

Joint sessions summoned
F.P. Report
ISLAMABAD: President Dr Arif Alvi has summoned the session of the National Assembly on Monday at 12:00 noon, whereas the Joint Session of the Parliament will also resume on the same day at 3:00 pm. Issues of national importance will be discussed in both the sessions. Meanwhile, Pakistan Day military parade will be held here at President's House in Islamabad today (Saturday).

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PM reviews Ramazan package

Shehbaz directs smooth, uninterrupted distribution of free wheat flour

F.P. Report

LAHORE: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif Friday directed that registration, of unregistered eligible persons in Punjab, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Islamabad for free flour scheme, should be ensured.

While chairing a meeting to review Ramazan package here, he said counters of National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA) and Benazir Income Support Programme should be set up at flour distribution points.

He said the government was taking all possible steps to lessen the difficulties of poor people. He said the distribution of free flour would continue till Ramazan 25.

Federal Ministers Shazia Marri, Marriyum Aurangzeb, Advisor to PM Ahad Cheema, Chief Minister Punjab Syed Mohsin Naqvi and officers concerned attended the meeting. The meeting was informed about the free flour scheme in Punjab, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Islamabad from which a large number of families were benefiting.

It was told that in Punjab flour distribution points were set up in marriage halls so that people should not face difficulties while waiting for their turn. The prime minister today visited flour distribution points in Lahore and Kasur and expressed satisfaction at the arrangements. He appreciated efforts of the administrations of Punjab, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Islamabad and officials of departments who were working for the programme.

The Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif also paid an unannounced visit to the distribution points of free wheat flour here and Kasur, and directed the authorities concerned to ensure hassle-free and uninterrupted supply of the commodity to the entitled people. The free wheat flour is being distributed across Punjab and federal capital, under the Ramzan Package announced by the government to reduce the burden of inflation from

the middle and low-income groups. The prime minister, who was accompanied by Advisor Ahad Cheema and Special Assistant to PM Malik Ahmad Khan, interacted with the people including children at the distribution centers. He listened to the problems faced by them and issued instructions for their immediate redressal.

He directed the relevant authorities to continue the free flour distribution till 25th of Ramzan as per the program announced by the government. Prime Minister Shehbaz, who also distributed flour bags among the beneficiaries, inspected the process of flour supply with the officials checking the particulars of the people before guiding them to the distribution point.

He also visited the waiting room established to facilitate the beneficiaries of the flour scheme, particularly keeping in view the month of fasting. "No citizen should face any difficulty during Ramzan. Special attention should be given to the facilitation of old-aged and persons with disabilities," he instructed and called for making arrangements to facilitate the women, particularly those coming with their children.

"Don't consider it just an official duty rather serve it as a humanitarian work to seek the appeasement of Allah Almighty during Holy Ramzan." The prime minister appreciated the secretary food, Punjab chief secretary, commissioner and deputy commissioner and other workers for good arrangements at the distribution centers.

As per the plan, around 15.8 million households of Punjab province would be distributed wheat flour, free of charge during the Holy Ramzan. It is for the first time in the country's history that a package for the distribution of free wheat flour has been prepared. The wheat flour distribution would continue till the 25th of Ramzan through 8,500 Utility Stores. Moreover, around 20,000 flour distribution points have also been set up to facilitate the people.

PM himself in field to ensure supply of free flour: Marriyum

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Minister for Information and Broadcasting Marriyum Aurangzeb on Friday said some 4.2 million people had so far received sacks of free wheat flour under the Ramazan Package launched by the government to reduce burden of inflation on lower-middle class and poor people.

Addressing the media persons, the minister said so far, free flour sacks were distributed among more than 4.1 million people in Punjab, while some 72,000 from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and 20,000 from Islamabad had benefitted from the "historic and unprecedented" scheme on the very first day of its launch in these areas.

She said all was set for starting the free flour supply in Gilgit Baltistan, while efforts were also underway to replicate this initiative in other parts of the country including Sindh and Balochistan. Marriyum said data of the Benazir Income

Support Programme was being used to distribute the free flour sacks in a transparent manner. The prime minister had categorically stated that there would be no compromise on quality of the edible and transparency in the distribution process.

She said the prime minister had a track record of pursuing the best governance model to execute people-centric projects. Whether it was related to flood or any other emergency, the PM himself had led from the front and always personally monitored the services being offered to the people in such critical times, she added.

The prime minister himself paid surprise visits to flour distribution centers in Kasur and Lahore to ensure uninterrupted supply of quality flour, she said, adding more visits were on the cards in the coming days. She said during his visits, the prime minister had held interactions with women children, and persons with disabilities who

were sitting in the waiting areas to wait for their turn. The PM also issued directives to the officials concerned to resolve the complaints of the people visiting the flour distribution centers.

Free distribution of flour reinforced the fact that Shehbaz Sharif had not only served the masses while being the chief minister of Punjab, but also continued that journey on becoming prime minister of the country, the minister maintained. "Launch of the Sasta Petrol (Subsidized fuel) and Muft Atta (Free Flour) schemes are the historic and unprecedented initiatives and it is the only Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz which can take such steps even during the difficult times," she said, while lambasting Imran Khan for first signing the agreement with the IMF on tough conditions and then violating the same for political gains which caused the economic meltdown and inflation.

Mishaps on free flour points: KP CM takes notice

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Caretaker Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Muhammad Azam Khan while taking notice of some unpleasant incidents that took place during the distribution of free wheat flour in some parts of the province, has directed Chief Secretary Khyber Pakhtunkhwa for necessary measures to ensure the distribution of free wheat flour in an orderly and organized manner and to make easier for the deserving families to get free of cost flour during the holy month of Ramazan.

He has further directed to put in place a well devised mechanism for the smooth distribution of free of cost flour to the deserving families, and to ensure its implementation by the local administration in letter and spirit so that such unpleasant incidents could be prevented in future.

He issued these directives during a call on meeting of Chief Secretary Nadeem Aslam Chaudhry who met him at Chief Minister's House here on Friday and provided updates about free of cost flour distribution in the province and about the causes of unpleasant incidents in some parts of the province.

It was decided on the occasion that administrative secretaries of the provincial government would be assigned special tasks to monitor the distribution of free of cost flour across the province who will submit reports to the Chief Minister and the Chief Secretary about the free flour distribution on regular basis. A notification assigning one district to each Secretary for the purpose will soon be issued.

President should remain in his 'constitutional domain': Sana

ISLAMABAD (APP): Minister for Interior Rana Sanaullah Khan on Friday said President Dr Arif Alvi should "work in the constitutional domain" and better write a letter to Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf Chairman Imran Khan to return 190 million pounds to the national exchequer.

He should also seek answer from the PTI chief for "acts of terrorism", besides "accepting Tyrian as his daughter" and facing the Toshakhana and foreign funding cases in courts, he said while reacting to a letter written by President Alvi to Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif.

The minister said the president should not "act on the orders of Imran Khan and becomes his puppet". But unfortunately, "a person breaking the Constitution and law had been appointed to the constitutional position", he added. He said the question arose why President Alvi did not act over violation of human rights when a person was arrested in a fake case of 15 kg of heroin.



LAHORE: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif interacting with the beneficiaries of free Atta scheme.

President writes to PM over Punjab, KP elections — asks to direct authorities concerned to assist Election Commission for timely polls in provinces

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: President Dr Arif Alvi on Friday wrote a letter to Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, emphasizing that all relevant executive authorities of federal and provincial governments should be directed to refrain from abuse of human rights and also to assist the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) in holding general elections in the provinces of Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa within the given timeframe.

He said the holding of elections in the two provinces as per the timeframe, in compliance with the Supreme Court's order dated March 1, 2023 was essential to avoid further complications, including contempt of court. The president said he was writing the letter as events had taken place in the recent past involving glaring violations of fundamental and human rights that were highlighted by the print, electronic and social media and needed to be brought to the prime minister's notice to ensure remedial measures and preventive action. The president said the elections of provincial assemblies, in case of their dissolution under Article 105

or Article 112, were required to be held within 90 days under Article 224 (2) of the Constitution.

He added that the Supreme Court of Pakistan vide its order dated 1st March, 2023 had directed the ECP to propose date(s) to the president for holding the poll within 90 days or on a date that deviates to barest minimum from afore-said deadline. He said the governor of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa was also directed by the Supreme Court to appoint a date for holding the general election for the provincial assembly of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa as per above timeframe.

Subsequently, the ECP had proposed holding of general elections between April 30 and May 7, 2023 and general elections for the Provincial Assembly of Punjab were announced to be held on April 30, 2023 and the same was notified by the ECP. President Alvi said that it appeared that federal and care-taker governments in Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa advised the heads of departments concerned to indicate their inability to provide the necessary support for holding general elections. He referred to Article 220 of the Constitution which states that "it shall be the duty of all executive

authorities in the Federation and in the Provinces to assist the Commissioner and the Election Commission in the discharge of his or their functions." He underlined that in his opinion, flagrant violation of the Constitution had been committed by the executive authorities and government departments, and that the ECP had not implemented his announcement of holding general elections in Punjab on 30th April, 2023 and also blatantly violated the Supreme Court's order dated 1st March, 2023.

The ECP had announced the date of October 8, 2023 for holding general elections of provincial assemblies of Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the president said. He wrote that it was a matter of concern that no meaningful consultation with the president on policy issues had been undertaken by the prime minister in line of Article 46 of the Constitution, which provided that "the prime minister shall keep the president informed on all matters of internal and foreign policy and on all legislative proposals the Federal Government intends to bring before the parliament".

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'Hold KP polls on Oct 8', governor urges ECP

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: In a fresh development, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Governor Haji Ghulam Ali Friday urged the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) to hold the general elections in the province on October 8, the same date the electoral watchdog has announced for Punjab, keeping in mind a rise in terror activities.

The governor, in the letter to Chief Election Commissioner Sikandar Sultan Raja, said it would be in the "best public interest as well as in the interest of the state" if polls were held in October instead of a previous date that he had suggested — May 28. The ECP's decision to withdraw

an earlier announcement for Punjab elections came after security and financial bodies refused to back the commission during the upcoming polls.

The governor noted that recently, a fresh wave of terrorist activities has been taking place in the north-western province on a daily basis. He said major terrorist activities include cross-border fire in North Waziristan, an improvised explosive device (IED) blast on an army vehicle in Kohat, heavy exchange of fire with terrorists in South Waziristan on March 15, unknown terrorists fire on Khyber's Bara Police Station on March 19.

Citing further incidents, he said a terrorist attack took on a police station in

DI Khan followed by a search operation by the army, resulting in the martyrdom of three army soldiers on the night between March 21 and 22. The governor, in the letter, further said that since the ECP has postponed the election date for the general elections of Punjab to October 8, it is also suggested that the same date should be appointed as the election day for the general elections in KP.

It is pertinent to mention here, the government has welcomed the election commission's decision to postpone the polls till October, but the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) has vehemently rejected it and announced challenging it in the Supreme Court.

AGP steps down

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The country's top law officer, Barrister Shehzad Ata Elahi, on Friday resigned from his position as attorney general Pakistan (AGP).

Elahi is the grandson of former president Fazal Ilahi Chaudhry and enjoys a good reputation for his hard work, integrity and understanding of legal issues. He is also a young corporate lawyer with experience in commercial, tax and banking laws, civil, commercial, corporate, constitutional litigation, etc. He has worked with the famous law firm, Cornelius, Lane and Mufti.

Shehzad Elahi's resignation comes nearly seven weeks after his appointment was confirmed by President Arif Alvi on February 2.

Govt welcomes comprehensive not transactional talks with PTI: Asif

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Minister for Defence, Khawaja Muhammad Asif on Friday said the government was ready to hold a comprehensive dialogue with the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) for the sake of the country's prosperity and national interest. The government would not oblige by entering into any transactional dialogue with the opposition, as nothing would come out of it, he said.

Addressing a news conference with the foreign media flanked by the Minister for Information and Broadcasting, Marriyum Aurangzeb, the Defence Minister briefed the foreign correspondents on the so-called PTI narrative and subversions of the constitution. Khawaja Asif said, "We assumed this govt almost a year back. We are completing one year in power as a result of the successful vote of no confidence against the then government."

"To prevent that vote of no confidence different unconstitutional actions were taken by Imran Khan's government and his collaborators were the President and Deputy Speaker." He added that around midnight the decisions of dissolution of

the assembly and other decisions were overturned by the Supreme Court.

"That fateful night the constitution was undermined and violated and thankfully Supreme Court intervened and set things right and we are in the government today," he added. The Minister said a lot had happened over the last year in the political journey of the opposition. "Imran Khan's political journey started with a cypher. Today Shireen Mazari has written a letter to the US raising the issue of so-called human rights violations in Pakistan. This is the same country which was accused of conspiracy against Pakistan and Imran Khan's government. The same people are asking for help from the alleged perpetrators of the foreign conspiracy. This is the sum total of Imran Khan's political journey. His dismissal from the government and SOS to the US," he said.

The Minister maintained that nowhere in the world an accused had ever refused to appear in court. "Imran Khan refused to appear in the courts on different pretexts and security reasons or reasons of being victimized. And then his appearance is

accepted in the court while he still sits in the car and he actually attacks the courts or the courts are mocked by his supporters," he added. Khawaja Asif alleged that every time he appeared in the courts, the judiciary was intimidated. He informed that when the police team was sent to his residence to arrest him and produce him in the court, adding, "The police were attacked as a result at least 70 to 80 police officers, including senior officers, were injured trying to arrest him. They pitched battle outside his (Imran Khan's) house. This has never happened in Pakistan."

The Minister said during his (Imran Khan) regime and in the past also opposition workers and leaders were arrested and they always submitted in a very graceful, and dignified manner as political workers. "They never contested their arrest physically, never abused and maligned the courts. During the last four years of his (Imran Khan) rule as Prime Minister, almost the whole of the top leadership of PML-N was arrested." "Our leader Mian Muhammad Nawaz Sharif got arrested when he came back from the UK to surrender, his daughter, sons and

nephews were arrested. But they never resisted their arrest."

The Minister while sharing his account claimed that he got picked up from Embassy Road and remained in jail for almost six months. "My wife appeared in the courts. Almost for three years my wife and sons appeared in the court. The victimisation of the opposition was unprecedented in Khan's era. We have seen that when politicians were victimized during martial law and military governments. But this sort of victimization and hounding was never there. The politicians were hanged like Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto was hanged and it was a judicial murder. Mohatarna Benazir Bhutto was martyred by the terrorists." The Minister further stated that Nawaz Sharif was removed from the government thrice but his party and workers never resorted to the methods or sort of things taking place for the past three to four weeks.

Khawaja Asif noted that the coalition government was governing the country under circumstances which were pretty difficult both administratively and financially and ultimately politically as well. "This is the backdrop in which we are at the moment

governing the country and trying to give the best. We do realise that the political capital we had when we took over or when moved the vote of no confidence has depleted. We paid a cost for it," he added. He said the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM-a coalition of 11 political parties) had the option after the dissolution of the assembly or after the vote of no confidence to dissolve the assembly and go for new elections. "But we were in the middle of negotiating arrangement with the IMF and an interim government perhaps could not do that as effectively as the elected government in power and it was a difficult decision and we decided to risk our political capital and stayed in the government. Despite the fact that we knew the risk of losing the political capital was there," he added.

He added that the coalition government was trying to manage the crisis but every day there was a crisis precipitated by Imran Khan and the government was handling it. Prior to the question-answer session, the Information Minister intervened to present a video of police officials visiting Imran Khan's residence depicting

how his party workers attacked the police team, and the women and mauled the police assets.

Responding to various media queries, he said when he was in power they offered him to build some consensus on economic policies but that offer was rejected and burnt by the then Prime Minister. During the past year, he said, Khan made several talk offers to the establishment, the military leadership but not to political leadership. Despite the fact that the opposition and the present government were willing to talk on so many occasions but he (Imran Khan) kept on insisting to approach the present leadership of the Pakistan Army but they were not responding. The Defence Minister added that Imran Khan had approached former Army Chief General Bajwa through the president and met him twice. Khan tried to negotiate with him (Gen Bajwa) and even offered him an extension for life. "We are ready to talk for the sake of peace in our country, not only for the present government but for coming generations we must have some sort of consensus on major issues that we are facing for the past many decades."

JI Emir declares ECP move as un-constitutional

ISLAMABAD (NNI): Jamaat-e-Islami Emir Sirajul Haq has declared the ECP move to postpone the Punjab polls as unconstitutional. The Election Commission of Pakistan, he said while talking to media here on Friday, had no authority to suspend the elections after holding consultations with some institutions.

He said the Supreme Court suo motu on the issue has also created ambiguity as the date fixed for the Punjab elections was beyond the 90-days limit set in the constitutions.

He asked the ECP to hold the consultations with the political parties to develop consensus on the national polls. He said the people must be given a chance to elect their representatives in a free and fair manner. The JI chief said the fight between the PDM and the PTI took the country to the closed alley and if the clash continued, its consequences could be dangerous. The fight among the ruling parties, he said, could derail the already fragile democracy. Sanity must prevail and the political leadership should at least agree on a minimum agenda. Haq said the unity government of the PDM and the PPP failed to provide relief to the masses, continuing the policies of the PTI. He said the current government performance of 11 months was almost zero. He said the IMF dictates the government on every matter of national importance and global lenders had virtually taken control of the key affairs.

He said the government could not even provide any relief to the masses in the holy month of Ramzan. He said the people were dying in the queues for flour and the prices of basic commodities touched skies. He said the load shedding of gas and electricity continued in parts of the country even during sehar and iftar time. He said the elections were the only way forward to pull the country out of prevailing crises.

JI demands govt jobs for athletes who brought home gold, bronze medals

KARACHI (NNI): Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) Karachi held an appreciation ceremony in the honor of young and talented kick boxers — Agha Kaleem, Muhammad Sabir, Muhammad Nisar — who had participated in Moithai World Kickboxing Championship held in Thailand and brought home two gold and a bronze medals respectively.

The graceful ceremony was held at Idara Noor-e-Haq, the JI Karachi headquarters, here on Friday. Qazi Sadaruddin of Alkhidmat, Pakistan Moithai Federation President Zahid Mughal, Iqar Khan — the coach, general secretary and manager of the federation and others also addressed the ceremony. Speaking on the occasion, JI Karachi Ameer Engr Hafiz Naeemur Rehman demanded of the government to take the unsung heroes under the state's guardianship and arrange for them public sector jobs.

He said that Agha Kaleem and his fellows brought honor to the country. He further said that there is a lot of talent in Karachi but unfortunately it is deprived of the government's patronage. He demanded of the government to support talented athletes in the city.

The JI leader said that Agha Kaleem serves at a hotel as a waiter and his fellows also engage in other jobs to meet both ends. They performed so well at international forum despite all odds and won medals for the country but they don't have any security for their future, he said, asking the corporate sector to come forward and support them.

Minister visits free flour center, inspects arrangements

LAHORE (APP): Caretaker Provincial Minister for Information and Culture Amir Mir made a surprise visit to free flour centre established at Wahdat Colony Model Bazaar and reviewed facilities being provided to the citizens over there.

He met with the citizens who had come to collect free flour and inquired from them about the problems being faced by them for getting flour. The citizens apprised the minister that despite sending messages on 8070 they did not receive any reply message and today even their registration process was not being made since they came here.

The minister immediately directed the administration to complete the registration process of the citizens who are present on the spot. Amir Mir directed to set up an 'Information Desk' for the citizens coming

to the free flour centre so that they could be informed about their eligibility.

Amir Mir advised the government officials present there that they should perform their duties with noble intentions and create facilitation for the citizens with regard to provision of free flour. He also directed the free flour centre administration to make an adequate sitting arrangement of citizens for their comfort. Amir Mir directed them to ensure as no eligible citizen should return back without getting free flour. He remarked that provision of free flour to the needy and deprived citizens gives ample proof of people-friendly caretaker government. Amir Mir disclosed that approximately 100 million persons across Punjab would be benefited from this programme and the programme would continue till 25th of Ramadan ul Mubarak.

Heavy rain lashes city, turns weather cold

LAHORE (APP): Widespread heavy rain lashed the provincial capital and adjacent areas, which turned the weather cold, dropping minimum temperature to 15 degree Celsius on Friday. The rain started in the morning and continued almost all the day with occasional gaps, varying from light to heavy. Commuters faced difficulty travelling on some roads as there were small puddles.

In many parts of the city, traffic signals were out of order which led to chaos on roads. The power supply remained suspended in low-lying areas. This strong spell of rain exposed the performance of civic bodies in city as low lying areas were seemed flooded, however WASA and Lahore Waste Management Company's machinery remained busy for draining the water.

The high ups of Water and Sanitation Agency, Lahore Waste Management Company and other departments put their machinery on high alert and the officers were also seen in the field to make satisfactory arrangements. The rain with occasional gaps covered almost all the parts of the metropolis and rain in millimetre was recorded Gulberg 19, Mall Road 34, Mughalpara 42, Laxmi Chowk 47, Tajpura

25, Nishtar Town 27, Farrukhabad 15, Gulshan-e Ravi 31, Samnabad 22, Jail Road 14, Airport 17.

According to a spokesman of Pakistan Meteorological Department, the wet spell is being occurred under the influence of a westerly wave affecting most parts of the country, and it is likely to continue in next 24 hours. Minimum temperature in the city was recorded 15 degree Celsius while maximum could not cross 21 due to wet conditions. Dry weather is expected in southern parts of the country. Rain-wind/thunderstorm is expected in northeast Punjab including the city during next 24 hours, daily weather report said.

Rainfall (mm) during last 24 hours: Punjab: Islamabad: (Golra 20, Syedpur 14, Zero Point 13, Bokra 06) Rawalpindi (Shamsabad 14, Chaklala 05) Kot Addu 52, Bhakkar 47, Leh 43, DG Khan 37, Jhang 35, Multan (City 38, Airport 33), Toba Tek Singh 31, Sahiwal 28, Okara 26, Faisalabad 19, Bahawalnagar 18, Nurpur Thal 17, Hafizabad 14, Sargodha 12, Gujranwala 11, Khanewal 08, Mandi Bahauddin, Murree, Khanpur, Joharabad 07, Mangala 06, Sialkot (City 06, Airport 05), Rahim Yar Khan 05, Jhelum, Chakwal 03.

Steps being taken to ensure supply of quality agri inputs to farmers

LAHORE (APP): Punjab government is taking all possible steps to ensure the supply of quality agricultural inputs to the farmers to achieve the production targets.

Provincial Caretaker Minister for Industries, Trade and Energy S.M Tanveer said this while presiding over the 56th session of Punjab Seed Council on Friday.

During the meeting, 56 new varieties of agricultural commodity of public and private sector were approved, which included varieties of Paddy, Hybrid Maize, Oats, Gram, Groundnut, Rye, Sunflower, Sesame, Barseem, Dates, Wheat and Cotton.

Provincial Minister gave approval for the general cultivation of 56 new varieties while directing to submit DNA fingerprint reports of 7 different

crop varieties within 15 days.

SM Tanveer directed to set up a sub-committee "Green Revolution 2" to review the problems faced in various types of crops.

He also congratulated agricultural scientists for developing these varieties and directed to further improve the research trials.

He also directed to make variety registration and DNA fingerprinting mandatory for the approval of agricultural commodity types.

He further said that the current government was paying special attention to the production of quality seeds so that per acre agriculture production could be boosted ultimately helping to increase domestic exports.

On the occasion, Secretary Agriculture emphasized on introduc-

ing modern harvesting technology. He urged the agricultural scientists to discover varieties that could be profitable for five years or more in the field while keeping production costs low.

He said that new varieties of crops with resistance were being prepared so that the attack of diseases on the crops could be minimized.

While giving instructions to maintain the quality while discovering new types of agricultural commodities, he said that instead of discovering more types, such types should be discovered which could give better results in the field.

Agriculture Secretary declared the DNA fingerprinting report mandatory to protect the rights of pure seeds and breeders' rights.



KARACHI: People offering first Namaz-e-Jumma at Historical New Memon Mosque during Holy Fasting Month of Ramzan ul Mubarak.

Sharjeel Memon for starting work on BRT Yellow Line at earliest

F.P. Report

KARACHI: Sindh Transport Department has decided to launch operations of People's Electric Bus Service on more new routes in Karachi in the month of Ramadan.

The decision was taken in an important meeting chaired by Sindh Information, Transport and Mass Transit Sharjeel Inam Memon held to review public transport projects at his office on Friday.

The Minister directed MD Sindh Mass Transit Authority and project director NRTC to finalize the arrangements of EV buses on new routes in the metropolises. Mr. Memon said that new fleet of environment friendly European standard EV buses are being imported.

The meeting also reviewed the People's Bus Service, BRT Red Line, Orange Line and Yellow Line projects reviewed in detail. The minister said that Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari has given strict instructions to complete the development projects of Karachi as soon as possible.

The Chairman himself is taking keen interest in the development projects of Karachi and has launched two important projects in the city in a week including foundation stone of Shaheed Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto Institute of Cardiovascular Diseases and opening of Johar Chowrangi flyover.

