chowki Latif recovered 50 grams of heroin from accused Fazlur Rehman, a resident of Razzaq Colony and head constable Muhammad Shafiq netted accused Mureed Abbas during the blockade at Korr-Qila recovering 45 grams of hashish from his possession.

Newly constructed steel bridge inaugurated



F.P. Report

DIR: Last year in Swat and Malakand, several bridges were swept away due to severe floods, making access to various areas impossible. Security Forces and the District Administration temporarily paved the roads for access to the areas, but important steps are being taken for permanent access. In this regard,

Security Forces completed the construction of a steel bridge in Killot area of Upper Dir and opened it for all types of traffic.

About 10,000 people of the area will benefit from the newly constructed steel bridge. While constructing, Security Forces ensured that the construction of the bridge is at a high level so it can be protected from the water flow after rains in the

future. Local residents also volunteered with the Security Forces during the construction of the bridge.

On the occasion of the inauguration of the bridge, the local population thanked the Senior Officials of the Pakistan Army & Frontier Corps North and said that the construction of the bridge will make travel easier and access to other areas will be possible.

DC chairs meeting regarding digital census

NAWABSHAH (APP): The Deputy Commissioner Shehryar Gul Memon here on Sunday chaired a meeting at his office to review the arrangements of 7th Digital House and population Census.

Addressing the meeting, the DC said that the first Digital House and Population Census commencing from March 1, 2023 throughout the country was of utmost importance. He said, it provides a platform for future planning, strategies and

decisions. The DC said that for that purpose, the Digital Census shall be finalized free from any error and negligence.

The DC said that the absence of staff discharging their duty for Digital Census would not be tolerated at any cost. He instructed the officials of the Education Department that staff who completed their training for the purpose shall ensure their attendance or in other cases face legal action.

Ulema team calls on RPO

FAISALABAD (APP): A delegation of Central Ulema Council Pakistan called on RPO Dr Muhammad Abid Khan, here on Sunday. The delegation was headed by Chairman Central Ulema Council Sahibzada Zahid Mahmood Qasmi. The RPO urged the delegation members to play their role in curbing the hate material on the social media. He said that the role of ulema was vital in maintaining law and order in the country and they should use their platform for establishing peace in the country. Qasmi assured the senior police officer of extending all-out coordination to the divisional administration. He said that the Central Ulema Council Pakistan was making efforts for establishing peace in the country by highlighting the message of brotherhood and tranquility from 'Mimbar and Mihrab' (pulpit).

The DC appealed to the general public to fully participate in the Digital Census as a national cause and provide correct information to the census staff. He also instructed officials of the police department to ensure strict security arrangements during the Digital Census program and District Census Officers to make arrangements for collection of correct facts and figures during the Census process.

On this occasion, Divisional Census Coordinator Noor Din Jamali informed that all arrangements including training of Census staff had been finalized while tablets were also handed over to Census staff.

The meeting was also attended by ADC Muhammad Saleem Jatoti, Capt Jawwad of Pak Army, DSP Police Habibur Rehman Lashari, Rangers, officials of the Statics Department, Health, Education, Transport and other related departments.



HYDERABAD: Kelashi girls dancing on stage during Kelash Festival.

Earthquake hits Awaran, other parts of Balochistan

AWARAN (INP): The earthquake tremors were felt early Sunday morning in Awaran district of Balochistan province and adjacent areas.

An earthquake of magnitude 4.6 on the Richter scale jolted Awaran and surrounding areas on Sunday morning. The residents came out of their homes reciting the 'Kalma-e-Tayyaba'.

The Seismological Center furthered that its depth was 76 kilometers. However, it didn't confirm the epicenter of the earthquake.

As per initial reports there was no loss of life or any financial loss.

On February 24, earthquake tremors of 4.2 intensity jolted Islamabad and its adjoining areas.

According to the National Seismic Monitoring Centre (NSMC), the tremors were felt at 6:06 in the morning.

People came out of their houses in fear by reciting Kalma-e-Tayyaba. No loss is reported as per initial reports. It is to be mentioned here that the tremors relatively closer to the surface are likely to bear long-term adverse effects on the buildings.

Hyderabad Literature Festival begins

HYDERABAD (INP): The eighth edition of two-day Hyderabad Literature Festival (HLF) has begun at Sindh Museum on Sunday.

The festival was inaugurated by Culture and Tourism Director General Munawar Ali Mahesar.

Famous writers, intellectuals, and poets from across Sindh attended the festival. They shed light on the ancient culture and history of Sindh. Some international scholars also attended the festival.

On the first day of the colourful event, children performed tableaux on national songs while local artists entertained the participants with Sufi poetry.

The festival also featured the exhibition of various books on history, science, literature and classical music.

Moreover, it also showcased the products made by skilled women from underprivileged areas which enthralled the participants and infused the air with the fragrance of art.

Kite dealers held with 233 kites

SARGODHA (APP): Police have arrested three kite dealers and recovered 233 kites and chemically coated twine from their possession during a special operation, launched in the city on Sunday.

The police officials of different stations launched the operation against kite-sellers and arrested Rabnawaz, Shehzad and Aslam over violation of the Kite-Flying Act.

District Police Officer Muhammad Faisal Kamran said in a statement that people involved in the illegal kite business would be treated with strictly. He said that no one would be allowed to put the people's lives at risk. He urged parents to monitor the activities of their children and protect them from mishaps.

Jail Bharo Tehreek:

Gujranwala central jail refuses to keep PTI workers

GUJRANWALA (INP): The administration of Gujranwala Central Jail on Sunday refused to keep Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) workers in the prison, who are surrendering themselves for the Jail Bharo Tehreek.

The jail administration in a letter has informed the police and the district administration.

According to the jail officials, Gujranwala Jail is already overcrowded as it is keeping 3,300 prisoners against its capacity of

1,500.

The PTI workers arrested in Gujranwala will be shifted to the other jails of the province, the sources.

It may be noted that Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf has kicked off Jail Bharo Tehreek at the directions of party chief Imran Khan from Wednesday.

Earlier, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Rawalpindi leaders, who volunteered their arrest under party's 'Jail Bharo Tehreek', were transferred to Shahpur jail from Adiala.

According to sources, PTI senior leaders Zulfi Bukhari, Sadaqat Abbasi, Fayazul Hassan Chohan, Ijaz Khan Jazi, Latifat Abbasi and Chaudhry Sajid were shifted to Shahpur jail. The police also moved 41 PTI activists from Adiala jail to the Hafizabad jail.

After Lahore, Peshawar and Rawalpindi, the court arrest drive will reach Multan today where more than 200 PTI activists will voluntarily surrender themselves to police.

Security forces to conduct 'Olive Plantation Drive'

F.P. Report

ORKAZAI/KURRAM: In an effort to revive sustainable agriculture practices and combat climate change, security forces in coordination with locals have planned to conduct the Olive Plantation Drive-2023 in DAK, Orakzai and Kurram District. The drive aimed to plant 100,000 Olive saplings.

In Orzkai, for the first phase of the drive, 16 students, youths have been

trained at the Barani University of Chakwal and more than 12,00 locals trained through an awareness workshop with the help of the district agriculture department and NGOs in December 2022. Whereas, in DAK out of two phases devised for the same purpose under a public-private partnership, a phase 1 has already been completed with the grafting of more than 3500 plants.

It is worth noting that

37,000 Olive saplings from the previous monsoon season have survived whereas the survivability rate at Kurram stands at 65%.

The plantation drive will promote broader agriculture practices in the Olive industry along with better job opportunities and will contribute to revenue generation.

Expertise in the agriculture department and relevant fields will be incorporated to boost the desired target.

Police rescue young girl from prostitution

— arrest father, three others in Mardan

MARADAN (APP): In a timely action, the Sadar Police Station Mardan on Sunday has saved a young girl from being exposed to prostitution.

The police team, led by SHO Abdul Salam Khan, arrested four accused, including the father who sold his daughter for money.

According to the police, Sajjad Ali, a resident of Khishgi Payan in

Nowshera, had sold his daughter for 8 lakh rupees (0.8 million) to three accused, Bilal Hussain from Gondal, Punjab, Arbab Riaz from Muslim Colony Sialkot, Punjab, and Mahmood Khan from Akakhel Bara, Khyber District.

Upon receiving confirmed information, the police team, along with female officers, raided the house of the accused and

rescued the girl. Sajjad Ali was arrested on the spot and the other three suspects were also taken into custody.

The police have urged the public to report any illegal activities and suspicious movements immediately. This incident highlights the importance of timely intervention in such cases to prevent young girls from falling prey to human trafficking and exploitation.

Haleem for ensuring best health facilities at hospital

D.I.KHAN (APP): The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Minister for Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries Abdul Haleem Khan Qasuria has said the people would be provided with the best health facilities at Mufti Mehmood Memorial Teaching Hospital.

The Minister said improvement in the health sector was among the "top priorities of the provincial government".

He expressed these views during a visit to Mufti Mahmood Hospital.

He said, "Dera Ismail Khan is our city and I will work for ensuring maximum facilities for the people in different departments including health, agriculture, livestock and fisheries."

On this occasion, MS of the hospital Dr Farrukh Jameel and other officials of the administration were present.

During his visit, the caretaker provincial minister went to different sections of the hospital and reviewed the facilities

being provided by the government. He also checked the cleanliness situation in the hospital.

He directed the hospital administration to take all possible measures for the provision of maximum facilities to the people in the health sector and assured of zero tolerance in that regard.

He said the Mufti Mahmood Hospital had its own importance as patients from far-flung areas came here for treatment facilities.

DC distributes food

BAHAWALPUR (APP): Deputy Commissioner Bahawalpur Zaheer Anwar Jappa visited the Langar Khana (community kitchen) of Saylani Welfare Trust near the General Bus Stand on Sunday and inspected the dining hall, washroom, and kitchen.

Members Board Saylani Welfare Trust Faisal Nadeem, Iftikhar Ahmed

Cheema, President Chamber of Commerce Zulfikar Ahmed Maan, General Secretary Bahawal Gymkhana Malik Ejaz Nazim, Member Board of Governors Bahawal Gymkhana Sharjeel Abrar and renowned industrialist Saad Masood were also present on the occasion.

Deputy Commissioner checked the quality of food

in the Langar Khana and expressed his satisfaction. He distributed food, clothes and shoes among poor people on behalf of the Saylani Trust.

He said the Saylani Welfare Trust is doing welfare work for deserving people and urged philanthropists to contribute to the welfare of deserving people.



Nigeria tallies votes for new president



LAGOS (AFP/APP): Nigeria was counting ballots on Sunday, a day after a historically tight election among three frontrunners competing for the presidency of Africa's most populous nation.

Nearly 90 million voters were eligible for Saturday's election, which went off mostly peacefully, although isolated violence, delays and technical hitches forced many to wait to nightfall to vote.

After two terms under President Muhammadu Buhari, many Nigerians hope a new leader can do a better job tackling the widespread insecurity, joblessness and growing poverty afflicting their nation.

The election pits former Lagos governor and APC candidate Bola Tinubu, 70, against old rival, former vice president and PDP candidate Atiku Abubakar, who at 76 is on his sixth bid for the nation's top job.

But for the first time since the end of military rule in 1999, a third-party candidate, Labour's Peter Obi, has challenged the APC and PDP dominance with a campaign message of change.

Crowds waited outside polling stations in Lagos and other cities late on Saturday as electoral officials tallied first results by hand and read out the counts before transmitting them to a central database.

"We just finished counting, but we need to make sure they upload the

results," said Chizoba Onuoha, an IT manager, watching the count at her Lagos polling station.

The competitive three-way race has some analysts forecasting an unprecedented, second-round runoff between the two frontrunners if no candidate meets election requirements.

But for some voters, nightfall meant more waiting, after late starts by election officials and technical difficulties with voter ID technology created huge delays in some polling centres in Lagos and other cities.

In northwest Kano city, in one electoral area voting materials arrived five hours after official opening time, according to an AFP correspondent.

"Voting is still in progress well beyond the approved hours," said voter Kabiru Sani, 37. "We started late, and we will not allow ourselves to be disenfranchised."

In a country where votes are often marred by attacks, violent clashes between rival supporters, and ethnic tensions, Saturday's election was mostly peaceful.

Several Lagos polling booths were ransacked, according to the Independent National Electoral Commission or INEC, voter ID machines were stolen in other states and voting at 141 polling units in southern Bayelsa State would take place on Sunday after the ballot was disrupted. Insecurity was a major

election issue, with Nigeria still battling a 14-year jihadist insurgency in the northeast that has displaced two million people, bandit militias in the northwest and separatist gunmen in the southeast. The success of Nigeria's vote will be closely watched in West Africa, where coups in Mali and Burkina Faso and growing Islamist militancy have taken the region's democracy back a step.

Buhari, a former army commander, steps down after two terms in office. His critics say he failed in his key promises to make Nigeria safer.

APC's candidate Tinubu, 70, a long-time political kingmaker and southern, says "It's my turn" for the presidency. He can count on APC's structure and his political network.

He faces a familiar rival -- PDP candidate Abubakar, 76, who is on his sixth bid for the top job and touts his business experience. But both are old guard figures who have fought off past corruption accusations. The emergence of a surprise third candidate appealing to young voters, Labour Party's Obi, 61, has thrown the race open with his campaign as the candidate of change.

Voters will also cast their ballot for Nigeria's two houses of parliament, the National Assembly and Senate.

To win the presidency, a candidate must get the most votes, but also win 25 percent in two-thirds of Nigeria's 36 states.

If no candidate wins, a runoff will take place within 21 days between two frontrunners.

The rules reflect a country almost equally split between the mostly Muslim north and predominantly Christian south, and with three main ethnic groups across the regions: Yoruba in the southwest, Hausa/Fulani in the north and Igbo in the southeast.

Nigeria's voting also often falls along ethnic and religious lines. This time, Tinubu is a southern Yoruba Muslim, Abubakar is an ethnic Fulani Muslim from the northeast and Obi is a Christian Igbo from the southeast.

Fuel and cash shortages caused by a bank note exchange in the run-up to the election also left many Nigerians struggling more than usual in a country already hit by more than 20-per-cent inflation.

Thousands without power as California storms bring rain, snow and cold

LOS ANGELES (Reuters): Nearly 85,000 households and businesses were without power in the Los Angeles area on Saturday, as storms continued to pummel parts of California, bringing snow to higher elevations and dumping rain and hail in the flatlands.

Interstate 5, the largest highway leading north out of the city, remained closed at the steep grade known as the Grapevine due to heavy snow, while several more southern points of the freeway in and around Los Angeles were closed due to flooding, the California Department of Transportation said.

In Northern California, San Francisco was expected to experience record cold temperatures on Saturday, and the National Weather Service warned residents of the state capital of Sacramento to avoid travel from Sunday through Wednesday as rain and snow started up again after a reprieve on Saturday.

"Extreme impacts from heavy snow & winds will cause extremely dangerous to impossible driving conditions & likely widespread road closures & infrastructure impacts!" the agency said on Twitter.

The next set of storms, expected to hit on Sunday, will bring wind gusts of up to 50 miles per hour (80 kph) in the Sacramento Valley, and up to 70 miles per hour in the nearby Sierra Nevada mountains. Yosemite National Park was closed through Wednesday due to severe winter conditions.

A massive low-pressure system driven from the Arctic was responsible for the unusual conditions, said Bryan Jackson, a forecaster at the NWS Weather Prediction Center in College Park, Maryland.

In Southern California, "this is a rare case of a cold, significant storm event," Jackson said.

In a sight that must have delighted many Angelenos on Friday, snowflakes even fell around the

Hollywood sign atop Mount Lee in the hills above the city, known for its sunny days and palm trees.

On Saturday, scattered showers and isolated thunderstorms were expected to bring rain, hail and a mixture of snow and moisture called "graupe" to the area, the National Weather Service said.

A separate storm that clobbered the U.S. Plains, Midwest and Great Lakes regions earlier this week blew out to the Atlantic on Friday after passing over New England, the weather service said. More than 400,000 customers of Detroit based DTE Energy (DTE.N) remained without power on Saturday, the Detroit News reported.

Even before the latest storm, much of California had experienced an unusually rainy, chilly winter, starting with a spate of deadly "atmospheric river" storms that unleashed widespread flooding, felled trees and triggered mudslides in a state long plagued by drought and wildfires.



How Italy's generous green homes scheme turned 'wicked'

ROME (AFP/APP): An Italian scheme to make homes more energy efficient has been wildly popular, but the government is seeking to rein in its "out of control" costs amid fears it could send the deficit soaring.

The "superbonus" scheme, which can be used for anything from insulation to solar panels, new boilers and windows, was introduced in May 2020 to boost the economy after the coronavirus lockdown.

Environmentalists were sceptical about its benefits but Italians rushed to take advantage of the programme, in which the state paid 110 percent of the cost of making homes greener, with the subsidy delivered via a tax credit or tax reduction.

As intended, it boosted the construction sector -- but it has so far cost the state 61.2 billion euros (\$64.8 billion), according to the finance ministry.

Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni, whose coalition government took office in October, said last weekend the situation was "out of control". She said the scheme had led to fraud worth nine billion euros, while the tradeable nature of the tax credits had "generated a sort of paral-

lel currency, and that parallel currency risks having a devastating impact on the budget".

Finance Minister Giancarlo Giorgetti went further, describing it as a "wicked policy".

Lorenzo Codogno, a former chief economist at the Treasury, told AFP that attempts now to quantify the impact of the scheme on Italy's strained public finances could be "a wake-up moment for financial markets".

He warned Italy's deficit could be revised up substantially, while both the construction sector and the government "could have liquidity problems".

Italy's deficit was an estimated 5.6 percent of GDP last year and set to fall to 4.5 percent in 2023, but revised figures potentially incorporating the superbonus scheme are due out on March 1.

The superbonus scheme was introduced by former premier Giuseppe Conte, whose populist, environmentalist Five Star Movement led the coalition government at the time. It allowed homeowners to either deduct the cost of work from their taxes over several years or sell the tax credit to their builder, who

would sell it to a bank, which would then claim the money from the state.

Angelica Donati, the president of the national constructors' association ANCE, told AFP the bonus had been "fundamental in the aftermath of Covid-19, both for reviving the Italian economy as well as restarting the construction industry".

The construction sector grew by 21.6 percent in 2021, helping fuel Italy's post-pandemic boom. But the scheme generated much more work than originally forecast and banks stopped buying credits last year, leaving some construction companies in the lurch.

Meloni's government has already sought to restrict the subsidies, reducing the superbonus from 110 percent to 90 percent last year.

Then last week it put a sudden stop to the use of the tax credits as it tries to work out how to unfreeze existing credits for an estimated 19 billion euros' worth of work that has been carried out but not yet paid for.

ANCE said some 25,000 construction companies were at risk of folding.

Superbonus users can now only receive money

back from the state via tax breaks -- but that mostly benefits those on higher incomes.

The government is looking into possible alternatives to the credit system. Climate campaigners hope it will also change the bonus's scope.

Experts have lamented what they see as a wasted opportunity to engineer a cultural shift towards properly green housing.

In a study last year, the Bank of Italy said the superbonus was "not a cost-effective way" to tackle climate change.

Matteo Leonardi, co-founder of Italian climate change think tank ECCO, said it lacked "ambition".

"It has not been linked to climate targets, which is what would have justified the costs," he told AFP, adding that renovations had only to boost efficiency by two energy classes. It also did not sufficiently promote innovative but less familiar technologies, such as heat pumps. But Leonardi said for all its faults, the superbonus had value if radically revised to meet more ambitious targets. With the tax credits gone, the government is now "just giving a lot of money to high-income families to install gas boilers".

KALMA. SUDAN (AFP/APP): In Sudan's sprawling Kalma camp for the displaced, Ansaf Omar lives with the gut-wrenching guilt of losing her toddler to a food crisis that has hit millions of people nationwide.

"I am severely malnourished so I couldn't breast-feed him," said Omar, 34, a month after her one-and-half-year-old child died in Kalma camp just outside Nyala, the provincial capital of South Darfur state.

"I took him everywhere - hospitals, treatment centres, but he died in the end," she said. Desperate mothers like Omar battle daily around Kalma to feed their frail and hungry children, many of whom are severely malnourished.

Sudan is one of the world's poorest countries, with one-third of the population -- at least 15 million people -- facing a growing hunger crisis, according to United Nations figures.

Nearly three million of

Sudan's children under the age of five are acutely malnourished, the UN says.

"Over 100,000 children in Sudan are at risk of dying of malnutrition if left untreated," said Leni Kinzli, head of communications in the country for the World Food Programme (WFP). Nationwide, one-third of children under five are "too short for their age", and nearly half of Sudan's 189 localities have a "stunting prevalence more significant than 40 percent", according to the Alight aid group. It said that at least 63 children were reported to have died from causes related to malnutrition at Alight facilities in and around Kalma in 2022.

Some 65 percent of Sudan's people live under the poverty line, according to a 2020 UN report.

Food insecurity is not new to the residents of Kalma, Darfur's largest camp and home to some 120,000 people displaced since the 2003 conflict erupted in the country's arid western region.

But residents say conditions have worsened as economic hardships kept rising and sporadic bouts of deadly violence continued.

Alight's nutrition centres in Kalma saw a "dramatic increase on admissions to and demand for its emergency nutrition services" in 2022, according to the group's country director, Heidi Diedrich.

"Kalma stabilisation centre newly admitted 863 children in 2022, an increase of 71 per cent from 2021," according to Alight.

"The number of deaths at the stabilisation centre increased by 231 per cent in 2022, all children aged six months and above."

Outside one nutrition centre in Kalma, 38-year-old Hawa Suleiman cradled her sleeping infant, hoping to find food for the child.

"We have nothing at home. We sometimes go to sleep hungry," she said.

In recent years the WFP

Hunger still blights the lives of Sudan's children

Syria's Assad meets senior Arab lawmakers in Damascus

DAMASCUS (Reuters): A delegation of senior Arab parliamentarians met with Syrian President Bashar al-Assad in Damascus on Sunday, another sign of thawing ties after more than a decade of isolation over the conflict in Syria.

The heads of the Iraqi, Jordanian, Palestinian, Libyan, Egyptian and Emirati houses of representatives, as well as representatives from Oman and Lebanon, traveled to Syria as part of a delegation from the Arab Inter-Parliamentary Union.

They met with Syrian parliamentarians and with Assad, according to Syrian state news agency SANA.

"We cannot do without Syria and Syria cannot do without its Arab environment, which we hope it can return to," said Iraqi parliament speaker Mohammed Halbousi.

Syria was largely isolated from the rest of the Arab world following Assad's deadly crackdown against



protests that erupted against his rule in 2011.

The Arab League suspended Syria's membership in 2011 and many Arab countries pulled their envoys out of Damascus.

But Assad has benefited from an outpouring of support from Arab states following the devastating earthquake on Feb. 6, which killed more than 5,900 people across his

country, according to a tally of U.N. and Syrian government figures. Donors have included Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, which both supported rebels seeking to overthrow Assad in the early years of the Syrian conflict.

Egypt's President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi spoke with Assad by phone for the first time on Feb. 7 and Jordan's foreign minister made his

first trip to Damascus on Feb. 15. Assad then traveled to Oman on Feb. 20 - the first time he left Syria since the quake. He had rarely left Syria during the war, travelling only to close allies Russia and Iran whose military support helped him turn the tide of the conflict.

Assad's 2022 visit to the UAE was his first trip to an Arab state since the 2011 outbreak of war.

A woman dies during pregnancy or childbirth every two minutes: UN

UNITED NATIONS (APP): Maternal health setbacks in many parts of the world have contributed to the worrying finding that a woman dies during pregnancy or childbirth around every two minutes, UN agencies have said.

According to a new report from the World Health Organization (WHO) released on February 23, maternal deaths have either increased or stagnated nearly everywhere, from 223 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births in 2020, down from 227 in 2015 and 339 in 2000.

Unless progress is made on global targets for reducing maternal deaths -- most

of which are preventable -- the lives of over one million more women by 2030 could be at risk, the WHO warned. "Pregnancy ... is tragically still a shockingly dangerous experience for millions around the world who lack access to high quality, respectful health care," Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, the WHO director-general, said in a statement. Tedros highlighted stark disparities in healthcare access in many regions and the urgent need "to ensure every woman and girl has access to critical health services before, during and after childbirth, and that they can fully exercise their reproductive rights".

Furthermore, as the world slowly emerges from the COVID-19 pandemic which has highlighted that coronavirus infections can increase risks during pregnancy, the report's authors stressed that more research will be needed to show the true impact of the global health emergency on maternal deaths. The WHO-produced report, Trends In Maternal Mortality, tracked maternal deaths nationally, regionally and globally from 2000 to 2020. It calculated 287,000 maternal deaths worldwide in 2020, which represented "only a slight decrease" from 309,000, in 2016. This was

the case despite countries' pledges in 2015 to implement the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), whose target is less than 70 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births by 2030. Although the report indicated "some significant progress" in reducing maternal deaths between 2000 and 2015, gains largely stalled, or in some cases even reversed, after this point, its authors said. Responding to the report's findings, the UN Population Fund's Executive Director, Dr Natalia Kanem expressed alarm that "so many women continue to die needlessly in pregnancy and childbirth.

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Judge and justice of own choice

Days after the top court kicked off its hearing into the suo motu notice taken over the apparent delay in Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa general elections. The ruling parties PML-N, the PPP, and JUI-F demanded the formation of the Supreme Court's full court bench to hear the suo motu notice regarding the general election in two provinces. Furthermore, the PDM alliance also sought the exclusion of Justice Ijazul Ahsan and Justice Sayyed Mazahar Ali Akbar Naqvi from the full bench dealing with their case. The parties were of the view that the reconstitution of the bench would be in the best interest of justice and fairness, and will strengthen the public confidence in the top court.

The state of Pakistan faces a deep social and political division on ethnic and party lines that is seriously undermining the normal functioning of the state institutions including civil administration, judiciary, Policing, and several other departments in the country. Over the years, hypernationalism and rigid politics continuously added to already existing inter-party, intersect, and communal biases in society. Thus, political groups, trade unions, and cartels exploit this social volatility and institutional weakness for their benefit.

Presently, the warring political groups have adopted a strange philosophy by refusing to accept the court's verdict, administrative order or poll result if it does suit their politics and hail those actions and decisions which come in their favor and promote their politics. At the same time, those groups try to influence the judiciary and executive through favoritism, conceit, and bribes to manipulate things in their favor. This trend is highly regrettable and poisonous for the political system in the country.

As, the Supreme Court larger benched started hearing the suo motu action to assess eligibility to issue the date for polls, the constitutional responsibility of the federation and provinces to conduct elections in the country. An unfortunate and unpleasant situation occurred when government Ministers and PML-N senior leadership launched a verbal attack against the judiciary while a few judges were specifically named for their alleged bias and animosity toward the group. Surprisingly, the issue did not restrict to press talks and TV shows rather ruling alliance requested the apex court to exclude their name from the full court likely to form to hear the case in the coming days. The PDM leaders were of the view that those judges keep bias against the ruling elite and had offered verdicts against it multiple times in the past.

Realistically, national institutions are the real prestige of the country and enjoy full confidence and backing from the nation. The politicians have introduced new kinds of politics which restrict them to initiate dialogue with their opponents to forge consensus on national and political issues instead approach the courts to get legal verdicts on every other issue of political nature. Pakistan is a poor country and has no such resources to provide fresh judges, staffers and administrators to the political clans in each case and every term. Governor servants are bound by their oaths to conduct according to the constitution weather it suits to an individual or party or not because appeasement of influential is not mandatory for them. Therefore, public leaders must stop attacking national institutions, and government servants and focus on national issues, and problems of the people if they intend to groom their politics, otherwise their governance left nothing with the masses so far.

Sometimes realpolitik diplomacy, based on practical rather than moral or ideological considerations, requires that difficult choices be made. This appears to have been the case when a Palestinian delegation, and their UAE colleagues, shifted their focus from a UN Security Council resolution, which would have risked a US veto, to a US-supported presidential statement by the council that contained basically the same text. That thinking continues to guide the Ramallah-based leadership as it participates in the Aqaba security summit on Sunday along with Jordan, Egypt, the US, and Israel.

While a UN Security Council resolution is technically legally binding, the Palestinian experience of Israel actually being bound by such resolutions is very low.

In January 2020, the Security Council approved Resolution 2334, which declared all Israeli settlements to be illegal. It passed after President Barack Obama allowed his ambassador to the UN in New York, Samantha Power, to abstain from voting.

The resolution stated that Israel's settlement activity constitutes a “flagrant violation” of international law and has “no legal validity.” It demanded that Israel halt all such activity and fulfill its obligations as

an occupying power under the Fourth Geneva Convention.

Despite the strong language in that binding resolution, successive Israeli governments have ignored it. In fact, on Feb. 13 the Israeli Security Cabinet approved the legalization of nine unauthorized West Bank settlements. The Civil Administration Higher Planning Committee, run by the Israeli army, has also approved 10,000 new settler housing units.

Neither a resolution nor a statement from the Security Council is likely to halt Israeli settlement activities undertaken by a weak Israeli government that is beholden to radical settlers. Already the killing of 11 Palestinians, including a number of elderly men in Nablus on Thursday, has shown the ineffectiveness of trusting the US or Israel. But for the Abbas administration which is unable to challenge the Israelis, the US track continues to be the only viable one.

The US and the entire international community consider all settlements built in the Occupied Palestinian Territories to be illegal.

The resolution that the UN Security Council had been expected to consider on Feb. 20, submitted by Lana Nusseibeh, the UAE's ambassador to the UN, included text condemning the latest decisions by Israeli authorities and

demanding that they cease all settlement activities. But as in the 2020 resolution, no punitive measures were included. Even so, Washington was expected to veto the resolution, reportedly because of its strong language.

Kevin McCarthy, the speaker of the US House of Representatives, and Chuck Schumer, the majority leader in the Senate, along with other Republican and Democratic leaders in the House and the Senate, had publicly urged the Biden administration not to allow the resolution, which they described as anti-Israeli, to pass.

The decision by Palestinians to accept a presidential statement by the Security Council reflects a political judgment call. Riyadh Mansour, the permanent representative of the state of Palestine, believes that the statement, which also required Washington's approval, will send the same message as a resolution but would not risk a US veto, as has happened in the past. “The decision will further isolate Israel,” Mansour told Arab News.

Many Palestinians argue, however, that it represents capitulation to the US and Israel and an unnecessary compromise. But since politics is the art of the possible, Ramallah's compromise had other elements to it.

Daoud Kuttab

According to press reports, the decision was only taken after the US offered a White House invitation to Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas (apparently before one has been offered to new Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu), along with movement on the issue of the US Consulate in Jerusalem.

US pressure is also said to have produced Israeli promises to suspend settlement activities and the demolition of Palestinian homes for months, and to allow the transfer of tax money collected by Israel on behalf of Palestinians.

To some this represents an acceptance of the realpolitik on the part of the Palestinian leadership.

While it remains to be seen whether the new Israeli administration, which is shamelessly controlled by radical settlers, will honor the commitments it has made, Palestinians are counting on Washington to test the recently elected Netanyahu.

The thinking among the Palestinian leadership is that its compromise over the Security Council statement is a win-win situation. If the Israeli government honors its pledges to the US, then the achievement will be registered. If it fails to honor them, as expected, it will widen its rift with Washington which, in the

long run, could serve the Palestinian cause.

Israel said that some new settlements had already been approved but that there would be no further settlement announcements in the coming months.

The UAE therefore agreed to withdraw its resolution, after the Palestinians also agreed to this based on many of the above-mentioned commitments from Washington.

The decision by the UAE to cancel a vote on a Security Council resolution calling on Israel to “immediately and completely cease all settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territories” — drafted in close cooperation with the Palestinian delegation — was not taken lightly.

Two important side accomplishments were achieved by the Palestinians. Firstly, the level of cooperation with UAE officials was very high and the Palestinian delegation publicly praised their Emirati counterparts for coordinating with them in making all their decisions. This rapprochement will help Palestinians in the coming days and ease some of the difficulties faced in recent years.

Secondly, the presidential statement included terms designed to criticize Israeli hate speech against Palestinian Jerusalemites.

“The Council noted with deep concern instances of

discrimination, intolerance and hate speech motivated by racism or directed against persons belonging to religious communities — in particular cases motivated by Islamophobia, anti-semitism or Christianophobia,” the statement noted.

This is perhaps the first time ever that the terms “Christianophobia” and “Islamophobia” have been spoken together by the Security Council presidency.

There is no doubt that the decision to withdraw the resolution came at a time when Palestinians have few diplomatic cards to play. While it comes from a position of weakness rather than strength, it represents a Palestinian leadership that is well aware of its own lack of influence in light of disunity in the Arab world and the recent formation of a dangerous Israeli government. At the same time, the leadership looks to a future in which Israel might be further isolated and weakened when, as seems most likely, it fails to honor its promises to Washington.

Overall, the political compromise by Ramallah might have improved Palestinian relations with Washington but it comes at the cost of a further deterioration in the popularity of the 87-year-old Palestinian president and the entire Palestinian leadership.

Tunisia's descent into madness continues

It is unlikely that even the most pessimistic assessments of Tunisia's democratization could have accurately predicted what has befallen the North African country, or how much worse things might get in its increasingly bleak future.

Once deemed the only relative “success” of the Arab Spring, years of political paralysis, economic stagnation and citizen apathy are the malignant legacy of cherished democratic aspirations indefinitely deferred.

The raucous public furor that once toppled autocrats can now only muster feverish transcriptions of the country's daily descent into madness, owing to President Kais Saied's growing “folie de grandeur” and the opposition's incredible knack for making a lot of noise about doing nothing.

Lengthy think pieces, dripping with scholarly inquisition and excitedly outlining how the Arab world's first true democracy was going to function, are no more. Nowadays, the only remaining fixation is with picking at Tunisia's suppurating wounds and trying to diagnose its demise in hopes of finding some as yet unknown “fix” — a futile exercise that simply results in impotent denouncements until the next escalation. Rinse and repeat.

The uncomfortable “truth,” however, is that Tunisia's maladies are simply another variation on the Arab public's obsession with entrusting their ideals to what, at first, seems to be the least-worst option. Recent arrests and crackdowns have all but buried the dreams Tunisians had after 2014; an almost natural consequence of delegating everything to a little known populist “outsider” in the hope he would sin-

gle-handedly remake a very broken system, the wonky foundations upon which a future resilient democracy was to be built.