He said that the people of Karachi have given a huge mandate



to the Pakistan People's Party in the local bodies elections, it is our priority to fulfill their expectations. The minister said work on the World Bank funded BRT Yellow Line will also be launched soon.

He directed the transport department to award the tender for the new Jam Sadiq bridge under the BRT Yellow Line project by May 2. No Delay in this will be tolerated in any case. The minister added that the hurdles in the construction of the bus depot for the BRT Yellow Line project should also be removed so that their construction can be start well in time. The minister also sought weekly report on the speed of work on Asian Development Bank funded BRT

Redline project. He said that the citizens are facing severe difficulties, the Sindh government wants to complete the BRT Redline project as soon as possible.

This project is the most important project to improve the public transport infrastructure of Karachi,' the minister remarked. He said that the BRT Red Line project contractors have been disbursed Rs 400 million this week. Round the clock construction of corridor should be ensured in lot one and lot two of the project in day and night shifts. Secretary Transport Abdul Haleem Shaikh, MD Sindh Mass Transit Authority Kamal Hakeem and NRTC Project Director Sohail Shafiq attended the meeting.

Over 29,000 cops to perform security duties in Ramadan

KARACHI (APP): Under the directives of Inspector General of Police (IGP) Sindh Ghulam Nabi Memon strict and extraordinary contingency security plan for the holy month of Ramadan would be implemented across the province.

About 29,257 policemen would perform security duties during the holy month of Ramadan across Sindh, according to a report of AIGP - Operations Sindh.

More than 10,365 police officers and personnel will perform security duties in 7762 mosques/ Taraweesh prayers, Mahafil-e-Shabina in East, West and South zones of Karachi Police Range during Ramadan

besides the additional deployment while over 368 police mobiles, 445 personnel on motorcycles would also perform security duties.

In Hyderabad, more than 3270 officers and personnel will perform security duties at 2085 mosques and religious gatherings etc. during Ramadan, besides 404 police mobiles and 190 motorcycle personnel will also perform duties.

Around 1517 officers and youths will perform security duties at around 222 mosques/Taraweesh open places during Ramadan in Mirpur Khas Police Range, including 45 police mobiles and 27 motorcycles mounted personnel.

Similarly in Shaheed Benazirabad Police Range, over 2789 officers and personnel will perform security duties including 75 police mobiles and 110 motorcycle personnel.

Around 3018 policemen will perform security duties at 999 mosques and open places in the Sukkur police range, including 95 police mobiles and 124 motorcycle personnel.

The report stated that more than 8298 cops will perform security duties at 1426 mosques/and other places during Ramadan in the Larkana police range, including about 469 police mobiles and over 288 personnel on motorcycles.

Spring Festival concludes at UVAS

LAHORE (APP): A week-long spring festival of the University of Veterinary & Animal Sciences (UVAS) Lahore concluded here on Friday. Vice Chancellor Multan University of Science & Technology/Former Dean Faculty of Veterinary Science UVAS Prof Dr Sarwar Khan presided over the concluding ceremony and distributed trophies among winners of contests while Prof Dr Abdullah Arijio from Sindh Agriculture Tandojam University, Principal Officer Students Affairs Prof Dr Kamran Ashraf, Senior Tutor (Acting) Dr Muhammad Oneeb, Prof Dr Kamran Ashraf and a large number of faculty members and students from different departments of the UVAS were also present.

The Institute of Pharmaceutical Sciences (IPS) won overall first position, Department of Food Science and Human Nutrition (FSHN) got second and Institute of Biochemistry and Biotechnology (IBBT) stood on third position.

KARACHI (APP): City Administrator Dr. Syed Saif-ur-Rahman on Friday said that Karachi Medical and Dental College was a quality institution where students were admitted on the basis of merit.

Presiding over a meeting at Karachi Medical and Dental College, the administrator also expressed his confidence in the teaching and extra-curricular activities, saying these activities help to make the graduates of this college serve their fellow citizens better.

"The students of this college are serving all over the world with their best abilities, which the KMC can rightly be proud of," he added. Meanwhile, College Principal Professor Dr. Nargis Anjum, Dr. Shah Faisal, Dr. Shiraz, Dr. Farhat Jafri and Director of Finance Javed Qaiser, and other relevant officers were also present on this occasion.

Administrator lauds KMDC as 'quality institution'

He said that work on upgrading the college into a university was being continued and the Sindh government was taking steps in this regard. He also pledged that the grant of the college would be increased and the grant allocated in the KMC budget would also be given to the college in any case.

He directed the principal of the college to hold a meeting of the governing body so that the problems and other issues of the college could be resolved through mutual consultation. All decisions should be approved by the governing body and no decision of any kind should be made on its own, he added.

He said that city wardens would be appointed for the security of the college and gradually the private security would be reduced.

The principal of the college Dr. Nargis Anjum

apprised the administrator Karachi that a sum of Rs. 42 million per month was allocated for the college in the KMC budget from which the salaries of college professors and lecturers were paid.

She said that measures were being taken to further improve the quality of the college and efforts were being made to provide better educational standard facilities to the students. It was proposed that the laboratory, library and seminar halls of the college should be upgraded.

The administrator directed that all the professors and teachers should come to the college on time and impart education to the students to the best of their ability, adding that the convocation of the college should be held regularly every year. He also directed that the degrees should be assigned to the students within the stipulated time.



LAHORE: Police officials traveling during heavy rainfall in the city.



Jurisdiction over PUTA hall, Community centers at UOP

PHC constitutes two-members body for operation

Humayun Khan

PESHAWAR: Justice Syed Arshad Ali of Peshawar High Court (PHC) ordered constitution of two-members committee for operation of teacher's community center and PUTA hall as well as to submit monthly financial report before court till disposal of petition.

The judgement stated that Peshawar University Teachers Association (PUTA) has challenged the judgment order of the learned Additional District Judge-XVII dated 11.02.2023. The decision of the Senate of the university passed in its 133 meeting whereby; "it was decided that the income of Teachers Community Center (TCC) and allied facilities shall be credited to the university fund instead of any other account and the university shall reflect the income as well as expenditure therefrom in the annual budget for the financial year 2022.

During hearing, PUTA's lawyer Saif Mohibullah Kakakhel Advocate, UOP counsel Wasim-u-Din Khattak and legal Officer Riaz Ali Khan appeared before PHC. This decision has aggrieved the PUTA to file a civil suit before civil court at Peshawar.

The learned trial court while finally deciding the request of the petitioner for temporary injunction has allowed the same, however, the said order was reversed by the learned appeal court on the appeal of the Peshawar University/respondent.

This case was argued at considerable length on 20.03.2023 and on the said date, when both the parties were asked whether it would not be in fitness of the case that as temporary arrangement a receiver/manager be appointed with the consensus of the parties with TORs. Today, both the parties have filed application/consensus for appointment of Manager at PUTA Peshawar University. The petitioner has given Dr. Amjad Amin Finance Secretary PUTA a member for the proposed committee for operations of TCCs and other facilities while UOP has nominated Mazhar Ullah Additional Treasurer. The committee will operate and sustain TCC account No.9077-6 at National Bank Pakistan, University Campus Branch.

PHC has disposed of the petition on the ground that Dr. Amjad Amin, Finance Secretary, PUTA and Mazhar Ullah, Additional Treasurer, University of Peshawar are jointly appointed as managers/receivers for

running day to day affairs. The aforesaid account shall be operated through joint signatures of both the managers. The relevant bank shall be accordingly informed. ii. The managers will be responsible for overall supervision of TCC and the allied facilities. They will perform their duties to the best of their abilities but in the interest of TCC and University of Peshawar. All the amounts, profits, sums received in the name of TCC shall be deposited aforesaid account.

The judgement ordered that both the managers shall provide monthly reconciliatory statement of the account before the trial court on monthly basis.

The aforesaid arrangements will be subject to the final judgment of the learned trial court and both the managers are expected to perform their duties honestly, however, if any party is aggrieved by any decision of the managers or in case there is dispute between the managers in respect of any issue, the same shall be 4 referred to the learned trial court whose decision in the matter shall be then enforceable. The learned trial court is expected to decide the case within 04 months being an urgent matter.



PESHAWAR: KP Caretaker Minister for Information Barrister Jamal Shah in a group photo with special children at Nishtar Hall.

Civilian engagement to achieve SDGs in uplift process
F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: These views were expressed during an event of the Launch of Spotlight Report on SDGs held on 'Engaging Civil Society in Decade of Action to Accelerate SDGs Implementation - Lessons from HLPF 2022 and Way Forward'. The event was jointly organized by Blue Veins, AwazCDS-Pakistan, and Pakistan Development Alliance on March 2023, at Hotel Shelton Rezidor, Peshawar.

AwazCDS in collaboration with Pakistan Development Alliance (PDA) triggered its efforts to strengthen development processes at the national level, especially after the presentation of the Voluntary National Review Report (VNR) at the High-Level Political Forum 2022 by the United Nations. Both organizations led the civil society engagement processes at the national level and produced spotlight report as well as voluntary local review reports in 2022 which were also launched during the event.

Mariam Amjad Khan, Program Lead-Awaz CDS-Pakistan & National Chair PDA said, "Civil society has done a lot of work in the implementation of SDGs and has aided in the improvement of the overall situation in Pakistan." She highlighted the need for inclusion and participation of civil society representatives at the policy level as well as the VNR report-making process for the depiction of real ground situations and the benefit from the learning of such review reports.

She further said, "VNRs provide the opportunity for countries to share their individual experiences, including successes, challenges, and lessons learned, with a view to accelerating SDG implementation."

Muhammad Rizwan, Coordinator NCHR KP chapter stressed engaging youth in the process and emphasized on the meaningful engagement of persons with disabilities, women, and religious minorities to ensure no one is left behind to benefit from the SDGs.

Qamar Naseem-Project Manager- Blue Veins said, "Since the adoption of SDGs as national development goals by the Parliament of Pakistan in March 2016, the government has achieved many instructional and strategic milestones to implement SDGs. Pakistan has successfully presented two Voluntary National Review (VNR) reports at the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) at UNHQ in July 2019 and 2022." He also stressed the need for better monitoring of SDG priority targets and indicators as per provincial SDGs frameworks.

The event was attended by youth, women, government representatives, academia, lawyers, media, CSO, and representatives of the Human Rights departments, Child Rights, and Status of women commissions.

Grand political dialogue inevitable for stability

PESHAWAR (APP): Democracy is considered to be the best solution to all political problems and a best form of government that not only guarantees supremacy of constitution and rule of law but also brings political and economic stability to a country.

Unfortunately, democracy couldn't strengthen its roots in Pakistan due to wrangling among political parties for power and leveling of corruption and rigging allegations against elected governments after elections, consequently, this popular system derailed four times in the past and no elected prime minister completed the five-year constitutional term.

"Instead of learning lesson from the country's grim political history, the political parties again have started wrangling ahead of general elections that not only increased people's problems but further deepened economic crisis in the country," said A.H.Hilali, former Chairman, Political Science, Department, University of Peshawar while talking to APP on Friday.

Despite the completion of 75 years of independence, he said the country was looking toward the IMF and other financial institutions to run the economy mainly due to inconsistent economic policies and political instability. Those countries, which have evolved a stable, progressive, inclusive and tolerant political culture have attained all feats including economic prosperity, civilian supremacy and rule of law, institutional efficiency and balance of power, he maintained.

Dr Hilali said a politically stable government guarantees sustainable economic development, national security and social harmony, transparency and capitalisation of resources, freedom of expression and pragmatic foreign policy besides taking bold decisions in the national interest. To achieve these key goals, he said that the 1973 constitution empowered all political parties to serve their countrymen for five years after winning the election and implement its manifestoes, adding that in democracies, people have the power to decide about the future of political parties through power of votes.

"Democracy, which is the process of political evolution, strengthened its roots after free and transparent elections following completion of five years term of the provincial and national assemblies," he said, adding political unity and dialogue was imperative among political parties ahead of general elections so that no one can raise financial

ger on polls' results. He said that elections were fast approaching and urged all political parties including PDM and PTI to sit together and start a grand political dialogue to take the ship of democracy to safe shores.

Ikhtair Wali Khan, PML-N KP spokesman said his party strongly believed in the political dialogue and time and again offered PTI Chairman Imran Khan to come forward and sit with the government for a grand political dialogue to bring down the political temperature besides holding of simultaneous elections for national and provincial assemblies for political and economic stability.

"The stubbornness of the PTI leadership and bad relations with the opposition in Imran's four year rule had created political and economic chaos in the country," He hoped that Imran Khan would positively reciprocate to the government's positive gesture and sit together for a grand political dialogue in the wake of the postponement of elections for Punjab assembly by the ECP and geo-political, security and economic challenges. Wali claimed that if elections in two provinces, which were currently under the caretaker setups, were held before six months of the Sindh, Balochistan and National assemblies, it would have created a controversy forever.

He said the constitution cannot act on the whims of one person, who could violate it anytime, dissolve the two provincial assemblies prematurely whenever he wants, saying such a negative attitude was against the spirit of the constitution. PML-N leader accused PTI chief for instigating his supporters to wound Lahore police at Zaman Park and storming the court premises at Islamabad. "Imran Khan was afraid of arrest and trying to give an impression to be assassinated like Murtaza Bhutto," he said, adding that political leaders were not scared of deaths or exiles like that of Benazir Bhutto Shaheed and Muhammad Nawaz Sharif.

"As Imran cannot face the public, that is why he was using such dramas only to gain people's sympathies ahead of general elections," he said. Ikhtair Wali said the PTI chief instead of talking about his government performance in public rallies and TV shows has again started leveling baseless allegations against political opponents as he had nothing to show.

He said the billion trees project has been taken by the NAB and the BRT project was completed at very high cost thus huge taxpayers money was wasted by

the PTI. He said Imran had left millions of flood victims alone in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Punjab provinces despite his government at that time and would face peoples' wrath in the upcoming general elections.

Wali said the PTI leader must answer for his false narrative of a foreign conspiracy against him, which he repeated for several months before suddenly retracting and declaring it false by own, adding his actions have negatively impacted the foreign policy of Pakistan. Following reports of hiring of a US lobbyist firm by the PTI, Wali said it was time for the PTI chairman to answer over his 'two-faced behaviour' and politics of lies and accusations, saying people would reject Imran's ill-mannered politics in the upcoming general elections.

Despite political stubbornness and allegations of PTI chairman, he said the coalition government had offered several times to PTI's former lawmakers to take their resignations back and come to parliament but they made a mockery of the sincere offer of the PML-N leadership and were now weeping after their resignations were accepted. He said Imran started Jail Bhao movement to please dissident workers after his childish decision of dissolving the KP and Punjab assemblies. The PTI had deceived people on the hollow slogan of "accountability and change" as the former PTI government in KP itself closed its own Ehtesab Commission at Peshawar, he added.

Wali said PTI has shattered the confidence of the voters of KP and Punjab after prematurely dissolving the two provincial assemblies and lost footings in both provinces where they would now face people's anger in upcoming elections.

Police arrest ringleader of burglars' gang
F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Capital City Police Peshawar arrested ringleader of burglars' gang active in the suburban localities of the city on Friday.

The arrested accused Ahad son of Fazal Rahim, resident of Surizai Upper along with his accomplices was used to steal valuables from houses during night. He was arrested on tip under a well-planned strategy.

The arrested accused during the initial investigation has confessed to various burglary incidents and also revealed the names of his other accomplices.

Construction work on Koto Power Project enters final stage

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The construction of Koto power plant in Dir Lower district of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has entered the final stage of completion. After successful completion at the end of this year, the project will start producing 40.8 megawatts of cheap electricity, which will bring more than 2 billion rupees to the province annually and create new employment opportunities in the province. It will help to overcome the crisis.

This was stated by the Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Pakhtunkhwa Energy Development Organization (PEDO) Engr. Naem Khan during his emergency visit to project site on Friday. Deputy Commissioner Lower Dir Iftikhar Khan Marwat also accompanied him during the visit. He reviewed the progress of work on the project and carefully reviewed the various parts of the project.

About the progress of work on the project, Deputy Director Engineer Muqem uddin said that due to security reasons, several workers of the team of Chinese engineers working on the project had left their work and



went back, while during the Covid-19 emergency, it proved difficult to bring machinery for the project. Due to these reasons, the project work was slightly delayed. However, after the security situation improved, now the Chinese staff is back and working fast again and the machinery has been brought.

He said that there are some difficulties in acquiring land for the project, on which Deputy Commissioner Iftikhar Khan assured the project officials that discussions are in progress with the local people regarding the

purchase of land and payments to the landowners would be made soon. Chief Executive PEDO Engineer Naem Khan, while expressing satisfaction over the pace of work on the project, warned the field staff that the pace of work on the project should be increased so that the people can benefit from the benefits of the project soon with the timely completion of the remaining work. The era will begin, which will provide the province with an annual income of billions of rupees as well as new employment opportunities.

Police resolve blind murder case

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: An investigative team of the Urmur Police resolved blind murder case during thorough and comprehensive investigation and arrested the accused Haji Mohammad on Friday.

The arrested accused Haji Mohammad son of Imandar had murdered Shaheel son of Sher Wali at Oach Nihar (dried canal) in the jurisdiction of the Police Station Umar. After the incident, police have registered a case against unknown persons and initiated a comprehensive investigation.

The arrested accused, who is the resident of Shamshatoo, had left his house and gone into hiding. The Station House Officer (SHO), Urmur Police Station, Tehseenullah during a thorough and comprehensive investigation conducted on scientific lines searched out the accused involved in the murder and arrested him. Further investigation from the accused was in progress.

Meanwhile, Capital City Police Peshawar have prepared a special security plan for ensuring fool-proof security during Ramadan in the city and more than 3000 police officers and personnel have been deployed for the purpose, said a press release issued here on Friday.

Under the plan prepared under the supervision of Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Operations, Haroon Rasheed, special snap checking and checkpoints have been established at all entrances and exits to the city.

Under the plan, surveillance of every passer-by, motorcycle rider and vehicle has been further tightened during snap checking and checkpoints.



PESHAWAR: Candidates for vacancies in police department holding a protest for acceptance of their demands.

ATP asks for unanimity on holding Punjab by-polls

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Chairman, Amun Taraqqi Party (ATP) Muhammad Faiq Shah while commenting on postponement of by-elections in Punjab asked the political parties to create unanimity on holding of elections instead of committing violating orders of superior judiciary on this crucial matter.

Chairing a weekly review meeting here at the party's central office on Friday, Shah called upon the government, election commission of Pakistan and political parties to jointly decide scheduled for the by-elections in Punjab. He said it is the duty of ECP to conduct elections rather to become a party or favouring anyone.

He continued to say that despite clear order of the superior court, the changing dates again and again

was tantamount to contempt of court. He asked the institutions to respect its constitutional and legal status/position. Shah said political polarization will lead the country to further chaos and anarchy. He said decency is lacking in our politics and political system.

We want transparent and fair elections through reforms for which all political parties and stakeholders should work together, the ATP chief said. He added political parties should foster democratic norms and culture among their ranks and create space for holding dialogue.

Faiq stressed that inherited and dynastic-based politics must be buried forever, which had become a substance of violation of rules, constitution and orders of the superior judiciary, calling it unaffordable for the country at any

cost. Talking about the joint parliament session on eve of Gold Jubilee Celebration, the party chief said they (legislators) and politicians have attended for personal interests in the joint session as they have never gathered for the public interests.

City Mayor discuss electricity issues with Pesco Chief

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Mayor Peshawar, Haji Zubair Ali Friday met with Chief Executive Pesco, Engr. Arif Mahmood Sadozai and discussed matters relating to uninterrupted supply of electricity to consumers. Mayor informed Pesco Chief about issues upgradation of transformers, unavailability of water in mosques and houses due to nonfunctional transformers, hanging electricity wires and concerns of people about connecting city areas with rural feeders. He also stressed decreasing load shedding in holy month of Ramzan. Chief Executive Pesco said that duration of load shedding would be decreased in Ramzan with uninterrupted power supply in Ifitari and Sehri timings. He said that open katcheries would be held after Ramzan to address problems of people relating to electricity supply and overbilling.



PESHAWAR: A vendor selling various items for Ifitari. — F.P. photo



In brief

Free flour bags distributed

B A H A W A L P U R (APP): As many as 866,566 bags of 10 kg flour were distributed among the underprivileged families free of cost by the Government of Punjab from March 18-23 here on Friday. These flour bags were provided from allocated distribution points and utility stores. Deputy Commissioner(DC) Zaheer Anwar Jappa visited 'Free' flour points set up at Government Abbasia Higher Secondary school, Dring Stadium, and Eid Gah, to review the distribution process. He said that the aged people should sit in the waiting room so that they do not face any problems while receiving flour bags. On the occasion, it was informed that 306,420 flour bags of 10 kg have been distributed in the Bahawalpur district from March 18-23. In Bahawalnagar district, 261442 'Free' bags had been distributed while in Rahim Yar Khan district, 298704 bags had been given to down-trodden families.

Commissioner chairs meeting

SUKKUR (APP): Commissioner Sukkur, Ghulam Mustafa Phull on Friday directed to provide maximum municipal facilities to the people in all graveyards of Sukkur, Khairpur and Ghotki districts during holy month of Ramadan. "Steps should be taken for cleanliness, lights, provision of potable water and repairing of paths around the graveyards besides establishment of medical camps for visitors," he said while addressing a meeting at his office regarding reviewing the municipal facilities being provided during Ramzan-ul- Mubarak. He said Taluka Municipal Administrations (TMAs) should also ensure cleanliness and lighting in their limits so that the visitors do not get troubled reaching the graveyards of their loved ones. Divisional Commissioner said the overflowing sewerage lines around mosques and graveyards should be repaired in cooperation with the relevant organizations on a priority basis. Municipal Commissioner, Muhammad Ali Shaikh informed the meeting that fragment spray would be carried out in all the graveyards under municipal administration before the Asar prayer in every Friday of the Ramadan ul Mubarak, while a medical camp would also be established in central graveyards, he added.

Students open aerial firing

JHELUM (PPI): A clash broke out between two rival groups at a private college in Jhelum on Friday, where students publicly brandished weapons and opened aerial firing. Students displayed modern weapons and firing gunshots in the air, spreading fear and panic among other students. Kala Gujran police, on the other hand, have registered a case and started further investigation. According to sources, the alarming tendency of using weapons on the premises of college has reportedly become a norm.

Man kills wife

FAISALABAD (APP): A woman was murdered allegedly by her husband at a nearby village in the limits of Jarranwala Sadder police on Friday. Police said that Sakina Bibi, 30, was shot dead by her husband Abdul Sattar in Chak No 55-GB, tehsil Jarranwala. The police took the body into custody and shifted it to the mortuary for autopsy. The cause behind the killing was yet to be ascertained, police said.

Distribution of free flour kicks-off in Landi Kotal



F.P. Report

LANDI KOTAL: Like elsewhere in the country, the scheme of supply of free wheat flour to the beneficiaries of Benazir Income Support Program (BISP) began in the district on Thursday. Last day Additional Deputy Commissioner (ADC), relief Nauman Ali Shah, ADC, finance Hasseeb-ur-Rehman along with Assistant Commissioners of all the three tehsils i.e. Landi Kotal, Jamrud and Bara visited the distribution points and observed the process. Under the special Ramadan relief package almost 0.168900 million deserving families will get three begs (10 Kg) free flour in all three subdivisions of district Khyber.

Prior to it, briefing the media, Deputy Commissioner, Khyber Abdu Nasir said that the government had decided to provide free food packages instead of setting up Sasta Bazaar and other relief in Ramadan. Approximately 164 points had been set up across the district to facilitate the locals, he added. It was the joint initiative of the Federal and Provincial governments aimed to reduce difficulties faced by the lower and middle classes during the holy month of Ramadan. To avoid any inconvenience, people have been asked to check their eligibility by sending through SMS their CNIC number to 8171, the helpline of BISP as the data was linked to it, he remarked. The district administrative officer directed the concerned staff to adopt all necessary steps to avoid long queues of beneficiaries at the distribution points. According to information a total of 164 distribution points had been established in three tehsils and 384 metric ton quota per day of flour has been reserved for Khyber.

It is to be stated here that the provincial government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa will distribute free flour to 5.75 million families across the province. Meanwhile, since first day of Ramadan, the local administration of Landi Kotal, Jamrud and Bara have started arranging Iftari facility for almost 100 of believers each in the tehsils with the purpose to assist the poor and strangers in the holy month, DC informed.

Bus service between Gilgat, Muzaffarabad inaugurated

M U Z A F F A R A B A D (APP): The Historical restoration of contact between the people of Azad Jammu and Kashmir and Gilgat Baltistan has been launched on the historical Day of Pakistan and the Prime Minister of Azad Jammu and Kashmir Sardar Tanveer Ilyas and Chief Minister of Gilgat-Baltistan Barrister Khalid Khursheed jointly inaugurated the Gilgat Muzaffarabad Bus Service event.