But democracy is not just about lengthy procedural affairs, elections, universal suffrage and open clashes between political formations in service to the betterment of a nation. Democracy is institutions, laws, norms, policies, edu-

cation, engagement and participation, as well as the mobilization of a polity to choose its governors and the means by which the governed can hold them accountable — plus more besides. A lot more.

It is tireless, often thankless, repetitive work, complicated further by, in Tunisia's case, the public repeatedly deferring to those more interested in clinging to power rather than exercising it.

Democracy is an undertaking that is as frustrating and exhausting as it is necessary, not only to safeguard it in its most basic form but also to enshrine a commitment by all, opposi-

Hafed Al-Ghwell

tion and incumbents alike, to respect the will of voters, ensure seamless transfers of power, uphold the rule of law and promote civil liberties, as well as defending the inalienable rights to have those freedoms.

It is clearly not a “fire and forget” ordeal that leaves someone, or something, else to deal with the

closed doors and ratified in a shoddy referendum that barely mustered a 30 percent turnout.

In a reflection of the suffocating lassitude permeating the public, most Tunisians opted to vote with their feet both in the referendum and the parliamentary elections late last year. To Saied's “L'Etat,

Tunisians are hopefully learning all of this, or they risk repeating the same mistakes that just nurture the next generation of aspiring despots and demagogues. After all, whenever history repeats itself, the price always goes up. In the past two years, Saied has not only shut down the parliament, itself paralyzed by petty squabbles. He has also seized most powers, self-empowered by a constitution that was hastily written behind closed doors and ratified in a shoddy referendum that barely mustered a 30 percent turnout. In a reflection of the suffocating lassitude permeating the public, most Tunisians opted to vote with their feet both in the referendum and the parliamentary elections late last year. To Saied's “L'Etat, c'est moi” (“I am the state”) brand of unilateralism, however, failure to say “No” is the same as saying “Yes.” Meanwhile, actual dissent will get the dissenter hauled before a tribunal.

c'est moi” (“I am the state”) brand of unilateralism, however, failure to say “No” is the same as saying “Yes.” Meanwhile, actual dissent will get the dissenter hauled before a tribunal.

Carthage Palace now rules Tunisia by decree in a strange hyper-presidency that is quickly consolidating itself, unperturbed by record-low turnouts, threats of disruptive protests by once-tacti backers and the constant finger-wagging from abroad.

Meanwhile, the public continues to suffer, as months-long shortages caused by a crisis in public finances intensify, forcing

messy bits, nor is the voting booth a miraculous vending machine that dispenses a fantastical wonderland, all for the price of a ballot paper.

Tunisians are hopefully learning all of this, or they risk repeating the same mistakes that just nurture the next generation of aspiring despots and demagogues. After all, whenever history repeats itself, the price always goes up.

In the past two years, Saied has not only shut down the parliament, itself paralyzed by petty squabbles. He has also seized most powers, self-empowered by a constitution that was hastily written behind

authorities to tighten the noose on ordinary Tunisians to avoid bankruptcy and secure a bailout from the International Monetary Fund.

Seemingly unfazed by any of this, the regime has gone on to unleash a campaign of arbitrary arrests, while military tribunals target civilians for the “crime” of publicly criticizing the president. Even lawyers,

longer independent. Eventually, the media will be forced to self-censor to avoid unfriendly visits from surprisingly compliant security forces.

Even migrants from Sub-Saharan Africa have become casualties of Saied's escalation, as he resorts to bizarre conspiracies depicting them as part of a criminal enterprise that is trying to alter Tunisia's demographic composition, in an attempt to divert attention from his alarming crackdown on dissent.

Resorting to the outlandish in an attempt to scapegoat failures or redirect the public's ire is a familiar tactic employed by despots to defuse perceived threats while simultaneously tightening their grip on power. It will not stop at targeting desperate migrants fleeing conflict, persecution and economic hardship, nor public figures who dare oppose the regime. It will only get worse because the one thing that despots never run out of is “enemies.”

Tunisia's woes must shatter the myth of the self-aggrandizing, “benevolent” dictator that clings to populism and has all the answers to society's ills. It can only be hoped that Tunisians will revive their once-cherished hopes for democracy and better governance because, for all its wars, most Arabs still maintain that it is the better mechanism for sharing and exercising power in plural societies.

Failure to do so, however, means that even after Saied is gone a new autocrat will emerge who is well-versed in resorting to illiberalism, and even outright criminality, to usurp power, monopolize the privilege it affords and sate the resulting megalomania by demanding the utmost obedience.

The Rohingya face the final insult

Dr. Azeem Ibrahim

Rohingya refugees continue to live in a painful limbo. About 750,000 of them are living abroad in squalor. Cast out of Myanmar, their home, they are trapped elsewhere in humiliating solitude.

Most of them live in refugee camps in Bangladesh, a country that is eager to be rid of them, come what may.

Myanmar itself is in a state of brutal civil war. The military junta that seized power in 2021 in a coup is now engaged in a vicious, and by no means successful, war of all-against-all. So isolated is the country, and so brutal the conflict, press reports are hard to obtain or verify.

However, Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh know one thing: They would be at great risk if they returned to a Myanmar dominated by the same military that

committed acts of genocide against them before 2017, when their villages were razed and they were expelled en masse from the country.

But danger lurks in Bangladesh, too, where the refugee camps are scenes of intense violence and cruelty. Refugees are forbidden from working, at least legally, and so for years they have felt the effects of grinding poverty.

That poverty means the Rohingya are dependent on charity and goodwill for food. Much of that food has come from the World Food Programme, a UN agency that for years has been supplementing their meager diet. But now, as global food prices continue to spike as a result of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the Rohingya are facing the prospect of less food aid reaching them through official channels.

The WFP has described the challenge in stark terms, warning that it is approaching the precipice of a massive funding shortfall. At a time of rising food prices, it said, the dollar amount of aid it can provide is already being reduced and further cuts are likely.

Al Jazeera reports that the monthly food allowance provided by the WFP to the Rohingya in Bangladesh will be cut by 17 percent to only \$10 per person at the beginning of March. Just think of that: Just \$10 with which to feed yourself for a month.

That is not all. The WFP has also warned that further cuts will soon be unavoidable unless additional funding is received by April.

This is a very bitter pill for the Rohingya. They

have lost everything. They have been thrown from their homes with no hope of returning to a country at war with itself. Their isolation has dragged on for more than half a decade. Now they are at risk of starvation.

UN officials have noted that malnutrition is not unknown within the refugee camps. The weakest are already under great strain as they are less able to ensure they get their rations. Criminal elements that exist within the camps, and the Bengali territory around them, disrupt the delivery of essentials.

Even before the latest cuts are implemented, up to a third of children in the camps are categorized as “stunted” in terms of growth and “underweight,” according to UN officials.

The situation can only

get worse.

“The repercussions of these cuts will be immediate and long-lasting, as refugees remain almost entirely dependent on this assistance for their nutritional needs,” Michael Fakhri, the UN's special rapporteur on food insecurity, and Tom Andrews, special rapporteur on human rights in Myanmar, said in a joint statement last week.

This is an understatement. If the cuts go through, it could prove to be the final insult to a population that is hardly ready to absorb additional shocks.

The camps are rife with iniquities. Children are forced to work or into marriage because their parents cannot legally find jobs and earn money. It is an awful situation for so many to be in — and it is likely to become much worse very soon.

This can all be turned around, however, just as the shortfall can be averted. An increase in funding for the WFP, which is provided both by nation states and private individuals and foundations, could prevent the axe from falling. If even a few donors made this their priority, they could save many people from destitution, illness and death.

But the larger issues still need to be addressed. The Rohingya will remain in limbo, whether or not some philanthropists ensure they are fed. The only way to resolve their fate positively is to pursue the justice they so desperately need: Justice in which the military junta in Myanmar is held liable for its campaign of genocide and punished, so as to allow the Rohingya to return to a Myanmar that is finally at peace.

Could civil war break out in Israel?

Not so long ago, the possibility of civil war in Israel would have been dismissed in the blink of an eye.

Political violence on some level has occurred throughout the country's short history, of course, and even before its inception. Nevertheless, even a defining moment such as the assassination of a prime minister, Yitzhak Rabin, by a Jewish gunman in the midst of crucial peace negotiations with the Palestinians in 1995, did not lead to fratricidal conflict between the factions of Israeli society, despite the anger mixed with deep sadness that the assassination produced.

However, times are changing, and the term civil war appears quite frequently in current discourse. While the political right in Israel has been employing violent tactics for years, talk among progressive forces about the use of weapons and possible bloodshed in the name of saving Israeli democracy are starting to emerge, too. Some argue that such words are only employed metaphorically but the leap from "so to speak" to resorting to actual violence could be shorter than many would want to believe.

Israel's system of democratic governance has always been built on less than stable foundations. This is due largely to the absence of any written, liberal-democratic-based constitution, but also to the country's experience of multiple conflicts with its neighbors and a lack of social cohesion.

In nearly 75 years of

independence, the Zionist belief that despite divisions within the Jewish majority, not to mention the large Arab Palestinian minority, there would be sufficient glue to hold the country together has proved to be no more than a pipe dream.

The current constitutional crisis, the worst since the country's inception, is no flash in the pan. Rather, it is the end result of a failure of nation building, a failure that has produced a fertile environment for divisive, populist political leaders who cynically exploit the divisions to gain power — and no one in the country's history has done this more unscrupulously, and more successfully, than the current prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu.

What held Israeli society together up until now were the twin pillars of hope and fear. The hope was one of building, after two millennia, an independent Jewish homeland, one that would be both safe and democratic. The pillar of fear had two facets: Firstly, fear of a return to the diaspora, where Jews would live once more under threat and persecution. Secondly, fear of decades of conflict with its neighbors, close and distant.

What is different now is that the line of demarcation between the forces that are determined to weaken the democratic system beyond recognition and those progressive forces who, after years of apathy, are protesting in the streets against them, is clearer than ever.

It can be argued that, in hindsight, this clash was

Yossi Mekelberg

inevitable due to the diametrically opposed views of what it means to be a Jewish democratic state to begin with but, more than that, one that is able to deprive millions of Palestinians of any democratic rights.

For too long, the unresolved, intrinsic paradoxes of Israeli society were swept under the carpet and allowed to fester, creating fertile ground for anti-democratic fundamentalist groups to accumulate power while the majority, instead of nipping the paradoxes in the bud, has shown unwarranted tolerance of right-wing violence.

It is not only about punishing those who carried out the actual acts of violence but, more importantly, clamping down on those who created such a permissive environment for such acts and banishing them from public life.

It is also about the failure of the education system to demonstrate to its students from a very early age that peaceful, healthy disagreement and debate is the sign of a strong society, and to warn that resorting to violence is a slippery slope that leads to social disintegration.

A procession of Likud prime ministers have incited their supporters to violence against their opponents, and against Palestinians on both sides of the Green Line, creating a toxic atmosphere that led to brutal acts targeting Arabs and peace activists, and to the assassination of Rabin, all by Jewish terrorists.

If such acts of political

violence have been more sporadic within Israel proper, albeit currently increasing, they are being carried out almost daily, on some level, by Jewish settlers against their Palestinian neighbors in the occupied West Bank.

Yet it was Prime Minister Netanyahu who, by driving wedges between the different segments, turned the manipulation of Israel's terribly frail social and political fabric into the darkest of arts.

While he always stands one step behind the thugs that inflict the violence, he is constantly in the engine room driving it. And in his current government he has welcomed some of these thugs into the heart of Israel's decision-making processes.

As if following an organized crime playbook, he has surrounded himself with political allies and advisers who are dragging down the level of debate to its lowest common denominator and, above all, inciting violence against those who do not share their views, while deliberately exacerbating disagreements and tensions between progressives and conservatives, the religious and the secular, Jews and Arabs, Ashkenazi and Sephardi, taking care to push the very basic emotional buttons of fear, jealousy and hate.

However, for the first time there is a strong sense among those who are afraid that Israel's democratic system is under an existential threat and on a trajectory to oblivion; that this is a battle their society cannot afford to lose.

Among them, increasingly and worryingly, there are voices using the terminology of armed resistance and civil war.

So far, the pro-democracy protests have been peaceful and any occasional violence has been mainly committed by right-wing thugs attacking the protesters in an attempt to deliberately fan the flames.

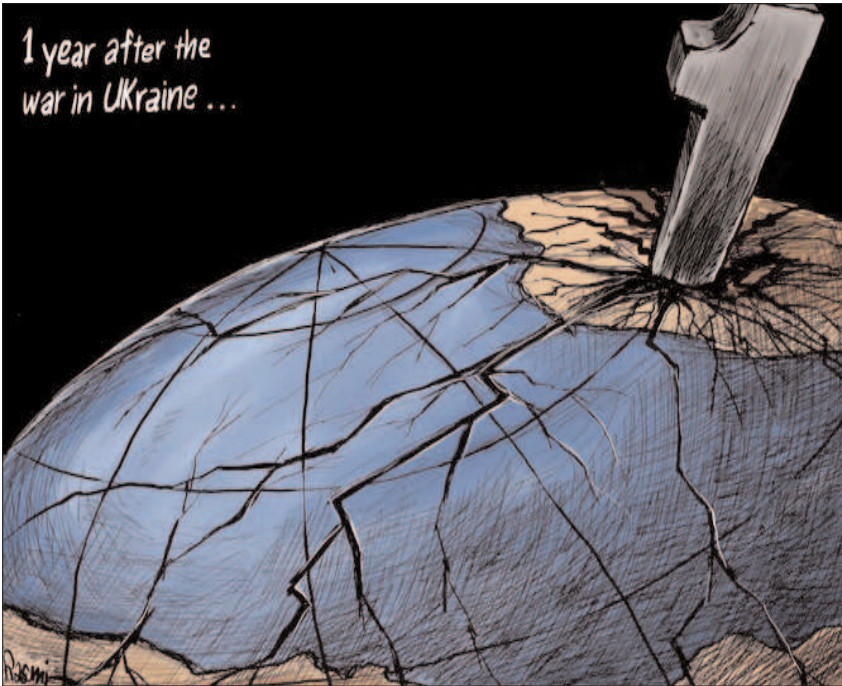
Yet some notable figures in the pro-democracy movement, which so far mainly has been a spontaneous grassroots phenomenon, are using military terminology that increases the likelihood that at some point firearms will be used.

The divide between those who see the Supreme Court as an enemy of the country and those who see it as the last bastion of individual liberties, human rights and the overall defence of the democratic system is now being defined in terms that leave little room for compromise.

In a highly militarized country, where most of the population has military experience, and given the toxicity of the current debate, the possibility of a civil war is no longer negligible.

As it stands on the verge of the 75th anniversary of its independence, Israel might need a crisis to help it redefine what it means to be Jewish and democratic in a very complex political and social ecology — but this must happen in a civilized manner and with respect for the democratic rules.

The question is: Has that train already left the station?



German chancellor faces a tricky trip to Washington

Andrew Hammond

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz has undertaken a wide-ranging itinerary of foreign travel in recent weeks, including official trips to Latin America and Asia. But his most important foreign trip as leader so far comes on March 3, when he will meet US President Joe Biden at the White House.

In the post-war era, Germany's alliance with the US has long been a strong one but it became extremely frayed during the presidency of Donald Trump. The personal relationship between Trump and former Chancellor Angela Merkel might have been the worst, by some stretch, of any between leaders of the two countries. Trump even appeared to refuse to shake Merkel's hand during a press conference after their first meeting in 2017.

In addition to their personal differences, Merkel also got a rocky ride from Trump on several long-standing issues related to the bilateral relationship between their countries,

Equally, Scholz acknowledges the continuing importance of the US to Germany. This has been especially true in the year since Russia's invasion of Ukraine, during which he has sought to remain in lockstep with Washington on key decisions, including the agreement to send tanks to Kyiv.

Ukraine will be high on the agenda for Scholz's meeting with Biden on Friday, given the continuing uncertainties about the months ahead as the conflict apparently remains locked in a war of attrition. The two leaders will also review bilateral cooperation on other security issues, including the challenges presented by China.

Within the agenda there will be much on which the two leaders can agree. However, despite the better personal relationship between Biden and Scholz compared with that of Trump and Merkel, there are several festering issues that remain irritants to

(\$10.5 billion) in China, according to the German Economic Institute.

While Scholz's trip was largely uneventful, it gave rise to perceptions of intra-Western splits over China. Germany, especially under the long chancellorship of Merkel, had long been the primary advocate of Western economic engagement with Beijing.

That long-standing strategy on China has come in for much stronger criticism since Merkel left office in December 2021. The perception that Scholz might be seeking to keep much of her policy on China intact has been widely criticized. For example Ivo Daalder, an Obama era former US ambassador to NATO, warned that Germany is "headed for a collision" with the Biden administration on the issue, not least because of China's qualified support for Russia over Ukraine.

Another issue complicating bilateral ties is the US Inflation Reduction Act. This landmark legislation was initially welcomed by

The first is the continuing caution that has characterized Germany's policy on Ukraine compared with some other Western allies. Certainly, Scholz has made some wide-ranging policy changes in the year since the Russian invasion, in areas including energy and defense.

especially trade and defense spending, about which previous US presidents had been more sanguine in public.

On trade, Trump described Germany as "very bad" because of its significant trade surplus, meaning exports that exceed imports. In particular, he singled out the German automobile industry and threatened to impose tariffs on exports.