The Gilgat Muzaffarabad Bus Service started with the joint venture of the governments of GB and AJK with a vision to restore the historical ties, common Religious, social and cultural bonds besides, boosting Tourism, industrial sector and Regional links between the people of the two sides.

The inauguration ceremony was held in the new Prime Minister House while the Chief Minister of Gilgat-Baltistan Barrister Khalid Khursheed was the chief guest of the event. The event was attended by the Interior Minister of GB Shamsul Haque and the cabinet Members of AJK including Ali Shan Soni,

Ch. Muhammad Ibrahim, Ch. Maqbool Gujjar, Akmal Hussain Sargala, Parliamentary Secretary Javed Bhutt, Chairman to Prime Minister for Inspection and Implementation Commission Pir Mazhar Saeed Shah and other high ups of the government, civil society at large scale and Lawyer community also attended the function.

The Chief Minister of Gilgat-Baltistan Barrister Khalid presented the traditional Jubba and cap of GB to Prime Minister of Azad Kashmir Sardar Tanveer Ilyas whereas, the AJK PM also presented the precious gifts to CM of GB.

Addressing the occasion, the AJK Premier said that the links we started today would be extended with the passage of time, saying that the way we opened has great potential to explore and materialize. AJK PM also announced that after Eidul Fitter his government is launching Tourism Bus Service to all big cities of Pakistan which would help promote tourism in Azad Kashmir.

AJK Premier said that

we will establish Medical University with the joint venture of GB government and also help to GB government for establishing Engineering College in GB. PM Ilyas also announced 35% discount of GB citizens on shopping while visiting AJK and 25% discount on Bus fare and continued that AJK Bank would be extended up to GB and Cooperative Bank of GB would also be extended in Azad Kashmir.

The AJK PM Tanveer Ilyas made many resolves to strengthen the ties and making cooperation in many field between the two regions of the state including setting up special economic zones, investment, and common marketing for fruit industry of GB. The Chief Minister of Gilgat-Baltistan Barrister Khalid, while addressing the inaugural session, termed it a historical moment for the people of GB and AJK, saying that the tow governments have decided to take full advantage from the potential of each other and explore avenues of mutual cooperation for the development, progress and prosperity of the people.

‘Da Kali Ranra’ projects to uplift status in Swat

Shafi Ullah

MINGORA: Launching Ceremony of the Project “Da Kali Ranra” (Gao Ki Roshni) held at University of Swat (UOS) in which Heads of various partners of the Gaon ki Roshni project which included top level representatives from Akhuwat, Hashoo Foundation, Centre for Excellence in Countering Violent Extremism organization (KPCVE) Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and the University of Chitral have participated in the event.

Speaking on the occasion, the Vice Chancellor University of Swat thanked all the partner institutions for joining hands under the Gaon ki Roshni (da Kali Ranra) project to improve the socioeconomic status of people living in tehsils of Madyan, Khwazakhela, Mingora, Barikot and Charbagh. Under the Memorandum of

Understanding (MoU) in the pilot phase, 500 locals from Swat will have access to interest free loans through Akhuwat.

Moreover, Hashoo Foundation will train community members at University of Swat in order to set up their micro/small businesses with the help of faculty and staff from University of Swat. The Vice Chancellor reiterated his resolve to improve the teaching, research as well as improve the standard of living of residents in the catchment area of the University of Swat as part of its third mission of University. In the end the Vice Chancellor, Professor Dr. Hassan Sher distributed shields of participation to Mr. Muhammad Kashif Irshad, Senior Manager, Centre for Excellence in Countering Violent Extremism KPCVE, Arshad Mehmood Project Manager Akhuwat Foundation, Miss Mehwish Afridi, Director Strategic

Support Unit Hashoo Foundation, Vice Chancellor University of Chitral/Representative and other government delegates. The Vice Chancellor also thanked the local community members and Project Focal Person Dr. Muhammad Tariq Director QEC and his team members for their relentless efforts.

Five injured

OKARA (INP): At least five persons sustained injuries in a road accident at the Faisalabad Road in Okara in the wee hours of Friday.

According to details, the accident occurred near Baba Fareed Sugar Mills in Okara where two motorcycles collided head-on due to over-speeding due to which five persons were wounded. Rescue teams reached the spot after being informed and shifted the injured to District Headquarters (DHQ) Hospital, Okara.

DPO orders to utilize resources for public's safety

F.P. Report

LOWER DIR: District Police Officer Tariq Iqbal instructed the station house officers to utilize all available resources for sustainable peace by tightening the siege against criminals, miscreants, habitual criminals and drug dealers.

This he stated while addressing a crime meeting with the SHO and SDPOs at his office. DPO said that the protection of life and property of the people was the first responsibility of police and no negligence will be tolerated in this regard.

He said that special teams had been formed at the police station level for arresting the criminals and by obtaining red warrants, they had narrowed the circle against them. He said the criminals residing in foreign countries would be brought to the country through the Interpol. The DPO said that the Nadra had been asked to block the national identity cards of the criminals.

Admn humiliates residents to obtain flour

F.P. Report

T A K H T B H A I: Administration and Food's Department completely failed in provision of free flour in the premises of Takhtbhai tehsil while on the other hand traders had increased prices of every edible item in wake of Ramadan, however, concerned officials had turned blind eyes towards the public miseries, on Friday.

According to details, tehsil administration and food's department didn't calculated plan for distribution of free flour while women and elders are compelled to suffer from inhumane behaviors for obtaining flour. The residents claimed that inflation has caused by traders with assistance of administration and concerned officials by obtaining their share on the sake public livelihood.

The residents argued both federal and provincial governments as well as Chief Justice of Pakistan to ensure provision of free flour on merit with decency otherwise deprived segments should be compelled for starvation and to face inhumane attitude at distribution points.

Rain inundates low-lying areas in Faisalabad

FAISALABAD (APP): The overnight rain inundated low-lying areas of the city which, created difficulties for people. Reports of failure of electricity supply were also received from several areas and Water and Sanitation Agency (WASA) staff also faced troubles in drainage out rainwater, as the disposal system was also closed due to non-availability of power.

According to WASA spokesperson, rain till Friday prayers was recorded 21mm in Allama Iqbal Colony, 16mm in Madina Town, 19mm in Gulistan Colony and Ghulam Muhammad Abad and 17mm in Dogar Basti area. The WASA operations staff became active immediately after the rain and cleared rainwater in Iqbal Stadium, Lasani Puli Sargodha Road, Jail Road and Sheikhupura Road. The rainwater was also drained out from different areas including Nishatabad Bridge, Abdullahpur Bridge, Dijkot Road, Saad Bela, General Hospital Samanabad and Susan Road.

4 injured as roof collapses

MULTAN (INP): Four persons on Friday sustained injuries after a roof collapsed near Askar petrol pump due to heavy rain here.

According to rescue sources, the injured namely Kahif (22) son of Rehmat Ali was shifted to Nishtar hospital while three others sitting under the roof namely Tayyab (17) son of Shafi, Mubasher (19) son of Abdul Ghafoor and Rizwan (17) son of Ramzan were given first aid on the spot.

World Forest Day celebrated in KUST



Sahibzada Afridi

KOHAT: Kohat University of Science and Technology (KUST) celebrated World Forest Day while plantation event held as a joint venture of Dept. of Forestry, KUST and the District Forest

Office.

The plantation was initiated as per directives of the Honorable Governor, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Vice Chancellor KUST Prof. Dr. Sardar Khan was the Chief guest on the occasion whereas the DFO Kohat,

Registrar KUST and the Dr. Nawab Ali Chairman Forestry Dept.

KUST planted ceremonial plants. The event concluded the Spring plantation campaign 2023, in which 5000 saplings were planted in main campus.

80000 flour bags provided to marginalized segments

Hafiz Aziz-ur-Rehman

HAFIZABAD: Deputy Commissioner Hafizabad Umar Farooq Waraich visited the free flour points established at Pindi Bhattian, Jalalpur Bhattian, Sukheke, Kisesay, Kot Sarwar and Rasulpur Tarar and reviewed flour distribution and other arrangements there.

Assistant Commissioner Pindi Bhattian Rashid Iqbal, Chief Officer Municipal Committee Ikramullah Sindhu were also with him. It is pertinent to note that more than 80 thousand bags of 10 kg flour have been distributed among the deserving people by the district administration so far. Deputy Commissioner Umar Farooq Waraich says that the process of distribution of flour to the deserving families registered at all flour points is going on in a transparent and peaceful manner and the district administration is also monitoring the process of distribution of flour at each center in all respects.

During his visit, the Deputy Commissioner directed the in-charge of all flour points to compile all the records regarding the distribution of flour and to refer the persons who have any problem of registration on their ID cards to Benazir Income Support Program office.

Pakistan Day observed with zeal: On the occasion of Pakistan Day in Hafizabad, flag hoisting ceremonies were held at District Complex and

Rescue 1122 office, where Deputy Commissioner Umar Farooq Waraich hoisted the flag. On this occasion, Rescue 1122 personnel also presented a salute. Additional Deputy Commissioner Revenue Imtiaz Ali Baig, CEO Education Amanullah were also present in the flag hoisting ceremony. A number of officials, employees, teachers and dignitaries participated. On this occasion, a special prayer was also offered for the development, prosperity, stability and exaltation of the country and the nation.

On this occasion, Deputy Commissioner Umar Farooq Waraich said that 23 March Pakistan Day is the day to renew the national faith and spirit on the day the resolution for the establishment of Pakistan was passed. We also have to pay tribute to those who worked tirelessly for the establishment of Pakistan. It was said that if we did not get an independent Islamic country of Pakistan today, we would have to live under the slavery of the Hindus, but with the efforts of the founder of Pakistan and his other companions, we got an independent Islamic republic country.

He said that the services of our elders, youths and the personnel of the

Pakistan Army and other law enforcement agencies who have sacrificed their lives for the establishment of Pakistan are unforgettable for the entire nation. The whole nation pays tribute to these heroes. Deputy Commissioner also planted a sapling in the office of Rescue 1122 as part of the plantation campaign and also inspected the new rescue ambulance and motorbikes received in Hafizabad. On this occasion, District Officer Rescue 1122 Engineer Muhammad Adnan Nawaz briefed him about the performance of Rescue-1122.

Gas disappeared with coming of Ramadan: With the arrival of Ramadan in Hafizabad city, the Sui gas disappeared. Citizens started cursing the rulers. According to the details, the Sui gas disappeared for a few hours last day during Sehri and remained missing for the whole day while the children were crying due to lack of food.

The women waited all day for the gas to arrive, but the gas supply remained suspended. On which the citizens strongly protested and said that non-stop supply of Sui gas during Ramadan is the responsibility of the rulers. On the one hand, the poor people are grinding in the mill of high inflation rate, the life of the citizens has been made difficult by load shedding of the Sui gas. If the gas supply is not restored within a day, they will be forced to protest on the streets.

Intercropping key for food security: IU VC



Saqib Mushtaq

BAHAWALPUR: Engr. Prof. Dr. Athar Mahboob, Vice Chancellor the Islamia University of Bahawalpur visited the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization's (FAO) office in Pakistan and met with the organization's representative Florence Rolle. Food security and agriculture, intercropping and other important topics were discussed on this occasion. The Vice-Chancellor apprised about the teaching and research measures being taken by the Islamia University of Bahawalpur in this regard.

Islamia University of Bahawalpur is currently carrying out the most important research projects for the national economy along with promoting cooperation and collaboration at the national and international level in the field of food security. A National Center for Intercropping has been established for intercropping of maize and soybeans, among other important crops, which is conducting research on intercropping of these crops in collaboration with Chinese universities to make the country self-sufficient in edible oil production and it is possible to save the valuable foreign exchange spent on its import. Similarly, this project is also important in the production of poultry feed. Cotton varieties introduced by the Islamia University of Bahawalpur are cultivated on 40% of the area of Punjab province and are very popular among the farming community due to their compatibility with local, climatic and geographical conditions.

The Islamia University of Bahawalpur is also work-

ing on the project of converting Cholistan into a special agro-economic zone through artificial rain project with the help of Punjab government and federal agencies, which is of great importance in the country's agricultural economy and food security. Florence Rolle, representative of United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization's, appreciated the projects of the Islamia University of Bahawalpur. He expressed interest in the agricultural research projects of the Islamia University of Bahawalpur and emphasized on cooperation with agricultural scientists and researchers. The Vice-Chancellor invited her to visit the Islamia University of Bahawalpur to promote possible collaboration and linkages with the United Nations Organization for these projects.



Any attempt to arrest Putin would be declaration of war on Russia, ally says

MOSCOW (Reuters): Any attempt to arrest President Vladimir Putin after the International Criminal Court (ICC) issued a warrant for the Kremlin chief would amount to a declaration of war against Russia, his ally Dmitry Medvedev said. The ICC issued an arrest warrant on Friday, accusing Putin of the war crime of illegally deporting hundreds of children from Ukraine. It said there are reasonable grounds to believe that Putin bears individual criminal responsibility.

Former President Dmitry Medvedev told Russian media that the ICC, which countries including Russia, China and the United States do not recognise, was a "legal nonentity" that had never done anything significant. Any attempt to detain Putin, though, would be a declaration of war, said Medvedev, who serves as deputy chairman of Putin's powerful security council. "Let's imagine - obviously this situation which will never be realised - but nevertheless let's imagine that it was realised: The current head of the nuclear state went to a territory, say Germany, and was arrested," Medvedev said.

"What would that be? It would be a declaration of war on the Russian Federation," he said in a

video posted on Telegram. "And in that case, all our assets - all our missiles et cetera - would fly to the Bundestag, to the Chancellor's office." The Kremlin says the ICC arrest warrant is an outrageously partisan decision, but meaningless with respect to Russia. Russian officials deny war crimes in Ukraine and say the West has ignored what it says are Ukrainian war crimes. Russia's Feb. 24 invasion of Ukraine has triggered the deadliest European conflict since World War Two and the biggest confrontation between Moscow and the West since the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis.

Relations with the West, Medvedev said, were probably at the worst point ever. As president from 2008 to 2012, Medvedev cast himself as a pro-Western reformer. Since the war, though, he has turned into one of the most publicly hawkish Russian officials, insulting Western leaders and delivering a series of nuclear warnings. Nuclear risks had risen, he said.

"Every day's delivery of foreign weapons to Ukraine brings closer the nuclear apocalypse," Medvedev said. After the 1991 fall of the Soviet Union, he said, the West had considered itself the boss of Russia but Putin had put an end to that.

"They were very offended," Medvedev said, adding that the West disliked the independence of Russia and China.

He said the West now wanted to crack Russia apart into a host of weaker states and steal its vast natural resources. Putin casts the conflict in Ukraine as an existential struggle to defend Russia against what he sees as an arrogant and aggressive West which he says wants to cleave Russia apart. The West denies it wants to destroy Russia and says it is helping Ukraine defend against an imperial-style land grab. Ukraine says it will not rest until all Russian soldiers are ejected from its territory.

"Ukraine is part of Russia," Medvedev said, adding that almost all of modern-day Ukraine had been part of the Russian empire. Russia recognised Ukraine's post-1991 sovereignty and borders in the 1994 Budapest Memorandum. Medvedev said ties with the West would one day improve, though he said it would take a long time. "I believe that sooner or later the situation will stabilise and communications will resume, but I sincerely hope that by that time a significant part of those people (Western leaders) will have retired and some will be dead," he said.

Vietnam may resist diplomatic upgrade with Washington

HANOI (Reuters): A push by the United States to upgrade ties with Vietnam this year is facing resistance in Hanoi, over what experts say are concerns that China could see the move as hostile at a time of tension between superpowers Beijing and Washington. The United States is hoping for an upgrade in the relations this year, ideally to coincide with the 10th anniversary in July of its comprehensive partnership with Vietnam.

The United States is a major investor in Vietnam and the largest ever US business mission visited the country this week. Though it is Vietnam's biggest export market, it is currently ranked as a third-tier diplomatic partner for Hanoi. Its top tier consists of China, Russia, India and South Korea are, while its second tier, which Washington wishes to join, includes European countries and Japan. A formal ties upgrade this year "is not considered realistic anymore," said Florian Feyereabend, the representative in Vietnam for Germany's Konrad Adenauer Foundation. Though the move would be largely symbolic, Vietnam's leaders are hesitating, fearing possible retaliation from China, according to experts, who cited discussions with Vietnamese officials.

"Given the intensifying China-US competition and proximity between China and Vietnam, Hanoi may feel reluctant to formally upgrade its comprehensive partnership with Washington," said Bich Tran, adjunct fellow at the Washington's Center for Strategic and International Studies. China is Vietnam's biggest trading partner and a vital source of imports for its manufacturing sector. The two neighbours have a long history of conflict and mistrust and remain at odds over islands, features and resources in the South China Sea. Asked whether Vietnam was ready to upgrade ties with the United States this year, a spokesperson for its foreign ministry on Thursday said that would happen "when the time is right", stressing the strong relations they already enjoy.

High-level meetings could offer a chance for a last-minute breakthrough on the US-Vietnam ties, the experts said, with diplomats hoping to arrange a meeting of their foreign ministers, while their leaders could meet on the sidelines of the G7 summit in Japan in May.

Ukraine children held by Russia reunited with parents

KYIV (AFP): Moments after the bus returning him and more than a dozen other children from Russian-held territory arrived in Kyiv, a ten-year-old boy jumped straight into his father's arms. Denys Zaporozhchenko held his son and kissed his forehead, before also hugging his two daughters who were among the 17 children separated from their parents for months.

The reunion was organised by Save Ukraine, an NGO that fights what it says are illegal deportations of Ukrainian children to Russian-controlled territory. More than 16,000 Ukrainian children have been deported to Russia since the February 24, 2022 invasion, according to Kyiv, with many allegedly placed in institutions and foster homes.

Russia denies the allegations, saying instead it has saved Ukrainian children from the horrors of the war. But the International Criminal Court (ICC) last week issued an arrest warrant against President Vladimir Putin for unlawfully deporting Ukrainian children. Zaporozhchenko last saw his children in October in Kherson, the only regional capital that Russian forces captured following the invasion, when they left for a so-called Russian summer camp.

He expected tough fighting in his home city as Ukrainian forces were pushing closer to recapturing it, which they ultimately did in November. Sending his kids to Crimea -- a scenic and touristy peninsula annexed by Moscow in 2014 -- seemed the lesser evil.

Russian officials "promised to send them to these camps for a week or two," he told AFP. "By the time we realised we shouldn't have done it (let them go), it was too late," he said. Families were sometimes pressured into sending their kids on the so-



called holidays, said Myroslava Kharchenko, a lawyer working with Save Ukraine. "(Russian officials) told parents that they have one hour to think, and that if Ukrainians get there before, they will bring American mercenaries who will beat and rape the children." After "black-mail, manipulation and intimidation, they take the children away," Kharchenko added.

Parents have previously had to embark on the fraught journey themselves to find their children on their own, Kharchenko said. But for the first time, Save Ukraine group organised a group collection for the separated children by assuming power of attorney for those parents unable to make the journey. They chartered a bus that went through Poland and Belarus and then to Russia, before picking up the children in annexed Crimea. Some of children inter-

viewed by AFP described a level of political indoctrination. "If we didn't sing the (Russian) national anthem, they made us write an explanatory note. Over the New Year, we were shown Putin's speech," 15-year-old Taisia said.

Zaporozhchenko's 11-year-old daughter, Yana, said "everything was like in normal camps" but camp officials "made us sing and dance when inspectors came" from Moscow. Forty-three-year-old Inesa Vertosh said her son had become "more serious" after the long separation. "He looks at me and says 'Mom, I don't want to tell you about it, you wouldn't sleep at night.'" All children will be given psychological support, said Kharchenko. Her organisation was "doing everything so that children and their parents do not return to dangerous territories", she added.

Facing spying claims, Mexico recorded phone call of prominent activist

MEXICO CITY (Reuters): Mexico's president confirmed for the first time that his government monitored the phone of a human rights activist, stressing it was a lawful part of a probe into a suspected gang member. Over decades, Mexico has struggled to reign in powerful organized crime groups while safeguarding free speech rights. A report by non-profit groups this month accused Mexican authorities of hacking the communications of prominent activist Raymundo Ramos in 2020, publishing documents that it said showed the military had access to messages Ramos sent to journalists.

President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador has repeatedly denied allegations that his government spies on activists, journalists and opponents, while saying it does intelligence

work to fight crime. On Thursday, he said the government had access to Ramos' phone because officials were investigating a suspected criminal who he said spoke with the activist. "This citizen ... was speaking on the phone to a suspected drug trafficker," Lopez Obrador said in a regular news conference. "Since the suspected drug trafficker was being investigated, we obtained this recording." Mexico's National Intelligence Center was involved in the case, he said, adding that the entity typically focuses on suspected criminals and can tap their phones with a judge's authorization. He did not give further details on Ramos' case, but generally called into question official Mexican documents obtained by unauthorized hacks. Ramos represents vic-

tims of military abuses in the violent northern state of Tamaulipas, where criminal gangs often wage bloody turf battles. Asked about Lopez Obrador's comments, Ramos said the government was trying to silence him. "They want to shoot the messenger," he told Reuters. Mexican digital rights group R3D and Toronto-based digital watchdog group Citizen Lab previously documented that Ramos' phone had been targeted by Pegasus in 2020, one of several alleged uses of the controversial spyware during Lopez Obrador's administration.

R3D later cited documents discovered in a mass hack of Mexican military emails that it said showed the army had spied on Ramos' phone. A statement from Lopez Obrador's office issued later on

Thursday noted that some of the leaked documents cannot be verified. "Some documents disseminated in the media about alleged acts of espionage are not official, are not signed or endorsed by any competent authority," according to the statement, concluding that some are "apocryphal," or of doubtful authenticity. It added that the government's intelligence-gathering efforts do not seek to interfere in the privacy of politicians, activists and media figures, and said people without links to organized crime have not been targeted. However, it acknowledged that intelligence has led to certain cases where "some people," presumably civilians, have been shown to have unspecified links to criminal organizations. The statement did not specifically address Ramos' case.

US judge orders \$1.68b payout to victims

NEW YORK (Reuters): A federal judge in New York ordered Iran's central bank and a European intermediary to pay out \$1.68 billion to family members of troops killed in the 1983 car bombing of the US Marine Corps barracks in Lebanon. US District Judge Loretta Preska said a 2019 federal law stripped Bank Markazi, the Iran central bank, of sovereign immunity from the lawsuit, which sought to enforce a judgment against Iran for providing material support to the attackers.

The lawsuit also names Luxembourg-based Clearstream Banking SA, which is holding the assets in a client account. Clearstream parent company Deutsche Boerse AG said that it is considering appealing against the decision. Clearstream will "weigh all relevant interests and responsibilities" and comply with its legal and

regulatory obligations in handling the funds, Deutsche Boerse said. The exchange said that it does not view the ruling as increasing the risk from the lawsuit in a way that would require the companies to make financial provisions. Attorneys for the parties did not immediately respond to requests for comment. The Oct. 23, 1983, bombing at the Marine Corps barracks killed 241 US service members.

Victims and their families won a \$2.65 billion judgment against Iran in federal court in 2007 over the attack. Six years later, they sought to seize bond proceeds allegedly owned by Bank Markazi and processed by Clearstream to partially satisfy the court judgment. Bank Markazi has argued that the lawsuit was not allowed under the Foreign Sovereign Immunities Act (FSIA),

which generally shields foreign governments from liability in US courts. In January 2020, the US Supreme Court overturned a lower court ruling in the families' favor, and ordered the case to be reconsidered in light of the new law, adopted a month earlier as part of the National Defense Authorization Act.

Preska said the 2019 law authorizes US courts to allow the seizure of assets held outside the country to satisfy judgments against Iran in terrorism cases, "notwithstanding" other laws such as FSIA that would grant immunity. A Luxembourg court in 2021 ordered Clearstream not to move the funds until a court in that country recognizes the US ruling. Clearstream has appealed that decision. The case is Peterson et al v. Islamic Republic of Iran et al, US District Court, Southern District of New York, No. 13-09195.

Kosovo will implement measures agreed on with Serbia, PM says

PRISTINA (Reuters): Kosovo will respect its international obligations and implement the measures agreed last week as part of a deal aimed at normalising relations with Serbia, Prime Minister Albin Kurti told lawmakers. Pristina and Belgrade verbally agreed to implement a Western-backed plan on how to improve ties in the wake of a war in the late 1990s and decades of tense relations. Normalising relations is a condition both Balkan countries must meet to speed up their path to joining the European Union.

"If we want to be treated as a state and be recognised as such, I cannot avoid the obligations from the international treaties that we have agreed," Kurti told lawmakers as he explained the plan in parliament for the first time. "I am convinced that it was impossible to reach any better text of the agreement in the situation we are in." Under the agreement, Kosovo is committed to give greater autonomy to areas of its country where Serbs are in the majority, while Serbia agreed not to block Kosovo's membership of international organisations.