A second sore point for Trump was Germany's failure to spend at least 2 percent of its gross domestic product on defense spending, a key target for NATO members. While Germany has expanded its foreign missions in recent years, from Mali to Afghanistan, its post-war disinterest in military force has been a longstanding driver of relatively low levels of defense spending.

Since Biden and Scholz took office, they have sought to restore the US-German relationship, which both consider very important. In the eyes of the US president, the importance of Berlin has only increased in the post-Brexit landscape, given its central role in EU affairs.

bilateral ties.

The first is the continuing caution that has characterized Germany's policy on Ukraine compared with some other Western allies. Certainly, Scholz has made some wide-ranging policy changes in the year since the Russian invasion, in areas including energy and defense.

However, tensions persist between Berlin and some other key allies about the pace and scope of Western support and strategy for Kyiv. This was revealed by initial disagreements between Scholz and Biden over providing tanks to aid Ukrainian forces, which threatened the unified allied effort.

A second point of contention is China, with Biden's administration concerned about the German policy pertaining to the emerging market giant. In November, Scholz became the first leader of a G7 nation to visit China since the start of the pandemic, which was a reflection of the importance Berlin places on its trade ties with Beijing. Between January and June 2022 alone, German businesses invested more than 10 billion

key EU stakeholders, including European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen.

However, it subsequently triggered a huge transatlantic row over the massive amount of green-energy subsidies given to US industry, especially in the context of high energy costs in Europe since Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

The issue has caused much alarm in Germany — in particular, when Robert Habeck, the vice chancellor and minister for economic affairs and climate action, said a few weeks ago that there was urgent need for an intensified European "industrial policy that enables our companies to thrive in global competition, especially through technological leadership."

Taken together, all of this underlines why the visit to Washington will be a tricky one for Scholz. US-German ties are stronger now than they were during the Trump era but multiple pitfalls remain that could threaten Biden's overarching goal of fully restoring the Western alliance following the divisions that characterized his predecessor's presidency.

Chief HR officers can be quite effective as CEOs too, when given the chance

Cindy Yang, Bob Bellano and Fernando Zavala

Organisations are arguably more people-centric than they have ever been in history. Company culture and employee wellbeing is a fundamental tenet of company health.

Challenges such as inflation, economic uncertainty and the pandemic presented a medley of challenges to organisations, not least the ones that involved the employee base - health and safety standards, hybrid work, and employee engagement, to name a few.

Research indicates that whilst inflationary pressures and economic uncertainty point to employees' renewed concerns about financial compensation, other concerns - such as work-life balance, and ethical alignment with the organisation they work for - are still front and centre to the work-related choices people are making. All of these elements, playing out through the heartbeat of organisations, are the core responsibility and remit of the CHRO (Chief Human Resources Officer) or CPO (Chief People Officer). Advances in people analytics, and the dire need to drive attraction and retention, along with diversity, equity and inclusion, make this role an absolutely critical component of the C-suite.

There is no concrete data on which functional areas the CEOs were in prior to them becoming a CEO, and how that has

changed over time. As recently as 10 years ago, an organisational HR head very often reported to COOs or even CFOs.

The HR function has rapidly transitioned from a mostly administrative role to a central strategic one, and has often become tied to executive committees, as well as a trusted advisor to CEOs in major corporations. Some major brands now have former HR leaders as CEOs: General Motors (Mary Barra) and Chanel (Leena Nair) are just two examples.

It's to be expected that top-tier CHROs and CPOs feel they have the requisite skill-sets to lead organisations as CEOs. They understand the employee mindset, and have a strategic comprehension of how to build a conducive environment that enables passions to take tangible shape into products, services, efficiencies, and client satisfaction. There are four 'must-haves' for CHROs and CPOs to be considered for CEOs. These suggestions have been selected as useful for all industries, and organisations, although there would also be additional action points required in certain industries.

Accountability for a P&L

A key component to both consideration and success as a CEO is demonstrative responsibility for a P&L. Almost

always, CEO candidates will know how businesses run from running a business. They will have a deep understanding of business models: how the business makes money, how it garners a profit, and how it sustains that profitability over time.

CHROs and CPOs don't traditionally have this skillset. They can gain this experience by taking on additional responsibilities such as leading a business unit, or serving on the company's executive committee.

Developing a deep understanding of the company's business strategy and financials is paramount. Additional competencies can also be gained through executive training and development, such as an MBA or other post-graduate finance degree.

Multi-faceted executive experience

Many leaders are exceptional at what they do, but are siloed in their skills, expertise and outlook. CHROs and CPOs looking to become CEOs need to have a considerable level of multi-faceted executive experience throughout their careers, which showcases an individuals' mettle and ability to think beyond traditional departmental boundaries.

Those with cross-functional experience and/or international exposure will be favored for CEO consideration. CHROs and CPOs who have led

other functional departments, such as sales, operations, or finance, is ideal.

Even if a portion of an additional departments responsibilities have been under your purview, this will be incredibly advantageous. Additionally, managing teams and aligning strategy across different geographies and cultures will be seen as extremely relevant to any potential CEO appointment.

Big picture vision

Long-term, strategic thinking is an essential ingredient for CEO success.

As leaders, they have an ability to envision the business, and make short-term decisions that benefit the organisation over longer timeframes.

Part of this decision making comes from top-tier experience, and part of it comes from having an intimate knowledge of the company's competitive stature in the marketplace, and a vision for what can be achieved.

For CHROs and CPOs, it's important to establish your own informed and considered vision for the organisation, and how you will lead as CEO. Communicate this clearly and effectively.

To establish this vision, actively seek out learning opportunities within the business.

Participation as an active member of the Board of Directors is ideal, which will enable

access to big picture strategic challenges and opportunities, as well as provide insights around the priorities of other functional leaders (the CFO, COO, etc.).

Develop a thorough understanding of your key industry trends and emerging technologies. A digital-centric mindset to solving challenges is beneficial.

An effectively super-charged network

Navigating complex challenges and driving business growth is the hallmark of CEOs, yet they are only as good as the network they have around them. Having the support of not only the senior executive team, but the broader management structure, and the employee base, is an imperative for success.

The focus on company culture means that successful CEOs have to foster positive, collaborative and transparent working environments.

CHROs and CPOs usually excel at this must-have, and tend to have more experience in this than CFOs or COOs. They are, as their title implies, 'people people': they usually have very well-established company networks, with stakeholders, the board of directors, other executives, and of course employees.

Establishing even stronger strategic ties, both internally and externally (think: investors, government, media) is prudent.

Tech advances are many, but make sure society gets a look in too

We are at the cusp of massive technology-centred transformations, where new-age tech offers breakthroughs to drive change at scale. The fast-shaping 'technovation' landscape of IoT, blockchain, Metaverse, are not just improving a company's technological prowess, they are enabling companies towards sustainable horizons.

Technovations enhance operational performance and governance of business verticals, making them more intelligent, sustainable and resilient. Tech advances have had a profound impact on our culture and economy throughout history.

In fact, our social structures have been highly influenced by it. It would

not be wrong to say that the intensifying technological progress is having an acute impact on different verticals of society - and sustainability is no stranger to this trend.

Technology for green and resilient systems

Beyond profit maximization, technologies can help embed sustainability into core corporate strategies. Technologies such as blockchain can potentially contribute to sustainable development. For example, the technology can bring more transparency to a supply chain or verify if a product comes from a fair-trade supplier.

Autonomous systems can predict and prescribe the probable course of action, thereby supporting human activities. Such

technological marvels are not just enabling businesses to scale at speed but enabling them to capture sustainable horizons.

There is an increasing need for technologies and platforms that turn insights into ready products that can be utilised by enterprises. To meet the burgeoning need to enhance business agility, simplify operations, and future-proof enterprises, another interesting innovation I would like to mention is a cognitive AI solution to automate and simplify field services.

Cloud-based solutions enable customers to address field services needs including enhanced technician productivity, improved service-level agreements (SLA), and reduce unmet

demands across sectors such as telecom, utilities, oil and gas, retail, and other industries.

Such future-forward solutions provide operational efficiency, enhance productivity, and improve workflow control by combining advance analytics, AI, Machine Learning (ML) and optimisation along with people to hyper-automate field operations. This in turn increases cost efficiency, improving customer experience and achieving sustainability targets.

Technological advances can help develop operations, processes, and supply chains that are intrinsically more sustainable and resilient. For this to happen,

a deeper understanding of the ecosystem of customers, employees, stakeholders, and society at large and what their needs and perspectives are on achieving sustainability is of paramount importance for businesses. We must move ahead together if we want to create a new world order that can survive and thrive the test of time.

Time to take the leap

As technology stalwarts, we must ask ourselves, "Are we thinking too small about the expanse of sustainable technology?" At a time when technology has been transforming every aspect of business and making our lives easier, its full potential can be harnessed in enhancing sustainable

horizons too. I recently came across a very fascinating study that stated, "For an organization of about 80,000 people, the combination of process automation, carbon data transparency, circular products or service design, and sustainable business models can reduce emissions by 45-70 per cent."

Isn't that amazing?

Sustainability demands a long-term commitment from organizations and governments. To respond to the evolving needs of the

diverse spectrum of stakeholders, it is imperative to re-align priorities. It is no longer about limiting sustainability to just a business function, but rather, adopting it as a way of life. As future-forward organizations, we must place immense thrust on building a 'Technology Eco-advantage Mindset', which can help organizations set up the right roadmap for new technology adoption and speed up their journey towards imbibing sustainability in their corporate

ethos. I am of the belief that sustainability and ESG present a unique growth opportunity for organizations to take bold actions today and be better equipped to take part in the next wave of economic growth at the intersection of Profit, Purpose, and Planet.

We have a long road ahead of us, and it is time we passionately embrace and drive the sustainability agenda. The time to act is - now.

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Govt urged to promote cheap sources of green energy

ISLAMABAD (APP): Coordinator to Federal Tax Ombudsman and Chairman Kyrgyzstan Trade House Meher Kashif Younis Sunday said the tariff of electricity generated from wind and solar power plants is less than half of the cost of electricity currently being procured from thermal sources in Pakistan.

Speaking at a one-day workshop on “The Role of CPEC in Meeting Pakistan Energy Needs” held under the aegis of Gold Ring Economic Forum, a strategic think tank, here today, he said that the Hydro Power Projects (HPP) have a comparatively long operational life which can be used as an advantage for reducing their tariff through a large spread of the cost over the life of the project.

He said besides CPEC projects have invigorated the once barren land in Jhimpir and transformed the region into a wind corridor in real. He said four

wind farms built here with a total installed capacity of 300 MW have supplied economical and clean energy to the national grid of Pakistan. He said CPEC energy projects have contributed to economic growth by increasing power supply with high efficiency at lower cost in Pakistan.

He said these projects, including that coal, wind, solar and hydropower, stand at 6570 MW that generated 28549.94 Gwh and 25772.48 Gwh power respectively in FY2020-21 and FY2021-22, accounting for 22.03% and 18.37% of the total generation in Pakistan.

He said the average 20% annual addition to the national grid has alleviated rampant cases of load shedding within the country and especially powered the export-oriented industries in Pakistan.

Quoting official facts and figures Meher Kashif Younis said Pakistan’s

energy sector is mainly dependent on imported fuel (oil and LNG), which has caused a heavy burden on foreign reserves and confined the industrial development of the country as the CPEC energy projects replaced the costlier energy production from furnace oil and diesel to coal and renewable energy resources in the last five years, the energy needs of Pakistan has been fulfilled at lower prices, driving growth in the export-oriented industries, he added.

He said the cost has been rising over the last year due to surged fuel prices in the international market. Nevertheless, the CPEC projects still provide competitive rates. In October last year, the power generation cost of CPEC projects based on imported coal was Rs.18.5/kWh, and that of domestic projects based on FO and RLNG was Rs.34.0/kWh, Rs.31.0/kWh. Rising fuel prices and a

new energy landscape after the Ukraine war necessitate Pakistan to avail of its indigenous resources, and at the time being, the most efficient solution is Thar coal. Data provided by internationally acclaimed coal expert Chairperson Punjab Higher Education Commission Eng Dr Shahid Munir shows that proven coal reserves in Thar are approximately 175 billion tons, he added.

Meher Kashif Younis said in December 2020, Pakistan announced that it would not build any new power projects that depend on imported coal, and pledged that by 2030, 60pc of its energy will come from clean and renewable sources.

This coincided with China’s commitment to building a green CPEC, which entails not building new coal-fired power plants overseas, and increasing support for low-carbon energy, he concluded.



ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister of AJK Sardar Tanveer Ilyas meeting with Federal Minister for Finance and Revenue Senator Ishaq Dar.

Three-day Brand expo concluded

ISLAMABAD (APP): The three-day Brand Expo concluded here successfully on February 26 after grabbing a lot of attention from the people of the twin cities.

The expo, held at Parade Ground Islamabad, provided an opportunity for companies, talented entrepreneurs, and innovators from different industries across the country, to display their latest products and services.

The event featured a lot of activities like musical performances of famous artists including Abrar-ul-Haq and Sehar Gul, exhibitors from across the country, and a wide range of innovative products, networking opportunities, and entertainment.

Talking to APP, a young entrepreneur Khalid Ali said that Pakistani youth had immense potential and such events “provide us an opportunity to showcase our capabilities to local as well as international investors”.

He said that the event was highly appreciated by the visitors, adding such activities should be arranged more frequently throughout the country.

Haider Khan, a university student and visitor to the event shared, “I want to start my business soon after my studies and this expo provides an amazing opportunity to see various brands, meet young entrepreneurs and start-ups, and learn from their experiences.” He said that these events greatly encourage budding start-ups and provide a platform to see innovative ideas for new businesses.

FPCCI seeks proposals for Budget 2023-24 from business community

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Federation of Pakistan Chamber of Commerce and Industry (FPCCI)’s United Business Group (UBG) Sunday sought viable proposals for Budget 2023-24 from the country’s business community for timely submission to the federal government.

The proposals must be aimed at boosting growth-oriented economic activities in the wake of Russia-Ukraine conflict and flood devastation, said a press release issued here.

Talking to a delegation of leading industrialists and traders, led by Waseem Ullah Anjum, UBG President Shahzad Ali Malik said Pakistan was passing through crucial times due to the side effects of coron-

avirus pandemic and Russia-Ukraine conflict.

At this uncertain time, the business community should come forward with a clear vision to help the country overcome the challenges, he added.

He further said that chambers and elected bodies should make such proposals that would help the government to revive the economy through the upcoming budget.

He said the private sector wanted to supplement the government’s efforts, focusing economic revival of the country, adding that joint proposals would help make the budget business-friendly, which would ultimately result in robust export-led growth.

Shahzad Ali Malik urged

the government to focus on ease of doing business in the upcoming budget, which would help attract the much-needed investment to trigger economic growth in the country.

“The government is highly appreciative of the contribution of the traders and the business community towards strengthening the economy and promoting tax culture”, he added.

He said the budget for the upcoming fiscal year should feature a balanced tax collection approach and the government should adopt a strategy for the documentation of the economy.

He also underlined the need for enhancing exports, reducing imports, and also giving incentives to expatriates to invest in Pakistan.

SVP terms trade team visit to Kuwait successful

SIALKOT (APP): Sialkot Chamber of Commerce & Industry (SCCI) Senior Vice President Wahub Jahangir terming the visit of SCCI trade delegation to Kuwait successful, said that in future, such delegations would be arranged for the exhibition in Kuwait to enhance bilateral trade between two countries.

In a press statement here on Sunday, he said that SCCI and Kuwait Chamber

of Commerce & Industry (KCCI) have signed a MoU to enhance cooperation and bilateral trade. He said that under the agreement, the access of Pakistani businessmen to Kuwaiti market would be provided.

Wahub said that the SCCI trade delegation consisted of representatives of major industries of Sialkot including surgical, sports goods, leather, rice and beekeeping equipments had

visited Kuwait in January 2023 where it organized a trade exhibition.

He said that Pakistani businessmen were given free stalls, for which, space was provided by the KCCI. He said that Pakistani Ambassador in Kuwait Malik Muhammad Farooq and his team also helped the SCCI delegation in this regard. “We are planning such like trade delegation visits in future,” he added.

Italy, Pakistan trade volume has grown exponentially to 2 billion

ISLAMABAD (APP): The bilateral trade volume between Italy and Pakistan has grown exponentially to 2 billion last year said the Honorary Investment Consular to Milan, Italy, Muhammad Sheheryar Khan said on Sunday, similarly Pakistani exports exceed imports in Italy.

Talking to Chairman UK-Pakistan Business Council and Pakistan Furniture Council Mian Kashif Ashfaq, Muhammad Sheh-

ryar said although global trade shrank during the Covid-19 pandemic, Pakistan’s exports to Italy in 2022 grew to 1.2 billion.

Italian exports to Pakistan were around 800 million in the same period. Pakistan has a surplus with Italy, he added. He said Pakistan remains an attractive market for Italian manufacturers and businessmen.

Sheheryar Khan said the ambassador of Italy to Pakistan Andreas Ferrerese

fully supported both countries in enhancing trade and increasing investments.

The Pakistani and Italian companies are collaborating to strengthen the economic partnerships between countries.

Talking about Italian products, he said Italian companies produced high-quality goods which were being appreciated across the world.

In Pakistan, only good quality matters as traders

and businessmen do not compromise on quality.