The EU pledged to organise a donor conference for both countries, with the disbursement of financial aid dependent on steps to improve ties. It is warning both sides not to cherry-pick parts of the deal but to implement it in full.

Kurti has been a critic of previous agreements reached between Kosovo and Serbia, including those that stipulated more autonomy for Serb communities. Serbs account for about 5% of Kosovo's population of 1.8 million. The opposition accuses Kurti of accepting what he was against for

almost a decade. Meanwhile, Serbia's President Aleksandar Vucic said last week that the "red lines" for Belgrade would be "the recognition of Kosovo as an independent state and Kosovo's membership in the UN." Serbia is a candidate for the EU membership but to do so it must first normalise relations with Pristina and implement an array of reforms. The EU's Foreign Policy Chief Josep Borrell, who brokered the deal in North Macedonia's coastal resort of Ohrid, said any attempt to question the agreement would be futile.

US working to re-establish diplomatic presence in Libya

WASHINGTON (Reuters): The United States is "actively" working on re-establishing a diplomatic presence in Libya, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said, although he declined to provide an exact time on when the US embassy can be reopened. Libya has had little peace since the 2011 NATO-backed uprising that ousted Muammar Gaddafi and it split in 2014 between rival eastern and western factions, with the last major bout of conflict ending in 2020 with a ceasefire.

Washington shut its embassy in Tripoli in 2014 and moved to its mission to neighboring Tunis following intensifying violence between rival factions. US

Special Envoy for Libya, Richard Norland, has operated out of the Tunisian capital, and took occasional trips into Libya. A September 2012 assault on the US consulate in Benghazi, since closed, killed four Americans including the then US ambassador to Libya, Chris Stevens. "I can't give you a timetable other than to say that this is something we're very actively working on. I want to see us be able to re-establish an ongoing presence in Libya," Blinken said at a Senate Appropriations subcommittee hearing. Blinken did not provide any details on the active work he referred to.. Assistant Secretary

Barbara Leaf, top diplomat for the Middle East and North Africa, is currently touring the region, traveling to Jordan, Egypt, Libya, Lebanon, and Tunisia March 15-25. In Libya, the State Department said, Leaf will meet with senior Libyan officials "to underscore US support for UN-facilitated efforts to promote consensus leading to elections in 2023." "There's also an important moment where through the work of the UN envoy, there may be, and I emphasize maybe, a path forward to moving Libya in a better direction including getting election for legitimate government and our diplomats are deeply engaged in that," Blinken added. The OPEC

member country has been locked in political stalemate since late 2021 when a scheduled election was canceled because of disputes over the rules and the eastern-based parliament, the House of Representatives, withdrew support from the interim government.

Peacemaking efforts have focused on getting the House of Representatives and the High State Council to agree on a constitutional basis for elections and on voting rules. The United Nations' special envoy for Libya last month moved to take charge of a stalled political process to enable elections that are seen as the path to resolving years of conflict.

China's huge quarantine camps standing months after 'zero COVID'

TAIPEI (Agencies): Nearly four months after China abruptly scrapped its tough "zero-COVID" policies following rare mass protests, authorities have yet to dismantle sprawling quarantine facilities designed for isolating hundreds of thousands of people, an Al Jazeera investigation based on satellite imagery shows.

Mass quarantine facilities in three Chinese provinces appear fully intact with no visible changes to their structure, an analysis of the satellite images shows, raising questions about the Chinese government's post-pandemic plans for the now-defunct structures. China's quarantine facilities, which were previously used to isolate, and at times treat, positive COVID-19 cases and close contacts, became a symbol of the human cost of Beijing's "zero-COVID" policy, which was dropped in December amid mounting public frustration with the draconian measures.

Beijing's overhauling plan for its now-defunct quarantine centres, if there is one, is not clear. Provincial authorities in Guangdong, Shandong

and Sichuan did not reply to Al Jazeera's requests for comment. Efforts to reach the National Health Commission (NHC) were unsuccessful. In December, however, the NHC called on local governments to "upgrade" quarantine centres into hospitals with facilities including intensive care. The NHC said local authorities should carry out the upgrades with local needs in mind but did not specify the ratio or number of facilities that should be refurbished. Meanwhile, some local governments have announced plans for a variety of other uses for the centres - from temporary housing to elderly care.

The satellite images obtained and analysed by Al Jazeera's Sanad investigation unit cover six quarantine centres: three in northern China's Shandong province, two in Guangdong province on the southern coast, and one in Sichuan in the centre of the country. The facilities include Guangzhou's 80,000-person capacity Nansha Health Centre, which was only completed in November. The furthest

distance between locations - from the outskirts of Jining in Shandong to Guangzhou in Guangdong - is more than 1,700km (1,056 miles). Sanad geolocated the quarantine centres using drone footage circulated on social media and analysed satellite images of the facilities taken within the last few days.

The images of quarantine centres analysed by Al Jazeera do not show any structural changes or construction to suggest significant upgrades. For China, upgrading defunct quarantine centres en masse could potentially be a potentially difficult and costly task. "Quarantine hospitals are designed in a very different way from acute care hospitals because for quarantine, the main purpose of the facility is to quarantine, not treatment," Chi Chunhui, director of the centre for global health at Oregon State University, told Al Jazeera. While the Chinese government has not published official figures, news reports and official statements suggest that a large number of makeshift structures were erected

across the country during the pandemic.

As early as January and February 2020, the National Development and Reform Commission allocated 530 million yuan (\$77m) to quickly build two prefabricated COVID-19 hospitals in Wuhan, the then epicentre of the pandemic. China State Construction allocated another 500 million yuan (72.6m) to the project, which was modelled after a makeshift hospital built during the SARS pandemic in 2003. The two facilities were dismantled in April 2020 as China began to contain the first COVID wave but the model would be widely adapted again two years later in the midst of an even larger infection wave in the spring of 2022. As authorities struggled to contain the virus once again, local and city governments got to work to flatten the curve and ultimately achieve zero cases. Chinese health official Jiao Yahui said there were 33 prefabricated hospitals completed or under construction in March 2022 alone. In May, the director of the NHC, Ma Xiaowei,

called for more quarantine facilities in an op-ed for the Communist Party's Qiushi Magazine.

Shanghai, a large COVID hotspot in 2022, by itself allocated at least 16.77 billion yuan (\$2.4bn) for COVID-19 infrastructure, services, staff salaries and other needs in its 2022 budget. Like those of other local governments, the budget did not break down how much was spent on quarantine facilities specifically. "The funding for the COVID infrastructure is a little bit opaque but it seems to come from a variety of sources, including SPB [special purpose bonds], central government budget and municipal/provincial budgets," Arendse Huld, an editor at the business-intelligence website and magazine China Briefing, told Al Jazeera.

In August 2022, an NHC directive called for more reserve quarantine facilities, while stipulating they should be built with normal day-to-day functions in mind. Construction continued across China, including in Guangzhou, where authorities announced plans to

build 36 facilities with a total capacity of 110,000 beds as late as November 2022. Discussions on the costs and future of the quarantine facilities are difficult to find in China's heavily-censored media. A critical article on the news platform 163.com, which questioned who would pay for Shandong to dismantle quarantine camps built at a cost of 23 billion yuan (\$3.3bn), had its contents deleted, although its title remains visible online. Much of the cost of China's quarantine centres was funded by debt. Chinese financial news site Yicai reported that more than 100 local governments issued special purpose bonds, racking up debts of up to 440 million yuan (\$63.9m).

Many of the local authorities said they planned to rent out the facilities after the pandemic to generate income and fund the debt. Huld, the editor, said authorities may find it difficult to make the centres economically viable if converted to other uses, which could include hotels, office buildings, shopfronts, warehouses, expo centres and even parking lots.

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Saudi-Iran reunion and greater Muslim cause

ACCORDING to the Arab media, the Saudi and Iranian Foreign Ministers greeted each other at the beginning of the holy month of Ramadan and promised to meet soon to implement the landmark bilateral reconciliation deal. During a Tele conversation on Thursday, the two leaders agreed to hold a bilateral meeting soon in order to pave the way for the reopening of embassies between the two countries along with initiating other measures to consolidate their recent rapprochement and boost trade and security cooperation between the two nations.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the Islamic Republic of Iran kicked off their bilateral diplomatic and trade engagements after two decades of pause in the aftermath of a surprising Chinese-brokered peace deal on March 10. Both nations have a genuine quest for the normalization of their bilateral relations by maintaining the momentum of engagement and intensifying their high-level contacts between their nations. Recently, President Ebrahim Raisi favorably received an invitation to visit Saudi Arabia from King Salman, while the top diplomats of the two countries are also continuously working to take the bilateral cooperation between their countries to the next level.

In fact, the Saudi-Iran detente was not only the utmost need of the two contesting nations but the entire Muslim Ummah and multiple brotherly countries had worked to normalize the relations between two major Muslim powers in the world. The Saudi-Iran tussle has badly hurt the core fabric of Muslim society while multiple Muslim countries including Yemen, Syria, Lebanon, Lybia, Pakistan, Iraq, Bahrain, and Afghanistan seriously affected by proxy wars and sectarianism fuelled by both nations over the past decades. As the two countries have now normalized their relations, there is a dire need for both rivals to work to reduce their difference of interests in multiple domains and play a constructive role in resolving issues confronting Muslim countries due to internal division and sectarianism.

At the same time, the Saudi-Iran rivalry seriously damaged Palestine's cause, as anti-Muslim Israel and its western backers tactfully stimulated inter-Muslim rivalry, created doubts and fear between Saudi Arabia and Iran through conspiracies and propaganda, while using their mutual weakness and distrust to their own advantage to implement their agenda in the broader Middle East region. Originally, the Saudi-Iran deal attracted massive outcry and criticism from Israel, the United States, and other western nations, as the west conceived a plan for Israel's greater integration in the Middle East region along with the formation of an anti-Iran Arab-Israel Alliance to tactfully weaken and ultimately destroy Muslim countries in the region while putting a last nail in the coffin of the Palestine cause.

Fortunately, the Chinese brokered Saudi Iran deal not only sabotaged all Israeli plans against Iran and other regional nations but also set a stage for greater trade, economic and security cooperation among the Muslim nations in the region, along with letting hope to Palestinians for solid and unified moral and political support from the Arab and overall Muslim world in their just struggle for the creation of a separate and independent homeland on their own land. In fact, the spirit of the Saudi-Iran reunion must be carried forward by the regional leaders to settle down their bilateral issues and revitalize peace and stability in Yemen, Syria, Lybia, Lebanon as well as Iraq so a durable peace could be ensured in those conflict-hit regions at the earliest. After restoring peace and tranquility in conflict regions, the Muslim countries must raise a strong and coordinated voice in support of Palestinian, Kashmiri, and Royangia Muslims who had been facing unceasing faith-based atrocities and brutalities by the occupier forces over the past decades, so those marginalized Muslim communities could achieve their fundamental rights according to the UN and global laws. After all, mutual unity, teamwork, and cooperation is the only key to unlocking hidden prospects for power, progress, and prosperity in this world and beyond.

Putin’s ICC arrest warrant is the first step in holding him accountable

MARKING the ninth anniversary of his illegal annexation of Crimea, Russian President Vladimir Putin visited the occupied Ukrainian peninsula on March 18, a day after the International Criminal Court (ICC) in The Hague issued an arrest warrant for him. Putin and his children's commissioner, Maria Alekseyevna Lvova-Belova, face charges concerning the alleged illegal deportation of Ukrainian children to Russia. Symbolic as it might be now, the warrant signals a determination against impunity and points to the enormous scale of the abuses committed by Russian forces and their proxies for which Putin bears ultimate responsibility.

The deportation of Ukrainian children from Russian-occupied territories of Ukraine to Russia is in clear contravention of the fourth Geneva convention, which deals with the protection of civilians during war and to which Russia is a party. The violations of children's rights have been documented in harrowing detail by the Almenda human rights organization, which until

2014 was based in Crimea and has monitored Russian abuses against children and other vulnerable groups since then. Russian abuses in Ukraine extend far beyond the deportation of children and far beyond Crimea. This has been documented in two reports by the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) on violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law in Ukraine. The United Nations Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine, has also compiled its own investigations. The reports, published in October 2022 and March 2023, give an indication of the scale of the abuses suffered by civilians since Russia annexed Crimea and occupied parts of Donbas in 2014.

There are clear obligations on occupying powers under the Hague Regulations on land warfare (1907) and the fourth Geneva convention (1949), as well as the first additional protocol to the Geneva conventions (1977). Russian violations over nine years include making the occupation arrangements permanent,

rather than temporary. They introduced the Russian ruble as currency and changed the curricula and language in schools to Russian. Russian passports have been forced on the population and men have been forcibly conscripted into the Russian military. The annexations by Russia of Crimea in March 2014 and of the regions of Donetsk, Kherson, Luhansk, and Zaporizhzhya in September 2022 are also illegal under international law.

There is also evidence that Russia failed in providing even basic necessities - food, water, electricity, sanitation, and healthcare - to remaining residents, another requirement under international law. Meanwhile, there have been reports of more direct abuses of civilians. These range from unlawful killings and abductions, to torture, sexual violence, and forcible deportations. Public and private property have been destroyed and the population denied basic civil rights and political freedoms. The full-scale invasion in February 2022 further intensified civilian suffering. Russia disre-

Stefan Wolff

garded the principles of distinction, proportionality and caution when attacking populated areas. They destroyed critical civilian infrastructure, and so-called "installations containing dangerous forces" - such as nuclear power plants.

Since February last year, the treatment of prisoners of war, who are protected under the third Geneva convention (1949) has been added to the list of Russian violations of international law. This has included systematic ill-treatment of PoWs, including torture and sexual violence. Ukraine has begun its own efforts to hold individuals accountable through domestic war crimes trials. But the ICC arrest warrant for Putin indicates a broader front in the fight against impunity. The fact that Russia withdrew, in 2016, from the Rome statute that created the court does not mean that the Russian president could not be tried before it.

Former Serbian president Slobodan Milošević was indicted while still in office in 1999. He had to stand trial before the International Criminal Tribunal for the former

Yugoslavia between 2002 and his death in 2006. Similarly, the fact that Ukraine is not a signatory of the Rome statute is irrelevant here, as the country has twice exercised its prerogative to accept ICC jurisdiction. In 2015 it gave the court an open-ended right to investigate potential crimes committed on Ukrainian territory after Feb. 20, 2014. Another option is to prosecute Russia's leadership specifically for the crime of aggression against Ukraine before a special tribunal, set up as a hybrid international mechanism to complement the ICC and domestic Ukrainian legal proceedings.

Other specialized bodies can also hear cases against Russia. The UN aviation council agreed to do so on March 17 in the context of the 2014 downing of flight MH17 over Donbas. There is also the principle of universal jurisdiction. This allows states to prosecute individuals who are not nationals of their countries for war crimes. Germany, Switzerland and other European countries have made use of this mechanism to prosecute war crimes from the Syrian civil war since

2011. But accountability alone will not even begin to address the suffering of Ukrainians. Helping citizens deal with the trauma they have experienced means building culturally relevant, local capacity for victims and survivors to organize, identify and advocate for their specific needs. There will need to be support for women and women-led households. Eventually, locally driven truth-seeking efforts will be necessary for people to live together safely again.

This kind of restorative justice will be an essential complement to retributive justice. There are already many victims and survivors of Russian abuses in Ukrainian-controlled and recently liberated territories. Working with these people is essential for their own sake, but also to constantly improve restorative justice efforts as Ukraine liberates more territories. Raising awareness of international support for restorative measures is as important a signal to the people of Ukraine as the fight against impunity for Putin and other Russian war criminals. It signals a commitment not only to a Ukrainian victory but also to justice afterward.

The Moscow Times

Covid struck and Britain locked down. Here’s what we learned from that - and what we must do next time

THREE years to the day from when Britain went into formal lockdown, it's worth reflecting on the historical moment we all lived through: a once-in-a-century kind of pandemic that swept the world over. As analysis and inquiries begin to make sense of what we lived through, it's clear that different political factions are attempting to rewrite what happened and why. Some are questioning, driven in part by the Telegraph's lockdown files, whether the Covid-19 pandemic was really that bad. Was the response by government proportionate?

In these debates, there's a clear survival bias. Those who can ask these questions were affected by restrictions and are likely to have had Covid-19 once, if not several times, and survived. Those who died - an estimated 220,437 people in the UK - don't have a chance to weigh in on whether government intervention was sufficient, or whether their deaths were preventable. More than a million people suffering from long Covid still face scepticism over their condition and an uphill battle to have it recognised and addressed. A large part of the problem in Britain's response was that we wanted it all. We wanted to maintain our pre-Covid-19 life, and, until hospitals were at the brink of collapse, didn't want to discuss trade-offs.

South Korea moved early towards testing, tracing and isolation in January 2020 (thus avoiding a national

lockdown) and its population accepted the necessary infringements on personal privacy. Its total mortality to Covid-19 is 34,000 in a population of 51.7 million. New Zealand moved early to close its borders and avoid imported cases, thus avoiding domestic restrictions for the bulk of 2020 and 2021. Its total mortality to Covid-19 is only 3,900 in a population of 5 million. Both countries avoided the stringent and long lockdowns that Britain experienced, because their leaders acted quickly to suppress the virus without simply locking people in their homes.

In Britain, community testing and border controls to limit imported cases weren't even considered until mid-March, when the initial strategy to "just let it spread" failed, given the high hospitalisation rate of Covid-19. Lockdown was the emergency button pressed in panic. Shouting about lockdown, or ignoring Covid completely, didn't help the challenge every country was facing: Covid-19 waves resulted in too many infections translating into hospitalisations. Vaccines and antivirals did provide the major solution. They managed to change the case conversion from an estimated 20% in January 2020 to 1-2% post-vaccines. Was there an option to simply do nothing? Looking around the world, no place did "nothing". Even in Florida, my home state, known for Governor Ron DeSantis's "freedom" approach, businesses imposed their own mask mandates that were

often more stringent than in Britain - for example, in children as young as two - and had to develop their own guidelines for running safely given the absence of state government leadership. The problem was simply pushed from the responsibility of government for safe workplaces on to businesses and individuals. And the result on the ground looked similar, with businesses using testing, masks and closures. Many businesses had to close because of sick employees, or workers and customers staying away out of fear. Businesses were left to struggle without government support, while the death toll climbed. As the California governor, Gavin Newsom, observed: "Since the beginning of the pandemic, Florida has had a 53% higher death rate than the state of California ... and their economy has done worse."

If we reflect back to three years ago, faced with a lack of government leadership in the early weeks of March, there was a similar "bottom-up" movement in Britain, with parents keeping their children off school, businesses asking their employees to work from home, and conferences and sports and cultural events being cancelled voluntarily. The UK government seemed to just watch and wait, and when the prime minister, Boris Johnson, announced the lockdown, it was following public opinion that stricter action was needed. Unfortunately, given how

late this was, and the lack of preparation put into containment, this led to a third of patients admitted to hospital with Covid-19 dying, putting the first wave on a par with diseases such as Ebola. The dilemma with Covid-19 came back to the fact that this was a virus that spread among humans, and we were most at risk from those humans we live with, love, work with and see regularly. Solutions were difficult, and this is where testing was crucial. Testing could determine who was infectious and who wasn't, instead of treating all of us as infectious, which is what lockdown did. Speed and volume of testing were key determinants of countries that did better in 2020.

What worked globally? Looking around the world, there are lessons from many countries. From Japan, that masks work at limiting spread, especially on public transport and in workplaces. From South Korea, that testing and tracing and support isolation could suppress the virus without lockdowns. From Denmark, that schools could reopen quickly if mitigations were put in place to use large, ventilated spaces such as parks and stadiums. From New Zealand, that messaging to the public is vital in pivoting from Zero Covid to mass vaccination. From Norway, to move early and prepare to contain and thus avoid harsher lockdowns later. From Britain, to roll out the vaccine quickly through a trusted institution such as the NHS and cover priority groups first. What

didn't work? Superficial and morally questionable debates pitting the young against the old. Pitting the healthy against the sick. Undermining the severity of Covid-19 by likening it to a bad cold or calling it a hoax. Telling those with cancer that their lives matter less. Saying the same to parents of children with asthma or diabetes by somehow implying child severe illness or death to Covid-19 is acceptable if there's an underlying health condition. We wasted time fighting each other instead of finding collective solutions to a common threat.

We are better than that as a society: any talk of herd immunity with Covid-19 in 2020 should have been about how the herd takes care of the weak. "Targeted protection" or "segregation" - asking vulnerable people to shield while the rest of society got Covid - was a fantasy that didn't work anywhere in the world, because the truth is, at the start, we didn't know who was most at risk of death. We know now that it's a mix of risk factors such as underlying health conditions, weight, age, sex and a genetic lottery. Even if you could identify who was at risk of severe illness, there was no simple way to separate the vulnerable from the healthy. We live together and work together.

Where else did we waste time? In debates over whether masks work, instead of recognising that they do work but that people don't like to wear them. Instead, we should have debated what kind of masks, in what setting, for how long and in

what age groups. In debates over whether lockdowns work, instead of recognising that of course asking people to stay at home stops an infectious disease spreading, but comes at a heavy cost and should be avoided, given the consequential risks of loneliness, financial precarity and domestic abuse. And in pretending that an alternative universe exists where, as we emerge from the pandemic, life continues exactly as it did before without any trade-offs. Science has almost always found some kind of solution to help manage the impact of infectious diseases on humans: whether it's vaccines, treatments, better clinical management, or better surveillance and public health containment. It is easy to feel dismayed watching politicians pass blame, seemingly thinking only of the next election and their polling. The public is fatigued, with a clear desire to move on from a collective trauma and loss. But this is too important to forget.

From what I see working in global health security each day, civil servants, scientists and advisers are working hard to protect the public and prepare for whatever may lie ahead, whether that might be avian flu or another emerging threat. Perhaps another lesson from Covid-19 is to trust the people who have made it their career's work to respond to health challenges, and not those who can't remember if they were at a party at their own residence during lockdown.

The Guardian

DeSantis clarifies position on Ukraine war, calls Putin ‘war criminal’

FLORIDA Governor Ron DeSantis this week called Russian President Vladimir Putin a "war criminal" and condemned his invasion of Ukraine, a week after coming under criticism for remarks that seemed to advocate a reduction in US support for Ukrainian forces. DeSantis, widely expected to announce his candidacy for the 2024 Republican presidential nomination later this year, had previously described the war in Ukraine as a "territorial dispute" that did not represent a "vital national interest" of the United States.

The remarks earned him immediate condemnation from many, including multiple long-serving Republicans in Congress, even though support for continued US aid to Ukraine is waning among a significant portion of the Republican electorate. In an interview with British journalist Piers Morgan scheduled to stream Thursday evening on Fox Nation, DeSantis said his comments - particularly those that seemed to dismiss the war as a territorial dispute - were "mischaracterized."

Morgan, who previewed the interview in a New York Post column on Wednesday, quoted the Florida governor's explanation for his comment at length. "When I asked him specifically if he regretted using the phrase 'territorial dispute,' DeSantis replied, 'Well, I think it's been mischaracterized. Obviously, Russia invaded [last year] - that was wrong. They invaded Crimea and took that in 2014 - that was wrong.' 'What I'm referring to is where the fighting is going on now, which is that eastern border region Donbas, and then Crimea, and you have a situation where Russia has had that. I don't think legitimately, but they had. There's a lot of ethnic Russians there.'"

According to Morgan, DeSantis went on to say why he thinks Russia is not the threat that the Biden administration has portrayed: "I think the larger point is, OK, Russia is not showing the ability to take over Ukraine, to topple the government or certainly to threaten NATO. That's a good thing." The Biden administration has characterized support for Ukraine as forestalling deeper US involvement in a

broader conflict.

DeSantis told Morgan he sees it differently: "I just don't think that's a sufficient interest for us to escalate more involvement. I would not want to see American troops involved there. But the idea that I think somehow Russia was justified [in invading] - that's nonsense." Also in the interview, DeSantis ridiculed Russia's high dependence on fossil fuel exports and said the country does not have the capacity to act on Putin's seeming plan to reconstitute the former Soviet Union's sphere of influence. "I think he's got grand ambitions," DeSantis said of Putin. "I think he's hostile to the United States, but I think the thing that we've seen is he doesn't have the conventional capability to realize his ambitions. And so, he's basically a gas station with a bunch of nuclear weapons, and one of the things we could be doing better is utilizing our own energy resources in the US"

DeSantis's comments were reminiscent of those of the late John McCain, who was a Republican senator and presidential candidate. Famously hawkish on Russia, he once

Rob Garver

derided the nation as "a gas station masquerading as a country." Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, in an interview with the editors of The Atlantic magazine, replied to DeSantis last week with an argument that America's investment in his country's defense is preventing a broader conflict that could pull in the US and its NATO allies. "If we will not have enough weapons, that means we will be weak. If we will be weak, they will occupy us," Zelenskyy said. "If they occupy us, they will be on the borders of Moldova and they will occupy Moldova. When they have occupied Moldova, they will [travel through] Belarus and they will occupy Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia."

"That's three Baltic countries which are members of NATO," he added. "They will occupy them. Of course [the Balts] are brave people, and they will fight. But they are small. And they don't have nuclear weapons. So they will be attacked by Russians because that is the policy of Russia, to take back all the countries which have been previously part of the

Soviet Union." Zelenskyy's assertions aside, many foreign policy experts are dubious about the likelihood of Russia choosing to invade any countries that are under the protection of NATO's mutual defense agreement. DeSantis' move to clarify his position on Ukraine highlights a difficulty that any Republican presidential candidate is likely to face on the issue because of a deepening divide within the party.

For Republicans, said William A. Galston, a senior fellow in the Brookings Institution's Governance Studies Program, "finding a tenable path on Ukraine is very difficult, because the party is divided between a traditionalist wing and a populist wing on this issue." The traditionalist view is that the United States, for reasons having to do with both its interests and values, is required to stand up to aggression, such as what Russia has unleashed on Ukraine, and to support indirectly, and in some cases directly, the military effort to oppose it." Galston told VOA. "The populist wing of the party is taking the position that this fight is none of our business, and more gen-

erally, that the interests of the United States are best served by staying out of foreign entanglements, particularly military entanglements, to the greatest extent possible," he said.

At the moment, the divide is most visible when comparing the positions of the party's two leading presidential candidates with those of its foreign policy veterans in Congress. Both former President Donald Trump and DeSantis have expressed doubts about whether it is in US interests to continue supporting Ukraine. In a recent Monmouth University poll, the two men received 80% of support - 44% for Trump and 36% for DeSantis - when prospective GOP voters were asked whom they support for the party's presidential nomination. In Congress, though, prominent Republican voices have offered unwavering support for Ukraine. "I think the majority opinion among Senate Republicans is that the United States has a vital national security interest there in stopping Russian aggression," John Thune, the second-ranking Republican in the Senate, told reporters last week.

VOA

Israel’s radicalization train is out of control

ONE of the most worrisome issues for the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan has been the threats by right-wing Israeli extremists to deport a large number of Palestinians to the country. The slogan "Jordan is Palestine" was perhaps the biggest source of concern to many. The "Jordan is Palestine" argument was a source of concern that Israel planned to further expel Palestinians from the Occupied Territories to the east of the Jordan river and thus destabilish Jordan to the degree that it would become a Palestinian state. The strongest response to this argument comes from Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, who has often said that "Palestine is Palestine and Jordan is Jordan."

Never did the Jordanians expect that this issue would reflect the opinion of a senior Israeli minister, especially since the signing of the 1994 peace agreement between the two countries. However, on Sunday, Israeli Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich gave a speech in France from a podium that was adorned with a map based on the logo of the former Irgun militia, which was considered a terrorist organization by the British. This has correctly caused uproar in Jordan. The map (minus the gun that appears on the original Irgun logo) shows Israel expanding into Jordan, south Lebanon and southern Syria, and even a small part of what is now Saudi Arabia. The map was noticed coincidentally after reports emerged of what Smotrich said at the event regarding the Palestinians. Smotrich has previously said his last name was derived from the Ukrainian town of Smotrych, where his ancestors lived. His attempts at negating the

Daoud Kuttab

very existence of Palestinians and adopting the claim of being the original Palestinian is an almost verbatim echo of what another former Ukrainian, Golda Meir, said in 1969. The then-Israeli prime minister said in an interview with Frank Giles, deputy editor of The Sunday Times, "There was no such thing as Palestinians."

This quote has been frequently used to illustrate Israel's denial of

the existence of the Palestinian people." In 1988, Amman severed all ties with the West Bank and, since then, all maps of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan have excluded the areas west of the river.

The PLO received a boost of sorts when the First Intifada erupted in 1987 and the local intifada leadership insisted on the organization representing them. The PLO even received official Israeli

The map (minus the gun that appears on the original Irgun logo) shows Israel expanding into Jordan, south Lebanon and southern Syria, and even a small part of what is now Saudi Arabia. The map was noticed coincidentally after reports emerged of what Smotrich said at the event regarding the Palestinians. Smotrich has previously said his last name was derived from the Ukrainian town of Smotrych, where his ancestors lived.

Palestinian history and is considered to sum up the Palestinians' sense of victimization by Israel. It is considered to be a successor to the early Christian Zionist phrase "A land without a people for a people without a land," and a predecessor to the academically discredited 1984 book "From Time Immemorial" and the 2017 satire "A History of the Palestinian People."

Edward Said described it as Meir's "most celebrated remark," adding that her "jingoistic comments concerning Palestinians remain one of her defining - and most damning - legacies." At the Rabat Arab League Summit in 1974, Jordan gave up representing Palestinians and recognized the Palestine Liberation Organization as the "sole legitimate representa-

acceptance when Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin exchanged letters of recognition with it in 1993. Rabin's letter was addressed to PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat and it stated: "Mr. Chairman, In response to your letter of September 9, 1993, I wish to confirm to you that, in light of the PLO commitments included in your letter, the Government of Israel has decided to recognize the PLO as the representative of the Palestinian people and commence negotiations with the PLO within the Middle East peace process." Now, nearly 30 years later, we are back to below square one. A senior Israeli minister has negated the existence of the Palestinian people and indirectly denied everything that happened not only at that White House signing ceremony in 1993 but also in 1994, when Israel

and Jordan signed the Wadi Araba treaty, making Jordan the second sovereign Arab country to sign a peace agreement with Israel.

Many in Palestine and Jordan still remember the fact that the Herut party, which formed the nucleus of what is now the Likud, had a saying that the Jordan river "has two banks, this one is ours and the other one too." Smotrich's statement and the map provoked immediate and angry responses from Palestinians and Jordanians. Palestinian Prime Minister Mohammed Shtayyeh said that Smotrich's statement was perfect evidence of the "extremist, racist, Zionist ideology that governs the current Israeli government." In Jordan, Prince Hassan bin Talal slammed the Israeli minister and called what he said and the map he stood in front of "a violation of laws and morals."

Jordanian Sen. Mohammed Momani, a former deputy prime minister and the secretary-general of the Mithaq party, called on the government to immediately denounce the statements and the map that Smotrich stood behind. "The statement must be condemned and diplomatic as well as political action must be taken against this radical Israeli government," he told AmmanNet. On the eve of Ramadan and amid the worries of King Abdullah and others that things could get worse, the map and the statements by a senior Israeli Cabinet minister - which have not been (so far) condemned by the prime minister of Israel - put the Jordanian government, King Abdullah and the Palestinians in a very difficult position, as they are unable to get the Israelis to stop their radicalization train that is out of control.



What do Trump’s legal woes mean for DeSantis ahead of 2024 race?

Joshua Green

DONALD Trump's expected indictment for an alleged hush money payment to adult film star Stormy Daniels is obviously a big complicating factor in his campaign to win next year's GOP presidential nomination. But it's nearly as vexing for the man who looks likely to be his main challenger, Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis. Over the last year or so, DeSantis has turned himself into a top presidential contender by treading a careful path, advertising his allegiance to the MAGA masses while building out a profile that is distinct from Trump's - and ultimately, he hopes, more appealing to Republican voters.

bunch of fights that might be thought of as "Trump adjacent" and cast himself in the starring role: battling Covid mask mandates in Florida, going after "woke" Disney, sending a plane-load of migrants to Martha's Vineyard to upset liberals and delight Fox News viewers. The problem with DeSantis's strategy is that he couldn't put off a direct confrontation forever. Eventually, he'd have to face Trump. I expected the reckoning to come on a debate stage. But Trump appears to have chosen the occasion of his indictment to force the issue a lot sooner.

In classic Trumpian fashion, he's cast his self-inflicted legal travails as a witch hunt by perfidious deep state liberals like Manhattan district attorney Alvin Bragg and demanded that Republicans publicly defend him. DeSantis could do the obvious political thing and attack Trump frontally by reminding Republican voters that his reckless disregard for the law (to say nothing of his own marriage) risks inflicting further electoral damage on the GOP and handing Joe Biden another term. In addition to shoring up his own masculinity, DeSantis would boost his chances of beating Trump next year.

DeSantis's biggest attribute as a presidential candi-

date is that he's perceived to have broader electoral appeal than Trump. But a CNN poll last week highlighted a key obstacle for him: Republicans, unlike Democrats, don't put a particularly high premium on electability. Only 41% of Republicans and Republican-leaning independents said they'd choose a candidate based on his or her ability to beat Biden, while 59% said they'd choose the person who agrees with their views on major issues. Trump led the poll. DeSantis will have to take him down a peg or two if he hopes to prevail.

Making a move now might be the best chance DeSantis gets. Trump's indictment marks the first time a former president has ever been charged with a crime. The scandal doesn't implicate other Republican politicians or even Trump supporters, as the Jan. 6 riots did. Unlike his removal of classified documents, there's no argument that national security is at stake or any matter other than Trump's own feelings of martyrdom. All his huffing and puffing aside, what's at issue is no more than a personal affair. For DeSantis, it won't get easier than this. If he can't muster the courage - or at least the political wisdom - to point this out to voters, it's hard to imagine that Trump's attacks won't soon have their intended effect.

Bloomberg

Is this the last hurrah for the Boris Johnson circus? Even Tory MPs really hope so

Katy Balls

THE four hours of evidence from Boris Johnson before the Commons privileges committee over Partygate held little in the way of surprises. With much of the witness testimony published in advance, there was no new smoking gun. Instead, there were plenty of tetchy exchanges as Johnson butted heads with the seven-strong committee of MPs. At times, it felt as though they were speaking past each other.

The reaction, too, was broadly as expected. The former prime minister's detractors have been quick to seize on his comments as evidence of his reckless dishonesty and unsuitability for office. Meanwhile, Johnson's most enthusiastic supporters offered a rather more optimistic interpretation - heralding the marathon session as a triumph for their man. Former cabinet minister Jacob Rees-Mogg declared: "Boris is doing very well against the marsupials." Other core Johnson MP backers joined in - tweeting their confidence that the former leader would be "exonerated". But there's another reason Johnson's appearance in the Grimond Room is unlikely to have changed many minds: a lot of Tory MPs didn't even bother to tune in.

"I didn't watch it," said one member of the 2019 intake. "I don't need to be reminded of that episode." "God, no," was another MP's reaction on being asked whether they had tuned in. Speaking to MPs after the session, it's a common refrain and testament to how Johnson's

power in the Tory party appears to be on the wane. Worn down by last year's psychodrama, rather than look on the investigation with high-stakes excitement, most would just like to pretend it's not happening. After a good few weeks for Rishi Sunak, Johnson's appearance is seen by many in the party as a nuisance to get through rather than the beginning of a pathway to a comeback. In No 10, there was a conscious effort to insist it was business as usual - even if Sunak managed to find an upside to the Johnson circus by publishing his tax return midway through Johnson's appearance. "Boris has become Rishi's dead cat," one MP jokes - in reference to the Lynton Crosby tactic of a shocking announcement diverting attention from the story you don't want people to talk about.

But it's more than that - some in government are keen to show that Sunak is not scared of his predecessor. It's no coincidence that the vote on the Windsor framework was held on a day Johnson had to be in parliament - meaning Johnson could not conveniently be away and miss the vote. It forced the former prime minister to put his money where his mouth was and vote against the deal. "Sunak is facing down his critics," says a government adviser. The fact that only 22 Tory MPs voted against the deal is seen as a success in Downing Street. While some members of the European Research Group point to the number of Tory abstentions - 48 - as

evidence that there was wider unease over the renegotiated Northern Ireland protocol deal, at least some of that number were allowed to miss the vote. Ultimately, only a handful of MPs - including the former cabinet ministers Jake Berry and Priti Patel - were willing to join Johnson in the public rebel camp.

"It's a mix of the people who really don't like Rishi and then the Brexit ultras," says one Tory MP. If the list of "MPs who really don't like Rishi" is under 22 - well below the number that demolishes the Tories' working majority - he is doing pretty well, given the amount of poison released over the past year by the infighting that led to two Tory PMs being removed. Yet while the mood may fall short of a Johnson comeback, the whole circus still presents problems for the government. It's not just the prospect of weeks more of Partygate coverage as Sunak tries to look ahead. It's what happens if the committee finds Johnson guilty and recommends a suspension of 10 or more sitting days. This would need to be voted on by the House of Commons in what Sunak has said would be a free vote. Even though Johnson's parliamentary supporters and the pro-Boris Conservative Democratic Organisation would probably encourage - or pressure - MPs to vote against the punishment, it would probably pass. "Any byelection right now is bad," says

a government adviser. "But this would be particularly bad."

At that point the real purpose of much of Johnson's and his supporters' positioning would come into effect. "The audience Boris and his supporters are trying to win is the court of Tory opinion - it's about what happens after the committee verdict," says one MP sympathetic to the former prime minister's cause. "It's not just Tory MPs, it's members and voters." Despite the state of the polls, there are some Tory MPs who believe Johnson could turn a byelection to his advantage. "He would win the byelection," insists one MP, who backed Sunak in the last leadership contest. "Boris has big star power - and the party would be forced to pump money in." As well as resources, the cabinet would be under pressure to put time into fighting it.

A byelection would allow Johnson a chance to whip up the grassroots and take centre stage once again. Given how low expectations are for the party's prospects after multiple losses, a hold would be spun as a huge success. There's already talk of running a campaign attacking Sadiq Khan's ultra-low emission zone (Ulez). With the mood in the party increasingly turning cold on the idea of a Johnson comeback anytime soon, the best Sunak can hope for is for the whole affair to die down. The last thing the prime minister needs, for his party and premiership, is anything that extends the Johnson circus one day further.

China’s shifting Middle East policy

Deborah Lehr

CHINESE President Xi Jinping this week traveled to Moscow to meet with his friend and ally, Vladimir Putin. It was the 40th time that the two have met since Xi took office more than a decade ago. The visit not only solidified China's strategic partnership with Russia, but Xi also hopes it will help deliver a potential ceasefire in Ukraine. A call with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky will reportedly occur next.

The reports of an attempted negotiated ceasefire by President Xi came on top of the recent news that China had brokered a major diplomatic deal between Saudi Arabia and Iran. For more than a decade, China has steadily expanded its influence across the Middle East. It has peppered the region with investments through its Belt and Road Initiative and grown to be the region's largest trading partner. All the while, it has mostly avoided entangling itself in the messy politics and sectarian rivalries of the region. These actions appear to reflect a new Chinese strategy characterized by a more aggressive foreign policy that suits its own interests - but also provides China with a larger role on the global stage. In the Middle East, this raises two questions: Does President Xi hope to supplant America's role as the diplomatic heavyweight in the region? And what is driving China's evolving interests?

The short answer to the first question is no. China plays - and will continue to play - a fundamentally different role in the Middle

East than the US. It has no goal to be the primary security guarantor in the region, nor can it offer the military resources provided by the US government. The arms trade between China and the Arab region, for example, is a small fraction of what is traded with the US. But China's interests in the region are indeed shifting. The country's relationship with the Arab world has long been based on trade and economics. Increasingly, however, it will be animated by geopolitical and strategic concerns. And while it may not seek to supplant or replicate the US role in the region, it will undoubtedly wield its growing political and strategic clout in ways that are likely to aggravate tensions with Washington.

To understand what is driving this change, some history is instructional. During much of the Cold War, China's relations with much of the Arab world were characterized by mutual hostility. China associated Gulf monarchies with Western imperialism and anti-communism. It supported an uprising in Oman in the 1960s. For its part, Saudi Arabia supported the nationalist government in Taiwan, voted against China's admission to the UN in 1971 and initiated a trade ban against China in 1972. This changed in the 1980s, as the Arab order was challenged by the Iran-Iraq War and the geopolitical order was overturned by the end of the Cold War. Between 1984 and 1990, China established diplomatic relations with the UAE, Qatar, Bahrain and Saudi Arabia.

Now, the global order is shifting

again, creating new dynamics between the Arab world and the two global superpowers. While the US is widely perceived to be retreating from the region with its new focus on the Indo-Pacific, China is rapidly increasing its ties with Arab nations. In 1990, China's bilateral trade with Saudi Arabia amounted to only \$417 million. By 2020, it had grown to \$65.2 billion. China's trade with Saudi Arabia in 2020 was more than three times the amount it traded with the US that same year.

These growing economic ties are underpinned by strategic imperatives. China's economy relies heavily on imported oil. And Beijing sees the energy-rich Arab region as a crucial supplier at a time when oil demand is expected to bounce back after nearly three years of COVID-19-related restrictions. China also sees significant potential to export more of its technologies and invest in critical infrastructure. It sees the Middle East as an attractive market, one without the regulatory and political restrictions that Chinese technology firms face in Europe and the US.

At the same time, China has been expanding its political relations with the region. A 2019 report by the Atlantic Council documents that China has signed comprehensive strategic partnerships with Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Iran, Egypt and Algeria. This level of partnership maintains "full pursuit of cooperation and development on regional and international affairs." China also maintains lower-level partnerships with eight other

regional states. China's expansive foreign policy goes well beyond the Middle East. In addition to its recent efforts to play a significant diplomatic role in the Russia-Ukraine war, China has engaged in a more activist foreign policy under Xi, concluding security and defense agreements with Djibouti and pledging \$100 million in military aid to the African Union.

Meanwhile, the Biden administration's ties with traditional allies and partners - Egypt, the UAE and Saudi Arabia - are all strained. When the US pushed for sanctions to punish Russia for invading Ukraine, not one of these three countries agreed to support it. China's transition from foreign policy observer to activist should not come as a surprise. As China's economic interests have grown significantly overseas, it has used this economic might to promote its own diplomatic agenda. This new strategy by President Xi is less about a seismic shift in the global order than a shift in China's own vision of its role internationally.

What does this mean for China's future in the Middle East? Beijing has much to gain economically and geopolitically, especially if the US continues to deprioritize the region. For the Middle Eastern nations, they have gained an important economic ally, but increasingly they are becoming the competitive playing field for growing US-China bilateral tensions. How the region balances its economic interests with its foreign policy and national security priorities will remain a challenge for the foreseeable future.

Hamish De Bretton-Gordon

IT was the 19th-century military theorist Carl von Clausewitz who described war as "the realm of uncertainty". In Ukraine, the fog of war is thick, and growing ever thicker. It's impossible to gauge the true state of the battles raging in the east of the country. For some, Ukraine's heroic defence against the renewed Russian offensive marks a victory of sorts. For others, the high losses they are sustaining are indicative of Russia's ability to remobilise and regroup.

officer told me to fight in one of these museum pieces, I would stand to attention, turn to the right, salute, and march home. The problem is that the Russian generals still believe their own propaganda. They believe in the myth of the indestructible Soviet tank rolling across Europe. Before the invasion, Russia's minister of defence, Sergei Shoigu, invested heavily in a fleet of modern tanks when he reformed the armed forces. Their effectiveness was impeded by corruption, however, and then they were largely destroyed in the initial invasion last year. Once they were gone, they were gone for good and impossible to replace. I said at the time it was hard to see how the Russians could ever truly recover; so it has proved. And far from giving the Russians any chance of victory, these relics will only hasten their defeat.

Critics of my view will argue that it's quantity not quality that matters; that even these relics in large numbers are a daunting prospect on the battlefield. Nonsense. One need only study the Battle of Kursk in 1943 - the largest tank battle in history - to see the folly of sending large numbers of old tanks against superior models and advanced anti-tank weaponry. The Russians lost many hundreds of T34s in that hideous battle, yet 80 years later they want to use outdated tanks against even more modern technology. It's lunacy. When Britain's

Challenger 2s arrive in Ukraine, they will pick off T55s as though in a fair-ground shooting gallery. And even if these Soviet tanks managed to hit a Challenger 2, it's likely the crew wouldn't even notice. A British tank round would probably go through two or three of them before it ran out of energy. It now makes complete sense why the Russians are trying to frame the rounds we are donating as biohazards (made as they are with harmless depleted uranium). They know they will decimate their "new" tank battalions, which will not be able to land a punch back.

At this vital moment, as certain Western countries equivocate about their continued support of Ukraine, it is important we don't buy into Putin's propaganda that Russia is remobilising so many men, munitions and materiel that it will be ultimately unstoppable. It is simply not true. The core of the Russian army is broken and unrecoverable. Its advanced tanks are wrecks and its men exhausted, unable to advance more than a few miles a week in this new push. In short: it will take years for Russia to rebuild - time it does not have as the new wave of Western weapons begins to arrive. If tanks designed many, many decades ago are what Russia is resorting to, we should station guards at the Tank Museum in Dorset in case the Russians try to steal them. They would be better use than the ones Putin is now bringing out of storage to relieve his beleaguered forces.

The Telegraph

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Pakistan’s weekly inflation jumps to 46.65pc

ISLAMABAD (NNI): Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS) released data on Friday and short-term inflation measured by the Sensitive Price Index (SPI) reached an all-time high of 46.65 per cent year-on-year (YoY) for the week ending on March 22, in comparison to last week 45.64pc YoY.

On a week-on-week basis, short-term inflation increased by 1.80pc as tomatoes, potatoes and wheat flour became costlier. The SPI for the current week ended on 22nd March, 2023 recorded increase of 1.80%. Major increase is observed in the prices of food items, Tomatoes (71.77%), Wheat Flour (42.32%), Potatoes (11.47%), Bananas (11.07%), Tea Lipton (7.34%), Pulse Mash (1.57%), Tea Prepared (1.32%) and Gur (1.03%), non-food items, Georgette (2.11%), Lawn (1.77%) and Long Cloth (1.58%).

On the other hand decrease is observed in the prices of Chicken (8.14%), Chillies Powdered (2.31%), LPG (1.31%), Mustard Oil & Garlic (1.19%) each, Pulse Gram & Onions (1.06%) each, Vegetable Ghee 1 Kg (0.83%), Cooking Oil 5 litre (0.21%), Pulse Moong (0.17%), Pulse Masoor (0.15%) and Eggs (0.03%).

During the week, out of 51 items, prices of 26 (50.98%) items increased, 12 (23.53%) items decreased and 13 (25.49%) items remained stable.

The year on year trend depicts increase of 46.65%, Onions (228.28%), Cigarettes (165.88%), Wheat Flour (120.66%), Gas Charges for Q1 (108.38%), Diesel (102.84%), Tea Lipton (94.60%), Bananas (89.84%), Rice Irri-6/9 (81.51%), Rice Basmati Broken (81.22%), Petrol (81.17%), Eggs (79.56%), Pulse Moong (68.64%), Potatoes (57.21%) and Pulse Mash (56.46%), while decrease is observed in the price of Chillies Powdered (9.56%).

The SPI monitors the prices of 51 essential items based on a survey of 50 markets in 17 cities across the country. During the week under review, the prices of 26 items increased, prices of 12 decreased and prices of 13 remained stable.

Seafood export increases 12.09 percent in 8 months

ISLAMABAD (APP): Fish and fish preparation exports from the country during 8 months of the current financial year grew by 12.09 per cent as compared to the exports of the corresponding period of last year.

During the period from July-February 2022-23 about 126,270 metric tons of fish and fish products valuing \$300.180 million exported as compared to the exports of 100,154 metric tons worth \$267.811 million of same period last year.

Meanwhile, meat and meat products exports from the country during the period under review registered 16.78 per cent growth as 57,855 metric tons of meat and meat production valuing \$256.971 million exported as against the exports of 50,011 metric tons valuing \$220.045 million of same period last year. On month on monthly basis, the exports of fish and fish preparations grew by 5.79 per cent in February, 2023 as compared to the same month of last year as 18,548 metric tons of fish and fish preparation valuing \$38.326 million exported as compared to the exports of 14,324 metric tons worth \$36.227 million of same month of last year.

In the month of February 2023 about 7,330 metric tons of meat and meat production valuing \$29.241 million exported as compared to the exports of 6,246 metric tons worth \$28.088 million of same period last year.

It is worth mentioning here that food group exports from the country during the last 08 months of the current financial year decreased by 6.08 per cent as compared to the exports of the same period last year.

During the period from July-February, 2022-23, food commodities valuing \$3.226 billion exported as compared to the exports of \$3.434 billion of same period last year.

However, food imports into the country during the last 08 months of the current financial year grew by 3.98 per cent as the country spent \$6.687 billion on the imports of different food products to fulfill local requirements as against the imports of \$6.431 billion of same period of last year.

Standard Chartered launches First Sustainable Trade Export

KARACHI (PPI): Standard Chartered Bank (Pakistan) Limited (SCBPL) has launched Pakistan's First Sustainable Trade Export LC Programme.

SCBPL is supporting Louis Dreyfus Company (LDC) export cotton sourced through the world's leading cotton sustainability certification programme, the Better Cotton Initiative (BCI), according to information on Friday.

With Standard Chartered's focus on helping companies accelerate to net-zero and closing funding gaps for sustainable and green finance in emerging markets, SCBPL was the bank of choice for LDC, given LDC's own commitment to work towards a safe and sustainable future in Pakistan.