“The economic partnership between both countries has created an environment to explore the talent of youth in Pakistan,” he added.

Mian Kashif Ashfaq said the Italian embassy in Pakistan granted more than 1500 visas to Pakistani business people and families who visited Italy to explore business opportunities at the same time.

PBF stress horticulture promotion to mitigate food insecurity

LAHORE (APP): Food security is a major concern in developing countries like Pakistan with 220 million population, which is growing at the rate of three percent annually.

Though growing population demands more food, Pakistan was hit hard by climate change as the recent flash floods washed away standing crops and agrarian yields. It created shortage of vegetables and other commodities, and the country had to import a number of essential food commodities during the current fiscal year. Secondly, Pakistan’s import bill was increasing automatically due to frequent fluctuation in currency rate, which was not only causing unusual hike in prices of food and other essential items but also leading to many economic constraints. Experts say the situation might continue for the next few years.

Climate change and unpredictability, caused by natural disasters and severe weather conditions -- rain, cold, drought, heat, etc. -- have a negative impact on conventional agricultural cropping patterns, which call for replacing those with modern techniques, which are cost-effective and give high yields.

With an intensive farming pattern, horticulture is relatively manageable and more productive, particularly for geo-sensitive regions, and farmers with small landholdings. When compared to conventional crops, farmers’ net returns per unit of land are significantly higher, and it can provide substantial income to farmers facing economic risk.

Similarly, urban and peri-urban Horticulture (UPH) must be considered an essential component of the agricultural production

system in order to meet the ever-increasing food demand of urban areas, with an emphasis on creating employment, food security, and income for the poor in urban areas. Promotion of horticulture could help overcome food insecurity and other economic constraints.

Pakistan Business Forum (PBF) Vice President Jahanara Wattoo and PBF Sindh Chairman Mir Murad Ali Talpur expressed these views, while talking to APP here on Sunday.

Jahanara Wattoo said that according to the World Food Programme, more than 48 per cent Pakistanis were food insecure and the insecurity was high in the formerly FATA with 67.7 per cent, Balochistan 61.2 per cent and Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) 56.22 per cent. The Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) discovered severe food insecurity in 10 Pakistani districts necessitating immediate action, and crisis-level food insecurity in 28 other districts. Food insecurity had also been severe in Thar region of Sindh due to ongoing drought. In a similar vein, Pakistan’s analysis of its food security reveals an alarming situation: The availability of food for residents of 56 districts was extremely limited, she maintained.

Jahanara Wattoo said that over 70 percent of the population was directly or indirectly associated with 22 million hectares agriculture sector, asserting that only six percent of the total land under cultivation was dedicated to horticultural crops, 3.5 percent to fruit, two percent to vegetables, and 0.5 percent to ornamental plants.

“Out of the total area planted with vegetables, potatoes make up 17 per-

cent, chillies 15 percent, onions 12 percent, and 30 different kinds of vegetables make up the rest,” she explained.

PBF Chairman (Sindh) Mir Murad Ali Talpur said Pakistan had the potential to grow a wide range of crops because of its diverse climate and the focus must on development of staple food, grains and other cash crops. “Cultivation of horticultural crops in urban and peri-urban areas will change the way people eat fruit and vegetable, and this will not only lessen our reliance on conventional agricultural produce but also the guaranteed high-quality food through horticultural crops will boost farmers’ earnings,” he added.

He disclosed that since horticultural products were highly perishable, improved infrastructure, storage facilities, an effective transportation system and an effective distribution system were required to guarantee supply freshness and quality for urban areas, which might increase the cost to end users.

However, by introducing technologies that individual families could manage, the UPH could provide the opportunity closer to consumption areas and supply chain management could be put in order for horticultural produce.

Mir Murad Ali Talpur said that conventional farming yields were of low quality as it involved too many inputs, which also caused many pre and post harvest problems.

Contrary to this agri patterns, he said, new horticultural technologies focused on integrated disease and pest management, organic cultivation using biological resources, kitchen gardening, minimal or zero tillage, high-density planting, bio-

fertilization, fertigation, drip irrigation, protected cultivation like greenhouses and tunnels, and the use of hybrid seeds and improved cultivars, thus significantly boost Pakistan’s fruit and vegetable production.

“If you look at the price and production statistics of last few years, you can observe that certain horticultural products have higher prices during a specific time of year when the demand and supply balance is off because of low or no production,” he asserted.

Murad Talpur further said that multiple cropping cycles in a single unit area were now possible due to early maturing hybrid varieties, and it enhanced farmers’ financial security. The gap between demand and supply could be bridged by a small shift in production paradigm, resulting in year-round price stability for end users.

PBF Sindh Chairman said, “It is absolutely necessary for the authorities and the government to intervene in the form of training and empowerment of the farming community with regard to technology adaptation, the provision of high-quality seeds, ensure inputs availability, and microfinance opportunities. In this regard growers will be motivated to shift toward high-value horticultural crops by means of subsidies for peri-urban horticultural farms, ecological zone-specific crop calendars, technology transfer, and farmer capacity building.”

PBF office-bearers also urged the government to take concrete measures to develop and strengthen existing supply chains in order to guarantee the freshness, quality and reduction of losses after harvest.

Chinese hybrid wheat demonstration fields in Pakistan cover about 3,000-5,000 hectares

BEIJING (INP): Chinese team’s hybrid wheat demonstration fields in Pakistan have been maintained at about 3,000-5,000 hectares.

“From Peshawar and Islamabad in the north, Lahore in the center to Karachi in the south, our hybrid wheat has performed well in all the major producing regions”, said Prof Zhao Changping, Chief Scientist of Hybrid Wheat Research Institute, Beijing Academy of Agriculture and Forestry Sciences in an interview with China Economic Net (CEN).

“What’s more gratifying is that through the cooperation of scientists from both sides, we discovered that using the Pakistani wheat varieties as distant parent to cross with Chinese wheat, the varieties produced are more dominant.

In addition, hybridization of spring wheat in the southern wheat region and

winter wheat in the northern wheat region can also produce dominant hybrids.”

The report stated, “The World Food Day highlights the need for global efforts to ensure food security in various countries of the world,” last year, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif tweeted, expressing his concerns over the impending food shortage in the wake of floods. In 2022, devastating floods in Pakistan have destroyed standing crops on millions of hectares.

Undoubtedly, wheat, a staple food, has also been hit hard. About 80 percent of farmers in Pakistan are engaged in wheat production, and the total area of wheat cultivation occupies as much as 40 percent of the total agricultural land in Pakistan.

The importance of wheat production in Pakistan cannot be overstated.

In addition to natural

disasters such as floods and high temperatures, a series of challenges such as high seed and fertilizer prices also make Pakistan’s

“wheat revolution” increasingly urgent. Over the years, a group of Chinese wheat experts working diligently and quietly here.

“Hybrid wheat is considered to be the first choice to solve the food crisis in the international agricultural science community.”

“When it comes to China-Pakistan hybrid wheat cooperation, the selection and breeding of hybrid wheat varieties suitable for the local environment requires the cooperation of both parties.

Therefore, we have established test stations in Peshawar, Lahore, and Yuanmou in Yunnan Province, which is very similar to Pakistan’s local climate,” Prof Zhao said.

It is learned that so far, the Chinese team’s hybrid wheat demonstration fields

in Pakistan have been maintained at about 3,000-5,000 hectares.

“From Peshawar and Islamabad in the north, Lahore in the center to Karachi in the south, our hybrid wheat has performed well in all the major producing regions”, emphasized Zhao.

“What’s more gratifying is that through the cooperation of scientists from both sides, we discovered that using the Pakistani wheat varieties as distant parent to cross with Chinese wheat, the varieties produced are more dominant. In addition, hybridization of spring wheat in the southern wheat region and winter wheat in the northern wheat region can also produce dominant hybrids.”

“The emergence of new varieties has given us momentum as we solve the two main problems, yield and disease resistance,” added Prof Zhang Shengquan, Deputy

Director of the Hybrid Wheat Research Institute of BAAFS, “In 2019, after nearly ten years of cooperation, the selected hybrid wheat combinations, such as the new variety BH1683, have increased by more than 20 percent in Pakistan for three consecutive years, and can be widely used in the wheat regions in central and northern Pakistan, including Lahore and Peshawar.

In addition, in the joint experiment between China and Pakistan, even if the sowing amount was reduced by 80-90 percent, BH1683 still has the potential to increase yield by 20 percent.

After the introduction of the dominant genes of Chinese wheat, its disease resistance is also more advantageous than that of local varieties”

“Several Pakistani scientists who have been in contact with me for a long time, such as Dr.

Muhammad Arif, Department of Agronomy UAP, have mentioned that wheat production in Pakistan has encountered unprecedented challenges.

For instance, last year’s rare high temperature once again tested Pakistan’s traditional wheat varieties, which has also deepened the understanding of China and Pakistan on the cultivation and application of wheat hybrids to ensure food security.

At present, our pace of cooperation is accelerating, and is moving towards the direction of joint research to global food security,” Prof Zhang told the CEN.

“We are working closely with the University of Agriculture, Peshawar and GUARD Agricultural Research & Services Private Ltd. In addition, the Ministry of Science and Technology of Pakistan, in addition, the Ministry of Science and Technology of

Pakistan, the Pakistan Agricultural Research Council, and the Chinese Embassy in Pakistan have also supported us as far as they could.”

At the end of the interview, Professor Zhao noted that this year marks not only the 10th anniversary of the Belt and Road Initiative, but also happens to be the 10th anniversary of China’s hybrid wheat going global.

“China-Pakistan hybrid wheat cooperation is a model of high-tech agriculture going international, and assign of China-Pakistan friendship.

It is our incontestable mission as agricultural practitioners to develop hybrid wheat to benefit the people of Pakistan and the whole world. I predict that by around 2030, not only Pakistan, not only South Asia, our hybrid wheat will enter the stage of large-scale application in all continents.”

Traders delegation meets CPO

RAWALPINDI (APP): A traders delegation of Anjuman-e-Tajran met City Police Officer CPO Khalid Mahmood Hamdani at Police Lines Headquarters.

SSP Operations Captain (Rtd) Muhammad Amir Khan Niazi and other officers also participated whereas issues pertaining to law & order Pakistan Super League (PSL) cricket matches, Kite flying were also discussed in the meeting.

The traders’ delegation consisted of Shahid Ghafoor Pracha, Tariq Jadoon, Sajid Butt, Tariq Hafeez, Saifullah Khan and others.

CPO Khalid Mehmood Hamdani said that the business community is the backbone of the economy, the solution to your problems will be on priority, and CPO assured all the resources are being utilized to provide the best security.

Hamdani said that traders should be coordinated in the market patrolling and snap-checking plan.



In brief

Siem ends eight-year wait

NEW DELHI (Agencies): Germany's Marcel Siem ended an eight-year wait for his fifth DP World Tour title with victory in the Indian Open. The 42-year-old finished one shot clear of compatriot Yannik Paul on 14 under to claim a first win since the BMW Masters in November 2014. Siem closed with a four-under 68 in New Delhi, decisively moving clear of overnight leader Paul with a 15-foot birdie putt on the 15th. "I'm a winner again, come on!" said the world number 337. "This means a lot because two years ago I wasn't even sure if I could still compete on the DP World Tour." Siem lost his Tour card in 2021 and returned to the Challenge circuit but regained it via Qualifying School last November. He built a two-shot cushion in the final round in India with four birdies in the opening 11 holes. However his lead was wiped out on the 13th as he made a bogey and Paul ensured a two-shot swing with a birdie. Siem quickly bounced back with a birdie on the 15th then closed with three pars to seal victory as Paul missed a birdie putt on 18 that would have forced a play-off.

Tamim denies rift with Shakib

DHAKA (Agencies): Bangladesh one-day international captain Tamim Iqbal denied on Sunday there was a schism in the team and insisted his relationship with leading all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan was "very normal". "Our team environment has been good for a number of years. A happy dressing room allows one to achieve the type of results that you are seeing," Tamim told reporters at a news conference in Dhaka. "I think everything is very normal." The top-order batsman's comments came after Bangladesh Cricket Board president Nazmul Hassan suggested to website Cricbuzz that the environment in the dressing room was not "healthy". "The biggest problem for Bangladesh cricket at the moment is this grouping, and that is the reality. I don't have a problem with anything else," Nazmul told the website. The BCB chief said he had tried to address a factional dispute between Shakib and Tamim but found it difficult. "It's not that I have not tried to sort it out. I have spoken with both of them, and I felt that it is not easy to settle the issues at the moment," he said. Tamim and Shakib have been teammates since their formative days in the mid-2000s and have at times been considered close friends. Tamim captains the Bangladesh ODI side, while Shakib is at the helm of the Test and Twenty20 international teams. Tamim said performance on the pitch was what mattered. "The important thing when Shakib and I put on the Bangladesh jersey is whether we are giving our best and whether we are helping each other. When we are leading the teams, nothing else matters," he said at the media briefing ahead of the three-match ODI series against England. "Whatever anyone is saying, whether we have coffee together, these things don't matter." Tamim will lead Bangladesh in the three-match ODI series against England next week and said he expected to play on "true wickets" — although the hosts generally offer visiting sides low and slow pitches, especially those from outside the sub-continent. "We have been discussing playing better on true wickets."



CAPE TOWN: Meg Lanning of Australia lifts the ICC Women's T20 World Cup following the ICC Women's T20 World Cup Final match.

PSL 8: Lahore, Rawalpindi matches to go ahead as scheduled

LAHORE (Monitoring Desk): The Pakistan Super League (PSL) season eight matches will be held in Lahore and Rawalpindi as per schedule, as the deadlock between the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) and the interim Punjab government has finally ended. Minister of Health from the interim government, Dr. Javed Akram, had confirmed to Express News on Saturday that the PSL matches will not be shifted from Lahore and Rawalpindi to Karachi.

The PCB chairman on Sunday, shared the news on his Twitter account that matches will be held as per schedule. "CM Punjab Mohsin Naqvi Saheb has been kind enough to agree to share cost of lighting routes during PSL matches in Lahore. HBI

PSL8 matches in Lahore and Pindi shall continue as scheduled," tweeted Sethi. It must be noted that the interim Punjab government had initially demanded PKR500 million from PCB to conduct the matches in Lahore and Rawalpindi. The board has already paid PKR50 million to Punjab government for expenses on food. The provincial government were then demanding the remaining PKR450 million for lighting and security purposes. In order to save these expenses, the board was considering shifting the Punjab-leg of PSL 8 to Karachi. The interim Government of Punjab on Saturday evening decided to be flexible on lights, security and other expenses. They decided to borne fifty per-

Messi, Mbappe and Benzema up for FIFA Best award

PARIS (Agencies): Just like in the World Cup final, Paris Saint-Germain teammates Lionel Messi and Kylian Mbappe go up against one another for The Best FIFA Men's Player prize for 2022 on Monday, with Ballon d'Or Karim Benzema the other contender. The ceremony takes place in Paris, and Messi appears as the favourite to add another individual gong to his collection after leading Argentina to glory over Mbappe's France in that epic encounter in Qatar. Messi has won the Ballon d'Or seven times and claimed the FIFA award — inaugurated in 2016 following FIFA's split with Ballon d'Or organisers France Football — once in 2019. In the last two years Messi has made the podium as Robert Lewandowski has won the title, but the 35-year-old's career-crowning World Cup triumph was the defining moment of 2022. The winner is decided by a jury comprised of the coach and captain of every men's national team and one journalist from each country, but fans can also vote. Mbappe became the first player to score a World Cup final hat-trick since Geoff Hurst in 1966 as he dragged France to a 3-3 draw after extra time — despite two goals by Messi — before they eventually succumbed in a shoot-out. Mbappe, who turned 24 just after the final, was the tournament's top scorer with eight goals, one more than Messi, who claimed the Golden Ball for best player. He was also comfortably PSG's most important player in the year leading up to the World Cup, despite being joined there by Messi — he was Ligue 1's leading scorer and France's player of the year.

Australia win Women's T20 World Cup for sixth time

CAPE TOWN (Agencies): Australia won the Women's T20 World Cup for the sixth time when they beat South Africa by 19 runs in the final at Newlands on Sunday. Opening batter Beth Mooney anchored the Australian innings, scoring an unbeaten 74 in a total of 156 for six. South Africa were never up with the required run rate and were restricted to 137 for six despite opener Laura Wolvaardt hitting 61 off 48 balls. Wolvaardt and semi-final heroine Tazmin Brits struggled to find gaps in the field and scored only 17 runs before Brits was caught at mid-on off Darcie Brown

off the last ball of the fifth over. Marizanne Kapp hit two boundaries but was out for 11 and South Africa captain Sune Luus was run out for two. At that stage the home side needed another 103 runs off 56 balls. Wolvaardt and the hard-hitting Chloe Tryon gave a near-capacity crowd of about 15,000 hope with an attacking fourth wicket partnership of 55 off 37 balls but the match was effectively over when Wolvaardt was leg before wicket to Megan Schutt in the 17th over. The left-handed Mooney played a measured innings, scoring her 74 runs off 53 balls while a succession of partners batted aggressively. Ash Gardner and Grace Harris both batted ahead of captain Meg Lanning and appeared to be under instructions to go for their shots. South Africa's bowlers performed steadily and were backed up by enthusiastic fielding. Stalwarts Shabnim Ismail and Kapp both took two wickets each. But Australia showed their quality in defending their total with athleticism and commitment that put the South African batters under constant pressure. Brief scores: Australia 156-6 in 20 overs (B. Mooney 74 not out; S. Ismail 2-26, M. Kapp 2-35) v South Africa 137-6 in 20 overs (L. Wolvaardt 61) Result: Australia won by 19 runs

after the video assistant referee recommended that the official review his decision. Chelsea's dismal run continues. A team sheet containing six changes from their defeat to Southampton and the inclusion of Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang as a substitute underlined the feeling of uncertainty and flux around Chelsea's bloated squad. To underline the point, Gabon forward Aubameyang — who appeared to have been cast aside following January's lavish spending — was sent on in the 83rd minute to help retrieve a two-goal deficit. The introduction of the striker came only after mid-fielders Denis Zakaria and Mason Mount had come on ahead of him with Chelsea chasing a leveller. The loss of Thiago Silva to a first-half injury did not help the visitors' rhythm but once Skipp had opened the scoring, with a superb shot Arrizabalaga could only get a hand to, Chelsea hopes of getting anything from the game appeared to quickly recede.