Arslan Nayeem, Head of Client Coverage, CCIB, Standard Pakistan, said, "Whilst we strive towards our sustainable financing goals at a global level, we find it key to support local exports not only as an economically viable venture but also to integrate sustainability and climate resilience in a manner that the Better Cotton Initiative encourages."

We are delighted to partner with Louis Dreyfus Company in this joint pursuit of our sustainability goals through this Sustainable Export LC Programme. Sustainability and transition finance have become the need of the hour and a priority for many of our clients. Pakistan is a prime market for green and transition financing and the Bank is here to support clients cover funding gaps for such initiatives."

Bilal Yousuf Chabra, Country Head of LDC Pakistan, said, "Sustainable agriculture and production remain amongst the world's most pressing challenges. As a leading merchant and processor of agricultural goods, we are driven by our purpose of a safe and sustainable future. We are proud to be working closely with Standard Chartered Bank to build and strengthen our commitment in Pakistan, where we have been part of the community since 2015."

"The partnership will also see LDC Pakistan aligning our environmental goals with our financial model, while supporting the growth and development of the local cotton industry." Initiating the first Sustainable Trade Export LC Programme for LDC in Pakistan is another pioneering milestone achieved by SCBPL. The underlying commodity is BCI certified cotton which is grown in a sustainable more pest and drought resilient manner allowing improved livelihoods for nearly 1.5 million small-holder cotton farmers. Pakistan is now the second largest producer of BCI cotton and through this Sustainable Trade Export LC programme will export to buyers in Bangladesh, Vietnam, and other countries. A sustainable-goods certification issued and approved by a third party will form a part of each transaction and documentation for this Programme. This is a key initiative to embrace sustainable exports which will encourage local and global sustainability measures while supporting Pakistan's economy.

OGRA reiterates its commitment to protect consumer interest

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Oil and Gas Regulatory Authority (OGRA) convened a meeting on Friday with the Oil Marketing Companies (OMCs) on their request to discuss the mechanism of exchange rate adjustment. According to the OGRA spokesperson, the meeting was attended by the industry including the OCAC, OMAP, representatives of the Ministry of Energy (Petroleum Division) and OGRA.

OGRA's finance department explained the mechanism of exchange rate adjustment in-depth, so that the stakeholders may understand the process, he said.

Further, the authority heard the issues of the OMCs and detail deliberations were done in this regard to improve the understanding of the participants. It had been noted with great concern in the meeting that a counter-productive media campaign was being run against OGRA, which was absolutely rebutted, the spokesman added. He said OGRA was cognizant of its mandate and was fully committed to working in the public interest.



QUETTA: People buying vegetables at Joint Road.



HYDERABAD: Vendors busy in preparing traditional item samosa to attract the customers outside their shop during Holy month of Ramadan.

PSX witnesses bearish trend, loses 434.05 points

ISLAMABAD (APP): The 100-index of the Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX) witnessed bearish trend on Friday, losing 434.05 points, a negative change of 1.08 percent, closing at 39,942.05 points against 40,376.10 points the previous day.

A total of 46,728,175 shares were traded during the day as compared to 148,452,001 shares the previous day, whereas the price of shares stood at Rs. 1.294 billion against Rs. 3.917 billion on the last trading day.

As many as 308 companies transacted their shares in the stock market; 89 of them recorded gains and 200 sustained losses, whereas the share price of 19 companies remained unchanged.

The three top-trading companies were WorldCall Telecom with 4,011,170 shares at Rs.1.20 per share; Telecard Limited with 3,877,000 shares at Rs.7.06 per share and TLP Properties with 1,839,174 shares at Rs.14.70 per share. Nestle Pakistan witnessed a maximum increase of Rs.99.95 per share price, closing at Rs.5100.10, whereas the runner-up was Sapphire Fiber with an Rs.71.60 rise in it's per share price to Rs.1026.39.

Pak Services witnessed a maximum decrease of Rs.89.00 per share closing at Rs.1099.00; followed by Pak Tobacco with Rs.52.50 decline to close at Rs.665.10.

Gold prices increase by Rs.5,600 to Rs. 207,500 per tola

KARACHI (APP): Four ships, Maersk Chicago, EM Astoria, Al Areeesh and Mild Bloom carrying containers, LNG and gas oil, berthed at Qasim International Container Terminal, Pakistan Gas Port Consortium Terminal and Liquid Cargo Terminal the other day. Meanwhile, another gas carrier, Hongtar Invictus also arrived at the outer anchorage of the port on Friday morning.

A total of seven ships were engaged at PQA berths during the last 24 hours, out of them two ships, gas carrier Broog and container vessel Maersk Chicago left the port on Friday morning, whereas three more ships EM Astoria, Melody Fair and Nordic Josephine are expected to sail later today.

Cargo throughput during the last 24 hours stood at 136,393 tonnes, comprising 118,407 tonnes of imports and 17,986 tonnes of export cargo, including containerized cargo carried in 2,744 containers (1,686 TEUs imports and 1,058 TEUs export) was handled at the port. There are four ships at the outer anchorage of Port Qasim, out of them, an oil tanker 'Leader Gas' and another container vessel 'RDO Fortune' are expected to take berths at Oil Terminal and Container terminal respectively on Friday, while two more ships, Olympia and Maersk Jalan with containers are due to arrive at Port Qasim on Saturday.

ISLAMABAD (APP): The per tola price of 24 karat gold increased by Rs. 5,600 and was sold at Rs. 207,500 on Friday against its sale at Rs. 201,900 the previous day, All Sindh Sarafa Jewellers Association reported.

The price of 10 grams of 24 karat gold also increased by Rs. 4801 from Rs.177,898 to Rs.173,097, whereas the price of 10 grams 22 karat gold went down to Rs.163,073 from Rs. 158,672.

The price of per tola silver increased by Rs 20 to closed at Rs 2200 and ten-gram silver surge by Rs 17.15 to Rs 1903.29 respectively.

The price of gold in the international market increased by US\$58 to \$1997 against its sale at \$1939, the association reported.

ICCI delegation donates Rs.2m for earthquake victims of Syria

ISLAMABAD (APP): A delegation headed by Ahsan Zafar Bakhtawari, President, Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ICCI) on Friday visited the Syrian Embassy and presented a cheque of Rs. 2 million to Dr. Ramez Alraee, Ambassador of Syria for the earthquake victims of his country.

Speaking on the occasion, Ahsan Zafar Bakhtawari said that the people of Pakistan, including the business community, fully realized the problems being faced by the earthquake victims of Syria and would not leave them alone in this difficult time. He emphasized that all sanctions on Syria should be lifted in this difficult time so that the earthquake victims can get the required goods and items easily and the problems of Syrians get reduced due to the improvement of its economy.

He said that the donations is the first step for the help of the earthquake victims of Syria by the business community and expressed the determination that the business community will continue its cooperation with them in the future so that they can restore their lives to normal. He said that the Syrian President's visit to Iran and the United Arab Emirates will be a positive step towards strengthening unity among the Muslim world.

He also discussed matters with the Ambassador for further improving bilateral trade and economic relations between Pakistan and Syria.

Speaking on the occasion, Ambassador of Syria Dr. Ramez Alraee, thanked the ICCI delegation for presenting the aid cheque. He said that the people of Syria will always remember the help and support extended by the government and people of Pakistan to them in these difficult times. He said that due to the sanctions on Syria, the earthquake victims are facing severe difficulties, so the international community should play its role in lifting of these sanctions.

He also thanked Pakistan for supporting Syria at international forums and reiterated that mutual cooperation between the two countries would become stronger with time. Faad Waheed, Senior Vice President ICCI, said that due to the earthquake, Syria has suffered heavy humanitarian and financial losses, so it is necessary that all Muslim countries, including Pakistan, to play a role for lifting of sanctions on Syria.

Stocks mixed after more interest rate hikes

NEW YORK (AFP/APP): Wall Street bounced but European markets wobbled Thursday as investors weighed fresh interest rate hikes by central banks and signs of a possible pause in US monetary tightening following turmoil in the banking sector.

Central bankers chose to continue their battle against inflation, even as investors had hoped for a halt, over concerns that rate hikes could further rock the banking system following the collapse of three US regional lenders this month.

The Bank of England and Norway's central bank raised their rates by a quarter point on Thursday, after a similar move by the US Federal Reserve the day before and a heftier half-point hike by the European Central Bank last week.

Switzerland's central bank went with a half-percentage-point increase as it declared that authorities had "put a halt to the crisis" at Credit Suisse after co-engineering the embattled bank's buyout by domestic rival UBS over the weekend.

"The Fed Reserve, along with the major central banks, is clear in its position that the recent turmoil does not pose a risk to the wider financial system," said Richard Flax, chief investment officer at wealth manager Moneyfarm.

The central banks appear "confident in the higher capital and liquidity standards in place today when compared with the Global Financial Crisis" of 2008, he added.

Wall Street's main indices closed higher on Thursday after slumping a day earlier following the Fed's rate announcement.

The tech-heavy Nasdaq climbed 1.0 percent while the broad-based S&P 500 ticked up 0.3 percent.

In Europe, London finished the day 0.9 percent in the red as the BoE acknowledged that "uncertainties around the financial and economic outlook have risen".

Paris added 0.1 percent, while Frankfurt was flat.

The US markets are "betting that we have reached a peak in terms of rate hikes and that from here, looser monetary policy should follow," said Fawad Razaqzada, analyst at City Index and Forex.com.

While the US, Swiss and UK central banks all hiked interest rates, "the message from these banks was the same: more increases may be required, not will be, if inflationary pressures persist," he added.

Fed chief Jerome Powell warned Wednesday that the banking sector's woes were likely to bring "tighter credit conditions for households and businesses" that would affect "economic outcomes".

He also said there needed to be more supervision and regulation of banks to prevent another crisis.

But the Fed also signaled it could soon pause rate hikes as its accompanying statement replaced a previous warning about the need for "ongoing increases" with a conditional one saying "some additional policy firming may be appropriate."

"They effectively said that they are going to pause or step back after they raise interest rates one more time," economist Hugh Johnson told AFP.

"That's a positive signal and it's the reason why the market has performed reasonably well today," he added.

Market jitters remain over rising rates because they are widely regarded as a catalyst behind the collapse of Silicon Valley Bank (SVB), the sector's biggest failure since the 2008 financial crisis.

"Uncertainty in the banking sector has undoubtedly altered the outlook for monetary policy," said Pushpin Singh, economist at the Centre for Economics and Business Research, a London think tank.

This is because central banks will have to balance their mandate of reining in inflation while ensuring financial stability, he said.

Nerves were also jangled on Wednesday when US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen declared that authorities were not looking at a blanket increase in deposit insurance for banks. But on Thursday, Yellen told a House subcommittee hearing that authorities would be "prepared to take additional actions if warranted" to prevent contagion in the financial sector.



In brief

Wahab inspects synthetic turf

LAHORE (APP): Adviser to Chief Minister Punjab on Sports and Youth Affairs Wahab Riaz visited the National Hockey Stadium and inspected the work of laying modern FIH approved synthetic turf on Friday. He was accompanied by Director General Sports Punjab Muhammad Tariq Qureshi and Director Youth Affairs Syed Umair Hassan during his inspection visit. Muhammad Tariq Qureshi briefed the Adviser about the laying of new synthetic turf. Speaking on the occasion, Wahab Riaz said that the National Hockey Stadium is of historical importance. "Hockey is our national game and new synthetic turf will provide a modern facility to emerging hockey players. The work of laying new synthetic turf will be completed soon". He further said that laying of new synthetic turf will improve the game of hockey players. "After the upgradation of the National Hockey Stadium, we will be able to hold international hockey events at this great venue," he added.

Munich sack manager

LONDON (BBC): Bayern Munich have sacked manager Julian Nagelsmann after less than two years in charge and appointed Thomas Tuchel as his replacement until 2025. The German side have won the last 10 Bundesliga titles and sit second in the table this season - one point behind leaders Borussia Dortmund. They beat Paris St-Germain to reach the Champions League quarter-finals, where they will face Manchester City. Tuchel, 49, was sacked by Premier League club Chelsea in September. He replaces Nagelsmann on a contract until 30 June 2025 and will take training for the first time on Monday. Bayern chief executive Oliver Kahn said: "When we signed Julian Nagelsmann in the summer of 2021, we were convinced we would work with him on a long-term basis - and that was the goal of all of us right up to the end. "But now we have come to the conclusion that the quality in our squad - despite the Bundesliga title last year - has come to the fore less and less often. "After the World Cup we have played less successfully and less attractively. The big fluctuations in performance have cast doubt on our goals for this season, but also our goals for the future. "That is why we have acted now. Personally and on behalf of Bayern, I would like to thank Julian and his coaching team, and wish everyone the best of luck for the future."

Leinster season is over

LONDON (BBC): Leo Cullen has said he does not know whether Johnny Sexton will play again for Leinster this season after being injured in Ireland's win over England. Sexton, 37, sustained a groin injury late in Ireland's Grand Slam-clinching victory last weekend. "I don't know is the honest answer," said the Leinster coach about Sexton's prospects of playing again this season. "I'm not expecting anything. I'm hopeful but I'm not sure unfortunately. He is going to see a specialist." Sexton had to leave the field after 73 minutes of last weekend's Six Nations game. The Ireland fly-half will retire after the World Cup in the autumn so there are now concerns that he may not play again for the Irish province.

Ukraine accuses IOC of ‘double standards’ over Russia

MOSCOW (BBC): The International Olympic Committee has been accused of "double standards" by Ukraine's sports minister for suggesting Russian and Belarusian athletes could compete at Paris 2024. Ukraine remains strongly opposed to the IOC "exploring a pathway" for athletes from the banned nations to take part. "What's changed? Nothing has changed. At first the IOC banned them, and now they are trying to allow them to compete," said Vadym Guttsait. "There are certain double standards." The topic of sanctions against Russian and Belarusian athletes will be high on the agenda when the IOC's executive board meets on Tuesday in Switzerland. Shortly after Russia's invasion of Ukraine last year, the IOC called on sporting federations to ban athletes from Russia and its ally Belarus. However, last month the IOC opened up the possibility of athletes from the nations participating under

a neutral flag in Paris.

Guttsait said that for that to happen there must be "serious criteria" attached to validate the neutrality of any athletes allowed to compete. "They can't just say 'we are for peace' and that's it," said Guttsait, who is also the head of Ukraine's National Olympic Committee. "If the criteria are very weak, then why was Russia suspended last year? "The situation has only deteriorated. More Ukrainians are being killed and more Ukrainian territory is being occupied. There are air-raid alerts every day and our cities are being bombed and our people are being killed.

"We do not understand at all what was the reason for the IOC to start discussion about the lifting of the ban on Russian and Belarusian athletes." Explaining its decision, the IOC said the Olympics "cannot prevent wars and conflicts" but the Games could "inspire us to solve problems by building bridges". But Guttsait said it was impossible to sepa-

rate politics and sport while his country was under attack. "We have no life in Ukraine, we have no conditions for normal training and preparations for the Olympic Games," he added. "At the same time, the Russians have all the conditions to practise and compete domestically. They sleep at night, and we don't." The IOC is encouraging sports to allow Russian and Belarusian athletes to compete as neutrals, but it remains a decision for the individual federations. On Thursday, World Athletics said it was keeping its ban in place.

World Athletics president Sebastian Coe said the sanction appears to be "the only peaceful way to disrupt and disable Russia's current intentions" and said Russia's actions over the past year had "only hardened" his "resolve" on this issue. "I would like to thank Sebastian Coe, and the entire World Athletics Board for their support for Ukraine, understanding and solidarity with us not only in words but also in deeds," said Guttsait.

Briton to race 10km in Gabon as part of London Marathon preparations

LONDON (BBC): Mo Farah will race the Port-Gentil 10km in Gabon two weeks before what is expected to be the Briton's final London Marathon appearance. The four-time Olympic champion, 40, announced in January that he expects 2023 to be his final year of racing before retirement.

Farah is currently training in Ethiopia as he continues his preparations for the London Marathon on 23 April. He is unsure if the marathon will be his last competitive event.

In a short video, the British marathon record holder said he has been "preparing well" in Ethiopia, adding he is "really excited" to test his fitness over 10km on 8 April in Gabon, 15 days before he takes to the streets of his



home city. A hip injury prevented Farah from taking part in last year's London Marathon, with the 2023 race set to be his first full marathon since 2019.

The six-time world track champion won the Big Half - a half marathon race - in London in September but he has raced just seven times since October 2019. Farah's personal best over 10km on the road is 27 minutes 44 seconds,

however that time was set in 2010 and he was surprisingly beaten by club runner Ellis Cross in his last outing over the distance at the Vitality London 10,000 last year. The 2018 Chicago Marathon winner's highest London Marathon finish was third in 2018. He will face a stacked field in the 2023 race, which features four of the five fastest runners in history.

Chairman HEC lauds HEC Sports Teams

ISLAMABAD (APP): Chairman, Higher Education Commission (HEC), Dr. Mukhtar Ahmed has lauded the HEC sports teams for clinching medals in different national championships.

HEC teams bagged a silver medal in 60th National Badminton Championship, bronze medal in Women National Volleyball Championship and bronze medal in 14th Tug of War National Championship.

Similarly, the HEC women team won a bronze medal in 10th National Archery Championship whereas HEC men team

secured 4th Position. In 17th HEC Women Baseball Championship, HEC team won bronze medal and HEC's player Aram Baktar was awarded 'Best Player of the Championship' title.

In the National Swimming Championship, HEC men's team won the bronze medal in 100-meter Freestyle. In his message, Chairman HEC appreciated the efforts of HEC sports division, coaches, team managers and players for their remarkable performance in various national championships.

He assured complete support for promoting

sports and extracurricular activities in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) alongside academic pursuits so as to create a holistic educational environment for university students. Since its inception in 2002, HEC has been playing a pivotal role in facilitating HEIs to promote sports activities along with providing higher education across the country. In this regard, one of the key initiatives of HEC is to organize inter-university championships and prepare and supports university players for participating in national and international championships.

Premier League refers club to independent commission over alleged breach of financial rules

LONDON (BBC): Everton have been referred to an independent commission by the Premier League over an alleged breach of financial fair play rules. The Premier League did not reveal the specifics of the club's rule breach, other than saying it occurred in the period ending with the 2021-22 season.

However, Everton have posted financial losses in several recent seasons.

The Toffees denied wrongdoing and said they were "prepared to robustly defend" their position.

In their statement, Everton added: "The club strongly contests the allegation of non-compliance and together with its independent team of experts is entirely confident that it remains compliant with all financial rules and regulations. "The club has, over several years, provided

information to the Premier League in an open and transparent manner and has consciously chosen to act with the utmost good faith at all times."

In March 2022, Everton announced losses of £120.9m for the 2020-21 season. That meant losses over a period of three years totalled £372m - more than three times the £105m permitted under Premier League rules.

The club said they remained "in a secure financial position" thanks to owner Farhad Moshiri - and blamed the Covid-19 pandemic for part of the losses. Everton are also in the process of building their new Bramley-Moore Dock stadium. They remain in a perilous position in the top flight, sitting 15th in the table - two points above the relegation zone. Last year, Leeds and

Burnley wrote to the Premier League asking for Everton's accounts to be independently investigated, although they later dropped their threat of legal action.

The two clubs had been advised Everton complied with profit and sustainability rules after meeting with the Premier League.

In its statement on Friday, the Premier League said the commission would be independent of the league and its clubs, adding proceedings would be "confidential and heard in private".

There have been widespread protests against Moshiri and the Everton board by fans this season. He has the most La Liga hat-tricks (36) and shares the record for the most trebles in a single season with Ronaldo, who also has eight.

Four Pakistan players to debut in first Afghanistan T20I

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan have named a dynamic XI for the first of the three T20Is against Afghanistan at the Sharjah Cricket Stadium on Friday. Opener Saim Ayub, middle-order batter Tayyab Tahir and right-arm quicks Zaman Khan and Ihsanullah will make Pakistan debuts. Top-order batter Abdullah Shafique, all-rounders Faheem Ashraf and Imad Wasim, and Azam Khan mark their returns to the Pakistan side.

These eight players were named in the 15-member squad for this T20I series after a string of impressive performances in the domestic circuit and the recently-concluded HBL Pakistan Super League 8. The series comes with an opportunity for these players to carry their form in international cricket. Karachi-born, 20-year-old Saim will open with Mohammad Haris, who has played five T20Is for Pakistan and announced his arrival in the last ICC Men's T20 World Cup in Australia with his blazing strokeplay and bold intent, and has batted with him in Peshawar Zalmi during the HBL PSL 8.

Saim comes into the side after a highly impressive run for Sindh and Peshawar Zalmi. The left-hander played an integral role in crowning Sindh the National T20 champions as he made 416 runs in 12 matches at a strike rate of 155.22. He smashed 341 runs - that included five half-centuries, the joint-most in the season with Babar Azam - at a strike rate of 165.53 for Peshawar Zalmi in this HBL PSL at the top of the order.

Speaking ahead of his debut, Saim told PCB Digital: "Whatever I had done in my life was to achieve this jersey and now I want to do justice with this opportunity. There's excitement and an element of nervousness as well as I never expected to play for Pakistan this early. But, since I have gotten this opportunity, I am going to do my best." "It is very important to give a good start to your team in T20 cricket no matter what opposition you are playing. You have to assess the conditions quickly and make your presence count and that's what I will be planning to do with Haris. We have been playing together in Peshawar Zalmi and we were batchmates as well. We enjoy good chemistry and our playing style is also similar - we look to

dominate the opposition. So, it will be fun to play with him."

Abdullah and Tayyab make numbers three and four respectively. Abdullah, who has played three T20Is with his last being in December 2020 in New Zealand, comes into the side after making 268 runs at 144.08 for champions Lahore Qalandars. He scored two half-centuries, the last being in the final against Multan Sultans.

Tayyab has been in good touch over the last year. He marked his HBL PSL 8 debut with a whirlwind 65 and made 137 runs at 144.21 and was the best batter of the Pakistan Cup, which concluded in January. He also bagged player of the final award for his match-winning 71 for Central Punjab. He made 708 runs in first-class Quaid-e-Azam Trophy at an average of 59 and recorded four centuries and one half-century.

"Whenever a cricketer starts his journey, he idolises the ones who wear the national colours and dream of doing the same," Tayyab said. "I am grateful to Almighty that I have been provided the opportunity to serve my country. My parents are going to be very happy when they see me play. "There will definitely be some nerves when I play for Pakistan, but I will be able to overcome them as I have been playing competitive and quality cricket at the domestic level and in the HBL Pakistan Super League. I am very excited to make my Pakistan debut." The middle order comprises captain Shadab Khan, Azam, Faheem and Imad.

Azam scored 282 runs at a staggering 161.14 for Islamabad United this HBL PSL. His highest score of 97 came against Quetta Gladiators at the National Stadium Karachi. This will be the 24-year-old's fourth T20I.

Faheem, Azam's HBL PSL teammate, provided balance to the side with his contributions with bat and ball. He made 215 runs at 149.30 and took eight wickets at an economy of 9.50 - in a league that has had the best run rate (9.20) in the last one year for any major T20 tournament around the world.

Imad's nine wickets for Karachi Kings came at an average of 28.22 and an economy of 7.93, but it was his sensational batting that turned heads as the left-hander scored 404

runs at a phenomenal average of 134.66 and a staggering strike rate of 170.46. The 34-year-old has an experience of 58 T20Is in which he has 55 wickets at an average of 23.49. His economy is 6.33.

Experienced speedster Naseem Shah will spearhead the pace attack that includes newcomers Zaman and Ihsanullah. Zaman was outstanding with the new and old ball in the Powerplay and death overs and he is expected to execute the same role in Pakistan colours on Friday.

He defended 13 off the last over to help Lahore Qalandars to their second straight HBL PSL title and took 15 wickets at 23.60 runs per dismissal and an economy of 8.53 in the recent season. "It was my goal to play for my country and I am about to achieve it," Zaman, who hails from Mirpur, said. "The presence of Umer [Gul, bowling coach] bhai has helped me immensely. We discussed how every pitch is different and spoke in detail, about the behaviour of Sharjah wicket. He told me that hitting the hard length will be helpful. I will definitely keep that in mind," Zaman added.

In Ihsanullah, Pakistan have a reliable pace bowler to carry them through the middle-overs. The right-arm pacer's thunderbolts kept batters on backfoot throughout the HBL PSL 8 as he peppered every opposition with lethal bouncers. Ihsanullah was the first bowler in the tournament to pick a five-wicket haul and he went on to finish the tournament as the best player and best bowler for taking 22 wickets (the second most) at only 15.77 runs apiece and he leaked only 7.59 runs in the 45.4 overs he bowled, the most for a bowler with top-five wickets. "My parents wanted me to play for Pakistan and I am delighted that their dream is coming true," Ihsanullah, who belongs to the village of Matta in Swat, said. "Definitely my experience of the HBL PSL will come in handy. There were players from all around the world and even from Afghanistan and I learned a great deal bowling to them, so it is going to be useful."

Pakistan XI for first Afghanistan T20I: Saim Ayub, Mohammad Haris, Abdullah Shafique, Tayyab Tahir, Shadab Khan (c), Azam Khan (wk), Faheem Ashraf, Imad Wasim, Naseem Shah, Zaman Khan and Ihsanullah

Pegula and Gauff advance in Miami

MIAMI GARDENS (AFP/APP): Americans Jessica Pegula and Coco Gauff advanced to the third round at the Miami Open with straight sets wins on Thursday.

World number three Pegula got her campaign under way with a confident 6-3, 6-1 second round win over Canada's Katherine Sebov.

With top-ranked Iga Swiatek having withdrawn, American Pegula is among the favourites to challenge Aryna Sabalenka for the title.

"I had to adjust my game plan a little bit in that first set and then was able to close it out pretty easily," said Pegula, a semi-finalist in Miami in 2022. Pegula will face fellow American Danielle Collins in the second round after she beat Bulgarian Viktoriya Tomova 7-6 (7/3), 6-2.

"She is someone who is pretty tough to play against and on a fast court as well, she will be going for her shots and playing aggressive. She's feisty, she competes really well. It's going to be a tough match," said Pegula. Sixth-seed Gauff, beaten finalist in the French Open last year, saw off Canada's Rebecca Marino 6-4, 6-3, converting five of her nine

break points and twice coming back from a break down in the second set.

"It was an up-and-down match honestly. A lot of breaks. I mean, I did well in the returning part, considering she's a big server," said the 19-year-old. "I'm really happy with how I played. She's not an easy opponent. She makes a lot of big shots, doesn't really give you a lot of rhythm. You kind of just have to hang in there," she added. Belgium's Elise Mertens upset eighth seed Daria Kasatkina 4-6, 6-2, 6-2. After letting a 3-0 advantage slip in the first set, Mertens dominated as Kasatkina struggled physically, needing a medical time-out in the second set.

Spain's Paula Badosa battled to a 7-6 (7/2), 4-6, 6-3 win over Germany's Laura Siegemund while Russian Anastasia Potapova defeated Ukrainian Marta Kostyuk 6-1, 6-3.

Kostyuk, enjoying plenty of support on the small outer court from Ukrainian fans gathered behind national flags, was never able to put her opponent under pressure.

There was no handshake from the two players at the end of the game as they left the court without acknowl-

edging each other.

Potapova had generated some controversy and was formally warned by the WTA after wearing a Spartak Moscow football shirt before a game at Indian Wells. The Russian will face Gauff next. Three-times Miami Open winner Victoria Azarenka beat Italy's Camila Giorgi 6-3, 6-1 to book her place in the third round.

In first round ATP action, big-hitting Czech Jiri Lehecka cruised to a 6-3, 6-4 win over Argentine Federico Coria. "The conditions suit me much better than in Indian Wells," Lehecka said. "The surface is a bit faster and the balls are flying more. I managed it well and I am super happy to get the win," he added.

Chile's Cristian Garin beat American Marcos Giron 6-4, 2-6, 6-4 and will face Argentine Sebastian Baez next.

France's Richard Gasquet beat Australian lucky loser Christopher O'Connell 6-4, 3-6, 6-1 to set-up a meeting with second-seed Stefanos Tsitsipas of Greece.

World number one Carlos Alcaraz starts his campaign on Friday against Argentine Faundo Bagnis.

Lionel Messi: Argentina & Paris St-Germain forward reaches 800 goals

MADRID (BBC): Lionel Messi scored his 800th top-level goal as Argentina beat Panama 2-0 in their first match since winning the World Cup.

The 35-year-old Paris St-Germain forward becomes the second player to reach the milestone after Cristiano Ronaldo.

Messi's tally includes 672 goals over 17 seasons for Barcelona and 29 for PSG. He also has 99 international goals, with two coming in the World Cup final. The Argentina captain scored an 89th-minute free-kick at the Monumental de Nunez Stadium in Buenos Aires to add to Thiago Almada's opener 11 minutes earlier.

Messi will have the opportunity to score his 100th international goal when Argentina play Curacao on Tuesday.

It is yet another milestone in an extraordinary career during which he has won almost every major trophy, including four Champions Leagues, 10 La Liga titles, the Copa America and, finally in December, the World Cup.

Established as one of the greatest players of all time, Messi has won the Ballon d'Or - awarded to



the best player of the year in European football - a record seven times, twice more than Ronaldo.

The only major competition Messi has played in but failed to win so far is the French Cup.

Messi's haul of 35 trophies with Barcelona, whom he joined at the age of 13, makes him the most decorated player in the Spanish club's history and he unsurprisingly holds Barca's all-time scoring

and appearance (778) records. He has also scored more goals (474) and provided more assists (192) than any player to have featured in La Liga and has the record for the most goals in a single season in the Spanish top flight - 50 in 37 games during 2011-12.

Should he carry on playing and stay fit, Messi should reach 900 club appearances next season and would likely score in

his 20th consecutive top-flight season.

He is already Argentina's most capped player (172) and is one away from a century of goals for his country. Gabriel Batistuta is second on the list with a distant 56 from 78 games.

Only Ronaldo (120) and Ali Daei, who scored 109 times for Iran between 1993 and 2006, have scored more men's international goals.



In brief

Nine anti-social elements rounded up

RAWALPINDI (APP): Police in their ongoing operations against law-breakers, conducted raids in different areas and rounded up nine drug peddlers, bootleggers, illegal weapon holders and other criminals besides seizing over 1200 grams of hashish, 13 litres of liquor, four 30-bore pistols, ammunition and other items from their possession. According to a police spokesman, New Town, Sadiqabad and Dhamial police rounded up Shehbaz, Amel, Khurram, Shahzaib, and Afzal on recovery of four 30-bore pistols, ammunition and a dagger. Sadiqabad, Naseerabad, and Airport police in their operations managed to recover 1200 grams of hashish and 13 litres of liquor from the possession of Husnain, Farhan, and Wasif. Waris Khan police rounded up a proclaimed offender namely Farhan Khan allegedly involved in the murder case of Tanveer Ahmed. The spokesman informed that five other accused involved in the murder case were already sent behind the bars. He further said that the police in their ongoing operation against professional beggars arrested 31. "Separate cases have been registered against the accused while further investigations are under process, the spokesman informed.

IRSA releases 70,100 cusecs water

ISLAMABAD (APP): Indus River System Authority (IRSA) on Friday released 70,100 cusecs of water from various rim stations with an inflow of 63,100 cusecs. According to the data released by IRSA, the water level in River Indus at Tarbela Dam was 1422.96 feet and was 24.96 feet higher than its dead level of 1,398 feet. Water inflow and outflow in the dam was recorded as 19,600 cusecs while outflow as 25,000 cusecs. The water level in River Jhelum at Mangla Dam was 1094.60 feet, which was 44.60 feet higher than its dead level of 1,050 feet. The inflow and outflow of water was recorded 18,400 cusecs and 20,000 cusecs respectively. The release of water at Kalabagh, Taunsa, Guddu and Sukkur was recorded 25,500, 34,200, 27,400 and 6,000 cusecs respectively. Similarly, from River Kabul, a total of 15,100 cusecs of water released at Nowshera and 3,000 cusecs released from River Chenab at Marala.

CDA directs owners

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Building Control Agency of the Capital Development Authority (CDA) directed the owners of affected buildings to repair the cracks of earthquake-impacted immediately to ensure public safety. "In case of non-repair the affected building immediately should be vacated and asked for a new building and structural sustainability certificate from the relevant authority," an official in the CDA said. The official said the certificates should be obtained from the CDA and Pakistan Engineering Council (PEC) registered firms, which would also need to be verified by a third-party consultant. He said the authority had conducted a survey of 90 high-rise buildings in the federal capital by the Building Control Agency under the direction of Chairman CDA, Noor ul Amin Mengal. "No cracks are found in the pillars of any building and ten out of 90 buildings are found slightly affected by the recent earthquake in the country," he added. The official said, "Minor cracks are found in the plaster or brickwork of the buildings."



ISLAMABAD: Senator Irfan-ul-Haq Siddiqui convened Sub-Committee of the Senate Standing Committee on Information and Broadcasting presiding over a meeting of the Committee at Parliament House.

CDWP approves six development projects worth Rs 21.28 bln

ISLAMABAD (NNI): Minister for Planning, Development and Special Initiatives Professor Ahsan Iqbal Friday chaired a meeting of the Central Development Working Party (CDWP) that approved six development projects worth Rs 21.28 billion.

The meeting, attended among others by the Secretary Planning, Chief Economist, Members Planning Commission and representatives from the various ministries and divisions, considered four projects related to the Ministry of Climate Change, Aviation Division and provincial projects, a news release said. The forum okayed the installation of a Weather Surveillance Radar at Multan (revised) at the cost of Rs 6188.759 million, the establishment of a 250-bed hospital at Skardu at the cost of Rs 6,045 million, setting up of 'Excellence Hubs' in the field of renewable energy at the cost of Rs 111.403 million, construction of road from Naag to Gichak, (revised) at the cost of Rs 4,255.591 million, construction of two lanes D. I. Khan at the cost of Rs 3097.045 million

besides establishing 'Capacity Building & Institutional Strengthening of Planning Commission' at the cost of Rs 2086.299 million.

Sharing some details of the approved projects, it said with the construction of a 250-bed tertiary care divisional hospital on land measuring 500 kanal in Skardu city, patients of all the four districts of Baltistan region, tourists and personnel of law enforcement agencies would benefit from the modern healthcare facility at their doorsteps. Currently, there is only a 190-bed RHQ hospital in the Baltistan Division.

Under a Punjab government-sponsored project, it said two excellence hubs of renewable energy for exploring new avenues in view of the demand and supply issues in the energy sector would be established. "The primary function of an Excellence Hub is the availability of trained manpower in the market by imparting technical training on RE along with the promotion of renewable energies, which includes the counseling of companies,

testing of equipment and machinery in that sector, start-up support and information sharing."

Similarly, the forum approved the Construction of a road from Naag to Gichak, sponsored by the provincial government of Sindh. "The project envisages, the construction of 47.557-kilometre long a two-lane single-carriage-way from Naag to Gichak, having a width of 06-meter (03-meter each lane wide) with 1.5-meter wide shoulders on each side, District Panjgur and Washuk, in the Southern Region of Balochistan Province."

The proposed road would connect Gichak with the mainstream of the National Highway (N-85), as well as with Panjgur towards the West and to the South with Awaran City. "Its connection with Awaran will provide an alternate route to reach Bela and then onwards to Karachi, the economic hub of Pakistan, through National Highway (N-25)." The scope of work included earthwork, sub-base & base, pavement structures, construction of bridges and culverts.

ANF recovers over 283 kg drugs in 10 operations

RAWALPINDI (APP): Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF) while conducting 10 operations in different areas of the country managed to recover over 283 kg drugs and arrested nine accused including a woman, said an ANF Headquarters spokesman here on Friday. He informed ANF in an operation on Islamabad Motorway recovered 6.6 kg opium and 3.3 kg charras from the possession of a drug smuggler resident of Mardan. In another operation at Bacha Khan International Airport, ANF recovered 1.6 kg cocaine from the possession of a Doha-bound passenger resident of Karachi.

ANF foiled a bid to

smuggle drugs from Peshawar to Rawalpindi and managed to recover 1.1 kg heroin from an accused resident of Peshawar arrested from Peshawar Ring Road Bus Stop.

ANF and FC in two operations in Khyber recovered 38 kg charras and 1.6 kg Ice drug.

Eight kg charras was recovered near Kamoke Toll Plaza on Gujranwala G.T. Road and ANF also arrested two accused residents of Peshawar.

The spokesman informed that in an operation near National Highway Hyderabad, ANF managed to recover 108 kg charras from secret cavities of a truck while two drug smugglers residents of Quetta

were netted.

In an operation at a private courier office in Karachi, ANF seized over one kg heroin from a parcel booked for London.

The spokesman further informed that in a joint operation by ANF and Rangers near City Point, National Highway Sukkar, 10 kg charras and four kg opium were recovered from the possession of an accused resident of Noshki. In the tenth operation conducted near Panshi Zero Point, ANF recovered 100 kg charras concealed in bushes to smuggle abroad. Separate cases have been registered against the accused while further investigations were underway.

Public asked to discourage 'professional beggars' during Ramadan

ISLAMABAD (APP): Social activists on Friday warned the public against 'professional beggars' who are encroaching cities to take advantage of their generosity during the holy month of Ramadan and stressed for social media awareness for such a societal scourge that detracts from the civilized image of any society.

The community members should not be sympathetic toward these professional beggars and donate to registered charities instead, renowned Social activist Abid Belal said while talking to a private news channel. Ramadan sees an influx of beggars seeking to exploit the philanthropic and giving spirit of the holy month, he said, adding, such people thrive on the public's increased levels of sympathy during this period.

He also launched an anti-beggar drive in an attempt to make the cities free of professional alms-seekers.

While shedding light on the horrifying aspect of professional begging rackets, he explained that the begging culture is not as simple as it seems. There are criminal clans of organized crime like a mafia.

Like every year, hundreds of seasonal beggars, including children and women, have been moving toward populated areas of major cities before the arrival of the holy month of Ramadan.

Apart from the bazaars, streets, traffic signals and famous brand shops and footpaths had become a strongholds for professional beggars because visitors give them money in the name of religious offerings, he added.

He said that instead of just expecting the authorities to curb this menace, we too should take necessary steps to discourage this degrading practice which is nothing but committing a fraud with the society.

Begging is not acceptable in society so people need to reach for deserving families and individuals, he added. "We through (No begging) social media drives are giving awareness to people that they should give their donations to authorized charity organization which will distribute to the deserved and needy people in their relatives and join us in the fight against this undesirable social habit", he added.

ICPT rejects propaganda against force

ISLAMABAD (APP): Islamabad Capital Territory Police (ICTP) on Friday said baseless propaganda was being made against the force and all the cases registered would be pursued on merit and as per law.

In a statement in connection with the law and order situation created on March 18 by violent protestors outside Islamabad Judicial Complex, the police spokesman said that 63 officers and personnel of Islamabad Police were injured in the incident. A police spokesperson said, "Shibli Faraz is a named accused in the case and his role will be determined by the Joint Investigation Team (JIT)." "The transfer of the court from sector F-8 to the judicial complex is implemented on the demand of Shibli Faraz and his party." The protestors deliberately vandalized and set fire to property around the judicial complex with planning, said a spokesman.

"Around 369 people involved in the riots have been arrested, he added. "ICPT will continue to perform its duties according to the law and will pursue cases on merit and as per law," the spokesman further said.

Two bike lifters arrested

RAWALPINDI (APP): Police have arrested two bike lifters and recovered 11 stolen motorcycles, weapons and other items from their possession.

According to a police spokesman, a team under the supervision of SHO, Taxila Police Station managed to net two bike lifters namely Saeed, ring-leader of Saeed gang and Yaqoob and recovered 11 stolen motorcycles, weapons and other items from their possession.

A case has been registered against the accused while further investigation is underway.

Superintendent of Police, Potohar, Muhammad Waqas Khan said the accomplices and facilitators of the accused would also be sent behind the bars.

He said that the operations against the law-breakers would be accelerated further.

'We want Pakistani diaspora women descent to become our brand ambassadors'

ISLAMABAD (PPI): Chairperson of the National Commission on the Status of the Women of Pakistan Nilofar Bakhtiar attended as a chief guest and a keynote speaker a houseful event organized by Nighat Khan, Founder and Chief Editor of the Magazine Dream America in New Jersey, USA.

The event was organized in collaboration with Proud Pakistan Awards and Dukhtaran-e-Pakistan for Women's Empowerment. While speaking at the event, Nilofar Bakhtiar admired and appreciated Pakistani women's hard work and dedication all around the world, says a press release received here on Friday from New Jersey, USA.

She said we want to inform the world that our women from Pakistan are brave and resilient and work together with men in all fields of life.

They are in no way any less com-

pared to those women from the west, she added.

She said our women in Pakistan work in all professions including flying fighter jets and working as judges in the higher courts. She said we want women of Pakistani descent based in America and elsewhere outside Pakistan to become our brand ambassadors.

Nilofar Bakhtiar also answered questions asked by some of the key members of the community. Nighat Khan, in her concluding remarks, thanked Asif Jamal, chief operating officer of ARY Digital Network, for being the event's official media partner and applauded Salman Abrahni of Proud Pakistan Awards for his support. She also thanked Mehmood Syed of Jinsoy for the beautiful arrangement and food. Lastly, she appreciated the community members who supported the event's success.

DG directed to ensure payment of salaries, pensions to all employees of PBC before Ramadan 20th

ISLAMABAD (PPI): Meeting of Sub-Committee of Senate Standing Committee on Information and Broadcasting was held here at Parliament House on Friday with Senator Irfan ul Haq Siddiqui in the Chair.

The Senate Body deliberated on financial issues faced by Radio Pakistan. Tahir Hassan, Director General Pakistan Broadcasting Corporation (PBC), apprised that deficit has been continuously increasing for last two years and the current deficit of Radio Pakistan stands at Rs2246.007 million.

He added that one of primary reason of increase in deficit is cessation of Grant in Aid worth around Rs12 crore to each station, provided by China Radio International. Senator Irfan Siddiqui suggested that Rs500 fee should be

charged from all vehicles owners at the time of registration and payment of token fee.

However, he directed the PBC to ensure payment of pension and salary to all the employees and pensioners before the 20th of Ramadan. Moreover, Senator Syed Waqar Mehdi inquired about the outstanding dues, which are not being paid by private individuals or entities in last few years and what measures are taken by Pakistan Broadcasting Corporation regarding the recovery of dues.

Director General PBC stated that the outstanding dues currently stands at approximately Rs7.5 crore and PBC has written letter to all defaulters for the payment of dues but unfortunately no recovery has been

made so far.

Senator Syed Waqar Mehdi also pointed out that PBC has properties located at prime locations in different cities all across the country but unfortunately PBC has leased these properties to private stakeholders at throw away prices and in order to combat this financial crisis PBC needs to revisit these leased properties.

While appointing the Additional Secretary Sohail Ali Khan as Coordinator for PBC, Senator Irfan Siddiqui directed the PBC to come up with a comprehensive plan which could help PBC in attaining financial independency. He also stated that Radio Pakistan is our asset and we will leave no stone unturned in making PBC financially independent.

Commissioner visits Adiala Jail to review facilities

RAWALPINDI (APP): Commissioner Rawalpindi Division Liaquat Ali Chhatta here on Friday visited Adiala Jail and reviewed the facilities.

Superintendent Jail, Asad Warraich was present on this occasion. A guard of honour was also presented by a contingent of police. The Commissioner visited different barracks of the Jail including juvenile and women. He inquired from the juvenile prisoners about educational activities.

The Commissioner also inquired about the treatment of the jail administration with women prisoners, food and health facilities. Liaquat Ali Chhatta also visited Adiala Jail hospital and inspected the available health facilities. He visited various wards of the hospital including the emergency ward, OPD, dental unit, medicine store and laboratory. The Commissioner inquired from the prisoners about the health facilities in the hospital. He expressed satisfaction over the cleanliness arrangements.

Liaquat Ali Chhatta also visited PCO and kitchen in the jail.

The Commissioner said that psychologists could play an important role in the prevention of crimes.

The Commissioner said that the prisoners should be provided conducive environment and guidance so that they could be made responsible citizens of society.

The vocational training in jail would help provide employment opportunities to the prisoners in practical life, he said adding, good behaviour plays an important role in the training of the prisoners.

Jail Superintendent briefed the Commissioner about the facilities available in Adiala Jail.

It was informed in the briefing that various educational courses were started for the prisoners in Adiala Jail. Vocational training courses were also conducted for the inmates. Different programs are also organized for the inmates to celebrate national and religious festivals. The inmates could also participate in sports activities. There is a hospital inside the jail to provide health facilities to the inmates.

Rain causes power supply suspension in various feeders

ISLAMABAD (APP): Intermittent rain caused temporary power supply suspension in various feeders of Islamabad Electric Supply Company (IESCO) on Friday.

According to the IESCO spokesperson, power supply witnessed suspensions to various feeders including Pir Sohawa, G-9 Markaz, Alnoor Colony, Eidgah, WASA, Muslim Town, Kahuta City, New Rawat, Pindigheb, Attock, Burma A Block, Rohltas and Sanghvi.

Operation teams were making all out efforts to remove fault and restore power supply at earliest, he further said.

The IESCO chief has also directed to restore power supply on all feeders before Iftar timing. However, field formations were facing problems to restore power supply due to rain in several areas.

Power restoration operation was also being monitored from the Central Control Room, he said.

The consumers were requested to lodge their electricity related complaints on concerned complaints office or help line 118.



ISLAMABAD: Commuters traveling during heavy rainfall at Margalla Road.

UK aid cuts

KABUL (Agenices): The UK government has cut almost £6m in funding to a programme in Afghanistan supporting vulnerable women and girls. Save the Children said it has been told by the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office that it will receive just over £1m of a promised £7m to support more than 100,000 people to access essential basic services such as health-care and education.

Etihad Journal's anniversary

BAGHLAN (Agenices): The 101st anniversary of the Etihad Journal was celebrated by the local authorities in Baghlan province. Head of the Etihad Journal, Sayedullah Sadaat, said that it has been 101 years since the publication of the journal. He said they are attempting to publish it once a month and make it available to Baghlan residents. "The journal is freely distributed to 34 directorates of the Ministry of Information and Culture in Nahrin, Doshi, and Farjaq districts in Baghlan.

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

Muttaqi in op-Ed calls for removal of sanctions, World engagement



KABUL (TOLONews): Acting Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi in an op-ed for Al Jazeera said that the primary cause of the ongoing economic crisis is the imposition of sanctions and banking restrictions by the US, saying that this impedes and delays efforts to address the humanitarian crisis. The op-ed is titled: "Afghanistan is ready to work with the US, but sanctions must go." Muttaqi said that a unique opportunity has emerged to embark on rapprochement between Afghanistan and the world. "We also understand that the globalised nature of modern relations means that all state actors must learn to live in harmony and peace with one another," he said. "Such relations should be founded on the immutable principles of equality, mutual respect and cooperation through the pursuit of

shared interests. Bearing this in mind, the current government of Afghanistan once again extends its hand of positive engagement to the world." Muttaqi also wrote about the achievements of the Islamic Emirate since it came to power "despite the fact that we inherited a collapsed narco-state, with an emptied treasury, unpaid bills, millions of drug addicts, rampant corruption, universal poverty and unemployment and a stagnant economy." "The Taliban are trying to define their relations with the world. This is the need of the two sides," said Nematullah Bizhan, an international relations' analyst. Afghanistan's new leaders believe in dialogue and an exchange of ideas, Muttaqi said, "but it takes two hands to clap." He called on the international community to respect Afghanistan's

independence, saying "the religious and cultural sensibilities call for a cautious approach." "The international community has repeatedly called for human rights, women's education, counter-terrorism efforts and assurances that Afghan soil will not be used by groups to attack foreign soil, as well as the formation of an inclusive government as preconditions for engagement with the Islamic Emirate." "The US and international community are currently focused on the civil and political rights of the people and the issue of governance, which are the obstacles in the way if recognition," said Javid Javid, an international relations' analyst. It has been nearly two years since the Islamic Emirate swept into power but it has yet to be formally recognized by any country.

Qatari, Canadian officials discuss ways to support Aghan girls' education

KABUL (Agenices): Canadian and Qatari officials met on Thursday to discuss ways to support education in Afghanistan, particularly women's and girls' education. Lolwah bint Rashid Al Khater, Minister of State for International Cooperation at the Foreign Ministry of Qatar, and Jennifer Macintyre, Canada's Assistant Deputy Minister of Immigration for Afghanistan, reportedly discussed plans to improve access to education for women and girls in Afghanistan, according to The Peninsula News. Lolwah Al Khater criticized the bans imposed by the Taliban barring women and girls to attend schools and universities. She said that the Taliban should learn from other Islamic countries including Qatar, Indonesia, and Malaysia, where despite the Islamic system, women have the right to education and work.



Furthermore, the two sides discussed the health development plans in Afghanistan, as well as shed light on the results of the meetings held between the Taliban delegation and two delegations from the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF). Meanwhile, the Organization of Islamic

Cooperation (OIC) has announced that it will send a delegation of scholars (Ulama) to discuss women's education and work with the Taliban in the near future. Separately, US Special Envoy for Afghan Women, Girls and Human Rights on Wednesday wrote on Twitter that Afghan girls' dreams have been shattered and they have been kicked out of school in tears. On Thursday, the Japanese Embassy in Kabul

expressed disappointment as Afghan girls are still barred from returning to schools and universities as the academic year begins in Afghanistan. The emphasis on supporting girls' education has increased among Afghanistan's partners, aid groups, and United Nations agencies in the recent past — collectively seeking ways to convince the Afghan interim government to allow women and girls to attend education and work.