LONDON: Harry Kane of Tottenham Hotspur scores their teams second goal during the Premier League match between Tottenham Hotspur and Chelsea FC.

Spurs beat Chelsea to increase pressure on Potter

LONDON (Agencies): Tottenham boosted their hopes of top-four Premier League finish with a London derby win over Chelsea that increases the pressure on Blues boss Graham Potter. Oliver Skipp's thumping 20-yard effort just after the interval put the hosts in command and their victory was sealed when Harry Kane turned home Eric Dier's knock-down late on. While the majority of the Tottenham Hotspur Stadium were in celebratory mood in the final stages, Kane's goal saw visiting supporters head for the exit as Chelsea's recent woes continued. The Blues have now won just two of their last 15 top-flight matches and sit 14 points off the Champions League places. This result is likely to place more scrutiny on Chelsea's expensively assembled squad — with British record signing Enzo Fernandez at fault for the Spurs' opener — as well as Potter, who recently outlined the toll that criticism has placed on his family and mental health.

Meanwhile, things are on the up for Spurs, who have won four of their past five league matches. The hosts now sit fourth in the table four points above fifth-placed Newcastle, who have two games in hand, and are expected to welcome manager Antonio Conte back to work this week after his recovery from surgery. Overall the hosts merited the three points and had come closest to breaking the deadlock in the early stages when Pierre-Emile Hojbjerg saw his deflected effort go past a motionless Kepa Arrizabalaga but hit the right-hand post. The biggest talking point of an underwhelming first half was referee Emile Attwell's initial decision to send off Chelsea's Hakim Ziyech after a melee that saw visiting forward Kai Havertz and home defender Emerson Royal booked. Having administered yellow cards to those players, Attwell dismissed the Morocco winger for a raised arm on the advice of his assistant referee before downgrading it to a yellow

after the video assistant referee recommended that the official review his decision. Chelsea's dismal run continues. A team sheet containing six changes from their defeat to Southampton and the inclusion of Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang as a substitute underlined the feeling of uncertainty and flux around Chelsea's bloated squad. To underline the point, Gabon forward Aubameyang — who appeared to have been cast aside following January's lavish spending — was sent on in the 83rd minute to help retrieve a two-goal deficit. The introduction of the striker came only after mid-fielders Denis Zakaria and Mason Mount had come on ahead of him with Chelsea chasing a leveller. The loss of Thiago Silva to a first-half injury did not help the visitors' rhythm but once Skipp had opened the scoring, with a superb shot Arrizabalaga could only get a hand to, Chelsea hopes of getting anything from the game appeared to quickly recede.

Grand football championship kick starts at Scouts Stadium Wana



F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: A grand football championship kick starts at Scouts Stadium Wana with the cooperation of Security Forces. The championship starts from 24 February

and will culminate at 23 March 2023. A total of 50 teams including 14 non local teams are participating in the event. The inaugural match was played between D I Khan and Zhob.

Approximately 300 people witnessed the match. The locals of Wana and people from other areas of South Waziristan appreciated the initiative of Security Forces and thanked them for organising such a wonderful event.

Karachi Kings beat table-toppers Multan Sultans by big margin

KARACHI (Monitoring Desk): Karachi Kings proved to be too good for Multan Sultans at their home as thumped the visitors by 66 runs at the National Bank Cricket Arena on Sunday evening. Multan Sultans, playing their first match out of Multan, were all out for a paltry 101 in 16.3 overs after they were set 168 to win. Tayyab Tahir had a fantastic HBL Pakistan Super

League debut as the right-hander scored 65 off 46 (eight fours and a six) after Mohammad Rizwan inserted Karachi Kings. Tayyab, who earned a maiden call up in Pakistan's ODI squad for a series against New Zealand in January, put a solid 109-run partnership with Matthew Wade, who scored 46 off 47. Both were dismissed by Ihsanullah (two for 22), while

Anwar Ali removed James Vince (27 off 12) as Karachi Kings made 167 for three. The second half of the match was dominated by Karachi Kings' spinners as Shoaib Malik (three for 16), Tabraiz Shamsi (three for 18) and Imad Wasim (two for 34) took eight wickets, while left-arm pacer Akif Javed took two wickets for eight. The partnership of 41

between Shan Masood (25 off 16) and Mohammad Rizwan (29 off 25) was the only positive for Multan Sultans. The fall of the former in the fifth over sparked a collapse which no batter below the order could arrest. Multan Sultans remain at the top of the points table with four wins and two defeats in six matches. Karachi Kings now have two wins from six matches and move to third, ahead of Lahore Qalandars because of a better net run rate. Scores in brief: Karachi Kings 167-3, 20 overs (Tayyab Tahir 65, Matthew Wade 46, James Vince 27; Ihsanullah 2-22) Multan Sultans 101 all out, 16.3 overs (Mohammad Rizwan 29, Shan Masood 25; Shoaib Malik 3-16, Tabraiz Shamsi 3-18, Akif Javed 2-8, Imad Wasim 2-34) Player of the match — Tayyab Tahir (Karachi Kings).

Abdullah Shafique struck blistering half-centuries to power Lahore Qalandars to post the third-highest Pakistan Super League (PSL) total before Shaheen Shah Afridi's five-wicket haul propelled the defending champions to a 40-run victory over Peshawar Zalmi. Opting to bat first, the Qalandars piled a mammoth 241/3 in their quota of 20 overs at the back of scintillating knocks by Fakhar and Abdullah. Earlier, the home side had a scratchy start as Wahab Riaz castled young opener Tahir Baig (5) to draw the first breakthrough for the Zalmi. Following an early setback, Fakhar and Abdullah settled things down as they took the Qalandars to 36/1 in the powerplay before launching a ruthless counter-attack on the Zalmi bowlers. The duo turned things around for the home side with belligerent hitting with Abdullah leading the charge of the stand. The right-handed batter smashed five boundaries and as many sixes amid his magnificent knock before Wahab struck again in the 13th over for Zalmi.



Fakhar Zaman raises his bat after reaching his fifty.

Abdullah scored a quick-fire 75 off 41 deliveries and left the Qalandars in complete command as the side were 127/2 in 13 overs. Following Abdullah's dismissal, Fakhar switched gears and took Zalmi bowlers to the cleaners with belligerent hitting but fell short of his well-deserved century by just four runs as

he fell to Rovman Powell in the 17th over. Fakhar top-scored for the Qalandars with 96 off just 45 balls, hitting three boundaries and 10 sixes. Wahab led the bowling attack for the Zalmi with two wickets but was expensive as he leaked 45 runs in his four overs, while Powell could make one scalp.



Matthew Wade plays the sweep

All-round Qalandars thrash Zalmi to secure third victory in PSL 8

LAHORE (Monitoring Desk): Fakhar Zaman and



In brief

Eight accused held

ISLAMABAD (NNI): Islamabad capital police Karachi company police team apprehended eight accused including four women involved in immoral activities, a police public relations officer said. He said that, following the special directions of Inspector General of Police (IGP) Islamabad Dr. Akbar Nasir Khan, the Islamabad capital police intensified crackdown against the criminal elements in order to eliminate the crime from the city and special efforts were also taken against the accused involved in immoral activities. During the ongoing crackdown, the Karachi Company police team arrested eight accused including four women involved in immoral activities. Case has been registered against the nabbed accused and further investigation is underway. CPO/ DIG (Operations) Islamabad Syed Shehzad Nadeem Bukhari directed all senior officials for effective crackdown against the accused involved in immoral activities. The performance of police officials in this regard would be reviewed on a regular basis, he maintained.

11 outlaws arrested

ISLAMABAD (NNI): Islamabad capital police apprehended 11 outlaws from different areas of the city and recovered drugs and weapons with ammunition from their possession, a police public relations officer said. He said that, following the special directions of Inspector General of Police (IGP) Islamabad Dr. Akbar Nasir Khan, the Islamabad capital police has intensified crackdown against the criminal elements in order to eliminate the crime from the city. Following these directives, the Ramna police team arrested three accused namely Asad Hussain, Muhammad Ijaz and Salem Gull involved in possessing illegal weapons and drug paddling and recovered one 32 bore revolver, one 30 bore pistol with ammunition and 1055 grams hashish from their possession. Likewise, the Tarnol police team arrested an accused namely Dil War Jan involved in drug paddling and recovered 740 gram hashish from his possession. Similarly, the Khanna police team arrested an accused Amman Ullah and recovered one 30 bore pistol with ammunition from his possession. Sihala police team arrested two accused namely Aadil Malik and Huzrat Khan involved in drug paddling and possessing illegal weapons and recovered 110 grams heroin and one 30 bore pistol with ammunition from their possession.

PS women arrested lady thief

ISLAMABAD (NNI): Islamabad Capital Police women police team apprehended a lady thief involved in theft activities and recovered stolen cash 1.4 million from her possession and handed over the actual owner, a police public relations officer said. He said that, following the special directions of Inspector General of Police (IGP) Islamabad Dr. Akbar Nasir Khan, the Islamabad capital police has intensified crackdown against the criminal elements in order to eliminate the crime from the city. Following these directions, a women police station team used technical and human resources and succeeded in apprehending a lady thief involved in theft activity. The accused was identified as Tuba. Police team also recovered stolen cash 1.4 millions from her possession and handed over to actual owner.



ISLAMABAD: Labourers busy in carpeting Srinagar Highway during maintenance work in Federal Capital.

Sanjrani chairs meeting to review austerity measures

ISLAMABAD (NNI): A special session of the Business Advisory Committee of the Senate was convened by Chairman Senate Muhammad Sadiq Sanjrani Sunday at the Parliament House to review and discuss austerity measures in wake of current financial situation of the country. At the outset, Chairman Senate Muhammad Sanjrani observed that hard decisions have to be taken to overcome challenges on economic front. He also sought recommendations from parliamentary heads of various political parties in the Senate and called for putting weight behind the government decisions to strictly implement the austerity plan in the best interest of the country.

The committee was also briefed about the steps taken for celebration of golden jubilee of the senate. He said that all out steps have been taken to celebrate it in a simple way. He informed that previously events and special sessions at four provincial assemblies were also planned and foreign dignitaries of friendly countries were extended invitations, however, keep in view the current situation, all these measures have been reviewed. The whole event will now take place in Islamabad and regrets would be extended to counterparts abroad. He said that the Senate Secretariat is also working on a pro-

posal to reduce the fuel limit for chairpersons of committees.

Besides, no additional honorarium will be extended to employees of the senate during current financial year, he said. There was also a proposal to impose ban on foreign visits for three months. The chairman senate observed that all these steps will help reduce burden on the national exchequer. He said that Senate special session has already been summoned on 15, 16 and 17 March, 2023. This will provide an ample chance to the senators to highlight the historical significance of the upper house, Chairman Senate observed. He further informed that former members of the senate have also been invited.

Federal Minister for Finance Senator Ishaq Dar brushed aside the rumours about Pakistan's default. He said there are economic hardships and we have taken efficient steps to overcome them. He, however, said that it is our collective responsibility and the whole nation has to contribute. There is a need to avoid unnecessary expenditures.

He said that his team is working day and night and soon we will be able to rid the country out of the economic mess.

The chairman senate while expressing satisfaction on the steps

taken by Ishaq Dar and his team. He expressed his well wishes for Finance Minister and hoped that country will soon overcome the challenge. He called for a national support to the austerity drive. He agreed with the views of Finance Minister.

Leader of the opposition Senator Dr. Shahzad Wasim had earlier appreciated the steps taken by chairman senate, Senator Yousaf Raza Gillani and Senator Saleem Mandviwalla also called for exercising financial control. They said that Golden Jubilee is an important occasion and we need to celebrate it with simplicity due to financial situation of the country. Senator Moulana Abdul Ghafoor Haideri said that there is also a need to impose a cut on the perks and privileges of bureaucracy. Senator Azam Nazir Tarar and Senator Mushtaq Ahmed also apprized the committee of their point of view.

A large number of members of the committee attended the meeting via video link which included Deputy chairman Senate Mirza Muhammad Afridi, Senator Azam Nazir Tarar, Senator Faisal Sabzwari, Saleem Mandviwalla, Senator Yousaf Raza Gillani. Besides, Senators Shahadat Awan, Mushtaq Ahmed, Secretary Senate Qasim Samad Khan and Senior officers of the Senate attended the meeting.

Gov't urged to promote cheap sources of green energy

ISLAMABAD (INP): Coordinator to Federal Tax Ombudsman and Chairman Kyrgyzstan Trade House Meher Kashif Younis Sunday said the tariff of electricity generated from wind and solar power plants is less than half of the cost of electricity currently being procured from thermal sources in Pakistan.

Speaking at a one-day workshop on "The Role of CPEC in Meeting Pakistan Energy Needs" held under the aegis of Gold Ring Economic Forum, a strategic think tank, here today, he said that the Hydro Power Projects (HPP) have a comparatively long operational life which can be used as an advantage for reducing their tariff through a large spread of the cost over the life of the project.

He said besides CPEC projects have invigorated the once barren land in Jhimpir and transformed the region into a wind corridor in real. He said four wind farms built here with a total installed capacity of 300 MW have supplied economical and clean energy to the national grid of Pakistan. He

said CPEC energy projects have contributed to economic growth by increasing power supply with high efficiency at lower cost in Pakistan.

He said these projects, including that coal, wind, solar and hydropower, stand at 6570 MW that generated 28549.94 Gwh and 25772.48 Gwh power respectively in FY2020-21 and FY2021-22, accounting for 22.03% and 18.37% of the total generation in Pakistan. He said the average 20% annual addition to the national grid has alleviated rampant cases of load shedding within the country and especially powered the export-oriented industries in Pakistan.

Quoting official facts and figures Meher Kashif Younis said Pakistan's energy sector is mainly dependent on imported fuel (oil and LNG), which has caused a heavy burden on foreign reserves and confined the industrial development of the country as the CPEC energy projects replaced the costlier energy production from furnace oil and diesel to coal and renewable

energy resources in the last five years, the energy needs of Pakistan has been fulfilled at lower prices, driving growth in the export-oriented industries, he added.

He said the cost has been rising over the last year due to surged fuel prices in the international market. Nevertheless, the CPEC projects still provide competitive rates. In October last year, the power generation cost of CPEC projects based on imported coal was Rs.18.5/kWh, and that of domestic projects based on FO and RLNG was Rs.34.0/kWh, Rs.31.0/kWh.

Rising fuel prices and a new energy landscape after the Ukraine war necessitate Pakistan to avail of its indigenous resources, and at the time being, the most efficient solution is Thar coal. Data provided by internationally acclaimed coal expert Chairperson Punjab Higher Education Commission Eng Dr Shahid Munir shows that proven coal reserves in Thar are approximately 175 billion tons, he added.

National immunization strategy to be prepared for 100% results: Qadir

ISLAMABAD (APP): Federal Minister for National Health Services, Regulations, and Coordination, Abdul Qadir Patel on Sunday said that effective measures were being adopted to make further improvements in the national immunization program. Addressing the annual meeting of the Federal Directorate of Immunization, which was attended by the coordinators from all provinces and representatives from international organizations, Qadir Patel said that a collaborative strategy was being formulated to ensure 100 percent results, by reaching everyone during every immunization drive in the country.

He said that it was the responsibility of the state to provide basic health facilities to its citizens and added that the government was working on a comprehensive plan for the complete eradication of vari-

ous diseases from the country.

For the purpose, he said, all available resources would be utilized, and urged the provinces to ensure 100 percent coverage of immunization to protect children.

He said that while there was no cure, "vaccination is the most effective way to protect children from various diseases. Each time a child is vaccinated, their protection against the virus is increased."

He said that repeated immunizations had protected millions of children, allowing almost many countries in the world to become free from various diseases.

"The only way to protect our children is to vaccinate them, especially under the age of five. It is critically important that parents and caregivers, particularly in high-risk areas, ensure that their child is vaccinated", Patel said.

Seasonal beggars turn to cities to reap 'benefits' of holy month

ISLAMABAD (APP): The citizens demanded the authorities concerned take serious action to discourage beggary practices as a large number of beggars hailing from far-flung areas of the country have invaded big cities to reap large benefits during the month of Ramadan.

Like every year, hundreds of professional beggars, including women and children have been moving towards populated areas of big cities before the arrival of Ramadan, said a report aired by a private news channel. Apart from the streets, bazaars and traffic signals the famous largest Sufi shrines have become a stronghold for seasonal beggars because visitors give a

lot of money to them in the name of religious offerings, said a citizen.

"The authority concerned should crack down on these seasonal beggars, said a citizen, adding, at the same time people should also stop giving them their money and discourage this attitude of begging during Ramadan.

The number of beggars hanging around the streets has significantly increased in the past few years, said a traffic warden. "Ramadan is the best season for begging and earning more profit, said a beggar, adding, she makes more than Rs1000 a day as people are keen to give charity in Ramadan". Beggars were found to be involved in several crimes and also create traffic hazards, said a

trader in the market.

Community members should not be sympathetic towards beggars and donate to registered charities instead, said a motorist.

"People during the holy month of Ramadan should use official charitable organizations to help the needy," said a citizen.

"Beggars in different disguises and of different ages start attacking you whenever you come out for shopping in markets, malls and bazaars, said a woman. We could not avoid them as they would not stop nagging you wherever you go," she added. "If beggary is not tackled tactfully, the number of seasonal beggars will continue to grow in coming months," said the social worker.

Dhai Chaal to showcase indelible sacrifices against terrorism

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan has been facing the scourge of terrorism for the past two decades, rendering countless human sacrifices and economic losses, highlighting the dire need to make these sacrifices acknowledged globally and counter enemies' onslaught.

Changing media dynamics and fifth-generation war has also made it more essential to reach out to international organisations and world nations to present the true face of Pakistan amidst this growing menace.

Although there had been movies like 'Khuda Ke Kiye', 'Waar', 'Yalghar' and others, there was a need for a film project that could focus on digging up the hidden stories of successful and hard-earned achievements of the country's people and its security forces against the inimical forces. 'Dhai Chaal' (half trick), a well-thought-out and properly designed film project by Faisal Production, revolves around an Indian spy Kulbhushan Jadhav who was arrested by the law enforcement agencies of Pakistan on March 3, 2016.

After World War II, this was a unique incident happening where a serving intelligence officer of a country (India) got arrested while spying in another country (Pakistan). The story is based on how Pakistani security forces arrested the Indian spy. It is a unique effort by the producer, director and actors to prepare a film on a novel topic rarely touched before by any producer with its shooting taking place at Balochistan's unique and under-rated locations. The shooting sites selected by the film director Taimour Sherazi and producer Dr Irfan Ashraf are an amalgamation of tough terrains and scenic beauty of Balochistan province.

This amalgamation of shooting sites will not only reveal the hardships the sons

of soil face in foiling the enemy's sabotage bids but also present the culture and natural beauty of Balochistan that is under threat due to the anti-state activities of the saboteurs. "Basic theme of the movie is to pay tribute to the sacrifices of locals of Balochistan, to promote positive impact of China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and expose Indian-sponsored terrorism in Balochistan," said producer Dr Imran Ashraf.

"The film also aims at exposing the Indian sabotage network run by Spy

Kulbhushan Jadhav and his terrorist activities in Balochistan and to show the reality of Pakistan to the world in a soft way," he added. Dr Ashraf said another theme of the movie was to pay tribute to Balochistan people who stood firm for national unity in the fight against terrorism and rendered valuable sacrifices by losing their dear ones in terrorist attacks.

During the filming of this project, the untapped tourism potential of Balochistan has also been highlighted. "The film has amicably utilized the landscape for good cinematography and to create public awareness on Balochistan's tourism potential." "Moreover, after the launch of this film, it can also grab the attention of filmmakers through Balochistan's picturesque scenery because it has the unique topography, landscape and natural beauty unmatched in the world," Dr Ashraf said.

He said Dhai Chaal in its different scenes tried to expose Indian-sponsored terrorism through Kulbhushan Jadhav-type hostile networks of Indian agencies involved in foiling CPEC and perpetuating terrorism in Balochistan. "Enemy's sabotage activities and evil designs still persist in the region and world nations must come to know about this reality."

CTP issues traffic plan for PSL cricket matches in Pindi

RAWALPINDI (INP): City Traffic Police (CTP), Rawalpindi issued a comprehensive traffic plan for the convenience of citizens regarding the Pakistan Super League (PSL) cricket matches being started from 01 March to 12 at Double Road Cricket Stadium. The CTP has made special arrangements to keep the traffic flowing on alternative routes during matches.

On the occasion, Chief Traffic Officer Rawalpindi Taimur Khan said more than 347 traffic police officers and jawans will perform special duties during the PSL, including seven DSPs, 27 inspectors, 206 traffic wardens and 107 traffic assistants.

During the movement of cricket teams, additional personnel have been deployed by making special arrangements to keep traffic flowing on alternate routes. For the convenience of cricket fans, parking facilities have been provided at three places, including Civil Aviation Ground Shaheen Chowk, Shahbaz Sharif Park near Shaheen Chowk and Graduate Degree College Satellite Town.

Besides, the shuttle service has been provided to access the stadium from the parking area.

Murree Road will be completely closed

from Faizabad to Double Road.

During this time, the traffic coming from Islamabad will be diverted from Faizabad to Expressway.

Traffic moving towards Islamabad will be able to enter Islamabad by using 6th Road Said Pur Road while traffic coming from Ghousia Chowk will be diverted to Farooq Azam Road, Kurri Road.

During the cricket match, both sides of Stadium Road from 9th Avenue Chowk to Double Road will be completely closed for traffic.

Meanwhile, the traffic coming from Islamabad 9th Avenue will be able to enter Rawalpindi through Faizabad Expressway and IJP Road through Pandora Chongi, Katarian, Carriage Factory, Pirwadhai Mor, Chak Madad while the traffic going from Rawalpindi to Double Road 9th Avenue Islamabad will be able to enter Rawalpindi through Murree Road.

The CTO said during the match, awareness banners regarding alternative routes and parking will be displayed on the main highways of Rawalpindi for the convenience of the citizens and to keep the traffic flowing on alternative routes so that the citizens remain updated.



ISLAMABAD: Shepherd guarding herd of sheep grazing along Murree Road, BharaKhao.

24 drugs dealers arrested

KABUL (Agencies): Security officers arrested 24 people in connection to dealing drugs in 7 provinces of the country. The Interior Ministry in a statement said on Sunday, that the counter-narcotics department's officers arrested 24 people on charges of drug trafficking and dealing in 7 provinces. Among them, nine people arrested in Herat, five in in Khost, three in Kandahar, three in Parwan, two in Paktia, and one other person was arrested in Bamyan province.

The Frontier Post

Shabaan 06, 1444 — Monday, February 27, 2023

Quake victims received cash

BADGHIS (Agencies): The International Organization for Migration (IOM) in cooperation with Disaster Management department of Badghis distributed cash assistance to 1376 families affected by the earthquake. The provincial head of Natural Disasters Management in Badghis Mawlawi Bari Daad Sabber, said that each family received cash for 26,000 to 52,000 Afghanis. The amount provided in 3 stages for the construction of shelters, he added.

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

2.7m tons of coal exported: Ministry

KABUL (TOLONews): 2.7 million tons of coal were exported in the last 10 months, according to figures provided by the Ministry of Finance. The ministry's information indicates that the export of coal earned more than 12.5 billion afghanis in customs revenue.

"In the first ten months of 1400 (the solar year), nearly 948,000 tons of coal were exported, from which 1 billion and 893 million Afghanis were received as customs income, but in the first ten months of 1401, nearly 2.7 million tons of

coal were exported through the customs of the country, from which 12 billion and 143 million afghanis were received as customs income," the Ministry of Finance said in a statement. "The figures released by the Ministry of Finance, stating that nearly 2.7 million tons of coal are exported abroad, are accurate," said Mohammad Rasoul Tutakhail, head of the Coal Exporters' Union.

Meanwhile, several Kabul coal sellers said that the price of coal has dropped in the nation's markets.

"This year's winter was colder, and the cost of wood and coal increased. The weather is getting warmer right now. Previously, the price of coal was between 16,500 and 16,500 afghanis a ton, but it is currently between 12,000 and 12,500," said Nasratullah, a coal vendor.

"In the past, the price of coal was 15,000 a ton, but now it is 12,000," said Nadimulhaq, another coal seller. According to statistics from the Ministry of Finance, over 950 thousand tons of coal were exported in 1400 (Solar year).

‘No nonopoly’ on govt jobs in Afghanistan



KABUL (TOLONews): The acting minister of communications and information technology, Najibullah Haqqani, disputed claims that the government has a monopoly, saying that nearly 800,000 people, including former employees of the previous administration, are working in the current government.

Addressing a Religious-Scientific Seminar for Lecturers of Central Private Universities, Haqqani said that one of the factors contributing to the nation's current crisis is the gap between universities and madrasas (religious schools), and he called for a solution to this issue.

"If we look at the current situation in this govern-

ment, some say it's monopoly, some say it's weak, and some say it's one-sided, but we have around 800,000 people in the government," Haqqani added.

The Acting Minister of Higher Education, Neda Mohammad Nadim, during the seminar said there is no dictatorship under the current government and that everyone has the right to assert their rights.

"In our system, there is neither a dictatorship nor arbitrary rule, and it is not that everything is implemented by force. Every Muslim can defend his or her right if it is related to the commander, minister, or governor," Nadim said.

The Acting Minister of Higher Education asked

the former government officials to return to the country.

"Return to your country and proudly live with Afghans, and with your people. Your house and land are protected," Nadim noted.

"Such seminars should continue. This seminar had positive effects in promoting unity among academic institutions and people," said Abdul Rasheed Iqbal, chancellor of Polytechnic University.

Officials of the current government said during the seminar that the Islamic Emirate is committed to the nation's growth and that by holding such seminars, the gap between the university and the madrasa will be removed.

MoAIL reaffirms providing all facilities for investors

KABUL (Agencies): The Acting Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock Minister, Mawlawi Attaullah Omari said while inaugurating the drip irrigation network in Nangarhar province, that the Ministry is ready to provide all facilities for investors in this sector in the country.

Minister visited the gardens built with the drip irrigation system and the opening of the drip irrigation system in 100 acres of gardens in Nangarhar, said the Ministry in a statement.

He asked the investors to return to their country and invest in agriculture, irrigation and livestock, poultry, horticulture and other sectors.

Meanwhile, a number of investors thanked the Islamic Emirate for the facilities provided, mainly in the provision of land for investment, and called for more assistance in this respect.

The officials of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock of Nangarhar department say that over 500 acres of orchards have been built with drip irrigation system in this province so far.

NSIA collects revenue of 3 million Afs

KABUL (Agencies): Local officials in the national Statistic and Information Authority of Urzgan say that the department collected 3 million Afghanis in a year.

The provincial head of NSIA, Mawlawi Abdul Haq Haq Bayan, said that 10,000 applications were processed in a year, which collected more than 3 million Afghanis in revenue.

Currently, the biometric data of 150 people are being recorded in the NSIA office in Urzgan and electronic identity cards are being distributed to the same number of people.

Jirga resolves 21 years of enmity

FARAH (Agencies): With the Islamic Emirate mediations a 21 years of conflicts between two tribes ended in Bakwa district of Farah province. Many local officials from the province and Herat including the deputies of Farah and Herat attended the Jirga to resolve the dispute between these two tribes.

Local officials and religious scholars spoke about the importance of peace and praised their actions for ending the conflict and forgiving each other.

During the years of conflict between these two tribes, 6 people were killed and 2 people were injured on both sides.

1155 patients received treatment by ophthalmology team in Maidan Wardak

WARDAK (Agencies): The Ministry of Public Health sent ophthalmologist's team from to treat patients with eye disorder in the province of Maidan Wardak. The Ophthalmology Team provide medical assistance to 1155 patients in 3 districts of the province for several days.

The Ophthalmology treatment teams have visited this province several times recently and have treated a large number of patients.

Women launches women's revolution movement



KABUL (Khaama Press): A group of females announced the launch of the Afghanistan Women's Revolution in Kabul, aiming to fight for fundamental human and women rights in the country.

According to one of the organizers, Donya Safi, the movement aimed to "protect the basic rights of citizens, particularly women, as access to basic rights is a serious requirement for the citizens." We started this campaign to fight the

injustice and inequity against women, reported by Amu TV.

She said the movement's supporters include students, teachers, and several former government employees fighting for women's rights.

Since the Taliban retook power in Afghanistan in 2021, massive rollbacks spearheaded by the Taliban leadership, Afghan girls and women have lost access to school, work, and public areas.

In addition, since December last year, the ban on Afghan women working with the aid organization has further disrupted the humanitarian programs in the country.

Meanwhile, several reports issued by international institutions indicate that 28 million people will need humanitarian assistance in 2023, and half the population will suffer from severe hunger in the country.

Despite widespread international criticism and

opposition from citizens of the country, the restriction edict on female employment and education has remained the same.

The movement also said that a society could only progress with the contribution of women. As a result, if women do not contribute to society, society will not progress. Despite women's essential role in the country's progress, women are not allowed to participate in the current Taliban government.

Teachers in Kabul complain about reduction in pay

KABUL (TOLONews): Several schoolteachers in Kabul expressed their displeasure at the reduction in pay, saying that they could not afford to provide for their families with this amount of money.

The teachers said that their salaries had been cut by 1000 afghanis since the Islamic Emirate was established, and they are asking a pay increase from IE.

Juma, who has been a

teacher in Kabul schools for 10 years, said he is the only provider for his family of five and he cannot provide for his family with this amount of money.

"Teachers' salaries have not changed; they are still down by 1,000, thus they are suffering various challenges," Juma Hamdard told TOLONews.

"The teacher's economy is very poor. Not only me, but other teachers in

Afghanistan have the same problem. They live in rented houses, and their troubles are numerous. I hope officials pay attention in this respect," Ahmad Farhad, another teacher said.

According to several Kabul residents, the country's educational system has been impacted by teachers' economic issues.

"Their economic situation is poor, and they cannot continue their lessons,

and due to economic issues they cannot teach with a peaceful mind," said Khalid, a resident of Kabul.

"The cost of oil and food are high, the price of everything has gone up, the prices are not steady, and the teacher's salary is inadequate," said Gul Wali, another resident of Kabul.

MoE has previously said that there are over 274,000 teachers employed at the nation's schools.

Women open center in Herat to teach sewing

HERAT (TOLONews): A women's tailoring training facility has been created by two sisters in the province of Herat for young women who have been denied access to education.

"We have more than sixty students here, which includes housewives, girls, and university students," said Yalda Yousefi, the head of the sewing school.

Girls studying at the center asked the Islamic Emirate to reopen schools and universities for girls in the country.

"Girls can continue their education if schools and universities are opened to them. They should be allowed to pick a path for themselves and determine their future instead of staying home



and wasting time," said Samira, a student.

"We ask them to reopen our schools, so that those

who are interested in the school can go to school and get an education," said Fatema, another student.

Some female students who learn sewing in this center said that they suffer from psychological pressure due to the closure of schools and universities.

"Most of the women turned to sewing once schools, universities, and educational centers were closed," said Suhaila, a student.

"A person's spirit grows stronger while they work. At home, we were feeling tired and unpleasant, and there was nothing to do," said Asma, another student. For girls in Herat, several sewing and other trade training facilities have opened in more than a year and a half.

Following the closure of schools, universities, and educational centers for girls, most girls have started learning handicrafts.

800 new military officers graduated



KABUL (Agencies): The Ministry of Defense said that 800 military officers have been graduated from General Headquarters of Joint Combat Training after receiving professional military training and religious education for three months.

The ministry in a statement on Sunday stated that

that Sheikh Noor Ul Haq Anwar, head of Office of Administrative Affairs during the graduation ceremony of the officers said, "You are the real guardians of this nation, and believe that, the army of any country who are organized in terms of military, belief and for-

mation, the hands of occupiers would not move there."

During the last one and half years, over 5,000 people have been trained and received their graduation certificates and sent to the military service to serve their country, the ministry said.

Eight people killed and wounded in separate incidents last week

KABUL (Pajhwok): Talks between Afghan officials and a visiting high-level Pakistani delegation on security and economic issues in Kabul and an American judge's ruling that relatives of the September 11, 2001 attacks are not entitled to funds from Afghanistan central bank were important news last week, when eight people were killed and wounded in separate incidents across the country.

Casualties

Half a dozen people were killed and two others injured in separate incidents of violence across

the country last week.

According to local officials, unknown gunmen killed a person in Paktia, a money-changer was found dead under mysterious circumstances in Zabul and a child was killed in firing by in Paktia.

Two armed robbers were killed during a clash with security forces in Herat and a kidnapper was also killed in a clash with security forces in Balkh.

A sticky bomb attached to a car went off in Murad Khani area of Kabul, but caused no casualties, according to officials, but eyewitnesses told Pajhwok

that two children were injured in the blast.

These figures are based on reports reaching Pajhwok. Some incidents may have gone unreported or sources provided incorrect numbers.

Last week, according to sources, 16 people were killed and two others were injured in various incidents across the country.

Before the regime change, hundreds of people, including civilians, security forces and insurgents, would be killed and wounded each week.

9/11 families not entitled to Afghan bank funds: US judge

A United States judge has ruled that family members of victims of the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks are not entitled to funds from Afghanistan's central bank.

In the ruling, US District Judge George Daniels said that awarding the families money seized from the Da Afghanistan Bank (DAB) would require an assessment that the Taliban is the legitimate government of Afghanistan, a decision he was "constitutionally restrained" from making.