Earthquake and flash floods kill at least 10 people in Afghanistan

PAKTIKA (Agenices): State Ministry for Natural Disaster Management of the Islamic Emirate says that due to recent flash floods and earthquakes, at least 10 people were killed and more than 60 others were injured. Shafiullah Rahimi, spokesperson of the State Ministry for Natural Disaster Management announced the

latest update on the number of deaths and injuries from the recent natural disasters in the country. The recent natural disasters have resulted in serious financial and human losses, as a result, roughly 800 houses have been completely destroyed in earthquakes, and more than 100 residential houses have been demol-

ished in flash floods across the country. The recent earthquake's epicenter, which was 40 Km to the south-Southeast of Jurm district in Afghanistan's Badakhshan province, according to US Geological Survey, also jolted Kabul, Kunar, Paktika, Takhar, Laghman, Baghlan, Samangan, Kunduz, Panjshir, Parwan provinces.

According to the US Geological Survey, a 6.5 magnitude earthquake with a depth of 187 kilometers on Monday night jolted several provinces of Afghanistan as well as parts of Pakistan, Tajikistan, and India. Previously, the Taliban's Ministry of Public Health had announced the number of fatalities 3, and injuries 70, caused as a result of the late earthquake. Furthermore, the State Ministry for Natural Disaster Management said that more than 1,000 people died and 2,150 others sustained injuries from natural disasters during the past year. Experts believe Afghanistan is prone to natural disasters including earthquakes, flooding, drought, landslides, and avalanches, which adds to the problems of the ordinary people, amid the existing economic and humanitarian crisis.



Fleeing Afghan refugee wins prestigious 'Loran Award'

KABUL (Agenices): Banin Arjmand, a 20-year-old refugee who fled Afghanistan with her parents after the Taliban seized control in August 2021, won a prestigious scholarship to pursue her higher education at a Canadian university. Currently, Arjmand lives in Saskatoon, finishing her high school diploma at Nutana Collegiate and working part-time to support herself and her family. Freshly arrived in Toronto, Arjmand thought she could not afford university tuition. However, she did not succumb to

the challenges and made every effort to find a way to continue her studies. Being advised by one of her professors, she applied for the prestigious Loran Award, a scholarship valued at more than \$100,000 over four years, she figured she didn't have anything to lose. The application process is demanding and brought back painful memories for Arjmand, how she fled her home country and left her friends, and good memories behind. "For me, it was like a flashback of everything I've been through. It made me think of every

detail of my life. I ended up crying," Arjmand told CBC News. On Thursday, the Loran Scholars Foundation announced that Arjmand had won one of 36 Loran Awards. About 5,000 students from across Canada apply for scholarships every year. The four-year scholarship program consists of a yearly stipend, free tuition at one of 25 Canadian universities, summer work experience, mentorship, and networking. Arjmand says the scholarship is life-changing for her. "I am sure through this foundation,

I'm going to know myself more, learn more about this new world, and do better." While Arjmand is excited about her future, she worries about the girls and women in Afghanistan who have been deprived of their fundamental rights to go to school, to work, or to move freely under the Taliban regime. Since the return of the Taliban to power in August 2021, the interim regime has issued more than 30 verdicts, barring Afghan women and girls from attending education, work, and public life.



Afghan female entrepreneur keeps girls in school, teaches useful skills



KABUL (Agenices): An Afghan entrepreneur still makes waves under the Taliban rule to help girls receive education and learn important skills under the cover of secrecy. Before the collapse of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, the 43-year-old operated a popular restaurant in the capital Kabul, where men and women dined together regardless of marital status, and for female customers to do without a hijab. However, with the return of the Taliban to power in August 2021,

her entrepreneurial spirit risked like everyone else. She was in a state of shock and believed that all her gains were lost. "I felt as though an earthquake had struck and taken everything away from me," she said. Taj Begum restaurant was closed as the Taliban did not allow women to run such businesses. But leaving with the thousands of others fearing a return to the Taliban's brutal rule of the 1990s was not an option for the trailblazer. Instead of fleeing the country,

she chose to remain in Afghanistan and provide a safety umbrella for some Afghan women who had nowhere to go. "Half of society has been wiped out from the face of the earth. As a woman, I have taken it upon myself to act not only for my own benefit but for the benefit of all women," she said. Following the regime change, the Afghan female entrepreneur founded the Mother Educational Center (MEC). The center provides an opportunity for 500 girls to receive education in diverse subjects, such as photography, jewelry design, painting, maths, physics, and the English language. Initially, MEC had two branches, one in the backstreets of Kabul, and another in the central Afghan province of Daikundi. Due to a lack of funds, the Diadundi branch shut down last year, however, girls still attend classes in the Kabul branch. Besides learning valuable skills in diverse subjects, female students are beginning to earn an income from making jewelry and other items from discarded ammunition. The income through minimum will contribute a lot towards their family's living conditions during these difficult times.

Investors had 'effective' participation at Kabul exhibition

KABUL (Agenices): A number of investors who attended a three-day exhibition in Kabul said they had productive talks with other businesspeople and succeeded to have good marketing opportunities for their products at the event.

The investors said they signed many contracts with others who visited the exhibition. "People are faced with economic challenges. They came here but could not buy anything," said Yalda, an investor.

"More than 100 people visited my booth and gave me their contacts. After the end of the exhibition, we will contact them to sign contracts," said Mohammad Reza, a local investor. Organizers said that over 100 women had



participated in the event. A number of participants said the event was useful for Afghanistan's economic development. "This exhibition is a good step for the country's economic development," said Ahmad Nasim Amiri, a participant. "We ask the government to support these kinds of exhibitions," said Abdul Qahar, a participant. The women's chamber of industry and commerce said that female participants in exhibitions had a good impact on the country's progress. "Women visiting the exhibition can encourage them and they can achieve progress," said Salma Yusufzai, head of the women's chamber of industry and commerce. Organizers of the exhibition said that more than 250 investors participated in the exhibition and 120 of them were women.

Pak urges Afghan govt to act against banned outfits

Muhammad Asad

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan urges Afghan interim Authorities to act against banned terror outfits having hideouts in its country. While responding to a media query at her weekly news briefing on Friday, Pakistan Foreign Office Spokesperson, Mumtaz Zahra Baloch said that Pakistan had been consistently urging the Afghan government to take action against those banned terror outfits having hideouts in Afghanistan.

According to the Spokesperson, the terror outfits enjoying safe havens inside Afghanistan are continuously targeting Pakistani security Forces, and innocent public and causing a law and order situation in the country. Zahra stressed that Afghan action against banned organizations would be crucial in preventing their future attacks inside Pakistan.

While answering another question regarding the recent statements of the former US Diplomat Zalmay Khalilzad and other lawmakers, the spokesperson said that Pakistan is a democratic country with a well matured political system and no statement and intervention from abroad could influence public opinion in Pakistan. Mumtaz Zahra Baloch was of the view that social media is an open platform and the personal assertion/opinion of any individual does not merit a response from the government of Pakistan. While commenting on Pak-China bilateral relations, Mumtaz Zahra Baloch told the jour-



nalists that the third round of Pakistan China bilateral Political Consultation successfully culminated in Beijing in recent days.

According to her, the two sides agreed to expand their political and security cooperation, along with the promotion of bilateral trade, tourism, cultural exchanges and people-to-people contacts to further explore the potential avenues of bilateral cooperation between the two. Countries. Ms. Balich also confirmed the reports regarding roll over of Pakistan's loan worth \$ 2 billion by China.

The Spokesperson hailed the Chinese decision and noted that Pakistan and China are all-weather partners, both nations always consult each other in all matters, while China has always come to Pakistan's assistance whenever needed including in

this difficult economic situation. While responding to a media query regarding the CPEC, the Spokesperson said that Pakistan and China are agreed to expand China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) to other countries and entities as and when applicable because the CPEC is a flagship project of the Chinese multi-billion dollar magnificent Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) aims at boosting regional connectivity and trade.

According to Mumtaz Zahra Baloch, a Pakistani delegation has attended the meeting of the SCO defense working group, while the decision regarding the participation of senior political leadership at the Defense or Foreign Minister level has not been made so far. While commenting on the human rights situation in Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJK) and mainland India, the Spokesperson called on India to stop suppression of human rights defenders and journalist and up holding of global human rights standards, along with freedom of expression and Assembly which is the fundamental rights of every human being men and women. Mumtaz Zahra Baloch expressed grief over recent terror attacks in KP and tribal area and urged the Afghan government to fulfill its responsibility under the global law and Doha agreement by squeezing it's land for terrorists organizations, so the recent wave of terrorism could be eliminated in it's early stage.



ISLAMABAD: President Dr. Arif Alvi giving the award of Sitara-e-Basalat to the widow of Major Shujaat Hussain (Shaheed) in recognition of his courage and services to the nation at the investiture ceremony to confer the insignias of Military Awards, at Aiwan-e-Sadr.

President confers military awards on armed forces personnel

E.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: President Dr. Arif Alvi on Friday conferred military awards on the serving and martyred armed forces personnel at a Pakistan Day investiture ceremony held here at the Aiwan-e-Sadr.

A total of 49 officers and soldiers of the Pakistan Army, Navy and Air Force received the military awards including the families of four martyred troops in the categories of Nishan-i-Imtiaz, Hilal-i-Imtiaz, and Sitara-i-Basalat. Two foreign dignitaries from friendly countries also received prestigious awards.

Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee Lt Gen Sahir Shamshad Mirza, Chief of the Army Staff General Asim Munir, Chief of the Naval Staff Admiral Amjad Khan Niazi, Chief of the Air Staff Air Chief Marshal Zaheer Ahmed Babar Sidhu, diplomats and senior official attended the ceremony.

Commander of Bahrain National Guards Shaikh Mohammed Bin Salman Al-Khalifa was awarded Nishan-i-Imtiaz (military) and Defence Attache of Saudi Arabia Major General (Pilot) Staff Awad Bin Abdullah Alzahrani was given Hilal-i-Imtiaz (military) in recognition to their illustrious services of strengthening defence ties with Pakistan.

The president conferred Sitara-i-

Bisalat on the martyrs of the Pakistan Army in recognition of their valour demonstrated while fighting terrorists in operation areas. The awards were received by the family members of the martyrs, including Major Shujaat Hussain (30 Baloch Regiment, martyred in Angoor Adda, South Waziristan); Captain Bilal Khalil (Army Medical Corps, martyred in Noshki, Balochistan); Captain Faheem Abbas (72 Punjab Regiment, martyred in Jani Khel area of Bannu); and Sepoy Muhammad Waqas (18 Frontier Force Regiment, martyred in North Waziristan).

President conferred Hilal-i-Imtiaz (military) on Air Marshal Chaudhry Ahsan Rafiq (Air Headquarters), Air Marshal Waqas Ahmed Sulehri (AHQ), Maj Gen Khurram Nisar (Joint Services HQ), Maj Gen Qamar ul Nisa Chaudhry (Army Medical Corps), Maj Gen Irfan Ali Mirza (AMC), Maj Gen Muhammad Rafiq Zafar (AMC), Rear Admiral Javed Iqbal (Naval Headquarters), Rear Admiral Muhammad Sohail Arshad (NHQ), Rear Admiral Salman Ilyas (NHQ), Air Vice Marshal Muhammad Nadeem Sabir (AHQ), Maj Gen Syed Khurram Shahzad (AMC), Maj Gen Bilal Umair (AMC), Maj Gen Muhammad Wasim (AMC), Maj Gen Muhammad Suhail Amin (AMC), Maj Gen Atriq ur Rehman Sulehria (AMC), Maj Gen

Muhammad Aleem (AMC), Air Vice Marshal Salman Abbas Shah (AHQ), Maj Gen Muhammad Avais Dastgir (General Headquarters), Maj Gen Ahmed Sharif Chaudhry (JS HQ), Rear Admiral Muhammad Faisal Abbasi (NHQ), Maj Gen Omar Ahmed Bokhari (GHQ), Maj Gen Inayat Hussain (GHQ), Maj Gen Kamal Azfar (Frontier Works Organization), Maj Gen Muhammad Aamer Najam (National Defence University), Maj Gen Adil Yameen (GHQ), Maj Gen Fahim Amer (Inter Services Intelligence), Maj Gen Shahid Manzoor (JS HQ), Maj Gen Muhammad Kashif Azad (ISI), Maj Gen Tabassum Habib (GHQ), Maj Gen Kamran Ahmed Satti (GHQ), Maj Gen Adil Rehmani, Maj Gen Muhammad Hassan Khattak (ISI), Maj Gen Muhammad Shuja Anwar (General Officer Commanding), Maj Gen Majid Jahangir (JS HQ), Maj Gen Azhar Waqas (Rangers), Maj Gen Asif Mahmood Goraya (Army Air Defence), Maj Gen Akif Iqbal (ISI), Maj Gen Rashid Mahmood, Maj Gen Muhammad Irfan (GOC), Maj Gen Dilawar Khan (JS HQ), Maj Gen Abdul Moeeed (GOC), Rear Admiral Muhammad Saleem (NHQ), Air Vice Marshal Shams ul Haq (AHQ), Maj Gen Chaudhry Muhammad Qamar ul Haq Noor, and Air Vice Marshal Muhammad Qaiser Janjua (AHQ).

Rahul Gandhi disqualified from parliament

NEW DELHI (Agencies): India's main opposition leader Rahul Gandhi has been disqualified as a member of parliament, a day after being convicted in a defamation case and sentenced to two years in jail. "Rahul Gandhi ... stands disqualified from the member of Lok Sabha from the date of his conviction," a notice issued by the parliament said on Friday, referring to the lower house.

In a tweet in Hindi following the move, Gandhi said he is "fighting for India's voice" and that he "will pay any price for it". Gandhi, 52, was found guilty in a case related to his speech ahead of the 2019 general elections in which he referred to thieves as having the surname Modi. Gandhi, a scion of the Nehru-Gandhi family and former president of the Congress party, will appeal in a higher court, the party said.

Congress officials have described the court order as politically motivated and accused Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) of targeting political opponents. Congress spokesman Pawan Khera told Al Jazeera the party is

"absolutely ready to fight this legally and of course politically". "We are in the courts of the people and as far as the legal options are concerned, our legal experts are looking into the remedial options available to us," he said.

"The government realises, and if they don't realise, they will soon realise that Rahul Gandhi in the parliament may not have been as lethal or dangerous for them, but on the streets of India, he will be far more dangerous for them to handle. People are with us." Earlier on Friday, Congress members held protests in some parts of the country against Gandhi's conviction and two-year-old jail sentence. Modi's government has been widely accused of using the defamation law to target and silence critics. The case in Gujarat is one of several lodged against Gandhi, Modi's chief opponent.

"The BJP is fearful about the rise of Rahul Gandhi and he poses a direct threat to the Modi government," said Pradip Bhattacharya, a Congress legislator from West Bengal state. "Black Day for Indian Democracy!" Srinivas Bhadravathi Venkata, president of the

party's youth wing, wrote on Twitter. BJP president JP Nadda dismissed the charges, saying Gandhi insulted a section of Indians who happen to share the same surname as Prime Minister Modi.

"It is one thing to question government regarding the policies, that would be considered a healthy debate, but clearly the Congress has never followed such rules," he told Reuters news agency. Reporting from New Delhi, Al Jazeera's Pavni Mittal said Gandhi has "accused Modi of crony capitalism and favouring certain business houses for lucrative contracts". "He has also led the criticism on minority rights and minority issues in India," she said.

"All of this plays out in the larger political context when India is heading for general elections next year. So opposition parties believe these [jail sentences and disqualifications] are intimidation tactics to make sure that BJP has an upper hand in the elections." Gandhi is the leading face of Congress, once the dominant force of Indian politics, with a proud role in ending British colonial rule, but now a shadow of its former self.

Gandapur flees after police raid his farmhouse

D I KHAN (INP): Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) leader Ali Amin Gandapur fled to avoid arrest during a police raid at his farmhouse Hathala Al-Amin Farm in Dera Ismail Khan on Friday.

The police raided the farmhouse to arrest Ali Amin Gandapur for inciting people against the state on social media and threatening to occupy Islamabad in case of PTI chairman Imran Khan's arrest. His brothers, Dera Ismail Khan Mayor Umar Amin Gandapur and Faisal Amin Gandapur, were present at the farmhouse during the raid.

According to the official sources, Ali Amin Gandapur is on the run to avoid arrest by police, and he is constantly changing his location. Meanwhile, the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) issued a call-up notice to Ali Amin Gandapur for threatening the government and state institutions on social media and inciting people to armed actions.

The FIA Cybercrime Wing Dera Ismail Khan started an inquiry into the viral audio of former federal minister Ali Amin Gandapur. In the audio, Gandapur threatened to occupy Islamabad in case of Imran Khan's arrest and also incited the police to revolt. He has been summoned in Dera Ismail Khan on March 24 (today).

PTI organizers of public rally arrested

LAHORE (INP): Punjab police arrested organisers of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf's Minar-e-Pakistan public rally in Lahore as the crackdown against PTI leaders and activists continued in Punjab.

Punjab police raiding the houses of PTI leaders and workers in Lahore before the Minar-e-Pakistan public gathering. Malik Qaisar and Mian Nadeem, organizers of the Minar-e-Pakistan rally? Furthermore, police detained PTI leader Shahid Hussain, who is a British citizen of Pakistani descent and remained the focal person of the task force during Imran Khan's government?

The residence of Hafiz Zeeshan Rasheed was also raided, and the family accused the police of "misbehaving" with them during the raid. Rashid PP is contesting elections against Maryam Nawaz in PP-149. The residence of PTI leaders Hamad Niazi and Bajash Niazi were also raided by Punjab police.

Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf constituted a 10-member legal team for the release of party workers - who were arrested during raids in Islamabad and Lahore. The decision was taken during a legal committee meeting chaired by PTI senior leader Dr Yasmin Rashid.

LAHORE (Agencies): Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Chairman Imran Khan on Friday secured a three-day extension in protective bail till March 27 in five cases registered against him in the federal capital after he personally appeared before the Lahore High Court (LHC).

The verdict today was announced minutes after the PTI submitted an affidavit that a bail petition has been submitted in Islamabad. Following the court's order, the PTI chief's counsel submitted the affidavit stating that his client's bail pleas have been submitted in the Islamabad courts.

After the submission, the court asked the prosecutor whether he wanted to say something. The prosecutor said that he did not have anything to add. Justice Sheikh said that the court is extending the relief granted to the petitioner as his cases are pending in the Islamabad courts. "If you [Khan] do not get bail there, then you will face the consequences of submitting a fake affidavit."

He also warned the PTI chief's counsel that submitting a fake affidavit was tantamount to contempt of court. Earlier on Friday, LHC Registrar's Office had attached objections to the plea as the PTI chief had already obtained bail in the cases.

As the hearing began, Khan's counsel told the judges that the former premier was seeking protective bail in order to go to the federal capital where several political cases have been registered against him. At this, Justice Sheikh said that no such precedence can be pointed out when protective bail is extended.

Khan's lawyer argued that the legal team was also struggling to understand how to secure bail as so many cases have been registered against the deposed prime minister. Justice Sheikh said that it would have been better if this petition would have been registered in the Islamabad High Court (IHC).

Arguing for himself,



LAHORE: Security personnel escorting PTI chief Imran Khan during his arrival at High Court for hearing.

Khan said that the last time when he went to Islamabad, all roads were blocked, mentioning that even today he came in secretly. "In Islamabad, police used tear gas and baton-charged the people due to which we had to return," the cricketer-turned-politician said, claiming that he "ran from there" in order to save his life.

Khan's counsel told the court that they are only seeking a working day so that they can reach Islamabad; however, the government's lawyer raised an objection to this. After hearing the arguments, the two-member bench directed the office to fix Khan's petition, adjourning the hearing till then.

Once the hearing resumed following the court's direction to fix the petition, Khan's counsel acknowledged that they know this plea was "extraordinary" as they are seeking an extension in the protective bail. "We have a strong ground," the lawyers said, at which Justice Sheikh directed them to narrate the incidents that took place since the last hearing on March 17 when he was granted protective bail.

The counsel started narrating the incidents by apprising the court that they went to Islamabad on March 18 to file a bail petition, adding they were not allowed to enter the federal

capital. At this, the two-member bench asked the government's lawyer to confirm whether bail petitions were filed or not. "We are unaware of this," the government's lawyer told the court.

"Were these petitions fixed for hearing?" the judges cross-questioned, at which Khan's counsel told them that the petitions are currently with the staff of the district and sessions court in Islamabad. The LHC directed that authorities concerned call the prosecutor-general within half an hour. At which, the court was informed that he wasn't there, adding that the if the court was convinced that the petitions are filed in the Islamabad court they would not oppose it.

The court further added that the petition bail cannot be fixed for hearing until the petitioner is himself/herself present in the court. "This is why the case wasn't heard because Khan was unable to appear before the court," the lawyer representing the PTI chief said, resuming his narration regarding the timeline of the incidents. "March 19 was Sunday and then on March 21 we secured more bails as a total of 140 cases have been registered against Khan," he said, continuing that no case was fixed for March 22 while March 23 was a public holiday.

ATC grants bail to Amjad, 63 other PTI workers

ISLAMABAD (INP): An Islamabad Anti-Terrorism Court (ATC) on Friday granted bails to PTI chairman Imran Khan's aide, Amjad Khan Niazi, and 63 other party workers in a case pertaining to violence outside the Federal Judicial Complex on March 18 when the former prime minister had appeared there for a court hearing.

ATC judge Raja Jawad Abbasi accepted the PTI leaders' request and instructed them to submit surety bonds worth Rs50,000. Hours-long clashes were reported between PTI workers and the capital police on Saturday after the former prime minister arrived at the FJC to attend a hearing in the Toshakhana case.

In the violent confrontation, a contingent of law enforcers and PTI supporters used anti-riot gear against each other with teargas used from both sides to push the opposing side back. The PTI used rocks against the police alongside petrol bombs to set their vehicles on fire.

According to the Islamabad police, dozens of officials were injured in the clashes a large number of vehicles were torched. Subsequently, Imran and a number of PTI leaders including Amjad were booked in terrorism cases. Moreover, the Islamabad police said on Wednesday that it has arrested more than 300 PTI supporters, accusing them of "incitement, arson, vandalism [and] attacks on police". As the PTI chief arrived in the FJC last week to attend the Toshakhana hearing, at least 25 people were injured, 30 automobiles, including motorbikes, and a police chowki was set on fire during hours-long clashes between the police and PTI workers.

The large crowd that descended on the judicial complex gathered on the call of PTI leadership which used social media to urge supporters to reach the judicial complex.



PESHAWAR: Chief Secretary Nadeem Aslam Chaudhry called on KP Caretaker Chief Minister Muhammad Azam Khan.

President writes to PM

(Continued from Page 1)

He added that Rule 15(5) of Rules of Business, 1973 also highlighted the responsibility of the prime minister, inter-alia, to furnish such information relating to the administration of affairs of the Federation and proposals for legislation as the president may call for.

In his letter, the president also drew the attention of the prime minister towards the seriousness of incidents of human rights violations, atrocities of police/law enforcement agencies and grossly disproportionate use of force against the citizens of Pakistan.

He said multiple fake and frivolous cases had been registered against politicians, workers, journalists and media persons; houses of political workers had been raided, and citizens had been abducted without warrants and lawful justification.

The president said the incidents of human rights violations and oppression by state machinery against innocent citizens were in "clear breach and violations

of fundamental rights" guaranteed by Article 4 of the Constitution, that "provides for, and guarantees citizens to enjoy the protection of law and to be treated in accordance with the law".

He also referred to Article 9 on 'security of person', Article 10 on 'safeguards as to arrest and detention', Article 10-A on 'right to fair trial', Article 14 on 'inviolability of dignity of man etc.', Article 15 on 'freedom of movement etc.', Article 16 on 'freedom of assembly', Article 17 on 'freedom of association' and Article 19 on 'freedom of speech', and said the spirit and mandate of these articles were being clearly transgressed. "This has tarnished the image of Pakistan in the international community and is casting negative repercussions on the future of democracy and state of human rights in Pakistan," he added.

President Alvi further highlighted that in the World Press Freedom Index of 2021, Pakistan ranked 145 out of 180 countries and dropped to 157 i.e., 12 points downwards in the

World Press Freedom Index, 2022, which reflected the sorry state of affairs and "this year's actions and images" would further exacerbate the country's already dismal ranking.

He wrote that in recent months, media had been further suppressed and journalists had also been subjected to charges of sedition and terrorism to stifle dissent and criticism against the government. It appeared that a reign of terror had been unleashed against the media persons who had independent opinions, he added.

The president concluded that the prime minister, being head of the government, was responsible for the safeguard of human rights as well as fundamental rights of every citizen of Pakistan as enshrined in the Constitution, and therefore, all executive authorities concerned of federal and provincial governments should be directed to refrain from abuse of human rights and also to assist the ECP to hold general elections in the provinces of Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.