In February 2022, the administration of US

President Joe Biden issued a controversial executive order stating it would split \$7bn in frozen assets from Afghanistan's central bank between the Afghan people and families of 9/11 victims.

Da Afghanistan Bank or central bank welcomed the US judge's ruling, saying the people of Afghanistan wanted the frozen money to be released in order their current economic hardships could mitigate to some extent.

Continuity of aid

Last week, a package of US\$40 million in humanitarian aid arrived in Afghanistan.

The Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation last week signed five agreements with four international NGOs worth \$14.5 million. Under the agreements, the foreign organizations would provide cash assistance to poor families in 15 provinces and provide them with jobs.

Women's work and girls' education

Dozens of women last week attended a gathering in northern Jawzjan province.

They insisted on wearing Islamic Hijab and voiced their support for the Islamic Emirate and

asked the caretaker government to allow girls to pursue their education in line with Sharia.

Also last week, Japanese Ambassador to Kabul, Takashi Okada met acting Interior Minister Sirajuddin Haqqani and said his country wanted continued cooperation with Afghanistan in various spheres.

The envoy hoped there would be no restrictions on girls education in the new academic year.

At the Munich security conference, female foreign ministers of Albania, Belgium, Canada, France, Germany, Iceland,

Kosovo, Liechtenstein, Mongolia and Slovenia asked the caretaker government of Afghanistan to remove restrictions imposed on Afghan women.

Islamic Emirate spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid said women were being given their rights enshrined in Islam and currently they lived in a safe environment

He said women's problems were mostly dealt with by the courts and in some spheres, there was a need to create a Shariah environment and work was underway meet Sharia conditions.

China lethal aid to Russia would come at real cost, U.S. says

WASHINGTON (Reuters): China has not moved toward providing lethal aid that would help Russia in its invasion of Ukraine and the United States has made clear behind closed doors that such a move would have serious consequences, White House national security adviser Jake Sullivan said on Sunday.

"Beijing will have to make its own decisions about how it proceeds, whether it provides military assistance - but if it goes down that road it will come at real costs to China," Sullivan told CNN's "State of the Union" program.

China has not moved forward in providing that aid, but neither has Beijing taken that option off the table, Sullivan said in a separate interview on ABC's "This Week" program. U.S. officials have warned their Chinese counterparts privately about what those costs might be, Sullivan said, but he would not elaborate on those discussions. The United States and its NATO allies in recent days have been scrambling to dissuade China from such

a move, making public comments on their belief that China is considering providing lethal equipment to Russia. U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken on Friday said China has been providing nonlethal assistance to Russia through its companies. U.S. President Joe Biden visited Kyiv and met with President Volodymyr Zelenskyy last Monday, promising new American military aid for Ukraine worth \$500 million. Friday marked the first anniversary of Russia's invasion. The United States has been by far the largest supplier of military assistance to help Ukraine repel better-equipped Russian forces. Ukraine expects a major new Russian offensive soon. CIA Director William Burns also weighed in regarding China in an interview aired on Sunday.

"We're confident that the Chinese leadership is considering the provision of lethal equipment. We also don't see that a final decision has been made yet, and we don't see evidence of actual shipments of lethal equipment,"

Burns told CBS's "Face the Nation" program. Republican Representative Michael McCaul, chairman of the House of Representatives Foreign Affairs Committee, cited reports that drones are among the lethal weapons China has considered sending to Russia.

McCaul said Chinese leader Xi Jinping is preparing to visit Moscow next week for a meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin. Putin has alluded to a Xi visit but the timing has not been confirmed by Russia or China. Russia and China signed a "no limits" partnership in February 2022 shortly before Russian forces invaded Ukraine. Economic links between Russia and China have deepened while Moscow's connections with the West have shriveled.

Biden said on Friday the United States would respond if China were to supply Russia with lethal weapons to use in Ukraine, but added in an interview with ABC News, "I don't anticipate a major initiative on the part of China providing weaponry to Russia."

The West has been wary of China's response to the invasion, with some officials warning that a Russian victory would color China's actions toward Taiwan. Beijing has never renounced the use of force to bring the self-ruled island that it considers a wayward province under its rule. China has not condemned the conflict in Ukraine or called it an "invasion."

"The fact that they're going to meet next week, Chairman Xi and Putin, to discuss this unholy alliance that they have, to put weapons into Ukraine, to me is very disturbing because while maybe Ukraine today, it's going to be Taiwan tomorrow," McCaul said. "That's why this is so important."

The West reacted with skepticism to China's proposal on Friday for a Ukraine ceasefire, with NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg saying Beijing did not have much credibility as a mediator because of its failure to condemn the invasion. Ukraine rejected the proposal unless it involves Russia withdrawing its troops.



ITALY: Remains of a ship are seen along the beach where bodies of suspected believed to be refugees were found after a shipwreck, in Cutro, the eastern coast of Italy's Calabria region.

At least 58 migrants killed off Calabria coast

CROTONE (BBC): At least 58 migrants, including a baby, have died and dozens more have survived after their overloaded boat sank in rough seas off southern Italy. The vessel reportedly broke apart while trying to land with about 150 people aboard near the coastal town of Crotone in the Calabria region.

Many bodies have been recovered from the beach at a nearby seaside resort. Large numbers of people fleeing conflict and poverty make the crossing from Africa to Italy each year. Local officials put the confirmed death toll in the latest tragedy to strike the central Mediterranean at either 58 or 59.

Earlier the coastguard said 80 people had been recovered alive, "including some who managed to reach the shore after the sinking".

Manuela Curra, a local government official, told Reuters news agency that the boat had left the Turkish coastal city of Izmir three or four days ago. Those onboard were mainly from Afghanistan, Pakistan, Somalia and Iran, according to Italian officials, and President Sergio Mattarella said many were fleeing "very difficult conditions".

One survivor was arrested on migrant trafficking charges, customs police said. The vessel is reported to have sunk after it crashed against rocks during rough weather, sparking a large search-

and-rescue operation on land and at sea.

Video footage shows timber from the wreckage that has been smashed into pieces washing up on the beach, along with parts of the hull.

Survivors are seen huddled under blankets, attended to by Red Cross workers. Some have been taken to hospital. "There had been landings but never a tragedy like this," the mayor of Cruto, Antonio Ceraso, has told Rai News.

Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni - elected last year partly on a pledge to stem the flow of migrants into Italy - expressed "deep sorrow" for the incident, blaming the deaths on traffickers.

"It is inhumane to exchange the lives of men, women and children for the price of the 'ticket' they paid in the false perspective of a safe journey," she said in a statement.

"The government is committed to preventing departures, and with them the unfolding of these tragedies, and will continue to do so," Carlo Calenda, Italy's former economy minister, said people in difficulty at sea should be rescued "whatever the cost", but added that "illegal immigration routes must be closed".

Ms Meloni's right-wing government has vowed to stop migrants reaching Italy's shores and in the last few days pushed through a tough new law tightening the rules

on rescues.

According to monitoring groups, more than 20,000 people have died or gone missing at sea in the central Mediterranean since 2014.

European Commission President Ursula van der Leyen said she was "deeply saddened" by the incident, adding that the "loss of life of innocent migrants is a tragedy". She said it was crucial to "redouble our efforts" to make progress on reforming EU asylum rules to tackle the challenges regarding migration to Europe. Pope Francis, who often defends the rights of migrants, has said he is praying for the dead, the missing and those who survived.

Regina Catrambone, director of the Migrant Offshore Aid Station which carries out search and rescue operations in the Mediterranean, told the BBC that European countries must work together to help those in need.

She also called for an end to the "myopic vision" that says that countries that are physically closer to Africa and the Middle East should take the lead on tackling the issue.

"Still there is no co-operation among the European states to actively co-ordinate together to go and help the people in need," she said, urging governments to work together to improve search and rescue efforts and develop safe and legal routes.

PM revises office timings under his austerity plan

ISLAMABAD (INP): The government under its austerity plan has announced working hours in offices from 7:30 in the morning to cut expenses and conserve electricity on Sunday.

The federal cabinet's all members have opted to work voluntarily without salaries and other official perks to save 200 billion rupees in a year under the prime minister's austerity plan.

The government has also announced to return back luxury vehicles given to all cabinet members. The cabinet has also banned

its members stay in five-star hotels during their overseas visits.

Prime minister Shehbaz Sharif last Wednesday announced an austerity plan to save the national resources. The PM said that austerity is the top priority of his government and the need of the hour.

He said that life has become tougher for the poor. "We have to learn lessons from the past and move forward", he said. "The elite have to play pivotal role as the entire nation is looking at us," he said. He urged ministers, special assistants and advisers, to sacrifice

and support the government's austerity drive.

It is pertinent to mention here that there is increasing demand in the public domain from the government and other elite to live within limited resources.

Recently, Federal Minister for Planning and Development Ahsan Iqbal had returned back his official vehicle. It is worth mentioning here that the Prime Minister had issued direction to his Cabinet for reducing non-developmental expenses to minimize burden on the national exchequer.

'Establishment a problem in itself, not a part of solution': SKA

LAHORE (NNI): Slamming the country's establishment, PML-N leader and former prime minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi said it [establishment] was a problem in itself, not a part of the solution. Speaking at a special session on the second day of the Lahore Literature Festival at the Alhambra Hall Lahore on Saturday, he also called for upholding the supremacy of the law and the Constitution.

Abbasi reiterated the importance of ensuring the supremacy of the Constitution, noting, "The Constitution exists in the country but it is high time its supremacy was established." The PML-N leader said that corrupt individuals are more acceptable to the establishment than those with integrity and exemplary character. He also highlighted that everyone, including the establishment, must work together to address political issues urgently as delays would not be in the best interests of the country.

Alleged audio call of PTI's Usman Dar lawyer surfaces

LAHORE (NNI): The recording of an alleged audio call between Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) leader Usman Dar and his alleged front man Javed Ali's lawyer Tahir Sultan with his friend Arif Bhatii surfaced.

According to details, Tahir Sultan can be heard discussing yesterday's deposed premier Imran Khan's video link address flanked by Usman Dar and his front man Javed Ali. In the address the PTI chief alleged that Javed Ali was abducted and tortured to give false statements against Usman Dar.

In the alleged audio, lawyer Tahir Sultan making fun of Javed Ali's press conference said that "Javed told me that he was not tortured but in the presser his claims were opposite from what he discussed with me."

Earlier, in a presser, Imran Khan said that people are being forced to give false statements after the ouster of the PTI govern-

ment. "Attempts were made to file fake cases, corruption cases and run audiotapes to blackmail us."

He said that the affected citizen namely Javed Ali will tell his story by himself. He added that Usman Dar had facilitated Javed Ali to get a watchman's position - a Grade 4 government job.

Javed Ali said that he works as a watchman in the education department and he was summoned via a telephone call. "Four policemen came in and shifted me to an unknown location after covering my face with a cloth. Some unidentified men had also come there."

"I was subjected to brutal tortured and hanged upside down. I was asked how much money you pay to Usman Dar [to get this job]. After I refused, they tortured me again. I was stripped naked and filmed. They threatened me to film the videos of my family too and post them on social media."

PM to unveil 100 MW Iran-Gwadar power project

ISLAMABAD (INP): Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif is all set to inaugurate the 100 MW Iran-Gwadar power transmission project to stamp out electricity woes in Gwadar.

With this project, according to Gwadar Pro, Gwadar will import uninterrupted electricity from Iran. In this regard all preparedness has been given in collaboration with officials of the Gwadar Port Authority (GPA), the Gwadar Development Authority (GDA), China Oversea Port Holding Company, Balochistan secretariat, Quetta Electric Supply Company (QESCO) and National Transmission National Transmission and Dispatch Company (NTDC).

According to the sources, final testing for the 100 MW power project has been conducted successfully. Supply will formally commence after unveiling of project by the premier.

UNICEF urges greater support for children affected by powerful Turkiye quakes

UNITED NATIONS (APP): A senior UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) official has called for stepped-up support for boys and girls affected by the devastating earthquakes in Turkiye, which have left more than one million people homeless.

Afshan Khan, UNICEF Regional Director for Europe and Central Asia, briefed journalists in Geneva on her recent visit to the region, where she saw first-hand some of the destruction, according to a press release issued at UN Headquarters in New York on Saturday.

"Children in Turkiye are at risk of developing anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder; they need to be able to resume their education, and they urgently need psychosocial support to help deal with the trauma they have experienced," she said. Both Turkiye and Syria were rocked by earthquakes on 6 February, and another struck Turkiye earlier this week.

Khan visited Kahramanmaraş, one of the 11 most affected provinces, where thousands of families are still huddled in shelters and temporary

accommodation, or taking refuge in cars, bus stations, under bridges, and in makeshift tents.

Survivors face homelessness, lack of food and water, and freezing temperatures, especially at night, she said, adding that more than one million people are staying in temporary accommodation shelters with limited access to essential services.

"I visited one of these centres in Kahramanmaraş. Initially hosting 9,000 people, this centre is now home to almost 18,000. Nearly one-third of them are children. The space is cramped, and living conditions are dire," she said.

The education of nearly four million children, including over 350,000 refugees and migrants, is at risk, she warned, due to the overwhelming number of damaged or destroyed schools. "We know how important learning and routine is for children and their recovery," she said. "Right now, amid such destruction and uncertainty, children need support so they can regain a sense of normalcy."

Türkiye also hosts the world's largest number of refugees, including

roughly 3.6 million people from war-ravaged Syria. Some of the 800,000 Syrian refugee children in the country are among those affected by the earthquake. "So many had already lost their homes once before; this is the complexity of the tragedy that we see before us now," she said.

Clearing rubble, for example in Kahramanmaraş in Türkiye, is an essential part of recovery efforts following the earthquake.

Meanwhile, the UN Development Programme (UNDP) is seeking \$113.5 million to support early recovery in Türkiye in the aftermath of the earthquakes, with most of the funding going towards removing mountains of rubble, estimated at between 116 million and 210 million tonnes.

The request is part of the broader \$1 billion UN appeal for the country, launched last week, which to date is only around seven per cent funded.

UNDP Resident Representative Louisa Vinton said ongoing support for the emergency response will be followed by a look ahead to the massive effort that will be needed to restore normal life in the area.

Turkey widens probe into building collapses as quake toll exceeds 50,000

ANTAKYA/ISTANBUL (Reuters): Turkey has arrested 184 people suspected of responsibility for the collapse of buildings in this month's earthquakes and investigations are widening, a minister said on Saturday, as anger simmers over what many see as corrupt building practices.

Overnight, the death toll from the earthquakes, the most powerful of which struck at the dead of night on Feb. 6, rose to 44,128 in Turkey. That took the overall number of deaths in Turkey and neighbouring Syria to more than 50,000.

More than 160,000 buildings containing 520,000 apartments collapsed or were severely damaged in Turkey by the disaster, the worst in the country's modern history.

Justice Minister Bekir Bozdog said that more than 600 people had been investigated in connection with collapsed buildings, speaking during a news conference in the southeastern city of Diyarbakir, which was among 10 provinces hit by the disaster.

Those formally arrested and remanded in custody include 79 con-

struction contractors, 74 people who bear legal responsibility for buildings, 13 property owners and 18 people who had made alterations to buildings, he said. Many Turks have expressed outrage at what they see as corrupt building practices and flawed urban developments.

President Tayyip Erdogan, who faces the biggest political challenge of his two-decade rule in elections scheduled to be held by June, has promised accountability.

In the province of Gaziantep, the mayor of the Nurdagi district - who is from Erdogan's ruling AK Party - was among those arrested as part of the investigations into collapsed buildings, state broadcaster TRT Haber and other media reported.

Nearly three weeks since the disaster, there is no final death toll in Turkey and officials have not said how many bodies may still be trapped under the rubble.

A firefighter helping to clear the rubble in the hard-hit city of Antakya said body parts were being found on a daily basis.

"It's very difficult. You cannot tell



a man to continue working if he's lifting out a person's arm," said the firefighter, who declined to be identified. Nearly two million people left homeless by the disaster are being housed in tents, container homes and other facilities in the region and in other

parts of the country, Turkey's disaster management authority said.

More than 335,000 tents have been erected in the quake zone and container home settlements are being established at 130 locations, while nearly 530,000 people have been

evacuated from affected areas, it added.

But near Antakya, Omran Alsweed, a Syrian, and his family are still living in makeshift shelters.

"Our houses are heavily damaged so we have taken shelter here,

in a garden in our neighbourhood," said Alsweed.

"The biggest issue is tents. It has been 19 days and we are yet to receive a single tent. We also applied to move into a tent camp but they said the ones nearby are full," he said.

Turkey's only remaining ethnic Armenian village, Vakifli, was badly hit by the quake, with 30 of its 40 stone houses heavily damaged.

"Vakifli is all we have, the only Armenian village in Turkey. It is our home. Seeing it like this is breaking my heart," said Masis, a 67-year-old retired jeweller, who moved back to his hometown after spending 17 years in Istanbul.

Turkey and Armenia are still at odds over the 1.5 million people Armenia says were killed in 1915 by the Ottoman Empire, the predecessor to modern Turkey. Armenia says this constitutes genocide.

Turkey accepts that many Armenians living in the Ottoman Empire were killed in clashes with Ottoman forces during World War One, but contests the figures and denies it was systematic.